

# At Your Service: A Congregational Study in Dutch Catholicism

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Religious participation is increasingly a matter of choice, and Roman Catholic Churches in The Netherlands have been approaching the consequent challenges in ways that are worthy of further reflection.<sup>1</sup> These approaches diverge from current congregational studies literature; thus, a comparative study of the Dutch situation in dialogue with congregational studies research will illumine future research and theorizing in practical theology.

Convictions that are held as self-evident are potentially the most misleading, as might be said of a dominant understanding of congregations today. Nancy Ammerman and her research team have provided insight into the importance of churches, congregations, and parishes for modern civil society.<sup>2</sup> From a European perspective, it is striking that the overall term they use is congregation. This is a common term in the North American context, but it has a specific meaning in ecclesiology. Congregationalism, as opposed to a presbyterian or episcopal church order, locates the power of the church in the local gathering, a position shared by Baptists, some Pentecostals, and Congregationalists of Calvinist origin.<sup>3</sup> This specific meaning corresponds with the distinction Ammerman makes between congregations with a “congregational” polity and congregations following a “hierarchical” polity. What is increasingly common, however, to all these congregations is that people *choose* to join them and they are places of *belonging*.<sup>4</sup> It is held as self-evident that such is the organizational structure and function of a church in modern society.

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2 Nancy T. Ammerman, with Arthur E. Farnsley/Tammy Adams/*et al.*, *Congregation and Community*, New Brunswick, NJ (Rutgers University Press) 1997.

3 Alan P.F. Sell, *Congregationalism*, in: Nicholas Lossky, et al., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva (WCC Publications) 2002, 242-244.

4 Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 354, 362.

John W. Stewart concluded his overview of American Congregational Studies with the observation: “As a rule, when most American practical theologians write about ecclesiology, there usually is an assumption that the congregation is the *locus classicus* of the Christian Church.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, other congregational studies, such as the U.S. Congregational Life Survey,<sup>6</sup> Faith Communities Today (FACT),<sup>7</sup> and the National Church Life Surveys,<sup>8</sup> reflect a similar perspective on the church as an organization. Churches are regarded as voluntary associations that are potential options for those seeking to participate. One chooses to belong. Accordingly, in a local context, churches are challenged to act as competing congregations.<sup>9</sup>

This view fits with a context where it is considered normal to be a religious person and a matter of choice to *which* congregation one belongs. Almost half of all Americans (40 percent) declare that they attend church *every week*. Observations of actual church attendance indicate that those interviewed have probably overestimated their reported church attendance; nevertheless, this over-reporting itself indicates the social standard of a churchgoing citizen.<sup>10</sup>

Congregational studies outside the United States will often reveal a less vital church life than US congregational studies.<sup>11</sup> From an American perspective, Dutch society in particular can only appear as a radically secularized society, where serious church affiliation is becoming a minority phenomenon. A closer look reveals, however, that religion is not dead in the Netherlands, and churches, specifically Roman Catholic parishes, are developing alternatives to the congregational scheme. What follows is an introduction to the Dutch situation, a study of Roman Catholic Parishes in the Netherlands from an organizational perspective, and a comparative theological reflection.

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5 John W. Stewart, The Emergence of Congregational Studies in Oldline American Protestantism, in: *International Journal of Practical Theology* 6 (2002), 253-287.

6 [www.uscongregations.com](http://www.uscongregations.com).

7 [www.fact.hartsem.edu](http://www.fact.hartsem.edu).

8 [www.ncls.org.au](http://www.ncls.org.au).

9 Such is the claim of the new paradigm in sociology of religion. See: Rodney Stark/Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith. Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, Berkeley (University of California Press) 2000.

10 Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*, London (Darton, Longman & Todd) 2002, 28; C. Kirk Hadaway/Penny Long Marler, How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measurement, in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, 2005, 307-322.

11 A group of British researchers, therefore, advocate an interest in parish communities as fascinating “tribes,” to be studied regardless of their success or relevance for the larger community. Mathew Guest/Karin Trusting/Linda Woodhead, eds., *Congregational Studies in the UK*, Aldershot (Ashgate) 2004.

## 1. Persistence of Religion in Secularized Dutch Society

Clearly, regular Roman Catholic parishes in the Netherlands have not, thus far, taken full advantage of global religious persistence. Other mainline Christian churches in Dutch society are not doing much better, as has been recorded extensively by the Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands and the long-term study of social-cultural developments in the Netherlands.<sup>12</sup> The recent church merger that resulted in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands has also been a downsizing operation. The future of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands appears to be especially bleak. Amongst the younger generation (the under 30s, the so-called Generation Y), the proportion of Catholics has decreased dramatically. Only 13 percent affirm that they belong to a denomination, namely the Roman Catholic Church, compared with 25 percent of Generation X (aged 30-40).<sup>13</sup> The number of Catholics is set to fall dramatically as their average age increases. From a congregational perspective, the church simply fails to recruit the younger generation.

An important factor in this respect is the attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church as an institution. The findings of a recent poll suggest that the overall image of the Roman Catholic Church is negative.<sup>14</sup> According to the European Values Study, the Dutch level of trust in churches is the lowest in Europe, after that of the Czech Republic. In the Netherlands, the churches are considered the institutions that are the least trustworthy.<sup>15</sup> The popularity of the Roman Catholic Church, being the pre-eminent religious institution, is decreasing.

