

# Teaching Faith with the Lantern: Audio-Visual Lantern Performances by the Clergy in France and Belgium Around 1900

By the dawn of the twentieth century numerous Western European associations, societies, organizations, and special interest groups as well as schools and universities, had adopted projected images as a way of achieving their educational goals. Optical lanterns were used not only for formal and informal instruction, for information and entertainment, but also for propaganda and indoctrination.<sup>1</sup> Among all those who adopted the projection lantern for their activities, the Roman Catholic Church<sup>2</sup> distinguished itself from others, with the clergy resorting to the medium to pursue one central purpose, the defense, preservation, and dissemination of religious faith in an increasingly secularized and rational modern world.<sup>3</sup> This was a particularly important development in France and Belgium, where the Catholic Church was the dominant Christian denomination but had to face strong secular opposition.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas most laic<sup>5</sup> organizations addressed largely adult and, frequently, male audiences, including adolescents from the age of twelve and up,<sup>6</sup> the clergy wanted to reach the

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- 1 Cf., for instance, Sarah Dellmann, and Frank Kessler (eds). *A Million Pictures. Magic Lantern Slides in the History of Learning* (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing, 2020).
  - 2 When we use the term 'Catholics', we always mean Roman Catholics.
  - 3 Cf. Th.-M. van de Vivere. 'Communication de Belgique', *L'Ange des projections lumineuses* 1.1 (October 1902): 6–7.
  - 4 Cf. the contribution by Margo Buelens-Terryn, Iason Jongepier, and Ilja van Damme in the present volume.
  - 5 We chose to translate the French 'laïque' as 'laic' rather than the more common 'secular' to emphasize the political character of these organizations.
  - 6 Cf. the website of La Ligue de l'enseignement et de l'Éducation permanente. 'Quand les enfants n'allaient pas à l'école: histoire du travail des enfants en Belgique' (<https://ligue-enseignement.be/la-ligue/chroniques-historiques/eduquer-n132-quand-les-enfants-nallaient-pas-a-lecole-histoire-du-travail-des-enfants-en-belgique/>, [accessed 11 August 2020]), and Lionel Vanvelthem. 'Le Temps de travail en Belgique durant le "long XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle" (1800–1914)' ([http://www.ihoes.be/PDF/Analyse\\_159\\_Temps\\_travail\\_1.pdf](http://www.ihoes.be/PDF/Analyse_159_Temps_travail_1.pdf), [accessed 11 August 2020]) for the situation in Belgium. For France cf. Jacques Perriault. *Mémoires de l'ombre et du son. Une archéologie de l'audio-visuel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), 103, and the website of Jean-Charles Champagnat (ed.). 'Histoire du travail des enfants en France' ([https://www.droitsenfant.fr/travail\\_histoire.htm](https://www.droitsenfant.fr/travail_histoire.htm)), [accessed 11 August 2020]).

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entire population, so that it would lead a life in accordance with the teachings and moral precepts of the Church. To do so many members of the clergy adopted the lantern as a tool for communication, visual instruction and even sermonizing, something their secular opponents and their Protestant competitors in the US had already successfully been doing for over a decade.<sup>7</sup> Yet the illustrated lectures organized by laic institutions and associations generally had an educational or scientific character and thus mainly addressed the intellect of their audiences, whereas the Catholic Church often also attempted to appeal to the senses using a multimedia approach. The clergy's ultimate goal was to tie parishioners as firmly as possible to the Church, to bolster their faith and win back those troubled by doubt. The optical lantern offered them the ability to go beyond the traditional sermon and the strictly scripted liturgical ritual.

In what follows, we would like to look at Catholic lantern practices in relation to the Church's age-old tradition of transmitting its teachings with the help of images and other visual instruments and the associated discussions. Thereafter we will focus on the specific form of audio-visual lantern performances, which combined music, *chants*, and projected images and which could serve different functions in the Church's efforts to rally the faithful around its cause. Our study is based mainly on primary source material, i.e. publications in Catholic journals dedicated to lantern projections, which we studied to reconstruct the Church's positions and strategies, as well as lantern slide sets preserved in Belgian and Dutch collections that document the audio-visual discourse addressed to parishioners.

## Sensualist Church Traditions

The influence of images and imagination on behaviour was an important aspect of the many discussions concerning visual media. As the French Catholic Philosopher and sociologist Henri Joly declared in his popular book *L'Imagination*: 'Imagining an action alone fosters the inclination to execute it [...] Whoever familiarizes himself with the idea of sin, will commit sin.'<sup>8</sup> In accordance with such ideas, conservative members of the clergy often rejected visual media, and in particular cinema, because of their presumed negative effects on viewers. This was the case not only for the Catholic Church in France or Belgium, but also, for instance, for Protestants such as the German Pastor Walter Conradt in his 1910 pamphlet *Kirche und Kinematograph. Eine Frage*<sup>9</sup> and many others in different countries who in particular feared the influence of moving pictures, especially on youth.

