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“On the Verge of a New Era”

21st Century Museology Explored in the Exhibitions of Museum Catharijneconvent (2008-2019)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the 21st century museology in two exhibitions of Museum Catharijneconvent in the past two decades. The research seeks to uncover how Museum Catharijneconvent's narrative has been changing over these decades. A theoretical framework analyzes three aspects of museal change and its causes. Firstly, several factors appear to be influential on museums in general, such as curatorial intention and the source community's memory or experience. Secondly, the ideas of the new museology affect museum practice and continue to reshape its direction alongside societal change. Thirdly, secularization has been changing the museum's direction as a result of their place in society and religious identity. After creating a theoretical framework to explore the theory on all three of these aspects, the thesis will analyze how the museum shaped its narrative through exhibitions. Two exhibitions displaying remarkably dissimilar topics will be explored: *All Kinds of Angels* (2008) and *Here in our very own Bible Belt* (2019). Both of the exhibition's narratives have been clearly shaped by curatorial intention, source communities, the ideas of the new museology and secularization. Analyzing the exhibitions created insights in the way Museum Catharijneconvent communicates different types of stories, while staying close to their mission, identity and core values. Exhibitions are unique and are approached differently. Exhibitions respond to a different part of society and include different parts of heritage, with different source communities involved. Exhibitions, apparently, respond to then current events. This demonstrates how Museum Catharijneconvent is not only in service of society, but also represents society.

INTRODUCTION

"On the verge of a new era"

In 2007, the former director Guus van den Hout called the Museum Catharijneconvent, "the museum for Christian art and culture of the Netherlands on the verge of a new era…"[1] According to Van den Hout, this new era signified the new world order after September, 11 2001; not only did the museum rearrange the collection of objects and introduced modern technology; it rethought its identity, image, mission and objectives. When analyzing the museal changes of Museum Catharijneconvent in 2001, several societal developments were indeed the principal motives for its reform.

To begin with, Dutch society had become more open to a constant influx of immigrants. General Director Van den Hout pointed out how the museum had therefore become an important institution to provide immigrants with the basic knowledge on the religious traditions that shaped Dutch society. Besides, he describes how the museum visitor had become much more critical over the years as a result of technological innovations. This had led to the unavoidable inclusion of modern technology in the museum. Furthermore, the role of religion in Dutch society changed significantly, which resulted in a lack of knowledge on the impact and meaning of Christianity amongst the general public. Even though the new generation was open to learn about the meaning, spirituality and richness of Christian cultural heritage, it was raised with less of the basic knowledge on Christianity.[2]

The aspects leading to the museum entering a 'new era' can be summarized by two theories: the concept of secularization and the theory on the new museology. Even though Van den Hout does not adopt these terms in his own writings, both ways suggest the museum has found a new approach to engage with society which can justify Van den Hout's declaration of the museum entering a new era. The museum is undoubtedly part of society and seemingly responds to societal change. To discover how the museums has been responding to societal change in the light of secularization and new museology, it is essential to explore why this museum for Dutch Christian heritage was founded in 1979.

[1] Guus van den Hout, "Museum Catharijneconvent, the museum for Christian art and culture of the Netherlands on the verge of a new era…," *Material Religion* 3, no. 3 (2007): 437.
[2] Van den Hout, "on the verge of a new era…," 438.

A national museum for Dutch Christian heritage

The Museum Catharijneconvent was founded in Utrecht in 1979 as the national museum of the history of Christian culture in the Netherlands. Already in 1966, Catholic politicians had initiated a meeting to establish a museum for the cultural history of Catholicism in The Netherlands, combining the former archepiscopal collections of Utrecht and Haarlem. However, as a result of the law regarding the formal division between church and state, a state-funded museum for religious art could only be created when the churches of the Reformation would be included. Because of the division within the Protestant churches in the Netherlands – and the fact that there had never been a museum for Protestant art and culture in the Netherlands before – the government decided to start negotiations with representatives of the Protestant churches and establish a museum for all Christian Art and Culture in the Netherlands. After the establishment of the Foundation for Protestant Ecclesiastical Art in 1970, five traditional Protestant churches decided to participate: the Dutch Reformated Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, The Remonstrant Church, the Baptist Brotherhood, and the Lutheran Church. Together they assembled a collection that represented their cultural heritage and the museum combined both the Protestant and the Catholic collections in a new museum: Museum Catharijneconvent.[3]

The original goal of the museum was to provide an overview of the unique history of Christian culture in the Netherlands by displaying authentic objects in their historical context. The museum wanted to primarily display Dutch Christianity and the ways in which it had been culturally shaped by society, while also showing the ways in which Dutch culture and society had shaped Dutch Christianity.[4] The museum's mission in 1979 was formulated as follows: "Acquiring, preserving, researching and presenting the material documentation of the Christian culture and its influence on Dutch society, and provide information on these material testimonials for the purpose of study, education and pleasure."[5] This focus on collecting and presenting the information on Christianity was significant in the 1970s because of the changing religious climate. With churches and religion being of less importance to the whole of Dutch society, it might have seemed to be even more relevant to establish a museum to educate and inform on religion and the way it shaped Dutch society. Besides, not only religious people were interested in establishing a museum on religious heritage. During the first negotiations on the

[3] DP Snoep et al, *Het Catharijneconvent: Monument met toekomst* (Utrecht: Centraal museum, 1975), 55-65.; Van den Hout, "on the verge of a new era…," 438.
[4] Snoep et al., *Monument met toekomst,* 58-59.
[5] Niels Koers, *Museum Catharijneconvent: een keuze uit de mooiste werken* (Gent-Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ludion, 2000), 4.

establishment of the museum in the 1960s, the former councilor of culture from Utrecht declared the following: "Being an atheist, I firmly believe this museum should be established."[6]

21st century change

With the museum entering the 21st century, society had changed significantly. Both the secularization of the public sphere and the new museum theory had reshaped the museum's course over the years. According to the museum's 1998 annual report, the changing religious climate was viewed to be the primary reason for the transformation in the early 21st century. Besides, the museum wanted to radically change its course after officially becoming privatized in 1995. The plan to reorganize the museum was first initiated in the annual report of 1998. The most important reason for changing the museum's permanent collection was the wish to "confront the audience of today and tomorrow with a new perspective on the religious aspect of Dutch cultural history".[7] With the museum "telling the story" of religion and society in the Netherlands, it had to take into consideration that the basic knowledge and understanding of Christianity by the Dutch people was ever changing.[8] It demanded rethinking the ways in which the information was presented. The ultimate challenge was to create an approachable showcase to inform and intrigue the visitors who lack background information – without bothering the well-informed visitors.[9] This has been one of the most demanding challenges the museum faced over the years.

The museum's 1998 annual report states how a secular museum displaying religion relies heavily on the role of religion in society. In the context of Museum Catharijneconvent, the secularization of the public sphere has had a significant impact on religion in Dutch society and resulted in a transforming religious literacy. This primarily meant that the museum's audience had changed over time which, accordingly, highly affected the ways in which the museum had to communicate and display its story through the years. This demonstrates how a museum's audience is of large influence on the chosen direction and narrative of the museum.

The influence of society and 'the people' affecting the museum's story had become even more substantial by means of the ideas of the new museology movement since the late 20th century. The new museology was reflected upon in literature and involved a critical and more inclusive approach to engaging with society. In this thesis, the concept of new museology will

[6] Snoep et al., *Monument met toekomst,* 57.
[7] Museum Catharijneconvent, *1998 Annual Report*, p. 9.
[8] Museum Catharijneconvent, *1998 Annual Report*, p. 6-9.
[9] Museum Catharijneconvent, *1998 Annual Report*, p. 12.

not only refer to the introduction of theoretical perspectives into museum studies, but also to wider changes in the museum world and society. It will thus refer to "a transformation of museums from being exclusive and socially divisive institutions" to museums being institutions "in service of society".[10] Accordingly, museums processed the societal information and changes to create a story. This story was respectively designed and registered in the museum's policy document and evaluated in their annual reports. What becomes clear from this process analysis is how the societal information is thus interpreted and made into a story by the people working in the museum. This makes the museum staff themselves very important actors in shaping the museum's narrative. An example is the acclaimed 'power' of the curator, who has a large degree of control over how objects are understood by museum visitors.[11] To illustrate how people influence the shape of a museum's narrative in the context of Museum Catharijneconvent can be done by examining the museum's two most recent general directors.

Starting with Guus van den Hout, the director from 2001 until 2010, in a changing era when the museum redesigned its space and identity. In the 2002 annual report, Van den Hout writes how the new direction of the museum would unfold in the "upcoming" years – a result of society "asking questions to which the museum could and should answer".[12] His mindset encouraged change. Similarly, Marieke van Schijndel, director from 2010 until the present, wrote about another development in 2016. Van Schijndel explains how the museum took steps in a "reversed crusade", displaying the first exhibition to present equally three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[13] Besides, the annual report of 2018 and 2019 refer to innovation and redesigning the museum in the "future" years.[14] Both directors in the past decades have clearly inspired and supported change. It is in the decades of these two influential directors that this research will put its focus.

[10] Grechen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate, "Afterword: Looking to the Future of Religion in Museums," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 247.; Max Ross, "Interpreting the new museology," *Museum and society* 2, no. 2 (July 2004), 84.
[11] Crispin Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 13.
[12] Museum Catharijneconvent, *2002 Annual Report*.
[13] "Lefgozer Franciscus als voorbeeld," Marieke van Schijndel in de Bilderbergconferentie 2017, accessed May 1, 2020, 92. https://www.vno-ncw.nl/sites/default/files/vno-bb17-pag88-101-Lefgozer-fransiscus-als-voorbeeld-Marieke-van-Schijndel.pdf
[14] Museum Catharijneconvent, "2018 Annual Report," 47.; Museum Catharijneconvent, "2019 Annual Report," 9; 56.

Shaping a narrative

This research seeks to uncover how Museum Catharijneconvent's narrative has been changing over the past two decades. After creating a theoretical framework to explore the theory on museal change and its causes, the thesis will analyze how the museum shaped its narrative through exhibitions. Exhibitions can be seen as clear examples of the museum communicating a story. The choice of the exhibition's topic, approach and selection of objects are all very clear choices of communication. Besides, exhibitions are variable and change every once in a while. This allows for a close connection between the exhibition on display and the societal events and context at the time. To illustrate the exhibition's communicative character, this research will explore two exhibitions displaying remarkably dissimilar topics in two different decades.

The first exhibition is from 2008 – one year after Van den Hout's 'changing era' article. This allows for an analysis on how this new era was made visible in this exhibition. The second exhibition is one of the most recently finished examples from 2019, and thus took place a full decade after the first exhibition. Besides, these exhibitions were selected because of their topic and title. The first case study, from 2008, concerns the topic of angels: "*All Kinds of Angels*". The second case study, from 2019, concerns a 'living' religious sub-group in the Netherlands: "*Here in our very own Bible Belt*". While the angels exhibit was remarkably inclusive and covered more than just the Christian approach to the topic; the Bible Belt exhibit appeared to have been more exclusive, focusing on a specific Dutch religious minority. Interestingly, both topics seemed to have perfectly fit the museum's mission and identity at the time. Besides, both exhibitions demonstrate the influence of secularization and the ideas of new museology. This makes for a valuable analysis and comparison.

All in all, this research will examine the ways in which Museum Catharijneconvent communicates its identity and Christian heritage, led by the following research question: *How has Museum Catharijneconvent communicated its story in two exhibitions in the past two decades (2008-2019), and how has this narrative been shaped by theory on religion, secularization, new museology, heritage, curatorial intention and source communities?*

CHAPTER 1

21st century (new) museology

In an article on museums, galleries and heritage as sites of meaning-making and communication, Rhiannon Mason states that "every aspect of a museum, gallery, or heritage site communicates".[15] All visible elements, from the architectural style of the building to the positioning and content of text panels and labels, are entangled in a communicative process with the visitors. Jenny Kidd, too, declares how the museum has a story to tell; "physically, architecturally and institutionally."[16] Museums are commonly understood as key agents in the creation of meaning. They attempt to engage visitors in issues relevant to the museum itself and the community, by creating and transferring information and knowledge.[17] Roger Silverstone states that museums as communicative media are therefore in many respects like any other contemporary media:

> They entertain and inform; they tell stories and construct arguments; they aim to please and to educate; they define, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or ineffectively, an agenda; they translate the otherwise unfamiliar and inaccessible into the familiar and accessible. And in the construction of their texts, their displays, their technologies, they offer an ideologically inflected account of the world.[18]

Even though this statement points out how museums seemingly present their own version of the 'truth', the ways in which such narratives unfold on site will presumably generate multiple understandings and 'truths'.[19] This could, for example, be the result of the way in which not all communication is explicit or intended.[20] Visitors literally walk "through the stories which museums provide for them in their display", but the varying degrees of freedom to do so allows them to create their own version of the narratives on offer.[21] This makes a museum significantly

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[15] Rhiannon Mason, "Museums, galleries and heritage: Sites of meaning-making and communication," in *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader,* ed. Gerard Corsane (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, ProQuest Ebook Central), 222.
[16] Jenny Kidd, "The museum as narrative witness: heritage performance and the production of narrative space," in *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions,* ed. Suzanne Macleod, Laura Hourston Hanks, and Jonathan Hale (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central), 81.
[17] Robert R. Janes, "Museums, Social Responsibility and the Future we desire," in *Museums Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed,* ed. Simon Knell, Suzanne MacLeod, and Sheila Watson (London: Routledge, 2007), 135.
[18] Roger Silverstone, "The medium is the museum: on objects and logics in time and spaces," in *Towards the Museum of the Future: New European Perspectives,* ed. Roger Miles, and Laura Zavalo (London and New York: Routledge, 1994. ProQuest Ebook Central), 162.
[19] Kidd, "Narrative witness," 81.
[20] Mason, "Museums, galleries and heritage," 222.
[21] Silverstone, "The medium is the museum," 167.

different from other contemporary media. Museums occupy physical spaces which allow the visitor "to wander (and wonder) through their texts".[22] This highly influences a visitor's meaning-making process. The process of meaning-making is also affected by factors such as the educational, familial, socio-economic and cultural background of the individuals.[23] In the context of the museum, this means that the visitor has become increasingly important in "the process of gallery and exhibition creation itself".[24]

Apparently, a museum's communication is not only shaped from the inside – there are many external influences shaping the museum's narrative in the 21st century. This chapter aims to discuss some of the influences that have been shaping the narrative of Museum Catharijneconvent in the past two decades. Firstly, several factors appear to be influential on museums in general, such as the example of the visitor, as well as the role of the curator and the memories of the object's source community. Secondly, the ideas of the new museology seem to have affected museum practice and continue to reshape its direction alongside societal change. Thirdly, secularization changes the museum's direction as a result of their place in society and religious identity. Consequently, the presented theory will provide a basis to better understand the museal changes of Museum Catharijneconvent in the 21st century and how they have shaped the museum's narrative in the exhibitions on display.

