A House for God or a Home for His People? The Church-Building Activity of Domus Dei in the Belgian Archbishopric (1952–82)

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INTRODUCTION

After the Second World War, economic development across Western Europe resulted in the spectacular transformation of cities into large and densely populated urban agglomerations. Although the underlying driving force of demographic change had already become apparent in the early days of the Industrial Revolution, it now manifested itself on an unprecedented scale and at an increasing speed. In most Western European countries the Roman Catholic Church's leadership responded to this with massive church-building campaigns, suggesting that it viewed architecture as a critical means by which to re-establish a religious presence within these urban agglomerations. To this end, many dioceses established administrative structures dedicated to the planning, financing and designing of religious infrastructure.

These bodies have been little studied hitherto, but this article argues that they played an instrumental role in the post-war Catholic revival, by establishing a dense pastoral network within the newly urbanized areas. Moreover, they fostered a new culture of ecclesiastical patronage, as the scale and urgency of the task required new operational and managerial structures for building, fund-raising and mobilizing congregations to support this massive undertaking. This article studies a particular example of such an attempt to engage with the general demographic and cultural change at a local level, namely the work of Domus Dei in the Archbishopric of Mechlin,¹ whose archbishop is the country's '*primus inter pares*' (equivalent to the Archbishop of Canterbury in England), and whose example would therefore prove particularly influential. By looking into the context, origins, goals and methods of this organization, we can assess the evolving culture of ecclesiastical patronage and its impact upon the renewal of church architecture in Belgium. As will be argued, whereas at the outset Domus Dei epitomized the higher echelon clergy's antipathy to modern culture and to the industrial city, in the

aftermath of the Second Vatican Council the same body became a central actor in the transition from the monumental church building as a symbolic marker in the townscape towards the multi-purpose religious centre in the service of community development.

RECENT HISTORIOGRAPHY OF RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE IN POST-WAR BELGIUM

The significance accorded by those writing in the 1950s and 1960s to the culture of ecclesiastical entrepreneurship then, with, for example, many periodicals devoting entire issues to religious art and architecture, has not been reflected in recent historiography.² Most surveys of post-war Belgium allow little space for religion in their accounts of everyday life and focus on the more general phenomena of secularization and the ideological opposition between Catholics, liberals and socialists.³ In addition, the more specialized historiography of the Roman Catholic Church in Belgium only treats the material organization of religion in passing.⁴ The Belgian contribution to Vatican II and its theological impact usually receive ample scholarly attention, but comparable research into its effect on religious art and architecture in Belgium has yet to be undertaken.⁵ Biographical accounts of the Cardinals Van Roey and Suenens mention their

Fig.1. Jozef Lantsoght, *Church of Our Lady of the Dunes, Koksijde, 1955–65*, photograph taken shortly after completion (© Oscar de Milliano and the architect's estate. Used with permission)

involvement with *Domus Dei* only in passing, if at all.⁶ Churches are also largely absent from accounts of post-war architectural culture in Belgium, although they constitute a type of architectural commission commonplace in the post-war period, when almost every architect designed at least one church during his or her career. The focus is rather on the dominant typologies of the emerging welfare state such as public housing, other residential architecture, leisure facilities and office buildings.⁷ Wherever churches are discussed, most reference works feature one-off examples that are representative of the imaginative capacity of a specific designer rather than reflecting the overall production, which tended to be far less ambitious in architectural terms, and were mostly realized with lesser financial means. Much-cited examples include the iconic, bunker-form chapel in Edelare by Juliaan Lampens (1961), the Expressionist Our Lady of the Dunes by Jozef Lantsoght at Koksijde (1965) (Fig. 1) or Léon Stynen's interpretation of Le Corbusier's Firminy church design in his own St Rita at Harelbeke (1967). Furthermore, most authors focus on the adoption or rejection of Modernist architectural principles in religious commissions. These factors — as well as the intrinsic value of these buildings — explain why the historiography of church architecture in Flanders has been dominated by two figures: Paul Felix (1913–81), whose 'Zonnelied' convent in Ostend (1958) (Fig. 2) foreshadowed the aesthetics of poverty and detachment of the post-conciliar period, and Marc Dessauvage (1931–84), who introduced a Scandinavian aesthetic in his adaptation of the 'house church' paradigm.⁸ In Wallonia (French-speaking Belgium), three figures come to the fore. Roger Bastin (1913–86) developed a neo-Corbusian language in his most important commissions, such as the diocesan Seminaries in Salzinnes and Floreffe, and the Benedictine Monastery in Rixensart (Fig. 3). Jean Cosse (1931–) designed vernacular house churches with a prevailing domestic feel at the end of the 1960s, while Lucien Kroll (1927–) exploited those religious commissions offered to him for experimenting with participation, community building and ecumenism.⁹ Apart from these protagonists, an entire generation of architects of more narrowly regional significance has left its mark on the Belgian landscape, often designing a large number of churches in a single town or province. Unfortunately, it is often only when such works are threatened by transformation or demolition that interest arises in them.¹⁰

Only recently has the historiography of religious architecture in Belgium begun to include other actors in the shaping of a modern religious idiom, such as critics, patrons, artists and congregations. For example, recent scholarship has assessed liturgical innovation and architectural experimentation from the perspective of lay associations and religious congregations.¹¹ The part played by the art critic Geert Bekaert (1928–), is currently being examined.¹² A former Jesuit, he was a prolific writer and remains the most prominent architectural critic in Belgium; Bekaert published numerous essays on religious art and architecture, culminating in his book *In een of ander huis. Kerkenbouw op een keerpunt* (*In One or Another House. Church Building at a Turning Point*) (1967).¹³ His Benedictine homologue Frédéric Debuyst (1922–) reported on recent developments at home and abroad to an international readership as editor of the journal *Art d'Eglise*, and also authored publications that were distributed worldwide, such as *Architecture Moderne et Célébration Chrétienne* (1966)/*Modern Architecture and Christian Celebration* (1968);¹⁴ however, his fundamental role in the fruitful exchange of ideas concerning architecture and liturgy still remains to be assessed. Finally, recent scholarly work on the St Lucas

Fig. 2. Paul Felix, *Zonnelied Convent for Poor Clare nuns, Ostend, 1957–65*, photograph taken shortly after completion (*Art d'Eglise*, 102 (1958), p. 179. Used with permission)

Fig. 3. Roger Bastin, *Convent for Benedictine nuns, Rixensart, 1964–69*, photograph taken shortly after completion of the first phase (*Art d'Eglise*, 159 (1972), cover. Used with permission)

architecture school in Ghent — the main source of church architects for all Flanders — has allowed the nuancing of Bekaert's contemporary accusations (notably in the 1960s) of the St Lucas School as an unworldly institute out of step with contemporary architectural developments.¹⁵ In this article on *Domus Dei*, we propose to look at this field from a fresh perspective, namely that of religious patronage. By investigating the role of the ecclesiastical authorities in the development of church architecture during the post-war period, this article seeks to contribute to an understanding of how the Belgian Roman Catholic Church dealt with architectural and liturgical innovation and, in a broader sense, how it attempted to maintain its place within a rapidly changing territorial, cultural and social context.

CHURCH BUILDING AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Discussing the place of the Roman Catholic Church within the fast-evolving urban environment of the post-war world, the French priest Paul Winninger stated in his book *Construire des églises. Les Dimensions des paroisses et les contradictions de l'apostolat dans les villes* (*Building Churches. The Dimensions of Parishes and the Contradictions of the Apostolate in Cities*) (1957) that throughout the twentieth century the Church had failed to adapt its organizational boundaries to fit the constantly changing realities on the ground, caused by increasing urbanization.¹⁶ This could easily be deduced from the disproportionate number of inhabitants in many urban parishes; in Paris, for example, 30,000 inhabitants had become the norm for a parish, and in Brussels, 12,000. Moreover, most parish boundaries had not changed since the days of Napoleon and did not take into account subsequent transformations of the urban landscape, so that the parishes no longer corresponded with current administrative boundaries or demographic reality. For Winninger, it was obvious that these parish structures were now ill-adapted to their role as the fundamental cornerstones in the Christianizing of the urban masses. In his search for alternatives, he proposed to adopt the concept of the neighbourhood unit, which had become popular in American planning during the 1930s.¹⁷ The central idea here was the introduction of a sense of human scale into these giant metropolises by means of splitting them into smaller entities of 5,000 inhabitants, each grouped around a central 'green' with a school, a place of worship, shops for everyday requirements, and so forth. Could the Roman Catholic pastoral network not be set up in a similar way, so that its buildings again became the spiritual and geographical hub of such living communities? To this end, Winninger defined the geographical and social contours of the 'ideal' parish. First, the nearest place of worship should be no more than 600 to 700 metres from one's home, as he believed that a place of worship any further away lost its force of attraction. Furthermore, Winninger cited empirical research indicating that humans were capable of recognizing no more than approximately a thousand individuals. This had especially crucial implications for a priest, as too large a number of parishioners would make it impossible for him to live out the word of the Bible: 'I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine' (John, 10, 14). Yet three or four priests were considered the maximum for staffing a single parish. Hence an 'optimum parish size' was deemed to be 3,000 to 5,000 inhabitants, in other words approximately 1,000 families.¹⁸ However, as not all individuals could be considered practising Catholics, in practice the number of 10,000 inhabitants per parish was considered a feasible upper limit. Winninger concluded that parishes which were too large needed to be subdivided into units of a more human scale, and each of these subdivided units equipped with at least one place of worship. The latter aspect was crucial: 'In environments where the Church is absent, there can be no effective pastoral organization for the evangelization of the people, without first planting a church: it is the beginning and the end, the fortress and the womb'.¹⁹ A visible sign of the Church's presence in the spiritually deserted areas of the *banlieues*, the parish church was to form the bridgehead in the 'Reconquest' of a city's outskirts — above all from the Communist party — and a beacon of spiritual guidance for its 'lost souls' — the neglected urban dwellers. This required an apostolate based on proximity, as only close, personal contact between the shepherd and his flock could overcome the decline in communal activity and the destructive atomism which,

in Catholic circles, was viewed as a characteristic of modernity. Whereas the parish church had to prevent rural migrants from feeling lost in the city, the stakes were even higher for the Church itself: for the Church it was a matter of not losing the city altogether.

The blueprint for Domus Dei and for other, comparable initiatives was developed in France, and more specifically in Paris and Lyons. In the French capital, with a population of five million in 1930, the average number of inhabitants per parish ran to 26,000 in the city centre and 13,000 in the outskirts; many parishes ran to over 50,000 inhabitants and some to over 100,000, the extreme case being Notre-Dame de Clignancourt with around 110,000.²⁰ Capitalizing on the general indignation caused by Pierre Lhande's *Le Christ dans la Banlieue* (*Christ in the Suburbs*) (1927), in which the Parisian periphery was portrayed as a spiritual and social wasteland prey to Communist propaganda, the French Cardinal Verdier (1864–1940), Archbishop of Paris from 1929, launched an ambitious building campaign that was to revitalize the already existing Oeuvre des Chapelles de Secours de Paris (Agency for the Chapels of Ease in Paris), founded by Monsignor Richard in 1902. The new L'Oeuvre des nouvelles paroisses de la région parisienne (Agency for the New Parishes in the Paris Region), or 'Chantiers du Cardinal' (The Cardinal's building sites) as it was soon dubbed (Figs 4 and 5), aimed at establishing at least one church per 10,000 inhabitants, each located no further than a ten-minute walk from one's home. Despite the economic crisis, Verdier achieved his ambitious goals; after only three years, sixty projects were under way, and in 1937 the hundredth chapel was inaugurated, at the Exposition Universelle, proudly featuring a map of the region showing all its new bell towers. Reportedly, this new infrastructure did indeed accomplish the intended boost to religious life, as statistics revealed a significant surge in baptisms, marriages and funerals. This success was largely due to Verdier's fresh and innovative approach towards the problem of church planning.²¹ In the first place, systematic surveys were conducted in all the parishes of the diocese, revealing that the 'optimum size' of 10,000 inhabitants per parish required the construction of a hundred new places of worship. As the corresponding investment (eighty million French francs) could not possibly be financed through traditional fund-raising methods — collections, donations, and social events — a bond loan was issued. Probably due to the volatile financial climate, this was entirely subscribed in less than half a day. Another innovation was the use of modern mass media, such as radio broadcasts and advertisement campaigns, to kindle the general public's generosity. The cornerstone of this propaganda machine was the widely circulated magazine *Le Christ dans la Banlieue* (*Christ in the Suburbs*), which set the pitch for later, similar publications: a pedagogical tone, short explanatory texts, catchwords in large characters and dramatic images featuring temporary church buildings made from scrap materials or new housing estates without a bell tower for miles around. Finally, and most importantly, perhaps, the *Chantiers* brought about a change in mentality, as it did away with a building culture based on paternalism, improvisation and prestige. As instruments of evangelism rather than expressions of affluence, the churches realized by the 'Chantiers du Cardinal' were generally modest in size and appearance, featuring a simplified plan and only sparse ornament.

