

**Zeitschrift:** Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie  
**Band:** 105 (2015)  
**Heft:** 2  
  
**Artikel:** A liturgical perspective on society? : Actuosa participatio and the Dutch Participation Society  
**Autor:** Smit, Peter-Ben  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-583632>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 08.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

---

# A Liturgical Perspective on Society?

## *Actuosa participatio* and the Dutch *Participation Society*

Peter-Ben Smit

### Introduction

‘Challenging Catholicism’ was the title of the academic gathering at which this paper was originally presented.<sup>1</sup> The title of the meeting can be understood in two ways: in terms of posing challenges to Catholicism (understood here in the broad sense of the word, not in the sense of ‘Roman Catholicism’), and in terms of a Catholicism that is itself challenging to other traditions; this double meaning was intentional. The present paper is mainly concerned with the second interpretation of the phrase – even if the paper itself also is the result of a *de facto* societal challenge to catholic theological reflection, provoked as it is by a particular context. It explores how a topic that is key to a Catholic understanding of liturgy can be understood as challenging contemporary political trends; the notion of active or full participation (*participatio actuosa*) in the liturgy will be compared and contrasted with the notion of participation as it is current in contemporary Dutch political discussions; the focus on the Dutch setting is fitting: the occasion for the meeting on ‘Challenging Catholicism’ was the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches. Having said this, it is now possible to turn to the actual subject matter of this paper: two distinct forms of participation compared and contrasted.

Liturgy and society will often be understood in terms of ‘church’ and ‘world’, ‘sacred’ and ‘secular,’<sup>2</sup> without much connection between the two. By contrast, and building on a broad tradition that seeks to connect pre-

---

<sup>1</sup> The essayistic style of the original presentation has been retained. The paper is also essayistic in that it intends to develop an initial thought, without being comprehensive. – The author is grateful to Mr. Philip Whittaker, Haarlem, for proofreading the paper and for asking critical questions about it.

<sup>2</sup> On the secular, see also my ‘Säkularisierung: Theorie und Kontext. Säkularisierungstheorien aus systematischer und historiographischer Sicht’, that will appear in this journal. This paper further draws on insights developed earlier in: Peter-Ben Smit, ‘Volk Gottes unterwegs. Zur Frage der Gebetsrichtung in der Eucharistiefeier’, in: *IKZ* 102 (2012) 159–179, ‘Eucharistie und Mahlzeit: Historische, theologische und praxisorientierte Perspektiven’, in: *IKZ* 97 (2007) 275–300.

cisely these two, this paper will consider an aspect that is current in the making and shaping of Dutch society at the moment in relation to aspects of the liturgical movement, to which Old Catholic theology is deeply indebted. In particular, it will be argued that the notion of ‘participation’ as it is current in contemporary Dutch discussions on the ‘participation society’ – a phenomenon known elsewhere as ‘big society’ – can be understood more precisely and even be criticized from the perspective of a notion that is key to the theology of the liturgical movement, i.e. *actuosa participatio*. In order to argue this, first a brief outline will be given of both the idea of a ‘participation society’ and the notion of *actuosa participatio*, after which a brief argument will be given concerning the inter-relationship between liturgy and the shaping of society,<sup>3</sup> on the basis of which the two kinds of participation will be compared and contrasted with each other. This will lead to further insight into the character of both of them, in line with the paradigm of comparative studies, both historical and theological.<sup>4</sup>

### **‘Participation Society’ – The Alternative for a ‘Welfare State’**

In the Dutch public discourse, the notion of ‘participation society’, although used previously by the prime minister Wim Kok as early as 1990 and by Jan Peter Balkenende in 2005, was propelled to greater prominence in the ‘troonrede’, the monarch’s annual address to the houses of parliament of 2013, delivered as it was by the new king, Willem-Alexander. He said the following:

