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Practicing Religion during a Pandemic: On Religious Routines, Embodiment, and Performativity

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Abstract: This article aims to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the religious lifestyles of practicing female Roman Catholics in Belgium. I explore how these Catholic believers manage to stay in touch with their faith and faith community in times of crisis when physical and real-life contact is very limited. In this article, I draw on in-depth interviews conducted via Zoom, carried out in the framework of my current ethnographic research project. The empirical results show how Catholic women grappled with the multiple lockdowns during the last year and a half, and how the lockdowns led to severe changes in their religious practices and routines. Many believers had to find alternative possibilities and modalities in order to preserve continuity with their religious pre-COVID-19 lives. Throughout the article, I intend to map their practices and strategies. I will argue that inquiring how religion and religious practices are performed during a pandemic can contribute to the flourishing and timely scholarship on digital and online religion and it also provides us with further insights in the performativity, materiality, and embodiment of religion.

Keywords: Roman Catholicism; Roman Catholic women; COVID-19; Belgium; religious practices; lived religion; materiality of religion; religion and embodiment; digital religion

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1. Introduction

This article aims to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic occurring in 2020 and 2021 has affected the religious lifestyles and practices of Roman Catholic[1] women in Belgium. Despite the tremendous consequences of this global health crisis, the pandemic has also opened up opportunities to investigate how religion is enacted in times of physical distancing and stringent confinements (Baker et al. 2020). Digital religion and online religion have been widely examined in recent years; see for example the work of Campbell (2012), Campbell and Evolvi (2020), Evolvi (2021), Helland (2016), and Hutchings (2017) for a more extensive overview. This last year and a half has led scholars to further explore religion and religious practices in pandemic times; see for instance Campbell (2020b, 2020c), Capponi and Araújo (2020), Dein et al. (2020), Przywara et al. (2021), Sabaté Gauxachs et al. (2021), and Vekemans (2021). As have many other religious groups and communities, the Catholic Church in Belgium had to make a swift and radical shift towards the online sphere in the spring of 2020 due to the federal measures in order to combat COVID-19. All of this then raises the following questions: how do Catholic believers perceive the impact of COVID-19 on their religious practices and routines? How do they enact religion if they are not able, for instance, to attend Sunday Mass, to join their prayer group, or to go on a pilgrimage? Do they experience difficulties and obstacles to stay connected to their local Catholic community? These are some questions I want to address in this article, which is based on empirical research conducted in the framework of a research project on Catholic women in Belgium.

Secondly, through the case study that I will elucidate in this article, I seek to contribute to the body of scholarship on the material and embodied features of religion. This body of scholarship has challenged the assumption that religion is a mere cerebral phenomenon

that manifests itself on a cognitive level, exemplified by beliefs or attitudes. Rather, taking into account materiality and embodiment provides us with a more holistic view on what a religious lifestyle entails (McGuire 2016; Meyer et al. 2010). I will argue in this article that examining how this global health crisis affects the religious lifestyles of my interlocutors can offer more insight into the materiality, performativity, and embodiment of religion.

In what follows, I firstly elaborate on the background, the methodology used in this article, and the research project in which these empirical data are collected. Then I will move on to the empirical section, which will pay attention to the narratives of the Catholic women I have interviewed. This will be followed by a discussion. Finally, I sketch some concluding remarks and formulate suggestions for further research.

2. Background and Methodology

This study takes place in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking community and region of Belgium. Flanders/Belgium is a Western European country which has increasingly become secularized in recent decades on societal, individual, and organizational levels (Billiet 2017; Dobbelaere 2002). Not unlike other countries in the West, Belgium can nowadays be described as a post-Christian society, in which Catholicism transformed into a sociocultural Christianity (Dobbelaere 2010). Yet, despite the declining numbers of self-identified (practicing) Catholics, we can nevertheless note the presence of young people in the Belgian Catholic Church who are involved in Church institutions and the organization of Church activities. Additionally, as scholars on women and/in religion have pointed out more broadly (Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012), in the Belgian Catholic Church, we also notice the numerical predominance of women, in spite of their lack of ordained authority and positions of power.

