

## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

### **CHRISTIAN FEMINISATION AND MASCULINISATION IN EUROPE: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES**

Research on Christendom increasingly emphasises that Christian churches and denominations should no longer be viewed as victims of secularisation and as the ‘losers’ of modernity and progress. In contrast, notwithstanding their sometimes radical rejection of some modern (-ist) values and practices, they profoundly adapted to the modern society and contributed to its modernisation. The recognition of the ‘feminisation’ of Christianity has played a key role in this respect, and the ‘feminisation thesis’ all but replaced the secularisation paradigm that dominated the history and sociology of religion in the nineteenth and twentieth century until fairly recently and continues to do so for the post-1960s.

Formulated in a research context studying Protestant culture and religion, the ‘Feminisation of Christianity’ in the nineteenth century has been attested in various North American and European countries and in both Protestantism and Catholicism. Research, mainly concentrating on single countries, has studied its quantitative, qualitative and discursive content, identifying historical, geographical and confessional variations. Feminisation has been defined in various terms such as a ‘domestication’ (a shift from ‘ecclesia to nursery’), a ‘sentimentalisation’ (the rise of a more affectionate and sentimental Christianity) and ‘infantillisation’ (expressed, among other things, in the representation and promotion of infants and children as ideal innocent Christians), and the ‘sacralisation of women’ (almost complete identification of femininity and religiosity). It has been linked to a feminine preponderance in church practice and charity activities (‘die kirchliche Caritas trug ein weibliches Gesicht’) and to a strong rise of the female religious professionals (the so-called ‘century of the nun’) with the creation of the deaconesses as well as, particularly among Catholics, female missionaries.

The feminisation of Christianity can be considered as an expression of the growing sexual dimorphism since the Enlightenment. The Protestant and the Catholic (Contra) Reformation as well as the Enlightenment and the American, French and Industrial Revolutions have been identified as important catalysing factors in the creation of a ‘gender gap’ between religious women and (more or less) irreligious men. Although World War experiences and the sexual revolution of the sixties might have had a mitigating effect, sexual dimorphism still is a feature of the religious practice and belief today.

Almost unanimously accepted in the research of French Catholicism and English Protestantism, the ‘feminisation’ thesis faces much more scepticism in German and North-

European historical research. The critics stress the ‘politisisation’ of religion, its important part in the formation of male identity, the importance of manly role models such as ‘heroic missionaries’ and martyrs, and the maintenance of the ‘Männerbund Kirche’ within the Catholic Church. The concept of ‘patriarchal domesticity’, its pious role in the ‘households of faith’ and the attested Christian influence on the formation and function of the public field also warn for too rigid an interpretation of this ‘feminisation of Christianity’.

It has become increasingly clear that the feminisation of Christianity did not necessarily exclude men from involving in religious activities. In particular the Catholic Church, where she opted to engage in the public domain (as she e.g. did in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, but less in France and hardly in Italy), considered this a field where men could play a major role as Catholics. Social and even political action could even become a way of fulfilling one’s religious duties. Moreover, Protestant and Catholic churches developed strategies and discourses that counterbalanced an all too ‘effeminate’ image of the church and religiosity. These focused less on their role in the public domain as on developing male semantics (esp. metaphors and manly language) supposedly appealing to men, and offering a semantic and apostolic framework in which manly Christian identities could be constructed. These often fused with national identities, a blending which immediately raises questions as to the mutual relationship. The ‘masculinisation’ of Christian discourses, however, could undermine the basic gender distinction that the Christian churches themselves defended and propagated. This led to the paradoxical phenomenon that outspoken manly discourses and initiatives actually could strongly appeal to women, on the one hand because religion could hardly escape being considered belonging to the female field of interest, on the other hand because they offered women alternatives to their confined domestic world.

The feminisation of Christianity as well as the reformulated Christian manliness in their different meanings and chronologies are still far from completely mapped, particularly in Europe. Moreover, virtually all studies in this respect were largely conducted in relative isolation, largely confined along national and confessional lines. Hence, it is time to draw a state of the art, comparing national and confessional cases. This would allow first of all to establish clear chronologies. Origins and development of the feminisation process vary considerably between regions and denominations (and majority or minority groups). Moreover, one should in this respect consider the different aspects or dimensions of this ‘feminisation’, which obviously varied according to region and denomination. Similar considerations apply as regards to masculinisation, which seems an even more elusive concept given the fundamentally masculine structure that all Christian churches, albeit with some nuances, share. The construction and development of alternative discourses and strategies regarding Christian men therefore appear even more diverse, and perhaps more depending on confession (Catholic/ Lutheran/ Reformed/ other?) but also on strategic choices – themselves depending on the ideological basics of any confession – such as the involvement in the socio-political domain. Hence, one should perhaps also refrain from too easily considering

‘masculinisation’ as a mere reaction to feminisation, and certainly not assume that there was a simple dialectic relation between the two. More likely, the churches adopted different strategies when addressing different publics, male or female.

Issues of chronology and definition immediately raise further questions. Were feminisation and masculinisation the result of common reactions to social and political changes, or, and to which extent, did transnational and perhaps even ‘transdenominational’ contacts and influences play a role? Notwithstanding the growing impact of communication on a global scale, such transnational and transdenominational influences are far from evident though, given the increased confessional identities and oppositions of “the second confessional age”. Perhaps the gendered transformations of churches, denominations and confessions shed light on (the existence of) the confessionalisation process itself. ‘Effeminate’ for example indeed became an insult for anticlericals as well as opponents of feminisation within the confessions.

