

# Subversive Saints

## Hagiographic and Devotional Publications as a Means of Literary Resistance in and around the Second World War\*

PETER-BEN SMIT

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What would get a busy parish priest and auxiliary bishop to invest time and energy in the publication of bibliophile and devotional editions of legends about saints and of medieval liturgical materials in the period 1940-1945? This question is raised by a series of publications by Utrecht clergyman Engelbertus Lagerwey, who during the Second World War also performed acts of resistance, such as hiding people in the cathedral compound of St. Gertrud's Cathedral (Willemsplantsoen, Utrecht). The titles of his publications sound innocuous enough: in January 1940, *Die Legende van Sinte Willebroert. Gereproduceerd uit het Passionael Winterstuc gedrukt door Gheraert Leeu ter Goude 31 juli 1478* appeared, published by the well-known publisher and printer Leiter-Nypels in Maastricht, the same year and the next saw the publication of two volumes entitled *Helden Gods* with Van Gorcum in Assen, and finally in 1943 *Het brevier van Beatrix van Assendelft* appeared, a bibliophile reprint of a beautifully illumi-

nated medieval manuscript, published by Brill in Leiden.<sup>1</sup> Author or co-author of all of these works was Engelbertus Lagerwey (1880-1959), parish priest of the aforementioned church, belonging to the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands, an office that he combined with service as (titular) Bishop of Deventer from 1941 onwards. The publication of the first and the last of these titles was in cooperation with the notable (Franciscan) book historian Bonaventura Kruitwagen and the Leiden professor Alexander Willem Byvanck respectively. Given the association of all of them with Lagerwey, it stands to reason to view them together as part of his oeuvre, which also included other hagiographic publications (cf. below).

These publications could be explained as a kind of retreat into the relative safety and innocence of the religious sphere by a pious and historically oriented prelate, an example of "innere Emigration".<sup>2</sup> And yet there is more than enough reason to interpret them – and the person behind

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1 Byvanck and Lagerwey, *Het brevier van Beatrix van Assendelft*.

2 Even that, of course, would be a political act – the religious is never apolitical, and the history of hagiography shows that saints and saints' lives are never purely devotional or religious.

them – politically as well, to understand them as the creation of a subtle, yet subversive discourse on the true nature and identity of Dutch society vis-à-vis the invitation to align oneself with the National Socialist paradigm of Aryan or Germanic identity. This will be argued on the basis of an analysis of the contents of the four volumes that Lagerwey (co-)published in these years and by drawing on insights from the “emotional turn” in (political) historical research. In order to do so, I will first give a brief outline of the “emotional turn,” next, I will introduce Lagerwey and his publications, which will be followed by the actual analysis and conclusions.

By addressing the question stated at the outset, this article goes beyond analyzing the particularities of these four publications, the persons involved, and the likely subversive discourse they were involved in: it also shows how previously neglected sources pertaining to the ecclesial and political history of the Netherlands can be mined from an interdisciplinary perspective (history of politics/history of religion), thus enabling a broader appreciation of available materials. In arguing all of this, the assertion is not that what Lagerwey was doing was particularly dangerous or courageous (he would be doing far more dangerous things in the course of the

war) – if it was possible to have someone buried to the tune of the national anthem (as happened with the diplomat Hendrik Muller on August 15, 1941 in The Hague) without any serious consequences,<sup>3</sup> it was certainly possible to publish subversive hagiographies – but mainly to show how such publications contain more layers than one might initially think and that they participate in multiple discourses simultaneously, such as those furthering piety, providing access to history, engaging politics and shaping ecclesial identity. As this article concentrates on one author and his oeuvre (although comparing it to a German counterpart briefly, cf. below), it does not suggest that he, Lagerwey, is unique when it comes to this strategy; it is very likely that it was employed elsewhere as well. Rather, the article intends to suggest a way for future research into what may be called “hidden discourses” in genres such as hagiography.<sup>4</sup>

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## The Emotional Turn: Theoretical Perspective and Example

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The “emotional turn” refers to one of the more recent theoretical shifts in, especially, the writing of political history.<sup>5</sup> Its theory can also be applied to other parts of history as well, and relig-

3 As, e.g., reported in *Het Vaderland: Staat- en letterkundig nieuwsblad* of August 15, 1941, 3.

4 For hidden transcripts, see Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 3-4; Street, *An Analysis of the Lord's Supper*; Horsley, “Introduction”; Van Henten, “Martyrdom, Jesus Passion and Barbarism.”

5 For this and the following, I am indebted to the research team executing the project *Blueprints of Hope: Designing Post-War Europe: Ideas, Emotions, Networks and Negotiations (1930-1963)* at Utrecht University's Departments of History and Art History and of Philosophy and Religious Studies, particularly Prof. Dr. Beatrice de Graaf, Prof. Dr. Mathieu Segers (Maastricht University College), Dr. Trineke Palm, Clemens van den Berg, MA, Jorrit Steehouder, MA, and Susanne Keesman, MA. The project uses a similar approach in terms of combining the history of religion and the history of politics and also employs insights from the emotional turn.

ious history, given the strong affective dimension of religion, is one that may particularly benefit from the reception of the insights of the “emotional turn” as it has emerged out of the work of Reddy.<sup>6</sup> Understanding emotions as being socially constructed and emotives as those terms, concepts or images that facilitate “directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions”<sup>7</sup> and therefore as tools that can be used in the service of all sorts of goals, this turn acknowledges that politics and political discourse do not only function on the basis of rational arguments or the pursuit of interests but are also driven by “emotionally charged” discourse that can lead people to move in a certain direction.<sup>8</sup> This can lead to the building of coalitions that would seem appear unexpected from a purely rational perspective (e.g., both left and right wing parties allying around the emotive “self-determination”) or a perspective focused on the pursuit of self-interest. Words or images are not by themselves “emotives” but are rather transformed into emotives due to their frequent emotionally charged use in a particular context. The use of the insights from the “emotional turn” does not amount to writing a history of emotions: the point is not how emotions developed throughout history but rather how emotions and the words, ideas and images that “carried” and evoked them played a role in historical discourse; accordingly, research along these lines is akin to discourse analysis.

While this is the theoretical perspective offered by the “emotional turn” in

a nutshell, the question is how it might function practically. An eloquent example, which can also show how words function as “emotives”, can be found in the rhetoric employed by the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB; National Socialist Movement), the Dutch NS party, led by Anton Mussert, both prior to and during the Second World War and NS occupation of the Netherlands. An example drawn from its daily *Het Nationale Dagblad* (“The national daily”) can both illustrate the theory and prepare the way for the analysis of Lagerwey’s publications. I will focus on an article reporting on the funeral of a member of the paramilitary wing of the NSB, the “Weerbaarheidsafdeling” (WA), by the name of Hans Pelzer, who had been killed in an altercation between the WA and the Dutch “Maréchaussée”, a part of the Dutch military, generally fulfilling military and civil police duties. During the NS occupation of the Netherlands, it had been made part of the national police force (given the disbanding of the Dutch army). Pelzer was killed on March 22, 1941 and the report on his funeral in *Het Nationale Dagblad* was published five days later on March 27. In this report, a number of terms appear that can be identified as “emotives”, as they also appear elsewhere in similar constellations and with a similar (even if differently oriented) emotional appeal.

In the report on Pelzer’s death and funeral, words appear that have a religious background and that function in what can be best described as a religio-political context. It should be

6 Cf. esp. the foundational work by Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*.

7 *Ibid.*, 105.

8 Cf., e.g., Koschut, “Emotional (Security) Communities.” Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 89-92, refers to “affective glue” in this respect.

