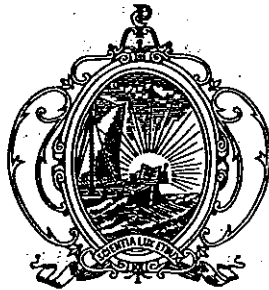


CHRISTIAN FEAST AND FESTIVAL

The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture

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AN ELEMENT OF CHRISTIAN LITURGY?
THE FEAST OF ST MARTIN IN THE NETHERLANDS IN THE
20TH CENTURY

1. INTRODUCTION: LITURGY AND POPULAR CULTURE

The problem of the relationship, in all its complexity, between liturgy and religious popular culture is a theoretical concern to both liturgists and (European) ethnologists. Increasingly during the last decades, this has been perceived as a common problem, requiring an interdisciplinary approach. Although liturgists have taken account in their analyses of ethnological models, concepts and data – and *vice versa*, a truly integral perspective, as Paul Post noticed recently, in the study of ritual in a Christian context has only rarely been realized.¹ Still, researchers combining at least in their person an intimate knowledge of both disciplines have made some remarkable statements concerning this relationship.

Such was the case, for instance, in the early 1980s when Dietz-Rüdiger Moser revolutionized the view on the Roman-Catholic carnival. Contrary to the commonly accepted view that the Church was opposed to this festival, he argued – referring to hitherto neglected theological statements, the practice of liturgy, in particular the reading during services of prescribed parts of the bible (pericopes), and sermons based on these readings – that the Church actually welcomed carnival as fulfilling an important catechetical role in the dissemination of religious doctrine. When this function became obscured, it was natural – only then! – that the Church opposed the feast.² There are, as

¹ P. POST: Religieuze volkscultuur en liturgie. Geïllustreerd pleidooi voor een benadering, in J. LAMBERTS (ed.): *Volksreligie, liturgie en evangelisatie* (Leuven/Amersfoort 1998) 19-77, p. 21-40; P. POST: Van paasvuur tot stille tocht. Over interferentie van liturgisch en volksreligieus ritueel, in *Volkskundig bulletin* 25 (1999) 215-234, p. 215-217.

² D.-R. MOSER: *Fasnacht, Fasching, Karneval. Das Fest der "verkehrten" Welt* (Graz/Wien/Köln 1986); D.-R. MOSER: Perikopenforschung und Volkskunde, in *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 6 (1983) 7-52. See the discussion in *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 5-7 (1982-1984).

can be readily imagined, various problems with this bold and provocative model, on an empirical as well as a theoretical level. These include foremost the likely discrepancies between the supposed intentions of the Church and their appropriation by those participating in carnival. Perhaps even more important in this respect is the sweeping claim of the model, that was soon extended by Moser, often with equally surprising claims, to other elements of popular culture in the liturgical year as well.³

Despite its novelty at first sight, there was, on a higher level of abstraction, a familiar ring to the model. Well into the 1950s, ethnologists were prone to ascribing pre-Christian ('pagan') origins to all kinds of (religious) popular customs. The contribution of ethnology consisted in making people aware of these long-forgotten, 'unconscious', connections. As in the 1960s due to the efforts of German ethnologists the ideological impetus behind this line of reasoning became apparent and also on factual grounds – there are no facts, except on a simple phenomenological level, to corroborate this continuity – the model was definitely dismissed, only to linger on at the level of popular lore. It would be unfair to apply directly the same kind of criticism to Moser's more sophisticated model. Moreover, although there is room for debate, he does adduce factual sources to support his theses. But their implication shows a striking similarity to the previously mentioned, 'pre-Christian' model. As a result of the steady erosion of Christian knowledge, people nowadays are more and more unconscious of the originally Christian grounds and motives behind all sorts of popular rituals and festivals. It is up to the ethnologist to uncover these underlying layers of meaning and to make them known again.⁴ In so doing, the banner of continuity is raised a second time and participants are made, perhaps against their will, unconscious enactors of Christian liturgy. It may well be, however, that some of these, after reading Moser's studies, actually welcome and internalize his message, thereby

³ D.-R. MOSER: *Bräuche und Feste im christlichen Jahreslauf. Brauchformen der Gegenwart in kulturgeschichtlichen Zusammenhängen* (Graz 1993).

⁴ "Der christliche Kalender enthält also eine Fülle von Hinweisen auf heilsgeschichtliche und theologische Zusammenhänge, die erst dann wirksam werden können, wenn man sich ihrer bewußt wird." It was his aim "verlorengegangene Selbstverständlichkeiten' wieder ins Licht zu heben". For: "Es handelt sich bei ihnen [the elements of religious popular culture (Bräuche) treated by him] um nichts anderes als um Ausdrucksformen christlicher Religion", MOSER: *Bräuche und Feste* 23, 286.

eventually confirming – in terms of Hans Moser's *Rücklauf* – the validity of the interpretation.⁵

Another example of this comprehensive incapsulation of religious popular culture is provided by the similar model of the ethnologist, specialising in religious popular culture, Wolfgang Hartinger. Drawing on a large number of examples from Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the present, he also concludes that the liturgy of the Catholic Church was of paramount importance in shaping religious popular culture. And again, it is to the secularization of recent times that he attributes the evaporation of the knowledge regarding this connection.⁶

On theoretical grounds Paul Post, also a scholar well versed both in ethnology and the study of liturgy, has objected to this model of liturgical primacy. In several theoretical and empirical studies⁷ he has advanced the perspective of the very complex nature of the relationship, or more precisely the interference, between liturgy and religious popular culture – to the point of considering by now these interferences in themselves the object of study. It is, as Post claims, on the dynamic interplay of ritual and cultural elements and attitudes that one should concentrate, on their congruence, convergence or divergence, on shifts in contexts, quotations and borrowings.⁸ A consequence of this view is that efforts at defining the precise nature of religious popular culture become somewhat less urgent.

Although on sure theoretical basis – because his model was tested and elaborated in various empirical studies, Post has called for new investigations, preferably case studies into the vast domain of feasts and

⁵ H. MOSER: *Volksbräuche im geschichtlichen Wandel. Ergebnisse aus fünfzig Jahren volkskundlicher Quellenforschung* (München-Berlin 1985) 359-360; H. BAUSINGER: Für eine komplexere Fastnachtstheorie, in *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 6 (1983) 101-106, p. 105-106.

⁶ "Ideenlieferant für alles brauchwürdige Geschehen", W. HARTINGER: *Religion und Brauch* (Darmstadt 1992) 240-241; 244. See the summary and critical assessment of his book, in POST: *Religieuze volkscultuur* 40-47; POST: *Paasvuur*, 219-223.

⁷ A fine example is P. POST: "An excellent game...". On playing the mass, in C. CASPERS, G. LUKKEN & G. ROUWHORST (eds): *Bread of heaven. Customs and practices surrounding Holy Communion. Essays in the history of liturgy and culture* (Kampen 1995) 185-205.

⁸ POST: *Paasvuur* 219, 229. Cf. P. POST: Het rituele perspectief, in A. VAN HARSKAMP et al.: *De religieuze ruis in Nederland. Thesen over de versterving en de wedergeboorte van de godsdienst* (Zoetermeer 1998) 47-55; P. POST: Rituele dynamiek in liturgisch perspectief. Een verkenning van vorm, inhoud en beleving, in *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 15 (1999) 119-141.

rituals, to try it again.⁹ The purpose of this study is to answer this call – merely from the point of view of an ethnologist – by offering a cursory sketch and interpretation of some developments in the celebration of the feast of St. Martin's in the Netherlands in the 20th century.

