

Tilburg University's Forgotten Founding Fathers
A Historical Critical Study
on M.J. Cobbenhagen and His Contemporaries

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Chapter One

Introduction, Research Question and Method

1. General Introduction

As a student of Tilburg University, it has been almost impossible not to notice the importance of Martinus Cobbenhagen for the identity of this educational institution. His name resounds almost anywhere, from the Tilburg educational profile, to the existence of a Tilburg Cobbenhagen Centre, the circle of the Friends of Cobbenhagen and the Cobbenhagen Foundation. To add to this list: an avenue was named after him, as was one of the most important University buildings. As a student of the Master's programma on Christianity and Society this was striking, since Cobbenhagen, time and again is referred to as Founding Father of the University. Cobbenhagen seems to embody christianity and society since he was both an economist and a priest. This seemed all the more interesting when I consulted the landmark study of the University's early history, published in 1978 by a noted church historian, Hans Bornewasser, who ended his survey on the very last page, writing that in the year 1954, the year in which Cobbenhagen passed away, Tilburg University had 'lost its father'¹. More recently, in the official University publication *Met het oog op het goede leven – Cobbenhagen en onze universitaire cultuur*, Cobbenhagen's founding role was linked to the fact that, in 1926 he had written a draft text with general ideas for the direction and the staff of the new institution. Bornewasser has later called this a 'Blueprint', giving it major weight, and this view on the importance of the 'Blueprint' was soon adopted in the rhetoric of Tilburg University.

Yet, there is a flipside to this coin. However much I was impressed by the fact that this priest, native of the diocese of Roermond, was the key founder of the University, his omnipresence at TiU was contrasted with another experience. In search of his role as founder, I consulted the webpages where the university presents its own history. Much to my surprise, the first rector for four years in a row was not Cobbenhagen, but Thomas Goossens.² Moreover, just like the University historian Bornewasser, Goossens was a church historian. Goossens was a priest, just like Cobbenhagen and there is also a building named after him on campus. After I learned of Goossens I was struck by the fact that in my University's commemorative culture the first rector seemed to play no significant role. This remarkable, and perhaps even somewhat inconvenient contrast constitutes the point of departure for my investigation on the university's tradition to present Cobbenhagen as Founding Father.

¹ Johannes A. Bornewasser, *Universiteit Van Tilburg 75 Jaar Waardenvolle Universiteit: Katholieke Hogeschool Tilburg : Economie, Ethiek, Maatschappij*, Vol. I, 1927-1954 (Amsterdam: Dutch University Press, 2003), 247.

² "History," Tilburg University, <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/about/history>(accessed May 15, 2019).

2. Research Question, Methodological Framework and Source

a. Research Question

In 1927, when the University of Tilburg was established under its initial name of *Rooms Katholieke Handelshoogeschool* (Roman Catholic Trade School). Goossens became its first rector, but he was not the only one active as founder. In fact, it is not irrelevant here to remind the reader that at the moment when, in December 1926, the first professor's chairs were announced in the Dutch press, only four persons, all priests, among the first generation of lecturers could call themselves full professor in a fulltime appointment. The church historian Thomas Goossens was one of them, aside the economist Henricus (Han) Kaag, the jurist Emilius Gimbrère, and the Dominican friar Antoninus Weve from Nijmegen.³

This too is striking, since among those of the first generation, Cobbenhagen was 'only' an extraordinary professor, with no prospective of obtaining a fulltime appointment. Later in my thesis, I will return to this point, but for now it suffices to indicate that Cobbenhagen does not appear as what one would be inclined to call a 'founding father'.⁴ This brings me to my research question, which is: 'is the current image of Martinus Cobbenhagen as 'founding father of Tilburg' historically warranted? And related to it is a double subquestion: First, might one, complementing the prevailing image, speak of other 'founding fathers'? Second, if so, to what extent can the university's actual focus of attention be described as what historians call an 'invented tradition'?

b. Method: Deconstructing Invented Tradition

Even if the notion of 'invented tradition' may raise some suspicion among whoever is not acquainted to it, among historians the concept is well known as a reliable methodological framework. The method was developed by the British historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012). Already in 1983, Hobsbawm was the editor of a renowned book entitled *The Invention of*

³ See the article devoted to the foundation of the University, which appeared right before Christmas in 1926 in newspaper *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*. In it the story was told how the Curatorium had gathered under the presidency of Baron Van Wijnbergen, in the buildings of the Roman Catholic Education Programs. The same article made it public that Prof. Dr. Thomas Goossens was appointed as the University's first rector magnificus, and that the decision was taken to appoint the first generation of Professors and lecturers. "Oprichting van de R.K. Handelshoogeschool te Tilburg," *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, 23 December, 1926, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010234972:mpeg21:a0027> (accessed August 23, 2019).

⁴ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a Founding Father is either a member of the convention that drew up the US Constitution in 1787, or a person who starts or helps to start a movement or institution: *Oxford Dictionaries*, s.v. "founding father," accessed August 12, 2019, Https://En.Oxforddictionaries.Com/Definition/Us/Founding_Father.

Traditions. The opening essay in the volume carried the same title and in it, Hobsbawm developed the basic principles which we will be applying in this thesis. According to Hobsbawm “traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented”⁶. At first glance, the commemorial tradition of Tilburg University around the figure of Cobbenhagen seems to match with this description. The methodological model of deconstructing traditions would seem to be applicable even more if one considers that according to Hobsbawm an invented tradition includes traditions that are easily traced in their constitution as well as traditions that are less easily traceable.⁷ Moreover, the model is not concerned with the success of a tradition but is interested in the ‘appearance and establishment’ of a tradition⁸. Hobsbawm also offers three aims of invented traditions that we see in the modern world, by which he means the period after the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century.

Hobsbawm’s model is centered around his definition of invented traditions. Hobsbawm distinguishes three overlapping types of invented traditions which are each characterized by their motive. The first type is a tradition that establishes social cohesion of groups and communities. The second concerns the tradition that establishes institutions, status or relations of authority. The third overlapping kind of invented tradition is the tradition aimed at the implementation of beliefs, values and behaviour.⁹ Invented traditions then are created or arise to serve one or more of these goals and can help groups to function well. One of the important differences between old and invented traditions according to Hobsbawm is the less precise values that the latter seeks to implement. An invented tradition might try to incorporate ‘duty’ or ‘the school spirit’.¹⁰

A helpful example can be found in the American ‘Pledge of Allegiance’. Children at schools pledge allegiance to the American flag every morning. This tradition was created in the 19th century and entails what Hobsbawm calls ‘the invention of emotionally and symbolically

⁵ E.J. Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger (eds), *The Invention Of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). In this thesis I will refer to the later edition of this book, published in 1992.

⁶ Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention Of Tradition*, 1. With some irony, and considering the fact that in 1969 Tilburg Students rebaptized their university into ‘Karl Marx University’, it may be considered that Hobsbawm’s work was not designed to be applied to religion as such, all the more so since he identified as a marxist historian. Moreover, it is interesting to note that key to his methodology was the distinction between traditions on the one hand, which present themselves as continuities, and customs on the other hand. Seemingly, Hobsbawm was unaware of the fact that this reflected the age-old theological distinction between *Traditio* and *Consuetudines*, which was already present in the Catholic hermeneutics of traditions developed by Johannes Driedo in his 1533 work, entitled *De Ecclesiasticis Scripturis et Dogmatibus*. On Driedo, see Peter Fabisch, *Johannes Driedo (Ca. 1480-1535)*, in Erwin Iserloh, ed., *Katholische Theologen der Reformationszeit*, Vol 3 (Münster, 1986) 33-47. On the importance of Driedo’s work, see for instance the article of the former Tilburg Church historian Marcel Gielis, *Een Romeins Doctoraat over het Traditiebegrip van Johannes Driedo van Turnhout*, in *Taxandria N.S.* 68 (1996), 145-161.

⁷ Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention Of Tradition*, 1.

⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

charged signs of club membership rather than the statutes and objects of the club'.¹¹ In the 19th century America was a new country and invented this tradition to stimulate all the goals that Hobsbawm mentions: to promote social cohesion, establish status and relations of authority and implements beliefs and values. The tradition of the pledge of allegiance and many others fill a space that before the industrial revolution and the French revolution was occupied partially by religion. The importance of studying invented tradition for historians according to Hobsbawm is found in the way that 'All invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion'.¹² Because invented traditions are often found in the public sphere, it is important to research them because they create images of the past 'which belong not only to the world of specialist investigation but to the public sphere of man as a political being'.¹³

In other words, what I aim to do in this study is focus on the ways in which the prominent focus on Cobbenhagen as founder came into being, and how it was formally or implicitly enforced. The conclusions to these questions will come later on in the thesis. This specific focus on the university's history has some consequences. For a start, Hobsbawm's definition of 'invented tradition' includes that such traditions hold 'a set of practices governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules of a ritual or symbolic nature', they also 'seek to incalculable certain values and norms of behaviour (...)', and perhaps most relevant for my purposes is that they link practices with a 'suitable historic past'.¹⁴ Putting this model into practice in the case of Tilburg University's commemorative tradition around the person of Cobbenhagen involves a double type of historical investigation, which determines the very structure of my thesis.

c. Outline of the thesis

Firstly, some explanation on the practice of historical deconstruction. As Hobsbawm has indicated, disclosing a tradition as invented, is only possible through a return 'ad fontes'. Any study of the founding fathers of this university, therefore, should not only be aware of the scholarly basis laid out by the classic three volume *History of the University in Europe*¹⁵, it should above all return to the sources. In my case this means looking at the available original materials that document the origins of Tilburg University. These are found in various places,

¹¹ Ibid., 11.

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.

¹⁵ In particular the third volume stands out as relevant background, Walter Rüegg ed., *A History of The University In Europe: Universities In The Nineteenth And Early Twentieth Centuries (1800-1945)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 39. Which names the University of Tilburg as an example of a Dutch university that was first named *Hoogeschool* because it offered a limited programme in contrast with a full university: "The Catholic School of Commerce in Tilburg, which dated back to 1919 and received university status in 1939, but which, like other part-universities, was called a *Hoogeschool*."

including the Archives of Tilburg University¹⁶, but also collections that hitherto have remained unconsulted, such as the archive of Thomas Goossens in den Bosch¹⁷, and the archive of Petrus Van Gils, kept in the Katholieke Documentatiecentrum of the Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen¹⁸. These materials, together with some secondary publications on the history of the University and original press articles from the late 1920's, will constitute the basis upon which I will reconsider the original constellation, of the Economic Trade School of Tilburg, as it was called back in 1927.

After returning to the sources, I will attempt to paint a picture that complements the prevailing image of Tilburg University's founders. The verb 'complement' is deliberately chosen here. As Hobsbawm's methodology may help identify invented traditions as practices that claim to be older than they are, this view of new traditions holds a risk. While this type of deconstruction might come across as normative in a negative way, this is not intended. Traditions are used to create a community and to reinforce a communal identity. Any academic historical evaluation of the claims made by such a tradition is not seeking to undermine the tradition, but may offer opportunities to broaden the narrative. This is precisely the aim of this thesis. The prominence given to Cobbenhagen in the publications, institutional bodies and activities of the University are not necessarily a bad thing. This thesis merely aims to demonstrate that other people too might have been involved in the foundation of the university. It might be worthwhile to recall those others into memory.

The next step, after having expanded the image of the founding fathers, will be carried out in chapter three. This part of the thesis addresses the second subquestion formulated above, namely the question of the origins of the invented tradition. Here we will focus on a more contemporary issue, pinpointing where and when the figure of Cobbenhagen became central in the University's commemoration tradition. A crucial role will be given to the impact of the official university history published by Bornewasser, and attention will also be given to the image of Cobbenhagen as contrasted to that of his peers, such as Goossens and Van Gils. At this juncture, our thesis will offer a study of secondary literature on Cobbenhagen. Finally, after completion of these chapters, we will come to general conclusions, and return to the research questions outlined in the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁶Archive University Tilburg [henceforth AUT], Archive Curatorium (Code C), Folders in C79, Archive TAEK Box 20.