After the Second World War, the Parisian suburbs grew at an even faster pace than before, but now priority had to be given to residential and industrial infrastructure.

Fig. 4. Chantiers du Cardinal campaign poster, early 1960s. The poster's image equates a booklet of donation envelopes with a brick in a new church building, while its slogan reads 'Everyone should bring their "stone" to the cardinal's building sites' (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese Mechlin-Brussels. © Chantiers du Cardinal, Paris. Used with permission)

Fig. 5. Front cover of the March 1963 issue of Chantiers du Cardinal. The cover shows Fontenay-Aux-Roses, a former village south of Paris which had become urbanized in only fifteen years; at its centre is St Stanislas des Blagi (Jean Braive, 1934–36), one of the churches built in the Chantiers du Cardinal campaign (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese Mechlin-Brussels. © Chantiers du Cardinal, Paris. Used with permission)

Consequently, in statistical terms, the religious implantation within the city became even weaker than it had been at the turn of the century.²² It was only in the early 1960s, with the appointment of Monsignor de Vaumas (1904–89) as its new director (1959–69), that the *Chantiers* recovered their momentum, and once more due to a very successful bond loan. Again, public opinion was skilfully manipulated through the mass media, now including television, to the extent that the slogan devised for a campaign for donating an hour's wages each month — 'one hour of work per month' — became a household expression. By the mid-1960s, no Sunday passed in the Paris region without the benediction of a cornerstone or the consecration of a new church building.

In Lyons, Pierre Lhande's publications led to the establishment of the diocesan Oeuvre du Christ dans la banlieue (Agency for Christ in the Suburbs) in 1928 with the aim of planning new places of worship, collecting the necessary funds and raising awareness of the issue.²³ In 1957, it was replaced by the Office diocésain des paroisses nouvelles

(henceforth ODPN; Diocesan Office for New Parishes), a consultative body, supporting local clergy in drawing up contracts and providing guidelines with regards to legislation, urban planning and financial optimization.²⁴ In contrast to its Parisian counterpart, it did not pursue a centralized system for church-building, on each occasion leaving most of the responsibility to an association of the parishioners concerned, who also bore the financial liability for the project.

The models developed in Paris and Lyons were also adopted in other large cities in France, albeit each time coloured by local practices. To name just one example, the Chantiers du diocèse de Lille (Building Sites of the Diocese of Lille) was set up in 1956 as a collaborative undertaking, composed entirely of lay people alone (Fig. 6).²⁵ Promoting the construction of multifunctional prayer halls, it attempted to reconcile budgetary constraints with an ambition to be 'modern'. In 1959, the organization's activities were broadened through the creation of the Centre diocésain d'études socio-religieuses (Diocesan Centre for Socio-Religious Studies). A model of its kind and typical for the emergence of the new academic field of sociology of religion, this research institute determined future pastoral requirements on the basis of demographical extrapolations and the city council's planning assessments. Again in France, in 1961, the Comité National de Construction d'Eglises (National Committee for Church Construction) was founded jointly by the largest French dioceses.²⁶ Composed of prominent members drawn from both the clerical milieu and the laity, and presided over

Fig. 6. Front cover of the Chantiers du diocèse de Lille bulletin no. 4, 1959, representing a new estate on the edge of town, with the slogan 'No church here / no mass here' (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese Mechlin-Brussels. © Diocèse de Lille. Used with permission)

by Monsignor de Vaumas, this *Comité* managed to establish a strong coalition of politicians and planning professionals in its support. It not only succeeded in securing government-backed loans from the country's largest banks, but also gained the full co-operation of the national planning administration in reserving strategic sites in the new districts at the edge of towns for future places of worship. Despite the strict separation between Church and State in France, religious infrastructure thus became an integral component of social and economic planning across the country.

The French models were also copied abroad. For instance, in Milan, in 1932 Cardinal Schuster (1880–1954, Archbishop of Milan from 1929) founded the *Comitato pro Templi Nuovi* (Committee for New Places of Worship) with the aim of building fourteen new churches in that city's outskirts.²⁷ Immediately after the war a further eighteen churches were realized, while sixty more were reckoned necessary to meet just the most urgent needs. The 'optimum size' was set here at 15,000 inhabitants, a figure derived from the elevated population density in that region but also the need to include social facilities, as each Milanese parish tended also to include infrastructure for education and leisure. This may also have been inspired by French experiences, as in inter-war France the construction of new places of worship in newly developed working-class districts generally went hand in hand with that of other sorts of social facilities, all built on a single site. Such *cités paroissiales* (literally 'parish cities') included accommodation for the priests and housekeepers, parish office(s), classrooms for catechism, a parish hall, club rooms (notably for Catholic Action, the term covering a range of youth and adult associations set up by the Church in the early twentieth century to cater for specific social groups of laity) and sometimes even primary schools, a cinema and sports fields.²⁸ The often surprisingly vast scale of many of these parish complexes illustrates the Catholic Church's ambition not only to cater for the spiritual welfare of the faithful, but also to occupy a central position in their social life and, through them, to foster a Catholic influence upon society.

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church in France, however, that in Italy received substantial financial aid from the State. In addition, financial companies and large industrial enterprises made substantial contributions. Such solid financial backing explains why, in 1957, forty-six churches and chapels had already been erected by Schuster's successor Monsignor Montini (1897–1978, consecrated as Pope Paul VI in 1963). The city of Bologna was likewise subject to the effects of intense industrialization and rural influx; in the mid-1950s, the city's population had tripled to 350,000 inhabitants, while the planning ambitions of the Communist municipality necessitated the realization of twenty-five new parish centres, at the pace of at least two per year. For this reason Cardinal Lercaro, Archbishop of Bologna (1955–68), founded the *Ufficio diocesano nuove chiese di periferia* (Diocesan Office for the New Churches in the Suburbs) on Christmas Day 1955.²⁹ Composed of clergymen, planners, architects and engineers, the *Ufficio* identified and purchased strategically situated building sites, appointed architects and contractors, approved or modified designs, secured funds and surveyed construction work — thus enabling the parish clergy to concentrate fully on their pastoral mission. With typically Italian flair, Lercaro missed no opportunity for bringing the issue of church-building to the attention of the general public. On a single day in June 1955, for example, eleven newly acquired building sites were consecrated by the cardinal in the

course of a widely publicized pilgrimage around the city's periphery. In the middle of nowhere, a huge number of cars would arrive, a procession would be formed, and a cross planted on the very spot where the new church was to arise. The significance of this ritual went beyond the spiritual, however; besides their role as new sources of Christian life, these new churches were also intended to serve as centres of social integration for the city's many immigrants, offering a familiar reference point with opportunities for companionship, education and recreation in the often barren new urban environments. Later on (1956) Lercaro would also found the Centro di Studio e Informazione per l'Architettura Sacra (Centre for the Study and Information of Sacred Architecture) that published the widely circulated journal *Chiesa e Quartiere* (*Church and District*).

In Holland, the problem of church expansion was addressed with the same rigour as was spatial planning in general. Catholics represented forty per cent of the population overall, and eighty per cent of these Catholics lived in densely populated urban areas. In 1946, the Katholiek Sociaal-Kerkelijk Instituut (KASKI: Catholic Institute for Socio-Ecclesiastical Research) was founded in The Hague.³⁰ Providing an advisory service for civil and religious authorities concerning the planning of new parishes, schools and churches regardless of denomination, its main client was, however, the Roman Catholic Church. With sixty collaborators in the mid-1950s, it produced over 150 reports in the first decade of its existence and published a journal, *Sociaal Kompas* (later *Social Compass*). In 1955, it published a study on the medium-term pastoral requirements for the largest diocese in the country, Haarlem (four million inhabitants). Estimating the number of additional churches required at fifty-eight, the report specified in detail where and when each place of worship should be realized, thus enabling the diocesan authorities to anticipate future urban development and secure centrally located sites in the new districts. This was crucial as the absence of state funding constrained the Catholic leadership to a politics of austerity, resulting in economically designed churches, built in brick and devoid of bell towers or additional amenities. The urban presence of these buildings was thus to depend upon their strategic locations rather than from any monumental design.

Finally, in Belgium, the Domus Dei campaign in the Archbishopric of Mechlin gave rise to similar initiatives in the other Belgian dioceses.³¹ In the Diocese of Bruges, for example, Monsignor Emile-Jozef De Smedt (1909–95) founded a comparable initiative, again under the name of Domus Dei, which instigated the building of a great number of schools, churches and hospitals. In 1962, after the (re)creation of the Diocese of Antwerp, an independent branch of Domus Dei was launched there to cope with the rapid industrialization of the Campine region north of Antwerp. In Wallonia, the Chantiers de nos Paroisses (Our Parishes' Building Sites) was founded in 1954 under the auspices of Monsignor Himmer (1902–94), Bishop of Namur. Emblematic of the importance accorded to sociological research in the organization of pastoral care in the newly urbanized areas, the Centre de Recherches Socio-Religieuses de Bruxelles (Brussels Centre for Socio-Religious Studies) was established by the priest and pioneering sociologist François Houtart in 1956.³² Sponsored by the Belgian episcopate, it carried out applied research concerning the planning of new parishes, hospitals and schools, according to the institute's own scholarly method, and also monitored statistics, notably the number of ordinations and the level of church attendance.

This brief overview of some diocesan church-building agencies founded in the 1950s reveals that, as diverse as they may have been, they shared a few common ideas in their approaches.³³ Generally, their method had four strands: sociological research would map out opportunities and requirements; a committee for 'sacred art' would evaluate the proposed designs; another branch would provide technical assistance and follow up construction work; and finally a working party for publicity would encourage the general public's generosity. Drawing on expertise from domains as diverse as sociology, finance, law, urban planning, architecture, public relations and pastoral theology, the problem of church-building thus became embedded into a wider Catholic strategy for dealing with urbanization. It did not escape from the technocratic ethos of the post-war planning culture, however, as the question of religious facilities was dealt with in an essentially reductionist manner, on the basis of quantitative assumptions such as the 'optimum parish size'. It was only towards the mid-1960s that the problem would be posed in more complex, sociological terms. Furthermore, these diocesan building agencies were instrumental in emphasizing the shared responsibility of the faithful, which was a crucial factor in stimulating congregations and deepening their sense of (financial) obligation towards the Church's broader life and work. Beyond their material and economical aspects, the massive church-building campaigns of the 1950s thus played a decisive role in the Catholic revival in post-war Europe, and also resulted in an architectural paradigm that expressed economy, simplicity and functionality, long before these notions gained liturgical or theological significance within the context of Vatican II.

