Inconspicuous Halidom

The material religion of Catholic barn churches in North Brabant

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Abstract: During the Dutch Reformation, the non-Calvinist religions, including Catholicism, were forbidden to use churches, so they were practised instead in relatively unrecognisable clandestine churches (schuilkerken), one type of which was the barn church (schuurkerk). This sacred space, hidden in the humblest structures, once dotted the Roman Catholic area of North Brabant, but was almost entirely abandoned and demolished in the 19th century. Inspired by theories of religioscape and material religion, an analytical framework is constructed around the architectural typology of the schuurkerk and its context to study the tensions between the authorities and the Catholics in this religious conflict over a hundred years. By extracting three attributes of the schuurkerk, the paper reflects on the repression and toleration of the authorities, the adaptation and creation of the Catholics, and the reasons for the disappearance of schuurkerken.

1 Introduction

In the Netherlands, a particular type of religious building, the schuilkerk, or clandestine church, was born at the time of the Reformation when Calvinism grabbed the religious monopoly in the country. All other religions, including Roman Catholicism, were forbidden from using churches and were required to gather in such relatively hidden locations for religious activities. A schuilkerk took the form of a house or a barn in the city and countryside respectively, and was thus categorized into two different typologies of the house church (huiskerk) and the barn church (schuurkerk). In the 18th century, the Catholic schuurkerken, sacred spaces hidden in the humblest structures, were applied throughout the Roman Catholic area of North Brabant, but were almost entirely abandoned and demolished in the 19th century, leaving behind only a story of the suffering period in the Catholic history. This paper revisits the drawings and documentation of schuurkerken in archives, analysing the forms and stories of this typology through the combined lens of architecture and anthropology, to create a social landscape of tension between the powers and religions in North Brabant during that time.

The schuilkerk is often mentioned as a phenomenon of socio-religious life in historical studies of the Dutch Reformation, but there is not much research on the architectural typology of schuurkerk. In contrast to the delicate and well-preserved huiskerken, such as the Hart in Amsterdam, the simple and vernacular schuurkerken are poorly documented, and much of the writing only focuses on the historical examination of the ownership, dating and restoration records of specific cases. However, this typology is very interesting in itself. From an anthropological perspective, it is an important feature of the religioscape of the period, representing a product of compromise under the relatively mild religious conflict. From an architectural perspective, the spontaneous growth of religious architecture in an almost entirely bottom-up vernacular scene offers an exceptional and typical model, helping us understand the most fundamental and intrinsic material attributes behind the luxuriant theological narrative of religious architecture.

Based on two theories of religioscape and material religion, this paper constructs an analytical framework for the schuurkerk, reflecting on the relativity of dominance in religious conflicts and

exposing the tension between repression and expression among multiple subjects. With the three defined attributes as infrastructure, political identity, and religious evocation, this paper reflects on the oppression and toleration of the authorities (the State General), the adaptation and creation of the Catholics, and the reasons for the disappearance of schuurkerken.

2 Background

2.1 Who is the dissenter in Staats-Brabant?

Since the Dutch Revolt, the former Duchy of Brabant had been a battlefield between the mainly Calvinist Netherlandish provinces (later the Dutch Republic) and Spanish Netherlands. Until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the northern part of Brabant was adjudicated to be Generality Lands of the Dutch Republic.[1] Between 1648 and 1794, the major part of it was known as Staats-Brabant, roughly equivalent to today's North Brabant (Noord-Brabant) in the Netherlands, which is the main spatial and temporal scope of this paper.

The complex political landscape of Europe at the time was undoubtedly about religious conflict, and the religious question was also the last stumbling block to peace in the Treaty of Munster. Because areas such as Brabant, which was to be ceded by the Spanish Netherlands to the Protestant-controlled Dutch Republic, had always been Catholic, the Catholic Spanish only recognised the Dutch Republic's secular, not spiritual, sovereignty over this territory. The peace negotiations were therefore deadlocked for some time.[2] The final compromise guaranteed the Catholics' freedom of conscience, but the Dutch authorities soon turned to cultural approaches in an attempt to Calvinize the area. In 1651, the Great Assembly formally established the Reformed religion, or Calvinism, as the only public religion. The others, especially Roman Catholicism, would continue to be allowed but under strict conditions. They were excluded from government offices, and their liturgical space and

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[1] "North Brabant," in *Wikipedia*, March 29, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=North_Brabant&oldid=1147268433.

[2] Jan Joseph Poelhekke, *De Vrede van Munster* (den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1948): 188-189.

activities were excluded from the public realm.[3]

It is clear from the above description that the Catholics in the Staats-Brabant was undoubtedly subjected to persecution, and the answer to the title of the chapter "who is the dissenter?" seems obvious. However, can the catholic be seen as absolutely underprivileged in this top-down Reformation? This depends on the subject as opposed to the "dissenter" being the authorities or the majority. Those in power in religious practice, such as the government, does not always imply absolute dominance; it is the masses who are the most negligible subjects in religious life, and therefore this religious conflict should be considered as dynamic, multidirectional antagonistic tolerance rather than the unidirectional relationship between the oppressing and oppressed.

In Staats-Brabant, this multi-directional series of religious contradictions formed an observable case. Unlike most of the North Netherlands, the population in Staats-Brabant was predominantly Catholic throughout. Although every village had at least a minister, a schoolmaster and a landdrost who belonged to the Reformed Protestants,[4] their numbers were limited and it was difficult to enforce a policy of repression against the Catholics. In the thesis *Rituele Repertoires*, Gerard Rooijakkers detailed the various forms of discrimination and bullying by Catholics to the Reformers, describing it as a "deliberate form of ritual violence."[5] In addition, it is clear from the results that the intention of Calvinization by the authorities was completely unsuccessful in Staats-Brabant. Thus, the relationship between the Reformers and the Catholics was not one of one-sided suppression, but rather dynamic interactions maintained in tension.

Given these facts, it would be biased to examine the phenomenon of schuurkerk with a preconceived judgement to treat the Catholics as mere dissenters under persecution. These architectural nodes

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[3] Willem Knuttel, *De toestand der Nederlandsche katholieken ten tijde der Republiek* (den Haag: Nijhoff, 1892): 206-210.