Yet, the religious climate in the Netherlands is changing. Judging from the attention given to religious themes both by the media and by science, religion is even back on form in the Netherlands. "God lives" was the title of a feature about the "return of religion" after the "God is dead" age.<sup>16</sup> A few years earlier, in 1997, the Dutch book week was entitled "My God." This event was regarded as a turning point in the recognition of the role of religion in Dutch society. Appreciation of the Roman Catholic tradition is growing in particular, as was indicated by journalist Monic

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12 Manfred te Grotenhuis/Peer Scheepers, Churches in Dutch. Causes of Religious Disaffiliation in the Netherlands, in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, 2001, 591-606.

13 Joris Kregting/José Sanders, "Waar Moeten Ze het Zoeken?" *Vindplaatsen van Religie en Zingeving bij Jongvolwassenen [Rapport nr. 510]*, Nijmegen (KASKI Beleidsonderzoek naar Godsdienst en Levensbeschouwing) 2003, 6.

14 Image Poll by Bureau Intomart, under the authority of the television magazine of the Catholic Broadcasting Association, *Studio KRO-Magazine*, 28 June 2003.

15 Loek Halman/Anthony M. Abela, *The European Values Study: A Third Wave. Source Book of the 1999/2000 European Values Study Surveys*, Tilburg (WORC/Tilburg University Press) 2001.

16 *Vrij Nederland*, 17 April 2003, [www.vn.nl](http://www.vn.nl).

Slingerland's and writer Willem Jan Ottens's conversions to Catholicism.<sup>17</sup> A great future lies ahead for the religious past.<sup>18</sup>

These various indicators suggest some changes in religious life, both globally and in The Netherlands. Firstly, from a global perspective, the importance of religion in the public domain is increasing. In various countries, politics are penetrated by religious discourse and religious organizations, and there has been a growth in organized religion, such as Islam and Catholicism, in various modernizing societies in Africa and Asia. With migration, this is more or less reflected in western societies as well. Minority religions and migrant parishes are, therefore, growing in the Netherlands, as in many other countries.

Secondly, people's individual religious interest is anything but dying, as has been demonstrated even in highly secularized societies like the Dutch one. People still participate in *rites de passage* and, to a somewhat lesser extent than before, imagine a life before this one and hereafter, believe in miracles, and pray, even if they are of the younger generation.<sup>19</sup> Is the hunger for religiosity, spirituality, and rituals growing in Dutch society? This is a development that cannot be confirmed. What can be confirmed is the increase in general public interest, while at the same time the character of choice dominates religious life. The phrase "save religion for the church" no longer applies. Religion is becoming freely available outside of religious institutions. People are making their own choices from the range of religious traditions available, and they are following religious trends but not necessarily taking part in religious communities. Religious themes in films, television commercials, computer games, and music reveal that inspiration is drawn from a sizeable reservoir of religious narratives, symbols, and rituals. In short, popular imagination is shaped by the tremendous cultural inheritance left by religious traditions. The Catholic tradition, with its visual and ritual elements, is appreciated widely in this respect.

Last but not least, important minorities are very much involved in so-called committed communities. A characteristic of these communities is that people choose to take part in them. They are not usually born into them. These booming home communities, non-denominational churches, and small Christian communities are associated with a whole range of new religious movements. Only a small part of church leavers join the evangelical, charismatic, and neo-Catholic groups, however, and these groups do not have great appeal amongst the non-Christian Dutch population.

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17 See: Arjan Broers/Staf Hellemans/Jacques Maas/Corja Menken-Bekius/Andreas Prokopf/Willem Putman, *Nieuwe Katholieken*, Tiel (Lannoo) 2000. Broers *et al.* offer a scientific exploration of the trend that these conversions appear to indicate.

18 This renewed attention is also reflected in scholarly interest in the topic of religion. After a few decades of marginal interest in the scientific study of religion, a budget of 5.4 million euro has been reserved for the interdisciplinary study of new and continued participation in religion. See [www.nwo.nl/future](http://www.nwo.nl/future) for the brochure of the vast government-financed study programme, *The Future of the Religious Past*.

In this context, where religious participation is increasingly a matter of choice, Dutch parishes are struggling to find their way. What strategic options do they have at their disposal and what choices do they actually make? This study indicates that they are taking a route that deserves special attention. It is a different route from the one stressing congregational life that dominates scholarly literature. One might say that the Dutch route is a turn to a religious service organization.

## 2. From Community to Organization

For a period of nearly a century, church participation was self-evident among Dutch Catholics. Being part of the Catholic subculture meant participating in the local parish. Within this subculture, the Catholic Church held a religious monopoly. The restoration of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands since the second half of the nineteenth century had been successful to the extent that community and parish could be regarded as identical.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the Dutch religious situation has been characterized by two developments: the declining power of the established religious regimes and the modest persistence of individual religious (not necessarily Christian) beliefs, experiences, and practices.<sup>20</sup> Cross-national surveys, such as the European (and World) Values Study and the International Social Survey Program indicate that the Dutch religious profile can be positioned between that of the Scandinavian countries, on the one hand, and the former East Germany and Czech Republic, on the other. Church adherence is low; Christian beliefs are not popular; relatively few people consider themselves religious; and non-Christian beliefs, such as in reincarnation, are not as popular in the Netherlands as they are in the USA, Great Britain, and France. Most people do not consider themselves members of a church, but neither do they consider themselves completely irreligious.<sup>21</sup>

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19 J.W. Becker/J.S.J. de Wit, *Secularisatie in de Jaren Negentig*, Kerklidmaatschap, Verandering in Opvattingen en een Prognose, Rijswijk (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau) 2000, 40-41; Kregting/Sanders, *Waar Moeten Ze het Zoeken*.