noted that the death and burial took place in Limburg, a bulwark of Roman Catholicism in the Netherlands, a place where Catholic religious vocabulary was well known and an area littered with churches, chapels, monasteries, publicly displayed crucifixes and statues of saints. Examples of emotives in the report include the reference to Pelzer's death as a "sacrifice" (Dutch: "offer"), which is stressed by calling it "the ultimate sacrifice" ("het hoogste offer") a few lines later. These terms must have had an evocative function, given the positively charged meaning of the word in religious discourse (i.e., in relation to Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, daily represented in a multitude of Masses said throughout Limburg) and in political discourse (as will be indicated below). Furthermore, Pelzer is described as "having died a hero's death in the battle for people and fatherland" ("als een held in den strijd voor Volk en Vaderland" – "Volk en Vaderland" was also the title of the NSB weekly). His sacrificial death is then described as having taken place "in unswerving faithfulness to his sacred ideal" ("in onwankelbaren trouw aan zijn heilig ideal"). This is then followed by jibes against the Roman Catholic Church, which had refused Pelzer the last sacraments due to his (sinful) membership of the NSB. Apparently, the NSB would have valued the administration of these sacraments, presumably as a sign of approval from the Church. Yet, the report goes on to state that Pelzer was nonetheless buried in consecrated ground ("gewijde aarde"), which apparently could be enforced by the NSB

given that the burial in this manner was a sign of the "power that our movement already has" ("de kracht welke onze Beweging reeds heeft"). Apart from demonstrating rather problematic political sympathies, the report shows how terms such as "people" ("volk"), "fatherland" ("vaderland"), "holy" ("gewijd", "heilig"), "sacrifice" ("offer") and hero ("held") can function together and work towards moving the reader to a positive identification with the heroic personality of Pelzer and the ideals that he embodied and for which he died. The newspaper report was part of the beginning of an intentional memorialization of Pelzer (and other killed NSB members) that led to the production of related materials such as postcards. Based on their role in this report and on further research in the newspaper archive [delpher.nl](http://delpher.nl), the terms listed here function, it can be argued, as "emotives" and were used in various combinations throughout newspapers and other publications of various political persuasions. When researching in what contexts these terms appear, it is clear that the number of hits in the period 1910-1939 is much higher than in the preceding period and the decades that followed, with steadily declining numbers in 1940-1949. A closer analysis of samples shows that articles using some combination of these terms stem from journals and authors of all sorts of political inclinations and usually seek to steer the reader toward a particular understanding of true national identity and virtues by appealing to particular embodiments of this identity: that is, heroes who pursue the sacred cause of

making sacrifices for the fatherland.<sup>9</sup> The emotional appeal of these terms in this period seems to be apparent, even though their exact meaning depends on the context. For example, journals published by the Dutch resistance ironically used the vocabulary of “heroism” in order to mock SS soldiers who attacked and humiliated defenseless people.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the vocabulary used in the aforementioned report on Pelzer’s death is so general that it can only be identified as being National Socialist in orientation by its introductory line – “Again, we have lost a national socialist from our ranks, as he was killed by the bullet of another Dutchman” (“Opnieuw is een nationaal-socialist onzen rijen ontval- len, gedood door den kogel van een anderen Nederlander”) – which points to the tragic character of Pelzer’s death: a true patriot killed by another Dutchman (at least from the NSB’s perspective). Without this remark, however, the report could just as well have been written about any other person pursuing the cause of nationalism from the different political perspective: in other words, the

same “emotional vocabulary” was used for promoting competing concepts of nationalism. It will be shown below how Lagerwey’s work fits into this, but at this point it is worth noting that across the border in Germany a similar competition with a similar shared “emotional vocabulary” used in different contexts was taking place. For example, the discourse around the NS hero *par excellence*, Horst Wessel, deploys very similar expressions,<sup>11</sup> whereas the Roman Catholic publication *Helden und Heilige* by Hans Hümmeler, a widely circulated publication in Germany, used the presentation of German saints to steer its readership in a rather different direction, one in line with Roman Catholic criticism of National Socialism. Its post-war preface is quite explicit about the intention and reception of this work, positioning it in the context of the NS *Machtsergreifung* of 1933, which led to the necessity of “dem falschen und verlogenen Heldenideal der Männer des Dritten Reiches das Bild der religiösen Kämpfer und begnadeten Heiligen entgegenzustellen.”<sup>12</sup> Hümmeler was tasked with the preparation of

9 Cf. for a selection: “Dagorders en oproepen bij de jaarwisselingen,” published in a number of newspapers, such as *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, January 3, 1944, 2 (instructions by the NS authorities), “Vaderland verdient den besten Frontsoldaat,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, January 3, 1944, 2 (reproducing text of Adolf Hitler). By contrast, the piece “Onverantwoordelijke elementen?,” in *Trouw*, June 15, 1944, 2, on the sacrificial death for the fatherland of resistance activists who were executed, uses the same vocabulary, which recurs in an “In Memoriam,” in *Trouw*, May 15, 1944, 2. This also applies to a piece “Het Voedselprobleem,” in *Het Parool*, November 18, 1944, 1 (in which the notion of “sacrifice” is also criticized). See, following the liberation, also the text of a speech by Queen Wilhelmina, reproduced in *Het Parool*, June 28, 1945, 1.

10 See, e.g., “Sinistere wraakoefening van de Landwacht-helden,” *De Waarheid*, August 18, 1944, 2; “Om uw durf en om uw daad,” *De Waarheid*, February 16, 1944, 2, and “Duitse heldenmoed,” in *De Onderduiker*, March 8, 1945, 1. See also a brief note on the “heroic” conduct of Anton Mussert, the leader of the NSB, who had moved closer to the German border in 1944, *Trouw*, December 1, 1944, 1.

11 Cf. in general: Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden*; Siemens, *Horst Wessel*.

12 Cf. Hümmeler, *Helden und Heilige*, ix. I was not able to discover whether Lagerwey was familiar with this work, but the parallels are striking. My thanks to Prof. Dr. Em. Franz Segbers, Marburg, for the reference.

a publication that could fulfil this aim: “ihr [sc. der Heiligen] Leben und Werk und die in ihnen leibhaft gewordenen religiösen Kräfte und Wahrheiten in knapper Form, aber historisch echt in der Sprache unserer Zeit und in Anlehnung an den kirchlichen Festkalender darzustellen.” The point was not lost on the Nazis, who eventually banned the book, publication of which only resumed after 1948.<sup>13</sup> Keeping this in mind, we can now turn to Lagerwey and his publications.

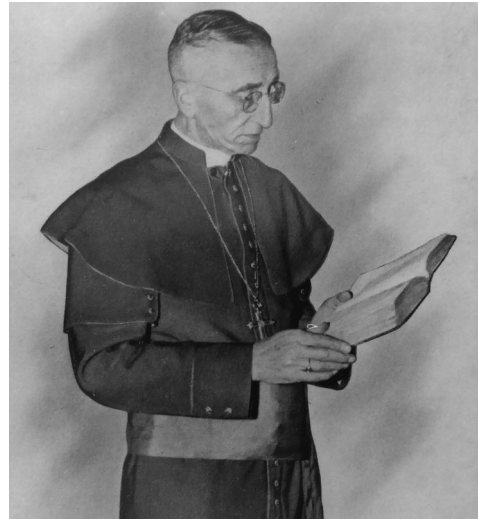
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## Engelbertus Lagerwey: Biographical Outline

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In order to contextualize the four publications by Lagerwey (and his colleagues) mentioned above, a brief sketch of his life and the church that he served is needed. His biography gives every reason to suspect that he was into more than just pretty books and devout legends in the 1940s.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Engelbertus Lagerwey was one of the more striking figures within the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands, one who helped this church transition from its identity as “oud-bisschoppelijke cleresie” to “Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland”.<sup>14</sup> He was born in Amsterdam on September 26, 1880, nine years before the establishment of what would



Engelbertus Lagerwey, n.d.  
[Utrecht, Catharijneconvent: OKMf119]

become known as the “Union of Utrecht” of Old Catholic Churches in 1889.<sup>15</sup> The Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands – as it was increasingly known since the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>16</sup> – is the Catholic Church in the Netherlands that has continued its life as a church since the Protestant Reformation and the so-called schism of Utrecht (1723/1724), which was, after a long change of events, instantiated by the excommunication by Roman authorities of the duly elected and consecrated Archbishop of Utrecht, Cornelis Steenoven, along with the clergy and faithful of this church. The church derived its popular name, “[oud-bisschoppelijke] Cleresie”, from its adherence to its (arch)

13 For an even broader perspective, see Van Eijnatten, Van Lieburg and De Waardt (eds.), *Heiligen of Helden*, who employ the notions “saint” and “hero” as part of a heuristic framework to highlight “iconic” personalities.

14 For this and the following, see Van der Velde, “Working for Things Eternal”; for the development in the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands in this period, see also Clemens, “Franciscus Kenninck”.

15 On the Union of Utrecht, see Schoon, “The Union of Utrecht”.

16 For this and the following, see especially Schoon, *Van bisschoppelijke Cleresie tot Oud-Katholieke Kerk*.

bishop and the rejection of his excommunication. Following this break with Rome, the Catholic Church became a minority church, led by (arch)bishops of Utrecht, Haarlem and Deventer. It was marginalized further by the appointment of competing bishops by the Vatican in 1853 (the institution of an alternative episcopal hierarchy for believers in communion with Rome).<sup>17</sup> The (thus far) primarily canonical dispute between this Catholic Church in the Netherlands and the Roman Catholic Church was increased by the unilateral introduction of the new dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. This prompted these Dutch Catholics to reorient themselves, given that the Roman Catholic Church was no longer a viable Catholic partner. Turning back to the “early church”, as it had been part of its tradition since the Augustinianist controversies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it began a slow process of renewal and revitalization. This process found affirmation and support in the *Altkatholische Bewegung* (“Old Catholic movement”) of the nineteenth century – inspired by theologians such as Ignaz von Döllinger – which resisted the new dogma of 1854 along with the new papal dogmas of 1870 (First Vatican Council) and the ultramontanization of the Roman Catholic Church at large, of which these dogmas were representative. When many “Old Catholics” were excommunicated following their decision to remain faithful to the Catholic

faith and not to submit to the papally proclaimed new dogmas, they continued the faith in newly established dioceses in Germany (“Katholisches Bistum der Alt-Katholiken in Deutschland”), Switzerland and the Habsburg Monarchy. These new churches – new in the sense of being newly constituted canonically – had an ecumenical mindset from the start and found themselves in partnership with the Dutch Catholics, a partnership that eventually led to what would become known as the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches in 1889. It is in this dynamic of theological repristination and ecumenical rapprochement that Lagerwey lived and served.