---

<sup>3</sup> For that, see also my ‘John Milbank, Theology & Social Theory’, in: *NTT* 67 (2013) 308–314. In a way, what follows can also be understood as an exercise in ritual criticism, when considering both participation in the (ritual) life of the people of God and the (ritual) participation in the life of the people of the Netherlands both from a ritual perspective. See on this topic also: Peter-Ben Smit, ‘Ritual Failure, Ritual Negotiation, and Paul’s Argument in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34’, in: *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 3 (2013) 165–195.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., the outline of comparative history given by Angela Berlis, *Vergelijking als weg tot historische kennis* (Publicatieserie Stichting Oud-Katholiek Seminarie 40), Amersfoort/Sliedrecht (Oud-Katholiek Boekhuis/Merweboek) 2007, which has been used in: Peter-Ben Smit, *Old Catholic and Philippine Independent Ecclesiologies in History. The Catholic Church in Every Place* (Brill’s Series in Church History 52), Leiden (Brill) 2011, as well.

It is an undeniable reality that in today's network and information society people are both more assertive and more independent than in the past. This, combined with the need to reduce the budget deficit, means that the classical welfare state is slowly but surely evolving into a participation society. Everyone who is able will be asked to take responsibility for their own lives and immediate surroundings.

When people shape their own futures, they add value not only to their own lives but to society as a whole. In this way, the Dutch people can continue building a strong nation of confident citizens. A nation with a small but strong government which gives people the space they need. Which offers opportunities where possible and protection where necessary, ensuring that no one gets left behind. Everyone in the Netherlands should have the chance to accommodate the changes ahead in their own lives.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, taking up the notion of 'big society', as it had been developed (primarily) in the setting of the political debate in the United Kingdom as a combination of (free market) capitalism, political liberalism, and social voluntarism,<sup>6</sup> the king's statements in his speech, drafted for him under the auspices of the then (and current) Dutch government, contain two notions that are of particular relevance for the purposes of the present paper, focused as it is on the notion of participation. These are: 1) participation is focused on those who are able to take responsibility for their own lives and environment; 2) the anthropological notion that it is beneficial for those

---

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.koninklijkhuis.nl/globale-paginas/taalrubrieken/english/speeches/speeches-from-the-throne/speech-from-the-throne-2013/> [25.3.2015]. See also the Dutch text at: <http://www.koninklijkhuis.nl/nieuws/toespraken/2013/september/troonrede-2013> [25.3.2015]. Needless to say, the speech provided ample food for discussion, see, e.g., the following publications: Mark Sanders / Timo Kansil / André Meiresonne, *Van opgelegde naar oprechte participatie: de mens en zijn verbindingen in samenleving, economie en staat*, The Hague (Mr. Hans van Mierlo Stichting) 2014; Mirjam Sterk (with Ardin Mourik-Geluk), *Ieder voor zich en God voor ons allen? Pleidooi voor participatie*, Utrecht (Ten Have) 2014; Kim Putters, *Rijk geschakeerd: op weg naar de participatiesamenleving*, Den Haag (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau) 2014; Anne Buskes / Govert Derix, *Iedereen doet ertoe: het ware gezicht van de participatiesamenleving*, Maastricht (Trajekt) 2014, as well as Nicolette van Gestel (ed.), *De kracht van de gemeenschap*, Nijmegen (Valkhof) 2015. – See also the following publication, predating the king's speech: Maria Vreugdenhil, *Nederland participatieland?: de ambitie van de Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning (Wmo) en de praktijk in buurten, mantelzorgrelaties en kerken*, Amsterdam (Vossiuspers) 2012.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., the analysis provided by: Steve Corbett / Alan Walker, 'The Big Society: Rediscovery of «the social» or Rhetorical Fig-Leaf for Neo-liberalism?', in: *Critical Social Policy* 33 (2013) 451–472.

doing so, because they will add value both to their own lives and to those of broader society. Furthermore, it is of relevance to note that the shift from ‘welfare state’ to ‘participation society’ also involved a massive reduction of government spending on all sorts of services and, at the same time, an ongoing privatization of various service providers. Quite emphatically, the idea of ‘participation society’ was also intended as a way of cutting costs and accessing new resources in order to uphold the standard of living in The Netherlands. Participation is, therefore, both tied to self-realization (adding value to one’s life), the good of society, and accessing the resources ‘hidden’ in the private sphere and that can be made available to the society at large.