[4] Ruud van Nooijen and Frank van Doorn, "Schuurkerk op de Burgakker te Boxtel (ca. 1672-1828)," *Canon van Boxtel*, no. 6 (January 2014): 1–10.

[5] Gerard Rooijakkers, "Rituele Repertoires. Volkscultuur in Oostelijk Noord-Brabant, 1559-1853" (PhD thesis, Catholic University of Nijmegen, 1994): 265.

should be placed in a wider temporal and spatial dimension and analysed around multiple subjects.

2.2 Why is the barn church?

The combination of the words "church" (kerk) and "barn" (schuur) presents a natural contradiction. One is the highest form of Christian masterpiece of art dedicated to the God, while the other is just the practical and humble farm facility. Philip Larkin's famous poem Church Going uses the phrase "accoutred frowsty barn" as a literal derogatory irony to the spiritual value of the church;[6] the analytical philosopher John Austin, in criticism of the phenomenal principles of sensory material theory, cites the example of a "church disguised as a barn."[7] These two literary and philosophical examples illustrate the dramatic semantic differences between the terms church and barn. In the narrow Western-centric conception of architecture with Banister Fletcher's statement as the representative,[8] a church can rightly be called "architecture," while a barn can only be considered a vernacular shed, hardly even reaching the standard of "building". Textually, "barn church" (schuurkerk) as a noun presents a tension; pragmatically, however, its most basic function is merely that of a compromise in a religious conflict.

In the cities, schuilkerken are more predominantly presented in houses, initially as a spatial vehicle for domestic worship[9], and gradually as the only tolerated place for collective worship by dissenters. In the countryside, this role was assumed by barns. The reason for its widespread practice was the fact that barns were larger buildings in the countryside and could accommodate more church services. Not only in appearance, but the schuurkerk also hid itself legally in a similar mode, being recorded as a barn in housing transactions.

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[6] Philip Larkin, *The Less Deceived* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012): 36.

[7] John Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford University Press, 1962): 125.

[8] Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, 17th ed. (Athlone Press, 1961).

[9] Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Harvard University Press, 2007): 174.

Thus schuurkerk, like huiskerk, can be considered a branch of schuilkerk. From a terminological point of view, schuilkerk emphasises the hidden features of the church, while schuurkerk and huiskerk emphasise the material space into which the church is disguised. However, in this paper's observations, the specific preferences in terminology are distinct in the north and south of the Netherlands. The term schuilkerk is used frequently in documentation in the northern Netherlands, while schuurkerk is preferred in the south. For instance, in the Brabant History Information Centre, there are 62 search results for schuurkerk in the archive and only 8 for schuilkerk; On the contrary, in the North-Holland archive, there are 35 for the former and 508 for the latter.

The analysis of this phenomenon begins with the controversy over the term schuilkerk. Some scholars, such as Sebastien Dudok van Heel, rejected the use of the word schuilkerk, arguing that the term can only be traced back to the 19th century and is a product of Catholics exaggerating the oppression to which their ancestors were subjected.[10] In contrast, other scholars, such as Xander van Eck and Benjamin Jacob Kaplan, continue to use schuilkerk in their texts to describe the phenomenon.[11] In the booklet *Religious Interiors in Schuilkerken* published by the Museum Catharijneconvent, it is pointed out that "schuil" emphasises unrecognisability rather than implying that the location is a secret. The word schuilkerk was coined in the nineteenth century when people had certain romantic feelings about this kind of shelter.[12]

These sources provide some explanation for the North-South differences in the use of the terms schuurkerk and schuilkerk. Firstly, the word schuilkerk appeared in the 19th century and was mostly used to describe churches that had survived until that time. In the south, including Brabant, the majority of schuurkerken had already been demolished by the early 19th century. The booklet *Religious Interiors in Schuilkerken* shows a page of the Overall map of important interiors of

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[10] Dudok van Heel, "Amsterdamse Schuil- of Huiskerken?," *Holland* 25 (1993): 1–10.

[11] Xander van Eck, *Kunst, Twist En Devotie. Goudse Schuilkerken 1572–1795* (Delft: Eburon, 1994); Benjamin Kaplan, *Reformation and the Practice of Toleration: Dutch Religious History in the Early Modern Era* (BRILL, 2019).

[12] Anique de Kruijf, Albert Reinstra, and Pia Verhoeven, "Bedreigde Religieuze Interieurs," Museum Catharijneconvent, July 2022, https://www.catharijneconvent.nl/advies-voor-kerken/religieuze-interieurs/.

schuilkerken that have survived to today (fig. 1), none of which are located in Brabant, proving this.[13] Secondly, in contrast to the northern provinces in the Republic, where the Reformers predominated, it is a well-known fact that the vast majority of the population in the south was Catholic, and their churches needed even less emphasis on the clandestineness implied by "schuil". For the southern Catholics, worship in barns was simply a compromise after policy required them to leave their medieval churches, not to hide from anyone's view. last but not least, the southern regions were not as urbanised as the north, and it was more convenient to keep religious services in larger barns than in houses in the countryside, leading to a much lower number of huiskerken. The term schuurkerk therefore already sums up the entirety of typology in this context, and no further distinction is needed. The combination of all these reasons has led to the fact that today almost all documentation that talks about schuilkerk is taken from the north, while searches for schuurkerk result in a concentration in the Brabant-dominated south.

Figure 1. The overall map of important interiors of schuilkerken. (Anique de Kruijf, Albert Reinstra, and Pia Verhoeven, "Bedreigde Religieuze Interieurs,")

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[13] de Kruijf, Reinstra, and Verhoeven, "Bedreigde Religieuze Interieurs."

3   Analytical framework

In order to describe the schuurkerken by typical examples without detaching them from their spatiotemporal context, two theories, religioscape and material religion, are introduced and integrated into a complete analytical framework. Religioscape and material religion can be seen as two similar, even mutually inclusive, concepts. Distinguished from scholarly discourse in religious studies, they both focus on the material manifestations, their relationships, and their interactions with people, to describe a human-religious relationship. The difference between the two is that religioscape is more concerned with the geographical scale and tends to depict anthropological narratives about the place,[14] whereas material religion tends to study objects. The scale of religious architecture lies at the intersection of the two, existing within an indivisible human context as well as a systematic set of material properties. Therefore, both theories can provide a valuable perspective for the study of religious architecture and can be combined to form a system comprising networks and nodes.