2. PROBLEM, PERSPECTIVE, SOURCES AND OUTLINE

The question to be addressed here in particular concerns the nature of this feast. In discussing the field of 'folklorized liturgy' – i.e. rituals originating in liturgy which are being appropriated by secular festive culture; the term interference refers to the same phenomenon – Post mentions as an example: out-door "processions with more or less 'liturgical content'", like those of children at the feast of St Martin's.¹⁰ This hesitation in calling these processions liturgical is not surprising – and puts us into the heart of the problem, for it shows an implicit assumption that there are grounds for engaging in this effort.

This is not unimportant. When one holds a particular point of view, one usually has little difficulty in finding 'facts' that will substantiate this view. This will only be achieved by neglecting competing readings or interpretations of the same facts or by ignoring other facts. Against this one might argue that, in particular in the social sciences, the *raison d'être* of the researcher's effort lies in the assumption that in the end he knows best – or at least better than the people he studied. Unconscious motives as objects of study play a deciding role here. To those who would object that these considerations are irrelevant in this context, one could point to the frequent use of precisely this term unconscious when the interference of ritual and religious popular culture is at issue, both in scholarly publications, as mentioned above, and in the popular press.¹¹ The term acts as a convenient metaphor indicating the many layers of meaning attached to a ritual. It is the researcher's task, however, not so much to 'uncover' these meanings as to monitor the arena of competing definitions and interpretations projected onto a ritual and appropriated – in all its modalities – by participants and commentators

⁹ POST: Paasvuur 224-226.

¹⁰ R. POST: *Ritueel landschap. Over liturgie-buiten. Processie, pausbezoek, danken voor de oogst, plotselinge dood* (= Liturgie in perspectief 5) (Heeswijk-Dinther 1995) 21.

¹¹ E.g.: "children honour him [St Martin] *unconsciously* [italics added] with a fantastic procession of lanterns". *Het Binnenhof* 10-11-1948.

in their different strands and in precise historical situations. In this arena his own interpretation plays a role on equal footing with those of others.¹² The outcome of these various debates not infrequently has resulted, as is well known, in adaptations of form and content of the ritual concerned – again triggering off new interpretations.¹³

This ongoing and complex process is best grasped at the level of a detailed case study. Bearing the above considerations in mind, however, here a different approach is used: presenting a tentative sketch of the history of St Martin over the course of about a century and in the country as a whole. What is lost in depth may be gained in taking a broader, historical perspective. My main sources are newspaper cuttings on St Martin's day from the archives of the Meertens Instituut and the Nederlands Openluchtmuseum (collection Van der Ven). Ethnological questionnaires (EQ) 4 (1938) 18-27 and 68 (1997) of the Meertens Instituut were also consulted.¹⁴

This contribution is divided in three sections each dealing with ideological systems that have sought to interpret, to influence and to mould the outward forms of and meanings attributed to the folklore of St Martin's day: those of the discipline of folklore itself, of the peace movement and of organized Catholicism. In the conclusion the findings are confronted with the abovementioned theses on the relationship of folklore and liturgy.

3. ST MARTIN'S DAY: THE IMPACT OF THE DISCIPLINE OF FOLKLORE

The basis of the St Martin's day folklore, in the Netherlands and in many other European countries, is the tradition that, on the feast day of this saint (11th November in the Roman-Catholic liturgical calendar),

¹² In this respect Hartinger's position is ambiguous, for, while sharing this view in principle (HARTINGER: *Religion und Brauch* 41-43) and in the analysis of cases (e.g. the *Sternsingen* (ibid.: 47, 204-206), his final conclusion still is comparable to that of D.-R. Moser.

¹³ Newspaper journalists may play a similar role; see the interesting study of C.A. NORMAN: 'Annual well-dressing – another brilliant success – finest work for many years' (by our own correspondent), in Th. BUCKLAND & J. WOOD (eds): *Aspects of British calendar customs* (Sheffield 1993) 137-146.

¹⁴ For an assessment of the purpose and value of this type of source see A.J. DEKKER: Inleiding, in *De Volkskultuurvragenlijsten 1-58 (1934-1988) van het R.J. Meertens-Instituut* (Amsterdam 1989) 1-27.

children are given special freedoms and privileges. In this respect, the feast shows some resemblance to Halloween in the United States. During two hours or so after nightfall, children roam the streets and ring at doors, carrying lanterns and singing St Martin songs.¹⁵ Usually their appearance is rewarded by the distribution of some coins, fruits or candy. I shall focus here on this characteristic and more or less unique element of the feast and leave aside the St Martin's bonfire.¹⁶

The very nature of the children's action – expecting a gift as an uncertain reward for their singing or quasi threatening the adults (as in the song: “give me something now and I won't be around till next year”) – contained an element of dependence that led in the first half of the 20th century to its overall description as begging. For poor children (with their parents sometimes in the background) the St Martin's singing was an occasion to gain some extra income in winter. This practice was looked down upon by the better sort. They would only allow their children to be treated simply with some sweets by their relatives and acquaintances, their social equals, at a few addresses nearby.

In the 1920s and 1930s ethnology as an academic discipline began to take shape in the Netherlands. Congresses and lectures were organized, folkloristic festivals were held and textbooks and schoolbooks were published.¹⁷ Accounts of all this were disseminated in the press and more and more ordinary people became aware of ‘folklore’ as a distinct subject matter. It changed their perception of what they were participating in or witnessing in their vicinity. This also extended to the customs on St Martin's day. From then on, they came to be seen as a part of ‘folklore’, that

¹⁵ On these songs, see G. HELMER: Het Sintmaartenslied in Nederland, in *Volkskunde* 57 (1956) 1-21; M.J. FRANCKEN: Het Sint-Maartenszingen in Noord-Holland, in *Noord-Holland* 8 (1963) 141-160. See also D. SAUERMAN: Westfälische Martinslieder nach den Sammlungen des Atlas der deutschen Volkskunde, in *Rheinisch-westfälische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 16 (1969) 70-104; D. SAUERMAN: Martinslied, in R.W. BREDNICH *et al.* (eds): *Handbuch des Volksliedes. I. Die Gattungen des Volksliedes* (München 1973) 391-417.

¹⁶ J.J. VOSKUIL & A.J. DEKKER: De jaarvuren in Nederland omstreeks 1938, in *Volkskunde* 71 (1970) 204-210, p. 205-207.

¹⁷ E.g. R. VAN GINKEL: Illusies van het eeuwige onveranderlijke. *Volkskunde en cultuurpolitiek in Nederland, 1914-1945*, in *Volkskundig bulletin* 24 (1998) 345-384; R. VAN GINKEL: *Op zoek naar eigenheid. Denkbeelden en discussies over cultuur en identiteit in Nederland* (Den Haag 1999) 107-111. In the series *Volkskundig leesboek voor de lagere scholen* (Groningen 1931) attention was paid to St Martin's in the volumes on *Nederland* (41-49), *Groningen* (59-68), *Drenthe en Overijssel* (24-27), *Limburg en Noord-Brabant* (47-51).

is untainted by the connotation of social inequality. The idea of real begging receded into the background and the procession with lanterns and the accompanying singing attracted the participation of children of all social strata; or that was the image one preferred to perceive.¹⁸ This process entailed, on the one hand, that gifts in money were considered less appropriate, and on the other hand that poorer families too were now frequented by the St Martin's singers. By the 1950s their action was described as “decent begging”, executed by “pseudo-poor children”.¹⁹ In



Fig. 1. St Martin's singers besieging a confectioner's shop in the 1930s.

¹⁸ E.g., “children of the rich and the poor, of all denominations, of the village [Spaarndam] as a whole”, *Haarlemsch Dagblad* 12-11-1938.