Power to the people

It might appear as if the museum constructs its narrative solely according to its policy documents, mission and objectives. These elements are written to give shape to the museum's choices and account for them. However, it becomes clear that the museum's mission has not significantly changed over time when analyzing the written documents of 1979 and 2020. With the focus of the 2020 mission being on illuminating the esthetic, cultural and historical values of Christian heritage to provide insight in "our current society", both missions suggest that museums are, and have been, aware of their role and relevance. [25] This societal role, however, has been changing over time. Change is a result of people.[26] On a large scale, this can refer to people encouraging societal change – for example via riots. But on a smaller scale too, for example in the context of the museum, the museum staff can influence the museum's narrative.

[22] Silverstone, "The medium is the museum," 162.
[23] Mason, "Museums, galleries and heritage," 232-233.
[24] Silverstone, "The medium is the museum," 173.
[25] Koers, *Museum Catharijneconvent*, 4. Museum Catharijneconvent, "Missie en Visie", accessed February 21, 2020, https://www.catharijneconvent.nl/de-organisatie/missie-en-visie/
[26] J. Gordon Myers, *People & Change: Planning for Action* (Oriel Inc, 1997), 24.

All objects are being interpreted in one way or another by the museum staff. Simply choosing a particular object for display or deciding what story to tell about it already bears the mark of "curatorial intention".[27] In the case of museum exhibitions, the curator is presumed to be the most prominent figure in the creation of an exhibition. According to Crispin Paine, curators indeed have a large degree of control over how objects are understood by visitors, because they are the ones creating a new meaning when an object comes into the museum.[28] He even argues that objects are thus inevitably "slaves of their curators, who choose which ones to acquire, whether to display them or put them in store, and how to display them".[29] Paine explains how creating a collection creates meaning of itself.[30] A curator therefore has a decisive role in the communicative process of the objects in a museum.

Consequently, curators have to think about methods to present the collection in a way to make their visitors understand and accept what is being communicated. Offering too little information to experts can be patronizing, while offering too much information can be alienating when visitors know little about a subject. Besides, adopting the wrong tone in the wording of labels and panels or in the design of the displays can also be excluding or off-putting.[31] The information curators obtain about objects is routinely divided into 'intrinsic' information and 'extrinsic' information.[32] The intrinsic information is carried by the object itself and thus includes the object's material, shape, colour and condition. This can be seen as information carried by the object itself, "merely waiting" for someone to "extract" it.[33] The extrinsic information, on the contrary, refers to the information derived from outside the object. This includes information on how it was used, who owned it and where it came from. Both intrinsic and extrinsic information can be derived from studying the object itself.[34]

However, a third category can be distinguished; the information ascribed to an object.[35] This information is not directly visible when looking at the object itself, yet crucial in shaping the object's meaning and story. An example is the significance of an object to an individual or group, which makes this information very much dependent on whose story was chosen to be

[27] Grechen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate, "Introduction: Religion in Museums, Museums as Religion," In *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 5.
[28] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 13.
[29] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 13.
[30] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 14.
[31] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 17.
[32] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 15-16.
[33] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 17.
[34] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 15-16.
[35] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 17.

included from which group(s) or individual(s).[36] As a result, the curator gets the freedom to choose whose story to tell and what information to leave out. To get this information on an object, the curator is required to do research and make a connection with the source community, or former 'owners', of the object to complete the story.

Strikingly, the ways in which curators connect with people from outside the museum is very often not visible when visiting the museum or reading information from an object label. According to Amanda Hughes, nearly all curators spend much of their time in private conversations with other curators, artists, collectors, scholarly texts and audiences of all kinds. However, these negotiations remain principally hidden from museum visitors – "cloaked behind third-person object labels and introductory text panels".[37] Hughes quotes Steven Weil (2002), claiming that museums should not be a mystery, but are "mysterious places to audiences".[38] Similarly, Michael Ames refers to the idea of a "Wizard of Oz technique": "exhibits present the anonymous voice of authority, while in reality texts are constructed by one or more curators hiding behind the screens of the institution."[39] According to both Hughes and Ames, this multivocality is important to acknowledge and be open about to the public.[40] This way, the public will understand what is being communicated differently as it won't occur to be the singular voice of "institutional authority".[41] Instead, visitors will acknowledge the voice of the 'source community' and empathize with the reported memories.[42] This adds to the story's credibility and authority of a museum's narrative.

Religion as a collective memory?

The processes of choosing, collecting, researching and understanding objects has everything to do with memory. According to Paine, memory is invariably associated with objects.[43] This relates to the aforementioned ascribed information to an object. Even though the significance of an object could be the same for a whole group, it is more likely to assume that unique individuals have their own feelings and memories regarding a certain object. In a study

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[36] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 17.
[37] Amanda Millay Hughes, "Radical Hospitality: Approaching religious Understanding in Art Museums," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 167.
[38] Hughes, "Radical Hospitality," 167.
[39] Michael M. Ames, "Museology Interrupted," *Museum International* 57, no. 3 (2005): 48.
[40] Ames, "Museology Interrupted," 48.; Hughes, "Radical Hospitality," 167.
[41] Hughes, "Radical Hospitality," 166-167.
[42] Mary Nooter Roberts, "Altar as Museum, Museum as Altar: Ethnography, Devotion, and Display," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 55.
[43] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 20.

by Jenny Kidd, a "narrative that recognizes and encourages individual remembering" was more appealing than the idea of a collective memory or grand narrative.[44] However, when creating an exhibition on a community topic – such as a faith community – it would be impossible to include everyone's individual memories. To allow for the visitors to indulge on the full story, and to understand the bigger picture, one would expect the exhibition to include a grand narrative alongside the individual testimonies.

According to Sharon Macdonald, museums position themselves as 'facilitators': "as agencies capable of representing communities in the public sphere."[45] Besides, she points out a statement made by Benedict Anderson (1983), who claims that museums can be seen as one of the key institutions through which "collective identities have been imagined".[46] Furthermore, museums can contribute significantly to the construction of both personal and shared identities.[47] Lynda Kelly, in her article on adult museum visitor's learning identities, quotes Ivanova who stated that "museums preserved history and memory as well as constructing them".[48] Ivanova recognized how the visitor's identity and the identity of the museum were in "a two-way process of exchange" which means that museums should understand how they "influence the development of identity".[49] Consequently, museums should effectively articulate community identities.

Sheila Watson highlights the importance of conversation with community groups to construct a museum's narrative. The way communities and individuals remember the past is significant, for certain memories are used by groups to articulate a "collective identity."[50] Even though many museums work collaboratively with community groups, some stories are still solely authored by curators. Watson suggests that museums should construct their narratives in conversation with community groups which might articulate the community identities "more effectively".[51] This underlines the importance of including the collection's or object's source

[44] Kidd, "narrative witness," 81.
[45] Sharon Macdonald, "Enchantment and its Dilemmas: The Museum as Ritual Site," in *Science, Magic and Religion: Ritual Processes of Museum Magic*, ed. Mary Bouquet, and Nuno Porto (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), 217.
[46] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 217.
[47] Sheila Watson, "History Museums, Community Identities and a Sens of Place: Rewriting Histories," in *Museums Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed,* ed. Simon Knell, Suzanne MacLeod, and Sheila Watson (London: Routledge, 2007), 160.
[48] Lynda Kelly, "Visitors and Learning: Adult museum visitors' learning identities," in *Museums Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed,* ed. Simon Knell, Suzanne MacLeod, and Sheila Watson (London: Routledge, 2007), 278.
[49] Kelly, "Visitors and Learning," 278.
[50] Watson, "History Museums," 160.
[51] Watson, "History Museums," 160.

community and is therefore an important statement in analyzing the creation of the museum's narrative.

With regards to religion, the idea of a collective identity could be illustrated by the concept of the "chain of memory".[52] Daniele Hervieu-Léger, writing in the 1990s, argues that memory and religion have a structural connection. To feel part of a chain or lineage depends on memories that are shared and passed on. Even though modern societies are no longer societies of memory – as a result of industrialization, urbanization, globalization and media – collective memory can be seen as something given: "collective religious memory is subject to constantly recurring construction, so that the past which has its source in the historical events at its core can be grasped at any moment as being totally meaningful."[53] Essentially, memories; remembering and forgetting, are cultural processes of meaning making. The fact that parents, who share their memories, find their memories changing does not make these collective or individual memories untrue, but rather illustrates how this is a process meaning making itself.[54]

However, introducing religious groups as a collective or a community with shared memories and beliefs is not as common as it used to be. Hervieu-Léger explains how people in the late 20th century started to develop a 'pick-and-mix' attitude to belief: "practice is a la carte in accordance with personal needs; and in its more extreme forms, where authorized memory no longer plays a role at all, there is a pick-and-mix attitude to belief."[55] Alan Aldridge, responding to Hervieu-Léger in 2001, expands this line of argumentation when he states how faith has become flexible. Tradition, he argues, can be seen as a cultural heritage on which "people draw selectively and at their own discretion", and is thus no longer a sacred trust "to be transmitted faithfully from generation to generation".[56] According to Aldridge, neither rationalization nor reason are the fundamental challenges to faith, but amnesia: "the chain of memory linking the present to both the past and the future is in danger of being irreparably broken."[57]

These notions on religion, identity and memory create an image of the relevant arguments made in the context of religion in museums. They demonstrate the importance of including source communities (a theme explored in a later part of this chapter) and carefully selecting the memories to shape a story from.

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[52] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 123-176.
[53] Hervieu-Léger, *Chain of Memory*, 124-128.
[54] Laurajane Smith, *The Uses of Heritage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 64.
[55] Hervieu-Léger, *Chain of Memory*, 139.
[56] Alan Aldridge, "Book Review Religion as a Chain of Memory," *Qualitative Sociology* 24, no. 4, (Winter 2001): 538.
[57] Aldridge, "Review Chain of Memory," 538.

Exhibiting religion in a (post)secular world

The statements on the 'pick-and-mix' attitude to belief and how faith became more 'flexible' in the late 20th century demonstrate how religion is in constant change. This poses a serious challenge to museums dealing with themes of religion and religious heritage, and highly influences a religious museum's narrative. Before analyzing religious change in the context of Museum Catharijneconvent in the subsequent case studies, the following part will explore how exactly religion has been changing in the Netherlands over the past decades. A prevalent way of describing how religion has changed over time is via the concept of secularization. Herman Paul, who held a special chair in secularization studies at the University of Groningen until recently, provides a very thorough description on secularization. Paul highlights a great variety of perspectives as to what the concept means, since this is still subject to debate and indifference.