¹⁷Brabants Historisch Informatiecentrum [henceforth BHIC], Den Bosch, Archive Thomas Goossens, 2029.

¹⁸Katholieke Documentatie Centrum [henceforth KDC], Nijmegen, Archive Petrus J. M. van Gils, 1017.

Chapter Two

Forgotten Founding Fathers?

Revisiting the Sources 1924-1927

1. Introduction

On March 21, in 1924, the Dutch episcopate decided the following in their meeting: “It will be the task of the Roman Catholic Education Programs [Rooms-Katholieke Leergangen], to establish and develop the much needed Roman Catholic Trade School, in the sense of the Rotterdam Trade School”.¹⁹ This was a decisive step toward the foundation of what is today known as Tilburg University. This brief clause is worth a closer look. For a start, it makes clear that the entire process of preparing the foundations started in the early Spring of 1924. It would be completed three years later, in 1927. This chapter will focus on those three years, and examine which people were instrumental in the establishment of the institution. At this point, it is important to recall what was said in the previous chapter: in the commemorative tradition, a document written by Cobbenhagen and commonly called the Blueprint is generally presented as crucial for the original establishment of the University. Given the importance of this text, we will start our chapter by offering a detailed description of this ‘Blueprint’. In this thesis, we will primarily refer to a later draft of the document. This draft of the ‘Blueprint’ was unknown at Tilburg University until now, and was preserved in the Katholieke Documentatiecentrum at Nijmegen. The next step will be to address two key questions: Was Cobbenhagen alone in his initiatives and ideas, or did he collaborate with others? And focusing more on the content of the Blueprint: When the Economic Trade School opens in 1927, does the portrait of the institution mirror the Blueprint? In other words, were Cobbenhagen’s ideas actually implemented? If his ideas were not, who and why decided not to implement them?

2. Cobbenhagen’s ‘Blueprint’ in its Historical Context

a) Background of the Draft

Cobbenhagen’s very first involvement with the preparations of the university can be dated quite accurately. In 1927 he drafted a chronology of his activities related to the establishment of the Trade School. He explains how he first heard of the Tilburg plans on Palm Sunday of 1926, which in that year fell on March 28. This was nearly two years after the bishops had launched the process of preparations, so already at this juncture one can safely conclude that he entered

¹⁹ As cited in Bornewasser, *Universiteit Van Tilburg*, 25: “That it is the task of the RK Leergangen in Tilburg to found the so needed Roman Catholic school for trade and to develop her in the direction of the Trade school of Rotterdam.”

the process rather late. This does not necessarily imply that his role would not have been crucial, but in any case an assessment of Cobbenhagen's involvement needs only to focus on the year before the university officially opened. Other notes make clear that he heard of the plans via Han (Henricus Kaag) - who reported to him how hard it was to find suitable teachers for the new school²⁰. Kaag himself had been contacted by two men who were involved in the Curatorium that prepared the founding of the Trade School. One of them was Rudolph Benjamin Ledeboer, a convert to Catholicism who acted as attorney general with the Supreme Counsel in the Netherlands, the other was the former minister Piet Aalberse. The conversation between Kaag and Cobbenhagen had some consequences, since Kaag apparently informed a key personality in the Curatorium, Petrus Van Gils. This was not strange. Kaag, at that time was a member of the editorial staff of the Catholic newspaper *De Maasbode*, and he had a vast network in Dutch Catholic milieus.

Van Gils too was not unknown to Cobbenhagen, and soon the teacher informed his former pupil at the seminary of Rolduc of this new project. As a result, in April 1926 Cobbenhagen was involved in the planning. In this context, the Blueprint was drafted one month later, in view of the meeting of the Curatorium that would be held on May 15 of that year. Cobbenhagen would then meet with van Gils and Goossens to discuss his ideas, but Cobbenhagen was not solicited to draft a blueprint. In his personal recollections Cobbenhagen wrote this: "On April 14, Dr. Van Gils wrote me a letter in which he asked me to list names for possible candidates to become a full professor, and he asked if I would be interested in becoming a lecturer"²¹.

In early May this led to a moment in which the rector of the Tilburg Education Programs, at that time also a prominent member of the Curatorium preparing the establishment of the university, agreed to a conversation with Van Gils and Cobbenhagen. That meeting was held at Goossens' residence along the Bosscheweg, Villa Tivoli, and Cobbenhagen's notes underline the enthusiasm of his interlocutors. He also mentioned other elements: for one, Goossens had made it clear that Cobbenhagen did not have to foster too much hope to become a lecturer in Tilburg, since he wished to appoint the Nijmegen professor Charles Raaijmakers, who studied the relationship between economy and ethics. The latter point was important for Cobbenhagen, who wrote in his chronology that Kaag had insisted in March (before Cobbenhagen was involved) that the liaison between economics and ethics would be crucial. In any case, this awareness of the important combination of ethics en economics was already present among those who pulled the strings before Cobbenhagen was involved.

b) The Blueprint, or rather ... the Blueprints

²⁰ AUT, C79, folder 07.11: 'Chronologisch verhaal van mijn [Cobbenhagen] relaties met de R.K.H.H.S. [Rooms-katholieke Handelshoogeschool]', 20 pp.

²¹ AUT, C79, folder 07.11: 'Chronologisch verhaal', 1: "Dr. Van Gils then wrote a letter on April 14, in which he asked me, among other things, to name some possible candidates for the position of professor and whether I myself felt like becoming a teacher. This letter was the beginning of my relations with the Roman Catholic Tradeschool Tilburg."

The emphasis on combining ethics and economy, even if it had been raised by others before Cobbenhagen, clearly returns in the Blueprint, which is kept in the archive of the University of Tilburg, and which, in Cobbenhagen's own words was written in preparation for the meeting of Cobbenhagen with Goossens and van Gils on May 15th²². First and foremost, Cobbenhagen never spoke of a blueprint, and the original title was much less impressive, with as prosaic title 'Guidelines for the discussion of May 15'. Furthermore, it is worthwhile mentioning that these guidelines were not the only version of the text, In fact, after the said meeting, Cobbenhagen drafted another version of it, which is kept in the Van Gils archive in Nijmegen. This later document featured the exact same structure as the blueprint, although it features some additions.²³ To the least, this document allows us to conclude that Cobbenhagen stuck with his proposals after the Curatorium meeting. That being said, let us offer a brief survey of the 'Blueprint'.

b.1. Vision and curriculum

The key elements in these guidelines concern the vision of the university that Cobbenhagen offers and the proposals he makes for the first generation of professors and lecturers. In the Blueprint Cobbenhagen argues that the new school ought to have sufficient attention to the 'normative' aspect of the economic sciences and aims to educate four types of persons: first, those who will take future leadership positions in business, followed by those who will act as economic advisers in various associations, such as. companies, in state administrations. Two other categories should also receive more economic training: teachers and those who will play a role in the Dutch colonies²⁴. Cobbenhagen envisioned an educational track with practical and societal purposes, and commented that there would be a very small percentage to visit the University for purely academic reasons. Finally, with regard to the educational vision; Cobbenhagen's focus on combining ethics and economics was not an entirely new idea.²⁵ In the earlier version of the blueprint he only mentions Henrich Pesch as an inspiration, in the later version of the document he also cites the economist William Smart. ²⁶

²²AUT, C79, folder 07.11: 'Chronologisch Verhaal', 3-4.

²³ KDC, Archive P.J.M. Van Gils, 1017, 220: 'Eenige aanteekeningen over de wenschelykheid en de organisatie van een R.K. Handelshoogeschool opgemaakt naar aanleiding van een onderhoud met dr. Van Gils en dr. Goossens op 15 mei 1926 te Tilburg', This confirms the fact that Cobbenhagen himself indicated that he proposed to rework his initial draft. See AUT, C79, folder 07.11: 'Chronologisch Verhaal', 4: "At the end, Dr. van Gils asked me to leave the report to Goossens: I requested that I be allowed to rework it in order to also be able to comment on points that had arisen during the discussion."

²⁴AUT, C79, folder 07.11: 'Leidraad', 1: 'personen geschikt om een min of meer leidende functie in het bedrijfsleven in te nemen' [...] "Persons capable of taking on advisory or leading positions in social life, which is nowadays very economically oriented, [...] forces of colonial relations [...], teachers of education"."

²⁵ 26

²⁶ KDC, Archive P.J.M. Van Gils, 1017, 220: "The breaking up of economic science and ethics contributes to the fatal phenomenon that "business" and "ethics" appear to contradict daily life. A morality threatens to arise in the

Regarding the curriculum, Cobbenhagen envisioned two broad programs: one general and one program especially for accountancy²⁷. The more general program should be divided in two parts, one that will lead to the diploma of trade-economics and the other with a doctorate in tradescience. Cobbenhagen argued for a rigorous selection of students that will lead to only 10% of the students opting for the doctoral track.

He also argued for two exams in the first program, in contrast to the way the program is structured in Rotterdam. The first exam was to function as a propedeuse, after approximately 1,5 years, the exam that leads to the diploma should take place a year after. This resulted in a program of about 2,5 years in length. The propedeutic exam entailed ethics²⁸, economics, economical history, geography, statistics, accountancy and mathematics for trade. The second exam should feature economics, organisational theory for businesses, theory of trade. For those wanting to obtain a doctoral degree the second track was made 1,5/2 years longer and contained economics as main subject with two or three other mandatory courses such as ethics, accountancy and law. They could also follow elective courses on history of economics, geography and others.

b.2. Cobbenhagen's proposal for the University staff ...

In his ‘Blueprint’, Cobbenhagen also proposed names for the teaching staff of the future university. In this document he describes that there should be full professors, extraordinary professors, lecturers and teachers, all preferably with experience in the Netherlands and not hired from abroad. Cobbenhagen insisted that there be full professors of Ethics, Economy, Business Economics and Theory of Trade.²⁹ It is interesting to list his proposals, since this offers an objective criterium to judge whether or not his suggestions were implemented. This is not an easy issue: in the guidelines Cobbenhagen did not list any people for a teaching position, except for his friend Han Kaag, and for Piet Aalberse, whom he proposed. What he did do is offer names that should not be hired such as Leonardus Gerardus Kortenhorst, or Johannes Veraart, both members of the Rooms-Katholieke Staatspartij elected in the House of Representatives. The latter point indicates that Cobbenhagen was not much aware of the preferences within the Curatorium. In fact the Curatorium president, baron Antonius Van Wijnbergen strongly supported Veraart’s sympathies for the democratically minded Michaels movement. Moreover, Veraart strongly defended the democratic rights of indigenous peoples in

bedryf and she is already there in part with principles that would be ashamed of civilian life, and that all too true makes the word of William Smart in his *Second Thoughts of an economist*: Surely it is a painful confession of failure if a man who wishes to spend a week with God has to leave his business and go into retreat ”

²⁷ AUT, C79, folder 07.11: ‘Leidraad’, 7-8.

²⁸ KDC, Archive P.J.M. Van Gils, 1017, 220: In the earlier draft for the meeting there is a specific mention of a programme of ethics modelled after the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. This does not feature in the later draft as found in the Van Gils archive.

²⁹ In Dutch: ethiek, economie, bedrijfshuishoudkunde en organisatieleer/theorie van de handel.

the Dutch colonies, a sensitivity which lacked in Cobbenhagen's Blueprint, given that he simply still proposed the formation of colonial staff.