Religioscape defined by Robert Hayden and Timothy Walker "refers to the distribution in spaces through time of the physical manifestations of specific religious traditions and of the populations that build them."[15] This model is characterised by discussing trajectories of the changing religious space in a broad spatial-temporal dimension, not limited to an isolated single site, which is the aspect that needs to be brought into focus in this paper. As mentioned above, due to the complex relationship of multiple religions in the chosen area, delving into a single architectural case or user group should be avoided. In contrast, there is a need to structuralize the relationship between architecture and the people within the appropriate context. Such an anthropological perspective as religioscape is therefore instructive for an architectural study such as this one.

After the contextual structure is constructed by religioscape, the theory of material religion is

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[14] Alexander-Kenneth Nagel, "German Religioscapes: Global and Local Perspectives," *Theological Review* 35 (January 2014): 13–14.

[15] Robert M. Hayden and Timothy D. Walker, "Intersecting Religioscapes: A Comparative Approach to Trajectories of Change, Scale, and Competitive Sharing of Religious Spaces," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 400.

introduced to analyse the specific nodes of architecture in this network. As mentioned by Birgit Meyer et al, materializing the study of religion means asking how religion happens materially.[16] Material religion was once employed by scholars like Mia Mochizuki to reflect on the iconoclasm and the devotion of artwork in the Reformation,[17] but as architecture lies on the blurred boundary between applied and decorative arts, it tends to be marginalised in the discourse of material religion. However, in fact, the theory of material religion as a study of the relationship between objects and people is very instructive for architectural research that specialises in the de-textualisational materialistic analysis. For instance, the concept of infrastructuring religion and relevant indicators proposed by Marian Burchardt can be applied well to the case of schuurkerk in this paper.[18] Furthermore, Oskar Verkaaik's discussion of the political and religious demand for religious architecture also provides inspiration for this paper to analyse the schuurkerk from the perspective of two different subjects.[19]

Thus, inspired by previous theories, this paper distils three key attributes of schuurkerk: infrastructure, political identity and religious evocation, which correspond to three different interactions between two groups of key subjects in the conflict, the authorities (the State General) and the Catholics. Infrastructure is reflected in the compromise between Catholics and the authorities over basic shelter; political identity in the emphatic suppression of Catholic public recognition by the authorities; and religious evocation in the commitment of Catholics to place-making with the tolerance of the authorities. In addition to comprising the framework for this paper's discussion of schuurkerk, these three keywords also provide a direction for the analysis of other religious buildings in modern discourse.

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[16] Birgit Meyer et al., "The Origin and Mission of Material Religion," *Religion* 40, no. 3 (July 1, 2010): 209, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.religion.2010.01.010.

[17] Mia Mochizuki, *The Netherlandish Image after Iconoclasm, 1566–1672: Material Religion in the Dutch Golden Age* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

[18] Marian Burchardt, "Infrastructuring Religion: Materiality and Meaning in Ordinary Urbanism," *Space and Culture*, (October 20, 2022): 1.

[19] Oskar Verkaaik, "Religious Architecture: Anthropological Perspectives," in *Religious Architecture: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Oskar Verkaaik (Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 10.

4   Infrastructure

The schuurkerk displays its attributes as a public infrastructure, thus distinguishing it from the Catholic Churches as we generally perceive it. In this special period, a schuurkerk acts first and foremost as a functional necessity of religious life, and its spiritual value and recognisability give way to the most basic needs of shelter. It thus fits well with Burchardt's definition of religious infrastructure, which is "a set of functional artefacts that enable people to create places for religious life, even if the precarious circumstances of township life prevent them from being durable, collectively meaningful and recognisable."[20]

The schuurkerk and relevant phenomena show that there is a tension of compromise between the authorities and the Catholics over the basic religious demand of a liturgical infrastructure. Under a series of secular objective conditions such as population, built environment, land property, etc, the authorities showed a certain tolerance for the Catholics' freedom of conscience: for a monetary price, the Catholics could obtain access to a basically adequate-sized building within a basically reasonable distance; but only at a minimum. The rule-makers from the State General looked for the "worst" solution for schuurkerk, provided that basic rations were met, and guarded against excessive "generosity" that would make Catholic political identity not sufficiently suppressed. On the contrary, the Catholic population also strove for better conditions. The dispute between the two sides over this infrastructure was reflected in the religioscape in tension over the location, size and fees of the schuurkerk.

4.1 Location – a negotiation in the built environment

When the schuurkerk first appeared, its location was marked by spontaneity. Especially before 1672, when Catholic activities were not tacitly accepted, people often trekked to other villages and towns on the frontier for temporary services. For example, from the edicts of 1649 onwards, people from the surrounding villages gathered at Weert on the Meijerij border, where the priest read the Holy Mass

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[20] Burchardt, "Infrastructuring Religion," 2.

in the open air. Shortly afterwards, a shelter was built right there to serve the sacred secrets of up to 2,000 people. This is how the religious infrastructure was constructed from the bottom up.[21]

After 1721, the barn church had been licensed and controlled on paper, and from this point onwards the State General became involved in controlling the choice of its location. It was no longer purely bottom-up, and conflicts therefore arose. The users wanted to worship in as convenient a place as possible, even at the cost of repeated requests; and the authorities, while seeking to make the Catholic church as remote and invisible as possible, must also consider the impact of large numbers of moving worshippers as well as the commerce of village. The reconstruction of the Wouw schuurkerk can be a case. As figure 2 shows, the town was in the shape of a strip at that time, centred on the old church and square. The old schuurkerk was situated at the northernmost end of the town (A), and the movement of the inhabitants to and from the main street brought commercial prosperity, but also displeasure to the Reformers. So when the schuurkerk needed to be rebuilt in 1750, it is only allowed by the State General to be built on the east side of the village perpendicular to the main street, so that no Catholics carrying worship materials would be seen on the street and the schuurkerk would be less likely to be recognized as a church. This decision was strongly opposed by the residents, especially the shopkeepers in the main street, to the extent that it led to some violent clashes.[22] This is a typical example of the negotiations between the users and the authorities around the location of this religious infrastructure.

