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Church Development in the Netherlands:
Social-religious Changes in Relation to the Development of a Pastoral Discipline

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Introduction

Although the Netherlands has a rich tradition of religious orders and congregations, mainly active in the education, health care and social services sectors, the principal place for religious communication for "regular" Dutch Catholics is in parishes. A clear picture of the contemporary Catholic Church in the Netherlands, therefore, requires an overview of the situation in Dutch parishes. In this article, I focus on the challenges and opportunities of the model of parishes as the main centers of Christian faith in the Netherlands. I will do this to show something of what seems to be the main concern of academic scholarship in what is generally called "church development" (or congregational studies) in the Netherlands: to develop theological theories of church praxis with a transformative orientation. "Church development" as a subdiscipline of practical theology can be distinguished in three levels in terms of its material object of study. On the micro-level, the object of study is the religious processes and phenomena in individuals and groups insofar as they relate to community building. On the meso-level, the institutions are the object of study insofar as structural and organizational aspects influence cultural aspects (including religious codes) and vice versa. Church praxis on the macro-level has to do with the interaction between religion and society as a whole. Here the issues are those of social inequality, social cohesion or the lack of it, and social change and rationalization insofar as they relate to religiosity. The historical ties between church and belief (micro), church and religious institutionalization (meso), and church and society (macro) are, however, becoming weaker. There is unbelief among church members and belief among non-members, religious institutions and organizations can be found inside and outside the traditional mainline churches, and functional differentiation is typical of modern society. Consequently church development is seen as a theological theory of church praxis with a transformative orientation on each of the (interrelated) levels. It does not aim at conserving and preserving the church as it is, but at reshaping its forms and structures. The church is challenged and

changed by the shifting beliefs of its members (micro) and society (macro). In practical theology, this theological reflection is almost always based on and shaped by empirical data of concrete experiences.

As with elsewhere in Western Europe, one thing in the Netherlands is certain: however interesting and active parishes may be, overall they seem to be in crisis. To a large extent, this is attributable to the crisis of religion in modern Dutch society. The challenges faced by local religious communities are largely connected with the processes of modernization and secularization in an increasingly complex society. The numbers of the faithful are declining and in that sense it is more a crisis of faith than a crisis of the church. Although a connection between "crisis of faith" and "crisis of the church" seems obvious, the two do not overlap completely. Felling (2004) shows that there are non-believers within the church as well as believers outside it. While (Christian) faith outside the church is fairly rare, the number of non-believers among churchgoers is increasing. Faith and church membership therefore do not automatically coincide, provided that "faith" is defined and measured according to traditional criteria of theistic belief in God and belief in an afterlife.

Against the broader background of the secularization process, there are more specific reasons why small, local parishes are a problematic organizational model for religious communities. To say something about the future of (the organization of) religious communities, it is important to take a differentiated look at these reasons. What factors are putting pressure on the classic local parish? First, the number of the faithful is declining. Second, the number of volunteers in the church is getting smaller and older. Third, there are fewer and fewer pastors available to give leadership to parishes. Fourth, available financial means are decreasing. Finally, the plurality of religious beliefs is increasing due to a diminished pressure towards conformity. These are among the developments influencing smaller parishes in the Netherlands as we know them. However, the aforementioned reasons are relevant to the classic local parish and influence it in various ways. Before going into this in more detail, I will describe what is meant by "the classic territorial parish."

The Territorial Parish as an Organizational Structure

The Code of Canon Law defines a parish as "a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (canon 515 §1). In itself, this description says nothing about the boundaries of a parish in a particular area, but canon 518 says that as a general rule a parish has to be territorial. This means that by definition all the faithful in a particular area are part of this parish. On the basis of their place of residence, all church members be-

long to a particular local religious community (here, parish), just as they belong to a particular diocese on that same basis. The various dioceses and parishes do not overlap, so the principle of territorialism does not mean simply that a parish is located in a particular area or that the faithful gather in a specific place. Obviously that is also the case, just as convent churches and religious centers are always located in a particular place. After all, we cannot exist outside space, at least not in this life.

This observation is not completely redundant, as evidenced by the common remark that territorial parishes will continue to exist because people always live somewhere. This does not get to the core of the problem, however. The principle of territorialism means more than that the church is located somewhere. It includes the organizational principle that, as a Catholic, one belongs to a particular parish because one lives in a particular place. Convent churches are not territorial parishes, even though they are situated "somewhere" on the landscape and are centers of intensive, frequently religious communication. This also applies to the so-called personal parishes described in canon 518 of the Code of Canon Law: "When it is expedient, however, personal parishes are to be established determined by reason of the rite, language, or nationality of the Christian faithful of some territory, or even for some other reason."[1] Personal parishes are an alternative organizational structure alongside classic territorial parishes. They can exist separately from territorial parishes, even though their places of gathering are located within the boundaries of a territorial parish. They are an exception to the rule, however.

In addition to territoriality, hierarchical structure is a second hallmark of the classic parish. The religious community is entrusted to a pastor by the bishop. This ensures the necessary bond (or one-to-one relationship) between parish and pastor. Here, too, there is an exception, namely on the basis of canon 517, §2. If the diocesan bishop has decided ("because of a lack of priests" is explicitly added) that the exercise of pastoral care is to be entrusted to a person other than a priest, he has to appoint some priest to direct the pastoral care from a distance. In other words, a parish cannot really exist without or completely apart from a priest, insofar as he bears the final responsibility assigned to him by the bishop.

Third, the definition of canon law emphasizes the pastoral care entrusted to a pastor. Within the parish, there seems to be little room for or acknowledgment of care provided by the faithful themselves.

This model of the classic parish with its three characteristics of territoriality, hierarchical structure, and emphasis on pastoral care is increasingly

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1 Dioceses are also able to deviate from the rule of territoriality in terms of canon 372, although the reasons differ from those for parishes. Particular churches (dioceses) can be erected in the same territory on the basis of the right of the faithful "or some other similar reason." Therefore, there is no lack of escape clauses which allow leeway in the sense of reinterpreting the rules.

coming under pressure. Each of the aforementioned characteristics is a topic of discussion and controversy as a result of empirical facts and theological considerations. While society has changed, as have Christian faith and theology, ecclesial structures are unwieldy and hard to change. This might be one of the reasons why practical theological studies in church development seem to focus more on the micro- and macro-level of church development than on the meso-level.[2] If the concern for evaluation of church practice and renewal of the organized church is lively, then this often leads either to studies of the spirituality of individuals or studies of the public (in)significance of religion, as well its interrelationships. In the former, one tries to relate new forms of religion to public allocation mechanisms, that is, organized settings in which individuals express and cultivate their beliefs to safeguard and further develop them. In the latter, one points to the cultural agents and institutions that have taken over the role of churches in offering frames of reference and meaning (Streib 2007; Ganzevoort 2007; Schilderman 2009).[3]

The organizational aspects of the established institution of "church" seems to be less interesting precisely because the deinstitutionalization of religion helps to interpret both the steady decline mainline churches and simultaneous small-scale spiritual revolutions. Another illustration of the negative sentiments about traditional structures is the critique to Bourdieu's approach to "social capital" as being too narrow in its identification with the prevailing institutional hierarchies and religious professionals (Verter 2003).