CARDINAL VAN ROEY AND THE FOUNDATION OF DOMUS DEI

In the 1950s, the Archbishopric of Mechlin was one of the largest and most densely populated dioceses in the Catholic world; it covered 6,000 km² and had a population of more than three million, due to the presence of two major economic centres, namely Antwerp and Brussels. Although eighty-one new parishes had been created since the 1920s in order to deal with the increase in population and the development of residential districts outside city centres, in the early 1950s seventy parishes still held more than 10,000 inhabitants, and twelve of them more than 12,000.³⁴ On the basis of Cardinal Verdier's target figure of 10,000 inhabitants per parish, it was calculated that sixty-eight new churches should be built.³⁵ The co-ordination and financing of such a building programme was no easy task, however, as in Belgium the creation of new places of worship followed (and still follows) a bottom-up process; the local congregation had to petition the ecclesiastical authorities, who in turn applied to the secular authorities for a thirty per cent subsidy of the total construction costs.³⁶ Approval was subject to an administrative carousel comprising a great number of public bodies, such as the Ministries of Justice and Public Works, the provincial governor, the city council, the Royal Commission on Monuments and Landscapes and, finally, the Diocesan Commission for Sacred Art. The state subsidy virtually evaporated, however, as this process took on average five years and building costs were increasing at an annual rate of ten per cent in the period under consideration here. At a cost of eight million Belgian francs (approximately 200,000 Euros) for a medium-sized church with a capacity of 500, the creation of a new place of worship entailed a considerable financial burden for the

newly created parishes. To remedy this situation, Cardinal Joseph-Ernest Van Roey (1874–1961), Archbishop of Belgium from 1926 until his death and already a ‘church-builder’ in the inter-war period (Fig. 7), instigated the Diocesan Action for Church Building, *Domus Dei*, in 1952 (Fig. 8).

Generally considered to have been the last real Church ‘sovereign’ in Belgium, Van Roey embodied the final stage in Catholicism destined for the masses. Structurally woven into the Belgian financial and political establishment and holding a near monopoly in spiritual matters (other Christian denominations being virtually non-existent in Belgium), the Belgian Roman Catholic Church was surrounded by an aura of stability, permanence and omnipotence. This materialized not only in the construction of a great number of churches, but also in structures such as the imposing St Joseph’s Seminary in Sint-Katelijne Waver, just outside Mechlin (Fig. 9). Discarding the traditional six-year curriculum (which had been separated into two years of philosophy and then four years of theology), Van Roey moved the first three years of study — those which attracted the largest cohorts — to this vast new campus outside town. Consisting of two parallel wings of 160 and 220 metres long, the new building triumphantly expressed the success of the Catholic Action in the archdiocese, accepting no less than 310 new students in the year of its opening. Designed by Simon Van Craen, the archbishop’s favourite architect, the building’s hybrid mixture of neo-Romanesque and Art Deco elements was inspired by the *Pelgrimbeweging* (Pilgrim Fellowship), an influential association of Catholic Flemish artists seeking to modernize religious art. Nevertheless, despite its rather traditional appearance, this was a modern building; besides an array of lecture halls, study rooms and libraries, it contained 350 individual rooms for the students, each equipped with running water, plus accommodation for staff and personnel, and also a large chapel.³⁷ Van Roey also managed to revitalize the project for constructing the National Basilica in Koekelberg (Brussels), a vast but unsuccessful scheme (begun in 1905 and eventually completed only in 1969) that he had inherited from his predecessor, Cardinal Mercier. Through well-covered site visits with prominent politicians or members of the royal family, Van Roey succeeded in drawing public attention to this project, which had been dropped in the 1920s due to its excessive cost and lack of public support; he also secured its funding through local publicity committees, whose members collected money from door to door. The inauguration of the National Basilica on 13 October 1951 not only served as the culmination of Van Roey’s episcopacy, but also epitomized the political, social and cultural dominance of the Catholic Church in Belgium at that time.

Each year Van Roey published a pastoral letter, to be read out aloud in all churches of the archdiocese, which discussed a particular issue related to religious life. In 1952 its focus was on the parish churches in the large urban agglomerations. In Van Roey’s view, the parish church was not only the House of God but also a place of instruction and an instrument of edification. Moreover, as he stated, a flourishing religious centre was ‘the most efficient means of safeguarding the moral integrity of the individual, of preserving and stimulating the sense of family, and of purifying and consolidating the local community.’³⁸ In the context of rapidly increasing suburbanization and secularization, the construction of new churches was therefore not only an act of faith but also a moral duty:

Fig. 7. Cardinal Joseph Van Roey consecrating the foundation stone of the St John the Baptist church, Sint-Jans-Molenbeek (Brussels), 11 May 1931 (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels)

Fig 8. Domus Dei campaign poster designed by Jozef De Vroey, 1954 (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels)

Fig. 9: Simon Van Craen, Episcopal Seminary, Sint-Katelijne-Waver, 1933–1935, aerial photograph taken shortly after completion (© Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels)

The inhabitants of the suburban neighbourhoods are as much entitled to pastoral attention from the diocese's leadership as are the other faithful. They must not be left to their fate as they run the risk of soon becoming indifferent in spiritual matters, resulting in their neglect of worship, complete ignorance in religious matters and Christian ethics, or ending up in a disguised form of paganism. The prime and most appropriate vehicle for combatting the dechristianization of the masses is the establishment of a parochial centre with its own church and amenities, wherever it is required to ensure the spiritual well-being of the faithful.³⁹

Drawing attention to the impact made on the clergy's ability to fulfil their pastoral responsibilities by an excessive amount of secular matters, Van Roey issued an appeal to fellow members of his diocese:

Until now, the often crushing burden of responsibility for building a new church has weighed upon a priest's shoulders [...] We have [therefore] decided to proceed more efficiently from now on, and to appeal to the solidarity of all members of our diocese to support the new body that we have founded as *Domus Dei* — the House of God.⁴⁰

The mission of this new diocesan organization was threefold: assisting the local parish priest in the project definition and the choice of architect; providing young parishes with financial support for the construction, transformation or restoration of churches; and, finally, professionalizing fund-raising for church-building (Fig. 10). A parallel subsidizing channel was thus created, not only bypassing the onerous state subsidies, but also ending the local clergy's chaotic and often counterproductive soliciting of funds. The financing of *Domus Dei* derived from three types of source. In the first place, members of the clergy and the religious congregations were supposed to set an example

Fig. 10. Domus Dei campaign poster (1961), comparing the cost of an average church building with, in turn, those of a sports stadium, an electric train, a jet aeroplane, the Postal Services' computer mainframe, a bridge over the river Scheldt, and a luxury liner (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels)

by regularly donating substantial sums. Then, at the parish level, local committees went from door to door collecting money from the *Kerkenbouwers* (Churchbuilders), parishioners who contributed a fixed sum on a weekly or monthly basis — a system that was followed up with an almost military precision; in addition, on the occasion of *Kerkenbouwdag* (Church-building day) — the first Sunday in December each year — a special collection was taken during Holy Mass. Last but not least, bequests and benefactions also formed a substantial source of income. In order to stimulate generosity, an annual bulletin was published featuring a portfolio of newly realized church buildings, along with a financial report (Fig. 11).

In the first years of its existence, Domus Dei was extremely successful: between 1952 and 1958, the donations almost doubled annually, while the number of *Kerkenbouwers* rose to 16,000. This generosity must be understood against the typically Belgian and Dutch phenomenon of *Verzuiling* (literally 'Pillarization'), a term that refers to the politico-denominational segregation of society into several sections (or 'pillars')

GEEF ZE EEN ZIEL !

De wijken met flatgebouwen verkeren in geestelijke nood. Om hierin te verhelpen dienen er dringend kerken gebouwd. In de nabijheid van sommige wooncomplexen werden reeds voorlopige bidplaatsen opgericht, onder meer te Kessel-Lo, Don Bosco (1); te Mechelen, Heilig Kruis, waar weldra de eerste steen zal gelegd worden van de Sint-Ernestuskerk, aangeboden aan Zijne Eminentie de Kardinaal, bij gelegenheid van zijn jubileum (2); te Vorst, Pius X (3). Deze noodkapellen lossen het probleem niet op en dan zijn er nog de plaatsen waar alles te doen blijft, zoals te Antwerpen, Kiel (4) en in de omgeving van Jette, waar zopas de eerste building van de « Modelwijk » werd opgetrokken (5). De ontvangsten van Domus Dei belopen ongeveer 18 miljoen per jaar, hetzij 12 miljoen ledenbijdragen, 4,5 miljoen opbrengst van de omhaling op Kerkenbouwdag en 1,5 miljoen buitengewone giften. Om het hoofd te kunnen bieden aan de jaarlijks noodwendige uitgaven zouden deze ontvangsten tot 25 miljoen moeten opgedreven worden. Alleen een toenemende edelmoedigheid vanwege de katholieken van ons bisdom kan in dit tekort voorzien! Verdubbel, zo mogelijk, uw gift. De Heer vergeldt het u.

Fig. 11. Sample page from the annual bulletin of Domus Dei, 1960. The heading reads: 'Give them a Soul!' The page shows photographs of some prominent public housing schemes of the day such as: image 1, Casablanca estate in Kessel-Lo, featuring the temporary church built with remnants of the 1958 World Fair; image 2, Oefenveldt estate in Mechelen; image 4, Kiel estate in Antwerp by Renaat Braem; image 5, the 'Model City' near Brussels, by Braem, Groupe Structures and others (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels)

according to religious and ideological beliefs — each with their own social, cultural, educational and political institutions, such as newspapers, trade unions, schools, hospitals, scouting and guiding organizations, and so forth. The ideological polarization between Christian Democrats, Liberals and Socialists in Belgium reached its peak in the two episodes of the so-called *Schoolstrijd* (School Struggle), in 1878–84 and in 1950–58. When, following the 1954 elections, a Liberal-Socialist government came to power, it ended state support to denominational education in order to break the dominance of the Catholic 'pillar'. In response, the Belgian clergy organized an unprecedented mobilization of its advocates: as well as arranging the largest protest march in Belgian history, it established the inter-diocesan association *School en Gezin* (School and Family) to raise funds for the Catholic educational network.⁴¹ Organized with an almost military efficiency, it raised no less than 200 million Belgian francs (approximately 5 million Euros) within two years. Domus Dei's modus operandi must thus be understood in the

light of the Catholic pillar's strategy of securing its moral autonomy on the basis of financial solidarity among its supporters.

THE PROJECT OF ST ERNEST'S CHURCH

In 1955, Domus Dei announced its intention to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Van Roey's enthronement through the construction of a church named after, and in honour of, the cardinal. As a location, the parish of the Holy Cross in Mechlin was chosen because of its pastoral needs; established in the outskirts in 1935, its population had doubled in less than twenty years due to two newly built housing estates within its boundaries. It is worth looking into this project in greater detail as here, for the first and only time, Domus Dei itself took the initiative to design and realize — that is, not only finance — a church building. This signalled a first step in a process where the diocesan leadership was taking on greater control over church-building. Moreover, this project allows us to examine the ecclesiastical hierarchy's ideas about contemporary church buildings, as its design was entrusted to a committee of four respected members of the Diocesan Commission for Sacred Art, namely Joseph-Louis Stynen (Antwerp), Léon Stassin (Leuven), Paul Rome (Brussels) and Simon Van Craen (Mechlin); in reality, however, it seems that it was principally the latter who wielded the pencil.