The data analyzed in this article derive from my current ethnographic research project that runs from 2017 until 2023. This research aims to study Catholic women, how they navigate between religious traditions and teachings on the one hand, and secular society on the other, with particular attention to the topics gender, intimate relationships, and sexuality. This article will specifically focus on the material that pertains to performing religion during the pandemic. While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on religious practices and routines is not one of the main topics I prioritize in my research project, it often came across in the interviews I conducted since the outbreak of COVID-19. These interviews were conducted via Zoom, which inevitably comes with disadvantages, such as the lack of body language. Nonetheless, it equipped qualitative scholars to at least be able to conduct research in these times (Howlett 2021). For conducting this research project, I received approval of the Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at [Ghent University, Belgium]. The main method I utilize are in-depth life story interviews, as it guarantees the full consent of the research participants (Davidsson Bremborg 2012). Between 2019 and 2021, I carried out 45 interviews with 33 self-identified Catholic women, all involved in the Belgian Catholic Church. In order to receive a comprehensive overview of the lifeworld of my interlocutors, I also carried out observations at events on love and sexuality organized by the Belgian Catholic Church, for instance courses and discussion evenings. Furthermore, I had several conversations with people working in family ministries. I have interviewed some women twice as part of the life story approach I utilize in my research project. The research respondents were between 22 and 44 years old at the time of the interview. All interviews were recorded, literally transcribed, and coded via software program NVivo.

For this article, I only selected the excerpts on religiosity during this COVID-19 crisis, as well as fragments on the embodiment and materiality of religion. Inspired by a grounded theory approach (Engler 2012), I brought together these excerpts, and discerned patterns that emerged from the data. These patterns yielded insight into how religion is experienced in this global crisis, and how this strongly relates to the embodied and material features of religion. Throughout my research, and thus in this analysis, I deploy a lived religion perspective (Ammerman 2016; McGuire 2008; Orsi 2003). While taking

into account religious authority, and official Church doctrines, a lived religion perspective draws attention to the everyday activities and practices in which religion takes shape. It highlights the ways in which individual believers make sense of religious norms, and accommodate them into their lives. Following this lived religion perspective, I approach religion in this article as an embodied quotidian practice (Woodhead 2011) and will thus focus on how Catholic women practice and express their faith in the pandemic.

3. A Catholic Faith Community Going Online

In the following section, I explore how my Catholic interlocutors have endured the COVID-19 crisis, in particular with respect to their faith and religious practices. In general, they related that faith was a powerful support that helped them to find peace and the ability to cope with this uncertain situation. This seems in line with recent studies on religiosity in pandemic times that underlined how religion provides consolation and comfort in uncertain times (Bentzen 2020; Molteni et al. 2020). Nevertheless, all my interlocutors indicated during the interviews that COVID-19 strongly affected (in a negative sense) their religious lifestyles and practices. With churches and places of worship being closed, and religious activities such as pilgrimages and worship services cancelled, the Catholic women in my study had few options in the last year to profess their faith.

In this section, I examine how they experienced all this and how they searched for alternatives. I structure this section in three parts: firstly, how the religious routines of these Catholics are disturbed through the pandemic; secondly, whether remote religion can count as a substitute (or not) for my interlocutors; and lastly, how religion as an aspect of community building is crucial for these women.

3.1. 'It's Like Top-Level Sport': Disruptions of Religious Routines

As religious practices can be considered as habitual and embodied (Bender 2012; Mahmood 2005), they are part and parcel of a religious subject formation, and thus crucial in a religious lifestyle. Many of my interlocutors indicated in interviews carried out before the pandemic that their religious lifestyle was often structured along the day and week. This often entails a fixed and regular routine, for instance attending Mass or monthly participation in a prayer group. Through these routines, religion was firmly embedded in the daily lives of my interlocutors. Many of them indicated during the interviews conducted during the COVID-19 crisis that as these routines fell away, it proved to be difficult to maintain religious practices. For instance, Jasmien[2] had a well-organized and packed religious life before the pandemic in which she went to church several times during the week, often in the morning before going to work to kick-start her day. Further, she prayed and read the Bible each day, and went on religious holidays in the summer. During our conversation, she compared this (religious) lifestyle to top-level sport, hinting to practices you should perform each day in order to stay in touch with your faith. During COVID-19 times, the only thing left possible for Jasmien was to pray and read religious literature such as the Bible, mostly on her own.