Attention to the normative consent of those who participate in institutions is increasingly important in a time when mainline churches are in decline. The reason is obvious. With the French historian Dupront (1996), one could say that the regime of normative agreement (or validation of religious truth in our field) has changed. More specifically both the referent and the criterion for normative consent have altered. Regarding the referent for validation of faith, Dupront makes a typological distinction between an institutionally qualified authority as referent, the group, the other (in a mutual validation), and finally the individual himself or herself as referent. The first one loses its importance while the latter ones gain significance. Regarding the criterion of validation, there is a similar movement from conformity,

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2   Moore (2004, 172 ff) elaborates several motives for practial theology's focus on the church and names the desire to reform ecclesiology as one them. She also observes that practical theologians have addressed this concern less than systematic and liberation theologians.

3   Streib (2007, 152) puts more emphasis on the organizational aspects to the detriment of the normative consent of those who participate in his definition of institution. He understands religious institution as "a highly stabile, obligatory, authoritative and legitimate religious organization which integrates the individual biography in a system of beliefs, values and rules which are answers to specific religion-generating conflicts and contingencies." However, he also then focuses on the question what kind of religion is left after deinstitutionalization and how to describe it.

past coherence and authenticity, to subjective certainty. This is not to say that these are set in a linear and irreversible development, but a genuine change has taken place (cf Hervieu-Léger 2004). In such a context, the established church organization is not seen as the primary ground for discovering new things. Nevertheless, religious institutionalization in modernity cannot be excluded if we describe an institution as a more-or-less standardized pattern of thought and practice that has normative validity in the specific community or society in which it is embedded. In other words, institutions are normative patterns of dispositions and behavior realized in a specific context (Buiks and van Tillo 1980, 29). In reality, structural factors influence mental representations in daily religious communication, just as in other cases.

The organizational conditions for continuity of religious communication and religious communities crop up not only in practical theology, but in everyday pastoral practice as well. Parish boards are confronted with them, often having to deal with these in carrying out their policies, at least more often than is "officially" expected of a parish board. Especially when a parish (board) is looking for a new pastor, many questions arise about the profile and future of the religious community. What exactly do we mean when we claim that we are inspired by the gospel? How do we embody our faith in these rapidly changing times? How do we support one another in light of the stories of our Christian tradition, and how can we continue to do so? How can we remain a close, concerned community inspired by the story of Jesus of Nazareth? How can we preserve the precarious balance built up in our community over the years? How can we maintain good relations in which everyone's contribution is appreciated? Note that these questions are often negatively formulated. For instance, how do we avoid loss of our religious community's identity when we are given a new pastor? I say "given" because according to the definition in the Code of Canon Law, the parish is a community of the Christian faithful which *is entrusted* to a pastor—the community is defined in terms of the (prospective) pastor, not the other way round! This is how the community will experience the crucial phase of pastoral succession, when the possibilities of directing the succession are maximally exploited.

To return to my main question, why is the organizational model of the classic territorial parish sometimes problematic in the current Dutch context? Does a large organization like the Roman Catholic Church really have alternatives? Although I do not want to give a totally negative or pessimistic picture of parish life in the Netherlands, due to the limits of space I will restrict myself to naming the challenges.

Challenges to the Organizational Model of the Classic Territorial Parish

Although not exhaustive, the following five socio-cultural developments complicate the classic territorial parish described above in one way or another: (1) declining church membership, (2) decreasing numbers of volunteers and increased ages of volunteers, (3) declining numbers of pastors and members of religious orders and congregations, (4) reduced financial means, and (5) increasing religious pluralism. I shall describe these factors from the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands.

Declining Church Membership

With regard to declining church membership, it should be noted that it is difficult to determine developments in this area. In random samples, church membership is determined on the basis of religious self-definition. People are considered Catholics if they call themselves Catholics. The recent introduction of a new administrative system for church membership in the Netherlands will probably make it easier to determine developments in church membership in years to come. For the last few years local parishes have been doing a great deal of administrative work, in cooperation with the Dutch Foundation for Interdenominational Membership Administration (*stichting interkerkelijke ledenadministratie*, SILA) and the Basic Administration of Local Civil Councils *(gemeentelijke basisadministratie*, GBA). Over 1.5 million people were wrongly listed in parish records, but 1.5 million "lost" Catholics were found again. During the first few years of the new system (1998–2001), SILA figures showed a growth in church membership due to greater participation by parishes in different dioceses in this administration. With all dioceses participating since 2001, however, the figures show a clear decline. In 2007 SILA registered 4,134,144 Catholics (see Table 1).

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) are two other important sources of church membership statistics. Both base their figures on random sample surveys among people aged 18 and over. To determine if someone is a church member, the CBS asks just one question: "To which denomination do you belong?" One of the alternative answers provided is: "I do not belong to a religious denomination." The SCP uses two questions to determine if someone is a church member. They first ask respondents if they consider themselves members of a denomination and then, if the answer is affirmative, of which denomination. Apparently as a result of this methodological difference, the SCP figures are lower than the CBS figures, and the decline in church membership in recent decades is more clearly visible in the SCP statistics. Both sets of statistics indicate a clear downward trend, however. From the 1960 s onwards, there has indisputably been a steady downward

Table 1: Numbers of Persons by Religious Denomination Registered by SILA, 2003–2007[a)]

	2003	2005	2006	2007
Mennonites (Doopsgezinde Sociëteit)	7,901	9,509	9,411	9,094
New Apostolic Church	11,682	11,157	11,326	11,246
Old Catholic Church	5,653	5,623	5,654	5,550
Protestant Church in the Netherlands	[2,595,246]	2,458,788	2,389,669	2,323,955
Evangelical Lutheran Church	20,235	0	0	0
Reformed Churches in the Netherlands	638,237	0	0	0
Dutch Reformed Church	1,936,774	0	0	0
Roman Catholic Church	4,301,856	4,234,881	4,156,970	4,134,144
Free Catholic Church	656	662	630	577
Total	**6,922,994**	**6,720,620**	**6,573,360**	**6,484,566**

[a)] The figures in brackets for the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in 2003 are the sum of the three large Protestant churches that united to form the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in 2005. Since 2005, therefore, the figures for the Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Evangelisch-Lutheraanse Kerk*), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*), and the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*) are not given separately.

trend in the percentage of Catholics in the total Dutch population. According to the CBS figures, the proportion declined from 40 % in 1970 to 28 % in 2007 (with 43 % of Dutch adults saying they do not belong to a church community). The SCP indicates 34 % Catholics in 1970 and 16 % in 2007. In any case, the statistics have been fairly stable over the last decade (www.cbs.nl).