The announcement of the project is itself instructive, if only for its warning against the lure of monumentality:

We expect a church building to provide a solemn, pleasant and fine space of devotion, suited for communal prayer. A magnificent monument dedicated to God's glory? Maybe, but in the first place a house of prayer: *domus mea, domus orationis*.⁴²

Much emphasis was also set on functionality; not only must the design ensure the clear visibility of the altar, but it also had to enhance an atmosphere of piety 'where prayer ascends naturally from the heart of the faithful'. Finally, following the concept that 'the prerequisite for a good church is its capacity to make the faithful feel at home as they are', it was vaguely required that the design's aesthetic features 'must respond to the nature of the local community'. The preliminary design for the church, presented by the architects in 1957, featured a central nave 13 metres wide, flanked by two processional aisles each 3 metres wide, with access to two chapels, one on either side of the choir. The main elevation was slightly set back from the street, in order for the monumental entrance, decorated with the cardinal's emblem, to stand out. The rear elevation, with its huge bell tower, looked out onto a vacant site behind the building (Figs 12–14). As the architects stated in an explanatory note, their main goal had been to obtain 'an effect of simplicity, quietness, dignity and distinction'.⁴³ Nevertheless, given the building's symbolic value and its ambition to set an 'official' standard in modern church design, the proposal fell short of expectations. The comments made by the Royal Commission on Monuments and Landscapes were the most outspoken in this regard. In a detailed two-page note, the commission criticized, amongst many other things, the 'clumsy' articulation of the secondary spaces (such as the sacristy and the side chapels), the lack of spatial differentiation within the central body of the church, and the excessive height of the bell tower. That which the architects had called 'simplicity and austerity' was interpreted here as 'poor detailing' and a lack of attention to liturgical symbolism, as,

Fig. 12. Joseph-Louis Stynen, Léon Stassin, Paul Rome, Simon Van Craen, St Ernest's Church: preliminary design as published in the annual bulletin for *Domus Dei*, 1957 (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels)

Fig. 13. Joseph-Louis Stynen, Léon Stassin, Paul Rome, Simon Van Craen, St Ernest's Church: final design, ground-floor plan, 1958 (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels)

for example, in the rather banal articulation of the ritual entrance of the newly baptized into the church — one of the most symbolic rituals in the pre-Conciliar liturgy. The Commission worded its conclusion in no uncertain terms:

The project is devoid of any architectural value. [...] This preliminary design is not worthy of the homage one wishes to pay to the revered pastor of the archdiocese. [...] If this project cannot be improved, a new design will become indispensable. The project should be designed according to other, more sound principles.⁴⁴

Fig. 14. Joseph-Louis Stynen, Léon Stassin, Paul Rome, Simon Van Craen, *St Ernest's Church: main façade*, 1958 (Antwerp, Architecture Archive of the Province of Antwerp, Joseph-Louis Stynen papers)

Furthermore, coverage in the local press reveals that amongst parishioners, too, an initially positive response to the project gradually gave way to controversy about its inappropriate monumentality and pastoral (ir)relevance in a predominantly working-class neighbourhood.⁴⁵ In this respect, the proposal for St Ernest's Church symbolized the Janus face of religious life during Van Roey's episcopacy; while the rituals, forms and symbols of Catholic faith were still structuring most people's minds and key moments in their lives (birth, marriage and death), they were nonetheless increasingly losing any significance in a rapidly secularizing and modernizing world. The same could be said of Cardinal Van Roey himself; dogmatically clinging to his hierarchical position and doctrinal supremacy as a Church leader, he only reluctantly engaged in a dialogue with the modernizing tendencies that emerged from the clerical milieu and from the laity alike. It was only in 1957, for example, that he officially endorsed the principle of active lay participation in the liturgy.⁴⁶ By contrast, several religious communities and lay organizations had already begun to experiment with lay-participation in liturgical

Fig. 15. (left) Marc Dessauvage, winning entry for the Pro Arte Christiana 1959 Christmas Prize, model (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels, Pro Arte Christiana)

Fig. 16. (below) Marc Dessauvage, winning entry for the Pro Arte Christiana 1959 Christmas Prize, elevations (Art d'Eglise, 111 (1960), pp. 320–21. Used with permission)

matters and with more interactive ways of celebrating the Mass. One such organization was Pro Arte Christiana, founded in 1957 by the Franciscan friar and painter Geroen De Bruycker.⁴⁷ In an attempt to bridge the gap between religion and contemporary art, it organized a series of competitions, such as the 1959 Christmas Prize for religious architecture. Organized in collaboration with Domus Dei, it invited young architects to design a parish church for 500 worshippers in a new district near Antwerp. The ambition of the competition can be measured by the composition of the jury, featuring some of the most prominent church architects of the day, such as Hermann Baur, the eminent Swiss architect as president, Rudolf Schwarz, his German counterpart, and the French architects Xavier Arsène-Henry and Michel Marot. The winning entry by Marc Dessauvage, newly graduated from the St Lucas School of Architecture in Ghent, was an uncompromising statement that combined architectural minimalism with liturgical sophistication.⁴⁸ Although similar to St Ernest's Church in terms of programme, location and scale, the contrast between the two designs could not have been more pronounced. Averse to monumentality and far-fetched symbolism, Dessauvage used elementary concepts such as 'shelter', 'enclosure' and 'support' to stimulate an intensely religious experience (Figs 15–16).

Meanwhile, the St Ernest's project had reached an impasse. After the Royal Commission had at last taken a favourable view of a revised design, it was not until 1961 that the state subsidy was secured — and even then only after Cardinal Van Roey had personally asked the Prime Minister about the affair.⁴⁹ Another factor contributing to this delay was the division of the archdiocese in order to (re)create the diocese of Antwerp, a process that took until 1963 to complete. Apart from a large part of its territory, the archbishopric also had to hand over much of its financial reserves — including half of the funds collected for St Ernest's Church. Last but not least, with the death of Cardinal Van Roey in August 1961, the entire undertaking became *de facto* obsolete. Moreover, in 1964 a sharp decline in membership together with the steeply rising cost of construction materials and labour caused Domus Dei to make a loss of six and a half million Belgian francs.⁵⁰ In fact, what was true for the Roman Catholic Church in general seemed particularly so for Domus Dei; its discourse appeared to have lost touch with the ordinary faithful, while its *modus operandi* proved more and more irrelevant for addressing the challenges of the time. In other words, it was time for an *aggiornamento*.

TOWARDS THE MULTI-PURPOSE LITURGICAL CENTRE

In the early 1960s there was a growing awareness within the Catholic leadership that securing a religious presence in the new suburbs required more than simply financial aid. As several sociologists of religion, such as the Belgians François Houtart and Jean Rémy, pointed out, the principles of massive building programmes and territorial reorganization (the creation of new parishes by dividing up those that had become too large) failed to take into account one fundamental aspect of contemporary urban society, namely its ever-increasing mobility, which resulted in an almost structural dissociation between places of residence, work and leisure.⁵¹ Furthermore, most suburban dwellers had become emancipated and relatively affluent individuals, making their own choices

based on personal preferences and affinities. Where churchgoing was concerned, a growing 'parochial nomadism' also became apparent, as many worshippers attended Mass in a different parish from their own, often combining churchgoing with other activities such as shopping or paying a visit to relatives. As Rémy concluded, the residential milieu had lost its primacy as the primary motivating group for the most important social functions. Indeed, in a time of generalized welfare, mobility and mass media, the neighbourhood was no longer the dynamic centre of urban society. One could now easily be part of a community without sharing the same physical territory. Conversely, physical proximity no longer automatically produced social cohesion. Concluding that the territorial urban parish no longer simply coincided with a homogeneous social group, Houtart stated: 'the Church needs to reinvent the urban parish according to different modalities and different geographical boundaries, and no longer to address the faithful as a community but as a group of individuals prey to doubt.'⁵² Such findings obviously undermined the territorially oriented approach to pastoral care as defended by Winninger, among others. Indeed, as Rémy stated: 'Deployment of clergy simply according to residential areas runs the risk of not being able to present a religion that can penetrate social life.'⁵³ Nevertheless, it took until the mid-1960s before meaningful alternatives were discussed within the diocesan planning agencies.

In France, Michel Brion (1923–), secretary of the Diocese of Nantes and a prominent member of the Comité national de construction d'églises, played a pioneering role, proposing a twofold policy, replacing the traditional division of the city into parishes defined solely by geographical boundaries.⁵⁴ On the one hand, he suggested an increase in scale: a few major church buildings at strategic locations could perhaps suffice to provide for weekly worship and the more solemn rites throughout the year. On the other hand, many communities of like-minded Christians — sharing a similar social, cultural or professional background — were arising, independent of the official, clerical structures. Reflecting the pluralism of contemporary society, these 'dynamic cells of urban life' could play a key role in a bottom-up Christianizing of the urban outskirts. Given the fact that, for these militant Christians, the celebration of mass was only the continuation and fulfilment of a prior experience of fraternity and communal prayer, a new type of infrastructure was required: a 'base camp' or 'church house', primarily dedicated to exchange, encounter and religious training. Brion encouraged architects to put these ideas to the test, through a series of experimental churches in Nantes such as the *Maison du peuple chrétien* (House of Christian People) (Pierre Pinsard and Hugo Vollmar, 1963–68) (Fig. 17).⁵⁵ Combining a prayer hall with a series of meeting rooms, offices and accommodation for the priest(s), it was a continuation of the French tradition of the *cité paroissiale* mentioned earlier: a pastoral centre including facilities (such as a lending library and a cinema) for Christianizing and educating the disinherited proletariat in the suburbs. The innovative aspect in the *Maison du peuple chrétien* was the idea of flexibility; rather than separate rooms or buildings, the architects used sliding partitions (developed in collaboration with Jean Prouvé) in order to accommodate the maximum variety of activities within a single spatial envelope: liturgical celebration on Sundays, an assembly of local associations on Saturdays, or individual prayer and catechism in small groups during the week. Part of a larger trend within the architectural

Fig. 17. Pierre Pinsard, Hugo Vollmar, *Maison du peuple chrétien*, Nantes, 1963–68, picture taken shortly after completion (Private collection, © Laurent Pinsard. Used with permission)

culture of the 1960s, these principles of multiple use and flexibility in the context of church building soon became much of a doctrine within progressive Catholic circles.

One of the most ardent defenders of the new, multifunctional church paradigm was the controversial Dutch bishop Monsignor Bekkers (1908–66). One of the few church leaders to clearly express his views on clerical matters, he caused quite a stir with his vision for the church of the future:

A sort of large living room where Christians gather to meet the Lord [...] that distinguishes itself in no particular way from the spaces and buildings around it. Architecture has no special role to play here: it suffices that this space is functional, simple, welcoming, ... [...] It is no more than a simple meeting room, albeit a special one. [...] When the occasion arises, nothing precludes this space being used for other purposes than worship services.⁵⁶

Buttressing his views with a typically post-conciliar 'back to the basics' line of reasoning, Bekker stated that using the church space exclusively for liturgical purposes alone was no more than a historical construct, without any foundation whatsoever in the Gospel or in Catholic history. Moreover, the monumental character of traditional church buildings institutionalized the boundary between the sacred and the profane, excluding those for whom its symbolism had no meaning. Typical of his time, Bekker took the early Christians as his model: meeting in places that formed part of their daily lives, their church spaces transcended the dichotomy between 'church' and 'world'. Last but not least, Bekker also observed that the multi-functional use of the church infrastructure could save up to forty per cent on running costs, a not unimportant argument for a religious institution devoid of state subsidies.