We can, however trace the other names listed in the chronological survey, which also makes clear that his propositions were only really discussed in September and October 1926. In the end, we reach the following list suggested by Cobbenhagen:

- **Business economics** - Claes³⁰
- **Accountancy and Mathematics** - Stubenrough³¹, eventually to be replaced by van den Eeden.
- **History of Economics** - Aalberse and Van Ketel
- **Psychotechnical Studies** - Franciscus Roels and Frans Jozef Rutte³²

None of the people from this list were included in the first generation of professors in 1927.

b.3. ... and his own uncertain position

One question remains after the list hereabove, which deliberately did not include Cobbenhagen himself. Was he a possible candidate from the beginning and what was his starting position? Cobbenhagen was a promising young academic born in 1893 in Gulpen, and had completed the Gymnasium (secondary school) at Rolduc where he also studied philosophy. He then studied Theology in Roermond and was ordained a priest of that diocese in 1917. After his ordination he was sent to Rotterdam to study at the Handelshoogeschool where he received his degree in Trade economics in 1919. He passed the doctoral exam in 1921 and started teaching economics and religion at Rolduc. In this period he also taught at the University in Heerlen and wrote a lot of articles.³³ In 1922 he was named a member of the commission for exams on trade science, in this commission he allegedly had much influence on how

³⁰ This possibly refers to the economist F.J. Claes who published a book on Rationalization of Working Methods and Solidarity in 1929 with a foreword by professor Volmer, who worked at the Higher School for trade in Rotterdam. The reference to this publication was found in this advertisement: "Verschenen: Rationalisering van arbeidsmethoden en solidariteit", *Nieuwsblad voor den Boekhandel*, May 24, 1925,
<https://www.delpher.nl/nl/tijdschriften/view?coll=dts&identifier=dts:2753043:mpeg21:0011>
 (accessed August 23, 2019).

³¹ Cobbenhagen is referring to Stubenrough, who, together with a certain Cheizoo later, published a handbook "Industrial Economics for the HBSA": A.F.A. Cheizoo and PH. C. Stubenrough, *Bedrijfshuishoudkunde en Boekhouden voor de H.B.S. A en voor de acte Handelskennis L.O.* (Groningen: Wolters, 1946). .

³² Roels developed the method for labour psychology and the screening of workers in his 1920 book 'Psychotechniek'. On the importance of the generation of Roels and Rutte for the development of the psychological study in the Netherlands, see Vittorio Busato, Minneke van Essen en Willem Koops ed., *Zeven grondleggers van de psychologie*, (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2016).

³³ "De R.K. Handelshoogeschool te Tilburg", *De Tijd: Dieu et Mon Droit*, 23 December, 1926,
[Https://Www.Delpher.NL/NL/Kranten/View?Coll=Ddd&Query=Cobbenhagen&Cql%5b%5d=%28date+_Gte_+%2201-01-1926%22%29&Cql%5b%5d=%28date+_Lte_+%2201-01-2201-01-%22%29](https://www.Delpher.NL/NL/Kranten/View?Coll=Ddd&Query=Cobbenhagen&Cql%5b%5d=%28date+_Gte_+%2201-01-1926%22%29&Cql%5b%5d=%28date+_Lte_+%2201-01-2201-01-%22%29)

matters were done regarding the teaching materials and formal regulations.³⁴ As we will see, in 1927 Cobbenhagen did become a part-time extraordinary professor in Tilburg. He received his position after he had defended his doctoral dissertation on ‘the responsibility of companies’. This promotion was required in order to assume his position at Tilburg, but it was not the only obstacle. The story of his appointment can be reconstructed on the basis of the archive documentation, and predominantly from the fact that Cobbenhagen himself told the tale in his 1927 chronology of events.

Even if Van Gils, his former teacher, had involved him in the reflection process regarding an eventual Trade School in Tilburg in the spring of 1926, in the beginning he was not more than an advisor. From what we have reconstructed above, it is clear that Cobbenhagen was not a part of the Curatorium, which was officially in charge of the preparations. Given the fact that the decisions on the general curriculum and occupation of the teaching positions of the institution were decided by Christmas of 1926. Cobbenhagen’s influence on the process was limited, spanning over a period of merely eight months, from April to December. Moreover, on several occasions he was in tension with Goossens, the man in charge of the process³⁵. And to make things worse, in these same months, Cobbenhagen experienced that it was all but certain for him to ever become a professor at Tilburg himself, and he was much in need for support from those involved in the Curatorium. This group had already asked Kaag to become a full professor in September 1926, and only after that suggestions were made to appoint Cobbenhagen as a lecturer. Aside the fact that he had still to complete his doctorate, his appointment now depended on the goodwill of his immediate superiors: the director of the institute of Rolduc, J.H. Thiel, and of the bishop of Roermond, Mgr. Laurentius Schrijnen³⁶.

In any case, Schrijnen was not quite enthusiastic and Cobbenhagen was dependent on the members of the Curatorium to defend his case. This is important for this thesis: rather than being in charge, records show that he was in the asking position. His own reconstruction of events supports this: in October 1926, three members of the Curatorium - baron van Wijnbergen, Van Gils, and Goossens – contacted bishop Schrijnen as well as the bishop’s brother, Jos Schrijnen, at that moment the rector of Nijmegen’s Catholic University, to move the bishop into allowing Cobbenhagen to become a staff member at the future Tilburg University. There was not much hope, when a letter arrived by Van Gils, dated October 16,

[1927%22%29&Redirect=True&Identifier=Ddd%3a010531512%3ampeg21%3aa0004&ResultsIdentifier=Ddd%3a010531512%3ampeg21%3aa0004](https://www.historischeencyclopedie.nl/1927%22%29&Redirect=True&Identifier=Ddd%3a010531512%3ampeg21%3aa0004&ResultsIdentifier=Ddd%3a010531512%3ampeg21%3aa0004) (accessed 19 May, 2019).

³⁴ “De R.K. Handelshoogeschool te Tilburg”, 23 December, 1926.

³⁵ AUT, C79, folder 07.11: ‘Chronologisch Verhaal’, On several occasions, Cobbenhagen utters himself quite negatively on Goossens. See for instance on p.4: ‘Goossens was not easy at the time; he was a bit stiff’; and on p. 8: ‘I have had to repeat this argument a few times, so that I apparently became a bit irritable, so that Goossens remarked that I was somewhat “hard-learner”..

³⁶ On Schrijnen, see the lemma entitled ‘Schrijnen, Laurent’, in P. Ubachs and I. Evers, *Historische Encyclopedie Maastricht*, (Walburg: Zutphen, 2005), 469.

made it clear that the bishop ‘will not let you go, neither fulltime or part-time³⁷. In the process Cobbenhagen became a bit desparate, when the proposals he himself made for replacements at Rolduc were dismissed one after another. The Jesuit Cavadino was not accepted by the bishop, and the aforementioned Claes was rejected by Goossens³⁸. This once more confirms that Cobbenhagen was not pulling the strings in this phase. The final result was known on October 22: the bishop of Roermond decided that Cobbenhagen was granted permission to be active in Tilburg one day a week, and he added to it that the director of Rolduc should make it very clear that the new university should not make any efforts to expand Cobbenhagen’s appointment or to lessen his duties at Rolduc, closing off with the remark ‘don’t let them fool you’³⁹. At this point, Cobbenhagen’s position is far from a founding father: his ‘blueprint’ was not used as a blueprint for the organisation of the new school and it was far from certain that he would have an active involvement in the new school at all.

³⁷ AUT, C79, folder 07.11: ‘Chronologisch Verhaal’, 12, where the full citation reads: "The director [or Rolduc, Thiel] also said that he was invited by Goossens and van Wijnbergen to be present at the maintenance. The bishop advised the director to stay at home, since he would not admit. The director was therefore not present at the audience, which took place on Saturday 16 October and lasted an hour and a half. Sunday morning, October 17, I received a letter from my classic former teacher Dr. van Gils, "alea iacta": the bishop cannot give me up, neither wholly nor quo ad partem. This writing will be October 18. confirmed by a very sympathetic letter from Goossens, which first made me a little down. However, I soon got over it, partly because I thought that I still discovered a bright spot after some thought. The gentlemen had proposed as a compromise to divide me between Rolduc and Tilburg at least for the time being. The bishop rightly found this worse than giving up completely. " Goossens accepted the proposed conference. Claes, however, had to stay out of discussion. Why? I do not understand this. I am curious to know the influences behind it. In my opinion about the director, which I wrote yesterday, I was confirmed by a passage in Goossens' letter, in which he stated that Monsignor had been so tenacious because of the director's "impossible."

³⁸ AUT, C79, folder 07.11: ‘Chronologisch Verhaal’, 17: “Dr. Goossens accepted the proposed conference. Claes, however, had to stay out of discussion. Why? I do not understand this. I am curious to know the influences behind it. In my opinion about the director, which I wrote yesterday, I was confirmed by a passage in Goossens' letter, in which he stated that Monsignor had been so tenacious because of the "impossible" of the director.”

³⁹ AUT, Folders Cobbenhagen ‘Chronologisch Verhaal’, p. 19: ‘October 22: In a letter to the director, Monsignor confirmed his permission for one day a week and also urged the director to ensure that the curators would demand black and white the statement that they would not attempt to carry out my duties in Tilburg later and would ask for an equal explanation from me with the explicit stipulation that under no circumstances would there be a reduction in work in Rolduc: "don't let them fool you" said Monsignor. [In Dutch the expression “laat u niet beet nemen” is used, which only roughly translates to “don’t let them fool you”.]

3. The Cradle of the Trade School

a. *The First Generation: A Group Portrait*

The first generation of professors did not count any of the names put forward by Cobbenhagen. In fact the line up of the teaching staff for the first year of the school was mostly completed and made public already in December 1926.⁴⁰ There were nine different chairs, but twelve professors and lecturers assigned. The various chairs or faculties with their appointed professors and lecturers are listed here below with a short biography, including the first rector magnificus, the Church historian Prof. Dr. Thomas Goossens – whose role will be discussed more elaborately further on. In September 1927, the following picture emerges when looking at the available chairs and staff members:

Logic, Ethics and Sociology: This chair was occupied by a full professor. Frans N.M. [Antonius] Weve, born in Nijmegen in 1884 was a Dominican friar who received his doctorate in Political Sciences from Freiburg University in 1918. Weve later taught at the faculty of Theology in Huissen. Weve was considered to be someone who would continue the theological line of the renowned Thomist Johannes Vincentius de Groot.⁴¹ It was Weve who held the chair that was so dear to Kaag and Cobbenhagen and crucial for the program. He was considered to be a fierce advocate of Christian solidarity, ethics and philosophy, but what is also interesting is that he was a clear advocate of neo-Thomist thinking, in a tradition that was very critical of the dangers of Catholic modernism, which in these years was also associated with the thought of John Henry Newman – an issue not irrelevant for our concluding chapter, given the current tendency to connect Tilburg university's original profile with both Cobbenhagen and Newman.

Economics and organisational business theory: This chair was divided over two lecturers: Martinus J. Cobbenhagen, who was appointed part-time extraordinary professor and became a lecturer in General Economics and the History of Economics. In these first years, he connected issues of trade and business. Cobbenhagen had to graduate and receive his doctorate before September 1927 in order to assume his position⁴².

The other lecturer for this chair was Cobbenhagen's close ally and friend, Han Kaag, native from Hoorn in 1897, had been involved in the founding of the university by Van Gils and Goossens. He now became full professor, teaching matters of coin, credit and banking. Kaag had graduated in commercial sciences in Rotterdam in 1920. He studied in Berlin with Sombart, Schumacher and Herkner. During his period in Berlin he developed a relationship with the

⁴⁰ See the article *De R.K. Handelshoogeschool. De hoogeeraren en lectoren*, in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 23 December 1926.

⁴¹ See Marit Monteiro, *Gods Predikers: Dominicanen In Nederland, 1795-2000*, (Hilversum: Verloren, 2008) 278.

⁴² Aloysius .C.A.M. Bots, 'Cobbenhagen, Martinus Joseph Hubertus (1893-1954)', In *Biografisch Woordenboek Van Nederland*, [Url:Http://Resources.Huygens.Nl/Bwn1880-2000/Lemmata/Bwn2/Cobbenhagen](http://Resources.Huygens.Nl/Bwn1880-2000/Lemmata/Bwn2/Cobbenhagen) (accessed 13 June, 2019).

