



*Call for papers*

**“Eat and drink at my table” (Lk 22:30)**

**Cultures of food and drink in Catholic religious orders and congregations in the Low Countries (nineteenth and twentieth centuries)**

**Stichting Echo seminar, Friday 12 December 2025 (Leuven, Belgium)**

From Friar Tuck of Robin Hood folklore to the ‘parish priest of the thriving vineyard’ of the Flemish author Felix Timmermans’s eponymous novel: the image of the jovial friar, monk or priest with a love of food and good wine or copious amounts of beer is a deep-rooted trope in the culture of the Low Countries. The origins of this stereotype have received little scholarly attention. Important works on eating and drinking cultures in the religious communities of Early Christianity, the Middle Ages, and – to a lesser extent – the early modern period exist, but studies on this theme are few and far between for the contemporary era. And yet this period saw a number of fundamental developments, including demographic growth, the mass production and consumption of food, the declining share of the population working in agriculture, occasional famines (Ireland 1845–52, Ukraine 1932–33), the rise of industrial agriculture and of ecological counter-movements, etc.

In his study *La vie quotidienne des religieux au Moyen Âge, X<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1978), the Belgian sociologist and medievalist Léo Moulin raised a series of questions, topics and approaches that can also be of interest for the contemporary era. What food and drink were served in the refectories of religious houses? What food and drink were distributed on festive occasions and what kinds were banned during periods of abstinence? Or, to refer to the title of Caroline Walker Bynum’s famous book, when and how did religious feast, and when and how did they fast? What customs applied in the kitchen and the refectory (etiquette) and what officers held sway in these places (cook, *corrector mensae*...)? When was silence required at table and what books were read during mealtimes? What food and drink were produced (as opposed to just prepared) by religious and what place did this activity occupy in the economic model of the institute? What food products were (and are) produced mainly or exclusively for the market and how are these products marketed as ‘monastic’? To what extent was there theological or spiritual reflection on these issues and what were the canonical and legal frameworks, for example also in relation to alcoholism and the excessive use of other stimulants such as tobacco? The impact of all this on the current context is another possible topic: what



aspects of the cultures of food and drink in religious institutes still exist today, and how have they affected popular culture? Have certain dishes from monasteries or convents influenced modern ‘secular’ gastronomy? To what extent can modern forms of dieting be traced back to fasting in religious houses?

**A seminar to address these and associated questions will be hosted by [Stichting Echo](#) in Leuven (Belgium) on 12 December 2025.** Researchers, both junior and senior, are invited to submit abstracts for papers (max. 500 words). In addition to case studies, more theoretical contributions are also encouraged. Given the historiographical lacuna identified above, the focus of this seminar will be on the **nineteenth and twentieth centuries**, but abstracts for comparisons with earlier periods will also be considered. Given Stichting Echo’s goal of promoting the study of **female and male religious institutes in the Low Countries**, priority will be given to papers that deal with this geographical area or with missionaries from Belgium or the Netherlands.

**The deadline for abstracts is 1 September 2025.** The publication of an English-language volume on the basis of papers read at the seminar is envisaged; the seminar (papers and discussion) will therefore be in English.

### **Summary:**

- 19th–20th century
- Catholic female and male religious institutes
- Low Countries
- Topics:
  - Cultures of food and drink
  - Ritualisation of eating and drinking
  - Theological reflection on eating and drinking
  - Spirituality of eating and drinking
  - Fasting and abstinence
  - Moderation and excess
  - Monastic gastronomy
  - Canonical legislation on eating and drinking
  - Production of food and drink



- Spatiality of eating and drinking culture in religious houses (architecture of refectories, kitchens, gardens...)
- Reception of religious culinary customs in modern (popular) culture

**Please send abstracts and any queries to Wouter Kock ([wouter.kock@ru.nl](mailto:wouter.kock@ru.nl)).**