20 Becker/De Wit, *Secularisatie*.

21 For an extensive cross-national study on secularization, using data of the 1990 European Values Survey, see: Johan Verweij, *Secularisering Tussen Feit en Fictie. Een Internationaal Vergelijkend Onderzoek naar Determinanten van Religieuze Betrokkenheid*, Tilburg (Tilburg University Press, 1998); Loek Halman/Thorleif Petterson/Johan Verweij, *The Religious Factor in Contemporary Society: The Differential Impact of Religion on the Private and Public Sphere in Comparative Perspective*, in: Wil Arts/Loek Halman, eds., *New Directions in Quantitative Comparative Sociology* Leiden (Brill) 1999, 141-160. The data of the 1999/2000 European Values Survey are used in: Loek Halman/Veerle Draulans, eds., *Religious Beliefs and Practices in Contemporary Europe*, in: Wil Arts/Loek

The Netherlands has seen a considerable growth in the number of non-practicing members of religious communities. Among Roman Catholics, the traditionally high figures of church attendance began decreasing much earlier and faster than the actual decline in church membership.<sup>22</sup> Although nominal membership is not as normative as it is in Nordic countries with their traditions of state churches, a large portion of the Dutch population still has a distant relationship with their church.

This changing context provides an impetus for the renewal of church organization. In this analysis, I will explore the present situation with the tools of organizational analysis, seeking insight regarding religious practice, church life, and ecclesiology in the Roman Catholic Church of The Netherlands.

### An Organizational Perspective

In the present situation, it is useful to take an organizational perspective on the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>23</sup> The Roman Catholic Church is a social unit that was established for an explicit purpose: to spread the Word and to provide the sacraments through its ministry. This does not imply, however, that the parish can rightly be considered an organization on its own. A parish is not an independent congregation, but a subdivision of a larger organization. The world's oldest multinational organization may be considered a *concern*.<sup>24</sup> This concern consists of dioceses, led by bishops who have the authority to manage affairs in their own domain, within canonical boundaries. A diocese usually consists of parishes.

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Halman, eds., *European Values at the Turn of the Millennium*, Leiden/Boston (Brill), 2004, 283-316. See also [www.europeanvalues.nl](http://www.europeanvalues.nl). For the International Social Survey Program, see: Detlef Pollack, *Religiousness Inside and Outside the Church in Selected Post-Communist Countries of Central and Eastern Europe*, in: *Social Compass* 50, 2003, 321-334. See also [www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org). My characterization of the Dutch position follows the typology by: Hermann Denz, *Religiosität und Kirchlichkeit im Wandel. Versuch einer Typologie*, in: Isidor Baumgartner/Christian Fries/András Máté-Tóth (Hg.), *Den Himmel offen halten*, Innsbruck/Wien (Tyrolia-Verlag) 2000, 15-21.

- 22 Jos Becker, *De Vaststelling van de Kerkelijke Gezindte in Enquêtes. 40% of 60% Buitenkerkelijken?* [Werkdocument 92], Den Haag (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau) 2003; Jolanda Massaar-Remmerswaal/Ton Bernts, *Kerncijfers 2003 uit de Kerkelijke Statistiek van het Rooms-Katholiek Kerkgenootschap in Nederland* [Memorandum nr. 329, September 2004], Nijmegen (KASKI Beleidsonderzoek naar Godsdienst en Levensbeschouwing) 2003. These findings oppose the observation in: Grace Davie, *From Obligation to Consumption. Patterns of Religion in Northern Europe at the Start of the Twenty First Century*, 2002, 7 in: [www.stalbans.anglicans/daviepres.htm](http://www.stalbans.anglicans/daviepres.htm).
- 23 Nicholas J. Demerath, III, et al., eds., *Sacred Companies. Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, New York/Oxford (Oxford University Press) 1998.
- 24 Michael Fleck/Oliver Dyma, *Bischöfe als mittleres Management des Weltkonzerns Kirche*, in: Bernd Jochen Hilberath/Bernhard Nitsche (Hg.), *Ist Kirche planbar? Organisationsentwicklung und Theologie in Interaktion*, Mainz (Grünewald) 2002.

In the Netherlands, parishes are under the collegiate administration of a parish priest and a parish council. The parish priest may cooperate with one or more professional lay ministers (“pastoral workers”). They see pastoral policy as their common concern, and this collective responsibility is officially confirmed. The parish council consists of parishioners appointed by the bishop and is chaired (since 1983) by the parish priest. This council is responsible for the management of the parish and also advises on pastoral matters. A separate body may exist to perform the latter task: the “parish assembly” or the “pastoral group.” Often, these lay bodies have an important say in the policy of the parish, if only because, nowadays, one man is usually the parish priest of several parishes. Much pastoral work is carried out and coordinated by volunteers, comparable to the way Reformed churches function. In this way, an earlier tendency to regard the church organization as primarily consisting of clerics is counteracted.

