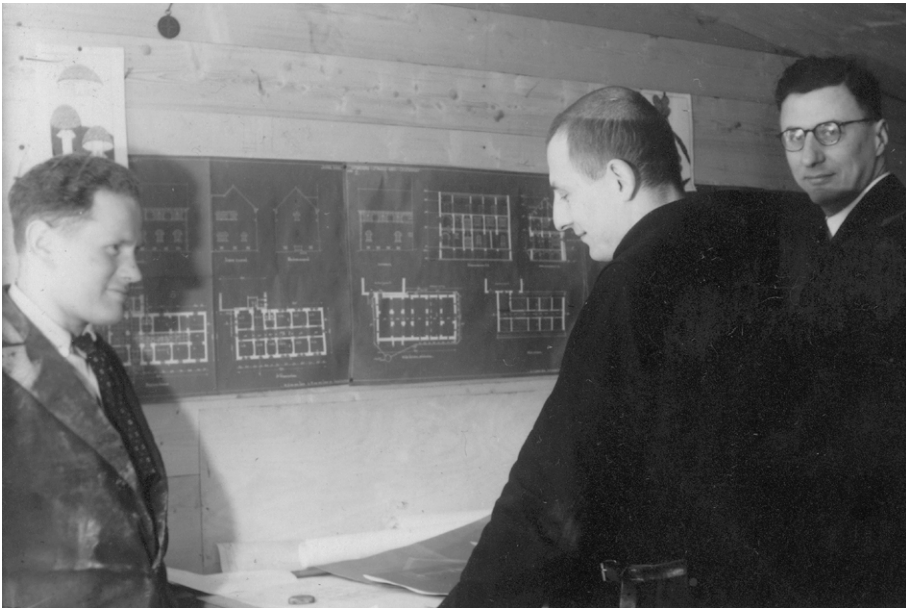


The Influence of Solesmes on the Theory of Dom Hans van der Laan OSB on Liturgy and Architecture

Michel Remery

1. Introduction: the theory of Dom Hans van der Laan OSB

The Dutch Benedictine monk and architect Dom Hans van der Laan OSB (1904-1991) holds an extraordinary position among theoreticians in the fields of both liturgy and architecture even today.¹ His theory connects these two subjects in an ingenious manner. He has developed this theory in more detail than many other scholars in the field. Not only did he involve the sensory and intellectually 'knowable' world in his thinking, but also its origin and final goal.



1. Oosterhout, St. Paulusabdij, work in progress for the guest house (1939).
Van der Laan (middle) discusses the design with Fried de Bonth (left) and Nico van der Laan (right). [AV/dL]

¹ Part of this article is based on the book: M. REMERY: *Mystery and matter. On the relationship between liturgy and architecture in the thought of Dom Hans van der Laan OSB (1904-1991)* (Leiden 2010).

There are very few scholarly studies on Van der Laan and his theory. Most of the publications concern newspaper articles. Of these only a limited number speak of his theory in general, as most attention has been given to his thinking concerning architecture, which has aroused the interest of an international audience.² This article intends to contribute to the study of the background of this architectural theory in so far as it concerns sources from his monastic life. That will enhance the relevance of the thought of Van der Laan in the field of architecture, as it is based on the way in which humanity interacts with the created world. It shall be seen that though Van der Laan was reluctant to indicate his sources – he liked to repeat that his theory was mainly based on the application of logic and reason, *bon sens* – nevertheless traces of some important sources can be observed in his work.³ These can be roughly distinguished into architectural and theological-philosophical sources.

The first go back mainly to Vitruvius as far as the theory of architecture is concerned. In his thinking, Van der Laan further included the experience gained from his contact with architects and from the making of his own designs. These influences helped him to formulate his architectural theory as ultimately laid down in two books, *Le nombre plastique* (*The plastic number* 1960) and *De architectonische ruimte* (*Architectonical space* 1977).⁴ The theoretical underpinning of his thought is found mainly in the texts which he read and heard during his formation in the monastery.

² Cf. e.g. R. PADOVAN: *Dom Hans van der Laan: modern primitive* (Amsterdam 1994); A. FERLENGA & P. VERDE: *Dom Hans van der Laan. Le opere, gli scritti* (Milano 2000); S. DE JONGE: *Kerkarchitectuur na 2000. Het ontwikkelen van grensverleggende typologieën tussen literatuur, architectuur en duurzame ontwikkeling* (Eindhoven 2002) 45-76; F. DAL CO: 'L'essenzialità architettonica di Hans van der Laan', in V. SANSON: *Lo spazio sacro. Architettura e liturgia* (Padova 2002) 117-124.

³ *Archief Van der Laan OSB*: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Dom P. Nau* (d.d. 19450907). The *Archief Hans van der Laan OSB* (= *AvdL* henceforward in the footnotes) is conserved in St. Benedictusabdij in Vaals in the south of the Netherlands. As the numbering of the archive was not definitive at the time of writing, data retrieved from it have been indicated by title, place and date. For the sake of completeness this bibliography also gives the numbering as known in 2010.

⁴ H. VAN DER LAAN: *Le nombre plastique. Quinze leçons sur l'ordonnance architectonique* (Leiden 1960 = tr. dom X. BOTTE); Nederlandse vert.: *Het plastische getal. XV lessen over de grondslagen van de architectonische ordonnantie* (Leiden 1967); trad. Italiano: *Il numero plastico. Quindici lezioni sull'ordine architettonico* (Milano 2002 = tr. L. FILIPETTO). IDEM: *De architectonische ruimte. Vijftien lessen over de dispositie van het menselijk verblijf* (Leiden 1977, 1983², 1992³, 1997⁴); English trans.: *Architectonic space. Fifteen lessons on the disposition of the human habitat* (Leiden 1983 = tr. R. PADOVAN); trad. Français: *L'espace architectonique. Quinze leçons sur la disposition de la demeure humaine* (Leiden 1989 = tr. X. BOTTE); Deutsche Üb.: *Der architektonische Raum. Fünfzehn Lektionen über die Disposition der menschlichen Behausung* (Leiden 1992 = tr. U. HAHN et al); trad. Italiano: *Lo spazio architettonico* (Milano 2002 = tr. M.V.M. MILANO [dal tedesco]); trad. Español: *El espacio arquitectónico* (Madrid 2010 = tr. W. BEEKHOF).

That leads to the second important range of sources which influenced Van der Laan and which did so even in a more fundamental and foundational way than the architectural sources, as here it concerns his Catholic faith and world view, which of course were very close to the heart of this Benedictine monk. These sources involve theological and philosophical thinkers, whose ideas were integrated by Van der Laan into what he called the background of his architectural theory and which he expressed in his last book, *Het vormenspel der liturgie* (*Form-play of liturgy* 1985).⁵

As the architectural theory of Van der Laan has been the subject of other studies, it should be sufficient to mention briefly the influence of architects and architectural sources in the first part of this article. This may serve as a prelude to the second, more extensive part, which intends to demonstrate that these sources were channelled to Van der Laan through the tradition of his religious Congregation of Solesmes, which ultimately goes back on the teachings of St. Benedict.

2. Van der Laan and the influence of architecture

The first thing one notices when studying the background of the architectural theory of Van der Laan is that he took a remarkably independent position with regard to the sources that could have possibly influenced him. He claimed to have found most of the material with which he constructed his theory by himself. As a young man he used to stroll through the world of nature and observe carefully everything around him. This can be recognised in his theory, when Van der Laan explained the origin of architecture and indeed of all human 'making' from humanity's initial encounter with nature.

After his observation of nature as a young man, Van der Laan became acquainted with architecture as he started to give a hand in the architectural studio of his father, Leo van der Laan, and his brother Jan. Although he would later diverge from their architectural ideas, this experience proved very useful when he started his architectural studies at Delft University in 1923, as it helped him to formulate his criticism against the education there, which was far removed from the daily practice in an architecture studio. He lamented that the main manual dated back to 1841 and that modern thought was hardly given a glance.⁶ Between 1902 and 1926 the leading professor was Henri Evers (1855-1929), a true lover of the *Beaux Arts School* which was modelled on classical values that, according to Van der Laan, were mostly outdated. It was only with the appointment in 1924 of Professor Granpré Molière (1883-1972), that Van

⁵ H. VAN DER LAAN: *Het vormenspel der liturgie* (Leiden 1985); English trans.: *The play of forms. Nature, culture and liturgy* (Leiden 2005 = tr. R. PADOVAN); trad. Italiano: *La forma. Natura, cultura e liturgia nella vita umana* (Milano 2000 = tr. K. DEN BIESEN).

⁶ F.P. PENN: *Handboek der schoone bouwkunst* (Breda 1841).

der Laan found a professor who was a true teacher to him. Granpré Molière was the driving force of the so-called *Delftse School* (the School of Delft), which formed a counter-force against the modern current of *Het Nieuwe Bouwen* and sought to return to traditional values, forms and materials.⁷ He had great influence on many future architects that upheld these values, like Kropholler, Pouderoeyen, Berghoef and Kraaijvanger, but also on non-traditional architects like Rietveld, Van Tijen, Bakema and Stam.⁸ By applying his attitude to life directly to his education and by his continued search for eternal values, Granpré Molière gave a personal touch to the chair of town planning at Delft University.⁹ He wrote later that shortly after his appointment he became acquainted with a small group of architecture students:

who had glanced into the depths of confusion and decay in which art and therefore all civilisation had sunk and who were searching, in a manly and sincere way, for a liberating truth regarding this desperate need.¹⁰

These students were led by Van der Laan and Sam van Embden and their group was called the *Bouwkundige Studiekring* (BSK, Architectural Study Circle).

The BSK was to become the cradle of the *Delftse School* of Granpré Molière, but indirectly also of the *Bosche School* (School of 's-Hertogenbosch), for it was here that Van der Laan started his talks about the foundations of architecture.¹¹ This was the beginning of his independent search for the very foundations of true architecture, which he continued to develop during his classes at the *Cursus*

⁷ Cf. e.g. J.H. HENDRICKS: 'Naklank bij het 25-jarig Hoogleeraarsjubileum te Delft van Professor Ir. M.J. Granpré Molière', in *Het Gildeboek* 32 (1950) 6-11; H. THUNNISSEN: 'De Kerkelijke Kunst in Nederland tijdens de Eeuw van de herstellende Hiërarchie', in *Het Gildeboek* 35 (1953) 5-9; J.J. VRIEND: *Links bouwen, rechts bouwen. Aantekeningen over architectuur en politiek* (Amsterdam 1974) 100; C. WAGENAAR: *Tussen grandezza en schavot. De ontwerpen van Granpré Molière voor de wederopbouw van Groningen* (Groningen 1991); M. KUIPERS: *Toonbeelden van de wederopbouw. Architectuur, stedenbouw en landinrichting van herrijgend Nederland* (Zeist 2002) 80-84.

⁸ For Catholic architecture in these years e.g. H. THUNNISSEN: 'Nieuwe stromingen in de Rooms-Katholieke kerkbouw in Nederland', in *Nederlands nieuwe kerken* (Amsterdam 1948) 47-53; A. SIEBERS: 'Herstel of verval van de kerkelijke bouwkunst? 1900-1953', in *Honderd jaar religieuze kunst in Nederland. 1853-1953* (Utrecht 1953) 23-27; J. HEER: 'De Delftsche school en de katholieke architectuur tussen 1945 en 1955', in *Eltheto* 64 (1981) 21-105; A. EVERS: 'Rooms bouwen en politiek?', in *Bouw* 26 (24 Dec. 1983) 24-26.