Just as top-level sport requires bodily efforts, religious practices often involve bodily engagements and practices as well. Marjorie told me that she attaches great importance to the physical aspects in the Church: 'if you look at the liturgy for example, that is not something cerebral, not something you only experience with your mind, but with your body as well. It is about smelling, tasting, seeing, and hearing.'[3] This emphasis on the senses fits well with the turn to the body and materiality within the anthropology of religion. Moreover, the Catholic tradition has been characterized with a corporeal religiosity and is known for its focus on body techniques, objects, and rituals (Meyer 2017).

In an attempt to uphold religious practices, some of my respondents found other modalities to sustain them and to challenge the disturbance of their routines. An example of this is visiting a chapel in their local neighborhood to meditate there and to light some candles. Creating rituals at home was another option for some of the women. As a way to look for stillness and meditation amidst these turbulent times, some started reading the

Bible more often, or texts of and about Catholic saints. Marthe begun to work as a volunteer in care homes for the elderly, who were heavily hit during the first COVID-19 wave and lockdown in the spring of 2020. Her motivation to do volunteer work during this crisis was clearly informed by religious aspirations and Catholic moral values such as solidarity and charity. According to her, this was an appropriate virtuous way to experience her faith.

While the majority of the women I spoke with indicated that their religious routines and practices were heavily challenged by the pandemic, some women claimed to have more time now to dedicate to their faith. One woman stated that since she no longer had to commute between her home and work, as she was obliged to work from home, she had more time and energy available to spend on religious practices, such as praying. According to her, this was a very positive result of the pandemic. A similar story was shared by Dorien. Dorien is an active member of a prayer group who meet every two weeks in normal times. Since the COVID-19 crisis, they organize their prayer moments through Skype. But after a while, 'as there were so little other things to do during this crisis', they started gathering online every week. While it was possible for them to meet more frequently, it was not the same authentic experience as their physical gatherings: 'normally', Dorien said, 'we start our gathering by singing together, but that is really weird to do by yourself in front of the camera'.

3.2. Implementing the Church at Home: Remote Religion as a Substitute?

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, each Sunday, a religious service is already being livestreamed on the Flemish public broadcasting channel—sometimes it is an Islamic or Protestant service, but mostly it concerns a Catholic service. In addition, during the COVID-19 crisis, some local parishes started a livestream of their services as well. On the official website of the Catholic Church in Flanders/Belgium, you can browse the offer of remote Church services (radio, television, and/or online). Many of my interlocutors watch these livestreamed church services, either on television or online. In addition, some of them looked on websites such as YouTube for religious clips, such as sermons.

As is the case for many others in this pandemic, some of my interlocutors stated that they suffered from an overload of screen time, or a so-called 'Zoom fatigue' or 'online fatigue'. Many of them have a job in which they are forced to sit behind their laptop all day long. Therefore, there was little energy left in the evenings or weekends to join online religious activities such as an online prayer group, or to watch the recording of a church service. Moreover, many interlocutors felt that it was tiresome to attend a church service digitally. Julie, for example, said that she was easily distracted and started scrolling on her smartphone instead of attentively watching the service:

> I noticed that I really need something to go to [physically] and then only focus on that specific thing. I do my best to have a sort of continuity, but I notice that the experience is not the same, not at all.

Interestingly, I heard several times during the interviews how women became aware of how important their faith was precisely because of the lockdowns. As it was suddenly no longer possible to attend services, they came to realize how much they yearn for it. For instance Kim said:

> Before the pandemic, I often went to Mass but not every week. To be honest, I mainly went because I had to be there as I am involved in the local parish and the organization of some activities. And if I was not obliged to be there, I didn't mind so much that I didn't attend Mass. But from the moment everything was cancelled, I strongly felt that I missed going to church. And that has increased my religious beliefs. I only realized how important it [faith] was in my life, until it was gone.

This has led Kim to think that once this crisis is over, she will attend church services more regularly, and will be grateful that she is able to attend in person as she knows that

such freedoms can suddenly be taken—something she never would have considered before the outbreak of COVID-19.