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[21] Marcoen Heijer, "'Schuilkerken' in Het Weerter Bos," *De Maasgouw : Limburgs Tijdschrift Voor Geschiedenis, Taal En Kunst*, 1951.

[22] JW Hagen, "Een Spatie van Ruim 47000 Voeten Binnenwerks : De Moeizame Totstandkoming van Een Nieuwe Schuurkerk in Wouw Gedurende Het Derde Kwart van de Achttiende Eeuw," *Jaarboek van de Oudheidkundige Kring "De Ghulden Roos" Te Roosendaal*, 1994.

Figure 2. The map of Wouw in 1783. The location of the old schuurkerk is marked A and the new one is marked B.

(Base map: Adan, "Kaart van de heerlijkheid Wouw", 1783, Collectie kaarten en tekeningen van het Rijksarchief in

Noord-Brabant, Brabants Historisch Informatie Centrum, 's-Hertogenbosch, no.137.)

In addition, barn churches are owned differently from churches in the traditional sense. Like a real

barn, they are usually leased on a private farm, for which the church pays an annual rent, and even

the owner of the land can intervene in the use and dismantling of the house. For example, when the

landowner Adriaan de Bruin leased the house and farm of Waspik to the Catholic parish priest, he

told his heirs that "the said house and farm shall always be in the service and occupation of the pastor";

but in addition, he appointed a regent for the house, and mentioned that "the regent has the right to

expel a pastor without mercy if the building is not properly maintained." [23]This parasitic attribute of

the schuurkerk makes it irrelevant to the supposedly eternal sanctity of a Catholic church and marks

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[23] Han Verschure, "Tussen St. Jan En Bartholomeus of De Waspikse Schuurkerk En Zijn Voorgeschiedenis," *Themanummers "Op 't Goede Spoor,"* (1988): 56.

its temporality as a religious infrastructure rather than a religious architecture in the traditional sense.

4.2 Size - a space ration based on population

One of the most basic requirements of the schuurkerk as infrastructure was that it be of sufficient size to accommodate the local souls, so size was an important issue in every application for restoration. Applications to the State General for widening the schuurkerk after 1721 all marked the size of the existing schuurkerk, the dimensions of the widening required and the local population. By approving and rejecting these applications, the State General indicated a set of potential criteria to regulate the size of the schuurkerk so that it would be just large enough to accommodate the local congregation, but not too large. Figure 3 shows the relationship between the size of some of the schuurkerken in Brabant and the population of the related parish, which generally shows a linear trend. Even in 1791, the authorities invited the architect Henry Verhees to draw up a set of official standards for the size of schuurkerken. Based on his research, Verhees made plans for seven different types of parishes with varied population sizes, and established the fixed rule that at least three square feet per parishioner, which he thought is already very meagre.[24]
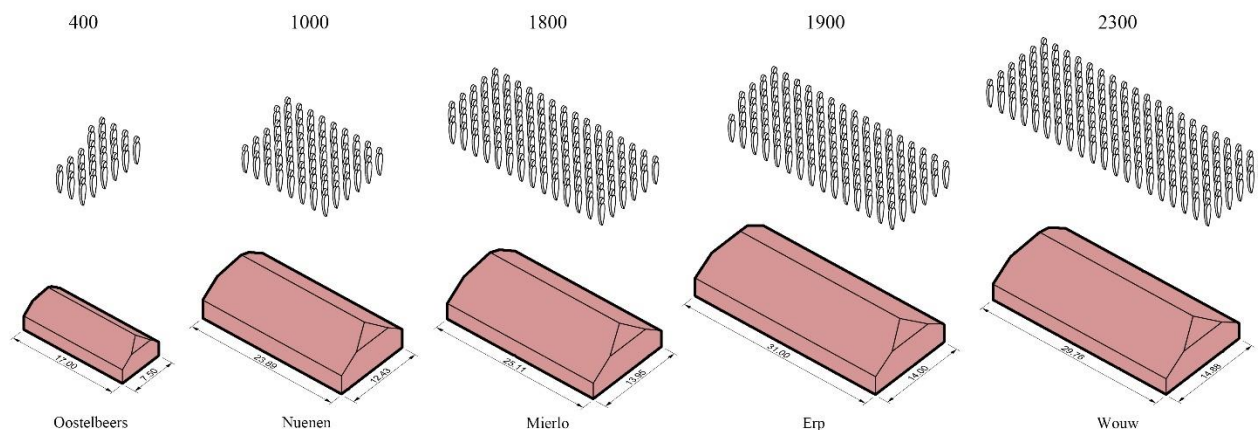

Figure 3. The size of some schuurkerken along with the parish population.

The State General's control of the size of this infrastructure clearly reflects their position regarding

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24 Am Frenken, "Antonius van Alphen, 1748-1831," *Bossche Bijdragen* 19 (1949): 182–183.

schuurkerk and catholic activities. On the one hand, the size is related to population, reflecting the fact that they saw religious space as a necessity precisely rationed to each member of the congregation, and it thus proved their tolerance of each individual's freedom of conscience and recognition of this infrastructure. This was out of an objective consideration for the health and safety of the people, as the authorities had to prevent the possible consequences of overcrowded churches, such as the spread of dysentery and the collapse of the building. On the other hand, this precise rationing of space meant that they did not want the schuurkerk to exceed the standards of infrastructure to the extent of becoming recognized as a landmark in the urban space. This fact reflected their strict suppression of Catholic political identity in the public sphere, which will be the focus of chapter six of this paper.

4.3 Fees - a Dutch approach to religious coexistence

Money is an important object in material religion. As the most secular material, it cannot intervene in religious practices in a straightforward manner, but every step in the formation and transformation of the religioscape is inevitably accompanied by the circulation of money. Maintaining the schuurkerk as an infrastructure required a considerable amount of expenditure. Therefore, monetary relations played an important role in governing the construction of the schuurkerk and Catholic religious practice.