⁹ J. VAN GEEST: *S.J. van Embden* (Rotterdam 1996) 11.

¹⁰ M.J. GRANPRÉ MOLIÈRE: 'Het aandeel van de Delftse School', in *Katholieke Bouwblad* 21 (1953-1954) 322-323: '... die een blik hadden geworpen in de diepten van verwarring en verval, waarin de kunst en dus de gehele beschaving was verzonken, en die op zoek waren, mannelijk en oprecht, naar een bevrijdende waarheid over deze dreigende nood'.

¹¹ *AndL*, inv.nr. 701: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19811110).

voor *Kerkelijke Architectuur* (CKA, Course on Church Architecture). The CKA, erected to aid the reconstruction of churches after the Second World War, was to become the beginning of a proper architectural current and was initially mockingly named the *Bossche School*.¹² At the CKA, where he would teach until its end in 1973, Van der Laan worked out the original intuitions of his theory of architecture, working closely together with his brother Nico van der Laan (1908-1986), who also was an architect.

Though Van der Laan was definitely influenced by the philosophical approach of Granpré Molière, his own thought on architecture took another approach. The great difference with the views of the *Delftse School* is that Van der Laan wanted to focus on the form itself and its background, and not on traditional forms as such.¹³ He found this background partly in ancient Greek and early Christian buildings, which he started to analyse during his studies in Delft, together with the study of Vitruvius. The search was for the specific proportions that are pleasing to the human eye and intellect. The result of this study led Van der Laan to the development of a proportional system of eight ratios which he gave the name 'plastic number'. These proportions he applied to the different fields of human 'making' – especially to those of architecture and the making of vestments and vessels. For Van der Laan, architecture can only be true and beautiful if it answers to the proportions of the plastic number. Therefore he claimed that specific ecclesiastical architecture does not exist. To construct a church he simply searched to create the purest form of the human habitat through the application of the proportions of the plastic number. For him, the highest goal of architecture is to serve in liturgy by consecrating its best products as churches to God. This is the basis of a view in which the things human-kind makes are able to play a role in his sanctification, as shall be worked out below.

Van der Laan said that after the observation of nature and the 'making' of architecture, he was able to further develop his theory of architecture in monastic life, which started in 1927. He himself considered the three periods of his

¹² H. VAN DER LAAN JUNIOR: 'Brabant bouwt in baksteen. Bossche School, leer, stijl en middelen', in *Brabantia* (June 1993) 3-5; P. POST (red.): *Een ander huis. Kerkarchitectuur na 2000* (Baarn 1997) 67-71; F.J. VAN DER VAART: *Bedelordekloosters. 's-Hertogenbosch en de Bossche School: studies over architectuur en stedenbouw* (Nijmegen 1999) esp. 165-223; W. GODDIJN, J. JACOBS & G. VAN TILLO: *Tot vrijheid geroepen. Katholieken in Nederland: 1946-2000* (Baarn 1999) 75-77, 213-218; R. DETTINGMEIJER: 'De kerk uit het midden: van godshuis tot 'een of ander huis'. Het belang van de kerken in de Wederopbouw', in *Bulletin KNOB* 1 (2002) 1-15; H. VAN DER LAAN JUNIOR: 'Kloosters in de 12^e en de 20^e eeuw. Laboratoria voor fundamenteel architectuuronderzoek', in M. ACKERMANS & T. HOOGBERGEN (reds.): *Kloosters en religieus leven. Historie met toekomst* (Den Bosch 2002) 88-99; H. DE HAAN: 'De levende erfenis van Dom Hans van der Laan', in *Blad van Nederlandse Architecten* (Dec. 2004) 10-13.

¹³ *AndL*: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Mr J. van der Laan* (d.d.19421025); inv.nr. 657; IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19800624); IDEM: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19830314).

life ‘looking’, ‘making’ and ‘praying’, as the true basis of his theory, which he claimed to be the direct result of his observations, experiences and reflections.¹⁴ He did not study many other architectural theories and apart from Vitruvius he only quoted a limited number of architects in his works. However, nothing comes from nothing, and many of the people mentioned above have had their influence on Van der Laan, though often only as a catalyst or as an example of how not to do things. He did acknowledge the influence of the liturgical and theological sources he encountered in monastic life. As these – contrary to his architectural works and theory – have not yet been extensively studied, the following analysis shall form the core of this article.

3. Van der Laan and the fundamental sources of the tradition of Solesmes

Van der Laan entered St. Paulusabdij in Oosterhout, the Netherlands, in 1927.



2. Oosterhout, St. Paulusabdij, guest house (1939). Architects Hans and Nico van der Laan. [Photo: M.P. Remery]

The abbey was founded by monks of the Congregation of Solesmes, which was started in 1833 in the former Priory of Solesmes by the priest Prosper Guéranger. The latter desired to restore the true religious life according to the

¹⁴ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 632: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Het liturgisch kader van de Abdij van Vaals* (Vaals 26 Mar. 1988 = unpublished); IDEM: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19880319).

Rule of St. Benedict of Nursia. In doing so he gave special attention to the form and the execution of liturgy and the original forms of Gregorian chant. He also stimulated the study of the Fathers of the Church. Solesmes rapidly became a centre of renewal of liturgy. In this sense one could say that Solesmes was a precursor of both the later Liturgical Movement and the *Resourcement* of the first half of the twentieth century. In 1866 Dom Guéranger founded the Abbey of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Cécile. Mme Cécile Bruyère was its first Abbess. When religious life was made impossible by the French anticlerical law of 1901, Dom Delatte, third Abbot of Solesmes, had to take the difficult decision to seek refuge with the entire congregation in England and the Netherlands. In 1907 Dom Jean de Puniet de Parry was appointed as the first Prior and later Abbot of the newly constructed St. Paulusabdij in Oosterhout, where the Benedictine Sisters had also founded a monastery. Dom de Puniet had a very strong bond with Dom Delatte. His brother, Dom Pierre de Puniet de Parry, was later appointed as novice master.

All these people from the tradition of Solesmes have had a very important influence on Van der Laan through their writings and their example. Their personality combined with the rich tradition of the Benedictine Order, as well as the great attention given to the Fathers of the Church, gave Van der Laan a very profound monastic education. This education would prove to be of fundamental importance for the development of his theory. Therefore he later spoke of the ideal monastic life in

a monastery where everything goes as Father Abbot in heaven [Dom de Puniet, mpr] would have wanted it, who himself did what Dom Delatte had taught him, who in turn realised the ideal of Dom Guéranger and in whom we have the likeness of Saint Benedict.¹⁵

3.1. The influence in specific fields of Dom André Mocquereau, Dom Pierre de Puniet and Dom Pieter van der Meer de Walcheren

Before discussing the importance of these fundamental Benedictine and Solesmian sources, for completeness' sake we should mention a number of people who inspired Van der Laan in one or another field. Among these, a special role is played by Dom André Mocquereau (1849-1930) of Solesmes, who worked with Dom Paul Jausions and Dom Joseph Pothier on the rediscovery of the original Gregorian chant with its special emphasis on rhythm.¹⁶ Van der Laan

¹⁵ *AndL*: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19801122): 'Een klooster waar alles gaat zoals Vader Abt in de hemel [Dom de Puniet, mpr] het gewild heeft, die zelf weer deed wat Dom Delatte hem geleerd had, die op zijn beurt het ideaal van Dom Guéranger realiseerde en in wie wij het evenbeeld van Sint Benedictus hebben'.

¹⁶ P. COMBE: 'Souvenir de Dom Mocquereau', in IDEM: *Lettre aux amis de Solesmes* 6,3 (1980) 24-28; A. TRAUB: 'Mocquereau', in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*. T. VII (Freiburg 1998) 355.

recalled vividly having seen Dom Mocquereau in Solesmes in 1927 and was stimulated by Dom Delatte and Dom Jean de Puniet's admiration for him.¹⁷ Dom Mocquereau's great achievement was his two volume book on the Gregorian musical rhythm, *Le nombre musical*, in which he considered all aspects of music, melody, dynamic, timbre and so on, to be subordinate to the rhythm of movement.¹⁸ He himself linked music with architecture.¹⁹ There are clear parallels between the structure of Mocquereau's musical doctrine and Van der Laan's architectural theory, for example when Mocquereau wrote:

there exists only one general rhythm, of which the fundamental laws, established on human nature, are necessarily encountered in all artistic, musical and literary creations of all peoples in all ages.²⁰

Where Mocquereau paralleled this rhythm with number in music, Van der Laan found the general rhythm of architecture in his *Le nombre plastique*.²¹ Van der Laan took the idea for this title directly from *Le nombre musical*. Where Mocquereau had managed to capture the thought of Solesmes for time in music, Van der Laan wanted to do a similar thing for architectural space.²² He believed that both theories could be a great help for the interior spiritual life, though he mainly focused on the field of the making of liturgical form, more specifically on architecture.²³ It can be observed how in his writings Van der Laan kept certain worlds of influence apart from others. What stimulated his thought in the field of architecture did not necessarily have an influence on the higher level of his overall theory.

Another Benedictine monk who influenced Van der Laan was Dom Pierre de Puniet de Parry (1877-1941), the brother of Abbot Jean de Puniet.²⁴ He was

¹⁷ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19840305).

¹⁸ A. MOCQUEREAU: *Le nombre musical ou rythmique grégorienne*. T. I (Roma / Tournai 1908); T. II (Paris / Roma / Tournai 1927); *AvdL*: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19620603).

¹⁹ A. MOCQUEREAU: 'L'Église du Saint-Esprit à Serravalle. Architecture et Musique', in *Revue Grégorienne* 13 (1928) 91-95.

²⁰ MOCQUEREAU: *Le nombre musical* I.26: 'Il n'existe qu'une seule rythmique générale dont les lois fondamentales, établies sur la nature humaine, se retrouvent nécessairement dans toutes les créations artistiques, musicales et littéraires, de tous peuples, dans tous les temps'.

²¹ MOCQUEREAU: *Le nombre musical* I.5; VAN DER LAAN: *Le nombre plastique*.

²² *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19510906, 19540307, 19870326); IDEM: *Letters to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19530413, 19540919); IDEM: *Letter to A. Mertens* (d.d. 19870105); IDEM: *Letter to A. Bodar* (d.d. 19880808).

²³ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19530413).

²⁴ C. COEBERGH: 'Dom P. de Puniet en zijn betekenis voor de liturgische wetenschap', in *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 21 (1940) 293-299; IDEM: 'In memoriam Pierre de Puniet', in *Ephemerides liturgicae* 58 (1944) 316-317; P. VERSNEL-MERGAERTS: *Van rubriekenjager tot wetenschappelijk grensganger. Wordingsgeschiedenis van de liturgiewetenschap (1900-1967) aan de*

novice master at Oosterhout when Van der Laan entered monastic life and was customary referred to as *Père Maître*. Like his brother Jean, Dom Pierre was instructed by Dom Delatte. He was above all a great liturgical scholar and had published many works.²⁵ Because of his book *Le Pontifical Romain*, Dom Pierre was asked by Pope Pius XI to be part of a (short-lived) commission to prepare a revision of the *Pontificale Romanum*.²⁶ Another example is his book on the Psalms, *Le psautier liturgique*, which was the result of many years of lectures to novices, Van der Laan among them.²⁷ *Père Maître* stimulated his novices to study independently and to be personally involved in what they did. That he had great success in doing so can be observed in the way in which Van der Laan was not satisfied with simply repeating his sources: he clearly developed his own theory. Dom Pierte also must have stimulated Van der Laan's great love for liturgy. He taught him much about personal prayer in line with the teachings of Mme Bruyère. However, little reference is made to him in Van der Laan's theoretical writings. His influence is much more subtle, more on the spiritual level, which affects all other aspects of life. A similar influence should be attributed to Dom Pieter van der Meer de Walcheren Junior (1903-1933). He was Van der Laan's closest friend in the monastery. His early death caused the latter much pain. Van der Laan claimed that Dom Pieter helped him to broaden his view and to discover the great *esprit de Solesmes* ('the spirit of Solesmes') to which he claimed to be strongly indebted.²⁸ In this way Van der Laan managed to involve all aspects of daily life and human faculties, like feeling and thinking, in the spiritual life with God.