More remarkable than the decrease in church membership is the decline in church attendance. Weekly attendance of a Sunday service (Eucharist or other services) has seemingly plummeted over the past twenty-five years. While in 1980 over 1,227,000 people went to church regularly each Sunday morning, by 2006 the number had dropped to 322,140. Put in percentages of the total Dutch Catholic population aged seven and older (according to KASKI statistics), this represents about 23.7 % in 1980 and 7.4 % in 2006. The SCP gives other figures. In 1970, 71 % of those who called themselves Catholic still went to church regularly (at least twice a month) compared with only 15 % in 2007, the vast majority of these being older than 64 years. Besides declining church attendance, there is a decline in participation in other sacraments. These figures show that no increase in Catholicism can be expected in the next generation either. While in 1980, 30.8 % of all live newborn children were baptized, in 2006 that percentage had dropped to 16.0 %. Although church attendance was still declining over the past few years, the annual decrease is plainly leveling off: it is still declining, but less markedly. Has it (almost) reached its nadir? There is also a decline in the number of children that make their first communion, and an even greater drop in the number of confirmations in light of the already dwindling number of baptisms. In 2006, there were 26,105 confirmations, being 54.2 % of the number of baptisms twelve years before. Finally, we turn to marriages. In 1980, 31.5 % of all civil marriages were solemnized in church. In 2006, that percentage had dropped to 9.1 %, whereas the number of civil marriages itself had not increased. For instance,

in 2007 there were 72,485 civil marriages, the lowest number since the Second World War (and this in an increasing population). Thus, there were over 120,000 marriages annually in the early 1970 s (www.kaski.kun.nl; www.cbs.nl). While a few years ago there was talk about a church revival, the figures for sacraments and church rituals are still clearly declining and instead show the opposite.

These are hard facts. Even though the decline in church membership is not confined to the Roman Catholic Church, it is happening in all major religious communities in Western Europe. How does one explain it? What is the consequence of this lapse of church membership? Why has it become so sharply noticeable now, in the past few decades? Is it symptomatic of a development that has been going on much longer? Schillebeeckx (1968, 305) asked already forty years ago whether increased non-religiousness perhaps merely reflected a pseudo-religiousness that persisted only because of social pressure. He simply posed the question, however, and nothing more. It is also possible that lapse of church membership is symptomatic of a new phenomenon. In that case, the full churches of the past were in fact a sign of authentic (but non-reflective) religiousness that was possible in those days, but no longer. That implies that religious authenticity varies with circumstances, culture, and time. The plausibility of a certain type of faith may be lost, but would it fit nowadays anyway? Is not everything in our society subject to permanent rational criticism? Would it be right to long for complete religious plausibility insofar as this means that we must never question our faith? Of course we need forums where our faith, search for meaning, and certainties are discussed, but we also have to talk with each other about our unbelief, experiences of meaninglessness, and uncertainties. Having said that, though, the question remains unanswered. If the lapse of church membership is a relatively new phenomenon, how are we supposed to interpret it?

I am afraid there is no straightforward answer. The explanatory models are numerous and varied. First are the cultural models, such as the hypothesis that increasing philosophical and religious pluralism, as well as plurality of norms and values, would make a person's own tradition "relative." This relativizing force would lead to less involvement, as evidenced by declining church membership and church attendance. Empirical research shows that this argument does not (at least not always) hold water. Religious pluralism can in fact cause greater involvement with one's own tradition (Sterkens 2001). The rise in average educational level over the past fifty years could play a part in this, too. This is not the same as claiming that educational level and church membership correlate inversely. A second type of explanatory model focuses on social factors like individualization, fragmentation of community life, and changes in marriage and family life. A third group of explanatory models concerns characteristics of the church on the macro level. Church (leadership) fails to demonstrate its relevance, is experienced as reactive or even reactionary, and its statements seem to be

out of touch with contemporary reality. A fourth chain of factors concerns characteristics of the church on the micro level of religious communities. The local parish is not (or is no longer) experienced as a vigorous religious community. This applies especially to liturgy and church welfare work. Churchgoers or potential churchgoers feel there is little liturgical creativity and lack of solidarity with regard to material or spiritual need (Van der Ven 1998, 28–30). Finally, there are so-called economic theories that shed light on lapse of church membership. I want to look into these more deeply, not just because they are quite new but also because they are highly controversial.

A first example is *rational choice theory* (Stark and Bainbridge 1987; Friedman 1996). This theory rests on the assumption that people are constantly looking for rewards in life. When the desired reward does not materialize, they content themselves with a compensator (an alternative).[4] Sometimes people's desires are so sweeping that they simply cannot be fully satisfied. Consider, for instance, the desire for love, for attributing meaning, or for life after death. Only a supernatural or divine authority would be able (literally) to offer plausible alternatives to these desires. Religious traditions and their churches put themselves on the market as purveyors of supernatural compensators, so to speak. Applied to the problem of declining church membership, this theory yields three propositions. First, when a religious organization reduces its focus on transcendence (the divine, gods or God), it weakens. It undermines its potential for offering worthwhile compensators. Second, religious movements that nurture faith in the supernatural will offer more plausible compensators. Third, when society is not able to offer the rewards people seek, the demand for (religious) compensators will rise.

The benefit of this theory is that it seems to explain movements within and between religious institutions. It appears to account for the fact that liberal churches are facing greater losses than more conservative or orthodox churches. It also seems to explain why traditional mainline churches seem to be losing influence in favor of charismatic groups and movements. In fact, though, the theory does not explain that! Actually, rational choice theory is quite vulnerable to criticism and cannot stand up to thorough analysis (Bruce 1999; 2002). A first objection is that the presupposition of compensations for rewards is not an adequate general theory to describe religion. This is not to say that religion never functions as comfort or compensation for dissatisfaction in human life. For some people under certain circumstances, this will definitely be the case, but to make this a general, basic assumption about all religion is wrong. Second, advocates of rational

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4   Compensators are "sets of beliefs and prescriptions for action that substitute for the immediate achievement of the desired reward. Compensators postulate the attainment of the desired reward in the distant future or in some other unverifiable context. Compensators are treated by humans as if they were rewards" (Bainbridge and Stark 1979, 284).

choice theory may misinterpret the empirical facts. There is no more an exodus from traditional to charismatic churches than there is an exodus from more liberal churches to orthodox churches. The success of charismatic churches lies in the availability of potential members who are no longer tied to any church. The potential increase is larger because there are more ecclesiastically unaffiliated people. Moreover, the huge decline in traditional church membership is on a completely different scale than the small increase in new religious movements. Third, the theory does not take sufficient account of factors like social belonging and social pressure. Rational choice should not be understood as if consumers strategically calculate profits and losses without regard to the normative and religious truth claims of the tradition. In other words, did one make a perfectly free choice of a religion? Is not the freedom to choose a religious tradition always relative? Consequently, is it possible for someone freely to abandon a tradition? I do not think so.

Another example of an economic approach to the issue of lapsed church membership is the *theory of consumer attitudes* (Hirschman 1970; 2002). According to Hirschman, consumers have three options when disappointed by a product: exit, voice, and loyalty. Translated to affiliation with religious institutions, *exit* stands for the willingness to break off the social connection (with the church) if one does not agree with its beliefs or the way it conducts its affairs. *Voice* means the willingness of church members to express their dissatisfaction within the church. The concept of voice entails a decision to remain with the church, based partly on what chance one imagines having of changing the institution, and partly on the judgment that it is truly worth the effort to attempt changing things. Beneath this consideration is the conviction that the church meets a need that cannot be met to the same extent by any other social connection. Finally, *loyalty* is distinguished by the reluctance to break off the social connection even though one does not agree with the current state of affairs. It is not just loyalty but also a well considered calculation. This means opting for loyalty knowing that one has the option to exit or voice one's dissatisfaction. Loyalty serves the purpose of activating voice and keeping exit under control. Church members with strong ties will find a way to assert their influence, especially when they think the organization is developing in the wrong direction. Conversely, church members who (think they) can influence the organization and are able to put it back on the right track will probably develop a strong commitment. Thus, the options of exit, voice, and loyalty can also be expressed in terms of church involvement.

