SUMMARY

Down to earth, committed and proud.
The interweaving of culture and religion
in late-medieval Utrecht, 1300–1600

Questions and sources

The fear of death is a central feature in our characterization of medieval mentality. The Papal Schism (1305–1377), the Hundred Years War (1337–1450) and the Plague (from 1347 onward) are held responsible for this phenomenon. They are supposed to have had a devastating effect creating insecurity on all levels. The Church was no longer considered a source of inspiration and meaningfulness and this caused people to fear for their souls. Although this view is commonly accepted it may be wondered whether it is correct. Can people on a collective scale remain anxious and depressed for hundreds of years? Moreover, this view does not coincide with the pride any medieval city still radiates. To overcome the inconsistencies between our judgment and observation I have studied the mentality in late-medieval Utrecht from various angles, taking the social cohesion as the guiding line. I have tried to establish the contemporary meaning of salvation by studying what the institutionalized donations for the soul actually accomplished.

This book throws light on the transition of a community in which the collective, for instance the neighbourhood, was important, towards a society in which social distinction became ever more precious, eventually leading to social division. How did this process influence the perception of the soul? What was the role of the argument of salvation?

For this purpose an integral analysis was made of the following sources: decrees, sentences and accounts of the city council, as well as regulations and accounts of church wardens, fraternities and charitable institutions. Finally I studied the donations *pro anima* on different levels. By studying the developments over a longer period of time transitions could be made visible, not only in intent, but also in practice.

An old society

The Romans founded Utrecht in 47 A.D. near the spot where the river Rhine forked in two branches, de *Oude* or *Leidse Rijn* leading to the North Sea and the Vecht to the *Almere* (the present *IJsselmeer*); they left c. 270. On the ruins of their stone fortress the Franks built a church c. 630. From these premises the Anglo-Saxon monk Willibrord started his missionary activities among the Frisians. In 695 he was ordained a missionary bishop. Frisians, Franks and Vikings fought over the Utrecht area. The year 925 saw the beginning of a rather stable period. By then Utrecht was a bishopric within the

German Empire. Although no bigger than 132 hectares, the town developed into an international market. After Count Floris v of Holland built the *Muiderslot* at the mouth of the river Vecht c. 1281, the international trade declined rapidly, but the regional market remained of great importance. The population grew from about 2000 in 1100 to 20,000 in 1500. The fourteenth century was Utrecht's golden age.

The town was situated in the outskirts of the German Empire, but played no vital part in it. Therefore it could develop rather autonomously and organically, but within the context of international trends of course. This is the main reason why Utrecht is such an interesting subject for in-depth research into social-cultural patterns.

The bishop was both the political and spiritual leader. Unable to create a strong lineage, his power depended upon internal and external factors. This careful balance of power offered the Utrecht people (henceforth the *Utrechters*) the opportunity to negotiate with the bishop, especially when they joined forces. Pressure from below was an important reason why Emperor Henry v confirmed the privileges the city had obtained from the bishop in 1122. A variety of people lived in the town: canons (Utrecht had five chapters, they formed the first estate), knights (the second estate) and citizens (the third estate). Shared interests facilitated communication between the members of these three layers: through marriage, housing and work they were often well acquainted with one another. Among them lived labourers, journeymen and beggars. Their shacks stood in the alleyways between the big stones houses or in their backyards and cellars, and of course in the backstreets and near the city wall. The local economy benefited from the close cooperation between Church and town.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the development of interest groups. The earliest references to the bench of aldermen date from 1122, to the city council from 1196. Merchants' and craftsmen's guilds were mentioned in 1233 and 1276 respectively. The Estates positioned themselves ever stronger and gained in power at the expense of the bishop. Although the guilds formally dominated city politics from 1304 onward, the patricians' influence remained great. With the signing of the *Stichtse Landbrief* in 1375 the bishop needed the Estates' permission to levy taxes or wage war.

The cooperation between the leading families did not prevent them from quarrelling. Their rivalry and strife drove them into the hands of foreign forces with whom they allied themselves. At the same time these forces were the main enemies of the city: for centuries Guelders and Holland had endeavoured to conquer Utrecht. In 1528 the curtains fell for the relatively autonomous city state as it had to bestow the temporal power upon the Habsburg Emperor Charles v. From 1428 onward his Burgundian forefathers had tried to get hold of Utrecht. Until then the civic guard had effectively withstood the attacks. In times of need Utrecht disposed of a standing army of approximately 1500 citizens. The bowmen formed the core of this militia. The bloody civil war of 1481–1483 heralded the downfall of the city.

Charles v tried to reorganize the administration, defence and judicial system, but had to acknowledge some existing privileges, procedures and relationships. He respected the micro-organisms of society, i.e. the neighbourhoods, parishes and fraternities, but abolished the political and military powers of the guilds.

A strongly developed sense of neighbourhood

When highlighting medieval society most attention is devoted to political, economical and social developments. One dimension is usually neglected: the organization structures of 'common people' which were, however, vital for the bonding process. In Utrecht a range of data has survived that indicate a strong neighbourhood tradition. With the departure of the Romans the area had not been deserted. Archaeological data and historical facts demonstrate that people continued to live here. In the tenth and eleventh centuries three, maybe four, pre-urban neighbourhoods already had their own parish church. The oldest was called the *Buurkerk* (*ecclesia civilis* or the church of the laypeople who were called neighbours [*buren*] as opposed to the then dominant chapter churches). The city-canal of 1122 cut through at least four communities. Although the city council had usurped most of the legal powers of most neighbourhoods in the fourteenth century, the days for transactions and other legal procedures remained fixed on the German and Frankish terms until the Reformation, in Utrecht in 1580. The earliest surviving neighbourhood agreement dates from 1391 and contains all the items neighbours traditionally have to deal with in order to protect their small community.

In the early turbulent history of Utrecht, neighbourhoods proved to be the most solid and constant structures. Their judicial and social rules are recognizable in the way the later administration was set up and in the way the neighbourhoods continued to function. As such neighbourhoods remained of vital importance to civic society. Because their organization is usually not recognized, Church and city council are ascribed too much power.