¹⁹ *Nieuwe Noordhollandse Courant* 15-11-1948; *Trouw* 7-11-1957. Still, in the town of Haarlem, there was even in the 1970s some hesitation on the part of parents of the more well-to-do, T.J.W.R. DE HAAN: Sint Maarten in Haarlem, in *Jaarboek Haarlem* 1974, 285-296, p. 289.

the 1960s the real begging was only remembered as something of a distant past.

That was not to say that negative associations surrounding the custom remained altogether absent. On the contrary, some of them even increased as a result of the 'folklorizing' operation. The probably larger number of children participating and their freer, that is more demanding, attitude, led to their behaviour being considered more and more as a nuisance. Ordinary people found it hard enough to answer the doorbell several dozen times that evening. It was worse for shopkeepers such as grocers and bakers. They felt besieged by scores of noisily singing children, not daring to turn them down, particularly because they were their customers' children. It was understandable that terms like "a mess" and even "begging in disguise" turned up again in this connection. The superintendent of police in the town of Alkmaar for instance, referring to complaints of shopkeepers, in 1938 felt that "an ancient custom, well-meant in its origin" had become "degenerated" because of "a wrong sense of sympathy" on the part of adults. In the same manner, the children themselves elsewhere were blamed for their "wrong conception" of the nature of the custom.²⁰ Perceptions like these paved the way for intervention.

This negative attitude was further enhanced by the riot-like events that accompanied St Martin's day in the later hours of the night in some towns and villages in the provinces of North-Holland and Friesland (such as Zaandam, Enkhuizen, De Rijp and Bolsward) in the 1930s and in the 1950s and 1960s. When half-grown youths threw firecrackers at the police or kindled small fires, this was seen as wantonness: "with folklore this row has nothing in common".²¹ As ethnologists have remarked in similar cases, it was not so much the appreciation of folklore itself that was in question as its form and function in new circumstances.²² The simultaneous folklorization of St Martin's day, that is its

²⁰ Quoted in *Alkmaarse Courant* 8-11-1951; Ethnological questionnaire 4 (1938) 20/F 66.

²¹ *De Zaanlander* 12-11-1934. Cf.: "This way De Rijp demonstrates its misunderstanding of the feast of St Martin", *Nieuw Noord-Hollands Dagblad* 13-11-1947.

²² D. SAUERMAN (ed.): *Weihnachten in Westfalen um 1900. Berichte aus dem Archiv für westfälische Volkskunde* (Münster 1976) 28; H. SCHWEDT: St. Martin, vorwärtstrend. Zur Transformation und Diffusion eines Brauchkomplexes, in A. LEHMANN & A. KUNTZ (eds): *Sichtweisen der Volkskunde. Zur Geschichte und Forschungspraxis einer Disziplin* (Berlin-Hamburg 1988) 257-266, p. 258, 262.

narrowing down to an innocent feast especially for small children, may have contributed to a sense of unfair exclusion on the part of youths from about twelve years and up. When these tried to get some candy too, they were described as 'St Martin's poachers' and 'dissonants'.²³ By throwing firecrackers they showed off their anger, in a sense making mock of the childrens' idyllic lanterns. This, of course, was a serious offence to those with new and different views on the meaning of this folklore. It seemed that some force was needed to put these into effect.

Bringing order to feasts of the lower classes and reducing their perceived excesses had a tradition dating back at least to the Enlightenment.²⁴ From the 1920s on this urge gained a new impetus.²⁵ It affected the tradition of St Martin too. In the 1930s and after the war in the 1950s, there was a ready climate for intervention. To meet the demand of a spectacle of proper and decent folklore, in the wake of the diffusion and popularization of academic folkloristics, it was deemed self-evident to lend tradition a hand.²⁶ Adults took over the free wandering of the children by organizing it on their own terms. The moments of the start and end of the procession as well as its route were fixed and publicly announced, the children were lined up orderly and a musical band was engaged. In order to attract the participation of the children, prizes were put up for the most beautiful or original lanterns. When the procession had come to an end, the children received some sweets or fruit from the hands of the organizing committee. After that they were supposed to be well satisfied and go home.

Along this basic pattern a wide array of committees and associations took it upon themselves to organize and thereby civilize the former begging and singing. It stood to reason that those in close connection with small children took the lead, such as teachers in primary schools and kindergartens. They explained the figure of St Martin to their pupils and passed on their knowledge of the folklore of that day, they

²³ *De Typhoon* 12-11-1959.

²⁴ E.g. B. HEIDRICH: *Fest und Aufklärung. Der Diskurs über die Volksvergnügungen in bayerischen Zeitschriften (1765-1815)* (München 1984); P. BAILEY: *Leisure and class in Victorian Britain* (London 1978); J. HELSLOOT: *Vermaak tussen beschaving en kerstening. Goes 1867-1896* (Amsterdam 1995).

²⁵ F. GROOT: *Roomsen, rechtszinnigen en nieuwlichters. Verzuiling in een Hollandse plattelandsgemeente, Naaldwijk 1850-1930* (Hilversum 1992) 187-188.

²⁶ H. SCHWEDT: St. Martin - Ein reformierter Brauch! Bräuche - Geschichte und Theorie, in *Volkskultur an Rhein und Maas* 11 (1992) 9-18.

had the children fabricate their lanterns out of mangolds or other materials, and rehearsed with them the songs to be performed in the procession. A special role was played by Catholic youth organizations (see below). But also associations organizing all kinds of festivities in their town or village took part, as well as associations specifically dedicated to the promotion of folklore.²⁷ To organisations operating on a very local level, that of neighbourhoods in towns and villages alike, the feast clearly had a special attraction. This was even reinforced when, as a result of the internal migration in the first decades after the war, new housing areas became populated with people from all over the country. Some of these newcomers introduced the tradition of St Martin's from regions where it was customary (the provinces of Groningen, Friesland, Drenthe, North-Holland and parts of North-Brabant and Limburg) into areas where it was unknown before. Their initiative seems to have been generally welcomed and may in part account for the growing popularity and spread of the custom in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁸

By the very organization of the procession, the children were largely reduced to passive ornaments for the amusement of adult spectators, whose active role in the tradition was decreased as well. This didn't preclude, however, groups of children singing on their own initiative before and after the organized procession. Sometimes they were even explicitly allowed to do so, attesting to the relative fluidity between the boundaries of spontaneous and organized folklore. Still, the organized processions seem to have contributed to an increased involvement on the part of adults – and in the end of the local community as a whole – in their conception of the tradition of St Martin.²⁹

²⁷ Such as 'The Society for Archeology and Folklore' in Doesburg, *Zutphensche Courant* 12-11-1936. In the same spirit in Koog aan de Zaan in the 1930s the children were dressed up – explicitly to "curb the wantonness of overgrown boys" – in traditional local costumes in the St Martin's procession, Ethnological questionnaire 4 (1938) 21a/E 85.

²⁸ Ethnological questionnaire 68/3. Cf. on this process H. & E. SCHWEDT: *Bräuche zwischen Saar und Sieg. Zum Wandel der Festkultur in Rheinland-Pfalz und im Saarland* (Mainz 1989) 120.

²⁹ D. TILLMANN: Dörfliche Festkultur am Großstadtrand, in *Kieler Blätter zur Volkskunde* 29 (1997) 147-160, p. 152-153; Th. LUDEWIG: Politische Gruppierungen und das Martinsfest, in H. SCHWEDT (ed.): *Brauchforschung regional. Untersuchungen in Rheinland-Pfalz und im Saarland* (Stuttgart 1989) 71-86, p. 81-85; S.J. VAN DER MOLEN & P. VOGT: *Onze folklore* (Amsterdam-Brussel 1980) 160, 162.