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- 7 Cf. Isabelle Saint-Martin. "Sermons lumineux" et projections dans les églises, 1884–1912', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 78.3 (2004): 381–400 as well as her contribution in this volume; Frank Kessler, and Sabine Lenk. 'Fighting the Enemy with the Lantern: How French and Belgian Catholic Priests Lectured Against their Common Laic Enemies Before 1914', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 17.1 (2019): 101; Frank Kessler, and Sabine Lenk. 'Projecting Faith: French Catholics and the Magic Lantern Before the First World War', *Material Religion* 16.1 (2020): 61–83. For the United States, cf. Sarah C. Schaefer. 'Illuminating the Divine: The Magic Lantern and Religious Pedagogy in the USA, ca. 1870–1920', *Material Religion* 13.3 (2017): 275–300.
- 8 Henri Joly. *L'Imagination. Étude psychologique* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1877), 163. Unless stated otherwise; all translations are by the authors. The book was published in the popular series *Bibliothèque des merveilles* on the basis of a course Joly taught in 1871–1872 at the Faculté des Lettres in Dijon and arguably represents the predominant ideas on the subject, albeit from a Catholic perspective. Joly taught in Paris from 1881 on.
- 9 Walther Conradt. *Kirche und Kinematograph. Eine Frage* (Berlin: Hermann Walther, 1910).



Fig. 1. Series 'Elisabeth of Thüringen', slide 11 'Death of Elisabeth'. Maison de la Bonne Presse. (Courtesy: Collection Toverlantaarnmuseum Scheveningen).

Conversely, those among the French Catholic clergy who promoted the use of slide projections, even occasionally calling themselves 'apostle-projectionists',<sup>10</sup> drew exactly the opposite conclusion from this observation: familiarizing churchgoers with depictions of pious acts and episodes from the lives of the Saints by repeatedly showing them visual representations of such, was to encourage the faithful to imitate these examples (cf. Fig. 1).

Once they had developed a moral compass with the help of illustrated lectures they would not fall prey to sin, thus echoing the famous line from Thomas a Kempis in the first chapter of his *The Imitation of Christ* (*De imitatione Christi*, c. 1418–1427): 'He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, saith the Lord.'<sup>11</sup> In his report on the 1903 congress of the Catholics in northern France, the French priest Alfred Lemoine indicated how this could be achieved: 'In his "Avertissement sur le Catéchisme" Bossuet wrote: "Learn how to seize the senses, and through the senses you will reach the mind and the heart"'.<sup>12</sup> This precept concerned both the Catholic Church's tradition of teaching through images and the modern practice of illustrated lectures, in line with the centuries-old sensualist axiom: '*Nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu*'<sup>13</sup> (Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses).

10 A. [Alfred] Lemoine. 'Causerie du mois', *Le Rayon* 4 (April 1910): 50.

11 Thomas van Kempen, quoted after the English translation on Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1653/pg1653-images.html>, [accessed 11 August 2020]).

12 Lemoine in his article 'L'Enseignement par les projections lumineuses', *L'Ange des projections lumineuses*, 1.7 (April 1903): 98, refers to the sermon given by Jacques-Bénigne Lignel Bossuet on 6 October 1686.

13 Lemoine. 'L'enseignement', 99; Lemoine writes: '*Nihil est in intellectu quod prius fuerit in sensu*'. For the original, cf. <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/qdvo2.html>, [accessed 11 August 2020].



Fig. 2. Light effect in a church (unidentified slide). (Courtesy: Collection Toverlantaarnmuseum Scheveningen).

Going to a church in the nineteenth century may in fact be considered as an aesthetic audio-visual experience that was presumably experienced far more intensely than a church visit today, especially in rural areas where people's everyday lives did not offer many distractions. As the French economist Henri Baudrillart observed in 1885 about peasants in Brittany:

A church, even modestly decorated, an altar shining with a few ornaments, sacred chants, ceremonies that speak to the imagination, to the eyes as well as to the soul – that is what the peasants do not cease to look for in the village church.<sup>14</sup> (cf. Fig. 2)

It has been argued that the visual acquired a specific position for the Church as early as the twelfth century, with a shift to a form of 'visual piety' linked not only to shimmering

<sup>14</sup> Henri Baudrillart. *Les Populations agricoles de la France. Normandie et Bretagne* (Paris: Hachette, 1885), 452–53, quoted in Jean-Claude Farcy. 'Le temps libre au village (1830–1930)', in *L'Avènement des loisirs 1850–1960*, edited by Alain Corbin (Paris: Champs Flammarion, 1995), 316.

devotional objects, the richly ornamented robes, stained glass windows, and wall paintings, but also the act of elevating the Host.<sup>15</sup>

In a religious illustrated lecture and a '*sermon lumineux*', the latter being given by clerics only, seeing and hearing were certainly the most important senses to be addressed.<sup>16</sup> Yet, other senses could be involved as well, particularly when the projected images were shown in a church, which regularly occurred in France from the mid-1880s onward.<sup>17</sup>

We will therefore first briefly consider touch and smell, both of which are involved in religious practice at a fundamental level, but are given less prominence than sight and sound, at least as far as the explicit communication of Christian faith is concerned.

