

## The Light From Above, Modern Religious Heritage in the Netherlands- Unbelievable

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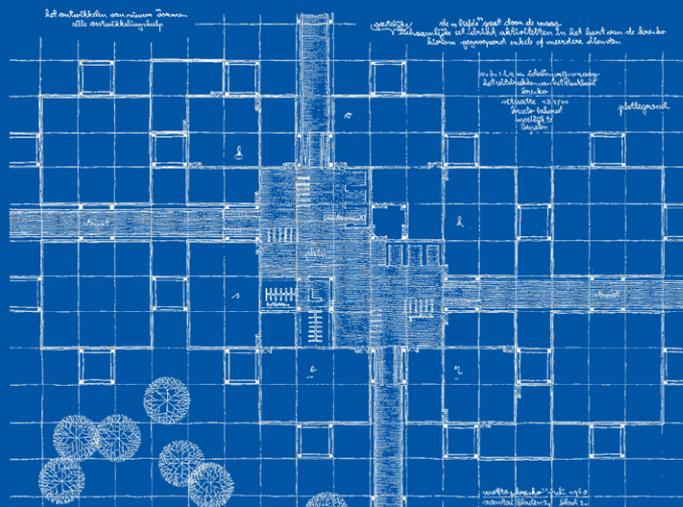
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# THE LIGHT FROM ABOVE

Modern Religious Heritage in the Netherlands



special do.co.mo.mo\_nl 2008 - conference issue

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# INTRODUCTION

At the time of construction of the Van Nelle factory an admiring journalist who followed the daily progress of this modern structure from his passing train was asked what sort of architecture and what kind of building this would be; was it light itself that was to be made there?

How ironic it is then to organise in this building the exhibition 'The Light from Above,' dedicated to our modern religious heritage. Modern architecture demonstrates a remarkable discontinuity.

This special docomomo\_nl newsletter is also dedicated to modern religious heritage. Chance has it that the conference falls in "The Year of Religious Heritage." The newsletter will be handed out to visitors to the 2008 conference and is therefore in English.

An extensive background story to the exhibition can be found in 'The Light from Above: Transformations of Dutch Church Building after the Second World War', by Ivan Nevzgodin, the most important man behind the exhibition and guest editor of the newsletter.

In addition we have been fortunate to find a number of publicists and interested parties who have contributed their efforts to this publication on the architecture of our modern religious heritage in the Netherlands and Flanders. The concept 'modern' is really more an indication of the period than of the ideology or style..... There seems to be no category of building in the post-war period that has shown such diversity in design concepts as "the church".

The opening of the exhibition will take place during the conference. After this it will appear elsewhere, to be indicated on our website.

*Frank Foole*



right  
Schiedam, Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk  
(photo Rook and Nagelkerke)

left  
Rotterdam, Doopgezinde Gemeente  
(photo Rook and Nagelkerke)

# TRANSFORMATIONS OF DUTCH POST-WAR CHURCH BUILDINGS

## An exhibition on the occasion of the 10th DOCOMOMO Conference

In the Netherlands the year 2008 has been designated the Year of Religious Heritage. In spite of all the celebrations and the impressive richness of the Dutch religious heritage the year is giving rise to some strong pessimistic feelings. There is a continuous process of secularization amongst the Dutch population; while ethnic and demographic changes also contribute to the decrease in the influence of Christian thought in society. As a social phenomenon this can be assessed in various ways, but for the built heritage it has really serious consequences. According a recent forecast, during the forthcoming ten years Dutch religious communities will sell nearly 1000 church buildings. The future of these buildings is very uncertain.

Ivan Nevzgodin

According the calculations of the Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw Foundation, in the first two post-war decades, 1564 churches and chapels were erected in The Netherlands. Today the National Service for Archaeology, Cultural Landscape and Built Heritage (RACM) includes 718 churches, 49 chapels, 42 monasteries, five abbeys, four church centres, three temporary churches and one beguine church in its inventory of the monuments of the post-war reconstruction in the Netherlands.

Post-war Dutch religious architecture inherited several crucial ideas from the inter-war period. In 1928-1929 J.J.P. Oud, with his Apostolic Church in Kiefhoek (Rotterdam), introduced a previously unseen abstraction into religious architecture. It is noticeable, that Oud designed the building as an additional element in the urban context of his housing and even had to look for a Christian denomination that would be interested in the location and in his design. This was a real step forward, as we realize when comparing it with the First Church of Christ Scientist of 1927, by the godfather of the Dutch Modern Movement, H.P. Berlage. During the inter-bellum the construction of the Reformed Churches also gave rise to another interesting development.

### THE DENOMINATIONALISM (DE VERZUIJING)

The compartmentalization in socio-political life according denominations, known as the *verzuijing*, was a characteristic aspect of the postwar development of Dutch society. This sectarianism was influential in the choice of an architect, constructor and contractor for housing, shops, offices, and even stricter for church buildings. Directly after the war Roman Catholic Church construction was dominated by the 'Delft school'. The adherents to this school were grouped around its initiator and spiritual leader, a Catholic proselyte, Marinus Jan Granpré Molière (1883-1972). In 1924 Granpré Molière became a professor at the Technical High School in Delft. [1]. With his traditionalist ideas of architecture he succeeded in dominating this school for several decades and passed important building assignments to his disciples. [2] The adepts of this school usually took the early Christian basilica as an example and restricted themselves to the use of brick as a suitable building material for ecclesiastical structures. The influence of Granpré Molière on another group of Roman Catholic architects, known as the *Bossche School*, was largely confined to ideology. The *Bossche School* took its name from the town 's-Hertogenbosch (or Den Bosch), where from 1946 until 1973 a special course of Church architecture was taught. The doctrine of this school was based on the proportion system of the Plastic Number (*het Plastisch getal*) elaborated by a Benedictine monk Hans van der Laan (1904-1991). Dom Hans van der Laan applied his system to the building of the Saint-Benedict Abbey in Mamelis near Vaals. His building, with its simplicity, sober use of materials, and incredible penetration of light, is so elegant, that it could be considered one of the best masterpieces of Dutch twentieth century architecture. His later building practice was rather modest, but several talented architects (including his brother Nico van der Laan (1908-1986), Jan de Jong (1917-2001), Cees Pouderoyen (1912-1993) and others) who were influenced by his ideas made a considerable contribution to Roman Catholic architecture in the south of the Netherlands. Nowadays the heritage of the *Bossche School* is under great threat. Several important buildings have already been demolished. Because they were con-



secrated, the Roman Catholic Church sees the buildings as sacred objects and is not very flexible in accepting new functions for them. For this reason in the Diocese of 's-Hertogenbosch many buildings have already been demolished. In any analysis of Roman Catholic Church architecture that of the architect Alphons Boosten (1893-1951) occupies an exclusive position. Although he used traditional materials, he achieved exceptional expressiveness, which clearly distinguishes him from the other Roman Catholic architects of the south of the country.

In the early work of two Roman Catholic architects, G.H.M. Holt and F.P.J. Peutz, we observe a search for the modernization of Roman Catholic church building. Both architects worked on church design during the Second World War. In both cases the transformations of the designs are very interesting to follow. Both architects finally completed buildings, the images of which are dominated by the use of reinforced concrete. Peutz found an excuse for using this un-Catholic material for his St. Anna Church in Heerlen (1953) because he could reduce the building costs (concrete was the cheapest material for the proposed gigantic cupola) and construct a building on possibly unstable sites in this mining area. Peutz started his education as a civil engineer in Delft, which explains his why he chose to design a concrete dome. Gerard Hendrik Maria Holt (1904-1988) was in the difficult position of being both a Catholic architect and admirer of the Modern Movement. The transformation of his design of a church (originally named the church of St. Anthony of Padua, but finally dedicated to St. Joseph) in the new neighborhood of Bos en Lommer in Amsterdam (built together with K.P. Tholens) in 1951-1953 shows his struggle for modernity. For this Catholic enclave (old people's housing, general housing and a school) Holt first designed traditional looking brick buildings with some reinforced concrete elements. To change the minds of the Building Committee Holt organized an excursion to France. However, even the meeting with Auguste Perret and the visit to his Church of Notre Dame du Raincy (1921-1922) could not convince the Committee to use the new design proposed by Holt. They objected to a 'superfluous application of glass' (*"could have a bad stimulation effect on the youth of Amsterdam"* sic). Nevertheless Holt succeeded in building one of the most modern churches in the Netherlands. Now this building functions as a climbing hall. The attempts of Holt to develop a design for cheaper standardized church building should also be noted.

## FOREIGN INFLUENCES

Although church architecture was a field of experimentation, very few epoch-making Dutch churches were built. Most Dutch architects were elaborating on the concepts of their foreign colleagues. During and directly after the Second World War Scandinavian influence was dominant in Dutch architecture. However it is difficult to overestimate the impact of the influence of the French architect-brothers Perret and the two Jeanneret cousins, one of whom worked under the name Le Corbusier. In particular the chapel of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, completed in 1954, and the Dominican priory Sainte Marie de La Tourette (1956-1960), both designed by the French-Swiss Le Corbusier had a big impact. There were several other influences deriving from Dutch traditional architecture and other European countries and also from as far afield as the USA. There



top  
Aerdenhout, Adventchurch,  
Sijmons

bottom right  
The Hague, Loos Duinen, Ontmoetings kerk,  
Drexhage

bottom left  
Amsterdam, Bos en Lommer, St. Joseph Church,  
Holt and Tholens



were even more exotic influences from Japan (for example three Dutch Reformed Churches in Zeist (1959-1962), Rijswijk (1962) and Amsterdam (1962-1964) by M.F. Duintjer).

## ARCHITECTS OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES

In The Hague in 1946 the architect Karel L. Sijmons (1908-1989) published a book *The Protestant Church building*. This book discusses both the restorations of the buildings and the search for new architecture for the Protestant Churches. It brought several commissions to the architectural firm of Sijmons. He, and later his ex-partner Piet Zanstra (1905-2003), built several architecturally important churches. In 1957 the exhibition 'ARK – ten years of church building' in the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam had already shown many of the achievements of Protestant architecture. Such architects as J.H. van den Broek and J.B. Bakema, J.B. Baron van Asbeck, M.F. Duintjer and B. van Kasteel designed several outstanding church buildings. The Resurrection church (known as *De Kolenkit*, 1955-1956) of M.F. Duintjer has a long-axis oval plan and vertical louvred wall construction. This building is interesting not only because of its architectural expression (it became an icon image of the new neighbourhood), but also as an example of how a Protestant church became a public social centre. The building has an impressive number of different ancillary rooms for social services. J.B. Baron van Asbeck was also a very successful church architect. Van Asbeck experimented with new materials and structures. His Dutch Reformed Easter Church in Amstelveen (1963) is an example of his innovative approach. The building has a hyperbolic paraboloid timber roof on a square plan, and played an important urban role.

In the late 1960s Protestant architecture achieved a high level of abstraction with the building of *De Ontmoetingskerk* in The Hague (Loosduinen) by the architect G. Drexhage in 1969. With very simple means Drexhage created an extremely pure and impressive church interior: the alignment of the benches provides a response to horizontal louvres of the external walls.

The exhibition follows the stylistic transformation in the church building of different confessions. To place the Modern Movement in its context several examples of 'shake-hands' architecture and unusual cases have also been selected for the exhibition. In contrast to Belgium, in The Netherlands usually relatively big churches were

built (mainly in the post-war expansion districts). Nevertheless one small Church building, the *Eglise Wallone* in s' -Hertogenbosch (1958) by the architect H. Knijffizer, has been included in the exhibition.

A separate part of the exhibition shows the impact of the 'liturgical movement' on architecture.

Another specific aspect is the application of the arts in the religious buildings. [3] We could mark the general tendency towards the merging of the approaches of the Catholics and Protestants. While the Protestants became increasingly more generous in the application of the arts, Catholics became more selective in their choices.