Jesuit economist and sociologist Heinrich Pesch - at that time, Pesch was the rector of the Marienfield monastery in Berlin.⁴³

Civil Law and Commercial Law: Emilius G.J. Gimbrère, born in Tilburg in 1891, was appointed full professor. He had studied Law at the University of Utrecht from 1910 to 1916. He became a lawyer in Padang, which is a place in the former Dutch East Indies.⁴⁴ In 1918 he was employed at the Dutch-Indies tradebank, and rose to the position of deputy director in 1922. He resigned in 1926 and returned to Tilburg to become a professor. It should perhaps be mentioned that this must have come as a surprise to Cobbenhagen. Since, only three months before the nomination was made public, on 25 September 1926, he noted that “Goossens informed me that a genius for commercial law had been discovered by accident.”⁴⁵

Psychotechnical studies for Business and Statistics: Jan Eduard de Quay, born in ‘s-Hertogenbosch in 1901 was appointed as a lecturer here. De Quay was a student of Roels, who was in fact on Cobbenhagen’s wish list, and became lecturer. He graduated in 1923 as a candidate in Law from Utrecht University.⁴⁶ In 1926 he graduated in Philosophy with psychology as his main subject. He had been working as an assistant at the psychological laboratory of the University of Utrecht since 1925. A bit like Cobbenhagen, de Quay had to obtain a PhD before June 1927 in order to teach at the new Roman Catholic Trade school. Later in his career, he became an important politician for the Catholic People’s Party (KVP), and in 1959, de Quay became prime minister and the leader of the de Quay cabinet.⁴⁷

History: This chair too was divided over two lecturers, and in contrast to the fact that Cobbenhagen had insisted on not focusing too much on the historical aspects, but rather preparing a practical curriculum, this was held dearly by curatorium members such as Van Gils and Goossens. So, it was the first rector of the university, Thomas Goossens, born in ‘s-Hertogenbosch in 1882, who took the position of full professor of Economic History of the Middle Ages and the Modern Age.⁴⁸

The lecturer for part two of this chair: ‘Economic History for the Eighteenth century and Political history of the Newest time’ was still unknown at the time.

⁴³ Aloysius C.A.M. Bots, Kaag, Henricus Antonius (1897-1970), in *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn2/kaag> (accessed 13 June, 2019).

⁴⁴ Alexander Claver, *Dutch Commerce and Chinese merchants in Java: Colonial relationships in Trade and Finance, 1800-1942*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 8.

⁴⁵ AUT, C79, folder 07.11: ‘Chronologisch Verhaal’, 8.

⁴⁶ At that time, the degree of ‘candidate’ was a Dutch academic degree which roughly corresponds to a present-day Bachelor’s degree.

⁴⁷ Jacques Bosmans, Quay, Jan Eduard De (1901-1985), in *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland*, [Url:Http://Resources.Huygens.NL/Bwn1880-2000/Lemmata/Bwn3/Quay](http://Resources.Huygens.NL/Bwn1880-2000/Lemmata/Bwn3/Quay) (accessed 13th June, 2019).

⁴⁸ Nicolaas Japikse, *Persoonlijkheden in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in woord en beeld* (Amsterdam, 1938), 531..

Geography: Here too, something interesting happened. The chair was split into two parts, and the first lecturer appointed was Dr. Jacoba Hol, born in Antwerp in 1886. She had obtained her PhD in Mathematics and Physics at the University of Utrecht in 1916, with a dissertation on physical-geography.⁴⁹ Hol was a pupil of professor Oestreich and would eventually become the first female full professor, when she succeeded her *Doktorvater* on the chair of physical geomorphology at Utrecht. This was only possible, however, through her prior appointment as academic lecturer in Physical Geography in Tilburg, which she kept on until 1940. Hol emulated the method of her former professor to describe the Dutch landscape in the province of Limburg⁵⁰.

The other lecturer was G.J. de Vries, born in Sneek in 1886, teaching ‘Economical Geography’. De Vries followed courses to become a teacher at the State school in Sneek and later went on to studie at the Roman Catholic Schools in Den-Bosch, Tilburg and studied at the University of Utrecht. De Vries was one of the candidates still having to receive a doctorate when he was appointed lecturer.

Technical physics: The courses in Technical Physics were taught by M.N. van der Bijl, born in Sprang in 1890. After completing the doctoral exam, van der Bijl became a secondary school teacher and later vice-rector of the Roman Catholic Lyceum of Tilburg. He obtained a PhD in History in 1926.

Technical chemistry and Trade Commodity: The engineer, Dr. H. Gelissen, born in Venlo in 1895, graduated as a chemical engineer at the HBS in Rolduc, and later as an engineer at Delft University of Technology. In 1925 he graduated cum laude as a doctor in the technical sciences, and subsequently became a teacher in Delft. He was also director of the Electrochemical industry NV in Roermond. Gelissen would turn out to become an influential academic, with a broad network, who received an honorary doctorate from the University of Aken in 1955⁵¹.

Social Policy: Dr. L.N. Deckers (Heeze 1883), obtained a PhD in Political and Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Leuven in 1912 with a study on ‘The farmers of the North Brabant sandy soil’. In 1918, Deckers became a member of the house of representatives, and resigned

⁴⁹ Catalogus Professorum Academiae Rheno-Traiectinae, s.v. “Prof. dr. J.B.L. Hol”, University of Utrecht, <Http://Profs.Library.Uu.Nl/Index.Php/Profrec/Getprofdata/908/162/230/0> (Accessed 13 June 2019).

⁵⁰ On Jacoba Hol and her significance for Tilburg, see the biographical note by J.P. Bakker, H. Boissevain and G.J. de Vries, *Jacoba Hol in dienst van de geografie en Dr. J.B.L. Hol als docente aan de RK Leergangen te Tilburg*. Postscript by Dr. Th. Goossens, (Amsterdam: Koninklijk Nederlands Aardrijkskundig Genootschap, 1941). Cf. Gary S. Dunbar, *Modern Geography: An Encyclopaedic Survey*, (Routledge, 2016), 143.

⁵¹ “Prof. Dr. Ir. Gelissen eredoctor van Technische Hogeschool te Aken”, in *Limburgsch Dagblad*, 25 Juli 1955 <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010418527:mpeg21:a0075> (accessed 12 June 2019).

from the Central Farmers Loaning Bank. Deckers also studied Law at the University of Leiden and graduated in 1925.

b. The Study Curriculum

In view of assessing Cobbenhagen's position as a founding father, one must admit that the survey of staff above is rather inconvenient for the narrative of Cobbenhagen's 'blueprint', even if it is clear that the curatorium did share some of his concerns. The case becomes more nuanced if we also take into account the study subjects that were inserted in the curriculum. Some subjects proposed in Cobbenhagen's blueprint are in fact present: the emphasis on ethics, the attention for economics and organisational theory, and the attention for psychotechnical studies. On the other hand, it should again be observed that the first of these three had already been proposed to the Curatorium by Kaag, and cannot simply be attributed to Cobbenhagen. And, several subjects listed in the so-called blueprint such as trade correspondence, tax law and non-academic courses are not adopted in Tilburg's curriculum.

Once again, a return to the sources may help clarify Cobbenhagen's position. As we have mentioned the appointment of staff members was arranged by Christmas 1926. This was not the same for the curriculum, since the debate on the content of the courses offered to a new generation of students lingered on. In the preparatory notes for the meeting of the curatorium on 25 April 1927, the Curatorium discussed the study guide for the first academic year of the Tilburg Trade School. In this guide, an outline was presented, matching the competencies of the hired staff and subdividing the study materials under six categories.⁵²:

- **Philosophy and Sociology:** This entailed Logics, Ethics, Psychology and Sociology.
- **Economics:** comprising the general Theory of Economics, Coin Credit and Banking, Trade and the politics of logistics.
- **Corporate theory:** This included lectures on the financing of a business; the organisation and technicalities of trade; business organisation; psychotechnical studies.
- **Jurisprudence:** Here the focus was put on civil law and basics of judicial proceedings; trade law and bankruptcy law; and finally social law and legislation
- **Economical Geography and History:** Courses were offered in economical geography; economical history; the economical description of trade, industry, agriculture and maritime transport; general modern history; and physical geography.
- **Technical sciences:** These required courses in the technology and chemistry of commodity goods and technical physics.
- **Additional subjects:** Finally, some preparatory and specialization courses were offered, such as accountancy; mathematics for trade; and language introduction into German,

⁵² KDC, Van Gils Archive, 1017, 223: 'Notulen van vergaderingen van het Curatorium der R.K. Handelshoogeschool 1927-1930': Meeting 25 April 1927, p. 535 ff. [Minutes of meetings of the Curatorium der R.K. Commercial High School 1927-1930].

English, French, Italian and Spanish, in order to allow graduates to be internationally active.

The question that now arises is: did Cobbenhagen influence this 1927 program? The overview of courses and subjects designed by the Curatorium for the first academic year does indeed show some overlap with Cobbenhagen's blueprint. His blueprint had proposed ethics, economical history, geography, statistics, accountancy and mathematics for trade, which were all mirrored in this Curatorium document.

The courses in trade terminology were in his summary, as were the law courses. The 'blueprint' shows some overlap with the study curriculum but it is still unclear if- and in what capacity- Cobbenhagen influenced the Curatorium outline. Was the outline made with Cobbenhagen's blueprint/guidelines in mind, or were there other influences?

Here too, a look at the sources helps to find answers, and the answer brings us back to the first paragraphs of this chapter, in the year 1924, long before Cobbenhagen was involved. A report of the Curatorium for the foundation of the Trade School is relevant, dated in November 1924, years before Cobbenhagen became involved. This report was the result of a meeting with Ronald Ledeboer, Henri Blomjous, Petrus van Gils, Thomas Goossens and the Tilburg industrial Barend van Spaendonck, and it already largely included the outline given above.⁵³ The notes added to the report clarify that an agreement was reached, that the school should have one program that would give future alumni a diploma in trade-economics by following a program of two years.⁵⁴ The commission also decided that it would be of the greatest importance to have at least three professors for the subjects coin-, credit and banking, economics and business organisation and law. Next to these professors they argued that there should be professors in accountancy, tax law, bankruptcy law, social law and legislation, international law, mathematics, modern languages, geography, history, chemistry of commodity goods, technology and others.⁵⁵ In fact, most of the themes addressed by Cobbenhagen were already discussed in the process. By April 1925 a structure was discussed that strongly resembled the curriculum mentioned above.⁵⁶ One year later, as we have seen in our reconstruction, it was Kaag who first introduced the crucial perspective of the combination of ethics and economics, which was later endorsed by Cobbenhagen.

In the end, it is difficult to conclude that much of what was presented in Cobbenhagen's 'blueprint' was innovative, and one might rather suggest that Cobbenhagen helped to arrange insights and thoughts that were already present before he became involved in 1926. Where does this leave us then? If Cobbenhagen's staff members suggestions were not decisive, and if the basic insights for Tilburg's curriculum program had been developed before he entered the

⁵³KDC, Archive Van Gils, 1017, 217: 'Notulen van vergaderingen van de Commissie voor de RK Handelshoogeschool 1924-1925' [Includes the outline of the first Academic year].

⁵⁴Ibid., Point 2 on the agenda.

⁵⁵Ibid., Points 3, 4 and 5.

⁵⁶KDC Nijmegen, 1017, 217: 'Notulen van vergaderingen van de commissie voor de RK Handelshoogeschool 1924-1925' [Report of the commission for the trade school].

process. The least one may conclude, based on the historical evidence, is that others too have played a crucial role as founding fathers of Tilburg University. What has also become clear is that the first place to trace these forgotten founders is the Curatorium.