## Touch and Smell

For Catholic churchgoers in general the sense of touch clearly plays an important role when pictures, relics, statues are touched, caressed, and even kissed. The entire body is involved in participating in the service, when the faithful sit on wooden benches, kneel, or stand. These bodily actions, the physical contact with the sacred space of the church, not to mention the various ways in which certain more extreme religious acts consist of the self-infliction of pain, constitute a corporeal mode of expressing one's faith. This in turn, appears to be very much in line with the idea that expressive movements can themselves produce the sentiment that they express, which means, in other words, that ritually executed gestures during the service were understood as being conducive to the experience of religious ardor.<sup>18</sup>

As for smell, frankincense has for many centuries been an important element of the Catholic rite, in particular during the *missa solemnis* or High Mass, as a symbol of God's presence. According to Matthew 2, 11, the gifts that the three Magi offered Jesus were frankincense, gold, and myrrh. The burning of incense in churches during mass thus introduced a strong olfactory dimension to the religious rites and became profoundly associated with the very idea of the sacred. The lingering scent of frankincense may have often still been present when lantern sermons or other projections took place in a church.

15 Cf. Jürgen Bärsch, *Kleine Geschichte des christlichen Gottesdienstes* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2015), 78–80.

16 The difference between a '*conférence religieuse*' and a '*sermon*' is defined as follows: 'If the Sermon differs from the Religious Lecture in that *it makes God speak* instead of *talking about God*, it follows that the style of the Sermon must be sober and serious; that the image and the feeling must be subordinated to the idea; in a word that the sermonary must be classical and not romantic' (Robert Lefebvre. 'La Prédication III', *La Bonne Parole* (10 February 1909): 34) '[...] let us note then: That the Religious Lecture employs above all reason as its major means, and, consequently, extends more on History, Philosophy, Exegesis, in short, Apologetics; it discusses the principles revealed. And that the sermon uses above all the major means of faith, of authority; it does not discuss them, but exposes them, develops them, draws consequences from them. The Conference assumes the skeptical audience, the Sermon the convinced audience' (Robert Lefebvre. 'La Prédication IV. De la conférence, du sermon et de l'homélie', *La Bonne Parole* (25 October 1909): 216.

17 Cf. Saint-Martin. 'Sermons lumineux'.

18 Cf. Joly. *L'Imagination*, 160–62.

## Visual Stimuli and the Problem of Images

The Catholic Church can look back upon a long tradition of imagery. The inside of a church is decorated with murals, mosaics, paintings, sculptures, and stained-glass windows, all of which creates a rich visual spectacle for the congregation. The presence of images in churches did nonetheless provoke controversy. As long ago as Pope Gregory I (540–604), when measures had to be adopted to oppose the iconoclastic efforts of the Bishop of Marseille, the Pope wrote:

For to adore a picture is one thing, but to learn through the story of the picture what is to be adored is another. For what writing presents to readers, this a picture presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow; in it the illiterate read. Hence [...] a picture is instead of reading.<sup>19</sup>

This passage is quoted in a treatise discussing whether lantern projections could be used for religious exercises by the French Jesuit Gabriel Le Bail,<sup>20</sup> who gave illustrated lectures for factory workers in the north of France. In his plea in favor of using the lantern, Le Bail referred to Pope Gregory to stress the fact that visual teaching aids had been accepted in the Catholic Church even in the sixth century. Even so discussion about the role of imagery in religious practice persisted, particularly during the Reformation and when prompted by Protestant accusations of Catholic idolatry, not to forget criticism from within the Church itself.<sup>21</sup> Yet in addition to the numerous images inside churches, performances such as short stage plays at Easter or other holidays had intensified the visual dimension of the liturgy since at least the fifteenth century, although conservative members of the clergy continued to be skeptical or even outright hostile to such spectacles.<sup>22</sup> These arguments were reiterated by both the promoters and opponents of illustrated lectures in the Catholic Church. When the detractors expressed the view that the profane innovation harmed the sanctity of the church, the supporters replied that they were simply following an age-old tradition by adopting an up-to-date medium.<sup>23</sup>

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- 19 *Sancti Gregorii Magni, Registri Epistolarum*, Epistolarum Liber XI (undecimus), mense Septembri, indictione IV, Epistola XIII, Migne JP, 1128, quoted in Gabriel Le Bail. *Peut-on employer des projections lumineuses dans les retraites?* (Enghien: Bibliothèque des Exercices, 1907), 5; we thank Bart Moens for sharing this source. English translation in *Register of the Epistles of Saint Gregory the Great. 0590–0604 – SS Gregorius I Magnus – Registri Epistolarum*, 98 ([http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/01p/0590-0604,\\_SS\\_Gregorius\\_I\\_Magnus,\\_Registri\\_Epistolarum\\_\[Schaff\]\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/01p/0590-0604,_SS_Gregorius_I_Magnus,_Registri_Epistolarum_[Schaff]_EN.pdf), [accessed 11 August 2020]).
- 20 On Le Bail cf. Saint-Martin, 'Sermons lumineux', 385.
- 21 Cf. Reinhard Hoeps (ed.). *Handbuch der Bildtheologie I: Bild-Konflikte* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), in particular the contributions by Jean Wirth (191–212) and Thomas Lentes (213–40). Cf. also the contribution by Isabelle Saint-Martin in the present volume.
- 22 According to Kees van der Ploeg, 'De zichtbare erfenis van het christendom. Van geloofspraktijk tot cultureel erfgoed', *Gronrek* 47 (2015): 215–29 (<https://ugp.rug.nl/groniek/article/download/27530/24944/>, [accessed 11 August 2020]) this happened for the first time in the thirteenth century in Utrecht, however more often such plays are documented in the fifteenth century. Van der Ploeg mentions scenes from the Gospels that were performed accompanied by songs on major holidays, an early example being a late thirteenth-century play performed at Easter in Hellum near Groningen; another example is a 'Heaven's hole' ('hemelsgat') in the Der Aa church in Groningen, which may have served to enact the Ascension of Christ. While not confirmed in this case, this practice was recorded elsewhere according to Van der Ploeg (221–22). The Jesuits are known to have regularly organized performances in churches.
- 23 Cf. Anonymous. 'Petite controverse', *L'Ange des projections* 1.12 (September 1903): 132–33.

