

Migration, Christianity and identity-construction (19th and 20th centuries)

Recent decades have seen a renewed historiographic interest in migration. In order to give a fuller account of the complexity of this phenomenon, the classical institutional and socio-economic analytic framework is being increasingly broadened through the use of other explicatory variables such as cultural value-patterns, group dynamics, forms of (shared) self-understanding and - more in general - different lifestyles. In this way researchers aim to assess the processes through which migrants have 'accommodated' the legacy of their original milieu to the requirements of their new surroundings, and thus have given meaning to their new life-paths.

Seen from this perspective, questions pertaining to the interaction between religion and migration become particularly pertinent, especially when the question of identity-construction takes a central place. Religion seems to fulfil an important role in many identification processes by means of which migrants give meaning to their new surroundings - processes in confrontation/synergy with the new milieu in which they are establishing themselves (which resulted often in strong mosaic identities). Given the present common view in which recent migration is often represented as a 'problem', it has been all too easy to assume - often with reference to a bygone, largely homogeneous Christian area - that the integration of intra-European migrations (19th century - years 1950) took place largely without problems. Drawing on a context-sensitive analysis, however, historians have now established that these migrants often stubbornly clung to (or were encouraged to cling to) the religious and cultural frames of reference from their country of origin.

With the *Migration, Christianity and Identity-construction* workshop, in the framework of *Culture, Religion, Otherness. Flemish/Belgian migrants in Northern France and Paris (1850-1960)*, a project of the Research Foundation - Flanders, attention will be paid to the many aspects of the interaction between Christianity and migration in Western Europe. Here the focus will be on the old (mainly Christian) intra-European migration flows.

1. Space will be allotted to contributions that offer insight into the role of religion in the identification processes themselves. What did this role mean in concrete terms for the newcomer? And for those who followed? To what extent was religion a concrete help in the construction of a new life in a foreign country? To what extent was religion a source of tension, both within the migrant community and in relation to the *others*? And what was the relation between religious identification and other identifications (nationality, gender, family, neighbourhood, social-economic position...)? What was the role of such identification in the daily network and life of the immigrant?

2. An unmistakable part of the interaction between Christianity and migration is the translocal/transnational religious framework that was set up by the countries of origin for migrants in the various establishment-structures in Western Europe. Different denominations actively worked for a wide range of nationalities. To what extent were these organisations an obstructive or facilitating factor for integration/assimilation? What relation did these initiatives have to the host country and to the country of origin? Were they considered inimical or favourable by migrants, the host population, the different levels of government, the competing or related denominations? What unifying (and protective) strategies did denominations develop in the interest of the immigrants? What were the actual objectives and how did these relate to the actual results? What can we learn from the impact on the second or third generation?

3. The workshop will also offer an opportunity for contributions that focus on the self-image and the self-understanding of migrants, based on ego-sources (diaries, correspondence, autobiographies, oral history, ...).

Also welcome are historical contributions that, within the thematic framework, offer approaches for (methodological) renewal and the questioning of concepts.

Proposals for papers (max. 500 words) should be addressed by e-mail to Henk Byls (henk.byls@kadoc.kuleuven.be) by **31 December 2008**. The participants of the conference will be asked to produce an article for a volume in the international peer reviewed series *KADOC Studies on Religion, Culture and Society* (University Press Leuven).

Decision by the scientific commission: 15 February 2009

Dates of the Workshop: 19th and the 20th of November, 2009, KADOC- K.U.Leuven, Leuven, Belgium.

Scientific commission: Prof. dr. Jan De Maeyer (KADOC - Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), Prof. dr. Anne Morelli (Université Libre de Bruxelles), Prof.dr. Didier Terrier (Université de Valenciennes et du Hainaut Cambrésis), Prof. dr. Idesbald Goddeeris (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), dr. Peter Heyrman (KADOC - Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), drs. Henk Byls (KADOC- Katholieke Universiteit Leuven)

Contact

Henk Byls
KADOC, K.U.Leuven
Vlamingenstraat 39
B-3000 Leuven
Belgium
tel. +32-(0)16.32.35.20
fax. +32-(0)16.32.35.01
email: henk.byls@kadoc.kuleuven.be
URL: <http://kadoc.kuleuven.be/> and <http://www.migration-religion.be>