Secularization can be seen as a historic-philosophic process theory: where the church had been central to the everyday life of people, this changed in the modern and progressive 20th century when the factories, newspapers and political parties became the new pillars in society.[58] Looking at the facts, established churches in many – if not all – parts of the world, seem to have experienced declining church attendance and most of the new generation has been raised without even a basic knowledge of Christianity.[59] However, according to Herman Paul, secularization is not so much a fact in itself, but instead an interpretative pattern. This implies that secularization does not only signify less people going to church or less people practicing belief, but likewise creates a 'horizon of expectation' which governs how people think they should behave. This results in secularization not only being a response to a changing modern world, but it being an advocate of change in itself.[60]

Additionally, Paul argues that secularization is very closely connected to the plural society.[61] In a socially differentiated society, religion simply does not have its 'own' place anymore. This does not mean that nobody believes in God, but it does mean that religious belief systems are now seen to be exotic when they used to be common sense. Religion seems to have been banned from the public sphere, for its social function is no longer relevant.[62] This means that religious institutions are left with two alternatives: they either have to adapt to the plural society and thus choose a more liberal strategy, or they try to redefine the margin of society as

[58] Herman Paul, *Een kleine geschiedenis van een groot verhaal* (Amsterdam: University Press, 2017), 10.
[59] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 210.; Van den Hout, "on the verge of a new era…," 438.
[60] Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 25-31.
[61] Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 77.
[62] Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 47-48.

a sect and embrace the orthodox strategy.[63] The liberal strategy apparently suggests that religion should change its societal role to adapt to the new, modern 'normal'. Klaus Oppenheimer even argues that churches had been 'deaf' for too long already. According to Oppenheimer, society already started to change in the 19th century. With the rise of material world views, such as socialism and science, there was "no room left for God".[64]

However, the societal changes cannot be interpreted as a linear process of decline in religion – at least not in the Netherlands. The religious situation in The Netherlands in the 19th and 20th century was in flux. Already in 1855, a group of 'free thinkers', *De Dageraad*, founded by liberals, socialists, scientists and feminists, wanted to ban religious influence from society. They expected that further personal development and "improvement of earthly life" would result in people no longer needing religion.[65] From the 1920s onwards, more people started to question the narrow cooperation between the government and religious organisations.[66] However, after the Second World War, Christian churches thought the 'Godless' war had shown the superiority of the ecclesiastic moral which made it reasonable for them to start having a more prominent part in society again.[67] This resulted in, for example, the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948 in Amsterdam. The founding members thought that this international council could support the much needed modernization of the church, and could overcome the ingrained structures and religious division. Accordingly, it has been argued that in the 1950s, the Netherlands was still – or again – determined by Christian traditions.[68]

Even though the Dutch post-war period seemingly resulted in an upturn of religion, this was not entirely true. The improvements people had hoped for were either not happening or happened in a non-satisfying way. As a consequence, people started looking for more intense and radical religious change in the mid-1950s. This could be one of the reasons why the 1960s are commonly seen as the turning point in the religious history of the Netherlands. People assumed Dutch culture had changed overnight in the 1960s: from exceptionally religious to exceptionally secular.[69] Considering the aforementioned movements in the 19th and early 20th century, change did certainly not happen overnight. However, from the 1960s onwards, secularization as a process, with regards to religious illiteracy and less church-goers, was indeed in a downwards spiral. As stated before, the notion of advancing secularization made people

[63] Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 77.
[64] Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 33-34.
[65] Peter van Dam, *Religie in Nederland* (Amsterdam: University Press, 2018), 143.
[66] Van Dam, *Religie in Nederland*, 168.
[67] Van Dam, *Religie in Nederland*, 176-182.
[68] Van Dam, *Religie in Nederland*, 185-186.
[69] Van Dam, *Religie in Nederland*, 198-204.

leaving church in the 1960s and 1970s feel as if their individual decision was part of an inevitable historical process.[70] Based on facts and figures, the Netherlands could no longer be identified as a Christian nation from the 1980s onwards.[71]

In the 21st century, the division between the religious and the secular seemed to have been universally accepted. This resulted in two ways of thinking about religion: religious people, or 'insiders', perceived their religion as something only 'they' could understand, whereas non-religious people, the 'outsiders', believed religion should be practiced in the private sphere.[72] However, the idea that religion could only being tolerated in the private sphere seems to already be out of date in the 21st century. As reported by many, society has already entered a new 'religious time': a postsecular time. How to define this concept is subject to discussion.[73] According to Beaumont et al., the "simple version is that religion returns to the public sphere".[74] This, however, does not mean that religion has made its comeback and is easily reintegrated in society and therefore widely practiced and understood again. Lieke Wijnia, in her book on art and the postsecular, explains how the postsecular acknowledges the diversified "and/or" transformed presence of religion in the public sphere, and draws attention to the "continuous negotiations for co-existence of religion and the secular in the public sphere".[75] According to Wijnia, this situation creates an important role for public institutions, such as museums. She explains how these sites mediate between the public domain and religious art, heritage and research.[76]

The museum's ability to communicate a story could thus facilitate the understanding of religion as a theme in the (post)secular public sphere. However, the declining presence of religion in the public sphere, as a result of secularization, is still profoundly transforming religious literacy.[77] With less people having basic knowledge on religion, the museum's story and exhibitions are urged to be communicated differently; using different words and allowing for a new openness and new interpretations. For a religious heritage museum, such as Museum Catharijneconvent, this highly influences their ways of communicating. It means rethinking and reshaping the ways in which to convey religious heritage.

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[70] Van Dam, *Religie in Nederland*, 206.
[71] Van Dam, *Religie in Nederland*, 231.
[72] Van Dam, *Religie in Nederland*, 11.
[73] Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*.
[74] Justin Beaumont et al, "Reflexive Secularization? Concepts, Processes and Antagonisms of Postsecularity," *European Journal of Social Theory* XX(X) (2018), 11.
[75] Lieke Wijnia, *Beyond the Return of Religion: Art and the Postsecular* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 80.
[76] Wijnia, *Art and the Postsecular*, 80.
[77] Wijnia, *Art and the Postsecular*, 32.

Wijnia refers to Jürgen Habermas as a key figure on the topic of the relevance of religious institutions in the public sphere. Habermas has argued for both translation and preservation of religious heritage in the secular public sphere. He calls for a mutual understanding and conversation: "For Habermas, the postsecular is therefore a much-needed correction on the outlook long maintained by secularists. It embodies a call for respect and, at the very least, an attempt of mutuality between religious and secular actors."[78] The endurance of religion in society today seemingly challenges people with different religious and secular backgrounds to find new ways to communicate.[79]

Museums in conversation with their visitors

Museums can be important sites of interfaith communication and bridge building.[80] Amanda Hughes introduces the concept of 'radical hospitality', challenging museum curators and educators who tackle religious topics to welcome diverse perspectives.[81] Hughes argues that the museum is a natural environment for people to ask questions, express divergent answers and creates a safe space to discuss these.[82] With the ever-changing role of religion in society, a religious museum's audience has become more and more diverse. The visitor's varying knowledge and background information on religion challenges the museum to find the right words to communicate and speak to all of them – individually and as a group. It is therefore essential for a museum to identify its visitors, to get a better understanding on how to communicate the museum's narrative. It could even be argued that the visitor is therefore a highly influential factor itself in shaping the museum's way of communicating and exhibiting.

In the context of exhibiting religious heritage, museums have realized that "attention to the predisposition and needs of the visitors is absolutely vital".[83] Visitors come to the museum from a wide range of backgrounds, for a variety of reasons and with diverse expectations. Museums, however, can be places of "safe encounter and profitable learning", providing space to people of varying backgrounds to encounter the beliefs and practices of others.[84] More generally speaking too, museums are becoming more aware of their diverse range of visitors. Margaret Lindauer points out that exhibition developers indeed recognize that "not two

[78] Wijnia, *Art and the Postsecular*, 32.
[79] Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 115.
[80] Buggeln et al., "Introduction," 5-6.
[81] Buggeln et al., "Introduction," 5-6.; Hughes, "Radical Hospitality," 166-167.
[82] Hughes, "Radical Hospitality," 165.
[83] Buggeln et al., "Introduction," 2.
[84] Buggeln et al., "Introduction," 2.

individuals go through an exhibitions in exactly the same way".[85] This complicates the ways in which the museum chooses to communicate. How can a museum shape their narrative in line with what the visitor 'wants' or 'expects'?

Creating visitor profiles allows a museum to try and map their unique visitors on the grounds of groups or stereotypes likely to visit an exhibition. Lindauer argues that, commonly, two types of visitors are distinguished when analyzing and assessing audience demographics: the typical visitor and the ideal visitor. A typical visitor represents the average of all visitors in terms of previous museum experience, education, racial or ethnic identity and socioeconomic status. The ideal visitor, by contrast, is one who would be culturally and ideologically "at home" in the exhibition or politically contented with the presented information.[86] Both these types of visitors can be constructed by the museum doing demographical research and investigating their visitor history. Lindauer, however, suggests an additional third category: the critical museum visitor.[87]

The critical museum visitor explores what is left unspoken, perceives in what way and for what purposes objects are presented, and questions for whom the communicated information, collection and interpretation would be most valuable – or not.[88] Lindauer's analysis offers the reader to become a more critical museum visitor oneself, by providing questions and themes to think about before and during the museum visit. From very broad questions such as, "what does the very word 'museum' mean to you" – to more specific things related to hopes and assumptions before going to the museum.[89] She even justifies that exhibition critique by a mass of critical museum visitors could lead to visitors becoming the new "agents of change".[90] This substantiates the idea that the visitor is of high influence on the museum's communication and story.

Drawing from her own experience as a (critical) museum visitor, Lindauer introduces the emergence of 'New Museum Theory'. This theory explains how exhibits enact social relations of power in addition to illustrating aesthetic concepts, historic events and cultural phenomena. Essays on this theory affected Lindauer's visits, as it made her aware of the multiple perspectives and the museum's authority: does an exhibit, for example, present a

[85] Margaret Lindauer, "The critical Museum Visitor," in *New Museum Theory and Practice,* edited by Janet Marstine (Hoboken New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2005), 204.
[86] Lindauer, "The critical Museum Visitor," 204.
[87] Lindauer, "The critical Museum Visitor".
[88] Lindauer, "The critical Museum Visitor," 204.
[89] Lindauer, "The critical Museum Visitor," 204-205.
[90] Lindauer, "The critical Museum Visitor," 223.

European, masculine, economically privileged perspective?[91] For a museum to listen to their critical visitors – noticing aspects of perspective and authority – creates more inclusivity and, consequently, allows for a more authentic museum narrative. After a time where museums initially had appeared to be "exclusive" and "socially divisive institutions", the new museology seemed to be the much needed catalyst of change.[92]

A new role for the museum in society

The public museum acquired its modern form during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[93] At first, museums were being summoned to the task of cultural governance of the "populace". They were part of an enlistment of institutions and practices of high culture to produce cultural power and a better economy.[94] Museums were indeed regarded as exclusive and socially disconnected. The movement of new museology has been trying to redefine the relationship between museums and society. This climate of institutional reflexivity emerged during the 1960s and 1970s.[95] The museum could no longer be understood in its own terms as "innocently engaged in the processes of the collection, conservation, classification and display of objects".[96] Instead, the museum was "among many components in a complex array of cultural and leisure industries", no longer isolated from political and economic pressures, and thus no longer certain of its role and its identity.[97] Museums were being called upon to prioritize their public educational role and to become more democratic.[98] Even though museums have always seen themselves as having an educational role, the more recent shift had been from education to learning: "responding to the needs and interests of visitors".[99] Museums needed to transform themselves from being "about something" to being "for somebody." [100]

This major shift led to museums increasingly identifying themselves to be "in the service of society", to actually help effect societal change and therefore became more political.[101] Robert R. Janes, in his article on museums and social responsibility, explains why socially responsible work is important in the context of museums. According to Janes, museums are

[91] Lindauer, "The critical Museum Visitor," 205.
[92] Max Ross, "Interpreting the new museology," *Museum and society* 2, no. 2 (July 2004), 84-85.
[93] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19.
[94] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 21-23.
[95] Ross, "Interpreting the new museology," 84.; Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 195.
[96] Silverstone, "The medium is the museum," 161.
[97] Silverstone, "The medium is the museum," 161.
[98] Julia D. Harrison, "Ideas of museums in the 1990s," in *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader,* ed. Gerard Corsane (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, ProQuest Ebook Central), 41.
[99] Kelly, "Visitors and Learning," 276.
[100] Kelly, "Visitors and Learning," 276.
[101] Buggeln et al., "Afterword," 247.

uniquely placed among contemporary social institutions. They have a potential to make the social, moral and practical legacies of human society "both visible and accessible – in a way that is free of any particular agenda".[102] Janes explains how museums are empowered to transmit the world's wisdom by making explicit the "successes and failures of our species in a manner that could inform and guide contemporary behavior, whatever the particular society happens to be".[103] He also states that socially responsible work allows the museum to redefine their role in communities. According to Janes, this could lead to the museum embracing a role that goes "far beyond education and entertainment". [104]

In sharp contrast with museums focusing more on relevant societal issues, the new museum movement was also characterized by a somewhat different shift: "from science towards magic".[105] According to Sharon MacDonald, museums have been shifting their emphasis from encouraged learning to matters such as entertainment, spectacle and "providing" enjoyment.[106] MacDonald illustrates this statement by a comparison of museums and religious sites. She describes how they share their aesthetics: dimmed lighting, hushed tones, a sense of reverence, emanating an aura of age – of the past. Furthermore, MacDonald argues that both museum and ritual sites are places where sciences and magic are mediated, and, moreover, can even be seen as sites "dedicated to such mediation".[107] She suggests that museums could therefore be regarded as ritual sites: "they are culturally demarcated spaces of concentrated meaning involving a degree of culturally regularized collective performance."[108] Both spaces involve an interplay between enchantment (magic) and authoritative knowledge (science). This interplay varies across different kinds of museums, time and space.[109]

Interpreting a museal space, or 'art', in religious light is more commonly recognized. According to Crispin Paine, the museum form itself indeed has the capacity to 'sacralize' objects and spaces. In modern western culture, for example, art has taken on many religious characteristics.[110] Museum visitors are often being invited to a form of 'enchanted looking'. Steven Greenblatt calls this "wonder": a cultural mode of "looking associated with the ritualized experience of the museums visit".[111] Already in 1824, William Hazlitt remarked that

[102] Janes, "Future we desire," 139.
[103] Janes, "Future we desire," 139.
[104] Janes, "Future we desire," 143.
[105] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 216.
[106] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 216.
[107] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 210.
[108] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 210.
[109] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 210.
[110] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 71.
[111] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 224.

visiting a collection resembles going on pilgrimage: "it is an act of devotion performed at the shrine of Art".[112] Besides, great museum commentator Kenneth Hudson quoted a 1797 German view: "A picture gallery appears to be thought of as a fair, whereas what it should be is a temple, a temple where, in silent and unspeaking humility and in inspiring solitude, one may admire artists as among the highest among mortals."[113] This results in museums continuously struggling with a tension between temple and fair.[114]

However, with museums being mostly understood as authoritative "knowledge experts" it is essential for them to display in an accurate way.[115] This is similar to how religious institutions are widely regarded as 'morality experts' – even by 'nonbelievers'.[116] The traditional assumption about museums is that they indeed present the "truth."[117] This is one of the reasons why the societal and political function of museums in the times of the new museology became more of an issue. People presume they are being educated by the museum's authoritative voice and accordingly demand the museum to be inclusive and visitor-orientated. Museums are therefore not only ritual sites, but also "deeply political agencies in contemporary public culture."[118]

For a museum to find the righteous way to present religion is therefore also determined by theory on how to display religion and heritage in an ethical way. The following approaches on religion in museums will create an understanding of the ongoing discussion and includes necessary background information when aiming to analyze the influences on the story and identity of Museum Catharijneconvent. Especially the work by Crispin Paine, independent scholar in religion and history of museums, is valuable and comprehensive.

