The Challenge of a Church Going into Liquidation

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Abstract
This article engages in the debate on religion in Europe and suggests a way of understanding that takes both discontinuities and continuities within the process of secularization into account. The central thesis is that institutional religion is not simply coming to an end in Western societies; rather, its assets and properties are being redistributed. Dutch Catholicism is presented as an example giving insights into the presence of religion in liquid modernity. The article concludes with a suggestion as to how the Church might respond to a situation where the secular world is taking over ecclesial initiatives.

Keywords
chaplaincy, modernity, Netherlands, secularization, the Passion, theatre

In the South of the Netherlands—traditionally a Catholic region—it would be impossible to deliver a lecture on a day like Shrove Tuesday. The majority of the population has been partying since the Thursday before. On the day before Ash Wednesday, the festivities will reach their summit—originally because Lent begins the next day. A minority will give up eating sweets, drinking alcohol or using social media; others will hardly consider the religious origins of Carnival. Still they celebrate by dressing up in all kinds of weird costumes, getting together in bars and on the streets, and being nice to everyone regardless of their social status. Some may have visited the special, ludic Mass for Carnival in their parish church. The popularity of the feast, however, exceeds the boundaries of the Catholic Church by far. Although it is no longer the norm to be Catholic, regional culture is still permeated by Catholicism. The Netherlands’ track record as one

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of the more secularized countries in Europe should not obscure the continued presence of Christianity in Dutch society.

Ireland is one of the less secularized countries in Europe. Yet, when I visited Maynooth in 1991, the number of seminarians at St Patrick’s College, hosting one of several seminaries in the country, amply surpassed the number of the National Seminary in 2018, and Maynooth University was not yet founded as an autonomous university. Nowadays, the university refers plainly to the site of the seminary as ‘the south campus,’ and St Patrick’s College has been outgrown by its ‘secular offspring’ in terms of student numbers, staff, resources, and university buildings. This anecdotal evidence might suggest that Ireland is on its way to be the guardian of a rich Catholic past.

These cases of a supposedly secular society on the one hand and a purportedly religious society on the other serve to illustrate the issue I raise in this article. How are the boundaries between the religious and the secular shifting in the current stage of the Western trajectory of modernization? While established religious institutions in Western Europe are breaking down, secular institutions are taking over some of their functions. The first goal of this exercise in practical theology is to describe and understand what is going on in this process, using sociological methods. The second is to raise the question of what a theological evaluation and the response of the churches might look like.

The empirical basis of this article is formed by a coherent collection of case studies in the Netherlands. It starts by portraying Dutch society and is followed by a theoretical perspective, building on the work of the Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) and the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002). The metaphor of liquidation is used to describe three phases in the recent religious history of the Netherlands: before, during, and after the process of closing down the institution, its assets being taken over by others. I will reflect on these stages and suggest lessons the Church may learn.

**The Dutch Case**

Modern people, especially in Europe, have often been under the impression of the idea that, gradually, religious regimes have lost, and are losing, terrain and that the world has become, and is becoming, more secular as modernization proceeds. However, authors such as José Casanova have made it clear that in several countries religion has become more present in the public world. Nowadays, we witness the growing importance of evangelical Christianity in the United States, political Islam in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, and all kind of new ‘spiritualities’ in the context of management, wellness, and lifestyle all over the world.

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1 See Jörg Stolz et al., *Unbelieving in Modern Society* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2016). There is an overlap between individual religiosity related to the products and teachings of Christian churches and beliefs, forms of practice and experiences that are related to the products of alternative spiritual suppliers.
2 See Collins Dictionary Online, s.v. ‘Liquidate’. www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/liquidate, accessed 12 March 2018.
3 José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago University Press, 1994).
4 Luigino Bruni, *Annual Lecture Christianity and Society: Good and Bad Spirituality in Business* (Utrecht, 2018).
The world as a whole is not becoming more secular, not even in terms of individual religious adherence, practice, and belief in God. Europe, Western Europe in particular, had been described as an exceptional case in this respect. The British sociologist Grace Davie argued that even Europe might be less secular than figures in church adherence show, since Europeans also believe without belonging to a church and those who do go to church do so also on behalf of others (‘vicarious religion’). Subsequent analyses of the data of the previous waves of the European Values Studies (1991–2008) using more advanced statistical techniques, however, show that European countries, even within Western Europe, differ considerably. There is no uniform pattern, but the trend is that both belief in God and church membership are declining. Overall, the proportion of church-going members who believe in a personal God has diminished to a minority, but Ireland, Malta, and Italy stand out as (distinctively Catholic) countries where the large majority belongs and believes. That is, until 2008. Since then, figures in Ireland have dropped further, and considerably so.