This analysis of the evolution of the post-war Dutch church architecture concludes with two Roman Catholic churches. One, the Pastor of Ars Church in The Hague, built by Aldo van Eyck in 1964-1969, the other - the Andrew Church /Chamber of Gabriel in Heerlen by Laurens Bisscheroux built in 1977. Both these extraordinary buildings are brilliant results of the highly individual anarchistic interpretation of a Church building.

## THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

In 2004 the amalgamation of the three main protestant churches formed the Protestant Church in The Netherlands (PKN, *Protestantse Kerk in Nederland*). This favorable development in the history of Dutch Protestantism has negative consequences for the post-war church buildings. After the unification, congregations could keep only one, usually older, building for the services and had to sell the others. While Protestants are very flexible in the adaptation of their former churches to other functions, the Roman Catholic Church prefers to demolish a church building, rather than to re-use it for a function, which is not in accordance with Christian ideals.

As mentioned above, it was necessary to find a new use for 1000 buildings. To make a good choice further research is needed. I can suggest several possible criteria for this difficult selection of uses for valuable buildings: the position of the building in relation to the transformation of liturgical ideas and in church history in general; the architectural originality, the individuality

The Hague, pastoor Van Ars church, '64-'69.

Aldo van Eyck

of the building program and the ground plan solution; the urban location of the church building; the relation of the building to the applied arts: a church building as a complete work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*); and the place of the building in the oeuvre of the architect. It is also necessary to investigate the need for further elaboration of these criteria. The question of whether the Dutch state should pay twice for the religious buildings should also be answered. During the Reconstruction period the State subsidized the construction of churches. Why should the secular State now pay again to keep the monuments of disappearing religions?

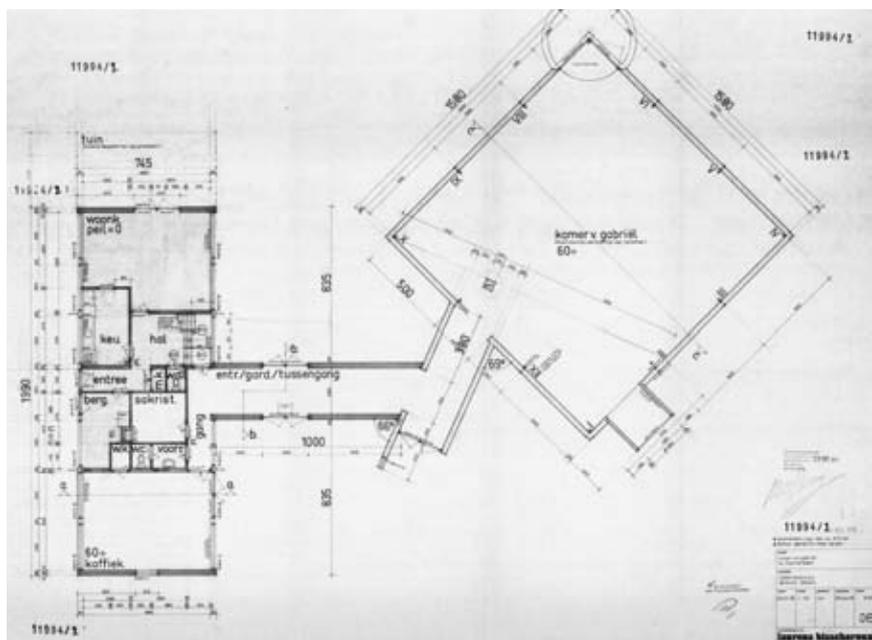
Usually the religious buildings are over-dimensioned. In the past this extra space was sometimes even seen as an offering to God, but now this makes buildings more suitable for re-use. The most favorable solution is to adapt a church building to new demands, while still keeping its religious function. One of the best recent examples of such an approach is the Emmaus Church in The Hague (originally St. Anthony and Louis Church by architects F.P.J. Peutz, W. Wouters, E. Laudy, 1958), which was refurbished in 2006 by Mari Baauw and René Oliver (Royal Haskoning). For four parishes (they were united in 1995), the architects created a flexible multi-functional complex with an inviting appearance. The successful conversion of a church building to apartments can be illustrated by the building of Dutch Reformed Resurrection Church in Schiedam. Famous Dutch Functionalists J.H. van den Broek and J.B. Bakema designed this building in 1956-1957. It was one of the first really modern church buildings in the country. In 2003 P.A. Peeters (Geluktreurniet Architecten) made a design for the re-use of this building, which in 2005 was awarded the Dutch National Renovation Prize.

Maybe the most innovative recent example of re-use is the transformation of the Ludger Church in Lichtenvoorde. Architect Gerard Schouten (1924-2000) designed the church in 1966. It was not built exactly according to his design. Thanks to the efforts of architect Hans van Beek of Atelier PRO to preserve this unique creation of Schouten, the space of within the former church building was transformed into a patio for new houses. Van Beek kept a 'footprint' of the church building. He virtually re-developed the original idea of an open-air church, a place for meditation in the nature of Gerard Schouten. It is also a reinvention of the Dutch tradition of *het hofje* (the courtyard) - with a magnificent result.

Ivan Nevzgodin is researcher at TU Delft

## NOTES

- 1 Unfortunately as yet there is still no critical monograph on this influential Dutch architect. However the recently published dissertation of Marinke Steenhuis on the private&public partner of Granpré Molière, the architect Pieter Verhagen (1882-1950) is a valuable contribution. Steenhuis, Marinke - *Stedenbouw in het landschap. Pieter Verhagen (1882-1950)*, Rotterdam: NAi Uitgevers, 2007.
- 2 Also worthy of mention is the work of Granpré Molière on Wieringermeer. It is possible that thanks to his efforts the state system of subsidies for church construction came into being. For the results of research into this see the forthcoming dissertation of Marisa J. Melchers of the Leiden University.
- 3 Drs. Marisa J. Melchers prepared these two parts of the exhibition.



top and center  
Heerlen, St. Andrew (Andreaskerk),  
Bisscheroux

bottom  
Schiedam, Reformed Resurrection Church,  
van den Broek en Bakema

## ROBERT NAGELKERKE AND PIET ROOK: ARCHITECTURE PHOTOGRAPHY

Piet Rook has had the idea for a book on churches for a while now. It was to be a church architecture guide, and in addition he wanted to show the four dimensions of architecture. This would be thoroughly relevant now so many churches are being re-designated or demolished. What happens in the course of time to buildings? Especially for this news letter, we have asked Piet Rook and his compagnon Robert Nagelkerke to photograph a number of Reconstruction churches in their present context. You will see the results throughout the newsletter.

Lies Rollman



### PIET ROOK

Piet Rook's most important passion was and still is music. Alas, he had too little talent for playing an instrument professionally, so worked as chemical laboratory assistant and salesman in a record shop. In his own time did photography as a hobby.

As self-taught photographer, he was introduced in 1979 to the architect Carel Weber by Kees Vollemans, a friend who gave art history lessons to the in Delft school of Architecture and then photographed the just-finished Paperclip in Rotterdam. There followed work for more young architects. Since then he has made architecture photography his profession. He is particularly known for the architectural guides that he made with Paul Groenendijk and Piet Vollaard for publisher O10.

### ROBERT NAGELKERKE

Robert Nagelkerke has worked as a photographer since the completion of his photography course in 1961. At first he worked mostly for advertising and industry, but in the course of time increasingly for architecture bureaus. Piet and Robert know each other from their study days and worked together from time to time; for the last ten years they have operated as a duo. Robert is the technical half of the duo (he bought his first Apple in '87) and Piet the artistic half.

Vlaard, Immanuel kerk  
(photo Rook and Nagelkerke)



top  
Magnalia Dei Church  
(photo Rook and Nagelkerke)

bottom  
Maassluis, Immanuel Church  
(photo Rook and Nagelkerke)

## POST-WAR CHURCHES

Recently, the committee of the city council, district Slotervaart in Amsterdam, gave permission to tear down the Pius X- church by the architects office (Jan) Van der Laan, Hermans, Van de Eerden and Kirch. This church, from 1960 in Bosche School style, had to give way to the construction of a community centre for housing corporation De Alliantie.

By purchasing the Pius X, the corporation committed itself to its destruction, since the bishopric of Haarlem would not give permission for re-use of the building.

Two things strike the attention here: a church, or at least the physical expression of one, is apparently no longer considered a 'community centre' and also a social-cultural phenomenon where the Catholic Church is working willingly towards the destruction of its own heritage.

Anita Blom

### INSTRUMENT FOR THE "MAKEABLE"

If anything can be considered typical of the connection between society and new districts' reconstruction in the post-war period, it is the building of the churches in the post-war districts in the interest of supporting the community. In the *verzuilde* (closely ordered) Netherlands, it was the instrument for the "makeable" society, a society which through the war years had been considerably damaged. In the recovery from the war's destruction, preference was given to two types of building: farms for food production, and churches for the recovery of community spirit and spiritual life. The government made available (for that difficult time not inconsiderable) subsidy money.

But also in the design of the new neighbourhoods and districts an important role was given to the churches. In the south of the Netherlands the bishoprics were included in the development of the council's structure plans and were thus given a prominent (often central) position in the area. Above the "great rivers" (Rhine, Maas and Waal) and in most districts the three most important denominations were represented: de Gereformeerde, de Hervormde and the Catholic Churches. Especially in the Catholic Church an own enclave was often created, since Catholic schools were also built in the neighbourhood of the church. Logically, the houses in the neighbourhood were also granted to Catholic housing corporations.



Since the 1950's and 1960's the Netherlands has rapidly been losing its churches. Many post-war neighbourhoods have now acquired other population compositions than they were built for. As a result of this many churches are threatened with emptiness and decay. For the small group of believers that have remained the maintenance of these churches is too much to ask. The smelting of the Protestant churches in the Samen-op-wegkerk (Together on the Way Church) can be a solution for the maintenance of a church but always means the loss of one or more other churches. Multiple use as a solution is not always possible: the Catholic service forbids this and for some Protestant communities it is difficult to talk about or the discussion is still in its infancy.

## TRADEMARK

As a result of the often beneficial location of the early post-war districts (near the centre, the facilities and the exit routes) the ground which the church stands on is often worth more than the church itself. Since the council will often cooperate in altering a zoning use plan for housing, ground prices rise even further and so the choice of tearing a church down is quickly made. Keeping these churches is therefore often strongly associated with the appreciation for the building itself and with the efforts of those directly involved: owners, councils and the neighbourhoods. With redefinition of use the church can remain a trademark, or become one again for the renovated neighbourhoods. In the last few years, the government has (again) given more importance to the identities of neighbourhoods and the possible identity-carriers of them. Churches are often the existing buildings which architectonically and functionally can fulfil a meaningful role in the uplifting of a neighbourhood.

Two examples: in Venray is the Christ the King church, or Peace church, by O. Boosten (Kennedyplein). In 2001 the church was designated out of use due to the extreme decrease in the number of believers in the neighbourhood. Since then, an office of the Homecare organisation has been established - a suitable function for the greying neighbourhood. Because the public wanted to keep the exterior of the building with its stained glass windows by Eugene Laudy and the glass-in-concrete windows by H. Martens, a remarkable alteration has been executed: a vide in the middle of the church has been realised for the introduction of daylight. (photos) through this alteration the building could be made suitable for its new function and the church has been kept for the neighbourhood

.The Pniël church (or the elichtje) in Bos en Lommer in Amsterdam by the architect B.T. Boeyinga (1954) was in 2005 rebuilt into café Podium Mozaïek and a GP's practice by the housing corporation Het Oosten Kristal. (Photos) It is once again a centre for the neighbourhood, also for the 70% immigrant population.