Utrecht neighbourhoods contained clusters of about forty houses. Rich and poor shared the same premises, both participated in neighbourhood life. Neighbours had mutual obligations concerning public safety and the maintenance of public commodities such as the wharves, the staircases leading down to the wharves, fire gear (buckets, hooks and ladders), cleanliness of the streets, etc. Their social obligations included childbed, sickness, especially the dying process, and the funeral. The neighbourhood organized the annual festivals. At least once a year they had a meal together. They also kept an eye on strangers, regulated mutual relationships in case of problems, and asked the city council's intervention if conflicts seemed insoluble. Poor relief and mutual aid were a matter-of-course.

After the Reformation the organization of neighbourhoods was radically changed. Out of fear for political agitation from below city councils began to restrict neighbourhood life. The annual feasts were considered 'papal superstitions' and therefore forbidden. Poor neighbourhoods were no longer allowed to appoint their own councils. For neighbourhood meals the permission of the city council was required. Henceforth they were allowed a meal every three years only. In rich neighbourhoods poor neighbours were excluded from membership. Neighbourhood life quickly eroded once the city council started taxing the beer the mourning house offered to the neighbours who had followed the bier. In 1628 the magistrate levied a tax as high as one third of the beer's value, raising this to fifty per cent in 1649. As a consequence the families stopped giving beer and neighbours stopped attending the funeral. In 1669 the magistrate had to issue a proclamation ordering the attendance of at least 25 people.

The social cohesion that had been an outstanding feature of Utrecht for so long was evaporating. This development can only be explained by pointing at the elitization process: the rise of a segment of society that considered itself to be the elite and increasingly wanted to manifest themselves as such. The 'city castles' of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are early examples of this process. In the seventeenth century the elite had become so rich, they could permit themselves to abandon the social game of 'give and take'.

Religious culture and urban, social and individual identity

The strong position of neighbourhoods indicates that the Church was not the only socializing force in the Middle Ages. Of course, the Church could not be overlooked: on the eve of the Reformation Utrecht had five chapter churches, four parish churches, three abbeys, twenty-eight monasteries, a beguinage, and more than twenty guesthouses or hospitals, all but one with their own chapel. These numbers are not exceptional for a middle-sized bishopric.

The churches and chapels were the pride of the neighbourhoods in whose midst they were erected: the people in the vicinity supported the churches and hospitals by creating fraternities and bestowing gifts and bequests on them. The interaction between Church and lay people calls for a redefinition of the position of the Church in medieval society. What was its real impact in shaping the identity and self-awareness of the people? What did religion actually mean at that time? How did people perceive God and themselves? The answers to these questions are important, as the Reformation debate has cast a negative light on late-medieval mentality, religion and spiritual care. Although historians have nuanced this view in many respects over the last decades, it still prevails in the public domain.

In Utrecht the churches and the remaining liturgical manuscripts, sermons and religious writings, including the songs and prayers of the Utrecht recluse Sister Bertken (1426/27–1514), testify to a highly elaborate liturgy that was meant to touch the hearts and souls of the participants. The remaining religious murals and paintings, statues in clay, wood and stone, and liturgical objects, confirm the image of a personal religiosity. God the Father is depicted as involved and compassionate: he keeps an eye on each member of his flock. Christ is the central figure, his sacrifice being the core of liturgy and worship. He reaches out to believers, who – on their turn – show a longing to be moved by his example and follow in his footsteps. Others might more easily identify themselves with saints, who – as his family, friends and followers – belonged to the close circle around Christ. Both the believers' devotion and self-knowledge were enhanced by the system of patron saints.

Records show how people contributed voluntarily to the Church: neither the clergy nor the city council could force people to donate gifts, attend church or participate in processions. Neighbourhood and family ties, working relationships and friendships favoured strong alliances from below (in conformity with the view of Ferdinand Tönnies). Accordingly, much was accomplished on initiative of the local community. The parish churches and chapels radiated the local atmosphere since local people had largely financed, built and decorated them. As such, churches were the most important

community centres, both in cities and villages. They also had personal significance. Here the bond between God and the community was continually being confirmed. Here the parishioners, guilds and fraternities gathered in prayer. Here the boys went to school. The weekly public processions in the church and around the churchyard strengthened the communal bond because most deceased parishioners were buried here. All these elements made a church into a holy place, both on a social and personal level.

Many sensations and emotions could be experienced in church: Mass, sermons and images appealed to the hearts of believers. The continuous confrontation with life and death invited the people to deal with the essentials of life and – as a consequence – live 'good' in the here and now. These teachings were not confined to the Church: the morals were shared on both a private and public level.

Mass, whether for the parish, a guild, fraternity or family, embodied the community, yet left room for personal reflection. Liturgy called for peace and atonement, as did death and burial: in the Utrecht areas neighbours gathered around the sick-bed to bid a dying person farewell personally. This ritual was called 'the blessing'. The extreme unction with its confession and testament (in Utrecht the latter only for the well-to-do) was also designed to make amends. In all respects, the symbolism of late-medieval religiosity was visualized and therefore accessible for whoever opened themselves up to it.

Yet, this religiosity was neither static nor constant: the research showed that the interest in communion and confirmation wavered in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, but then revived again. A fraternity that was created in 1432 to commemorate the dead stopped memorial Masses altogether in the late 1540s. These developments did not cause friction. They are a good indication of the public character of religion and of the public's participation in the reformation debate. There was room for dialogue, also within the Church.

Spiritual care

The Utrecht parish clergy was usually committed to its church and parishioners. They were better educated and less promiscuous than is generally assumed. At least half of them came from the city or the province of Utrecht, which meant they were acquainted with local people and local traditions. 'Outsiders' generally grew roots here in the course of time. Priests often came from well-to-do families. They therefore knew the demands on preaching and spiritual care of this critical segment of the public firsthand. In the Sunday sermons (in parish churches always in the vernacular), the meaning of the liturgical year, the creed, the Ten Commandments, the sacraments and the Lord's Prayer, were systematically being explained. Sacraments strengthened the individual, reinforced society, and confirmed traditions.