The Netherlands, on the other hand, has been among the more secularized and religiously heterogeneous countries since the 1970s. A recent national survey showed that a vast majority (68 percent) of the population (2015: 17 million) does not consider themselves as belonging to any religion at all. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest church. Protestants outnumber Catholics, but are divided among several churches; the largest is the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, which has most members of the Royal family among its ranks. Five percent of the population are Muslim; two percent are Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, or have another religion. The ‘nones,’ who have been discovered recently as an interesting category for sociological research in the United Kingdom, have been researched in the Netherlands since the 1960s, following the ground-breaking work on the unchurched by sociologist—and socialist—J.P. Kruijt in 1933.

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5 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
6 Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Modified in: *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).
7 Loek Halman and John Gelissen, ‘Wat Is er aan de Hand in Religieland?’ *Religie & Samenleving* 13 (2018): 28–49. The authors used single and multilevel latent class analysis on survey data of the European Values Studies 1991, 1990, 1999, and 2008 (www.european-valuesstudy.eu, accessed 12 March 2018).
8 In 2015, 23 percent of the population were registered as Catholics. Joris Kregting and Jolanda Massaar-Remmerswaal, *Kerncijfers Rooms-Katholieke Kerk* 2016 (Nijmegen: Kaski, 2017). In a national survey in the same year, 12 percent indicated they consider themselves as Catholics; cf. 14 percent Protestants. Ton Bernts and Joantine Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966–2015* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016).
9 Linda Woodhead, ‘The Rise of “No Religion”: Towards an Explanation,’ *Sociology of Religion* 78 (2017): 247–62.
10 Heije Faber et al., *Ontkerkelijking en Buitenkerkelijkheid in Nederland, tot 1960* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1970). Jakob Pieter Kruijt, *De Onkerkelijkheid in Nederland: Haar Verbreiding en Oorzaken: Proeve ener Sociografiese Verklaring* (Groningen: Noordhoff, 1933).
It is clear that the traditional categories are becoming less informative. In order to distinguish further among those who do not ‘have a religion,’ answers to other questions are used to construct categories, such as those among them who do regard themselves, in whatever way, as ‘believing’ (17 percent) or ‘spiritual’ (10 percent). These categories are not growing and do not compensate for the decline of conventional believers. Church membership continues to decline steadily and so does belief in God. In the recent past, the expectation was that belief in ‘something beyond’ would replace belief in God, but a trend report shows that what is growing is rather unbelief, or not-knowing whether there is a God or a higher power.11

Thus, the Dutch case differs considerably from the Irish case at the moment. As a rule, people do not attend church; neither do they consider themselves members, nor do they believe in God. Representatives of the Irish church may look at these figures with special interest, since it was from Irish soil that the Benedictine monk Saint Willibrord and his fellow monks departed in 678, and brought the Christian faith to the inhabitants of the Low Countries. The final outcome must be disappointing.

Militant Catholics may find some comfort in the fact that, since the 1930s, the Catholic Church constitutes the largest denomination in the country, although the former Dutch Republic was a product of a Protestant revolt (1568) against the Catholic Spanish Empire. One of the stadtholders in those days, governing several provinces as a steward, even made it to King of England: Prince William of Orange (1650–1702). On 12 July, Protestants in Ireland still commemorate ‘King Billy’s’ victory over King James II at the Battle of Boyne (1690). Protestants used to rule our country. Yet, the repressed Catholic minority in the North survived, blossomed and emancipated as full Dutch citizens, as did the Catholic inhabitants of the Southern regions who had been colonized by the Northern Protestant provinces. Napoleon Bonaparte and his brother Louis Napoleon, first King of Holland, brought religious freedom to the Low Countries, which was revived after the Netherlands welcomed its own King William (1772–1843), in 1815. Our present King Willem-Alexander even married a Catholic, Máxima Zorreguieta from Argentina, both recently welcomed by Pope Francis in the Vatican. The division between Catholics and Protestants has faded, and so has the social relevance of organized Christian religion.

In Europe, religious heterogeneity doesn’t seem to favour a strong presence of religion in society and yet, even the Dutch case doesn’t witness the dying out of religion. The main thrust of this article is to refute the persistently popular narrative of secularization as signifying the end of religion. This is a modernist idea. What is needed is a review of our conception of modernity and of religion’s place in it.12

Religion in Liquid Modernity

Contemporary writings on religion often depart from a modern point of view in which religion is organized in churches and similar collectivities. Churches are losing

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11 God in Nederland 1966–2015.
12 Charles Taylor, A Secular Age (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 427–37.
members; therefore, religion is disappearing. However, this is similar to claiming the end of politics now that membership of political parties is declining, or the end of love, considering the increased diversity in relationships. The analysis of religion in late modernity needs to take into account that society has changed, roughly speaking, from an industrial society to a post-industrial society. Taking up a characterization of these societies by Zygmunt Bauman, I refer to this transition as the transformation from ‘solid modernity’ into ‘liquid modernity.’