The payment of multiple kinds of exorbitant fees was a necessary condition for Catholics to use the barn churches for their worship services. In Knuttel's book *De toestand der Nederlandse katholieken ten tijde van de Republiek*, several forms of extortion from Catholics were mentioned. One was the so-called recognition fees (recognitionitiegelden), as fixed annual contributions; the second was the admissions fees (admissiegelden), which had to be paid when a priest or chaplain arrived; thirdly, the sacrifices that had to be made when renovating and building new schuurkerken. In addition, Catholics had to pay fines when they committed "crimes".[25] Although the State General had explicitly forbidden officials to accept money from Catholics since the "Waarschouwinge" of 1666, and similar

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[25] Knuttel, *De toestand der Nederlandsche katholieken ten tijde der Republiek*, 206.

resolutions were reiterated in 1730 and 1750, officials were often able to fabricate new names for the money. And monetary means did restrain Catholic resistance, as the lawyer Askaal Erpecum put it in 1728, that he found those fees highly useful, and considered them a very suitable means of keeping the "malicious and dangerous" Catholics in check.[26] The congregation had to take into account the high fines they faced for breaking the rules. In addition, the financial situations of parishes were repeatedly mentioned in the construction and renovation of schuurkerken throughout Brabant, and the fulfilment of the congregation's expectations of their new churches was sometimes frustrated by the lack of funds.

The payment of fees, a means of exchanging money for a degree of religious freedom, can be considered as compensation for this lenient religious monopoly through economic means, a form of religious co-existence with Dutch characteristics. This kind of national trait is the mercantilist theory that gained currency around the seventeenth century.[27] Local officials were happy to choose the most profitable of the various ways of oppressing Catholics. There were even drossaards who deliberately turned a blind eye to some Catholics' violations in order to get paid for them. In summary, the maintenance of the schuurkerk infrastructure was the result of a compromise between the two sides in this moderate religious conflict, and money was used as the material flow to maintain this balance in this network of religioscape.

5   Political identity

The authorities' most important aim and attitude to dissenters' problems is to have them disappear from the public sphere, both visually and audibly. As mentioned in the discussion of the term schuilkerk in the second chapter, its clandestineness does not mean that the location is secret, but that it is formally unrecognisable. The authorities resorted to confining the religious dissent to a defined space, erasing the nature of the church as a ritual landmark in the public vision, in order to suppress

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[26] Askaal Erpecum, "Brief van Den Advokaat-Fiskaal", Inventaris van het archief van de Staten-Generaal, September 1728, Nationaal archief, den Haag.

[27] Kaplan, *Reformation and the Practice of Toleration*.

the Catholic public identity. In contrast, the freedom of conscience of the congregation was not stifled at all, their collective liturgical activities were not restricted, and even the interiors of the schuurkerken were treated leniently as private property, and it is here that Kaplan's concept of "toleration" is reflected.[28] In the eighteenth century, many clear and strict regulations of church form appear in the resolutions of the State General. The architectural elements that are strictly forbidden, explicitly restricted or relatively tolerated reveal which aspects of the identity the authorities are vigilant or nonchalant about. In addition, the changes in these regulations reflect the increasing tolerance of Catholicism over the century. Therefore, an analysis of these elements from an architectural perspective can help us to recognise at what levels political identity was controlled and to examine the changes in these attitudes over a century.

From 1672 onwards, assemblies in barn churches were no longer prohibited, but strict requirements were imposed on their form - no resemblance to a church, no opening to the street and, understandably, no belfries. the State General's regulations for the schuurkerk from 1721 onwards can be clearly traced. The resolution against the renovation of the schuurkerk in Heeswijk in that year stated that "the Roman Catholic church houses in Staats-Brabant shall not be extended or renovated without the prior permission of His Highness", so that renovation work on schuurkerken everywhere thereafter can be found in the archives.[29] The resolution of 1761 is even more specific, in rejecting the request for the reconstruction of the schuurkerk in Standdardbuiten's, clearly specifying the form and dimensions of walls, windows, doors and ceilings, and stressing that when the Roman Catholic Church "wishes to renovate, enlarge or restore a barn church, it must submit to The Hague." [30]The resolution of 1771 relaxed some of the conditions, in particular changing the description of the roof.[31]

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[28] Kaplan, "Reformation and the Practice of Toleration," 206.

[29] de Staten-Generaal, "Extract Uit Het Register Der Resolutiân van de Hoog." (432: Heeren Staten Generaal der Verenigde Nederlanden, March 5, 1721), Archief Raad van Brabant.

[30] "Extract Uit Het Register Der Resolutiân van de Hoog.," August 28, 1761.

[31] "Extract Uit Het Register Der Resolutiân van de Hoog.," July 18, 1771.

The vast majority of the regulations were trying to make these churches look less church-like. Firstly, the absolute prohibition of the belfries, the most typical symbol of the church, visually reflected this suppression of public identity, not only because it was a towering visual landmark, but also because it had an aural ritual significance for Catholics. Secondly, the fact that doors and windows should be "not oval or Church-like, but square"[32] also confirmed that these two elements were also important symbols of the external image of the church. These means can correspond to one of the measuring indicators of political dominance in a religioscape as defined by Hayden and Walker, namely "perceptibility", which can be subdivided into "visibility, audibility, massiveness."[33] It was through these means that the Reformed church asserted their explicit religious monopoly.

The requirements for the roof have undergone interesting changes. In terms of form, the schuurkerk was initially restricted to the Wolfsdak roof, a gable roof with two chamfered faces on the short sides, which was the most common roof form for barns in the south of the Netherlands at the time. Although it was also commonly used in dwellings, it was not as frequently used as in the more humble structures of barns. It was also commonly used in dwellings, but not as often as in the more modest structures of barns. This rigidity indicates that the authorities wanted the church to be as close in appearance to the barn as possible. At the end of the 18th century, however, the roof was given more freedom in form, for example during the restoration of the Waspik schuurkerk in 1784, when the roof form of the Wolfsdak was changed by agreement, replacing the gable with a vertically rising wall, which was more dignified for the users.[34]

And in terms of roofing materials, the schuurkerk were initially required to be covered with thatch until the resolution of 1771, which stated that church roofs had to be adapted to their surroundings: "Where the majority of houses are covered with tiles, it will be permitted to cover them with red tiles, but on the contrary, where straw or thatch roofs cover the majority of houses, no other roofs will be

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[32] "Extract Uit Het Register Der Resolutiân van de Hoog.," August 28, 1761.