These dynamics should translate in different national case studies that would address the issues and questions raised in the above. Research seems not advanced well enough to present transnational and transdenominational papers, however. Hence, we propose to discuss different national and denominational cases of feminisation and masculinisation, with the purpose of establishing a framework for confrontation and comparison, with the idea of reaching a tentative comparative synthesis as a result. Since ‘feminisation’ is considered a long time development (whether or not with a parallel developing or temporary ‘masculinisation’), contributions can relate to any period in the era between 1750 and 1950. Particular notice will be given to the numerous ways in which this ‘feminisation’ and ‘masculinisation’ might have been expressed and to the source types they created. Hence, the studies should also contribute at a continued reappraisal of the modernisation perspective of religion.

Two workshops will be held, one in Ghent and one in Leuven (Belgium).

#### **‘DIEU CHANGEA DE SEXE’? (4-6 January 2008)**

A first workshop will deal with different dimensions of the feminisation/ masculinisation debate.

#### **Images, discourses and representations**

A first session will in particular focus on religious discourses and images of God. The nineteenth century witnessed the gradual move from the idea of a revengeful God to that of a ‘loving father’, supported by images in which Mary became more commonly praised as a tender mother than as a heavenly queen. Instead of a stress on the rational content, the heart became the most prominent site to experience one’s religiosity. This ‘sentimentalisation’ of

the religious discourses was accompanied by a more 'androgynous' image of Jesus, a remarkable emphasis on the 'child' Jesus, and, among Catholics, the rise of the Marian devotion, the creation and the rise of the devotion of other female saints and other cults concentrating more on the heart as e.g. the Sacred Heart Devotion. Femininity and religiosity in the nineteenth century in many discourses appear closely linked, changing an older narrative in which woman was considered the incarnation of sin and moving her into the realm of the (desexualised) angels. This revaluation might also be attested through the rise of the female visionaries in the nineteenth century. Although the Church did everything it had in its power to keep the enthusiast crowd under her firm control, these visionaries created to a certain amount their own authority.

However, one should question if this feminisation in discourse and imagining was continued in the twentieth century, an era of increased violence and war, an epoch of muscular men as ideal.

### **Milksops, machos and real men**

The 'homo religiosus' moves from a shadowy existence back into the spotlight as he is studied within Christian male movements, social and political activities and in the 'Männerbund Kirche'. The so-called 'politisisation' of religion has had an influence on confessional identities. Churches identifying with a minority group, apparently had a stronger hold on the faithful, even the male part, or is that too easy a statement? Comparing their male movements might indicate which features can be considered unique and to what amount they made use of strategies common to all confessions.

### **Feminisation of the religious field**

The feminisation of the religious field contains two statements: one is the creation and rise of the female professional religious; the other is the expansion of their field of activities and those of the female laity (education, charity, but also: rise of female choirs). Political and social contexts had an important influence on their development (e.g. in France: women as the human ammunition of the Church).

### **'HOUSEHOLDS OF FAITH': DOMESTICITY AND RELIGION, 4-6 September 2008**

Although revisionist gender history has raised doubts about the novelty and relevance of the concept of 'separate spheres', 'domesticity' appears as a powerful ideal propagated widely, and particularly by Christians, throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century religious practice indeed apparently more and more moved into the private world of the family, creating the archetypical image of the mother as 'angel in the house', particularly among the (new) middle class. One should question though to which

extend this model was propagated and imitated among rural and working classes, or if these did not develop different, even opposing models and practices. Recent historical research tries to reintroduce men into the domestic sphere and pays attention to the patriarchal domesticity and its pious responsibilities. Nevertheless, not all families were 'households of faith': particularly among farmers and the working class the ideal of domestic piety only slowly manifested itself. Religion could also function as a demarcation line between the male and female members (e.g. France).

Hence this workshop will assess the multiple ways in which men and women organised their religious life in the domestic sphere in different social, national (regional) and confessional contexts. Papers may address the private expressions of faith of women and/ or men at home, the home religious education, the role of reading (incl. children's literature) in the construction of gendered religious identities, investigate the architecture and design of the home as well as the interactions of the home with the outer (public?) world, via transgressions of home boundaries (such as the role of visitors, lay and religious; of the doorstep as the boundary allowing transgression and negotiation; gossiping) and the impact of home culture on the public sphere. Also papers that deal with the representations of the home in public discourse or that question the chronology and validity of the formulation and reality of the domestic ideal are welcome.

Proposals for papers (max. 300 words) should be addressed by e-mail to Professor Dr. Patrick Pasture ([Patrick.Pasture@arts.KULeuven.be](mailto:Patrick.Pasture@arts.KULeuven.be)) by 30 April 2007. The organisers will make a selection of proposals. Anyone who submitted a proposal will be informed by 31 May 2007. Papers will be due by 30 November 2007 for the workshop '*Dieu changea de sexe*'? (4-6 January 2008) and by 30 August 2008 for '*Households of Faith: Domesticity and religion*' (4-6 September 2008). After reviewing the papers will be published in two collective volumes.

Both workshops are organised in the framework of a research project of the Fund for Scientific Research Flanders (FWO) and involves scholars of the Universities of Leuven and Ghent. The organising committee consists of Prof. dr. Jan Art (University of Ghent), Thomas Buerman (University of Ghent), Prof. dr. Jan De Maeyer (Kadoc, KU Leuven), Prof. dr. Patrick Pasture, Prof. dr. Leen Van Molle, Tine Van Osselaer and Prof. dr. Vincent Viaene (MoSa, KU Leuven).