

1. A Coat of Many Colours: New Immigrant Churches in the Netherlands

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According to Philip Jenkins' thought-provoking book *The Next Christendom*, Christianity is stagnating – even declining – in North America and Europe but rapidly expanding in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Jenkins, 2002). The centre of Christianity is shifting from Rome, New York, and Geneva to Manila, Kinshasa, and Buenos Aires. Jenkins thinks that in 2050 only one out of every five Christians will be a non-Hispanic white person from the Western world. Theologically, Christianity will be more apocalyptic, conservative, and charismatic than it is now. In his study, Jenkins acknowledges the fact that at the same time millions of Christians are moving from other continents to Europe and Northern America, raising the important question of whether this new influx of Christian immigrants will cause a change in Western Christianity and Western society as well. Jenkins sees them as contributing to “the prospect of a revitalized Christian presence on European soil” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 98). One of the possible outcomes could be that Christianity in the West will also become more apocalyptic, conservative, and charismatic.

Drawing on data from the *World Value Survey*, Norris and Inglehart show that, although people in virtually all advanced industrial regions of the world have been becoming more secularized, the percentage of religious people among the world population is growing, which is mainly due to low fertility rates in the West and high fertility rates in other parts of the world. As a result, the world now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before. The authors make the interesting observation that secularization in the United States is partly masked by massive immigration of people from Hispanic countries with traditional religious worldviews (Norris and Inglehart, 2004, p. 25). The same could be happening in Europe as well.

The Netherlands is considered to be one of the most secularized countries in the world. Traditional church affiliation decreased from 76% in 1958 to 35% in 2004 (Becker and de Hart, 2006, p. 38). To the surprise of many,

however, religion seems to be back on the Dutch public agenda, although it is very unlikely that the traditional, established churches will profit from this development (Donk *et al.*, 2006). The Roman Catholic Church and the mainline Protestant churches have lost millions of members in recent decades. Growth, however, is manifest in the rather mixed group of “other denominations”, including immigrant churches, which developed from 3% of the Dutch population in 1958 to 8% in 2004 (Becker and de Hart, 2006, p. 38). At present, the Netherlands is rapidly changing into a post-secular, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, with many immigrants bringing their own religious faith and rituals into the country. While much public and academic attention has been given to Muslim immigrants and their integration into Dutch society (or assumed lack of it), it is only recently that the presence of Christian immigrants from Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia and their churches has begun to attract some attention as well. A popular handbook on ethnic minorities in the Netherlands stated that immigrants brought along their religions, “Islam, Hinduism, and Winti” (Werf, 1998, p. 130), forgetting, apparently, about southern and eastern forms of Christianity.¹

Academic research of the phenomenon of immigrant churches in the Netherlands has been rare until now.² In 1996 Jongeneel *et al.* produced a very useful inventory of non-Western immigrant churches in the Netherlands (Jongeneel *et al.*, 1996). Ter Haar studied the situation of African Christians in Europe (ter Haar, 1998) and Van Dijk wrote several articles on Ghanaian Pentecostalism in the Netherlands (Van Dijk, 2002), whereas Schukkink analyzed a Syrian Orthodox community in the city of Enschede (Schukkink, 2003). The year 2006 brought a modest rise in academic studies in which immigrant churches in Dutch society were analyzed: Roman Catholic immigrant parishes (Castillo Guerra *et al.*, 2006), Pentecostal immigrant congregations (Droogers *et al.*, 2006), and immigrant churches in Amsterdam (Euser *et al.*, 2006).

This article will assess the presence and significance of immigrant churches in the Netherlands. I will start with an overview of Christian immigrants and immigrant churches in the Netherlands. In the second part of this article, I will look at their role in society and to their relations with Dutch churches.

CHRISTIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

The number of Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands is estimated at 944,000 (6% of the Dutch population) (Becker and de Hart, 2006, p. 34).

¹ A few lines on Christian immigrants were included in the 2002 edition of this book.