### **Liturgical Participation: *Participatio Actuosa***

Within the liturgical movement, understood in the broad ecumenical sense of the word, the term *actuosa participatio*<sup>7</sup>, as it began to be used in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the notion itself is older), indicates,<sup>8</sup> generally speaking and without entering into the details concerning the meaning of the term,<sup>9</sup> the participation of all in the liturgy in the sense of participating in the liturgical actions of the church both mentally and physically, rather than being in attendance at a ceremony performed for their benefit, in other words: the liturgy is not about (and by) the priest only, but also about and by the people; it is also not primarily about ritual, but about the church, given that it is about participation in the life of the church

---

<sup>7</sup> On which see, e.g., my ‘Volk’ (see note 2), esp. 159–164. See on aspects of active liturgical participation in (German) Old Catholicism further also: Angela Berlis, ‘Einbruch in männliche Sphären? Der Aufbruch alt-katholischer Frauen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert’, in: Michaela Sohn-Kronthaler (ed.), *Feminisierung oder (Re-)Maskulinisierung der Religion im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert? Forschungsbeiträge aus Christentum, Judentum und Islam*, Wien (Böhlau) 2015 (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> The term (as ‘partecipazione attiva’) was used influentially and was probably introduced by Pope Pius X in his motu proprio *Tra le sollecitudini* of 22 November, 1903. See: Albert Gerhards / Benedikt Kranemann, *Einführung in die Liturgiewissenschaft*, Darmstadt (WBG) 2008, 102. For an overview of the debate, see the contributions collected in: A. Montani / M. Sodi (eds.), *Actuosa participatio. Conoscere, comprendere e vivere la Liturgia*, Rome (LEV) 2002.

<sup>9</sup> See, again, the contributions collected in: Montani / Sodi (eds.), *Participatio* (see note 8).



through participation in the church's ritual.<sup>10</sup> This also sums up, *in nuce* and with the use of what probably is an unfair caricature of earlier forms of liturgy, what the liturgical movement moved away from: ways of celebrating the liturgy, in particular, but not only, the Eucharist, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While the concern of the liturgical movement was pastoral (a better participation would lead to a better understanding and appreciation), historical (the rediscovery of sources from the early Church led to the need for rethinking and revising the liturgy), it was also profoundly ecclesiological and theological.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the liturgical movement, in its quest for the revision and renewal of ecclesial ritual, sought to find ways of performing and thus embodying the theological and spiritual insights that were very much the catalyst of the movement. These insights pertained in particular to a renewed and stronger understanding of the church as a communion (*communio*, *koinonia*) of the Spirit-endowed baptized, who, given that they are the royal priesthood of God, are to worship this God corporately and, therefore, actually participate in the rites of this worship (*actuosa participatio*).<sup>12</sup> In the liturgical move-

<sup>10</sup> See for this: Mattijs Ploeger, 'Het "onliturgische" karakter van de Liturgische Beweging', in: *NTT* 61 (2007) 109–122, and further: Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber, 'Liturgische Bewegungen', in: *TRE* 21, 2000, 401–406, as well as the study: John R.K. Fenwick / Bryan D. Spinks, *Worship in Transition: The Liturgical Movement in the Twentieth Century*, London (Continuum) 1995. – To be sure, this does *not* mean that everything should be done by all (e.g., all saying every prayer, or all being in the same place, etc.), but rather that each should fully participate from one's place in the order of the church.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Herman Wegman, *Riten en Mythen*, Kampen (Kok) 1991, 351–353, referred to by Mattijs Ploeger, *Celebrating Church: Ecumenical Contributions to a Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Netherlands Studies in Ritual and Liturgy 9), Groningen/Tilburg (Instituut voor Liturgiewetenschap/Liturgisch Instituut), 79.