From the end of the nineteenth century up to the summer of 1912, when the Vatican prohibited the practice,<sup>24</sup> projections on religious topics regularly took place in churches. These were not only illustrated sermons, but also included lectures on the catechism, Bible stories, the lives of the Saints or the history of the Church. The specific atmosphere of the church building itself, its sanctity, awe-inspiring architecture, impressive spatial dimensions, and often overwhelming decoration which, when combined with the mighty tones of the organ and the occasional whiff of frankincense, provided a multi-sensory environment for slide projections that no other group, institution, or setting could offer. The characteristics of the church space, which also afforded working with large screens – Canon Chamayou of Toulouse sometimes used one measuring fifty square meters<sup>25</sup> – for the illustrated sermon created an atmosphere that could deeply impress the audience and may have often surpassed their expectations.

Given the size of the projected images, their visual quality was key according to G.-Michel Coissac,<sup>26</sup> who headed the slides and film distribution service of the Catholic Maison de la Bonne Presse in Paris:

The audience attending an illustrated lecture does not merely expect a good lecture or a causerie presented with verve if they have been promised a delight for their eyes, and they will leave only half-way satisfied should their expectations not be met.<sup>27</sup>

Coissac was referring not just to the quality of the projection itself, but to the visual qualities of the slides as well, and in particular to the use of colour. That this recommendation was indeed largely followed is suggested by the fact that almost all narrative slide series held in the collections of the KADOC (Catholic Documentation Centre) in Leuven and which were used to teach the catechism, are coloured.<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, many priests opted for showing only a limited number of slides, albeit of a high quality in their '*sermons lumineux*' and other projections. Abbé J. Parmentier, according to Saint-Martin the editor of *La Croix des Pyrénées-Orientales* at Perpignan, for instance, recommended using a maximum of twenty-five slides in a religious lecture.<sup>29</sup> Too

24 For the prohibition of projections in churches cf. Saint-Martin, 'Sermons lumineux', 382.

25 Anonymous. 'Projections et prédications', *Le Rayon* 5 (May 1908): 68–69.

26 G.-Michel Coissac's real first name is Guillaume and not Georges as certain sources state. We are indebted to Jacques Malthête who shared the results of his research, and which was subsequently confirmed by our own online searches in the Corrèze archive ([www.archinoe.fr/cg19/visu\\_affiche.php?PHPSID=1c00a274e86a18df3181b03daa6507ce&param=visu&page=1#](http://www.archinoe.fr/cg19/visu_affiche.php?PHPSID=1c00a274e86a18df3181b03daa6507ce&param=visu&page=1#)): cf. the document 'R1449 Bureau de recrutement de Tulle. Répertoire alphabétique des hommes inscrits au registre matricule 1888' stating 'Coissac Guillaume dit [called] Michel', [http://www.archinoe.fr/cg19/recrutement\\_liste.php?PHPSID=1c00a274e86a18df3181b03daa6507ce&page=1](http://www.archinoe.fr/cg19/recrutement_liste.php?PHPSID=1c00a274e86a18df3181b03daa6507ce&page=1), [accessed 11 August 2020].

27 G.-Michel Coissac, quoted in J. [Joseph] Périé. 'L'Apostolat par les projections (suite et fin)', *La Semaine religieuse de l'Archidiocèse d'Albi* 37 (11 September 1909): 540.

28 Members of the Church, too, appreciated the quality of the colours: 'While our ears hear music and delightful songs detailing the works of the Divine Creator, coloured views pass before our eyes, representing our Earth during the different stages of its slow formation. [...] What varied landscapes appear, expertly rendered by the brush of the eminent and daring draughtsman Mr Vignola with the aid of a master colourist, Mr D'Inguibert'. A. [Alfred] Lemoine. 'Causerie du mois. Le Congrès des Œuvres de Projection à la Bonne Presse du lundi 19 Octobre au Jeudi 22 Octobre 1908', *Le Rayon* 10 (October 1908): 130–31.