Although the parish may *also* be formally considered the work area of a bishop’s division manager, it makes sense to regard the parish as a relatively autonomous organization within a larger concern. This local organization is at least partially led by lay persons.

### The Ambivalence of Membership

In relation to any formal organization, four basic categories of persons can be distinguished: the managers of the organization, the “ordinary” members, the public-in-contact, and the public-at-large, or the society in which the organization operates.<sup>25</sup> The management of the parish is controlled by the parish priest and the parish council. But who are the members? There is an important difference between nominal membership and membership according to sociological standards. Fortunately, there are data to support this distinction and to quantify the different types of members.

All those who are baptized as Catholics are formally part of this church. This formal belonging is reflected in the results of Statistics Netherlands’ study, asking random samples of Dutch citizens about their religious affiliation. When asked in a single phrase to which denomination they belong, including the option “none,” virtually all nominal Catholics identify themselves as Catholics. Not all, however, consider themselves church members. This is reflected in the considerably lower figures of Catholics identified in other research projects, such as those of the Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands. Their divergent figures can be explained by a different method of questioning. First, they asked

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25 Peter M. Blau/W. Richard Scott, *Formal Organizations. A Comparative Approach*, London (Routledge & Kegan Paul) 1963.

respondents, “Do you consider yourself to belong to a church?” Then they asked: “Which church?” To put the issue in technical terms: these surveys used a two-step-question indicator for church membership, instead of the one-step-question that is used by Statistics Netherlands.

In 1998, the same random Dutch sample was asked both the two-step question and, later, the one-step question. Only 72 percent of the Dutch Catholics who had affirmed that they belonged to the Catholic Church, expressed that they considered themselves to belong to a church, more specifically to the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>26</sup> The findings of secondary analyses indicated that these differences are caused by a fairly distinct category of respondents who believe in God or a higher power, but keep the church and its moral authority at a distance.<sup>27</sup> Thus, 27 percent of Catholics are willing to confess their religion, whereas they also express their feeling that they do not belong to this church, or any other church. They are “believing without belonging” in a particular sense.<sup>28</sup>

This evidence supports my thesis that a considerable proportion of Dutch Catholics probably do not regard themselves as members of the Roman Catholic Church, but as part of the public to which the church delivers services.<sup>29</sup> A quarter of all the so-called inconsistent respondents attended church more than once a year. The others claimed that they never attend services.<sup>30</sup> The Catholics among them were, however, at least baptized in this church. They may still attend weddings, funerals, and Christmas services. They may have been married in the church, and their relatives will probably ask the church to provide a funeral service when their time comes.

People appear to have varying relationships with the parish. A majority of the parishioners by ascription prefer to participate to a limited degree, be it for their whole lives, or only during a certain phase. Sometimes they need the church to pray, to commemorate, to celebrate, or to include them as part of a larger community. Many parishioners do not see themselves as members of a congregation, but as the potential clients of a service provider or, even more generally, as the supporters of an institution that provides services that are regarded as important by society at large. Only a minority is involved more intensely.

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26 Becker, *De Vaststelling*, 14.

27 Becker, *De Vaststelling*, 22-23; Rob Eisinga/Albert Felling, *Church Membership in the Netherlands, 1960-1987*, in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, 1990, 108-112.

28 Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945. Believing without Belonging*, Oxford/Cambridge (Blackwell) 1994.

29 Becker, *De Vaststelling*, 23.

30 Becker, *De Vaststelling*, 16.



### The Parish as a Mixed Type

A classical typology of organizations that gives considerable weight to the distinction between members and clients is of use, in this study.<sup>31</sup> Applying the *cui bono* (who is the prime beneficiary?) criterion, Blau and Scott distinguished four types of organization. In a *business concern*, such as a firm or a private army, the power, or the revenues, of the top of the organization is primary. In a *mutual benefit organization*, such as an interest group or a society of friends, the interests of the members are central. In a *service organization*, such as hospitals and schools, the public-in-contact is dominant. In a *commonweal organization*, such as public institutions, the public-at-large dominates as the prime beneficiary.<sup>32</sup>

All four types exist in the religious field. A shrine that is exploited by a priest is an example of a business concern; a society of believers (Blau and Scott's "religious sects") exemplifies a mutual benefit association; churches that are used incidentally by a large public for services and ceremonies are service organizations; and state churches are religious commonweal organizations.

What type of organization is the contemporary Dutch Roman Catholic parish? We have to distinguish carefully between ecclesiological theory and practice and, after that, we have to acknowledge the ways in which theory and practice are interrelated. The parish is designed to preach the gospel to the faithful and to administer the sacraments, especially confession and the Eucharist. Following the Second Vatican Council, the parish is also considered instrumental for the faithful in fulfilling their mission in the world. In this way, a key notion of the Council is translated to the parish level: the faithful are not only receivers of sacraments, but also part of the people of God.<sup>33</sup> The parish is intended to gather the faithful, in particular in the celebration of the Eucharist, and to empower them to do their Christian duties in the world. That is the theory; now the practice.