The fruitless dichotomy between the sacred and the profane also formed the central theme in many of Geert Bekaert's writings. In his book *Een of ander huis. Kerkenbouw op een keerpunt* (1967), in which he critically examined the theological, liturgical, cultural and historical aspects of contemporary church architecture, he stated:

Religious art cannot hide the fact that it is, at best, a fanatical attempt to take part in contemporary reality, yet without acknowledging the radical demands of this reality; in other words, it contents itself with an appearance of modernity. [...] [Religious art] cannot hide the fact that it only has any significance when it is *simply* art, when it transcends the dichotomy between church and world.⁵⁷

For Bekaert, the existence of a separate category of *modern* religious art confirmed his thesis that, ever since the advent of modernity and its secularizing impulses, the Roman Catholic Church had lost touch with the civilization that it claimed to nourish spiritually. In his view, rather than opposites 'church' and 'world' were just two ways of apprehending the same reality, namely human existence. Stating that 'the church building has always been the expressive synthesis of this reality, and, if it wants to make sense today, it has to continue do so', for Bekaert there was no reason why church architecture should differ from the paradigm that shaped the rest of the built environment.⁵⁸ This did not mean, however, that he followed Monsignor Bekker's functionalist approach. Quite the contrary; in an article entitled 'Kerkenbouw op drift' ('Church building adrift'), Bekaert condemned Bekker's radicalism as symptomatic of the Catholic leadership's failure to embrace modern ideas.⁵⁹ While he agreed that church buildings should no longer symbolize a triumphant religious institution, he disputed Bekker's downplaying of their architectural aspect. As the most tangible manifestation of interaction between human values and Christian culture, in Bekaert's view:

All the fundamental questions concerning today's Christian existence must reach their conclusion in the *Gestalt* of our place of worship: how Christian revelation and human religion relate to each other; what place and role Christianity occupies in the world; whether a religious human being needs structured sacred experiences at all; what kind of means modern man possesses to express himself in current worship and, finally, how all this is to be dealt with in terms of urban, architectural and artistic form.⁶⁰

Emphasizing the cultural aspect of the church building to the detriment of its religious significance, Bekaert thus suggested that, rather than vehemently discarding its sacred nature, the real challenge lay in developing a contemporary understanding of the sacred and finding a proper architectural expression for it. Recent initiatives in the Belgian archbishopric somehow seemed to point in that direction. Indeed, by 1965, Domus Dei had found a new élan, especially after the appointment of the young priest Jos Fannes as diocesan secretary for all aspects of parish administration. Fannes knew the field well as he had previously conducted an extensive survey into the difficulties encountered by local clergy in the exercise of their duties.⁶¹ Not surprisingly, most interviewees mentioned the hefty responsibilities engendered by the construction of a new church building. Whereas after ten years of operation, Domus Dei had indeed eased the financial side of such an undertaking, the priest nevertheless remained responsible for establishing the programme, negotiating the design with the architect and supervising the construction process. The effects of such a lack of professionalism — with matters being dealt with in an ad hoc way — were apparent everywhere: favouritism in the appointment of architects and builders, monumental designs not corresponding with the size of the parish, and a generally conservative taste. Relying on his experiences in the field as well as on his academic background (he had read law before entering the

seminary), Fannes set out to revitalize Domus Dei. To counterbalance the rapid decline in voluntary donations, he tapped a new source of income in the form of an annual lottery with prizes (cars, home appliances and package holidays) that cleverly responded to the expectations of the rising consumer society (Fig. 18); this lottery had an instant effect and would remain the organization's principal source of income. The annual bulletin was also modernized and renamed as *Kontakt met Domus Dei* (*Contact with Domus Dei*). Individual projects were now documented in greater detail than before and published alongside critical essays discussing fundamental issues of church design. A new house style and a new logo were designed to express this process of modernization, which was also visible in the layout of the campaign material (Fig. 19). Finally, to foster the commitment and enthusiasm of the faithful, the concept of 'godparent parishes' was introduced, conferring substance on the somewhat abstract notion of solidarity as it allowed each established parish to donate to a particular 'godchild' parish of its own choice, rather than to the general fund. This idea probably came from France, where the concept of *paroisses marraines* (godparent parishes) formed an essential ingredient in the

Fig. 18. Poster announcing the 1966 Domus Dei lottery (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels)

Fig. 19. Domus Dei campaign poster with slogan 'New districts, new churches. Become a church builder', c. 1964 (Mechlin, Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels)

financing of new places of worship. In Lyons, for example, each new parish was assigned one or more godparent parishes by the ODPN, essentially on the basis of the latter's financial reserves. It was then up to the local clergy to give this essentially economic bond a more personal touch, for example by organizing visits to the new parish community or to the construction site of its new church building. Children were also encouraged to participate, for instance by donating their pocket money in church-shaped cardboard boxes, or helping with soup kitchens in the new parishes.⁶²

The titles of some of Fannes' articles published in *Kontakt met Domus Dei* reveal his commitment to stimulating the debate about churchbuilding in the post-conciliar era. This became most apparent in two longer essays, namely 'Vernieuwde liturgie en kerkgebouw of Kerkenbouw op drift?' ('Renewed liturgy and churchbuilding, or Churchbuilding adrift?') and 'Evolutie in de kerkbouwopvatting' ('Evolution of the concept of the church building'), published in 1965 and 1968 respectively.⁶³ Both articles were meditations on a fundamental question raised by Bekaert in 'Kerkenbouw op drift', namely 'Is Christian celebration to be considered a sacred act [...] and if so, what is its substance today?'⁶⁴ Stating that, historically speaking, the relevance of ecclesiastical architecture had always derived from its capacity to reflect contemporary concepts of the sacred, the liturgy and the social position of the Church, Fannes set out to define how a place for present-day Christian worship should look. In his view, the monumental church building had become obsolete as an architectural expression of God's presence on Earth, because it maintained an outmoded conception of faith, restricting the interaction between God and man to a few isolated moments in time and space. Moreover, the cost of building and maintaining such structures had become more of a curse than a blessing for many parishes. It was clear that the days of such ostentatious, 'romantic' religiosity were over. Meanwhile, under the impulse of the Liturgical Movement, the 'liturgical' church type had come to the fore. Less a tangible manifestation of the Church as an institution than an instrument in the service of liturgical action, it aimed at deepening both the personal involvement of the worshipper and his sense of community. In this concept, the church building itself no longer had any sacred significance but rather became a functional structure facilitating the gathering of the faithful. Although the concept of active participation by the faithful had only recently been endorsed by the Second Vatican Council, Fannes argued that, nonetheless, the latter's 'liturgical' church concept already appeared out of step in the light of the 'incarnation theology' then on the rise. Central here was the idea that 'the religious status is everywhere present; it only remains to be discovered by man and to be realized spiritually'.⁶⁵ In such a view, everyday life became a sacred ritual in itself, in turn giving rise to a typically post-conciliar idea that the essence of Christian living today consists in 'being the leaven, the salt of the Earth, the light that shines and the grain of corn that dies in order to give a chance to a new life in this world'.⁶⁶ Contemporary spirituality had thus more to do with an ethics of solidarity and community than either with any liturgical rites or with private worship.

The question now became one concerning the kind of church building that corresponded with these new insights. Fannes' reasoning was quite straightforward, and similar to Bekaert's: if worship was to become embedded within a broader social practice, then there could no longer be any question of a separate building reserved exclusively

for liturgical use; nor should its architectural expression differ from that of 'ordinary' public buildings. Conversely, if a contemporary church building ought to mediate between the church and the world — both symbolically and instrumentally — it should also accommodate activities other than religious celebrations. Like Monsignor Bekker, Fannes was not preoccupied by theological and liturgical concerns alone, however. Based on his conviction that 'parishes also have other things to do than collecting money for a colossal building that is used only 60 days a year', in his view the use of any church space for a variety of activities became unavoidable.⁶⁷ Fannes thus became the principal promoter in Belgium of the multi-purpose liturgical centre. In this endeavour, he received the full support of his superiors, in particular Monsignor Theeuws, the Vicar General of the Archdiocese, and Cardinal Suenens, who had succeeded Van Roey as Archbishop of Belgium. Nevertheless, innovative as the principle of mixed use of religious infrastructure may seem in retrospect, such combination of spaces for liturgical and secular uses was not new. Although there is no scholarly evidence (yet) supporting the existence of a Belgian tradition similar to that of the French *cit paroissiale*, many new churches of the inter-war period had included spaces for secular use — a fact related to the infrastructural needs of Catholic Action, since this required classrooms, halls for meetings, and so forth. A typical example is SS Peter and Paul's Church, in Neder-Overheembeek, Brussels (1935). Built and paid for by the local community, the church building included several rooms for secular, albeit parish, activities. With its two huge bell towers, it not only formed a spiritual centre and an urban landmark, but also occupied a key position in the social organization of the local community.⁶⁸ Thus, the significance of the multi-functional prayer hall of the post-conciliar period lay perhaps less in its typological novelty than in the fact that the concept of a flexible infrastructure in the service of community building was now advanced as a model by the diocesan church authorities.⁶⁹

The most conspicuous example of this new type of multi-functional infrastructure in Belgium was the Don Bosco parochial centre in Kessel-Lo, an expanding working-class neighbourhood near Leuven. It was designed by Marc Dessauvage, by then the most important church architect of his generation. Following his prizewinning (but never built) design for the Pro Arte competition, recounted above, Dessauvage had rapidly become the most successful church architect in the country, executing no less than fourteen churches between 1959 and 1974 (Figs 20–22). Although intrinsically distinct from each other, his early churches share a similar division of the interior into a primary zone — containing the liturgical centre with ambo, altar, president's chair and pews — and a secondary zone for the ministry of baptism and confession, as well as spaces for individual prayer; this division was subtly articulated, for example by means of a change in tiling pattern, or in the height of the ceiling.⁷⁰ Most of these churches also featured movable liturgical furniture, allowing the community of worshippers to organize the space according to their own requirements, while the imperative of poverty and simplicity was expressed through the use of simple brickwork, exposed concrete and unpainted wooden joinery. Dessauvage referred to these buildings as *woonkerken* ('dwelling churches'), stressing not only their formal resemblance to his residential projects, but also their 'inhabitable' character. For Bekaert, this typological blurring between the religious and the domestic held the promise of a new religious paradigm, crossing the boundary

Fig. 20. Marc Dessauvage, *St Paul's church, Westmalle, 1964–67, exterior view* (© Filip Tas Estate / Provincial Museum of Photography, Antwerp. Used with permission)

Fig. 21. Marc Dessauvage, *St Paul's church, Westmalle, 1964–67, interior* (© Filip Tas Estate / Provincial Museum of Photography, Antwerp. Used with permission)

between the sacred and the profane; here, at last, was an architect capable of evoking a religious experience through a purely architectural vocabulary. In the second half of the 1960s, Dessauvage received larger commissions, such as the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy for the Catholic University of Leuven, the Magnificat monastery for the Order of the Annunciation in Westmalle (1966–70) (Fig. 23) and the Godsheide retreat centre in Hasselt (1969). In step with similar developments abroad, his later church designs integrated a great diversity of functions that covered far more than strictly ecclesiastical ones. Of this later generation of churches, only Don Bosco was realized more or less as planned. In place of a typical parish church, it offered a robust infrastructure for a pastoral experiment introduced by the newly appointed parish priest (and supported by Cardinal Suenens in person), much in the spirit of the religious base communities that had been described by abbé Brion in Nantes.⁷¹ Spurred on by Fannes (who had ousted the original architect, a member of the local community), Dessauvage developed a global architectural

Fig. 22. Marc Dessauvage, *St Paul's church, Westmalle, 1964–67, plan* (Geert Bekaert, Luc Verpoest, Marc Dessauvage 1931–1984 (Antwerp, 1987), p. 69)

Fig. 23. Marc Dessauvage, '*Magnificat*' Monastery, Westmalle, 1966–70 (© Filip Tas Estate / Provincial Museum of Photography, Antwerp. Used with permission)

programme capable of accommodating not only religious gatherings but all kinds of communal human activity: social, cultural and festive. To this end, the building comprised a multi-functional main hall and an array of smaller rooms and facilities for personal meditation, instruction and informal meetings, all devoid of any fixed furniture (even the altar and its podium, in the main hall, could be moved away) (Figs 24–25). All these spaces were clustered around an ‘internal street’; penetrating into the heart of the building, this artery of communication and activity organically linked the celebration area with the other communal areas, as well as with the more meditative and private area of the weekday chapel, with the various service areas (sacristy, cloakroom, toilets, kitchenette), and finally with the environment outside. In this way, the weekly liturgy became embedded in the everyday life of the local population.