Religion in museums, museums on religion

To start with, Paine published a book on religious objects in museums: *Private Lives and Public Duties (2013)*. Paine states that religious objects in museums are seldom alone. Helped by their curators, religious objects assemble together to tell a story, create an impression or even persuade its viewer.[119] Unavoidably, this means that objects change their meaning "willy-nilly" once it is taken out of its original context.[120] This was already pointed out by

[112] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 72.
[113] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 72.
[114] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 72.
[115] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 218.
[116] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 218.
[117] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 197.
[118] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 224.
[119] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 71.
[120] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 14.

Quatremere de Quincy in Napoleon's Paris, at the very time the modern museum was invented: "by taking objects out of context, a museum robs them of their identity and value."[121] In the context of religious objects, this poses some serious challenges. Paine describes how objects are commonly seen as secular in the context of a secular museum.[122] Subsequently, the museum as the object's new environment is in itself an important factor in the object's new meaning-making process. This is emphasized by the fact that museums are public spaces. According to Paine, this simple fact means "a ban on intrusive worship, and resistance to claims to control interpretation of objects".[123] In more concrete terms, this implies that objects in museums must be seen as "purely secular".[124]

Exhibiting religion still "seems a notion with challenging implications."[125] Wijnia observed how the social positioning of museums as secular sites reinforces complexity. She quotes John Reeve, who argues that few museums prioritize presenting and interpreting religions, "yet religious beliefs are now, more than ever, a major area of public discussion, controversy and media attention, prejudice and misunderstanding".[126] Furthermore, Reeve posits several important tasks for museums to consider. He describes how collaboration with representatives of faith communities is crucial to show that religious knowledge is not solely produced by curators but "out in the field". This relates to the idea of including the source community of an object, theme or whole exhibition. He also underlines the importance of exhibitions being "multivoice" rather than "single-handedly authoritative", and argues that museums should take up an active role in the contemporary public debates around religion – "being less afraid".[127]

There are, indeed, very few museums in the world that are specifically presenting "religion" as a human phenomenon, and even fewer approach the topic from a scholarly, disinterested standpoint.[128] Even those museums which – from their subject matter or name – appear to be undoubtedly displaying religion, tend to work around questions of belief and spirituality. This was, for example, the case with the now defunct Museum of Biblical Art (MOBIA) in New York. The MOBIA explored a range of art inspired by the (Hebrew and

[121] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 14.
[122] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 71.
[123] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 79.
[124] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 79.
[125] Wijnia, *Art and the Postsecular*, 23.
[126] Wijnia, *Art and the Postsecular*, 23.
[127] Wijnia, *Art and the Postsecular*, 23.
[128] Crispin Paine, "Rich and Varied: Religion in Museums," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 215.

Christian) Bible, but was, assertively, not a museum of religious art per se and tended to avoid questions of spirituality and belief.[129] Another argument to illustrate why displaying religion in a museum can be challenging is the way in which religious objects seem to undergo a transformational process when entering the museum. Due to recontextualization, religion gets "museumified".[130] As a result of religion intersecting with archeological, ethnographic, historical and artistic dimensions of human life, the religious object is transformed by the museum.[131]

Even though exhibiting religious objects appears to be a nearly impossible task for any museum, Tom Freudenheim suggests differently. He argues that – especially in these modern times – presenting religion in an accurate way should be uncomplicated: "Given the increasingly sophisticated technological devices that invade and control our lives, we have ever greater means to purvey religious ideas, beliefs, and rituals that give greater specificity and meaning to what we see in our museums".[132] However, it has also been claimed that digital technology is not enough to help people understand "what a 'devout' feels like inside".[133] Besides, exhibiting religious objects still provokes many questions about ethics, authenticity, approaches to display and interpretation. Gretchen Buggeln et al., in their edited volume on religion in museums, therefore suggest that the main task would be to better understand the diverse group of curious museum visitors and "to present – with intelligence, openness, sensitivity, and creativity – religious objects and stories to their communities".[134] Accordingly, including first-person narratives seems unavoidable. With objects changing their religious status and losing their function, it is the intangible heritage – the people and their stories – that make a museum's story valuable and relevant.

[129] Tom L. Freudenheim, "Museums and Religion: Uneasy Companions," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 187.
[130] S. Brent Plate, "The Museumification of Religion: Human Evolution and the Display of the Ritual," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) 46.
[131] Plate, "Museumification of Religion," 41-46
[132] Freudenheim, "Uneasy Companions," 187.
[133] Buggeln et al., "Afterword," 248.
[134] Buggeln et al., "Afterword," 249.

Whose heritage?

Museums play a peculiar role in modern secular societies by preserving valuable objects that must be passed on to future generations – "which constitutes them as heritage".[135] Many, if not all, objects in museums are referred to or considered as heritage. Even the International Council of Museums (ICOM) uses the term heritage to shape a definition of the museum: "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment."[136] Clearly, objects in museums are relevant because of their meaning to humanity. The object's significance resides in the meanings that people attribute to it.

To understand the choices a museum makes, it is important to understand the concept of heritage. From the aforementioned examples, it becomes clear that objects being part of a heritage means that they are connected to humanity in some way. Laurajane Smith, a heritage and museum studies scholar, acknowledges that heritage engages with acts of remembering to understand and engage with the present. Heritage, according to Smith, should therefore be seen as a cultural and social process, instead of a 'thing':

> The physicality of the Western idea of heritage means that 'heritage' can be mapped, studied, managed, preserved and/or conserved, and its protection may be the subject of national legislation and international agreements, conventions and charters. However, heritage is heritage because it is subject to the management and preservation/conservation process, not because it simply 'is'. This process does not just 'find' sites and places to manage and protect. It is itself a constitutive cultural process that identifies those things and places that can be given meaning and value as 'heritage', reflecting contemporary cultural and social values, debates and aspirations.[137]

Smith refers to heritage as a 'multilayered performance', made up of conserving, interpreting, managing and visiting. All of these performances embody acts of commemoration and remembrance while constructing and negotiating "a sense of place, belonging and understanding in the present".[138] Furthermore, Smith explains how heritage may also be understood as a discourse – constructing and reflecting the aforementioned acts.[139] This

[135] Mark O'Neill, "Museums and the Repatriation of Objects, 1945-2015," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) 99-100.
[136] ICOM, "Definition of a Museum", accessed March 14, 2020, http://archives.icom.museum/definition.html
[137] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 3.
[138] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 3.
[139] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 13.

discourse is concerned with the regelation and negotiation of social meanings and practices associated with the (re)creation of identity.[140] Museums help govern and establish both national and social identity.[141] They become a cultural tool in the processes of remembering, since museums "may certainly be identified as textual resources around which specific narratives are written and negotiated".[142] Religious objects in museums and their textual resources keep the story of a community alive. It is their heritage. It shapes their identity.

Visiting a museum, thus being both a heritage performer and audience, can be seen as a performative statement about identity.[143] Many people visiting heritage sites and museums perceive the sites visited as part of their own heritage. They are thus able to critically contextualize what they see.[144] However, when the generation 'whose heritage' is on display passes on their nostalgia and memories to children and grandchildren, this might disrupt the authenticity of memory and meaning.[145] According to Pierre Nora, this depends on the sense of belonging. Nora explains how heritage traditionally referred to "goods and properties you inherited from your father or your mother."[146] In this context, newer generations will still value their heritage and identity as it is given to them by their ancestors – it belongs to them and their community. The newer meaning of heritage, as reported by Nora, refers to "goods and properties of a group which help define the identity of that group".[147] Even though it is highly probable that the same goods and properties will be important to define a group's identity over time, the meaning of the objects is prone to change. Furthermore, this sense of belonging raises questions of ownership. Whose heritage is on display? And who gets to decide to whom it belongs?

Ownership and belonging

The tangible aspects of religious objects will supposedly suggest ownership. When analyzing an object's material aspects, the members of the connected religious group will presumably be considered the owner of the object. However, the significance of an objects does not reside in the physical qualities of the object alone. The meaning that people attribute to it

[140] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 5.
[141] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 18.
[142] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 64.
[143] Hervieu-Léger, *Chain of Memory*, 125.; Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 70.
[144] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 199-201.
[145] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 201.
[146] Christopher Whitehead, Susanna Echersley, Mads Daugbjerg, and Gonul Bozoglu, "Final Thoughts: Heritage as a dimension of collectivity and belonging," in *Dimensions of Heritage and Memory: Multiple Europes and the Politics of Crisis,* ed. Christopher Whitehead, Susanna Echersley, Mads Daugbjerg, and Gonul Bozoglu (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 209.
[147] Whitehead et al., "Final Thoughts," 209.

and the feelings of ownership and connection – and thus the intangible aspects of the past – are considered heritage "as much as the physical fabric of the object itself".[148] This makes it way more difficult to answer questions on ownership and whose heritage. On the one hand, the answer to this question could be important to add credibility and authority to a museum's narrative. On the other hand, objects could perhaps be anyone's heritage; to anybody who feels a sense of belonging or identifies the object as part of their culture, history or identity. Consequently, for the museum to rightly choose which story to display could be a burden.

Questions concerning ownership and belonging have been raised because, apparently, the stewardship of collections has changed. This, however is an oversimplifying statement according to Gail Anderson. Anderson describes how environmental responsibility, cultural awareness and other issues "greater than the agenda of a single museum have yielded an new set of criteria and perspectives".[149] Consequently, people better understand their rights with respect to "caring for the treasures of their own heritage and the environment".[150] This radically influences the relationship between the museum and society. As a consequence, issues on ownership and belonging concerning collections is one of the very complex aspects of museum operations. However, interpreting and using a collection is what sets museums apart from other cultural and educational experiences: "The effort to care for the real thing must involve due diligence, unparalleled commitment to ethical standards, and adept management to assure the long-term care of the cultural and natural heritage of any nation or group on behalf of greater society."[151]

The fact that people have started to better understand their rights with respect to 'their' heritage is challenging in the context of religious heritage. Even though supporters of a certain faith would normally be seen as the people 'whose heritage' it concerns, religion can be of significance to all kinds of people. Religion could be part of a history, a culture, and people's identity. This means that religious heritage could not only hold meaning for the religious group 'belonging' to the heritage, but could include a whole nation: "For the faithful, as well as for those who do not practice, Church treasures have become heritage, things from their past they want to conserve, transmit, highlight, and promote, as a means of national pride. They are more

[148] Samantha Hamilton, "Sacred Objects and Conservation: The Changing Impact of Sacres Objects on Conservators," in *Religion in Museums: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Gretchen Buggeln, Crispin Paine, and S. Brent Plate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) 135-136.
[149] Gail Anderson, "The Role of the Object: The Obligation of Stewardship and Cultural Responsibility," in *Reinventing the Museum. Historical and Contemporary,* ed. Gail Anderson (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004), 266.
[150] Anderson, "The Role of the Object," 266.
[151] Anderson, "The Role of the Object," 267.

than cult objects, they are objects of culture, objects that speak and that are the history of a whole people."[152]

Exhibiting religious heritage

This idea of religious heritage belonging to the whole population of a country is especially relevant in an originally Christian West-European country, such as the Netherlands. The Dutch Christian history is considered to be part of the national identity, as most of the preceding centuries were characterized by religion.[153] This fact is even stated in the Museum Catharijneconvent's current vision:

> Ever since the Middle Ages, the Christian culture is rooted in Dutch society. This of influence on all of us. Whoever wants to understand The Netherlands, now and in the future, cannot work around Christianity. The Netherlands has a rich and unique religious tradition and holds a great deal of important material and immaterial Christian heritage: from church buildings and religious art to our public holidays. This heritage is relevant for everyone, by means of its beauty, story and meaning. A museum and knowledge center in this field is therefore essential.[154]

On the one hand, the relevance of Christian heritage for "all of us" justifies the relevance of the museum's collection. On the other hand, this raises questions on ownership when any Dutch person could feel a sense of belonging. With the museum being a communicative medium where people control both what is being presented and how this is interpreted, a museum's meaning and narrative will be in constant change. The presented theory on religion, secularization and the new role for the museum in society as introduced by the new museology, demonstrate how these aspects influence the position of Museum Catharijneconvent. Besides, the overview of theory on religion in museums heritage and ownership illustrate the general discussion points shaping the narrative of museums displaying religion.

Analyzing two exhibitions in the past two decades allows us to explore these aspects of chapter one. To what extent are these exhibitions a reflection of new museology? And how do these exhibitions illustrate the theory on religion, secularization, heritage, curatorial intention and source communities? It is these questions and the rooted Dutch Christian identity that add value to researching the subsequent case studies. To start with, *All kinds of Angels (2008-2009)*.

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[152]Paine, "Rich and Varied," 215-216.
[153] W. Bouwman et al., "2000 jaar Nederlanders en hun zielzorgers," *Geloof in Nederland*, no. 8, Utrecht: Waanders Uitgevers/ Museum Catharijneconvent (2009): 258.; W. Bouwman et al., "2000 jaar Nederlanders en hun kerstening," *Geloof in Nederland*, no. 12, Utrecht: Waanders Uitgevers/ Museum Catharijneconvent (2009): 362.
[154] Catharijneconvent, "Missie en visie."