Naturally it can be disputed whether the churches' monumental values have been sufficiently kept following their re-designations. The interiors have been lost through these new functions. Typical of post-war church construction is the strong dynamic between exterior and interior, and the monumental art. The architects and their commissioners were strongly attracted to the experience of the religions, partly through the fall of light and also the public. But looking back over history, re-designation of churches seems almost to speak for itself:



hospital, barracks, stables, salt depots, our Middle Ages churches – they have all been through it.

We will (soon) be without the Pius X church, partly through a bishopric that (still) attaches no importance to its post-war heritage. In Breda the Onze Lieve Vrouwe van de Altijddurende Bijstand (what's in a name) will be re-designated and will be part of the Brede School for the neighbourhood De Heuvel. Hopefully, good examples from one bishopric will promote good practice by others, because tearing down is losing for ever.

*Anita Blom, specialist in early post-war architecture and urban design on the subject of post-war neighbourhoods and redevelopment.*

top  
Bos en Lommer, Amsterdam, Pniël Church, arch. Boeyinga '54

center  
Venray, Peace Church,  
arch. Boosten

bottom left  
Amsterdam, Pius X Church

## LITURGICAL FUNCTIONALISM: THE POST-WAR MODERNISATION OF LITURGY AND CHURCH BUILDING

Dutch post-war church architecture is typified by an increasing modernisation. Church architecture, defined for many years by Christian liturgical traditions and symbolism, evolved in a few decades into multifunctional buildings constructed in modern materials and with modern methods. The changed views on liturgy and social organisation within different calvarsted, or pillars of society led to new demands being placed on church design. The great demand for new churches in villages destroyed or damaged in WWII, in addition to the new expansion of suburbs and towns was a stimulus for these developments. In this text the modernisation process of church interiors and exteriors will be looked at, focussing on the three most important denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, the Dutch Reformed Churches.

Marisa Melchers

### THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Within the Roman Catholic Church in the years immediately after the War, a strong preference for traditionally designed brick basilicas with longitudinal seating blocks in the nave. The choir ended in an apse and was preferably accentuated by a turret or tower.

Under the influence of the Liturgical Movement, which strived for greater involvement by believers in the activities in the choir, some architects such as A.J.N. Boosten (1893-1951) and Joh. Sluijmer (1894-1979), chose for the addition of a transept filled with choir-oriented seating. In 1953 the church builder F.P.J. Peutz (1896-1974) worked this "Christocentric" idea out in his concrete St. Anna church in Heerlen. In this centralized building the community of believers is concentrated under a cupola. A square-axial seating plan is arranged round a square, slightly raised priest's choir. Although there was admiration for the seating plan and the "honest soberness" of the concrete in liturgical circles, the believers did have some criticism of the lack of devotional atmosphere.



Nearly 15 years later the central design was an accepted phenomenon in Catholic church building. In the Mother God church in Voorschoten (1967) by architect H.N.M. Neffkens the parishioners are seated under a pyramidal roof arranged round a narrow lengthwise choir. The baptismal font was given a place in the choir and the tabernacle moved to an external concrete niche. This enabled the priest to carry out the liturgical advice of the Second Vatican Council to make the mass "facie ad populum." In the surrounding passage are three free-standing spaces which are used as devotional chapels, confessionals and storage space. Apart from the concrete bell towers decorated with crosses, this church is not recognisable as typically Catholic.

### THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH.

Until the beginning of the 20th century there was little experience with new churches. The Church had, after all, a wealth of pre-Reformation churches available. The debit of thinking on church architecture and design was quickly made up in response to the demand for churches in the early 20th century new suburbs and towns.

Also, within the various Protestant movements, liturgical tendencies developed. One aspect that was considered important was the equality of the sacraments, baptism and communion and the word. This meant that, apart from the pulpit, both the baptismal font and the communion table could be given a permanent place in the liturgical centre.

Unhampered by synod rules on church styles or designs, the Dutch Hervormed Church led the way in church architectonic renewal. Building styles on the line between tradition and modernity allowed influences from profane architectural design and an integration of fine art. This building style worked through in church building from the other two main denominations.

An architect who went through a remarkable development in the designs of his church commissions is K.L. Sijmons (1907-1989). Shortly after WWII he chose the 17th century Protestant churches as source of inspiration for his commissions, such as the historicised Hervormed



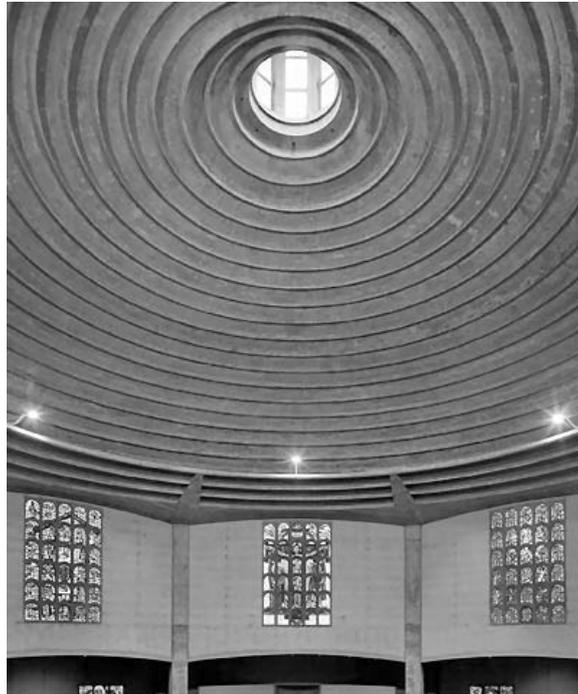
church in Halle (1952). From 1955, Sijmons developed a new, modernistic vision for church building. He created churches with a separate communion space and a social space which formed a unity with the main church space.

An early example of a church with an underlying communion of spaces is the Advent church in The Hague-Loosduinen (1955). The low social hall could be included in the crosswise church space during services. This money saving spatial solution was adopted by many church builders.

## CALVINISTICAL CHURCH

Just as in the pre-war years, most gereformeerde church councils preferred a church with a lengthwise seating plan in a moderate functional building style. The typical soberness and the attention to functional qualities agreed with the Calvinistic background. From 1955, new liturgical and church insights within the gereformeerde believers led to freer plans. The eight-sided Maranatha church (1953) in Eindhoven, by A.C. Nicolai (1914-2001) has a traditional brick exterior with gable-high concrete lancet windows. In the interior the solid concrete skeleton is clearly visible. The main hall of the church is filled with amphitheatre-style seating; the liturgical furniture (in the order chancel, communion table and font) is positioned on the long axis.

The Calvinistical church architecture from the 1960's is typified by box-like building volumes which are supplied with curtain walls and integrated art works. The Antwoord church (1964, Hoogvliet), built in one week, by the architect R.H. Fledderus (1910-1970) is an expression of unlimited optimism by nine church communities working together. They strived for a church in each new-build area. In this blue profile plate-clad steel skeleton building the believers sat not only on benches but also on the extended concrete parapet. The dominee preached from an open concrete chancel with against the background a glass appliqué by Ger van Iersel. In 1968 the church was given an extension, with spaces for catechism and youth work.



## CONTRARY DEVELOPMENTS

It can be concluded that from 1958 a converging movement in the design of Dutch Catholic and Protestant churches and their interiors can be seen. Where the Catholics strived for a more sober liturgy and church architecture, in the Protestant churches there was a re-valuation of the aesthetics of church buildings and liturgical rituals, which could be supported by artistically designed carpets or rugs, communion articles or glasswork. It is striking that the updated box-like churches were first popular with the more liturgically conservative reformed church. In the course of the 1960's the influence of this style was visible in the architecture of the two other main denominations.

The modernisation of church architecture came to completion at the same time as the process of the dissolving of the main organised groups within society (zuilen) and the secularisation of Dutch society. Architects concentrated in increasing measure on the practical spatial design of the socially-experienced celebration of the liturgy and chose a liturgically functionalistic form language.

*M.J. Melchers (1965) is an art and architecture historian. As Conservator of the art collection of the Academic Medical Centre in Amsterdam she did research into a "forgotten" group of traditionally-working artists from the post-war period. At the moment she is working on the completion of her thesis on the cultural history of 20th century church architecture in the Netherlands for the University of Leiden.*

top left  
Hoogvliet, Antwoordkerk ('responsechurch'),  
R.H. Fledderus, 1964

top right  
Heerlen, St. Annaschurch,  
Peutz, (photo RACM)

bottom left  
Aerdenhout, Adventskerk,  
Sijmons

## DIVERSE AS NEVER BEFORE

### Protestant church building 1945-1965

Gert Jan van der Harst

Protestant<sup>1</sup> church buildings during the post-war reconstruction period in the Netherlands were characterized by its great diversity. Within the religious denominations the formation of opinions about the church building was influenced by the very active involvement of the world of architecture, by collaboration on publications and exhibitions, and by participation in national church building commissions. In particular intensive attention was paid to the relation between liturgy and the church building. Very strongly divergent opinions were represented, which led to great typological variation. The churches issued various forms of assistance to their followers that was intended to be 'considerations' or 'guidelines'. They certainly did not prescribe a specific type of building, let alone a specific type of design, but drew attention but to various possibilities. A distinction was drawn between what the churches, as clients, should determine and where the artistic freedom of the architect should be respected. This freedom was considerable. Between the convinced supporters of the Delft School and Functionalism many forms of personal synthesis could be observed within individual designers. This varied group showed tendencies towards Expressionism, Sculpturism, a strongly decorative architecture, and a wide range of combinations of these. This was partly a post-war continuation of the synthesis between traditionalism and modernism for which the architects in the Groep '32 were striving. The post-war conditions made a very big contribution to this. It was necessary to use industrial products and more modern construction methods. All this characterized church building of, for example J.B. van Asbeck, M.F. Duintjer, G. Pothoven, F.A. Eschauzier and K.L. Sijmons far into the nineteen-fifties. Around 1960 more modern designs gained the upper hand, as can be seen from the work of younger architects such as G. Drexhage, D. Zuiderhoek and W. Ingwersen, and from the move towards this by some other architects including Van Asbeck and Duintjer. Despite the far-reaching modernisation of the building industry, churches remained special, individually designed objects for which the architects retained great design freedom. This led to unusual uses of materials and structures, often enriched by the integration of applied art. In addition to functionalist churches with their austere purist designs, there arose designs, partly inspired by Le Corbusier, for clear-cut Sculptural and Brutalist churches.

The following buildings give an impression of the variation and quality of Protestant churches between 1945 and 1965.

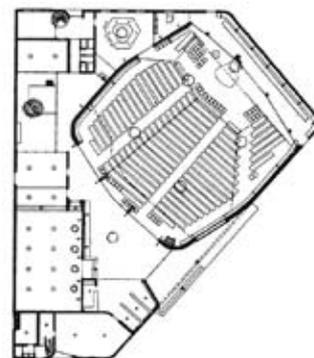
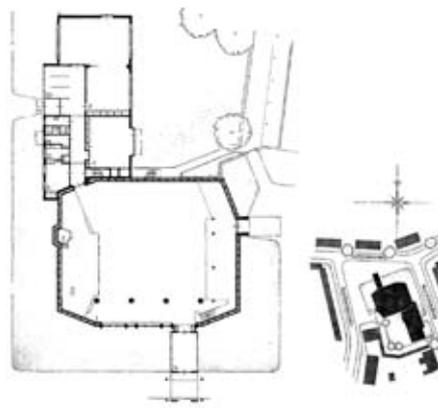
<sup>1</sup>This concerns the church building activity of two of the reformed churches in the Netherlands that have been united since 2004: the Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde kerk), and the Dutch Reformed Churches (Gereformeerde kerken in Nederland).

#### OCHTEN, REFORMED VILLAGE CHURCH

In 1950 A. Eibink designed the new church in this village in the Betuwe. At first sight this appears to be a traditional church with a separate bell tower, buttresses, blind arch friezes and a rose window in the gable. These historicizing forms are combined with various clearly recognisable industrial structural elements: in the side facades prefabricated concrete window frames; in the towers a structural concrete grill and square decorative concrete elements in the openwork lantern. Prefabricated structural elements were also used in the interior, these being wooden solid web girders for the roof. Most unusual was the slender ornamental wrought iron work of the chancel rails; an abstract translation of a classical protestant baptistery screen in unambiguously nineteen-fifties design.