In the sixteenth century some Utrecht priests were in favour of reform. In fact, in that century the Utrecht priesthood covered the whole range, from traditional, the larger part, to reformist and orthodox or counter reformist. In Utrecht the prosecution of dissident clergy was not severe: reformist clergymen could stay in town, or return there after they had spent some time in exile, however, in all cases they were no longer allowed to administer sacraments to lay people. As long as they respected the public order, and did not endanger it, both the ecclesiastical and the secular courts were lenient.

This was to change after the Iconoclasm of 1566. The Utrecht clergy was not inclined to support the reformist decisions of the Council of Trent. A few adaptations were made, mostly on paper. Only strict priests would endorse them. The Revolt and Reformation made them redundant.

Processions

Processions were no static relics from past times either. Even in the sixteenth century they kept growing in size and number and became ever more splendid and magnificent. The three Estates dominated the general processions, that is Corpus Christi and Mary Magdalena (on 22 July 1173 the rebuilt Dom church was rededicated). In their traditional order of pre-eminence the chapters, knighthood and magistrate presented themselves together with their officials and servants. The procession was headed by the male monastic orders and the clergy of the four parish churches, each group on its own, and with their own crosses. Only from c. 1550 onward the parish clergy would carry statues of the church's patron saints. The ranking was quite strict, changes were seldom made. In 1529 the imperial officials were officially allotted a place. Civic organizations, like the militia, the guilds and fraternities, or even the parishes, did not present themselves. In times of crisis exceptions to this rule were made, but they never lasted. The chairmen of the guilds participated in a few smaller processions, but without banners or insignia. Pilgrims, who had visited the Holy Land, joined the Palm Sunday procession on its way back from St Peter's to the Dom church, carrying palm leaves.

The composition of the Utrecht general processions showed much resemblance to the structure of processions in old German and English towns: the prominent position of the Estates, including the clergy, visualized the origin and history of the city.

Anyone who did not have an official function walked anonymously in the rear, the women following the men. But precisely this anonymity turned general processions into an urban manifestation. Within this context many *Utrechters* will have experienced themselves as *St Martin's men*, protecting the identity and tradition of the city of which St Martin was the patron saint. This term was originally a name of honour for the bishop's officers and was gradually adopted by the civic militia. The Emperor Charles V tried to break this identity by removing the image of St Martin from public buildings and the city seal. The Habsburg princes kept the old, but also introduced new processions to enforce unity.

With the exception of processions for prayer and penance, most processions were followed by fairs and festivals. The annual markets that were created in the fifteenth century had usually grown out of a religious cult that attracted large crowds.

Processions were a stabilizing element in society. They were only cancelled in extreme circumstances. And sometimes they were challenged: young people yelled and threw stones at St Lawrence procession after 1487. Yet all processions continued until July 1578. In 1576 and 1577 the civic militia had occupied a place of honour in the Mary Magdalena procession: they were allowed to wear their uniforms and carry flying banners. Only three years later, in 1580, this militia would enforce the prohibition of public Roman Catholic worship. This last fact cannot undo the earlier appreciation. It is an outstanding example of the social impact of processions.

By their public character, processions were, even stronger than Mass and sacramental ceremonies, 'total social phenomena': they were solemn, festive and massive. Their appeal was enhanced by the fairs and festivals. Here the community presented itself on all levels. The whole manifestation did not only revive tradition, but visualized the actual political, social and economic relationships. Individuals had a chance to deepen their devotion and show their commitment to society. This was a dynamic process. The church offered a suitable stage to display both one's own and the collective identity. Religion, festival and commerce reinforced one another.

A shared religious culture

The question whether late-medieval religion was a shared culture is a current issue in historiography. The analysis of patterns in liturgy, spiritual care and processions informs us that the Utrecht canons, parish clergy and citizens often celebrated Mass together. They also gathered for other forms of worship. For instance, the chapter churches were as a rule open for visitors, but on feast days especially the Dom chapter organized special ceremonies and sermons to attract people and encourage them to offerings, which, however, were not given. On Ascension Day a wooden image of Christ would be hoisted up and disappear through the vault, on Pentecost a wooden dove would come down from the same vault. From 1543 onwards it carried little burning torches to symbolize both the Holy Spirit and the tongues of fire. These examples show how religious culture was shared by clergy and lay people alike. There was no distinction between the elite and the so-called popular culture. On feast days and in processions the shared traditions and interactions between the Utrecht Church and the lay community became visible once again.

The many sermons and images helped to explain the Mass. Although in Latin, the meaning of its words and gestures was familiar, at least in broad outline. Mass was the ritual commemoration and celebration of Christ's sacrificial death. Prayers, songs, gestures, bells, candles, decoration and incense stressed the meaning of the drama that had taken place then and now, in order to inspire and encourage believers. In Mass people were connected to the holy example of Christ. The believer was part of the Christian community, not only of the people actually around him, but also of his ancestors and those who had lived before him. The graves in or outside the church made the past almost tangible. By repeating the rituals over and over again, the message of Jesus Christ became familiar. Although the Church discipline was not as strict as is generally assumed: people needed to confess and take communion only once a year, with Easter, yet Christianity was firmly rooted in the Late Middle Ages. Anyone who wanted to be touched by it had ample opportunity to do so. Religious inspiration was a well-known phenomenon.

This interpretation deviates from the 'civilizing offensive' that is regularly mentioned in historiography. The term presupposes an actor from above or outside. Before Charles v came to power, there was hardly room for such a process in Utrecht: bishop, canons and mendicant orders had little manoeuvring space. Politics and public life were regulated by agreements; traditions were not easily put aside. Even after 1528 it remained customary in Utrecht that the ecclesiastical judges did not enforce a strict observance

of the synodial statutes: they were generally lenient towards infringers, mostly imposing small fines only. Most parish clergy was familiar with the parishioners and faithful to the old traditions. The priests certainly did not speak with one mouth, their diversity allowed parishioners to find a priest to their liking. Because of the low frequency of confession, often only once a year before Easter, and the irregular attendance of Mass, there was no battle ground for an offensive.