CHAPTER 2

All Kinds of Angels (2008-2009)

The *All Kinds of Angels* exhibition was open to the public from the 4th of October 2008 until the 25th of January 2009. In a concept statement on the exhibition, the museum describes how angels can be seen as an "intriguing phenomenon", having inspired many people since the ancient times.[155] The exhibition communicated the story of the angels through the centuries, mainly focusing on their image from various religious perspectives. Even though the focus was on 'today's' experience of angels, this was done with reference to earlier traditions and, particularly, to Christian (art) history. The exhibition both uncovered the diversity in the representation of angels, and showed how images from different periods and cultures were very much related at the same time. Primarily, the exhibition wanted to invite its visitors to (re)shape their own, personal image of the angel.

The angels exhibition was one of the first exhibitions on display after former director Guus van den Hout wrote his before quoted article on the museum entering a "new era" in 2007. Researching this specific exhibition will therefore uncover how this proclaimed "new era" had taken its form in the museum's communication after 2007. The new era followed a period of rethinking the museum's mission and objectives, and rearranging all the objects in a new way. Van den Hout referred to the years between 2001 and 2007 as a "complete makeover".[156]

The museum's changed policy was clearly included in the exhibition's concept statement. One of the museum's new aims was to engage a wider target group to make the museum more accessible. Furthermore, increasing the programming of cultural-historical exhibitions in the years before 2008 was an illustration of the museum wanting to focus more on subjects relevant to society at time of display. The *All Kinds of Angels* exhibition was both an example of an exhibition aiming to engage a wider target group and an example of the museum's cultural-historical approach. Besides, the concept statement of the angels exhibition declares that the exhibition supported one of the museum's core values, namely that of "providing insight" in the unique nature of Christian art and culture.[157] These statements demonstrate how exhibitions are created in line with the museum's then current core values, policy documents and vision.

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[155] Museum Catharijneconvent, *20080428 All Kinds of Angels Concept*, 28 April 2008, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[156] Van den Hout, "on the verge of a new era…," 438.
[157] Museum Catharijneconvent, *20080428 All Kinds of Angels Concept.*

From the annual report of 2008, it becomes clear that the museum's new direction resulted in very positive outcomes. Guus van den Hout, general director at the time, declared it had been a "jubilee year" for the museum.[158] The number of visitors rose by more than 10 percent, and the *All Kinds of Angels* exhibition had more people visiting than any other exhibition since the museum's reopening – a staggering number of 67.000 visitors. According to Van den Hout, the museum had managed to connect with a new group of museum visitors by carefully balancing art, history and contemporary relevance.[159] Besides, the museum received a Special Commendation from the European Museum Forum at a ceremony in Dublin in that same year. To Van den Hout, this prestigious award acknowledged the "daring" course the museum had steered in the early 21st century.[160]

Furthermore, the 2008 annual report includes a statement by J. F. Van Duyne, who was the chairman of the museum's supervisory board. Van Duyne describes how the exhibition on angels was exceptional in many ways. Not only did the exhibition attract a new and younger public, the exhibition also "dared to be different" by showing a new side to the museum.[161] This changed the museum's identity in the media as "fitted to modern society". [162]

Apparently, the museum's great success was powerfully written about in the museum's annual report. This chapter's aim is to analyze how the general influences, theory on secularization and the ideas of the new museology have shaped the *All Kinds of Angels* exhibition. Did the museum righteously write about the museum's daring course and changing identity?

Power to the people

As explored in chapter one, all objects are being interpreted in one way or another by the museum staff. Within the exhibition creation of Museum Catharijneconvent, the museum's curatorial decisions were made by several staff members from different departments of the museum who worked together in creating this exhibition. Commonly, these so-called 'project-groups' include a project leader, one or two (guest) curators or conservators, one or more educators, a registrar, a marketing and communications officer and, varying per exhibition, external experts and designers. All together, these people are in charge of the ways in which an exhibition communicates and thus how visitors will experience and interpret the exhibition's

[158] Museum Catharijneconvent, *2008 Annual Report*, 3.
[159] Museum Catharijneconvent, *2008 Annual Report*, 27.
[160] Museum Catharijneconvent, *2008 Annual Report*, 27.
[161] Museum Catharijneconvent, *2008 Annual Report*, 4.
[162] Museum Catharijneconvent, *2008 Annual Report*, 4.

story. A very decisive choice made by the project group concerns the choice of objects and thus the focus of the theme on display. What elements are shown and what information is left out? This question is relevant because the traditional assumption about museums is that they are "knowledge experts" who present the "truth".[163]

Curators are recognized as the 'knowledge experts' of the museum and its collection.[164] Even though curators are undeniably influential when it comes to creating an exhibition, the museum's educational staff constructs the ways in which the exhibition's stories are told – and thus interpreted. While curators take care of the objects and are commonly in charge of a museum's collection, the educational staff is concerned with the process of learning: the ways in which the texts and visual story of the exhibition is communicated to the visitor. With regards to the *All Kinds of Angels* exhibition, several communicational elements enhanced the understanding and experience of the visitor, namely the textual information in the exhibition space, an audio tour, video installations, a kids quest, educational projects for primary school and educational projects for secondary school.[165] Every space related to a new theme with corresponding objects and ambience. The educational elements were in balance with the exhibition's design. To prevent the textual elements from distracting from the exhibition's objects and atmosphere, the textual information was also compiled in a small booklet.

An example of a textual element providing information and influencing the way visitors interpret, or 'read', an exhibition is the audio tour. Twenty *All Kinds of Angels* objects were included in this tour and presented stories supplementary to the physical exhibition texts. The audio tour allows for the museum to construct the way in which a visitor experiences the museum's story. In this way, the museum can prevent the visitor from solely wandering "through their texts".[166] However, it is precisely the opportunity to 'wander' that makes the museum significantly different from other contemporary media.[167]

The physical information of the angels exhibition was presented in a way to contribute to the visitor's process of meaning making. The information was presented in several layers: an introductory text to the exhibit as a whole (A-text), an explanatory statement on the individual themes and objects (B and D-texts), and if required, several objects were clustered and explained in an appended text (C-text).[168] From the introductory text (A-text) of the *All Kinds*

[163] Macdonald, "Enchantment," 218.; Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 197.
[164] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 13.
[165] Museum Catharijneconvent. *080310 Allemaal Engelen Publieksbegeleiding*, 12 March 2008, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[166] Silverstone, "The medium is the museum," 162.
[167] Silverstone, "The medium is the museum," 162.
[168] Museum Catharijneconvent. *080310 Allemaal Engelen Publieksbegeleiding*.

of Angels exhibition, it becomes clear that many different perspectives were included – as could have been predicted from the title. The text describes how angels are very popular and appear on all kinds of decorative objects to create an image of "nice beings who effortlessly switch between the human and the superhuman".[169] Besides, the introductory text states that people desire to make contact with angels. This was popularized among the older generation by "the sappy devotional prints and school pictures".[170] This interpretation of angels goes beyond their characterization of "nice beings" and refers to angels as "impressive beings" who are able to "issue difficult orders".[171] The introductory text ends with the following lines: "Angels are finding a new place in our post-modern, secularized society."[172] Undoubtedly, "the exhibition seeks *all kinds of angels*".[173] This final statement points out the inclusivity of the exhibition.

A policy of inclusion

One of the museum's aims in 2008 was to implement and follow a new policy of inclusion: to engage a wider target group and to make the museum more accessible. This aim was specified in the exhibition's concept statement and is in line with the ideas of the new museology. However, aiming to engage a wider target group and making the museum more accessible meant that the museum had to find out who their expected visitors were and what they would desire to see. In the concept statement of the *All Kinds of Angels exhibition*, the museum expresses their hope to attract a minimum of 40,000 visitors, with a focus on people from 40-65 years old and youngsters in a school context. Additionally, the museum expected to welcome visitors specified in categories of interest: people interested in cultural history and (Christian) religion, families with children (10+), school classes, and religious (church) communities.[174] Clearly, the museum expected a diverse group of visitors with very different ages and probably very different interests. The museum thus had to think thoroughly about a way to communicate the exhibition's story to all of these groups in an understandable and engaging way.

An example of inclusive communication is the exhibition's poster campaign (see fig. 1). This campaign visually enhances the exhibition's title and focus by including their target group: people 'of all kinds'. The photographed people on the posters are real, they have diverse

[169] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Teksten tentoonstelling ENG*, 24 October 2008, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[170] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Teksten tentoonstelling ENG.*
[171] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Teksten tentoonstelling ENG.*
[172] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Teksten tentoonstelling ENG.*
[173] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Teksten tentoonstelling ENG.*
[174] Museum Catharijneconvent, *20080428 All Kinds of Angels Concept.*

backgrounds, they are both male and female, they are both younger and older of age, and – most importantly – they are all potential visitors. Besides, the poster campaign greatly complemented the exhibition's goal to encourage visitors to reconsider their image of an angel: "The visitors will discover that angels are not just the sweet and innocent little winged creatures but that they visit humanity as fierce defenders of justice – but also as ordinary people (without wings) who are recognized as angels only after the event."[175]

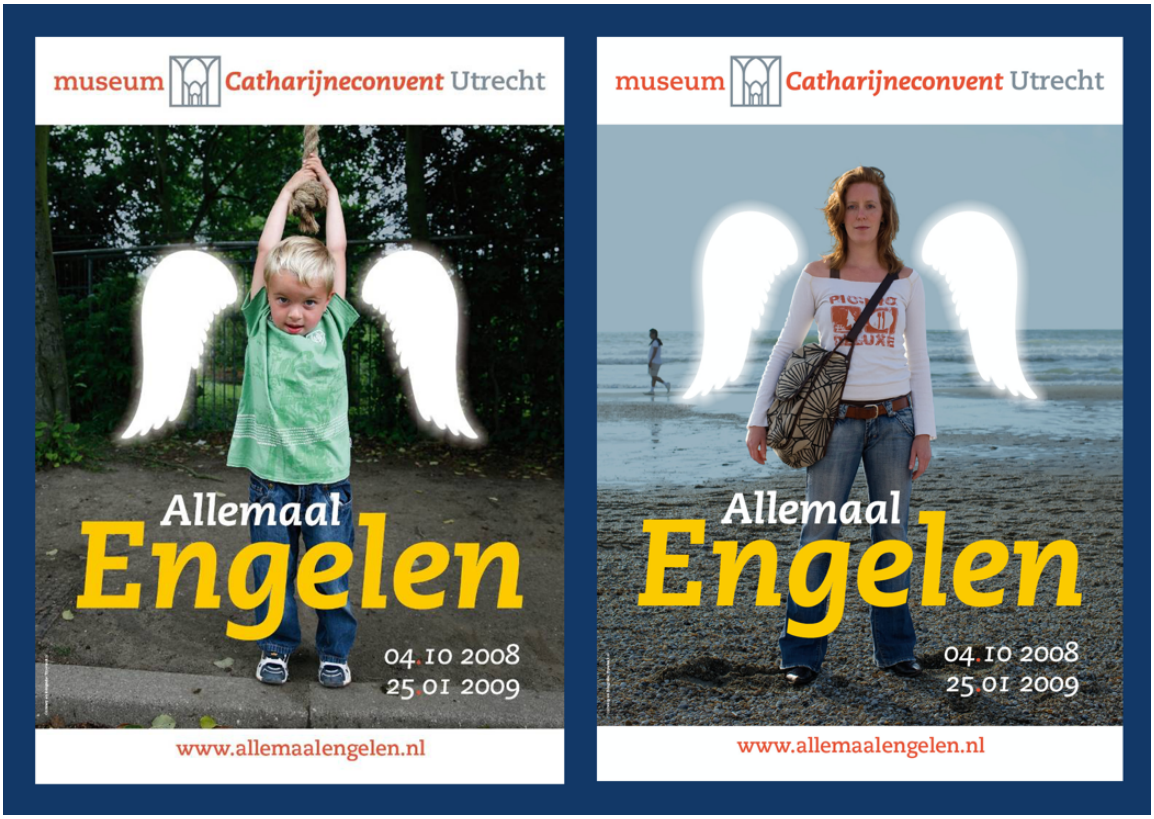

Fig. 1. Poster for the *All Kinds of Angels* marketing campaign. Created by Museum Catharijneconvent, 2008. Online archive.[176]

Considering the attention to the 'angel' phenomenon at the time of the exhibition, the museum expected its potential visitors to have a certain prior knowledge to this topic. They expected young visitors to be familiar with angels from movies, advertising and public holidays such as Christmas. The older visitors were expected to have a different image, for example of a guardian angel watching over them. Mapping information on potential visitors is crucial for a museum. Knowing what hopes, assumptions and understandings visitors bring with them

[175] Museum Catharijneconvent, *20080428 All Kinds of Angels Concept.*
[176] Museum Catharijneconvent, "Poster for the *All Kinds of Angels* marketing campaign." Created by Museum Catharijneconvent, 2008. Online archive.

results in a better understanding.[177] It allows for the museum to translate these assumptions into a narrative, which increases the probability of the visitor's expectations becoming reality.

However, the *All Kinds of Angels* exhibition was not just designed to meet expectations. On the contrary, the exhibition was mainly designed to educate its visitors. The exhibition's task was to uncover how angels were already a phenomenon far before they had a place in Christianity and in other religions. The museum therefore claimed to tell the story of the angel through the centuries "in an impressive manner."[178] This also meant that the objects on display were both religious and non-religious. This might seem out of place in a museum focusing on Dutch Christian Heritage. However, Museum Catharijneconvent is a secular museum and one of their core values was that of "providing insight" in the unique nature of Christian art and culture.[179] The angels exhibition provided this insight by displaying how angels have been more than the winged creatures in the Christian Bible.