In the era of the religious pillars, the Dutch Roman Catholic Church held a position that resembled the position of a state church. Within the Catholic subculture the Church acted as a monopolist. On the other hand, within Dutch society as a whole the Roman Catholic acted somewhat as a sect.<sup>34</sup> A militant attitude was expressed and fostered by massive

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31 In this way, I avoid becoming too involved in the complicated church-sect debate. The task of classifying organizational patterns is not an end in itself. Different purposes require different typologies. See, for example: Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion. The Social Context* (4th ed.), Belmont, CA (Wadsworth) 1992, 142.

32 Blau/Scott, 42-45.

33 Vatican II. *Lumen Gentium*. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, nos. 9-17.

34 Erik Sengers, "Although We Are Catholics, We Are Dutch." *The Transition of the Dutch Catholic Church from Sect to Church as an Explanation for its Growth and Decline*, in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, 2004, 129-139.

church attendance. When this system imploded, parishes moved slightly in the direction of congregations. Now, a new phase is starting for the Dutch Catholic parish.

The legacy of the pillar society in contemporary Dutch society, where religion is an option, consists of a series of religious organizations that present their services to a more or less interested audience. In this context, the contemporary Dutch parish is a mixed type: part mutual benefit, part service.<sup>35</sup> Catholic theology provides room for both. This is illustrated by the divergent ways in which it uses the keyword *communio*. The post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church values “the community of the faithful” (*communio fidelium*) as well as “the participation of individuals in the life of the triune God” mediated by the word and sacraments, especially the Eucharist (*communio sanctorum*).<sup>36</sup> In the former sense of *communio*, the community consists of members belonging to the association; in the latter, community is experienced (as in Victor Turner’s *communitas*) by persons taking part in a collective ritual that visualizes, enacts, and fosters a common faith. In this case, the Roman Catholic Church may function as an institution providing a service to those who want to live as Christians. In the former, the prime beneficiary is the church community; in the latter, the beneficiary is the public-in-contact, which enjoys the services that are provided.

Each organization type has its structural strengths and weaknesses. To the extent that a parish operates as a *mutual benefit association*, its members, such as volunteers and regular participants, dominate the organization. The main aim is to serve the interests of the members. Mutual support is encouraged; client behavior is discouraged. The organization’s intention is that those who are interested (the served public) become participating members. A typical strength of the parish that positions itself as a faith community is that it provides the parishioners with the experience of being part of a Christian community of committed believers who support each other. Its typical weakness is its closure towards non-believers and the exclusion of apostates. In the Roman Catholic Church, it is held that the heretic and the sinner excommunicate themselves. This conforms with the image of a religious group that seeks to safeguard its identity.

To the extent that a parish operates as (a division of) a *service organization*, the public-in-contact, or more specifically, the interests of the served public, dominate the organization. Client behavior is expected. The parish views itself as offering religious services, comparable to a mental health institute offering psychological services. As in other so-called “people

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35 Kees de Groot, *Religieuze Organisaties in Meervoud: Mogelijkheden voor “de Kerk” in de Huidige Nederlandse Samenleving* in: *Praktische Theologie* 28, 2001, 5-24; Kees de Groot, *Kerkelijk Management met een Missie*, in: *Praktische Theologie* 31, 2004, 299-314.

36 Ton van Eijk, *Teken van Aanwezigheid, Zoetermeer (Meinema)* 2000, 158-175.

processing organizations,” clients are only part of the organization during the service delivery. A typical weakness is the asymmetrical relationship between church attendants and pastors. Nevertheless, care for the faithful is central in a parish that functions as a service organization, unlike in a church that operates as a business concern. The parish that positions itself as a service organization may assure the accessibility of the Christian tradition, even to those who are not willing to become members of a specific society. This can be considered a strength.

### 3. The Challenge to Be Accessible and Christian

In a context where there is continuing public interest in rituals and spirituality, and a continuing negative attitude towards the institutional Roman Catholic Church, parishes are faced with the challenge of combining the best of both worlds. The parish has to have a clear religious identity, which should not be too strictly Roman-Catholic. It has to be accessible, but not without obligations. Supported by public interest, the policy of some dioceses, among which is the Archdiocese of Utrecht, is to promote a service-minded parish. Other dioceses promote a congregational model. Some bishops explicitly condemn “religious shopping”, which is facilitated by experiments in other dioceses. Diocesan politics and attitudes thus differ in their responses to the challenges confronting them.

In order to investigate the positioning of Roman Catholic parishes in this respect, we conducted a survey in which parish councils and assemblies were asked about the strategic choices they make in positioning their parishes. The results, which have been discussed elsewhere,<sup>37</sup> indicated that parish councils do not make a sharp distinction between the position of the mutual benefit association and the service organization. An exploratory factor analysis suggests, however, that they do differ with respect to two issues.

The first issue is the extent to which a parish is perceived as an accessible community for religious affairs, where one can come and go as one likes, according to one’s personal needs. Such a community has a Christian identity, but is open to everyone. We ranked parishes on a scale we called *perceived accessibility*, varying from “applies strongly” to “does not apply (or hardly).” The five strongest items on this scale characterize

37 The results discussed here were found in survey research that our research team conducted in spring 2003. The questionnaire contained 74 statements and was mailed to a representative sample of parishes in all seven Dutch dioceses. In the accompanying letter, we requested that a few members of the parish council or assembly collectively complete the questionnaire about the positioning of the parish. After receiving one follow-up letter, 103 parishes responded (47.9 %), which is satisfactory for a postal survey. Factor analysis was carried out by Joris Kregting. More details can be found in: Kees de Groot/Erik Borgman/Joris Kregting, *The Positioning of the Parish in a Context of Individualisation*, in: *Social Compass* 52, 2004, 211-223.