<sup>12</sup> For a clarification as to what this can mean, see, e.g., the formulations of Vatican II's constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963): "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in the ceremonies which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people' (I Pet. 2:9; 2:4–5) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true spirit of Christ." (14) – See on the notion of the laity as people of God also Rowan Williams, 'Being a People: Reflections on the Concept of the "Laity"', in: *Religion, State and Society* 27 (1999) 11–21.

ment ecclesiological and even ontological convictions, pertaining to what the church is and to who the baptized are, underlie the ritual developments that many of its proponents strove for. In the line of thought characteristic of this movement, the identity of a Christian is both constituted by and expressed through the liturgy and is, therefore, also always an identity established by being part of a larger body, or communion. The theology underpinning the liturgical movement, therefore, is always strongly ecclesiological in orientation and focused on the (ideal) ordering of a 'utopian' community, that is to say, a community in which salvation and reconciliation, as wrought by God and as it will be fully realized in the *eschaton*, already become an experiential reality.<sup>13</sup>

### **(Liturgical) Ecclesiology and Politics: General and Old Catholic Observations**

Because liturgical theology is, as was indicated above, always strongly focused on questions of community, its meaning and appropriate shape, the interrelationship between precisely such theology and politics, concerned as it also is with the shaping of a(n ideal) society, is a rather obvious one – and one with roots that are as old as Christianity as well.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, this has been explored extensively by a variety of authors, prominently among them thinkers such as William Cavanaugh, publishing titles such as *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (1998), but the authors associated with the movement known as *Radical Orthodoxy* heavily draw on liturgical theology in order to substantiate their oftentimes political program,<sup>15</sup> which also applies to a theologian such as Rowan Williams.<sup>16</sup> Also the ecumenical movement, to the extent

---

<sup>13</sup> Within the Old Catholic theological discourse, this has been emphasized in particular by Kurt Stalder, see: Ploeger, *Celebrating* (see note 11), 201–202.

<sup>14</sup> There is a direct line between early Christian concerns related to meal fellowship, understood as a microcosmic representation of ideal community, and contemporary liturgical theological concerns; see for a study of early Christian meals in relation to utopian society, e.g., Peter-Ben Smit, *Food and Fellowship in the Kingdom: Studies in the Eschatological Meal and Scenes of Nutritional Abundance in the New Testament* (WUNT II.234), Tübingen (Mohr) 2008.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g. Smit, *Milbank* (see note 2) and the references there.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., the importance of liturgy with: Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, Oxford (Blackwell) 2000. See also the chapter on Williams in Ploeger, *Celebrating* (see note 11), 283–296.

that this is embodied by the World Council of Churches, has explored this interrelationship, especially in the footsteps of the Vancouver assembly, which referred to a 'Eucharistic vision' for the world.<sup>17</sup> This list could be continued, but the main point has been made. In relation to Old Catholic theology, in which the theology of the liturgical movement has become very important,<sup>18</sup> the interrelationship between liturgy and politics has

<sup>17</sup> See the Official report of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver, Canada, 24 July–10 August 1983: "Christ – the life of the world – unites heaven and earth, God and world, spiritual and secular. His body and blood, given us in the elements of bread and wine, integrate liturgy and diaconate, proclamation and acts of healing. Our eucharistic vision thus encompasses the whole reality of Christian worship, life and witness, and tends – when truly discovered – to shed new light on Christian unity in its full richness of diversity." The statement is quoted by Franz Segbers, 'A Transformative Eucharistic Vision for the Entire Oikoumene', in: *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9 (2009) 138–150, here 140.