In the context of declining church membership, two more observations about these three options are called for. First, the options can occur on two levels: local and further afield. One can disagree with the situation in one's own parish (local) or with the policy of church leadership (supra-local). In the hierarchically structured Roman Catholic Church, it may be that one level is troubled (to put it mildly) by the other level. With regard to the

local parish level, critical parishioners who realize they have the options of exit, voice, and loyalty at their disposal will be prepared to travel a little further to a neighboring religious community. In this instance, the option of loyalty will take the form of driving to another district if religious satisfaction is not obtainable nearer to home. SILA uses the term "preferential members" (*voorkeursleden*) to refer to those who choose to go to a parish other than the one where they reside. Their motives to go to another church are a combination of push and pull factors, as is the case in all emigration processes. On the one hand, they may be pulled by the open ambience, communication, beautiful liturgy, and the social network. On the other hand, they may have been pushed to leave their former parish because they did not feel comfortable with its religious beliefs, sometimes in combination with the (authoritarian) leadership of the local pastor. Second, the responses of exit and voice are mostly the consequence of multiple disappointing experiences and not the direct outcome of one particular conflict. There is often a latent or prolonged dissatisfaction with one's own "territorial" parish that causes a specific negative experience to precipitate the break. This also applies to volunteers. When one feels that one's own beliefs do not (or no longer) accord with those of one's religious community (or one's pastor), one will be more inclined to leave that community because of a minor conflict (Hirschman 2002, 67).

Having considered all these interpretations of declining church membership and church attendance, we can only conclude that a closely reasoned explanation is impossible. Declining church membership and church attendance are the result of a complex combination of several factors. It should still be clear that declining church membership puts pressure on the classic territorial parish. With fewer parishioners, the parish will be less vigorous and have a lower chance of survival. In our search for explanatory models, Hirschman's theory also permits the inference that self-aware, critical seekers are willing to break the principle of territoriality. In practice, it is the faithful who decide on the location of their parish, not the other way round! In any case, now that the Dutch Roman Catholic Church has affiliated with SILA, the principle of territoriality has been partly abandoned in membership administration. People can register with a church of preference that is not necessarily their territorial parish church.

Decreasing Numbers of Volunteers and Increased Ages of Volunteers

Together with a decline in church membership, there is a decrease in the number of volunteers and an increase in their age. Even so, the average effort per volunteer has grown over the past few years. I will not go into the phenomenon in detail but will only examine the motives of (church) volunteers to dedicate themselves (to the church). These motives should be taken into account in the organizational structure of the church as well as when

modifying it, to avoid the danger of losing more volunteers and triggering a downward spiral. When fewer and fewer volunteers, some of them older and less vigorous, try to achieve the same results, they will become frustrated. It boils down to taking timely action.

Volunteers are of such importance that sociologist Berger (1967) uses the phrase "church of volunteers" to refer to the theological and ecclesiastic ideology of the necessity of customer relations! This is borne out by statistics. Volunteers attend church more often, participate more in activities, and pay more church membership fees than non-volunteers (Veerman and Spruit 2000; cf. Van der Ven 1993, 382–385).

What are the motives, then, to dedicate oneself voluntarily to perform pastoral duties? Van Gerwen (1990, 19–23) distinguishes three motivations for volunteers to do pastoral counselling: achievement, relief, and affiliation. First the achievement motivation means that the pastoral volunteer will concentrate on handling and/or religiously interpreting the experiences of fellow parishioners. Second, the pastoral volunteer will realize that he or she is helping others to give meaning to an experience. In this sense it is a relief motivation, which can be intrinsic or extrinsic. It is intrinsic if the pastoral duties are performed for the sake of contributing to the well-being of a fellow parishioner who is given assistance. The motivation is extrinsic if the duty is performed to earn approval from others. Third, the affiliation motivation is when the volunteer seeks a personal relationship with fellow parishioners. Fellow parishioners needing help are less likely to accept this guidance, because they are interested in dealing with experiences and searching for meaning and perspective. Van Gerwen makes it clear that these three motivations can have a religious element: the volunteer considers it important that religious interpretation should play a part in dealing with experiences, emotions, and attitudes. Yet is it of overriding importance? Do pastoral volunteers commit themselves *because* they are religious, *for the sake of* the gospel? Not always, as empirical research shows, and in fact not primarily! This applies to *pastoral* voluntary work like catechesis, pastoral counseling, or activities relating to proclamation. Conceivably, it would apply even more to other kinds of voluntary work like secretarial work, building maintenance, and flower arrangement. Pastoral volunteers are not primarily motivated by religious factors. Research shows that nonreligious factors are more important. Although religious motivation emerges less clearly, however, this does not mean that we can dismiss it completely. Religion may not be the core of the motivation, but it does color and direct it (Van Gerwen 1990, 165–171).

Nonetheless the foregoing justifies a scrutiny of general motivation theories with regard to church voluntary work. There are many theories, but from the point of view of practical applicability I confine myself to that of Herzberg (1974). He developed his theory in the context of paid professional work, but many elements are directly applicable to voluntary work. Herzberg describes two factors influencing the motivation to work: satis-

fiers and dissatisfiers. Satisfaction stems from the actual tasks. They dispose one favorably to the work: appreciation shown, the nature of the work, responsibility taken, achievement, and the fact that one is learning something from the voluntary work. Dissatisfiers are not directly related to the work but concern the conditions under which it is done. They do not directly trigger positive feelings, but when the conditions are not met it will be demotivating. Dissatisfiers have to do with working conditions, corporate culture, organization, leadership, material reward (possibly financial), interpersonal relations, status gained from the work, and the role of private life in the work. Thus, both types of factors have an influence but operate in different ways. Satisfiers have a strong positive influence on job satisfaction, but only a limited influence on possible dissatisfaction. In the case of dissatisfiers it is just opposite: any defect here has a negative impact on achievement. Organizations should therefore deal first with dissatisfiers before they can successfully concentrate on positive motivators.