Other contemporary Benedictine sources of inspiration include philosophers like Dom Talma (1886-1978), Dom Huiting (b. 1923) and Dom Roose (b. 1926); fellow novices like Dom Diepen (1908-1960), Dom Smeets (1907-1986) and Dom Boer (1908-1984); architecture and artistic 'colleagues' such as Dom Bellot (1876-1944), Dom Nau (1902-1978) and Dom Botte (1907-1991); as well

katholieke theologische opleidingen in Nederland in zes protretten (Groningen / Tilburg 2009 = NSRL 9) 28-67.

²⁵ P. DE PUNIET DE PARRY: 'Aupertio aurium', in: F. CABROL, H. LECLERCQ & H. MARROU (réds.): *Dictionnaire d'archéologie et de liturgie chrétienne* (Paris 1907-1953) I-II.2523-2537; IDEM: 'Aubes baptismales', in *Ibidem* I-II.3118-3140; IDEM: 'Baptême. Étude sur les ordines baptismi', in *Ibidem* II-I.251-346; IDEM: 'Bénédictions de l'eau', in *Ibidem* II-I.685-713; IDEM: 'Catéchuménat', in *Ibidem* II-II.2579-2621; IDEM: 'Concélébration Liturgique', in *Ibidem* III-II.2470-2488; IDEM: 'Confirmation', in *Ibidem* III-II.2515-2544; IDEM: 'Consécration épiscopale', in *Ibidem* III-II.2579-2604; IDEM: 'Dédicace des églises', in *Ibidem* IV-I.374-405.

²⁶ P. DE PUNIET DE PARRY: *Le Pontifical Romain, histoire et commentaire*. T. I-II (Paris 1929-1931).

²⁷ P. DE PUNIET DE PARRY: *Le Psautier liturgique à la lumière de la tradition chrétienne*. T. I-II (Paris 1934).

²⁸ H. VAN DER LAAN: *De liturgie* (Utrecht 1969 = Geschriften van de vereniging voor Latijnse liturgie); *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 1968 Christmas).

as his superiors Dom Mähler (1905-1991), Dom Truijen (1916-2006), Dom de Wolf (b. 1931); and many unnamed brothers. These monks were important, mainly as interlocutors, and in that they passed on specific passages from certain authors that might interest Van der Laan and thus filtered the enormous amount of philosophical and theological information written throughout the centuries. Though the exact extent of the collaboration of his *confrères* remains unknown, they made it possible for Van der Laan to dedicate his energy to the invention of his theory and not to historical studies. He explained:

This is the way of the monastery: when one is working on something, in the evening one may, just as at Saint Nicolas, find at the door of the cell exactly the book or the text which one needs... These are the mysteries of a monastery where the one makes the other do things which he himself would never be able to do.²⁹

Leclercq spoke about this unique way of assembling study material in the monastic environment, which he called '*théologie monastique*' ('monastic theology').³⁰ This is probably a good way to describe what Van der Laan did, for his approach must be called theology the moment he introduced God into his logical reflection.

Each of the sources mentioned above had a specific influence on Van der Laan's thought. However, none of them can be isolated as the decisive origin of his theory or of his view of God and theology. As shall be seen below, this is more the case for a number of his predecessors of the tradition of Solesmes, together with the theological and philosophical sources they preferred.

3.2. Sources that inspired Van der Laan in a more fundamental way: Dom Prosper Guéranger, the Fathers of the Church and Dom Paul Delatte

Dom Paul Guéranger, Mme Cécile Bruyère and the Fathers of the Church

From the beginning of his monastic life, Van der Laan read the books by the founding father of Solesmes, Dom Prosper Guéranger (1805-1875). He especially loved the *Institutions liturgiques*, which had had a great influence on the reform of the Gallican liturgy because of the arguments it made for the uniqueness of the Roman liturgy.³¹ Van der Laan quoted several times from this

²⁹ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 272: H. VAN DER LAAN: *De architectonische ruimte* X ('s-Hertogenbosch 9 Dec. 1967 = unpublished): 'Zo gaat het namelijk in het klooster: als men ergens mee bezig is, ligt 's avonds aan de deur van de cel, net als met Sint Nicolaas, precies het boek of de tekst die men nodig heeft... Dat zijn de mysteries van een klooster waar de een de ander dingen laat doen, waartoe hijzelf nooit in staat zou zijn'.

³⁰ J. LECLERCQ: *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu. Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du moyen âge* (Paris 1957) 179.

³¹ P. GUÉRANGER: *Institutions liturgiques*. T. I-III (Le Mans / Paris 1840-1851). Cf. also e.g. C. JOHNSON: *Prosper Guéranger (1805-1875): a Liturgical Theologian. An Introduction to*

work.³² Two fundamental elements in his thought can be traced back to Dom Guéranger. First of all there is the definition of liturgy in the introduction to the *Institutions liturgiques*, a definition which Van der Laan truly interiorised: 'Considered generally, liturgy is the entirety of symbols, hymns and actions by which the Church manifests and gives expression to its worship of God'.³³ This definition is of fundamental importance for understanding Van der Laan's thought concerning the form-play of liturgy. For example, he wrote in retrospect:

I did not believe in the monumentality of individual liturgical objects, but rather in the monumentality of the totality of liturgy and thought I could find the starting point for this in the definition of liturgy by Dom Guéranger.³⁴

Secondly, the Guérangerian idea of '*demeurer dans l'esprit de l'Incarnation*' ('to remain in the spirit of the Incarnation') was very important for Van der Laan's thought, to such an extent that he said that it was the great genius of Dom Guéranger to have integrated the external forms into the interior religious life of humanity.³⁵ The theme can be recognised throughout the *Institutions liturgiques*, where Dom Guéranger said that like the Incarnation, the Church and humanity itself, liturgy is situated at the edge of the invisible, belonging at the same time to both the spiritual and the sensory world.³⁶ For Dom Guéranger,

his liturgical writings and work (Roma 1984) 102; G.-M. OURY: 'La liturgie, l'esprit et l'Église dans la pensée de dom Guéranger', in: *Mélanges Dom Guéranger. Histoire - Liturgie - Spiritualité* (Solesmes 2005) 505.

³² *AvdL*, inv.nr. 40-42: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Werkgroep kerkelijke architectuur* VI (Breda 11 June 1946 = unpublished); inv.nr. 5-6: IDEM: *Rijnsburgerweg 160* (Leiden 19-20 Apr. 1947 = unpublished); inv.nr. 901: IDEM: *Liturgische vormleer* II (Vaals 16 Oct. 1974 = unpublished); inv.nr. 903: IDEM: *Liturgische vormleer* IV (Vaals 27 Nov. 1974 = unpublished).

³³ GUÉRANGER: *Institutions liturgiques* I.1: 'La liturgie considérée en général, est l'ensemble des symboles, des chants et des actes au moyen desquels l'Eglise exprime et manifeste sa religion envers Dieu'. *AvdL*: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19400910); IDEM: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 1945 In Albis); inv.nr. 745-746: IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19830802); IDEM: *Letter to A. Mertens* (d.d. 19870105). Also IDEM: *Vormenspel* (I.1) 7 and (IV.7) 39.

³⁴ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 745-746: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19830802): 'Ik geloofde niet in de monumentaliteit van de liturgische objecten ieder op zich, maar eerder in de monumentaliteit van het geheel der liturgie & meende daarvoor het uitgangspunt te vinden in de definitie der liturgie door Dom Guéranger'.

³⁵ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19400331, 19440323); IDEM: *Letter to C. Ponderoyen* (d.d. 19411214); IDEM: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (before 19421026); IDEM: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19440107, 19470402); IDEM: *Letter to M.J. Granpré Molière* (d.d. 19460919); inv.nr. 566-572: IDEM: *Genesis van de liturgische vorm* (Vaals 2-3 Mar. 1974 = unpublished); inv.nr. 594: IDEM: *Letter to R. van der Does de Willebois* (d.d. 19780105).

³⁶ P. GUÉRANGER: *L'Année liturgique* I.X; IDEM: *Institutions liturgiques* IV.313.

the essence of liturgy is contained in the mystery of Easter as the source of the seven Sacraments. Therefore, liturgy takes place in the prolongation of the mystery of the Incarnation and comes forth from the nature of the Church, which is one. This is the core of a theology of the Church and liturgy which forms the larger background of the work of both Dom Guéranger and Van der Laan.

These two themes play a very important role in Van der Laan's theory on liturgy and architecture, for he held that as of the moment of the Incarnation, all earthly objects can serve in the relationship with the divine. Further quotations from Dom Guéranger do occasionally occur in his writings, but these are not of fundamental importance.³⁷ Although the *Institutions liturgiques* gives a complete overview of the history of liturgy, Van der Laan's theory does not manifest any clear interest in this history, as it attempts to return to the very principles of liturgy and its forms, thus giving evidence of a systematic approach.

In line with St. Benedict, Dom Guéranger promoted the reading of the Fathers of the Church, evinced for example by his collaboration with J.P. Migne.³⁸ Special importance was given to Neo-Platonic thinkers like St. Gregory of Nyssa, the Cappadocian Fathers and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. St. Augustine too should be mentioned, although he was more obviously influenced by Porphyry (c 234-305) rather than directly by Plotinus.³⁹ Though he was not a Christian, one could say that Plotinus prepared Platonism for 'christianisation' by adding elements like dynamism. The Fathers of the Church properly 'christianised' Platonism, and in doing so laid the basis for a more positive approach to matter, though certain Fathers still considered matter as inferior. In the monastery, texts from the Fathers were read daily in the Office and at table.⁴⁰ All together this opened a complete treasury, especially as Van der Laan was a very attentive listener. As it was the yearly custom to choose one book and read it carefully in Lent, he often requested a book from the Fathers, especially by St. Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite or St. Augustine.⁴¹ From all he heard and read, certain elements were retained and included into his theory. Unlike some of his other sources, Van der Laan truly absorbed certain elements of the teaching of the Fathers. A good example is Van der Laan's 'great analogy', in which humanity learns about their relation

³⁷ *ArdL*, inv.nr. 40-42: VAN DER LAAN: *Werkgroep kerkelijke architectuur* VI; inv.nr. 5-6: IDEM: *Rijnsburgervog 160*; inv.nr. 903: IDEM: *Liturgische vormleer* IV.

³⁸ L. SOLTNER: 'Migne et Dom Guéranger. La collaboration Solesmienne aux débuts de la patrologie Latine', in *Mélanges Dom Guéranger* 649-684.

³⁹ F. COPPLESTON: *A history of philosophy* (New York 1993) I.127-276, I.463-485, II.13-100; B. DELFGAAUW: *Beknopte geschiedenis der wijsbegeerte* (Baarn 1965) 20-53; C. ZINTZEN: 'Neuplatonismus', in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* VII.679-772.

⁴⁰ S. BENEDICTUS NURSINUS: *Regula* c. 42; *ArdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19871105).