Solid modernity refers to a society where the production process is the dominant social factor, where the hierarchical mass organization—such as a factory with labourers, supervisors, managers, and directors—flourishes, and where identity is partly ascribed and partly achieved based on class. The film director (and actor) Charles Chaplin has captured solid modernity poignantly in *Modern Times*, where the Little Tramp becomes part of the assembly line he is working on.

Liquid modernity refers to a society where consumption is the dominant social factor: rather than, or in addition to, one’s position in the production process, it is one’s consumer pattern, one’s lifestyle, which determines one’s social position. Fluid networks replace the firm hierarchical mass organization. Identity is not so much something you have, but something you construct and reconstruct in an ongoing reflexive project. Richard Sennett’s portrayal of ‘flexible man’ illustrates liquid modernity very well: contemporary people are challenged to adapt themselves to various circumstances and to be at several places at the same time—all the while being passionate about it, too.

Bauman’s explicit attention to religion is limited. His own position seems close to a crude version of the secularization thesis, seeing religion mainly as a counterforce against modernization. The only relevant and fully contemporary form of religion he distinguishes is fundamentalism, considered as the choice that liberates believers from the agony of choice. Following the work of several sociologists of religion, I have argued that, on the contrary, religion ‘made itself at home’ in solid modernity and is doing the same in liquid modernity. In solid modernity, the Church cultivated a fixed religious identity and mobilized people to participate in its hierarchical organization, principally by attending mass on a weekly or even daily basis. In

13 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000). See Mark Davis, ed., *Liquid Sociology: Metaphor in Zygmunt Bauman’s Analysis of Modernity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) for an evaluation of the ‘liquid’ metaphor.
14 Charles Chaplin, *Modern Times* (United Artists, 1936).
15 Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (London: W.W. Norton, 1998).
16 James A. Beckford, ‘Postmodernity, High Modernity and New Modernity: Three Concepts in Search of Religion,’ in *Zygmunt Bauman*, ed. Peter Beilharz (London: Sage, 1996), 282–97; Kieran Flanagan, ‘Bauman’s implicit theology’ in *Bauman’s Challenge: Sociological Issues for the 21st Century*, eds Mark Davis and Keith Tester (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 94–120.
17 Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997).
18 E.g., James A. Beckford, *Religion and Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Unwin Hyman), 1989.
itself, this contrasted with pre-modern concepts of Christian civilization as a collective and individual practice and habitus rooted in local culture rather than required by a specific organization. One should not forget that church attendance once grew to the high figures we came to take for granted. In liquid modernity, processes that took off in solid modernity are pursued further. Religion enters consumer culture and becomes a matter of choice, associated with networks rather than with institutions, something belonging to the sphere of personal reflection than of a fixed identity—hence the popularity of the term ‘spirituality.’

Is the established Christian religion dying out in liquid modernity? Is personal alternative spirituality taking its place? Both stories miss the continued, but radically transformed, presence of Christianity in liquid modernity. My thesis is that institutional religion is not simply coming to an end in Western societies; rather, its assets and properties are being redistributed. Large parts of the church have gone into liquidation, like companies that have gone bankrupt and are selling out. Religious capital is crossing the boundaries of institutional religion and appears in other social contexts: in the fields of leisure, care, and contemporary culture, Christian religion has an unexpected currency. It can be observed in spiritual care and mental health care, in exhibitions and in the theatre.

This economic metaphor of liquidation provides an alternative to approaches that perceive the decline of religion or a spiritual revolution. Religion is becoming fluid. The social phenomenon called religion is present in various ways and includes elements of Christian religion. This is not to relativize secularization or to reassure proponents of the persistence of religion and Christianity; the power of institutional churches over religion, over church, and even over liturgy has severely declined. Religion in liquid modernity is substantially different.

It seems to me that the ecclesiology that dominates the Roman Catholic Church is often in defence of solid modernity rather than of the Christian tradition. Where bishops uphold membership, the institution, and the denomination, they display an affinity with solid modernity. Where bishops promote choice, networking, events, and the experience of faith, they display an affinity with liquid modernity. A close attachment to a previous social formation of the Church may hinder our ability to perceive the presence of Christianity today. Once we accept liquid modernity as a given, we can see what opportunities it offers and criticize its downsides.