The way in which the *All Kinds of Angels* exhibition showed the changing image of angels over the years is illustrated by the exhibition lay-out and sub-themes. The exhibition started with the ancient times, where it was made clear that angels were 'born' in Mesopotamia – centuries before the world religions included the divine creatures. Following the ancient times, space was created to showcase paintings of artists who shaped the appearance of angels from biblical scenes. These paintings often included angels to highlight a dramatic moment, portraying them as outstandingly bright, nearly luminous, (winged) creatures. After this first encounter with angels in religious spheres, the hierarchy of angels in Christian tradition was displayed. This part referred to the well-known image of angels singing at the throne of God.[180] Subsequent to these religiously focused representations, a section followed with examples of guardian angels. Generations of people have grown up with images of male – or even genderless – figures who appeared to have motherly features in their protective roles. This was a more spiritual way of exhibiting angels. The last segment included modern art and contemporary representations of angels.[181] This demonstrates the inclusivity of the exhibition and attempts to truly include all kinds of angels, which closely relates to the explored theory on the new museology.

[177] Buggeln et al., "Afterword," 248.
[178] Codart, "Allemaal Engelen," accessed May 14, 2020. https://www.codart.nl/guide/agenda/allemaal-engelen/
[179] Museum Catharijneconvent, *20080428 All Kinds of Angels Concept.*
[180] Museum Catharijneconvent, *20080428 All Kinds of Angels Concept.*
[181] Museum Catharijneconvent, *20080428 All Kinds of Angels Concept.*

Heritage of the living

The exhibition's contemporary representation of angels consisted of seven video installations, all presenting an interview with an expert. The term 'expert' already raises questions – what does it mean to be an expert? Seemingly, people who tell their own side to a story and share their opinion, knowledge or experience makes them experts in this context. It suggests that everybody with a story or sense of belonging to an object could have been included. These video interviews raise questions with regards to whose heritage is on display. Furthermore, they embody a way of communicating the voice of the source community, and illustrate the concept of inclusivity as introduced in the new museology.

To begin with, the exhibition included 'all kinds of angels', which made it difficult to define 'whose heritage' was presented. The religious objects in this exhibition could, for example, be considered as part of Christian heritage. Several other objects, however, might not evidently 'belong' to anyone. With angels being used in speech, advertising, on stage, in films, in music and in the visual arts; they seem to belong to society without belonging to anyone in specific.[182] The seven videos all represent people with their own story or experience related to 'angels' – which makes these people part of the exhibition's source community 'whose heritage' is on display. However, that does not mean this excludes others. It might allow visitors to feel connected to the presented stories and therefore acknowledge that this is just as much part of 'their' heritage as it might be to 'others'. By including the seven perspectives, the museum showed that they did not only come up with the presented theories themselves, but actually included people involved with the theme in their own unique way. This adds to the exhibition's credibility, inclusivity and authority.

Each of the interviewees answered a question from their personal perspective, knowledge or experience. Besides, the interviewees were requested to connect their story to one or more of the exhibited objects – if possible. This would make their story part of the ascribed information to the object.[183] The answers to the questions were provided from a religious as well as a non-religious perspective. A very clear religious perspective came from Pastor Visser. According to Visser, there would be no faith without angels. He describes how angels have many appearances in the Bible which would make theology without them "dead".[184] His video with the title, "Why is the angel not allowed in church?", already unlashes

[182] Codart, "Allemaal Engelen."
[183] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 17.
[184] Museum Catharijneconvent. *Dominee_visser_script[1],* 5 September 2008, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.

an intriguing element to this religious perspective on angels. Apparently, angels are not allowed in Pastor Visser's church. Pastor Visser explains how people in church share their experiences with angels constantly, but always do this whispering. Speaking of angels seems to be some kind of taboo. According to Visser, being more open to alternative "sounds" and perspectives would enrich people's faith. He explains that he thinks angels support Christ's story and "guide us people to the heavenly paradise".[185]

Danne van Schoonhoven, on the contrary, has a more artistic and spiritual vision when it comes to angels. Van Schoonhoven provided an answer to questions six, and explains how angels symbolize his personal search for freedom: "A search for the outside world, for meeting a soulmate, for love – both the woman of your dreams and the love of a mother".[186] According to him, these are transparent, "elusive" feelings. Painting these feelings should therefore also be transparent and elusive, Van Schoonhoven explains. He wants to help remind people that angels exist and challenge them to be open to a world "beyond the accepted boundaries".[187] These examples illustrate how the museum chose to include both religious and non-religious perspectives. Consequently, a larger group of people could have felt connected to the people presented as the experts – or source community.

Secular museum – secular objects?

Including both religious and non-religious perspectives seems to fit very well to the museum's aim of attracting a broader audience. Was the museum trying to make the museum more attractive to the secular part of society by including non-religious perspectives? When looking at the museum's statements, this could be suggested. As a result of secularization, religion had become of minor importance in society. This meant that society was increasingly religiously illiterate and the museum had to display their story on religion in a different way.[188] Even though including non-religious elements in the exhibition on angels was a deliberate choice made by the museum, this perspective was also necessary to make the story on angels complete and be 'true' to its diversity. Essentially, the exhibition wanted to communicate how angels were not solely religious beings. By choosing to include "all kinds of angels", the museum also chose to include multiple perspectives.

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[185] Museum Catharijneconvent. *Dominee_visser_script[1].*
[186] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Danne_Schoonhoven_script[1],* 5 September 2008, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[187] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Danne_Schoonhoven_script[1].*
[188] Museum Catharijneconvent, *1998 Annual Report*.; Wijnia, *Art and the Postsecular*, 32.; Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 25-31.

Alongside the inclusion of both religious and non-religious perspectives, the seventh question was answered by Kader Abdollah: "What is the role of the angel in the life of an 'ex-muslim?" Even though Abdollah lost his faith at the age of 15, he describes his encounter with an angel's voice who told him to translate the Quran into Dutch. He did. According to Abdollah, an angel can be seen as the truest version of a human being: an angel is someone's inner voice. Abdollah describes how he thinks everyone has this inner voice, but some "simply give more attention to it than others".[189] In the Quran, angels are not frequently written about. They are, however, specified as creatures of light – without a tangible form, without right or wrong. Thanks to his inner angel, Abdollah decided to translate the Quran – "even though I am not religious myself".[190]

Generally speaking, museums are expected to help promote interreligious understanding to create space for individual learning and understanding.[191] For the museum to include this perspective thus creates space for conversation and discussion – a natural means of the museum.[192] It demonstrates how the museum's identity is secular and the focus is on educating and providing knowledge. In the end, Museum Catharijneconvent is a secular, state-funded, museum displaying Dutch Christian heritage.

The museum's secular identity is also significant when looking at the way in which space itself communicates a story.[193] As explored in chapter one, objects change their meaning when taken out of their original context and are commonly seen as secular in the context of a secular museum.[194] Even though this suggests a change in meaning of the religious objects to secular – the image of Museum Catharijneconvent might not be that secular at all. With the museum primarily exhibiting religious objects, many Dutch people might consider the museum to be religious in origin. This could result in visitors expecting to solely see religious objects on display. In the context of the angels exhibition, this could have meant that non-religious objects have been interpreted in a religious way.

[189] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Kader Abdollah (2),* 29 August 2008, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[190] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Kader Abdollah (2).*
[191] Buggeln et al., "Introduction," 2.; Buggeln et al., "Afterword," 247.
[192] Hughes, "Radical Hospitality," 165.
[193] Mason, "Museums, galleries and heritage," 222.
[194] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 14; 71.

All kinds of angels?

Because even though the exhibition's message was challenging visitors to reconsider their image of angels being purely religious, the exhibition still mainly displayed the Christian image of the angel. This was, for example, stated in an evaluation form.[195] The museum deliberately chose to mainly project the angel in its elevated form, which left out the "cozy" devotion angels and made the exhibition somewhat obedient.[196] Besides, the evaluation document questions whether this Christian image was too much present and if it might have been better to have included a wider variety of images and perspectives. For the museum to question their own chosen perspectives demonstrates their ability to critically reflect. This encourages the idea that the museum will constantly enhance and develop its narrative.

The *All Kinds of Angels* exhibition clearly embodies the museum entering a "new era". The exhibition was not only inclusive and multifaceted – and thus in line with the new museology, it also attempted to educate and challenge its visitors to reshape their image of the angel. This suggests the museum's neutrality and fits to the museum's secular identity, core values and goal of attracting a broader audience. However, the exhibition mainly covered Christian imagery and objects, which implies the difficulty of exhibiting religious heritage on secular grounds. With the museum trying to include all kinds of angels, the museum uniquely responded to new museology and secularization.

[195] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Evaluatie,* 17 March 2009, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[196] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Evaluatie.*

CHAPTER 3

Here in our very own Bible Belt (2019)

The second exhibition, "*Here in our very own Bible Belt*", was open to the public from the 7th of July until the 22nd of September 2019. A noteworthy exhibition displaying a Dutch orthodox minority: the orthodox Christian Reformed Churches situated in a broad swathe that runs across the Netherlands from the south-west to the north-east. The exhibition's project plan points out that a lot of attention has been given to the conservative minorities with a migration background in the past two decades. However, not many people realize that the Dutch orthodox Christians are a minority themselves too. This exhibition therefore invited its visitors to critically think about the complex and multifaceted Dutch identity, "which could lead to further insights on Dutch society as a whole".[197] This goal conforms very well with the museum's (2019) mission: "Museum Catharijneconvent demonstrates – in dialogue with partners and public – the esthetic, cultural and historical values of Christian heritage, to get a better insight into our present-day society."[198]

The Bible Belt exhibition is one of the museum's most recently completed exhibitions. Choosing to display the Bible Belt exhibit in 2019 illustrates how the museum responds to its time and place in society: three then current themes in Dutch society were decisive and motivated the museum to start creating the exhibition in 2018. Firstly, the museum wished to connect the exhibition with the remembrance of the 'Synod of Dordrecht'. This international synod took place from November 1618 until May 1619, and intended to settle disputes concerning Arminianism, or so-called Remonstrants. In practice, the synod was mainly concerned with problems facing the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, though it was originally intended to bring agreement on the doctrine of predestination among all Reformed churches.[199] Besides, the synod had initiated an official Dutch translation of the Holy Bible. With a large part of the Bible Belt Christians being orthodox Reformed – and with the important place of the Bible in their community – this made for a great consolidation of the two events.

Secondly, Dutch society was disrupted by two impactful events; the societal commotion resulting from the Dutch version of the Nashville Statement, and the public discussion regarding the vaccination of children. The Nashville Statement included orthodox declarations

[197] Museum Catharijneconvent, *2019 03 06 Projectplan Biblebelt voor EXTERN GEBRUIK*, 28 March 2019, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[198] Museum Catharijneconvent, "2019 Annual Report," 5.
[199] "Synod of Dort", Netherlands Church Assembly, accessed May 7, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/event/Synod-of-Dort

with regards to sexuality and gender. These statements against abortion are accepted by the Dutch orthodox church but rejected by most other churches and most of society. The vaccination discussion too forms a division between the Dutch orthodox reformed minority and most of society: where vaccination is commonly seen to protect human kind from certain diseases, the orthodox minority finds this unnatural. Since these topics are relevant to the Bible Belt community, it was very thoughtful of the museum to plan this exhibition as a response to the formed prejudices and the lack of information and knowledge on the community's way of living and their diverse standpoints. The museum's wish to display this exhibition as an answer to societal events shows how the museum truly responded to society in a very clear and relevant way. It demonstrates how the ideas from the 'New Museology' of the late 20th century are still relevant.

The responsive attitude of the museum was positively assessed when looking at the exhibition's outcome. While the museum was expecting to welcome around 20.000 visitors, the actual number was 72.823 visitors in just under three months; a new record based on the length of the exhibition and nearly 4 times more than expected.[200] Besides, the Bible Belt exhibition was extensively covered in the media and from the variety of articles and news items it became clear that the exhibition invoked discussion and reflection.[201] The actuality of the topic and positive outcome make the Bible Belt exhibition of great relevance when analyzing how Museum Catharijneconvent communicates their story via exhibitions.

Power to the people

Here in our very own Bible Belt was curated and initiated by Tanja Kootte. The museum explains how Kootte, specialized in Dutch Protestantism, already wished to create this exhibition for "years and years".[202] This in itself is a clear example of how the museum staff is eminently decisive in the museum's choice of focus and narrative. Besides, several experts advised the museum in the processes of creating and designing the exhibition. A first expert was Fred van Lieburg, professor in the history of religion at the *Vrije Universiteit* and establisher of the *Dutch Bible Belt Network*. A second advisor was Jan-Kees Karels, editor of the *Reformatorisch Dagblad*. Karels once wrote an open letter to the *Nieuwe Kerk* in Amsterdam to plead for an exhibition about the Bible Belt. For the museum to explicitly

[200] Museum Catharijneconvent, "2019 Annual Report," 15.
[201] Museum Catharijneconvent, "2019 Annual Report," 15.
[202] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Extern gebruik Q&A_ Bij ons in de Biblebelt*, 25 June 2019, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.

mention their used sources and cooperation with experts contradicts the conception of museums being mysterious places to audiences. It opposes the "Wizard of Oz technique", where exhibits appear to be presenting the anonymous voice of authority.[203] In the case of the Bible Belt exhibition, acknowledging that the presented information came from the source community whose heritage was on display made the exhibition even more credible and relevant.