² The Institute for Migrant and Ethnic Studies (IMES, University of Amsterdam) and the European Research Centre of Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER, University of Utrecht) both have a broad research scope, but they rarely focus on religion and, if they do, it is usually on Islam.

The number of Christian immigrants is probably much higher – a fact that is not generally known – at least if we include both Western and non-Western immigrants in our estimations. In the literature we find estimations of the number of *non-Western* Christian immigrants and their children in the Netherlands varying from 640,000 (Wijsen, 2003) to 800,000 (Ferrier, 2002). My estimation of the total number of non-Western immigrants is somewhat lower (516,500), but if we add another 798,000 Christian immigrants and their children from European countries (Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Poland, the former Soviet Union etc.), we arrive at a total of 1,314,500 Christian immigrants. Of course, these figures say little or nothing about the personal commitment of these immigrants to Christian beliefs and Christian churches in the Netherlands, just as figures about Muslims say little or nothing about their personal commitment to Islam. The value of these estimations, however, is that they give an indication of the *potential* membership of immigrant churches and Dutch initiatives focussed on immigrants. American research results show that in general, religion is important for immigrants (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000; Stepick, 2005, p. 13; Warner, 1998). The same holds true for immigrants in the Netherlands, as some survey data indicate.³ The total percentage of immigrants in the Netherlands, both from the Western and non-Western world, amounts to almost 20%. CBS (Statistics Netherlands) expects the percentage of people with a foreign background to be around 30% of the total Dutch population in 2050, mainly through the creation and reuniting of families.⁴

In Table 1 I have tried to estimate the numbers of both Western and non-Western Christian immigrants in the Netherlands (first and second generation), based on a combination of official immigration statistics (CBS, 2004) and the percentage of Christians in the countries of origin (World Christian Database, 2006). Calculations in the last column are based on the assumption that the percentage of Christian immigrants in the Netherlands equals the percentage of Christians in their native country. This assumption, of course, will be wrong if Christians – for whatever reason – are over- or underrepresented among immigrants from a certain country. In the cases of Turkey and Iraq, I have corrected the initially low numbers of 1,400 Turks and 1,100 Iraqis I calculated, because of more detailed knowledge about the number of Christian immigrants from these coun-

³ A survey amongst persons from different ethnic groups in the Netherlands showed that immigrants more often identified themselves as belonging to a religious tradition (varying from 46% of the Iranians to 95% of the Moroccans) than native Dutch (only 35%) (SCP/WODC/CBS, 2005, p. 120).

⁴ One has to keep in mind that CBS (Statistics Netherlands) includes in these calculations all those with at least one non-Dutch parent. Surprisingly, the entire Dutch Royal Family meets this criterion as well.

tries.

Table 1. Estimation of first- and second-generations Western and non-Western immigrants in the Netherlands, including an estimation of Christian immigrants.

	<i>Estimated number of immigrants</i>	<i>% Christians in country of origin</i>	<i>Estimated number of Christian im- migrants</i>
Belgium	112,000	84.4%	95,000
Germany	384,000	74.9%	288,000
France	34,000	69.3%	24,000
United Kingdom	76,000	81.5%	62,000
Italy	36,000	82.1%	30,000
Poland	45,000	96.0%	43,000
Spain	31,000	91.3%	28,000
Former Soviet-Union	42,000	45.8%	19,000
Former Yugoslavia	76,000	74.0%	56,000
Other Western countries	185,000	82.8% ⁵	153,000
Afghanistan	36,000	0.0%	0
Cape Verde	20,000	95.0%	19,000
China	42,000	8.5%	3,600
Ghana	19,000	57.5%	10,900
Indonesia	399,000	13.5%	54,000
Iran	28,000	0.6%	200
Iraq	43,000	2.6%	4,300 ⁶
Morocco	306,000	0.4%	1,200
Netherlands Antilles	131,000	94.0%	123,000
Somalia	25,000	1.3%	300
Surinam	325,000	51.1%	166,000
Turkey	352,000	0.4%	15,000 ⁷
Other non-Western countries	341,000	27.1%	92,000
Undocumented immigrants ⁹	100,000	27.1%	27,000

⁵ An average of the percentage of Christians in the countries of origin mentioned above.