Growing up in Amsterdam, Lagerwey attended primary school and subsequently received an education at the municipal grammar school and Old Catholic Seminary in Amersfoort.<sup>18</sup> Following his ordination to the diaconate and priesthood in 1903 and 1905 respectively, he served as a parish priest in Zaandam (1905-1910), Dordrecht (1910-1924) and finally in Utrecht, where he was in charge of the cathedral church of St. Gertrud, a ministry that he would exercise from 1924 until his retirement in 1945. In 1941 he became (titular) Bishop of Deventer, an office that he would hold until his death on March 13, 1959.

During his ministry, Lagerwey developed a very broad range of interests related to the fields of (adult) religious education, the social and political involvement of the church, the pres-

17 The historiographically common term “herstel van de bisschoppelijke hiërarchie” is a confessionally inspired misnomer that ignores the existence of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands with its bishops firmly in place. This outline employs a point of view that goes slightly against the grain of much historiography of the period. Apart from the value of stressing a minority perspective, it has the advantage of coming close to the atmosphere in which Lagerwey grew up.

18 On its history, see: Berlis and Hallebeek, “Das Seminar der niederländischen Kirche.”

ervation of the cultural heritage of the church, the liturgical and devotional praxis of the church and the ecumenical commitment of the Old Catholic Church, with a particular emphasis on a recognizably Catholic voice in the emerging ecumenical movement. His episcopal heraldic motto reflects this hard-working attitude (and was probably intended somewhat tongue-in-cheek, which would have suited his personality): “Eternitati Laboremus” – let us work for eternity (the first letters of these words also correspond to the initials E[ngelbertus] L[agerwey]). Examples of his projects include the opening of an “Old Catholic museum” in the former hidden church of St. Gertrud (now the conference center “In de Driehoek”; the collection has been loaned to Museum Catherijneconvent)<sup>19</sup> and the initiation of the large Willibrord exhibition and commemoration of 1939 (of which the current statue at the Janskerkhof is still a tangible reminder; due to historical circumstances, the statue was only placed there in 1947).<sup>20</sup> During the Second World War, he supported ecclesial protest and resistance, both ecumenically and within the Old Catholic Church itself. For example, he formally protested the compulsory use of the “German salute” (“Germaanse groet” – the common English rendering “German salute” renders the racial rather than national connotation somewhat invisible, “Germanic” would be

better) by people who were (forcibly) drafted into the *Arbeitseinsatz*. He also found liturgical ways to have the Old Catholics pray more emphatically for their rightful government, while appearing to yield to the Nazi demand to cease prayer for the queen. At great personal risk, he also housed persons in hiding in the cathedral complex, notably in the former hidden church, the “Old Catholic museum”. These included the mayor of Utrecht, G. A. W. ter Pelkwijk. He also found ways for people to escape duty in the *Arbeitseinsatz*.<sup>21</sup> In all this, Lagerwey’s position was far from self-explanatory; his brother, for example, as Van der Velde has shown, was a member of the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, just across the border, the Old Catholic Church of Germany was pursuing a course that was very sympathetic, to put it mildly, to National Socialism, making the most of what many saw as a convenient synergy between its own emphasis on national, German (i.e., non-Roman) Catholicism and the nationalism of the NS regime.<sup>23</sup> Institutionally, the position of the Dutch Old Catholic Church during the Second World War seems to have been cautious, possibly somewhat indecisive; it did not, for example, take as firm a stance vis-à-vis the NSB as other churches, and it was only affiliated with – rather than a member of – the “Interkerkelijk Overleg” (Interchurch Consultation) of (Protestant) churches. The history of the

19 Cf. Verhey, *Het Oud-Katholiek Museum*.

20 Exhaustively discussed by Van Schaik, “Waar alle richtingen samenkomen.” Cf. also Van der Velde, “Working for Things Eternal.”

21 See: Van Schaik, “Waar alle richtingen samenkomen” and Van der Velde, “Working for Things Eternal.”

22 Van der Velde, “Working for Things Eternal,” 160.

23 See especially the extensive study by Ring, “*Katholisch und deutsch*” and documentation in Idem (ed.), “...dass auch wir mitschuldig geworden sind.”



Old Catholic Church during the Second World War still needs to be written.<sup>24</sup>

These various forays into ecclesial heritage and art history, the political and social role of the church and a commitment to the edification of the faithful may appear somewhat fragmented, but it seems that in Lagerwey's work they constituted a coherent whole. He was evidently able to find the political, social and ecclesial relevance of what he unearthed in church history, the history of art and the history of spirituality. For the large Willibrord exhibition and commemoration of 1939 – 1200 years

after the death of the "Apostle to the Frisians" – Lagerwey was not only committed to bringing exquisite ecclesial art to Utrecht; he simultaneously drew on Willibrord as a source of ecumenical inspiration, as Van Schaik has duly recognized,<sup>25</sup> and emphasized what Willibrord's international attitude, as a boundary crossing missionary, meant for the twentieth century, given that the late 1930s witnessed weakening internationalism and an increase in the influence of the enemies of the faith (as he put it in an article in the weekly *De Oud-Katholiek*).<sup>26</sup> Somewhat ominously, the

24 See, apart from the official report on behalf of the church (Verhey, *De Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland*), esp. Smit, "Andreas Rinkel," 66-108, and Van der Velde, "Working for Things Eternal," 170-174.

25 Cf. Van Schaik, "Waar alle richtingen samenkomen" – The title of Van Schaik's essay is also a reference to the ecumenical significance of the event.

26 See: Lagerwey, "De viering van Willibrords twaalfde eeuwgetijden." It contains a number of striking remarks, starting off with "In somberen tijd viert ons volk het feest van zijn Apostel. Niet de juichende klank van blijde klokken, maar het dof dreunen van het kanon en de heesche kreten van in nood en doodsangst worstelende christenen vergezellen de dankbeden en de plechtige offers in dezen tijd. Zoo kende ook Willibrord zijn land, volk, kerk en tijd." He also recalls the remembrance of Willibrord by the apostolic vicars of the post-Reformation Catholic Church in the Northern Low Countries as someone who built up the church in a time of troubles, noting that this leads to questions for today: "stellen we de vraag hoe ons geslacht zal handelen, als door aan het geloof vijandige machten de kerk onder de voet geloopt wordt en hoe zij zal reageren, als een te ver gedreven nationalisme of verwaterd internationalisme haar bestaan gevaarlijker bedriegt dan destijds [sc. during the Protestant Reformation] het geval was met materiele verwoesting harer gebouwen en roof harer bezittingen?" (337-338) Near his conclusion and following on remarks about the art historical treasures related to Willibrord's commemoration, he states that art is not the most important piece of heritage ("erfdeel") deriving from the veneration of "our apostle" ("in de vereering van onzen apostel"), instead: "Sprekender is, dat zijn naam in de officieele misliturgie staat en mitsdien iedere maal, als het heilig Offer wordt gevierd, onze biddende aandacht gevraagd wordt voor hem, die in Gods handen het werktuig was, waardoor het voorgelacht (en ook wij) onttrokken werd aan Satans helse macht." (338) Cf. Van der Velde, "Working for Things Eternal," 177. For a further contribution with a similar view of Willibrord's international relevance (in relation to Anglican – Old Catholic contacts), see: Lagerwey, "Der heilige Willibrordus," esp. 151-152. On the idea of the principally supra-local orientation of a church, see also Id., "Selbständigkeit einer Kirche", in which Lagerwey categorically rejects the notion of "independence" for a church from a Catholic perspective. The context of his article is a questionnaire of the World Council of Church (in formation) among its (future) members concerning their ecclesiological views. – Lagerwey can also emphasize other aspects of Willibrord, of course. For instance, in a brief contribution to *Maandblad Oud-Utrecht* ("Over de Willibrord-Herdenking," June 1939, 41-42), he mainly focuses on Willibrord as the one who brought Christianity to the Netherlands, his significance for all churches and the historical and art historical importance of the upcoming exhibition. Yet, ignoring this

exhibition had to be terminated early due to the outbreak of the Second World War, which seemed to confirm Lagerwey's concerns expressed in this article. While he obviously couldn't control that, he could maintain an ecumenical and internationalist accent at the start of the exhibition *cum* commemoration, on (still) neutral terrain. The Church of England was represented by the bishops of Gloucester (the ecumenist A. C. Headlam, himself a supporter of the Protestant *Reichskirche* rather than of the *Bekennende Kirche*) and of Ripon (G. C. L. Lunt; Willibrord grew up as an oblate of the abbey of Ripon) were both invited and also attended;<sup>27</sup> unfortunately, the invitation to the episcopate of the Old Catholic *Reichskirche* (an involuntary combination of the Old Catholic Churches of Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia) was not accepted for political reasons. The significance of the Anglican (and English) bishops in times of war was not lost on the people involved, as Methuen has shown.<sup>28</sup>

It is, therefore, in the context of his biography and his approach to historical matters that Lagerwey's hagiographical and bibliophile publications for 1940, 1941 and 1943 need to be situ-

ated. Such contexts also provide further evidence that these publications might be more than didactic and aesthetic in nature. Whether this may indeed be the case will now be tested by considering the four publications chronologically. Methodologically, therefore, this article does not view Lagerwey's publications on their own, but positions them firmly within the context of other expressions of his opinions and position elsewhere; this contextualization allows us to read between the lines to see just what was at stake with these publications.