Museum Catharijneconvent openly states that all the exhibitions they create are consistently told from multiple perspectives.[204] Stories can therefore always be interpreted in different ways and looked at from different angles. Including diversified viewpoints was unavoidable in the case of the Bible Belt exhibition. It was a story of the people. The most important goal of the museum was to go against the visitor's prejudices and tell the full story: what inspires them? What is their daily life like? And what makes them different from other people and parts in the Netherlands?[205] When looking at the themes and objects on display, the inclusion of the source community is undoubtedly present.

The exhibition was set up in themes referring to different parts of the Bible Belt's story. The first theme challenged the visitor's preconception. Short documentary fragments made visitors aware of their prejudices. After stimulating the visitor to be open to experiencing the Bible Belt and, possibly, create a new image – several themes focused on the diversity of the people living in the Bible Belt and their life choices. Displaying the diversity within the community had been a challenging task, and even more so because it concerned a living group of people. Besides, the Bible Belt can be considered a closed off community. This obstructed the museum from collecting objects and other tangible elements related to the Bible Belt.

The Bible Belt exhibition therefore mainly focused on the story of the people instead of displaying objects. Another reason for this focus on intangible heritage is how modern religion can be considered more interiorized and individual: "rather than being a matter of objects, it becomes a matter of the heart and mind".[206] With museums presenting their stories via visual elements and objects, the lack of materiality was challenging at first. The museum had to think creatively in visually shaping and designing the exhibition to uncover all aspects of the Bible Belt and the community's diverse ways of living. With the focus not being on the object but on the people – the museum included various audio-visual technologies to tell the people's stories.

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[203] Ames, "Museology Interrupted," 48.; Hughes, "Radical Hospitality," 167.
[204] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Extern gebruik Q&A_ Bij ons in de Biblebelt.*
[205] Redactie DUIC, "Utrecht volgens directeur van Museum Catharijneconvent Marieke van Schijndel," *DUIC,* September 10, 2019, https://www.duic.nl/cultuur/utrecht-volgens-directeur-van-museum-catharijneconvent-marieke-van-schijndel/
[206] Wijnia, *Art and the Postsecular*, 18.

An example is the use of audio fragments – both voices and music – in the exhibition's third theme covering diversity. Visitors were invited to listen to the voices of different pastors to uncover how heterogeneous the Bible Belt community actually is. Besides, church music from different congregations revealed how psalms are sung differently too.[207] Both these examples illustrate how the museum achieved to display diversity by only using sound. Engaging the visitor's senses beyond vision alone creates empathy, which makes this a very significant choice.[208]

Another form of visually and creatively telling the people's stories was by photography. Photographer Sjaak Verboom made a series depicting women from churches in the Reformed Experiential world. Between 2013 and 2019, he made portraits of women both in their everyday clothing and in their "Sunday's best" (see fig. 2).[209]

Fig. 2. Sjaak Verboom, "Saturday/Sunday", series 2013-2019. From online archive, Museum Catharijneconvent.[210]

Clothing reveals much about a person's identity which made this series a valuable addition; shedding light on the position of women in the Bible Belt society. It became clear that the women conform to a group identity. This group identity is shaped by more or less

[207] Museum Catharijneconvent, *2019 03 06 Projectplan Biblebelt voor EXTERN GEBRUIK.*
[208] Buggeln et al., "Afterword," 247.
[209] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Biblebelt Teksten ENG op zaal*, date unknown, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[210] Sjaak Verboom, "Saturday/Sunday." 2013-2019, Online Archive Museum Catharijneconvent.

compulsory – often unwritten – rules dictating the style of their hat, the colour of their costumes, and the presence or absence of make-up and jewelry. However, certain details indicate how women also try to preserve their individuality.[211]

Two other parts of the Bible Belt exhibition actually did include objects and thus the community's tangible heritage. The first space was created to symbolize a Bible Belt's family home. The objects on display were related to politics, ethics, sexuality and education. This allowed the visitors to discover their home's characteristics. According to the museum, this part of the exhibition showed the "heart" of the Bible Belt: the (large) family.[212] Family life is very important for the Bible Belt community. The majority of them live their lives among their 'own kind', couples tend to marry at relatively young age, and families are relatively larger - having more children than average families in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the Bible Belt has its own newspaper: *The Reformatorisch Dagblad*, their own political party: the SGP, their own Bible Foundation, Reformed schools and own healthcare centers. They even have their own association of reformed-affiliated artists known as KORF (Kunstenaars op Reformatorisch Fundament). The Bible and the Three Forms of Unity are the founding principles of this art association.[213] The Three Forms of Unity are accepted as official statements of principle by many of the Reformed churches an consist of the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism. Part of the exhibition was dedicated to the Reformed art as part of the community's tangible heritage.

A policy of inclusion?

Including art made by people from the Bible Belt seems like a sound choice in the context of a museum. However, including this art was not solely for aesthetic means; it communicated and demonstrated two fundamental things. The first was to show that art is art, no matter the maker. The Reformed art is not per se different from 'other' art, which indicates commonalities with the rest of society. Even though not many reformed artists are known, the Bible claims it is obligatory to use the talents "you have been given".[214] Furthermore, Calvin himself stated that art "enriches everyday life".[215] The second meaning communicated via the KORF art was the closure of the exhibition's art department on Sundays. Art may be art, but

[211] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Biblebelt Teksten ENG op zaal.*
[212] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Projectplan Biblebelt Vormgeving*, 21 December 2018, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[213] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Biblebelt Teksten ENG op zaal.*
[214] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Biblebelt Teksten ENG op zaal.*
[215] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Biblebelt Teksten ENG op zaal.*

the Reformed artists live according to Biblical values. This means that Sunday is considered a day of rest; a day for going to church and working on spiritual growth.

Sunday was not meant to be 'wasted' by going to a museum which made the KORF artists decide to not show their works of art on this day. This was the condition under which the KORF-artists wanted to participate in the exhibition. For the museum to agree with this shows great respect for the source community and demonstrates how the museum truly identifies themselves to be "in service of society".[216] Consequently, curtains were installed to hide the works of art on Sundays. This visually communicated how the belief system of the Bible Belt community works 'in practice'.

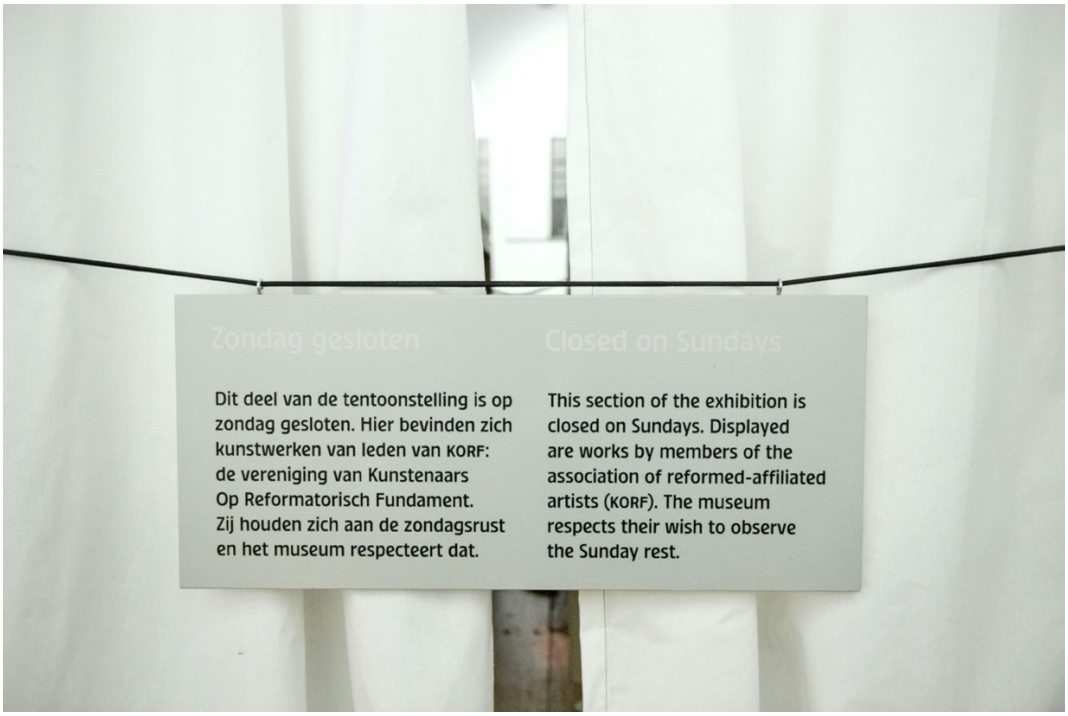

Fig. 3. Mike Bink, 2019, via online archive, Museum Catharijneconvent.[217]

Displaying the KORF-art in this extraordinary way was debated and reflected upon by many. A response from people 'outside' of the community could have been expected, for they might felt this acknowledged their prejudices and demonstrated the apparent dissimilarities of the community with people of their 'own'. However, reflection and debate also arose from inside the community itself. This becomes clear from an article by Tijs Huisman, published in the Bible Belt's newspaper *the Reformatorisch Dagblad*. Huisman is an artist himself and had

[216] Buggeln et al., "Afterword," 247.
[217] Mike Bink, 2019, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent.

worked as an art teacher for over forty years.[218] When he wanted to study the Arts himself, his parents would not let him go because of art's bad reputation in the Reformed community. According to Huisman, however, beauty can be seen as a gift of the Lord because "art shows beauty in spite of sin to the world".[219] He describes how art can be about honest and individual creating, without losing sight of the norms of the Biblical commands.[220] Accordingly, Huisman – being both an artist and Reformist – wrote his reflection on the Bible Belt exhibition with focus on the art made by KORF. He argues that blocking the artworks on Sunday, while all other parts of the exhibition were still on display, might have created a mystery around these artworks which allowed for further alienation amongst the visitors.

Huisman therefore thinks it would have been better if the artworks had not been blocked after all. This did not only leave out a "beautiful part" of the exhibition, it was also less relevant in the light of more recent Bible Belt 'rules'.[221] Initially, galleries had to be closed on Sunday because of their concerns with trading and buying, but this was irrelevant in the context of the Bible Belt exhibition.[222] Furthermore, Huisman even declares that the choice to hide the artworks by KORF on Sunday aroused questions related to identity and thus implicitly affected all of the Bible Belt: "What do we actually stand for when it comes to appearances? What is principally off guard, what is in the middle or questionable and what is less fundamental?"[223] He therefore concludes his article stating that the exhibition in Utrecht provoked self-reflection and a reconsideration of the Bible Belt's rooted standpoints and traditions. This makes for a great outcome of the exhibition, seemingly encouraging societal change.

All in all, Huisman's opinion is remarkably positive. And there is more. Many Bible Belt community visitors were contented with the way the exhibition communicated their story. In total, around 20 percent of the total number of visitors was part of the Bible Belt community.[224] This is striking because 75 percent of this group had never been to Museum Catharijneconvent before. Amongst the other visitor groups, not more than between 30 and 40

[218] Rudy Ligtenberg, "Kunstenaar Huisman: ruimte geven aan het wonder der dingen," Reformatorisch Dagblad, November 11, 2014, https://www.rd.nl/vandaag/binnenland/kunstenaar-huisman-ruimte-geven-aan-het-wonder-der-dingen-1.432372
[219] Ligtenberg, "Kunstenaar Huisman."
[220] Ligtenberg, "Kunstenaar Huisman."
[221] Tijs Huisman, "Bij ons in de biblebelt, aanleiding voor zelfreflectie," *Reformatorisch Dagblad,* October 1, 2019, https://www.rd.nl/opinie/bij-ons-in-de-biblebelt-aanleiding-voor-zelfreflectie-1.1598508
[222] Huisman, "Bij ons in de biblebelt."
[223] Huisman, "Bij ons in de biblebelt."
[224] Mathijs Steinberger, "Tentoonstelling over Biblebelt overtreft alle verwachtingen van Utrechts Catharijneconvent," *Algemeen Dagblad*, September 26, 2019, https://www.ad.nl/utrecht/tentoonstelling-over-biblebelt-overtreft-alle-verwachtingen-van-utrechts-catharijneconvent~a445d4b44/

per cent of the visitors had never been to the museum before.[225] A prevalent response was that the exhibition took away some of the predominant prejudices by displaying the community's diversity and providing knowledge.[226] General Director Marieke van Schijndel pointed out how visitors acknowledged that the exhibition was "made with love": people identified with their heritage on display and were often moved.[227] The source community's positive responses along with the exhibition having created space for self-reflection and discussion – even amongst the Bible Belt visitors themselves – seems to be a perfect outcome for this exhibition. Clearly the story was communicated in a convenient way and showed great cooperation between the museum, society, and the community whose heritage was on display. Besides, it demonstrates the way in which the museum explored the theme of inclusivity as brought up in the theory of the new museology. The exhibition includes multiple perspectives and is in itself a way of including a religious minority group into the Dutch religious heritage displayed by the museum.

