

The Netherlands

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While today the Netherlands ranks among the most secularised European countries, it remains a nation with a rich diversity of Christian traditions and confessions. This is due largely to a variety of historical influences and events, some remote, some more recent, such as the effects of migrant churches from the Middle East, the war in Ukraine and the advent of new Evangelical movements. All of this shapes the complexity of the Dutch Christian landscape, which still today includes relevant populations of Reformed and Roman Catholic Christians, next to a vast array of minority communities, comprising Old Catholics, Lutherans, Remonstrants, Baptists and various Orthodox traditions. In this essay, we briefly highlight the historical roots of these communities in the Netherlands before sketching the contemporary religious diversity in this country.

In Roman times, Christianity originally penetrated the territory now known as the Netherlands from the south. In the fourth century, the first small Christian communities were established near the city of Maastricht, by merchants rather than by missionaries. From the end of the seventh century, the Christian religion was brought to the north-western area of the Netherlands (the Frisia Kingdom) from overseas by Anglo-Saxon missionaries. Prominent figures were Saint Willibrord, Bishop of Utrecht from 695 to 739, and Saint Boniface, who was martyred by the Northern Frisians near Dokkum in 754. The range and success of their activities brought the entire country under the influence of the episcopal see of Utrecht. The conversion of pagans and Frisians was a long and never straightforward process, leading into a mixture of Christian and pagan activities and traditions. To be successful, most missionaries were reliant on the political support of the Merovingian and, later, Carolingian lords.

As Bishop of Utrecht, Willibrord built churches and an adjoined monastery on the remnants of the old Roman complex in the city. The oldest monasteries in the Netherlands are termed *eigenkloosters*, Benedictine foundations endowed by Carolingian aristocracy. Most of these suffered heavily during the ninth century, when the Normans frequently invaded the Netherlands. As a consequence of such attacks, the see of the Bishop of Utrecht was moved to the city of Deventer at the end of that century.

Bishop Radbod (c. 850–917), a well-known medieval scholar and a poet, governed the Diocese of Utrecht from its Deventer post, and in 925 his successor moved the see back to Utrecht. In the following decades, several new churches were constructed or rebuilt in the city and surroundings. In close cooperation with local aristocracy and the Holy German-Roman Emperor, the bishops of Utrecht gained considerable wealth and political influence, resulting in their status as Prince Bishop. However, during the later Middle Ages, the see of Utrecht lost most of its political power to the counts of Holland and Guelders.

From the 1100s, the economy of the Low Countries flourished, several cities were founded and new religious orders were introduced, causing a growing diversification in Christian traditions. In comparison with other European countries, this occurred rather late. Famous ‘Dutch’ theologians, preachers or mystics were the mystic Saint Lidwina of Schiedam (1380–1433); the German-Dutch canon regular and author of the *Imitatio Christi*, Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380–1471); Adrian VI, the only Pope from the Low Countries, born Adriaan Florensz Boeyens (1459–1523); and Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), one of the most renowned scholars of the humanist renaissance. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Netherlands saw the rise of a unique movement, the *Devotio Moderna*, which laid stress on both mystical piety and education. It found expression in the Brethren of the Common Life, inspired by the deacon and preacher Geert Grote (1340–84), and consisted of semi-religious communities whose male and female members did not take traditional monastic vows.

Early Modern Period

In the early phases of the Reformation, both Lutherans and Anabaptists (*doopsgezinden*) gained followers in the Netherlands. Especially after the Münster rebellion in the mid-1530s, the Anabaptists were fiercely

Christianity in the Netherlands, 1970 and 2020

Tradition	1970		2020		Average annual growth rate (%), 1970–2020
	Population	%	Population	%	
Christians	11,642,000	89.3%	9,681,000	55.5%	–0.4%
Anglicans	8,000	0.1%	35,000	0.2%	3.0%
Independents	183,000	1.4%	425,000	2.4%	1.7%
Orthodox	7,700	0.1%	12,000	0.1%	0.9%
Protestants	4,674,000	35.9%	2,766,000	15.9%	–1.0%
Catholics	5,367,000	41.2%	4,445,000	25.5%	–0.4%
Evangelicals	525,000	4.0%	580,000	3.3%	0.2%
Pentecostals/Charismatics	112,000	0.9%	425,000	2.4%	2.7%
Total population	13,038,000	100.0%	17,435,000	100.0%	0.6%