Differing or even conflicting views did not disrupt society. They were too small in scale to accomplish that, as will be demonstrated in my next book. Real cracks became visible around 1566. Anabaptism had only attracted a few *Utrechters*. Nevertheless, the Emperor and his inquisitors pushed for a reorganization of Church and society. Under imperial pressure the Episcopal synod accepted some Trent measures in 1549, but did not do much to enforce them. The hard-core politicians contributed in the end to the polarization of society through a combination of political, economical and religious and cultural factors.

The long range of communal ecclesiastical traditions testifies to the longstanding consensus between the local clergy and the parishioners. Loyalty to their common history is the key factor. Compared to this steadiness the occasional signs of dissatisfaction are a murmur in the background. Therefore it is important to establish the roots of this commitment.

In late-medieval Utrecht the Church functioned quite satisfactorily. Its religiosity was both personal and social: people could connect to God and his saints, they could add personal touches to the liturgy and church and they could socialize within the religious framework. In this way, church became familiar and more than that: church could become a part of oneself. People could *appropriate* religion, as it is called in modern terminology, if only by placing a bunch of flowers in front of Mary's statue. This personal feature is crucial. Apart from this, the analysis of neighbourhood life showed how traditions were firmly rooted in the smallest of communities. In addition, the densely populated city of Utrecht offered many opportunities and structures where traditions could be passed on and people mattered. The transference of cultural and religious values, which were inseparable at the time, was self-understood in late-medieval Utrecht.

Until the Reformation people kept investing in religious ritual. We see processes of both in- and externalization. This illustrates at once how both Church and believers went along with the tide. The lay involvement gave the local Church its particular character, as is shown time and again when the medieval Catholic Church is studied within its local framework (see the pioneering studies of William Christian Jr and Eamon Duffy). There was much diversion within the Church. Local festivals give the finest picture of the *couleur locale*. In Utrecht this flavour can best be detected in the festivities around Mary Magdalena, St Martin, St Poncian and St Agnes, and St Lawrence. Community, Church and tradition were tightly interwoven. Because of the local traditions the multiform medieval catholic churches cannot *a priori* be characterized as orthodox-roman.

Who determined the cult?

Yet the harmony showed flaws. At the end of the fifteenth century young people repeatedly disturbed the St Lawrence's procession and the Epiphany play in the Dom church. In Holy Communion there were differences between rich and poor: only the well-to-do could afford a sip of unblessed wine.

Therefore it is time to differentiate the homogeneous picture by analyzing the involvement of specific groups in a particular church. This is the only way to distinguish social levels within a community. The *Buurkerk* offers the starting point. The main questions to be answered were: who financed the church, who joined a fraternity, who was active in poor relief, and why?

In late-medieval Utrecht the citizens moulded the church to their tastes. Around 1300 the parish church was a largely undivided room. Only the top of the elite was buried inside. Private altars were rare. From 1375 onward fraternities, guilds, individuals and families founded private altars. By 1570 maybe 40 altars can be discerned in the *Buurkerk*. More and more people were buried inside (nine in 1420 to an average of 106 a year in the 1560s). As a consequence the church had to be enlarged time and again. The altars with their decorations, the private pews and the grave-stones altered the aspect of the church considerably. From a community centre the church became the domain of small units. The financing curve shows that commitment to the *Buurkerk* was highest during the restructuring into a hall church (1434–1455). With each subsequent building campaign the donations decreased. The parishioners obviously considered the church complete.

Fraternities

For late-medieval Utrecht 101 fraternities could be positively identified. This large number supports the earlier observation of a strong social cohesion. These fraternities were the result of private initiative, membership was voluntary. Prosopographic research has made it possible to establish that around 1500 membership was attractive for the upper 40% of male society, i.e. nearly all the citizens, and for 15% of the women out their ranks. Around 1300 the first fraternities were created among the clergy and lay elite. Their example was gradually copied, first by the upper class and then by the lower middle-class. These collectives gave citizens the opportunity to realize goals that would otherwise remain beyond their reach, such as private Masses in a stylish environment, a dignified funeral, a grave in the church, a form of commemoration, a yearly banquet, and above all the informal contact with peers. Even the altar of a poor fraternity could not be overlooked. Poorer fraternities often had to save for years before they could commission a major piece of work like an altar, but once they were ready to do so, the order went to the most renowned craftsman of the day. Thus the fraternities could distinguish themselves at their own level. Moreover: a modern, prestigious altar would attract new members. The phenomenon of the fraternity allowed the vast majority of the citizens to present themselves proudly to their fellow-parishioners. Processions did not offer this opportunity. And both the neighbourhoods and the guilds were not equipped to fulfil the needs that the fraternities covered.

Fraternities fitted well within the horizontal structure of Utrecht by offering a stage on which the various social strata could manifest themselves according to their status. Ballot, subscription fee and expenses were the criteria by which a fraternity could close its ranks. These barriers prevented people from rising above their status. Fraternities, therefore, could not be used for social climbing. The financial obligations turned out to be a perfect criterion to determine with accuracy the social level of the members of a fraternity. Fraternities were not used as a means to integration either: at least in the sixteenth century (for which we have the most accurate data) only well-to-do newcomers gained membership. The many fraternities strengthened the cohesion between the citizens. The intrinsic denial of this quality, formulated by John Bossy as *brotherhood-otherhood*, does not do justice to the pride membership incited. Yet, there were *others*: newcomers and underprivileged, also among the citizens: many of them became the first adherents of the 'new religion'.

In the course of the sixteenth century the interest in fraternities faded: only a few new brotherhoods were created; existing fraternities remained active, but with fewer members. This can be related to the recession that began with the civil war of 1481–1483. The size of the membership ran parallel with economic developments, both in an upward and downward sense, necessarily with a certain delay. And more importantly: with each enlargement of the church more graves became available. From 1520 onward citizens did no longer need a brotherhood to manifest themselves in church: by then most bourgeois families had their own graves and some form of institutionalized commemoration.