#### AMSTERDAM, PNIELKERK

The Pnielkerk in Bos en Lommer designed by B.T. Boeyinga in 1954 has a visible concrete skeleton filled by facades of square concrete tiles. Closed parts of the facade are cut by strips of open worked prefabricated elements with diagonally placed square windows subdivided by crosses. This expressive structural concrete architecture with a high decorative content was inspired by the churches of Auguste Perret; in particular the concrete elements or 'claustra' he designed for the church in Le Raincy. The two towers are a continuation of the columns that flanked the liturgical centre of the church.



from left to right  
Ochten, Reformed Church

Eindhoven, Resurrection Church

Delft, Immanuel Church

Nagele, Gereformeerde Kerk

Alphen Shepherd Church

top right  
Aerdenhout, Adventchurch

## EINDHOVEN, OPSTANDINGSKERK

This church was designed in 1955 by the architect Wieger Bruin. The simple, almost square, main design of the brick mass is reshaped by 'folding' one of the facades at each corner. In this slightly fractured, almost crystalline form, the gently sloping roof, at once falls into place as a similarly folded 'fifth facade'. In the body of the church is a row of brick columns that are star-shaped and 8-pointed in cross section. There is a remarkable transition between the interior and the exterior: the main entrance projects into the open square as a transparent outer corridor with a porch.

## AERDENHOUT, ADVENTKERK

This church built in 1958 by K.L. Sijmons shows the influence of Le Corbusier. The image is dominated by the body of the church with its three concrete vaults that were cast on site on heavy supports, with deeply inset concrete framed windows between them. The low entrance section opens out into a low side area of the church, which is intended as a separate communion area. The interior is dominated by rough materials and finishes: untreated concrete, plastered brick walls, and a rough concrete floor. The chancel, baptismal font and communion table are likewise made of concrete, the table having a marble top.

## DELFT, IMMANUELKERK

The Immanuelkerk, 1956, designed by F. Eschauzier junior and others, lies at the end of a block of buildings. The design of the church is based on a square, all the corners of which are rounded off and the sides curve outwards. The copper covered roof completes the main sculptural design. The interior is enclosed by the single encircling flow of the closed brick walls. This church also has a separate communion room. The concrete structure of the main entrance is crowned by a concrete Christ's monogram. The unequivocal use of materials has transformed the streamlined church interior has become a powerful sculpture.

## NAGELE, GEREFORMEERDE KERK

The central area of Nagele is dominated by the Gereformeerde Kerk that was designed by Van den Broek and Bakema in 1960. The open tower consisting of concrete wall segments receives the paths that run under it



as the start of the path that leads into the church itself. Here the transitions between inside and outside are the important theme. The stepped wall rising from the forecourt is the beginning of a cubistic interplay between rising volumes, culminating in the raised part of the body of the church above the liturgical centre. The preponderant use of concrete materials and structural elements is explicitly industrial; an exception to this is the quarry stone floor in the main body of the church.

## DEN HAAG, CHRISTUS TRIUMFATORKERK

The 'Christus Triumfatorkerk, designed by G. Drexhage in 1962, is at the most important crossroads in the post-war part of the Bezuidenhout district. The plan was fitted into this restricted site by putting ancillary rooms projects under the raised main body of the church, which, with its tower, dominates the corner of the street. The church has an unusual structure: between the concrete upper and lower beams are bearing walls that consist of square 'lammellae' composed of prestressed brick columns rotated by an angle of 45 degrees and separated by narrow strips of glass. This admits somewhat filtered, indirect light into the church.

## ALPHEN AAN DE RIJN, GOEDE HERDERKERK

This church, designed in 1963 by W. Ingwersen, shows the inspiration of Le Corbusier, translated into oblique angular shapes. The church has an irregular plan, and the heavy concrete roof seems to hover over the massive, tapering walls. The interior too, is treated brutally in both design and finish, with an irregular pattern of holes in the roughly plastered end wall. The church clearly contrasts with the rectangular design of the wing with ancillary rooms; a functional expression of the unusual character of the worship areas in which all the furniture, including the liturgical furniture, is on the same level.

*Gert Jan van der Harst, architecture and building historian, TU Delft.*



## CARPET HALLS & SUPERMARKETS

### Bishoprics of Haarlem and Rotterdam perform an inventory of redesignated and demolished churches

Nicole Roeterdink, Judi de Jong

The secularisation during the last decades meant a definitive end for the rich Catholic life. The preekshuren (preaching halls), built after the emancipation of other denominations than the Dutch Reformed Church and the concrete colossi of the Reconstruction period after WWII seem doomed to the wreckers' ball. Not every village and every district today needs a church, which has long since ceased to function as a social centre. Most of those who are subscribed to the church go at best for Christmas and Easter. Most are believers but at best in a vague "somethingism." The pastor or priest is no longer someone expected to answer the big questions of life – we have Wikipedia for that, don't we? As a result of all these developments many churches have fallen into disuse.

#### EMOTION.

The bishoprics of Haarlem & Rotterdam and the project bureau Belvédère have joined forces to determine the facts: how many church buildings in North and South Holland, of all denominations, have been torn down or redesignated since 1970? It is necessary to gather the facts because many reactions are based on emotion: "My church mustn't be torn down; I was baptised there, married there and my parents are buried there. Doesn't anyone have any feelings any more?" To start a rational discussion, we have to research how many churches have been turned into carpet halls, mosques, houses or supermarkets.

Which form of redesignation is the most profitable? Which churches are most likely to be demolished, those from the 19th century or from the Reconstruction? Would it be the city or the village churches be first to lose their original functions? Is it really true that the Catholics insist on tearing down a church while Protestants see it as just a building? In the case of a listed building, is that status justified or simply requested in order to preserve the building?

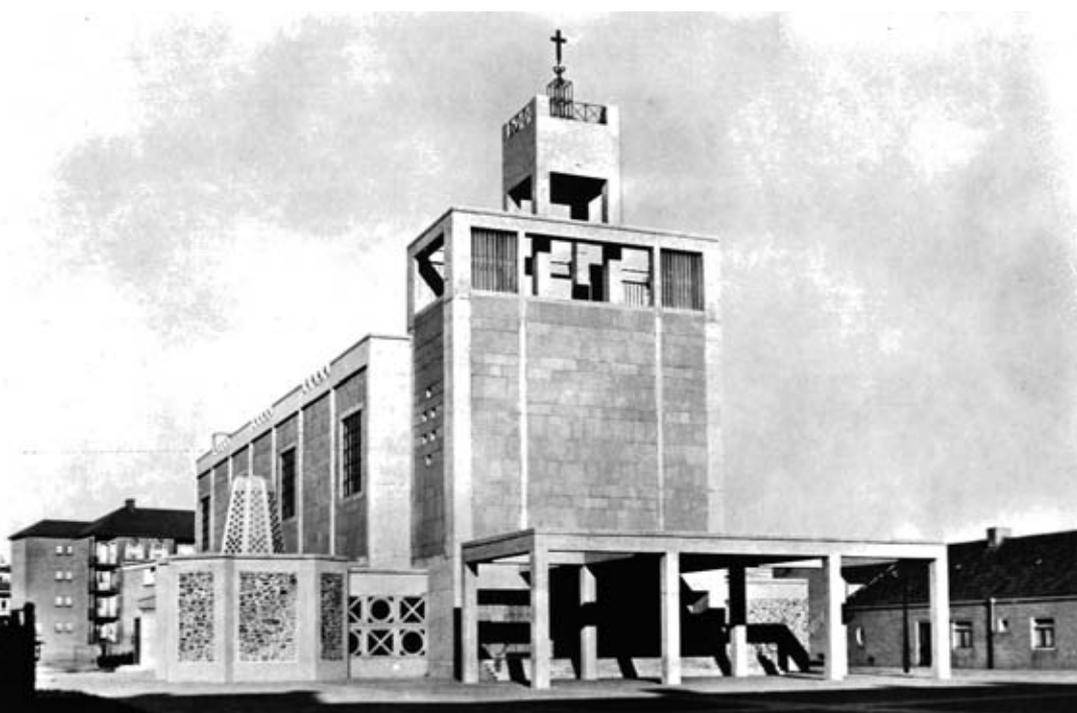
What does the point in time of the application say about this?

We need solid figures in order to be able to talk about the future of a church building. To be open for development is necessary because we can say with certainty that in the coming decade many more churches will have to close their doors.

The inventory project will deliver the exact numbers on this and is intended further to be of use to religious and governmental organisations. In addition to this the bishoprics of Haarlem & Rotterdam are also busy with financial research into existing churches. This study presumes long-term maintenance plans for nationally listed churches, where it will be calculated what financial amounts will be needed in the future to maintain the inventory of churches.

Both studies will be completed by late 2008.

*Nicole Roeterdink, Judi de Jong, Colleague in the rijksdienst for Archeology, Culture and Monuments (listed buildings).*



Amsterdam, Joseph Church

# FROM HOUSE OF GOD TO CLIMBING GYM

## Josef kerk Amsterdam

Marije de Korte

In 1952 the Jozefkerk (Joseph Church) in the Amsterdam 'Bos en Lommer' district was completed. At the time the progressive design of the first concrete church in the Netherlands (architects G.H.M. Holt & K.P. Tholens) met a lot of criticism. The architects were inspired by the work of the French architects Perret, two brothers who in the 1920's designed some really innovative concrete churches.

The church, with central nave and side aisles, an extended apse, a large concrete tower also contains an interesting open construction around the entrance. The Roman Catholic parish church is situated at a central square at the Amsterdam Erik de Roodestraat, and forms an important point in the urban structure of the district.

The concrete frame is clad with prefab concrete panels and stone. The inside is characterised by among other things a ceiling, consisting of coffers made out of prefab elements, and stained glass windows in the choir, designed by the artist M. de Leeuw.

Because of the secularisation, and change in population of Bos en Lommer in this period, the church, with some 1130 places, has since 1990 not been used for service anymore. After a couple of years without any use, the building was in 1996 changed into a climbing gym – appropriately called "Between Heaven and Earth".

However, this present destination is only temporary. At the moment a new permanent destination for this former church is sought for. In October 2007 the minister of culture, Ronald Plasterk has published his intention to put this church on the list of modern listed monuments; a final decision will be made end of this year.

*Marije de Korter works at the rijksdienst for Archeology, Culture and Monuments (listed buildings).*



Amsterdam, Josef Church, exterior and interior

# IN FACT, CHURCH BUILDINGS ARE NOT SUITABLE FOR USE AS ANYTHING OTHER THAN CHURCHES.

## Project planning and mediation for the religious heritage

In the Netherlands churches are disappearing at an alarming rate and it is particularly the modern churches that are being lost. The reason for this is clear: their congregations are shrinking. Often it is no longer possible to keep the churches open; the newer churches are especially vulnerable, since they must compete with older churches that are often more centrally located and, in many cases, of greater symbolic value to the religious denomination. The property developer 'Reliplan', which is located in Amsterdam – Noord, is engaged in the redevelopment of the religious heritage. To this end an approach between development and brokerage has been developed. We spoke with Mickey Bosschert and Dagmar den Ouden of Reliplan.

Frank Foole

In the first place property developers look at the potential value of the land under the building. Who stands up for the church buildings themselves?

The real estate value of the church building is strikingly different from the emotional value that is attached to the building by the former users, and as part of the urban landscape. In the extensive postwar housing estates the church buildings provide for variety and have become landmarks. Often they are also used in some way or other for community work, by clubs or serve other public functions.