29 Cf. Saint-Martin. 'Sermons lumineux', 394. According to Nathalie Boulouch. 'L'image de lumière comme tableau noir', in *La plaque photographique. Un outil pour la fabrication et la diffusion des savoirs (XIX<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, edited by Denise Borlée, and Hervé Doucet (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2019), 31, projection manuals recommended a projection speed for slides between 6–7 and 15–20 seconds per slide.

much excitement, not to mention passion, provoked by visual stimuli should be avoided, if control over the congregation is not to be lost. Henri Joly, for instance, had warned of the contagious effect of excessive religious passion that women in particular were prone to and which might be triggered by visual representations.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the spoken words could in a way guide the congregation's understanding of the image and thereby prevent undesired devotional excess.

Conversely the effect of the projected image could be seriously impacted by a bad speaker. A common complaint in lantern circles concerned the inability of a lecturer to capture the audience. As the experienced lantern performer Thomas Cradock Hepworth stated, 'A lecture entertainment will fail sometimes owing to the total incapacity of the speaker, – to his bad articulation, nervousness, lack of voice, or want of tact in dealing with the audience.'<sup>31</sup> Many Catholic priests were equally aware of the negative effects of an uninspiring sermon, '[...] To talk about sermons means evoking boredom and even intensified boredom, as a consequence many churches are now deserted.'<sup>32</sup> Even traditional members of the clergy did not deny this problem, and liturgical forms such as the *missa cantata* were one way of augmenting the churchgoer's participation in the service. Hymns and anthems, generally accompanied by an organ, together with the sermon and the exchanges between priest and congregation, constituted the multi-layered aural dimension of every service.

Although the early Christians included music in their mass, it was during the Reformation that singing gave the attendee an active role and let him or her feel part of the community. Martin Luther was convinced that 'the devil, the creator of saddening cares and disquieting worries, takes flight at the sound of music almost as he takes flight at the word of theology.'<sup>33</sup> Chanting also helped to internalize and amplify religious teaching. Singing to God could be a form of prayer and worship. The optical lantern made it possible to address the faithful by combining visual teaching with music and singing, a quality that the Catholic Church used in its projection practices in various ways (cf. Fig. 3).

## Audio-Visual Performances: Music, *Chants*, and the Projected Image

In the catalogue of Maison de la Bonne Presse and in the catalogue of slides available for distribution published in 1910 in the journal *Le Rayon*, edited by the diocese of Cambrai, there was a specific section dedicated to 'chants lumineux', i.e. slides that could be projected while music was performed or the church choir and congregation sang a hymn.<sup>34</sup> These slide series were divided into different categories.

30 Joly. *L'Imagination*, 129–32.

31 Thomas Cradock Hepworth. *The Book of the Lantern. Being a Practical Guide to the Working of the Optical (or Magical) Lantern* (New York: Edward L. Wilson, 1889), 265–66; cf. also G.-Michael Coissac, quoted in J. Périé. 'L'Apostolat', 539–40.

32 *L'Ami du Clergé* (1904): 1049, quoted in Saint-Martin. 'Sermons lumineux', 390.

33 Martin Luther. Letter to Ludwig Senfl (October 1530), quoted in Adam Hough. 'Martin Luther and Musically Expressed Theology', *Illumine* 11.1 (2012): 35.

34 Cf. Diocèse de Cambrai. *Œuvre Diocésaine des Conférences et Catéchismes avec projections* (ed.). 'Catalogue des Séries de Vues de Projections en dépôt au siège principal de l'Œuvre, 33 bis, Rue du Vieil-Abreuveur, Roubaix', *Le Rayon* 6–7–8 (June, July, August 1910): 98–99. It seems that others such as Abbé Pelez de Cordova in Paris also constituted a repertory of songs with and without lantern slides. Cf. Anonymous. 'Petite



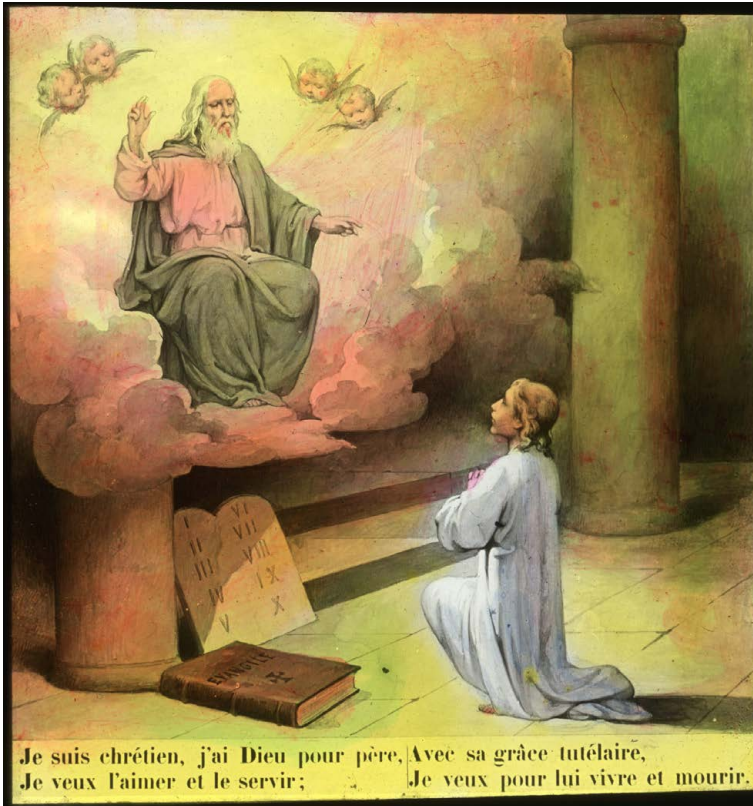


Fig. 3. Song slide 6 of the series 'Je suis Chrétien' ('I am a Christian') (unidentified producer). (Courtesy: Collection Toverlantaarnmuseum Scheveningen).

