

VEFIE POELS

“A DESIRE TO BECOME WHAT THEY WERE”:  
WILLEM VAN ROSSUM AS A REDEMPTORIST BEFORE HIS  
ROMAN YEARS (1873–1895)

*Introduction; 1. – The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century; 2. – Attracted by the Redemptorists; 3. – Becoming a Son of Alphonsus: novitiate; 4. – Petrus Oomen; 5. – Studentate in Wittem (1874-1880); 6. – Lector in the juvenate in Roermond (sept. 1880-sept. 1883); 7. – Dogmatic theology in Wittem (1883-1893); 8. – Rector of Wittem 1893-1895; 9. – The General Chapter of 1894; 10. – The Smoking issue; 11. – Van Rossum’s appointment to Brazil and his transfer to Rome; 12. – Van Rossum’s Redemptorist legacy*

*Introduction*

In a recent issue of *Spicilegium Historicum*, Dr. Eric Corsius has written about Cardinal Willem van Rossum and the theological tradition of the Redemptorists in a general setting.<sup>1</sup> In this present article we will focus on Van Rossum’s life and position within the Congregation of the Redemptorists until he went to Rome in 1895.

The Dutch Redemptorists became well known in the course of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, both in Dutch society and in the entire Redemptorist Congregation. Van Rossum was a key figure who contributed to this

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<sup>1</sup> Eric CORSIUS, *The Theological Tradition of the Redemptorists in the life and work of Cardinal van Rossum*, in SHCSR 61 (2013) 153-170. On Willem Marinus van Rossum (Zwolle 1854-Maastricht 1932), see Vefie POELS, Theo SALEMINK, Hans DE VALK (eds.), *Life with a Mission. Cardinal Willem Marinus van Rossum CSsR (1854-1932)*, Gent 2011, also published as a special issue of *Trajecta. Religie, cultuur en samenleving in de Nederlanden* 19-20 (2010-2011) 1-2; Joop VERNOOIJ, *Cardinal Willem van Rossum, C.Ss.R. ‘The Great Cardinal of the Small Netherlands’ (1854-1932)*, in SHCSR 55 (2007) 347-400; Joseph Maria DREHMANN, *Kardinaal van Rossum. Korte levensschets*, Roermond/Maaseik 1935. See also the website [www.cardinalvanrossum.eu](http://www.cardinalvanrossum.eu).

success, together with two of his “Alphonsian soul-mates”: his tutor Petrus Oomen,<sup>2</sup> and his friend and sometimes his formidable opponent Jan Kronenburg.<sup>3</sup> All three were later to be strong candidates for the office of Redemptorist Superior General, Oomen in 1894, and Oomen’s protégés Van Rossum and Jan Kronenburg in 1909. What made them likely candidates for this office was both their talents and their broad knowledge of the works and ideas of St. Alphonsus who in 1871 had just been declared Doctor of the Church. They also drew attention because they came from a rather young and flourishing province.

However, in the end none of these three were chosen for the highest office in the Redemptorists. In fact, it was not until the years 1947-1953, with the election of Father Leonard Buijs, that a man from the Netherlands would serve as the Superior General.

In this article we will concentrate on Willem van Rossum as a Redemptorist against the background of the development of the Dutch province in the nineteenth century. We will ask ourselves how Van Rossum became acquainted with the Redemptorists and why he deliberately chose to become a son of Alphonsus. Then we will follow Van Rossum’s path within the Congregation, first as a novice and seminarian, as a teacher in Roermond, and finally as lecturer and scholar in dogmatic theology, as well as prefect and rector in the theologate at Wittem.

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<sup>2</sup> Petrus Oomen (Breda 1835-Amsterdam 1910), prof. 1857, ord. priest 1860. Successively in Wittem he was lecturer, 1860-1862, prefect of students, 1862-1868, and rector, 1868-1874. From 1874-1887 he was provincial of the Dutch province, consultor to provincial 1887-1891, *consultor generalis* to the Superior General Nicholas Mauron, 1891-1894, procurator general, 1894-1909. Died in Amsterdam in 1910. BOLAND, 268; DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie*, II, 299, mentions Oomen’s contribution to the scholarly development of the Dutch province, though he did not publish much of his own.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Kronenburg (Zutphen, 1853-Nijmegen, 1940), prof. 1873, ord. 1877. Superior of the Dutch province, 1894-1898 and 1918-1924. Published many devotional and edifying works and many years the main editor of *De Volksmissionaris*. DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie*, II, 235-238; BOLAND, 188; Laurentius Dankelman, *Oversten en officiales*, in *Monumenta Historica Provinciae Neerlandicae CSSR* (hereinafter this work will be cited as *MHPN-CSSR*), 5 (1953) 19-39; here 20-21. Since this survey is used throughout this article for dates and functions of Dutch Redemptorists it will not be mentioned at all the specific places.

In doing so, we will try to get an impression of the kind of man Willem van Rossum was, what it meant for him to be a Redemptorist, and what he wished to contribute to his Congregation. A basic question with which we will deal is how his development within the Dutch province of the Redemptorist Congregation in the years 1873-1895 can account for his later career. In this respect we will also focus on the development of the relationship with Petrus Oomen and Jan Kronenburg through the years. In 1895 Van Rossum was suddenly replaced and called to Rome by the Superior General Matthias Raus. The reasons for this move will be clarified here, not only because it was decisive for his later career, but also because it provides a rather revealing perspective on the character of the future cardinal.

In our next paragraph, before turning to Willem van Rossum, we will first give an overview of the development of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century. When did they settle here and what was their policy and strategy in finding their way in this predominantly Calvinist country? In doing so, we will get an impression of the institute which the young Willem van Rossum decided to join in 1873, an institute that would mark his life.

### 1. – *The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century*

Today there are some fifteen Dutch Redemptorists living at the residence in Boxmeer and several more are missioned at Wittem in Dutch Limburg.<sup>4</sup> At the start of 2013, the Congrega-

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<sup>4</sup> For the history of the Dutch province, see: Theo DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul. Het verhaal van een grootseminarie. Wittem 1836-1968*, Wittem 2007; Bert VAN DIJK, Theo SALEMINK, *Tussen droom en daad. Beeld van anderhalve eeuw Redemptoristen in Nederland*, Nijmegen 2000; Eric CORSIUS, *Een vrij en bevrijdend leven. Een theologisch onderzoek naar de geschiedenis van de praktische en reflexieve arbeid der Redemptoristen in Nederland in het licht van de subjectdiscussie in de theologie, 1833-1990*, Kampen 1999; Henri MOSMANS, *Het Redemptoristenklooster Wittem. Een bijdrage tot onze vaderlandsche kerkgeschiedenis 1836-1936*, Roermond-Maaseik 1939. In 1947, Leonard Buijs was elected Superior General. As an academic he was interested in the history of the Congregation. He not only started the international periodical *Spicilegium Historicum Congregationis SS.mi Redemptoris*, but also the Dutch periodical *Monumen-*

tion had a total of forty-three members in the Netherlands. Their average age is eighty-one. The youngest is sixty-four, the oldest being ninety-four.<sup>5</sup> These men remember the heyday of their Congregation, when this Dutch province counted hundreds of men and was proud of its impressive and crowded houses in places like Wittem, Amsterdam, 's-Hertogenbosch, Roermond, Roosendaal and Nijmegen.

In the 1940s and 1950s the Congregation witnessed its highest numerical strength: in 1948 the Dutch province had 528 members and was third in rank after the Baltimore unit with 765, and Belgium with 583 members.<sup>6</sup> But thereafter the attraction to religious life decreased quickly in the Netherlands, which affected the Redemptorist Congregation as well. Since the last new recruits were welcomed in the 1960s, the number of Redemptorists has declined steadily and after some decades their houses had to be closed one after another. On August 1, 2005, the Dutch province merged with the Belgian, German (Cologne) and Swiss Redemptorists into the St. Clement Province with its international headquarters in Wittem.

This means that in the Netherlands the Congregation is virtually back at its starting point. Almost one-hundred-eighty

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*ta Historica Provinciae Neerlandicae CSSR*. It was published during eight years, between 1949 and 1956. The aim of the periodical was to publish articles on various subjects in order to enhance a future compilation of the history of the Dutch province; originally one strived for such a history in 1955, when the Dutch province observed its one-hundred anniversary. As a matter of fact, in 1855 the Dutch-English province was established, and only in 1865 a separate Dutch province was created. See Martinus MULDER, *Waarom en waarheen*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 1 (1949) 7-17. Regrettably, a general history of the Dutch province of the Redemptorists as yet is still lacking, though Corsius gives a thorough overview of their theological impact, while some of the articles in *MHPN-CSSR*, though rather eclectic in its choice of topics, give valuable background information.

<sup>5</sup> Information received from the secretary of the St. Clement Province, Jelle Wind, Feb. 1, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Laurentius DANKELMAN, *Groei van de Nederlandse provincie in ledental*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 2 (1950) 190. In 1962 *Inter nos* 16 (1962) nr. 2, 3-4, counted no more than 439 Redemptorists: 187 priests in the Netherlands, thirty-nine clerical students, seven clerical novices, ninety-six brothers, one brother novice, and 109 (eighty-six priests, twenty-three brothers) in the vice-provinces of Paramaribo (Surinam) and Pernambuco, later Recife, (Brazil).

years ago, in 1836 the first Redemptorists settled into the theology house at Wittem with a community made up of a group drawn from various European nations. St. Clement Mary Hofbauer had brought the first Redemptorists across the Alps from Italy in 1785. Later the Congregation spread into the Belgian regions via Warsaw, Alsace, and Austria. Within Belgium houses were established first in Rumillies near Tournay (1831). Then followed Liège (1832), St. Trond (1833) and Wittem (1836). (At its beginning Wittem was still part of Belgium, but in 1839 this area would become part of Dutch Limburg.)<sup>7</sup>

According to the historian L.J. Rogier in the standard work *In vrijheid herboren* (which, even though it is a dated study, still contains valuable observations),<sup>8</sup> no religious order or congregation has contributed more to the Catholic religious revival in the middle of the nineteenth century in the Netherlands than that of the Redemptorists. They were looked upon as “the Jesuits for the common people.”<sup>9</sup> More recently, Doctor Otto Weiss has also drawn attention to the rapid growth of the Redemptorist influence in the Netherlands.<sup>10</sup>

Rogier, to a large extent, attributes their success to the “opposites” one can find in the founder of the Congregation, Alphonsus de Liguori: aristocrat and at the same time man-of-the-people, lawyer and theologian, intellectual and sentimental, relentless fighter against heresy and mild moralist. Alphonsus tried to create a moral theology which did justice to both law and human freedom. Standing between Catholic Romanticism and ultramontanism, these characteristics would have made the Redemptorists especially apt to play a leading role in the development of Dutch Catholicism in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jean BECO, *Les Rédemptoristes en Belgique*, in *SHCSR* 55 (2007) 3-83; 273-345.

<sup>8</sup> Ludovicus J. ROGIER, Nicolaas DE ROOY, *In vrijheid herboren. Katholiek Nederland 1853-1953*, Den Haag 1953, 239-243.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Y.H.A. JACOBS, *Werken in een dwarsverband. Een portret van de gezamenlijke Nederlandse priesterreligieuzen 1840-2004*, Nijmegen 2010, 16-17; 30-31.

<sup>10</sup> Otto WEISS, *Deutsche oder römische Moral? – oder: Der Streit um Alfons von Liguori. Ein Beitrag zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Romanismus und Germanismus im 19. Jahrhundert*, Pustet 2001, 35-36.

<sup>11</sup> L. ROGIER, N. DE ROOY, *In vrijheid herboren*, 239-243; also E. CORSIUS,

Since the Reformation in the sixteenth century, from a religious point of view, the Netherlands had been divided: in the North the Protestants held the majority, in the South the Catholics. Generally, the Calvinists were dominant in all sectors of society. This predominant position of the Protestants was challenged by the Catholics from the beginning of the nineteenth century. More and more Catholic places of assembly became open and public, more and more priests and women religious ministered visibly. The Constitution of 1848 established separation of Church and State.

This development offered the prospect of the reinstatement of the Episcopal hierarchy in 1853. Until then, the ecclesiastical organization of the Catholic church was split. In the Northern part of the Netherlands (the so-called *Hollandse Zend-ing* or Dutch Mission) seven archpriests governed the Church, while in the Southern part apostolic vicars headed their districts. A coordinating vice-superior governed the whole area on behalf of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, while an internuncio served as contact with the same Propaganda Fide. In 1853 the apostolic vicars and archpriests were replaced by an archbishop and four bishops.<sup>12</sup> Johannes Zwijsen became the first new Archbishop of Utrecht, an ancient centre of the Catholic church in the Northern part of the country.<sup>13</sup>

For the new ecclesiastical hierarchy it was a challenge to bring uniformity in the new Church province, where many archpriests and parish priests had developed into “small popes,” following their own inclinations in liturgical and catechetical matters.<sup>14</sup> Some of them were quite rigid in their beliefs – some

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*Een vrij en bevrijdend leven*; C.E.M. STRUYKER BOUDIER, *Wijsgerig leven in Nederland, België en Luxemburg 1880-1980*. Vol. 4 *Een zwerm getuigen*, Nijmegen/Baarn s.a., 61-106.

<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the Netherlands remained under the jurisdiction of the Propaganda Fide until 1908.

<sup>13</sup> Piet DE ROOY, *Inleiding*, in J. VIS, W. JANSE (eds.), *Staf en storm. Het herstel van de bisschoppelijke hiërarchie in Nederland in 1853: actie en reactie*, Hilversum 2002, 9-16; Martinus Hubertus MULDER, *De Redemptoristen en het herstel der bisschoppelijke hiërarchie in Nederland*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 5 (1953) 40-64.

<sup>14</sup> Hans DE VALK, *Meer dan een plaats. De keuze van Utrecht als aartsbisdom in 1853*, in J. VIS, W. JANSE (eds.), *Staf en storm*, 37-63; here 40-42.

were often labeled as at least semi-jansenistic, while others were reproached for being too lenient in their ministry.

Along with the fragmented situation inside the Church province, Archbishop Zwijsen and his fellow bishops had to face a hazardous relationship with the Protestants. They were on guard since the reinstatement of the Episcopal hierarchy had aroused a short, but ardent anti-papist upheaval in the so-called *April-movement* in 1853. In fact, for decades many Catholics proceeded cautiously, carefully avoiding offending the Calvinists. However, the reinstatement also meant a strong impetus for the Catholics, as they managed to be regarded as having a more equal position in the Dutch society in the decades to come.

In this situation the Redemptorists seized their opportunity. After Wittem in 1836, they came to settle in Amsterdam in 1850, the Dutch capital in the Northern part of the country, where, as it were, only “Protestants and liberals” lived. Then followed foundations in ’s-Hertogenbosch (Bois le Duc) in 1854, Roermond (1863) and Roosendaal (1868). We can discern three different paths through which the Redemptorists succeeded in expanding their influence and reputation in the Netherlands: their popular missions (*volksmissies* in Dutch), the translation and spread of Saint Alphonsus de Liguori’s writings and their special relationship with the diocesan clergy.

### *Missions*

For the common believers, the missions or *volksmissies* of the Redemptorists generally were their first encounter with this missionary Congregation. The Austrian Redemptorist Friedrich von Held, who would become the first superior of the Belgian province in 1841, was an ardent supporter of “the main work of the Congregation, the Holy Missions.”<sup>15</sup> The first mission was held in Wittem in 1833 and was a noteworthy event. According to Henri Mosmans, “The most brilliant orator was a Father Ludwig, from Alsace, who knew how to mould the hearts as a potter does his clay.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> H. MOSMANS, *Wittem*, 22-40; BOLAND, 158-159.

<sup>16</sup> H. MOSMANS, *Wittem*, 27.

The mission, which was held in German, lasted almost three weeks due to the enormous interest of the people in this area with its German, Belgian and Dutch connections. Each day there were three sermons: at 9 a.m., at 3.00 p.m. and one in the evening, which was repeated the next morning. The dramatic sermons aimed at frightening the souls and then showing them the way out: hope and faith in God's mercy, which would lead them to forgiveness and redemption. After the sermons many penitents, from Aachen and Cologne as well, confessed and each day the priests were busy hearing confessions from 6 a.m. until noon, and 3:00 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. Each Redemptorist was so deployed, along with some twenty diocesan priests from the Gulpen deanery. The final sermon on January 7, 1834, was attended by 6,000-7,000 people. The next day, directly opposite the main entrance of the Wittem church, and with a good deal of ceremony, the Mission Cross was raised.

According to Mosmans, the edifying influence of the first mission was beyond dispute: the faithful recaptured their frequent and worthy reception of the Eucharist, their prayer life was revived and Catholics who had strayed from the path of virtue, experienced a conversion of life. Very soon, new missions were held in other places such as Sittard (1835), Horst, Roermond and Venlo (1836). Now and then disturbances were reported, for instance in Venlo where some Belgian officers had spread rumors, probably at the instigation of Freemasons.<sup>17</sup> More serious was the death of three persons when panic broke out during a mission in an overcrowded church in Bommel in 1851.<sup>18</sup>

Soon the popular missions were considered as the major endeavor of the Redemptorists, which brought them recognition throughout the country. Their missions lasted ten or twelve days and followed a standard and strict schedule of sermons, celebration of the Eucharist, and opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Mandatory subjects for the sermons were Mortal Sin,

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. See also Martinus Hubertus MULDER, *De volksmissies der Redemptoristen in Nederland*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 5 (1953) 131-186.

<sup>18</sup> Laurentius DANKELMAN, *Een gestoorde missie*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 7 (1955) 181-182.



Confession of Sin, Death, Judgment, Hell, the Virgin Mary and Prayer.<sup>19</sup>

A renowned charismatic speaker was the Dutch Redemptorist Bernard Hafkenscheid (1807-1865). Born in Amsterdam as the son of a paint merchant, he chose to study for the priesthood. After attending the junior seminary of Hageveld, at the age of twenty he went to Rome to complete his studies at the Collegium Romanum. Here he met as fellow student named Vincent Joachim Pecci, the later Pope Leo XIII, and it seems that they became good friends.<sup>20</sup> In Rome, with the consent of the bishop of Liège, Cornelius Richard A. Van Bommel, who was a friend of the Redemptorists,<sup>21</sup> Hafkenscheid joined this Congregation of missionaries, professing his vows in 1833. In 1835, he returned to the Low Countries and became rector of the community in Liège. Soon, the preaching of missions and retreats became his main activity.

According to Rogier, Father Bernard, in a sense, overshadowed all his confreres. His pulpit rhetoric was highly evocative and even demagogical.<sup>22</sup> The Dutch Protestant press described him as an “ex-comedian,” stressing his “medieval zeal,” and his merchandise, selling all kinds of devotional objects in stalls to the superstitious and foolish crowds.<sup>23</sup> When the *Evangelische Kerkbode* (Evangelical Church Messenger) learned that he would be sent to America in 1848, they were delighted, inviting him to take all his Congregation with him.<sup>24</sup>

After Hafkenscheid returned from overseas at the beginning of the 1850s, he returned to his former ministerial activity. During the years of childhood of Jan Kronenburg and Willem

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<sup>19</sup> M. MULDER, *Volksmisies der Redemptoristen*, 136-137 and 175; E. CORSIUS, *Vrij en bevrijdend leven*, 166-181.

<sup>20</sup> A. DANKELMAN, *Paus Leo XIII en pater Bernard*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 3 (1951) 187-190. When Pecci was apostolic nuncio in Bruxelles, from Jan. 28, 1843, until Jan. 19, 1846, Hafkenscheid visited him several times.

<sup>21</sup> Henri MOSMANS, *Mgr. Van Bommel en de Redemptoristen*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 4 (1952) 129-139.

<sup>22</sup> BOLAND, 150-151; L. ROGIER, N. DE ROOY, *In vrijheid herboren*, 241-243.

<sup>23</sup> M. MULDER, *Herstel der bisschoppelijke hiërarchie*, 53-62.

<sup>24</sup> Laurentius DANKELMAN, *Amstelodamensia* 2, in *MHPN-CSSR* 2 (1950) 33-48.

van Rossum, between approximately 1855 and 1865, he crossed the Dutch country as a famous and fiery preacher. It is unlikely that both youngsters saw him on one of these occasions, even though it is said that Kronenburg later described the mission of Hafkenscheid in 1862 as if he, then nine years old, had been present at the occasion.<sup>25</sup> At least they do not mention the example of Hafkenscheid in their *curricula vitae*, which they had to write at the end of their novitiate.<sup>26</sup> Van Rossum rarely refers to Hafkenscheid in his writings or letters.

By 1850, the Redemptorists more or less had the monopoly on giving missions in the Catholic parishes of the Netherlands. In the 1870s, the houses in Amsterdam, 's-Hertogenbosch and Roosendaal organized most of the *labores externi* of the province: that is, missions and retreats. The houses of Wittem and Roermond, however, specialized in the formation and education of the young aspirants to Redemptorist missionary life, and in *labores interni* in honor of the Virgin Mary.<sup>27</sup>

The paradigm of parish missions promoted by Bernard Hafkenscheid would remain in place among Dutch Redemptorists for almost a century. In the beginning of the 1950s, however the Dutch Redemptorists started looking back with something of embarrassment about the first missions given in the Netherlands. They objected to the theatrics, the manipulations, the quasi-hypnotic "performances" aimed at putting the fear of God into the assembled people, as well as to the deceit involved, such as promising indulgences of ten thousand years if the faithful attended the raising of the Mission Cross at the end of a mission. But one cannot overlook the fact of some contemporary

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<sup>25</sup> Albert VAN DER ZEIJDEN, *Heiligen, nationale identiteit en herinneringscultuur. J.A.F. Kronenburg (1853-1940) en zijn meerdelig seriewerk "Neerlands Heiligen,"* in *Trajecta* 17 (2008) 50-78, here 72.

<sup>26</sup> To be admitted to the Redemptorist Congregation, all novices were obliged to write down their vocational story in a brief, so-called *curriculum vitae* at some time during their year of novitiate.

<sup>27</sup> St. Agatha, Erfgoedcentrum Nederlandse Kloosterarchieven (ENK), Archives of the Dutch Province of the Redemptorists (ANPR), 3: *Chronicles of the Dutch province 1866-1881*, ff. 203-337. In the course of the twentieth century, Wittem would become a well-known place of pilgrimage in honor of Gerard Majella after his beatification in 1893 and canonization in 1904.

criticism; already in 1866 the then Dutch provincial Anton Konings stipulated a number of mission regulations aimed at preventing damage to people's faith.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the success of the missions went unquestioned for a long time and it made the Jesuits and Franciscans take up this kind of missions as well.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Spreading the ideas of Alphonsus*

At the same time, writings of the founder of the Congregation of the Redemptorists, Alphonsus de Liguori, were spreading rapidly in the Catholic part of the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> Even before the Redemptorists settled in Belgium in 1831 and in Wittem in 1836, some of his writings were available in Flemish or Dutch. The first works to be published in Flemish dealt with *Daily Meditations*, *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*, *The Way to Salvation*, *Preparation for Death*, and *Consolation for a Desperate Soul*.<sup>31</sup> In the 1830s the number of editions increased quickly, especially after the canonization of Alphonsus in 1839.

It seems that many of these works of Alphonsus were meant especially as supplemental spiritual reading to accompany the popular missions, as we can learn from the *Small Catholic Mission Book* of 1839.<sup>32</sup> The introduction emphasizes that the

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<sup>28</sup> M. MULDER, *Volksmissies der Redemptoristen*, 182-184. Anton Konings (1821-1884), Dutch provincial 1865-1868, was sent to the United States in 1870. In 1884 he published in New York his work based on St. Alphonsus' *Theologia moralis*; see: Gilbert A. ENDERLE, *The American Moral Theology of Anthony Konings*, University of Michigan Press, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> M. MULDER, *Herstel der bisschoppelijke hiërarchie*, 50-52; L. ROGIER, N. DE ROOY, *In vrijheid herboren*, 239.

<sup>30</sup> DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie*, I, 291-306, gives an outline of the 111 writings of Alphonsus which were published in Dutch at the time with a total of 1538 editions.

<sup>31</sup> *Eeuwige grondregelen of meditatieën voor elken dag der week* (1780), *Bezoeken aan het H. Sakrament* (1778), *Weg der zaligheid met eenige overwegingen van de eeuwige waerheden* (1803 by J.A. Juten in Turnhout), *Bereiding tot den dood* (1826) and *Raadgevingen ter verlichting en aanmoediging van een troostelooze ziel* (1830).

<sup>32</sup> *Klein katholijk missieboek of inleiding tot eenen christelijken levenswandel, voor het meestendeel getrokken uit de geschriften van den H Alphonsus de Liguori*, Wittem 1839.

book was meant to be a practical continuance of what was taught during the mission sermons, “so that the good intentions and the salutary truths would not be forgotten.” It contained “the most necessary and most beautiful prayers,” confessional and Communion aids, devotions for brief visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, as well as brief catechetical reminders and helps for meditation. In short, it was a guide for “dear Christians... in order to be saved, and for the instruction of those who may be entrusted to your care.”