The influence of this conception showed itself also in another aspect of the custom. Folklorists and the general public were fascinated, particularly in the 1930s, by the idea that in the lanterns and bonfires of St Martin's day one could see – as in so many other elements of popular culture – the vestiges of ancient pagan rituals. These were supposedly held to beg the sun-god for his return or to bring thanks to Wodan for the harvest.³⁰ The effect of this kind of theorizing was, as it became more widely known, to confer on the contemporary custom the status of something vaguely sacred, or meaningful – because very old. This in turn demanded, from those who knew, a reverent or at least respectful attitude, for the feast "was religious in origin".³¹ The participants were seen, and probably sometimes saw themselves, as staunch upholders of tradition, thereby even proving their moral quality.³²

As is well known, conservatism is an aspect of this attitude. This became manifest in particular in views on the proper shape of the lanterns carried along by the children in their processions. With the benefit of hindsight, it was fortunate that an ethnological questionnaire was sent out in 1938, at a time the folklorization of the custom was being consolidated. Numerous correspondents noticed that most children carried paper lanterns. This was a phenomenon that in their view only recently had come into fashion. They contrasted this practice unfavourably – e.g.: "I consider this to be a loss"³³ – to earlier times when children made their lanterns out of all kinds of beets. Chance remarks that paper lanterns were seen as something for the rich or life in the cities are indications that the adoption of these new attributes was part of the general process of modernization of the countryside during the inter-war years.³⁴ It is safe to assume that aversion or resistance of others to this process found expression, in a slightly distorted way, in

³⁰ E.g. *De Telegraaf* 11-11-1931; *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* 11-11-1935.

³¹ *De Zaanlander* 9-11-1935.

³² E.g.: "in old folk customs the sound spirit of our ancestors becomes apparent", *Culemborgsche Courant* 11-11-1949; "We welcome the maintenance of the tradition of St Martin's. Folklore is of great value to all who are Dutchmen to the backbone", *Eembode* 13-11-1953. See for the general background of this mood e.g. J.H. KRUIZINGA: *Levende folklore in Nederland en Vlaanderen* (Assen 1953) 200; J. VOS: *Democratisering van de schoonheid. Twee eeuwen scholing in de kunsten* (Nijmegen 1999) 145-146.

³³ Ethnological questionnaire 4 (1938) 20/E 45.

³⁴ See on this process e.g. A. SCHUURMAN: Plattelandscultuur in de negentiende en vroege twintigste eeuw. Modernisering en glocalisering. Een essay, in *Jaarboek Nederlands Openluchtmuseum* 5 (1999) 270-301.

the denunciation of the paper lantern as “not so beautiful”, because simply bought, “for convenience’s sake”. People felt unable to admire lanterns like these and showed this even by receiving the children carrying them with ridicule!³⁵ Also a burning real candle was deemed an essential requisite. Otherwise one couldn’t speak of truly celebrating St Martin’s.

What was going on was, of course, a cultural battle around the notion of the authenticity of folklore. Echoing the dominant model in scholarly studies, newspapers too maintained that the countryside was the true *locus* of folklore.³⁶ St Martin was “one of the few old customs not yet swept away by modern civilisation” or by the “general trivialisation and encroaching influence of modern times”. In small villages one could still come upon these customs, “unknown to city-dwellers”.³⁷ Concomitant with this diagnosis was the conviction that the authenticity of the custom was best preserved when the children were stimulated to fabricate the lanterns by themselves. That way they could testify to their “unconscious ties to the folklore (*volkscultuur*) of their own village or region”. Not surprisingly, this view was preached by the staunch promoter of all things folklore, Dirk Jan van der Ven.³⁸ Pedagogical ideas, developed from the 1920s onwards and gaining ground after the war, on the moral and social value of children expressing themselves artistically, coincided and reinforced the preference for this kind of lantern.³⁹ In kindergartens they were eagerly seized upon.

When, as a logical consequence, kindergartens and various local associations made the children show their lanterns in organized processions this collided, however, with the professed authenticity of the custom – as emanated in the self-fabricated lanterns. There was “something

³⁵ Ethnological questionnaire 4 (1938) 20, esp. E 45, C 88, C 75, C 176, C 99, E 35, G 12a. “A produce of one’s own yields more”, a child confirmed, DE HAAN: Sint Maarten in Haarlem 290.

³⁶ With respect to material culture e.g. G. ROOIJAKKERS: ‘De tot vorm gekomen persoonlijkheid van het volk’. *Volkskunst als cultuuriagnose*, in *Volkskundig bulletin* 23 (1997) 89-105, p. 92-95.

³⁷ *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* 11-11-1935; *De Tijd* 11-11-1938; *De Telegraaf* 12-11-1936.

³⁸ *Alkmaarse Courant* 8-11-1951. On Van der Ven, see VAN GINKEL, *Illusies* 348-351; T. WAGEMAKERS: *Het Vaderlandsch Historisch Volksfeest*. Over D.J. van der Ven, massatoerisme en de moderne folklore, in *Jaarboek Nederlands Openluchtmuseum* 2 (1996) 170-187.

³⁹ VOS: *Democratisering* 108-167.

unnatural” in an organized procession, its “emotional value” was different (Van der Ven) and also “detrimental to the atmosphere (*gezelligheid*) of the old folk custom”.⁴⁰ Such puritanism did not gain much support.⁴¹ In the 1960s the attitude towards the lanterns became more relaxed and tolerant. Increasingly no contradiction was felt between organization and celebrating folklore.

4. ST MARTIN’S DAY: THE IMPACT OF THE PEACE MOVEMENT

This malleability of popular culture became manifest in the late 1920s. The coincidence of the dates of the feast of St Martin and of Armistice Day (November, 11, 1918) was seized upon by the proponents of world peace. Defining St Martin’s as “a children’s feast of light”, that “for many people had lost its meaning”, the Dutch branch of the International Women’s League for Peace and Freedom (*Vrouwenbond voor Vrede en Vrijheid*) sought to give it “a new content” to those willing “to overcome the forces of darkness”. Joined by similar organizations with progressive Protestant leanings and with the support of schoolteachers in several larger and smaller towns, mainly in the northern part of the country, processions were organized in the 1930s of children carrying lanterns with peace emblems or symbols – like the bells, the dove, the angel of peace and banners with peace slogans – and singing peace songs like ‘Children of one Father’ and ‘Never again war’. Afterwards slogans were shouted and meetings were held to discuss peace and disarmament.⁴²

This initiative met with a mixed reception. Surprisingly, the influential folklorist Van der Ven at the time welcomed the idea of filling old forms with new meanings. It testified to the “indestructible vitality” of folklore. By participating in the celebration, on St Martin’s day, of world peace, the disappearance of confessional and social divisions, “party politics and chauvinism” would certainly ensue.⁴³ This way he

⁴⁰ *Alkmaarse Courant* 8-11-1951; *De Volkskrant* 11-11-1959. Cf. KRUIZINGA: *Levende folklore* 192-193.

⁴¹ Looking at newspaper photographs of processions one is, in the same vein, struck by the still continuing presence of paper lanterns.

⁴² *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* 22-10-1931; *De Telegraaf* 11-11-1931; *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad* 11-11-1930; 13-11-1936, *De Zaanlander* 11-11-1934; Ethnological questionnaire 4 (1938) 20/E 77, 20/F 179.