### DATABANKS

Reliplan has been involved in many changes in the religious heritage of the Netherlands. Crucial to the success of these are the databanks that have been built up over the years. In these databanks an impressive collection of photos has been acquired. Reliplan professes to have photographs of all the churches in the Netherlands "even though from time to time churches from less familiar religious denominations still keep popping up". The databank of properties is constantly updated. Whenever possible changes in use or ownership, demolition, conversion, rebuilding, structural alterations, or renovation are recorded.

In addition to a databank of properties there is a record of 'seekers'. These searchers, who include individual people or organizations that are looking for accommodation, usually make the first approach themselves. They may be private individuals looking for unusual residential accommodation or businesses (very many day-care centres for children), but by far the most important group of users is still the religious denominations. While the traditional church denominations in the Netherlands are shrinking, the new ones are still growing. These are often evangelically inspired denominations/churches with, in many cases an exotic ethnic background.

For the preservation of the churches this is often the best option. The large church building retains its function, the building remains open to the public, and the layout and décor of the old and the new functions are in line with each other. Sometimes there are conflicts and modifications are required. Religious symbolism can be very sensitive. Several times the taking over of churches by Moslem communities has led to the removal of or changes to valuable parts of the buildings in ways contrary to the original agreement. After several disappointing experiences Reliplan no longer cooperates in the conversion of churches to mosques.

### VALUES

Properties are assessed according to three values: the value with continued use as a church (in cases of transfer to a different denomination), the value when the building is to be reused by a social organization, and finally, the value to a commercial property developer. Reliplan is often commissioned by the owners of the property. The closing of a church is often a very sensitive issue for the current or former users. Every denomination reacts in a different way. The Catholic Church often prefers sale and demolitions to 'de-consecration'. Sometimes Reliplan is given a specific commission, for example to sell the ground so that in this way the building can be preserved.

The partial adaptations of the churches when transferred from one denomination to another are usually limited. An important 'new' ritual is the baptism of adults, which often involves total immersion. This occupies an important central position in the church. The traditional baptismal font, often located in a side chapel or baptistery, no longer meets this need and can be replaced by a bigger baptismal font (that may very well be a bath tub) somewhere in the centre of the church, which it must then be possible to cover. The traditional large church organs are often not used in these new forms of worship. Active participation in music making is part of the service; the congregation themselves may play guitars, while of course singing is very important.

## CHANGE IN FUNCTION

Whenever a change in function is involved it appears that postwar churches form a separate and troublesome category. The large undifferentiated spaces with specific incidence of light often present more limitations to potential users than is the case when traditional church buildings are being redeveloped. In the end many of the postwar buildings for which the services of Reliplan are called upon are eventually demolished.

Examples in which a change of function has taken place are very limited. For instance, the Gereformeerde Ichtuskerk in Zwijndrecht dating from the nineteen-sixties, a building with a large pyramidal roof, was sold and is at present in use as a childcare centre. The tower of the former Gereformeerde Schuilplaatskerk in Diemen has been successfully saved, but the greater part of the complex has disappeared. The tower is now part of a health centre and residential building. The former Gereformeerde church (with house) in Luttelgeest is now a private residence with an exhibition hall. However, unexpectedly, Reliplan has little experience of the secondary use of modern churches as dwellings.

The essential approach of Reliplan to the preservation/maintenance of the religious heritage has proved very valuable. Recently the company has made a careful start on introducing itself to the international market. Unfortunately this approach would seem to provide only limited protection for modern buildings. Their scale, layout and architecture make them relatively difficult marketable properties.

*Frank Foole*

## NOTES

1 For Reliplan see: [www.reliplan.nl](http://www.reliplan.nl)



Zwijndrecht, Ichtus church last spring  
(photo Rook and Nagelkerke)

## MOMO IN NOBO: AN OVERIJSEL PROGRAMME

Post-War MoMo architecture and city planning was engendered by either war-damage or the necessity to accommodate a growing population. In the war-damage category there was damage resulting from enemy bombardment, the action of combatants and even from 'friendly fire' when, for example, allied pilots mistook Dutch towns for German cities. In a regional, rather rural area like the province of Overijssel one may still see the results of serious damage in a city like Deventer, because the bombing of road and rail bridges also destroyed fairly large built up areas. Allied bombers also attacked the cities of Hengelo and Enschede, which subsequently had to rebuild large parts of their centres.

Dirk Baalman

In the post-war period the respect for architecture and the city planning was usually not very deep. The general public associates this period with rigidly planned town-quarters, poor details and boring architecture. While pre-war architecture (the 30s) is cherished and copied (the work of our grand-fathers), post-war production is considered to be easily replaceable (though nobody wants to tell his father this). Housing corporations, municipalities and private developers seem to share this depreciation, demolishing much from this period without hesitation.

As a consultant to planning committees and the provinces of Overijssel and Flevoland, 'Het Oversticht' sought a different approach and found a partner and sponsor in the Overijssel administration: the NoBO-programme was born. NoBO stands for 'Naoorlogs Bouwen in Overijssel' (post-war building in Overijssel) and focuses on housing estates, churches and works of applied art. It seeks to provide knowledge / expertise about these areas, to obtain support for their preservation and development and to educate pupils, students and those responsible for decisions on the future of post-war MoMo. NoBO was also the name of a well-known sweet treat enjoyed by many families on Saturday nights in the 1950s.



The areas of attention were chosen with an eye to urgency. Works of applied art, for instance, are under threat and may disappear without anyone noticing that they ever existed, let alone appreciating their meaning or importance. Sheer listing, documenting and publishing this category has brought its richness and variety to the attention and awareness of many people. The churches became an object of attention not only because of the rich variety of their architecture, but also because churches were important pawns in the chess-play of town planning. Almost every housing quarter had to have three churches for the three main denominations of Dutch Christianity. In the large areas covered with housing they were placed at important nodes and used as accents and points of orientation. Thus the demolition of a church very often results in the destruction of part of a city-planning concept. Should demolition be unavoidable, tribute should be paid to this role in the town-plan by the formulation of special requirements for the building that might replace it.

But the re-use and redevelopment of such churches is preferable and, owing to the nature of post-war architecture, is very often feasible. The NoBO programme can profit from the experience that was developed in Overijssel with a similar programme for the 're-animation' of industrial heritage, a programme activated and sponsored by the same provincial administration, with 'Het Overzicht' as its consultant. Industrial heritage has also suffered from a long period of disrespect and depreciation, but is now at the heart of many a successful real-estate development operation. It provides such developments with an air of identity, individuality and historic reference. This position was attained through the historic narrative and by the nature of the buildings themselves. This nature is one that is unspecific, over-spacious and flexible. Often, this unspecific nature is a characteristic that the industrial heritage shares with religious architecture of the post-war period. The latter differs from the industrial example however, in the lack of narrative: these churches do not yet adhere to the memory of those passing by and, often not even to that of their owners or users. Many a post-war church is sacrificed by its parish after a fusion with adjoining parishes, often with a certain joy deriving from the gain in the real-estate value and with little emotion relating to the building left behind.

The NoBO programme pays much attention to education. It publishes books on housing quarters, churches and art. It helps people to relate to their neighbourhood by means of lectures, walks and guided tours, and by letting them document it in photographs, which, for example, become part of exhibitions. GPS- and PDA-guided tours have been developed. These enable people walking in an area to extract information on the spot from a handheld computer. Usually reactions are very positive: 'we never realised that we lived in such an interesting area'. Preservation and careful redevelopment start with appreciation of the subject matter, and therefore this is a very basic part of the programme.

A subtle, but very clear example of the re-use of a Roman Catholic Church building is found in the town of Bant, in the province of Flevoland. The church was transferred to a Protestant parish, a rather unique event, since Catholics generally consider their churches to be sacred buildings, which should therefore be demolished when no longer required by the Catholic congregation. The church at Bant (a designated monument) could have



been used in its original state, however it was necessary to add a balcony. This was done in accordance with a well-known typology and with great respect for the architecture. It was agreed that the objects of art in the church could either be used elsewhere, or remain in the building in places where they would not interfere with Protestant services. Only the crucifix on the former altar was a problem: Catholics have a crucifix with the body of Christ on it while Protestants use a bare cross. The compromise made was that on Christian feast days such as those at Easter or Christmas, the body of Christ would be covered by a suitable cloth. This example shows that even theological disputes do not have to hinder the creativity needed for the preservation, re-use and development of post-war religious MoMo-architecture.

*Dirk Baalman is an art historian at 'overzicht'Zwolle*

top  
Former Elin Chapel

bottom right  
Zwolle, Resurrection Church, '60  
Boxman (to be demolished?)

bottom left  
Sint Jans klooster, gereformeerde kerk  
Nicolai, 1965

## 20TH CENTURY CHURCH ARCHITECTURE IN FLANDERS

Like the neighbouring countries, Flanders has a problem with its religious heritage: the increasing secularisation gives rise to the question of what should be done with the church buildings. A traditionally strongly Catholic region, Flanders has an extensive ecclesiastical patrimony. This is often perceived as a problem, in view of the heavy cost of maintenance and restoration. Still we must not forget that church buildings also represent a valuable resource: they form an inseparable part of the identity of the region, since the historical organisation of villages and urban neighbourhoods took place literally 'around the church tower'. Despite the increasing volume of high-rise buildings, churches and their towers remain as beacons in the landscape.

Leen Meganck, Yves Schoonjans & Sven Sterken

From the point of view of ecclesiastical history, the 20th century was an eventful period that brought many changes to the liturgy. This was clearly reflected in the ecclesiastical architecture. Under the influence of the Liturgical Movement, which started during the pontificate of Pius X (1903-1914), the liturgy and its structure were thoroughly reappraised. Architecture too was made to serve the new liturgical concept. The church building must be sober and structurally straightforward, modern and yet timeless, and above all must contribute to the maximum participation of the faithful in the liturgy. The role of individual devotion was reduced in favour of celebration by the community. Architecturally this was

translated into the reduced importance of the side chapels and the widening of the nave. The choir became shorter and the side aisles were reduced to circulation zones. These innovations, especially in the area of the plan concept, took place during the first half of the 20th century in churches that were built in both progressive and traditional styles. Up to the 1920s, church architecture illustrates the declining days of the neo-styles. Thus in 1930 the Sint-Pauluskerk (Fig. 01) in Ghent was still constructed in a robust neo-romanesque style according to a design of Henri Valcke. From the later 1920s onwards the search was directed towards a contemporary design language which maintained the link with the traditional. The Saint-Luke's school played an important role in this. It promoted church building using an austere architecture in traditional brick. In particular the designs and theories of the architect A.J. Kropholler were promoted as rational and modern. A number of churches in Flanders showed a clear relationship with the architecture of Kropholler and other Dutch architects such as B.T. Boeyinga, Jan and Theo Stuivinga, J. Uytendillen, and C.M. Van Moorsel. However, literal references to, or copies of historic style elements are nowhere to be found. Yet these churches radiate a degree of familiarity. Very characteristic of this building style is Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van de Oude Bareel, in Sint-Amandsberg (Fig. 02), designed by Valentin Vaerwyck in 1930. For a young generation of Catholic intellectuals such modernisation did not go far enough. In his writings Huib Hoste, in particular, polemically defended the choice of modern design. The concrete rafters that remained visible in the church of Zonnebeke (Fig. 03) (1922) broke with the traditional design that still dominated church building at that time. The churches that were most progressive in design in the interwar period were those of Flor Van Reeth. His Sint-Walburgiskerk in Antwerp, designed in 1937 (Fig. 04) bears witness to the persistent sobriety, typical for the functionalist movement. For the inter-war churches built in Flanders such a style was the exception rather than the rule.