Moreover, some women stated during the interviews that they felt that it was a bit awkward to watch a livestreamed church service, as it takes place totally out of its context: 'to recite the Lord's Prayer before my television in my living room . . . I don't know . . . ', said Hanne. As the liturgical rituals and practices take shape in a particular and sacred setting, it feels uncomfortable for these women to perform these in a non-sacred space. A specific example of such a liturgical ritual that was not possible as the churches were closed is receiving the Eucharist in the Sunday Mass. Nevertheless, as Jasmien says:

> God knows that we're in this situation, and I'm sure that He will give me the same as He would do in a real [Eucharistic] celebration. I asked Him during my prayers: 'God, you know that I'm watching a livestream of a church service, but I trust that you know that I'm in this situation, and that there is no alternative.'

For others, it was important to create rituals at home, especially during important periods in the liturgical year. Maureen, for instance, created an Advent wreath with candles, so she could light a candle once a week to prepare herself for Christmas. This was at the same time a moment of meditation and praying. A similar practice was shared by another woman, who crafted an Advent calendar consisting of Bible texts, one to read each day. In times when the digital sphere has become the main locus for religious practices, some women turned to the prayer corner they furnished at home. This was mostly done before the pandemic. Sometimes it was a small prayer corner in the living room, with icons, pictures, and candles, but I also encountered a larger prayer niche in a bedroom, with a prayer kneeler and cushions.

3.3. Creating Church Together: Missing the Community

For many of the women I talked with, religion was profoundly interwoven with human relations such as the intimate relationship with their life partner and friendships. Many of their friends and acquaintances were Catholic as well, and they were often involved together in Catholic organizations and activities. It was often said by my respondents that religion played a major part in their friendship, exemplified by going on a religiously inspired holiday together (for instance on a pilgrimage or visiting Taizé[4]). The pandemic thus not only affected their religious practices and routines, it also created a distance from their friends and peers. Some women opted for other online alternatives in addition to these livestreams and rituals at home, particularly in order to transcend the individual aspects of such practices. Two of my interlocutors, for instance, joined a digital prayer group via WhatsApp during Advent and/or Lent in which they read Bible texts and prayed with friends each evening. A woman who was part of a Catholic group in which they monthly gathered to perform Lectio Divina together now went online with the other group members to do this. Another interlocutor posted religiously inspired images and texts on her Facebook and Instagram profile to reach out to other (Catholic) believers.

The Catholic Church in Flanders/Belgium also provided means to help believers nurture their faith, for instance daily e-mails with guidance for how to pray like Catholic saints, such as Ignatius of Loyola or Teresa of Ávila. These initiatives were truly appreciated by many of my interlocutors, but in spite of the good intentions, they remained a solitary activity. Especially when my interlocutors were not living together with other Catholics, for instance when they lived alone or their partner was not a Catholic, it was challenging for them to stay in touch with their faith. Hanne lives together with her boyfriend who is non-religious, of which she said the following:

> I see among my friends that couples or families who are Catholic, manage to pray together, watch livestreams of Mass together, or have a sort of Eucharist celebration at their homes. But for me it's sometimes difficult to do those kind of things, as my partner is not religious.

As stated above, many of my interlocutors indicated that (intimate) bonds with others were crucial for fostering religiosity. Scholar of lived religion, Orsi (2003, p. 172) stated how 'religion is always [. . .] religion-in-relationships between people [. . .]', thereby pointing to the importance of kin, family, and friends in order to practice faith. This was indeed often conveyed by my interlocutors. One woman who shared a house with other Catholics indicated that it helped her during the lockdowns to pray together with her housemates, or to read religious books together. Reading religious books with others was something that was done by other women in my study as well, for instance Linde who read religious literature together with her husband.

However, feeling isolated from other believers was something that often came across during the conservations I had with these women. In particular with respect to the major Catholic holidays, such as Christmas and Easter Sunday, these were felt as emotionally draining for some women as they were unable to celebrate these important days with others in the church. According to Marjorie, for example, being religious and attending church services entails singing together, sitting together in the church, and praying together. She compared processing her faith on her own (and her family) as a 'desert experience'. For Marjorie, being a Christian is being part of a community, and thus collectively celebrating the Eucharist: 'as a young Catholic family, you already have the feeling that you're alone, that no one else in society is still Catholic. And if you then end up doing everything on your own . . . '. By stating this, Marjorie pointed to the decreasing number of practicing Catholics in Flemish society (Billiet 2017). Many women expressed that it often felt lonely to be (practicing) Catholic in a society that has become more and more secular. This is all the more true for young people who are voluntarily engaged in the Church. Therefore, they found it crucial to share their faith with others in order to deepen it.

