



Prof. Robert Regout, S.J., LL.D.

Maastricht 18th January 1896 - Dachau 28th December 1942

On the 3d of November 1944, shortly after the liberation of Nijmegen, appeared the first “in memoriam” of Robert Regout in “De Gelderlander”, a Dutch daily newspaper. It was written by Uri Nooteboom, a young staff member of the Nijmegen University and journalist, who would, himself, be killed at Den Bosch on the 5th of may 1945.

PROF. MR. ROBERT REGOUT SJ

Cool and objective he was, this priest of the Society of Jesus, moderator and professor at the university. He died in the German concentration camp of Dachau at the age of forty six, after having passed a harsh imprisonment of almost two and a half years. Many “in memoriams” followed in rapid succession. Professor Regout would soon succeed Professor Titus Brandsma. They both were priests, both professor at the “Carolina”. Victims as well of the German terror and their suspicious mind against all that was good and noble in our native country. Father Regout, it is almost two years now that the wind blows over his grave in that hostile foreign country. Meanwhile a great deal of sorrow has come over us, and scores of bitter events shake violently our remembrance of him: but how clearly is this

thoughtful man with his spiritual lucidity, as yet branded in the minds of so many people! He was still young when he died, the Society of Jesus having high-pitched expectations in his regard, and no less the university: this Jesuit, detached of all things material in this life, this priest, always fulfilling his great task with an exalting simplicity, this man who gave his heart to science.

Born in Maastricht the 18th of January 1896, from a very distinguished family, he did his Grammar School (in Dutch “gymnasium”) at the famous St. Willebrord College in Katwijk on the Rhine. It was not surprising that this delicate mind chose the Society of Jesus in order to fulfill his life-long task. He studied Law at Leiden University and then made for England to study International Law. He was ordained a priest on the 15th of August 1927.

This priest with his serene distinction was, even as a priest, the obvious man to build a network of relations, this being facilitated by the study he had set himself to, and contacts abroad being necessary to enlarge his scientific insight. He often went to Paris where he maintained an active relationship with the well-known Jesuit Yves de la Brière, a contact he will maintain also at a later stage, when he will succeed father C. Hoogewegen SJ taking over his position as a moderator at the university. In that function, at the “Carolina”, he obtained influence amongst students, having just left behind them the first tempests of youth, thus facilitating their dedication to actual problems and deepening of inner life. His serenity, sober mindedness and profound discernment brought some peace and quiet in the Nijmegen student world, as if some of that profoundness, in which he viewed all life and work, inspired them. On the 18th of September 1939 the St. Radboud Foundation appointed him associate Professor of International Law, whilst at the same time he would keep his function as a moderator at the university.

Meanwhile the war had broken out; and trust in the future of International Law was at the lowest level ever. Consequently, at his inaugural address on the 28th of February 1940, Professor Regout’s plea was: “Is there a basis for confidence in International Law?” His task was a double as well as a heavy one: his moderatorship required his attention and he participated in the International Student Congresses of Pax Romana in 1939 in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia and in 1940 in the USA. He continuously went to The Hague for the International Peace-manifestations. In spite of the events and facts of war he was confident of the future. He was one of those who, with their cool and scientific vision would not give

credence to Rauschnig's book: "Gespräche mit Hitler", which had already thrown ahead its shadow over eastern Europe. Even after the occupation of Denmark and the conquest of Norway he stuck with steadfast optimism to the belief that Germany's behavior in occupied areas would be more dignified than news messages and rumors would have it.

On Tuesday the 7th of May 1940 - less than four days before the invasion in The Netherlands - he delivered in the evening an address in the auditorium of the university: "The neutrality of The Netherlands, a matter of national and European interest", a well-thought-out and worked-through plea, a few hours later outdated by the invasion of the Germans. One of his first publications after the occupation was an article: "The legal position in occupied territory". Therein stood clearly formulated what rights the occupying army could, and what rights it could not enforce in this area according to the Hague Convention. This publication already evoked obstinacy and suspicion with the Germans. But the great number of relations he disposed of gave the Germans enough reason for imputation. Professor Regout persevered in his task. He tried to inspire the attitude of the universities towards the occupying force with pride and assertiveness. The invasion had occurred only a few weeks ago when he was arrested. He had anticipated the invasion, he was prepared, yet having an unshakeable confidence that right was on his side: when they came to pick him up, his last request was to have his bicycle arranged for, because he intended to return to The Hague again on Saturday. So deeply he was convinced that soon he would be back!

He has not returned. This resolute character was not a prey the Germans would release. He went for martyrdom, the way Germany forced many great personalities to go. In the first few days after the 10th of May he had made use of his activity to have different leading persons adopt the right attitude. He had set his attitude, and would not deviate from it. Arnhem, Berlin, Dachau! The long days of the prison. He, with his serene conviction, his priestly courage, he was a great comfort and example to his fellow sufferers. Regout's heroism was safely anchored in the depth of his heart, it was fought in tranquillity and almost unnoticed. His daily prayer was: "and lead us not into temptation", interpreted by him as: "and do not try us beyond our forces". More than two years Regout endured the days of imprisonment. A portrait drawn of him in the Berlin prison of Alexanderplatz, shows a sad twist around that ever so determined mouth. For him too, the days of tribulation have been rough, even if there might always be a narrow view of freedom. When this hope

appeared to be a vain one, God did no longer test him, but took him up into his Realm on the 29th of December 1942.

Robert Regout, this noble personality, who served his mother country with all the strength he disposed of, is only one out of many, but amongst those many he is one of the first who, apart from the salvation of his soul, merited an everlasting laureate. Priest, professor: the country, the order, priesthood at large, and the Society, university, as well as students are looking up to him with deep reverence!

Translated by A.J.M.I. (Wiet) Regout, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, Friday 29th of October 2004

IDEAS NEED TIME TO MATURE.
TOIL WHICH SEEMS FRUITLESS
CAN BECOME, FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS,
A PRIZED POSSESSION.
IN THE VERY WRECK OF A RUINED CIVILISATION
A NEW GENERATION MAY CONSTRUCT
A MORE SECURE HOME.
TO THOSE
WHO ARE THINKING OF THE FUTURE
WITH ANXIETY, I SAY
THAT OUR PRESENT DUTY IS CLEAR:
TO GIVE ALL TO ESTABLISH JUSTICE AND TRUTH
IN THIS WORLD.

INAUGURAL LECTURE NIJMEGEN, 28TH FEBRUARY 1940.

Addendum:

[H. de Waele, 'Commemorating Robert Regout \(1896-1942\)](#). A chapter from the history of public international law revisited', Journal of the History of International Law 7 (2005), pp. 81-102.

[Annex to the article 'Commemorating Robert Regout'](#)

Is there Reason to Trust in a Future for International Law? Inaugural lecture, delivered by

Robert Regout, 28 February 1940.