⁴¹ *Archief Abdij St. Benedictusberg*: N.N.: *List of Lenten reading* (Vaals [s.d.] = unpublished).

with God through their interaction with the visible world, for this resembles the interaction of God with all of creation. In this context he quoted Pseudo-Dionysius, who affirmed that it is not possible for the human intellect to rise to the immaterial conception and contemplation proper to the celestial hierarchies unless by being guided towards it by way of material things.⁴² Van der Laan read the works of Pseudo-Dionysius and the other Fathers of the Church through the eyes of Dom Guéranger and Mme Bruyère and thus within the context of *l'esprit de Solesmes*. For this reason and because of his positive opportunistic approach, he concentrated on the aspects that were of direct use for his own theory.

Mme l'Abbesse Cécile Bruyère (1845-1909) of the Abbaye de St. Cécile was the author of the book *L'Oraison*, which was a classic at Oosterhout.⁴³ Van der Laan and his sisters had read the book even before he entered the monastery.⁴⁴ In it, Mme Bruyère revealed the teachings of Dom Guéranger in her own refined way, emphasising the primacy of liturgy in religious life and its importance for living and developing the special grace received in the Sacrament of Baptism. The book was a synthesis of everything she liked most in Scripture and the teaching of the Fathers, and it introduced Van der Laan to *l'esprit de Solesmes*. The influence of Mme Bruyère was more in terms of transmitting a spiritual attitude than giving Van der Laan concrete information for his theory as Dom Guéranger and Dom Delatte did. Still, he regarded her as a strong influence on his monastic life and hand-copied several of her lectures.⁴⁵ Upon finishing the editing of *Vormenspel* he wrote to his sister that in it she would find everything they both loved:

following a completely different path, I come to the same conclusion as *Mme l'Abbesse* at the end of her book on prayer, that there is only one great liturgy. So the little book starts with a definition by Dom Guéranger and ends with the great thought of *Mme l'Abbesse*.⁴⁶

⁴² PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITA: *De coelesti hierarchia* I.3, in *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris 1958) 58.72; IDEM: *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* I.2, in: *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris 1890) III.373; VAN DER LAAN: *Vormenspel* (II.8) 22 and (X.7) 99.

⁴³ AvdL, inv.nr. 566-572: VAN DER LAAN: *Genesis van de liturgische vorm*; IDEM: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19420607, 19510204); IDEM: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19640720); inv.nr. 616: IDEM: *Letter to R. van der Does de Willebois* (d.d. 19780105).

⁴⁴ C. BRUYÈRE: *La vie spirituelle et l'oraison d'après l'Écriture Sainte et la tradition monastique* (Solesmes 1885). AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19420607) and IDEM: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19830314).

⁴⁵ AvdL: C. BRUYÈRE: *Conférence* (Solesmes 12 Oct. 1884 = unpublished); IDEM: *Conférence sur Saint Denis* (Solesmes 9 Aug. 1887 = unpublished); and some other conferences on the Celestial Hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius.

⁴⁶ AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19850318): 'Langs een heel andere weg kom ik dan tot dezelfde conclusie als Mme l'Abbesse aan het eind van haar boek over het Gebed, dat er maar één grote liturgie is. Het boekje begint met een definitie van Dom Guéranger & eindigt dus met de grote gedachte van Mme l'Abbesse'.

Given the importance he attributed to Mme Bruyère, it is noteworthy that, though Van der Laan truly absorbed her teaching which was so important for his spiritual life, he did not directly quote her in his theoretical writings.

Dom Paul Delatte, Dom Jean de Puniet and St. Thomas Aquinas

Mme Bruyère faithfully transmitted the teachings of Dom Guéranger to Dom Paul Delatte (1848-1937) and helped him, for example, with the research for his biography of the former.⁴⁷ Before his entry into the monastery, Dom Delatte had been a professor in Thomistic philosophy at Lille University. Van der Laan often read his writings on St. Thomas and on the spiritual life. Essential to Dom Delatte's work is his attention to the contemplative character of Benedictine spirituality, the awareness that human life and therefore monastic life in particular is directed to God in all its aspects:

the main idea of Saint Benedict is that we must *search for God*. Before God, there are really only two legitimate positions: to rejoice in Him as we possess Him, to search for Him as long as we do not possess Him fully.⁴⁸

This attitude was very important for Van der Laan's spiritual life. He met Dom Delatte for the first time on the 15th of August 1927, and wrote later: 'I will never forget the cross he imprinted on my forehead. No one will ever know how much I owe him'.⁴⁹ *Le Grand Père Abbé*, as he was customary called, was both a grandfather and a great spiritual father to Van der Laan, who claimed that his life and even all of his architectural work had been based on the principles he discovered in Dom Delatte's writings.⁵⁰ For his yearly Lenten reading, Van der Laan often asked for a book by Dom Delatte and frequently referred to him in his letters.⁵¹

⁴⁷ P. DELATTE: *Dom Guéranger, Abbé de Solesmes*. T. I-II (Paris 1909-1910); N.N.: 'Le centenaire de l'entrée de dom Delatte au noviciat de Solesmes', in *Lettre aux amis de Solesmes* 9,3 (1983) 11; P. DUPONT: 'Foreword', in M.D. TOTAH (ed.): *The spirit of Solesmes* (Kent / Petersham 1997) 9-11.

⁴⁸ P. DELATTE: *Commentaire sur la Règle de saint Benoît* (Paris 1913, 1931¹⁰) 347-348: 'La pensée maîtresse de saint Benoît est que nous devons chercher Dieu. Il n'y a réellement, devant Dieu, que deux situations légitimes: jouir de lui lorsque nous le posséderons, le chercher aussi longtemps que nous ne le possédons pas pleinement'.

⁴⁹ AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19880818): 'Het kruisje dat hij toen op mijn voorhoofd drukte zal ik niet vergeten. Niemand zal ooit weten wat ik allemaal aan hem te danken heb'.

⁵⁰ AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19440305, 19450908, 19560908); IDEM: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19830314); IDEM: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19380327).

⁵¹ AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19400910, 19831125); IDEM: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19421026); IDEM: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19510204, 19560908, 19620904, 19671010, 19690316, 19730604, 19740410); inv.nr.

Two works should be mentioned in particular. In his explanation of the essence of liturgy, Van der Laan made reference to Dom Delatte's *Commentaire sur la Règle de Saint Benoît*, which he considered to be of great importance. The fundamental role played by liturgy in his theory can partly be traced back to this commentary.⁵² The same applies for the need to use all creation to praise the Lord and thus lead everything which has been received back to the Source. As with the Rule of St. Benedict, Van der Laan must have read this commentary in its entirety. However, all the elements concerning the organisation of daily life, charity and community life do not in any way reverberate in his theory and the visible influence is limited to a few direct quotations. During his theological studies, he hand-copied a commentary by Dom Delatte on the third book of the *Summa contra gentiles* by St. Thomas, which he considered to be a summary of both the Pseudo-Dionysian and the Thomistic corpus, because it spoke of God as the final end of creation.⁵³ This work introduced Van der Laan in a positive way to Thomism and Aristotelianism. He claimed that the section where Dom Delatte spoke of the way in which humanity knows God by means of the intellect, based on a true relationship, but different from that of the angels, had a particularly great influence on his thought.⁵⁴ Van der Laan himself confirmed that the discovery of his theory was partly inspired by St. Thomas and his philosophical studies.⁵⁵ In particular the inspiration for his 'great analogy' between divine and human creation and the way in which the intellect is informed by the senses are related to important Thomistic themes.

According to the Aristotelian-Thomistic motto '*anima est quodam modo omnia*' ('in one sense, the soul is everything') it is in the intellect that everything is symbolised and summarised.⁵⁶ Without the intellect, mankind cannot know God. Van der Laan said in *Vormenspel* that 'faith can only be grafted onto our intellectual faculties'.⁵⁷ For him, expressive forms respond to the intellect, which in turn allows man to move up from one form-world to the next. This important role played by the human intellect led him to the analogical relation with the divine Intellect in his theory. Van der Laan must have been thinking of

457: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to P. Allary SJ* (d.d. 19560822). Also *Archief Abdij St. Benedictusberg*: N.N.: *List of Lenten reading*.

⁵² DELATTE: *Commentaire sur la Règle de Saint Benoît* (Paris 1931¹⁰) esp. 149-155. Cf. also *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19400910).

⁵³ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19830314).

⁵⁴ P. DELATTE: *Commentaire sur la Somme contre les gentils* (Solesmes 1930) 103-109; *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19830314).

⁵⁵ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 587: VAN DER LAAN: *Cursus Kerkeelijke Architectuur* (28 Jan. 1977 = unpublished).

⁵⁶ S. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *Summa theologia* I q14 a1c & I q80 a1c, in IDEM: *Opera omnia*. T. IV (Romae 1888 =ed. Leonina); IDEM: *In Aristotelis Librum de Anima Commentarium* lect. 13 n787, in A. M. PIROTTA (ed.) (Taurini 1948).

⁵⁷ VAN DER LAAN: *Vormenspel* (I.9) 15: 'het geloof kan zich slechts enten op onze verstandelijke vermogens'.

these themes when he said that the ideas of Dom Delatte had had such an important influence on his theory, which is permeated by the idea that by grace humanity can transcend their natural existence through their intellect and receive the gift of God.⁵⁸ It may be concluded that, though direct quotations are limited to relatively few themes, Van der Laan's thought clearly reveals a Thomistic influence, mainly thanks to the teachings of Dom Delatte.

Dom Jean de Puniet de Parry (1869-1941) was the first Abbot of the St. Paulusabdij in Oosterhout. He was very close to Dom Delatte, who had said of Dom De Puniet: 'I have no one who is so at one with me' (Phil. 2:20).⁵⁹ The latter claimed to have received everything from Dom Delatte.⁶⁰ Dom Jean de Puniet helped Van der Laan and his sisters to discover their vocation and throughout the years Van der Laan always felt most indebted to his *Père Abbé du ciel*.⁶¹ One of Van der Laan's few treasures which was found in his cell after his death was a collection of spiritual lectures by Dom Jean de Puniet, mostly hand-written during his early years in Oosterhout and carefully preserved.⁶² In line with the Solesmes tradition, in these lectures the main emphasis was given to *Holy Scripture*. Dom De Puniet described the essence of Solesmes as a simple and complete faith in the service of God, believing in the impenetrable Mystery, totally veiled in the invisible.⁶³ This may have stimulated Van der Laan in his description of 'negative theology', which he attributed to Pseudo-Dionysius, recognising three movements of the intellect, the third being a withdrawal and a 'negation of everything that can be seen or known'.⁶⁴ Dom Jean de Puniet's entire spiritual life was marked by the transcendence of God and His working in the human soul.⁶⁵ All these things were very close to Van der Laan's heart and Dom De Puniet was very influential for his spiritual life.

Apart from his lectures, Dom Jean de Puniet did not write a lot. His most important work is probably *La liturgie de la messe*, which Van der Laan must have

⁵⁸ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19880818, 19890615).

⁵⁹ *Archief St. Paulusabdij*, inv.nr. G III: J. DE PUNIER DE PARRY: *Conférence* (Oosterhout 18 Apr. 1907 = unpublished): 'Neminem enim habeo tam unanimem'. Cf. e.g. *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19690917, 19761115, 19790225, 19830428, 19851029, 19890615).

⁶⁰ *Archief St. Paulusabdij*, inv.nr. G II.1: J. DE PUNIER DE PARRY: *Conférence* (Oosterhout 15 Mar. 1935 = unpublished).

⁶¹ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19450908).

⁶² *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 195111, 19771104, 19790225).