[33] Hayden and Walker, "Intersecting Religioscapes," 403.

[34] Verschure, "Tussen St. Jan En Bartholomeus of De Waspikse Schuurkerk En Zijn Voorgeschiedenis," 15.

permitted except for straw or thatch."[35] The authorities' intentions are visually reflected by this change in the roofing material. They did not intend to "desecrate" the sanctity of the church with such a lowly material as thatch, but rather demonstrated a consistent attitude to make the schuurkerk roof as unrecognisable as possible in its surroundings. These restrictions look somewhat like the planning regulations that we have today to shape urban morphology, although for a completely different purpose.

Furthermore, there are also parts of the regulations that are intended to be prohibitions against catholic characteristics. What was abhorrent to the Reformed doctrine could not appear in the Catholic schuurkerk either, such as ornaments in domes or attics, objects of iconolatry, etc. For the Reformers, who had taken the Netherlands from the Catholics, their resistance to Catholic extravagant ornament or devout iconolatry was always radical. In 1755, for example, the schuurkerk in Wouw was found to have restored the organ without permission, and the sounds of "accursed idolatry" as called in the *Heidelberg Catechism* were heard.[36] Thus, the Catholics suffered a period of closure and some fines. In another restoration of the same schuurkerk, the resolution also required that the pulpit must be free of ornaments and that no images or decorations be allowed on the stucco inside or outside the church, etc. However, these restrictions on religious identity were far less forceful than those on the public identity of the building's exterior. Especially in the late 18th century, the interior of the schuurkerk became more and more elaborate, and many icons and rood screens were not required to be removed. In contrast, the restrictions on the Catholic political identity, which forced its exterior to seemly disappear from the city, were much more stringent and critical.

6   Religious evocation

It is difficult to make schuurkerk a religious architecture that is durable, aesthetically pleasing, and in keeping with Catholic expectations of the presence of God, given the constraints described above.

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[35] "Extract Uit Het Register Der Resolutiân van de Hoog.," July 18, 1771.

[36] Hagen, "Een Spatie van Ruim 47000 Voeten Binnenwerks," 76.

however, Verkaaik argues that religious architecture is "not defined by some inherent qualities but by its opposition to secular space and its potential to create spaces of affirmative transgression where the secular is confirmed by the very existence of its opposite."[37] The objective material conditions of the schuurkerk, as a place that is forced to become sanctified with no choice, make it difficult to be considered as a religious architecture possessing inherent qualities such as eternity and symbolism. Despite that, the Catholics also gave the schuurkerk what Meyer called a "sensational form" within the limited conditions,[38] creating an interaction with certain religious sensations, and a resonance with the aesthetic power of architecture.
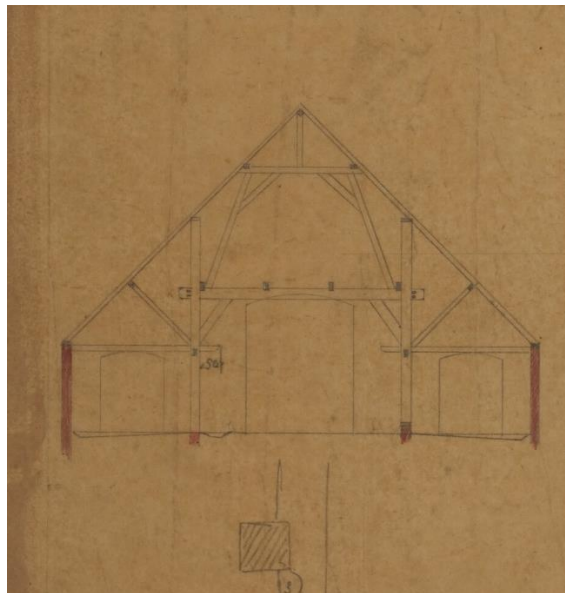

Figure 4. A cross-section of a typical barn in the 19th century. ("Profil. Lengteprofil (van boerderij, schuur of stal),"

1850, Gelders Archive, Arnhem, 1506, https://proxy.archieven.nl/0/668DA3DE49AF493C86D1F1D3A70FDC09.)

There is a natural fit between the church space and the physical form of the barn. Most of the schuurkerken listed in this paper adopted the same basic composition of space: the altar at one end of the long side, the choir loft at the other, and the pews arranged in the nave facing the altar. Most of

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[37] Verkaaik, "Religious Architecture: Anthropological Perspectives," 13.

[38] Birgit Meyer, "From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding," in *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, ed. Birgit Meyer, Religion/Culture/Critique (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009), 7, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230623248_1.