19 Steve Bruce, *God is Dead*, Secularization in the West (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
20 Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005).
21 Ton Bernts and Joantine Berghuys, *God in Nederland 1966–2015* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016); Peter van Dam, James Kennedy, and Friso Wielenga, eds, *Achter de Zuilen. Op Zoek naar Religie in Naoorlogs Nederland* (Amsterdam University Press, 2014); Peter van Rooden, “‘Oral History’ en het Vreemde Sterven van het Nederlandse Christendom,” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 119 (2004): 524–51.
22 Kees de Groot, ‘How the Roman Catholic Church Maneuvers through Liquid Modernity,’ in *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity*, eds Staf Hellemans and Jozef Wissink, *Tilburg Theological Studies* (Münster: Lit, 2012), 195–216.
Three Stages of Transformation

A metaphor says what is similar and whispers what is not.23 Here, the metaphor of liquidation whispers: ‘There are no executors.’ This liquidation is a process, not an act. One cannot single out the responsible actors. Some have blamed ‘the bosses,’ the liberal Dutch clergy, for selling out—the conservative view, supported by a religious market approach.24 Others have blamed the post-Vatican II restoration, when traditionalist bishops drove out the masses by fixing high prices for low quality—the liberal view.25 Both views exaggerate the role of church leaders. Organized religion will not thrive unless it is connected with a particular social cause. Liquidation is happening, in the Netherlands, in Europe, both in Catholic and Protestant churches.

A process of liquidation presumes a phase before the actual liquidation and afterwards. In the following, I will use the three phases to interpret the recent transformations in Catholicism and Dutch society.

Before: Ecclesial Manoeuvres in Fluidity

In my work as a parish consultant for the Diocese of Rotterdam (1998–2002), I often encountered a bureaucratic system. In fact, I was part of it. We promoted federative cooperation between parishes and the involvement of parishioners through pastoral councils, all ‘by the book.’ We stimulated the writing of policy plans and protocols for volunteers. We enhanced the parish as a system. Once you are in, you are in. Then you have to know your place in the organization, follow procedures, and address the right officials.

It seems that the religious notion of surrender, which Peter Berger described as the basic posture vis-à-vis the other reality in Biblical religions, got caught up with the modern notion of finding oneself part of a hierarchical mass organization.26 Modernity affected the way the church and, indeed, the Christian faith was organized.27 One could argue that since the second half of the 19th century, Catholic theology has been systemized in accounts that can be reproduced and which can be used as a checklist for orthodoxy. Furthermore, during the period of church renewal following the Second Vatican Council, the room for mysticism, venerating saints, and practising devotional rituals has been restricted.28 Despite the

23 Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM, 1983), 13.
24 Erik Sengers, “‘Although We are Catholics, We are Dutch’: The Transition of the Dutch Catholic Church from Sect to Church as an Explanation for its Growth and Decline,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2004): 129–39.
25 Peter Nissen, ‘Restauratie in de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk. Kerk zijn met de Ramen Open of de Ramen Dicht?’ *Theologisch Debat* 5 (2008): 4–15.
26 Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 73.
27 Cf. Staf Hellemans, ‘From “Catholicism Against Modernity” to the Problematic “Modernity of Catholicism”’, *Ethical Perspectives* 8 (2001): 117–27.
28 See James Kennedy, ‘Building new Babylon: Cultural Change in the Netherlands during the 1960s’ (PhD, University of Iowa, 1995); Kim Esther Knibbe, *Faith in the Familiar: Continuity and Change in Religious Practices and Moral Orientations in the South of Limburg, the Netherlands* (PhD, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam 2007); Jos Palm, *Moederkerk. De Ondergang van Rooms Nederland* (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: Contact, 2012).
fierce Roman Catholic opposition to ‘modernism,’ this church has embraced solid modernity in both matter and form. The surveys I referred to above, seeking to categorize members of a mass organization, demonstrate a similar tendency. Originally, questionnaires constructed in the second half of the 20th century tended to focus on typical modern issues such as ‘Do you believe in the existence of heaven/purgatory/hell/devil?’ and ‘Did Adam and Eve exist, according to your opinion?’ Although questions on practice, rituals, and salience were not absent, surveys often measured the extent to which respondents fitted in with organized religion.

Through events such as World Youth Day and international network organizations such as Focolare and other New Movements, the Roman Catholic Church as a global institute also takes part in a liquid modern network society. It organizes mega events and promotes small communities, uses social media and accentuates the experience of faith. Yet, its manoeuvres are ambivalent. On the one hand, for example, World Youth Day accommodates to consumer culture; on the other hand, this very culture is criticized. On the one hand, participation by choice in movements with a specific spirituality is appreciated; on the other hand, the value of the organizational structures that have been developed in solid modernity, and the mindset and behaviour patterns these induced, are considered superior. Solid modern notions on ecclesial bureaucracy and keeping church business running, and functional and managerial modes of thought have often been guiding church life. Liquid modernity is met with more suspicion than solid modernity, but is gaining influence.

This stance represents the first phase, before the process of liquidation starts: the ‘firm’ is more or less intact, suffering some losses and using marketing techniques and innovation in order to survive. I take these developments as signs of ecclesial manoeuvres in liquid modernity.