⁴³ Offprints of *Agrarisch Nieuwsblad* c. 1930, 1936, archive NOM.

harmonized the idea of peace, acceptable to all, with his view on the a-political nature of popular culture. It is not quite clear how the children reacted to this restyling of the feast. When, for instance, it was reported from the town of Groningen they were not much attracted to the peace procession, this was probably because they disliked the idea of an organized procession as such.⁴⁴ Some adults, of course, were more outspoken. "This was an ill-conceived action. The character of a St Martin's procession got completely lost and a tradition of many years was destroyed. This is unpleasant for those keen on traditions." The disappearance of typical St Martin's songs was also deplored.⁴⁵ After World War II commemorating the Armistice Day of 1918 lost its appeal in The Netherlands. Pacifists made no new attempts to appropriate the lanterns of St Martin. Their interference proved to be only an incident.

In passing, it may be mentioned that, contrary to expectation,⁴⁶ the Nazi's seem to have kept aloof from St Martin's day. During the occupation of The Netherlands the processions of the lanterns were not allowed because of the general black-out of the country. Whereas in Germany St Martin's day was used for propaganda meetings during the war in towns like Dortmund and Düsseldorf⁴⁷ and St Martin was also instrumentalized to benefit the *Winterhilfe*,⁴⁸ I have not yet come across similar examples for The Netherlands.

⁴⁴ *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* 12-11-1930.

⁴⁵ Letter to the editor from a person in Edam, newspaper cutting 1938, archive Meertens Institute; S.J. VAN DER MOLEN: *De Friesche kalenderfeesten. Volksgebruiken van Westerlauwersch Friesland, het geheele jaar rond* (Den Haag 1941) 89. Curiously, Van der Ven in later years changed his opinion and wrote that the old tunes had been "drowned" by the "pedagogical St Martins'-peace songs", *Helmondsche Courant* 5-11-1955.

⁴⁶ On their appropriation of carnival and Christmas, see D.-R. MOSER: Nationalsozialistische Fastnachtsdeutung. Die Bestreitung der Christlichkeit des Fastnachtsfestes als zeitgeschichtliches Phänomen, in *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 78 (1982) 200-219; E. GAJEK: Weihnachten im Dritten Reich. Der Beitrag von Volkskundlern an den Veränderungen des Weihnachtsfestes, in *Ethnologia Europaea* 20 (1990) 121-140.

⁴⁷ M. HAPP: Die Martinslegende als ein religionsgeographisches Problem, in M. BÜTTNER & K.-H. ERDMANN (eds), *Geisteshaltung und Umwelt - Stadt und Land. I. Beiträge zum Geographentag in Bonn 1997* (Frankfurt am Main 1998) 59-88, p. 84 n. 69.

⁴⁸ D. SAUERMANN: Neuzeitliche Formen des Martinsbrauches in Westfalen, in *Rheinisch-westfälische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 14 (1967) 42-67, p. 66.

5. ST MARTIN'S DAY: THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZED CATHOLICISM

Obviously, as St Martin was a Christian saint, the abovementioned pagan interpretation of the St Martin's ritual could only be partial. Newspaper accounts of the custom pointed, often in the same breath, to the christianization of originally pagan practices in later times. "In the early Middle Ages St Martin was such a popular saint and his feast coincided so luckily with the end of the season, that the pagan feast without any difficulty was brought into the Christian sphere."⁴⁹ This interpretation, repeated over and over again in the popular press, must have gained very wide currency indeed, perhaps even up to the point of becoming the accepted truth in the minds of those participating in the custom.

Its cogency can be measured by the relative disinclination to accept the interpretation of St Martin as a "purely Christian feast". This view was already put forward in 1937 - undoubtedly inspired by Karl Meisens' book on St Nicholas that advocated the same kind of interpretation⁵⁰ - by the influential student of folklore Jan de Vries in his popular textbook *Volk van Nederland*.⁵¹ Although later repeated in similar textbooks, it apparently sounded less attractive.⁵² Contributing to this was the fact that even in Roman-Catholic circles the pagan interpretation continued to be passed on. This was mainly due to the equally influential textbook on Dutch folklore of the Roman-Catholic scholar Jos Schrijnen. In his view it was "undeniable" that present-day customs originated in Germanic pagan feasts. Saints like St Martin later simply had taken over the role of chthonic deities.⁵³

⁴⁹ *Limburgs Dagblad* 10-11-1956.

⁵⁰ See W. MEZGER: *Sankt Nikolaus. Zwischen Kult und Klamauk. Zur Entstehung, Entwicklung und Veränderung der Brauchformen um einen populären Heiligen* (Ostfildern 1993) 45-48.

⁵¹ J. DE VRIES: *Volk van Nederland* (Amsterdam 1937) 228. His view was only seldom echoed in the press.

⁵² S.J. VAN DER MOLEN: *Levend Volksleven. Een eigensijdse volkskunde van Nederland* (Assen 1961) 18-19; VAN DER MOLEN & VOGT, *Onze folklore* 160. Cf., probably also by Van der Molen: "It is out of the question that this day is a christianized pagan feast", *Lecuwarder Courant* 7-11-1953. Only incidentally one finds: "Not a single Germanic feast can be found on or about November 11th", *Alkmaarse Courant* 11-11-1961.

⁵³ J. SCHRIJNEN: *Nederlandsche Volkskunde*. Tweede herziene druk. I (Zutphen 1930) 139, 129-130. On Schrijnen and De Vries e.g. T. DEKKER: De blik omlaag gericht. Over koerscorrecties in de volkskunde, in *Volkskundig bulletin* 21 (1995) 351-369, p. 354-355; T. DEKKER: Ideologie en volkscultuur. Een geschiedenis van de Nederlandse

If few were inclined to regard St Martin's day as a purely Christian feast, there was even less room for seeing it as a typically Roman-Catholic event. On the contrary, St Martin was widely seen as only 'nominally' a Roman-Catholic saint and the feast in his honour – just like that of the very popular St Nicholas – as 'non-confessional' or 'national' in character. This could be plain to all, as it was celebrated not only in the Catholic southern provinces, but also in parts of the predominantly Protestant North and West of the country. Against the devotion towards a real saint of the people (*volksheilige*) the Reformation was powerless.⁵⁴ Comments in newspaper accounts suggest that this wishful and ideological view on folklore's ability to overcome religious divisions in society found resonance, particularly in the 1930s.⁵⁵ Indeed, Protestants were generally not unsympathetic to the children singing in praise of St Martin at their doorsteps. Perhaps they were even unaware of the Catholic ring of the custom.⁵⁶

However, in the back of some Catholic minds may equally have lingered thoughts of a less distant – that is: medieval – past when the whole of Holland was still Catholic and saints like St Martin were venerated by all. Admittedly this situation no longer persisted. Narrowing down the perspective (and so contrary to the view mentioned earlier), one was prone to point to the Catholic south where St Martin and his feast were still, that is continuously, kept sacred. Elsewhere in the country these had "fallen into disuse" or were "on the brink of disappearing" – the, in the discipline of folklore familiar, vocabulary of *Folklorismus*.⁵⁷ This called for their revitalisation. By organizing the traditional feast of

volkskunde, in T. DEKKER, H. ROODENBURG & G. ROOIJAKKERS (eds): *Volkscultuur. Een inleiding in de Nederlandse etnologie* (Nijmegen 2000) 13-65, p. 36-42; VAN GINKEL: *Illusies* 353.

⁵⁴ E.g. *Nieuwe Haarlemsche Courant* 10-11-1930; *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad* 14-11-1939; *De Nieuwe Dag* 9-11-1949; *Alkmaarse Courant* 8-11-1951. Cf. W. FRUJHOFF: *Heiligen, idolen, iconen* (Nijmegen 1998) 25.