4. Discussion

Despite all these (online and remote) alternatives to physical gatherings, all my interlocutors stated that 'it is not the same'. They genuinely do appreciate the efforts the Belgian Catholic Church and local parishes have made to get through these last couple of months, but they all long for 'normal times'. Not like other religious groups and communities who are already well trained and experienced in practicing religion online, such as for instance migrant or diasporic faith communities—see, among others, Leurs et al. (2012) and Vekemans (2019)—or the faithful who already made use of the internet before the outbreak of the pandemic—see for example Evolvi (2018) and Campbell (2020a)—the Belgian Catholic Church and its believers had very limited experience with practicing religion in the online sphere. Therefore, this sudden shift to the online world was not planned. From this specific case study, we can distillate new findings on digital religion and this also serves as a compelling example to make an argument for the importance of bodily and collective aspects of religion in order to constitute religiosity and religious subjectivities. The major insights emerging from the research findings elucidated in this article will be further discussed in this section.

The impact of the physical and social distancing measures, and the closure of churches and other places of worship, have disrupted the religious habits and practices of my interlocutors. Here, we underline how bodies play an important part in fostering these religious routines. As Meyer (2017, p. 313) posits, 'paying attention to Catholic religiosity is helpful to further flesh out an approach to religion that acknowledges the role of the body, objects, and human practice in generating a sense of divine presence.' I argue that the case study that stood central in this article, namely how religion is enacted and performed in (mandatory) digital times, may add novel knowledge to how bodies and material practices are crucial in shaping religiosity. In the times of COVID-19, it is no longer possible to invoke bodily engagements such as attending church services, going on a pilgrimage, experiencing sensory stimulations such as smelling incense, listening to Church hymns, or tasting the wafer. It should not come as a surprise then that being denied all these sensory and bodily impulses, according to my interlocutors, results in

a 'desert experience'. Indeed, religiosity is not only performed and expressed through bodies and rituals; in turn, these bodily practices and rituals are constitutive elements in constructing a religious identity and trajectory (Mahmood 2005; McGuire 2008, 2016). Thus, for my interlocutors, engaging the body and senses is a pivotal endeavor in order to fully 'do religion' (Avishai 2008). Accordingly, social and physical distancing create barriers to maintaining religious embodied practices. By drawing attention to the importance of the body, emotions, and senses, we can challenge the cognitive framework in which religion is often placed (Meyer 2017). Capponi and Araújo (2020) aptly speak about the 'crisis of the body' in their study on the impact of the COVID-19 measures on Afro-Brazilian religions. Although this research takes place within another context and religious community, this 'crisis of the body' utterly applies to this Catholic faith community in Belgium as well. The research findings above point clearly to the importance of engaging the body, both in and for religious practices. Due to the strict limitations and physical distancing during the pandemic, the religious body was indeed in crisis. Therefore, remote religion was not considered to be a fully adequate or sustainable substitute. As Mahmood (2005, p. 163) notes:

> [. . .] one might say that the pious subject does not precede the performance of normative virtues but is enacted through the performance. Virtuous actions may well be understood as performatives; they enact that which they name: a virtuous self.

Bringing together Mahmood's work on piety, performativity, and embodiment, and this 'crisis of the body' (Capponi and Araújo 2020), we might argue that the lack of modalities to fully engage the body in religious practices and the disrupted religious routines during the last year and a half indeed obstruct the formation of a religious self.