**During: A Devastating Success**

The second phase is the actual process of liquidation itself. This happens when ecclesial initiatives are taken over by the secular world. During the long history of Christianity, this took place numerous times. Bishops, religious orders, and congregations have founded hospitals, schools, firms, and universities that are now no longer in the hands of the church. They have been secularized, in the strict sense of the word. We should acknowledge that this is not equivalent to a discontinuation. The practices are continued, often in another way, and in the context of another regime of power. The church has lost control.

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29 Chris Dols, *Fact Factory: Sociological Expertise and Episcopal Decision Making in the Netherlands, 1946–1972* (Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit, 2014).

30 See, e.g., G.H.L. Zeegers, G. Dekker, and J. Peters, *God in Nederland: Een Statistisch Onderzoek naar Godsdienst en Kerkelijkheid in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Van Ditmar, 1967), 124–26.

31 See Benedict XVI, *Homily Given at Cologne, August 21, 2005* [http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050821_20th-world-youth-day_en.html], accessed 14 March 2018.
An instructive example is constituted by ‘the devastating success’ of chaplaincy in the Netherlands. For over half a century, Dutch society has known chaplains of all kinds of religious and secular backgrounds working in hospitals, in the army, and in penal institutions. They provide spiritual counselling, whether they are Protestant ministers, Catholic priests or pastoral workers, humanist counsellors, rabbis, imams or pandits. Usually, they are salaried by the institutions for which they work, and trained at various theological (or ‘humanistic’) schools. The social construction of the chaplain itself, however, is of Christian origin. The chaplain is a religious specialist, operating within what Max Weber called ‘a firm’ that is legitimized by a systemized worldview. He or she deals with the individual suffering of clients in a particular way: they are asked to talk about themselves, in particular their inner life, and the chaplain searches for alleviating behaviour.

The contemporary profession of ‘spiritual counselling’ is the result of a development from an ecclesial initiative to a practice that is no longer totally controlled by the official Church. Since the 1970s, priests, pastoral workers, ministers, and rabbis have started cooperating in the care of souls for patients, soldiers, and inmates. They established a common, ecumenical, professional organization, and as a result of specialized training trajectories, a separate profession has emerged. These chaplains often work outside their own denomination. What started as an ecclesial service to the world of care, the military, and justice has evolved into a new, precarious profession, sometimes only loosely connected with organized religion. Rather than as an instance of secularization, I regard this persistence of the care of souls as a successful dissemination of the ecclesial tradition in the secular domain.

One may distinguish two strategies in dealing with this process: underlining the confessional identity of, for example, Catholic spiritual care, or promoting the integration of spiritual care within the different institutional contexts, a strategy that downplays fixed religious identities. In institutions directly ruled by the state, such as prisons and the army, the positions of distinctive religions have remained strong. Based on the freedom of religion, the government allows counsellors from any religious background and appoints them as civil servants, as long as the hierarchy of their background community acknowledges them. Interestingly, this presupposes a ‘church-like’ structure, which has given both humanists and Muslims a hard time. In care institutions, such as hospitals, religious identities are often downplayed in favour of a professional identity that may lack the characteristic representation of a specific religion. Recently, the bishops tried to counter this development with an instruction that, in the end, they decided not to publish.

From the perspective of organized Christianity, the case of spiritual counselling testifies to a loss of control over denominational chaplaincy. From a cultural perspective, however, the development of chaplaincy outside the Christian religion shows how a template for a particular practice has been taken over, adapted, and re-used by practitioners of other religions, or even without a professional affiliation to an organized

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32 Max Weber, *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe I/19* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), 90.
33 Stefan Gärtner, Kees de Groot, and Sjaak Körver, ‘Zielzorg in het Publieke Domein. Over de Legitimering van Geestelijke Verzorging,’ *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 52 (2012): 53–72.
worldview at all. In this view, the de-Christianization of chaplaincy has produced something new.

I regard this case as an example of a liquidation process in actu. Church authorities are not just losing control, but initiatives that started off as wanderings in a secular environment are transferred to this environment: secular authorities take over and sometimes, but only sometimes, religious authorities succeed in regaining authority.

After: The World Takes Over

The third stage is the period after liquidation. It shows how religious legacies are presented and recreated in secular environments. In the 1960s, a similar process as the one described above has led to the organized care for people trying to cope with life issues, partly as a continuation of preceding ecclesial initiatives. A development reflects the movement from the church to the world: a particular (pastoral) practice is transferred to the secular domain.