The Bible Belt and the postsecular

Some critical notes, however, were based on the overall focus of the exhibition. Both members of the community and the museum itself acknowledged that the focus of the exhibition was more sociological and less theological. This resulted in a discussion on the nature of the exhibit: was the Bible Belt more about a culture or a religion?[228] Because in the first place, the Bible Belt is a community and region shaped by religion. It is the region in the Netherlands where relatively many people go to the Reformed church, which is usually measured by the number SGP voters – the reformed political party. That the foundation of the Bible Belt is religious can be illustrated by the fact that this region only became visible in the 1960s, when secularization started to become more evident in Dutch society.[229] The place of religion in Dutch society changed significantly, with less people going to church and religion being banned from the public sphere.[230] Accordingly, religious institutions either chose a more liberal strategy; adapting to the modern plural society, or embraced the orthodox strategy; trying to

[225] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Evaluatie Bij ons in de Biblebelt*, 27 January 2020, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.
[226] Bas Roetman, "De expositie 'Bij ons in de Biblebelt' breekt records: 'Mensen zijn vaak ontroerd'," *Trouw*, September 11, 2019, https://www.trouw.nl/religie-filosofie/de-expositie-bij-ons-in-de-biblebelt-breekt-records-mensen-zijn-vaak-ontroerd~bb4e11ef/ ; Teunie Luijk, "Bij ons in de Biblebelt," *Eenvoudig leven,* July 5, 2019, https://eenvoudigleven.blogspot.com/2019/07/bij-ons-in-de-biblebelt.html; Museum Catharijneconvent, "2019 Annual Report".; Museum Catharijneconvent, *Evaluatie Bij ons in de Biblebelt.*
[227] Roetman, "Breekt records."
[228] Roetman, "Breekt records."
[229] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Projectplan Biblebelt Vormgeving.*
[230] Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 47-48.

redefine the margin of society as a sect.[231] Dutch Reformists selected the second option which led to the creation of a religious minority, allegedly closed off from society.

With the current renewed postsecular approach to religion, however, the Bible Belt became more approachable as it allowed for religion to return to the public sphere.[232] This resulted in more attention to religion and spirituality in the media and enabled for society to be more open to reflection and discussion on these matters. According to Johan Roeland, Professor in media, religion and culture at the *Vrije Universiteit*, the success of the Bible Belt exhibition can be connected to this postsecular way of thinking because the reformed church became more visible in society. Consequently, present-day Bible Belt is not considered to be just an "exotic minority" in a secular country, but more as a "self-conscious denomination who deserve respect".[233]

Meanwhile, the postsecular society was highly affected by secularization and the subsequent religious illiteracy and de-churching. As a result, less people had knowledge of religion and the diverse religious communities in the Netherlands, which created new types of prejudices regarding religion and, inevitable, the Bible Belt. For many people, the Reformed church members were seen as 'the religious people' after they had become more visible in the postsecular times. This was amplified by the invisibility of opposite religious practices, for example the "pick-'n'-mix" approach to religion with people practicing inside the four walls of their homes.[234] Besides, the Bible Belt community and their way of living and practicing their religion, has similarities with the appearance of the religious society before the 1960s – before visible secularization. The museum even referred to this preconception in mapping their expected visitor profiles. One of the groups to expectedly come to visit the exhibition were the 'babyboomers' who "might feel nostalgia towards the Bible Belt because it reminded them of the way religious people lived their lives when they were young".[235] Apparently, for the museum to include this exhibition on the Bible Belt was much needed to reshape the image of Dutch religious heritage.

[231] Paul, *Kleine geschiedenis*, 77.
[232] Beaumont et al., "Reflective Secularization?," 11.
[233] Roetman, "Breekt records."
[234] Paine, *Religious Objects in Museums*, 20-22.
[235] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Waarom is de tentoonstelling zo succesvol*, 13 September 2019, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.

Heritage of the living

The Bible Belt and the Reformed orthodox religion undoubtedly resound a feeling of earlier days in Dutch society. The Bible Belt heritage can therefore be considered an important part of Dutch religious heritage. With Museum Catharijneconvent stating in their mission and objectives how they want to provide insight into our present-day society by displaying the ethic, cultural and historical value of Dutch Christianity; this exhibition is of great importance in communicating that message.[236] Even more so because many of the museum's objects on display in the permanent collection are conceived to be 'old', impressive, authentic religious objects – which constitutes them as heritage. When thinking about the meaning of heritage, this indeed seems to commonly refer to objects from earlier generations.[237] Heritage, however, is also about defining a group's identity in present times, about engaging with acts of remembering to understand and immerse with the present. It should be seen as a cultural and social process, instead of solely a 'thing'.[238] Heritage is itself "a constitutive cultural process that identifies those things and places that can be given meaning and value as 'heritage', reflecting contemporary cultural and social values, debates and aspirations."[239] The Bible Belt exhibition, having been based on a story of living people, clearly fits into the idea of heritage being not only about history but also about a social and cultural process.

Presenting 'living heritage' appeared to have been a singular task. With a lack of significant tangible heritage, the museum had to mainly focus on the community's intangible aspects. This choice, however, was perfectly fitted to the museum's mission and added to the exhibition being of greater societal value. The exhibition did not only provide educational elements, it also created space for discussion and reflection. Besides, it responded to the societal actuality and allowed for a better understanding of the influence and identity formed by this part of Dutch Christian heritage. Even though the exhibition showed a religious minority, which underlines the religious illiteracy, secularization and otherness in Dutch society; it also showed how religion is still very much alive in present-day society.

A museum's neutrality

To conclude, the exhibition's final room consisted of an installation created by Liesbeth Labeur, *The broad and narrow path* (2019). The installation depicted the Reformed subculture

[236] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Extern gebruik Q&A_ Bij ons in de Biblebelt.*
[237] Whitehead et al., "Final Thoughts," 209.
[238] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 3.; Whitehead et al., "Final Thoughts," 209.
[239] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 3.

in which Labeur herself was born and raised. According to Labeur, the parable of the broad and narrow path in the Gospel of Matthew represent the core of the Reformed theology; each individual has to account for his or her own choices at the end of life.[240] The installation invites the visitors to answer the following question: "Yet are we such wicked creatures that we are wholly incapable of any good and inclined to all that is evil? Answer: Yes, we are; save when we have been reborn through the Spirit of God."[241] When stepping into the installation, the visitor was challenged to choose either the broad or the narrow path (see fig. 4 and fig 5.). The museum thus clearly invited the visitor to create one's own opinion after having been provided with the information on display.

For the museum to take a neutral stance is something commonly expected by visitors. In her research on the reforming agendas of museums in the contemporary society, Fiona Cameron provides illustrative examples of visitors clearly stating this believe in the museum's neutrality. As one participant stated: "In principle, museums should deal with something confrontational in a non-judgmental way … it's not there to manipulate, its simply there to say here it is."[242] This refers to the museum prioritizing the self-regulation of audiences while maintaining a "non-judgmental" position. Consequently, people are invited to form their own opinions.[243] The *Bible Belt* exhibition demonstrates the Museum Catharijneconvent taking this neutral stance. A secular museum displaying the Dutch religious heritage in a neutral way. However, the museum also demonstrated its ability to work through the more difficult subjects related to religion in a postsecular society, being unafraid to take up an active role in the public debates and create a safe space for discussion and reflection. This results in an open and inclusive approach to religion – closely related to the ideas of the new museology.

[240] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Biblebelt Teksten ENG op zaal.*
[241] Museum Catharijneconvent, *Biblebelt Teksten ENG op zaal.*
[242] Fiona Cameron, "Moral lessons and Reforming Agendas: History museums, science museums, contentious topics and contemporary societies," in *Museums Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed,* ed. Simon Knell, Suzanne MacLeod, and Sheila Watson (London: Routledge, 2007), 332.
[243] Cameron, "Moral lessons," 332.

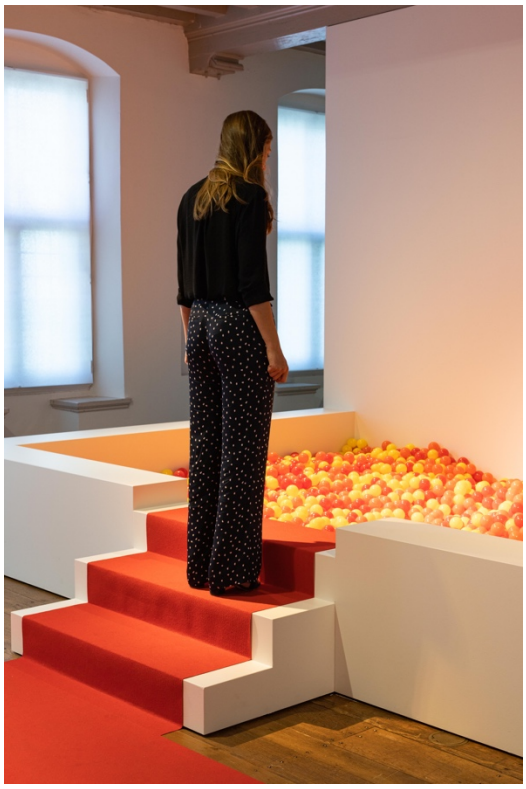

Fig. 4. Billie-Jo Krul. 2019. Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent.[244]

Fig. 5. Liesbeth Labeur. “Brede en Smalle weg,” 2008. https://www.liesbethlabeur.nl/brede-en-smalle-weg [245]

[244] Billie-Jo Krul, 2019, Online Archive, Museum Catharijneconvent.
[245] Liesbeth Labeur, “Brede en Smalle weg,” 2008, https://www.liesbethlabeur.nl/brede-en-smalle-weg

CONCLUSION

A unique museal narrative

In conclusion, both of the exhibition's narratives have been clearly shaped by curatorial intention, the object's source communities, the ideas of the new museology and secularization. Even though the exhibitions show signs of their time, many similarities can be distinguished.

When considering the theory on religion and secularization, both exhibitions clearly respond to the changing place of religion in the postsecular society. The *All Kinds of Angels* exhibition included both religious and secular perspectives. This was not only a means to attract a broad and secularized audience, but additionally contributed to the creation of an exhibition displaying the angel's story in a complete and multifaceted way. The *Bible Belt* exhibition demonstrates to have been significant in the context of religious change in many ways. To begin with, secularization caused the Bible Belt to stand out more – with less people going to church and religion being banned from the public sphere. Consequently, the Bible Belt community became a closed-off religious orthodox minority. With the renewed postsecular approach, the Bible Belt became more visible in society which resulted in both respect and prejudices. An exhibition on this community in the current postsecular time allowed for expanding knowledge, discussion and reflection.

Furthermore, the ideas of the new museology are visible when analyzing the exhibitions and their responsive approach to society. Not only were both exhibitions created as a response to societal occurrences, both exhibitions also displayed diversity and included the voice of the people. The angels exhibition was created because of them being an "intriguing phenomenon", having inspired many people for centuries. Besides, the exhibition carefully balanced art, history and contemporary relevance – aiming to engage a wider target group. This aim was also achieved by including religious, secular and inter-religious perspectives which made the exhibition inclusive and multifaceted. The exhibition on the Bible Belt was a response to three then current events which illustrates the museum's responsivity to societal happenings. Besides, the exhibition included varied standpoints within this Dutch religious minority which provided knowledge and understanding to their story. Both exhibitions undoubtedly showed the importance of inclusivity to create a more authentic and credible narrative.

Besides, both exhibitions demonstrated how exhibiting religion or religiously related subjects can result in discomfort and provokes both discussion and reflection. Consequently, the exhibitions challenged its visitors to be open to reshaping their opinion and prejudices. With the angels exhibition, its motive was to make people understand that angels are more than the

winged creatures from advertising and the Bible. The Bible Belt exhibition was the first public display regarding the community's story to reveal its beliefs and ways of life. It is significant that both exhibitions, in this somewhat uncomfortable position, performed above their expectations – both having way more visitors than expected. The exhibitions are examples of the museum's diverse identity and demonstrate how challenging ones visitors can lead to very positive outcomes. It also shows the great variety and liveliness of Dutch religious heritage.

Analyzing the exhibitions created insights in the way Museum Catharijneconvent communicates different types of stories, while staying close to their mission, identity and core values. Exhibitions are unique and are approached differently. Exhibitions respond to a different part of society and include different parts of heritage, with different source communities involved. Exhibitions, apparently, respond to then current events. This demonstrates how Museum Catharijneconvent is not only in service of society, but also responds to society and represents society.

Heritage carries the story and its meaning

With the museum radically changing its course after 2001, the museum had entered "a new era" according to Guus van den Hout. The museum's new plans for renovations in the upcoming years will significantly change the presentation of the permanent collection and visual outlook of the building. However, the museum's mission will presumably always be the same: presenting and conserving the Dutch Christian heritage.

Heritage is not only about old objects holding ancient meanings. Heritage is also about a discourse, being in constant conversation with society. This makes heritage of great relevance when considering the ideas of the new museology. In line with the ideas of the new museology, museums should be in constant conversation with people in a certain time and place. Heritage too is constructed by people in place and over time. Both relate to a process of meaning making – of constantly recreating and reshaping meaning. The meaning of Museum Catharijneconvent, as demonstrated in this thesis, is continuously shaped and created by the analyzed general aspects relating to curatorial intention and visitor experience, theory on new museology and the ongoing process of secularization. The meaning of heritage is shaped by all of these aspects too. Museum Catharijneconvent not only holds a valuable collection of items considered heritage, the museum also introduces stories of heritage to the people and therefore creates space for constantly reshaping the meaning of heritage.

The exhibitions on display can be considered stories themselves too. They allow space for thought, meaning making and conversation. As Laurajane Smith observed, this can be

considered heritage: “The idea of heritage not so much as a ‘thing’, but as a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present.”[246] The exhibitions of Museum Catharijneconvent are examples of cultural and social processes of engaging and creating. Both exhibitions explored in this thesis demonstrate this. While engaging with society, the museum develops stories for the people – by people. Stories on heritage, being heritage themselves. Even though the museum’s narrative has not significantly changed over the past two decades, the museum will probably keep rearranging its course in dialogue with society as is demonstrated by their collaborative attitude towards people and their stories. The museum’s responsive approach is an encouraging outlook for the future of Dutch religious heritage and museology on the whole.

[246] Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, 2.

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