Poor relief and self-support

Did the alleged social cohesion reflect itself in the size and quality of poor relief? According to historiography, social support had not been systematically developed in the Middle Ages. It was too small-scale to be effective. Much attention is devoted to the donor's motivation: his investments in poor relief would not stem so much from concern for the needy as from anxiety over his soul's salvation. The Church is assumed to have played a key role in both stimulating and coordinating charity. Research into the Utrecht charitable institutions offers a different perspective. Utrecht had both a wide range of – mainly civilian – charitable institutions as well as a long-standing tradition of informal poor relief. The earliest institutions date from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Between 1122 and 1577 thirty-five relief agencies had been established. Specialized hospitals gave shelter to sick, old or insane people, to vagrants and pilgrims, and to orphans and poor schoolboys who wanted to enter the priesthood. Poor people who lived at home received a fixed amount of money, usually a stiver a week, and/or some bread, butter and peat. Some also enjoyed free housing.

The funds all sprang from private initiative. Parish churches, chapters, bishops, city councils and guilds mostly kept aloof. Citizens generally administered the foundations, although sometimes dignitaries, both ecclesiastical and civilian, were in command as a consequence of their office. Abuse and negligence were real threats to any poor-relief institution. Therefore all founders tried to create a solid construction, putting their trust on dignitaries, fraternities, family members, etc. Funds administered by a

fraternity proved to be the most effective: these people often showed a genuine concern for their clientele. In the course of the sixteenth century a growing number of founders, nearly 10 per cent, entrusted their funds to church wardens (in case of the *Buurkerk* and *Geertekerk*) or deacons (*Jacobikerk* and *Klaaskerk*). Worst off were funds supervised by dignitaries: they often appointed a steward they did not systematically check. Besides this, they preferred to invest the surplus in the creation of new capital rather than spending it on poor relief. This was the case with the oldest almshouse, the Holy Spirit, founded in 1307. Misappropriation was the result, as the example of Jan Bogaert shows. From 1545 to 1578 he was the steward of this foundation. He also used the fund's reserves for private investments in peat bogs. His annual records were either examined years later or not at all. He therefore never had to show any cash money. This type of embezzlement was a longer standing practice in this foundation that had turned into a frozen institution decades ago, only fulfilling its fixed obligations and not taking new initiatives. To fill this gap an anonymous lady founded a new institution, simply called the *Poor Relief*, in 1496, stipulating that all gifts should be immediately spent on alms and peat. This principle attracted many donors: money poured in. The immediate sharing of money and goods was dropped to some extent in the second half of the sixteenth century, in the sense that this institution also started to invest in capital by leasing loans and mortgages, but still considered poor relief of paramount importance.

The income of most foundations depended on leases. Until 1539 they had been fixed, but were then released. As a result the income of the foundations doubled in a few decades. This was hardly of any consequence for the poor. Mostly the amount of a stiver a week did not rise, although people needed at least four stivers a week to live modestly. During a great crisis, sixteen per cent of the Utrecht population would receive alms of some kind. This was higher than in foreign countries, where one to eight per cent was normal. Yet also in Utrecht poor relief was insufficient: in times of crisis half of the population lived below subsistence level. The 'sincere poor' had to find ways to support themselves and/or were dependent on the informal aid and assistance of rich people or of their neighbours, friends and relatives. This is especially true for the incapacitated, the sick and the old.

The sixteenth century saw a growing discrepancy between the founders' intentions and the foundations' actual functioning. Had the institutions been carefully managed, they could have supported more people on a larger scale. From the 1580s stories of grinding poverty appear in the accounts of charitable institutions.

In the debate on the motivation for poor relief historians usually pay attention to issues like 'salvation' and 'controlling- and disciplining strategies'. It is questionable whether these notions are worthwhile. In Utrecht most new foundations aimed at alleviating an actual need. Most people mention 'for God's sake', when they refer to their motivation. The argument of salvation only occurred once the testament had reached its fixed form (in Utrecht around 1360) and yet was, even then, rarer than is often assumed in historiography. Generally speaking, the hospitals often took good care of their residents, but the aid for the 'sincere poor' was inadequate. Therefore it can be argued, as Martin Dinges does, whether the alms could effactually serve as a tool of control.

To gain more insight in the quality of poor relief, historians should involve the neighbourhoods in their research. Too often donations to the Church or the poor are

placed in a religious framework and are too easily labelled as *do ut des*. By doing so these donations are compared to the gift exchange between dignitaries and are therefore seen as strategic and contractual tools. But many donors only wanted to help on a humane level. And many, including the poor themselves, supported one another and tried to solve their problems together. When the neighbourhood tradition of give and take is included in the picture, then notions of solidarity, friendship and natural care can come to the fore.

Decreasing involvement

In the sixteenth century citizens turned inward. They hardly gave money to the parish church anymore. Fraternities were involved in projects that would embellish their own chapels and altars; poor relief was not on their agenda. Some charitable institutions spent their money on banquets and others speculated with surplus money or arrears. In 1538 Charles v ordered an examination of their accounts, which led to a series of recommendations for improvement. Their effects, if any, were short-term. His plans for reorganization did not find support: neither a communal fund nor effective government control could be realized at that time. In the sixteenth century some individuals did create new funds and continued to support old ones, but the increasing need did not translate into better care or improved administration. Thus the poor were made responsible for their plight. From the 1520s onward the ideology supported this development: healthy poor were to earn their living by working, not by begging.

This much is clear: the elitization process manifested itself on an unprecedented scale in the sixteenth century. At the same time, the living conditions of the poor worsened. On a local level the Iconoclasm and the Reformation both contested and confirmed this process. The protests can be seen as a token of dissatisfaction with the way the well-to-do had moulded both Church and society. But the rise to fame of Protestants did not lead to an improvement of the poor man's living conditions. The Revolt and Reformation consolidated his inferior ranking and even reinforced it by the prohibition of public ritual and by suppressing neighbourhood life. In public life the have-nots became more invisible. Apart from the street and the market they had no stage where they could manifest themselves.