<sup>18</sup> See Ploeger, *Celebrating* (see note 11), esp. 161–234. – See also the documentation provided by: Urs von Arx, 'Trends and Developments in Modern Western European Old Catholic Liturgy, with a Focus on the Swiss Church', in: *PNCC Studies* 10 (1989) 9–39; Sigisbert Kraft, 'Die Erneuerung der Liturgie in den alt-katholischen und anglikanischen Kirchen', in: Karl Schlemmer (ed.) *Gemeinsame Liturgie in getrennten Kirchen?*, Freiburg i.Br. (Herder) 1991, 11–28; idem, *Wir feiern Gottesdienst. Ein Grundkurs Liturgie*, Karlsruhe 1984; Herwig Aldenhoven, 'Gottesdienstliche Erneuerung in der Christkatholischen Kirche der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert. Die Revision der liturgischen Bücher. Mit einem Verzeichnis der liturgischen Bücher der Christkatholischen Kirche der Schweiz (Anhang von Roland Lauber)', in: Bruno Bürki / Martin Klöckener (eds.), *Liturgie in Bewegung / Liturgie en mouvement. Beiträge zum Kolloquium „Gottesdienstliche Erneuerung in den Schweizer Kirchen im 20. Jahrhundert. 1.–3. März 1999 an der Universität Freiburg, Schweiz / Actes du Colloque Renouveau liturgique des Églises en Suisse au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. 1–3 mars 1999, Université de Fribourg, Suisse, Freiburg Schweiz (Universitätsverlag) 2000, 295–309; Urs von Arx, 'Tagzeitenliturgie in der Christkatholischen Kirche der Schweiz', in: Martin Klöckener / Bruno Bürki (eds.), *Tagzeitenliturgie. Ökumenische Erfahrungen und Perspektiven / Liturgie des Heures. Expériences et perspectives œcuméniques*, Fribourg (Academic Press) 2004, 223–251; Koenraad Ouwens, 'Liturgie in de Oud-Katholieke Kerk', in: Angela Berlis / Koenraad Ouwens / Jan Visser / Wietse van der Velde / Jan Lambert Wirix-Speetjens, *De Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland: leer en leven*, Zoetermeer (Boekencentrum) 2000, 123–162; Koenraad Ouwens, 'In geest en waarheid – maar niet altijd langs de kortste weg', in: idem / Adrie Paasen (eds.), *Liturgie vernieuwing in de Oud-Katholieke Kerk*, Amersfoort (Oud-Katholiek Boekhuis) 1999, 9–20. See also the following contributions to the 2012 International Old Catholics Theologians' Conference, published in IKZ 103 (2013): David R. Holton, 'Old Catholic Eucharistic Prayers in Ecumenical Context: Some Current Questions', 53–79; Klaus Rohmann, 'Die Eucharistie als gedenkende Gegen-*



also begun to be developed, for example by the 2006–2008 consultation on “Catholicity and Globalization,” in the method of working of which and conclusions of which precisely a shared liturgical vision played a key role.<sup>19</sup> This is apparent in the consultation’s final statement, dedicated to the martyr bishop Alberto Ramento:

The Eucharist looks forward to a global society in God, a city for all the nations, in which the last are first, the humble lifted high, and the powerful repentant, as grace and peace forgive and unite all humanity. The supper should be celebrated as a provocation and inspiration to make that rebellion real in love and a song of reinvigorating hope that the future can break through into the present. The Eucharist is the sign and reality of the hope of a just world for all.<sup>20</sup>

More recently, and illustrating one of the sources of Old Catholic liturgical theology, a documentary volume on the Ecumenical Patriarch’s visit to the Old Catholic Church of The Netherlands was published, in which

---

wart des Heil schenkenden Gottes. Erwägungen anhand der deutschen altkatholischen Eucharistiegebete’, 80–99; Andreas Krebs, ‘Leben durch den Tod hindurch. Zur Symbolik des Opfers’, 100–121; Wietse van der Velde, ‘Die neuen Eucharistiegebete der Altkatholischen Kirche der Niederlande’, 122–132; Hans-Werner Schlenzig, ‘Zur Entwicklung der altkatholischen Eucharistiegebete in Deutschland’, 133–142; Urs von Arx, ‘Das Eucharistiegebet in der Christkatholischen Kirche der Schweiz nach der zweiten Liturgiereform’, 142–181; Erich Ickelsheimer, ‘Im Osten nichts Neues’, 182–184; Jerzy Bajorek, ‘Liturgiereformen in der polnischen Tradition des Altkatholizismus’, 185–192; Angela Berlis’ contribution to the same conference was published as: ‘Das missionarische Potenzial der Liturgie’, in: Luca Baschera / Angela Berlis / Ralph Kunz (eds.), *Gemeinsames Gebet. Form und Wirkung des Gottesdienstes* (Praktische Theologie im reformierten Kontext 9), Zürich (TVZ) 2014, 231–245. See also: Mattijs Ploeger, ‘Kirchlichkeit, Gebundenheit und Freiheit der Liturgie in altkatholischer Sicht’, in: *ibidem*, 209–230; Angela Berlis, ‘Die Sprache des Gebets im alt-katholischen Eucharistiebuch’, in: Birgit Jeggle-Merz / Benedikt Kranemann (eds.), *Liturgie und Ökumene. Grundfragen der Liturgiewissenschaft im interkonfessionellen Gespräch*, Freiburg i.Br. (Herder) 2013, 125–139.