4. The Curatorium

a) Launching a University: A Collective Enterprise

In the final part of this chapter, it is clear that we should no longer only stare at the figure of Cobbenhagen, however interesting his profile and his story. Understanding the foundations of Tilburg University, both on the level of its staff, its ideological direction and its context required a broadened perspective. In fact, when looking back at the reconstruction we have offered, one factor or thread connecting many of the protagonists involved becomes visible: the curatorium of the Tilburg Trade School. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Curatorium consisted of almost the same people as the curatorium of the Roman Catholic Education Programs: it was presided over by baron and member of parliament van Wijnbergen, and counted several prominent members. For instance the mayor of Tilburg, the jurist Dr. Frans Vonk de Both, who used the finances of the region's textile industry to help finance the new University; the Tilburg industrial and member of parliament Henri Blomjous; Drs. Jan Verhoeven, rector of the Sint-Odulphus Lyceum; B.J.M. Van Spaendonck, deacon P.G.H. Dircx; Mgr. Dr. W.G.A. Van Sonsbeeck; Mad. Dr. Th. Van Oppenraay; Gerrit Cornelis Van Noort, pastor and later deacon of Amsterdam; Minister of state en chairman of the House of Representatives Charles Ruyts de Beerenbrouck; and of course Petrus van Gils, the inspector of education in the diocese of Roermond. In another publication by Hans Bornevasser; *Vijftig jaar Katholieke Leergangen 1912-1962*, published in 1962, the foundation of Roman Catholic Trade School [Rooms Katholieke Handelshoogeschool Tilburg] is also described. The overarching chapter that deals with the foundation of Roman Catholic Trade School is named "Goossens Re-creation: 1921-1940".⁵⁷ In the chapter on the Roman Catholic Trade School, Bornevasser states that the curatorium initially planned to each approach one bishop and that they were surprised when they received a letter giving them an assignment to start a trade university/school.⁵⁸ The curatorium was launched in 1924, after the bishops had decided to establish a Trade School, and its members had regular meetings. These persons decided on the matters regarding the future university, including the line-up of teaching staff, the types of courses offered, ... all of this has become obvious from the above, and a further study of the archives, containing the minutes of the meetings, kept in the Catholic Documentation Centre in Nijmegen stands to underline the importance of the Curatorium.

⁵⁷ Johannes A. Bornevasser and Anton van Duinkerken, *Vijftig jaar katholieke leergangen: 1912-1962*, Tilburg: Zuid-Nederlandse Drukkerij, 1962.

⁵⁸ Bornevasser and van Duinkerken, *Vijftig jaar katholieke leergangen*, 160.

This thesis cannot offer a full detailed reconstruction of all the activities of the Curatorium. For the purposes of this thesis, it suffices to list some relevant elements. For instance, the report of a very early meeting, on 9 September 1924 indicates how the curatorium was installed in the beginning. A small commission decided to ask Ronald Ledeboer, Thomas Goossens and Henri Blomjous as key players for the future⁵⁹. The following members were present: Ledeboer, Blomjous, Van Gils, Goossens and van Spaendonck. In March of that year the Dutch Bishops decided to further the cause of a Higher school for Trade in Tilburg, and very rapidly the relationship with the young Catholic University of Nijmegen was on the agenda. Members of the curatorium had a meeting on 6 December 1924 with the curatorium of the University of Nijmegen, explaining the importance of the mutual interest regarding the hiring of professors and lecturers and the intent of the Tilburg Roman Catholic Education Programs to launch a higher school for trade in Tilburg.

According to another note by secretary van Spaendonck the following people were present at the meeting in Nijmegen: Van Wijnbergen, Ledeboer, Sonsbeeck, Van Gils, Bongaerts, Goossens and van Spaendonck.⁶⁰ This meeting was surely important to make sure that the relationship between Nijmegen and Tilburg would not be strained. Such issues were crucial for Tilburg's future, and they were decided upon long before Cobbenhagen entered the stage. This caused considerable tensions, and it is clear from the archives that persons such as Goossens and Van Gils have played a decisive role here, also in making sure that the two Catholic institutes would not end up becoming financial enemies. The 1924 report discussed a letter of the curators of the Nijmegen university to the Dutch bishops, written on 7 May 1924, in which they argued that a new faculty of trade and economics would preferably be included in their university.⁶¹ In these discussions, lingering on throughout 1925, Goossens argued strongly that it could not be the intent to offer Tilburg's Roman Catholic Education Programs a 'minor part of the educational program' at Nijmegen. On the contrary, Tilburg's future rector magnificus stood his ground and insisted that Tilburg was entitled to have a 'full' Trade School⁶². This was in reference to a comment made by the bishop of Roermond, Schrijnen, who

⁵⁹ KDC Nijmegen, 1017, 217: 'notulen van vergaderingen van de commissie voor de RK Handelshoogeschool 1924-1925', In the Report of the commission for the trade school. Point 1: Membership of the Commission, 285.

⁶⁰ KDC Nijmegen, 1017, 217: 'Verslag der conferentie tusschen een commissie uit het curatorium der R.K. Leergangen en hun commissie uit het curatorium der R.K. Universiteit over het R.K. Hoogerhandelsonderwijs op zaterdag 8 augustus 1925 's middags te twee uur in Nijmegen', 315. [Report of the conference between a committee from the R.K. Courses and their committee from the R.K. University about the R.K. Higher trade education on Saturday 8 August 1925 at two o'clock in Nijmegen].

⁶¹ KDC, Archive Van Gils, 1017, 217.

⁶² KDC, Archive Van Gils, 1017, 217, 'verslag van de vergadering van 8 augustus 1925[report of the meeting of 8 August 1925]', 321: "Mr. Goosens explains that it is not the intention of the R.K. Leergangen with regard to the "division of labor", about which Mr Schrijnen spoke, we can go so far that Tilburg would only receive a piece of training. The intention is to establish a complete Handels Hooge School in Tilburg, so that it is not possible to settle for the idea that, by analogy with the conditions in Switzerland by Prof. dr. De Langen Wendels was suggested on December 6."

suggested that Tilburg would provide the practical education and Nijmegen the scientific part of the programme⁶³. Such debates made it clear that Cobbenhagen's bishop was quite aware of the tensions and was not the most enthusiastic supporter of the new initiative. It makes clear why the enthusiasm of Cobbenhagen was not welcomed at Roermond. And, it is striking to see that in his blueprint and his chronology of events, Cobbenhagen did not reflect any awareness of these matters, showing little sympathy for Goossens. In the end, Schrijnen was forced to change his position, and in the last months of 1926, the Dutch bishops held a press conference and published a letter regarding the higher school for trade in 1926.⁶⁴ In their letter, signed by A.F. Diepen, secretary of the episcopal conference, the decision to 'recommend and support as soon as possible the vigorous action to be taken by your Curatorium throughout the Netherlands to form the essential capital [kapitaal] of this Higher School for trade' was communicated.

b. The Forgotten First Rector: Thomas Goossens

Time and again, the figure of Goossens returns in our story. As we have guessed in the introduction of this study, tracing the Founding Fathers of Tilburg University one cannot surpass the first rector, even if he has become a forgotten figure today. So, this chapter ends with a brief portrait of this remarkable person. Not just because he was forgotten, but also because in this concluding chapter, a glance at the imagery around Goossens helps us to understand the reasons why Cobbenhagen, and not Goossens, has become the key figure of reference at the University.

Thomas Johannes Adrianus Josephus Goossens was born in 1882. His family was a sculptor's family, both his father and his grandfather were active in the trade. Goossens received his education at boardingschool 'Ruwenberg' in Sint-Michielshestel and joined the minor seminary in 1895.⁶⁵ Afterwards he continued his education at the seminary Beekvliet and the Major seminary of Haaren, until he was ordained a priest on 25 May 1907. Goossens turned out to be a talented student, so bishop van der Ven sent Goossens together with Alphons Meuwese to the University of Amsterdam, where he studied Dutch Literature. In 1914, Goossens replaced Johannes Adrianus Cornelis De Kroon as professor at the Beekvliet seminary. In 1921, he eventually became the rector of the Roman Catholic Education Programs, as well as the diocesan inspector for higher- and secondary education. In the mean time, in 1917, he had completed his dissertation at Amsterdam, with a well respected study on 'Franciscus Sonnius in the Pamphlets', in which he published a hitherto unknown polemic pamphlet against the Brabant Catholic figure of Sonnius, proving that its author was Henricus Geldorpious.

⁶³ KDC, Archive Van Gils, 1017, 217: 'verslag van de vergadering van 8 August 1925[report of the meeting of August. 1925],' 319.

⁶⁴ See the article "Een Katholieke Handelshoogeschool: Een persconferentie te Tilburg, wat men zich voorstelt en hoe het doel te bereiken," in *De Grondwet*, 27 December 1926,

<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMGARO01:000182606:mpeg21:p002> (accessed 12 June 2019)[press conference]

⁶⁵ Bornevasser and van Duinkerken, *Vijftig jaar*, 118.

Goossens was not just a scholar specialized in the history of Brabant's Catholicism. He helped overcome the crisis of the Tilburg programs and replaced Moller as of 1921, afterwards becoming a prominent figure. His central role in the Curatorium launched by the bishops in 1924 served as a stepping stone to become the first rector magnificus of the Tilburg Trade School three years later, and he would serve in that capacity for several terms. At the first official start of the Academic year in 1928 he gave a speech in which it became clear that the school had already surpassed expectations⁶⁶: while in September 1927 they had expected about fifteen students, there turned out to be 28 full-time and 13 part-time. In the rest of the speech, printed by the newspaper, he mentioned the need to expand the library and listed various activities undertaken by professors and teachers of the school. Moreover, rector Goossens explicitly stated the Trade School's gratitude toward Dr. Van Gils for being a promotor of the school and to Msgr. Diepen for representing the school's interests within the Dutch episcopate. In this speech he also gladly accepted the request of staying on as rector for a next term, saying that:

I would now have the task, in the ordinary course of the Dutch University traditions, of saying goodbye to my office and offering my successor a sincere and warm welcome. But I'll have to address the usual *Salve, rector, iterumque salve* to myself. The Curatorium was unanimous in judging that continuity of the first management was desirable for the newly emerging University of Applied Sciences, and therefore put me on the shoulders of the rectorate, so honoring but also so responsible and demanding, also for this second year of study⁶⁷.

Goossen was well respected as a rector of the new school, which becomes clear when he was succeeded by professor Weve in 1930. The local newspaper, the *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* discussed the new rector Professor Weve, but was expressly positive on Goossens: 'This will also end the meritorious term of office of the current Rector Magnificus, Mgr. Dr. Th. Goossens, who was first appointed in 1927, who saw his mandate renewed in the next two years and under whose leadership the education was led from the beginning with a calmness and regularity that a starting college will rarely show'⁶⁸.

We list these positive echoes here, because, as will be clear in the next chapter, they stand in some contrast to the way Goossens was later described by Tilburg University's own historians. Such reports and newspaper clippings nevertheless make clear that his contemporaries regarded Goossens as a good and competent colleague and rector. On the other hand, Goossens, already in 1927 seemed to be aware that some people found him, just as Van

⁶⁶ "Redevoering van Dr. Goossens," in *De Tijd*, 17 september 1928,
<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010532453:mpeg21:p001> [Speech by dr. Goossens] (accessed 13 June 2019).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "R.K. Handelshoogeschool. Prof. Dr. F. A. Weve O.P. Rector Magnificus", in *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, 1 July 1930, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010235883:mpeg21:a0051> (accessed 12 June 2019).

Gils, too much of an apologetic defender of the Catholic milieus of the Southern parts of the Netherlands, always insisting on the heritage of the eighteenth-century struggle of Catholics against the northern parts of the nation. Such discussions became tangible when he was quoted, in the *Tilburgsche Courant* of 12 August 1927, one month before the opening of the first academic year, saying that ‘The Rector Magnificus defends the foundation of a Catholic Commercial High School with irrefutable arguments, among other things because the philosophy of life that one adheres to is an education. The Hoogeschool in Tilburg is not something that owes its origin to a whim of the south’⁶⁹.

