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**“A DIFFICULT MODERNITY”:  
THE LIBRARY OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF NIJMEGEN, 1923-1968**  
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*Introduction*

The topic of this paper is Nijmegen University Library between its foundation in 1923 and the climactic year of 1968.<sup>1</sup> At first sight the development of a relatively young, confessional institution in the Dutch provinces during the early and middle years of the last century might appear an unpromising topic. The library's comparatively short history, however, does include rather more than its fair share of incident and controversy. In addition I shall argue that it raises significant (and, I hope, intrinsically interesting) problems of interpretation to which I should like to draw attention if not fully resolve. Finally, although the library's history is documented extensively in archives and particular aspects have been addressed in a number of printed publications,<sup>2</sup> no comprehensive account of the library's history has so far appeared and almost nothing has been published in English. It is a primary aim of this paper, therefore, not only to suggest topics for further consideration and research but fundamentally to argue for a new historical overview of Nijmegen University Library.<sup>3</sup>

I have borrowed the title for this paper from a festschrift published in 2005 which had the subtitle 'Catholic culture in transition'. This festschrift was in honour of Jan Roes,<sup>4</sup> the founding father of the Catholic Documentation Centre (KDC), a national archive for Dutch Catholicism which happens to be located in Nijmegen University Library. This proximity might cause us to reflect upon the Catholic context of the University Library itself. The title of the festschrift was intended by its editors to reflect the period in which KDC was founded in 1969, in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. But it seems to me to apply equally well to the Catholic University itself in the half-century after its foundation, and therefore also to the University's library.

The paper falls into three broad parts. First, I shall trace the fortunes of Nijmegen University Library from its origins in the early 1920s to the upheaval and renewal of the late 1960s. In this I shall place particular emphasis on the way that those with responsibility for the library understood its role and presented the case for the resources they believed the library was due (based on a "value proposition" as we should probably now describe it). Second, I am going to focus on a specific issue that might be described as a fundamental "problem of modernity", namely the issue of authority within the University and the library. Lastly, I shall propose some fields for further consideration and research. I have based my paper not only on the available Dutch printed sources, but also on archival and pictorial material and (unusually perhaps) on some informal interviews I have conducted with retiring staff.<sup>5</sup>

*Dutch Society and the Catholic "Pillar" in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

Jan Roes once referred in a speech to what he called "the adventures of the Catholic movement" being "one of the greatest puzzles of twentieth-century Dutch history".<sup>6</sup> The development of Nijmegen University and its library can indeed only be understood in the context of this "puzzle" - twentieth-century Dutch Catholic history - a topic which, I suspect, is relatively little known outside the Netherlands.

By the beginning of the 1920's, when the university and its library were founded, the Netherlands had developed somewhat ossified political and social structures based on the principle of *verzuiling* (sometimes translated as "pillarisation", a word unknown to most dictionaries) in which the ideologically competing *zuilen* (we would probably say "pillars of

society” or perhaps “silos”) had achieved a certain *modus vivendi* through consensus about the rights of particular groups. Defining the Dutch *zuilen* is not a simple task,<sup>7</sup> but most sources recognise at least three: the Protestant pillar, with strands closely related to the Dutch political establishment and the established Church; the socialist or social democratic pillar; and, finally, the Roman Catholic pillar.<sup>8</sup> Instead of building comprehensive, inclusive structures accessible to all, each of these maintained or strove to set up its own community institutions, typically including newspapers, broadcasting networks, trade unions, charitable organisations, political parties, schools, housing associations and even scouting groups.<sup>9</sup>

Some further explanation is probably necessary here about the Roman Catholic pillar and its particular sensitivities.<sup>10</sup> In the early twentieth century, Roman Catholicism was still emerging from several centuries of political and religious repression accompanied by social and economic disadvantage. Dutch Catholics were to be found across the Netherlands but were particularly concentrated in the south and east of the country, in the provinces of Gelderland, Limburg and Brabant, contiguous with predominately Catholic areas of north-western Germany, Luxemburg and Belgium. Today, about 25% of the Netherlands population are said to have Catholic roots. Emancipation was achieved slowly, beginning at the time of the French Revolution. As in Britain, the Church had only been permitted to re-establish its hierarchy in the middle of the nineteenth century. Even in a very secular society such as the modern Netherlands, awareness of confessional background remains relatively high.

For the British and Irish, with their common experience of Northern Ireland, one of the most negative aspects of the “pillarisation” of society will immediately be recognisable. The development of separate economic, educational, social and cultural organisations dependent on ideological and confessional affiliation was hardly a recipe for social cohesion. Although confessional parties worked together in coalitions at the government level, by the early twentieth century it was becoming increasingly possible to pursue one’s everyday life in the Netherlands without much contact with those avowing a different confession or ideology. This was apparent even at the local level, where everyday life would quite often be conducted largely within one’s own community. One sports organisation called itself “Rooms in Alles” (“Roman Catholic in Everything”), which could have been a motto for “pillarisation” as a whole. Nevertheless identification with the Catholic Church was often as much social as it was strictly confessional.

Two further points need to be made about Dutch Catholicism in the period. Their long history as a disadvantaged minority had made Dutch Catholics probably more interested in social justice and solidarity than Catholics in some other countries. In addition, the Netherlands’ colonial possessions in the East and West Indies became a particular focus for Catholic missionary, social and educational activity, giving Dutch Catholicism a wider world view perhaps than some of its rival pillars. From 1918 no government could be formed without the participation of the Roman Catholic State Party; the disadvantaged minority had finally joined the establishment. Pillarisation might rightly be seen as a successful route to emancipation and recognition.