<sup>19</sup> See the documentation published in an earlier issue of this journal: Marsha Dutton (ed.), *Globalization and Catholicity: Ecumenical Conversations on God’s Abundance and the People’s Need* = Beiheft zu IKZ 100 (2010). See also Peter-Ben Smit, ‘Imagining a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: The Philippine Independent – Old Catholic – Episcopal – Church of Sweden Consultation on Catholicity and Globalization’, in: *Ecumenical Review* 66 (2014) 214–225.

<sup>20</sup> See: The Bishop Ramento Statement, in: Dutton (ed.), *Globalization* (see note 19), 237–242. See also Segbers, ‘Vision’ (see note 17).

the ecology and liturgical theology (in its Orthodox shape) are placed in an interrelationship with each other.<sup>21</sup>

In all of these theologies, the Eucharist, or the liturgy in general, is here understood as a way of ordering a community and giving expression to the order that is inherent to this community due to its relationship with God and participation in God. Therefore, it is a political discourse, beyond 'mere' ritual.

### Participation and Participation

On the basis of the above considerations, which show that both politics and liturgy are concerned with the creation of a community, now the two notions of participation at stake in this paper, *participation actuosa* as understood by the liturgical movement, and the notion of participation as it is current in the Dutch political discourse, can be compared. In doing so, it is useful to ask three questions: who participates, on what basis, and to what end?

When turning to the first question, i.e. who participates, immediately a difference between the two notions of participation becomes apparent. In the political discourse, those who are called upon to participate are those with many resources, in time or talent, at their disposal, who can take responsibility for, in a way, co-governing, or co-creating society, those, in other words, who can carry a heavy load, or go the extra mile in order to, indeed, create a society worth its name. This is apparent from the quotation from the king's speech above. Somewhat differently, a rather typical answer to this question from the perspective of liturgical theology would indicate that the participation of *all* is meant when the phrase *actuosa participatio* is used. This is a significant difference in accentuation, if *all* are to participate in the actualization of a community by participating in its life (be it its rites or otherwise), this community will need to focus on all as well and take all into account, rather than only those with 'broad shoulders'. This will, as a consequence, make for a different kind of community. The question that this observation leads to is: what is one's participation in a community based on?

---

<sup>21</sup> See: Jan Jorrit Hasselaar / Peter-Ben Smit (eds.), *An Ongoing Conversation. The Green Patriarch in the Netherlands*, Amersfoort (Oud-Katholiek Boekhuis) 2015.

The question that the latter paragraph ended on is, ‘what is the basis for one’s participation in a society’, be it the ‘society’ of the church, or as ‘society’ in general. From the perspective of Christian liturgical theology, the answer is fairly straightforward: the full participation of all is based on their identity as (Spirit-endowed) baptized members of the people of God. In other words, the participation of all is based on the members ‘being’, not on one’s actual contribution in terms of time, talent, or money. The ‘big society’ perspective, as it is provided by the ‘participation society’ discourse in The Netherlands, would answer the question differently: participation is based on the amount of resources, time and/or talent that a person can and is willing to contribute to society. The measure and the value of one’s participation depends on the resources at one’s disposal. This makes the number of actual (i.e. full) participants in a participation society rather limited. The difference seems to be that the one discourse focuses on the fundamental talents and importance of all of its members, the other seems to have a smaller selection of participants in mind. Given this difference, a further question becomes relevant: what is the goal of the participation of those who are participating in a society?