The introduction to an early Dutch edition of *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ* mentions that the canonization decree of Alphonsus in 1839 states that his works are especially suited to ignite devotion in the hearts of Christians.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1830s and 1840s the works of Alphonsus were already read and discussed by students and professors of the Dutch seminaries. At first, the diocesan priests objected to the ideas of Alphonsus. Some of them adhering to semi-jansenistic ideas, considered his works too lenient and “laxist” in content because of Alphonsus’ espousal of *aequiprobabilism* in his casuistry or practical ethics, even though his approach was not the “laxist” stance of Jesuits in these matters.<sup>34</sup> (One century later, when the Redemptorists were regarded by most Catholics in the Netherlands as rather severe in moral issues, L. Rogier recalls that one could hardly imagine that Alphonsus’ ideas once were seen as not rigorist enough).<sup>35</sup> In addition many of the clergymen, especially in the field of moral theology, looked upon the works of Alphonsus as dangerous in the hand of any student.

Presumably, in the years after the canonization of Alphonsus, the clergy’s resentment decreased bit by bit, and the teachings of Alphonsus were more and more accepted at the seminaries. The Dutch Redemptorist Johannes Looijaard had the opportunity to translate and edit twenty-two volumes of the ascetical

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<sup>33</sup> *De ware bruid van Jezus Christus of de door de oefening der kloosterdeugden geheiligde ordespersoon, voor kloosterlingen van beiderlei geslacht*, 1867, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 's-Hertogenbosch, iv.

<sup>34</sup> For the discussion on probabilism, equiprobabilism and probabiliorism, see E. CORSIUS, *The Theological Tradition*, 163-166.

<sup>35</sup> L. ROGIER, N. DE ROOY, *In vrijheid herboren*, 239-243.

and dogmatic works of Alphonsus between 1849 and 1856.<sup>36</sup> These editions of Looijaard were in use at the seminary of Warmond in the diocese of Haarlem.<sup>37</sup> In 1871, the declaration of Alphonsus as a Doctor of the Church decidedly favored the general acceptance of the works of the Saint.

If we observe the “Tableau statistique général” in the bibliography of Maurice De Meulemeester, we can see that the Dutch and Flemish regions, with populations smaller than other Western European countries, took rather special interest in the works of St. Alphonsus. In 1933, with a total of 1538 editions, the number of publications in Dutch ranked in the fourth position, behind the French (5629),<sup>38</sup> the Italian (3916) and the German (3291) ones, and well ahead of the Spanish (842) and the English (797) editions. Of other language editions Latin was the most important. In this Latin category we find those works that were seen as suited for the clergy and dangerous for the laity, for instance the *Theologia Moralis* (also published in French), and the *Pratica del Confessore* (published in Italian, German and French) and *Istruzione e Pratica* (published in Italian, German, Spanish and French).<sup>39</sup>

De Meulemeester mentions that there were some doubts if Alphonsus' works *The Selva* (on the dignity and duties of priests), and *The Glories of Mary* should be published in Dutch, because one feared violent opposition from Protestants.<sup>40</sup> As a matter of fact, some Protestant publications indeed aimed at undermining the authority of Alphonsus. Especially his works on moral theol-

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<sup>36</sup> Johannes LOOJAARD, *Volledige ascetische en dogmatische werken van den H. Alphonsus Mar. de Liguori, bisschop van St. Agatha der Gothen en insteller van de Congregatie der Allerheiligsten Verlossers of der Redemptoristen*, Utrecht 1849-1856. M. MULDER, *Herstel der bisschoppelijke hiërarchie*, 49-50.

<sup>37</sup> Jan Y.H.A. JACOBS, *De opgang tot het altaar van God. De structuur van de priesteropleiding in Nederland vóór en ná 1853*, in *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800*, 24 (2001) 54 (June), 5-27; here 15.

<sup>38</sup> France was especially apt to embrace the ideas of Alphonsus because of influential ultramontane anti-jansenists like Bruno Lanteri and Thomas-Marie-Joseph Gousset.

<sup>39</sup> DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie*, I: “Tableau statistique général,” 1-3, II, 1-3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

ogy and confessional practice encountered severe criticism. For instance, the German Protestant scholar Robert Grassmann published some excerpts of the *Theologia Moralis* which he said was “sanctioned ex cathedra as a directive for the Roman Catholic Church.” Grassman pointed to the terrible danger which Liguori’s moral theology represented for the morality of the people.<sup>41</sup> (His brochure was also published in Dutch circa 1900).<sup>42</sup>

In this small work of Grassmann rules for and the practice of confession as urged by Alphonsus are labeled as indecent, because Alphonsus explicitly and in detail described all kinds of sexual acts that were sinful and therefore had to be confessed. These descriptions, Grassmann said, would inevitably have a “pornographic effect” and therefore they constituted a great moral danger to both the penitents and the priest himself. This brochure, which is kept at the Radboud University Nijmegen, was originally part of the Redemptorist library of Wittem (built by Van Rossum in 1894). In 1975, this collection encompassed 75,000 items, which were then sold to the Nijmegen University. The brochure of Grassmann belonged among the “*Libri Prohibiti*” which were referred to collectively as “Hell” by the Redemptorist students at Wittem. This “Hell” was placed at the highest level of the library, an area where students were admitted only for a worthy reason of research and by special permission. A handwritten note on the first page of the booklet warns the reader: “*Non tanta stupida in bubis omnibus, non tantum odium in Holland, quanta stupida odiumque in hoc libello*” (There is not so much stupidity in all the cows on earth, nor so much stupidity and hatred in the Netherlands, as the stupidity and hatred found in this small book).

Because of the serious reservations of the Protestants and because of the supposed dangers for the Catholics, it is no wonder that the above mentioned “precarious” writings were not

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<sup>41</sup> On Grassmann and his polemics see O. WEISS, *Deutsche oder römische Moral?*, 157-174.

<sup>42</sup> *Uittreksels uit de door de Pausen Pius IX en Leo XIII ex cathedra als richtsnoer voor de RK Kerk gesanctioneerde moraal-theologie van den h. Dr. A.M. de Liguori en het ontzettend gevaar daarvan voor de zedelijkheid der volken*, Leiden ca. 1900.

published in Dutch, but only in Latin.<sup>43</sup> However, despite these objections, already at the end of the nineteenth century the *Theologia Moralis* was embraced in many Dutch seminaries. The first Dutch/Belgian edition in Latin was published by the Dutch Redemptorist Joseph Aertnijs (Eindhoven 1828-Wittem 1915) in 1886-1887. From 1860-1898 Aertnijs taught moral theology almost continuously in Wittem. He likewise taught this subject in 1883 to 1892, a period in which Willem van Rossum was also at Wittem teaching dogmatic theology. As we will see, these two colleagues did not totally agree on the application and interpretation of Alphonsus' teachings.

For years Aertnijs also was coeditor of the "professional" periodical for the entire clergy of the Netherlands, *Nederlandsche Katholieke Stemmen*, together with the President of the seminary of the Utrecht archdiocese Antonius C.M. Schaepman.<sup>44</sup> This periodical had the same function in the Netherlands as the *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* had in Belgium.<sup>45</sup> Schaepman remembered Aertnijs in 1915 as a good scholar and a hard worker, someone who by choice did not want to be in the limelight. His *Theologia Moralis* saw publication in twelve editions and was used for decades in almost every Dutch seminary.<sup>46</sup>

Besides the works of Alphonsus, many biographies of Alphonsus were published, describing his life in a more or less

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<sup>43</sup> René BASTIAANSE, *Onkuisheid. De Nederlandse biechtpraktijk 1900-1965*, WBooks 2013, 42-69; 96-97. Bastiaanse mentions that the Redemptorist Lodewijk Wouters in his introduction warned the students to read his manual *De virtute castitatis et de vitiis oppositis* (1932) not out of mere curiosity, and to pray often to God and to the Immaculate Virgin Mary to remain free from this seduction.

<sup>44</sup> According to Th. DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 90-91, W. van Rossum and F. ter Haar played a part in the coming about of this partnership in 1900.

<sup>45</sup> DE MEULEMEESTER, *Histoire*, 185-187.

<sup>46</sup> ENK, ANPR, 34: Documents of the Dutch province, J. Aertnijs to J. Meeuwissen, Aug. 25, 1901. Aertnijs reported that his "Moral" would be introduced as the manual at the seminary of Warmond after the holidays. A.C.M. SCHAEPMAN, *In memoriam Plur. Rev. Patris Joseph Aertnijs C.ss.R.*, in *Nederlandsche Katholieke Stemmen* 15 (1915) 210-211; L. WINKELER, *Ten dienste der seminaristen. Handboeken op de Nederlandse priesteropleidingen, 1800-1967*, in *Jaarboek Katholiek Documentatie Centrum* 17 (1987) 12-56; DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie*, II, 9-11, 210-216, 420-422; BOLAND, 3-4.

hagiographic style. With a translation from a French edition, in 1856, Adrianus Bossers wanted to stimulate the Catholics “to the practice of all virtues.”<sup>47</sup>

*Relationship with the diocesan clergy*

In due course, the Redemptorists managed to build a close relationship with the Dutch diocesan clergy. This was not so at first, since religious order priests were sometimes looked upon as competitors by the archpriests in the so-called “*Hollandse Zending*” and by the apostolic vicars in the southern part of the Low Countries.

This threat became actual when King Willem II (1840-1849) ascended the throne. Whereas his father Willem I (1813-1840) had restricted the expansion and activities of orders and congregations, Willem II gave permission to the Crosiers, Franciscans, Capuchins and Carmelites to extend their activities again in 1840. The “Liguorians,” as the Redemptorists were frequently called in the nineteenth century, were not only legally acknowledged by the Royal Decree of November 28, 1840, but they also received official permission to organize parish missions. Moreover, in 1841, the Jesuits, who had been considered as a “dangerous order” by Willem I, obtained permission to take charge of the junior seminary of Kuilenburg.<sup>48</sup>

As was true of other orders and congregations, the Redemptorists encountered some opposition from the diocesan clergy, but since parish work was not their main business, they were considered less a threat than, for example, the Jesuits, Dominicans or Franciscans who in several cities had their own parishes alongside the diocesan ones.<sup>49</sup> In the person of Franciscus Jacobus van Vree<sup>50</sup> (1807-1861), the President of the diocesan semi-

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<sup>47</sup> *Leven van den H. Alphonsus de Liguori, Bisschop van St. Agatha der Gothen en Stichter van de Congregatie des Allerheiligsten Verlossers*, Amsterdam 1856, Introduction.

<sup>48</sup> J. JACOBS, *Werken in een dwarsverband*, 23-31.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* In protection of their lives as religious order priests, the Dutch Redemptorists were very reluctant in accepting parishes of their own, not only in the Netherlands, but also in their foreign missions.

<sup>50</sup> Franciscus Jacobus van Vree (1807-1861) in 1853 became the first



nary of Haarlem at Warmond, they found an advocate and friend. It was he who re-started the retreats for the theology students of Warmond and placed the retreats in the hands of the Redemptorists. The Protestant publication *Evangelische Kerkbode* once more felt called upon to warn the Catholics about the Redemptorists, who, they said were “actually Jesuits” and would inspire the Catholic clergy with a medieval spirit.<sup>51</sup>

However, the Congregation soon expanded its retreat ministry to the annual retreats of all the priests in the diocese of Haarlem. This had happened before in the diocese of Roermond, after Bernard Hafkenschied had given such a retreat in 1841. Other dioceses soon followed, putting the retreats of their priests and theology students under the care of the Redemptorists as well.

As mentioned, the Redemptorists resisted any tendencies to rigid Jansenism or to laxist attitudes within the Dutch clergy. They considered the jansenistic clergymen to be proud and high-handed, and their strictness in pastoral care was lacking in the merciful disposition of Saint Alphonsus. On the other hand the Redemptorists also stood up against any lackadaisical religious life on the part of some other diocesan clergymen. It is striking that, probably attracted by their middle course, many diocesan priests requested admission into the Redemptorist ranks, as Hafkenschied himself had done.<sup>52</sup>

By giving retreats to the diocesan clergy, the Redemptorists came into close contact with virtually all the Dutch diocesan priests and exerted considerable influence on their formation and religious spirit, renewing their devotional life and encouraging their life of prayer, urging them to pray, for instance the rosary, and creating a kind of uniformity amongst them. In the course of the nineteenth century, the relationship between the Redemptorists and the bishops and their diocesan clergy became cordial, more so than the diocesan priests developed with other

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bishop of the new diocese of Haarlem.

<sup>51</sup> L. DANKELMAN, *Amstelodamensia* 2, 41.

<sup>52</sup> Laurentius DANKELMAN, *Roepingen tot onze congregatie onder de seculiere priesters*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 5 (1953) 121-130, 190, mentions among the Redemptorist recruits in the years 1833-1906 forty-nine diocesan priests; M. MULDER, *Herstel der bisschoppelijke hiërarchie*, 50-52.

regular orders and congregations.<sup>53</sup> The already mentioned cooperation with regard of the *Nederlandsche Katholieke Stemmen*, corroborates this observation.

The Congregation benefitted from this good relationship, but it also seems to have contributed to one of the major conflicts between the Dutch Redemptorist province members and their Roman General Council. This conflict, which centered on the issue of smoking (*rookwestie*), was to become acute in the 1890s and will be revisited later.

To promote their program of religious revival, the Redemptorists were keen on opening houses in the Northern part of the Netherlands where, as mentioned before, mainly “liberals and Protestants” resided. In Amsterdam, where approximately only one fifth of the population was Catholic at the time, a Redemptorist house was considered a powerful instrument. Due to the efforts of Christiaan M.A. Hafkenscheid, brother of Father Bernard, the Redemptorists managed to establish a threshold in the Dutch capital. He informed the Congregation that a priest in Amsterdam wanted to sell two adjacent pieces of land in the centre of the city, on the Keizersgracht and Prinsengracht (two famous canals), in an area destroyed by a previous fire. Despite protests from some local priests, who feared competition, and serious doubts of Monsignor Carlo Belgrado, the internuncio and vice-superior of the “Dutch mission,” who feared Protestant resistance, the Congregation bought the land and opened a chapel on November 24, 1850, three years before the reinstatement of the Episcopal hierarchy.<sup>54</sup>

Their founding in Amsterdam is seen as a wise decision by the historian Rogier, a decision that had a most beneficent influence on the expansion of the Congregation. Their Amsterdam chapel soon became a popular place for Catholics to approach the sacrament of Reconciliation. One year later, the Congregation received permission from the Minister of Catholic Worship

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<sup>53</sup> L. ROGIER, N. DE ROOY, *In vrijheid herboren*, 239, 246; M. MULDER, *Herstel der bisschoppelijke hiërarchie*, 53.

<sup>54</sup> L. DANKELMAN, *Amstelodamensia 1*, in *MHPN-CSSR 2* (1950) 1-10. For the same reason Belgrado preferred 's-Hertogenbosch as the archdiocesan seat to Utrecht in 1853. H. DE VALK, *Meer dan een plaats*, 62-63.

(*R.K. Eeredienst*), to build a new church. One of the members of the committee who was responsible for the building, was A.H. Hafkenscheid, another relative of Bernard Hafkenscheid.<sup>55</sup>

The relationship with a part of the local clergy remained difficult for some time. But in 1865, when the new church was consecrated by Redemptorist Bishop Johannes B. Swinkels, who had been the first superior of the Dutch-English province and at the time was Apostolic Vicar of Suriname, almost all of the Amsterdam diocesan priests participated in the festivities.<sup>56</sup>

It was rumored that the Redemptorists tried to prevent the reinstatement of the Episcopal hierarchy in 1853. This is doubtful because the Redemptorists especially welcomed one of its major effects, i.e., the renewed discipline among the clergy.<sup>57</sup> But the rumors persisted, and to end them, on the occasion of the seventy-fifth jubilee of the restored hierarchy, Cardinal van Rossum asked the archivist of the Propaganda Fide, Giuseppe Monticone, to search in the Propaganda Fide archives for any evidence. The evidence indicated that, unlike the Cistercians, Jesuits and Premonstratensians, the Redemptorists had brought no objections against the reinstatement of the hierarchy.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, the reinstated hierarchy offered also some disadvantages for the regular order priests. On occasions, the bishops curbed their expansion because regular order priests could claim some forms of exemption from the Episcopal management. Moreover, some diocesan priests feared that their parishioners would prefer going to the chapels in the residences of the religious orders both to confess and to celebrate the Holy Mass. This could, of course, mean a loss of influence and income for the diocesan parish priests. The Redemptorists experienced after 1853 that it was not always easy to get permission from bishops

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<sup>55</sup> L. DANKELMAN, *Amstelodamensia* 1, 14.

<sup>56</sup> L. DANKELMAN, *Amstelodamensia* 5, in *MHPN-CSSR* 2 (1950) 139; on J. Swinkels see: BOLAND, 378-379.

<sup>57</sup> L. ROGIER, N. DE ROOY, *In vrijheid herboren*, 238-242; E. CORSIUS, *Vrij en bevrijdend leven*, 163-166.

<sup>58</sup> M. MULDER, *Herstel der bisschoppelijke hiërarchie*, 40. The undated Promemoria of Monticone is kept at Nijmegen, Catholic Documentation Centre (KDC), *Archives of Cardinal W.M. van Rossum (ROSS)*, 70.

to settle in their territories; thus in spite of seven attempts by the then Dutch provincial Petrus Oomen, the Redemptorists were not allowed to open a house in Arnhem due to the resistance of the diocesan clergy.<sup>59</sup>

## 2. – Attracted by the Redemptorists

### *The seminary of Kuilenburg*

When Willem van Rossum decided that he wanted to be a priest in the 1860s, the Redemptorists were already widely known in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, Van Rossum went to the diocesan minor seminary of Kuilenburg of the Archdiocese of Utrecht. Junior seminaries for order priests were as yet not very common; the Redemptorists opened their “juvenile” only in 1870.

At the age of 13 on October 7, 1867, Willem van Rossum entered Kuilenburg. He was accepted into the diocesan seminary with the help of his parish priest Gerardus Roelofs, after his father Jan van Rossum had died in 1861, and his mother Henrika Veldwillems in 1863. In the years 1863-1867 Willem had been residing at the Catholic orphanage in his native town Zwolle.<sup>60</sup> As seen earlier, in 1841 the Jesuits took charge of the seminary Kuilenburg. Most young men who started their formation here became diocesan priests, while some of them chose for an order, usually the Jesuits. It is even said that the Jesuits picked out the best students for their own.<sup>61</sup>

However, Willem van Rossum made a different choice: he entered the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. Only few young men in these years made this particular choice, but Van Rossum was not the only one; Jan Kronenburg had made that

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<sup>59</sup> Laurentius DANKELMAN, *Niet gelukte stichtingen*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 1 (1949) 97-102.

<sup>60</sup> Otto S. LANKHORST, *La jeunesse du cardinal Van Rossum et son lien avec le Salland, sa région d'origine*, in *Trajecta* 19-20 (2010-2011) 27-32. In his youth Van Rossum was usually named Marinus instead of Willem.

<sup>61</sup> A.J. VERMEULEN (e.a.), *1818-1968: 150 Jaar Klein Seminarie Aartsbisdom Utrecht 1816-1868*, 17. Out of the 1,870 students who attended Kuilenburg between 1841 and 1891, 709 continued their diocesan training, while 233 students chose for an order or congregation.

same move one year earlier, in 1872. The two young men, born in the archdiocese of Utrecht in old mercantile centers belonging to the so-called Northern-European “Hanseatic League,” had become friends at Kuilenburg. In his biography of Kronenburg, Henri Mosmans even refers to a relationship that was “unprompted and frank like that of David and Jonathan.”<sup>62</sup> Van Rossum’s and Kronenburg’s lives would remain intertwined after these years of training.

In 1906 the administration of the Kuilenburg seminary would be withdrawn from the Jesuits by the then archbishop of Utrecht, Henricus van de Wetering.<sup>63</sup> In regard to the formation of Willem van Rossum it might be of interest to mention the significant reasons. The skimming off of the best students has been mentioned in this regard. But another consideration comes into focus. The Jesuits, as a worldwide order, would not have been focusing enough on the interests of the archdiocese, but instead had their eyes turned to the whole world and the Church in Rome. This observation is confirmed when we observe a great attachment to Pope Pius IX, who wrote a personal letter to the seminary in 1853, in which he mentioned his awareness that the seminary and the Society of Jesuits, “were closely attached to Us and this Holy See through faith, love and devotion.” This letter was followed by another in 1860 containing an apostolic blessing for the seminary.<sup>64</sup> Both letters were carefully preserved by the staff of Kuilenburg.

When Jan Kronenburg and Willem van Rossum were students at the junior seminary, the major events on the world stage of the Catholic Church did not pass unnoticed to the semi-

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<sup>62</sup> The friendship of David and Jonathan is described in II Samuel, 1:26. Henri MOSMANS, *J.A.F. Kronenburg*, in *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde*, 1939/40, 34-43; here 35. Kronenburg is also referred to as Johan Baptist Kronenburg. BOLAND, 189.

<sup>63</sup> The Jesuits resisted and protested this removal. See Vatican, Archives of the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (ASPF), *Nova Series*, Vol. 324 (1904) 316-329; 337-364.

<sup>64</sup> Nijmegen, Archives of the Dutch Province of the Jesuits (ANSI), *Archief Kuilenburg*, 6180: Letters of Pius IX, July 07, 1853; Mar. 14, 1860, and the brochure *Viering der Piusfeesten op het aartsbisschoppelijk seminarie te Kuilenburg 1871* (Utrecht [1871]).

narians. The First Vatican Council was closely followed, if only because “their” archbishop of Utrecht, Andreas Ignatius Schaepman, who succeeded Johannes Zwijsen in 1868, was present. Students and staff strongly empathized with the developments regarding the Church State, the capture of the City of Rome, and the faith of the Pope as a “prisoner in the Vatican.” During the twenty-fifth jubilee of Pope Pius IX, from June 16 to 21, 1871, there were abundant festivities. One of the professors, Bernard van Meurs SJ, organized a magnificent *soirée musicale et littéraire*. The evening included speeches and performances by the best students, Jan Kronenburg among them. There was also a kind of procession in a grandly decorated hall in the middle of which was an illuminated bust of the Pope. The day ended with a moving speech by the Jesuit provincial, in which he recalled his personal meetings with “the exalted personality of Pius IX.” In this way the students were brought into contact with the international nature of the Church, well beyond the scope of their own archdiocese.<sup>65</sup>

#### *Choice for the Redemptorists*

Both Willem van Rossum and Jan Kronenburg stated in their *curriculum vitae*, which they were supposed to write during their year of novitiate, as required of all those aspiring to be Redemptorists, that their reading of St. Alphonsus’ biography influenced their decision to enter the Redemptorist Congregation. That seems to be the only similarity in their choice. When we take a closer look at their motivation, we are struck by the differences in their ways and characters. Because it might help us to understand later developments, we will shortly deal here with Kronenburg’s deliberations before turning to Van Rossum’s.

Jan Kronenburg was born on September 22, 1853, as Johannes Antonius Franciscus Kronenburg, being the only son of a Catholic middle class family.<sup>66</sup> He entered the junior seminary of Kuilenburg in 1866, where he immediately was noticed for his

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<sup>65</sup> Th. RUYS, *Bladerend in oude papieren*, in A. VERMEULEN, *150 Jaar kleinseminarie*, 12-13.

<sup>66</sup> H. MOSMANS, *J.A.F. Kronenburg*, 34-43; BOLAND, 189.

talents. Almost every year he ended as the best or second best of his approximately twenty classmates.<sup>67</sup> He was a bright young man, skilled with literary gifts, which resulted already in 1872 in the publication of two of his poems in an anthology of Kuilenburg.<sup>68</sup>

In spite of his excellent results, in his *curriculum vitae* of 1873, he stated that through the years he had experienced increasing doubts about his future and the life he lived. He was tormented by the words *Quid hoc ad aeternitatem* – “What is this in the light of eternity?” – which he had read in the introduction to the life of the Jesuit Saint Aloysius Gonzaga. The words urged him to look for another path than becoming a diocesan priest, and he was attracted by the Jesuit way of life. He consulted his confessor, the already mentioned Bernard van Meurs SJ, who suggested that he should wait until his last year, the *rhetorica*, to make a final decision.<sup>69</sup>

By pure coincidence, during a holiday which the young student spent with his aunt in Amsterdam, he came in contact with the Redemptorists on the Keizersgracht. The silence he experienced, made a deep impression on him. Besides, in the Redemptorist house he met Father Joannes van Groeningen, whom he had met in his hometown of Zutphen when Van Goeningen served as a chaplain there.<sup>70</sup>

Even though the Jesuits were still his favorites, some doubts arose, even more so when on the next retreat he was assigned to read a small French book on the life of Alphonsus. He was not convinced to alter his plans at once, but after months of intensive prayers, as Kronenburg stated in his curriculum, he eventually chose in favor of the Redemptorists. Father van Meurs and the other Jesuits would have liked to welcome him into their order, but Van Meurs allowed Jan to make his own choice, espe-

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<sup>67</sup> ANSI, *Archief Kuilenburg*, 6196: Loca compositionum 1863-1880.

<sup>68</sup> *Het wapenbord der Chateaubriands*, 5-6, and *Ecce homo*, 23-24, in H.J. ALLARD, *De eersteling-proeven onzer Muze, door de Academie der Rhetorica in 't Seminarie Kuilenburg*, Vol. II, St. Michielsgestel 1872.

<sup>69</sup> ENK, ANPR, Personal files J. Kronenburg: Curriculum vitae.