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### Lagerwey's Book Publications 1940-1945

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Against this background, here Lagerwey's book publications from the period 1940-1945 will be discussed in the order listed above.<sup>29</sup> First, the two volumes of hagiographies will be discussed, and then the insights from these books, as works by Lagerwey alone, will be brought to bear on the two co-authored (or, rather, co-edited) volumes: the medieval life of Willibrord and the breviary of Beatrijs of Assendelft.

international and somewhat political aspect seems to be ignoring a significant dimension of the Willibrord commemoration of 1939. This would also apply to the statue of Willibrord, now on the Janskerkhof. Cf. Van Schaik, "Stapvoets voorwaarts op het Janskerkhof"

27 Van Schaik, "Waar alle richtingen samenkomen," 342.

28 Cf. Methuen, "Close and friendly relations," 98, quoting from the correspondence between Alan Don, chaplain, to Archbishop Gordon Lang of Canterbury and Arthur Headlam: "The Archbishop of Canterbury sees no reason why you and the Bishop of Fulham, along with Usher and Douglas if they wish to accompany you, should not risk your lives by crossing the North Sea to take part in the Willibrord Celebrations in Utrecht on November 7th. His grace admires your enterprise and courage." (Letter of October 20, 1939.)

29 Lagerwey also played an important role in the publication of a new Old Catholic hymnal, *Gezangboek ten dienste van de Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland* (1942). His precise contribution is, however, difficult to ascertain and a clear political program is hard to detect in this multi-author work.



Woodcut "The legend of St. Ludger", by Johannes Mulders (1899-1989), published in Engelbertus Lagerwey, *Helden Gods. Legenden van Nederlandse heiligen*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1940-1941, 2 vols. [Utrecht, Catharijneconvent: OKM g1671.4]

### **God's Heroes: Helden Gods. Legenden van Nederlandse heiligen**

Let us begin with the two-volume *Helden Gods. Legenden van Nederlandse heiligen* ("Heroes of God. Legends of Dutch Saints") that appeared in the Van Gorcum editions in 1940 and 1941 (with illustrations by Johannes Mulder).<sup>30</sup> These two volumes contain prefaces that make explicit some of the underlying concerns of Lagerwey, who appears as the sole author of the books.

### **Helden Gods – Volume 1**

In the introduction to the first part of the *Helden Gods* (1940), published about a month and a half before the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands,<sup>31</sup> Lagerwey details his motivation for publishing these legends. He tells how he came across the medieval edition of saints' legends by Gerard Leeu at the beginning of

30 These woodcuts were colored by Mulder in a limited number of copies; although much simpler in its execution than the 1940 edition of the legend of St. Willibrord, the *Helden Gods* were not without beautification either. The illustrations are forceful and bring out key episodes and their characters in a paradigmatic manner.

31 Cf. the review in *De Oud-Katholiek*, 50:56 (February 21, 1940), 325 (front page).

the 1930s (“een jaar of tien geleden”).<sup>32</sup> He regretted that such “precious Dutch property” (“kostelijk Nederlands bezit”) had largely been forgotten, particularly as it contains “treasures of religious, moral, literary, exalted poetic, truly patriotic value.”<sup>33</sup> He classified the genre of the texts as “legends, i.e. texts that are to be read” (“*legenden*, d.i. *leesstukken*”),<sup>34</sup> taking the word *legend* literally. For this reason, the texts are “no fairytales, no saga’s, no myths” (“geen sprookjes, geen sagen, geen mythen”) but rather liturgical texts from the tradition of the church that preserve the accounts of the “heroic death of her blood witnesses or martyrs as well as the courageous confession of the faith of her heroes” (“heldhaftige dood van haar bloedgetuigen of martelaren, alsook die van de kloekmoedige belijdenis des geloofs van haar helden”) in order for them to be read in services.<sup>35</sup> The aim of doing so is twofold, according to Lagerwey: to honour “God in his saints” (“God in zijn heiligen”) and to support the faithful “by providing them with edification on their often very difficult journeys of life” (“door hun stichting te geven op hun vaak zeer zwaar begaanbaar levenspad”). Although Lagerwey seems to think principally of the early

church when he writes this, he stresses that the legends, now part of the offices of the church (Matins), retain this function.<sup>36</sup> He next discusses the collection and transmission of such legends, which is of lesser relevance for this study.<sup>37</sup> He offers an account of how he selected the legends, and it appears that he used other sources than the Leeu. Importantly, he indicates his criteria for selection: he has chosen such legends “that are related to our fatherland and more specifically to the Church of Utrecht” (“welke met ons vaderland en nog in het bijzonder met de Utrechtse kerk in verband staan”).<sup>38</sup> He moreover stresses that “our work is, therefore, of particular value for our own people” (“Ons werk is derhalve voor ons eigen volk bijzonder van waarde”).<sup>39</sup>

Next, Lagerwey discusses the extent to which these legends are true and how one should read them. He emphasizes the symbolical (“zinnebeeldig”) character of the legends and suggests that they be read in this light: in the Dutch artistic tradition, it is not the form that matters but the spirit that is communicated.<sup>40</sup> Lagerwey shows how this symbolical character informs the writing of all of the (medieval) authors involved and in

32 Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, I, 7. The medieval edition by Gerard Leeu is: *Passionael: Winterende Somerstuc* 1-2 (Gouda, 1478-1480), which is (largely) a translation of sections of Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea*. Lagerwey seems to intend to perform in the 20th century the same service as Leeu did in the 15th century: making the legends accessible in a Dutch translation.

33 Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, I, 7.

34 *Ibid.* Italics in the original.

35 Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, I, 7-8.

36 *Ibid.*, I, 8.

37 *Ibid.*, I, 8-9.

38 *Ibid.*, I, 9.

39 *Ibid.*, I, 9.

40 *Ibid.*, I, 9: “Zo [sc. zinnebeeldig, pbs] is feitelijk onze gehele vaderlandse, echt-Nederlandse kunst, die in haar vorm niet het uiterlijke vertellen, maar de geest gestalte geven wil.”

doing so addresses what makes a saint a saint. He argues that the saints, who have lived a beautiful (“schoon”) and courageous (“kloek”) life – Lagerwey emphasizes that there is no contradiction between these two characteristics – are called “saints” because “God’s grace has had a more evident and more splendid effect in their lives than in our lives.”<sup>41</sup> It is therefore not an institution such as a pope or a Vatican congregation that makes someone a saint, nor is someone a saint because she or he performs miracles. Rather, the saints are only saints “because God has been glorified in them and through them.”<sup>42</sup> He develops this point of view further by arguing the following: “God has given these people the power to perform supernatural deeds, but this only to some of them, yet all of them the power to be heroes, to be heroes in suffering for his Name’s sake, heroes in self-denial, heroes in courageous behavior, heroes in faithfulness, heroes in navigating the great dangers and small inconveniences of everyday life.”<sup>43</sup> These saints should therefore be seen as *exempla*, who “ignite a desire” (“begeerte doen ontbranden”) in the reader “to honor Him as a hero of God” (“als held van God Hem te eren”) by following the example they have set.<sup>44</sup>

These theological remarks about what makes a saint a saint – though they can be read as being more than just theological, as will be shown below – are followed by a paragraph in which Lagerwey notes that his book will feature “fellow countrymen” (“landgenoten”) who also proclaimed the gospel elsewhere (i.e., abroad and “as ‘pioneers’ of Christian civilization and society”).<sup>45</sup> He emphasizes this particularly for the contemporary Dutch reader, who may be inspired to embrace this international aspect of these “national saints.” In the final paragraph of his introduction, Lagerwey addresses the question of the contemporary relevance of his work by narrating a dialogue between himself and an either fictitious (or at least unidentifiable) interlocutor by the name of Frobenius, who asked him whether this book had any contemporary relevance, which Lagerwey affirms emphatically.<sup>46</sup>

Lagerwey’s introduction – with its emphasis on the contemporary relevance of the book as well as a title that seems to play on the discourse surrounding “sacred” heroism and nationalism during the 1930s and 1940s – prompts us to consider the contents of the book in light of the social and political situation of 1940. In doing so, a number of aspects of the book appear some-

41 Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, I, 10: “omdat Gods genade in hen merkbaarder heeft gewerkt, en luisterrijker uitgeschenen, dan in onze levens.”