First there were 'Cantiques' ('Canticles'), most of them praising Jesus and the Virgin Mary, whereas others celebrated a life lived in accordance with the precepts of the Christian faith. Just as in the other sub-categories, many of the sets were offered both in colour and black and white, but the majority were coloured. The slides presented a combination of text and illustration, one slide per verse.

Secondly, there were 'Chants' by French nineteenth-century composers such as Jules Granier, Adolphe Adam, Gabriel Fauré, Charles Gounod, Gustave Goublier or the Irish-French Augusta (Mary Anne) Holmès, as well as works by the poet-musician Pierre Dupont and the Swiss-born opera composer and sacred music writer Abraham Louis Niedermeyer, who lived most of his life in Paris. Most of these 'Chants' were sacred music, others were about peasant life and poverty. French compositions dominated this category and stressed the link between the Catholic Church and the French nation. This was also the case for other sets in the catalogue, which emphasized Catholic patriotism.<sup>35</sup>

Correspondance. Pièces et Chants', *La Vie au patronage* 10 (October 1912): 751.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Kessler, Lenk. 'Projecting Faith', 70–72.

Maison de la Bonne Presse also distributed slides of songs by a popular singer and poet from Brittany, called Théodore Botrel. These constituted another sub-category in the section 'chants lumineux'. Botrel's compositions in fact represented the numerically largest section in the category, which contained twelve canticles and twenty chants, and thirty-three of his songs. While the hymns were undoubtedly used during services, Botrel's textual slides were probably projected as part of an entertainment in venues such as meeting rooms.

Botrel was extremely popular for his lyric poems and songs about the simple life of peasants and fishermen, inspired by his beloved Breton home as he was born in Dinan as son of a blacksmith.<sup>36</sup> As he openly celebrated his faith and stayed in touch with the congregation that had spiritually nurtured him, despite a move to Paris when still a boy, the Catholic Church accepted his *chansons* as part of its community life. Botrel toured not only in France, but also came to Belgium where he must have had many admirers.<sup>37</sup> Invited by the Duchess d'Ursel and the Countess of Flanders, he gave his first Belgian performance in the presence of members of the Royal family with a program of folk songs at the Grande-Harmonie in Brussels in January 1901.<sup>38</sup> It may seem surprising that Botrel appeared so prominently in the distribution catalogue of a Catholic organization, but he was first of all firmly aligned with the Catholic Church and moreover a large proportion of French and Belgian Catholics lived in the countryside, which may have made his spiritual folk songs particularly attractive to rural audiences. Furthermore, in this period of rapid industrialization and modernization, Botrel's songs and artistic persona probably also satisfied a certain nostalgia for an idealized form of pastoral piety.

At the other end of the cultural spectrum, projections with chanting and musical accompaniment that addressed bourgeois and cultivated audiences were also organized by the Catholic Church. *Chants* played an important role during, for instance, the festive event entitled 'La Rédemption' that took place at a Catholic parish hall in the industrial French town of Roubaix in December 1908. The evening was dedicated to a representation of the history of the world that started with the Genesis and was followed by the events leading up to the birth of Christ.<sup>39</sup> The projected glass-plates then illustrated the life of Christ and the various stages of the passion. A large part of the slides showed famous paintings and were accompanied by local singers and musicians performing nineteenth-century French sacred music by composers such as Hector Berlioz, Charles Gounod, Jules Massenet, or Camille Saint-Saëns. 'In each scene and with a moving concordance, the music offered the support of its captivating charm to the paintings and made the illusion of reality complete.'<sup>40</sup> Such an 'exceedingly dignified spectacle', wrote *Le Rayon*, extolling its virtues,

36 On Botrel cf. Élisabeth Pillet. 'Gaston Couté, ou la parole aux paysans sur les scènes parisiennes', *Le Mouvement social* 160 (July-September 1992): 125–46; for a contemporary Jesuit view on his life and poetic work, cf. T. J. M'L. 'Theodore Botrel, the Poet of Brittany', *The Irish Monthly* 39.451 (January 1911): 33–42.

37 Cf., for example, a fonds of 'partitions and song texts [...] and some newspaper cuttings' catalogued under 'BE/942855/1477/667 Partituren en liedjesteksten bijgehouden door Roobaert Jozef (broeder Jozef Ireneüs) en enkele knipsels betreffende de zanger T. Botrel, 1926' in the collection of 'Broeders van de Christelijke Scholen' held at KADOC-KU Leuven.

38 Théodore Botrel. *Les Mémoires d'un Barde Breton* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, Brussels: Collections Durendal, 1933), 247.