<sup>70</sup> Joannes G.P. van Groeningen, b. Jan. 25, 1839; ord. diocesan priest, Aug. 10, 1863 (Abp. Andreas I. Schaepman); prof. CSSR Oct. 15, 1869; d. Nov. 24, 1901. L. DANKELMAN, *Roepingen onder de seculiere priesters*, 127-128.

cially since the Jesuit had a great devotion for the recently named Doctor of the Church, Alphonsus.<sup>71</sup>

In 1872, just before the final exams, Kronenburg left the diocesan junior seminary at Kuilenburg. The then president of the Kuilenburg seminary, Petrus Prinzen SJ, provided him with a recommendation laden with praise. He stated that for nearly six years young Kronenburg had focused on his studies with exemplary zeal and very favourable results. The Jesuit president did not have the slightest hesitation in recommending him. His religious attitude was always of such a high standard that his superiors were fully satisfied. Moreover his attitude was genuinely an edifying and encouraging example to his fellow students.<sup>72</sup>

*A desire to become what they were*

Willem van Rossum did not exhibit the same intellectual acumen in seminary study as his friend Kronenburg, but he was one of the better students. In his first year, the *sexta*, out of thirty-eight students he was among the top ten. Next year, the *quinta*, he ranked as number five – even though because of illness he did not participate in the lectures and tests between mid-November and mid-January. In the *media grammatica* he was sixth; in the *suprema grammatica* (also known as *syntaxis*), he finished third, and in the *humanitas* (or *poesis*) he was placed fourth.

He received especially good grades for catechism, Bible history, *declamatio* and mathematics. Sometimes he was also at the very top in Latin, Greek and cosmography.<sup>73</sup> On several occasions, just as Kronenburg, he was honored at the annual awards ceremony presided over by Archbishop Andreas Schaepman, who, incidentally, also was a native of Zwolle like Van Rossum.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> ENK, ANPR, Personal files J. Kronenburg: Curriculum vitae. Rome, AGHR, H. SCHÄFER, “*Levensschets van Pater J.A.F. Kronenburg Redemptorist (1853-1940)*. *Ad usum stricte privatum CSSR*, (manuscript, dated Nijmegen 1940).

<sup>72</sup> ANSI, *Archief Kuilenburg*, 6194: Testimonia de alumnis 1845-1903.

<sup>73</sup> ANSI, *Archief Kuilenburg*, 6196: Loca compositionum 1863-1880. Van Rossum showed his least interest in geography and secular history.

<sup>74</sup> ANSI, *Archief Kuilenburg*, 6202: Prijsuitdelingsboeken 1869-1905; 6215: *Diaria alumnorum*. As the local priest of the St. Michael parish in the years 1855-1857 in Zwolle, Andreas Ignatius Schaepman (1815-1882) must have been



Just like Kronenburg the year before, Van Rossum was the only student of the *rhetorica* class who left the Kuilenburg seminary to become a religious order priest. He likewise did not complete the last days of his final year so that he would not miss the start of his Redemptorist postulancy scheduled to begin on May 15.

Apparently, the Redemptorists at that time did not attach much value to the completion of such a seminary course. As mentioned before, the notion of having junior seminaries for orders and congregations was not yet in vogue; even the Jesuits did not have one of their own. Public “Latin schools” fulfilled this function.<sup>75</sup>

However, the Redemptorists had just begun in 1870 with a “juvenate” in Roermond. It was a kind of junior or preparatory seminary, just like the one that the Congregation had started in France. This was undertaken through the initiative of the Dutch provincial, Johannes Henricus Schaap.<sup>76</sup> Schaap feared the competition of the diocesan junior seminaries and was afraid that the Redemptorists would get only the “leftovers.” To assure “good vocations,” the Redemptorists needed a preparatory course for the novitiate, an idea that was supported by the Superior General Nicholas Mauron.<sup>77</sup> The Roermond juvenate began very quietly with only three young men. Even though the most prominent Redemptorists supported Schaap’s junior seminary foundation, others were against it, arguing that the Rule did not men-

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acquainted with the family of Willem van Rossum. After he became an orphan in 1863, Willem moved to the Catholic city orphanage. The director of the Board of the orphanage was J.F.A.A. Schaepman, an elder brother of the archbishop. Zwolle, Historisch Centrum Overijssel, *Archief RK Weeshuis*, 903, inv. 2: Notulen van de vergadering van 6 October 1867.

<sup>75</sup> Jan J. DELLEPOORT, *De priesterroepingen in Nederland. Proeve van een statistisch-sociografische analyse*, Den Haag 1955, 28-33; J. JACOBS, *De opgang tot het altaar van God*.

<sup>76</sup> For Johannes Henricus Schaap (Amsterdam 1823-Paramaribo 1889) see BOLAND, 353.

<sup>77</sup> Nicholas Mauron (b. Sankt Silvester, Fribourg, Switzerland, Jan. 7, 1818; d. Rome, July 13, 1893), Superior General of the Redemptorist Congregation from 1855 until 1893. He saw his Congregation increase in these years from some five hundred members to more than three thousand. BOLAND, 230-231.

tion educational tasks for boys aged twelve to sixteen. Besides, they were afraid that the Congregation would get too large.<sup>78</sup>

In his *curriculum vitae*, Van Rossum's tone is very different from that of Kronenburg's in regard to why he chose the Redemptorists. Since all novices were obliged to write down their motivation for entering the Congregation, these *curricula vitae* without doubt are colored and one must not jump to conclusions. One item for instance, shared by most of his peers, is the attraction of the parish missions. But in comparison with the *curricula vitae* of some peers like Mathias Tulkens, Johannes Lohmeijer, Frans ter Haar and Kronenburg, the essay of van Rossum is much more elaborate and premeditated regarding his motive for choosing the Redemptorists.

Whereas Kronenburg had written of "a coincidence," of his preference for the Jesuits and of his original dislike of the Redemptorists, Willem van Rossum by contrast stated that he had been inclined to the Congregation of the Redemptorists ever since he had witnessed one of their missions in Zwolle as a child. Because some Redemptorists from Amsterdam, had held a mission in Zwolle from June 8-19, 1865, it is possible that the ten-year-old orphan had indeed witnessed this event.<sup>79</sup> From that moment on, he felt "the desire to become what they were," a feeling that stayed with him, sometimes more intense, sometimes less so, but always coming alive again whenever he laid hands on one of the writings or life stories of Saint Alphonsus.

According to his own words, van Rossum was especially attracted by the Redemptorists austere lifestyle and their discipline (which were "very appropriate to expiate my former sins,")

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<sup>78</sup> Schaap asked Mauron permission on April 26, 1870. Herman J.J. JANSSEN, *Geschiedenis van het 'Juvenaat' van de Nederlandse Provincie. Van de oprichting tot en met het directeurschap van pater J. Kronenburg, 1870-1915*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 3 (1951) 76-86; *MHPN-CSSR* 4 (1952) 161-166.

<sup>79</sup> LANKHORST, *La jeunesse*, 32. ENK, ANPR, 884: Register of missions. It does not mention the names of the Redemptorist missionaries at this occasion. That of 1865 is the first mission mentioned in Zwolle. However, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van Zwolle's grooten kardinaal. Overdruk uit het Overijselsch dagblad*, Zwolle, 1932, 9, says that Van Rossum had told his stepfather Lambertus Janssen that he witnessed a Redemptorist mission when his mother was still alive. She died on Sept. 24, 1863.

and by their activities and their devotion to the Virgin Mary. “Finally, after a long prayer of more than a month to Jesus and Mary, I placed myself on my deathbed (according to the advice of my confessor). I considered my reasons again, and asked myself in which state of mind I would die most peacefully. And my answer was: as a Redemptorist.”<sup>80</sup> Probably this confessor was the same as Kronenburg’s, Father van Meurs, of whom it is said that he had a great impact on the formation of Van Rossum.<sup>81</sup>

At the end of the *rhetorica*, in April 1873, Willem van Rossum wrote a letter to the Redemptorists, asking for admission. His letter was accompanied by a letter of recommendation written by the already mentioned parish priest Roelofs. Because of his “priestly, fatherly care” for Willem, Roelofs had always hoped, so he wrote, that the boy would be called for the religious life. He added that it would be the best for the young student to start the novitiate as soon as possible, not waiting for the summer holidays because of his bad health.<sup>82</sup> Just as in the *quinta*, in his last year at Kuilenburg Willem was ill for several months. He skipped all the tests between mid-November and mid-January, but even then he ended up with good scores on the tests after January.<sup>83</sup>

When Willem van Rossum left Kuilenburg on April 11, 1873, the report he received was more sober than Kronenburg’s a year earlier, stating that Van Rossum during five and a half years had studied the *humaniora* successfully, recommending him highly because of his piety for God and his high standard of morals. This phrase was used by the new President Jacobs for most of the students who left the seminary prematurely.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8530: Personal files W. van Rossum: Curriculum vitae; J. VERNOOIJ, *The Great Cardinal*, 358. The exercise resembles the one described in *Bereiding tot den dood door den zaligen Alphonsus Maria de Ligorio*, Gent 1836, 233-235.

<sup>81</sup> J.H. MULDER, *Levensschets van de Hoogerw. pater Petrus Oomen C.Ss.R.*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 4 (1952) 66-69.

<sup>82</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8530: Personal files W. van Rossum: G. Roelofs to the superior of the Dutch province, April 14, 1873.

<sup>83</sup> ANSI, *Archief Kuilenburg*, 6196: Loca compositionum 1863-1880.

<sup>84</sup> ANSI, *Archief Kuilenburg*, 6194: Testimonia de alumnis 1845-1903: “Seseque cum pietate in Deum tum morum integritate quam plurimum commendavit.”

One should take into account the possibility that Van Rossum's choice for the Redemptorists might have been a negative one for the Jesuits. Even though he never mentions this, he might not have felt at home in the Society of Jesus, coming from the lower middle class, feeling more at ease with the Redemptorists as the "Jesuits of the common people." But it is also possible that just because of his background and his health, van Rossum was not a very welcome candidate for the Jesuits either, who were quite strict in their admittance policy. It is striking that we never come across a remark that the Jesuits wanted to "have" Van Rossum, as they indeed would have welcomed Jan Kronenburg in their order.

We can conclude that, for the nineteen-year-old Willem van Rossum, choosing for a life as a Redemptorist seems to have been a well-considered decision. However, these years of Jesuit formation did not fail to have their impact on his later life. He left Kuilenburg well educated by skillful priests. We can also assume that his love for the universal Catholic Church with its centre in Rome was nourished at Kuilenburg. Useful were the contacts he laid in these years within the Utrecht Archdiocese and within the influential Society of Jesus. He also had learned to handle problems in a "Jesuit way," as we will see, in which the end sometimes justifies the means.

### 3. – *Becoming a Son of Alphonsus: novitiate*

On May 15, 1873, Willem van Rossum entered the postulancy, followed shortly thereafter by his novitiate in the same primitive building at the Kapellerpoort in Roermond on June 16. Later that year, on October 28, the novices would move to a better accommodation in 's-Hertogenbosch.<sup>85</sup>

In the year that Van Rossum became a novice, at the beginning of January 1873, the Dutch province counted five houses and 136 members: fifty eight priests, seventeen students for the priesthood, two aspirant-priests, six clerical novices, forty brothers, nine brother novices and four brother candidates. The pro-

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<sup>85</sup> Alfons STRIJBOS, *De geschiedenis van ons noviciaat*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 6 (1954) 6-11.

vincial house was situated in Amsterdam, with the already mentioned superior Johannes Schaap, the studentate in Wittem and the juvenate in Roermond. Besides, there were the already mentioned houses in 's-Hertogenbosch and Roosendaal. Suriname, a Dutch colony, was part of the Province as well, as its own mission area in northern South America, since 1866.<sup>86</sup>

Each year there were, on average, six to ten new clerical novices in this period, of whom several would leave before the end of their formation process. Some of the novices were young students like Van Rossum, coming from different junior seminaries or Latin schools, others were former diocesan priests, or elder men, the so-called "late vocations," such as Engelbertus Bührs from Amsterdam, who had taken care for his next of kin before entering the Congregation.<sup>87</sup>

As was customary in those days, the order of the day in the novitiate was quite strict.<sup>88</sup> The newcomers were introduced to the Constitutions and Rule of the Congregation, which were published for the first time in Dutch in 1868.<sup>89</sup> The Rule stipulated that everybody always had to carry the Constitutions with him, that he had to make them his own and often reflect on them. In a later edition of 1924, the Superior General Murray once more urged the members of the Congregation to observe the Rule and Constitutions scrupulously. If a Redemptorist did not value even the slightest rule, he was an utterly unworthy son of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

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<sup>86</sup> ENK, ANPR, 3: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1866-1881.

<sup>87</sup> ENK, ANPR, 3: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1866-1881; Personal files E. Bührs: Curriculum vitae. For the names of the other novices see: J. VERNOOIJ, *The Great Cardinal*, 359.

<sup>88</sup> ENK, ANPR, 49: *Regula Novitiorum Congregationis Sanctissimi Redemptoris*, Rome 1856. *De Regel der Novicen van de Congregatie des Allerh. Verlossers, Uit het Latijn vertaald, en uitgegeven met verlof van den Hoogw. JP. Nicolaas Mauron, Generaal en rector major derzelfde congregatie*, Gulpen 1885. With an additional text: *De ware Redemptorist. Door den H. Alphonsus zelven geschetst*. See also *Manuale Novitiorum Congregationis SS. Redemptoris*, Rome 1856.

<sup>89</sup> ENK, ANPR, 49: *Regels en constitutien van de Congregatie der Allerheiligsten Verlossers. Eerste en tweede deel. Uit het Italiaansch en het Latijn. Uitgegeven met verlof van den hoogw. P. Nicolaus Maurin [sic], Generaal en Rector Major derzelfde Congregatie*, 's-Hertogenbosch 1868.

Evangelical self-denial and renunciation of one's own will had to be striven for, even though it was beyond human capacities. With the mercy of God it could be fulfilled: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).<sup>90</sup> Mortification and asceticism were considered important instruments to reach this self-denial on the way to perfection. As in many congregations and orders it was normal to practice mortification by discipline and physical challenges, like night offices, Lent, wearing a hair shirt and the use of the iron *cilicium* on Fridays – Van Rossum's *cilicium* is still kept in Wittem – and exercises in humility, like the chapter of faults where one had to accuse oneself, for instance, for breaking a cup, and the performance of different acts of penance. Quite unique were the Redemptorists in the use of a bitter weed (*artemisia absinthium*) in the soup of the novices, which served to ruin the taste of the food. It seems that it was a tradition initiated by Alphonsus de Liguori.<sup>91</sup>

When Van Rossum moved from Kuilenburg and started his novitiate in Roermond, he encountered Jan Kronenburg again, who was then in the final month of his novitiate. If we can rely on Joseph Drehmanns in his biography of Van Rossum, the harshness of the training and of the master of the novices, Theodorus Langerwerf, were too much for Van Rossum. The particular custom of the bitter weed was the straw that broke the camel's back. Drehmanns relates that after only a couple of weeks – still in his postulancy – Van Rossum decided to turn his back on the Congregation. In the days before the taking of the habit, during a walk, he entrusted to his companion Jan Kronenburg what he had planned: "I cannot stand it anymore, I am leaving." "Are you crazy?," Kronenburg replied to his younger friend. And Willem stayed.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> ENK, ANPR, 49. Edition from 1924, n. 267; n. 285. For the ritual of the investment *Ibid.: Ritus investiendi candidatos et suscipiendi oblationem Novitiorum Congregationis Ss. Redemptoris*, 's-Hertogenbosch 1905; in Latin and Dutch; there is a Latin version from 1856 with a guideline handwritten in Dutch.

<sup>91</sup> Emke BOSGRAAF, *Gebroken wil, verstorven vlees. Een historisch-psychologische studie over versterving in het Nederlandse kloosterleven (1950-1970)*, Groningen 2009, 115-142, here 128.

<sup>92</sup> J. DREHMANN, *Korte levensschets*, 18.

We do not know if Drehmanns' observations were correct; they seem to contradict Van Rossum's firm choice for the Redemptorists as shown in his *curriculum vitae* and Drehmanns own remark that van Rossum's will was his most striking feature.<sup>93</sup> Van Rossum himself never refers to this period of doubt. There is only one letter in which he mentions the novitiate at all, more precisely the moment that he met Petrus Oomen for the first time in Roermond in 1873. As he recalled in 1915 in a letter to Jan Kronenburg, who was then writing a biography of Petrus Oomen (who had died in 1910), the following incident had made a tremendous impression on him. Oomen, then the rector of Wittem, paid a visit to the novices and when he saw the young novice Van Rossum, Oomen had blessed him and embraced him with extraordinary cordiality. From that moment on, Van Rossum wrote, he felt a great love for Oomen, putting an unconditional trust in this man with whom he would have a very special bond for the rest of his life.<sup>94</sup>

#### 4. – Petrus Oomen

Petrus Oomen, provincial of the Dutch province from 1874 until 1887, was more of a strong and dominant administrator, who preferred to maintain a distance, rather than exhibit a sympathizing and paternal presence.

Martinus Lathouwers, at the time a young Redemptorist, recalls the rather cold welcome which Oomen received in the Amsterdam community, upon his 1909 return from Rome after being on the General Council for almost twenty years. "If we speak honestly," Lathouwers wrote, "we must admit that Father Oomen was not loved. Father Kronenburg and Father van Rossum were great friends of his, but there were many in the Dutch province who really did not like Oomen, though his enormous merits were, of course, appreciated."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>94</sup> KDC, ROSS, 336: W. van Rossum to J. Kronenburg, 13.4.1915; J. DREHMANN, *Korte levensschets*, 20-21; Laurentius DANKELMAN, *Uit het leven van kardinaal Van Rossum. Studiën te Wittem (1874-1880)*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 6 (1954) 191-196; this reference, 193; ENK, ANPR, 8416: Letters from P. Oomen to W. van Rossum 1882-1897.

<sup>95</sup> Martinus LATHOUWERS, *Iets over het karakter van pater P. Oomen*, in

For Oomen this cool welcome, and the lack of appreciation which he encountered from his Dutch confreres in his last years as a consultor of the Dutch provincial, were difficult for him. It is clear that some Dutch Redemptorists believed that Oomen's positive achievements did not measure up against old, smoldering grievances held against him. This, as we will see, related to his rigid, unyielding notions on some issues. A case in point was his stance on "the smoking issue," in which Kronenburg and van Rossum were also involved.

Oomen, born in Breda in 1835, attended the seminary of the diocese of Breda, but eventually chose to become a Redemptorist.<sup>96</sup> He began his novitiate on May 24, 1856, and professed his vows one year later in 1857. At the time, the then Dutch provincial Joannes Swinkels described him to the Superior General Mauron as an extraordinary young man, both intellectually and morally. After his studies in Wittem in 1860 he was appointed lecturer in philosophy. Two years later he became prefect of the students in Wittem, and in 1868 rector of the same house. In 1874, after a conflict with Johannes Henricus Schaap about the future of the Wittem monastery, Mauron appointed Oomen superior of the Dutch province, while Schaap was sent to Suriname as the successor of the Vicar Apostolic Joannes Swinkels.<sup>97</sup>

Oomen led the Dutch province in a most promising period. The Congregation was flourishing, and in the decades to come, it would become one of the main religious institutes in the Netherlands. In the years 1870-1900, in comparison the Redemptorists had more recruits than the diocesan clergy and oth-

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*MHPN-CSSR* 2 (1950) 94-95. Lathouwers compared Oomen to the beloved and fatherly Gerardus Schrauwen (1839-1904), rector in Wittem (1877-1884), rector in Roosendaal (1884-1887), provincial superior (1887-1890).

<sup>96</sup> This connection with Breda explains why Oomen was a serious candidate as bishop of Breda in 1885, which was quite uncommon for a religious order priest in the Netherlands in these years. A. SAMPERS, *Documenta*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 1 (1949) 28-29, who refers to correspondence between Mons. Jacobini, Secretary of Propaganda Fide, and Nicholas Mauron, April 11, 1885.

<sup>97</sup> J. MULDER, *Levensschets Petrus Oomen C.S.S.R.*, 33-92. See also J. KRONENBURG, *Stille krachten*, in *De Volksmissionaris* 36 (1914/15) and 37 (1915/16). JOOP VERNOOIJ, *The Seven Redemptorist Bishops of Suriname*, in *SHCSR* 60 (2012) 223-277; 226-241.



er orders and congregations in the same period.<sup>98</sup> While Oomen reported in 1873 to Mauron that in Wittem forty rooms stood empty, in the next years the number of students increased quickly. In 1874 there were twenty students, and in 1879 already forty-four. New houses were planned, such as that of Rotterdam. Victor Dechamps, archbishop of Malines and former teacher in dogmatic theology in Wittem, was the first Redemptorist ever named created cardinal in 1875. On 21 June 1876 this new *Cardinalis Romanae Ecclesiae* visited Wittem, together with Bishop Johann Theodor Laurent (1804-1884), the retired Apostolic Vicar of Luxembourg (1841-1848) and a good friend of the Redemptorist community. In the same year the devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help was intensified.<sup>99</sup>

The expansion of the Congregation in these years must have been a point of particular interest to the provincial, but another important goal of Oomen seems to have been a solid spiritual and religious formation of his “sons of Alphonsus.” In his view, this meant that Saint Alphonsus had to be put clearly in the forefront of their religious life. In one of his first circular letters as provincial, on December 30, 1874, Oomen ordered special Alphonsian personal devotions, in order to ‘stimulate the piety of religious life’, at the expense of the hitherto daily Saint Joseph prayers. He also recommended the daily exercise of the Way of the Cross. Lack of time was not accepted as an excuse for omitting the exercise, because, as Saint Alphonsus had said, a

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<sup>98</sup> H. VAN MIERLO, C. STUART, *De seminaries van de Redemptoristen in Nederland. Een onderzoek naar het rendement van de opleiding*, s.a./s.l. [circa 1961], 26; J. DELLEPOORT, *Priesterroepingen*, 45-47. It is interesting to notice that in these years the priests of religious orders compared to the diocesan reached the majority, a preponderance which they would keep for decades. Whereas in the period 1881-1890 there were ordained 573 diocesan and 343 religious order priests, in the next decade it would be 663 diocesan and 669 religious order priests. The years 1941-1950 were the most disproportionate: 884 diocesan and 3001 religious order priests were ordained. Nowadays, however in much smaller numbers, the balance is in favor again of the diocesan clergy.

<sup>99</sup> Th. DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 43, 229; ENK, ANPR, 3: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1866-1881. Starting in 1875, according to the wish of the Superior General, the province was also placed under the special care of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

simple glance at the cross was very good for our souls, so meditating on the Way of the Cross could not possibly be without fruit.<sup>100</sup> In his last circular letters as Dutch provincial, in 1887, Oomen was still speaking out in favor of studying and following Alphonsus. “Nobody should know more of the teachings and feelings of Saint Alphonsus in every field than a Redemptorist: his life, his ascetic works, dogmatic works, moral works.”<sup>101</sup>

Encouraged by the policy of Nicholas Mauron and the General Council in Rome to make Saint Alphonsus’ name well known in ecclesiastical circles, both within and outside the Congregation, Petrus Oomen mobilized as much help as possible. Talented Dutch Redemptorists and students were urged to be prepared to play their part in spreading, defending and explaining the ideas of the new Doctor of the Church, sometimes to the detriment of their health.

A clear example is given by Jan Kronenburg. As is mentioned before, Kronenburg was noticed especially for his literary skills. The prefect Franciscus Godts painted him in superlatives at the end of the school year 1873-1874: “extraordinary spirit, distinguished poet, manages without effort in all classes,” and with a character that was “cheerful, open, docile without pretention, in spite of his great talents, pleasant in community life, pious and charitable.” In the future he would be “a first-class teacher.”<sup>102</sup>

Already in his first year at the Studentate, when Oomen was still rector in Wittem, Kronenburg was assigned to translate a book of hymns of Alphonsus out of French into Dutch. It was published in Amsterdam in 1874, comprising fifty-six hymns mostly on the subject of the sufferings of Jesus and on devotion to the Virgin Mary.<sup>103</sup> Kronenburg was also chosen to deliver a

<sup>100</sup> ENK, ANPR, 32: Documents of the Dutch province. Oomen P. 1874-1887: Circular letter of P. Oomen, Dec. 30, 1874.

<sup>101</sup> ENK, ANPR, 32: Circular letters of P. Oomen, Jan. 25, 1887 and Feb. 2, 1887.

<sup>102</sup> AGHR, Prov. Hollandica Studentatus VI 3 G. 1864-80: Rappports sur le studendat de Wittem (PH Stud. Rappports), 1873/74.

<sup>103</sup> *Geestelijke liederen van den H. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori. Vrij gevolgd naar de Fransche vertaling van O. Hayois en de daarbij behoorende muziek van E. Deval, beide priesters van de Congregatie des Allerh. Verlossers*, Amsterdam 1874 (imprimatur April 14, 1874). Added in handwriting on the copy that

thesis in philosophy in 1874.<sup>104</sup> Subsequently, during his second year of philosophy, the hard work took its toll and Kronenburg's nerves were heavily overstrained. Suffering from constant excruciating headaches, at the doctor's order he immediately had to stop his studies in Wittem.