them consisted of a row of timber frames, with two rows of columns on either side of the nave, forming a common barn structure, like the barn in the 19th century shown in figure 4. This very vernacular, utilitarian structure naturally creates a spatial archetype with low aisles on either side and a high nave, very similar to the classic Basilica archetype. As a result, the structure appropriately accommodates the function of the church and evokes the congregation's sense of church space.
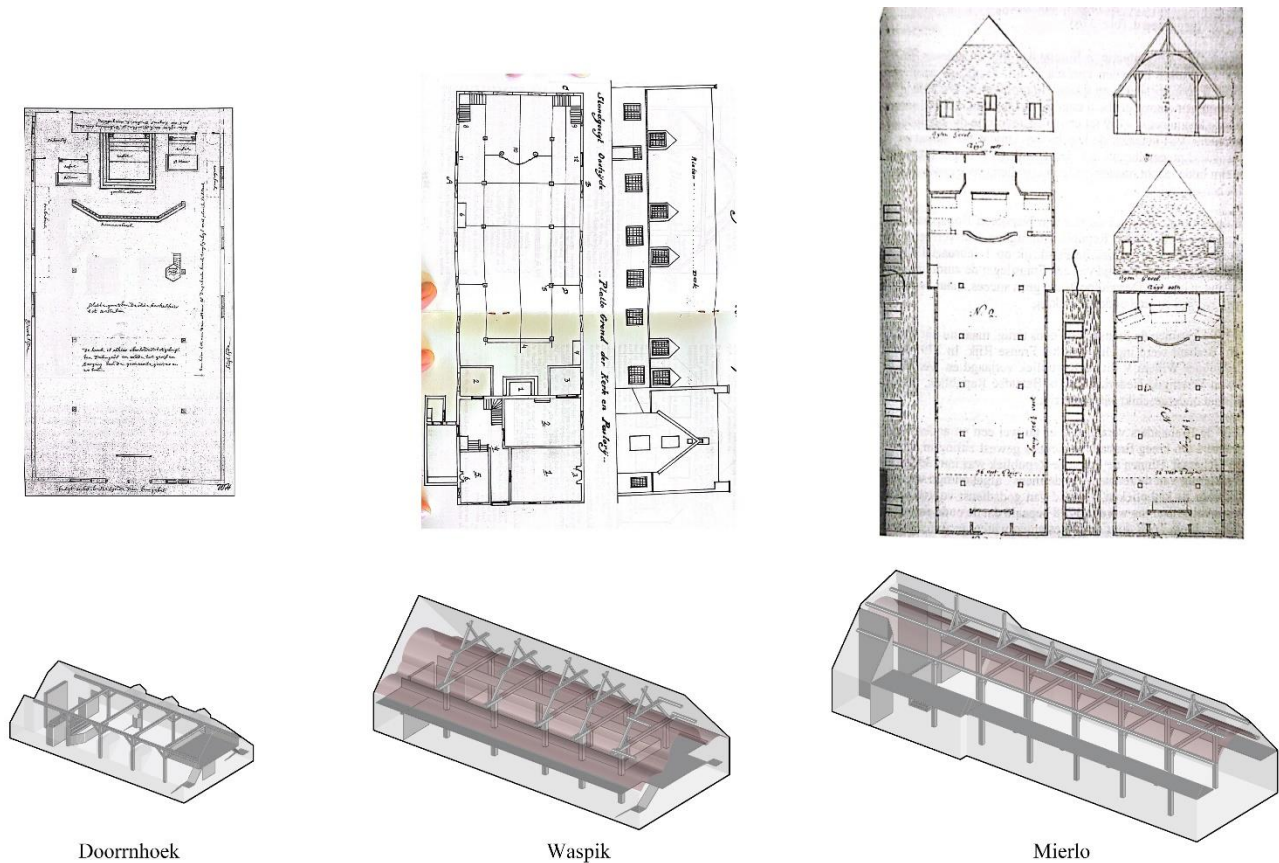

Doorrnhoek   Waspik   Mierlo

Figure 5. The floorplan and axon view of three typical schuurkerken. (Plan: het Nationaal Archief in Den Haag.)

The left row of figure 5 shows the layout of the schuurkerk at Doornboek in 1676, which is a typical example of many similar ones. The rectangular main altar has a side altar on each side, a wide buckled communion bench between the columns in front of it, and a pulpit standing on the right. Other cases such as the schuurkerk of Waspik, in the middle of figure 5, which was renovated in 1784, had galleries built on the two long sides of the upper floor connecting to the loft, and "this was not because

people thought they were so beautiful, but because they had to make do with space."[39] In addition to these two most common rectangular plan layouts, some examples such as the one in Mielo even cleverly created two very shallow transepts by adding a wider volume at the end of the original rectangular hall, which is presented in the right row of figure 5.

In addition, common to many late 17th-century schuurkerk is the presence of a beautiful barrel vault, an expression of "they had to make do with space". In the classic case of the real church, the vault originated as an architectural element supporting the span of the structure, but at this time it was a wooden adjunct that was used as an evocative symbol to add an almost church-like spatial experience to the interior. As no ornamentation or painting was allowed on the interior walls or ceilings, the barrel vault became the most important architectural element in the schuurkerk to shape the aesthetic feeling, and it was very common in all schuilkerken.

Figure 6. The schuurkerk of Sint-Oedenrode is on the left. ("Schuurkerk in Mariaheide," "Schuurkerk in Mariaheide," Canon van Nederland, accessed January 15, 2023, https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/noord-brabant/meierijstad/schuurkerk-in-duifhuis)

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[39] Verschure, "Tussen St. Jan En Bartholomeus of De Waspikse Schuurkerk En Zijn Voorgeschiedenis," 37.

If one compares the schuurkerk with its barn contemporaries, the most obvious difference lies in the windows, which is also quite logical. The number of windows in the schuurkerk basically met the needs of a common public space due to the need for light and ventilation, whereas the barn as a farm facility had more doors and fewer windows. Although the shape of the windows is strictly rectangular according to the state general, as a symbolic architectural element, the Catholics have used some other techniques to give the windows a special character. For example, in the schuurkerk of Sint-Oedenrode (fig. 6), the doors and windows were fitted with a pointed arch to resemble catholic churches. In order not to be punished, the priest of Sint-Oedenrode hid the pointed arches by hitting planks in front of them.[40] For the schuurkerk in Doornhoek, which is shown in the left part of figure 5 as well as figure 7, there were three high dormer windows on both sides inserted into the roof at gutter height, which were reminiscent of the church windows from the expropriated church in this parish, and these windows brought beautiful light into the schuurkerk even though the side walls were only 1.5m low.[41]
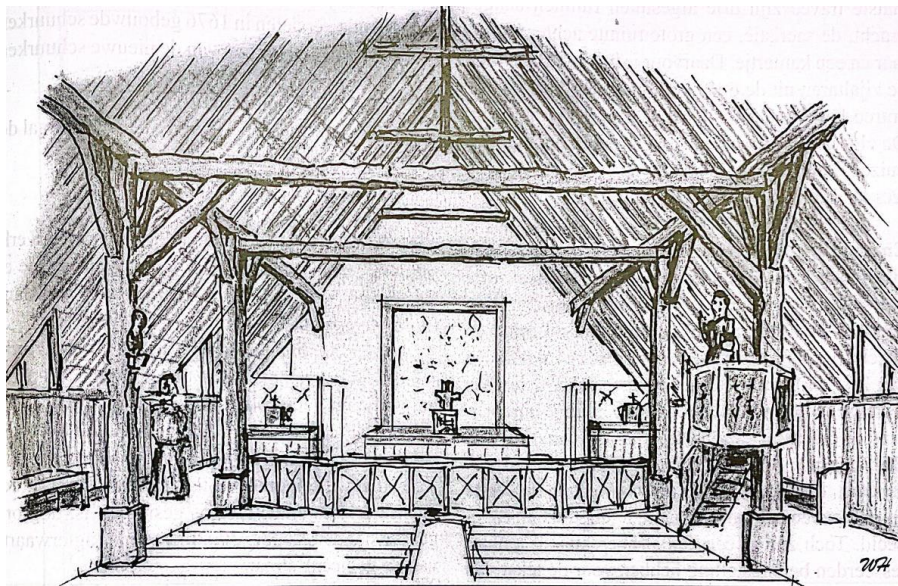