39 On the representation of Genesis, cf. also the contribution by Kurt Vanhoutte in the present volume.

40 Bou. 'La Rédemption', *Journal de Roubaix* (30 December 1908), quoted in Anonymous. 'Causerie du mois', *Le Rayon* 1 (January 1909): 3.

with its combination of religious paintings and music, could not be objected to, not even by those members of the Church who opposed lantern shows. With 'La Rédemption', the Church indeed showed itself capable of integrating the lantern into a high-culture event that at the same time presented central articles of Catholic dogma.

It is instructive to compare this French spectacle with another event that made use of local soloists and a boy choir, which was organized a year later on 12, 19 and 22 December 1909 and held in a Protestant house of prayer, the Neue evangelische Garnisonskirche at Kaiser Friedrich-Platz in Berlin.<sup>41</sup> Here too the audience enjoyed a mixture of slides of famous paintings by, among others, Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. However, the majority of the slides showcased the works of the then popular German artists Bernhard Plockhorst, Walter Firlé, Heinrich Hoffmann, Josef Scheurenberg, and others. The music consisted of traditional Protestant hymns and popular German Christmas songs.<sup>42</sup> The organizers insisted that the spectators should read the program leaflet in advance to learn about the paintings they would see and the music they were to hear as the church would be dark during the '*Lichtbilderpredigt*' (illustrated sermon), and those attending were asked to observe a 'solemn silence'. Like the *soirée* in Roubaix, the program of music apparently featured primarily national composers. The paintings too were largely by German artists. This national, or maybe even nationalist bias no doubt reflected the political atmosphere of the years preceding the First World War.

Whereas the French Catholic reporter of *Le Rayon* presented 'La Rédemption' as a concert with religious imagery, the German Protestant organizers settled on a church service as the format for the three evenings, with projected religious images replacing the sermon. Each slide was accompanied by music. Apart from several pieces played on the organ and one cello solo, most of the songs were pious or were Christmas carols intoned by the soloists or the boys' choir. Sometimes the audience joined in. In many cases, the songs were thematically related to the paintings displayed on the screen. The service ended with a blessing by the pastor. The event was announced as the depiction of Jesus's life, 'The Story without equal in word, images and sound'. The program leaflet gives the impression of something like an antiphony between the religious element – as represented by the images of Jesus on the screen – and the spectators, comprising for the most part the choir, the singers, and the musicians. An actual sermon is not mentioned despite the announcement of a '*Lichtbilderpredigt*' (illustrated sermon). During the event the focus is clearly on '*Lichtbilder*', not on '*Predigt*'. The projected images were apparently supposed to speak for themselves. Still, as the public could at certain moments participate in the singing, the overall effect and mode of address of the German '*Lichtbilderpredigt*' was arguably closer to a '*sermon lumineux*', despite the lacunae, notably the absence of a sermon, than was the Roubaix spectacle, which appears to have been more of a cultural event, more akin to a concert rather than a church service.

In addition to cultural events or actual church services combining slides and chants or instrumental music, '*chants lumineux*' were also used by the Church to combat secularization in France and to rally the faithful around its cause. From the French slides we

41 Leaflet by Neue evangelische Garnisonskirche. *Lichtbilderpredigt über das Leben Jesu, I. Teil*, printed by Ernst Schimkönig in Berlin 1909 (authors' collection).

42 The French source does not contain information about which paintings were projected.

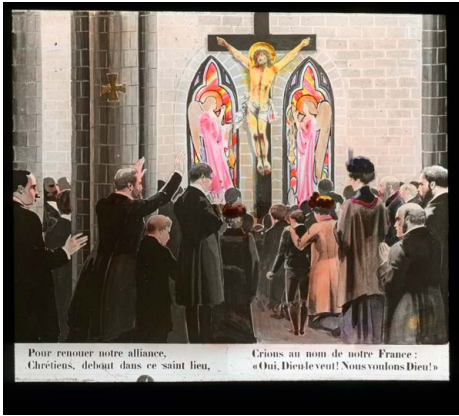


Fig. 4. Song slide 8 of the series 'Nous voulons Dieu' ('We want God'), Maison de la Bonne Presse. (Courtesy: Collection Toverlantaarnmuseum Scheveningen).



Fig. 5. Song slide 4 of the series 'Nous voulons Dieu' ('We want God'), Maison de la Bonne Presse. (Courtesy: Collection Toverlantaarnmuseum Scheveningen).

have had access to,<sup>43</sup> it is clear that institutions such as Maison de la Bonne Presse relied on the power of the visual, 'even the ignorant see what they ought to follow' (Gregory I). This was reinforced by the songs, especially when they were sung as an expression of a community's faith. The slide set 'Nous voulons Dieu' ('We want God'), which was part of Maison de la Bonne Presse's repertory,<sup>44</sup> shows scenes illustrating the song's words, a slide representing the Virgin, churchgoers praying during mass, a three-generation family reading at home, a cemetery with an insert representing a priest going to a house to administer extreme unction, a scene of a court of law, a dying soldier on a battle field receiving the last rites, all visibly accompanied by religious symbols such as the cross, Mary, angels, and priests (cf. Fig. 4, 5). The words to be sung emphasize the importance of God's presence in all these situations.