#### *A Catholic University in Nijmegen and its Library*

It was against this background that a foundation was set up within the Catholic community in 1905 with the aim of working towards a Catholic university in the Netherlands.<sup>11</sup> After some debate about its location, it was decided to establish the new university at Nijmegen, a historically important city on the Waal, a major tributary of the Rhine in the south east of the Netherlands, very near the border with the German county of Kleve (Cleves). The Roman

Catholic University of Nijmegen was opened in 1923 with three faculties, theology (naturally), letters and philosophy (originally together) and law. Further faculties were added in later years, including medicine and science. The new university received no state aid, being entirely funded from contributions by Catholic organisations and individuals. Its existence was of vital significance to Roman Catholic society and its “pillar”. That this new centre of Catholic scholarship would need an appropriately equipped library was clear.

From the beginning of the new university, the library service comprised a central library and a number of faculty libraries which remained organisationally independent. The central library building was (and in its present manifestation remains) the most powerful physical expression of the library service within the university. From the beginning, the relative size of the central library and the importance of the central library service in relation to faculty and institute libraries was a matter of considerable controversy. Owing to the presence of these libraries under faculty control, the University felt able to opt for a relatively modest central library service with a small core of professional staff.<sup>12</sup>

Thinking about the library was reflected not merely in organisational structures but also in built forms. Although a new library building was proposed at an early stage, architectural plans for which are preserved in the archives,<sup>13</sup> it was finally decided to acquire an existing building for the purpose, ironically the former headquarters of the Nijmegen Banking Association in the Snijderstraat in the centre of the city.<sup>14</sup> A reading room was opened at this location on 7 January 1925 and an additional building provided storage was built nearby in 1928. Although the building must have been typical of many buildings in pre-war Nijmegen, it is not difficult to see why it was chosen to fulfil the role of a library. The neo-Renaissance exterior provided what I assume was considered an appropriate façade.

The interior spaces must have proved relatively easy to adapt as library spaces, with bound volumes of periodicals presumably taking the place of bank ledgers. The building allowed the library, as it were, to (re)connect visibly with the tradition of Catholic scholarship, a primary *motif* of the University in its early years. But it is interesting to note that the library furniture seen in contemporary photographs does not attempt to reflect a neo-Renaissance theme, clearly being art nouveau (or perhaps early art deco) in its inspiration. The library had few funds for acquisitions in its early years, depending heavily on donations by Catholic institutions and individuals.<sup>15</sup>

#### *“An armoury of scholarship”*

The University’s first librarian died, it is said of overwork, only two months after taking up his appointment. Apparently the University considered his contribution not to be significant enough to set up a permanent memorial. There followed an interregnum during which Dr Willem Johannes Maria [W. J. M.] Mulder SJ (1875-1936),<sup>16</sup> a professor of church history and medieval history at the new university, was appointed acting university librarian for the period from 19 August 1923.<sup>17</sup> Mulder’s brief stewardship of the library has largely gone unremarked but his vision of the library and his passionate commitment to its success is apparent in a newspaper article he published on 31 August, barely two weeks after his interim appointment.<sup>18</sup> This text, addressed to a Catholic audience with the primary aim of encouraging (indeed demanding) donations of books for the new library (“our first *big* Catholic library in this country”), presumably reflects aspirations shared by many within the Catholic pillar. It is headed ‘An armoury of scholarship’ (‘Een Wapensmidse der Wetenschap’).

“The University Library is the armoury of scholarship! The non-Catholic, official scholarship has already had its armoury for many centuries. The Royal Library in The Hague, the university libraries of Leiden, Utrecht, Groningen and Amsterdam with their millions of volumes (originally, of course, old Catholic libraries themselves) allow everyone, including Catholics, to pursue scholarship. But our particular needs are not met there and our wishes are not always heard. A library must be set up, both an arsenal and armaments factory, which will help to defend and expand our scholarship”.

Despite pillarisation, Catholic scholarship was apparently still in need of active defence in early twentieth century: “The attacks on our beliefs have increased of late in strength and in number. Since the other side is arming itself for battle, it is necessary to expand our arsenal in our own defence and to refresh our stock of weapons”. Extraordinarily, Mulder even sees the library as helping to bring about the eventual (re)conversion of the Netherlands through newly-won scholarly prestige. Bringing his metaphorical peroration to a climax, he adds:

“A monastery without book shelves is an army camp without weapons. Or a university without a library is an army without artillery. In this sense we want to be properly medieval in our aims! Modern in our methods but medieval in our aims!”.<sup>19</sup>

Nothing could more dramatically demonstrate a “problem of modernity”, the inherent dichotomy between establishing a modern library service and the ideology that apparently lay behind its foundation, expressed in a language recalling the Counter-Reformation. As we shall see, bizarre as his military analogies or millenarian aims might seem today, Mulder’s arguments (his “value proposition”) were to be repeated over twenty years later, when once again the library needed to argue for additional resources.

### *The Pre-War Years*

Mulder’s permanent successor as librarian, Herman de Vries de Heekelingen (1880-1941), who, appears to have been essentially Francophone and mainly resident in Switzerland and Italy, was a controversial figure within the University almost from the beginning, provoking various disputes with the University authorities (for example with Mulder, who served as rector, 1926-1927) and the faculties on topics ranging from lack of funds for the library to his own salary and leave allowances.<sup>20</sup> One legitimate cause for concern was lack of space to house the rapidly growing collections. Roman Catholic institutions and individuals donated a mass of material in a short period, ensuring that “their” library would have relatively large collections of early and contemporary printed books. De Vries gradually became disconnected from his duties and was effectively dismissed in 1927, moving to Switzerland and later becoming a minor literary apologist for Fascism.<sup>21</sup>

A rather more sympathetic figure, and something of a youthful prodigy, was his successor Anthony [A. J. M.] Cornelissen (1902-1977), born into an academic family in Nijmegen.<sup>22</sup> He had already been working in the library for a number of years before being named its Librarian at the age of only 25 in November 1927. The group portrait of Cornelissen and his staff in 1928 shown here is an interesting example of its genre, suggesting a much better balance of youth and age (and of men and women) than was usual at this date. Only one member of staff is obviously in holy orders although some officers of the university clearly thought that it would have been more appropriate for the librarian himself to be a priest.