The great activity with regard to church building in the 1950s can be explained by the destruction which took place during the Second World War and the increasing suburbanisation. This was initially dominated by a traditionalist trend. For example Jos Ritzen, an early



Gent, Sint-Pauluskerk, 1930, Henri Valcke  
(photo Vincent Debonne)

follower of the Bossche School, built basilica's in early Christian style with freestanding bell towers such as those of the renowned Sint-Margarethakerk in Knokke (1952-1959). A modernizing impulse arrived only with the 1958 world fair in Brussels and during the run-up to Vatican II, when religious clients commissioned modern designs to support their progressive fervour. The 'Zonnelied' convent (Fig. 05) by Paul Felix (1959) is illustrative of the sobriety and the anti-monumental character of this new religious paradigm. With its restricted palette of materials (visible concrete, wood and glass) and its clear spatial and structural articulation, it forms an architectural expression of the vow of poverty and detachment. This also explains why the church can hardly be distinguished from the surrounding buildings of the convent. Another important renovating impulse arose from the work of Marc Dessauvage. In close cooperation with Geert Bekaert, the most important Belgian architecture critic in the postwar era, he developed the concept of the 'house church'. It formed the architectural translation of a new vision on liturgy: a return to the example of the first Christians, for whom the Eucharist was primarily a social event that took place in 'one or other house'. The Sint-Pauluskerk in Westmalle (Fig. 06) illustrates the small scale and deliberate 'invisibility' of these house-churches that inconspicuously integrate themselves with their surroundings. Here the typical axial orientation of the church building is replaced by a subtle spatial configuration, structured by a careful positioning of the liturgical furniture. The desired simplicity in the aesthetic and the use of materials (in which concrete, wood and brick remain visible) forms the architectural expression of an ethical imperative for integrity. This reticence contrasts with the expressive, often monumental church buildings of other prominent Flemish architects, such as the conical Sint-Ritakerk of Léon Stynen in Harelbeke (1966), the monolithic concrete chapel of Juliaan Lampens (1961) in Edelare or the expressive silhouette of the OLV Ter Duinenkerk (Fig. 07) of Jozef Lantsoght (1965) in Koksijde. In addition to these emblematic figures, an entire generation of architects of more regional importance has left its mark on the Flemish landscape because they were responsible for a large number of churches in a particular town or province: René Van Steenberghe and Paul Meekels in the province of Antwerp, Arthur Degeyter and Chris Vastesaeger in West-Flanders, and Adolf Nivelles in Limburg. So far the corresponding patrimony has not yet been systematically surveyed and in consequence is only fragmentally documented.

## MENACES TO THE 20TH-CENTURY ECCLESIASTICAL PATRIMONY IN FLANDERS

Although still young, for several reasons this ecclesiastical patrimony is threatened. Numerically well represented, 20th-century church architecture is not yet perceived as a subject for discussions on heritage. As a result restoration or transformation is often carried out negligently and is not always carefully managed. Moreover, this patrimony is not sufficiently well known and is surrounded by negative connotations relating to its rational and stern architectural expression. Often built by using new experimental construction methods and materials, the long term behaviour of which was unknown, these churches age badly and are extra vulnerable. Finally Flemish statistics reveal a growing tendency towards secularisation. In the modern churches built during the



top  
Koksijde, Jozef Lantsoght, Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk,  
(photo Anneleen Cassiman)

bottom  
Oostende, Clarissenklooster 'Zonnelied', Paul Felix.



post war Catholic revival in particular, it is not uncommon to find a large church welcoming only a handful of faithful each week. Empty churches or church buildings in limited use and with heavy costs for maintenance, heating and restoration, give rise to the need for the development of a consistent methodological framework which will permit a critical evaluation of this patrimony, with regard to its cultural-historical importance and its conservation, reconversion or reuse.

However, when developing strategies it is important to realize that there is a difference between Flanders and the neighbouring countries. The separation between the Church and the State, although registered in the constitution, is not as sharp as in many other European countries. In 1801 a 'concordat' was signed in which it was stated that places of worship for the recognized faiths should be built and maintained with public money. This means that at the basis of every construction of a new church or transformation of an existing one, there is always a negotiation between the Church (the religious authority) and the State (the financial authority). Because of this special financial arrangement one could conclude that 20th-century church buildings in Flanders are well protected. Paradoxically this is not automatically the case, because the urge of the Church Institution to redefine those underused buildings is almost nonexistent. However, it is precisely this underuse that causes poor maintenance and a rapid decline of this heritage. At the same time this is the reason why there is very little methodological design expertise in the area of church reuse in Flanders, and that one can hardly find an example of reallocation. At this time, given the financial burden represented by this decaying and underused patrimony, policymakers have begun to question its social relevance, patrimonial value and its potential in future cultural, social and urban developments.

## TOWARDS AN INVENTORY OF THE 20TH-CENTURY CHURCH BUILDINGS IN FLANDERS

The re-designation of the function of church buildings is more sensitive than that of any other type of building. The Flemish Government wishes to play the role of a catalyst in this, as evinced by the recent workshop 'Kerken in een ander licht. Neven- and herbestemming van religieus erfgoed' ('Churches in a Different Light. Reconversion and Reuse of Religious Heritage'), held in March 2008.<sup>1</sup> To delineate a policy for this young heritage, an overview of the number, distribution and quality

of the buildings is necessary. Since 2004 the Flemish government has directed its policy towards creating a thematic-typological inventory. This type of inventory will enable to work on a survey of a specific architectural typology throughout Flanders. This will yield an assessment framework within which a well-supported selection of buildings for the protection as monuments is possible. In the Flemish context the responsibility for the listing of heritage lies with the Flemish Heritage Institute (Vlaams Instituut voor Onroerend Erfgoed, [www.vioe.be](http://www.vioe.be)), a scientific research institute founded in 2004. Therefore in 2008 the VIOE was given the assignment to prepare an inventory and evaluate the 20th century churches. To some extent this project is a follow-up to a previous campaign which considered the neo-style churches in Flanders in 2003. Linked to this first campaign was a proposal for the development and implementation of a methodology for the protection and care of the nineteenth century ecclesiastical architectural patrimony in Flanders. [Currently, the VIOE is undertaking a thematic inventory of 20th-Century church architecture in Flanders. This externally contracted study will be carried out by a consortium consisting of KADOC (Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society of the Catholic University of Leuven), the Department of Architecture Sint-Lucas of the university college WENK, and the Department of Architecture, Urban Development and Spatial Planning of the Catholic University of Leuven. The inventory reviews the church architecture in Flanders between 1914 and 2000. This involves some 500 churches, convents and chapels. The basic data relating to all these buildings will be collected, including the interiors and the valuable art collections in so far as they are inextricably linked to the architecture. The inventory will be completed by the end of 2008. By making clear the status of this extensive patrimony from an architectural and historical perspective, it will create a frame of reference for possible restoration, renovation and re-use. In this way the inventory will contribute to the development of a strategy for the future of the ecclesiastical heritage of the 20th century.

## NOTES

- 1 The working document can be downloaded on: [http://tijlv.studentenweb.org/mt/archives/2008/03/kerken\\_in\\_eeen\\_a.html](http://tijlv.studentenweb.org/mt/archives/2008/03/kerken_in_eeen_a.html)

Marc Dessauvage, Sint-Pauluskerk, Westmalle  
(foto: Stephanie Van de Voorde,



top

Zonnebeke, Onze-Lieve-Vrouw, 1922, Huib Hoste  
(photo en copyright VIOE, O. Pauwels)

bottom

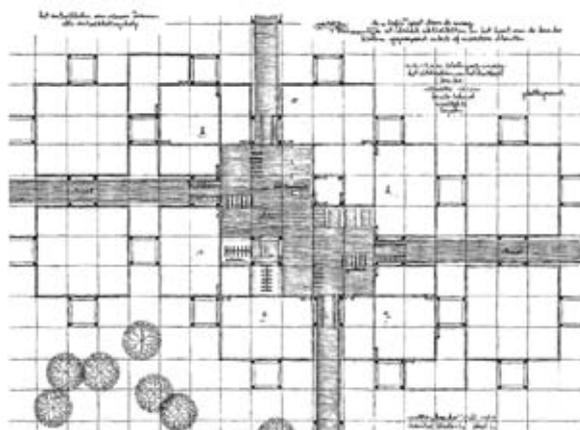
Antwerpen, Sint-Walburgis, 1937, Flor Van Reeth

# 'IN THE END, MAN NEEDS NO BUILDING OR INSTITUTE TO WORSHIP GOD'

## The work of J. van der Grinten

Joost van der Grinten (Venlo 1927) started his architect's office Environmental Design in Delft, in 1953, and then moved to Amersfoort. His work included schools and office buildings and he also worked on the Hoog Catherijne (shopping centre) in Utrecht. In 1972 Van der Grinten left the world of architecture and chose a career as violin builder. He built several innovative and special churches in the 1960s and was witness to many developments within the institute. In the spring of 2008 we visited him at home in Amersfoort.

Norman Vervat & Frank Foole



*'All architects in the 1950s were obsessed by the church that Le Corbusier had built in Ronchamps. I was too, despite not having any great interest in church buildings. Recently I went there and revisited it and was smitten once again - so phenomenal! It is a real heathen holy place, a sculpture, a monument. So perfect and of course not reproducible, although many have tried! Even the great Gio Ponti, with whom I worked for a while, took elements of the church over, but it wasn't entirely successful. I learned things from Ronchamps too. There's only one real Ronchamps though, which has earned the right to survive for eternity!'*

## ESCHAUZIER

In the Delft of 1946 the Modernist perfection of Ronchamps was far away. In the year that Van der Grinten began his studies at the Technical University Delft, quite another wind was blowing. Despite attracting modern architects such as Van den Broek, traditionalists such as Granpré Molière and Berghoef held sway in Delft. 'I didn't learn much. The course began with endless studying of classical monuments such as the Parthenon. In the second and the third year there was much more attention for design-work, but it didn't really amount to much'. Much more fruitful was being the assistant to Eschauzier: 'he designed for people. Eschauzier saw the new era coming and knew that it was our task to find a solution for it'. These days Eschauzier is especially known for his very luxurious houses where he could indulge himself in the design of chic details such as ivory doorknobs. Really, though, he was a man of the essentials. Van der Grinten learned a lot from the intrinsic simplicity of his work, just as from Scandinavian architecture. The often excellent feeling for material also made a great impression. Despite this skillful achievement, according to Eschauzier the future lay in the improvement of industrially produced products. During his assistant's period, Van der Grinten went abroad to orient himself as part of his preparation for setting up an industrial design course in Netherlands. It awakened an interest for objects with Van der Grinten: his churches are full of his own designs.

top  
Hilversum, Theoretical Church

center and bottom  
Venlo, Nicolaas church



## HUMILITY

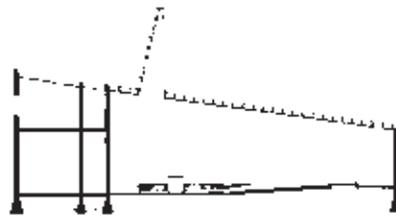
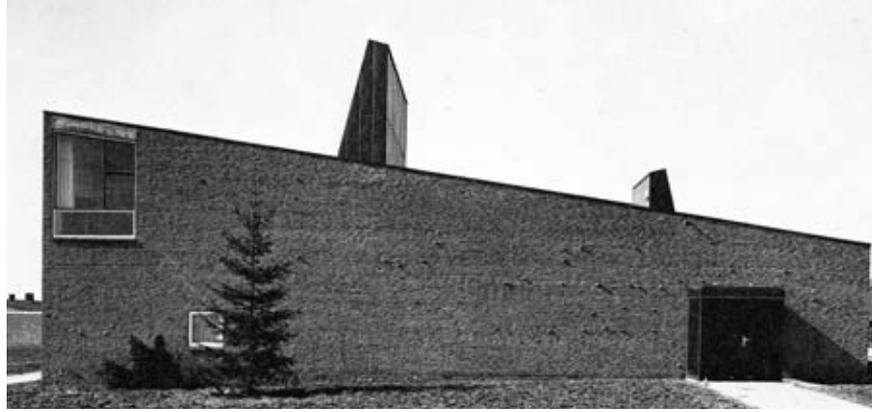
In his first years as an architect he worked on stations, (including Beverwijk and Den Helder). Van der Grinten realized his first church in Venlo, his city of birth, a commission that came out of winning the Prix de Rome in 1954. The 'Nicolaaskerk' was built in 1960 – 1961, and uses an amphitheater design, with the seating grouped around the altar. The altar stands not as in other churches on a small podium but lower than the congregation. The bishopric wasn't too sure what to do with it, however. Van der Grinten defended this arrangement with the sentence: 'Introibo ad altar Dei': go to the altar of the Lord... and was allowed to build the amphitheater. He doesn't care for churches where you walk up to the altar but prefers an intimate arrangement. 'the congregation must have the feeling of being invited, of being able to see what is happening on the altar and feel equal to the priest. The priest must therefore be on an equal height, or preferably a bit lower than the people. The priest should be the most humble of all the people'.