42 Ibid., I, 10: “God door hen en in hen verheerlijkt is.”

43 Ibid., I, 10: “God heeft dezen mensen kracht gegeven, sommigen hunner slechts, om bovennatuurlijke daden te doen, allen om held te zijn, held in het lijden om zijn Naam, held in zelfverloochening, held in moed, held in trouw, held in de grote gevaren en in de kleine pijnen van het leven alledagen.”

44 Ibid., I, 10-11.

45 Ibid., I, 11: “als ‘voortrekkers’ der christelijke beschaving en samenleving.”

46 Ibid., I, 11: “Mijn Frobenius vroeg of in onze tijd dit boek ook waarde zou hebben. Mijn mening gaf ik in twee woorden: juist nu!” – “Juist nu” has been underlined in the edition present in the collection of the library of the University of Amsterdam, but it cannot be traced to a particular owner or reader of the book.

what striking, beginning with the title, which seems to contradict the book's content. Although the title announces "Dutch saints" ("Nederlandse heiligen"), hardly any of the saints are Dutch or, to remain in the time of the legends, Frisian. The people that Lagerwey presents are a very international. The reader has to wait until page 89 (out of 151) until s/he encounters a saint who is completely Frisian: St. Ludger. Prior this, a series of others has already been presented: Willibrordus, Suitbertus, Adelbertus, Willibaldus, Wunibaldus, the two Ewalds, Werenfrids, Engelmundus, Wiro, Plechelmus, Otger, Marcelinnus, a series of further companions of Willibrordus, then Bonifatius, Gregorius, Albrik, Radboud and Lebuinus. These are all saints with an Anglo-Saxon, Irish, Frankish or other foreign background. This also applies to many of the saints following Ludger. All of this is somewhat curious, then, given that Lagerwey states in his introduction that he will be offering legends of saints who had a special relationship with "our fatherland" and in particular with the Church of Utrecht.<sup>47</sup> The book's title raises a different kind of expectation. Furthermore, Lagerwey frequently uses modern designations – such as "England" or "Ireland", countries that did not necessarily exist as such in the Middle Ages – to indicate the provenance of his saints, thus linking them to the known geography of twentieth-century Europe. This is consistent with his international-

ist attitude elsewhere and echoes the remarks in his introduction about going beyond national boundaries (see above). The extent to which national origins are relativized (or transcended) in these legends is apparent from a commentary on the life of Albrik: "This holy bishop is therefore famous, even if one disagrees about his place of birth (sc. either York or the Frankish realm) and of his grave (sc. Utrecht or Susteren), from which one may learn that God knows his saints anyway, even if human beings know neither where they are from nor the spot where they are awaiting the resurrection of the dead."<sup>48</sup> Instead of a geographical (or, rather, national and ethnic) frame of reference, the identity of Lagerwey's saints is determined by their relationship to God, from whom a saint also derives his (or her – volume one of Lagerwey's legends discusses only one woman, Cunera) holiness. The definition of "Dutch saints" therefore corresponds with Lagerwey's international outlook both in his introduction and in commentary concerning the Willibrord commemoration of 1939. A common faith unites people, and they derive their holiness from the God who belongs to this faith; on the basis of that sanctity, they can also act as heroes. This approach conflicts, of course, with other narratives about holiness, heroism and (inter-) national community that were circulating in the 1930s and 1940s. For example, the National-Socialists envisioned an

47 Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, I, "welke met ons vaderland en nog in het bijzonder met de Utrechtse kerk in verband staan."

48 Ibid., I, 82: "Zo is deze heilige bisschop beroemd, niettegenstaande men over zijn geboorteplaats [sc. York of uit het Frankische rijk] en zijn graf [sc. Utrecht of Susteren] van mening verschilt, waaruit men moge weten, dat God zijn heiligen toch wel weet te bewaren, al kennen ook de mensen hun herkomst niet noch het plekje, waar zij wachten op de opstanding uit de dode."

international community (if it was worth the name) based on race and an appropriation of space in accordance with that; the ability to act heroically was rooted in one's embodying of the "spirit" ("Geist") of a particular people, understood as a racial/ethnic entity. It was in this way that heroes of National Socialism were celebrated, often through the use of a term also employed by Lagerwey: blood witnesses ("Blutzeugen" resp. "bloed-getuigen"), a common enough expression that helps to link the various discourses of heroism with each other linguistically and conceptually – they are part of one discourse.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Helden Gods* – Volume 2**

If the first volume of the *Helden Gods* can be read along somewhat subversive lines, what can be said about its second instalment, as it appeared in 1941?<sup>50</sup> The introduction to the volume is again of particular interest and not only because Lagerwey now takes the time to give an account of his sources (both primary and secondary). To begin with, Lagerwey notes that the legends demonstrate "the extent to which the people ("volk") honored its saints in the church and beyond the church – within the family and through processions and pilgrimages."<sup>51</sup> This dual reference to "saints" and "people" is significant in this context, given that the same combination of terms occurs in contemporary

narratives about national identity and holiness. In addition to this remark from the beginning of his preface, Lagerwey also comments on the relatively modest character of his book: all sorts of scholarly, theological or philological aspects could not be considered. And yet, who knows what the future will bring, he adds. He himself continues to hope for better times ("hopen op rijker tijden"): "who knows, maybe the loftiest wishes will also be fulfilled one day!"<sup>52</sup> Is Lagerwey referring only to the desires and wishes of his more critical readers, or is his statement more general, relating to the social and political situation in the Netherlands? Lagerwey concludes with a kind of blessing that strongly suggests the latter: "May God, who is wondrous in his saints, fulfil them (sc. "the loftiest wishes") for us, even beyond our prayers and expectations, reward us with peace and crown us with glory!"<sup>53</sup> These remarks can, again, be read on two levels. The first is the polite and devotional or even devout level, a humble excuse for the modest and limited character of the publication together with a pious benediction. The second is the political and social level, dearly held wishes that were more political than scholarly and included a yearning for peace and victory in the war ("crown us with glory").

So far, only the beginning and the end of Lagerwey's introduction to his second volume of legends has been considered. Reading it from the perspective of the

49 Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, I, 7-8. Cf. Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden*; Siemens, *Horst Wessel*.

50 Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, II.

51 Ibid., II, 7: "de mate, waarin het volk zijn helden in de kerk en daarbuiten – in gezinskring en met optochten en bedevaarten – eer beweest."

52 Ibid., II, 10: "Wie weet worden de hoogste wensen ook niet nog eens vervuld."

53 Ibid., II, 10: "Moge God, die wonderlijk is in zijn heiligen, ze [sc. de hoogste wensen] aan ons vervullen boven bidden en verwachten, ons lonen met vrede en kronen met glorie!"

emotional turn, however, draws attention to the scholarly core of the introduction, which has more to offer than just a list of sources and an account of Lagerwey's working methods. The modest (amateur) scholar, as Lagerwey presents himself in this preface, can be seen as appealing to the reader's sympathies – the tone is humble and even somewhat self-deprecatory; he does not brag about the highly successful Willibrord commemoration, for example, or tout his ecclesial offices – while at the same time deploying the vocabulary of scholarship with all its associations of trustworthiness and objectivity. This latter attitude may also be seen as functioning as an “emotive”, in the sense that it appeals to ideas and concepts with positive connotations, particularly in an era that maintained a somewhat objectivist academic ethos. This reticent scholarly attitude is new in the preface to the second volume; the preface to the first had a more didactic and pastoral tone (the more political remarks aside). In this second preface, he also states the following about his *modus operandi*:

Again, we remained faithful to the text of our source very strictly – we did this with honest intentions and not to pretend to possess a kind of style that is not ours. We did so in

order to emulate a master builder, who has been charged with the restoration of an old memorial: with the utmost caution, we tried to preserve the original as precisely as possible, in order not to mutilate something of which we did not apprise the true value. Of such behavior, we would disapprove in the case of other narrators of legends, sagas and fairy tales, even if they succeeded in embellishing their stories.<sup>54</sup>

Subsequently, Lagerwey introduces the list of sources that he has used with the following commentary:

Some people have asked for a list of the sources that we have used. Let me say frankly that I had never anticipated that this booklet would be received in such an extraordinary fashion and I was wary of “exhibiting scholarship” in the context of a rather ordinary and small publication. Now that appears that many are interested in the result of this labor, it is only fair that we also give, having given God the glory first, the honor due to those who have assisted us in centuries past.<sup>55</sup>

As both quotations show, Lagerwey has little reason to fear accusations that he borrowed others' style to mask his own unconvincing literary style – in fact, his

54 Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, II, 7-8: “Weer hielden wij ons streng aan de tekst onzer bronnen, wat wij met een eerlijke opzet deden en niet om een soort stijl te vertonen die de onze niet is. Wij doen als een bouwheer, wien het herstel van een oud gedenkteken is opgedragen; met uiterste voorzichtigheid pogen we zo nauwkeurig mogelijk het oorspronkelijke te bewaren, om niet uit onwetendheid iets te verminken, waarvan ons misschien de echte waarde zou ontgaan. Zulk een gedrag zouden we in andere legenden-, sagen- en sprookjesvertellers afkeuren, ook al maakten zij hun verhalen dan nog zo mooi.”