⁶ About 10% of the Iraqis in the Netherlands are Christian (Choenni, 2002).

⁷ In the 1970s many Suryoye (Syrian Orthodox) Christians from southeastern Turkey sought refuge in Western Europe. Some people of this group live in the Twente region in the eastern part of the Netherlands (Schukkink, 2003).

⁸ An average of the percentage of Christians in the countries of origin mentioned above.

⁹ Estimations of undocumented immigrants vary from 50,000 to 200,000. Again, I took the percentage of Christians in non-Western countries as a basis for estimating the number of undocumented persons with a Christian background.

<i>Total of immigrants</i>	3,188,000	41.2%	1,314,500
<i>Total Dutch population</i>	16,300,000		

(Sources: CBS, 2004; , World Christian Database, 2006)

The Netherlands has always been a temporary or permanent refuge for people from other countries (Lucassen and Penninx, 1994), who came to Holland for economic, political, social, and religious reasons. Until the twentieth century, most immigrants came from neighbouring countries in Western Europe and often founded their own churches. French-speaking Protestants from Roman Catholic Belgium fled to the Dutch Republic at the end of the sixteenth century and founded the *Églises Wallonnes*, which still exist. French Huguenots joined these churches after the abolition of the Nantes Edict in 1685. Around 1700, about a quarter of the Amsterdam population was of French origin. In 1816, the Dutch King William I forced the *Églises Wallonnes* to become a part of the Dutch Reformed Church (now part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands). English and Scottish Presbyterian churches were also integrated into the Dutch Reformed Church in 1816. For a long time, the Evangelical Lutheran Churches were the home of many Scandinavian and German immigrants, and until the eighteenth century, Lutheran worship services were held in both Dutch and in German (Rommes, 1996). A special group of immigrants were Armenian merchants, who founded the Armenian Apostolic Church in Amsterdam in 1714.

Most immigrant churches in the Netherlands, however, were founded after World War II. In recent decades the Netherlands has begun to attract immigrants from all over the world. The first wave of post-World War II immigrants came from the newly founded Republic of Indonesia, one of the former Dutch colonies. A special group of 12,500 Moluccans, soldiers in the Royal Dutch Indonesian Army (KNIL) and their families, arrived in the Netherlands in 1951, expecting to be repatriated as soon as their islands attained independence from the young Indonesian state. As we know now, a free *Republik Maluku Selatan* is as far from reality as it was 50 or 25 years ago. The predominantly Christian Moluccans kept aloof from Dutch society and founded their own Moluccan Protestant and Evangelical churches; other Indonesian Christians either joined one of the Dutch churches or founded their own Indonesian churches. Several Indonesian Pentecostal churches were established (Laan, 2006, p. 52). From the 1950s onward, many Roman Catholic inhabitants of the Netherlands Antilles came to the Netherlands for economic reasons. Roman Catholic Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese *guest workers* arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, soon to be replaced by Muslim guest workers from Turkey and

Morocco. Although Roman Catholic immigrants are automatically assigned to the local parish in which they reside, dozens of ethnic Roman Catholic parishes were created in the past sixty years (Castillo Guerra *et al.*, 2006, p. 24f). After the decolonization of Surinam in 1974, more than 100,000 Surinamese moved to the Netherlands, among them many Roman Catholics, Moravian Brethren, Lutherans, and Pentecostals. Syrian Orthodox Christians and Armenians, both from Turkey, arrived in the 1970s and 1980s. Africans from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Nigeria, Latin Americans from Chile, Argentine, and Brasil, and Asians from Iran, Iraq, and the Philippines have moved to the Netherlands in recent decades for political and economic reasons. The Balkan wars of the 1990s brought Roman Catholic Croatians, Orthodox Serbians, and Muslim Bosnians to the Netherlands. Some of these immigrants returned to their home countries as soon as the political or economic situation had improved, others moved to the United Kingdom or the United States, but the majority settled down in the Netherlands (Jongeneel *et al.*, 1996, pp. 17-40).