It was clear from the beginning that Cornelissen hoped to follow a less ideologically motivated and probably less controversial course than his predecessors while making as

strong a case for the library as he could. As early as 14 January 1928 he appealed to the Catholic community (through the pages of the same newspaper as had printed Mulder's article in 1923) for more resources for the library. The "double appeal" ("tweedeelige oproep") was directed at Roman Catholic authors (to donate copies of their scholarly publications) and the wider Catholic public (to help fill gaps in the periodical holdings). To avoid de Vries's problems with space caused by a flood of often unwanted material, Cornelissen proposed publishing a weekly list of desiderata in the Catholic newspaper *Het Centrum*, comprising periodical titles with indications of gaps in current holdings. Postal costs would be reimbursed by the library. In Cornelissen's appeal to the Catholic public, the library is no longer referred to as an arsenal or armoury but, rather less ideologically, as a "central Roman Catholic book depository for the Netherlands".

In the introduction to his appeal in 1928, Cornelissen estimated that the library's holdings had grown to about 75,000 volumes by the end of its fourth year of existence, including 350 current periodicals. Later the same year, another newspaper, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, published an extensive report on a visit to the library by a senior cleric in the Catholic hierarchy, the Bishop of s'Hertogenbosch, accompanied by various civic and academic dignitaries to mark the fifth anniversary (lustrum) of the university's foundation.<sup>23</sup> During the visit, we learn, "the Librarian, Mr A. J. M. Cornelissen MA, until recently the curator, invited the press to view the buildings. [...] Before the tour began, the Librarian explained the particular significance of the library: 'The library is not exclusively concerned with things Catholic, because – in order to serve the university and scholarship – it is necessary that one is informed about all ideas. This is what the reading rooms make possible.'" Although Cornelissen does go on to stress the "particular attention paid to Catholic literature", the contrast with the "value proposition" made by Mulder is obvious. The reporter of the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* was clearly impressed by what he saw during the tour itself:

"Everything one saw was a testament to spaciousness and convenience as far as the furnishing of the library's rooms and the arrangement within them was concerned".

Cornelissen combined his work as a practical librarian, in which he put much emphasis on cataloguing the steadily growing collection and resolving differences with the faculties, with political thinking and writing. In contrast to de Vries, Cornelissen was a leading opponent of Fascism within the Dutch Roman Catholic community. Indeed his personal Catholicism was not untypical of the Netherlands, being essentially anticlerical and democratic. Unfortunately, during the 1930s, he found himself the subject of a number of university boards of enquiry into aspects of his management of library staff. Cornelissen finally resigned from the library in 1941, by which time he had been mobilised (and quickly demobilised following the defeat and occupation of the Netherlands in May 1940) and was concentrating on writing. I shall return to Cornelissen later.

### *The Second World War and its Aftermath*

The nature of the German occupation of the Netherlands between May 1940 and May 1945 is not especially well known in the English-speaking world. Attention has focussed on the appalling fate of the relatively small Jewish population, only 20% of which is estimated to have survived the Second World War. Less well known is the Germans' often vindictive policy towards wider Dutch society. The German occupation authority was dominated by "true-believing" National Socialists who presumably became increasingly frustrated by the refusal of much of the Dutch to conform with their vision of a new world order.<sup>24</sup> As the

Germans' frustration grew, social, cultural and educational organisations in each of the "pillars", including universities and their staff, became particular targets for repression and reprisals. Many academics were placed under house arrest or interned as hostages. The Catholic University of Nijmegen was as badly affected by the occupation as any of the Dutch higher education institutions, closing its doors under German threats in 1943 and working underground.<sup>25</sup>

The library could not remain unaffected by these events. One of the first acts of Cornelissen's successor, Karel [Carolus] Smits (1893-1971), as acting Librarian in November 1940 was to deal with an incursion into the library by members of the German security service.<sup>26</sup> These had come armed with a list of supposedly anti-German literature. Smits's failure to comply with their demands led to his temporary arrest in early 1941. Accounts of the library service provided under the German occupation suggest that it continued to operate throughout and to support students clandestinely even after the formal closure of the University in 1943.

In addition, Nijmegen acquired the dubious distinction of being one of the Dutch cities most heavily affected by military operations during the war. The library's main building was burnt out during the fighting associated with "Operation Market Garden", apparently as a result of deliberate arson by retreating German units, although the bulk of the collection, housed in the separate storage buildings, survived.<sup>27</sup> Following the liberation of the city, Karel Smits with Nol [Arnoldus] Kievits (1901-1984), his assistant and eventual successor from 1959, did their best to maintain a library service operating from temporary accommodation in a police station, even while the Germans were still shelling the city from across the Waal.<sup>28</sup>

The library's response to the disaster of autumn 1944 reveals much about its strong sense of identity in the period and the University's apparent ability to mobilise resources on its behalf. For example, a campaign was launched in 1946 in order to raise awareness of the library's plight nationally and internationally and to rebuild the library's lost collections.<sup>29</sup>

In the United States this campaign was coordinated by an *American Committee to Aid the University of Nijmegen* based in New York.<sup>30</sup> The American campaign was apparently known in the library as the "Actie Mommersteeg" after P. [Piet] J. M. H. Mommersteeg, a Dutch cleric resident in the US, who acted as Executive Secretary of the American Committee. The basis for the library component of the Committee's campaign appears to have been the case made in Smits's flyers in Dutch and English issued in 1946. In mid-1947 an article appeared about the library in the *Library Journal*.<sup>31</sup> This article, signed by Willibald Ploechl [properly: Willibald Maria Plöchl],<sup>32</sup> an exiled Austrian academic with strong Nijmegen connections, is headed: 'Ancient Dutch library seeks aid' and has the subtitle: 'Carolus Magnus University at Nijmegen, a point of fiercest resistance, painfully rebuilds its valuable collections'. The article continues in a similar vein, stressing the professionalism and indeed heroism of the Librarian and his staff in re-establishing a library service while fighting was still continuing. Plöchl, who at the time was coordinating the appeal for book donations in the United States, gives as a source of much of the information in his article Smits's pamphlet, probably published in late 1946.<sup>33</sup>