Looking back, Goossens was a child of his time, and a child of the Catholic emancipation story. His vision of the University reflected this, and this is recorded in speeches were kept. On the celebration of the dies natalis of the school in 1930, for instance, the rector gave a long speech on the history of Brabant in the eighteenth century⁷⁰. On the Brabant Revolution of March 1796 he stated that ‘Noord-Brabant has been able to stick with his own in the Netherlands. After all the suffering it had endured, after all the extortions, which it had to undergo, Brabant was forced to make new sacrifices again, before it was recognized as an equal entity alongside the Seven Provinces. Poor Brabant had to give and beg until the very last moment, and finally had to buy its free recognition. The other regions, with the exception of Holland, have made it more difficult rather than helped’⁷¹. Like other historians did⁷², Goossens time and again contrasted Brabant with the Northern provinces⁷³. However common this may have been among Catholics in the south in the Interbellum, it did not help the rector being remembered in a positive way five decades later.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ “LUMEN ET VERITAS: Prof. Dr. Th. Goossens over de R.K. Handelshoogeschool,” In *Tilburgsche Courant*, 12 August 1927, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010193046:mpeg21:a0055> (accessed 12 June 2019).

[a speech by dr. Goossens]

⁷⁰ “REDE PROF. DR. TH. GOOSSENS,” in *de Maasbode*, 7 March 1929,

<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB04:000197199:mpeg21:a0076> (accessed 12 June 2019).

⁷¹ REDE PROF. DR. TH. GOOSSENS,” in *de Maasbode*, 7 March 1929: “Noord-Brabant has retained itself for the Netherlands. After all the suffering it had endured, after all the extortion, which it should have accepted, Brabant had to make new sacrifices again, before it was recognized as being equal with the Seven Regions. Poor Brabant had to praise and offer poor Brabant until the very last moment, and finally had to buy its free recognition. The other regions, with the exception of Holland, have rather made it more difficult than helped.”

⁷² See for example the short description of the thoughts of Johannes Krieger and Willem Nuyens in: René Huiskamp and Ton van de Sande, ‘Het aflossen van een dood paard: Kanttekeningen bij Huide de Bruin, ‘Den Haag versus Staats-Brabant: IJzeren vuist of fluwelen handschoen’, in BMGN, CXI (1996) 449-463.

⁷³ “31e Dietsch Academische Leergang: Officiele sluiting,” in *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant*, 12 April 1930, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010235819:mpeg21:a0106> (accessed 4 July 2019) [a speech by Goossens under the motto ‘Partir c'est mourir un peu’ at the Dietsche Academische Leergang was mentioned where he insisted on the historical and linguistic links between the North and the South].

⁷⁴ For more information about the Protestant-Catholic divide and historical tensions between the North and the South of the Netherlands see for example: Joris van Eijnatten and Frederik A. van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006), 241-257.

Chapter Three

The Origins of an Invented Tradition

1. Introduction: The Disappearing of a ‘Father’

In the previous chapter, it has become both clear that Cobbenhagen was undoubtedly one of the figures involved in the early years of Tilburg University. On the other hand, when focusing on the historical foundations of the university, and at those who founded and governed over it in the first years, one ought to admit that granting him the epitheton of Founding Father is not entirely warranted. For one, the unilateral focus on Cobbenhagen has the side effect of downplaying or even neglecting the role of other figures, such as Goossens, Van Gils or Kaag. More important is that it attributes an importance to Cobbenhagen which is difficult to defend on the basis of original source materials, and which appears to have been created on a later basis. That said, we return to the introductory chapter of the thesis, and the problem of invented tradition. In that light, the key matter of this final chapter is to detect the origins of Tilburg University’s commemorial tradition presenting Cobbenhagen as Founding Father.

This requires a survey of those places, traditions and publications in which Cobbenhagen was presented as such. When doing research into the prevalence of sources presenting Cobbenhagen as Founding Father, it became clear that there was a gap in time. For a start, it should be acknowledged that something of this imagery was present immediately after his untimely death in 1954⁷⁵.

After Cobbenhagen’s funeral an article discussing the deceased rector appeared in the Catholic newspaper *De Tijd*. This would appear to be the first moment in which Cobbenhagen’s ‘paternal’ role was mentioned. The newspaper piece did not only indicate that a large crowd, consisting of both students, university officials and government representatives attended the funeral, it also explicitly stated that ‘here a large family was gathered around the grave of its Father, who has been a wise counsellor and a good friend for all, young and old’.⁷⁶

However striking the citation above may be, it was also a unique case. After a moment of grief, the interest in the figure of Cobbenhagen and his role for Tilburg University faded. Not just for a few years, but for decades almost no signs were present of his importance. Poignantly, it is in the previously mentioned work of Bornevasser *Vijftig jaar Katholieke Leergangen*

⁷⁵ “Laatste Gang Van Prof. Cobbenhagen,” In *De Tijd*, 15 Februari 1954.

⁷⁶ The article “Laatste Gang Van Prof. Cobbenhagen,” In *De Tijd*, 15 Februari 1954, 4 describes the university as Cobbenhagen’s ‘spiritual Child’ or ‘geesteskind’. This terminology seems to be borrowed from Cobbenhagen’s own words, in his chronology. ‘Will I be allowed to participate in building what I may call my spiritual property, or should I stand by the side as a disinterested person to defend the young university against the attacks that will also come from Catholic Rotterdammers? Deus providebit? I am prepared for both and in the latter case, if necessary, the whip kittens the legs of the attackers, making them jump in pain.’ <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011203017:mpeg21:a0085> (accessed 4 July 2019).

1912-1962, that we find a narrative that would be repeated in his later work on the University and other publications. In this book, there is mention of what would later become known as the blueprint: “Cobbenhagen now issued a report that has become the actual basis for the university”.⁷⁷ We also find the firm statement that Cobbenhagen’s vision “determined the course of the new e-education institute for the first years of its existence, and gave it its own unique character.”⁷⁸ Apart from this publication by Bornevasser, there is little academic writing on Cobbenhagen in the decades after his death.

Where usually in academic writing, the *argumentum e silentio* is seen as problematic, this is not the case when investigating invented tradition. Precisely the fact that a tradition claims authenticity while in reality it emerges after a longstanding silence is an important signal. This argument of silence is precisely what occurs in the case of Tilburg University’s attention for the figure of Cobbenhagen. It disappeared for about twenty years, and when it surfaced again, this was owed to the university’s alumni network, where a steady increase of attention for Cobbenhagen’s work and legacy was fostered.

2. Cobbenhagen’s Growing Popularity: 1990 to 2017

a. Rediscovery of Value-Driven Economics

In order to come to an understanding of the commemorative tradition that is the object of this study, it is worthwhile to have a closer look at an official document from the 1990s which mentions how a ‘Cobbenhagen Fund’ was established on the 17th of March, 1972. the Foundation came out of the alumni group founded by Professor Cobbenhagen, bearing as name the Tilburg Academic Economic Circle (Tilburgse Academische Economische Kring - TAEK),⁷⁹ now incorporated within the Cobbenhagen foundation as the alumni network ‘Friends of Cobbenhagen’. The Cobbenhagen Foundation as a whole has among its goals to promote the scientific work related to the programs at the Tilburg University. It also aims to financially support teachers, alumni and students who do work that is related to the university. To summarize; this foundation has its origins in Cobbenhagen’s alumni group that he started in 1934 but it was renamed and expanded in the 1980s.

What is important for our purpose is not so much the actual activities of the Cobbenhagen Friends or the Cobbenhagen Foundation, but the chronology of events. After Cobbenhagen’s death in 1954, his legacy seemed a bit forgotten, and the rhetoric of him being ‘the first full

⁷⁷ Bornevasser and van Duinkerken, *Vijftig jaar*, 164.

⁷⁸ Bornevasser and van Duinkerken, *Vijftig jaar*, 165

⁷⁹“Stichting Professor Cobbenhagen,” Tilburg University,

<https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/nl/alumni/betrokken/vrienden-van-cobbenhagen/stichting-professor-cobbenhagen> (accessed 1 June 2019).

professor' (as found today on the website of the Cobbenhagen Foundation) is not present. The only major publication devoted to his work was found in the edition of his writings published by his former colleagues⁸⁰. As of the 1980s and 1990s, this drastically changed. Several factors were at play: in the Dutch *Biografisch Woordenboek* of 1985 a biographical lemma was devoted to Cobbenhagen⁸¹. This new interest in a figure that had been forgotten for decades is in itself a symptom of a neo-classic revival among economists. In the slipstream of this evolution, other publications appeared, such as the one by Smulders on value-driven economics⁸². Suddenly, the question of the actuality of Cobbenhagen's economic ideas surfaces, and this is something that will remain until the 1990s. For instance, in 1995, two Tilburg economists, Kolnaar and Meulendijks, publish on this matter⁸³. This renewed biographical and economic attention to the role and work of Cobbenhagen lingers on after the turn of the century. In 2003 van den Eerenbeemt also devotes a study on the importance of ethical perspectives in economic science. Strikingly, something new occurs here: Van den Eerenbeemt not only credits Cobbenhagen for having proposed an economic science based on sound (Catholic) moral principles in the lineage of *Rerum novarum*, he also offers a certain framing of Cobbenhagen calling him the 'grondlegger' or Founder of the university.⁸⁴ This image, seemingly has become predominant by then, and in 2008 it will be repeated in the inaugural lecture of Professor Erik Borgman. Borgman too focuses on the key role of Cobbenhagen for the university, and he moves a step further than van den Eerenbeemt in his discussion of 'Universiteit en Theologie'.⁸⁵

b. Institutional Rediscovery: Cobbenhagen as a pillar for Academic Identity

Hitherto, my focus was mainly on the re-emergence of Cobbenhagen in biographical and economic publications. Even if it is clear that this interest only dates from the 1980s, it remains

⁸⁰ Han Kaag, Petrus Van Berkum and Dirk Schouten ed., *De Economist Cobbenhagen. Economische Geschriften Van Prof. Dr. M.J.H. Cobbenhagen* (Amsterdam/Brussel, 1957) [This volume contains a full bibliography of Cobbenhagen].

⁸¹ Aloysius C.A.M. Bots, 'Cobbenhagen, Martinus Joseph Hubertus (1893-1954)', In *Biografisch Woordenboek Van Nederland*, [Url:Http://Resources.Huygens.NL/Bwn1880-2000/Lemmata/Bwn2/Cobbenhagen](http://Resources.Huygens.NL/Bwn1880-2000/Lemmata/Bwn2/Cobbenhagen) (accessed 13 June, 2019). This seemed to be the beginning of a new biographical interest in the figure of Cobbenhagen. Later, other lemmata will be published. See in this regard Theo Cuijpers ed., and Jan van Oudheusden, *Brabantse biografieën. Levensbeschrijvingen van bekende en onbekende Noordbrabanders* vol. 4 (Amsterdam: Boom, 1996). And also the online lemma found on the website of Brabants Erfgoed:

<https://www.brabantserfgoed.nl/personen/c/cobbenhage-jos> (accessed 23 August 2019).

⁸² A. A. J. Smulders, Cobbenhagen En De Waardenvrijheidsdiscussie, in A. Vermaat, J. Klant En J. Zuidema ed., *Anderhalve eeuw economisch denken in Nederland* (Leiden/Antwerpen, 1987), 183-204.

⁸³ Adrianus H.J.J. Kolnaar and Pieter J.F.G. Meulendijks, *Zijn Cobbenhagen's Ideeën Opnieuw Aktueel?*, Research Memorandum/Tilburg University,(Tilburg: Faculty Of Economics and Business Administration, 1995).

⁸⁴ Henricus F.J.M. van den Eerenbeemt, *Terugkeer van de ethische denkbeelden bij Cobbenhagen: Grondlegger van onze Universiteit* (Tilburg, 2003).