Another example of this new church type was the chapel of ease at Ter Hert in Mechlin. It is worth mentioning here as it constituted the replacement for the projected St Ernest’s Church. As a response to the pastoral needs in that rapidly developing area, left unresolved after the debacle over the project of the memorial church (which had finally been discarded in 1965), the archdiocese agreed in 1973 to use the remaining budget to buy three parcels of land on a new site and build a chapel of ease there. The task was entrusted to Luc De Boe, who had succeeded Dessauvage as the diocese’s principal church architect. Conceived as a ‘liturgical house’ rather than as a church building, it featured a prayer hall (extendible through sliding partitions) and a smaller room for personal meditation while, once again, the circulation areas were designed as spaces for informal social intercourse. From the outside, it was hard to tell that this was actually a place of worship; perfectly merging with its residential surroundings, its liturgical dimension became only apparent in the weekly gathering of the faithful around the altar (Figs 26–27).⁷²

The architectural and liturgical innovations in the archbishopric of Mechlin-Brussel did not pass unnoticed. Geert Bekaert, for instance, praised the broadmindedness of its leadership when he wrote: ‘Monsignor Theeuws took chances. And that alone is worth mentioning in our bureaucratic land. The risk he ran a few years ago by commissioning some important and sensitive projects from Dessauvage was, however, amply rewarded’.⁷³ For Frédéric Debuyst, Don Bosco and Ter Hert constituted expressions of ‘a living plurality which corresponds to the complexity of present day life and its multiple values.’ Praising the ‘extreme modesty’ with which these buildings fitted into their environment, he praised their hospitable character, which brought them ‘close to house architecture’. In his view, these church buildings transcended the dichotomy between the monumental and the liturgical church types:

Churches like these ones here allow us to escape from the dilemma of public architecture and private architecture with which church design has been confronted for a few years now. They introduce us into a sort of semi-public category which is a more honest expression of the real situation of today’s church: the church of neither a dominant majority nor a ‘catacombal body’, but of a ‘qualified’ minority which slowly becomes capable again of living and unselfconsciously transmitting its own values, and to do so in a language that is really its own.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, the limitations of this new church paradigm soon became apparent. While these experimental ‘liturgical houses’ were popular amongst an elite of

Fig. 24. Marc Dessauvage,
Don Bosco parish centre,
Kessel-Lo (Leuven), 1968,
ground-floor plan (Mechlin,
Archives of the Archdiocese of
Mechlin-Brussels)

Fig. 25. Marc Dessauvage,
Don Bosco parish centre,
Kessel-Lo (Leuven),
1968, model of the complex
as built (© Paul Stuyven.
Used with permission)

Fig. 26. Luc De Boe, Liturgical house Ter Hert, Mechelen, 1973–75, photograph of the exterior, taken shortly after completion (© Luc De Boe. Used with permission)

Fig. 27. Luc De Boe, Liturgical house Ter Hert, Mechelen, 1973–75, plan (Art d'Eglise, 188 (1979), p. 64)

progressive, committed parishioners, a large majority found it difficult to view the parish church as a pragmatic instrument principally serving pastoral community work. In some instances, this was quite understandable, as the multiple use of the main hall often led to conflicts related to the shared responsibility for maintenance. At Don Bosco, for example, during Holy Mass on Sunday, the smell of beer and cigarettes more than once reminded the worshippers of the previous evening's party.⁷⁵ At Ter Hert, the weekday chapel — the sole space in the complex exclusively intended for liturgical acts — was used as office space from the outset, while the main hall was rarely used for purposes other than conventional celebrations.⁷⁶

After a period of frenetic activity in which sixty-five new church buildings were erected, many more provisional structures were realized and countless alterations to existing buildings were carried out, representing a total budget of roughly 350 million old Belgian francs (equivalent to 90 million Euros), church-building came to a halt in the archbishopric towards the mid-1970s, as a result of the population stabilizing and church attendance declining significantly. Only then, after twenty years of intensive research and debate dedicated to the ideal location and the building economy of churches, the most fundamental question of all came to the fore: did it still make sense to build churches? This was the title of a pamphlet published by the Comité national de construction d'églises in 1970, in which the contemporary relevance of the territorially defined parish and the parish church were openly questioned.⁷⁷ Discussing this publication in *Kontakt met Domus Dei*, Jos Fannes did not commit himself, avoiding taking sides and concluding vaguely that the variety of church types published in previous issues of the periodical illustrated the fluidity of the church as a building type. Reading between the lines, it seems that he was suggesting that only a comparable flexibility on the part of the ecclesiastical leadership could safeguard its mission for the future, namely to be 'a church in the service of the World in the image of Christ'.⁷⁸ Indeed, rather than a complacent institution firmly embedded in a traditional geographical territory, circumstances demanded, more than ever, a missionary church — flexible, dynamic, and responsive to the opportunities offered by urban growth.

CONCLUSION

This assessment of the origins, methods and goals of Domus Dei in the Belgian archbishopric has revealed a forgotten but important actor in the debate about the place of the Roman Catholic Church — both as a building and an institution — in the urbanized spaces of post-war society in Western Europe. Its absence in current historiography on modern religious architecture constitutes a lacuna that contrasts with its international recognition in the 1950s and 1960s. In *Construire des églises*, for example, Paul Winninger discussed its methods and approach at length, even calling it 'un modèle du genre' (a model for its type) and quoting extensively from its foundation charter.

Writing the history of Domus Dei has enabled us to nuance two underlying assumptions in the historiography of the renewal of Roman Catholic space in Belgium and beyond. First, the suggestion that the ecclesiastical authorities principally acted as a conservative agent in this process, suffering from institutional inertia; and second, the idea that typological innovation principally emanated from individual architects and

critics outside the clerical structures. As the case of the Belgian archdiocese shows, there have been instances where the ecclesiastical leadership acted as an enlightened patron, fully acknowledging its precarious situation within contemporary society and displaying a strikingly open-minded spirit in dealing with this. It testifies to the remarkable openness of mind among higher-ranking clergy, under Cardinal Suenens for example, that members of their middle-management such as Jos Fannes were given so much freedom for stimulating experimentation and creativity. On the other hand, he would not have been able to exert so much influence without a centralized institution such as *Domus Dei*. Thus, quite ironically, given that this was a period when freedom, experimentation and self-expression were celebrated, the choice of a particular type of church building came down to a single person, and one outside the parish at that.⁷⁹

As we have seen, in the course of its existence *Domus Dei* evolved from a fund-raising vehicle to an active participant in the debate about the sacred identity of the post-conciliar Church. A specific case of a broader international trend, it clearly reflects the concerns and strategies of the Roman Catholic Church in addressing the spatial, demographic and social evolution of post-war society. Indeed, whereas the phenomenon of geographic mobility in Belgium was first addressed by the Church leadership through a massive church-building campaign, it was soon realized that the gap between the needs of working-class parishes and the scarcity of means available could not be solved simply by saving on the architectural dimension of the church buildings but also required their more intensive use. Supported by a post-conciliar climate favourable to theological and liturgical renewal, this resulted in the paradigm of the 'non-specific church building': a multi-functional architectural programme designed to support a modern Christian society. Mediating between Church and world, such multi-functional, socio-religious centres aimed at embedding liturgical celebrations within a larger set of social and communal practices. Thus, despite its name and original intent, *Domus Dei* quite paradoxically catalysed a new conception of liturgical space that was less a 'House of God' than a *Domus Ecclesiae*, a space of encounter for the local Christian community.

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I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions which have stimulated me to explore further the international network of knowledge and expertise upon which initiatives such as *Domus Dei* were drawing. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Gerrit Van Den Bosch, archivist at the archbishopric, for his generous and knowledgeable assistance. Finally, I owe much to Prof. Judi Loach for her encouragements in the past and the thorough revision of this manuscript.

NOTES

All quotations are translated by the author unless otherwise stated.

1 The findings in this paper are based on a detailed inventory, carried out by the author, of the *Domus Dei* papers in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Mechlin-Brussels and interviews with Jos Fannes and Paul Michiels, secretaries at the archbishopric in charge of parish affairs and church council administration respectively during the period under consideration here. Additional research was carried out at the Mechlin City Archives, Architecture Archive of the Province of Antwerp and the Maurits Sabbe Library of the Faculty

of Theology and Religious Studies, at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. A first draft of this paper was presented at the international conference 'Modern Catholic Space' (London, Mount Street Jesuit Centre, 9–10 December 2011). I have deliberately restricted my research to the period 1952–82, so as to coincide with the period when Monsignor Theeuws (1914–93) was vicar-general of the Archdiocese since, in this capacity, he was the driving force behind *Domus Dei*.

2 For contemporary accounts of post-war church-building in Flanders, see Geert Bekaert, 'Tien jaar kerkbouw, kritisch commentaar', *Streven*, 2 (1957), pp. 57–70; *Nieuwe Stemmen*, 6–7 (1961); *Nieuwe kerkbouw in Vlaanderen en Nederland* (Tilburg, 1962); *Architecture*, 19 (1956); *Architecture*, 71–72 (1966); *La Maison*, 11 (1968); *La Maison*, 12 (1968); *Vlaanderen*, 2 (1952); *Vlaanderen*, 5 (1955); *Vlaanderen*, 5 (1956); *Vlaanderen*, 73 (1964); *Vlaanderen*, 100 (1968); *Vlaanderen*, 121 (1971).

3 *De geschiedenis van België na 1945*, ed. Els Witte, Alain Meynen and Jaak Billiet (Antwerp, 2004); Marc Hooghe, *Het wordt nooit meer als vroeger. 1945–1995: België een halve eeuw modern* (Leuven, 2004); *Van Hugo Claus tot hoelahoep: Vlaanderen in beweging 1950–1960*, ed. Kevin Absillis and Katrien Jacobs (Antwerp, 2007).

4 *De Kerk in Vlaanderen*, ed. Jan Kerkhofs and Jean Van Houte (Tielt, 1962); Robrecht Boudens, *De Kerk in Vlaanderen. Momentopnamen* (Averbode, 1994). On the history of the Belgian dioceses, see: *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen–Brussel: 450 jaar geschiedenis*, ed. Jan De Maeyer et al. (Antwerp, 2009); *In de stroom van de tijd. (4)50 jaar bisdom Antwerpen*, ed. Marcel Gielis and others (Antwerp, 2012); *Het Bisdom Gent, vier eeuwen geschiedenis (1559–1991)*, ed. Michel Cloet (Ghent, 1991); *Het Bisdom Brugge (1559–1984)*, ed. Michel Cloet (Bruges, 1984).

5 *Vatican II et la Belgique*, ed. Claude Soetens (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1996); *Vatican II and Its Legacy*, ed. Matthijs Lamberigts and Leo Kenis (Leuven, 2002).

6 Roger Aubert, 'Le Cardinal Van Roey', *La Revue nouvelle*, 8–9 (1961), pp. 113–30; Joseph Kempeneers, *Le Cardinal Van Roey en son temps* (Brussels, 1971); Wladimir Plavsic, *Le Cardinal Van Roey* (Brussels, 1974); Elizabeth Hamilton, *Cardinal Suenens: A Portrait* (London, 1975).

7 Albert Bontridder, *Hedendaagse bouwkunst in België* (Antwerp, 1963); Geert Bekaert and Francis Strauven, *Bouwen in België* (Brussels, 1971); Pierre Puttemans, *L'architecture moderne en Belgique* (Brussels, 1974); Geert Bekaert, *Hedendaagse architectuur* (Tielt, 1995). For a summary overview of post-war church production in Belgium, see Marc Dubois, 'Primal Image of all Architecture. Churches in Belgium and the Netherlands after 1950', in *Europäischer Kirchenbau*, ed. Wolfgang Jean Stock (Munich, 2002), pp. 113–27; Leen Meganck, Yves Schoonjans and Sven Sterken, 'Twentieth Century Church Architecture in Flanders', *Docomomo NL Newsletter*, 8.3 (2008), pp. 22–25.

8 On the churches by Dessauvage, see Tine Broos, Stephanie Van de Voorde, Johanna Vermeir, 'Marc Dessauvage en de evolutie van het kerkgebouw' (Masters dissertation, University of Ghent, 2005); see also Anne-Françoise Morel and Stephanie Van de Voorde, 'Rethinking the Twentieth-Century Catholic Church in Belgium: the Inter-relationship between Liturgy and Architecture', *Architectural History*, 55 (2012), pp. 269–97.

9 Geert Bekaert and Ronny Demeyer, *Paul Felix 1913–1981* (Tielt, 1981); Geert Bekaert and Luc Verpoest, *Marc Dessauvage 1931–1983* (Antwerp, 1987); Roger Bastin 1913–1986, ed. André Lanotte (Sprimont, 2001); Frederic Debuyst, *Jean Cosse architecte: des maisons pour vivre* (Brussels, s.d.); Wolfgang Pehnt, *Lucien Kroll: Buildings and Projects* (London, 1988).