⁶³ *Archief St. Paulusabdij*, inv.nr. G II.1: J. DE PUNIER DE PARRY: *Conférence* (Oosterhout 30 Jan. 1938 = unpublished).

⁶⁴ VAN DER LAAN: *Vormenspel* (X.5) 97: 'ontkenning van alles wat gezien of gekend wordt'.

⁶⁵ *Archief St. Paulusabdij*, inv.nr. F III: J. DE PUNIER DE PARRY: *Conférence* (Oosterhout 30 Jan. 1931 = unpublished). IDEM: 'De Goddelijke lofprijzing', in *Egmondiana* 5 (1941) 138-144.

read over and again.⁶⁶ Dom De Puniet was a great lover of the solemn celebration of liturgy. In his monastery he encouraged the use of beautiful chants, ceremonies, vestments and vessels. Van der Laan clearly inherited his love for these things from Dom Jean de Puniet. Above all it was the way in which his Abbot lived his monastic life that had the most impact on Van der Laan. In his letters, the latter recalled many precious moments with Dom Jean de Puniet.⁶⁷ He especially remembered the way his Abbot treated the things around him.⁶⁸ Here, he said, Dom De Puniet was fully in accord with the ideas of Dom Guéranger and St. Benedict and recognised the importance of daily objects for the spiritual life with God in the monastery. Important as Dom Jean de Puniet was for his personal and spiritual life, Van der Laan did not however make much explicit reference to him in his theory.

The preceding paragraphs have shown how the tradition of Solesmes has been very important for the development of the thought of Van der Laan. As this tradition was in turn strongly based on the teachings of St. Benedict, the latter should be considered fundamental also for the work of Van der Laan.

3.3. The fundamental basis of the thought of Dom Hans van der Laan found in St. Benedict of Nursia and Holy Scripture

Van der Laan was convinced that St. Benedict of Nursia (c 480-547) not only founded a monastic community with its own Rule, but also strongly influenced Western civilisation, which was the reason why Pope Paul vi made him Patron of Europe in 1964.⁶⁹ As a Benedictine monk, Van der Laan was imbued with the thinking of his Order's founder. He knew the Rule very well and admired it greatly.⁷⁰ Therefore it is surprising that he only occasionally quoted it.⁷¹ He

⁶⁶ J. DE PUNJET DE PARRY: *La liturgie de la messe, ses origines et son histoire* (Avignon 1928); English trans.: IDEM: *The Mass. Its origin and history* (London 1931); Nederlandse vert.: IDEM: *De liturgie van het H. Misoffer. Haar oorsprong en historische ontwikkeling* (Roermond 1939). AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *La forme des églises* [Oosterhout 1930 = unpublished] 1.

⁶⁷ AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Miss J. van der Laan* (d.d. 19410416); IDEM: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19410116, 19420607, 19480215, 19480907, 19500104, 19690917, 19740217, 19750928, 19760326, 19881004); IDEM: *Letters to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19640720, 19660803); IDEM: *Preek Huwelijk van Dick van Dam en Cécile de Puniet de Parry* [s.l.] 3 Aug. 1963 = unpublished).

⁶⁸ AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19421026); IDEM: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19450430, 19500813, 1952 Holy Saturday).

⁶⁹ PAULUS PP. VI: 'Pacis Nuntius, 24 Oct. 1964', in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56 (1964) 965-967. AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19640720); IDEM: *Liturgische vormleer III* (Vaals 6 Nov. 1974 = unpublished).

⁷⁰ AvdL: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19360209, 19421230, 19451204); IDEM: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19690504, 19720706, 19831112).

⁷¹ AvdL: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Drie voordrachten over 'paramentiek'* I-III [s.l.] 30 Nov. - 2 Dec. 1946); inv.nr. 94-99: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Studiebijeenkomst* ('s-Hertogenbosch 23-24 Apr. 1949 = unpublished); inv.nr. 255: H. VAN DER LAAN: *De architectonische dispositie IV*

hardly referred to the chapters of the Rule that regulate daily life in the monastery, and only sometimes to those concerning liturgy. For example, the Rule's emphasis on community life and obedience do not feature in Van der Laan's theory. Important as they were for his personal relationship with God and his Brothers in the monastery, he did not mention them when considering the world of form-making. Below it shall be seen that the few instances where he did quote the Rule, he immediately applied an 'exegesis' of his own, though still remaining within the tenor of the thought of St. Benedict. This obliges a researcher of his work to take a different approach when wishing to reveal the importance of the writings of St. Benedict for the theory of Van der Laan. Therefore the following shall first consider the resonance of the Rule, than the influence of the way of thinking of St. Benedict and finally the way in which Van der Laan spoke about his founder, mainly in his private letters.

First there is the resonance of certain elements of the Rule that can be recognised in the work of Van der Laan. This is for example the case for the way in which he wanted to deal with daily objects. Like St. Benedict he said that in the Church and in liturgy nothing should be disturbed by worldly ways: 'To make yourself different from the world by your way of acting'.⁷² Instead, the habitual actions of liturgy should penetrate all of daily life step by step: crockery should be treated like sacred vessels and guests should be received like Christ Himself.⁷³ A section of the Rule which was to be important for Van der Laan right from his entry into the monastery was where St. Benedict spoke of the communal singing of the psalms in such a way that the intellect of the monks would attune with their voices.⁷⁴ It is the basis for the Guérangerian motto '*demeurer dans l'esprit de l'Incarnation*', which expresses an attitude in life in which every daily object and action may serve in humanity's relation with God. Another important element is that for Van der Laan it had been the genius of St. Benedict to connect the two worlds of thinking and doing, of philosophy and practi-

(s-Hertogenbosch 5 Mar. 1966 = unpublished). Also H. VAN DER LAAN: *Gesprek van de architect met de zusters van Waasmunster over het in aanbouw zijnde klooster Roosenberg* ([s.l.] May 1974).

⁷² S. BENEDICTUS NURSINUS: *Regula* c. 4,20: 'saeculi actibus se facere alienum'.

⁷³ S. BENEDICTUS NURSINUS: *Regula* c. 31,10. *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19421026, 19440107); inv.nr. 334b: IDEM: *Over de schoonheid van het liturgische gebaar* (Oosterhout 1944 = unpublished) 2; IDEM: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19440107, 1952 Holy Saturday); inv.nr. 412-414: IDEM: *De architectuur van het boek* (Antwerpen 22 Nov. 1952 = unpublished); inv.nr. 543-545: VAN DER LAAN: *De liturgie VII* (Amsterdam 5 Feb. 1969 = unpublished); inv.nr. 566-572: IDEM: *Genesis van de liturgische vorm* 4; inv.nr. 902: IDEM: *Liturgische vormleer III*; inv.nr. 911: IDEM: *Liturgische vormleer XII* (Vaals 4 June 1975 = unpublished).

⁷⁴ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19430523); inv.nr. 334b: IDEM: *Over de schoonheid van het liturgische gebaar* 5; inv.nr. 354-355: IDEM: *Kerkelijke architectuur IV* (Hoeven 16 July 1947 = unpublished); inv.nr. 902: IDEM: *Liturgische vormleer III*.

cal work.⁷⁵ Van der Laan himself intended to do the same with the plastic number, which, through the intellect, relates the created world to the world of artificial human 'creations'.⁷⁶ He loved to echo this combination of two worlds using an unattributed quotation from the American philosopher Dougherty, saying that Benedictines are intellectuals 'with dirt under the nails'.⁷⁷ As if to confirm this he once received a nail file from his sister who urged him to take better care of his nails.⁷⁸ Furthermore, he said that St. Benedict organised daily life and even liturgy in an architectural fashion with order and rhythm:⁷⁹ 'It is the creation of an ordinance of the recurring complete daily cycle, which during the intervening 15 centuries could not be improved'.⁸⁰ The Rule sets high demands for architecture, he said, especially in the sense that the building must serve as the external framework of the inner life of the monks. This balanced harmony lies at the core of Benedictine life and it was the deepest desire of Van der Laan that people would discover the eternal values of the Catholic faith through the application of his architectural theory.⁸¹

⁷⁵ *AvdL*: inv.nr. 595: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Groep Rijnland BNA* ([s.l.] 10 Feb. 1978 = unpublished); IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19840515); inv.nr. 616: IDEM: *Letter to R. van der Does de Willebois* (d.d. 19821004); inv.nr. 623: IDEM: *Letter to C. Genders* (d.d. 19840612); IDEM: *Letter to Br. K. den Biesen* (d.d. 1991 Maundy Thursday).

⁷⁶ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19831227, 19840515); IDEM: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19840513); inv.nr. 623: IDEM: *Letter to C. Genders* (d.d. 19840612); IDEM: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19850121).

⁷⁷ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19831112, 19850121); IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19840515); inv.nr. 623: IDEM: *Letter to C. Genders* (d.d. 19840612).

⁷⁸ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19831112).

⁷⁹ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 94-99: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Studiebijeenkomst* ('s-Hertogenbosch 23-24 Apr. 1949 = unpublished); inv.nr. 436-442: IDEM: *Reis naar Rome* (Rome 28 Feb. 1955 = unpublished); inv.nr. 488-490: IDEM: *Leden van Sint-Adelbertus* (Oss 20 Apr. 1959 = unpublished); inv.nr. 493-494: IDEM: *Over de dispositie van het koorgebed* ('s-Hertogenbosch 20 Feb. 1960 = unpublished); inv.nr. 255: IDEM: *De architectonische dispositie IV*; inv.nr. 274-275: IDEM: *Excursie naar de abdijkerk van Vaals* (6 July 1968 = unpublished). Also IDEM: *Gesprek van de architect met de zusters van Waasmunster* 13-18 en IDEM: 'Bouwen en bidden', in *Mededelingen voor de vrienden van de abdij* (Mamelis 1966) 18-24.

⁸⁰ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 94-99: VAN DER LAAN: *Studiebijeenkomst*. 'Het is de schepping van een ordonnantie van het dagelijks terugkerend geheel, die 15 eeuwen lang voor geen verbetering vatbaar is geweest'. Cf. e.g. W. DERKSE: *Een levensregel voor beginners. Benedictijnse spiritualiteit voor het dagelijks leven* (Tiel 2000).

⁸¹ A.E. VAN HOOFF, quoted in E. KOSTER: 'Dom Hans van der Laan's arcadian architecture', in *Architectura & Natura Quarterly* 1,1 (1992) 32. *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19801220, 19840614, 19841005, 19870326, 19880319); IDEM: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19831125).



3. *Left-top*: Vaals, Abdij St. Benedictusberg, abbey church (1968) with furniture and choir books (1987). Architect Dom Van der Laan. [Photo: M.P. Remery]
Left-bottom: Vaals, Abdij St. Benedictusberg (1923-1986), refectory. Architects Böhm, Weber and Van der Laan. [Photo: M.P. Remery]
Right: Vaals, Abdij St. Benedictusberg, bell tower (1968) seen from the atrium. Architect Dom Van der Laan. [Photo: M.P. Remery]

Secondly there are elements in Van der Laan's theory that demonstrate how he thought and lived essentially *ad mentem sancti Benedicti*. For example, the personal striving for perfection in monastic life overflowed in everything he did, thus giving evidence of the indirect influence of St. Benedict.⁸² The fundamental fact that all aspects of monastic life were regulated by a 'Rule and an Abbot' must have strongly inspired him in his idea that there is one single theory that underpins all architecture.⁸³ What the Rule represents in monastic life is the theory of the plastic number for the world of form-making. Considered in all its aspects, the theory should govern the design of all forms of daily life, as well as their 'use'.⁸⁴ Another example is that in his monastic life Van der Laan did what he could to lay down his work immediately and without delay when the bells called him for his liturgical duties, trying to let 'the sign be simultaneous with

⁸² S. BENEDICTUS NURSINUS: *Regula* c. 73,2.