In September 1875 Oomen sent him to the juvenate in Roermond. In his report to Mauron, Oomen mentioned that Kronenburg was transferred "because of his weak health. This excellent student suffered constantly with a headache," without mentioning the cause of his tenseness. In Roermond he could give some lessons to the twelve boys there, which would not be too difficult for him and could distract his mind.<sup>105</sup> Apparently, in those years it was accepted to employ in the juvenate young teachers who had not yet finished their education at the seminary.<sup>106</sup>

It seems, however, that Roermond was the right place to be for Kronenburg, because for many years until 1915, when he became provincial for the second time, he was lecturer, subprefect, prefect and rector of the Roermond monastery, only with an interval of his first provincial years 1894-1898. For decades he moulded almost every Redemptorist student at the junior seminary, in such a way that he became a beloved and respected member of the Congregation. His literary gifts rose to a great height as well. In his home country, he became popular for his devotional and edifying publications, especially on the Virgin Mary, and partially hagiographic works on Petrus Donders, Alphonsus de Liguori and Dutch saints. He was especially seen in orthodox Catholic circles, as a dedicated supporter of the restoration of Dutch Catholic traditions, such as pilgrimages to Heiloo and Renkum.<sup>107</sup>

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is kept in the University Library of Nijmegen it says: translated by J.A.F. Kronenburg Csr.

<sup>104</sup> G. VAN NIMWEGEN, *Miscelanea. Pater Kronenburg als filosoof*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 2 (1950) 24-25.

<sup>105</sup> VAN NIMWEGEN, *Kronenburg als filosoof*, 24-25; AGHR, PH Stud. Rapports 1874/75; ENK, ANPR, 5079: *Chronicles of the Juvenate*, Sept. 13, 1875; AGHR, H. SCHÄFER, *Levensschets J.A.F. Kronenburg*, 10.

<sup>106</sup> H. JANSSEN, *Geschiedenis van het 'Juvenaat'*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 4 (1952) 121-124.

<sup>107</sup> When Kronenburg died on January 12, 1940, Vincent Cleerdin, who

In spite of the heavy demands made by Oomen, Kronenburg remained very attached to his mentor.<sup>108</sup> But not all Redemptorists were in favor of Oomen's tendencies to lead the province in a harshly exacting mode, and especially when he started to oppose some traditions within the Dutch province that were different from other regions: such as drinking coffee during the afternoon recreation, breaking silence at table or in the kitchen, and wearing slippers in the house. Besides, as Mauron urged, the Dutch province simply had to abandon the custom of confessing to any priest approved by the bishop, instead of to those especially selected for this task by their rector or superior.<sup>109</sup>

In these years the Congregation was also confronted with behaviors that seemed to cast the missions and retreat ministry in an unfavorable light. In 1879 one of the Redemptorists died, being sadly the victim of his imprudent action, which severely damaged the reputation of the Congregation. This priest, during a retreat, had unfortunately drowned while swimming naked in a river, which was strictly forbidden for clergymen. In a warning letter of June 22, 1879, Oomen recalled that all Redemptorists who were on mission or a retreat, had to follow stringent rules, the more so since they were outside the safe walls of their residence. It was strictly forbidden to receive visitors, to pay visits to homes at unusual times and to go into town in the evening. Every letter written or received during these days had to be monitored very strictly, and the maxim "that a Father who is on his own, is his own superior" was not valid in these situations.<sup>110</sup>

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was a in the years 1912-1914, wrote collaborator with the anti-modernist M.A. Thompson in his periodical *Rome a warm* In Memoriam in *de Maasbode*, Jan. 12, 1940. See also H. MOSMANS, *J.A.F. Kronenburg*, 38-39; A. VAN DER ZEIJDEN, *Heiligen, nationale identiteit en herinneringscultuur*.

<sup>108</sup> J. KRONENBURG, *Stille krachten*, in *De Volksmissionaris* 36 (1914-1915) and 37 (1915-1916).

<sup>109</sup> ENK, ANPR, 32: Circular letter of P. Oomen, Jan. 4, 1879.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, June 22, 1879.

5. – *Studentate in Wittem (1874-1880)*

*The Wittem program: for God and studies alone*

In the Netherlands the seminary of the Redemptorists in Wittem, known as the Studentate, in general had a good reputation. The aim of the studentate was twofold: further formation of the religious life of the students and the academic training which was necessary for an effective ministry in the priesthood, in short *solī Deo et studiis*, for God and studies alone.<sup>111</sup> At the time the “Wittem seminary” was an important international scholarly centre of the Redemptorists, characterized by a rather orthodox explanation of the teachings of Alphonsus.<sup>112</sup>

When Willem van Rossum after his novitiate arrived in the Wittem seminary, on June 17, 1874, Petrus Oomen had just left Wittem to assume the office of provincial superior in Amsterdam. At the time, besides the twenty clerical students, the population of the Wittem monastery numbered nineteen priests (six of them were German, probably because of the *Kulturkampf*), thirteen professed Redemptorist brothers, and three lay employees. Oomen was succeeded by Willem Wulfingh as rector of the house.<sup>113</sup> In June 1874 Franciscus Godts was the prefect of the students, but he would be replaced several months later by Ernest Dubois, from Belgium.<sup>114</sup>

Due to the already briefly mentioned conflict between Oomen and Schaap, Wittem had just narrowly escaped being handed over to the German province. Because of the *Kulturkampf* (1872-1878), the German provincial superior Matthias Schmitz had been looking for housing for the German students. The Dutch

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<sup>111</sup> Th. DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 53.

<sup>112</sup> E. CORSIUS, *Theological Tradition*, 163-166.

<sup>113</sup> Willem Wulfingh (Wülfinh) was born in 's-Hertogenbosch in 1830 and buried in Paramaribo in 1906. In 1889 he was named Vicar Apostolic of Suriname after the death of Johannes Schaap. Gerardus Schrauwen succeeded Wulfingh in 1877 as rector in Wittem. See J. VERNOOIJ, *Seven Redemptorist Bishops*, 241-248.

<sup>114</sup> Ernest Dubois, b. Verviers, June 23, 1835; prof. July 18, 1858; ord. Wittem, Mar. 22, 1862; d. Jette, Aug. 25, 1911. Was superior of the Belgian province from 1892-1894; consultor general to Matthias Raus, 1894-1909. BOLAND, 118.

superior Schaap had been so generous as to offer the seminary complex of Wittem for that purpose, planning to move the Dutch students to a new house in Sambeek, and the Belgians to their home country. Superior General Nicholas Mauron was very pleased with this kind gesture and on July 9, 1873, had accepted this plan of action.

But when Petrus Oomen, being the rector of Wittem, heard of the plan one week later – Schaap had not consulted him – he was furious. At once he sent a letter to Mauron, stating that all the German students were welcome to join the other students in Wittem, since forty out of the seventy-two rooms in Wittem stood empty. He was backed up by several of the Wittem professors, Joseph Aertnijs among them, who wrote a letter to Rome stating boldly that Schaap was motivated by a misplaced notion of nationalism. Schaap wanted to split up the students according to their home countries, whereas Oomen and Aertnijs welcomed the international accent of Wittem. The arguments of Oomen and his supporters were convincing enough, for on August 4 Mauron retracted his decision.<sup>115</sup> Schmitz sent his German students to a Redemptorist house in Luxembourg; apparently, he, too, was not very enthusiastic about the prospect of an international Belgian-Dutch-German community in Wittem.<sup>116</sup>

Thus the studentate was still an international house when van Rossum arrived. Out of the twenty students spread over six years, half were Dutch, while the other half were Belgian. In the years to follow the numerical ratio shifted in favor of the Dutch. Thus, in 1878, of the thirty-nine students in Wittem twenty-six were Dutch, and thirteen were Belgian. Eventually, on September 8, 1882, the Belgians would have their own studentate in Beauplateau.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Oomen gave Schaap another difficult time in 1874. Schaap, just before his term as Dutch provincial ended, had managed to make a dream come true: the juvenate, more or less his “love child,” moved from Roermond to the new house in Sambeek. But while Schaap had departed for Suriname, the new provincial Petrus Oomen summoned the students after their holidays to go back to Roermond, leaving the house in Sambeek to the Redemptoristine nuns. H. JANSSEN, *Geschiedenis van het ‘Juvenaat’*, 164-165.

<sup>116</sup> Th. DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 41-47. Until 1861 Wittem had held German students, which seems to have generated some conflicts.

<sup>117</sup> ENK, ANPR, 3: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1866-1881; AGHR,

The official languages in the studentate were French during recreation and the weekly walk on Thursdays, and Latin during class. On the days that there were no classes, the students were allowed to speak other languages. The order of an ordinary day in Wittem, which was inaugurated on October 15, 1847, was still operative during Van Rossum's student days.

The students rose at 4.30 a.m., had a period of meditative prayer, participated in the Eucharistic liturgy, and spent an hour studying before breakfast at 7.00. Then followed three classes and periods of study during the day, some free time, meals, and four or five periods of time for other religious practices such as private prayer, *lectio divina*, weekly Chapter of Faults, rosary, meditation, and a visit before the Blessed Sacrament. The time for retiring was at 21.30 p.m.<sup>118</sup>

During the first week of the school year, just after their summer holidays, the students held their annual retreat. The first Friday of each month was reserved for a day of recollection. Devotional practices and prayer were very important in the lives of the students. In 1845, a statue of Our Lady of Wittem was placed in the "Round Chapel," which later in 1889 would be replaced by an icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Every morning in May at half past seven, including the years that van Rossum was a student in Wittem, a hymn was sung honoring the Virgin Mary.

On Sunday mornings the students spent their time in recollection and silence, and after the celebration of Eucharist they assembled for a sermon by the prefect, a task which was taken very seriously by van Rossum when he himself was prefect of the Wittem students from 1886 until 1893. The preparation took him a lot of time and effort since he wrote out his lecture completely. So Oomen urged him to only make some short notes instead and speak extemporaneously, telling him that he would be more convincing and this would spare him a lot of tension. "Just try it," urged Oomen.<sup>119</sup>

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PH Stud. Rapports.

<sup>118</sup> L. DANKELMAN, *Uit het leven van kardinaal Van Rossum*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 6 (1954) 191-192; Th. de Caluwe, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 35; ENK, ANPR, 3: *Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1866-1881*; 5678: *Chronicles Studentate Wittem*, 76 ff.

<sup>119</sup> Th. DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 55; ENK, ANPR, 8416: P.

*Teaching staff*

The nineteen priests living in Wittem included the six members of the professorial staff. Its composition changed several times in the years that Van Rossum was a student. The only constant members throughout these six years were the prefect of students, Ernest Dubois, and the professor of moral theology Joseph Aertnijs, who, along with his academic credentials, seems to have had a great talent for forming students into good confessors.<sup>120</sup>

The curriculum was divided into two years of philosophy (based on the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas) and physics (a mixture of mathematics, physics and biology), two years of dogmatic theology (both Thomistic and Alphonsian) and Scriptural exegesis, and the two final years of moral theology, canon law and Church history.<sup>121</sup> Next to these subjects, there were also courses in different languages, both modern and source languages.<sup>122</sup>

Van Rossum started his studies at Wittem in mid-June 1874 together with three other students, Jacobus Polman from the Netherlands, and Paulus Wittebolle and Joseph Heyndrixx from Belgium. For two months until the holidays, they joined the other students who had almost ended their first year of philosophy, taught by Henricus Saintrain, and physics, taught by Henricus Bruining.<sup>123</sup> It is somewhat interesting to note that Bruining, who had taught physics since 1869, would be dismissed from the faculty in 1875 because he had endorsed “certain modern ideas in regard to the human body and geology.”<sup>124</sup> He was replaced by Josephus Nuyts.

Of special interest is the case of Saintrain, who left Wittem already in the summer of 1874. The problem with Saintrain in-

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Oomen to W. van Rossum, Amsterdam, Feb. 28, 1887.

<sup>120</sup> L. DANKELMAN, *Uit het leven van kardinaal Van Rossum*, 195.

<sup>121</sup> ENK, ANPR, 3: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1866-1881; J. VERNOOIJ, *Cardinal van Rossum*, in *Life with a Mission*, 11; L. DANKELMAN, *Uit het leven van Kardinaal van Rossum*, 191-196.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*; Th. de Caluwe, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 65-66.

<sup>123</sup> L. DANKELMAN, *Uit het leven van kardinaal Van Rossum*, 192. ENK, ANPR, 5678: Chronicles of Wittem, 1874, 408: “Notanda. RR.FF. Wittebolle, Heyndrickx, Van Rossum et Polman per duos tantum menses in studentatu fuerunt.”

<sup>124</sup> AGHR, PH Stud. Rapports 1874/75.



volved the introduction of the scholastic method in philosophy. According to Mosmans and Dankelman this method was already accepted in Wittem in 1857 and was certainly ratified in 1862 when, at the order of Superior General Mauron, the new manual of the Thomistic author Matteo Liberatore was introduced. (This was long before the 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of Pope Leo XIII on the restoration of the Christian philosophy according to Saint Thomas Aquinas).<sup>125</sup> Saintrain, with his doctorate in philosophy and literature from Louvain, had been appointed in 1873 to teach at Wittem, but resigned his position only one year later apparently because he could not identify himself entirely with Thomism.<sup>126</sup>

Joseph Drehmanns' biography of Van Rossum gives a somewhat different version of his departure, stating that Van Rossum and other students had protested against his philosophy be accorded deserved status at Wittem".<sup>127</sup> Henri Mosmans and Laurent Dankelman were indignant about this version of Drehmanns, not only because he implied that the Redemptorists were reluctant to accept Thomism (then an unacceptable viewpoint in Catholic circles), but also because, according to Drehmanns, it was Ernest Dubois who taught the "false" philosophy. Dubois had taught only dogmatic theology, and never philosophy.<sup>128</sup>

Since van Rossum followed Saintrain's curriculum for two months in 1874, it is remotely possible that he protested against Saintrain's philosophy. But there is no proof of such protest in

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<sup>125</sup> H. MOSMANS, *Wittem*, 205n; L. DANKELMAN, *Uit het leven van kardinaal Van Rossum*, 194-196; DE MEULEMEESTER, *Histoire Sommaire*, 186 mentions that from 1879 every student in Wittem got his own 'Summa'.

<sup>126</sup> C. Struijker BOUDIER, *Wijsgerig leven*, 64. He states that Oomen as well, being professor of philosophy in the years 1860-1862, had some reserves regarding the scholastic method.

<sup>127</sup> J. DREHMANNS, *Korte levensschets*, 20.

<sup>128</sup> H. MOSMANS, *Wittem*, 205n; L. DANKELMAN, *Uit het leven van kardinaal Van Rossum*, 194-196. It is peculiar that Drehmanns erroneously mentioned Dubois. According to J.O. Smit in his comment on the *Korte levensschets*, Drehmanns should not have mentioned Dubois, since the reputation of the Congregation was at stake. He owed Drehmanns' observation to the 'old' consultant of the Holy Office in him, who was rearing his head again. ENK, ANPR, 7696: Jan Olav Smit aan J. Drehmanns, Dec. 30, 1935.

the Redemptorist archives and it is unlikely since van Rossum had just arrived in Wittem as a young student. However, the story suited Drehmanns, because it “proved” that van Rossum’s ideas were Thomistic from the start, never deviating from the official line of thinking with the Church.

Saintrain was succeeded by the German philosopher Alphonsus Jansen, who went on to teach philosophy from 1874 until 1890.<sup>129</sup> When Van Rossum pursued the courses in Church history in 1878-1879 and in canon law in 1879-1880, Hector Nimal was his professor. Theodulus Heintz taught him exegesis in the years 1876-1878, while Joannes van Asten was his professor in dogmatic theology.<sup>130</sup>

#### *Class results of Van Rossum*

According to Drehmanns, Willem van Rossum was a student of extraordinary zeal and diligence.<sup>131</sup> All these years we indeed see that he received outstanding results: always an *excellenter* in the list, apart from the *optime* after two months in philosophy by Saintrain in 1874 and, remarkably, in 1880 only a *bene* from Joseph Aertnijs for his thesis in moral theology.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Alphonsus Jansen left the Congregation on March 17, 1890, probably after a report made by van Rossum as prefect of the students. ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Mar. 28, 1890, in which Oomen mentions that (“the poor unhappy”) Jansen (who entered at once the Brothers of St. Joseph founded by Peter J. Savelberg in Heerlen) should have had learned his lesson after the unfortunate departure of Father Joseph Nuyts in 1886, adding that he did not doubt that the same was going to happen to Father Van de Heuvel after Van Rossum’s report. Jansen was succeeded by his brother Joannes Laurentius Jansen, who taught philosophy in the years 1890-1903. He was not considered suited for the task either: J. Kronenburg described him as hysterical and melancholic, with the risk of becoming mad sooner or later. AGHR, PH V. Relatio Triennalis 1894-1897. Joannes Laurentius Jansen went to America for a year in 1906, returned disappointed (AGHR, PH, Personal files J.L. Jansen), but seems to have found his way later as one of the chief editors of the periodical *Nederlandsche Katholieke Stemmen* from 1915-1936. C. STRUIJKER BOUDIER, *Wijzgerig leven*, 64-67; L. DANKELMAN, *Oversten en officiales*, 29-30.

<sup>130</sup> L. DANKELMAN, *Uit het leven van kardinaal Van Rossum*, 194.

<sup>131</sup> J. DREHMANNS, *Korte levensschets*, 20-21.

<sup>132</sup> AGHR, PH Stud. Rapports 1873/74-1879/80.

Together with ten other students, five Dutch and five Belgian, Van Rossum sat for his examinations from Friday, September 3 (his 26<sup>th</sup> birthday) until Monday, September 6, 1880. It was customary that, along with the examinations, six theses were prepared, not necessarily by a student who was due to take his final examinations. In 1878, Van Rossum defended a thesis in the field of dogmatic theology, and as already mentioned, again in 1880 in the field of moral theology.<sup>133</sup>

The defender of such a thesis was exempted from the exam in that particular field. The defending of these annual theses was one of the highlights in the academic year at Wittem. All the Dutch houses of the Redemptorists received the announcement of the thesis presentation and an invitation to attend. Apart from the Dutch and Belgian provincials, many Redemptorist rectors both from Dutch and adjacent countries attended these academic debates between the authors of the theses and their opponents.

In these years, besides the educational curriculum, formation for the priesthood took place as well. On October 6, 1874, only about three months after he had arrived in Wittem, van Rossum was ordained subdeacon and received what was known as “tonsure” (a small snipping of hair) and the “four minor orders” of acolyte, exorcist, lector and porter.<sup>134</sup> Four years later, on October 16, 1878, he received his ordination as a deacon, followed by his ordination as a priest on October 17, 1879, by Bishop Johann Theodor Laurent.<sup>135</sup>

Even though Van Rossum was now an ordained priest, there remained one more year of his seminary education. This construction, by which priests were already ordained before passing their final exams, was one of the privileges or special *faculties*

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<sup>133</sup> Th. DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 60-61; ENK, ANPR, 5829-5830: list of theses in moral theology and dogmatic theology. Unfortunately, they do not comprise the titles of the theses of van Rossum. L. DANKELMAN, *Uit het leven van kardinaal Van Rossum*, 192, states that van Rossum defended a thesis in philosophy in February 1878 and one in moral theology in February 1879 as well, but there is no proof of this found in Redemptorist Archives.

<sup>134</sup> AGHR, PH Stud. Rappports 1873/74, and 1879/80.

<sup>135</sup> ENK, ANPR, 3: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1866-1881, 328, 335-337.

given to the Redemptorists by subsequent Popes.<sup>136</sup> Such a privilege was a matter of status for the Congregation but also a matter of finance: as soon as a priest was ordained he could celebrate mass and gain the benefit of stipend income for the Congregation.

*Young Van Rossum characterized*

In his capacity of prefect of the students Ernest Dubois was responsible for the material and spiritual wellbeing of the students. Except for the first two months, when Godts held that function, Dubois was Willem van Rossum's prefect during all his student years in Wittem.

As prefect, it was Dubois' duty to draw up each year a report on the status of the studentate as a whole, and to give his views on each individual student. Dubois' impression of the institution after one year was, as he informed the Superior General in Rome, quite satisfying. The "Spiritual state" of the students was very good. "Among our young men we can observe piety, obedience, charity, openness, trust toward superiors, interior peace, cheerfulness and courage. Only their exterior conduct leaves something to be desired; there could be a greater religious sense of reserve and politeness." Special attention was given to improve these two minor points during the annual retreat. Also the "state of academics" was good. "Our students love to study, they apply themselves seriously, and they willingly discuss their studies among themselves." Dubois did mention some problems with the professors in the areas physics and philosophy, but then added that after the dismissal of both professors, much hoped-for harmony in the studentate was retrieved. According to Dubois, this contributed strongly in the ability to exercise the desired authority over the students' minds.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> ENK, ANPR, 53: Privileges, *Compendium privilegiorum Congregationis SS. Redemptoris ex concessione summorum pontificum Benedicti XIV, Clementis XIII, Clementis XIV, Pii VI, Pii VII et Leonis XII. Recto, et accurato ordine collectorum ad usum patrum ejusdem congregationis* (1840). Another privilege was to give absolution during parish missions in some cases where usually only the Pope himself could absolve.

<sup>137</sup> AGHR, PH Stud. Rapports 1874/75.

It is interesting to see that Petrus Oomen, as the responsible provincial, did not totally agree with Dubois. He made some additional remarks in Dubois' report of 1874-1875, saying that the prefect had given a too rosy picture of the spiritual and academic state of the studentate. Oomen also held the opinion that not only the teachers were to blame for the lack of authority. Some students had not shown the required respect, which he had experienced himself and in which indeed he had corrected the students during the exams. This he considered a bigger problem than the lack of a religious sense of reserve and politeness which Dubois had given special attention to during the retreat.<sup>138</sup> Here again we witness Oomen's tendency to a strict regime in the Dutch province.

Besides the general situation, the annual report also mentioned the impression the prefect had of the individual students, with regard to their health, studies, character and the prospect for them as members of the Congregation.

At the end of the academic year of 1873-1874 Franciscus Godts was still the prefect. Godts pictured van Rossum as someone with a somewhat weak constitution, "Not very robust, although he is not ill," and in the next years Dubois usually agreed, considering Van Rossum's health "delicate," adding in the 1874-1875 report that "His chest is not well developed." But even if his physical condition was hampered, his intellectual capacities were not. Already in 1873 Godts wrote to the Superior General that van Rossum was an "excellent subject,"... "intelligent, studious, and he succeeds easily in all of his courses." In later years Dubois would emphasize these traits: "brilliant," "right sense of judgment," and "penetrating intelligence" with a "great appetite for study."<sup>139</sup>

Van Rossum's character usually gets a positive review as well: "A fine young man with strong desire to advance in perfection, pious, profiting much from the spiritual conferences, and he exactly observes the Rule," according to Godts, but maybe not too energetic. In any case, one did not have to fear for his voca-

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 1873/74 and 1879/80.

tion. In the next years the impression stands of somebody who was scrupulously dedicated to “piety” and striving for perfection.

In the report of 1875-1876 Dubois observes some potential threats, stating about van Rossum: “An overly tender heart, although he does struggle with his feelings,” which could be a danger for the future and for his vocation, unless “he always guards his heart carefully.” Apparently, van Rossum had a difficult time in this year, at age twenty-one, and it supposedly were these particular troubles and the consolation of P. Oomen to which he referred in the already mentioned letter to Jan Kronenburg some years after the death of their tutor.<sup>140</sup> But it seems that it was just a passing phase and in the year of his ordination (1879-1880) Dubois is more certain about van Rossum’s outlook: “Fervent, and taking seriously to heart his working toward perfection; but is a little pusillanimous.” He concludes that, if his health remains sound, he could become an excellent teacher, and he also could do good work in the pulpit.<sup>141</sup>

In summary, one may say that Willem van Rossum proved himself a diligent and intelligent student at the Wittem seminary, sometimes even considered brilliant, with a sound judgment, but also someone with fragile health, who kept strictly to the rules, trying to become a perfect “son of Alphonsus” and learning to interpret the founder’s work in an orthodox way. Even though Petrus Oomen as the new provincial lived in Amsterdam, van Rossum maintained a good relationship with him in these years. Whenever Oomen visited Wittem, they had an opportunity to meet and converse. Oomen not only consoled him during some periods of doubts, but he also gave him some special tasks, just as Oomen did with Jan Kronenburg. Correcting the translation of a small booklet of the early Redemptorist priest, Gennaro Sarnelli, was Van Rossum’s first introduction to the Italian language. Van Rossum was allowed to work on such special tasks while the other students had different in-house assignments at Wittem.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> KDC, ROSS, 336: W. van Rossum to J. Kronenburg, April 4, 1915.

<sup>141</sup> AGHR, PH Stud. Rapports 1873/74 and 1879/80.

<sup>142</sup> J. DREHMANN, *Korte levensschets*, 20-21; Id., *Uit het leven van kardinaal Van Rossum*, 193.

However, just as was true with Jan Kronenburg, van Rossum's health deteriorated because of the heavy studies at Wittem. That was why, as Van Rossum recalled, he was sent to Roermond after finishing his examinations in 1880, instead of being attached to the Wittem residence, as had been suggested by the then Belgian provincial Johan Kockerol.<sup>143</sup>

6. – *Lector in the juvenate in Roermond (sept. 1880-sept. 1883)*

It was on September 6, 1880 that Willem van Rossum joined the teaching staff in Roermond. The juvenate, now in its tenth year, had proven its worth. In a circular letter of December 12, 1879, the provincial Petrus Oomen had urged all houses in the Dutch Province to participate in a kind of fundraising for the juvenate in Roermond. He asked the houses to keep their eyes open for more young candidates, but, as Oomen underlined, one had to be quite particular in their choice, accepting only those in whom one could discern the kernel of a vocation for the priestly and religious state. Moreover, they had to come from respectable families, showing an aptitude for study, and generally having those characteristics that held promise of being good Redemptorists in the future. One also had to inquire about the financial situation of the parents, trying to determine if they were able to cover the expenses.