The elitization is a European process that already manifested itself in the High Middle Ages. It was a consequence of the prosperity that grew in spite of the Plague and wars. In Utrecht this trend can be read from the representative buildings and the grander life style of bishops, canons and upper-class families. Their wealth allowed them to distance themselves from the community. In this regard it cannot be a coincidence that canons hardly ever created charitable funds, Evert Foec being the notable exception. Apparently, rich people find it hard to be generous.

A rupture in tradition of great consequences

How could the elitization manifest itself within the church? Around 1300 a new trend in the grave and memorial cult started in the chapter and parish churches. Whoever wanted to prolong his memory after his death made sure he was not buried in a

collective, mostly anonymous grave in the churchyard, but acquired a personal grave in the church. On top of that, institutionalized memorial services helped to keep his memory alive.

These processes could only occur because people started to relate differently to their history and traditions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. When their churches had been rebuilt or refurnished, old tombs and gravestones were either reused or not replaced at all. Older memorial services that lacked sufficient funding were dropped. The memorial system was reorganized. Canons had to reserve funds for an anniversary or else their heirs would lose a great amount of money. These anniversaries had to be so richly endowed that canons and vicars could be paid for their attendance.

These decisions had great impact. Henceforth canons preferred to attend the paid memorial services and left the singing of the hours mostly to professional singers. Until 1345 ordinary canons were officially not allowed to be buried inside the church, but by instituting private altars and services in the new radial chapels around the Gothicised choir the chapter could be moved to alleviate this rule from c. 1324 onward. Out of gratitude towards their generosity canons were allowed a grave near their altar.

The same procedure took place in parish churches, where prominent lay families acquired their own altars, graves and memorial services. People who could not afford a distinguished funeral at their own expense joined a fraternity. Between 1485 and 1528 nearly one third of the new members were enlisted in the Miserable Souls after their death. In these cases the funeral Mass, the burial in a brotherhood's grave and the memorial Masses were clearly the deciding factors.

The testament allowed testators to dispense with traditional property rights and use their money to acquire personal space in the once impersonal, communal building. On all levels the stage was set for a personal memorial cult. Statues on tombs and coats of arms and portraits on slabs, wall paintings, memorial tablets and stained windows show the increasing need of people to immortalize themselves. All these developments indicate a reorientation on the meaning of collective identity. Notions like 'tradition', 'sacred territory', and 'veneration of common ancestors' devaluated. This development started at the top and gradually reached a larger audience. In this process notions like grace and salvation got twisted.

The argument of salvation

Historiography emphasizes the impact of salvation for medieval people. This is justifiable to some extent: sermons and religious images taught people that they should live honestly and devotedly. Pointing at death, as *Memento mori* does, does not, however, imply that people were afraid to die, it rather reminded them to listen to their conscience and live decently. Then they would be ready when the hour came. The Church did not propagate fear: God is merciful to anyone who does what he can (*Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*). All images of the holy radiate this message. And, of course, hell was depicted as frightening, in striking contrast to the golden glow of heaven.

Although care of the soul had a positive and encouraging connotation in the Middle Ages, it is not appreciated as such in modern history. According to many authors medieval man mainly wanted to buy his soul's peace. Good deeds are seen in the light of

the so-called 'spiritual economy'. My in-depth research into the Utrecht society shows that this vision needs modification, when the works of mercy are analyzed within their actual, social context. Then a more humane picture arises.

First of all: the argument of salvation was not used in founding charters before 1372. Until then a new institution was generally presented as a natural development within the social-cultural and religious value patterns of that time. After 1360 the term 'salvation of the soul' is standard in charters and wills. From 1490 onward some donors – particularly those who had died without an heir – demanded a prayer for their souls from their protégés. These steps reflect developments both in the judicial and the religious sphere. Around 1360 the structure of wills had taken shape: both the composition as well as the phrases had been standardized. The argument of salvation was part of the jargon.

Once the works of mercy had officially been framed in a judicial and religious pattern, they could serve as an outward manifestation of the founder's pious intentions and thus become a trophy on his part. Therefore the reference in these documents towards salvation should not be taken as a reflection of the founder's religious mentality. Wider research is needed in order to establish the scope of his intentions.

Not accidentally, these legal developments coincided with religious movements: around 1375 the Modern Devotion called for an intense and conscious piety. Around 1500 this appeal was modernized and revitalized by Humanists like Erasmus. After 1545 the Counterreformation stressed a more formal religiosity.

Nevertheless, between 1300 and 1600 most patrons did not explicitly relate their foundation to their salvation. Most charitable funds were raised 'for God's sake'. The same observation applies to the bulk of donations that disappeared anonymously into the communal purse, without even a prayer attached to them. In Utrecht a gift to the church or a charitable institution did not automatically lead to commemoration. When people wanted to be remembered or prayed for, they had to officially institutionalize this themselves.

Even when salvation was a motive, often self-understood, it cannot be implied that it was inspired by fear. Ordinary people gave modest, not excessive, gifts to the church, always within their own budget, at a time that suited them, and often with a well-determined goal in mind: the relief of an actual need. Besides, people did not invest in church, brotherhood or poor relief at times of crisis. After 1450 the collection boxes remained nearly empty in both the *Buurkerk* and the *Domkerk*.

On the other hand, when people donated a concrete object to a church, they would have them adorned with their coats of arms, sometimes also their names and even their portraits. In this way they created monuments for themselves. The growing numbers of private graves, memorial services and private altars show that an increasing number of people wanted to be remembered after death.

Thus it becomes clear that the argument of salvation has – in Utrecht anyway – a different connotation than is generally assumed: most people wanted to be remembered and used the salvation argument to achieve this. In more than one respect the ecclesiastical memorial foundations formed a rupture with communal traditions. Not only because they occupied communal, sacred space, but also because their founders did not want to merge in the anonymous mass of the dead.

The meaning of the late-medieval memorial cult

Galpern's statement that *Catholicism at the end of the Middle Ages was in large part a cult of the living in service of the dead* is well-accepted among medievalists. The Utrecht research shows that memorial services in a chapter church like St Peter's had a different meaning than in a parish church like the *Buurkerk*. In St Peter's most Masses had a memorial function. They were faithfully attended by a large part of the clergy, both canons and vicars, who received a small fee in return. Thus the memorial services in a chapter church really became shared phenomena.