In making a strong a case as possible for the library, the article strays into exaggerations or, quite frankly, falsehoods not contained in Smits's pamphlet. The University was not known, for example, as the "Carolus Magnus"; indeed, this name had been rejected before the foundation in favour of the more prosaic "Roman Catholic University". Nor could the library truthfully be described as "ancient", being in 1947 only 24 years old. Plöchl presumably

wished to recall the fate of the (truly) ancient University Library at Louvain (Leuven), notoriously destroyed by the Germans in both 1914 and 1940. But in order to do this, he needed to suppress the information that (unlike Louvain), Nijmegen's collections or rare and early printed materials had mostly survived the war. Even more striking is the almost apologetic reference to the library's Catholic identity, which is mentioned only briefly in the text and in a footnote on the third page which stresses that, despite being Catholic, the University "is open to students of all denominations".<sup>34</sup>

In a letter to Smits dated July 1, 1947 announcing his intention to dispatch copies of the article, Plöchl apologises in advance (in English) for its obvious distortions, blaming editorial interventions and the need to present Nijmegen's case in the best possible light:

"I am sending you under separate cover three copies of the article I published in the "Library Journal", or – better said – what became of it in the hands of the Editor. This is something which cannot be helped. Thus, if there is anything in it which does not support the story properly, please forgive, and don't count it against me. It should also be taken into account that the "Library Journal" has the largest circulation of any periodical of this kind in America. This is the reason why it was so important for us to have something about Nijmegen in the "Journal". [...]"<sup>35</sup>

Despite his protestations Plöchl had already published an article in a similar vein (on 'The saga of Nijmegen') in an American journal in 1946.<sup>36</sup> Plöchl's articles, therefore, need to be seen in the context of a very American campaign to encourage donations by foundations, institutions and individuals. Mommersteeg and Plöchl obviously understood what arguments could be deployed in order to capture the attention of the public in the United States. The campaign clearly also had access to considerable personnel and material resources. In his letter, Plöchl mentions the usefulness of off-prints of the article during "book trips" undertaken as part of the campaign.

I am interested in this material for a number of reasons. First, the scale and reach of the campaign is quite remarkable in view of the library's relatively recent foundation, its modest international profile and the University's own limited resources. The case made for the library is of special interest, particularly the deliberate underplaying of the library's Catholic identity in addressing a national or international audience. In his flyers, Smits had already not chosen to emphasise the Catholic nature of the library but rather its practical utility, describing the losses in strictly material and library-technical terms:

"The Main Reading Room, with first-class research material [and] a collection of about 6000 or 7000 standard works, has been totally lost. All the offices, with important bibliographical material, such as books and index-cards, collected over a period of 20 years, [...] were entirely destroyed by fire. The lending department has gone, as well as the whole collection of exchange material, [...] The periodical library was also burnt out, [...]"<sup>37</sup>

This approach is in strong contrast not only to Mulder's article of 1923 (the library as an "armoury") but also to arguments deployed *within* the University by Smits himself (and, one assumes, within the Catholic pillar as a whole). In a memorandum circulated within the University in 1945, Smits argued for the rebuilding of the library in the following terms:



“The rebuilding of the University Library is of such special importance”, he begins, “for the renewal of Catholic scholarship, that, after careful consideration, I have decided to write this special report”.

Smits ends the introduction to his memorandum with an appeal so strongly confessional that it once again recalls the language of the Counter Reformation, if in a somewhat more moderate form compared with Mulder’s peroration in 1923: “May the planned rebuilding, with God’s grace, contribute to the aim of the University library, to be an arsenal but also a guide for Catholic civilisation”.<sup>38</sup> This contrasting approach, the careful calibration of arguments in appealing to different audiences, is clearly sophisticated, but, as with Mulder’s and Plöchl’s articles, it does raise uncomfortable questions.

Unfortunately perhaps most of the support pledged to the campaign in the United States came not in cash but in kind, that is to say in the form of ca. 30,000 monographs and periodical volumes. Tensions soon arose between Smits and the New York campaigners over the campaign itself and over the nature of the donated material. Two issues seem to have been paramount. First, in a memorandum of October 1946 Mommersteeg complained that the library was seeking to make contact with institutions in American without the knowledge of the New York office. Secondly, the library quickly became concerned about the nature, quality and quantity of the material being donated. Mommersteeg chose to interpret this as an underestimation of American scholarship and publications. In a memorandum of September 1947, however, Smits sets out what might be called the “library-technical” shortcomings of the project, that is to say those associated with the dispatch of large quantities of mostly undifferentiated material (a problem de Vries had already encountered in the 1920s). For example, much of the material sent over was on topics not studied at the University; also, the amount of duplication with existing collections was unknown. Above all, the necessary assessment and processing of the material was beyond the library’s capacity to cope.<sup>39</sup> It should be noted here that the American Committee would wind up its work in 1949 with considerable debts, although by this time Plöchl had returned to Austria.

#### *The Library in the 1950’s and 1960’s*

In view of the apparent need to retain the association with Catholic scholarly tradition, it was perhaps hardly surprisingly that the University chose as a replacement for the destroyed library building in the Snijderstraat a building reproducing much of the “look and feel” of its predecessor, a late nineteenth century villa, formerly a Catholic girls’ school known as “Stella Maris”. The chapel of the Stella Maris was transformed into the main reading room, a space where, we are told, “the many users in holy orders could turn their memory of old monastic libraries into reality”.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately the library was not the only occupier of the building which it shared with faculty departments and institutes. In photographs of the library spaces, one notes the apparent lack of space and also the furniture, some of which appears to be identical with the furniture in the destroyed building in the Snijderstraat.