What has all of this to do with church organization? How does the motivation of volunteers relate to the subject of this article, namely, the future of the classic local parish? The answer is that if one wants to preserve the church as a vigorous community with the aid of volunteers, the factors above will have to be taken into account in its organization. Let me illustrate this in two ways relating to the classification of satisfiers and dissatisfiers. First, insofar as the classic territorial approach stresses pastoral care (the third characteristic of the classic parish), making parishioners responsible for the work and showing appreciation for it will, in the long term, offer insufficient incentives to motivate and maintain a corps of parishioners/volunteers who build up the church. The content of the work, assigning responsibility, and the perception of appreciation happen to be the real satisfiers that Herzberg discerned. Second, I have pointed out already that interpersonal relationships resulting from the job are dissatisfiers. In plain language, this means that social contacts as such do not motivate people to do (voluntary) work, but a lack of social contacts soon demotivates them. When reorganization of religious communities (for example, a merger) causes social contacts to crumble, motivation suffers. When existing social contacts break down for some other reason (for instance, due to conflicts, or a pastor who keeps everything in his own hands and does not want to share duties and responsibility), volunteers become demotivated. A bureaucratic corporate culture or an authoritarian organization can also lead to demotivation. In short, the organizational structure of the church, both locally and at the macro level, affects these satisfiers and dissatisfiers.

Declining Numbers of Pastors and Members of Religious Orders and Congregations

The third pressure on the classic territorial parish is the declining number of pastors. The word "pastors" is commonly used in the Netherlands to indicate all sorts of paid pastoral professionals: priests, deacons, and pastoral workers. Insofar as one proceeds from a canonical framework in which final administrative and pastoral responsibility rests with the priest, the biggest problem for the organizational structure of the classic territorial parish is the declining number of priests. As mentioned above, the parish is defined as a community of the Christian faithful that is entrusted to a priest (CIC 515 § 1).[5] With the exception of Poland and Romania, a decline in the number of priests is the trend across the European continent. Sometimes the decline is spectacular, as in Belgium, Austria, and Switzerland. Translated into a percentage of the total number of priests in the early 1970s, France and the Netherlands top the list: a drop of more than 50 % in thirty-five years (Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2007). As long as a one-to-one relation between parish and priest is retained, the declining number of priests is a crucial problem for the classic territorial model of the parish, since so many parishes cannot continue to exist (as parishes) without priests.

Should we therefore speak of a "lack of priests" so pastoral care can be entrusted to others (canon 517 § 2)? The answer to this question is bedeviled by normative claims and ideological principles. More than that, the question itself is fraught with theological views and norms. It presupposes that delegating pastoral work to non-priests is at most a second-best solution. This could apply in some cases for pragmatic reasons: a priest rarely has a family to support and mostly has no partner. This arouses expectations and hopes that he will be freely available to the religious community, or at least have more time than pastors with a partner and/or family. Sometimes that expectation is founded, sometimes not. Overall, however, for the vast majority of the faithful, celibacy is not something they require from their pastor. In 1992, about 92 % of Dutch Catholics thought that priests should be allowed to marry and 66 % thought that the priesthood should be open to women (Schepens 1992; cf. van der Ven 1993). More recently, according to a questionnaire completed by pastors in the Dutch Catholic Church, 6 % of priests answered affirmatively to the question whether

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5 The hierarchical structure of the church is further clarified by the Code of Canon Law (CIC) in canon 129 (only those who have taken sacred orders are qualified for the power of governance; lay members of the Christian faithful can only cooperate in the exercise of this power) and canon 274 § 1 (only clerics can hold offices requiring the power of ordination or ecclesiastic governance). Practice sometimes deviates from these general regulations, however. Canon lawyers often criticise the regulations or look for "creative" solutions (Lynch 2000; Torfs 2003).

they have a partner, 45 % answered negatively, and 49 % answered "not applicable," the latter being a fairly rare response category in other research populations (Schilderman 2005, 310). Of course, one can interpret this response category in different ways. Perhaps these respondents find the question inappropriate, or they want to underline that priesthood supposes celibacy, or the subject is taboo and they don't want to answer the question, etc. In the official teaching of the church, however, priesthood, celibacy, and sex are intrinsically related.

Other believers think that the sacrament of the Eucharist is particularly important. Here, too, the church authorities insist that the Eucharist and the sacrament of ordination are inseparable. Others think that this intrinsic relation is a protectionist measure by the church to legitimize its hierarchical structure and help preserve it. These are all well-known arguments for and against, heard not only among present-day critics but also found in theological literature (Hasenhüttl 1974; Schillebeeckx 1981; 1985; Sonnberger 1996; Ford 2000; Panhofer 2003; Aymans-Mörsdorf 2007; Benedict XVI 2007).

Recently the discussion on church and ministry was very much in the limelight (again) in the Netherlands. In September 2007, the Dutch Province of the Dominican order sent a discussion document (explicitly described as "not a guideline or doctrine") to all Dutch Catholic parishes. The document pointed out some contradictions between the ideas of church authorities and daily practice. The discussion is not new, the arguments in the document were not original, and neither were the objections against it. What was new was that reflection on this matter was called for not by an individual author (or group of authors) but by a province of a religious order. On the one hand, the document was praised for the courage and willingness of a group of professionals involved in pastoral care to take responsibility with a view to safeguarding the future proclamation of the gospel in the Netherlands. On the other hand, there was criticism both of the distribution as such (without prior consultation with the bishops) and the contents.[6] The contents were explicitly condemned by the Dutch bishops, who declared on the day of publication that the document's plea regarding the Eucharist and the one permitted to confect it is completely contrary to the faith of the Roman Catholic Church (Press Release, Dutch Bishops' Con-

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6 This discussion was conducted mainly on the internet and, to a lesser degree, in the press. The symposium initially planned by the Dominicans was cancelled at the request of the Master of the Order of Preachers, after the chairman of the Dutch Bishop's Conference had complained about the project to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome. Once the Dutch Dominicans sent an article of the French Dominican Hervé Legrand with objections against the document, a study day organized together with the Bishops seemed to be acceptable. An official reaction from the Dutch Bishop's Conference came in June 2008 with an elaborated public letter, "Church, Eucharist and Priesthood."

ference). The document offers pastoral and theological arguments for parishes to be more autonomous in choosing their pastors (lay and ordained ministers), but urging them to request the bishops' approval (by laying on of hands). Ultimately, however, the people of God have priority over the hierarchy. Consequently, in the undesirable situation where a choice has to be made, the sacrament of Holy Orders is seen as subordinate to the celebration of the Eucharist. The following passage in particular provoked irritation and charges of ecclesial disobedience from some, while it was recognized as an authentic desire for less dependence on the church hierarchy by others: "If a bishop should refuse such a confirmation or 'ordination' on the basis of arguments not involving the essence of the Eucharist, such as obligatory celibacy, parishes may be confident that they are able to celebrate a real and genuine Eucharist when they are together at prayer and share bread and wine" (*Nederlandse Dominicanen* 2007, 37).

Supposing ordination could be separated from celibacy, sex, and sacramental competence, is it as such a decisive factor in the deliberations of parishioners or a parish board when looking for a new pastor?[7] Alternatively, if forced to choose, do they attach more importance to the pastor's professionalism? Would they not prefer to have a good lay pastoral worker rather than a bad priest? When "priesthood" and "professionalism" are balanced, the latter is indeed considered more important. What else could we expect? Of course, the two options need not be contradictory but should instead be connected. Theology of ministry and professionalism should not to be separated. Ministry and professionalism should be interrelated. Theological legitimization of professionalism is required, but the theology of ministry in particular must be nourished by professionalism. The ministry should be legitimized primarily by professionalism, and this goes for all pastors: priests, deacons, and lay pastoral workers. In that respect, there is no difference between them (Schilderman 2005).