Figure 7. The reconstructed interior view of the schuurkerk in Doornhoek. (Wim van der Heijden, "De Bouw van de Schuurkerk.")

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[40] "Schuurkerk in Mariaheide," Canon van Nederland, accessed January 15, 2023, https://www.canonvannederland.nl/nl/noord-brabant/meierijstad/schuurkerk-in-duifhuis.

[41] Wim van der Heijden, "De Bouw van de Schuurkerk," *Rondom de Plaets*, (2004): 90.

Both the barrel vault and the windows reflect a commonality in the schuurkerk's architectural place-making: a direct quotation of the formal qualities of the church. As the designers of the churches were almost Catholic users such as pastors or local farmers, this formal language does not rely on strong doctrinal grounds or architectural concepts and is almost entirely motivated by the designers' experiential perception of the church space. These evocative elements were therefore derived from the ritual sensation of the place, and were then given to the schuurkerk, a purely vernacular ritual space that influenced the way the congregation in later decades perceived liturgical space and liturgical rites.

7 The end of schuurkerk

By the end of the 18th century, some of the schuurkerken were very close to real churches, not only in function but also in form, as restrictions were eased year by year. However, after the parishes regained the right to practice their religion in public in 1795, a storm of reclaiming old parish churches and building new ones swept across the region. Few people were satisfied enough with their schuurkerken, even if it was large and convenient enough and have accompanied the congregation for more than 100 years . Franciscus van Gastel, the Leende pastor, knew this well. He wrote to the Vicar Van Alphen with worries that he didn't know why the others were eager for the big church with their burden increasing while the current schuurkerk was already perfect.[42] In addition, most of the schuurkerken were demolished and auctioned off immediately after the real churches were recaptured, so there are very few schuurkerken left in North Brabant today. The fact that this precious history was so quickly erased is closely linked to the nature of Catholicism and the oppression to which it was subjected.

Firstly, the congregation needed to reclaim its Catholic public identity with the advent of freedom. After centuries of suppressed political rights, it desperately needed a symbolic approach to proclaim it, and the most direct way to do this was to reclaim a church in the heart of the town with a towering

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[42] Franciscus van Gastel, "De Brief Aan Vicaris Van Alphen" (PA Leende, folder 3, no. 10., n.d.), Archief van de Parochie van St-Petrus' Banden, Rijksarchief in Noord-Brabant.

belfry. As argued by several scholars, this need for political identity is the main reason for their struggle to reclaim the church. "The battle for the return of the tower church is a prestige battle about the symbolic value of the tower church. The struggle is more on the political than the religious plane." As door Ger Rombouts argues in the example of Rijsbergen.[43] In Heeze, people were so anxious to assert their identity that they kept ringing the bells in the churches until the bell rope in the chapel broke.[44]

Secondly, for Catholics, church buildings are part of the sacredness of religion, a place of praise and invocation of God's holy name, but schuurkerken were more or less seen as emergency shelters rather than fully merited shrines. A preacher Stephanus Hanewinkel wrote at the end of the 18th century that, in many cases, the ritual consecration of the barn churches would not have been officially carried out by the bishop. When he asked whether an old consecrated one is then better or holier, he got the reply "Very much so."[45] The local congregation, therefore, saw the old church as a property belonging to the Catholic Church that needed to be reclaimed at all costs. And at the same time, because of this strict regard for sanctity, Catholics have a strict definition of desecration. Unlike Protestants, who treat the church as a mere space for worship, they make a strict distinction between the sacred and secular spheres. The use of sacred space for secular functions is considered to be an act of sacrilege. It is therefore not difficult to imagine that they could not take the decision to reuse the nice schuurkerk as a farm facility. Dismantling it to subsidise the church would have been more acceptable by comparison.

On top of this, after years of paying dues, the financial situation of most parishes was very difficult, and many plans for new parish churches were therefore delayed until the mid-19th century when the state issued subsidies. With this situation in mind, some churches chose to dismantle the schuurkerk

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[43] Ger Rombouts, "Van Schuurkerk Naar Torenkerk," *Het Land Aan de Breede*, (1996): 28.

[44] Rooijakkers, "Ritule Repertoires," 279.

[45] Stephanus Hanewinkel, *Reize Door de Majorij*, vol. 2 (Amsteldam, 1800): 56.

and auction it off to raise money for, among other things, the repair of old parish churches.

Eventually, the schuurkerk, an emergency infrastructure, had to give way to the higher religious demonstrative requirements of the Catholics, and almost all of it disappeared into history.

8 Conclusion

Schuurkerk, as a typology that existed briefly in this period of religious conflict, reflects its triple attributes of infrastructure, political identity and religious evocation through its connection to the two subjects, and the attitude of these two subjects towards these attributes. This research allows us to understand an important element of the religioscape of the period, reflecting the way of toleration characterised in the Netherlands during the period of the Reformation.

To put it another way, the schuurkerk, as a particular kind of architecture located by definition on the boundaries of sacred space, provides a reference point for the study of other religious architectures. Therefore, we can also extend the analytical framework and the three attributes proposed in this paper to the analysis of all religious architectures, qualitatively describing their features in each of these dimensions. Especially in our discussions of modern religion today, facing a globalised and diverse religioscape, it is possible to continue to explore how architectural analysis can intervene in the large anthropological issue.

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