The 1950’s saw the final flowering of “pillarisation” in the Netherlands and public participation in Catholic social and cultural organisations of all kinds increased. After the Second World War the university and student numbers also expanded rapidly rendering the Stella Maris building “unfit for purpose”. Smits is recalled as complaining about the noise associated with students attending lectures on the floor above the library’s reading room.<sup>41</sup> But the reading room itself – with all of 40 study places – was usually full, as were the library’s storage facilities. Books were brought from the depository (or rather depositories, as

new facilities were continually being added) to the main library on a carrier cycle, meaning that at least two visits to the library were necessary in order to borrow a book.

Planning for a new building began with the establishment of a commission in 1956. Interestingly, the plan the commission came up with was rejected by the Ministry of Education on the not unreasonable grounds that it was too modest. The plan apparently called for more than double the number of study places in the library, in other words, 100 instead of 40 in Stella Maris. The result was a reconsideration of the plan inspired by a tour of recent library buildings in Germany. The capacity of the reading rooms was increased to 250 and of the storage facilities to 2 million volumes.<sup>42</sup>

The present central library, the result of these deliberations, was constructed between December 1964 and May 1967. Collections were moved to the new building in the summer of 1967 and the official opening of the library took place in March 1968. As we have seen, the earlier library buildings were not purpose-built but rather selected for use as libraries and adapted where necessary. One might reasonably note that they reflected a historicising ideal of Catholic scholarship. The new, modernist, concrete-and-glass building in the Erasmuslaan within the University's new Heyendaal campus on the edge of central Nijmegen was a clear statement of something quite different. Maybe we should seek the reasons for the appearance of the new building in developments in Dutch Catholicism in the intervening period.

The flowering of the "pillarisation" and the popularity of Catholic institutions of all kinds during the 1950's proved to be a fairly temporary phenomenon. The system was increasingly being challenged both at the political level and at the level of local and personal life. As secularisation spread, the popularity of confessional activities also declined. Tensions within the Catholic community and between the community and the hierarchy were increasing throughout the 1960s. I should not like to exaggerate the direct impact of the Second Vatican Council on the architectural expression of the new University Library but there does appear to have been a determined effort at least to appear modern.

Nevertheless, those library staff that moved to the new building in 1967 was following older rules and workplace traditions.<sup>43</sup> On the threshold of the events of 1968 and 1969, hierarchical forms and practices pertained. One former member of staff recalled in conversation the culture of the library before and after the move. The librarian, Kievits, for example, was regarded as a person of high integrity, but remained strictly formal in his dealings with staff and colleagues. Senior staff was still addressed in the polite form (the Dutch "U") whereas they themselves would use the familiar form with more junior staff. Female staff was still required to leave the service on marriage. Many offices had crucifixes upon the walls.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, no one seems to have associated the opening of a modernist building with necessary changes in work patterns and style or other innovations. As Kievits wrote in his memorandum circulated on his retirement in June 1966:

"Equipment for library work does not need primarily to be modern but rather to be good. Experiments with methods which have not been satisfactorily tried and tested should be avoided in a library."<sup>45</sup>

Within a few months of the library's opening, and beyond the period of this survey, the entrance hall of the new building had been occupied by students and library staff had won the right to participate in the management of the library's affairs. The University's magazine was publishing sexually explicit cartoons.<sup>46</sup> But the impact of the events of 1968 on the University

and the library lie unfortunately – or maybe fortunately - beyond the temporal scope of this article.<sup>47</sup>

### *Cornelissen and the Problem of Authority*

In the final part of this short survey of Nijmegen University Library in its first half-century I should like to return to what I have described as “the problem of authority” raised by many of the events described above and especially to the case of Cornelissen. In February 1937, the Board of the Saint Radboud Foundation, which in effect governed the University in this period, approved standing orders for the Supervisory Commission for the University Library.<sup>48</sup> This is surely one of the most extraordinary documents in the library’s archive. The Commission’s role is laid down in the following terms:

- Supervisory: not only was the Commission to check that the library was meeting its commitments, it was also to decide whether administrative structures were appropriate.
- Advisory: the Commission would give advice on the library to the Board of the University as it saw fit.
- Managerial: it would give directions to the Librarian on dealing with individual staff and reserve for itself the right to summon anybody from the staff to appear before it, including the Librarian.

The document is signed by the Archbishop of Utrecht and the Secretary of the Foundation.

The context of the new standing orders is clearly the controversy surrounding Cornelissen’s management of library staff since 1933.<sup>49</sup> Starting in the following year there had been various initiatives by those managing the University and also commissions of enquiry, the results of at least one of which were not made available to Cornelissen himself. In 1934 the Supervisory Commission for the library had been set up, quickly deciding that the library should be run jointly by the Librarian in cooperation with Bonaventura Kruitwagen, a Franciscan priest, who had himself conducted the enquiries and produced what are said to be highly dubious and inaccurate reports. How this arrangement was to work in practice is not clear, but Cornelissen unsurprisingly submitted his resignation in 1936 although this was not immediately accepted. He was eventually given the opportunity to present his case to the Supervisory Commission, but only after under its new standing orders had already been agreed. As we have seen, he eventually left the post in January 1941 (subsequently going into hiding from the occupation authorities). Such was the controversy surrounding his case it was still being discussed among library staff some thirty years later.

One explanation for Cornelissen’s apparent preparedness to stay on as Librarian in the most humiliating circumstances is that he was by this time heavily involved in national politics and political discourse within the social-liberal wing of the Roman Catholic camp. Extraordinarily, in the year he was suffering the particular humiliation of the Supervisory Commission and its new standing orders, he published a pamphlet entitled *Democracy, rise or fall?* (or more accurately: *fall or rise?*)<sup>50</sup> in which he attacked the pseudo-democratic pretensions of Fascism.