IMMIGRANT CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS

The term “immigrant churches” can refer to mono-ethnic churches, such as the Ghanaian congregations in Amsterdam Zuidoost, to multi-ethnic churches, such as the Scots International Church in Rotterdam, attracting people from many different countries, or parishes of Dutch churches with a focus on immigrant groups, such as a Spanish-speaking Roman Catholic parish in The Hague or the International Christian Fellowship congregation in Rotterdam, which is part of the Christian Reformed denomination. Immigrant churches are churches in which the immigration aspect plays an important role – in the social composition of the congregation, as well as in language, culture, and religious rituals, practices, and beliefs (see also Wartena, 2006, p. 24). Some immigrant churches reject the term “immigrant church”, preferring the term “international church”, because they stress the unity of different ethnic groups in Christ as their main reason for existence. However, the most important organization of immigrant churches in the Netherlands, SKIN (Samen Kerk In Nederland / Being Church in the Netherlands Together), considers itself explicitly to be an assembly of *immigrant* churches and congregations (see www.skinkerken.nl).

In the 1990s, immigrant churches began to receive some attention from the wider Dutch public. The first occasion on which immigrant churches and Christians drew massive public attention was in the aftermath of a plane crash in Amsterdam. In 1992 an Israeli cargo plane crashed into a large apartment building in Amsterdam Zuidoost. More than forty people were killed, mainly Africans with a Christian background. The Dutch

public suddenly became aware of an immigrant neighbourhood in which religion seemed to be at the heart of the community. Immigrant churches played an important role in the pastoral and psychosocial care in the stricken area. The publication of an extensive overview of Asian, African, and Latin-American churches in 1996 marked the growing role and visibility of the new immigrant churches (Jongeneel *et al.*, 1996). Dutch researchers worked closely with representatives of immigrant churches on this project.

Thanks to an inventory compiled by A.P. Van den Broek, a retired Dutch pastor of a Ghanaian Presbyterian Church in Amsterdam Southeast, we now know that approximately 900 immigrant churches and 200 churches with foreign language services (including Roman Catholic parishes) can be found in the Netherlands, particularly in the larger cities (Van den Broek, 2004). Amsterdam accommodates almost 200 immigrant churches, Rotterdam about 90, and The Hague more than 100. The number and names of these churches fluctuate constantly: they pop up and then disappear, join and split, and sometimes they reappear under another name. It is almost impossible to classify these churches along denominational or ethnic lines. Of course, we can distinguish among Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterian, Reformed, Pentecostal, Baptist, and Seventh Day Adventist churches, but the majority does not belong to a specific denomination, and will probably best be described as charismatic, Pentecostal, and/or Evangelical. Some of these churches are mono-ethnic, while others are multi-ethnic, often including the term “international” in their name. Many churches were founded by immigrants, but others were founded by Dutch Christians and churches in an attempt to offer hospitality or to evangelize among immigrants. Immigrant churches draw members from immigrant communities but also from among those who only stay temporarily in the Netherlands (students, business people, embassy personnel), and from the native Dutch population.

Dutch people may join an immigrant church because of social bonds with other members (family ties, friendship, marriage), but also because they feel attracted to the style and character of a specific immigrant church. Crossroads International Church in Amstelveen (near Amsterdam) attracts expatriates from Europe, America, and other continents, as well as a number of Dutch families (www.xrds.nl). About half of the members of the Russian Orthodox St. Nicholas of Myra Church in Amsterdam is of Dutch origin. For them, the tradition, the liturgy, and the communal spirit of the Russian Orthodox Church were important reasons to join (Braakhuis, 2006).