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo (eds), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill), accessed January 2023.

persecuted in the Netherlands. In the years to follow, the Anabaptist movement split into several factions, which adopted a more pacific character. Marginalised concentrations of these communities were found in the Netherlands throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

While Lutheran protests against ecclesial corruption and abuses can be traced in the southern Netherlands as early as the 1520s, the official condemnation of Luther in 1521 launched a period of persecution of his followers in this area. As a consequence, some Lutherans moved as exiles to cities in the northern regions, where Lutheranism survived. However, Protestant reforms inspired by the ideas of John Calvin would have a much larger impact upon Dutch society. Calvinist reforms reached the masses in Walloon and Flemish cities, starting in the 1550s, which led to the Belgian Confession (1561). This proclaimed a comprehensive overview of Reformed faith for the Low Countries and was soon adopted by Dutch Protestants. With the Iconoclastic Fury of August 1566, a wave of disorderly attacks on churches and monasteries hit various places in the northern Netherlands. In this period the political revolt against Spanish rule in the Netherlands, 'officially' ignited in 1568, became inextricably bound up with religious uprisings. The adherence of William the Silent (of Orange) to Calvinism in 1573 became a significant step in underlining the role of that creed in the struggle, and its impact proved to be lasting in the Netherlands given the role of the 'Oranges' in the nation's leadership until today.

In an endeavour to find favour with the Catholics and to implement the reforms promoted by the Council of Trent, the Spanish king Philip II ordered the creation of five new sees under Utrecht, which was raised to an archbishopric in 1559. However, the experiment was soon overtaken by the Dutch revolt and the subsequent detachment of the northern Netherlands from Spanish Catholic rule. From 1580, when the last Archbishop of Utrecht died, until 1853, the Roman Catholic Church no longer had territorial bishops in the Dutch Republic. Instead, it was governed by vicars apostolic. Although the Dutch government formally embraced religious freedom, between 1579 and 1795 state governance was predominantly Calvinist and issued legislation that forbade all other denominations, in particular Catholics, to worship in public. However, during these two centuries most Catholic believers continued to worship in so-called 'clandestine churches' (*huiskerken*), upheld mostly by regular missionaries and local lay women, in particular 'spiritual daughters' (*klopjes*).

By 1609, the Dutch Republic was effectively independent from the Spanish Crown, and its political leadership aligned itself with Reformed religion (*Nederduits gereformeerd*). Nevertheless, controversies between adherents of renaissance humanism and Augustinianism arose within

the course of the century. The quarrel led to the condemnation of the liberal-minded Arminians or Remonstrants at the national Synod of Dort in 1618–19. Though never formally established, the Dutch Reformed Church (NHK), with its Calvinist orthodoxy, continuously proved to be the nation's official religious body until 1795.

The impact of quarrels between Augustinian and humanist-minded fractions also divided Catholics. In 1694, accusations of Jansenism were launched from Rome against a large portion of the Dutch Catholic secular clergy, including its vicar apostolic, Petrus Codde. This caused a schism among Dutch Catholics. Codde's followers upheld the continuity of their communion with the national Catholic Church of the past (*Oude-Bisschoppelijke Clerzie*). As these 'Old Catholics' continued to ordain clergy, they were sacramentally continuing the apostolic succession and would survive as the Old Catholic Church.

Modern Period

After the invasion of the French revolutionary troops in the late eighteenth century, the Batavian Republic was proclaimed in 1795. The Netherlands would remain under French occupation until 1813. This era induced a turnabout after a turbulent time of political and social unrest. It marked the end of the Dutch Republic. The effect on Christianity of the introduction of legislation based on liberal principles was major, as for the first time equal rights were granted to all religious groups in the Netherlands. After the overthrow of Napoleonic rule (1813), the Netherlands reinstalled the monarchy. The effects of nineteenth-century developments are still relevant in order to understand the country's present religious landscape. The newly established Kingdom of the Netherlands was ruled by King William I. In 1816, this monarch introduced a system of church government in which the state exercised extensive powers, through a special department of religious affairs. Given the religious diversity, objections to this arrangement came from various sides. In the southern parts of the united kingdom, liberal Catholics reacted against it, and with the Belgian Revolution of 1830 this predominantly Catholic part split off and established the state of Belgium. On the other hand, the king, belonging to the royal lineage of Orange Nassau, was criticised for the prevalent theological liberalism in his religious legislation. This led to the Secession (*Akte van Afscheiding en Wederkeering*) of 1834, when a group of stricter Calvinists established the 'Christian Reformed Churches' (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*). Further such disputes against the impact of liberalism within the main body of the Dutch Reformed Church would occur in the nineteenth century. In 1886 this gave rise to another secession (*doleantie*), led by the neo-Calvinist theologian and later Prime Minister