⁵⁵ Still, when in 1953 the figure of St Martin was depicted on the new 25 guilders note not all protestants were pleased. In the Lower House an orthodox protestant member objected to this, in his view, typical papist (*rooms*) image. Other protestants, however, denounced his action as "narrow-minded anti-papist bigotry", *De Volkskrant* 11-11-1953.

⁵⁶ VAN DER MOLEN & VOGT: *Onze folklore* 163

⁵⁷ E.g. *Gooise Klanken* 14-11-1949; *Maas- en Roerbode* 8-11-1947. On folklorization e.g. R. BENDIX: *In search of authenticity. The formation of folklore studies* (Madison-London 1997) 176-187; P. NISSEN: *De folklorisering van het onalledaagse* (Tilburg 1994).

St Martin one could uphold the memory of St Martin as a "national figure", "the same way this was done in earlier centuries".⁵⁸ The dominant motive behind this revitalizing effort, as allways, was to stress and to promote the distinctive features of, in this case, Catholic culture in the present.⁵⁹

In 1936 in Utrecht an attempt was made, by an organisation of Catholic young girls, to honour St Martin publicly by laying a wreath at an image of the saint and singing a special song. Because St Martin was, already in pre-Reformation times, the patron saint of that city, an inclusive strategy was followed. St Martin was hailed as "the patron of Utrecht's Catholics and non-Catholics, christians and non-christians" alike. This could not, however, soften the attitude of the municipality towards the plan. Precisely its motivation as a "purely religious" occasion will have led them to forbid the outward aspects of the manifestation. The children were only allowed to pay a tribute to the saint by marching past the image in silence. The organizers acquiesced in this – "we Catholics of the northern provinces have been accustomed to confine our Catholic traditions within the walls of our churches" – but hopes were expressed for better times in the future.⁶⁰ They were not disappointed.

After the war Catholics succeeded in actively promoting the public cult of St Martin. Imitating the example of St Martin's processions in Germany, particularly the Rhineland,⁶¹ a live St Martin already from the 1930s onwards occasionally figured in processions. He was mounted and usually dressed up as a Roman soldier, wearing a conspicuous red mantle. This allowed the staging, during the procession or at its close, of the scene for which St Martin is most well known. After meeting a shivering beggar, the saint draws his sword, cuts his mantle in two and gives half to the beggar. A huge bonfire, sometimes lit by

⁵⁸ *De Nieuwe Limburger* 10-11-1955; *Biltse Courant* 12-11-1948.

⁵⁹ E.g. W. FRUJHOFF: *Traditie en verleden. Kritische reflecties over het gebruik van verwijzingen naar vroeger*, in *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 7 (1991) 125-136, p. 133-134.

⁶⁰ *Utrechtsche Courant* 11-11-1936. On these 'unofficial' processions at the time, P.J. MARGRY: *Teedere quaesties: religieuze rituelen in conflict. Confrontaties tussen katholieken en protestanten rond de processiecultuur in 19e-eeuw Nederland* (Hilversum 2000) 412-413, 606 n. 24.

⁶¹ D. PESCH: *Das Martinsbrauchtum im Rheinland. Wandel und gegenwärtige Stellung* (Diss. Münster 1969) 58. This was in the style of 'historical parades' of earlier decades, SAUERMAN: *Neuzeitliche Formen* 62.

the mayor, constituted the solemn and spectacular end of the events of the day. These theatrical aspects understandably appealed a great deal to Catholic organizations looking for ways and means to express themselves.⁶²

Within the already elaborate and refined network of Catholic youth organizations in 1947 the 'Boys Guild' (*Jongensgilde*) was founded. Originating from the diocese of Den Bosch in Brabant, it became a more or less national organization. In 1955 it fused with the kindred youth movement of Young Holland (*Jong Nederland*), that from 1944 on had operated exclusively in the diocese of Roermond in Limburg. Their joint name became Guild Young Holland, later simply Young Holland. The Guild resembled the boy scouts, but was based, as its name indicated, on quasi-medieval notions and ideas. Under the slogan 'Be prepared' (*Sta klaar*) the boys were to devote themselves to Christ, the Church, the fatherland and their fellow human beings. In doing so they would become "fine Catholic boys and in later life vigorous Catholic men".⁶³

As patron saint for the Guild, St Martin was chosen. Because he was a figure of both martial and religious qualities he was considered fit to appeal to impressionable young hearts. Having a patron saint, of course, called for the celebration of the patron's day. The effects of this were considered beneficial to the organization itself: "beautiful traditions will guarantee the continued existence of our movement".⁶⁴ To all local branches in the mid-1950s booklets were distributed containing stories of the saint's life and various ideas on how to keep the feast. The performance of plays like 'The miracles of Saint Martin' by Henri Ghéon or 'The good bishop' by C.A. Bouman was encouraged.⁶⁵ This was seen

⁶² "Our catholic youth organizations are so busy looking for a theme for their festive calendar. (...) it is in the feast of St Martin that they will find exactly what they are looking for", *De Volkskrant* 6-11-1937.

⁶³ J.W. DINJENS: *Jong Nederland. Ontstaan en ontwikkeling van een jeugdbeweging* (Utrecht 1981). See also: *Sta klaar. Het Jongensgilde van de Katholieke jeugdbeweging* ('s-Gravenhage 1954); *Het programma van het Jongens Gilde* (S.l. [c.1955]); *Rakkers. Het Jongensgilde van de Katholieke jeugdbeweging* ('s-Gravenhage 1956), 9; *Sta klaar. Handleiding voor Jong Nederland* ('s-Gravenhage [c.1958]); *Jong Nederland. Schets van een methodiek* (Utrecht 1973).

⁶⁴ *Leidersblad* 1954, 181.

⁶⁵ *De mantel van Sint Maarten. Gilde - Jong Nederland. Katholieke Jeugdbeweging* ('s-Gravenhage 1956) 70; see also: "We celebrate St Martin", in *Leidersblad* 1952, 186-187; *Leidersblad Jong Nederland* 1958, 24-25; *Leidersblad* 1953, 194.

as part of a general effort to 'restore' all over the country the tradition of celebrating the feasts of the liturgical year. "Folklore and observances outside the church proper", however, were explicitly included in this.⁶⁶



Fig. 2. St Martin cutting his mantle before the beggar in a procession of the Guild Young Holland in the 1950s.

⁶⁶ *De Volkskrant* 12-11-1949; *Het programma van het Jongens Gilde* 7.

From the late 1940s onwards the Guild, often with the aid of other local Catholic youth clubs, celebrated St Martin's day with great fervor. In Amsterdam in 1949, for instance, after having attended Mass in the morning, the Boys Guild organized a splendid procession in the evening, with its flag in front, buglers and drummers, a group of mounted Roman soldiers escorting St Martin, in the outfit of a Roman officer and surrounded by beggars, and other members carrying lanterns. In the outskirts a bonfire was lit, with the boys dancing and singing around. As it died down, the chaplain chanted the *In manus tuas*, his example followed by all attendants. In conclusion a 'St Martin's message' was read exhorting the boys to unity, mutual love in the family and to follow the example of their patron saint.⁶⁷ Along similar lines in the 1950s equally impressive processions were held in various other towns (like The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Tilburg). In smaller towns and villages in the southern provinces groups of Young Holland were active till about the mid-1960s. Medievalism as source of inspiration was renounced in 1958.⁶⁸ In the course of the 1960s Catholic organizations began to lose their grip on the young and their active involvement in the feast of St Martin was increasingly shared or taken over by other local groups, as indicated above.