The fear that the Congregation would become too large and therefore difficult to handle, as was noticed before by provincial Schaap, was still alive among some Redemptorists. Therefore Oomen pointed at Alphonsus' and Clement Mary Hofbauer's words that the growth of the Congregation had to be interpreted as an act of the mercy of God. Thus the contribution of the Congregation toward the salvation of the souls both within and outside the Netherlands would only increase.<sup>144</sup>

How many students the *Collegium Ruramundense* might accommodate in those years is not mentioned in the Chronicles of the Dutch Province, but from a long-term overview we can

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<sup>143</sup> KDC, ROSS, 336: W. van Rossum to J. Kronenburg, Apr. 13, 1915.

<sup>144</sup> ENK, ANPR, 32: Circular letter of P. Oomen, Dec. 12, 1879.

conclude that the annual incoming class did not exceed eight pupils.<sup>145</sup> The Chronicles do mention, however, that in 1882 there were six instructors: Kronenburg, van Rossum, Frans ter Haar, Johannes Lohmeijer, Gulielmus Dortants and Alphonsus Mathijssen.

What van Rossum taught, we can deduce from his (predominantly Latin) notes, in which he explicitly mentions the manuals he used in his lessons, probably the same as he knew from his own training.<sup>146</sup> One textbook for teaching oratory or public speaking was entitled *Ars dicendi priscorum potissimum praeceptis et exemplis* by Joseph Kleutgen SJ (1811-1883). This 1855 publication, comprising rules and examples of the “old art of speaking,” was also used by the Jesuits in Kuilenburg.<sup>147</sup> Van Rossum was respected for his rhetorical skills.<sup>148</sup> Another book to which Van Rossum refers in his notes was a religious anthology of the French priest-author, Francois Fénelon (1651-1715); it advised one on such topics as humility, self-denial, distractions of the mind, sadness, and consolation in “suffering without losing courage.” H. Weytingh’s *Historia graecorum et romanorum* aimed at acquainting young students in a responsible way with Greek and Roman authors, while also making mention of more recent writers such as Dante and Erasmus.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> ENK, ANPR, 5391: *Stamboek van het juvenaat der Congregatie des Allerh. Verlossers in Nederland*, 1870-1919.

<sup>146</sup> After he was created a cardinal, Van Rossum’s notes were provided with a red cover of leather, bearing in golden letters: “In memory. This book was written by His Eminence W.M. Cardinal van Rossum, and used during his professorship in the juvenate in Roermond – 1880 September 1883”. KDC, ROSS.

<sup>147</sup> *Ars dicendi priscorum potissimum praeceptis et exemplis* saw in 1928 its 21<sup>st</sup> edition. Joseph Kleutgen SJ, theologian and, during the First Vatican Council, co-writer of *Pastor Aeternus* (“On Papal Infallibility”), he was called to Rome by Pope Leo XIII as prefect at the Gregorianum in 1878. – It is said that he also contributed to the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (“On Thomas Aquinas”), but the manuscript of this encyclical is missing, hence this cannot be proven. However, Kleutgen held similar views on the importance of Thomas Aquinas as the Pope did. See John INGLIS, *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy*, Leiden 1998, 143-158.

<sup>148</sup> ENK, 8530: Personal files W. van Rossum: Aantekeningen door Henri Mosmans. Jeugdherinneringen aan pater van Rossum.

<sup>149</sup> Fénelon. *Bloemlezing uit zijn godsdienstige werken met een voorberigt*



Van Rossum was especially involved in one of the in-house ministries of the Roermond community. In the years 1881-1883, he would host and speak to pilgrim groups who visited their chapel of Our Lady in the Sand.<sup>150</sup> From the time the Redemptorists had come to Roermond in 1863, they had the responsibility of caring for this miraculous image of the Virgin Mary, venerated by many people at Roermond since the fifteenth century.<sup>151</sup> In the 1920s the small image of Mary started to become surrounded by votive tiles on which people would record their needs and intentions. As Prefect of Propaganda Fide, van Rossum left a tile, four times the size of the ordinary ones, with special prayer intentions for the missions.

In his addresses to the pilgrims Van Rossum urged them to let Mary know all their longings. He considered the sanctuary as a special place where Mary was present, as it were, as if she lived among her devotees, and it was here that she desired to show them her maternal love. "Pray to her together with ardent love, and with unlimited trust. Your desire to receive favors from her cannot be too great. How great your desire might be, it is surpassed by the desire of the Virgin Mary to give you her favors".<sup>152</sup>

Van Rossum's veneration for Mary, mentioned already in his *curriculum vitae* in 1873, would remain firm. In later years, he dedicated several writings to her. In one of them, he started with a quote of Alphonsus: "Whenever an idea about Mary

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van Ernest Naville. *Naar het Fransch door Tryposa*, Amsterdam 1873; H. WEYTINGH, *Historia graecorum et romanorum. Literaria. In usum juventutis concinnavit*, Hornae 1854.

<sup>150</sup> Published posthumously in *Het pelgrimsblad van O.L. Vrouw in 't Zand, Roermond* 8 (1934) nr. 5, 18-19, 23, 32, 34-35, 38-39, 42-43. Here we learn that no less than seventy-four sanctuaries – like Lourdes, Issoudun and Wittem – had joined their forces. It was believed that a prayer that was sent to heaven in one of these locations was fortified by the prayers offered in the other sanctuaries. In this way heaven would experience "a holy energy." With a sense of humor students in Wittem would send greetings of "their" Heavenly Lady to Our Lady of the Sand in Roermond. ENK, ANPR, 8545: L. Voncken, Wittem, Aug. 2, 1890.

<sup>151</sup> ENK, ANPR, 4: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1882-1894, 26 mention twenty-two processions in 1882.

<sup>152</sup> *Het pelgrimsblad van O.L. Vrouw in 't Zand* 8 (1934) 18-19, 23, 32, 34-35, 38-39, 42-43.

which gives honor to her and has any basis not in contradiction with the Catholic belief, it must be accepted.”<sup>153</sup>

We do not know if Van Rossum distinguished himself in any special way during his Roermond years.<sup>154</sup> However, a much quoted letter of the provincial Petrus Oomen to Van Rossum has given the impression that he did. The letter, which treats the question whether certain students could be admitted, ends with a ‘prophetic’ advice: “Take good care by being obedient and virtuous to become holy; then the good God will use you in time for really great things.” But if not God, then Petrus Oomen was going to use him in the years to come.<sup>155</sup>

### 7. – Dogmatic theology in Wittem (1883-1893)

#### *Teacher and prefect*

After three years in Roermond, Van Rossum was appointed professor of dogmatic theology in Wittem. Oomen had recommended him to the Superior General Nicholas Mauron as “un sujet très distingué.”<sup>156</sup> Van Rossum succeeded Joannes van Asten, who was appointed prefect of students.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Th. VAN EUPEN, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de dogmatische theologie in Wittem (1836-1955)*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 7 (1955) 97-118. The study of Harte contains passages of Van Rossum on Mary: Franciscus J. HARTE, F.X. SCHOUPE, *Dictata theologico-dogmatica. Ad usum stricte privatum RR. FF. studentium Collegii Wittemiensis C.ss.R.* Vol. 1 and 2. Galoppe (Gulpen), 1898-1899. See also W.M. VAN ROSSUM, *S. Alphonsus M. de Liguori et Immaculata Conceptio B. Mariae Virginis*, Rome 1904.

<sup>154</sup> From this period there are also preserved in manuscript form some single sermons and Lenten meditations of Van Rossum. ENK, ANPR, 8531: Manuscripta van Pater W. van Rossum, nr. 8 and 9, and some notes in AGHR, box file Conferences of Van Rossum. The latter box file was handed over to the then archivist of the AGHR, A. Sampers, by Nic. Kowalsky OMI, archivist of the Propaganda Fide, in 1965. Apparently Van Rossum had kept these notes.

<sup>155</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, May 29, 1882.

<sup>156</sup> AGHR, 0900: Correspondence with the Amsterdam Province, P. Oomen to N. Mauron, Sept. 27, 1883.

<sup>157</sup> Th. DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 83. At first Van Rossum used the same curriculum as Van Asten, but soon he changed to the manual of the Belgian Jesuit F.X. SCHOUPE, *Elementa theologiae dogmaticae e probatis auctoribus collecta et Divini Verbi ministerio accommodata-opera Francisci Xaverii Schoupe*, Lyon [ca. 1900].

We do not know much about Van Rossum's teaching skills, and we hardly ever come across positive remarks from his students, who considered him, though learned, generally as a stern teacher.<sup>158</sup> Even though he was not particularly beloved, the provincial Oomen soon expanded his tasks. At the end of 1885, for unknown reasons, the rector of the house could not function anymore and the prefect Van Asten had to fill in at that position. Oomen then passed on some of the tasks of the prefect of students to the thirty-one year old Van Rossum.<sup>159</sup>

At the time, Wittem was seized by an unspecified epidemic. Several members of the community died, and Van Rossum was responsible for the caring of the sick, the cleaning of clothing, and sanitizing rooms with a sulphuric compound.<sup>160</sup> It seems that this task made him less rigid and he is remembered for his "maternal care."<sup>161</sup> The deaths made a deep impression on Van Rossum, who wrote in the beginning of 1886 to Oomen that he wished God had taken him instead of promising young fathers like Father Albert Smulders. "Indeed (...), what would have been lost with me? Nothing but a bit of misery, a *sujet* without judgment, and, what is worse, without virtue."<sup>162</sup>

Despite his own judgment, Van Rossum soon was given the care of all the students with the title of vice-prefect. This came about in the summer of 1886 by way of an official act by Oomen with the consent of Mauron in Rome.<sup>163</sup> Van Rossum considered it "nonsense" to have such an important task as-

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<sup>158</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8530: Personal files W. van Rossum: Aantekeningen H. Mosmans.

<sup>159</sup> AGHR, 0900: P. Oomen to N. Mauron, June 8, 1885; ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Feb. 5, 1886; June 13, 1886. Rector Theodorus Langerwerf was replaced in 1886.

<sup>160</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Dec. 18, 1885; Jan. 4, 1886.

<sup>161</sup> Some letters are kept in the Archives of the Dutch Province, stating that they are witnessing the "self-sacrificing love" of Van Rossum as prefect of the students. ENK, ANPR, 8545: Letters of W. van Rossum to L. Voncken, e.g., Aug. 10, 1890 and Sept. 5, 1891.

<sup>162</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8538: Letters of W. van Rossum to the provincial superior 1885-1930, W. van Rossum to P. Oomen, Wittem, Feb. 7, 1886.

<sup>163</sup> AGHR, 0900: P. Oomen to N. Mauron, June 8, 1885; ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Feb. 5, 1886; June 13, 1886.

signed to him. He wrote to Oomen, “My god, what a message” (...) There is *nothing, nothing* in me to guide and mould the students into solid virtue. (...) Don’t think, Rev. Father, that it is pure humility that makes me say this (...). God grant that it were for the good of the Congregation. But it is my strong conviction and the complete and simple truth.” Nevertheless, he accepted the assignment obediently.<sup>164</sup> Two weeks later Van Rossum sent a letter to Mauron, thanking him for the trust put upon him and solemnly promising to do anything possible “to make our beloved students happy in their beautiful state of life, to guide them according to the spirit of Our Father Saint Alphonsus and form them into true Redemptorists.”<sup>165</sup>

Being prefect, Van Rossum took his task seriously, but demanded the same of his students, to whom he liked to point out that they had to stick to God and their studies. “Holiness is our first activity, study our second, and besides those we have none”.<sup>166</sup> It is said that he put much energy in organizing good holidays and excursions as well.<sup>167</sup> In 1887 his assignment as prefect was made definitive.<sup>168</sup>

In his annual report to Rome over the school year 1886-1887 he was very positive on the “spiritual state” of the students: “I believe that fervor reigns in the Studentate. There is a healthy balance between learning and piety. They experience peace and joy in their vocation, are docile towards the Prefect and their professors, and they are charitable toward one another as confrères.” He was more critical about academic matters. Even though the students liked studying and concentrated on their scholastic work, he complained that the professors had so many ministerial tasks as priests, that study and classes threatened to become secondary concerns. In due time, he believed,

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<sup>164</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8538: W. van Rossum to P. Oomen, June 15, 1886.

<sup>165</sup> AGHR, Correspondence of G. van Rossum Wittem Praef. et Rector with the Generalate 1886-1895 (Corr.VR with Generalate): W. van Rossum to N. Mauron, July 10, 1886.

<sup>166</sup> Th. DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 56-57.

<sup>167</sup> J. DREHMANN, *Korte levensschets*, 22.

<sup>168</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate, W. van Rossum to Mauron, June 25, 1887.

this would have a negative effect on the genuine erudition of the Studentate and the quality of instruction.<sup>169</sup>

After 1887 things seem to have improved, for in his succeeding reports he never employs a really critical note. The successor to Petrus Oomen as provincial, Gerardus Schrauwen, attributed great intellectual capacities to Van Rossum, and described him as “very virtuous,” but “a little severe and demanding” as well. As he wrote to Mauron, Van Rossum would function much better if he would be less rigid and authoritarian in his judgments and his way of acting.<sup>170</sup>

#### *A dogmatic theology according to Saint Alphonsus*

The real challenge for Van Rossum in Wittem in the years 1883-1893, seems not to have been forming the students into good Redemptorists, but the compilation of a solid dogmatic theology according to Saint Alphonsus.<sup>171</sup> Urged on by Petrus Oomen, as he recalled in an 1890 letter to the Superior General Nicholas Mauron, he started in 1883 at once with this major project: “I am currently working on the (dogmatic) theology of St. Alphonsus for which I have made notes and assembled material during more than seven years. It would be for me a true joy if I could succeed in writing a Dogmatic theology worthy of our Great Doctor.” As proof of his talents, the letter was accompanied by seventeen copies of the small work he had produced on the six days of Genesis, *Hexameron seu Officium sex dierum*. He included a specially-bound copy meant for Mauron personally.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> AGHR, PH Stud. Rapports 1885/86.

<sup>170</sup> AGHR, 0900: G. Schrauwen, Rapport sur le Personnel de la Province Hollandaise 1887-1900.

<sup>171</sup> E. CORSIUS, *Theological tradition*, 168 suggests that Van Rossum only in his later life became interested in the teachings of Alphonsus. However, at least from 1883 until 1893, his life seems to have been completely filled with studying Alphonsus. Also, as mentioned before, Van Rossum's *curriculum vitae* shows an early interest in the founder's writings.

<sup>172</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to N. Mauron, Nov. 14, 1890; see also W. van Rossum to N. Mauron, March 12, 1892: “It has been several years now that Very Rev. Father Oomen, then Provincial, ordered me to take up a dogmatic work, aiming to explain and put into good order all that

As seen earlier, in his letters to the province, Petrus Oomen encouraged Redemptorists to broaden their knowledge of St. Alphonsus' works and opinions. It was the Superior General Mauron who exhorted Oomen to have his men study the teachings of Alphonsus and to see to their international publication at a relatively academic level. To Mauron, who had witnessed the elevation of Alphonsus de Liguori as a Doctor of the Church in 1871, such Dutch support was welcome since, from a theological point of view, Alphonsus' teachings could not always bear the test of criticism.<sup>173</sup> It therefore was not a foregone conclusion that Alphonsus' teachings would become widely accepted simply because St. Alphonsus' new stature as a Doctor of the Church.

Moreover, Alphonsus' teachings encountered an unsurpassable rival in the Medieval philosopher and theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). As mentioned, the prestige of teachings of the Dominican Saint had been enhanced in 1879 with the publication of the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* by Pope Leo XIII, which proposed Thomism as the secure philosophical and theological basis for Catholic engagement with modernity.<sup>174</sup> It was due to Leo XIII that for decades Thomism became the undisputed norm for Catholic doctrine.<sup>175</sup>

The Redemptorist Congregation, however, wanted to play its part in current theology as well. It tried to "claim" a specific Alphonsian influence, especially in the field of moral theology, an attempt that was rather successful since this could be considered as the particular domain of Alphonsus. A substantial contribution to this success was delivered by the already mentioned

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Our Father St. Alphonsus wrote about the dogmatic teaching [of the Church].” – *Hexameron seu Officium sex dierum*, Wittem, autogr. 1888 (88 pages) 2e ed., *Ibid.*, 1890 (109 pages). Van Rossum asked Mauron to pass on one copy of his work to the Dutch Father Aloysius Walter in Rome.

<sup>173</sup> O. WEISS, *Deutsche oder römische Moral?*, 25-36.

<sup>174</sup> ENK, ANPR, 32: After Petrus Oomen had congratulated the Dominican order with the issuing of *Aeterni Patris*, the Dominicans answered on Aug. 23, 1879, that the sons of Alphonsus and those of Saint Dominic would join forces in “fighting the errors.”

<sup>175</sup> John INGLIS, *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Medieval Philosophy*, Leiden 1998.

renowned Dutch scholar Joseph Aertnijs.<sup>176</sup> He managed to publish an influential Latin edition of the *Theologia Moralis*, with its first edition in 1886-1887, followed by many new editions. In Rome, the French Redemptorist Leonardus Gaudé (1860-1910) had worked on an edition of the moral theology as well since 1887.<sup>177</sup>

The first topic Van Rossum handled in the dogmatic field was the editing of the *Dissertatio adumbrata de Praedestinatione J. Chr.* This dissertation of Alphonsus on the doctrine of the predestination of Christ was as yet available only in its Italian manuscript.<sup>178</sup> In consultation with Oomen, Van Rossum took up translating it into Latin, and thus making it accessible to a wider public. From the start, Oomen showed that he was enthusiastic about Van Rossum's approach. On January 24, 1884, he wrote to his pupil that he was delighted to see his "childlike veneration for the teachings of Our Holy Father Alphonsus." His love for Alphonsus would enlighten him with insight and enable him to solve problems where others would stagger in the dark. "Wherever there is love, there is found insight." ["*Ubi amor, ibi oculus.*"] Oomen urged him to pray often to their Holy Teacher, so that he would help him to truly understand his teachings.<sup>179</sup>

The *Dissertatio adumbrata de Praedestinatione J. Chr.* was published in 1885 (in autograph).<sup>180</sup> Since he owed his great

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<sup>176</sup> AGHR, 0900: P. Oomen to N. Mauron, Sept. 27, 1883. Oomen asked if Aertnijs could be substituted for two years as lector in moral theology in Wittem, to give him the opportunity to work on his manual.

<sup>177</sup> The first volume of his *Opera moralia Sancti Alphonsi Mariae de Ligorio doctoris Ecclesiae: theologia moralis* saw the daylight in 1905, the fourth posthumously in 1912.

<sup>178</sup> DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie*, I, 177.

<sup>179</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Amsterdam, Jan. 24, 1884.

<sup>180</sup> *Dissertatio adumbrata de Praedestinatione J. Chr. Autore S.P.N. Alph. ex Italo in Latinum versa*, Wittem, autogr. 1885 (67 pages). It was printed in Rome by Cuggiani in 1896: *Dissertatio de Praedestinatione D.N. Jesu Christi auctore S. Alphonso Maria de Ligorio ecclesiae doctore. Nunc primum edita cum versione Latina, introductione et adnotationibus rev. patris W.M. van Rossum C.ss.R.*, Rome 1896 (32 pages), in the Italian and Latin version. It was published a third time in 1903 in the *Opera Dogmatica de S. Alphonsus* by Aloysius Walter, Vol. 2, 731-754.

love for Alphonsus to a great extent to Oomen, Van Rossum dedicated the translation and commentary to his provincial.<sup>181</sup>

Already in this first publication, the hazardous relation with the stature of St. Thomas Aquinas came to the fore. On the one hand, it was not in vogue to abandon the teachings of Thomas; and, on the other hand, it was necessary to demonstrate that Alphonsus' teachings really differed from the teachings of Aquinas in order to establish Alphonsus' independent status. Van Rossum had some discussion with Ernest Dubois, his former prefect in Wittem and now rector of Beauplateau, whether Alphonsus, regarding the classical controversy about the *motivum incarnationis* (i.e., without original sin there would have been no Incarnation of Christ) was completely in line with Thomistic teaching. Beforehand, Dubois had some doubts, but after Van Rossum's publication he congratulated him on his "excellent *opuscule*," which showed that Alphonsus' theoretical system was much more solid in comparison with other teachings, for instance, those of Scotus, and that it did not diverge from Thomism. It showed, as Dubois admitted, the real teachings of Alphonsus, and he was gladly prepared to correct his own ideas and curriculum in Beauplateau on certain points after he had read the *opuscule*.<sup>182</sup>

After Van Rossum had completed the translation of the *Dissertatio adumbrata de Praedestinatione J. Chr.*, he started to work on the thesis *De essentia ordinis* (On the Essence of Holy Orders).<sup>183</sup> On March 4, 1886, Oomen congratulated him on this work.<sup>184</sup> In the same letter Oomen added a rather critical remark about the work of Aertnijs, who was just then in the final phase of his manuscript.

Within the international Redemptorist Congregation, as Eric Corsius has described in his article, the "Wittem School" distinguished itself by a rather "conservative" interpretation of the

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<sup>181</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8538: W. van Rossum to P. Oomen, June 30, 1885; E. Corsius, "Theological tradition," 166-167.

<sup>182</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8538: W. van Rossum to P. Oomen, June 30, 1885; ENK, ANPR, 8416: E. Dubois to W. van Rossum, Beauplateau, Nov. 26, 1884; Jul. 20, 1885.

<sup>183</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8538: W. van Rossum to P. Oomen, Feb. 7, 1886.

<sup>184</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Mar. 4, 1886.



teachings of Alphonsus.<sup>185</sup> Corsius considers Aertnijs as one of the “rigorist” Witten scholars. However, from the correspondence between Oomen and Van Rossum, we learn that both held the opinion that Aertnijs was yet not “fundamental” enough, diverging too far from Alphonsus’ teachings.<sup>186</sup> What worried Oomen and Van Rossum most was that Aertnijs was not convinced *a priori* that, whenever reasonable, Alphonsus’ teachings were to be preferred in all matters. Van Rossum wrote to Oomen that he had tried in vain to convince Aertnijs of certain of his erroneous opinions, whereupon Oomen urged Van Rossum to stay true to his own ideas and to teach them in his classes as well. “Just stick to your decision to defend the teachings of Alphonsus everywhere, and you shall be enlightened and blessed.”<sup>187</sup>

Van Rossum’s next project was the *Hexameron seu Officium sex dierum*, which as mentioned above, he sent in its second edition to Mauron. The *Hexameron* is a commentary on the six days of creation in Genesis in which Van Rossum argued for a literal sense of a twenty-four hour day. Van Rossum finished it in 1888. It was received positively in Rome by the consultor Karl Dilgskron and the general archivist Frederick Kuntz as Oomen was able to inform him from Rome, where at the time he probably discussed his future career now that he no longer was provincial superior.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> E. CORSIUS, *Theological tradition*, 163-166. AGHR, 0900: G. Schrauwen, *Rapport sur le Personnel de la Province Hollandaise, 1887-1900*, described Aertnijs as a simple, very peaceful man, with great intellectual capacities, a good religious but not an administrator, nor an effective preacher.

<sup>186</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Mar. 4, 1886; Mar. 24, 1886. See also Nov. 26, 1885, in which letter Oomen points at a conflict between Franciscus Godts and Aertnijs concerning Alphonsus’ teachings with respect to the *essentia ordinis*.

<sup>187</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Amsterdam, Mar. 24, 1886. Oomen wanted to see Aertnijs’ text himself and discuss its quality with “Rome.”

<sup>188</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Amsterdam, Feb. 24, 1888; June 6, 1888. Oomen visited Rome together with J. Schaap, the apostolic vicar of Suriname. Oomen also congratulated Van Rossum on his second edition in a letter of Jan. 30, 1891, and expressed his approval of Van Rossum’s news that Alphonsus was quoted by several dogmatic theologians, like Jeremias DALPONTE, *Compendium theologiae dogmaticae specialis*, Tridenti, 1890.

With his friend Oomen no longer serving as the Dutch provincial, Van Rossum seemed to have a depleted incentive for continuing his project on the dogmatic theology of Alphonsus. The new provincial, Gerardus Schrauwen, showed considerably less interest in such an academic project, and Van Rossum now had none of the lavish appreciation which came previously from Oomen.

Moreover, others were now taking up studies in this field. One such was Jean Herrmann from the French province, and also the Dutch Redemptorist Frans ter Haar, who studied the moral question of probabilism.<sup>189</sup> Van Rossum was also finding it hard to combine his academic research and writing with his tasks as prefect.

But Oomen urged him to go on with his work of compiling a theology that could function as “an anchor in all storms.” He maintained that thus Saint Alphonsus would be more respected and loved by the Redemptorists. It would lead to more appreciation for the founder outside of the Redemptorists as well. If he would produce fully completed treatises, as Aertnijs, Herrmann and Ter Haar recently had done, he surely would get encouragement from Rome. Van Rossum was, Oomen stressed, the best man for it, so his advice was “Onward!”<sup>190</sup> Because of Oomen’s urging, Van Rossum sent the already mentioned second edition of the *Hexameron* to Nicholas Mauron in 1890.

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However, at first sight the references to Alphonsus are very scarce when compared to the many references to Aquinas works.