Touristic pilgrimage, secular funeral rituals, cultural re-use of church buildings and monasteries: all are examples of this. A telling example is the contemporary event called ‘The Passion,’ which illustrates quite well how a new institutional context transforms a ritual that has been lifted out of its religious institutional context. ‘The Passion’ is an annual Dutch cross-media project, produced by the independent company Eye2Eye Media, inspired by a British project, The Manchester Passion (2006). It builds on the growing popularity of Bach’s St Matthew passion in Dutch high culture since the early 20th century. Since 2011, every year a new edition of its contemporary version ‘The Passion,’ following the same format, is rendered, each time in a different city. The 2016 edition also took place in the United States (New Orleans) and Belgium (Ieper). The format prescribes time, space, the people involved, the action, and media coverage. In the Netherlands, every Maundy Thursday, national celebrities visit a city’s plaza to perform a musical Way of the Cross with participants carrying a big cross to the plaza where the crowd is gathered. Several scenes have been recorded earlier and are projected on big screens. A host, also known from television, narrates the story. A remarkable detail is that secular songs are used and placed in the setting of the Gospel. Actors are not necessarily Christian, but during the process of announcing and promoting the event, they have to follow strict rules regarding the way they present themselves in the media.

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34 Cornelis Nicolaas [Kees] de Groot, Naar een Nieuwe Clerus. Psychotherapie en Religie in het Maandblad voor de Geestelijke Volksgezondheid (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1995).
35 Paul Post, ‘Ritual Studies,’ Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion, Oxford University Press (2015), http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-21 a, accessed 4 June 2018.
36 Martin J.M. Hoondert and Mirella Klomp, ‘“The Streets of Gouda are our Jerusalem!” A Popular Passion Performed in the Market Square of a Dutch City,’ in Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities: Space and Ritual Dynamics in Europe and Africa, eds P. Post, Ph. Nel, and W. van Beek (Trenton/London/Cape Town: Africa World Press, 2014), 313–30.
37 Mirella Klomp and Marten van der Meulen, ‘The Passion as Ludic Practice—Understanding Public Ritual Performances in Late Modern Society: A Case Study from the Netherlands,’ Journal of Contemporary Religion 32 (2017): 387–401.
This event itself is broadcasted live on Dutch public television by both the Evangelical and the Roman-Catholic broadcasting organization, watched in 2016 by 3.2 million viewers which exceeds the television audience of a football match in the Premier League. They are invited to participate virtually and react through social media. As only 25 percent of the Dutch population (2016: 17 million) consider themselves church members, this number indicates that the audience is not restricted to members of the Christian churches. A national survey shows that non-Christians appreciate the programme as well. Some churches do integrate this event in their programme for Holy Week or construct local versions of it. City councils use the event to promote their city, broadcasting organizations to express their identity, churches to proclaim the Gospel, visitors to experience oneness, express their religious identity, commemorate suffering or enjoy being near their favourite singers and actors. All parties involved have their own means and ends. Traditions such as Passion play and processions are taken up and joined with elements of musical theatre and television shows to create particular experiential effects and to contribute to the ends of the parties involved: media exposure, profit, propaganda, and evangelization.

From an ecclesial perspective, ‘The Passion’ demonstrates both how religious organizations seek to communicate the Christian faith to a secular audience and how the Christian tradition is exported to the secular domain. This depends on the extent to which one would say that religious actors are in control. From a cultural perspective, actors such as city councils, artists, and media celebrities use the Christian tradition as a resource for new products and creations. The movement also takes place the other way round: from the world to the church. Religion is used as a cultural resource.

In order to illustrate further how this is not only interesting from a sociological point of view, but also a challenge to theology, I will explore a case study, taken from my fieldwork on theatre. Several theatre shows approach the form and content of a liturgical meeting in such a way that the distinction sometimes is blurred. An example of such a production is one by two female performers, Minou Bosua and Ingrid Wender, who call themselves ‘The Flourishing Virgins.’ The two have a slightly controversial reputation. The show was originally performed at a festival in a neo-gothic church building that was no longer in use for church services. A gospel choir assisted, singing to the accompaniment of an organ. In the following, I will give an account of the performance I attended in the city of Den Bosch (17 August 2008).

Outside the building, a ‘street musician’ is playing ‘We shall overcome.’ The performers, dressed in white suits, appear, address us as ‘Congregation!’ and tell us what to do: we have to clean the inside of our left and right cheek with water and spit it out in the containers that are there. Then we can enter. On the chairs are ‘missals,’ that is, a folded piece of paper with the program: an introit, a confessional rite, lectures, a sermon, a

38 In 2014, the Roman-Catholic broadcasting organization (KRO) merged with the Protestant broadcasting organization (NCRV) into KRO-NCRV, which continued the involvement.
39 Bernts and Berghuijs, God in Nederland 1966–2015, 74–76.
40 Kees de Groot, ‘Theater als Wij-Water: Gemeenschap en Liturgie bij de Bloeiende Maagden,’ in Als Ik Wij Word. Nieuwe Vormen van Verbondenheid, eds Jonneke Bekkenkamp and Joris Verheijen (Almere: Parthenon, 2010), 63–80.
responsorial, an offertory, the sharing of wine, baptism, absolution, and a revelation. Various songs and three so-called ‘passion plays’ are also listed.