A direct comparison between the actions of the higher echelons of the University and the Church hierarchy in respect of the University Library and the rise of Fascism would, of course, be too far-fetched. Certainly nothing in Cornelissen’s book could be considered an ironic reflection on his own experience of the University. I also consider it too easy an

explanation to fall back onto clichés about ecclesiastical (usually “Jesuitical”) machinations behind the scenes. Judging by evidence such as Mulder’s article of 1923, what seems certain is that the University’s sense of identity in its early years was heavily influenced by a determination by the Church and University hierarchy to ensure its survival and success as a *Catholic* institution. This might well explain a certain ruthlessness in their application of internal discipline and a determination to exercise control. One might reasonably assume an anxiety about the role of the library, that “arsenal” for Catholic scholarship, within the University. How much the University’s dealings with Cornelissen were influenced by his democratic political views remains unclear. Certainly, he is unlikely to have been able to agree with Mulder’s vision of a Catholic university library - “modern in our methods but medieval in our aims”.

### *The Kievits Memorandum*

What is clear however is that questions of authority surrounding the management of the library did not cease with the war and Cornelissen’s departure. Kievits’s memorandum of 1966, his “testament” on retirement, also addresses recurring themes, though written nearly 30 years after the Supervisory Commission had revised its standing orders in 1937. Kievits’s typescript is entitled ‘Some observations by the retiring librarian of the University Library on the administration and policy of the library’ and dated ‘June 1966’.<sup>51</sup> It is divided into twelve sections with a brief concluding statement offering further information if required. One assumes it to have been intended for senior academic and administrative staff within the university and faculties. It is clearly *not* a final report to the Library Commission itself, as will become apparent.

Kievits’s memorandum focuses on questions of authority and responsibility as well as traditional librarians’ complaints about staff numbers. In the introduction, Kievits argues for an end to the supervisory role of a Library Commission, a body of the University Senate, and a direct reporting line between the Library and the University’s curators. The problem with the present structure, according to Kievits, was that the commission was too much concerned with the needs of individual faculties and institutes whereas the University Library was required to service the University as a whole.

In the second section Kievits sets out his objections to the role played by the Library Commission, pointing out (not unreasonably) that he himself was not a member of the Commission which was comprised entirely of professorial staff from faculties. These, however, were happy to take decisions on matters of which they had little knowledge:

“If the Librarian appears [before the Commission] with complaints of an organisational or library technical nature, then they are usually dismissed with the argument that they are of no academic significance even though the Librarian is convinced that the Commission has a poor understanding of his complaints”.

Kievits’s conclusion is that the University Librarian should report directly to the Curators of the University and not indirectly through a commission of the Senate (section 3). Kievits further argues (in section 4) that the existence of separate faculty libraries under faculty management (Kieveits calls them “departmental libraries” which took decisions on holdings and budgets made the development of the library function within the University as a whole difficult as well as being inherently inefficient:

“Of course they should be able to make their wishes known, which the Librarian will need to take into account, but he must be free to take his own decisions” (section 4).

Supporting faculty libraries accounted for a disproportionate amount of staff time according to Kievits, when compared with work for their own (central) library with its general collections. This needed to be remedied both by working towards a 50:50 balance between staff resources devoted to work on faculty libraries and those supporting the central library and also by levelling up the budgets for the central and faculty libraries. Nevertheless, the argument for centralisation was strong. Central library staff possessed the necessary expertise in acquisitions and the processing of books and periodicals, and maintained the University’s central catalogue (sections 5, 6, 11).

That being said, in view of the work that needed to be done, staff numbers were too low. There needed to be about 80 staff including 10 to 12 graduate staff. This would still be modest in comparison with staffing at comparable libraries in the Netherlands (Leiden, for example, had 113 staff including 21 graduates). At the time of writing, Nijmegen had only 55 staff of which only six were graduates.

Finally, Kievits took a parting shot at his professorial colleagues (section 12). Many faculty members regarded library holdings virtually as their private property, retaining books for years in the rooms without anyone having the courage to demand their return.<sup>52</sup> The library played too important a role within the academic community to be subject to the whims of individual faculties or professors. He hoped that this situation would change with the opening of the reading room in the new Central Library building.

If Kievits’s language about the role of the Library Commission and the behaviour of the faculties tends to be critical, then it is clear that questions of authority, like questions of workplace style and practice, had not been resolved by the time the library opened in its new building in 1968.

#### *Proposed Topics for Further Research and Conclusions*

My first proposal is for a new and comprehensive history of the Nijmegen University Library. Unfashionable as this might seem, I do see a need for a chronicle approach in order to set the issues I have raised into their proper context.

More specifically, I should like to propose three specific areas for more analytical consideration and interpretation:

- The role and responsibilities of the University Librarian;
- The relationship between the central library function and the institutes and faculties;<sup>53</sup> and finally,
- The hierarchical structures and relationships within the library itself.

In addition I have mentioned the closely related issues of identity and here I would focus on:

- the library’s presentation of itself in reports and publications;
- the built forms chosen for the library; and,
- the response by the library and its staff to technical or organisational innovation.

In an article on the University's Catholic identity,<sup>54</sup> Lodewijk Winkeler identifies three guiding motifs in the formation of policy and administrative practice: "protection", the wish to protect staff and students from negative influences from outside the Catholic community; "emancipation", the desire to develop educational standards and academic excellence among the underprivileged Catholic community; and "mission", the belief that the Roman Catholic contribution to scholarship had a particular value in itself. The library of the Catholic University was clearly regarded as an important element in the revival of Catholic scholarship in the Netherlands. I should welcome more research on the relation between the new University's need to establish itself as a credible institution within the "pillarised" society and the obvious failure to find an appropriate, long-term solution to the problem of the position and management of the University Library.