<sup>189</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Amsterdam, Feb. 22, 1889; May 11, 1889; Dec. 1, 1889. Frans ter Haar (1857-1939), taught exegesis in Wittem (1882-1892), was prefect in Wittem (1893-1904), and was appointed the first head of the Redemptorist *Schola Major* in Rome in 1909. In 1911 he succeeded Van Rossum as Consultor General and stayed in that office until 1936. DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie*, II, 420-422 mentions a.o. *Das Decret des Papstes Innocenz’ XI. über den Probabilismus. Beitrag zur Geschichte des Probabilismus und zur Rechtfertigung der katholischen Moral gegen Döllinger-Reusch, Harnack, Herrmann und Hoensbroech*, Paderborn 1904; *De conferenda absolute sacramento iuxta canonem 886 Codicis Iuris Canonici*, Rome 1919. In this publication he used the work of Van Rossum, *Commentarius de Iudicio Sacramentali* ed. 2<sup>a</sup>, nr. 48 (“Cardin. van Rossum cum S. Alphonso docet, ...,” 33-35.

<sup>190</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Stratum, May 11, 1889; Amsterdam, Dec. 29, 1889. Since Van Rossum felt that he could not dedicate enough time to this study, he asked and got permission from Oomen, now consultor of the provincial, to leave some of his normal priestly commitments to others.

Herrmann's "Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae"

In the spring of 1892 Van Rossum was able to send to Rome a lithograph print of his new treatise on the Holy Eucharist, the *Tractatus de SS. Eucharistia*.<sup>191</sup> On March 6 Oomen wrote him a letter to congratulate him. At the time, Oomen had already been stationed in Rome for a year as Consultor General for the Belgian and Dutch provinces, after his predecessor Theodor Lelouchier had died.<sup>192</sup> In Rome, of course, it was easier to bring Van Rossum's scholarship to the attention of the Redemptorist General Council. In his first letter to Van Rossum from his new home, on March 4, 1891, Oomen mentioned that he had already had a discussion with his fellow consultor Karl Dilgskron. Their conversation revolved around the dogmatic theology of St. Alphonsus and the role Van Rossum might play in collaboration with the Redemptorist French theologian Jean Herrmann (1849-1927).

As mentioned before, Herrmann had also done a serious study of the Alphonsian dogmatic teachings. Moreover, for some years he had worked on a scientific manual of these teachings. In the 1880s Van Rossum had written a letter to Mauron in which he gave his opinion of Herrmann's work.<sup>193</sup> Unlike Van Rossum, Herrmann was allowed to leave the classroom and could spend all his time on this work. He finished a treatise *De Incarnatione* in the beginning of 1889, which was much appreciated in Rome. Oomen commented favorably on Herrmann's work, but said what he hoped for was a formal volume on Alphonsian do-

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<sup>191</sup> This treatise was not published separately. F.J. Harte, who succeeded Van Rossum in 1892 as lecturer in Dogmatics, collected several treatises, among them the *Tractatus de SS. Eucharistia* of Van Rossum, and published them together in the already mentioned manual of two volumes, with the work of the Jesuit Schouppe as its basis. F. HARTE, F. SCHOUPPE, *Dictata theologico-dogmatica*, 490-573.

<sup>192</sup> AGHR, XLIV 4: Nicholas Mauron to the Provincial Superiors, March 4, 1891.

<sup>193</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Nov. 9, 1886. For correspondence between Herrmann and Van Rossum: AGHR, LX 2b Epistolae Congregatorum ad G. van Rossum 1884-1909: J. Herrmann to W. van Rossum, July 8, 1887; Jan. 22, 1888; Jan. 16, 1888.

gmatic theology. Herrmann seldom quoted Alphonsus literally, and in his work it was St. Thomas who played the leading role.<sup>194</sup>

Oomen told Dilgskron that in the Netherlands Van Rossum was also working on a dogmatic theology, but compared to Herrmann would give a more prominent place to the teachings of Saint Alphonsus. Dilgskron showed his interest but proposed that Van Rossum should not write a manual such as Herrmann's, but instead compose an "elaborate work on the dogmatic teachings of Saint Alphonsus, since such a work would have a lasting value."<sup>195</sup>

After receiving Van Rossum's *Tractatus de SS. Eucharistia* in March 1892, Oomen reacted immediately, writing his protégé on how to proceed. He instructed Van Rossum to send one copy to the Superior General, and another to the consultor Michael Ulrich at once. In the letter to Mauron he should say that this was the fruit of the work he was ordered to do earlier by Petrus Oomen and that he hoped to continue in the future. He should also write that he had started the work because Mauron had many times urged the Redemptorists to make serious study of the works of Alphonsus. In the letter he also had to stress that the work did not compete with that of Herrmann's, who was producing "only" a manual, while the project of Van Rossum foresaw a much more fundamental publication. Then he should end the letter by asking Mauron to bless him and his work.

Oomen added that Van Rossum as yet should not mention his difficulties and his lack of time (in 1892 his task of teaching dogmatic theology was taken over by Franciscus Harte). He also thanked Van Rossum for pointing to the exact locations where Herrmann strayed from Alphonsus' teachings, asking him to keep an eye open in the future and informing him of any new details.<sup>196</sup>

In his succeeding letters to Mauron and Ulrich Van Rossum indeed stressed that he was not doing the same as Herrmann, who "is writing nothing more than a manual, while I have intended to show forth in more complete fashion the doctrine of St. Al-

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<sup>194</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Stratum, May 1, 1889; May 11, 1889.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, Rome, May 25, 1891.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, Rome, Mar. 6, 1892.

phonsus, while also proving and defending these teachings. This booklet [on the Holy Eucharist] contains only a part of a treaty.”<sup>197</sup>

Congratulations came back from Ulrich on March 16, 1892. He liked the treatise “in which your guides have been St. Thomas and St. Alphonsus. Aware of your expertness and of your love for these two great Doctors, I do not doubt in the least that your book will be excellent.” Four days later Nicolas Mauron showed his approval: “I have received the lithographed work which you have sent me. I wholeheartedly agree and am happy that you are not giving up the thought of producing a work of theology inspired by St. Alphonsus.” He encouraged Van Rossum to proceed. “That would be a great blessing for the Congregation if we could have in that style a solid course of theology entirely completed. May God give you the grace to grant it to us.”<sup>198</sup>

In 1892 a first draft of Herrmann’s manual was ready. Several Redemptorists were invited to examine it before publication, and Van Rossum was one of them. In his letter to Van Rossum at the end of 1892, Nicholas Mauron emphasized that the manual’s success was very important, and therefore the manuscript had to be examined scrupulously before he could give his authorization: “The works of your Reverence with which I am familiar give me complete confidence in you, and so I am naming you one of the examiners of the theology of Rev. Father Herrmann.” Mauron added that to guarantee the liberty of the examiners, their reports would be anonymous: Herrmann would never find out whose remarks belonged to whom. In his reply, Van Rossum thanked Mauron abundantly, stating that it was the most honourable task he could ever imagine. “Here on earth I could not possibly do something of more importance.”<sup>199</sup>

But in his succeeding letter to Oomen Van Rossum was not enthusiastic at all. He wondered if no one in Rome had ascertained beforehand whether this Redemptorist Herrmann was in

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<sup>197</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to N. Mauron, March 12, 1892; W. van Rossum to M. Ulrich, March 12, 1892.

<sup>198</sup> AGHR, LX 2b: M. Ulrich to W. van Rossum, Rome March 16, 1892; N. Mauron to W. van Rossum, Mar. 20, 1892.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, N. Mauron to W. van Rossum, Nov. 4, 1892; W. van Rossum to N. Mauron, Nov. 18, 1892.

any way capable of writing a theology. In his confidential letter of December 15, 1892, marked *solli* (meaning for “Van Rossum’s eyes only”<sup>200</sup>), Oomen replied that he regretted learning that Van Rossum considered Herrmann’s work no more than a poor little theology, “*een pover theologietje*.”<sup>201</sup> (Whatever Rossum wanted to indicate by use of the diminutive *theologietje*, it could not have referred to size, for Herrmann’s *Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae* eventually encompassed more than 2000 pages.<sup>202</sup>) In the same letter Oomen categorically denied that he had persuaded Mauron to invite Van Rossum to examine Herrmann’s work, since he knew how Van Rossum was laden with work. But as Van Rossum and Herrmann were working in the same theological field, it was, as Oomen underlined, quite logical that Mauron chose Van Rossum as an examiner.

Thus, after years of studying Alphonsus, encouraged by Oomen as his provincial, and acknowledged by the General Consultors Dilgskron and Ulrich, and by the Superior General himself, Van Rossum was now an accepted expert on Alphonsian dogmatic theology within the Redemptorists. Despite his initial judgment on Herrmann’s theology and his busy life at Wittem, Van Rossum turned to examining Herrmann’s work. On July 6, 1893 he sent off his notations to Rome, but these probably never reached Superior General Mauron.

#### 8. – Rector of Wittem 1893-1895

##### *Troubled times*

On July 13, 1893, Nicholas Mauron died. His death, along with the sudden death of the rector of Wittem, Franciscus Pe-

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<sup>200</sup> Several confidential letters of P. Oomen to W. van Rossum bear the text *Solli*, sometimes three times underlined, followed by an urgent appeal to destroy the letters after reading. It is striking that Van Rossum kept them – unlike Oomen, in whose correspondence we do not find the matching letters.

<sup>201</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Rome, Dec. 15, 1892.

<sup>202</sup> Jean HERRMANN, *Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae*, Rome. The first edition was published in 1897, the seventh in 1937. The edition of 1908 explicitly mentions erroneous modernist ideas.

ters, only nine days later, had drastic consequences for the life of Willem van Rossum.<sup>203</sup>

Not long before he died, Mauron, whose leadership of the Redemptorists had lasted for thirty-eight years, named Father Matthias Raus as his vicar general. Consequently it was now up to Raus to appoint someone as the new rector of Wittem. The Dutch provincial, Jacobus Meeuwissen,<sup>204</sup> advised Raus to consult Petrus Oomen (who was well acquainted with Wittem) before appointing a new leader at Wittem. Raus took this advice and “after a long prayer and a serious deliberation with his consultors,” his choice subsequently was Willem van Rossum.<sup>205</sup> In a letter to Matthias Raus written on August 9, 1893 Van Rossum expressed his gratitude for being named as the new rector.<sup>206</sup>

There were reasons Van Rossum might have welcomed his new position, but he would soon experience some disadvantages as well. Earlier in 1893, that is, in April, when the new triennial appointments had been announced, Van Rossum had again been given the task of prefect. He also was appointed confessor of the Redemptoristine nuns in their Mariental (Partij) monastery, near Wittem.<sup>207</sup>

Apparently, Van Rossum disliked being a spiritual leader and confessor for the forty-six Redemptoristine nuns. In a letter to his stepfather he wrote about the reality of the Redemptoristines’ contemplative life:

They only live a life of prayer and penance. They never leave their enclosure, and they are always heavily veiled, in such a

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<sup>203</sup> Franciscus Peters (Sambeek 1824-Wittem 22 juni 1893), taught moral theology in Wittem from 1848 until 1852, and was rector in various Dutch Redemptorist houses between 1867 and 1893.

<sup>204</sup> Jacobus Meeuwissen (1847-1916), provincial superior (1890-1894), rector in Roermond (1894-1898), provincial from 1898-1907, vicar apostolic in Suriname 1907-1911. J. VERNOOLJ, *Seven Redemptorist Bishops*, 248-254.

<sup>205</sup> AGHR, 0900: J. Meeuwissen to M. Raus, July 23, 1893; M. Raus to J. Meeuwissen, July 28, 1893; Corr.VR with Generalate: M. Raus to W. van Rossum, July 28, 1893, in which he also appointed Frans ter Haar and Jacobus Schrauwen as Van Rossum’s consultors and Josephus Aertnijs as admonitor.

<sup>206</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Aug. 9, 1893.

<sup>207</sup> ENK, ANPR, 4: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1888-1894, 353 and 359; AGHR, 0900: N. Mauron to J. Meeuwissen, Apr. 26, 1893.

way that even I cannot see them when giving conferences. (...) Saint Alphonsus established this order especially so that through their praying and penance they may gain God's blessing on the missions of the Redemptorists.<sup>208</sup>

In a confidential letter to Oomen he expressed the sense of aversion he felt. Oomen replied that he could understand that he did not like his being assigned to the nuns, for their lifestyle was foreign to their own active life as Redemptorist missionaries. But he urged Van Rossum to overcome his dislike and try to motivate himself with "lofty sentiments."<sup>209</sup>

Then Oomen finished his letter with a frank and serious reprimand of Van Rossum's complaints, telling him that he had to take a good look at his own general behavior because he was not always considerate of others. Oomen recalled that, when he himself still lived in the Netherlands,

People on several occasions told me that you were too stern and rigid, that you lacked paternal feelings and kindheartedness for your subjects and that you always assumed an attitude of strictness. Well, good Father, practice some kindheartedness, a virtue that is so important in the community life.<sup>210</sup>

In the same letter of letter of May 1893 Oomen again urged Van Rossum not to give up his studies of the dogmatic theology of Alphonsus. He advised him to return again to his treatise *De Eucharistia*, even though he understood that Van Rossum at the moment did not feel inclined to do so, so that perhaps after some revision it might be published.<sup>211</sup>

It is clear that, not only when he was a student, but also in later years, Van Rossum in troubled times relied on Petrus Oomen. Through the years one can discern a growing friendship in their confidential correspondence. Already mentioned are the confidential "eyes only" (*solli*) letters. In 1893, Oomen frankly

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<sup>208</sup> *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van Zwolle's grooten kardinaal*, 13. The letter is dated July 23, 1893. Van Rossum does not mention that the Redemptoristine Order was founded a year prior to the Redemptorist Congregation.

<sup>209</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, Rome May 17, 1893. Oomen explicitly asked Van Rossum to destroy this confidential (*solli*) letter.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*



admonished Van Rossum that he had to learn to be more lenient and paternal toward confrères. Van Rossum had replied that this letter had really helped him.<sup>212</sup>

Even in earlier years they had often written one another when experiencing difficulties. They expressed their (mostly impossible) hope of meeting each other to talk things over. For instance, in 1888, when Oomen consoled Van Rossum for his “spiritual sorrows and sadness,” he warned him not to work too hard, and that they had to pray and suffer a lot for the Congregation they both loved.<sup>213</sup> Again, in 1890, from Amsterdam Oomen spoke freely of some troubles and anxiety he was passing through.<sup>214</sup>

Another difficult period was in 1891, when Van Rossum as prefect met with opposition from the new provincial Jacobus Meeuwissen. Meeuwissen seemed to question the wisdom of the line of action of Van Rossum as prefect.<sup>215</sup> Oomen urged Van Rossum to remember that he was appointed prefect by the Superior General, “that is to say, by God himself.” If he remained faithful to the teachings of Alphonsus, he would be safe, whatever the provincial might say to the contrary. The letters show they were genuine “fellow-sufferers,” or *socii in poena* as Oomen expressed it. For Oomen at the time believed that he himself was useless; after having been the provincial superior for many years, experiencing only respect and love at a central point of the Congregation, he now was an outcast and of concern to no one.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, June 21, 1893. The letter contains a small note in which Oomen declares that after his death all his writings must be passed on to Van Rossum, who can preserve or dispose of them according to his own discretion.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 24, 1888 and June 6, 1888.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, July 3, 1890: “tribulatio et angustia invenerunt me”.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 2, 1891. In 1892 Van Rossum had another confrontation with Meeuwissen. AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to N. Mauron, Aug. 7, 1892.

<sup>216</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, March 2, 1891. It seems that Oomen felt burdened because he thought he had acted against the will of God, when manipulating the general superior to write a negative advice when the Propaganda Fide considered him a good candidate for the diocese of Breda. Thus he felt that he never held the function that God had predestined for him. A. SAMPERS, *Documenta*, 28-29.

*Rebuilding the Wittem monastery*

After he was appointed rector at Wittem, Van Rossum was relieved of his duties as prefect of students, and Frans ter Haar replaced him in the role of prefect. He likewise was no longer confessor of the Redemptoristine nuns. But he was also loaded down with many new responsibilities, for he had to oversee the numerous “internal” and “external” ministries attached to the house at Wittem. The “external” ones included the many requests that arrived for missions and retreats.<sup>217</sup> Thus, for instance, in 1894 the community members conducted ten parish missions and eleven mission renewals in the dioceses of Roermond and Liège, not only in Dutch but often in French or German. There were also requests for retreats to be preached for women and men religious, and for the students at the Roermond Episcopal college of Rolduc. Preaching requests also arrived for briefer preaching events which were to last three days.

Within the Wittem community there were countless devotional practices which the priests were called upon to organize and lead. Also, connected with the semi-public Wittem chapel there were periodic festive occasions to be celebrated, as well as oversight of three pious associations. One such association, that of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, counted the incredible number of 38,167 members. Other associations promoted devotions in honor of the Holy Family and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Wittem community Chronicles mention the sales and distribution of 26,500 articles of devotion in 1894. As rector, Van Rossum was the one whose office held the final decision-making responsibility regarding these “internal” ministries.<sup>218</sup>

In mid-September 1893 Matthias Raus wrote from Rome to Van Rossum in Wittem. Raus explained that when sorting through the letters and other documents of the deceased Superior General Mauron, he had found a letter sent by Van Rossum in the previous July.

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<sup>217</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8531: Manuscripta van Pater W. van Rossum, nr. 8 and 9, and AGHR, box file Conferences of Van Rossum, encompass notes for sermons, missions and retreats for students and priests given by Van Rossum.

<sup>218</sup> ENK, ANPR, 4: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1888-1894.

This letter contained the comments which Van Rossum had composed regarding the work of Jean Herrmann on dogmatic theology. Raus had read the work himself as well and stated that he had had “exactly the same thoughts as you, the same impressions.” He went on to say that he considered that Van Rossum’s report was the best report on the work of Herrmann he had seen yet. He urged Van Rossum to continue to examine the dogmatic manual of Herrmann “which is earnestly desired all over.” Raus said, however, that he was aware of the many tasks Van Rossum now had as rector of Wittem.

The vicar general also expressed his great interest in Van Rossum’s own studies on St. Alphonsus, and was pleased that their founder was gaining in veneration and esteem, not only with the simple people, but also with savants. “St. Alphonsus will be more and more known as a great Saint, a great scholar, and the Doctor of our age.” And the work of Van Rossum would enlighten that part of the work of Alphonsus which was the least known. Therefore, Raus urged him to continue his work at all costs.<sup>219</sup>

It is clear that Raus shared Mauron’s drive to elevate Alphonsus de Liguori in the view of ecclesiastics of all ranks, and that he considered Van Rossum’s scholarly talents and knowledge as a useful means to further that goal. However, in a reply to Raus on November 25, 1893, after thanking him extensively for his positive judgment of his report on the work of Herrmann, and the support of his own work on the dogmatic theology of Alphonsus, Van Rossum began complaints about his new position as rector. He said Raus’ letter was really honorable and flattering. But it was now “a physical impossibility” for him to do any additional work on examining Herrmann’s manuscript, or to continue his own toil “on the dogmatic works of our Glorious Doctor,” into which he had put so much effort, and which was now more or less finished.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> AGHR, LX 2b: M. Raus to W. van Rossum, Sept. 19, 1893.

<sup>220</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate : W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Nov. 25, 1893. He also thanked Raus for “the beautiful relics of our Blessed Gerard [Majella],” for whom the devotion in Wittem increased each day in such a way that he would soon be “a second Anthony of Padua” and in honor of whom a chapel in the renovated Wittem would be dedicated, just like the one in honor

His new position was very demanding, all the more so since he had so many new tasks: pastoral tasks in the house, preaching, hearing confessions, caring for local religious, and giving missions. This last-mentioned ministry was one in which he had never been engaged and it demanded a lot of preparation. He had conducted his first mission in Valkenburg, as he wrote to his family, and “Thanks be to God it had been successful.”<sup>221</sup>

Besides all that, in regard to the physical plant at Wittem, he was burdened by continuous and weighty concerns which one could hardly have imagined, and which by themselves take up all of one’s days and hours. It even meant that he now and then was not even able to pray his breviary, and he really needed the help of God “in this sea of commitments and distractions which are so hazardous to one’s interior life.”<sup>222</sup>

Indeed, the rebuilding of the Wittem monastery, on which project Father Franciscus Peters, the previous rector (who contributed much of his own family money) and Van Rossum had cooperated since 1891, now had become Van Rossum’s sole responsibility. There had been grumbling about the project, as some Redemptorists found it much too expensive and glamorous.<sup>223</sup> Due to Van Rossum, the Wittem monastery got a majestic and much enlarged library. Already in October 1890 he wrote enthusiastically to a former student that it would be twenty-three meters in length, eight meters high and seven meters wide.<sup>224</sup>

However, it was because of this new construction, that the beautiful baroque façade of the old Capuchin monastery, built by the Westphalian architect Johann Conrad Schlaun (1695-1773), had been demolished.<sup>225</sup> Van Rossum, who was actually involved

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of Clement Mary Hofbauer.

<sup>221</sup> *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van Zwolle’s grooten kardinaal*, 14. Letter of Jan. 1, 1894.

<sup>222</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Nov. 25, 1893; see also W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Dec. 23, 1894.

<sup>223</sup> See for instance AGHR, 0900: Bernardus Richters to Michael Ulrich, Aug. 5, 1892.

<sup>224</sup> H. MOSMANS, *Wittem*, 64. ENK, ANPR, 8545: W. van Rossum to L. Voncken, Wittem, October 1890.

<sup>225</sup> K. VAN WELY, *De uitwendige schoonheid van ons oude Wittem*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 4 (1952) 97-120, 166-184 and 5 (1953) 1-16.

in designing the renovations and imposed his own ideas on the architect, was held responsible for the decision about the façade. Many deeply regretted the change, but apparently not Van Rossum. On November 4, 1894, he wrote to the Superior General Raus: “Construction is now proceeding on the new façade of the church, which will once again be under a roof, I hope, before winter. Thus the church and the façade will be in perfect harmony.”<sup>226</sup> His opinion was not shared by subsequent generations, who thought that “the colossal brick monster” was a blot on the appearance of Wittem Drive/*Wittemer Allee*.<sup>227</sup>

### 9. – *The General Chapter of 1894*

As already seen, Nicholas Mauron, shortly before he died, had named Matthias Raus as his vicar general, with the task of preparing a General Chapter in which a new Superior General would be chosen. A General Chapter can be considered an opportunity to make new beginnings. In this instance, advice from all parts of the Congregation was forthcoming, whether requested or not.

Petrus Oomen, one of the Consultors General, and the intended secretary of the Chapter, was also involved in this preparation. Already two days before the passing away of Mauron, on July 11, 1893, Oomen asked Van Rossum to put on paper (in Latin) his experiences and “wishes” as having been formerly a professor and prefect – “because, if the experts and the experienced men do not set the tone, we have to fear that the braggarts will act so boldly as to take the lead.” He was sure that the academic and ascetic formation of “our young men” was going to be a question of great importance in the deliberations, the more so because knowledge of Alphonsus’ writings on this issue had been, in the meantime, much improved.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Nov. 4, 1894.

<sup>227</sup> K. VAN WELY, *De uitwendige schoonheid*, 97; Th. DE CALUWE, *Emmaus aan de Geul*, 74-77; H. MOSMANS, *Wittem*, 64.

<sup>228</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8416: P. Oomen to W. van Rossum, July 11, 1893.

Some months later Matthias Raus also asked Van Rossum's advice on the formation of students.<sup>229</sup> In his reply of November 25, 1893, Van Rossum pleaded for clear rules for prefects of students and novice masters. Each prefect did, of course, the best he could, but it might occur that he was following his own ideas which in themselves might be commendable, "but less in conformity with the spirit of our Congregation, and that could do much damage." A directory with rules and regulations on set policy, and a mandatory list of the conferences to be given, would bring uniformity to the Redemptorist formation, which would be more in line with the special spirit of the Congregation ("*esprit particulier*"). Not only would that make things easier for the prefect, but especially beneficial for the Congregation as well. Van Rossum also pleaded for additional classes of continued education, and for retreats given by excellent Redemptorists, to be provided for men who had finished their seminary years (just as the diocesan priests had in the Netherlands).<sup>230</sup>

From the Dutch province more "wishes" were coming toward Rome. In November 1893 Joseph Aertnijs wrote to his provincial Meeuwissen that he had been in contact with several respectable confreres of different provinces (Aertnijs did not name who these men were, nor if Van Rossum was one of them). It appeared that among them there had been dissatisfaction because of the administration of Mauron, who was considered too monarchical. They all longed for competent and vigorous General Consultors, and every five years a visitation of the Superior General, or if that were not possible, of someone from a different province, simply to prevent abuses, aberrations and complaints of the members of the Congregation. They also asked for more competence, and clear regulations, to be accorded to provincial councils and provincial chapters. Similarly, there was a request for a joint consultation of the provincials by the Roman government, instead of individual consultation by the General Council with each provincial.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> AGHR, LX 2b: M. Raus to W. van Rossum, Sept. 19, 1893.

<sup>230</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Nov. 25, 1893.

<sup>231</sup> ENK, ANPR, 34: J. Aertnijs to J. Meeuwissen, Nov. 12, 1893.