Abraham Kuyper. These two Protestant groups merged in 1892 and constituted the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, GKN), a denomination that has a strong counterpart in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The introduction of religious freedom in state legislation would also have strong effect on Catholic populations in the Netherlands. As a result of the new Dutch constitution, drafted in 1848 by the Lutheran statesman Johan Rudolph Thorbecke, the position of Catholics altered. In 1853, for the first time since the Reformation, the Catholic hierarchy was re-established in the nation. While this was met with fierce opposition by conservative Calvinists, it also paved the path for a vivid movement of self-identification and emancipation of Dutch Catholics. This was also the era in which the foundations were laid for the distinctively Dutch system of 'pillarisation', whereby society was divided into distinct vertical blocks based on common and often confessional ideologies (Catholic, Calvinist, social and liberal) that dominated Dutch life roughly between 1920 and 1960.

In those years, Dutch Roman Catholicism flourished and demographically became dominant. Catholics rapidly accomplished networks of education and a political party, and established hundreds of new churches, hospitals, newspapers and sport clubs. In all of this, compared with the situation on the rest of the European continent, religious congregations and orders, several of which were founded in the Netherlands, were over-represented in the fields of social care, education and overseas missions. This shift in religious demography shaped the religious landscape of the country during the middle years of the twentieth century. Traditionally, Catholics were most represented in the southern regions. There, in the 1920s, two Catholic universities were founded, in Nijmegen and in Tilburg, and throughout the century these provinces produced several renowned theologians and high-ranking clergymen. Figures of international importance were the redemptorist Cardinal Willem van Rossum, who led the Apostolic Penitentiary from 1915 to 1918 and served as Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith from 1918 until his death; and the Jesuit theologian Piet Schoonenberg, best known for his authorship of the *Dutch Catechism* of 1966, which became a worldwide bestseller. In fact, in the 1960s the Netherlands was globally seen as one of the most progressive regions, including with regard to Christian reforms. With the Nijmegen theologian Edward Schillebeeckx, the Catholic bishops played a key role in the modernisation of global Catholicism at the Second Vatican Council. These protagonists were also the generation that overcame confessional divides. In 1948, in Amsterdam, the World Council of Churches was founded, led by the Reformed pastor Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft. While the Council, fostering Christian unity and

transcending historical divisions, initially consisted of mainly Protestant churches, from the 1950s Dutch members were actively involved in reaching out to the Orthodox churches behind the Iron Curtain. From the Catholic side, they received support from Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, who served as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity from 1969 to 1989.

Secularisation, Abuse Scandals and Migration

After the speedy renewals and liberalisation of the Christian landscape in the late 1960s and early 1970s, marked by the National Pastoral Council held at Noordwijkerhout (1966–70), which received restorative responses from the side of the Vatican, came a period of setback and polarisation between right-wing and left-wing Christians, in both the Catholic and the mainstream Protestant churches. The latter led to a remarkably fast and strong process of secularisation in the Netherlands in the second half of the twentieth century, with a strong loss of impact of institutional church structures and popular affiliation.

Statistics derived from the Netherlands Central Bureau of Statistics offer a clear picture of this evolution: in 2010, with more than 16.5 million inhabitants, 28% of the population belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, 18% were Protestant (both those in the recently formed Protestant Church in the Netherlands and other Protestants), 4% were Muslims, 6% had another denomination and 45% professed no religious adherence. A decade later, in 2020, with more than 17 million inhabitants, the percentages of the major religious traditions had dropped respectively to 20%, 14%, 5% (actually an increase) and 5%, with more than 55% claiming no religious affiliation. The only religious group with rising numbers is the Muslim community. Among the Christian churches, the 2020s have seen an acceleration of decline in numbers. The leadership of most churches was not well prepared for the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020–1), which led to a further drop in church attendance. In 2022, as a consequence of the war in Ukraine, energy prices increased so fast that several Christian denominations were facing new difficulties in keeping their church buildings open.