As an illustration of the variety, Table 2 presents an overview of immigrant churches, native churches offering foreign language services, and other Christian immigrant initiatives in a randomly chosen, medium-sized provincial town, Breda (137,000 inhabitants) in the predominantly Roman Catholic province of Brabant (Van den Broek, 2004).

Table 2. Immigrant churches, native churches offering foreign language services, and other Christian immigrant initiatives in the city of Breda (137.000 inhabitants).

1. Ambassadeurs du Christ / Ambassadors of Christ
2. Assemblée de Messagers de Dieu
3. Assemblée Evangelique Mon Rocher (Evangelical)
4. Assemblies of God New Anointing Ministries (Pentecostal)
5. Capitol Worship Centre
6. CEME Breda (Chinese Evangelical Mission in Europe)
7. Church of Pentecost
8. Ecumenical Christian Assembly Indonesia-Netherlands
9. Église Wallonne (Reformed)
10. Evangelical Baptist Church (Baptist)
11. Full Gospel Church Immanuel (Pentecostal)
12. Geredja Indjili Maluku - Moluccan Church (Evangelical)
13. Greek-Orthodox Church
14. Maasbach World Mission (Pentecostal)
15. NGPMB - Moluccan Church (Reformed)
16. NGPMB53 - Moluccan Church (Evangelical)
17. Roman Catholic Philippine parish
18. Roman Catholic Polish Chapel
19. Roman Catholic Vietnamese parish
20. Victory Bible Church

We can give only a very rough estimate of the number of people who belong to immigrant churches – if these churches even have such a thing as formal membership.¹⁰ If the average number of members in a church is 100, then immigrant churches in the Netherlands together have about 110,000 members. If the average size is 200, then the total amount of members would be 220,000, etc. Recent research among fifty Roman Catholic immigrant parishes showed an average of 200 regular church attendees of a total of 740 members per parish (Castillo Guerra *et al.*, 2006, p. 26f). Many young African churches have less than 100 members. We do not have much information about the religious involvement and participation of most Christian immigrants, but it is clear that a huge gap exists between the estimated total number of Christian immigrants in the Netherlands (1,314,500) and the estimated number of people involved in immigrant churches. How can we explain this gap? Some Christian immi-

¹⁰ Perhaps it is better to speak of “more or less committed persons”.

grants have become involved in mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic immigrant churches, others have joined one of the traditional Dutch churches, and still others, perhaps the majority, prefer to keep aloof, maintaining their Christian faith on a more individual base or having no affinity to Christianity at all. In addition, some survey data on Surinamese people and Antilleans show that the second generation tends to have a lower commitment to organized forms of religion than the first (SCP, 2002).

Jenkins describes a recent visit to Amsterdam. On a Sunday morning he became aware of how little religious activity was taking place in the centre of the city. Venturing into a working class area, however, he watched a swelling stream of Africans going to their African church (Jenkins, 2002, p. 98). The number of individuals attending one of the mainline Protestant churches in Amsterdam on Sunday is estimated at 2.500. The immigrant churches in Amsterdam are thought to draw about 24.000 attendants each Sunday (Euser *et al.*, 2006, p. 40).

IMMIGRANT CHURCHES IN DUTCH SOCIETY

The most important reasons for establishing or joining an immigrant church are language, religious tradition, cultural background, and, of course, immigration. The immigration experience itself can be “theologizing” and many immigrants become more aware of (the importance of) their religion than they used to be. Roman Catholic immigrants mentioned “Meeting people with the same origins” (85%) and “Experiencing faith in my own language and culture” (85%) as the most important reasons for joining an immigrant parish, whereas a majority of them (55%) also stressed “Preserving our cultural identity” as essential. Only a minority (19%) mentioned “Orientation in Dutch society” as an important motive (Castillo Guerra *et al.*, 2006, p. 29). Immigrant churches fulfil important *bonding* functions for their members, as meeting places (“a home away from home”) where people experience fellowship, where they share and maintain their cultural and religious identity and where they give mutual social, moral, and often also financial support. Immigrant churches often play an important role in establishing and strengthening “safe havens” within a society that is experienced as indifferent, inhospitable, or overtly hostile.