10 In 2008, an inventory of all twentieth-century church buildings in Flanders was undertaken by the author in collaboration with KADOC (Documentation Centre for Religion, Culture and Society) and the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, both at Leuven University. In quantitative terms, the following architects appeared to be the most prolific church-builders in Flanders: René Van Steenberghe and Paul Meekels in the province of Antwerp, Arthur Degeyter and Chris Vastesaegeer in West-Flanders, Adrien Bressers in the region around Ghent, and Adolf Nivelle in the province of Limburg. See 'Thematische inventarisatie twintigste eeuwse kerken: eindrapport', ed. Veronique Boone, Zsuzsanna Böröcz and Annick Tansens (unpublished report, Brussels, 2008).

11 Morel and Van de Voorde, 'Rethinking the Twentieth-Century Catholic Church in Belgium'.

12 Christophe Van Gerrewey is currently undertaking PhD research on Bekaert: 'Architectural Criticism 1950–2000. Theories and History of Architecture via The Collected Writings of Geert Bekaert'. This project is supervised by Prof. Mil De Koening and Prof. Bart Verschaffel at the University of Ghent.

13 Geert Bekaert, *In een of ander huis. Kerkbouw op een keerpunt* (Tielt, 1967). Bekaert's most significant writings on architecture have been compiled and translated into English as Geert Bekaert, *Rooted in the Real* (Ghent, 2011). However, none of his essays on religious architecture were included in this volume. On Bekaert, see Marc Dubois, 'Geert Bekaert, architectuurcriticus en essayist', *Ons Erfdeel*, 3 (1989), pp. 412–13; and Christophe Van Gerrewey, 'Een discipline zonder land. Geert Bekaert en het nationale bouwen in België', *Streven*, 3 (2011), pp. 257–61.

- 14 Founded as *L'Artisan liturgique* (1920–40) and subsequently renamed as *L'Artisan et les arts liturgiques* (1940–49), *L'Art d'Eglise* (1950–57) and *Art d'Eglise* (1957–79), this periodical was published by the Benedictine abbey of St Andrew in Loppem (Bruges). Internationally distributed, it was a window on the world for Belgian designers, and also familiarized an international readership with the work of Dessauvage, Bastin and Cosse. A collection of Debuyst's writings from *Art d'Eglise* was published as Frédéric Debuyst, *Architecture moderne et célébration chrétienne* (Bruges, 1966); translated as *Modern Architecture and Christian Celebration* (London, 1968).
- 15 Dirk Van de Perre, *Op de grens van twee werelden. Beeld van het architectuuronderwijs aan het Sint-Lucasinstituut te Gent in de periode 1919–1965/1974* (Gent, 2003); Dirk Van de Perre, 'Wedstrijden, een studiekering en een mentor. De bijdrage van het Gentse Sint-Lucasinstituut tot de Vlaamse kerkenbouw, 1958–1970', in *Tekenen en Betekenen. Opstellen over het architectuurinstituut Sint-Lucas, 1862–2012*, ed. Rajesh Heynicks, Yves Schoonjans and Sven Sterken (Leuven, 2012), pp. 148–58; Wilfried Wouters, 'Broeders in het kunstonderwijs. De Sint-Lucasscholen in België 1866–1966' (doctoral thesis, University of Leuven, 2011).
- 16 Paul Winninger, *Construire des églises: les dimensions des paroisses et les contradictions de l'apostolat dans les villes* (Paris, 1957).
- 17 The concept of the neighbourhood unit is generally attributed to the American planner Clarence A. Perry. Officially introduced in 1929 as a part of the Regional Plan of New York and its Environs, the neighbourhood unit has strongly influenced local planning and subdivision design since its inception. For a critical assessment, see Larry Lloyd Lawhon, 'The Neighborhood Unit: Physical Design or Physical Determinism?', *Journal of Planning History*, 8.2 (2009), pp. 111–32.
- 18 On the discussion about the ideal size of the Catholic parish, see Franck Debié and Pierre Véro, *Urbanisme et art sacré: une aventure du XXe siècle* (Paris, 1991), pp. 152–58. The French historian of religion Jean Chélini came to similar conclusions as Winninger, in *La Ville et l'Eglise: premier bilan des enquêtes de sociologie religieuse urbaine* (Paris, 1958).
- 19 'Il n'existe pas d'adaptation pastorale réellement efficace, pour l'évangélisation des milieux où l'Eglise est absente, sans d'abord y mettre une église: elle est le point de départ et d'arrivée, la forteresse et le bercail' (Winninger, *Construire des églises*, p. 52).
- 20 Winninger, *Construire des églises*, p. 180. See also Blaise Wilfert, 'Les Chantiers du Cardinal, une oeuvre attendue', *Eglises parisiennes du XXe siècle. Architecture et décor*, ed. Simon Texier (Paris, 1996), pp. 26–42 (26–27): In the century from 1830, the capital's population had increased almost sevenfold (from 750,000), with the most dramatic rise during the 1920s (averaging 43,000 more people each year in the first half of the decade, and 63,000 in the second half); moreover, throughout that century of population explosion, the rise was far greater in the periphery than in the *arrondissements* comprising the centre. Wilfert cites somewhat different figures for average parish size in 1931: 28,000 (instead of 26,000) inhabitants for city centre parishes and 18,700 (instead of 13,000) for suburban parishes; and he gives the population of Clignancourt as 120,000 (instead of 110,000) (Wilfert, 'Les Chantiers du Cardinal', p. 30).
- 21 Pierre Lhande, *Le Christ dans la Banlieue: enquête sur la vie religieuse dans les milieux ouvriers de la banlieue de Paris* (Paris, 1930). On the Chantiers du Cardinal, see Debié, *Urbanisme et art sacré*, pp. 43–50 and 178–83.
- 22 Emile Poulat, 'La Découverte de la ville par le catholicisme français contemporain', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 15.6 (1960), pp. 1168–79.
- 23 Olivier Chatelan, 'Les catholiques et la croissance urbaine dans l'agglomération lyonnaise pendant les Trente Glorieuses (1945–1975)' (doctoral thesis, University of Lyons, 2009), p. 62.
- 24 Chatelan, 'Les catholiques et la croissance urbaine', pp. 233–89; Maryannick Chalabi, 'Les églises paroissiales construites dans la seconde moitié du XXe siècle et leur devenir: l'exemple de Lyon', *In Situ*, 11 (2009), at <http://insitu.revues.org/5887> (accessed on 6 February 2013).
- 25 On the Chantiers diocésains de Lille, see Debié, *Urbanisme et art sacré*, pp. 173–78; Céline Frémaux, 'Construire des églises en France dans la seconde moitié du XXe siècle. De la commande à la réalisation. Nord-Pas-de-Calais (1945–2000)' (doctoral thesis, University of Rennes, 2005). On the *Centre Diocésain d'Etudes Socio-Religieuses*, see 'XVe anniversaire du Centre Régional d'Etudes Socio-religieuses de Lille', *Social Compass*, 21.1 (1974), pp. 215–17.
- 26 These dioceses were Bordeaux, Lille, Lyons, Meaux, Nancy, Nantes, Paris, Reims and Rouen.
- 27 Winninger, *Construire des églises*, pp. 98–112.
- 28 On the phenomenon of the *cité paroissiale*, see Antoine Le Bas, 'Des Eglises missionnaires pour une banlieue déchristianisée: l'exemple de l'Île de France', in *Architecture religieuse du XX siècle. Quel patrimoine?*, ed. Céline Frémaux (Rennes, 2007), pp. 145–46; Debié, *Urbanisme et art sacré*, p. 297. An illustrative example of such a parish complex is the Sainte-Famille church (Church of the Holy Family) in Villeurbanne (1926–28), Diocese of Lyons. It included girls and boys schools, a hall, a cinema, and a large sports field for soccer and athletics.

See <http://resurrection.paroisses-villeurbanne.fr/spip.php?article12> (accessed on 19 March 2013). Another example is the church complex of St Antoine de Gerland, Lyons (1934), which again included two primary schools (one for girls, another for boys). I am indebted to Judi Loach for reference to these examples.

29 Winnering, *ibid.*, pp. 89–98; Giacomo Lercaro, 'La paroisse, moyen d'intégration religieuse et sociale. L'expérience de la périphérie de Bologne', *Social Compass*, 3.3 (1960), pp. 195–208.

30 Winnering, *ibid.*, pp. 113–33; A. Holl, 'La recherche appliquée: le cas du Katholiek Sociaal-Kerkelijk Instituut aux Pays-Bas', *Social Compass*, 18.4 (1971), pp. 621–37; *Vijftig jaar KASKI-onderzoek 1946–1996*, ed. Leo Spruit (Nijmegen, 1997).

31 The Archdiocese of Mechlin is a diocese in its own right, and the other dioceses of Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, Hasselt, Liege, Namur and Tournai are suffragan dioceses, hierarchically dependent on the archdiocese, but autonomous in matters of church-building. None of the initiatives mentioned in this paragraph have been the subject of scholarly research so far; in certain cases, this is due to the inaccessibility of the material, such as the archives of Monsignor De Smedt in Bruges. For a brief comparison between the building politics of the five Flemish dioceses with regards to churches in the 1960s, see *Het Bouwbedrijf*, 19 (1970), p. 11; *Het Bouwbedrijf*, 20 (1970), p. 2; *Het Bouwbedrijf*, 21 (1970), p. 11; *Het Bouwbedrijf*, 22 (1970), p. 11; *Het Bouwbedrijf*, 26 (1970), p. 11; *Het Bouwbedrijf*, 27 (1970), p. 2.

32 Louis Dingemans, 'Le Centre de recherches socio-religieuses de Bruxelles', *Social Compass*, 8.1 (1961), pp. 177–86; Alex Sokolski, 'Méthode de planning paroissial urbain', *Social Compass*, 7.4 (1960), pp. 313–24.

33 There were, of course, many more examples of diocesan initiatives with regards to church-building, but I have limited my survey to those that influenced or were influenced by *Domus Dei* (through magazines, correspondence, personal contacts, etc.). In the UK (and thus outside the scope of this survey), a notable example was the Church of Scotland's Church Extension Movement; see E.W. McFarland, 'Building the Promised Land. The Church of Scotland's Church Extension Movement, 1944–61', *Twentieth Century British History*, 23.2 (2012), pp. 192–220. As far as I have been able to verify, magazines such as *Church Buildings Today* (later *Churchbuilding*) were virtually unknown in Belgium in the 1960s, which makes it difficult to assess the influence from Peter Hammond's New Churches Research Group and the like. One explanation for this could be that, until the early 1960s, Belgian intellectual, political and cultural life was predominantly oriented towards France.

34 During Van Roey's episcopacy (1926–61), the population of the archdiocese increased by 25%, from 2,734,000 to 3,338,000 inhabitants. During the same period, the number of parishes grew from 776 to 889 (14%). The discrepancy between both growth ratios resulted in a relative increase of the number of inhabitants per parish. Sources: 'Kerkenbouw: de grote zorg van dertig jaar episcopaat', *Domus Dei*, 3 (1955), p. 3; *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel: 450 jaar geschiedenis*, pp. 180–82.

35 'Kerkenbouw en kerkennood', *Domus Dei*, 1 (1953), p. 2.

36 *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel: 450 jaar geschiedenis*, p. 143.

37 Herwig de Lannoy, 'Van Sint-Jozefseminarie tot Borgerstein vzw. Het voormalige instituut voor priesteropleiding, nu welzijnsvoorziening', *Monumenten en Landschappen*, 2 (2004), pp. 4–32; *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel: 450 jaar geschiedenis*, pp. 186–87.

38 'De dagelijkse ervaring leert immers dat de oprichting van een bloeiend godsdienstig centrum het beste middel is om de zedelijke gaafheid van de enkeling te vrijwaren, om de familiegeest te behouden en te ontwikkelen, om de algemene atmosfeer te zuiveren en te versterken, en om aldus het peil van het plaatselijk milieu hoger op te drijven' (Cardinal Van Roey, pastoral letter, 1952, p. 6).

