

*'A desire to become what they were.'* Willem van Rossum as a Redemptorist before his Roman years (1873-1895)

Vefie Poels

SUMMARY

This article focuses on Willem van Rossum as a Redemptorist against the background of the development of the Dutch province in the nineteenth century. Born in 1854 in Zwolle, Van Rossum entered the Congregation in 1873. The Dutch province was a rather young and flourishing province at the time and its members were eager to mold an orthodox, pious and moral Catholic Church as a defensible fortress against the malicious influences of Protestantism, liberalism and a modern, industrialized society. The young orphan Willem van Rossum hungered to share in the ambitious Redemptorist project, developing an intense devotion to Saint Alphonsus and the Virgin Mary. In this article we closely follow Van Rossum's novitiate, seminarian years and lectureship in Roermond. In 1883, we witness his appointment as professor in dogmatic theology and prefect of students in Wittem. Guided by the Dutch provincial Petrus Oomen, Van Rossum studied the Alphonsian dogmatic theology meticulously and published several expert theological treatises. Van Rossum's organizational and fund raising talents as Rector at Wittem are also being discussed. In general it can be said that the characteristics he developed prior to 1895 served him well when he became a key member of the Roman Curia: his exemplary conduct as a religious, his tendency to rigidity (he was more respected than beloved within his community), his knowledge of languages and his thorough study of the works of Aquinas and Alphonsus. They were useful not only when he functioned, for instance, as consultor of the Holy Office, but also later after being named a Cardinal in 1911 and finally Prefect of Propaganda Fide (1918-1932).