All this makes it hard to give a clear-cut answer to the question of whether we are dealing with a lack of priests. Statistically, a "lack of priests" is relative; theologically, it is controversial. Apart from diocesan and parish priests, there are members of male and female religious orders and congregations, as well as lay people, involved in pastoral work. Their numbers, however, are also decreasing. In general, there is a lack of competent "professionals" in religious communication. This can be concluded from the difficulty of filling a vacancy speedily and to the complete satisfaction of the faithful in both territorial (parish) and categorical pastoral

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7 One could ask what remains of ordination without this, however. According to the Commission of Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (Lima 1982), ordination entails that (a) the Holy Spirit is invoked by the community to grant further growth of the candidate, (b) the candidate's call is confirmed by the church leaders, and (c) the candidate is acknowledged and accepted by the community. The ministry has personal, collegial, and communal aspects (Houtepen 1984).

care (hospitals, prisons, etc.). Overall the number of pastors is decreasing. The statistics in Table 2, from the Catholic socio-religious institute KASKI, speak for themselves. In any case, it goes without saying that a smaller staff means that local religious communities cannot continue to operate in the same way. This is a challenge to parishes and parish boards alike.

Table 2: Active Priests, Permanent Deacons, and Pastoral Workers in Catholic Parishes in the Netherlands, 1980–2006[b]

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2002	2004	2006
Priests	3,374	2,661	2,138	1,610	1,242	1,112	1,013	948
Permanent deacons	–	43	120	201	234	243	252	240
Pastoral workers (m/f)	302	392	543	702	783	774	797	775
Total (pastors)	3,676	3,096	2,801	2,513	2,259	2,129	2,062	1,963

[b] www.ru.nl/kaski.

A similar picture of decreasing numbers is evident in the Netherlands among nuns, priestly religious, and brothers and friars, who contribute enormously to the testimony of Christian humanity in word and deed. Table 3 shows that in 2006 the number of male and female members of orders, religious congregations, and societies of apostolic life in the Netherlands was roughly one third of what it was thirty years ago. What is more, the average age of nuns, priestly religious, and brothers and friars leads one to expect that these numbers will drop considerably in the years to come. In 2004, 85 % of priestly religious in the Netherlands were 65 years or older, while 97 % of active conventuals (sisters) in the Netherlands were 65 years or older.

Table 3: Active Conventuals (Nuns), Priestly Religious, and Brothers and Friars in the Netherlands, 1980–2007[c]

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2003	2005	2007
Active conventuals	17,768	15,081	12,235	9,414	7,362	6,506	5,749
Priestly religious	4,555	4,051	3,409	2,806	2,358	2,219	2,041
Brothers and friars	1,690	1,366	1,079	856	862	583	513
Total	24,013	20,498	16,723	13,076	10,582	9,308	8,303

[c] Dutch Conference of Religious Orders and Congregations: www.knr.nl. Not included in this table are contemplative conventuals (nuns). They were always smaller in number, with 645 sisters in 2001 decreasing to 490 in October 2007.

Reduced Financial Means

The fourth pressure on the classic territorial parish is the relative decrease in available financial means. Although in most parishes income from church membership fees remains stable or has even increased slightly, the situation is becoming precarious because of the increasing cost of salaries and building maintenance. Of the total income of the Dutch Church Province in 2006 (€164,903,000), 68 % comes from church membership fees, collections, gifts, and income from church services, and 32 % from church property,

rentals, and investment revenue. Church membership fees (*Kerkbalans*, an annual national, interdenominational drive to raise money for churches) amount to €59,025,000, being 36 % of total income. For some years now, expenses have exceeded income, which means the church is slowly eating into its capital. The financial burden of building maintenance in particular is forcing the church to take measures. In 2006, 38 % of expenses (€65,823,000) in the Netherlands were on building maintenance or payments on the buildings (churches and presbyteries), and 45 % (€79,782,000) were on staff. Demolition and sale will become necessary to guarantee the continuity of church activities and the maintenance of the remaining buildings (*R.-K. Economencollege* 2008).[8]

In the period from 1973 to 2007, 338 churches were closed down and 155 new ones were brought into use. On average, new church buildings are smaller than those that are closed down. The number of seats also decreases more than one would assume on the basis of percentages of closed church buildings. At the end of 2007, the seven Dutch dioceses together had 1,693 church buildings in use. For the last few years, though, the decrease in the number of parishes is greater than that in terms of the number of church buildings in use, which can be explained by the advent of cooperation or merger. At the end of 2007, the number of Roman Catholic parishes was 1,420, which is 164 fewer than in 2001 (KASKI 2008). Lack of funds puts pressure especially on local parishes in small villages. Because house construction is not allowed in the environs of small villages, and because the religious community is close to extinction, this is also referred to as the "small-center issue." The (expensive) church building is often the last central meeting place. A vast majority of the Dutch population thinks that the government should guarantee one church building will remain for assembly in every village. This issue is currently being considered by different authorities, sometimes successfully. The Province of North Brabant, for instance, has recently taken the initiative in creating a "church fund," but this does not remove the uncertainties. Here too, (some) parishes face a challenge, which means that the structure as such is challenged.

Increasing Religious Pluralism

Finally, the classic territorial parish is challenged by increasing religious pluralism. Perhaps this is the most fundamental factor because it greatly influences the others. I confine myself to pluralism in the Christian tradition and leave aside other religions because pluralism between different reli-

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8 Annual expenditures for the whole Dutch Church Province and per diocese on buildings, staffing, payments, and other expenses in exact amounts in euros, and in percentages of costs relative to the total, can be found at www.kerkbalans.nl, or are available upon request from the author.

gious traditions does not affect internal church structures directly. Pluralism is a challenge because it can threaten the cohesion of the religious community. It can be divisive, although not necessarily. The issue of division is important, not just at the level of the parish (horizontal) but also at the level of the church as an organization (vertical). In simplified terms pluralism is sometimes expressed as "conservative," "progressive," "premodern," and "modern" (even "postmodern"). Sometimes there is talk of "literal," "anti-literal," and "mythological" interpretations of religious language (Hunt 1972). The reality, however, is more complicated. I shall provide examples regarding two central themes in the Christian tradition, namely God and Jesus Christ, but there are also divergent views on the Spirit, liberation, eternal life, church, sacraments, and so on.

In his distinction between various *images of God*, Van der Ven (1998) appends to each image a description of God's action or presence. He distinguishes between theistic, pantheistic, and panentheistic images of God. Theistic images of God emphasize God's transcendence. God is above and beyond reality, but at the same time is capable of having a personal relationship with humans in the world. Pantheistic images of God focus on God's immanence. God is seen as the oneness and structure of the world, or God coincides with the world. Finally, panentheistic images of God are midway between the other two. They emphasize God's transcendental immanence or immanent transcendence. This applies to views in which one directly or indirectly recognizes God's activity in one's own life, in nature, or in relationships with others. On the basis of empirical research a further distinction is made in panentheistic images of God, namely anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic images, in which God is or is not described in terms of human characteristics like "helping," "understanding," "supporting," and "encouraging."