⁸⁵ Erik Borgman, '...want de plaats waarop je staat is heilige grond'. *God als onderzoeksprogramma* (Amsterdam: 2008) 92-96.

insufficient in order to speak of an ‘invented tradition’. To add to this picture, it is also useful to point to an institutional rediscovery of Cobbenhagen, in the same era: Take for instance the importance of the aforementioned alumni network. Until the early 1990s the official network, founded by Cobbenhagen in 1934 – seven years after founding of the University, and in fact during Cobbenhagen’s very first term as rector magnificus - was simply called Tilburg Academic Economic Circle (TAEK). A notarial act signed in 1992 defined the establishment of the Professor Cobbenhagen Foundation, which received the saldi of the former TAEK and which, as of that moment, also comprised the Circle of Cobbenhagen Friends. Just as in the field of publications, this seems to offer a starting point for an institutional Cobbenhagen revival. As of then, Cobbenhagen becomes ever more visible on Campus. In 2002, for instance, the University rebaptizes its ‘Building A’, used since 1962 under that name, into ‘Cobbenhagen Building’. In 2015 a Tilburg Cobbenhagen Center is opened, under the directorship of Erik Borgman.

This is quite interesting, since four years earlier, Borgman already contributed to the commemorative tradition around the figure of Cobbenhagen. In that year, 2011, an official booklet was published at Tilburg University, entitled *Met het oog op het goede leven – Cobbenhagen en onze universitaire cultuur*, distributed among all staff members. This booklet contained a series of publications written by Cobbenhagen and an introduction by the head of the university of Tilburg, Koen Becking. In the book the theologian Erik Borgman linked Cobbenhagen’s holistic vision to those of Humboldt and the famous Victorian age theologian Newman⁸⁶ This publication is important with regard to the commemoration culture surrounding Cobbenhagen because the university administrator, Becking, not only refers to the key importance of Cobbenhagen’s ‘Blueprint’, he also underlines that Cobbenhagen’s vision constitutes the heart of Tilburg’s ‘tradition’ and identity, two words that are repeated time and again:

In addition to general views and opinions about universities, it is important to take full account of our own history and *tradition*. [...] We believe it is important that you take the time to read it. Students should perhaps read it after leaving the institution, because the publication also says something about how we hope they will use what we have given them in their later lives. It will

⁸⁶ “The exploration of a multiform reality calls for a multiform university. *Understanding society* calls for a university that is itself a varied and mixed community that continually reforms and rebuilds itself. In this way, the university reflects society in which everyone is part of a greater whole no one can control or oversee. This greater whole transcends all models and refutes all theories but also lies at the basis of every individual life and every concrete experience, every insight and every concept. These ideas, reenacting those of Newman, are linked directly to Cobbenhagen’s belief that real life unites and holds together the fragmented and fragmenting theoretical ideas and not the other way around.” In Erik Borgman, *Met het oog op het goede leven: Cobbenhagen en onze universitaire cultuur* (Tilburg: Tilburg university, 2011), 51. This connection is historically questionable, given that in Cobbenhagen’s era Newman was regarded as suspicious and as a danger to the neo-thomist tradition that inspired the writings of Cobbenhagen. It should also be observed that in Cobbenhagen’s writings, Newman is absent.

be useful for staff in providing an effective grounding in the *tradition* in which we operate, in motivating them to think about the challenge they face and in encouraging them to develop ideas about the nature and *identity* of our institution as it moves forward into the future.⁸⁷[emphasis added]

These introductory remarks reveal a concern for the history and tradition of the University. That same concern returns a few years later in another publication by the University board. In 2016 the *Cobbenhagen essays* are distributed among the staff, having as subtitle *The founding father's idea of Tilburg University*. Once more, the foreword to this publication was written by the President of the Executive Board of Tilburg University and the aim of the collection of essays was quite the same. An important difference seems to be that this publication encourages the students to listen to Cobbenhagen's 'own voice':

This collection allows us to listen to his own voice – not to concentrate unduly on the terms he uses or even on the ideas he introduces, but to take it as an example, from very close to home, of what a university can be like. This presentation of the thoughts and actions of our *founding father* in his own days and in his own circumstances may inspire us to understand better what is going on nowadays, and to act accordingly. As representatives of Tilburg University, we not only feel its identity in our bones, we also translate this identity into core values and practical activities.⁸⁸

The Cobbenhagen essays and the book *Met het oog op het goede leven* were published in 2011 and 2016. In 2017, when the University celebrated its 90th birthday, the *The little encyclopaedia of Tilburg university* was published and this too was distributed among the staff of the university. This booklet was indeed conceived as a small encyclopedia, and once more depicted Cobbenhagen as Founding Father. Once again the link between Cobbenhagen and Newman was made, while other figures from the first generation were either neglected, or portrayed in a much less benevolent way. This was the case for that of the very first rector, Thomas Goossens, who received a very short lemma.

Moreover, in the same year the *Encyclopaedia* was published, the University also published its new educational profile. At the beginning of this essay, a full page was dedicated to the importance of Cobbenhagen.⁸⁹ The educational profile started with an outline of the European tradition of the University, the second part described the Educational goal of Tilburg University and it concluded with a proposal on the Academic profile of the University.

"Lying at the foundation of the Tilburg academic programs is the conviction voiced by Martinus Cobbenhagen that our university bears a moral responsibility toward society, that consequently our alumni should make themselves count, make a difference in everyday life in

⁸⁷ Borgman, *Met het Oog Op Het Goede Leven*, 34.

⁸⁸ Martinus Cobbenhagen, *Cobbenhagen Essays: The Founding Father's Idea Of Tilburg University*, A. Hinten, L. Jeurissen, H. Klerx, M. Peeters, J. Schiks eds., (Tilburg University: Valkhof pers, 2016), 8.

⁸⁹ Alkeline van Lenning and Herman de Regt, *Exploring an Educational Vision for Tilburg University* (Tilburg series in Academic Education, 2017), 6.

society, inspired by the thought that what you are is more important than what you know.”⁹⁰ This quote demonstrates once more how Cobbenhagen, as in the previous two publications, is constantly put forward by the University as its founding father. These publications are not the only way in which Cobbenhagen is being put forward in the commemoration culture of the University.

A quick survey teaches that on Tilburg’s campus, the figure of Cobbenhagen has become unavoidable. The University website prominently states that ‘serving and enhancing society to help citizens. That is what drives us. It was the opinion of Tilburg University’s founding father, Martinus Cobbenhagen, that those who want to understand society should be actively and consciously involved in it’⁹¹. Aside this, there are the publications, the Cobbenhagen Friends, the Foundation, the Cobbenhagen evenings organized by the Student chaplaincy Maranatha⁹², the aforementioned building, and other initiatives such as the Cobbenhagen summit:⁹³ according to the website of the university this provides with ‘a forum for entrepreneurship, public administration and higher education and research, where a strategy for the Brabant economy and society will be developed in the (middle) long term’. The summits are organized at the beginning of each year in order to ‘discuss and evaluate the Strategy for the Brabant Region’.⁹⁴ The list might even be expanded, but what is abundantly clear is that Tilburg University fosters a tradition of referring to Cobbenhagen as its Founding Father.

This brings us back to the central question: was this always the case? Returning to the results of the previous chapter it is clear that among the original founders of the Hoogeschool in 1927, Cobbenhagen may have been important, but he was one among many. As indicated, his position in 1927 was that of a part-time lecturer being all but sure of an academic future. His “Blueprint” played some role in shaping the university’s direction, yet not a decisive role. When one takes into account that Cobbenhagen’s lineup for the professorial corps was not heeded, and taking into account that – even if he became of major importance in Tilburg during and after World War Two - in the early years he was not regarded as a key figure, nor was he elected rector in these years, it is historically difficult to claim that he was the main founder of the University.

⁹⁰ van Lenning and de Regt, *Exploring An Educational Vision For Tilburg University*, 56.

⁹¹ “About,” Tilburg University, accessed May 15 2019, <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/about> (accessed 15 May, 2019).

⁹² [Http://Www.Cobbenhagenavonden.Nl/](http://Www.Cobbenhagenavonden.Nl/) (accessed 1 June 2019).

⁹³ “Cobbenhagen center,” <Https://Www.Tilburguniversity.Edu/Nl/Onderzoek/Instituten-En-Researchgroepen/Cobbenhagen-Center> (Accessed 15 May 2019).

⁹⁴ “Cobbenhagen summit,” <Https://Www.Tilburguniversity.Edu/Nl/Samenwerken/Societeit/Cobbenhagen-Summit> (accessed 15 May 2019).

Chapter Four

Conclusions and Analysis

1. Cobbenhagen as Founding Father: An Invented Tradition

An invented tradition, as explained in the first chapter has the appearance of an actual or an ‘authentic’ tradition. It loops certain rituals, symbols, and information from historical sources. The difference is that invented traditions, in general, are artificially created and relatively recent in their conception, while they claim an older provenance. Precisely this gap between what they historically claim on the one hand and their being of recent date on the other hand, allows for us to call them ‘invented’ or ‘created’. It is important to stress again that even if a tradition is created this does not necessarily imply that it is wrong, misplaced, or void of any value. Now, let us return to the particular case of Cobbenhagen and Tilburg University’s commemorial culture surrounding his role as a reference point for the identity of the institute. Some observations can be made. Archive sources documenting the foundation of the university illustrate, for a start, that there were a lot of people involved in the process of starting the new school in the period between 1924 and 1927. This already raises a question mark: was Cobbenhagen the only ‘Founding Father’? The process of establishing the school commenced in the early 1920s, and was launched by the curatorium. In our reconstruction it became clear that the major figures playing a role here were Petrus Van Gils, Thomas Goossens and various others, such as Han Kaag. Arguably, the concept of the Trade school was already ‘founded’ when Cobbenhagen was consulted, rather late in the process, by van Gils to suggest teaching staff. The least one might conclude is that if Tilburg University is to praise its founders, it is strange that Cobbenhagen is granted a major role, while protagonists such as Van Gils and Goossens, the first rector for several terms, should perhaps also be given these credits.

When we mention that Cobbenhagen was consulted late in the process, another issue pops up, that of the Blueprint, which returns time and again in the commemorial culture. Historically speaking, the fact that the document is called ‘Blueprint/blauwdruk’ also raises questions, since this term gives it a strong weight, but the term is never used in the document, and Cobbenhagen did not call it this either. In fact, we may characterize the document as a preparatory note for a meeting, existing alongside other such documents. Our analysis of this document has made it clear that this document (of which we have discovered a second, alternative version, was not entirely as decisive for the early foundations of the university, and that is served as a mere guideline for one of the discussions in the preparation period.

Historically speaking, the image of Cobbenhagen as ‘the Founding father of the university’ appears to be problematic – left aside the simple fact that in the first years of the university’s existence, he was only a part time lecturer and the Roermond bishop did not give

much room for him to be a major player in the future. That brings us to the conclude that the tradition of celebrating Cobbenhagen as Tilburg University's founding father indeed fits the description of an invented tradition.

This is all the more so when we glance further, and may safely conclude that the source for this tradition is of recent date. It is only found after the work of Bornevasser was published in the late 1970s. The repetition of the *leitmotiv* 'Cobbenhagen as founding father' in recent years seems to start with his description and interpretation, and certainly was not present in the first decades of the institution's existence. This tradition, we insist, is valid in the sense that it is important for the university to have a solid brand or identity to present to the outside world. It is however, not historically warranted when one studies the actual sources. Cobbenhagen is only heralded as the symbol of the university in recent decades and his work is only linked to the university's core values since the turn of the millennium. Recent official university publications to project an image of him as spiritual and intellectual father of the university.