55 *Ibid.*, II, 8: “Sommigen hebben gevraagd om een lijst van de bronnen die we gebruikten. Laat me openhartig zeggen, dat ik nooit gedacht zou hebben, dat dit boekje zo buitengewoon ontvangen zou worden en tegen een ‘uitstalling van geleerdheid’ voor een gewoon werkje heb ik opgezien. Nu het blijkt, dat velen belangstellen in deze arbeid, is het billijk dat wij na God de eer geven aan hen, die in vroeger eeuwen ons geholpen hebben.”



self-deprecation only draws attention to his fine craftsmanship. At the same time, he also reduces his own role to that of a messenger, allowing the sources of the past and those who produced them to speak for themselves. In other words, his message is that this project is not about him but about bringing to light the valuable treasures of the past. He thus presents himself as modest, scholarly and trustworthy and places himself at the service of the materials that he is presenting to his readership. When he refers to giving God the honor, he is displaying his devotion and suggesting that what he presents has its origins in God. He is not afraid to note the success of his publication, but he softens what may be perceived as bragging by stating his modest intentions and expectations: he did not set out to write a work of scholarship but merely a “booklet”. In all of this, he wants to cast his role as one only interested in providing access to the sources and in doing so claims the authority of sober, distanced, well-intentioned and simple historical artisanship, which heightens the trustworthiness of his work and may well speak to the reader at an emotional level, seducing her/him into taking Lagerwey’s work – including its various political messages – at face value.

In carefully managing his tone and register, Lagerwey presents his blueprint for what society should be and what should (and should not) hold it together in the guise of modest historical scholarship intended for the edification of a general audience. His *communio sancto-*

*rum*, however, also represents a political ideal. In presenting it, he uses broad terminology that was socially current and had the characteristics of “emotives” but fills these terms with a distinct meaning. Lagerwey’s “heroes” (emphasized in the titles of his volumes) are indeed embodiments of what it means to be Dutch (cf. subtitle: “Nederlandse heiligen”) and patriotic or nationalistic (cf. prefaces). Simultaneously, they embody what is truly holy and sacred: God’s working in and through these people. This *communio sanctorum* is thus based on faith, grace and the attendant virtues and not on membership to a particular “race” or ethnicity, the “spirit” of which moves people to heroic deeds. Instead of the “Geist” of a “Volk”, it is the Holy Spirit that makes heroes. Illustrative of this stance is that the overwhelming majority of Lagerwey’s saints are anything but Dutch (or “Frisian”), like Willibrord, who was archbishop “in gentem Frisonem”, with Utrecht as his ecclesial center, but anything but Frisian himself.<sup>56</sup> Even if Lagerwey’s saints are courageous and steadfast (sometimes they are indeed “blood witnesses”, faithful unto death), their sanctity is revealed through acts of charity and perseverance in the faith rather than heroic deeds on the battlefield (let alone membership of paramilitary organizations, such as the *Weerbaarheidsafdeling* of the NSB). In fact, the second part of *Helden Gods* begins with two saints who are converted soldiers whose conversion involved abandoning their military careers: St. Martinus and St. Bavo, the patron

56 Cf. on Willibrord’s mission and its effect, e.g., the recent contribution of Otten, “Wonderverhalen in de vroegste heiligenlevens over Willibrord, Bonifatius en Ludger.” See also the historical contributions by Sven Meeder and Miriam Jones in: ten Klooster, Smeets and Smit (eds.), *Willibrord door de eeuwen*.

saints of the episcopal cities of Utrecht and Haarlem respectively, both in use by the Old Catholic Church (the patron of the see to which Lagerwey himself was appointed in 1941, Deventer, i.e., Lebuinus had appeared in the first volume already). True Dutch identity, it seems, is internationally oriented and based on the virtues of Christianity rather than an ethnic or “pagan” identity with its violent heroism. In the lives of the saints that Lagerwey presents, a line is drawn precisely between these groups, between Christian and “pagan”. Christian heroism has its own characteristics, to which violence does not belong, and is on display in the stories of “military saints” such as St. Joris (the third saint to be discussed in the second volume). All of this resonates with other statements by Lagerwey with an internationalist outlook, such as those made in the context of the Wilibrord commemoration of 1939, giving reason to suspect that this reading of the legends of the saints is more than just *Hineininterpretieren*. If this is indeed the case, then the language of patriotism, heroism and holiness that Lagerwey deploys, together with his emphasis on modest and objective scholarly service, can well be understood to function as “emotives” that rallied his readership to his cause by appealing to shared values through emotionally charged conceptualities. This argument is confirmed by reviews of Lagerwey’s work in the 1940s.

### The reception of *Helden Gods*

One way of verifying (or falsifying) this interpretation of the *Helden Gods* volumes is to read contemporary reviews, a few examples of which illustrate how Lagerwey’s relation of the *communio sanctorum* to the present political situation was also detected by others.

In the *Maasbode* of December 16, 1940, a review appeared of the first volume that concludes with a remark about the contemporary relevance of the book: “read in a childlike manner, these ancient legends of saints offer us, children of such a terribly enlightened and civilized age, a wealth of materials for edification and embarrassment.”<sup>57</sup> A review in the *Nieuwsblad van Friesland* of November 29, 1940 is also worth mentioning, given that it quotes a sentence from Lagerwey’s preface that stresses the national focus of the publication, noting that what Lagerwey has presented are “schatten van godsdienstige, zedelijke, letterkundige, verheven dichterlijke, echt vaderlandse waarde” (“treasures of religious, moral, literary, high poetic, truly patriotic value”, p. 2).<sup>58</sup>

*Het Nationale Dagblad*, the same daily of the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging cited above, published a review of the second instalment of Lagerwey’s legends on March 6, 1942 (p. 6). Written by Andreas Glotzbach, it is generally positive, even though Glotzbach is annoyed by remarks that, for example, refer to the king of England as “a very powerful

57 Evening edition, p. 5: “kinderlijk gelezen bieden deze aloude heiligenlegenden ons, kinderen van een zoo vreeselijke verlichten en beschaafde (?) eeuw, rijke stof tot stichting en beschaaming.” The review is not signed.

58 Cf. Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, I, 7.

ruler, who had submitted many nations to his sceptre..."<sup>59</sup> Such comments allegedly made Lagerwey's publication too historically oriented (i.e., they recall a time when the English monarch was still powerful) and therefore unsuitable for pious edification. That the reviewer has chosen this particular historical example is probably no coincidence. He did not know, apparently, that the blame fell not with Lagerwey here but with the *Legenda aurea*, the text of which Lagerwey faithfully reproduces in Dutch translation. Other reviews hint at similar sentiments, even if from a different political point of view.

Of course, the political aspect was not the only one noted by reviewers. For example, the review in the *Haagsche Post* of March 8, 1941 (p. 6) stressed the ecumenical importance of the publication: the saints all point to one, Catholic and apostolic Church. Similarly, in *De Tijd* of November 6, 1942, Dom Servatius M. Lejeune reviewed Lagerwey's books in the context of a broader piece on "De 'Gulden Legende'. Historische en poëtische waarheid" (p. 3). He is generally positive but also annoyed that St. Servatius (his personal patron saint and a key saint of Limburg, where he was a monk) has been omitted by Lagerwey, due to his focus on the Northern Low Countries.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting the revised edition of Lagerwey's work that appeared in 1955. The legends, which include some additions (notably, some apostles), are now all collected in one volume with an updated title: *Boden en Helden Gods: Legenden van in Noord-Nederland veel vereerde heiligen*. The shift in title is telling already: the saints are no longer "Dutch" but rather "much venerated in the Northern Low Countries". The emphasis and orientation of the publication thus seem to have shifted. In a new preface, Lagerwey explains that, due to feedback from his readers and in an effort to recast his book as a guide to the tradition of the church's visual arts, he has decided to focus more on the lives of apostolic figures, those who were envoys of the faith:

Furthermore, during the secularization of the ecclesial art [sc. in the 14th and 15th centuries], one saw what one was reading in the adornment of churches and chapels with their sculptures, frescoes, panels and sanctuaries made of ivory and metal. Just so, we, who had forgotten these legends, find in them the keys for unlocking the meaning of the decorations and paintings from that bygone past and, maybe, some inspiration for the contemporary artist.<sup>61</sup>

59 Lagerwey, *Helden Gods*, II, 131: "[D]e koning van Engeland, een zeer machtig heerscher, die tal van volkeren aan zijn scepter [sic] onderworpen had ..."