The performers enter from behind, with the bowls of water, place them at the stage, and welcome us. We are silent for those who are not here, and get started with a song and a prayer. We are asked to confess by raising hands: ‘Who has once told a lie?’, ‘Who has eaten pork knowing it came from industrial farming?’, ‘Said “I love you” while really wanting to hear that that the other loves you?’ The show moves on. After this rite and a hymn, we listen to a sermon on evil: in order to promote peace in the Middle East we have to acknowledge the evil within our own hearts in order to make it harmless. ‘Who do you really dislike?’ ‘About whom was your last gossip?’ The ritual continues: ‘Let us sing the following curse song and after we have let it all out, those negative feelings can be converted.’ We sing along to a well-known melody (Glory, glory, hallelujah) wishing the other ‘the head of a neurotic’ and a ‘collapsed lung.’ Afterwards, so we are told, we are able to call the person and have a coffee with him or her.

We hear a reading with the following content. The Japanese scholar Masuro Emoto has done experiments with water. He took three bottles of water: the first bottle he called ‘idiot’ and labelled it as such, to the second he said nothing, and to the third he said ‘I love you’ and labelled it as such. The water was put in the refrigerator, taken out and . . . the third bottle showed—slides shown in the show—beautiful crystals as opposed to the ugly, unstructured patterns in the first!

The performers invite us to act accordingly, since we consist of 90 percent water ourselves. We follow the instruction: each half of the congregation says to the other ‘I love you’ and the other respond ‘Thank you. I love you too.’ And then, so we are told, a miracle has happened. The spittle is gone from the water; the bowls contain clear water! We are blessed with the water, the ‘baptism.’ Time to pray. We are asked to write down what we wish for, and, later on, to finish two sentences: ‘the nice thing about money is . . .’ and ‘the nasty thing about money is . . .’, and also: ‘the nice thing about love is . . .’, and ‘the nasty thing about love is . . .’ All papers are collected, followed by the offertory, a real offertory: resulting in 270 euros. We are told how much it is, since, so it appears, the money will be given to one of us, the visitors. The wishes of seven visitors are selected at random; the audience decides with cheering. A young man wants to buy a small car, a Renault 4; an older man wants to donate to a development project in Sri Lanka. The young man wins, but is confronted with a dilemma. He could donate the money to a girl with dysfunctional legs to enable her to get a prosthesis. He does not, which is considered ‘OK’. Still the issue is raised: ‘But what would you have done?’ It is discussed freely. A song is sung, entitled: ‘We have got enough.’ We drink wine, toast to peace, and the performers stage a little discussion: one (Minou) believes everything will be all right from now on, the other (Ingrid) has severe doubts. The show—or, rather, the meeting—ends with a poetic vision of doves coupling in peace, and a closing song by the choir.

The show required active participation of the audience, who were asked to reflect on their experiences. At the heart of the show was the question: ‘How should we deal with evil?’ Interesting in this case is the contrast with official church services. In this playful service, provocative elements of the Christian tradition, such as confession, imprecatory psalms, and the uncensored input of mass intentions are used, whereas modern church services tend to leave these elements aside, or transform them into something more
‘civilized.’ Elements are derived from the Christian tradition in a process that is beyond the control of any churches. Elsewhere, I have discussed how other shows used liturgical elements but did not accomplish a sense of community or a transcendence to the sacred.\footnote{Kees de Groot, ‘Playing with Religion in Contemporary Theatre,’ \textit{Implicit Religion} 15 (2012): 457–75.} In my interpretation, this one does. Theology may appreciate such developments as a dissemination of the gospel so long as it is, indeed, the Good News that is preached here, regardless of the status of the ones who preach it.

**Conclusion**

My take on these processes in the Church, chaplaincy, and the performing arts differs from the more usual perspectives. Depending on the author’s position, the storyline usually starts with the reign of religion, describes its demise, and ends with its fall. Alternatively, the story starts with the dominance of religion, describes the rise of the secular—or the spiritual—and ends with its victory over religion. Both plots are similar: the religious regime fades away and another is established. One is a narrative of loss, the other of liberation.

The story I have told is also about shifts in balances of power, but I have interpreted the developments as transformations rather than as violent takeovers. New practices were developed using older traditions. Ecclesial actors have contributed to changes that have resulted in a loss of ecclesial control. Forms of capital that had been accumulated within the religious field—for example, concepts of liturgy and pastoral care—are deployed in other fields.\footnote{Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Le Champ Religieux dans le Champ de Manipulation Symbolique,’ in \textit{Les Nouveaux Clercs. Prêtres, Pasteurs et Spécialistes des Relations Humaines et de la Santé}, ed. Centre de Sociologie du Protestantisme (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1985), 255–61.} What was already there took on a new shape.