Another major topic appearing from these research findings is the importance of the faith community surrounding my research participants. All my interlocutors indicated during the interviews—both the interviews carried out before and during this pandemic—that the Catholic community in which they are located is essential to sustaining their faith. Either the local parish or the prayer group wherein they were involved was considered to be a vast support. While the extensive debate pertaining to believing and/or belonging (Davie 1990, 1994; Day 2009, 2011) falls out of scope of this article, we can nevertheless build further on the insights emerging from this realm of research. Through the research findings elaborated in the empirical section above, we can point to the significance of a collective feeling within religious traditions, and thus consider religion as a constitutive aspect of community building. To cope with the lack of connectedness with other Catholic believers, the interlocutors with a partner who was Catholic as well attempted to accommodate the Church into their homes, thereby creating a sort of 'domestic church' (Dillen 2009). This also reveals the entanglement between religious practices and family, friends, and kin. We may therefore suggest to see 'the church as family' (Sharma 2012). Particularly, in a secular society where religious affiliation is no longer deemed to be the default option (Taylor 2007), performing religious routines and practices together with other Catholics feels necessary in order to maintain their faith. Many of my interlocutors told me that they often encountered negative remarks by non-religious people, who implied that religion is 'conservative', 'old-fashioned' and 'out of date'—particularly in terms of gender and sexuality. This line of thinking is often conveyed in secular-liberal Western European countries (Knibbe and Bartelink 2019; Scott 2018). Because of this, at times, hostile attitude vis-à-vis religion, combined with the decreasing numbers of (practicing) Catholics, the Catholic faith community was therefore, according to my respondents, vital in order to conserve religiosity.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

In this article, I foregrounded the lived experiences of Catholic women amidst the current global health crisis. By demonstrating how these Catholic women navigate the current pandemic in terms of religiosity, we may come to a better understanding of religious practices.

The goal of this article was twofold. Firstly, I wanted to examine how the COVID-19 crisis has affected the religious routines and practices of Catholics in Belgium. Approximately a year and a half after the outbreak of the pandemic, scholarship on how religion is enacted and practiced during this COVID-19 crisis is burgeoning. By focusing on this specific example, I aimed to contribute to this novel road of inquiry. It is clear that the pandemic drastically altered the religious practices of my interlocutors. The Belgian Catholic Church, and thus my interlocutors, had to make an unexpected shift to the online world. As neither were prepared for that, this transition did not always occur smoothly. In this article, I have mapped how these women accommodated religious practices online. In doing so, I aimed to contribute to the nascent scholarship on religion during pandemic times, which investigates the sudden and unforeseen switch to the online spheres.

Secondly, I have argued how investigating religion in a pandemic does not only contribute to the study of digital and online religion but it also provides us with further insights into the performativity, materiality, and embodiment of religion. To date, the study of digital religion, and in particular the emerging scholarship on digital religion in the pandemic, does not always take into account the importance of the bodily features of religion. In this article, I have argued how we need to take seriously the role of the body in religious routines and practices as a necessity in order to shape a pious self. Keeping in mind the shortcomings of this limited case study, i.e., focusing on one particular age group, faith community, and geographical locus, we may not be able to generate grand conclusions. Nonetheless, I believe this case serves as a compelling example to reveal the importance of scrutinizing religion by highlighting the bodily practices of believers, and how these are (scarcely) substituted in times of physical and social distancing. This article should thus be regarded as a contribution to, among other things, the existing scholarship particularly focusing on Catholicism and digital religion; see for instance Giorgi (2019), Evolvi (2018) and Kołodziejska (2018), and scholarship on digital religion and materiality more broadly; as well as Campbell and Connelly (2020). This scholarship differs from my analysis here, but it can nevertheless help to come to a better understanding of (online) religious practices. Moreover, this analysis raises further questions on the materiality and spatial formations of religion. Not only is the material body an essential tool in crafting a religious self, this article also explicated how spatiality plays a role within religious practice. This was exemplified by the importance that is ascribed to, for instance, the Sunday Mass in a church, as it engages the senses but also functions as a space where one can solely focus on religion without other distractions. This article should thus be regarded as a contribution to the growing body of literature on digital religion (particularly in this COVID-19 pandemic), but also to the scholarship on embodiment, materiality, and spatiality within religion.

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Informed Consent Statement: This research was explained in detail to all the research participants, and an (written or oral) informed consent was obtained from all the people involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data used in this article were collected and analyzed in the framework of an ethnographic research project. Therefore, it will not be shared because of ethical and privacy reasons.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 For reasons of readability, I use Catholicism/Catholic instead of Roman Catholicism/Roman Catholic throughout this article.

2 All names are replaced by pseudonyms in order to ensure anonymity.

3 The interviews were carried out in Dutch. Excerpts from the interviews are translated into English by the author.

4 Taizé is a Christian community in France, which brings together both Catholic and Protestant friars. It is a popular place of worship among my interlocutors. Most of the pilgrims visit during the summer, and stay for approximately a week.

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