Dutch worship services seldom last longer than 60 or 90 minutes. African worship services can take several hours and sometimes almost the whole day. The Dutch engage in recreation and visit their relatives after church, whereas Africans do it *in* church.

Immigrant churches, however, are also possible resources of social, economic, spiritual, and cultural capital, necessary for *building bridges* to other groups and areas of society. Although it may be not the primary reason for people to join, these churches often function as ways for members to gain access to housing, schooling, medical care etc. Members can learn

useful community and leadership skills in these churches. Driven by faith, churches and church members reach out to their fellow people and to the broader local community.

A documentary by IKON-television (*De makeover van God*, July 26, 2006) showed a black Pentecostal pastor distributing food parcels to native Dutch citizens. The Amsterdam Maranatha Community Training Center, discussed in other contributions in this volume, organizes evangelization activities, care groups, programmes for marriage counselling and childrearing, leadership training, a fitness club on Saturday and Sunday morning for the whole community (“Through fitness to Christ”), and programs for money management and business development (<http://www.mctc.nl/mas.html>). Immigrant churches are actively involved in offering shelter to undocumented immigrants and in developing programs for prostitutes, drug addicts, and people with HIV/AIDS.

Discussions in the Dutch political arena show that a shift has taken place during the past fifteen years from a “multicultural society” model, stressing cultural diversity and the equality of diverse cultural groups and systems, to an “integration into Dutch culture” model, or even a “forced assimilation” model, stressing the superiority of Dutch culture and Western Enlightenment values, such as individual rights, gender equality, sexual freedom, and the separation of church and state. The main target of critique is Islam of course, but non-Western Christian immigrants and immigrant churches are implicitly included in the debate on multiculturalism and integration. Therefore, it is an important question as to whether new Christian immigrants and immigrant churches are able and willing to integrate and participate in Dutch society, and whether Dutch society promotes or hinders such processes.¹¹ Leaders of new immigrant churches who are looking for space for worship and other activities, enter inevitably into a process of integration and participation because they have to adapt to Dutch political rules and negotiation customs. Knowledge of the Dutch language and Dutch culture is very important. At the same time, a certain cultural distance is preserved, when immigrant pastors warn their flock for the danger of getting too much involved in the liberal and secular Dutch culture or when they emphasize the mission they have towards Dutch Christianity. Different strategies of isolation and participation, of detachment and involvement, of dialogue and evangelization can be observed.

During recent decades, Dutch society has undergone a radical process of individualization, a process in which individual autonomy and experience have become dominant. Strong and often lifelong commitments to social groups – family, neighbourhood, political parties, and churches – have diminished in favour of loose and temporary connections. This shift has

¹¹ This is the central question in our research project on “The participation of immigrant churches in Dutch civil society” (see www.immigrantchurches.nl).

enormous consequences for Dutch civil society – the domain of voluntary actions of citizens -, especially in the areas of welfare, labour, politics, and religion. Some authors even argue that civil society is “dissolving” (Dekker, 2002). Likewise, most Dutch churches, as part of civil society, have lost much of their power and influence.

This context of individualization and the dissolution of civil society seem to create specific problems for immigrant churches. The solutions they propose for societal problems often have a very religious character, which may not be accepted by others. Christian immigrants tend to involve themselves in voluntary associations, among which churches play a central role. Often, the church is at the heart of community life. Moreover, immigrant churches often find themselves on the margins of society with respect to status, means, power, and knowledge. Most of these churches are newcomers on the social and religious “market” and therefore have to discover and create their own “niches”. It is often very difficult to find an affordable and suitable place for worship and other church activities. These churches have to accumulate *social* and *financial capital* first before they can seriously begin the process of building a church.