Unlike a popular notion of secularization as a predetermined process, I have identified actors and factors that have contributed to the course of the action. The case of chaplaincy, for example, shows how different institutional contexts and different strategies produce different outcomes. In contemporary art, the existing Church has often been disregarded, but religious and spiritual traditions are embraced. The religious and the secular are more interrelated than one would expect from the perspective of a society in which religion has a position on the margin.

Unlike the narrative of the spiritual revolution as a liberation from religious power, this approach shows how religion and spirituality continue to be linked with power. Religion has not become an individual preference.\footnote{Heelas and Woodhead, \textit{The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality}.} There is more than its private role in late-modern society.\footnote{Wim Hofstee and Arne van der Kooij, eds, \textit{Religion beyond Its Private Role in Modern Society} (Leiden: Brill, 2013).} Religion is present in the public domain and is involved in the dynamics of the sectors in which it is present, such as the media, health care, leisure, and art. Religion has not ceased being an institutional phenomenon, regardless of the de-institutionalization of the religious field.
Both the continuities and the discontinuities between the religious and the secular should be viewed. On the one hand, the religious field has co-produced new, secular institutions; on the other hand, the vast influence of religious discourse and religious organizations has evaporated. At least partly, the religious field has dissolved.

This historical-sociological approach has drawn attention to at least four processes: (1) the formation of the religious field itself; (2) the contribution of the religious field to the secular domain; (3) the decay of the religious field; and (4) the use of elements, originating in the religious sphere, in other spheres. Thus, this perspective has moved beyond the paradox of increased interest in religion versus the demise of religion. Processes of disembedding and re-embedding occur in succession and interaction. The metaphor of liquidation indicates both what is lost in the religious sphere and what is gained in the secular.

**Outlook**

The overall result is a more realistic picture of Western Christianity. Its structures are partly disappearing and its position in the world is changing. In the Netherlands, on average every week, one church building is closed down.45 In Ireland, the regime of the Roman Catholic Church is still dominant, but it is clear that the path the country is taking is approaching that of other Western-European countries.46 The obvious answer of a church facing liquidation may be to fight it, and to try to maintain itself. After all, processes of liquidation may very well result in the end of the Church as we know it. However, some theologians have advocated that the church should stop focusing on itself in an escape form the world. They identify a lot of concerns with the Church as ‘narcissistic’ identity politics.47 Instead, the Church should focus on its mission and turn towards the world since the encounter with Jesus Christ is both in the church and in the world. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer is often quoted, writing from his Berlin prison in 1944:

> The church is church only when it is there for others. As a first step it must give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the freewill offerings of the congregations and perhaps be engaged in some secular vocation [Beruf]. The church must participate in the worldly tasks of life in the community—not dominating but helping and serving. It must tell people in every calling [Beruf] what a life with Christ is, what it means ‘to be there for others.’

45 Taskforce Toekomst Kerkgebouwen, ‘Omvang Afsstoting Kerkgebouwen is Schrikbarend,’ http://www.toekomstkerkgebouwen.nl/NL/content/3-1-31/cijfers.htm., accessed 12 March 2018.

46 See Tom Inglis, *Meanings of Life in Contemporary Ireland: Webs of Significance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 123–53.

47 Peter Cruchley-Jones, ‘Findings: One Foot in the Grave?’ in *God at Ground Level: Reappraising Church Decline in the UK through the Experience of Grass Roots Communities and Situations*, ed. Peter Cruchley-Jones (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), 117–29.

48 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘Outline for a Book,’ in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. De Gruchy, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 499–504.
This position traces an impetus to liquidation in the Christian tradition itself and challenges church leaders to abandon a trade as shopkeepers and focus on the mission of the Church, here conceived as serving the world.\textsuperscript{49} In the end, this strategy may serve the continuation of the Church better than a strategy of maintenance: a self-disinterested, radical \textit{mission}-shaped Church could be successful in unforeseen ways. However, from a sociological perspective it remains to be seen to what extent the real existing church can afford to devote itself to service and disregard the care for its own infrastructure, systematic religious socialization, and cultivating a more favourable public image. Future research could clarify not only how examples of a serving church would operate in practice, but also how theology in the context of liquid modernity is developed.

Miraculous restarts have happened before both in the history of business firms and in the history of organized religion. The future is open.

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\textsuperscript{49} Ulrich Schmiedel, ‘Opening the Church to the Other: Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Reception of Ernst Troeltsch,’ \textit{International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church} 17 (2017): 184–98.