Although it was sometimes deemed necessary to carry a banner with the words 'St Martin' to explain to the public what was happening,⁶⁹ Catholic youth organizations were rather successful in appropriating the folk custom through their organizational effort. Also their flags, uniforms and sometimes the presence of a chaplain or their parading before the local bishop (as in Rotterdam, Roermond) brought this easily home to outsiders. These did not fail to respond. A liberal Protestant newspaper expressed the hope, referring to the Catholic parade on St Martin's day in Utrecht in 1953, that "this revival will not expand much further". The march looked like a disguised effort to hold a – still officially prohibited – religious procession. "What is to become of Utrecht when, through its innocent patron, it were to develop gradually into a papist (rooms) city?" Objecting to similar views supposedly expressed in Amsterdam – "a papist horror" – the leading Catholic newspaper of the city pointed to the entry, gaining every year in importance, of St Nicholas

⁶⁷ *De Volkskrant* 12-11-1949; *De Nieuwe Dag* 10-11-1949, 12-11-1949.

⁶⁸ DINJENS: *Jong Nederland* 60.

⁶⁹ *Het Binnenhof* 13-11-1956 (The Hague); sometimes even a loud-speaker was used to clarify the meaning of the ritual, *Maas- en Roerbode* 11-11-1952 (Roermond).

and his greyhorse. There was clearly no evidence that these figures acted as the Trojan Horse of a Catholic take-over!⁷⁰ Still, organizers of a St Martin's procession may have felt satisfied: they had unequivocally made their point.

An exclusive claim to St Martin, however, was not granted to them. Already in 1948 and 1952, for example, the city centre of Utrecht had seen mass rallies of Catholic organizations on St Martin's day. In the mid-1950s there seems to have been a Protestant reaction to this too conspicuous Catholic appropriation of the saint, in line with the general view that he was of a nonconfessional nature. Now processions of hundreds of children with lanterns were organized by a joint committee of both Catholic and Protestant boy scouts. They were addressed by the mayor and his wife and received from their hands a 'traditional St Martin's cake'. Moreover, during their procession the children had collected fruits that were delivered later on to children's hospitals or money for UNICEF – an element, so obvious in respect to St Martin, that was absent in Catholic processions.⁷¹ In later years implicit tensions like these seem to have subsided as the custom grew more and more popular, explicit Catholic involvement became attenuated and religious identity increasingly lost its power as a marker in social life.⁷²

Uniting the boys (and the adults surrounding them) in their Catholic associations and ultimately in the Church itself was the main impetus behind the revitalization of these St Martin's processions. It was one of the many ritual means used to reinforce the cultural identity of young Catholics. In contrast, the Catholic impact on the meaning(s) attributed to the custom was rather poor. Not surprisingly, the pagan connotation surrounding the feast was not altogether absent. For instance, when Young Holland in the Limburgian village of Born organized its annual procession in 1950, it was explained to the boys in advance that "the feast of St Martin had evolved from pagan-Germanic autumn- and har-

⁷⁰ *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* 12-11-1953; *De Tijd* 12-11-1953. For similar views of orthodox protestants in Germany, G. ANGERMANN: Das Martinsbrauchtum in Bielefeld und Umgebung im Wandel der Zeiten, in *Rheinisch-westfälische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 4 (1957) 231-256, p. 253. Cf. also MARGRY: *Teedere quaesties* 416-418.

⁷¹ *Nieuw Utrechts Dagblad* 11-11-1955; *Het Centrum* 12-11-1956; *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* 12-11-1957; *Trouw* 13-11-1957; *Utrechts Dagblad* 11-11-1958. Cf. on this type of involvement of protestants, ANGERMANN: Das Martinsbrauchtum 251.

⁷² Cf. S. TOP: Das Martinssingen in Mecheln und Umgebung 1982 und 1983, in W. DEUTSCH & W. SCHEPPING (eds): *Musik im Brauch der gegenwart* (Wien 1988) 189-211, p. 208.

vestrituals". Rather frivolously elsewhere it was stated that apparently "the old heathen was still not dead yet".⁷³

On the other hand some efforts were made by the leadership of Young Holland to impart a purely Christian meaning. In their guidelines it was emphasized that the feast of their patron saint was "not only a folkloristic event. Its religious celebration is primary".⁷⁴ Indeed, the feast often began with a Mass in the morning or the evening before. Although mention was also made of the explanatory legend, echoed many times in the press, of the villagers looking at night with lanterns for St Martin's lost donkey, one was "of a different opinion" as regards its value. The emphasis was on another interpretation of the lanterns carried by the children. "I cannot understand", it was written in the journal for their leaders, "why diligent researchers of the treasure of our folk customs exclusively point to the pagan origin of the many traditions of St Martin's day." Wouldn't it be more plausible, it was rhetorically asked, to trace their origin back to the "gospel of light" or "the gospel according to St Martin": Jesus' admonition in Luke 11, 33-36 not to hide one's light under a bushel? "We consider it of eminent importance to take this motive of light as the point of departure for our celebrations, also in their outward form."⁷⁵ Presumably, the boys were instructed with this meaning of the lanterns. However, contrary to the various other interpretations, this specifically Catholic one found hardly any echo in the press, neither at the time nor in later years.

Although the bonfires at St Martin's day could be interpreted as "a symbol of the burning *charitas* of which St Martin, splitting his soldier's mantle, set the noble example",⁷⁶ only weak attempts were made to impart this meaning on the participants of the processions in which this scene was dramatized. It was regarded by the leadership of the Guild as "a splendid point of contact with our boys to transpose the life of St Martin into their own ways of thinking and imaginative faculties. Not to moralize, but simply as a living example of his sainthood."⁷⁷ Still, it was on the moral aspects of his deed that emphasis was laid in the annual 'messages of St Martin', issued from headquarters and read aloud

⁷³ *Limburgs Dagblad* 8-11-1950; similarly, *Bisdomblad* 15-11-1974; *Brabants Nieuwsblad* 10-11-1956.

⁷⁴ *Sta Klaar* 62.

⁷⁵ *Leidersblad* 1953, 193, 183; *De mantel van Sint Maarten* 14, 61-62.

⁷⁶ *De Tijd* 11-11-1947.

⁷⁷ *Leidersblad* 1953, 192.

at the feast of each local branch, and less on the practical. For as the boys nowadays didn't wear a soldier's mantle, it was impossible for them to give away half of it. "But you can give a part of yourself to another person. Instead of putting your own interests first you must be ready for him." By imitating St Martin the boys would become "adequate men and adequate christians".⁷⁸ As they were seldom followed by concrete acts, e.g. making a collection for a charity, such highminded words remained just that. When catholic youth clubs withdrew from organising St Martin's processions, these ideas in later years were no longer repeated, or only in very general terms like 'love of one's neighbour'.

Compared to its (recent) involvement in and generally positive attitude to other elements of 'folklorized liturgy', such as children disguising themselves as the Three Kings and singing in the streets at Twelfth Night, the folklore of the palms and even carnival,⁷⁹ the Church itself seems to have kept rather aloof from the feast of St Martin. In contrast to the German Rhineland, in The Netherlands the procession of the lanterns only incidentally – unless my documentation is incomplete – entered the church or was part of some special service for children.⁸⁰ His feast was not moved to a Sunday, which would have facilitated a possible liturgical incapsulation.

6. CONCLUSION

My aim in sketching above the history of the St Martin's feast in the Netherlands, of its outward forms and the impact on them of various systems of interpretation, was to provide some materials to enable an evaluation of theses regarding the interference of liturgy and popular culture.

⁷⁸ *Leidersblad* 1951, 265; 1954, 195. Texts of messages for other years in *Leidersblad* 1952, 195; 1953, 183; 1955, 199, 1957, 179.