The memorial Masses in the *Buurkerk* formed a minority. They were low Masses on side altars that only a few people will have attended. This changed in 1537 when seven weekly foundations were joined to form three daily parish Masses. They were celebrated at fixed times. The parish was emphatically invited to join them: the little clock in the transept would announce the beginning.

From these data it can be gathered that the actual meaning of a memorial Mass depended upon the population of a church. The chapter church was a collegiate church. From 1348 onward canons were forced to institute an anniversary under penalty of a heavy fine: if they ignored this obligation, their heirs would not receive his 'year of grace' (the income from his prebend was continued for thirteen months after his death). Although the memorial cult in chapter churches existed by the grace of financial incentives, yet it did contribute to the corporate character.

The *Buurkerk*, on the contrary, accommodated many groups (families, guilds and fraternities), who wanted to manifest themselves by their altars, Masses and graves. The number of eternal memorial foundations was relatively low: around 205 between 1300 and 1580. Thirty-four (or, less likely, forty-two) families had their own private Masses; 140 people had created a monthly requiem or an anniversary; seven persons had instituted weekly Masses (from once to seven times a week); the purpose of sixteen transactions is unknown. The numbers show that these memorials were not so much created for individuals as well as for the honour of their families. Rarely the names of deceased parishioners were mentioned in the *Buurkerk*. The memorial cult had an actual function in the chapter, but not in the parish church. This should not come as a surprise: 'ordinary people' simply did not have enough time to preserve a cult artificially.

From the perspective of the Utrecht community the memorial cult was a marginal affair. The elite used it to manifest itself in the most important communal building. Around 1300 this trend became visible in chapter and parish churches by the rapidly increasing number of graves, altars and private Masses. The building campaigns are closely related to these needs. The choir of the Dom was enlarged and Gothicised between 1254 and 1321; a comparable building campaign started in the *Buurkerk* in 1279. The graph of memorial foundations in the *Buurkerk* corresponds with the building phases. The founders were often well-known benefactors of the church.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries most people were pleased to share an altar and grave within the church: the cartularies of the *Buurkerk* seldom mention families or citizens that had their own pew or grave. Only in the sixteenth century a growing number of citizens could afford a private grave. Their coats of arms would adorn their slabs. The need for private space caused the enlargements of the church. In the second

half of the sixteenth century the building campaigns came to an end: most people who could afford a private grave had one. These processes are in no way to be related to disasters or religious developments, but correspond to the prospering economics from which the upper class and the bourgeoisie particularly profited. Their growing wealth favoured the elitization process.

Salvation and commemoration

The overwhelming majority of *Utrechters* did not have an institutionalized form of personal commemoration. This may indicate that the prayer for the deceased's soul was not as important as is generally assumed. The bequests show a variety of motives, from personal or family interests to concern for the community. The elitization process also manifested itself in church, once the symbol of the undivided community. The people in charge, both the clergy and lay, used the argument of salvation to legitimize this development. The bourgeoisie regarded private Masses and altars as worthy causes, because they embellished the church. As soon as the private use of the church was accepted, so-called salvation practices were dropped: donations to the church dramatically fell after 1450. In that same century memorial foundations were either not carried out to the letter or simply forgotten. After 1500 hardly any new altars were founded. The interest in fraternities declined after the wars against IJsselstein (1511–1512) that had been so disastrous for Utrecht. After 1520 the creation of new memorials stagnated and fraternities stopped naming deceased members altogether. After 1549 the Miserable Souls dropped all personal memorial services. These developments are not to be related to a growing dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church. The sequence rather indicates that the need of a personal form of commemoration was fulfilled by the existing memorials, private Masses, memorial tablets and private graves. On top of this, the heirs may have noticed that the memorial services were not always carried out to the letter or with the required respect. A church warden specifically stated in 1498 that priests had to carry out his memorial services without laughter or jokes.

It seems clear that in Utrecht the institutionalized commemoration did not have the impact it is generally assumed to have had. Oexle's definition of the memorial cult as a 'total social phenomenon' does not apply to this city, where the memorial cult was a marginal affair that – as a lasting side effect – created social division. The observation of the dead as a separate social category or a 'sixth age group' was to a certain extent a reality in chapter churches, but hardly in parish churches. It goes without saying that most people commemorated their loved ones in their own ways. For most people the anonymous commemoration of the dead in Mass sufficed as a moment for personal prayer. In the Utrecht parish churches the institutionalized prayer for the deceased had little priority. Of the 34 (or 42, the sources are not clear on this matter) private Masses, only twenty were still functioning in 1569. The state of memorial affairs in the *Buurkerk* does not coincide with the usual interpretation.

Salvation and self interest

In the meantime the salvation argument had allowed the elite and middle classes to transcend social barriers and traditions. The more often the argument was used, the more dividing lines were drawn. Common people were buried in the churchyard, the well-to-do in the church. The poor stood in the empty spaces in church, the well-to-do had private areas and benches. Descend and money determined the dividing lines. Social levels had always been present, but now became ever more explicit. A sense of communal feeling and solidarity was still self-understood, yet we had to conclude that the administration of both the *Buurkerk* and some charitable institutions showed some serious flaws.

This raises the question what the salvation argument in fact achieved. After all, when a transgression or offence could be redeemed by confession, indulgence and prayer, then the concept of an inner road to salvation was set at risk. Practice shows that the concept of salvation did not have the same impact for all *Utrechters*. The corrupt bookkeepers and administrators tell a revealing story. The salvation argument had given the well-to-do the space to manoeuvre themselves away from the rest of the community. In the end, the argument contributed largely to the loosening-up of the interweaving between religion and culture, and in the end of society. The well-to-do were so convinced of the legitimacy of their position, that they did not find it necessary to justify themselves anymore or to go on bearing responsibility for the community. This feeling was so widespread that failing wardens or stewards were not called to account.