Even though religious pluralism is more in evidence than it used to be, it is not a new phenomenon. Schoonenberg (1991, 21–44) identifies two models in early Christian references to Jesus: Spirit Christology and Logos Christology. Spirit Christology is the oldest model. We find it primarily in the Mark's gospel, but there are also traces of it in the other synoptic gospels and in Paul. Typical of Spirit Christology is an emphasis on Jesus being filled with the Spirit of God, the idea being that, "Jesus becomes the Son of God, or at least becomes more the Son of God" (Schoonenberg 1991, 54). In Logos Christology, the emphasis is on the Word that Jesus became. With some qualifications, one could say that in Spirit Christology Jesus becomes (more) the Son of God, and hence ascends to increasing equality with God, while in Logos Christology, the Son of God descends. Although on the face of it these two images of Jesus seem contradictory, Schoonenberg sees them as complementary. Each expresses what is implicitly present in the other. Hence he harmonizes the two models in wisdom Christology, which speaks of the Spirit and the Word together.

This distinction between an ascending and a descending Christology is confirmed by empirical research into the *images of Jesus.* In research among Nijmegen students, Van der Ven and Biemans (1994, 91–94) distinguish between seven types of images of Jesus. After statistical analysis, three distinct types of Christologies emerge: an ascending Christology, a descending Christology, and a humanistic Christology. An ascending Christology highlights Christ's closeness to humans and God. Van der Ven cites Schleiermacher's liberal-theological orientation and Schillebeeckx's Jesuological Christology as examples of this type. Schleiermacher takes Jesus as the archetype of the right human attitude towards God and other people. Schillebeeckx stresses that Jesus' behavior demonstrates salvation for all people through God. In a descending Christology, Jesus is taken to be the Son of God "coming from above" who offers humankind a radical choice. Karl Barth's theology is an example of this approach. In humanistic Christology, Jesus is taken to be a special, good human being, but nothing more. Every reference to a transcendent reality is renounced.

So much for the two examples. The question again can be raised: What does pluralism mean for church organization? Theoretically, pluralism does not have to be a problem to the religious community, but it does become problematic if the pastor is unable to handle it. In that case, the pastoral care for the community (the third characteristic of the classic parish) comes under pressure because it is no longer accepted (by everyone). When the hierarchical structure or its officials (the second characteristic) is oriented to promoting one absolute truth, one interpretation, and one specific image, it comes under pressure because it is no longer broadly based. When the head of the church and the base (the community of the faithful) hold systematically and consistently different views, this also gives rise to friction and conflict. Lastly, the principle of territoriality (the first characteristic) is put under pressure because the faithful will leave their territorial parish as soon as they no longer feel religiously at home there, that is, if they make that effort at all and do not immediately (and finally) turn their backs on the church. Some authors speak of such mobility as a threat to the territorial church structure, but against the background of this discussion that is a simplification (perhaps arising from "non-modern" resistance?). It is not mobility as such that puts pressure on the principle of territoriality. Instead, lack of mobility is no longer an obstruction to turning to a different parish when one does not agree with the religious profile of the parish in which one lives!

Renewal in the Organization of Christian Congregations

In the previous section, I reviewed five developments that, in different ways, influence the three characteristics of the organizational model of the classic territorial parish. Does this description give cause for pessimism? Does the

future of the church hold (only) trouble and affliction? That is certainly not what I have been saying. After all, the church does not coincide with its legal definition. In the rest of this article I discuss possible policy strategies that could serve as an answer to the five socio-cultural challenges to the classic territorial model of the parish. I divide these strategies into three categories: accommodation, transformation, and reformation. This does not mean accommodation, transformation and reformation *of* or *within* the classic parish. Instead, these are different organizational models for Christian belief against the background of the five socio-cultural challenges outlined above. The *accommodation* strategy concerns adaptations and reorganization without formally abandoning the organizational model of the classic territorial parish. The *transformation* strategy tries out alternatives that abandon (some) characteristics of the classic parish, but in so doing explicitly adhere to canon law. Finally, the *reformation* strategy introduces new structures based on free initiatives by the religious community without undue concern for legal niceties, but generally also without seeking to oppose them. This trichotomy is therefore not based on an internal canon law criterion, nor do I strive for canon law precision in what follows.

Accommodation

Accommodation models try to find solutions to the challenges of the five socio-cultural developments within the structure of the classic local parish. The resultant "redrawing of the parish landscape" assumes four different forms: personal union, inter-parochial association, merger, or closing down. A *personal union* is when the bishop appoints one or more persons in several parishes. It could be a pastor, but it could also involve members of the parish board or the parish assembly (Stassen and Van der Helm 2002). The *inter-parochial association* model goes one step further by legally unifying parishes in a federation. A federation is a legal entity with its own board. It can be organized depending on circumstances, although the separate parish boards will lose all or part of their authority. Besides its own board, an inter-parochial association can have other bodies like a pastoral team, working groups, assets and building management, and so on. The federation creates a new committee tier between parish and deanery (or between parish and diocese) that could be an additional source of administrative conflict. In a *merger* the existing parishes are disbanded and reconstituted as one new parish. Usually the decision to proceed to a merger is made only when other forms of cooperation fail to bring about a vigorous, unified religious community (Stassen 1998). *Closing down* is a final, drastic solution. When a parish does not pass the general test of viability (insufficient church members, volunteers, money, and/or pastors) the bishop may decide to incorporate it into the territory of a neighboring parish. The latter will then include the defunct parish (Stassen and Van der Helm 2002).

These four policy strategies do not set aside the classic territorial model of the parish. At most, the territorial boundaries of parishes are slightly expanded. In some respects, these models do offer a kind of solution. Declining church membership and church attendance will not be slowed down or reversed, but these strategies can prevent the phenomenon of empty churches on a regular basis. They will probably not attract new volunteers, but the remaining forces can be consolidated, which can strengthen motivation. They can solve financial problems (at least temporarily), especially insofar as the models entail closing down churches, although this is not always necessary. Closing down buildings is another alternative. Finally, the models in themselves do not offer a solution to religious pluralism. In fact, accommodation strategies can even be problematic when it comes to acknowledging pluralism in the church, if expansion implies leveling religious profiles in a relatively large area, such as part of a city or a metropolitan area. In turn, this can cause a further lapse of church attendance.

From this point of view, one could ask whether it would be wise to opt for breaking up large parishes into different locations that concentrate mainly or even exclusively on liturgy, catechesis, and church welfare work. Should one not try instead to keep all pastoral duties (liturgy, catechesis, mission, church welfare work, pastoral counseling, and spiritual guidance) easily accessible (that is, as close as possible) and available? This becomes all the more problematic if the decision is accompanied by the erosion of the variety of profiles. It may be reasonable to expect that spiritual and religious life will be concentrated in centers with a strong, distinctive profile, as Kehl (1995, 149) predicts. This prediction may arouse ambivalent feelings, but if realistic, I think sufficient variety in spiritual and religious profiles is desirable.

