

PHD RESEARCH

HENK BYLS

Remaining Catholic in France. A History of the Religious Initiatives accompanying the Flemish Migrants to Northern France - [Original Title :

Rester catholique en France. Une histoire de l'encadrement religieux destiné aux migrants belgo-flamands du Lillois, de Paris et des campagnes françaises (1850-1960)]

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This dissertation examines a particular aspect of the Belgian/Flemish migration in France: the Belgian Catholic religious initiatives which, between 1850 and 1960, accompanied the migrants to their various destinations. In the eyes of most of these organizations, migration was a dangerous phenomenon: the migrant was divorced from and had left behind his own (language) community and the environment it provided for experiencing traditions, religion and culture. In France, supportive Belgian initiatives sought to protect the migrants against these presumed risks.

In *Rester catholique*, the interaction between these initiatives and the Belgian migrants in three specific regions is analysed: the industrial district of Lille, the city of Paris, and the agricultural areas north of the Seine. In the Lille region for example, there was a strong presence of Belgian religious institutes in Roubaix and the Wazemmes quarter in Lille. However, during the period of 1860-1880 in particular, their activities far exceeded the simple objective of gathering Belgian migrants. They acted more as an ecclesiastical cross-border zone, where the distinction between Catholic and non-Catholic was far more important than nationality. Until 1901, the Belgians constituted by far the largest migrant group in the city of Paris, where the diocese of Ghent had established an initiative on their behalf. However, the organization never truly

mastered the Parisian cosmopolitan reality. This stands in contrast to the results of the ecclesiastical initiatives after the First World War towards the permanent Belgian migrants in French agricultural areas, where such initiatives were successful in consolidating transnational networks of predominantly Flemish farmers.