These innovations were only possible through his familiarity with church tradition. There was not much criticism of the churches by believers but there was a struggle with building inspectors and others officials involved. 'Once a councilor in Venlo asked me why there was no tower on the Nicolaas church. I asked him then what time it was. Of course he had a watch. A tower is unnecessary; the design of the city does not need it as accent. Christ doesn't need monumental accents, does he?'

Not only the towers are missing on van Van der Grinten's churches; the visual arts have only a modest place in his architecture. Here and there are a few artworks, often images from an older church or a contribution from a contemporary visual artist. Van der Grinten found art in churches excessive and his churches are in that aspect much more sober than the work of his contemporaries. Undoubtedly this was sometimes awkward for the commissioning pastor. 'I wasn't of course always in the position to push my vision of applied arts but luckily people seemed to understand me well and simply didn't ask me to involve artists in the design process'. The materials used have no symbolic meaning: 'I never really thought about using steel'.

'Looking over the centuries, isn't it remarkable that people once built those gigantic cathedrals for the service of God? Did the church need all that fuss? All those suffocating rules - terrible. I was Catholic; in the 1960s we hoped that under Pope John XXIII everything would change. After his death all the innovations were reversed. We hoped we could contribute to the modernization of the Catholic Church; looking back that was a naive idea. I left the Catholic Church after that; I feel more at home in the local Hervormde Church.'

The Nicolaas church in Venlo - the best known by Van der Grinten – will be given a place on the local monuments list. Despite this, the Andries church in Leersum approaches his ideals more closely. The church is "small, intimate and without fuss; church and presbytery are a whole, the exterior is simple, almost nothing betrays the fact that there here is a church for 250 or more people."



1. altar area, 2. auditorium, 3. font, 4. entrances, 5. rectory, 6. dining room, 7. dressing room, 9. meeting room, 10. storage, 11. central heating unit, 12. stair to sleeping level

## CHURCH & THE FUTURE.

Alas, the Andries church according to Van der Grinten has been much spoiled because 'they've filled the interior with all sorts of things'. Preserving the interiors is very difficult. In the Salvator church in Amsterdam North the beautiful wooden ceiling was replaced by a system ceiling due to the presence of asbestos. In the churches by Van der Grinten, which with their simple forms and clever use of materials create a very special religious atmosphere, these are disastrous changes.

In recent years church attendance has drastically fallen. In a few years a number of churches by Van der Grinten will also be closed. The Salvator church in Amsterdam will probably become a Turkish neighborhood centre. 'Wonderful! My churches were always meant to be multifunctional. On Sunday it was a church, through the week people could play bingo or put on a theatre show. Demolition isn't a problem for me either. Re-use is actually a compliment; the multifunctional concept can then fully prove itself'.

At the end of his career his bureau took part in a competition in Hilversum. 'The idea was to build a church in a suburb of Hilversum in combination with schools. The church would be surrounded by schools and be absorbed by the whole. If the church had to close, it could directly be put into use as a school hall. The church building as independent architectonic object then completely disappears.

That is perhaps the destiny of the church as an institute. In the end man doesn't need a building or institute to worship God. Religion is a force in everyone and can really be expressed everywhere and at any time.'

*Norman Vervat is member of the Bond Heemschut Commission, Amsterdam.*

*Frank Foole, is an architect and member of docomomo.nl*

top

Leersum, Andries Church

## JAN VAN ASBECK AND THE CHAPEL AT RONCHAMP BY LE CORBUSIER.

During the period 1955 till 1967 the architect Ir. J.B. Baron van Asbeck (1911) rebuilt and restored a number of Dutch churches. Later he was asked to design several new churches. Of these ten churches the most striking are the Paaskerk at Amstelveen (1963), the Messiaskerk at Wassenaar (1967) and the church at Valkenheide (1963) an institution for re-education at Maarsbergen.

Looking at these churches you get the impression that Jan van Asbeck must have been inspired by the design of Le Corbusiers Notre Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamps. In the book 'Le Corbusier en Nederland', published in 1985, even photographs of the Paaskerk and the chapel of Ronchamp are printed next to each other. However when analyzing the similarities we find a lot of differences.

Arnold Meine Jansen

A close cooperation existed between Jan van Asbeck and my father, the painter Jan Meine Jansen (1908 – 1994), who designed most of the glass-in-concrete windows for the churches and other buildings. I remember a trip they made around 1960 to France and Switzerland, not so much because of their enthusiasm about the buildings they had seen, but because of Van Asbeck's beautiful newly bought Citroën DS in which they travelled.

Comparing the church designs of Le Corbusier and Van Asbeck is quite a task because of the few publications about the works of Jan van Asbeck. Most descriptions, explanations and sketches are currently missing.

The first determining factor for Le Corbusiers design of the very well known Notre Dame-du-Haut was the deep impression made by the landscape. He integrated this in the design. Following the principles of his 'Modulor-system' this resulted in an organic and sculptural building. A building that was no more ruled by scholastic and academic formulae. Another factor was that for transport there was no practicable road to the top of the hill. This led to the decision to produce the most of the

material at the site and to recycle the rubble and stones of the old chapel, which was destroyed in World War II. Concrete reinforced constructions were filled up and completed by the old stones.

The synthesis of these factors determined the massive and sculptural characteristics of the chapel Notre Dame-du-Haut.

The sites for building the three mentioned churches of Van Asbeck were residential areas with reasonable room for a church of distinguishing design, without the need for extraordinary adaptations at the building sites; the churches are mainly based on mathematical work-outs of the concepts.

The floor plan of the Paaskerk has a trapezoid form. Whether this is because of the construction of the roof or because of acoustical reasons, or both, is not known, but the outlook of the east- and south-façade evokes several associations with the chapel at Ronchamp.

The roofs, in both churches, play an important role in the resemblance. But the construction of the roofs itself



is essentially different. The roof of the Paaskerk has the form of a hyperpar scale (a hyperbolic paraboloid) and is a wooden glued rafter construction, calculated by Aronsohn Consulting Engineers. The roof of the Notre Dame-du-Haut is very voluminous, based on the form of large crab scale once found on the beach by Le Corbusier.

I found that during the period 1955 till 1970 many architects designed buildings characterized by a hyperbolic roof. A lot of experiments were found at the World Exhibition 1958 in Bruxelles. For example, the entrance building by the architect Baucher and the Philips Pavilion by Le Corbusier.

Compared to the chapel of Ronchamp the Messiaskerk at Wassenaar has more resemblances because of its thick walls and its composition of the colourful glass-in-concrete windows. But here, the roof is visually absent and only marked by the ending of the walls. Also the round corners of this church contribute to the resemblance.

The church of Valkenheide, a much simpler building, with its elongated windows, light-cracks between walls and roof, and the composition of the coloured windows make up a fascinating image that reminds us at the Notre Dame-du-Haut.

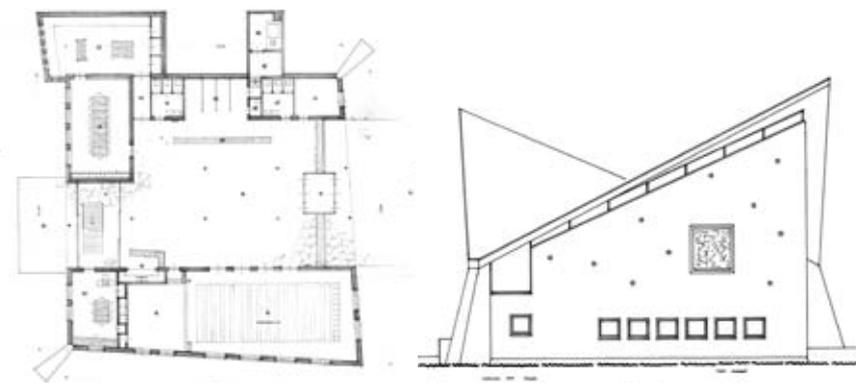
The stained glass in Le Corbusiers chapel was designed by himself, the glass-in-concrete windows in the churches of Jan van Asbeck were designed by my father Jan Meine Jansen and constructed by Atelier Bogtman. I realize that the photographs of the windows are made to show the richness of the colors and therefore don't show the mystical impression you see so often at the photo's of the Ronchamp chapel.

I think we may conclude that - apart of all differences - these three churches built by Jan van Asbeck have a similar kind of mystic, although less dramatic, as Le Corbusiers chapel at Ronchamp.

*Arnold Meine Jansen*

**NOTES**

- 1 The floor plans have been made available by the 'RACM (Zeist)'
- 2 Copyright of the photographs by Adriaan P. Hartland and Arnold Meine Jansen



top  
Amstelveen, Paaskerk

bottom left  
Messiaskerk, Wassenaar

## UNBELIEVABLE

Practically all buildings originally designed and built for religious meetings can be used for other functions as well. History has proven that these buildings, designed specifically for people to meet, maintain their character when turned to other uses. Of course, houses of worship can be restricted to that function and to just one religion. However, such a narrow approach means that many buildings, which could also serve other functions, will deteriorate and eventually be demolished.

Hielkje Zijlstra

### SYNAGOGUE

If you live in Delft and are looking for a fairly large, attractive and affordable venue, say for your fiftieth birthday party, then the Synagogue at the Koornmarkt is an obvious choice. This multifunctional space is only used once or twice per week by the Jewish community of Delft. The building can be hired for a modest sum and with few restrictions. You are not tied to a caterer for the food and drink and it is a beautiful building, a listed monument in the centre of Delft. This is just one example of the flexible use of our religious heritage. See Figure 1.

### RELIGION

Specifically, the Catholic church in the Netherlands (but also in Germany, as illustrated in an article in *Monumenten* magazine of December 2007) insists that churches should not be converted to other uses. They prefer to

demolish a church rather than see it used by another creed. Fortunately, there are now some examples of different approaches, although they took a lot of time and effort: in The Hague, the Pius X church and the Juliana church have been converted to community centres, in two different districts of the city. The type of building, a large central room with several smaller rooms around it, is eminently suitable for this use. The community centres are valuable additions to the districts and the buildings could always be converted back to churches should the need arise. So many churches were built in the 1950s in the town of Nagele in the Noordoostpolder that one of them is now used as a museum. See Figure 2. Converting churches to housing might appear to be a useful option. However, in my view this will always be unsatisfactory given the original typology of the buildings.

### EMBARRASSING

One would not expect every redundant church to be converted to a pop music centre such as Paradiso in Amsterdam, but a large room for the residents of a district or neighbourhood to meet in is essential for the life of any area. Such spaces can fulfil a key role in the restructuring of post-war districts. It is therefore unbelievable to read (*Volkskrant*, 7 November 2006) that the Moroccan community in the Bos and Lommer district in Amsterdam has to meet in a squat (an empty office building), while the Opstandingskerk church next door is vacant. Incidentally, this striking church was designed by M.F. Duintjer and is colloquially known as the "kolenkit" (coal scuttle). The Netherlands cannot afford this.

