

Obituary: Adelbert Roessingh



On 16 October, one of our oldest parishioners, Albert (Adelbert) Roessingh, passed away in Zaandam. He was 96 years old.

Albert was born in Oosterbeek in 1929, where he lived until the Battle of Arnhem in 1944. The war was a dramatic period for the family: his mother died, and his sister was killed by shrapnel in a field hospital. The family fled to Wapenveld, where Albert found comfort in the beauty of nature. At the age of sixteen, he started an herbarium, which he continued to expand throughout his life, including bees and hoverflies. He became an enthusiastic member of the Dutch Youth Association for Nature Study, the Field Biology Association and the Royal Dutch Natural History Association. Until old age, he was committed to the maintenance of the Kalverpolder reserve

near the Zaanse Schans.

Albert was also committed to collections in his working life: for a long time, he worked as an archivist at the National Archives in The Hague and later helped municipalities to organise their archives.

Albert grew up in the Remonstrant Brotherhood, but later joined the Old Catholic Church, which has known a rich connection with Orthodoxy since the 19th Century. He also was an avid reader of Dostoyevsky. Around 1979 he joined the Orthodox Church, being received by Archimandrite Pachomius in Saint Hubert.

Albert became a member of our parish. This was never an exclusive membership: he maintained contacts with many Dutch-speaking parishes, monasteries and clergy. He had a broad vision of Orthodoxy and strove to embed it in Dutch culture and language. He was therefore enthusiastic about the Orthodox Fellowship of St Nicholas, founded in 1979 as a meeting place for Orthodox Christians from different jurisdictions (at that time, there were virtually no formal ecclesiastical contacts, and lay people were the driving force behind rapprochement). Between 1982 and 2013, he was a regular contributor to the Association's annual Almanac ("Jaarboek", see below).

Like many Orthodox converts of his generation, Albert took the church services extremely seriously. He owned all the liturgical publications of the monastery in The Hague (and later of the monastery in Asten) and used them to prepare for services. He would follow special services (Holy Week, high feasts, the Royal Hours of Christmas and Theophany) with particular attention, book in hand. He enjoyed discussing the best possible translations with Father Alexis and Mother Maria, sometimes taking firm – not to say uncompromising – positions. His conviction that the Dutch word "glorie" is a better translation of the Greek "doxa" than the more commonly used terms "eer" or "heerlijkheid" did not prevail; his comment about a translation error in Psalm 50 (the psalter from The Hague speaks of 'the bones which Thou hast humbled'), however, was corrected in the Amsterdam Prayer Book to 'the bones which were humbled'.

One of the most fundamental issues for Albert concerned the prayer of the last Elders of the Optina Monastery. Among other things, the prayer mentions “the firm conviction that all eventualities fulfil Thy Holy Will.” This was unacceptable to Albert; according to his firm conviction, no evil eventualities can come from God, even if God did not actively cause them to happen but only allowed them to happen. He writes, “If I allow evil to happen to another person, for whatever reason, I am reprehensible, if not punishable. This can therefore never apply to God.” At his request, Father Alexis included a footnote in the prayer book (“‘will’ in the sense of the good, salvific will of God, Who desires salvation for all. Our human will can accept this salvation, but also reject it”). This, however, did not satisfy Albert: when the prayer book was re-edited in 2011, he explicitly asked for confirmation that the new edition was not done in his name. With the same fervour, he fought for the reading of the Gospel of Luke in the Christmas Matins, as is customary in most Western churches.

Such statements were typical. Albert did not approach matters of faith without a fight; he wanted to understand and to embrace them. He describes that while typing out the Dutch translation of the catechism ‘The Living God’:

“The first chapter and the first part deal, as can be expected, with creation – and it is immediately stated that God initially created everything out of nothing. This is where the thinking begins. For how am I to understand “creation ex nihilo”? One question leads directly to another. And one solution can be diametrically opposed to another, until I understand both solutions so thoroughly in their meaning that I see how they are connected.”