Another factor that has played a significant part is the abuse scandals. In 2010, several cases of sexual abuse of children by Dutch Roman Catholic clergy became public, in the wake of comparable scandals in the United States, Belgium and Germany. In the same year, the Dutch Episcopal Council charged an independent commission (the Commissie Deetman) with the investigation of the cases and heard several victims and perpetrators testify about the abuses that had occurred mainly between 1945 and 2010, in seminaries, colleges, parishes and so on. The commission listed

almost 2,000 notifications of abuse and was convinced that between 1945 and 1985 several thousand minors were victimised. These scandals ruined the moral image of the Dutch Catholic Church and caused thousands of Catholics to leave it. The negative image of the Dutch Catholic Church has persisted.

Since the 1960s, the landscape of theological institutes has also been narrowed drastically. Whereas in the 1970s the Catholic Church in the Netherlands counted five academic theological faculties, in 2023 only two remain, in Nijmegen and Tilburg/Utrecht, and only the latter faculty is granted the authority to administer ecclesial degrees.

The changes of the last half-century equally affected the Protestant world, where numbers of churchgoers are in serious decline. Even though a few orthodox Reformed and liberal churches did not join, in 2004, an important ecumenical merger took place. The vast majority of faithful from the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands established the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, PKN). Although the Netherlands never had an official state religion, this step also had some consequences, as the traditional faith of the Dutch Royal Family is the Dutch Reformed Church, the main predecessor of the PKN. Recent evolutions there are notable on two fronts. On the one hand, critical investigations into the colonial role of the Oranges and the Dutch Reformed Church are ongoing. And here too, in the last decade, notifications of sexual abuse committed by office holders of several former Protestant denominations are under scrutiny.

An important addition to the Christian landscape of the Netherlands has to do with the presence of Orthodox Christians. Once-small communities of Eastern Orthodox (mostly immigrants from Russia and Greece during the Cold War era) and Oriental Orthodox (from Syria and Egypt) believers in the Netherlands have grown significantly and now number a quarter of a million. They are organised in more than 35 (Oriental) Orthodox parishes and monasteries, which belong to eight patriarchates, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Orthodox parishes can be found in such cities as Amsterdam, Zaandam, Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Tilburg. Since 2010, the bishops of these patriarchates have collaborated in one episcopal council, with its central see in Brussels.

In 2021, the Orthodox Churches in the Netherlands jointly founded the Saint Irenaeus Institute of Orthodox Theology, incorporated in the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies of the Radboud University in Nijmegen. Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the wave of Ukrainian exiles (Greek Catholic faithful, members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and members of the Russian Orthodox Church critical of

the conduct of the Patriarchate of Moscow) moving to Western European countries had an impact on Christianity in the Netherlands. Consequently, the number of Orthodox Christians in the Netherlands has increased, and in general the Orthodox communities distance themselves strongly from Moscow. The Amsterdam-located Russian Orthodox Parish of Saint Nicolas of Myra has publicly and canonically denounced its allegiance to Moscow and was transferred to an allegiance with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

There are also Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in the Netherlands, united in their Debre Mewi Heilige Gabriël Kerk and led by a patriarch. Ethiopian Orthodox churches are found in Amersfoort, Amsterdam and Eindhoven. A unique moment was their first joint public procession in the Netherlands during the Orthodox Feast of the Epiphany, held in Amersfoort on 19 January 2023 with the mayor present. As one of the many migrant churches in the secularised Netherlands, they try to keep the Christian faith visible in the country.