Another “wished-for objective” was a “general house for studies,” where the most talented Redemptorists would be sent for advanced studies. In that way the Congregation would acquire a band of learned men, who could spread and defend sound teachings, especially those of St. Alphonsus. In that respect, a periodical was needed for the Congregation as well.<sup>232</sup> The lack of a Redemptorist periodical was considered a major need; it was a disgrace that such an opportunity to spread the ideas of Alphonsus did not exist.

These suggested points, such as the establishment of what eventually became the Redemptorist *Schola Major*, were taken to Rome, where the General Chapter started on February 25, 1894. The Dutch province was represented at the General Chapter by the provincial Jacobus Meeuwissen, Joseph Aertnijs and J. Mastboom, while Willem Wulfingh was *vocalis* for the Vice-Province of Suriname. For the Dutch province, it was a very exciting event, because on March 1 in the first ballot for Superior General, Matthias Raus and Petrus Oomen more or less had the same amount of votes: Raus twenty-four and Oomen twenty-three. However, in the subsequent ballots the number of votes for Oomen declined, so eventually, in the seventh ballot, the choice finally fell upon Raus.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> In 1894 an opportunity to spread the ideas of Alphonsus was found in the *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*. This periodical was started in Belgium by Jean-Joseph Loiseaux in 1869. The founder, who became a religious and took the name of Père Piat, after having directed the periodical up into the nineties with the publishing house Casterman, asked the Redemptorists if they wanted to take it over. A gathering of the Wittem lecturers under the lead of rector Van Rossum discussed it in October 1894. J. VERNOOLJ, *The Great Cardinal*, 362-363, wrongly suggests that the scope of the meeting was the general orientation of the theology courses. AGHR, Correspondence of the Belgian province with the generalate, R. Van Aertselaer to M. Raus, Oct. 20, 1894: “Les professeurs de Wittem seraient prêts à reprendre la «Nouvelle Revue Théologique» du P. Piat, entre autres pour défendre l’honneur de St Alphonse. Cette pétition est signée par Willem Van Rossum, Jozef Aertnijs, Frans Ter Haar, JB Jansen, Hubert Schoth, Henri De Jong, Frans Harte et Adriaan Mertens – Le Provincial Jaak Meeuwissen approuve et Van Aertselaer attend la décision.” The Redemptorists would direct the periodical from 1895 until 1907, when it – for unknown reasons – was taken over by the Jesuits. *Litterae Annales de rebus gestis Provinciae Hollandicae Congregationis SS Redemptoris*, Galopiae 1895, 13.

<sup>233</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8437: Brieven aan W. van Rossum Csr, ter hand ges-

The Dutch who were present at the Chapter may have been disappointed, but they told everybody at home that it had been Oomen who had been “the soul of the Chapter.”<sup>234</sup> He had been the one who had formulated a proposal for the constitutions of the novitiate and the rules for the students. Whoever was not in line with what he considered to be the rule and spirit of Saint Alphonsus was severely opposed by Oomen. He was the “sign of contradiction,” (as he described himself in a confidential letter), but that did not bother him. He never had to blame himself for keeping silent where he should have spoken.<sup>235</sup> Jacobus Meeuwissen later remembered that Oomen had thus shown that he was truly an expert on the writings of Alphonsus, and in this knowledge he outdid everyone else at the chapter.<sup>236</sup>

However, in his rigid defense of Alphonsus, Oomen did not do himself a favor. Not only was he not chosen the new Superior General, but he was even “downgraded.” Instead of being reelected as a Consultor General, the office he had held since 1891, he was just barely elected as the Procurator General, that is, the official who represents the Congregation in its dealing with the Holy See. Although still a member of the general government, Oomen no longer sat among the group of consultors/advisers of the Superior General. As tradition in the Dutch province has it, not being not elected as a consultor, the assertive Oomen was not in a position to prevail over the less stern Raus.<sup>237</sup> For Oomen the opposition he had encountered was hard to take, even though in a confidential letter he wrote that he was fortunate to have escaped the heavy burden of the office of Superior General that had almost been laid on his shoulders.<sup>238</sup>

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teld aan J. Kronenburg CsrR: postcard from J. Aertnijs, Rome, Mar. 1, 1894.

<sup>234</sup> J. MULDER, *Levensschets Petrus Oomen CsrR*, 76.

<sup>235</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8419: P. Oomen to unknown confrere. *Soli*, May 27, 1894.

<sup>236</sup> M. MULDER, *Pater Oomen en het Generaal Kapittel van 1894*, in *MHPN-CSSR 2* (1950) 23-24.

<sup>237</sup> J. MULDER, *Levensschets Petrus Oomen CsrR*, 76.

<sup>238</sup> ENK, ANPR, 8419: Oomen to unknown confrere. *Soli*, May 27, 1894. Five years later, in a letter to Kronenburg, Oomen complained about his position: “In Rome, a Procurator General is generally considered to be the first per-



For Willem van Rossum, this new function of Petrus Oomen was very providential. As Procurator General of the Congregation, Oomen had the task to keep in close touch with the Vatican and he managed to build a broad and influential network. In this capacity, within several years he could easily introduce Van Rossum to many personalities, professors, influential prelates and cardinals.<sup>239</sup>

#### 10. – *The Smoking issue*

##### *A national tradition*

One of the key concerns which rose up within the General Chapter of 1894 originated from an international group led by Joseph Aertnijs. They wanted to see an end to “abuses and aberrations that had crept into some provinces”. Uniformity of practice was sought, and it was to be brought about by the Superior General on his visitations. No mention was made of any specific provinces, but it was clear that the Dutch province was one of those being targeted. The principal concern here was smoking, as disputes over interpretations of “smoking rules” dated back to the 1850s. This issue was now being brought out into the open again.<sup>240</sup>

Basically, smoking was against the rules. Only for particular personal reasons could a provincial permit a Redemptorist to smoke outside the house or in his room. For many Redemptorists of other provinces, this preoccupation of the Dutch with smoking was seen as something peculiar. But in the Netherlands, tobacco was a national product, of which the Dutch were as proud as the Italians were proud of their wine. Since the early seventeenth century a smoking pipe was a status symbol for wealthy men. But from the beginning of the eighteen century almost eve-

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son after the Superior General and as the representative of his order at the Holy See. But in fact, I am nothing more than an errand boy and a cashier. I am kept out of everything. (...) May God grant that they [i.e. the general consultors] acknowledge the value of a despised and humiliated life.” ENK, ANPR, 8094: Correspondence, P. Oomen to J. Kronenburg Aug. 12, 1899.

<sup>239</sup> KDC, ROSS, 336: W. van Rossum to J. Kronenburg, April 13, 1915.

<sup>240</sup> ENK, ANPR, 66: Memorandum on the smoking issue 1894-95 dictated by Jan Kronenburg to Felix Schweigman, 6-7.

ryone in the Netherlands smoked, even children. More recently, among the elite, pipes, snuff and chewing tobacco were being supplanted by the smoking of cigars. The Dutch colonies of Indonesia and Suriname provided great amounts of quality tobacco which was processed into cigars in Dutch factories. Amsterdam alone boasted of sixty-two such factories in 1867, and the Dutch cigar was growing in fame throughout the world.<sup>241</sup>

The delight of “a good cigar” was a widely accepted habit in the Netherlands and among Catholics it was seen as an important prerogative for the diocesan clergy, and only slightly lesser so for priests of religious orders. From the moment young men set foot in a diocesan minor seminary they were initiated into the smoking cult; and every year thereafter they were allowed to smoke on more and more occasions. For instance, the thirteen-year-old Willem van Rossum was classified in “smoking, second class” in his first week at the Kuilenburg seminary in 1867. The chronicles of the seminary mention smoking every Wednesday, even during Lent, and on festive occasions.<sup>242</sup> One of the demands Van Rossum had to face before he could enter the Redemptorist Congregation in 1873 was to give up smoking, which, according to Drehmanns, was a real sacrifice for Van Rossum. Interesting is Drehmanns’ next remark: “from that moment on, he stopped smoking and never in his life did he smoke again”.<sup>243</sup> Here we sense the echo of the smoking conflict within the Dutch province, and the side chosen by Van Rossum.

The fact that smoking was a national tradition, was accepted in earlier times by the Redemptorist General Council. In 1867 the Dutch got dispensations because “this practice of smoking is ingrained in the national identity in Holland. Everyone smokes... priests, bishops, the most fervent religious as well as the most lax Orders.” Dutch Jesuits smoked everyday and were defended by their Superior General J.Ph. Roothaan (1785-1853).<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> G.A. BRONGERS, *Nicotiana tabacum. The history of tobacco and tobacco smoking in the Netherlands*, Groningen 1964, 201-226.

<sup>242</sup> ANSI, *Archives of Kuilenburg*: 6215 Diaria alumnorum, 68 ff.

<sup>243</sup> J. DREHMANN, *Korte levensschets*, 17.

<sup>244</sup> AGHR, PH V 11/M, ‘Pour quelles raisons l’on désirerait que la coutume de fumer soit réintroduite’, Memorandum from 1867; AGHR, 0900: J.

Dutch Redemptorists got permission to smoke during their missions, twice a day, outside the house, if in the company of diocesan priests.

In a memorandum on the smoking issue, Jan Kronenburg recalls that, after the General Chapter of 1894 was scheduled, some Dutch Redemptorists started a lobby for a further softening of the smoking ban, expecting the Chapter to be the opportunity to get a general permission for smoking in their own rooms. Kronenburg, who was then the rector in Roermond, learned of the petition, and fearing that this action would lead to opposition (and thus a loss of dispensations already in place), tried to prevent the petition being made. He sent a postulate to Rome in which he asked the Chapter Fathers to maintain the existing situation. The postulate was signed by some twenty Redemptorists from Roermond and Wittem, amongst them W. van Rossum, while other houses refused to join the initiative.

*Extraordinary Visitation of 1894*

In the General Chapter of 1894 both petitions were rejected. On the contrary, at the Chapter the decree “Regarding the Prohibition of the Smoking of Tobacco” was accepted by forty-three votes to four (probably the four Dutch representatives). The decree stipulated that all existing general dispensations on this subject were hereby withdrawn.<sup>245</sup> The chapter had ended on April 22, 1894 and on June 9, Raus ordered an Extraordinary Visitation of the Dutch province by a Dutch Redemptorist named Fulgentius Koopmans.<sup>246</sup> Raus did this probably with the intention of inquiring into probing the opinions and atmosphere of the province before imposing the new regulation.

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Kronenburg to M. Raus, Nov. 4, 1895. Kronenburg referred to a decision of Nicholas Mauron, Sept. 30, 1857: smoking in the presence of ecclesiastical *officiales* was a Dutch tradition and therefore not prohibited.

<sup>245</sup> ENK, ANPR, 66: Memorandum on the smoking issue 1894-95, 2. See also ANPR, 63-65: Correspondence between J. Kronenburg and the Generalate and several other documents and letters concerning the smoking issue.

<sup>246</sup> Fulgentius Koopmans, b. Oct. 16, 1838; ord. diocesan Aug. 10, 1864; prof. Oct. 15, 1876. Was rector in Roermond 1884-1890. See L. DANKELMAN, *Roepingen onder seculiere priesters*, 128, therein described as a man with a “golden heart” and, though suffered asthma, a dedicated missionary.

It is not clear why Koopmans was chosen for this particular task. Maybe it was expected that commotion could be prevented because Koopmans was known to be a gentle and mild Redemptorist. In any case, Willem van Rossum was stupefied by the choice of Koopmans by Raus. He wrote to the Superior General on June 30 stating that Koopmans, being a former diocesan priest who had experienced no more than half-year of novitiate, was a very nice person, but had never become a real religious, nor a true Redemptorist affected by the spirituality of St. Alphonsus. This rendered him unfit to respect authority. Together with some other malcontents, Van Rossum continued, Koopmans tried to foil the implementation of the decrees of the General Chapter, especially the one on smoking. Their argument that the typical Dutch smoking tradition made it impossible for the Dutch Redemptorists to observe the smoking ban was nonsense: the Dutch could follow the same rules as everybody else in the Congregation, especially since the chapter had reestablished the rule on the general prohibition of smoking.<sup>247</sup>

Van Rossum made no attempt to disguise his opinions or feelings. According to Van Rossum, Koopmans should write in his visitation report:

In the province there are some malcontents who always speak against authority, and I am one of them. There are some who are more diocesan priests than religious, who give themselves over too much to parish ministry with no regard to the rules and spirit of the Congregation, and among them I am one of the foremost.

Van Rossum complained that the dissatisfied always were the noise-makers, both in politics, society and religion, exaggerating and pretending to be misunderstood and persecuted, while the good religious kept silent, prayed and trusted in God “especially in the very times when the spirit of democracy of this age everywhere threatens to invade religious houses.”<sup>248</sup> It cost Van

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<sup>247</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, June 30, 1894. Van Rossum names Jacobus Mastboom, Carolus Wulfingh, Joannes Boumans, Fulgentius Koopmans and Bishop Gulielmus Wulfingh as the malcontents; among them only Koopmans is a former diocesan priest.

<sup>248</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, June 30, 1894.

Rossum dearly to write this letter, but he felt obliged to speak forth his heart on behalf of good religious.

Koopmans conducted the visitation in July and August. In his report to Matthias Raus of September 19, 1894, he suggested various changes in the Congregation. However, his recommendations to appoint Jacobus Mastboom and Willem van Rossum as the new consultors of the provincial, because they represented two opposite groups within the province, and the naming of Jacobus Polman as the new provincial, were never implemented. But his suggestion not to appoint Meeuwissen as provincial was followed. According to Koopmans, Meeuwissen was a pious and good religious, but he lacked a keen and practical judgment, and he did not enjoy the confidence or goodwill of the clergy or the people.<sup>249</sup>

#### *The provincial Jan Kronenburg*

The new provincial appointments were published on October 25, 1894. Johannes Kronenburg, of whom Koopmans had reported that he was not suited to become provincial because he was a man without experience, was nevertheless named as the successor of provincial Jacobus Meeuwissen. We do not know if Petrus Oomen in Rome pleaded the case of his young protégé Kronenburg, who was forty-one years old at the time. The appointment was met with mixed reactions, as Kronenburg's biographer, Henri Schäfer, was later to recall in 1940. Some were of the opinion that his views were too broad, and others thought he was too much of a diplomat.<sup>250</sup> The predecessor of Meeuwissen, Gerardus Schrauwen, characterized Kronenburg in 1890 as somebody who was passionate but also morbid, and had a tendency towards independence.<sup>251</sup> Fulgentius Koopmans and Carolus Wulfingh became the new consultors of Kronenburg. Meeu-

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<sup>249</sup> AGHR, PH V, Visitatio extraordinaria Sept. 19, 1894, report of F. Koopmans, 1-4.

<sup>250</sup> AGHR, H. SCHÄFER, *Levensschets J.A.F. Kronenburg*, 22-25.

<sup>251</sup> AGHR, 0900: G. Schrauwen, Rapport sur le Personnel de la Province Hollandaise 1887-1900. He added that Kronenburg suffered from migraine as a consequence of problems with his bile.

wissen was appointed rector of Rotterdam, as Van Rossum stayed in his position as rector of Wittem.<sup>252</sup>

Until then Meeuwissen had not promulgated the controversial new smoking decree to the province members. Knowing that it would raise a storm of protests and cause a lot of unrest, he left that to his successor. Soon after their being appointed, Kronenburg and his new consultors protested vehemently to Rome. They pointed at the tradition of exemptions granted regarding smoking regulations that dated back to the provincial Johannes Swinkels. They offered the opinion that the internuncio and the bishops would simply not comprehend the new regulation. (This indicated rather strong connections between the Redemptorists and diocesan personnel). They believed that it would be impossible for Dutch Redemptorists to follow this Roman decree. Fulgentius Koopmans and Carolus Wulfingh warned that obedience to the decree would harm the reputation of the Congregation in the Netherlands. It would also diminish the motivation of Redemptorists to accept parish missions. Some Redemptorists, they said, would leave the Congregation, or would simply continue to smoke secretly.

In November 1894 Raus and his consultor Ernest Dubois informed Kronenburg that the General Council stood firm in its decision. He said the Dutch might compare themselves with the American provinces, where smoking was also quite common, but where smoking was permitted through exemptions granted by provincials to individual Redemptorists, not through a general dispensation for all Redemptorists. Such an individual personal permission could be given only for “a grave cause,” and if there was none, such permission had to be withdrawn.

Raus, however, did give Kronenburg permission to postpone the promulgation until Easter, after the mission season ended. Oddly, the Superior General added in this letter of December 1, 1894, that, speaking personally, he would have loved to grant the requested permission, but since the General Chapter had decided as it did, he was bound to implement its decrees.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> ENK, ANPR, 4: Chronicles of the Dutch Province, 387-389.

<sup>253</sup> ENK, ANPR, 66: Memorandum on the smoking issue 1894-95 dictat-

In the beginning of 1895 Kronenburg, advised by Joseph Aertnijs, then asked if he could give all the Redemptorists an individual permission to smoke when they were with clergymen or during a mission. He also reported to Raus that some Redemptorists wanted to consult Pope Leo XIII on the issue. They had already informed the internuncio of the situation, who had reacted in favor of the discontented Dutch, stating: "This is foolishness. We are criticized, we Italians, because we do not conform to the customs of the country, now look at the Redemptorists...". Raus, however, remained determined and in the end, on April 6, Kronenburg yielded as the decree "*De prohibitione fumandi tabacum*" was promulgated in the Dutch province.

Raus was very pleased, as he wrote to Kronenburg on May 5, 1895 and had no fear that anyone would go complaining to the Pope on this matter, because his decision was guided by only one thing: "the Rule, the Rule, the Rule. That is our strength. Beyond that, everything just becomes arbitrary."<sup>254</sup>

Even though Kronenburg in his correspondence had submitted to Raus, apparently there was too much at stake for the Dutch province simply to be silent on the matter. The Dutch province was flourishing, among other things because it attracted, as we have already seen, diocesan priests. One could foresee that this source would run dry when smoking would be forbidden. Another problem was that the Redemptorists felt more or less equal to (or even better than) diocesan priests, for whom they conducted retreats and with whom they closely cooperated during missions. One could suspect that a smoking prohibition could make the Redemptorists into "outsiders" within the Dutch clergy.

Moreover, because of the German *Kulturkampf* and French anticlerical laws, dozens of congregations were seeking refuge in

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ed by Jan Kronenburg, 6-7.

<sup>254</sup> ENK, ANPR, 66: Memorandum on the smoking issue 1894-95, 6-7; ANPR, 5: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1894-1901, 23. It is also of interest to notice that in 1896 Raus simply prohibited any discussion in the Dutch province about the idea that Alphonsus had changed his own teachings through the years, which would have made them less absolute. AGHR, 0900: M. Raus to J. Kronenburg, April 7, 1896.

the Netherlands at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, and they all began to recruit new members.<sup>255</sup> This meant increasing competition. Another threat was the growing negative comparison of the Congregation with other, less rigid religious institutes.

In this light we can understand that Jan Kronenburg asked for an eye-to-eye meeting with Matthias Raus to discuss various problems, amongst them the decree on smoking. The meeting was arranged during a visit in Rome of the vicar apostolic of Suriname, Willem Wulfingh, in which Wulfingh had pleaded for a smoking dispensation for Suriname.<sup>256</sup> The admonitor of Raus, Ernest Dubois, had written on January 1, 1895, that such a stipulation was not necessary, since the Belgian Redemptorist missionaries working on the islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix did not need such a dispensation either. At this Kronenburg had protested immediately: the situation in Suriname was absolutely different, if only because of the problems with the mosquitoes in the boggy terrain of Suriname. Raus then had agreed to discuss the problem personally with the apostolic vicar Wulfingh, when visiting Raus in Rome before he would travel to Suriname.<sup>257</sup>

11. – *Van Rossum's appointment to Brazil and his transfer to Rome*

*Van Rossum appointed to the foreign mission of Brazil*

In the meantime, Kronenburg had to deal with another problem: the adequate staffing of the foreign missions in Suriname and Brazil. Suriname had been the responsibility of the Dutch Redemptorists since 1866, and recently, in 1893, they had acquired Brazil, as their second foreign mission.<sup>258</sup> That summer

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<sup>255</sup> Jan ROES, Hans DE VALK, *A world apart? Religious orders and congregations in the Netherlands*, in Jan DE MAEYER, Sofie LEPLAE, Joachim SCHMIEDL (eds), *Religious institutes in Western Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Historiography, Research and Legal Position*, Leuven 2004, 135-162. Between 1851 and 1900 twenty German and ten French, and between 1901 and 1950 ten German and thirty-eight French religious institutes settled in the Netherlands.

<sup>256</sup> AGHR, Unclassified box file: J. Kronenburg to M. Raus, July 8, 1895.

<sup>257</sup> ENK, ANPR, 66: Memorandum on the smoking issue 1894-95.

<sup>258</sup> Foreign missions were not considered a major endeavor of the Dutch



Matthias Tulkens and Franciscus Lohmeijer had crossed the ocean and in January 1894 had settled in Juiz-de-Fora. Two months later the former rector of Wittem, Gerardus Schrauwen, was installed there as the first superior. He is thus considered as the founder of the Brazil mission.<sup>259</sup> Schrauwen had written to Kronenburg that the mission needed more personnel, and he had asked for another four priests and two brothers to be sent to Brazil.<sup>260</sup>

On July 18, 1895, Kronenburg unfolded his plans for Brazil to Raus. The first one Kronenburg wanted to send to Brazil was Simon Boddeke, who had been living for several years in Rome as the archivist of the generalate. He could be very useful in the mission of Brazil, because of his knowledge of Italian.

Surprisingly, the second Redemptorist whom Kronenburg and his consultants had chosen, was the rector of Wittem, Willem van Rossum. This unexpected move apparently needed a solid justification, given the range of arguments which Kronenburg had formulated. First, his predecessor, Jacobus Meeuwissen, had previously judged Van Rossum very suited for this mission, and had already proposed him together with Mathias Tulkens to Mauron. And, secondly, Van Rossum could be extremely useful there since Gerardus Schrauwen, although a very peaceful man and a good local superior, was not the one to take initiatives in order to establish and develop the Brazil mission. The same went for the other priests already in this mission. Van Rossum, however, was energetic and courageous, and of very sound and practical judgment. He could supply what Schrauwen was missing. Kronenburg and his consultants believed that by combining the

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Redemptorists in those days, and several requests were turned down. L. DAN-  
KELMAN, *Niet geslaagde stichtingspogingen*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 1 (1949), 42-60, tells  
(here 50-57) about the pressure of the Vatican, the Prefect of Propaganda Fide  
Fransoni and King Willem II to take over the missions in the Dutch East-Indies  
in the years 1846-1847. The (Belgian) provincial Von Held stubbornly resisted,  
not only because the Belgian province (which included Holland) was already  
in charge of the houses in the United States, but also because the Rule of the  
Congregation forbade taking on parish work, with its dangers to the vocation  
of religious. See also *MHPN-CSSR* 1 (1949) 103-104.

<sup>259</sup> B. HAANAPPEL, *Brazilië. Begin van de toekomstige Vice-Provincie van  
Rio-de-Janeiro*, in *MHPN-CSSR* 3 (1951) 44-51.

<sup>260</sup> AGHR, Unclassified box file: J. Kronenburg to M. Raus, July 18, 1895.

talents of Schrauwen and Van Rossum, the mission would be assured a solid basis for success.

And there was yet another reason for Kronenburg's proposal. As the superior of the Wittem seminary community, Father van Rossum was missing one precious quality: he did not know how to make himself beloved. When he was prefect of students everyone obeyed him and respected him for his virtue and scholarship, but there was not a single person who loved him and many suffered from his exercise of authority. How different he was as a simple and cheerful confrere. Mindful of this, Kronenburg and his consultors considered him in some way a liability in the Netherlands, but they thought he could render enormous services in Brazil.<sup>261</sup>

Still, it must be said, that from another aspect, the decision to send Van Rossum to Brazil was rather peculiar. Van Rossum had never showed any interest in going the foreign missions,<sup>262</sup> and his fragile health may well have been a disqualifying factor. There is no evidence indicating that Kronenburg ever discussed the Brazil option with Van Rossum before he sent his letter of July 18 to the Superior General Raus. Van Rossum's own papers never refer to his being considered for Brazil.<sup>263</sup>

On July 29, from Vienna, Raus hurried to answer that he and his consultors could not comply with the proposal of Kronenburg: it would be a downright pity to bury the wonderful talents of Van Rossum in Brazil. Moreover, Raus had already

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<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.* Kronenburg ended his letter with the proposal of two other priests and two brothers, adding that it could have waited until he would meet Raus but, since the departure to Brazil was scheduled in September 1895, he had sent his proposal immediately.

<sup>262</sup> In several works it is *suggested* that Van Rossum was attracted to the foreign missions as a reason for him to join the Redemptorists; for instance in *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van Zwolle's grooten kardinaal*, 10. However, the archives give no proof of this. In AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus June 30, 1894, Van Rossum discusses the importance of the promising mission in Brazil, without showing any interest in going there himself.