Goossen analyzed the process of preparation for building a new multi-church complex in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The process started in 1997, when some Ghanaian pastors took the initiative for the construction of several multi-church buildings. The first building *De Kandelaar* (The Candlestick) will probably be ready at the end of 2007 and will accommodate 15 Ghanaian churches. The pastors faced several problems: lack of money, distrust by the local authorities, and ignorance of Dutch rules and customs. Without the support of native advisors, the process could not continue. As a project manager of the local housing association remarked: “Beautiful plans, great commitments, passionate prayers, and the ever-returning mantra “God will provide” were not enough to get the thing going” (Goossen, 2006, p. 120). The white advisors began to play an ever more important role, giving the African pastors unintentionally the feeling that the project had been taken out of their hands and that they had been thrown back into old patterns of dependency and having to be grateful.

Immigrant churches discover that several access points to participation – such as pastoral counselling in hospitals and prisons – are already occupied by the “established” churches. In this situation, it is difficult to discover the possibilities of contributing to civil society and putting important topics “originating from the life world” (Habermas) on the agenda of the public sphere. The differences in power, status, and culture are often too big to overcome.

A remarkable development is the recent “discovery” of the Christian immigrants by the Dutch political parties. The ChristenUnie (Christian Union) shows a growing interest in Christian immigrants (and their votes). This party is one of the conservative Protestant parties in Parliament and, as of 2007, is also represented in the Dutch government. During the local elections in the spring of 2006, this party worked together for a while

with “Dr. Johnny Love”, a Surinamese pastor and a stand-up comedian.

Also in 2006, 200 pastors of immigrant churches had a meeting with members of Parliament from the Christian Democratic Party. One of these pastors, Rev. Koney of the Pentecostal Revival Church in Amsterdam Zuidoost, said: “Our churches help the government. We liberate people from criminality and prostitution. Thanks to our efforts, Amsterdam Zuidoost is becoming a better place, halfway between earth and heaven” (*Trouw*, June 15, 2006).

Another important aspect is the global context of immigrant churches. They can be understood as nodal points of *transnational* and *international* networks of ideas, persons, contacts, and money. Mutual influences between the home country and the host country can be observed, and in the case of multi-ethnic communities these influences have a broad international character. Therefore, many immigrant churches prefer to present themselves as *international churches* with a special mission for the Netherlands, trying to overcome the gap between native and immigrant Christians. In this respect, immigrant churches are already changing the face of Dutch Christianity. As one of the few growing Christian groups in the Netherlands the importance of immigrant churches will probably increase in the near future.

RELATIONS BETWEEN DUTCH CHURCHES AND IMMIGRANT CHURCHES

Dutch churches have been aware of the existence of Christian immigrants for a long time. However, they assumed that these immigrants, who came for the most part from former Dutch colonies, would integrate rather smoothly into the Dutch churches. The Protestant Indonesians, arriving in the Netherlands between 1946 and 1958, tried initially to integrate into the Dutch Reformed Church, but many left this denomination after a while for Pentecostal churches and specific Indonesian churches (Pluim and Kuyk, 2002). Several churches of the Moluccan people maintain long-standing connections to the Protestant churches in the Netherlands. Already in the 1950s, Italian, Polish, Russian, English, German, and Spanish parishes existed within the Roman Catholic Church (Castillo Guerra *et al.*, 2006, p. 24). While the Roman Catholic Church integrated Roman Catholic immigrants into the existing diocesan infrastructure, relations between the established Protestant churches and Protestant immigrant churches was more incidental and fluctuating, both on a national and local levels (Pluim and Kuyk, 2002).

