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# Religious Institutes in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Historiography, Research and Legal Position

Edited by

Jan De Maeyer, Sofie Leplae & Joachim Schmiedl

*To the memory of prof. dr. Jan Roes († 24 May 2003), Professor at the University of Nijmegen and Director of the Katholiek Documentatiecentrum (Nijmegen), who was a source of great inspiration in the founding of the European Forum on the History of Religious Institutes.*



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## Table of Contents

Introduction Jan De Maeyer, Sofie Leplae & Joachim Schmiedl	7
<b>PART I HISTORIOGRAPHY &amp; RESEARCH</b>	<b>27</b>
The Historiography of Male Orders and Congregations in Belgium. A Status Quaestionis Jan Art	29
Les instituts féminins en Belgique. Bilan et perspectives de recherche Paul Wynants	41
Les publications françaises relatives à l'histoire des congrégations religieuses Daniel Moulinet	53
An Assessment of the Histories of Religious Communities in Germany Joachim Schmiedl	71
Traditional Religious Orders in Germany. A Research Report Peter Häger	83
A Survey of Research and Writing about Roman Catholic Women's Congregations in Great Britain and Ireland (1800-1950) Susan O'Brien	91
L'état de la recherche sur les congrégations religieuses en Italie Nicola Raponi	117
A World Apart? Religious Orders and Congregations in the Netherlands † Jan Roes & Hans de Valk	135

Research on Religious Institutes in Switzerland Franziska Metzger	163
<b>PART II</b> <b>THE LEGAL POSITION OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES</b>	183
Les associations religieuses en Belgique pendant le 19 <sup>e</sup> siècle Fred Stevens	185
La législation relative aux congrégations religieuses en France Daniel Moulinet	203
The Social, Cultural and Legal Conditions for the Foundation of Religious Orders and Congregations in Germany Joachim Schmiedl	243
The Laws of Suppression in Italy. Characteristics and Effects Alessandro Colombo	263
“Should it happen that God should permit...” The Political and Legal Position of Orders and Congregations in the Netherlands Joos van Vugt	277
The Legal Situation of Religious Institutes in Switzerland. Conflicts about Social and Cultural Modernisation and Discourses about National Hegemony Franziska Metzger	309
Bibliography	331
Index of names	369
Index of religious institutes	373
Notes on Contributors	376
Colophon	380

## Introduction

### Religious Institutes in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries: an Underrated History?

*Jan De Maeyer, Sofie Leplae & Joachim Schmiedl*

The Italian historian Nicola Raponi rightly insists that in both church history and general history not enough recognition is given to the history of the development of religious institutes in Western Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>1</sup> The reason is that historians all too often see religious orders and congregations as separate entities and ignore the fact that religion and religious experience also influence cultural history. This does not mean that historiography has completely neglected religious institutes. In fact there is an impressive number of studies that give the careful reader a good overview of the development of individual institutes, both in relation to the broader religious movements as well as in relation to their apostolate (education, health care, etc.). However, we still do not have any studies that focus on an international comparison - such as, for example, a systematic analysis of the position of the Holy See and of local bishops. The possibility of such an approach presupposes a forum for research and discussion in a (Western) European setting. This is exactly what *The European Forum on the History of Religious Institutes in the 19th and 20th centuries (Relins-Europe)* intends to establish. The present volume is the initial result of the work of this international research group.

<sup>1</sup> See the contribution of Raponi in this volume. In general we refer to “religious institute”, the official canonical term. However, other terms are also used, e.g. “religious institution”, “community”, “congregation” etc.