Many of these topics seem to me to relate very well to one of the "problems of modernity" identified by Alistair Black and Peter Hoare in their introduction to the third volume of the *Cambridge history of libraries in Britain and Ireland* in which they discuss the tension between the library's perceived spiritual and material functions in the modern world.<sup>55</sup> Mulder's stated ambition that the library should be "modern in [its] methods but medieval in [its] aims" seems to describe succinctly the causes of this tension. The apparently unpromising topic of the early years of a Dutch provincial university library may well deliver insights that are of more than local and particular interest.



Staff of Nijmegen University Library, 1928. A. J. M. Cornelissen is sitting at the centre of the front row. Katholiek Documentatie Centrum, Nijmegen, TF1A30786 (Collectie afbeeldingen)



The Reading room of Nijmegen University Library (1946-1967) in the "Stella Maris" building on the Van Schaek Mathonsingel, Nijmegen. Katholiek Documentatie Centrum, Nijmegen, TF1B19285 (Collectie afbeeldingen)



A view of the new library building in the Erasmuslaan, 1968 (Nijmegen University Library collection).

<sup>1</sup> The article is based on a lecture given in May 2009 as part of the series of library history seminars at the University of London. The University was originally called the “Katholiek Universiteit Nijmegen”, (“[Roman] Catholic University of Nijmegen”). It adopted the new name “Radboud Universiteit (“Radboud University”) in 2004. The library has generally been known as “Universiteitsbibliotheek Nijmegen” [Nijmegen University Library] though variants have been used and are quoted here where relevant.

<sup>2</sup> Most notably the contributions of Léon Stapper and Otto S. Lankhorst to *Capita selecta uit de geschiedenis van de Universiteitsbibliotheek Nijmegen aangeboden aan mr. G. G. A. M. Pijnenborg bij zijn afscheid als bibliothecaris* (Nijmegen: Universiteitsbibliotheek Nijmegen, 1995). See references below passim.

<sup>3</sup> I should like to thank my colleagues Lodewijk Winkeler, Léon Stapper and Els Peters for their comments on this article. Any errors of fact or interpretation that remain are of course entirely my own.

<sup>4</sup> *Moeizame moderniteit: Katholiek cultuur in transitie. Opstellen voor Jan Roes (1939-2003)* ed. by T. Clemens, P. Klep and L. Winkeler (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2005). My translation, as throughout, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>5</sup> In preparing this article I have consulted the archive of the University Library but not the archives of the University itself nor on those of the Radboud Stichting [Foundation], depending here on the material quoted by the contributors to *Capita selecta* and to published sources such as H. Laeven and L. Winkeler, *Radboudstichting, 1905-2005* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Clemens et al., p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> See the Dutch Wikipedia article for an overview of the complexities of *verzuiling* (consulted summer 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Other social and political groups, such as Dutch liberals, resisted “pillarisation” altogether.

<sup>9</sup> Pillarisation was widely satirised even at its height, for example in a cartoon of 1909 in which state subsidies have been showered on a variety of unlikely organisations including the “R. C. Goat Breeders’ Association”. See the “Digitaal Katholiek Erfgoedhuis”, <http://nederlandskatholicisme.ruhosting.nl> (consulted summer 2009).

<sup>10</sup> See for example, *Memoriale: Katholiek leven in Nederland in de twintigste eeuw*, ed. by H. Pijfers and J. Roes (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1996) in which the characteristics of Catholic “pillarised” society are excellently documented in pictorial form.

<sup>11</sup> See Laeven and Winkeler, passim, and J. Brabers, *Proeven van eigen cultuur: vijfenzeventig jaar Katholiek Universiteit Nijmegen 1923-1998, deel 1 1923-1960* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 1998), pp. 41-142.



<sup>12</sup> See O. S. Lankhorst, 'Voedsters of dochters: de betwiste positie van de instituutbibliotheken in het eerste decennium van de Nijmeegse alma mater', in *Capita selecta*, p. 25. The library was allocated 100,000 guilders as start-up capital in 1923 and the very modest sum of 10,000 (15,000 guilders from 1928) to cover annual running costs. See Brabers, pp. 186-187. Complaints by university librarians about unrealistic funding levels have a long tradition at Nijmegen.

<sup>13</sup> See 'Plan [by Titus Brandsma] voor nieuwbouw van de bibliotheek', 1927 (University Library Archive 374) and a memorandum by Brandsma on the same subject (Archive 545).

<sup>14</sup> See Lankhorst, pp. 35-36.

<sup>15</sup> About 70% of acquisitions in the early years were by donation. See Brabers, p. 187, and also R. Arpots, 'Een schenker van het eerste uur' in: *Capita selecta*, pp. 103 ff.

<sup>16</sup> See L. Stapper, 'De bibliothecarissen van de Katholieke Universiteit: zes korte biografische schetsen' in: *Capita selecta*, p. 8 and Lankhorst, passim, pp. 23-44. There are entries for Mulder in: *Lectuur-Repertorium*, Part 2, Antwerp: Algemeen Sekretariaat voor Katholieke Boekerijen; Antwerp: Vlaamsche Boekcentrale; Tilburg: Nederland'sBoekhuis, 1953, p. 1775; RK "Wie is dat." *Biografisch Lexicon van bekende Nederlandse Rooms-Katholieke tijdgenoten*, Leiden: Dieben, [1925], p. 94.

<sup>17</sup> *Capita selecta*, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> 'Een wapensmidse der wetenschap' ("An armoury of scholarship") in: *Het Centrum*, no. 11899, Friday, 31 August 1923, p. 1. *Het Centrum* was not the leading Catholic national newspaper by this date and it is unclear why the article was offered to this title (or accepted by it) rather than *De Tijd*, to name a prominent rival. See O. S. Lankhorst and C. T. H. Reul (eds.), *Bibliografie van katholieke Nederlandse periodieken, deel 1: Dag- en weekbladpers*, Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 1999, p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> "Modern in de inrichting, maar middeleeuwsch in de richting!"

<sup>20</sup> Stapper, pp. 10-12 and Lankhorst, passim.