### IRREPLACEABLE

Since time immemorial, churches (e.g. the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul) have been successively used by different groups of believers. These are perfect examples of buildings with essential architectural and cultural roles which can be used many times and for different purposes.

Hence, houses of worship in particular should be reused for their original purpose, providing people with a place to meet, in the neighbourhood, district and city. They are irreplaceable, both because of their visual impact and because of their function.

*Hielkje Zijlstra, Associate Professor at Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, Department @MIT.*

Delft, synagogue  
(photo Hielkje Zijlstra)





top  
Maassluis, Het Kruispunt  
(photo Rook and Nagelkerke)

bottom  
Steigerkerk  
(photo Rook and Nagelkerke)

# THE EMPTY CHURCH

## The church in the cityscape of post-war towns

Secularisation of the Dutch society, a call for greater freedom and expanding individualism makes that neither the functional nor even the physical existence of the church building is, especially in a post-war context, self-evident anymore. The question arises as to how we can deal with this cultural heritage when it loses function.

Loes Veldpaus

Post-war neighbourhoods in the Netherlands are suffering from erosion; rigorous transformations of post-war housing estates are the order of the day. They are being confronted with several social and physical problems due to sociological and demographic changes and the alteration of preferences in dwelling. The church building could play a special role in this context, as it held an explicit and important position as a binding and structuring element within both the post-war society and the post-war urban plan. The local church as "God's office" in the neighbourhood formed a programmatic and morphological focus, often in an ensemble with a school and/or local community centre. The role of the church building within the transformation of the post-war town is now a point of discussion.

In this article I wish to make a first attempt to show the importance of the urban design layer of the church building within new town development, using the case study of the Sint-Nicolaas church in Presikhaaf (Arnhem - NL). This case is part of research into the "religious heritage in the post-war town" at the Eindhoven University of Technology, subsidised by Belvedere and the RACM<sup>1</sup>.

There are different design layers to be separated within the design for a church building. At first sight we can already distinguish the liturgical design, architectonic design, social design, spatial design and perhaps also the cultural design. Often we only look at the architectonic layer of the object's value, sometimes combined with some liturgical or spatial values. Here, I particularly would like to emphasize the value of the urban design.

The spatial – morphological - design in the 1950's and 1960's, briefly summarised, was dominated by the idea

of the rational city and the concept of the neighbourhood unit. Themes such as planning, rationality, science and governmental intervention determined the socio-political system. Society would, under the guidance of science, literally be transformed into a social-economic order. New town development had an obvious role; it was thought that a defined social group in a town could be translated into a defined physical zone – the "makeable" society.

### "PILLARS (ZUIL)" AND NEIGHBOURHOOD

In contrast to these modern post-war values, religion kept its traditional role and at first exercised great influence, which enabled the "zuilen" (plurality of socio-political minorities) or pillars of society to continue. This had both socially and culturally great influence; in addition to a strikingly polarised society, it brought an explosive increase in the number of church buildings; each religious "pillar" strived for its own church building near its congregation.

The spatial implications of the neighbourhood unit and modern town development are clearly visible in the expansion plans of (just) after WWII. They consist of a green-blue structure flowing through the neighbourhood, an open structure of repetitive dwelling compositions (*woonstempels*) and a few well-dosed and strategically situated neighbourhood functions, clustered, where possible in a 'pillar'. Spatially, we can see that more or less centrally situated built areas are designated as social neighbourhood centre.

Presikhaaf is an example of a post-war neighbourhood where quite soon after the first building started a Gere-



*formeerde*, a *Hervormde* and a Catholic “pillar” and church were situated. Since then, the *Gereformeerden* and the *Hervormden* congregations have joined together to form the Bethlehem church; the other church has been demolished. The Catholic (Sint-Nicolaas) church was let go a few years ago by the parish in cooperation with the bishopric and purchased by the council. It is now rented to a religious society (Rafael Oasis) but will in due course have to make way for an ‘ecological zone’. The ensemble which this Sint-Nicolaas church (1962, architect H.J. van Balen) belongs to consists not only of a church but also a R.C. primary school (1961, G.J.J. van Hassel), and an old folks’ centre (1964 G.J.J. van Hassel). Both in town planning design and architecturally, the ensemble is designed as a whole - a typical Roman Catholic ‘neighbourhood care’ island. As such, the design has a clear social component. Spatially the ensemble is designed in combination with the green-blue structure. Architecturally, this is made visible in the north facade of the church. Here is an open face on the water, designed as a play of glass and reflection, and so gives the low unassuming church visibility in the neighbourhood. The water encompasses the ensemble, creating a unity with a naturally protected interior area. Although the complex was never given a tower and so cannot be called a typical landmark, the combination of function and composition ensures that the ensemble forms a beacon in the neighbourhood and spatially a special object within the repetition of the “dwelling stamps”.

## MORPHOLOGICAL HUBS

Before the transformation of the Presikhaaf, an extensive cultural-historical analysis was made of the “dwelling stamps” which are found in the neighbourhood. Also the power of the green-blue structure is in this analysis made clear. On the basis of this valuation information the spatial ‘rules of the game’ for the transformative plan are formulated. The qualities of the identifying ensembles – like a church island, however, hardly gets a chance of being considered, because “saving” is assumed on the basis of monumental values set by qualified bodies. In so doing, these ensembles seem of no importance in the urban composition of the neighbourhood which otherwise is so precisely exposed.

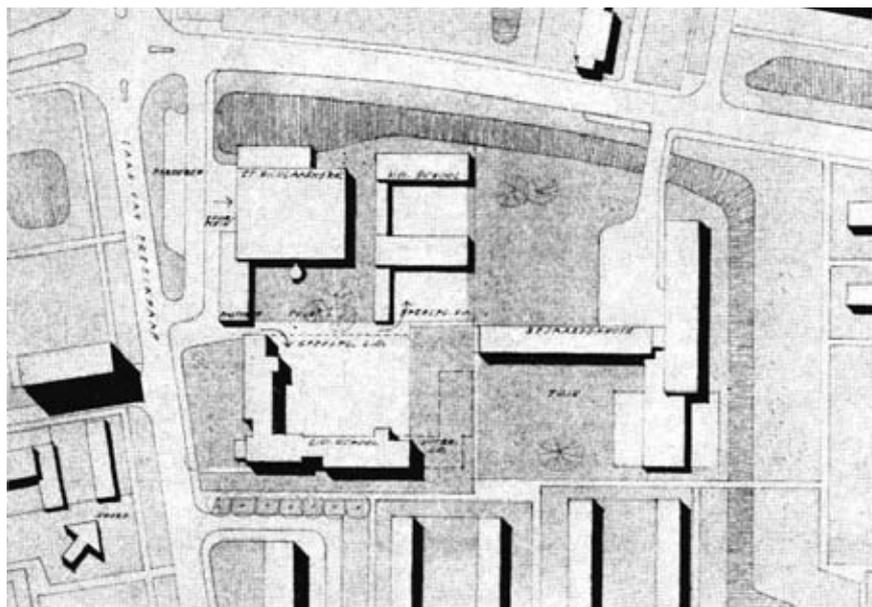
While you could say that the church is in a morphological sense part of a select group of buildings with a special status in the weave: they are the ‘primary objects’ of the post-war town. These objects were allowed to stand out, within an environment dominated by repetition through situation, scale, typology and detailing. In this way they create the public and parochial space: churches functioned in this way not only as a hub within the social-cultural context but also in the morphological structure of the post-war town.

As the urban design layer, especially in this context, is definitely one of the design layers to be considered my plea would be that even if a church is not to be kept for its architectonic values, the urban composition of these complexes should be taken into consideration, as an ensemble, but also as part of the total composition of the neighbourhood.

*Loes Veldpaus is Researcher, of the Technical University Eindhoven*

## NOTES

- 1 RACM: De Rijksdienst voor Archeologie, Cultuurlandschap en Monumenten (The National Service for Archaeology, Cultural Landscape and Built Heritage)



top  
St. Nicolaas church

bottom right  
‘typical roman catholic “neighbourhood care” island’

bottom center  
current Presikhaaf plan

bottom left  
Presikhaaf, plan

## PIUSX IN THE HAGUE:

The explicit symbolism, the large spaces and specific light effects, the lack of openness to the street – all these aspects makes it difficult to find new users for modernistic churches that do justice to its architecture.

Frank Foole

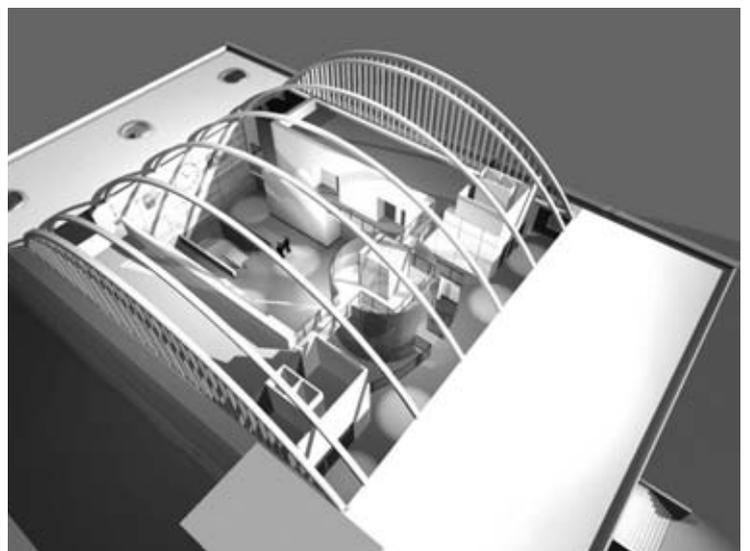
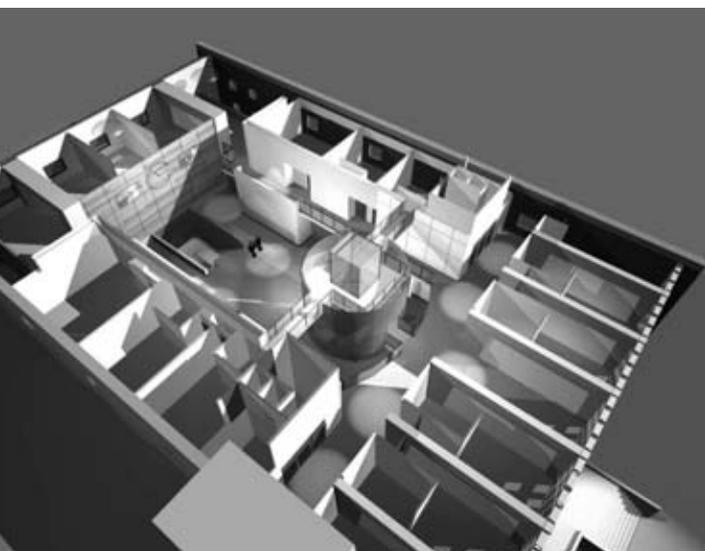
The PiusX church in southwest of The Hague, by the Rotterdam architects Thomas Nix and Theo Taen, built in 1960 is one of the most beautiful post-war churches in The Hague. For many years this church played an important role in the 'Bouwlust' neighborhood. In the nineties the church became obsolete.

The bishopric did not want to sell the building to another denomination and sold it to the property development firm 'Ceres projecten'. They turned it in 2004 into a 'care and welfare centre'.

The architect, Ton van den Haspel opened up its facades of the building and sought for contact with its surroundings, "but tried to maintain the specific characteristics of its original architecture".

The design of the buildings' interior is a perfect example of the troublesome combination under one roof of offices and consultancy and meeting rooms. Although new windows penetrate the old facades many rooms are orientated at the buildings' interior space. The large barrel vault and the way the light enters the space makes this possible. Today, the church contains a remarkable public space. However, apart from the importance of the fact that the building has been saved, one might wonder what surplus value this former sacred space gives to the functions it contains.

*Pictures are made available by Ton van den Haspel*





The Hague, Pius X Church

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