the basic ideas of a parish upon which these councils disagreed: “Our parish offers something to hold on to, comfort, and a momentary sense of solidarity”; “Our parish wishes to respond to the interest in spirituality”; “We try to support new forms of religious life”; “Our outreach program supports all kinds of people”; and “What we offer connects to the questions ordinary people have about the meaning of their lives, especially when they’re experiencing important life events.”<sup>38</sup> Parish councils differ in their perceptions of the accessibility of their parishes. Does the parish offer spirituality, support, and programs for initiation rites? Does it operate in a style that responds to the interests of the people? Does it meet the needs of all kinds of people, including incidental visitors, who believe there is “something beyond”? Some 75 percent of the parish councils respond in an affirmative way to statements saying that their parish is accessible to anyone with religious needs.

The second issue is the extent to which a parish is seen as a community that strongly stresses its distinctive Christian features, a community that expects parishioners to have a real religious interest and be prepared to participate. Such a parish would express strong ideas about its mission. Commitment to the Christian tradition is central. We ranked parishes on a scale we called *Christian profile*. Items in this scale were: “When you listen well, you’ll find that people have a longing for God”; “Nowadays, more than ever, a deep religious faith is required”; and “Jesus Christ should be central in every parish activity.” Favorite mottos were: “Unless one is born anew, one cannot see the kingdom of God” and “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”<sup>39</sup> Parish councils also differ in their appreciation of such a Christian identity. Is it really our mission to be a *Christian faith* community? Do we expect people to relate to that seriously and to participate actively? A category of 30 percent identifies with a strong Christian profile: they affirm statements that their parish demand active participation and strong motivation.

Parishes are challenged, on the one hand, to address the (implicit) religious needs of the general public (including secularized Catholics) at the risk of losing their specifically Christian identity. On the other hand, parishes are called on to stress their distinctive features, at the risk of losing contact with all those who are baptized in this church and who do not identify completely with the Roman Catholic Church or feel the need to participate frequently. The former strategy may end in a church that vanishes; the latter in a church that is reduced to a sect.

Parishes are experiencing the strategic challenge of holding on to a Christian profile while trying to stay in contact with the public. By cor-

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38 Factor loadings varied from 0.60 to 0.70. The remaining 16 statements had factor loadings > 0.45.

39 Factor loadings varied from 0.60 to 0.69. The remaining 8 statements had factor loadings > 0.45. These two components explained 36.2 % of the total variance.

relating the two scales, we have found three common ways of dealing with this dilemma, plus a fourth way that is less common.<sup>40</sup>

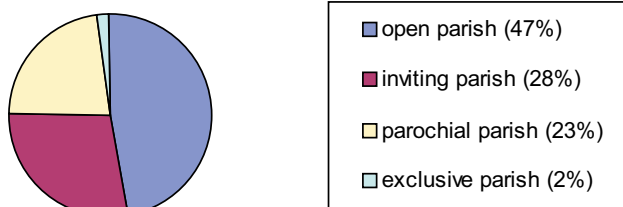
Correlation between Perceived Accessibility and Christian Profile,  
reported in percentages (N = 90)

		<i>Christian profile:</i>		Total (N)
		Low	High	
<i>Perceived accessibility:</i>	Low	23	2	25 (23)
	High	47	28	75 (67)
Total (N)		70 (63)	30 (27)	100 (90)

In light of these survey results, we present an empirical classification that adds nuance to the analytical typology we introduced at the outset. In the upper left, we find parishes that combine a low score on both scales (termed “parochial parishes”). Down left, we find parishes that perceive themselves as accessible, while they do not identify with a Christian profile (“open parishes”). The down-right cell consists of parishes combining “accessibility” with “Christian profile” (“inviting parishes”). The upper right cell, which would consist of “exclusive parishes” favoring “Christian profile” and rejecting “accessibility,” is almost empty.

The chart below gives a graphic representation and interpretation of the data in the table above.

### Parish types



With this overall perspective on frequency, the open parish being the most frequent and the exclusive parish being the least, we turn now to descriptions of the four types.

<sup>40</sup> We combined the two scores from “Does not apply (or hardly)” and “Applies to some extent” as a low score. “Applies” and “Applies strongly” were combined as a high score.

### Parochial

The *parochial parish* combines low accessibility with a weak Christian profile. This accounts for almost a quarter of Dutch parishes. A person cannot easily start to participate in this parish. Nor is it clear what to expect, or easy to know what is expected. In a way, this is typical of a *community* as described by Ferdinand Tönnies. A community is simply present (*zuhanden*).<sup>41</sup> It was present before and is meant to endure. One does not “choose” to participate; one is born into a parish. As soon as one starts to think about the identity of a community, it stops being a community. Being part of a community speaks for itself.

This parish does not offer services or try to attract members. This parish does not have an identity profile or a mission statement. This parish simply *is*. Sympathetic as this Heideggerian attitude may be, this is probably the type of parish that gave the adjective “parochial” its meaning. According to the Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1987), “People who are *parochial* think only about their own local affairs and interests.”<sup>42</sup>

In contemporary Dutch society, the parochial parish combines the worst of both worlds. With no reconstruction of the organization, the parish continues to rely on the loyal participation of the faithful. As long as there is a local Catholic subculture, and competition from sports clubs and cultural activities is weak, these parishes may survive. These are probably not vital parishes, and their future is insecure. In this case, models of cooperation and mergers only conceal the fact that there is no future in their marginal position.