Around 1992, SKIN (Samen Kerk in Nederland), a foundation for international and migrant churches in the Netherlands, was established to promote communities being church in their own way. This platform became the central partner for the churches in their communication with the central government, local cities and other religious denominations. Estimated figures for 2018 show more than 1,000 international and migrant churches operating in the Netherlands, such as the Apostolic Church International (Amsterdam), the Église Pentecôte la Grace de Dieu, the House of Fellowship and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, to name just a few. Taken together, these churches have approximately 1 million members, and their services are held in 75 different languages. SKIN also promotes regional networks of migrant churches. In 2017, cooperation started between SKIN and the Faculty of Religion and Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU), which led to the establishment of the Centre for Theology of Migration.

Online Religion, Charity and Volunteering

Today, most institutional churches in the Netherlands have become communities in the margins of a secular society. The tradition of internationally renowned Dutch theologians, started in the 1960s, has not continued, although the Netherlands has still produced some original and influential theological thinkers, such as Professor of Sociology of the Church and Religion Walter Goddijn OFM, the liberal Protestant minister Klaas Hendriks (the 'atheistic minister'), Professor of Ecumenical and Inter-cultural Theology Anton Houtepen and the Remonstrant minister and theologian Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck.

However, many Dutch faithful no longer identify themselves with particular confessions or with classic doctrinal content. Religion itself has become, in the words of sociologists, 'liquid', flowing into areas other than the traditional ones. While many churches in the Netherlands were active in the ecumenical movement until the 1970s, the ecumenical endeavour has become less important to the large group of Christian believers, given a growing focus on personal religious experience rather than an institutional embeddedness or an emphasis on doctrinal truth. A good example of this is the enormous success of the annual public event *The Passion*, which is performed each year in a different Dutch city. Started in 2011 and broadcast in prime time on Dutch television, the show tells the story of the last days of Christ in a modern version with Dutch singers and television personalities. Also, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, several churches and religious communities in the Netherlands have started experimenting with online church meetings and services, which reinforce the scattered presence of adherents.

In the larger cities in particular, a blend of new movements is active, often with a strong focus on charity work. Statistical reports reveal a strong inter-relatedness between religious adherence and voluntary work, from both Christians initially brought up in a Roman Catholic setting and those from a Protestant background. Scholarly reports like *Tel je zegeningen* ('Count Your Blessings') demonstrate the role of the churches in building social capital in the Dutch cities. Furthermore, new, experimental forms of church building (*pioniersplekken*) have appeared, especially in the Randstad (Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague). The synod of the PKN launched this process in 2012, and by 2018 more than 100 initiatives of this kind were taking place. These include biblical storytelling in cafes, a Christian youth network, 'Urban Monasteries' (*stadskloosters*), second-hand shops and the website *Mijnkerk.nl* ('MyChurch.nl'), being the first digital church in Europe. It is interesting that roughly one-third of these experimental forms of the PKN involve typical Catholic monastic activities, like the 'Protestant' monasteries in Jorwerd and Noordwelle. A special website of the PKN (*lerenpionieren.nl*) brings all of these pioneering ways of being church together and fosters their interaction. These experimental forms have in common that they reach out to people who are searching in a non-traditional way for God or Christian understanding. Pioneering actions have also started within the other institutional churches in the Netherlands church. The Union of Baptist Communities in the Netherlands has launched several comparable activities in Dutch cities such as Amersfoort, Arnhem, The Hague, Haarlem and Rotterdam. Here also an 'Urban Monastery' (Arnhem) and several 'Community Churches' (*Buurtkerken*) play a vital role in spreading the Gospel.

The Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands has started some new initiatives, although this is induced more by current church closure or merging of parish churches than it has to do with new theological visions of pastoral ministry. Here, too, the role of volunteers in charity has become key and is more important than classic church or parochial structures, which are in constant decline. The growing presence of influential and boundary-crossing groups like Sant'Egidio witnesses to this. Particular to the Catholic Church is its global nature, which results in evolutions that sometimes differ from those in mainline Dutch Protestant churches. In 2021, a new parish church was built in Almere, a city whose population is mostly young urban professionals. This flourishing parish has an international signature, with the worshippers comprising not only people born in the Netherlands but also others from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and the United States. In 2022, a similar parish church was inaugurated in Hengelo, in the east of the Netherlands, being the result of the merger of two Catholic parishes.