39 'De bewoners van de randwijken hebben evenzeer recht op de herderlijke bezorgdheid van het Hoofd van het bisdom als de andere gelovigen. Zij mogen niet overgelaten worden aan hun lot, want zo lopen zij gevaar spoedig onverschillig te worden op godsdienstig gebied, met al de schadelijke gevolgen hiervan: verzuim van de godsdienstpraktijk, volkomen onwetendheid inzake geloof en christelijke zedenleer, en tenslotte niets anders dan een min of meer verkapt vorm van heidendom. [...] Het doelmatigste en het eerste redmiddel tegen de ontkerstening van de massa's is wel de oprichting van een parochiaal centrum, met eigen kerk en aangepaste werken, overal waar het geestelijk welzijn van een zeker aantal gelovigen dit eist' (Van Roey, *ibid.*, p. 5).

40 'Jusqu'à présent, la responsabilité souvent écrasante de la construction d'une nouvelle église reposait sur les épaules d'un curé qui en était chargé [...] Nous avons décidé d'agir dorénavant avec plus d'efficacité et de faire appel à la solidarité de tous nos diocésains, pour soutenir l'oeuvre nouvelle que nous avons fondé sous le nom de Domus Dei, Maison de Dieu' (Domus Dei foundation charter, *Domus Dei*, 1 (1953), p. 4).

41 On the School Struggle, see Lize Haagdorens, 'De mobilisatie van de katholieke zuil in de schoolstrijd tijdens het eerste jaar van de regering Van Acker (mei 1954–juli 1955)', *Belgisch tijdschrift voor nieuwste*

- geschiedenis, 15.1–2 (1982), pp. 3–70; *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel: 450 jaar geschiedenis*, pp. 227–29.
- 42 'Van ieder kerkgebouw verwachten wij [...] dat het een wijdingsvolle, stemmige en mooie ruimte zou scheppen, geschikt voor het gebed van de gemeenschap. Een prachtig monument tot Gods glorie? Dat mag wel eens, maar in de eerste plaats een huis van gebed: domus mea, domus orationis' (Announcement in *Domus Dei*, 2 (1955), p. 1). The phrase 'domus mea, domus orationis' refers to Matthew, 21.13: 'My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.'
- 43 Antwerp, Architecture Archive of the Province of Antwerp (hereafter APA), J.L. Stynen papers, note by the committee of architects, undated.
- 44 'Le projet est dénué de toute valeur architecturale. Cet avant-projet n'est pas digne de l'hommage que l'on désire à juste titre rendre au vénéré pasteur de l'Archidiocèse. Comme ce projet ne pourrait être corrigé, une nouvelle étude s'imposerait. Le projet devrait être conçu selon d'autres principes plus sains' (APA, J.L. Stynen papers, Report of the Royal Commission on Monuments and Landscapes, 28 June 1958).
- 45 De Sint-Ernestuskerk. Zou zij passen in het kader van de Oude Antwerpse Baan? (The St Ernest Church. Would it fit into the environment of the old Antwerp road?), *Gazet van Mechelen*, 27 July 1961.
- 46 *Rond het altaar des heren. Richtlijnen voor het Bisdom Mechelen omtrent de actieve deelname van de gelovigen aan de Holy Mass* (Mechlin, 1957).
- 47 On *Pro Arte Christiania*, see Geroen De Bruycker and Rik Van Schil, *Een halve eeuw Pro Arte Christiana 1957–2007* (Antwerp, 2007).
- 48 On Dessauvage's proposal, see Morel, 'Rethinking the Twentieth-Century Catholic Church', pp. 286–88.
- 49 Mechlin, Diocesan Archives of the Archbishopric Mechlin-Brussels (hereafter AMB), *Domus Dei* papers, Letter by Monsignor Van Roey to Theo Lefevre, Prime Minister of Belgium, 13 June 1961.
- 50 Jos Fannes, 'Domus Dei-dag en de kerkennood in het aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel', *Pastoralia*, 2.32 (1964), p. 2.
- 51 Jean Rémy, 'Conséquences socio-culturelles de la concentration urbaine', *Social Compass*, 7.4 (1960), pp. 307–11; Jean Rémy, 'Les institutions ecclésiastiques en civilisations urbaine et industrielle', *Social Compass*, 13.1 (1966), pp. 39–52; Thierry Paquot, 'Théologie chrétienne et urbanisation', *Annales de la recherche urbaine*, 96 (2004), pp. 7–16; François Houtart, 'L'Aménagement religieux des territoires urbains', *La revue nouvelle*, 2 (1958), pp. 517–27.
- 52 'Il faut que l'église invente la paroisse urbaine selon d'autres modalités et une autre cartographie, afin d'aller à la rencontre, non pas d'une communauté de croyants, mais d'un croyant solitaire en proie au doute.' Paquot, 'Théologie chrétienne et urbanisation', p. 10.
- 53 Rémy, 'Les institutions ecclésiastiques', p. 39.
- 54 Pierre Lebrun, *Le Temps des églises mobiles. L'architecture religieuse des Trente Glorieuses* (Gollion, 2011), pp. 82–83.
- 55 Published in *L'Architecture française*, 347–48 (1971), pp. 8–10; discussion in Lebrun, *Le Temps des églises mobiles*, pp. 193–237.
- 56 'Une sorte de grande chambre de famille où les chrétiens se rassemblent pour rencontrer le Seigneur et se rencontrer les uns les autres dans le Seigneur. Rien ne la distingue spécifiquement des espaces ou bâtiments avoisinants. L'architecture n'a aucun rôle spécial à y jouer : il suffit qu'elle soit fonctionnelle, simple, hospitalière, et permette aux fidèles de témoigner du Christ dans ce monde et pour ce monde. Enfin rien n'empêche que, le cas échéant, cet espace soit employé à d'autres usages que celui du culte.' The original source was in Dutch: 'Rede van Mgr. Beckers over kerkbouw', *Tijdschrift voor Architectuur en Beeldende Kunst*, 32.6 (1965), pp. 125–28 (p. 126); it is quoted here from Debuyst, *L'art chrétien contemporain, de 1962 à nos jours* (Tours, 1988), p. 18.
- 57 'De kerkelijke kunst kan niet verbergen dat ze in het beste geval slechts een fanatieke poging is om aan de werkelijkheid van haar tijd deel te nemen, zonder de radicale eisen ervan te erkennen, dat ze met andere woorden zich met een schijn van moderniteit tevreden stelt [...]. Ze kan het feit niet wegmoffelen dat ze slechts betekenis heeft als ze kunst *tout court* is, als ze boven de tegenstelling kerk en wereld heen komt' (Bekaert, *In een of ander huis*, p. 10).
- 58 Bekaert, *ibid.*, p. 11.
- 59 Geert Bekaert, 'Kerkenbouw op drift', *Streven*, 18.7 (1965), pp. 633–37.
- 60 'Alle wezenlijke vragen van de christelijke existentie van vandaag, moeten hun beslag krijgen in de vraag naar de gestalte van het kerkgebouw: de vraag naar de verhouding van het geopenbaarde christendom en de menselijke religie; de vraag naar de plaats en de functie van het christendom in de wereld; de vraag naar de eventuele behoefte van de religieuze mens aan sacrale belevenisstructuren; de vraag naar de

expressiemogelijkheid van de moderne mens ten aanzien van de bestaande eredienst; de vraag tenslotte naar de concrete urbanistische, bouwkundige en artistieke vormgeving van dit alles met de psychologische en sociologische achtergrond ervan' (Bekaert, 'Kerkenbouw op drift', pp. 634–35).

61 Jos Fannes (1927–) read law at the University of Leuven before entering the Seminary of Mechlin in 1952. After having served as an assistant priest at the parish of St Julian in Auderghem (near Brussels), he became secretary to the Archbishop in 1962, and continued in that post until his retirement in 1992.

62 Chatelan, 'Les catholiques et la croissance urbaine', pp. 410–13 and 465–70.

63 Jos Fannes, 'Vernieuwde liturgie en kerkgebouw of Kerkenbouw op drift?', *Pastor Bonus*, 42.7 (1969), pp. 330–34; Jos Fannes, 'Evolutie in de kerkenbouwopvatting', *Kontakt met Domus Dei*, 3 (1969), pp. 7–11.

64 'Moet de christelijke viering een sacraal cultuskarakter hebben, dat uiteraard naar een exclusieve liturgische ruimte tendeert [...] en, zo ja, hoe zal dat sacrale karakter in onze tijd geconstitueerd zijn?' (Bekaert, 'Kerkenbouw op drift', p. 635).

65 'De religieuze hoedanigheid is overal in de kiem aanwezig en behoeft door de mens slechts ontdekt en geestelijk gerealiseerd te worden' (Fannes, 'Evolutie in de kerkenbouwopvatting', p. 10).

66 'De kristen is er zich terug van bewust geworden dat zijn roeping is: zuurdeeg te zijn, het zout der aarde, het licht dat schijnt en de graankorrel die sterft opdat er nieuw leven in deze wereld tot stand zou kunnen komen' (ibid., p. 10).

67 Fannes, 'Vernieuwde liturgie en kerkgebouw of Kerkenbouw op drift?', p. 333.

68 Morel and Van De Voorde, 'Rethinking the Twentieth-Century Catholic Church', pp. 282–84.

69 Apart from the two projects discussed here, other examples of multi-functional church buildings in the archdiocese include: St Nicolas in La Hulpe (Dierckx, 1971); the Aurodenberg liturgical centre in Aarschot (Debruyne, Macken, 1971); St Joseph's liturgical centre in Hoegaarden (Reynaert, 1971); and the Holy Ghost in Anderlecht (De Smet, Lateir, 1969).

70 Dessauvage realized such churches in Ezemaal (St Aldegondis, 1962–65), Willebroek (St Jozef Ambachtsman, 1962–64; Holy Cross, 1963–67), Vosselaar (St Jozef, 1960–65), Aarschot (St Rochus, 1960–65), Westmalle (St Paul, 1964–67), Holsbeek (St Carl, 1964–69), Herne (Our Lady, 1966–69) and Jette (St Joseph, 1964–69).

71 AMB, Parish files Sint-Johannes Bosco, Kessel-Lo; Pieter De Bruyne, 'De geschiedenis van de Don Boscoparochie te Kessel-Lo (1958–1988): een pilootparochie in woelig vaarwater' (Master's thesis, University of Leuven, 2006).

72 De Boe realized similar church buildings in Averbode (St John the Baptist, 1976–78), Testelt (Our Lady, 1970–71) and Kalfort-Puurs (Our Lady, 1973–78). See Frédéric Debuyst, 'Petites églises de Luc De Boe dans l'archidiocèse de Malines-Bruxelles', *Art d'Eglise*, 47.188 (1979), pp. 55–69.

73 'Mgr. Theeuws heeft een riskant spel gespeeld. En dat alleen is in ons officiële land al het vermelden waard. Het risico dat hij enkele jaren geleden op zich nam met Dessauvage een aantal belangrijke en delicate opdrachten te geven, werd echter ruimschoots beloond' (Geert Bekaert, *Verzamelde opstellen. Deel 1: Stapstenen 1950–1965* (Brussels, 1985), pp. 318–21 (p. 319)).

74 Debuyst, 'Petites églises de Luc De Boe', p. 55 (quoted from the English summary).

75 De Bruyne, 'De geschiedenis van de Don Boscoparochie', p. 81.

76 AMB, Monsignor Schoenmaeckers papers, internal memo dated 8 October 1982.

77 Jean Baboulène, Michel Brion and Jean-Michel Delalande, *Faut-il encore construire des églises?* (Paris, 1970). Discussion in Lebrun, *Le temps des églises mobiles*, pp. 78–86.

78 Jos Fannes, 'Heeft het nog zin kerken te bouwen?', *Kontakt met Domus Dei*, 4 (1970), pp. 6–10.

79 I am indebted for this observation to Judi Loach.

 