⁸³ S. BENEDICTUS NURSINUS: *Regula* c. 1,2. *AvdL*, inv.nr. 488-490: VAN DER LAAN: *Leden van Sint-Adelbertus*; IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19831227); inv.nr. 632: IDEM: *Het liturgisch kader van de Abdij van Vaals* 29.

⁸⁴ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 632: VAN DER LAAN: *Het liturgisch kader van de Abdij van Vaals* 20.

his gestures' and searching not to be attached to his activity of the moment.⁸⁵ It is understandable how it required a life-long struggle to learn how one can be totally detached and still live a full monastic life of work and prayer.

Thirdly there is the way in which Van der Laan spoke about St. Benedict and monastic life to others and especially in his letters to family members and friends. For him, nothing was more important than to give first place to the love of Christ and to the Office, just as he had learned it from St. Benedict.⁸⁶ He suggested to others to read the Rule of St. Benedict for the benefit of their spiritual and daily life.⁸⁷ Van der Laan loved the legends by St. Gregory the Great about the life of St. Benedict, which helped him in his own spiritual and liturgical life and he drew a parallel between himself and St. Benedict, observing that they both constructed churches and abbeys.⁸⁸ He illustrated their approach by referring to St. Gregory's remark that the Rule excels in sobriety.⁸⁹ Van der Laan sought to do the same in his architecture, bearing in mind St. Benedict's *dictum*: 'everything should be done with moderation'.⁹⁰ For example, he quoted St. Benedict's proclamation that the oratory should be *quod dicitur* ('what its name says it is').⁹¹ Another example of his love for his founder occurs when he considered a gold medal with a depiction of St. Benedict, given by his abbot to his sister before the birth of a son – who therefore received the name Benedict

⁸⁵ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19720706).

⁸⁶ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19560826); *IDEM*: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19690504); *IDEM*: *Letters to Sr R. Engels* (d.d. 19800902, 19850903); *IDEM*: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19840513).

⁸⁷ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19800327).

⁸⁸ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19790520, 19801224); *IDEM*: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19860721). Cf. S. GREGORIUS MAGNUS: 'Dialogorum liber II', in *Patrologiae Latina* LXVI 125-204; *Sources Chrétiennes* 260, 126-249. *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19360209); *IDEM*: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19410324, 19421026, 19680310). Clark however disputed that St. Gregory was the true author of the dialogues. Cf. F. CLARK: *The 'Gregorian' dialogues and the origins of Benedictine monasticism* (Leiden 2003).

⁸⁹ S. GREGORIUS MAGNUS: 'Dialogorum liber II.36', in *Patrologiae Latina* LXVI 213. *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19421026).

⁹⁰ S. BENEDICTUS NURSINUS: *Regula* c. 31,12 and 48,9: 'omnia mensurate fiant'. Cf. H. VAN DER LAAN: 'De architect over zijn werk', in: N.N.: *De nieuwe abdijkerk van Mamelis* (Vaals 1968) 16.

⁹¹ S. BENEDICTUS NURSINUS: *Regula* c. 52,2. Cf. e.g. *AvdL*, inv.nr. 475-477: VAN DER LAAN: *Mishoren met goede manieren* (Utrecht 6 Feb. 1958 = unpublished); inv.nr. 500-502: *IDEM*: *Bijzondere les over de ceremonies van de H. Mis* ('s-Hertogenbosch 23 July 1960 = unpublished); *IDEM*: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19430919). Cf. also *IDEM*: 'De architect over zijn werk' 16; *IDEM*: 'Kerkelijke architectuur', in *St. Adalbert* 8 (1960) 65; *IDEM*: 'Het heiligdom der christenen en de moderne architectuur', in *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 78 (28 Oct. 1960) 490.

– a very precious gift.⁹² Possibly it is on the instigation of Van der Laan that his sister later attached that same medal to the dress of the bride of her son Benedict on the day of their marriage. Furthermore he was impressed by his pilgrimage to the shrine of his Founder and the Mass he was able to celebrate on the tomb of his founder in Monte Cassino.⁹³ In a similar fashion he referred to St. Benedict in many other circumstances.⁹⁴

St. Benedict also influenced Van der Laan's education in another way, by prescribing the daily reading of Scripture and the writings of the Fathers of the Church.⁹⁵ It is beyond doubt that Scripture played an important role in Van der Laan's life.⁹⁶ Special favourites in the tradition of Solesmes were the biblical texts of the *Canticle of Canticles*, the *Apostolic letters* and the *Apocalypse*.⁹⁷ Van der Laan mainly referred to the *Book of Genesis*, the *Wisdom literature*, St. Paul and the *Apocalypse*. The creation story plays a very important role in his work, especially in the analogy between Divine and human creation, in which humankind does in a limited way what God did at the moment of creation in an unlimited way.⁹⁸ At least two of his favourite authors, St. Gregory of Nyssa and Dom Guéranger often referred to creation. Van der Laan also referred to other scriptural texts in support of his theory.⁹⁹ For example, a quotation from Jesus ben Sira (Sir. 29:21) led him to the conclusion that humans depend on nature for food,

⁹² *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19630807).

⁹³ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19690603).

⁹⁴ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr R. Engels* (d.d. 1979 Advent); IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19860721); IDEM: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19410324, 19430919, 19811122, 19860404); IDEM: *Letter to M. Tyra Antonia* 19870531; IDEM: *Letter to Br. K. den Biesen* (d.d. 1991 Maundy Thursday).

⁹⁵ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 19421230, 19451204, 19560826); IDEM: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19680310, 19690504, 19720706, 19800327, 19811122, 19890615); IDEM: *Letters to Sr R. Engels* (d.d. 1979 Advent, 19800902, 19850903).

⁹⁶ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19790225); IDEM: *Letter to A. Evers* (d.d. 19860413); IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19871105).

⁹⁷ OURY: 'La liturgie, l'esprit et l'Église' 508.

⁹⁸ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 7-8: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Torenvelstraat* (Oegstgeest Jan. 1941 = unpublished); inv.nr. 27-29: IDEM: *Werkgroep kerkelijke architectuur II* (Breda 16 Apr. 1946 = unpublished) en inv.nr. 40-42: IDEM: *Werkgroep kerkelijke architectuur VI*; inv.nr. 87-92: IDEM: *Drie voordrachten over 'paramentiek'* I-III; inv.nr. 5-6: IDEM: *Rijnsburgerweg 160* 19-20; inv.nr. 290-297: IDEM: *Algemene lesdag* ('s-Hertogenbosch 17 Oct. 1970 = unpublished) en inv.nr. 301-303: IDEM: *Algemene lesdag* ('s-Hertogenbosch 9 Jan. 1971 = unpublished); IDEM: *Letter to Sr R. Engels* (d.d. 19791219); IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19801023); IDEM: *Letter to A. Mertens* (d.d. 19870105). Cf. also IDEM: *Vormenspel* (II.1) 16 and IDEM: *De liturgie* 6.

⁹⁹ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 348-349: VAN DER LAAN: *Kerkelijke architectuur I* (Hoeven 18 June 1940 = unpublished); inv.nr. 352-353: IDEM: *Kerkelijke architectuur III* (Hoeven 9 July 1947 = unpublished).

clothes and housing.¹⁰⁰ In an analogical way, he said, these things of daily life form a background to the supernatural life with God in liturgy. He referred several times to the *Book of Wisdom*, especially saying that God has 'arranged all things by measure and number and weight' (Wis. 11:20).¹⁰¹ He also cited certain passages from the *Letters of St. Paul*, giving special attention to the instance where St. Paul spoke about the Christian: 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ' (Gal. 3:27). Van der Laan considered this as a biblical foundation for his teachings concerning liturgical vestments.¹⁰² He dearly loved St. John's descriptions in the *Book of the Apocalypse* of the heavenly liturgy, mainly because of the lectures by Dom Jean de Puniet, and underlined the analogy between the earthly liturgy and the glory given to God by the Saints in heaven.¹⁰³

Though *Scripture* was very important for his spiritual life, in his more theoretical writings biblical texts play a merely illustrative role. It is probable that, rather than actually needing these texts for his theory, he desired to attribute some of his discoveries to the Bible. At the same time, some of the fundamental elements of his theory can be traced back to great biblical themes, which are not easily expressed in one single quotation. For example, he compared human 'making' with the creation by God: 'Somewhere in the Book of Wisdom it is written about creation: *'Creavit omnia simul'*. Everything has been created as one

¹⁰⁰ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 7-8: VAN DER LAAN: *Torenveltstraat 6*; inv.nr. 10-17: IDEM: *Rijnsburgerweg 160*; inv.nr. 87-92: IDEM: *Drie voordrachten over 'paramentie'*; inv.nr. 389: IDEM: *St. Paulusabdij* (Oosterhout 2 June 1952, 12 May 1953 = unpublished); inv.nr. 422: IDEM: *Letter to C. Montaigne* 1953; inv.nr. 443-444: IDEM: *Over het kloosterkleed* (Veghel 16 Apr. 1955 = unpublished); inv.nr. 488-490: IDEM: *Leden van Sint-Adelbertus*; inv.nr. 250-252: IDEM: *De architectonische dispositie I* (9 Jan. & 20 Feb. 1960 = unpublished); inv.nr. 511-512: IDEM: *Oog en Al* (Utrecht 29 Jan. 1963 = unpublished); inv.nr. 281-282: IDEM: *De architectonische ruimte I* ('s-Hertogenbosch Mar. 1963 = unpublished); inv.nr. 616: IDEM: *Letter to R. van der Does de Willebois* (d.d. 19680926); inv.nr. 260: IDEM: *De architectonische ruimte* (I.1) 1; inv.nr. 588: IDEM: *Inwijding van het huis van Dr. Van der Eerden* (Nieuwenhagen 26 June 1977 = unpublished). Cf. Also IDEM: 'Liturgie en Architectuur', in *Communio* 3 (1978) 472; IDEM: *Vormenspel* (I.10) 15 and (III.1) 25.

¹⁰¹ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 350-351: VAN DER LAAN: *Kerkelijke architectuur II* (Hoeven 25 June 1947 = unpublished); inv.nr. 106-116: IDEM: *Studiebijeenkomst*; inv.nr. 272: IDEM: *De architectonische ruimte X*.

¹⁰² H. VAN DER LAAN: 'Over de zin der Liturgische Gewaden', in *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 34 (1950) 261-265; IDEM: 'Kerkelijke architectuur', in *St. Adelbert* 8 (1960) 68; IDEM: 'Openbare les over liturgie en Architectuur gehouden op 5 oktober 1963 door Dom van der Laan', in *Katholiek Bouwblad* 30 (1963) 500-504; *AvdL*, inv.nr. 245-246: IDEM: *Leidraad voor het beoordelen van kerkegebouwen* ('s-Hertogenbosch Summer 1964 = unpublished); inv.nr. 451-454: IDEM: *Drie lessen over kleding* (De Tiltenberg 3-4 Jan. 1956 = unpublished); IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19840629).

¹⁰³ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 194308, 19500813); IDEM: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19870507).

entirety. This however cannot be said about our products' (cf. Sir. 18:1).¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in *Le nombre plastique* Van der Laan came very close to mentioning God when referring to His creation: 'In nature, forms are ruled by natural laws, based on the infinite intelligence of the Creator, to whom they bear witness'.¹⁰⁵ It may be concluded that Van der Laan did not only know OSB well, he also incorporated it firmly in his thinking.

