Spiritual Virgins and their Passion for Devotional Prints

Ruusbroec Institute, Print room · Thijs Colllection

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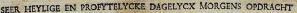
Some important sources for research into the religious history and culture of Flanders are *archivalia* and *Catholica*: pious books and manuscripts. Less well-known sources for research in this area are devotional prints or 'prayer pictures'. These little pictures were disseminated from Antwerp throughout Europe and beyond at the time of the Catholic Counter Reformation. They served, in addition to the imagination of belief, as an important aid to prayer.

During the Early Modern period many people experienced the calling to follow Christ. Thousands of women united themselves via a mystical wedding with their heavenly groom and in the process made the vow of chastity. Most of these spiritual virgins or spiritual daughters (filiae devotae), however, in contrast to nuns, remained in the world' and were active in education and handiwork (e.g. embroidery and lacemaking). (Semi) religious women were a definite majority in relation to their male counterparts. In the northern Netherlands such spiritual virgins or daughters were popularly called 'klopjes' whereas in Flanders they were called 'kwezels'. The 'quesel' depicted on page 8 stems from a series of representations of religious dress in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.



De lesse van de morale [The lesson on morality], coloured copper engraving on parchment, anonymous \cdot Thijs Collection

In their daily lives the *virgins* made full use of devotional prints. In Antwerp millions of these pictures were printed to inspire a virtuous life following Christ, His mother Mary and the saints. On one of these prints two *Spiritual Virgins* are pictured together with their main exemplar Mary. They are in the process of receiving a meditation lesson from her while doing their handiwork.



Totoeffeningh van alle Geloovige, om daer door befonderlyck deelachtigh te worden van alle de verdiensten van Jesus, Marta, en alle Godis lieve Heyligen, tot vergiffenis der sonden, beternis van leven, en bekomingh der eeuwige saligheyt.

Odt Hemelichen Vuder, fin ickt rum fondunjsh menich darge uhmeden op alle de verdientlen van het levers, lyden-med in Chaiti. Sayn varleen,
in de stern de Chaiti. Sayn varleen,
in de stern de Chaiti. Sayn varleen,
in letterleyn, finder in de stern de stern
in bieden fijn traesen
in het de stern de stern
in de stern de stern de stern
in de verdientlen van fijne
mentheyr, fijne woode, mal teligie verdientlen, met de verdientlen van fijne
gebenedigde Moeder nied Magte Maritte often in de heel Wertel gefchieden,
in fallen gefchieden, tot vegriffentif
van mynen alle menichens fooden, vold
comenbeten is von os keven, endedderge van alle Christene slaven uy stervende menschen, tot verheffinge van ons Heyligh Roomsch Catholyck Ge-loof, ende welvaren van onsen Aklerhey-lighsten Vader den Paus van Roomen



faligheyt.

finnelyck Oppethooft der ware Kercke Jefti-Chrifti, en voor alle geeftelycke de dee werelycke Overigheyt en oaderdaam, Bichryader, en islebelfrieders, dat gy die en alle menfchen, door uwen Goddelycken Geeft beliefer be belitzen. Ende eyndelyck toe laeffeniffe en versleifinge van alle Geloovige Zielen inde pyne des Vageviërs, oock voor N...

N... tot dien synde drage iek u op geheel myn felven toe uwen eeuwigen infinym woorden. "myn wereken ende gepeyfenju bildende dat fy allegader, door a (om uren in a alleen megen beginnen gedsom worden, nede volsydden. Vereenight met die van uwen eenigen Sone Jeius, ende uwe welkeminde Dochren Marie on der misten van alle hand on verdenflen der misten van alle hand on der misten van alle hand on verdenflen der misten van alle hand on der misten van alle hand on

Smaondaeghs falmen de fe Opdrught oessennter eeren van het bloedigh swesten in het Hossen, ende gevangenisse Jasu-Christi. Ende dan dit misserie inden dagh som wylen overpeysen principalyak in u Gebudt of Meditanie, ende also odoende dagesyak met de navolgende misserien op die navolgende dagen. Dysslagh ster eeren wande ovreede gewangenisse Jesu-Christi. Woonslaghs ter eeren wande schroomstycke geesselinge.
Donderdaghs ter eeren wande pinelijcke Doorne Vroone Jesu-Christi, en het Hooghweerdigh H. Sacra-

m aes antweis. Vrydaghs ter eeren wande fware Cruyfdraginge ende Cruyfinge. Saterdughs ter eeren wande Doot en begraeffenisse Jesu Christi,ende bedruckte Moeder Godts Maria. Sendaghs ter eeren wande Verryssenisse en Hemelwaers wan Jesus en Maria.

V. A.E.L.C. WANTWERPEN, By HENDRICE TRIEULEIER, Boschdrucker en Verkooper, inde Wolftraet. 1710.

Seer heylige en profytelycke dagelycx morgens opdracht [Very holy and profitable daily morning exercise], (Antwerp: Hendrick Thieullier, 1710) · Thijs Collection

A particularly rare combination of word and image is constituted by a detailed prayer picture Seer heylige en profytelycke dagelycx morgens opdracht, made by the Antwerp printer and bookseller Hendrik Thieullier from 1710. In the middle a virgin is meditating on the four last things: death, the last judgement, heaven and hell. Around it are printed some texts: a pious prayer to the Father and how one can follow Christ throughout the entire week in His suffering. This print was kept in a book, but was meant to hang on the wall as a reminder. Although probably printed in large numbers, this is the only surviving example, a fate that befell many of them.

These three unique sources of the spirituality of the Spiritual Virgins come from the rich legacy of professor Alfons K.L. Thijs. Together with his friend Filip Lemmens he has contributed much to our knowledge of devotional representation. Following his death in 2014, the pictures were bought by the University of Antwerp Library and loaned to the large existing collection of pious pictures of the Ruusbroec Institute Library to aid research into the history of devotion during the Early Modern period.

Further reading

A.K.L. Thijs, Antwerpen internationaal uitgeverscentrum van devotieprenten, 17de-18de eeuw, Louvain, 1993. E.M.F. VERHEGGEN, Beelden van passie en hartstocht. Bid- en devotieprenten in de Noordelijke Nederlanden, 17de en 18de eeuw, Zutphen, 2006.