There is moreover a clear subtext in the selection of the people who are depicted (a bourgeois family, for instance) and their behaviour (adults fervently praying, well-dressed children reading in their hours of leisure), thus showing 'good examples' to be followed.

Two slides in the set openly attack the 'enemies' of the church. The first references the laicist French government: in a scene in a classroom, boys watch how the crucifix is detached from the wall by a policeman under the eyes of a city official, with another policeman standing by and already laden with three crosses (cf. Fig. 6). In the second slide a horde of angry men dressed in modern clothes are shouting at Jesus, who has just collapsed under the weight of the cross, an image familiar from the Stations of the Cross. Some of the men shake their fists at him, one bends forward to pick up a stone, and

43 We thank Henk Boelmans Kranenburg from the Toverlantaarnmuseum Scheveningen for giving us ample access to his collection.

44 Cf. Diocèse de Cambrai, 98. The original series had eleven slides, we had access to nine of them, all in colour.

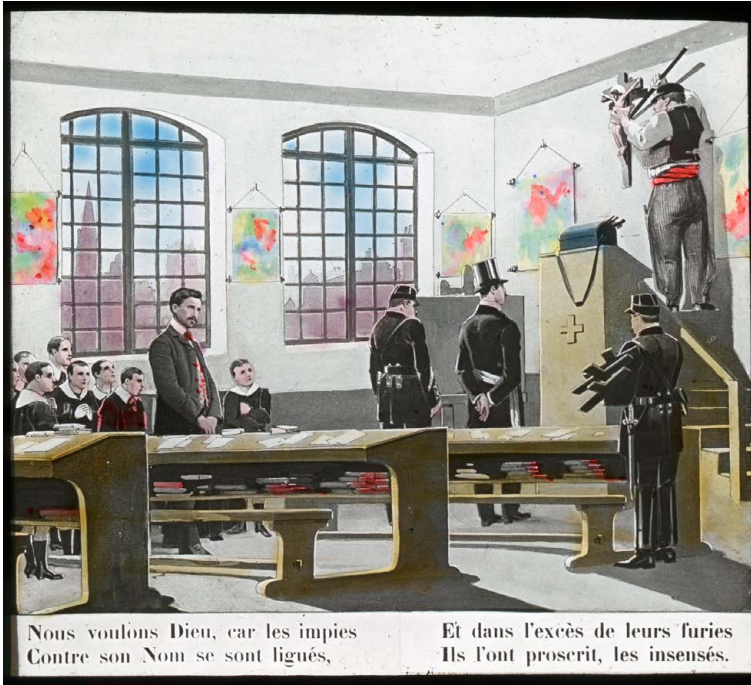


Fig. 6. Song slide 3 of the series 'Nous voulons Dieu' ('We want God'), Maison de la Bonne Presse. (Courtesy: Collection Toverlantaarnmuseum Scheveningen).

another one carries a stick. The text of the song echoes and amplifies the message of the pictures: 'We want God, as the godless have rallied against His name and in the excess of their rage these fools reject Him'.<sup>45</sup> This example demonstrates how lantern slides could be used to complement the political message of a song aimed at closing the ranks of the faithful against the 'godless'. This strategy contrasts with another set of a 'chant lumineux' where the commercial producer Elie-Xavier Mazo simply selected a series of reproduced paintings for 'Il est né le divin enfant' ('He is born, the Devin child').<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Projected images combined with music and chants offered the Catholic Church a range of possibilities for the promotion and defense of its cause, in addition to other lantern practices such as illustrated lectures or 'sermons lumineux'. When the members of the congregation sang themselves, the combination of the music they heard, the projected image they looked at, and their own physical involvement resulting from their singing could indeed produce extraordinarily strong effects.

45 The original French text says: '[...] les impies contre son nom se sont ligués'. The choice of the verb 'ligner' might have implied an attack against the laic teachers' association 'Ligue de l'enseignement'.

46 Also in Henk Boelemans Kranenburg's collection.

More generally, however, the ‘apostle-projectionists’ celebrated the lantern as a powerful new weapon in their battle against their laic enemies, taking care at the same time to emphasize the solid ties that attached the medium firmly to Church tradition. Even so despite their efforts and the support they won among of the higher ranks of the French Catholic Church, all slide projections inside a church were banned by the Vatican in 1912.

Whether this ban was directed in the first instance against the moving pictures that by then had become a burgeoning new industry and was perceived by many as a moral threat, or whether those who had opposed the lantern from the very outset had now finally achieved their goal, is difficult to say. Whatever the case, both projection media continued to be a part of the Church’s evangelism and missionary work, albeit not inside the church building itself with the result that the optical lantern became part of church tradition after all.<sup>47</sup>

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47 The article was written within the framework of the B-magic. *The Magic Lantern and its Cultural Impact as Visual Mass Medium in Belgium (1830–1940)*, a project funded by FWO and FNRS under the Excellence of Science (EOS) project number 30802346. B-magic will write the as yet unwritten history of the magic lantern as a mass medium in Belgium. In doing so, it will provide an essential contribution to the study of the country’s cultural history as well as to international media historiography.

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