### Open

The *open parish* is accessible, or supposedly so, and does not have a strong Christian profile. This accounts for almost half of Dutch parishes. This type fits in well with modern consumerism. Any person looking for rituals, spirituality, or simply a sense of belonging is welcome. The aim of the parish is to tune in with the common vague notion that there is “something out there.” Prayer, Bible, sacraments, and Christian tradition are held as important; however, sensitivity to what is offensive in individualized, pluralized, and secularized Dutch society is high. The door is open. All persons are allowed to decide for themselves to what extent they will participate in or identify with the Roman Catholic Church.

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41 Zygmunt Bauman, *Community. Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge (Polity Press) 2001, 7-20.

42 John Sinclair, ed. in chief, *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* [developed and comp. in English Dept., Univ. of Birmingham], London/Glasgow (Collins) 1987, 1043.

The open parish gives priority to the accessibility of the parish. Such parishes may attract people with lively celebrations, an active social network, and a keen sense of contemporary religious consciousness. In villages and parts of towns where the Catholic parish is (still) strongly connected with the local community, this may be a successful way of operating. The strength of such parishes lies in the commitment of the volunteering parishioners. Their main concern is recruiting volunteers from the new generation for new activities.

### Inviting

The *inviting parish* combines high accessibility with a strong Christian profile. More than a quarter of Dutch parishes seek to combine the best of both worlds. Any person, whether highly motivated or not, who is searching for “something more” is welcome, but the parish organization itself is characterized by a clearly identifiable Christian identity. The Catholic notion of a natural longing for God is clearly present. The parish is there to cultivate this longing and shape it into a truly Christian faith. This is, in the end, the central purpose. Such a parish does not consider it a problem that people behave as clients; they are welcomed and invited to become confessing and practicing Christians.

The inviting parish aims to remain open without forsaking its identity. It has a strong theological motivation to be accessible. This position is defended by authors who believe there is a future for a church that cares for its spiritual traditions and offers elements of these traditions to the faithful and non-believers, those of other faiths, ex-believers, and believers-to-be.<sup>43</sup> Theological and management skills are required to put this into practice. If these are present, this strategy may work successfully.

### Exclusive

A fourth approach is the combination of a strong Christian profile with low accessibility. This *exclusive parish* has a discernible identity; it presupposes strong commitment and discourages a “shopping” mentality. This parish is less inclined to respond to a general wish for spirituality and rituals, offering a clear Christian message instead. Such a parish is not an institute for the delivery of “spiritual” services. One is only welcome if one is willing to become a committed Christian. Our parish is the way to God.

This approach was virtually absent in our sample, however. Only two parishes consistently favored the items of the Christian profile and rejected the items of “perceived accessibility.” Most parishes that perceived them-

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43 Staf Hellemans/Willem Putman/Jozef Wissink (red.), *Een Kerk met Toekomst? De Katholieke Kerk in Nederland 1960-2020*, Zoetermeer (Meinema) 2003.

selves as having a strong Christian identity also thought of themselves as welcoming all kinds of “seekers” and “shoppers”.

#### 4. Beyond Parochialism

A considerable portion of Roman Catholic parishes can still be characterized as parochial in the sense that they have neither a strong Christian profile, nor a service orientation. There are signs, however, that parishes are attempting to get beyond such parochialism. The direction of these attempts is different from that of the religious congregations that reward membership. Churches are moving more in the direction of the open and inviting types discovered in our empirical study. The majority of Dutch parishes value accessibility and have an organizational orientation that resembles a service institution. The strength in this is that parishes are willing to respond to the desires of those who do not consider themselves devout Catholics, but nevertheless require spiritual, religious, and ceremonial services from the institution.

Only one third of these parishes (a quarter of all parishes) combine the accessible attitude with a strong view of their Christian profile, which may be considered a strength of the mutual benefit organization. The situation is precarious, however; the majority of Dutch parishes seem not to have a clear concept of their unique faith. Parishes that are willing to be open without having a clear concept of what they have to offer will have difficulties in reaching their audience with their specific services. Only as long as competition is absent, will there be a market for their services. The challenge for these parishes is to combine their service orientation with a conviction that no other institution provides the same quality as they do.

Support for the strategy of the service institution is, surprisingly, provided by the rational choice hypotheses on strictness and niche-straddling, elaborated by John Auping.<sup>44</sup> According to rational choice theory, strict churches are growing because they reward members' investments and discourage “free riding.” However, churches, such as the Roman Catholic, serving several niches have a competitive advantage. Under specific conditions, the negative effects of diminishing strictness can be compensated by a church's ability to integrate sect-like reform movements into the larger structure of a church.<sup>45</sup> For the period 1970-1995, analysis of church

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44 John A. Auping, *The Dynamics of Growth in Christian Churches*, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Norfolk, VA, 2003, 19.