This is interesting, since Cobbenhagen is put forward as a completely original thinker who pioneered the idea of combining economics with ethics, an emphasis which is at the core of the university's identity ever since. Ironically, the historical sources reveal that not the ideas of Cobbenhagen were essential, rather the agreement among several protagonists that a higher school for trade and economics needed to identify itself over against other institutions by highlighting its explicit Catholic moral ethics. . Moreover, in the process reconstructed, the emphasis on Catholic morality was already introduced by Kaag before Cobbenhagen's guidelines brought it in the discussion. It is also interesting that the emphasis on the 'Catholic' aspect of ethics, so important for Cobbenhagen and his generation in the 1920s is not stressed this much in the contemporary framing. Today, the university's commemorial tradition only refers to a very small, and not confessional, portion of the history of the University to enhance an identity or school spirit. The commemorial tradition of the university, with the Cobbenhagen summit, essays, centre, friends, avenue, building, etc.. can be said to fall under the header of invented traditions, with the recent purpose to uphold a school spirit. I may add, from personal experience, that it is poignant that the tradition of centering Cobbenhagen as founding father is a top-down process, which bottles down from the hierarchical top of the university, but which is not experienced as necessary or crucial by the students themselves.

2. The Trouble with Church Historians: Bornevasser, Goossens and Rogier

All of the above brings us to a final question: if Cobbenhagen was not seen as Founding Father at the time of, and in the first decades after the foundation, and if after his death his role was neglected for decades, where lies the origin of the tradition to promote him as Founding Father, and why were figures that have historically invested much more, such as the first rector, Thomas Goossens, neglected A glimpse of an answer seems to lie in the publication of *the*

Cobbenhagen essays. More than *Met het oog op het goede leven*, the *Cobbenhagen essays* constantly refer to the writings of Hans Bornewasser, amounting up to about twenty references in this booklet.

An important publication that appears to be central to the commemoration tradition of the University and Cobbenhagen is the aforementioned study on the history of the University by Hans Bornewasser, published in 1978. He was given the assignment from the rector to write this study on occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Tilburg University in 1977, but the project was delayed with one year. Given the impact of his work on the commemorative culture in Tilburg, a closer look at his profile. Bornewasser was a professor of church history and theology at the Theological Faculty of the University of Tilburg from 1967 until 1989.⁹⁵ The book was commissioned to him by the board of the University in 1975, and it was not primarily an academic project. The university had suffered what one might call ‘an identity crisis’ in the 60s, when the revolting students rebaptized it into ‘Karl Marx University’,⁹⁶ This study provided with an alternative vision and sense of historical identity. As described in the first chronicle of the University’s history by Bornewasser, his study could provide a cornerstone for the next fifty years. Bornewasser’s book eventually appeared in 1979, and this date is striking since it precedes all of the publications and institutional decisions using the ‘invented’ the tradition of Cobbenhagen as the supposed Founding Father.

In an article published in the University journal *Univers* on the 1st of June 1979 on the publication of the book, a header is named ‘Spiritual Father’. This somewhat summarizes Bornewasser’s framing of Cobbenhagen as a father-figure in his book.⁹⁷ The article also mentions that initially a collective of five history teachers were asked to write the monument, but eventually Bornewasser wrote it book alone.⁹⁸ The portrait of Cobbenhagen designed by this Church historian became prominent, and it was Bornewasser who first decided to label Cobbenhagen’s guidelines as a ‘Blueprint’. As of 1980, all of this turned into an authentic reference point. In his reconstruction, the real vision of the University was provided by Cobbenhagen and his so-called blueprint of 1927. In the very end of his book, the last sentence Bornewasser writes on the university’s history says that with the death of Cobbenhagen, ‘the Tilburg Hogeschool had in a sense lost her father, it had become adult’.

Tilburg’s alumni organisation and the university administration built on this. It explains why the figure of Cobbenhagen could become so prominent that other founding figures, such as Petrus Van Gils⁹⁹, Han Kaag or the first rector, Thomas Goossens, were eventually forgotten in

⁹⁵ Jurjen Vis and Wim Janse, *Staf en storm: het herstel van de bisschoppelijke hiërarchie in Nederland in 1853, actie en reactie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 361.

⁹⁶ Pieter Siebers, “De bezetting van 1969 – een halve eeuw later,” *Univers*, 24 april 2019, [Https://Universonline.NL/2019/04/24/De-Bezetting-Van-1969-Een-Halve-Eeuw-Later](https://Universonline.NL/2019/04/24/De-Bezetting-Van-1969-Een-Halve-Eeuw-Later) (accessed 10 June, 2019).

⁹⁷ “Eerste deel geschiedschrijving van de Hogeschool verschenen,” *Univers*, 1 June 1979, [Https://Issuu.Com/Universonline/Docs/1979-06-01](https://Issuu.Com/Universonline/Docs/1979-06-01) (accessed 10 June, 2019).

⁹⁸ dr. Johan de Vries wrote the second part of the history of the university, that covers the years 1955-1977.

⁹⁹ On Van Gils, see the first chapter in the book of Lambert Giebels, *Beel. Van Vazal Tot Onderkoning. Biografie 1902-1977*, (Den Haag: SDU Uitgeverij Koninginnegracht, 1995).

the University's commemorative tradition. But there is more to it. The position of Bornewasser over against the actual first rector, Goossens provides with an interesting interpretive key. Both Goossens and Bornewasser were church historians, and they shared something. But they were also very different, not only belonging to different generations, they also fostered divergent ideas on the use of history for identity construction, and on the nature of a Catholic university in the Netherlands.

In the spirit of the modernizing and openminded Dutch Catholic community of the 1960s and 1970s, Bornewasser was very reluctant to relate to the figure of the first rector Goossens. This has had its effects on the imagery around Tilburg's first rector, who by that time was regarded as a symbol of an outdated type of Catholicism, no longer needed. In his own days, however, Goossens was well respected by his contemporaries, and was often praised as a wise administrator by his peers¹⁰⁰. But, as we have indicated above, Goossens's speeches were embedded in the rhetoric of Catholic emancipation, had an apologetic tonality and fostered the heritage of Brabantian Catholicism, something he wholeheartedly shared with Petrus Van Gils, and something that was prominent in the perspective of most of Tilburg's Founding Fathers . When one studies the annual *Dies*-speeches of rector-historian Goossens in the first years of the university's existence, they never discussed Cobbenhagen's much beloved combination of economics and ethics, rather they always focused on the heritage of Brabant Catholics and their struggle against Calvinist suppression. Take for example the very first inaugural speech of rector Goossens in October 1927. This was reported upon in the *Tilburgsche Courant* as follows:

Someone recently wrote that the name Tilburg will soon conjure the thought of the flourishing foundation of the R.K. Educational Programs with almost six and a half hundred students. But now Tilburg will also become known as the seat of the second institution for Catholic Higher Education next to the R.K. University in Nijmegen. [...] The peace of Munster in 1648 made Brabant a subdued country among the Seven United Regions, which have oppressed it for two and a half centuries, especially with regards to its spiritual and cultural goods. Even the simplest education was made virtually impossible because only Protestant textbooks and Protestant teachers were tolerated. [...] We are now 275 years later. And now in the same Brabant Higher Education is going to be given not only in accounting and arithmetic subjects, with which religion at most has only a very remote connection, but in subjects such as Ethics and others, which touch

¹⁰⁰ See for instance the testimonial of one of Tilburg University's professor: Herman H. Knippenberg, *Memoriaal. Herinneringsbeelden Met Enige Portretten En Naamregister* (Helmond: Uitgeverij Helmond, 1949), 22: Regarding the conflict with Moller in 1920 that eventually led to Moller's resignation, and the appointment of Hoossens as rector of the leergangen and later of the hogeschool, he wrote: "Op verzoek van zijn opvolger mgr. Dr. Th. J.A.J. Goossens nam ik zijn lessen in Nederlandse letterkunde over in februari 1921 met de verklaring dat ik ten allen tijde bereid was als docent terug te treden wanneer moller wenste terug te keren. Het heeft niet mogen zijn, en zo ben ik nog steeds aan het onderwijsinstituut verbonden, dat inmiddels uitgegroeid is tot een nooit vermoede bloei onder de schrandere leiding van mgr. Dr. Goossens." ["Upon request of his successor mgr. dr. Th. J.A.J. Goossens I took over his lessons in Dutch literature in February 1921 with the statement that I would be, at all times, willing to withdraw as a teacher if Moller wished to return. It was not to be, and now I am still connected to the educational institute that has now entered a phase of flourishing that was never expected under the acute/sharp leadership of mgr. dr. Goossens" [free translation].

our deepest conviction. Purposeful Catholic education will be given in the social and economic field, where three centuries ago a Catholic small child was not allowed to learn how to make math assignments [sommen].¹⁰¹

This type of defensive Catholicism, quite normal and evident in the 1920s, received no credit in the eyes of the post-Vatican II historian Bornewasser, whose opinion on his colleague-historian Goossens was well conceived years before he started writing the History of Tilburg University. In a lemma devoted to Goossens in 1972, the epitheta used to describe Goossens were: ‘hardly scientific, militant, apologetic, anti-Hollandic, archaic, …’.¹⁰² The effect was that Bornewasser described the university before World War Two in quite negative terms, as ‘narrow minded, only just arriving, and fulfilled with crampish selfpride’.¹⁰³ This rather stark characterisation is not all found in a publication by the church historian Louis Rogier, published in 1953, and thus a contemporary of Goossens and Cobbenhagen. It is even more interesting to mention this publication since Bornewasser always thought of himself as Rogier’s successor.¹⁰⁴ In his book *Catholic Revival, 1853-1953*, the church historian Louis Jacobus Rogier wrote some passages about Catholic education and the development of catholic universities.¹⁰⁵

This publication, which covers Dutch Catholic history up until a year before Cobbenhagen’s death, he mentions Goossens and Van Gils as pivotal players in the process of founding the university, while Cobbenhagen is nowhere to be found in the parts covering the rise of Catholic educational facilities. Rogier explicitly mentions Goossens and Van Gils as pioneers in the following passage: “The wisdom of spiritual rulers, who did not wait for this change of being with their hands in their lap or cramp it with the courage of despair, has already been highlighted. They found their counterparts in the field of education in a few pioneers, of whom, following the words of dr P.C. de Brouwer, especially dr P.J.M. van Gils, dr. H.W.E. Moller and Dr. Th. Goossens must be mentioned.”¹⁰⁶

The contrasted imagery Bornewasser installed by not only framing Cobbenhagen as a father, but also by downplaying the figure of Goossens was easily adopted within Tilburg University, where still today little interest is shown in the figure of the first rector, and where a clear preference for the legacy of Cobbenhagen is fostered. There is no question to the fact that this is legitimate for present-day policy. On the other hand, it should be clear that this has little

¹⁰¹ “Curatorium der R.K. Handelshoogeschool,” in *Tilburgsche Courant*, 7 October, 1927, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010193091:mpeg21:a0012> (accessed 27 June 2019) [in this article on the ‘historic moment for tilburg’ Goossens and the Curatorium were portrayed as standing in the tradition of mgr. Zwijsen].

¹⁰² J.A. Bornewasser, “Thomas Johannes Adrianus Josephus Goossens”, In *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde 1971-1972* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 136-142.

¹⁰³ Johannes A. Bornewasser, *Universiteit Van Tilburg 75 Jaar Waardenvolle Universiteit: Katholieke Hogeschool Tilburg : Economie, Ethiek, Maatschappij*, Vol. I, 1927-1954 (Amsterdam: Dutch University Press, 2003), 176.

¹⁰⁴ https://www.dbln.org/tekst/_jaa004201601_01/_jaa004201601_01_0007.php

¹⁰⁵ Ludovicus J. Rogier and Nicolaas de Rooy, *In vrijheid herboren: katholiek Nederland, 1853-1953* (Den Haag, 1953),

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 610-611.

to do with the historical foundations of the university. Perhaps, if at the end of this thesis an open question can be put forward, it would be this: Cobbenhagen undoubtedly was an influential professor and rector for the University, and a pivotal player, but are the University's foundations not richer or broader than only Cobbenhagen? Might other and forgotten figures of the Catholic 'revival' not complement Cobbenhagen in the educational vision and commemorative tradition of Tilburg University?

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