60 St. Servatius was not only the personal patron of Lejeune, but he had also published a number of works on him. That he was somewhat piqued by Lagerwey's selection of saints is understandable.

61 Lagerwey, *Boden en Helden Gods*, 5-6: "Bovendien vond men in die dagen der secularisatie [sc. 14de en 15de eeuw] van de kerkelijke kunst in de versiering van zijn kerken en kapellen met beeldhouwwerk, muurschilderingen, panelen en op zijn ivoren en metalen heiligenschrijnen zijn lectuur terug. En wij, die deze legenden vergeten waren, vinden er de sleutels in terug ter verklaring van de versieringen en de schilderijen uit die vergane tijd en misschien wat bezieling voor de huidige kunstenaar."

Lagerwey concludes his preface by stating his belief that “this second, revised and expanded edition can also make a modest contribution to your enjoyment of life and your appreciation of hidden, ancient beauty.”<sup>62</sup> This new orientation suits the different circumstances in which the book was reissued. Instead of a counternarrative against NS heroism, Lagerwey now offers, with a pastoral and missionary intention, a tool for deciphering the lives of the envoys of the faith of the past.<sup>63</sup> He seems to detect a parallel between the “secularization” of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance and that of his own days: in both cases the interplay between text and image (ecclesial art) offers a means of rediscovering tradition and finding (artistic) inspiration through the appreciation of otherwise hidden beauty. The 1955 edition does not affect the interpretation of the first edition of his hagiographies, though it certainly adds to the impression that a historical and devotional interest was not all that was at stake in the 1940s (or in the 1950s). The interpretation of the first version (or edition) of the *Helden Gods*, however, can also stand on its own, without relying on any information taken from the version of 1955.

Having surveyed the *Helden Gods* volumes, we can now turn to the two

other publications by Lagerwey, both of which were produced in cooperation with (senior) scholars of his day, in order to see whether what was found in his hagiographical work can also be found there – or not.

***The Edition of a Medieval Willibrord Legend in 1940: “peoples who were not Christian or did not want to be Christian”***

The publication of *Die Legende van Sinte Willebroert* in January 1940 – i.e., about four months before the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands – followed the Willibrord exhibition and commemoration of 1939; it predates the first of the two *Helden Gods* volumes and incorporates materials that Lagerwey had made available at an even earlier stage.<sup>64</sup> Published only after sufficient subscriptions had been obtained, it is a beautiful, large format, bibliophile reproduction of a medieval Willibrord legend originally printed in 1478 (incunable). The prominent book and church historian Bonaventura Kruitwagen O.F.M. (1874-1954)<sup>65</sup> and Lagerwey worked together on this publication, lending it an ecumenical dimension: close theological cooperation between Roman and Old Catholic theologians was by no means self-evi-

62 Ibid., 6: “Daarom geloven wij ook en ook hopen wij, dat deze tweede gewijzigde en vermeerderde druk ook wat kan bijdragen tot uw levensvreugde en aan uw waardering van verborgen, oude schoonheid.”

63 Cf. also the comments in the brief book note in *De Oud-Katholiek*, 71 (1955) 17, 139 by Th. Moleman. He notes that it is only partially true that the book is a reprint: “Min of meer, want deze uitgave mist aan de ene kant verschillende legenden uit de beide eerste uitgaven, maar bevat daartegenover een aantal legenden over een zestal Apostelen en voorts over Maria Magdalena.”

64 Cf. the book note in *De Oud-Katholiek*, 56 (April 6, 1940) 15, 114-115, where the history of publication is laid out; see also Lagerwey, *De legende van Sint Willebroert* (1933), which contains the same translation.

65 Cf., e.g., Van der Hoeven, “Kruitwagen, Franciscus Josephus (1874-1954).”

# Die Legende van Sinte Willebroert

GEREPRODUCEERD UIT HET PASSIONAEL WINTERSTUC  
GEDRUKT DOOR GHERAERT LEEU  
TER GOUDE 31 JULI 1478

•

VERKLARENDE TEKST  
VAN  
KANUNNIK E. LAGERWEY

•

AANHANGSEL OVER DE LEGENDA AUREA  
HET PASSIONAEL EN GERARD LEEU

DOOR

PATER DR. B. KRUITWAGEN, O. F. M.

•

*Title page of Engelbertus Lagerwey and Bonaventura Kruitwagen, Die Legende van Sinte Willebroert. Gereproduceerd uit het Passionael Winterstuc gedrukt door Gheraert Leeu ter Goude 31 juli 1478. Maastricht: Leiter-Nypels, 1940.*

*[Leuven, KU Leuven Bibliotheken Special Collections: BTAB 093.1 (492) gouda]*

dent in the 1930s. Both the Roman and the Old Catholic Churches understood Willibrord as their forefather, albeit in competing ways, though it was the 1939 Willibrord exhibition that re-established contact between their two episcopates.<sup>66</sup> The volume reproduces a medieval Willibrord legend as it appeared in a Dutch translation based on the *Legenda Aurea*, which had been published by the pioneering printer and publisher Leeu in Gouda (1478, 1480). The publication, which had a limited circulation, contained the following parts: a retelling of the legend of St. Willibrord by Lagerwey (or, more precisely, the text of the medieval legend in contemporary Dutch, pp. 7-20),<sup>67</sup> the actual reprint (pp. 21-33), an extensive essay by Kruitwagen on “De Legenda Aurea, het passionael, en Gerard Leu” (pp. 35-56), which amounts to a historical contextualization of the main text, and finally a postscript.

Now, much of this edition seems innocuous enough, although, as the postscript especially makes clear, this is not entirely the case. This postscript is written in a kind of imitation of medieval Dutch – the language in which the main text is written – and contains the phrase quoted in the heading of this section. The postscript reflects on the printing (and the circumstances that led to the printing) of the volume:

Ende wort ghedruct ende voleynt  
anno domini Mo.do.cccco ende vier-  
tich inden maent ianuario/ als daer

was groet swaer orloge ende onpays  
onder die kersten volcken. ende oec  
ander volcken dye geen kersten en  
waren/ ofte niet syn en wouden.<sup>68</sup>

Such language goes beyond merely justifying the production of an exquisite edition of a medieval legend. In fact, the world in which the publication was printed is analyzed here: there is a serious war going on amongst Christian peoples (“groet swaer orloge ende onpays onder die kersten volcken”) and even among peoples who were not Christian or did not want to be Christian (“ende oec ander volcken dye geen kersten en waren/ ofte niet syn en wouden”). This latter category must be read as a fairly conspicuous reference to Nazi Germany and its self-consciously “pagan” mythology – communist countries, to which it might also refer, had not entered into a war with Germany yet (although the USSR had invaded Poland in 1939). This postscript comes right after the Willibrord legend, which features a conflict between Christian forces (embodied by Willibrord and his companions) and unchristian, pagan forces (embodied by the saint’s various antagonists). A parallel between both situations was likely intended: Willibrord and his eight-century struggle provides a framework for understanding twentieth-century political conflicts. In both cases there is more at stake than just a war; the conflict is between Christian and unchristian forces, between Christian nations and

66 Cf. Van Schaik, “Waar alle richtingen samenkomen.” For a contemporary example of the ecumenical relevance of the commemoration of Willibrord, see the contributions in *Perspectief*, 35 (2017), which originated in an ecumenically organized and historically oriented symposium on November 7, 2016, held in Utrecht, the city of Willibrord.

67 The text is the same as in: Lagerwey, *De legende van Sint Willibrord* (1933).

68 Lagerwey and Kruitwagen, *Die Legende van Sinte Willebroert*, 57.

pagan Nazism. The allegory is clearly visible in the text of the legend, given that it too features an ongoing struggle between Christians and pagans (not, importantly, between various “races”) and has a strongly internationally oriented narrative. Willibrord is the embodiment of an international *communio sanctorum*; he moves with great ease from England, by way of Ireland, to “Frisia” (i.e.: Utrecht and surroundings), to Rome and finally to Echternach, where he died and is buried.

The emotional turn allows the force of this brief postscript to be appreciated more fully. The key emotive in the postscript is “Christian”, a concept that in the 1930s and 1940s evoked positive emotions, particularly in the circles to which the clerics Kruitwagen and Lagerwey aimed their publication. A Christian reader would have aligned her- or himself with the message of the postscript due to the (affective) appeal of a world in which Christians were at war with non-Christians. The postscript thus sent an unsympathetic message to the non-Christian, likely Nazi, group. It seems, then, that the 1940 edition of the Willibrord legend was treated by Lagerwey in the same multidimensional manner in which he also approached the Willibrord exhibition in 1939. Yes, it was a beautiful reprint, but its contents also offered a social and political commentary and a means for understanding, to put it somewhat anachronistically, the “signs of the times”.