Transformation

In the transformation models, renewal is pursued by means of organizational structures that abandon (some of) the characteristics of the classic parish but explicitly observe the legal framework of the church. Although very different in nature, the personal parish, construction of a personal prelature, and the principle of custom formation all fall in this category. The organizational form of the *personal parish* is not based on a geographic criterion but is established by reason of the rites, language, or nationality of the Christian faithful in some territory, or even for "some other reason," such as the shared objectives or convictions of the members (canon 518). This covers student parishes and immigrant parishes. This approach abandons the principle of territoriality but (theoretically) not the characteristics of hierarchical structure and the emphasis on pastoral care, even though in practice these religious communities are often characterized by great openness and a non-hierarchical organization.

The so-called *personal prelature* (canon 294–297) is a second example in the transformation category. It is an organizational form that exists autonomously alongside the diocese and falls under the direct authority of the pope, although the members will still be part of the diocese in which they live. A prelature is aimed at carrying out specific pastoral duties. At the moment there is only one example: Opus Dei, which is aimed at advancing the ideal of holiness in ordinary life by working according to Jesus' model (Opus Dei 1982). At the request of the local bishop, Opus Dei's priests and laypeople can perform tasks within a diocese, even though its priests are not diocesan functionaries. Conversely, diocesan priests cannot join Opus Dei, but they can belong to an affiliated association. The personal prelature abandons the characteristic of territoriality and modifies the characteristic of hierarchy by, in some respects, bypassing the diocesan level—which does not mean that Opus Dei is not hierarchical. Opus Dei is controversial and is often classified within the conservative right wing of the church.[9] Some church lawyers think that it does not comply with the requirements of the personal prelature (Aymans-Mörsdorf 1997, 747 f), while others cannot hide their enthusiasm (Lo Castro 1993).

Custom formation is the last policy strategy in the transformation category (canons 5, 23–28). Unlike the personal prelature, it is initiated from the base. Because of custom formation in local congregations, certain practices can acquire legal force after thirty years, even though this does not make them laws. Legal force can also be obtained sooner if specifically approved by a competent legislator. The competent legislator can be the local bishop, according to canon lawyer Huysmans (1993, 128), inasmuch as he considers approval of the custom beneficial to the mental well-being of the faithful. Torfs (2003) writes that whereas custom cannot abolish law, it can erode it. He means by this that space is created at a parochial or diocesan level, while "universal" legal rules continue to prevail and are not directly opposed. Approval of existing customs, while enacted by the legislator, is not a legislative act. Within the scope of custom formation, many alternatives are possible. Therefore, the extent to which the characteristics of territoriality, hierarchy, and emphasis on pastoral care are "transformed" depends on the specific circumstances. It is possible, for instance, to abandon the principle of territoriality in this model. Although in a sense the hierarchy remains in tact because customs must be approved before they obtain force of law (cf. Walf 2004, 262), in practice it can be weakened or eroded. The model can also reorganize pastoral care into mutual care among all parishioners.

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9 For example, in 1997 Opus Dei ended up on a list of sects in the final report of the Belgian parliamentary committee of inquiry. The list named groups that were discussed or mentioned in this committee. The normative value of this list is subject to debate.

Reformation

Last of all, there is the free initiative of the faithful. Examples are the formation of base communities, a phenomenon found mainly in the Latin American context, although it also occurs in the Netherlands, Italy, and France. They describe themselves as groups of believers who want to restore the original form of the church but who have no ambition to start a new institution. In the course of church history, there have been regular calls for a return to the source and purity of the origin: *ecclesia semper reformanda*. This is why I call this category "reformation," although it is not a very fortunate choice. The ecclesiology underlying the free initiative of the faithful could be called congregationalist. It is less strongly directed to rules governing church life, which are (primarily) based on ministry and sacrament. Here, too, the principle of territoriality is abandoned, the hierarchy is sometimes ignored, and pastoral care is a concern of the faithful (Haarsma 1981; Mudge 1992).

Conclusion

In this article, I gave an overview of some relevant organizational and structural aspects of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands in 2008. To this end, I discussed three characteristics of the classic organizational structure of the parish (territoriality, hierarchical structure, and emphasis on pastoral care) against the background of five socio-cultural developments. I then presented some alternative organizational structures of religious communities. In light of all of this, how can we evaluate the organizational model of the territorial parish for future Christian religious communication in the Netherlands? In other words, how should we assess the territorial parish as the core of (Catholic) church organization in the Netherlands? Perhaps we should not be too negative. The fact is that in the course of history, the parish has proved to have one abiding merit. The "parish on site" has often been able to bring together heterogeneous (groups of) people to communicate about finding meaning on the basis of the Christian tradition. In many spheres, parishes have been able to build bridges between rich and poor, highly and less educated people, men and women, the underprivileged and the "lucky devils," immigrants and natives, young and old. In a positive sense, then, the principle of territoriality can be understood as the church's offer to be fundamentally open to everyone: it is a meeting place for all! Against this, it could be argued that at least some of the aforementioned alternative organizational structures run a risk of becoming sectarian or elitist. Space constraints prevent me from exploring this point further.

In the description and analysis of the five socio-cultural developments, however, some points emerged which are highly relevant to the existence of

the territorial parish. First, the binding principle of territoriality on individual believers could be questioned, even though in practice it has already been breached. Second, structures have to be geared to motivating volunteers. The hierarchical aspect and the emphasis on (hierarchical) pastoral care in particular have become problematic these days. Third, the theology of ministry would benefit from a powerful injection of professionalism. Fourth, reorganization must take place when financially necessary, but at the same time the faithful should be encouraged to take responsibility. Finally, religious pluralism should be recognized and acknowledged, horizontally (local congregation) as well as vertically (church structures and church law). Here, too, the last recommendation is the most important one and outweighs all the others, since it guarantees the openness of the church. This observation highlights the point that the structure of an organization is determined by its identity, and vice versa. Organizational structures are not value-free!

Abstract

This article reflects on several organizational and structural aspects of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands relevant to Christian religious communication in 2009. Three characteristics of parishes (territoriality, hierarchical structure, and emphasis on pastoral care) are discussed against the background of five societal developments: declining church membership, decreasing numbers of volunteers and increased ages of volunteers, declining numbers of pastors and members of religious orders and congregations, reduced financial means, and increasing religious pluralism. The author concludes by presenting and discussing current alternative organizational structures of religious communities.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser International Report reflektiert organisationelle und strukturelle Aspekte der Katholischen Kirche in den Niederlanden in Bezug auf ihre Relevanz für die christlich-religiöse Kommunikation im Jahr 2009. Drei Charakteristiken von Gemeinden (Territorialität, hierarchische Strukturen und die Betonung auf Seelsorge) werden diskutiert vor dem Hintergrund fünf gesellschaftlicher Entwicklungen: abnehmende Kirchenmitgliedschaftszahlen, geringeres Engagement Ehrenamtlicher und zunehmendes Alter der Ehrenamtlichen, weniger Pastoren und Mitglieder religiöser Orden und Gemeinschaften, geringere finanzielle Ausstattung, schließlich wachsender religiöser Pluralismus. Der Autor beendet seinen Beitrag mit der Vorstellung und Diskussion gegenwärtiger alternativer Organisationsstrukturen religiöser Gemeinschaften.

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