<sup>21</sup> Lankhorst, pp. 41-42.

<sup>22</sup> Stapper, pp. 12-15.

<sup>23</sup> *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 18 October 1928, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> A disproportionate number of National Socialist institutions was based in Nijmegen, presumably because of its proximity to the German border.

<sup>25</sup> See Brabers, pp. 246-279. The best known casualty of the war from Nijmegen University was Prof. Titus Brandsma, OCarm., a notable opponent of fascism, arrested by the German occupation authorities and murdered in Dachau in 1942.

<sup>26</sup> See Stapper, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> In the English version of a flyer, probably issued in 1946, Karel Smits writes: "The Library of the University of Nijmegen [the Dutch version refers to the "R.C. University of Nijmegen"] sustained considerable damage during the battle in September 1944. On the evidence of eye-witnesses, the Germans deliberately set fire to the buildings when they retreated before the allied armies.

<sup>28</sup> See K. Smits, *De Rooms-Katholiek Universiteitsbibliotheek te Nijmegen*, pp. 5 ff. This undated pamphlet cannot have been printed before 26 September 1946 as that date is mentioned in connection with the opening of the Reading Room at Stella Maris. Nor can it be later than very early 1947 as its contents are clearly reflected in Plöchl's article mentioned below. The titlepage bears the motto: "Aan allen, die ons hielpen" ["To all who helped us"]. University Library Archive 534.

<sup>29</sup> University Library Archive 222-227 contains a considerable quantity of correspondence with Dutch and foreign publishers, librarians and foundations so that it would be possible to construct a fairly detailed account of the campaign and its results.

<sup>30</sup> The headed paper on which the Committee's correspondence was typed has the following note at foot: "A memorial to the nearly one thousand American dead who rest at "Nymegen" [a spelling variant of "Nijmegen"] and the living who serve people and democracy. Sponsored by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division Association and a national committee of American citizens". The U.S. 82<sup>nd</sup> airborne division had played an important role in the liberation of the eastern Netherlands.

<sup>31</sup> *Library Journal*, 72:11 (June 1947), pp. 867-871.

<sup>32</sup> Willibald Maria Plöchl (1907-1984) was a specialist in canon law. Nijmegen University Library holds copies of his monumental *Geschiede des Kirchenrechts* (1953-1969) and festschriften in his honour issued in the occasion of his sixtieth and seventieth birthdays (1967, 1977 respectively). As a young Catholic scholar, Plöchl had been active in anti-Nazi activities in Austria before the so-called *Anschluss* in March 1938. After leaving Austria, he held a teaching post in Nijmegen (1939-1940); from 1941 to 1947 he taught at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC. His involvement in Austrian exile activities and his particular interest in supporting exiled academics help to explain his interest in coordinating the campaign to rebuild Nijmegen's collections. In 1946 he was also acting as an adviser to various organisations within the U.S. government

concerned with foreign policy. See the entry for Plöchl in the online *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, [http://www.bbkl.de/p/ploechl\\_w\\_m.shtml](http://www.bbkl.de/p/ploechl_w_m.shtml) (consulted summer 2009).

<sup>33</sup> *De Roomsche-Katholieke Universiteitsbibliotheek te Nijmegen* (Nijmegen: [1946?]). Nijmegen University Library, Br 26670.

<sup>34</sup> *Library Journal*, 72:11 (June 1947), p. 869.

<sup>35</sup> University Library Archive 227. Written in English, according to a handwritten note, because Plöchl's secretary was American.

<sup>36</sup> See Brabers, pp. 294-296 for an account of the "Mommersteeg campaign" and its ultimate failure.

<sup>37</sup> The Archives contains the English version in typescript draft, quoted here. See University Library Archive 112.

<sup>38</sup> K. Smits, 'Heropbouw der R. K. Universiteitsbibliotheek' [typescript], University Library Archive 535. See also Brabers, p. 186 and fn. 93, where one of the early librarians is quoted as describing the library as "an armoury of scholarship" ["wapensmidse der wetenschap"].

<sup>39</sup> University Library Archives 227.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in: R. Wolf, *De trek naar het zuiden: gebouwen van de Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen 1923-1998* (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij KU Nijmegen, 1998), p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> Wolf, p. 120.

<sup>42</sup> Wolf, p. 127.

<sup>43</sup> I am grateful for the recollections of a former member of staff, Pierre Venbrux, for some of the insights in this paragraph, although the interpretation is my own.

<sup>44</sup> A hierarchical overview of library activities from the 1950's suggests that almost all library staff, including the Librarian himself, had the processing of books and periodicals as their primary task.

<sup>45</sup> A. M. Kievits, 'Enige beschouwingen van de scheidende bibliothecaris van de U. B. over het beheer en beleid van de Universiteitsbibliotheek. Juni 1966' [typescript], University Library Archive, 379.

<sup>46</sup> See F.-J. Amberg and M. Post, *Van preek tot porno: de ontwikkeling van het Nijmeegs Universiteitsblad 1951-1968* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2001).

<sup>47</sup> The events of 1968-1969 are described in Osmund Schreuder, *Proeven van eigen cultuur: vijfenzeventig jaar Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen 1923-1998*, part 2, Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 1998, p. 365 ff.

<sup>48</sup> 'Reglement voor de Commissie van Toezicht op de R. K. Universiteitsbibliotheek', 1937. University Library Archive 334.

<sup>49</sup> See Stapper, p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> A. Cornelissen, *Democratie, einde of opgang?* (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1937).

<sup>51</sup> 'Enige beschouwingen'.

<sup>52</sup> Not of course a phenomenon unique to Nijmegen.

<sup>53</sup> Building of course on the work of Otto Lankhorst in *Capita selecta*.

<sup>54</sup> 'Verschuivingen in de katholieke identiteit van de Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 1923-1995' in: *Ex tempore*, 15 (1996), pp. 31-41.

<sup>55</sup> Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006, p. 9.