It should be added, finally, that there remains one significant uncertainty: who created the afterword? Was it Lagerwey or his (senior) co-author Kruitwagen, who is known to have imitated medieval Dutch on other occasions? In the bibliography published in the 1949 Kruitwagen *Festschrift*, the text is, as a whole, attributed to Kruitwagen.<sup>69</sup> Even if the text originated with Kruitwagen, however, the publication belongs to the oeuvre of both men and can still serve as a useful starting point for the exploration of the work of Lagerwey.

### *The Breviary of Beatrix of Assendelft*

Remarks on the final publication to be considered here – the breviary of Beatrix of Assendelft, published in 1943 in a luxurious edition of 250 copies – can remain relatively brief compared to the treatment of the other publications. I have been able to find allusions to the political situation in the Netherlands in neither the body nor the front or back matter of this publication. However, there might be one exception hiding in plain sight. In the medieval text itself, the proprietor and intended user of this book of hours is referred to as “Beatrijs”: “Dit boeck hoert toe die Regulierissen te Zijl binnen Haerlem. Ende is gecomen van suster Beatrijs Gerijtsd. van Assendelff” (folium i, recto).<sup>70</sup> By contrast, the name of the mother of Beatrijs, Beatrix van Daelem, seems to have been spelled as ‘Beatrix’. In other words, two medieval versions of the same name existed.

69 S.a. *Huldeboek. Pater Dr. Bonaventura Kruitwagen*, in which see: “Lijst van de geschriften van Pater Dr. B. Kruitwagen, O.F.M.” 15-60, 48. For Kruitwagen’s political view, see: “Het Derde Rijk en het Paard van Troje. Het is op stap maar niet naar Oostenrijk,” *De Maasbode*, March 6 (morning edition), 2.

70 Byvanck and Lagerwey, *Het brevier van Beatrix van Assendelft*, 8.

Though called “Beatrijs” in the breviary itself, the owner is obviously not referred to in this way on the title page of Lagerwey and Byvanck’s publication. Here she is “Beatrix”, which, coincidentally or not, is also the name of the Dutch crown princess, who had been born in 1938. Could this be a subtle promotion of the royal family? Given the hidden layers of meaning in Lagerwey’s other publications, this is not an unlikely, though it is not entirely clear that Lagerwey came up with this pun on the spelling of the breviary owner’s name. And yet, as in the case of the legend of St. Willibrord, he attach his name to it at the very least.

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### The Hagiographic and Bibliophile Editions in the Context of Lagerwey’s Oeuvre

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Finally, to appreciate the character of Lagerwey’s work published in 1940 and 1941, it is helpful to compare it with some earlier publications, particularly those hagiographic or didactic in nature.

Already in 1933, Lagerwey published the legend of St. Willibrord in a slim brochure. In both its preface and main text,

nothing can be found that links the narrative to contemporary social or political issues. All emphasis is placed on making texts available from the *Legenda Aurea*, beginning with the legend of Willibrord. (This choice would have surprised someone in the Middle Ages: Willibrord was much less prominent than a martyr such as St. Boniface, and in this sense Lagerwey is buying into the identity politics of his church.)<sup>71</sup> Nor is anything to be found in *Stemmen uit Port-Royal* (1929), which contains brief excerpts from the writings of persons associated with the monastery of Port Royal, important as it was to Old Catholics. In his preface, Lagerwey primarily emphasizes the ecclesial and edifying importance of the texts rather than their political or social potential.<sup>72</sup> This approach can also be found in a roughly simultaneous publication, a play written by Lagerwey in 1931 for use in religious education in the parish of St. Gertrud.<sup>73</sup> It would seem therefore, that in the context of the late 1930s and early 1940s Lagerwey developed a new perspective on these texts, discovering in legends about the saints not just edification but also a social vision and a blueprint for Dutch identity.

71 Vgl. Van der Velde, “Koomt dezen dag blijmoedig vieren aan Willibrordus toegewijt.” This was also noted by Lagerwey himself in a later publication, cf. Lagerwey, “Der heilige Willibrordus” to be sure.

72 Lagerwey, *Stemmen uit Port-Royal*. In his introduction, the archbishop of Utrecht (Franciscus Kenninck) writes that the book is a kind of replacement for a pilgrimage to Port Royal and that “our times yearn for solid food for the human soul” (“onze tijd behoeft is aan vaste spijs voor een hongerende menschenziel”), a yearning to which Lagerwey’s publication is the answer (Lagerwey, *Stemmen uit Port-Royal*, 5-6). Lagerwey himself writes in his preface that the publication aims at giving people direct access to the voices of the witness of the faith from the tradition of Port Royal: “We are used to praise their [sc. Portroyalists] examples, their teachings, their views of life, and their books, usually because others taught us to do so. Here, everyone can gain knowledge about all of this through one’s own observation. May these observations lead to the desire ‘Not to honor the saints by calling them blessed, but by imitating their examples.’” The texts originate in Lagerwey’s use of them in weekday Masses at the parish of St. Gertrud in Utrecht.

73 Lagerwey, *Sinte Gertrudis. Leekenspel*. Hectographed copy in the possession of the author, who was given access to it by Ms. S. C. Smit-Maan, IJmuiden.



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## Conclusions

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On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that Lagerwey, cooperating in two instances with Bonaventura Kruitwagen and Alexander Willem Byvanck, used his hagiographical publications in a manner that exploited their potential for edification as well as for political and social commentary. This was, as contemporary reviews of the two volumes of the first version of *Helden Gods* suggest, noted by a first generation of readers with various degrees of sympathy. Drawing on the “emotional turn”, it can be shown how Lagerwey used “emotives” current in his context to cast his vision in an appealing way that invited his readership to identify with it. In deploying notions such as “hero”, “saint”, “blood witness”, and “Dutch”, Lagerwey relied on terms that were “charged” positively in the emotional landscape of the Netherlands in the 1930s and 1940s and were thus suitable tools to present his vision. Throughout these publications, Lagerwey advocates a Dutch society that is very international in character, one based on a shared faith and characterized by virtues that are inherent to that faith. He, moreover, positions this society in clear opposition to and in conflict with “pagan” culture and its representatives. This vision of society is not based on ethnicity or “race” and does not consider (typically violent) heroism as the embodiment of the “spirit” of that race (as would be common in National Socialist ideology, which relied

on similar vocabulary and emotives). In fact, Lagerwey casts contemporary NS ideology as that paganism with which his saints had to contend. Thus Lagerwey, especially when considering the above an exercise in critical discourse analysis, can be seen as constructing, for the perceptive reader at least, a kind of “hidden discourse” about true Dutch identity and the desirable shape of Dutch society. That this discourse fits well in the broader context of Lagerwey’s life and ministry only increases the plausibility of this analysis. In addition to liturgical acts of resistance, acts of witness concerning the “Germaanse groet”, getting people out of the *Arbeitseinsatz*, and hiding people in the former St. Gertrud’s chapel, Lagerwey also pressed at least some of his literary and cultural efforts into the service of creating a discourse of resistance, offering an alternative narrative about Dutch identity and with that an alternative vision for Dutch society.<sup>74</sup>

74 In this way, Lagerwey did not go to the same (risky) lengths as book publishers who operated illegally. However, his strategy is also a subversive one. Cf. Lewin, *Het clandestiene boek*. I was pointed in the direction of illegal book printers by dr. Chip Coakley, Ely.

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## Summary

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This article explores the bibliophile and hagiographic publications of Engelbertus Lagerwey, an Old Catholic clergyman, as they appeared just prior to and during the Second World War. Asking first the question what would motivate a socially and politically astute and active cleric to dedicate his time to such undertakings, the article explores the manner in which historical and devotional materials are presented and framed in Lagerwey's books (partially published together with other authors), using theoretical and analytical insights from the "emotional turn" in historical scholarship. It is concluded that Lagerwey goes beyond a purely historical and devotional interest and presents, albeit in a somewhat hidden manner, an alternative discourse on both heroism (and ethics) and international cooperation by means of this literary output of his.

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## Personalia

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Peter-Ben Smit (1979) holds a PhD in New Testament from the University of Bern, a ThD in Anglican Studies/Ecumenical Theology from the General Theological Seminary, New York and the degree of Habilitation in Church History from the University of Bern; he currently is professor by special appointment of Ancient Catholic Church Structures and the History and Doctrine of the Old Catholic Churches at Utrecht University and holds chairs in systematic theology and contextual biblical interpretation at the University of Bern and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. At Utrecht University he co-directs the NWO funded project "Blueprints of Hope", dedicated to plans for European reunification around the Second World War, as these were inspired by spiritual and political ideals. E-mail address: p.b.a.smit@uu.nl