The above demonstrated that the great *esprit de Solesmes*, which started with the interpretation by Dom Guéranger and his successors of the Rule of St. Benedict, focusing especially on liturgy, was essential to the thought of Van der Laan. The attention given to daily objects and their role in liturgy is fundamental. This is expressed in the definition of liturgy by Dom Guéranger which is so important in Van der Laan's theory as it speaks of the role played by earthly things in liturgy. Elements of the Christian Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian-Thomistic line of thought of his monastic and academic training fit very well in this view. Because the same elements occur in his own theory and architecture, Van der Laan believed that his teachers in the monastery would have very much loved this theory.¹⁰⁶ His indebtedness to the tradition of Solesmes and more specifically to the teachings of St. Benedict cannot easily be overestimated. Both the work and the life of St. Benedict had a fundamental influence on Van der Laan. Not only does this become clear from certain direct quotes in the work of the latter, where these rare quotes support some essential elements of his theory, but especially through a more indirect approach. It was seen how the words of St. Benedict resound in many writings of Van der Laan, who gives evidence of thinking along the same line as his founder. The influence of St. Benedict is also evinced by the great devotion to his monastic father and his thought as expressed by Van der Laan in certain letters to relatives and friends. Precisely those themes that were most important for him in the teaching of St. Benedict and their interpretation by the tradition of Solesmes hold together his entire theory as one great hierarchical system of levels, where liturgy, theology and spirituality as well as form-making and architecture each play a specific role.

4. Conclusion: creation and salvation

It may be concluded from the preceding that Van der Laan's thought contains many theological elements, based on what he learned from the monastic tradition of Solesmes as based on St. Benedict. It is unfortunate that he rarely made

¹⁰⁴ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 5-6: VAN DER LAAN: *Rijnsburgerweg 160*: 'Ergens in het Boek der Wijsheid staat over de schepping: *'Creavit omnia simul'*. Alles is als één groot geheel geschapen. Dit kunnen we echter niet zeggen van onze voortbrengselen'.

¹⁰⁵ VAN DER LAAN: *Le nombre plastique* (I.11) 5: 'Les formes, dans la nature, sont régies par des lois naturelles, basées sur l'intelligence infinie du Créateur, dont elles sont le témoignage'.

¹⁰⁶ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19781112).

explicit reference to his sources. Therefore the following will consider three theological elements that form the basis of Van der Laan's thought: Creation, Incarnation and Sanctification. Though he did not use these terms in the same systematic way, an analysis of this triad will help to shed more light on some aspects of his theory. The intention is to make explicit what Van der Laan assumed but did not work out in detail.

4.1. Creation

In *Vormenspel*, Van der Laan started with the question: 'What is liturgy?'.¹⁰⁷ However, although the frequent use of the definition of liturgy by Dom Guéranger might suggest otherwise, the starting point of his reflection was not liturgy, but the material world as it was created by God (cf. Gen. 1-2). Of special importance was humankind encounter with created nature. Thus Van der Laan gave evidence of an 'anthropocentric' view of creation. Because of their soul, human beings are the crown of creation. They are called to dominate the earth (cf. Gen 1:26). At its creation the world was created good by God (cf. Gen. 1:31). This situation was changed in the Fall by the human sin, which changed not only the relation between humans and God, but also the relation between humans and creation (cf. Gen. 3).¹⁰⁸ As of that moment, a certain hostility existed between humans and created nature, which was no longer perfect. Thus humans needed protection, which brought Van der Laan to emphasize that the first human necessities are shelter, clothing and food (cf. Eccl. 29:21).¹⁰⁹ This led him to the essential forms of the house, vestments and vessels.

Note the Aristotelian-Thomistic influence when Van der Laan said that the intellect, having been informed by created reality through the senses, in turn is able to make its own 'creations', applying the same rules it recognises in nature created by God.¹¹⁰ Here one encounters the ancient theological theme of humankind as a co-creator. Van der Laan did not use the term, possibly because he recognised the danger of falling into a self-divinisation of humanity, but he

¹⁰⁷ VAN DER LAAN: *Vormenspel* 7-15.

¹⁰⁸ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 7-8: VAN DER LAAN: *Torenvelstraat* 6; inv.nr. 330: IDEM: *Over het laatste doel van het bouwen* ([s.l.] 10 Jan. 1942 = unpublished); IDEM: 'Kleding', in *Katholieke Bouwblad* 14 (1946-1947) 99; IDEM: 'Façon classique du vêtement sacré', in *L'Artisan et les Arts Liturgiques* 17,4 (1948) 268; *AvdL*, inv.nr. 428-429: IDEM: *Toelichting op het nieuwe religieuze kleding*, JMJ (s-Hertogenbosch 24 Sept. 1953 = unpublished); inv.nr. 443-444: VAN DER LAAN: *Over het kloosterkleding*; inv.nr. 487: IDEM: *Lezing* (Roosendaal 8 Dec. 1958 = unpublished); inv.nr. 515-517: IDEM: *Bij de inwijding van het nieuwe kloosterhabijt* (Huldenberg June 1963 = unpublished); inv.nr. 515-517: IDEM: *Over kleding* I ([s.l.] June 1964 = unpublished).

¹⁰⁹ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *La forme des églises* 8-9.

¹¹⁰ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *La forme des églises* 9; inv.nr. 260: IDEM: *De architectonische ruimte* (I.12) 9.

would agree with Ladaria that 'man was created, and at the same moment God made him 'creator''.¹¹¹ Van der Laan expressed this reality in what he called the 'great analogy'. By analogy of the unlimited divine Intellect, the limited human intellect is able to create artefacts itself, always basing itself on the natural 'given'. It is understandable, given the high value Van der Laan allotted to human 'making' and the role of the intellect, that he strongly opposed the modern separation between making and thinking, for example when in a factory workers have to make parts of a whole they do not know.¹¹² By excluding the intellect in human 'making', one applies a dualism between body and soul which Van der Laan clearly disputed. With reference to St. Thomas Aquinas, he said that whereas animals received hooves or a hairy skin to protect themselves, the intellect is humanity's main means of survival as he uses it to create whatever he needs.¹¹³ In order to dominate it, humankind introduces three-dimensional limitations into the vast extensiveness of nature which for them is unlimited and therefore hostile.¹¹⁴ The intellect needs a limited world which it can dominate and thus demarcates a limited architectural space, which it can order. Similarly, human beings make clothing, pottery and other artefacts to serve both the needs of the body and the intellect.

By starting with nature, Van der Laan was able to follow a philosophical reasoning, based on empirically derived facts, which allowed him to open up the practical use of his theory to a wider public. His conviction was that one does not need to believe in order to interact with God's creation. Part of his theory

¹¹¹ L. LADARIA: 'Il Creatore', in: R. FISICHELLA (ed.): *Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica. Testo integrale e commento teologico* (Casale 1993) 676-684: 'l'uomo è stato creato, e nello stesso tempo Dio lo ha fatto 'creatore''.

¹¹² *AvdL*, inv.nr. 503-504: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Keyenberg* (Renkum 17 Sept. 1960 = unpublished).

¹¹³ S. THOMAS AQUINO: *In Aristotelis libros Physicorum* lib. 3 l. 5 n. 15, in IDEM: *Opera omnia*. T. II (= ed. Leonina) (Romae 1884). Quoted in *AvdL*: ARISTOTLE: *Tekst van Aristoteles over het predicaat 'habitus'* ([s.l.] [s.d.] = unpublished); inv.nr. 387-388: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Gesprek van Pater Talma met P. v.d. Laan* ([s.l.] 7 July 1950 = unpublished); inv.nr. 400-401: IDEM: *St. Paulusabdij*, inv.nr. 391-392: IDEM: *Het huis* (Oosterhout Nov. 1950 = unpublished); inv.nr. 408-409: IDEM: *Kunst en persoon* (Breda 6 Oct. 1952 = unpublished); inv.nr. 389: IDEM: *St. Paulusabdij*. Cf. also IDEM: *Vormenspel* 25; IDEM: *Het domein van de kunst* (= Mgr. Van Heukelumstichting, Kerkelijke architectuur I) (Antwerpen 1952) 19-20.

¹¹⁴ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 447-448: H. VAN DER LAAN: *Het kazuijfel* ([s.l.] 30 Sept. 1955 = unpublished); inv.nr. 451-454: IDEM: *Drie lessen over kleding*, inv.nr. 254: IDEM: *De architectonische dispositie* III ('s-Hertogenbosch 25 June & 23 July 1960 = unpublished); inv.nr. 515-517: IDEM: *Bij de inwijding van het nieuwe kloosterhabijt*, inv.nr. 281-282: IDEM: *De architectonische ruimte* I; inv.nr. 245-246: IDEM: *Leidraad voor het beoordelen van kerkgebouwen*, inv.nr. 281-282: IDEM: *De architectonische Ruimte* (I.1) 1; IDEM: *Letter to Padovan* (d.d. 19830806). Cf. also IDEM: 'Het heilgdom der christenen en de moderne architectuur', in *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 78 (1960) 491; IDEM: 'Openbare les over liturgie en Architectuur' 500-504.

can be derived without referring to God or divine grace. This can be clearly seen in Van der Laan's books on architecture, which very rarely refer to God and which are based on 'the book of nature' and the logical application of reason. The many aspects of Revelation were for him stepping-stones which he simply accepted and included in his reasoning, often without specific reference. In this approach he let the supernatural be the Mystery, recognising the importance of the Incarnation in the role played by material forms.

4.2. Incarnation

As a result of the Incarnation, which plays a central role in Van der Laan's thought, created reality was once again ordered to God. In this sense, creation can be considered to be a preparation for the Incarnation. Van der Laan referred to the analogy of the new person, who has been clothed in Christ through Baptism (cf. Gal. 3:27). It is an optimistic approach which might, if superficially considered, lead to Duns Scotus' conclusion that even without the Fall the Incarnation would have taken place.¹¹⁵ However, though Van der Laan did not enter into such speculative theological debates, and though he hardly ever referred to essential theological themes like the Fall and Redemption, these must be considered to be the assumed foundation for his theory. He gives evidence of upholding the importance of the Incarnation by referring to Christ as the new Adam, which implies a real change in the course of history.¹¹⁶ Christ became flesh to repair what went wrong at the moment of the Fall, when nature became hostile to man. Because of the Incarnation, creation is, as it were, elevated; now everything may serve to praise God, to teach about Him and to reach out to Him. Thus, for Van der Laan, the physical is a way to God, and salvation can be reached through the mediation of matter.

Although the Council of Trent does not mention the created world (i.e. man and matter) as an instrument of salvation in its *Decree on Justification*, various important scholars like St. Thomas and Ratzinger have affirmed that the senses are not to be discarded in matters of faith.¹¹⁷ Though Van der Laan said the same, contrary to Ratzinger he did not include historical and eschatological arguments in his reasoning. All of these commentators would agree that if the senses are not involved in the right way, one falls almost inevitably into a merely apophatic approach, which cannot take into account the transparency of

¹¹⁵ J. DUNS SCOTUS: *Lectura III D.1 q.1*, in IDEM: *Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera Omnia* T.XX (Roma 2003) 1-35, esp. 1-3, 32-33; A. VOS, et al.: *John Duns Scotus. The possibility of the incarnation. Lectura distinction III question 1, Latin Text and English Translation* (Utrecht 2009) 3-30, esp. 3-5, 27-30.