Again the two perspectives are somewhat different. The goal of the one perspective seems to be that all members contribute to a society and in the process become who they are, i.e. full members of the body of Christ, on their way to an even fuller participation in this body, in the *eschaton*. The goal of the other perspective seems to be to have people engage in a project of co-shaping society, in particular by contributing resources to it. While this may yield results indeed, it can also be asked whether it does full justice to the participants in such a society. It is claimed that it adds value to their lives and to that of society, but will that value outlast their usefulness? This question can be pushed a little further, by pursuing the notion of usefulness. The usefulness of participation in a ‘participation society’ is fairly obvious, it leads to a better society (at a lower cost of the government). However, participation in worship or liturgy is not a particularly useful activity. In fact, most liturgical scholars would claim that liturgical celebration goes beyond economic value; if participation in such a ‘useless’ activity constitutes the apex, even the source and summit of all ecclesial activities – it is more like participating in a work of art than the production of a good; the celebration of a fundamental gift, a new creation, rather than participation in building utopia. This, again, raises questions.

### **Concluding Observations: Comparison as a Way to Further Insight**

As noted at the beginning of this paper, these considerations were first presented at a workshop entitled ‘Challenging Catholicism’, a title which could be read in two ways, with ‘Catholicism’ either being the object or the subject of the clause. The above remarks on two different concepts of participation can be understood in both ways, i.e. the catholic, liturgical concept can be seen as challenging what is current in broader society, while the latter can also be seen as challenging the concept used in liturgical theology. When looking at the notion of ‘participation society’ from the perspective of liturgical theology, it becomes apparent that the notions of participation (all, or just a few, endowed with sufficient resources), the basis of this participation (one’s ‘being’ or one’s resources), and its goal (becoming who one is, or the creation of a better society) in the discourse on participation society can be questioned indeed. By doing so, it also becomes clear what the nature of such participation is indeed. At the same time, through the same process, the understanding of participation in the notion of *participatio actuosa* is clarified, at least in relation to one (other) political discourse. Furthermore, the notion of participation inherent to the liturgy can be questioned from the perspective of ‘participation society’. In particular, it can be argued that it is fine to have ideals, but that realizing them fully can be quite a different thing. Being held accountable for the actual life of the church in relation to the church’s own proclamation, for example: how a church actually treats its members, as providers of voluntary man hours, to be disposed of just as quickly as they are asked to perform a certain task, or as valued brothers and sisters in Christ, is sometimes best seen from the perspective of a (relative) outsider. I would, therefore, submit that precisely a dialogue with political discourse in a spirit of mutual accountability would be healthy for an otherwise intra-ecclesial ecclesiological discourse.

*Peter-Ben Smit (geb. 1979 in Rotterdam NL), Dr. theol., studierte 1997–2003 Theologie und Bibelwissenschaften an den Universitäten von Amsterdam, Sheffield und Bern sowie am Altkatholischen Seminar der Universität Utrecht und am anglikanischen General Theological Seminary in New York (MA 2000 in Amsterdam und 2002 in Sheffield [Bibelwissenschaften], kirchlicher Abschluss des Utrechter Seminars 2003). Er promovierte 2005 und habilitierte 2010 an der Universität Bern und promovierte 2011 am General Theological Seminary (Th.D.). Derzeit ist er Dozent für Neues Testament an der Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam und hat eine Stiftungsprofessur für Alte Katholische Kirchenstruktur an der Universität Utrecht. Ausserdem arbeitet*

*er als assistierender Priester in der altkatholischen Kirchgemeinde Amsterdam.*

*Adresse: Herengracht 559 HS, NL-1017 BW Amsterdam, Niederlande.*

*E-Mail: p.b.a.smit@uu.nl*

### *Deutsche Zusammenfassung*

In diesem Beitrag werden zwei Auffassungen von Partizipation in einer Gemeinschaft miteinander verglichen: das Verständnis von Partizipation als «tätige Teilnahme» (*actuosa participatio*) in der liturgischen Theologie und das Verständnis von gesellschaftlicher Partizipation in der aktuellen niederländischen Politik (*participatory society*). Es wird die These vertreten, dass jede der beiden Auffassungen von Partizipation für die andere eine Herausforderung darstellt. Während das Verständnis von Teilnahme in der liturgischen Theologie auf der Identität der Teilnehmenden als Getauften beruht und deshalb auch die Teilnahme aller zu sein hat, beruht Teilnahme in einer «*participatory society*» eher auf dem Besitz von Ressourcen, die der gesamten Gesellschaft zugutekommen sollen.