With Poland becoming a member of the European Union in 2004, and especially with the non-restricted status of Polish immigrants to work in the Netherlands since 2007, Catholic Polish communities have become a significant part of the Christian landscape of the country. These parish groups, consisting often of young Polish Catholics, are situated not only in the Randstad but also in other regions, such as the cities of Breda, Heerlen, Maastricht, Nijmegen and Enschede. Currently there are six exclusively Polish parishes in the Netherlands, run by Polish priests. These communities have often taken over church buildings of former Dutch parishes. In 2009, there were more than 130,000 Polish immigrants in the Netherlands, of whom the majority were practising Catholics.

Decline of Religious Orders and Congregations

As a consequence of the secularisation and the steady decline of new religious vocations, most religious orders and congregations in the Netherlands are facing dissolution. Here, too, the international scope of Catholic structures leads to particular effects. To a growing extent, orders are merging their provinces with those in the Flemish-speaking parts of Belgium. Jesuits, Augustinians, Dominicans and Franciscans have created new, border-crossing provinces. Other congregations, especially those that were founded primarily for educational or social caring work, are on the verge of extinction. Several stopped admitting new novices decades ago, well aware of the fact that the state has taken over these activities. In 2021, there were in the Netherlands 1,520 female religious and 926 male religious (friars and fathers combined), being members of one of the 170 orders and congregations in the country. In 2003, this was respectively

7,862 and 2,996. Nonetheless, new initiatives were launched, often with coordination of the Conference of Dutch Religious (Konferentie Nederlandse Religieuzen). It aims to bring religious and lay people together in different ways, for example associates groups attached to religious communities (such as lay Marists, associates of the Friars of Maastricht or the Carmelites), lay associates living together with religious (for instance, the Redemptorist community in Wittem, the Eleousa community of the CMM Brothers in Tilburg, the international community of Chemin Neuf in Oosterhout), independent lay communities working together with a religious institute (such as the community Hooge Berkt in Bergeijk and the community De Wonne in Almelo) and independent lay communities inspired by religious traditions (for example, the Scala Community, Salesian Workers of Don Bosco, Franciscan Movement).

Some contemplative religious orders in the Netherlands also give lay people the opportunity to become an oblate of their abbey, like the Benedictine abbeys of Saint Adelbert in Egmond, Saint Benedictusberg in Vaals and Saint Willibrord in Doetinchem. Two other contemplative branches relocated their religious community life in the Netherlands. In 2009, around 30 Trappistines moved from their old convent in Berkel-Enschot (province of North Brabant) to a newly built monastery in Arnhem, in the province of Gelderland. The estate on which the climate-neutral religious complex was built was bought from the Mill Hill Missionaries and is situated in a natural environment. In 2015, four Cistercian friars founded a new community on the island of Schiermonnikoog and sold their old monastery, Sion, in Diepenveen, to the ecumenical foundation New Sion, which continues its monastic legacy and tradition as a place to meet God. The newly built monastery on the island is constructed on ecological principles. The focus on climate neutrality and the care for our planet for generations to come are new elements that are integrated in the pastoral approach and policy of almost all religious orders and congregations in the Netherlands.

Nowadays, several branches of the Franciscan Order, as well as the Dominicans, are also experimenting with mixed religious communities and 'urban monasteries'. The urban monastery San Damiano in 's-Hertogenbosch was founded in 2017 as a unique religious community of Franciscans, Capuchins, Poor Clares and Tertiaries living and working together. The male 'urban monastery' of the Dominicans in Rotterdam invites all to their regular prayers. They started the so-called Blackfriars Coffee Club as a response to the loneliness caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, they broadcast podcasts and they organise pilgrimages in a new way. Also the Dutch Jesuits, who merged in 2017 with the Flemish Jesuits, are successful with their so-called pastoral care on the internet,

with podcasts about praying (Bidden Onderweg), meditation (Gewijde Ruimte) and digital retreats (Ignatiaans bidden).

At present, the image of Christianity is scattered. The general picture is that of a rapid and ongoing decline of membership numbers and institutional structures. This decline is enhanced due to developments like the general development of secularised society, but also specific events like the abuse scandals and the Covid-19 pandemic. This decline does not allow for easy conclusions regarding the disappearance of Christianity. Increasingly, studies speak of an allocation of Christian presence, or of the liquidity of religion due to the importance of the digital world, new tendencies, a focus on charity rather than doctrine and the arrival of migrant communities.

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