<sup>263</sup> J. DREHMANN suggests in his *Korte levensschets*, 23-24, that Van Rossum was named among the *first* group of missionaries to go to Brazil, which would have made the appointment more plausible. He adds that this appointment was no small matter for the forty-year old Van Rossum; however, he was willing to submit completely to the wish of his superiors.

had an eye on him, wanting him in Rome where his abilities could be put to very good use. He had already intended to discuss the matter during a meeting with Kronenburg. They would discuss a preferable time for Van Rossum to move to Rome because, now at the height of summer, it was much too warm in the Eternal City. In the meantime Van Rossum was simply to continue as the rector of Wittem. Raus ended his letter with the proposal that he and Kronenburg have their proposed meeting in Prague.<sup>264</sup>

Several days later, Kronenburg replied to Raus. "As the Lord has wished, so it has come to be," he said to himself upon reading the letter of Raus. Even though the Dutch province already had so few priests, and was so much in need of them, he submitted entirely to the decision of Raus with regard to Van Rossum's reassignment to Rome. He had also decided to abandon his plans regarding Simon Boddeke; instead he would send Henricus de Jong, who played the organ, which was very useful in Brazil.<sup>265</sup>

One wonders what was Kronenburg's intention in choosing to send his old friend Willem van Rossum to South America. Possibly, he reckoned that the appointment would be thwarted in Rome, where Petrus Oomen, as Van Rossum's patron, was still an influential figure. One could even imagine that the three friends Oomen, Kronenburg and Van Rossum were in league to transfer Van Rossum to Rome. Van Rossum's biographer Drehmanns mentions that Oomen did all in his power to resist the appointment to Brazil. According to Drehmanns, it was Oomen who launched the idea of bringing Van Rossum to Rome, where he could be useful in regard to the plans for the Schola Major, as approved at the recent General Chapter.<sup>266</sup> Ernest Dubois, an-

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<sup>264</sup> AGHR, 0900: M. Raus to J. Kronenburg, Vienna July 29, 1895. With respect to Boddeke, Raus was not very enthusiastic either, but he gave Kronenburg the freedom to approach him on the matter while giving Boddeke a completely free choice. Eventually on October 1, the Fathers Beks, De Jong, Brandouw and Van Wesemael (Belgium) together with the Brothers Johannes Ramakers and Sebastianus Warmerdam traveled to Brazil. ENK, ANPR, 5: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1894-1901, 24 f.

<sup>265</sup> AGHR, Unclassified box file: J. Kronenburg to M. Raus, Aug. 2, 1895.

<sup>266</sup> *Korte levensschets*, 23-24. In his biography of Petrus Oomen, Kronen-

other member of Father Raus' General Council, lodged his objections against the suggested transfer of Van Rossum to Brazil: for in a situation in which there were so many others who were suitable only for apostolic jobs, one should not send learned Redemptorists to Brazil.<sup>267</sup>

For Kronenburg it probably did not matter if Van Rossum were sent to Brazil or to Rome. Because Van Rossum stuck strictly to rules, Kronenburg could foresee that Van Rossum would never comply with his solutions regarding the smoking issue, and this would make Kronenburg's administration an especially hard job.<sup>268</sup> Therefore the Dutch provincial simply had to see that Van Rossum was removed from the Netherlands.

*A matter of conscience*

In the summer of 1895, on August 31, while the Superior General was on a visitation tour in the Austrian province in Central Europe, Jan Kronenburg and Joseph Deckers, rector of Rosendaal, traveled to Prague.<sup>269</sup> The day after Kronenburg left, Willem van Rossum, "at the request of several confreres,... however, reluctantly..." wrote a distressed letter to Raus.<sup>270</sup> He warned

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burg also claims that Oomen was accountable for the transfer of Van Rossum to Rome. Kronenburg, however, avoids mentioning that he himself had previously assigned Van Rossum to Brazil. See: KRONENBURG, *Stille krachten. Pater Oomen en Kardinaal Van Rossum*, in *De Volksmissionaris* 37 (1915-1916) 36-44.

<sup>267</sup> AGHR, Unclassified box file: E. Dubois to M. Raus, Aug. 13, 1895.

<sup>268</sup> Van Rossum's critical attitude in this letter, and his statement that he thought that Kronenburg's interpretation was in error, was not a new accusation. Already in the early 1880s we see similar accusations. See ENK, ANPR, Correspondence between W. van Rossum and J. Kronenburg, Van Rossum to Kronenburg Nov. 9, 1884, Nov. 19, 1884. Van Rossum was positive in regard to a publication of Kronenburg, but he was sad that the "precious, sparkling diamond" of Alphonsus' writings on eloquence was insufficiently brought to the readers. Van Rossum apologized to Kronenburg for his critical, pedantic tone, which seemed harsh, but he only wanted to be sincere. He concluded the letter with: "But now let me finish. You will probably say: that old chronic complainer is still around."

<sup>269</sup> ENK, ANPR, 5: Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1894-1901, 23-24. Kronenburg returned in Amsterdam on September 25, 1895.

<sup>270</sup> The annual visitation of Wittem was planned from 23 July until 1 August; on 5 August Kronenburg had matters to attend to in Wittem as well,

that the journey of his provincial Kronenburg to Prague had but one goal: “to appeal to your sympathy for the granting of cigars.” Kronenburg had told everybody in the Dutch province that he would surely obtain this concession if only he could speak personally to Raus.

Van Rossum said the Superior General, “being someone in such a high position and enlightened by our good God,” was, of course, acquainted with all counterclaims, but he wanted to emphasize once more that the concession to smoke was not an isolated question. It would mean a victory for the earthly and worldly tendencies within the Dutch province (*“la tendance trop naturelle, trop séculière, qui menace notre province”*). And Raus should not believe everything he was told; Van Rossum’s experience was that, even though diocesan priests insisted that he join them in smoking a cigar, they eventually accepted his refusals. He ended his letter asking Raus to keep secret that he was writing to him about this matter, because he had already mentioned this event to Kronenburg. “To avoid having unpleasant squabbles I would prefer to remain in the background.”<sup>271</sup>

Being very confident even before traveling to Prague, Kronenburg must have known that he was going armed with a solidly convincing case. Its exact content is not known. It seems that ten Redemptorists had threatened to leave the Congregation, and perhaps the internuncio and Dutch bishops had exerted pressure on the Congregation as well.<sup>272</sup>

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and the exams were held in Wittem from 26-28 August. It is possible that during one of these days Kronenburg discussed the option that Van Rossum would be sent to Rome.

<sup>271</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Sept. 1, 1895.

<sup>272</sup> AGHR, 0900: J. Kronenburg to M. Raus, Nov.19, 1896. Apparently, the bishops were supportive on acquiring the permission for the Dutch Redemptorists. They sent a request to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide Mieczyslaw H. Ledóchowski on June 4, 1896, which was repeated by Archbishop Henricus van de Wetering on Aug. 22, 1896. Raus, being informed by Ledóchowski, advised him not to grant the permission asked for. ASPF, *Nova Series*, vol. 80, f. 321-328. According to Kronenburg the Episcopal letters were an initiative of two (unnamed) Dutch Redemptorists who had acted without his consent. AGHR, 0900, M. Raus to J. Kronenburg, July 4, 1896.

From a note which Kronenburg wrote in September 1929, we can conclude that whatever was presented was sufficiently convincing to Raus. In Prague (and later again in Wittem) Kronenburg and Raus came to the verbal agreement that, in anything written to the Superior General and his consultants, Kronenburg would always submit to the prohibition of smoking. But *in practice* he would permit smoking under certain conditions. Thus Raus could keep his critical consultants at bay (Ernest Dubois being probably one of these critics) and Kronenburg would inform the rectors of the houses verbally about this secret agreement.<sup>273</sup>

Kronenburg returned to Amsterdam on September 25, 1895. Probably he informed Van Rossum that his transfer to another location was probable, for one day later Van Rossum wrote a letter to Raus. He sent him pictures of the renovations at Wittem while expressing his hope that Raus would soon come to visit the Wittem house. In the meantime, he said, he was totally at the disposition of the Superior General; with pleasure and without difficulties he would go anywhere his superiors wanted him to go, to do any job that they would impose on him. He added that he had not forgotten the advice of Raus when he was still vicar general, to occupy himself with the theology of S. Alphonsus, which he gladly would do if God wanted him to do so.<sup>274</sup>

We can easily assume that most of the rectors of the Dutch houses were satisfied when they learned about the smoking

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<sup>273</sup> ENK, ANPR, 66: Memories written by Kronenburg in September 1929. Nevertheless, in the years to come more complaints that the smoking prohibition was not observed, reached the General Council in Rome. E. Dubois to M. Raus, Aug. 18, 1896; J. Meeuwissen to E. Dubois, Nov. 15, 1896. J. Kronenburg wrote to M. Raus that these were all lies (AGHR, 0900: Jan. 24, 1897 and Mar. 29, 1897). But finally, in 1898 Kronenburg was being accused by Raus of lying, of foul play and of trying to split the Congregation. In 1898, after a visitation by the Belgian provincial R. Van Aertselaer (who afterwards denied that he had spoken of a general weakening of the Dutch discipline under Kronenburg, only that the original zeal had diminished), Kronenburg resigned from his position as provincial superior in 1898. ENK, ANPR, 35: Documents of the Dutch province: R. Van Aertselaer to J. Kronenburg, Mar. 2, 1897; Aug. 8, 1898; Aug. 22, 1898. See also AGHR, H. SCHÄFER, *Levensschets J.A.F. Kronenburg*, 22-25.

<sup>274</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Sept. 26, 1895. See also W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Dec. 23, 1894.

agreement which Kronenburg had achieved, but Willem van Rossum certainly was not. On October 9 he again wrote a long lamentation to Raus, giving a detailed description of the behavioral flaws within the Dutch province, and the deviations from the decrees accepted in 1894. Religious discipline was far from ideal and the situation was more miserable than it had been before the General Chapter. Against the rules and decrees, the provincial superior permitted students, priests and brothers to travel and to visit their families and to stay there at night, even if they were in the vicinity of a Redemptorist house. There were even Redemptorists who went for a drive in public or, even worse, went on recreational sailing excursions: it was all a "strange spectacle to behold." The rector in Amsterdam, Father Koopmans, encouraged everyone, even the young priests who had not left the studentate yet, to visit an "obscene" exposition in Amsterdam. "One of the young Fathers informed me that in broad daylight he saw the exposition of frivolities and indecencies so that he had to turn his eyes away."

Van Rossum had still more complaints. Kronenburg had declared that brandy was not considered a strong liquor, so on some occasions it could be served before dinner. Kronenburg already had permitted four priests to smoke in their rooms, whereas Oomen, in the fourteen years as provincial, had given permission to only one Redemptorist, something that he still regretted. Schrauwen and Meeuwissen, when provincials, had given such permission to nobody. Moreover, Kronenburg had said that from the Superior General he had been given a general dispensation to smoke when a distinguished prelate would insist on it. But when Van Rossum had asked if Kronenburg would be so kind to write down on paper what he meant by "insist" and "distinguished," he simply refused. On the contrary, Kronenburg had given a shrug and told him to apply the "dispensation" in a flexible way. That is, every priest who was respected could be seen as a distinguished prelate.

When one of the Redemptorists had asked permission to smoke while he was in a neighboring parish for some ministerial duties, Van Rossum had been embarrassed, saying that he believed he could not give this permission. The priest reacted as if truly offended, reproaching Van Rossum as a rector and main-

taining that all the other rectors in Dutch Redemptorist houses gave permission in such a situation.

To Raus, Van Rossum excused himself for this letter, which he had written reluctantly, but he felt obliged to speak. He wanted neither to judge, nor to accuse someone, but he simply wanted to communicate these things to the Superior General, so as to prevent any scruple and remorse in his own soul. And Van Rossum also did not want Kronenburg to know that this information came from him. His postscript was: "P.S. I urge you, Reverend Father, that you kept my name in complete secrecy, especially from the Most Rev. Father Provincial."<sup>275</sup>

For Van Rossum it must have been a relief when three days later on October 12, 1895, Raus wrote officially to Kronenburg that Van Rossum was now transferred, stationed in Rome.<sup>276</sup> In an elated letter, Van Rossum thanked the Superior General.<sup>277</sup>

During twenty-two years Van Rossum had been part of the Dutch province of the Redemptorists. Between the time that Van Rossum came as a novice to the Redemptorist Congregation in 1873 and the moment he left for Rome, the Dutch province had experienced a considerable growth from 136 to 227 members.<sup>278</sup>

On November 19, 1895, a farewell party for Van Rossum was celebrated in Wittem. It was attended by the provincial superior and the rectors of Roermond, Bruxelles, Liège and St. Trond. On the following day Kronenburg accompanied Van Rossum to Liège where they bade each other farewell. After visits to Lourdes and Assisi, Van Rossum, "having been summoned to the international studentate," – as Simon Boddeke wrote down in the *Chronicles of the General House* – arrived in Rome on December 9, 1895.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Oct. 9, 1895.

<sup>276</sup> H. Mosmans, *Wittem*, 124.

<sup>277</sup> AGHR, Corr.VR with Generalate: W. van Rossum to M. Raus, Dec. 10, 1895. He also showed his gratitude for the permission granted to visit Lourdes and Assisi on his way to Rome.

<sup>278</sup> ENK, ANPR, 5: *Chronicles of the Dutch Province 1894-1901*. In 1895, the Congregation numbered six houses and 227 members: hundred and nine fathers, twenty-seven clerical students, nine clerical novices, sixty-one brothers, fifteen brother-novices, six brother candidates. In addition, there were forty-one juvenists.

<sup>279</sup> J. DREHMANN, *Korte levensschets*, 24-25; AGHR, DG II: *Cronica della*



12. – *Van Rossum's Redemptorist legacy*

If one ventures to ask Dutch Redemptorists nowadays how they remember Cardinal van Rossum, they will most likely mention the moulding of the beautiful façade of the old Wittem building, and then comment on his strict and stern attitude towards the seminary students and his Redemptorist peers. They do not speak of any affective warmth. In these comments one can almost hear an echo of Father Martinus Lathouwers, who vividly described the ice-cold welcome given to the elderly and very ill Petrus Oomen who returned from Rome in 1909. Like Oomen, Willem van Rossum was respected, especially for his later achievements as Prefect of Propaganda Fide. But he was never beloved. This does not imply, however, that Redemptorists had no reasons to cherish his memory.

In his *curriculum vitae*, written in 1874, Van Rossum said that he wanted to join the Redemptorist Congregation because he “desired to become what they were.” Showing himself within the Catholic trend of his time, he was profoundly impressed both by the example of Saint Alphonsus Liguori and also by how the Redemptorists were revitalizing the Catholic Church in the Netherlands. Their young Dutch province was suffused with vigor, with optimism, and with devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to St. Alphonsus. Its members were eager to mould an orthodox, pious and moral Catholic Church in the Netherlands, both among the clergy and laity. They wanted to be leaders erecting their Church as a defensible fortress against the malicious influences of Protestantism, liberalism and a modern, industrialized society. The young Zwolle orphan Willem van Rossum, probably more than his peers, seemingly sought certitude and a sense of belonging in his life. It was as if he hungered to share in the ambitious Redemptorist project, to grasp a clear purpose and direction in his life, delighted to have a Father in Alphonsus and a Mother in Blessed Mary.

Although he was a good rhetorical speaker, he was never greatly endowed as a missionary preacher, probably because of

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casa Generalizia del Santissimo Redentore, Dec. 10, 1895.

poor health and his aversion for theatrics. Instead, he developed his scholarly skills as his specific contribution to his beloved missionary Congregation. He had been trained by outstanding educators, both the Jesuits in Kuilenburg and the Redemptorists in Wittem.

Deftly guided by his Redemptorist mentor, Father Petrus Oomen, Van Rossum set out to study the writings of Alphonsus Liguori. Since Alphonsus had been declared a Doctor of the Church only recently, namely, in 1871, both the Redemptorists and the universal Church lacked a wider and deeper knowledge of the Saint's writings. There was a clear need of someone to analyze and explain the broad corpus of Alphonsian literature. For indeed the Saint's literary endeavors embraced dogmatic, moral, pastoral and ascetical fields that begged to be introduced into the current ecclesiastical *discours*.

Van Rossum's keenest specialization was dogmatic theology. Painstakingly reading and translating Alphonsus' texts, he sought their "true" meaning, comparing them to and assessing them in the light of the philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas. In doing so he honed his skills in research and analysis, sharing his findings in several publications. By means of such meticulous study, careful judgment and convincing argumentation, Van Rossum developed into an orthodox defender of the stature of Alphonsus as the "Doctor of our Age." Accordingly, he was noted as one of the international Redemptorist experts in the field of Alphonsian dogmatic theology.

However, more than a century later one might fairly detect that Van Rossum at times slipped into some degree of naïveté in his defense of St. Alphonsus. He could not see or appreciate the need for nuance and further defining of Alphonsus as a man of his time. In his view, Alphonsus held the last and final word.

Within the Redemptorists, when it came to discussion and/or debate as to how to be a faithful member of this missionary Congregation, Van Rossum, like his tutor Petrus Oomen, held forth for nothing but the strictest regime. Rules and Constitutions were to be followed, not allowing for even the slightest deviation or lenient interpretation. According to him this was the only way to be a "perfect son of the founder St. Alphonsus." Suf-

fering and self-denial were the inevitable conditions of this state and calling. Aiming at such perfection, Van Rossum's strong will helped him to endure necessary physical and psychological challenges, and he found it hard to sympathize with any confreres who could not meet such high standards. He showed little, if any, leniency or clemency of judgment toward them.

Proceeding from this mentality and personal mode of life, Van Rossum was not inclined to yield when he believed that his own convictions in regard to Alphonsus dogmatic teachings were at stake. Oomen had schooled him to stand his ground when challenged. He was not to yield out of mere sympathy, nor in the presence of more modern prevailing views. In this respect Van Rossum can be considered rigid, but also as a man of integrity. He was not looking to advance his own career or to be everyone's friend. His field of vision was to champion both the wellbeing of his missionary congregation, and of the universal Church, as he perceived these entities.

Considering Van Rossum in his role as rector of the Redemptorist seminary at Wittem, some people have faulted him for the demolition of the old baroque façade of the building. But one should also admit that because of a growing student body he did complete a much needed renovation of the entire house. This renovation included a very impressive library suitable for the excellent education and formation intended for the students. But also included was a renovation of the chapel to aid the religious and devotional life of the community. Incidentally that Wittem chapel became a renowned place of pilgrimage... and it remains so even to this day. In his role as rector of the seminary at Wittem, Van Rossum clearly showed that he possessed considerable talent for organization and fund raising.

In general it can be said that the characteristics which he developed prior to 1895 and his appointment to Rome served him well when he became a key member of the Roman Curia.<sup>280</sup> When Cardinal Lucido Parocchi, Secretary of the Holy Office,

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<sup>280</sup> Giuseppe ORLANDI, *S. Alfonso negli archivi Romani del Sant'Officio. Dottrine spirituali del Santo Dottore e di Pier Matteo Petrucci a confronto, in due voti del futuro cardinale W.M. van Rossum*, in *SHCSR* 47 (1999) 205-238.

was looking for a new consultor, in late 1896 he made inquiries about Willem van Rossum. Father Matthias Raus, the Superior General of the Redemptorists, told Cardinal Parocchi that he could truly vouch for Van Rossum's exemplary conduct as a religious, his thorough study of the works of Aquinas and Alphonsus, his knowledge of Dutch, French, German and Italian, and of the expert theological treatises he had thus far authored. Moreover Raus praised him for his accomplishments as Rector at Wittem, his zeal for regular observance of community life, and also for his execution of the renovation and enlargement of the physical plant at Wittem. Interestingly, the Superior General did not deny Van Rossum's tendency to rigidity, affirming that this gave rise to his being more respected than beloved within his community.<sup>281</sup>

Hereafter, as is well-known, after Van Rossum arrived in Rome, he was steadily requested to take on more and more responsibility. At first, the Redemptorists asked that he pursue further studies in the field of dogmatic theology. But he had to set aside this activity when he became completely absorbed in other tasks assigned by the Roman Curia. Nevertheless the research skills and expertise of Van Rossum with regard to the dogmatic writings of Alphonsus turned out to be very useful later, when, for instance, he functioned as consultor of the Holy Office and the Index, and as consultor for the Commission for the Codification of Canon Law.

After being named a Cardinal in 1911, he was appointed for other Curial positions such as President of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1914-1932), Major Penitentiary (1915-1918), Cardinal Protector of more than thirty Orders and Congregations of men and women religious, and finally Prefect of Propaganda Fide (1918-1932).

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<sup>281</sup> AGHR, XLIV: Mattias Raus to Eccellenza Revma [Lucido Parocchi], Nov. 19, 1896. Raus gave also information on another Redemptorist, Oliver Vassall, an English convert. Raus had received an earlier request of Cardinal M. La Valletta to propose names of Redemptorists who were suited to become a consultor of the Holy Office. In his answer to Tancredi Fausti, Assessor of the Holy Office, June 9, 1895, Raus named Claudio Benedetti and Petrus Oomen; they obviously were not appointed to the position.

In these years his loyalties lay with the universal Church, as he guarded its orthodoxy,<sup>282</sup> always keeping alert for improvements to safeguard its true teachings from his point of view.<sup>283</sup> As a religious order priest with his own spirituality, his devotion to the Virgin Mary and St. Alphonsus Liguori remained steadfast. No doubt it was a major disappointment for Van Rossum to experience the diminishing recognition of the dogmatic teachings of Alphonsus, as those of Aquinas remained in the forefront. However, the devotional works of Alphonsus shone forth for him like a beacon of hope in troubled times as is proven by Van Rossum's last work: the Dutch translation of the thoughts of Alphonsus on the Passion of Christ: *Sint Alphonsus' lijdensgedachten*.<sup>284</sup> Presumably not without suffering (as something foreseen by him at age nineteen according to his *curriculum vitae*), he died a "true Son of Alphonsus" on August 30, 1932.

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<sup>282</sup> Otto WEISS, *Der Glaubenswächter van Rossum*, in *SHCSR* 58 (2010) 85-138.

<sup>283</sup> Hans de Valk, 'Some matters that should be improved in the government of the Church. A Remarkable Proposal to Reform the Roman Curia, 1931', in Paul VAN GEEST, Roberto REGOLI (eds), *Suavis laborum memoria. Chiesa, Papato e Curia Romana tra storia e teologia/Church, Papacy, Roman Curia between History and Theology. Scritti in onore di Marcel Chappin SJ per il suo 70° compleanno/Essays in honour of Marcel Chappin SJ on His 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, Città del Vaticano 2013, 181-203.

<sup>284</sup> Wittem 1933. E. CORSIUS, *Theological tradition*, 167-168.

## SUMMARY

This article focuses on Willem van Rossum as a Redemptorist against the background of the development of the Dutch province in the nineteenth century. Born in 1854 in Zwolle, van Rossum entered the Congregation in 1873. The Dutch province was a rather young and flourishing province at the time and its members were eager to mould an orthodox, pious and moral Catholic Church as a defensible fortress against the malicious influences of Protestantism, liberalism and a modern, industrialized society. The young Willem van Rossum hungered to share in the ambitious Redemptorist project, developing an intense devotion to Saint Alphonsus and the Virgin Mary. In this article we closely follow Van Rossum's novitiate, seminarian years and lectureship in Roermond. In 1883, we witness his appointment as professor in dogmatic theology and prefect of students in Wittem. Guided by the Dutch provincial Petrus Oomen, van Rossum studied the Alphonsian dogmatic theology meticulously and published several expert theological treatises. Van Rossum's organizational and fund raising talents as Rector at Wittem are also being discussed. In general it can be said that the characteristics he developed prior to 1895 served him well when he became a key member of the Roman Curia: his exemplary conduct as a religious, his tendency to rigidity (he was more respected than beloved within his community), his knowledge of languages and his thorough study of the works of Aquinas and Alphonsus. They were useful not only when he functioned, for instance, as consultor of the Holy Office, but also later after being named a Cardinal in 1911 and finally Prefect of Propaganda Fide (1918-1932).

## SOMMARIO

L'articolo presenta la figura del Redentorista Willem van Rossum, con sullo sfondo lo sviluppo della Provincia Olandese nel XIX secolo. Nato a Zwolle nel 1854, van Rossum entrò in Congregazione nel 1873. Quella Olandese era una Provincia abbastanza giovane e fiorente a quel tempo, e i suoi membri erano ansiosi di dar forma a una Chiesa Cattolica fondata sull'ortodossia, pia e morale, come fortezza di difesa contro le influenze malefiche del Protestantismo, del liberalismo e della società moderna e industrializzata. Il giovane Willem van Rossum

anelava a condividere l'ambizioso progetto Redentorista, sviluppando un'intensa devozione a sant'Alfonso e alla Vergine Maria. In questo articolo seguiamo da vicino il noviziato di van Rossum, i suoi anni di seminario e la sua esperienza di docente in Roermond. Nel 1883, lo vediamo nominato professore di teologia dogmatica e prefetto degli studenti in Wittem. Sotto la guida del Superiore Provinciale olandese Petrus Oomen, van Rossum studiò la teologia dogmatica alfonsiana meticolosamente, e pubblicò diversi e specialistici trattati teologici. Si riportano anche i talenti organizzativi e amministrativi di van Rossum come Rettore a Wittem. In genere si può dire che le caratteristiche da lui sviluppate prima del 1895 gli furono utili quando divenne un membro influente della Curia Romana: intendiamo la sua esemplare condotta come religioso, la sua tendenza alla rigidità (era più rispettato che amato nella sua comunità), la sua conoscenza delle lingue e il suo scrupoloso studio delle opere di san Tommaso d'Aquino e sant'Alfonso. Gli furono utili non solo quando agì, per esempio, come consultore del Santo Ufficio, ma anche dopo, quando nel 1911 fu nominato Cardinale e infine Prefetto di Propaganda Fide (1918-1932).