(Introduction to the website for Philosophical Reflection on (Eastern) Orthodoxy in Faith, Spirituality and Liturgy)

‘This is where thinking begins!’ These words perfectly describe Albert. Over the years, he put many of his reflections on paper, in the form of articles or small brochures. Several of these can be found (in Dutch) on the website ‘[Philosophical reflection on \(Eastern\) Orthodoxy in faith, spirituality and liturgy](#)’. Over the decades Albert also enthusiastically participated in faith-related activities within and outside the parish: services, Bible study, study groups, parish weekends, activities of the Association of Orthodox Christians, the Western European congresses of the *Fraternité Orthodoxe* and, from the beginning in the 1990s, the Orthodox Information Centre. With Bernard Frinking, he learned to memorise the Gospel of Mark. Many faithful thus became friends and brothers. For example, he became the godfather of the son of another active parishioner, Galina Rol. As recently as 2022, he wrote an obituary for another friend in Christ, our former starosta Karin Boysen. At his request, the Orthodox sculptor Serafim Oddens created a beautiful grave monument.

Another cause to which he devoted himself heart and soul was refugees. From 2001 onwards, he participated in the organisation of prayer vigils at the walls of the immigration detention centre at Schiphol Airport. With the support of various priests and believers, up to 40 Orthodox believers gathered to pray for the detained refugees. It was essential to Albert that incense be directed towards the detainees during such services, as a sign that every human being is an icon of God.

In recent years, it became increasingly difficult for Albert to participate in activities. But he continued attending church regularly, always enjoying the services and the contact with parishioners. On 23 October he will come for the last time, allowing our community to say goodbye to him. We will miss his penetrating, clear eyes and his human warmth.

We wish Albert's wife Wilma, his children and his grandchildren strength in coping with the passing of this remarkable personality. In closing, a few words from Albert about how he envisaged his meeting with the Lord:

"Since we have "fallen away" from God through the Fall, He can only reach us if we open ourselves to Him. To the extent that we succeed in doing so, we allow God to be Who He is and enthrone Him. Then we can indeed say, yes, sing: "The Lord is King, He has clothed Himself in majesty."

Because we have fallen away from Him through the Fall, He cannot do anything for us – unless and to the extent that we succeed in opening ourselves to Him and accepting His revelation as revelation. After all, God respects our freedom; He wants us to come to Him as free people. And if we succeed in truly opening ourselves to Him – and how difficult that is – and coming to Him, He will by no means reject us.

Thoughts on what revelation actually is..., from the 2013 Almanac

Memory eternal!

Texts by Albert (all in Dutch):

<http://orthodoxfilosofischebezinning.nl/index>

- A bit of history – The Low Countries and Orthodoxy (1982 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- Orthodoxy in the Low Countries (1989 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- A bit of history. Joannes Antonius Seinerus (1668-1745), the first Orthodox Christian in the Low Countries (1989 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- Basic misery and revelation of salvation (2008 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- The epilogue of Father Pachom (2010 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- An Approach to Orthodox Eschatology – Translation (from French) and commentary (2010 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- The Revelatory Character of the First Creation Story (2010 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- The revelatory character of the second creation story (2011 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- Postscript to the reflections on the revelatory character of the creation stories (2012 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)

- A Pilgrimage to Bolshiye Dorki (2013 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- Thoughts on what revelation actually is... (2013 Almanac of St Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Fellowship)
- The question of meaning and the question of God – On the path to recognising the truth (no date, self-published)
- The actual break in religious thinking between the Eastern and Western Churches (no date, self-published)
- Belief in reincarnation and belief in resurrection (no date, self-published)
- Living from “fullness” (including the Akathist of thanksgiving “Thanks to God for everything”) (no date, self-published)
- About the Cherubic Hymn – from the Cherubic Hymn to an understanding of Orthodoxy (no date, based on correspondence with a non-Orthodox person on this subject) (no date, self-published)