⁷⁹ G. ROOIJAKKERS: Vieren en markeren. Feest en ritueel, in DEKKER, ROODENBURG & ROOIJAKKERS (eds): *Volkscultuur* 173-230, p. 201-204; P. POST & J. PIEPER: *De Palmzondagviering. Een landelijke verkenning* (Kampen-Amsterdam 1992) 53-54, 58; C. WIJERS: *Prinsen en clowns in het Limburgse narrenrijk. Het carnaval in Simpelveld en Roermond 1945-1992* (Amsterdam 1995) 24-26. See on the history of Twelfth Night in the Netherlands in the 20th century, closely paralleling that of the feast of St Martin, P. SPAPENS & P. HORSTEN: *Driekoningenzingen. Een lange en levende traditie* (Utrecht 1996).

⁸⁰ P. POST: Het verleden in het spel? Volksreligieuze rituelen tussen cultus en cultuur, in *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 7 (1991) 79-124, p. 105.

One of the most outspoken statements in this respect has been made by Dietz-Rüdiger Moser. The dominating impulse behind customs like that of St Martin's day was and is to provide a marker for a "christliche Gesamtlebensordnung". The rituals of popular culture testify to "eine religiöse Haltung, die keineswegs ins Diffusen verborgen blieb, sondern über die Liturgie mit ihren vorgeschriebenen Lesungen unmittelbar auf das Verhalten der Gläubigen einwirkte". This liturgical imprint was provided by the lecture of Luke 11, 33f that was found in the *Missale Romanum* from the 13th century onwards and generally prescribed after Trent, until 1969. This lecture inspired the carrying of lanterns – the process was definitely not the other way round – that spread "das 'Licht' (des Glaubens) [...], auf das am Martinstag so konkret wie möglich hingewiesen werden soll". Another lecture, that of Mt 25, 40 (*pauperi datum, Deo datum*), related the legend of St Martin to liturgy and exhorted to love of one's neighbour. In a world alienated nowadays from its religious roots, it was up to the researcher to revive the public consciousness of these connections.⁸¹

Despite its reliance on historical sources, this is essentially an a-historical view. Werner Mezger accepts D.-R. Moser's interpretation of the lanterns on the one hand as highly probable, but also makes some critical comments that make sense. It is unlikely that the participants in St Martin's processions were conscious of the theological connotations of their lanterns. Whether or not this was the case, certainly after the Enlightenment the custom became more secularized. Its Christian meaning was even lost to theologians. Only when the custom was reorganized, particularly in the course of the 20th century, this led "natürlich auch zu einer verstärkten Rückbesinnung auf den religiösen Kontext und dadurch wiederum zur katechetischen Vertiefung der Botschaft des Heiligen".⁸² This way the Christian interpretation becomes historicized.

⁸¹ MOSER: *Bräuche und Feste* 36, 32; cf. 24. "Ein wirklicher Fund", according to H. TRÜMPY: Kirchlicher Einfluß oder christliches System?, in *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 6 (1986) 88-90, p. 89. See also J. KÜSTER: *Wörterbuch der Feste und Bräuche im Jahreslauf. Eine Einführung in den Festkalender* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1985) 124; J. KÜSTER: *Bräuche im Kirchenjahr. Historische Anregungen für die Gestaltung christlicher Festtage* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1986) 103-105. See also the comment of K. MEISEN: Sankt Martin im volkstümlichen Glauben und Brauch, in *Rheinisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 19 (1968) 42-91, p. 91.

⁸² W. MEZGER: "Brenne auf mein Licht...". Zur Entwicklung, Funktion und Bedeutung der Brauchformen des Martinstages, in W. GROß & W. URBAN (eds): *Martin von Tours. Ein Heiliger Europas* (Ostfildern 1997) 273-350, p. 309 and also 319, 329, 343.

As generally accepted nowadays, this course is the most wise to take. The meaning(s) of elements of popular culture are always contingent. They come into being as a result of a complex process of negotiation and appropriation between all kinds of interest groups. They can, however, never be fixed. As circumstances change, there will equally be a propensity to develop new meanings.⁸³ Konrad Köstlin rightly observes, *nota bene* in the *Festschrift* for D.-R. Moser:

Historische Bräuche, ihre Muster und ihr Sachinventar können in der Moderne auf ganz verschiedene und oft widersprüchliche Weise genutzt und eingesetzt werden. Ihr ausdrückliches Zitieren ist oft Bestandteil einer Strategie, gegenwärtige Anliegen und Deutungen aus dem Fundus der Historischen und des ausdrücklich Eigenen zu stützen und so zu legitimieren. Dabei gibt es kein Gebrauchsmusterschutz, und auch keinen warnenden Hinweis.⁸⁴

The Christian interpretation and appropriation of St Martin's day – at least in the 20th century – were only an incident at a very specific moment in its history. Gertrud Angermann witnessed its incipience in Germany in the early 1950s and was probably right in concluding: "Damit war zum erstenmal seit der Reformation der hl. Martin bewußt gefeiert worden." That is, in a Christian sense, referring particularly to the idea of *caritas*.⁸⁵ In The Netherlands this Christian meaning, although not altogether absent in the 1950s, seems to have been only

⁸³ E.g. P. NISSEN: Percepties van sacraliteit. Over religieuze volkscultuur, in DEKKER, ROODENBURG & ROOIJAKKERS (eds): *Volkscultuur* 231-281, p. 242, 247-248; ROOIJAKKERS: Vieren en markeren; MEZGER: *Sankt Nikolaus* 283-291 ('Perspektiven der Brauchanalyse'); H. SCHUHLADEN: Auf der Suche nach Geschichte – Selbstfindung im Mythos. Zu Neuschöpfungen steirischer Nikololäufe, in B. PÖTTLER *et al.* (eds): *Innovation und Wandel. Festschrift für Oskar Moser zum 80. Geburtstag* (Graz 1994) 377-395; W. BRÜCKNER: Brauchforschung tut not, in *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 21 (1998) 107-138; R. JOHLER: Volkskunde – und doch wieder Bräuche. Das Scheibenschlagen, der Funken- und der Hollepfannsonntag, in F. GRIESHOFER & M. SCHINDLER (eds): *Netzwerk Volkskunde. Ideen und Wege. Festgabe für Klaus Beitz zum siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Wien 1999) 655-666.

⁸⁴ K. KÖSTLIN: Sternsingen, Christkind und Eintöpfe. Brauch-Transformationen in die Moderne, in M. SAMMER (ed.): *Leitmotive. Kulturgeschichtliche Studien zur Traditionsbildung. Festschrift für Dietz-Rüdiger Moser zum 60. Geburtstag am 22. März 1999* (Kallmünz 1999) 553-561, p. 560.

⁸⁵ ANGERMANN: Das Martinsbrauchtum 248-249. Sauerermann made similar observations. He also pointed to the tendency that the feast in the 1960s had become "offen für neue Sinngebungen", SAUERERMANN: *Neuzeitliche Formen* 67.

weakly developed. One is tempted to infer that scholars like D.-R. Moser have taken the feast of St Martin's as they encountered it in the 1950/60s for the normal or even normative practice. This is, as research on the popular understanding of the idea of 'tradition' has shown,⁸⁶ a very common phenomenon. When this normative conception is threatened by new developments, a defensive attitude usually is the result. Pointing to new evidence to substantiate the original view may be part of this strategy. Of course, each view plays a role in the arena of meanings. As this game is neverending, however, no one is entitled to claim a final victory.

⁸⁶ A. ERIKSEN: "Like before, just different". Modern popular understandings of the concept of tradition, in *ARV. Nordic yearbook of folklore* 50 (1994) 9-23. Cf. B. BLEHR: On ritual effectiveness. The case of Constitution Day, in *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 1999, 28-43, p. 35-36.