Thus the dualism that characterizes the Church ever since her appearance on the public stage penetrated society on an ever lower level. On the one hand the Church focussed on ethics, morality and repentance, on the other hand the penitential system allowed people to ignore these qualities. The sixteenth century saw an unprecedented increase of wealth that was accompanied by both growing materialism and an ever louder call for repentance. In daily practice the well-to-do took a pragmatic stance and manifested themselves ever more proudly. This process was facilitated by the argument of salvation. Around 1300 some of the barriers that had thus far prevented people from occupying an exclusive position within the church had been removed. Veiled in a religious code the argument of salvation was crucial. And so it could happen that the argument of salvation is today mainly seen in a religious perspective, while in reality it may have served a materialistic goal.

These critical comments on the memorial cult and the salvation practice do not deny the inspiration and encouragement many people found in religion. Besides exteriorization there was interiorization. The reflection on death did indeed incite many to live well in the here and now. At a juncture in which status began to matter more, this 'here and now' grew in complexity. In the Late Middle Ages prestige was an important notion. It lay at the root of the grave and the memorial cult and of the ensuing fraternity system. Compared to the death cult of princes the veneration of the dead was rather sober in Utrecht. The well-to-do wanted to be remembered within limits. A token, however simple, of their existence was enough. In this they differed from princes who tried to determine their dynasty's course by the size and symbolism of their monuments. Or from closed communities like chapters, monasteries and fraternities that used the memorial cult to safeguard their cohesion, identity and tradition.

The memorial cult does not really betray a fear of death or spiritual anguish; it rather gives insight into a growing awareness of status. The trend to have a personal monument in the church was continued after the Reformation, on an even more intense level. Both old families and upstarts had their cushions on their seats, embroidered with their coats of arms. They were buried in the church under impressive slabs. The memorial tablets were replaced by the much cheaper wooden mourning plaques; their number rose considerably. Leading families kept or acquired their own funeral chapels and/or erected impressive memorial monuments. In 1795, 583 mourning plaques hung in the *Buurkerk*. As soon as the French invaded the city in 1795, people started to destroy these much-hated symbols of the Regency. As a consequence all personal symbols were removed from the churches, never to enter them again. A 500-year-old custom had come to an end. Even so, the image of the church as the domain of the undivided community was not to be restored yet: Lord's benches, the selling of personal seats, and the standing poor in the rear of the church continued to display the status differences well into the twentieth century.

The paradox of the salvation argument

To appreciate these processes, more local research into the practical effects of these kinds of donations is required as well as more restraint towards the alleged benefits of these donations in the hereafter. That is outside the scope of our observations. This much is clear: the Church used means of grace inappropriately. Her teachings and behaviour contradict evangelical values. This was already diagnosed at the time. Herein lies the secret behind the late-medieval use of the salvation argument: it was both politically and religiously correct to use the phrase, but not necessarily sincere.

In the history of mentalities the paradoxical connotation of the concept of salvation in the Middle Ages is insufficiently recognised. It did not only lead to spirituality and detachment, but also to materialism and an urge for individual manifestation. As such the argument of salvation paved the way for modern society. It seems that the more prosperous people become, the sooner they forget the spiritual dimensions of life. Against this background the religious crisis of the sixteenth century takes on a different meaning. This is the subject of my next book.

Synthesis: a paradigm change

In Utrecht, social distinctions became more accentuated between 1300 and 1600. Churches had become the stage for the urban elite and well-to-do. Their Masses, ceremonies and objects dominated these holy places. As such achievements were not available to everyone, this display of power became the seed-bed for the Reformation in Utrecht. In the course of time, the Church had become vulnerable.

The Church itself had largely contributed to this development by sanctioning a broad interpretation of the term 'salvation'. There was, however, a world of difference between the judicial and the evangelical meaning of the term. The Utrecht research gives ample reason why these two levels should be distinguished. Although only a small

minority of the well-to-do *Utrechters* used the salvation argument for their investments in institutionalized charity and only the well-to-do cared for a form of institutionalized commemoration, yet the upper classes did prefer prominent places in the church and used the salvation argument to achieve them. At the same time many cherished the natural feeling of salvation in the sense of a self-understood care for whoever was in need. Many were active in their manifold communities. Therefore terms like 'salvation market', 'spiritual economy', 'calculated piety' and 'insurance for the hereafter' should be used more carefully: most social support and behaviour, especially among peers, sprang from care and involvement. In historiography the calculated interpretation prevails, the social level is underexposed. The usual perspective on late-medieval mentality devalues both the rationality and religiosity of those days: they need to be considered on their own merits. As the term 'salvation' appears to have more layers than is usually recognised, a paradigm change both for the interpretation of the term 'salvation' and for the characterization of medieval mentality is proposed here.

The traditional interpretation is based on the teachings of the Catholic Church and on the humanists' and Protestants' opinions on late-medieval Catholicism. But these premises do not take daily life into account. The theological, judicial and political discourses cannot be equated with the way people used or experienced religion. The impact of religion has to be investigated in a well-defined space and time where the various dealings of concrete people are systematically studied. Then clear distinctions can be made between genuine religious experiences and the use people made of doctrine.

Utrecht is a good starting point in this sense that the bishopric lacked a strong central government up to 1528. Daily religiosity could therefore develop rather autonomously. Here as everywhere else the Church rested on a solid base. Incidents were rare. However, since *Utrechters* did not show much inclination towards the Reformation, their sixteenth-century history is often neglected. Only the last decades have shown a growing interest in the actual position of the Catholic Church in local communities. The necessity of revision is commonly acknowledged. Yet this approach touches a sensitive spot, especially in the Netherlands, where the national identity is closely related to the Protestant Republic.

A broader reconstruction of social relationships in the Late Middle Ages offers the advantage – as is shown here for Utrecht – of a more consistent and above all a more humane and rational perspective on late-medieval mentality. Individualism and other Renaissance characteristics could be discerned from 1250 onwards. The organisation of neighbourhood, Church and city administration was founded on a natural understanding of God, common sense and involvement with the community. As such, late-medieval mentality, including religiosity, can be characterised as down to earth, committed and proud.