Recently, several organizations in the Dutch mainline Protestant churches have established more formal relations with immigrant churches. In 2004 the diaconal office of the Protestant Church of Amsterdam started the *Kerkhuis* (“Church House”), an organization that offers all kinds of services to immigrant churches, such as language courses, financial and legal

advice. The diaconal organization of the Protestant Church of The Hague opened a special counter for immigrant churches and financed a local research project on the “social return of investment” of immigrant churches.

On February 17, 2006, a report called “Free and Valuable” (“Gratis en Waardevol”) was presented to the local authorities in The Hague (Stichting Oikos, 2006). The composers of the report had tried to capture the social benefits of immigrant churches to local society, using a method called Social Return on Investment. They calculated the worth of the joint effort of about 100 immigrant churches in the city of The Hague to be the equivalent of an annual 17,5 million euros, including projects for social support, development of organizational skills, practical help, pastoral care, language courses, computer courses, and cultural activities.¹²

During the 1990s, Christian immigrants also began to collaborate to enhance their public profile. They initiated several organizations, the most important one of which was *SKIN*, Samen Kerk in Nederland (“Being Church in the Netherlands Together”), founded in 1997.¹³ *SKIN* represents around 60 churches from different continents. Another, more specific platform is *GATE*, Gift from Africa to Europe, (originally Gospel from Africa to Europe), a rather loose alliance of African Pentecostal churches.

Despite good intentions on both sides, relations between the established Dutch churches and immigrant churches often seem to be complex and problematic. Several contacts on a local level were terminated after a while, because the experienced differences were too large. Perhaps the model of thinking in terms of “the established” and “the outsiders” prevents any kind of true collaboration.

The above-mentioned *IKON* television documentary *De makeover van God*, showed a Dutch Protestant congregation with a lesbian pastor and a Nigerian Pentecostal congregation preparing for a common worship service on Pentecost. The Nigerian congregation rented the Protestant church building for their services but had financial problems. The Nigerian male pastor was a strong opponent of homosexuality and pretended that he did not know about the sexual preferences of his female Dutch colleague. After the broadcast, the collaboration was ended.

Dutch Christians are seldom aware of their own ethnicity, their own biases and limitations (Pluim and Kuyk, 2002, p. 59). It might be a good idea, both for academic researchers and churches, to abandon an “established vs. outsiders” model and shift to an approach in terms of internationalization and globalization. Then an international church can suddenly become a future model for white, indigenous churches instead of being considered to be a sign of a lack of integration (Wartena, 2006).

¹² See the contribution by Stoppels in this volume.

¹³ A follow-up of the Platform van Niet-Inheemse Kerken (Platform of Non-Indigenous Churches, 1992).

CONCLUSION

The presence of Christian immigrants and immigrant churches in the Netherlands is undeniable and has become clearly visible during the past fifteen years. They have a potential for contributing to Dutch civil society and to the revitalization of Dutch Christianity, provided that they have access to sources of social and financial capital. Their potential is already being discovered by local and national politics and the established Dutch churches. Whether or not this potential will be developed depends however, on the ambition and capability of immigrant churches to contribute to Dutch society and on the opportunities within the host Dutch society. The effects will be greater when immigrant churches manage to keep a sensible balance between adaptation and identity. Adaptation means that these churches and their leaders have to learn how to “play the game” in Dutch society and eventually have to downplay the immigration aspect. However, if they adjust their message and style too much to the established Dutch churches, their fate may be similar to these churches. Therefore, they have to deal with the important challenge of “translating” – in various meanings of the term – their message and style into an approach that is attractive and understandable for both immigrants and Dutch natives.

When confronted with secularism, plurality, and individualism in Dutch society and with perceived liberalism and lack of faith in Dutch mainline churches, immigrant churches can opt for withdrawal, opposition, evangelization, dialogue, adaptation, or assimilation. Under what circumstances will immigrant churches choose one option or another? Will their religious beliefs and practices be transformed? Do they really have an influence on Dutch society and Dutch churches? In which ways will Dutch Christianity be transformed? Answering these questions will be an important task for future research.

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