¹¹⁶ *AvdL*, inv.nr. 5-6: VAN DER LAAN: *Rijnsburgerweg 160*; inv.nr. 352-353: IDEM: *Kerkelijke architectuur III*.

¹¹⁷ CONC. TRIDENTINUM: *Sessio VI, 13 Jan. 1547, Decretum de iustificatione*, c. 7, in: *Concilium Tridentinum* (Freiburg de B.) V.791-799 (DH 1528-1531); J. RATZINGER: *Der Geist der Liturgie. Eine Einführung* (Freiburg / Basel / Wien 2000) 106-107.

the spirit in the senses and regards matter and God as absolute opposites which cannot be related to one another (cf. I Cor. 2:10-16) Van der Laan did not consider his works of art as relating directly to the divine, unlike the icon. For that relation to exist, the human intellect has to play a special role in the creation of artefacts destined to serve in liturgy.

On a more practical level Van der Laan realised the need for both intellect and senses, as is shown by his frequent use of the Thomistic motto 'nothing is in the intellect, which is not first in the senses'.¹¹⁸ He dearly loved a solemn liturgy and faithfully adhered to the liturgical rubrics.¹¹⁹ He was mainly concerned with the use of matter in the liturgical form of the many objects used for the liturgical celebration and their symbolic meaning, including the church building. However, he abhorred any form of mysticism or symbolism, and allowed only the 'great sign of the church as the *domus Dei*' ('the house of God').¹²⁰ It simply is an '*aula*' or a '*locus*', which becomes special because it is dedicated to God by virtue of its consecration.¹²¹ All churches and liturgical objects respond both to the senses and the intellect. Thus Van der Laan took great care in designing his buildings and liturgical artefacts, both the design and execution of which were anything but straightforward, precisely because only perfect designs should be used in communication with the divine. Unlike humans, God does not need a house to protect his body. Van der Laan concluded that therefore a church must necessarily respond to all architectural rules in order to be able to glorify His name: 'If this witness of honour does not find its echo in the visible form it is in vain that one constructs in honour of God' (cf. Ps. 127:1).¹²²

Though Van der Laan often spoke of the importance of the Incarnation, he hardly ever referred to Christ and made no mention of Love, Sacrifice or Salvation in his theory. However, because these are the reason, consequence and aim

¹¹⁸ S. THOMAS DE AQUINO: *De Veritate* q2 a3, in R.M. SPIAZZI (ed.): *Quaestiones disputatae*. T. I (Taurini / Romae 1953): 'nihil est in intellectu quod non sit prius in sensu'.

¹¹⁹ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19431121); inv.nr. 334b: IDEM: *Over de schoonheid van het liturgische gebaar* 13-14. Cf. also IDEM: 'Façon classique du vêtement sacré', in *L'Artisan et les Arts Liturgiques* 4 (1948) 284; IDEM: 'La chasuble pliée ou «plicata»', in *L'Art d'Église - supplément L'Ouvroir Liturgique* 12,3 (1951-1952) 55-58.

¹²⁰ H. VAN DER LAAN: 'Brieven uit Oosterhout', in *Katholiek Bouwblad* 16 (1948) 56; *AvdL*, inv.nr. 83-84: IDEM: *Bijeenkomst met de geestelijkheid* (Breda 23 Nov. 1948 = unpublished).

¹²¹ H. VAN DER LAAN: 'Over de invloed van natuur en bovennatuur op de vorm van het kerkgebouw', in *Katholiek Bouwblad* 16 (1948) 16-17; IDEM: 'Over de Institutie van het Romeinse Missaal', in *De Romeinse Mis na Vaticanum II* (Utrecht 1970) 22; *AvdL*: IDEM: *Letter to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19480716, 19550814); inv.nr. 150-153: IDEM: *Het plastische getal VIII* ('s-Hertogenbosch 26 June 1954 = unpublished).

¹²² *AvdL*, inv.nr. 380: H. VAN DER LAAN: *In het vriendenboek van Granpré Molière* ([s.l.] Feb. 1950 = unpublished): 'si ce témoignage d'honneur ne trouve pas son écho dans la forme visible, c'est en vain que l'on construit à l'honneur de Dieu'.

of the Incarnation, for Van der Laan the word 'Incarnation' includes the entire mystery of Christ's Incarnation, Sacrifice in love and Resurrection: 'Thus since the Incarnation, and especially since the Ascension, a worship, a heavenly liturgy has been inaugurated in which the earth is involved in its entirety'.¹²³ The tradition of Solesmes related all these aspects to the fundamental attitude of '*demeurer dans l'esprit de l'Incarnation*'. Mme Bruyère notably did not speak extensively of Sacrifice either.¹²⁴ Van der Laan concentrated mainly on the *exitus* of creation and the *reditus* towards God. The Incarnation is then the turning point and Van der Laan expressed this great movement towards God with the concise words '*ima summis*', which first of all refer to Christ, who in Himself reconciled the lowest (*ima*) with the highest (*summa*). The *reditus* is not done in spite of, but through the created world. Van der Laan's thought does not include the philosophical idea of Plotinus that the *exitus* is negative and the *reditus* positive. In his Christian approach, the *exitus* is the positive creation by God, and the *reditus* is the free answer of humankind to the grace of God, which may ultimately lead to his sanctification.

4.3. Sanctification

It is in the incarnate Christ, who united in Himself the *ima* and the *summa*, that from the moment of the Incarnation the entire created world was included in His redeeming action which intends to bring everything back to God.¹²⁵ Though Van der Laan did not use the theological term 'sanctification' to describe this movement towards God, it covers precisely what he intended to say. He emphasised the fact that, as with all creation, humanity is limited by both time and space and needs sacred space, sacred time and sacred symbols to reach out to God. It is through the mediation of these things that humankind participates in the heavenly liturgy and since the Incarnation – with the grace of God – it is in the earthly liturgy that the *exitus* of creation is turned into the *reditus* towards God.¹²⁶ The latter movement may be called the sanctification of humanity, emphasising the fundamental importance of the Incarnation. Liturgy is the earthly 'endpoint'; the sharing in the divine life is the ultimate goal. Humans, being both matter and spirit, are tied to matter, but with their intellect they can reach out beyond themselves. Van der Laan always considered liturgical architecture and artefacts to be related to the 'ecclesiastical hierarchy'

¹²³ VAN DER LAAN: *Het domein van de kunst* 6: 'Sedert de Incarnatie en vooral sedert de Hemelvaart is dan ook een eredienst, een hemelse liturgie geïnaugureerd waarin de aarde geheel betrokken is'.

¹²⁴ BRUYÈRE: *La vie spirituelle*.

¹²⁵ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19431121, 19830314); *AvdL*, inv.nr. 589-591; IDEM: *De beschrijving van de Sint Lucaskerk te 's-Hertogenbosch* ([s.l.] Easter 1977 = unpublished). And IDEM: 'Over de zin der Liturgische Gewaden', in *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 34 (1950) 264-265; IDEM: *Vormenspel* 7.

¹²⁶ VAN DER LAAN: *Vormenspel* 93-102.

taken in the largest sense to include also Creation, Incarnation and Sanctification through the Sacramental mystery of the triune God, who is the object of the faith of the Church.¹²⁷ Thus in liturgy, earthly matter is used as a vessel of grace. This is expressed in the reality of the Sacraments, where bread made by humans is turned by God into the Body of Christ. The key to the concept of sanctification for Van der Laan is that in the Incarnation God Himself became matter, for the sole reason of bringing humankind, body and soul, to Himself. Van der Laan recognised that the matter of the mystery which is celebrated is very simple and at the same time essential. For example, the matter of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is minimal and it can be celebrated at any place, just as the Office, the *opus Dei*, for which suffices a breviary and a corner in a train compartment.¹²⁸ But without bread there is no Eucharist, without simple cloth there are no vestments and without walls there is no *aula Dei*. As such, the sensible signs of liturgy are firmly rooted in physical human life and Van der Laan added that therefore one needs to keep one's eyes and ears open in church.¹²⁹ Hence the importance for sanctification of liturgical symbols which speak to all the senses and which in turn inform the intellect.

Van der Laan was always aware of the larger background of the top-down movement of creation and the bottom-up movement of the created world, which – with the help of divine grace – is ultimately aiming towards the supernatural life with God. With reference to the Incarnation of Christ, he sought to give created matter its original elevated and referential value, always pointing to God. Although a parallel can be observed with Neo-Platonism, which is concentrated around the emanation from the divine and the call of creation to return to its origin, there are also fundamental differences. Plato would neither accept the mediation of an incarnate God, nor the mediation of matter. In Van der Laan's ideas there is not a trace of paganism, for his work is grounded in a deeply Christian approach to life. The sanctification of humankind, though implicit and assumed, is among the most essential theological elements of his theory and should always be considered as its ultimate background and aim.

In the preceding sections certain theological elements of Van der Laan's theory have been made explicit. This is different from the method Van der Laan himself applied. He let the Mystery be what it was. His 'monastic theology' in the tradition of Solesmes relates the essence, origin and final destination of the

¹²⁷ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19400331, 19431121); *IDEM*: *Letter to Sr L. van der Laan* (d.d. 195206); *IDEM*: *Letters to Sr G. van der Laan* (d.d. 19630804, 19731221, 19801220, 19841019, 19860618, 19881016); *inv.nr.* 594: *IDEM*: *Letter to R. van der Does de Willebois* (d.d. 19780105); *IDEM*: *Letter to Sr R. Engels* (d.d. 19810528); *IDEM*: *Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19831227); *IDEM*: *Letter to A. Bodar* (d.d. 19880728).

¹²⁸ VAN DER LAAN: 'Bouwen en bidden' 14-15.

¹²⁹ *AvdL*: VAN DER LAAN: *Letter to N. van der Laan* (d.d. 19431121).

whole world with both Revelation and the ordinary daily objects humanity encounters.

In conclusion it may be said that in Van der Laan's theory, liturgy, architecture and spiritual life are mainly connected through certain specific themes, which serve as bridges between all the hierarchically-related levels and fields of study that together form his single world-view. Apart from architectural sources like Vitruvius, and what can be called his empirical experience, it has been demonstrated that the basic elements with which he constructed his theory of 'human making' can be recognised in the works of different authors from the tradition of Solesmes. Apart from a limited number of direct quotes that greatly affected Van der Laan, there is an undercurrent of the 'invisible', indirect influence of the tradition of Solesmes, *'l'esprit de Solesmes'*, which traverses his whole life and which is subtle and mainly indirect, but very substantial. The way in which Dom Guéranger defined liturgy, Mme Bruyères' mystical approach to the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, but also the Thomistic approach of Dom Delatte and the practical spirituality of Dom de Puniet all had their effect on the thinking of Van der Laan. In turn, these authors based themselves on the writings of St. Benedict, the founder of their Order, and especially on his Rule.

Therefore it can be concluded that the Rule of St. Benedict has been truly fundamental for both the life and thought of Van der Laan. It was his personal experience that the 'secret' of the interior life with God is the foundation of all exterior expression: 'The sacramental structure of our Christian life has always been a guide to me for the construction from below of the architectural theory'.¹³⁰ Ultimately it is because of the link between Mystery and matter in his own life, the basis of which is found in the style of life he learned from St. Benedict, that Van der Laan was able to develop his entire theory, recognising how in the Incarnation the *ima* were reconciled with the *summa*, thus involving matter in the movement towards God, the ultimate Mystery.

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¹³⁰ *AndL: VAN DER LAAN: Letter to R. Padovan* (d.d. 19840629): 'De sacramentele structuur van ons christelijk leven is mij altijd een leidraad geweest bij het van onder af opbouwen van de architectonische theorie'.