45 Roger Finke and Patricia Witberg, *Organizational Renewal from Within. Explaining Revivalism and Reform in the Roman Catholic Church*, in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, 2000, 154-170.



statistics gathered in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* shows that – as far as nominal membership is concerned – the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands has been successful in providing services to different categories of believers, from liberal to strict.<sup>46</sup> Whereas the mostly liberal, mainline Protestant churches have lost members, partly to the new, stricter sects and churches, the one Roman Catholic Church has succeeded in providing services to liberal, moderate, conservative, and strict believers. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church has not been diminished as much as the average Protestant denomination.

### A European model?

In serving a variety of believers, Dutch Catholic parishes may reflect a European trend in the modernization of religion.<sup>47</sup> Many sociologists, amongst them Grace Davie, have pointed out that the American situation reflects a tendency for churches to operate as voluntary associations.<sup>48</sup> The results of the present study show the dominance of the service organization in Roman Catholic Churches in The Netherlands. A majority of the Roman Catholic parishes do not see themselves as associations to which one *belongs*, but as institutions that *do* things for people. In order to explain this important difference, I would like to unearth two classical *ideal types*. Although some may find them outdated by subsequent, more refined typologies, the general distinction made by Max Weber between the concept of the church that prevails in Europe and the sect that prevails in the United States may still be useful.<sup>49</sup> To rephrase his famous words: the church, unlike the sect, acts as though it controls access to the eternal goods of salvation, which are presented to *every individual*. Normally, one does not join this church voluntarily as one joins a club or society, but rather one is born into it. The non-religiously qualified and the ungodly alike are subjected to its discipline. The sect, on the other hand, is characterized as a community of people qualified by their own personal charisma.<sup>50</sup> These concepts are still instrumental as heuristic concepts.

Further research is necessary to test the validity of this general distinction between the so-called European and American models, as Grace Davie suggests. In the meantime, an active discussion with this perspective

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46 David B. Barrett/George T. Jurian/Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia. A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religion in the Modern World* (2 Vols.), Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2001.

47 Davie, *Europe*, 1-26.

48 Davie, *Europe*, 36.

49 Max Weber, *Die protestantischen Sekten und die Geist des Kapitalismus*, in: *Die protestantische Ethik I. Eine Aufsatzsammlung*, Gütersloh (Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn) 1984 (1920), 279-317.

50 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tübingen (J.C.B. Mohr) 1976 (1922), 692-693.

can be instructive for both practical theology and sociology of religion. Among European authors, one may find more proponents of a plural church or service-institution.<sup>51</sup> Rational choice theory, which points to the success of strict churches or exclusive firms, has an American origin, and is extensively discussed in American journals, such as the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.<sup>52</sup> This focus is less discussed in Europe, where the plural and service church types are more common.

I would not, however, simply join the proponents of an open church. Against the general background of an unchurched European population, the model of an open church, without further specifications, is not very convincing. An important difference with the “church” that Weber had in mind has to be reckoned with. The service church does not have the power to socialize a religious “habitus” that the state church has. When religious regimes have crumbled away, individual religious affiliation can no longer be an obligation, but only an option. Religious institutions, confronted with this situation, may opt for the position of a voluntary association, but also for the position of a service institute. Both cases differ from the position of the state church, but the service position still tries to remain accessible to everyone within a given context in which the obligation for individuals has changed into an option. This raises another question: can the church remain an institution that offers services when its power has dwindled?

### The Service Church Imperative

The American (although originally Austrian) sociologist Peter Berger coined a fitting term for the social obligation that people face in modernizing societies to make personal choices with regard to religion: the heretical imperative.<sup>53</sup> There are, however, several types of choices. One option is to join a certain congregation; another is to receive a religious service. My suggestion is that the United States Protestant situation reflects a congregational tendency. Here, religious institutions operate under the condition of a congregational imperative. It is noteworthy that, in the United States, Roman Catholic parishes are often regarded as an exception:

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51 See, for example, Hermann Steinkamp, *Gemeinden jenseits der Pfarrei*, in: Hans-Georg Ziebertz (Hg.), *Christliche Gemeinde vor einem neuen Jahrtausend*, Weinheim (Deutscher Studien Verlag) 1997, 233-246; Hellemans, *Kerk met Toekomst?*; Joep de Hart, *Kerkelijke en Niet-kerkelijke Religie*, in: *Praktische Theologie* 26, 1999, 277-296.

52 See, for example, Rodney Stark/Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith. Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, Berkeley (University of California Press), 2000; cf. the online *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, [www.religjournal.com](http://www.religjournal.com). The opposition between the United States and Europe is criticized in Massimo Introvigne/Rodney Stark, *Religious Competition and Revival in Italy. Exploring European Exceptionalism*, in: *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 1, 2005, Article 5.

53 Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative. Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, New York (Anchor Press/Doubleday) 1980.

“[T]he Catholic Church remains popular even though Catholics tend to perceive many free-riders in their congregations.”<sup>54</sup> From a congregational perspective, the common Catholic pattern of leaving the parish largely to the concerns of clergy is regarded as something that opposes the popularity of the Church. From a service church perspective, this pattern is perfectly understandable.

According to Davie, European countries, such as the United Kingdom and Sweden, reflect a European tendency to regard the church as a useful institution.<sup>55</sup> The Dutch situation reflects the same tendency, and the Netherlands is characterized both by a higher level of unchurched people and by a higher level of religious volunteering.<sup>56</sup> Here, religious institutions operate under the condition of a “service church imperative.”

The congregational imperative usually goes unrecognized, pervasive as it is. Its normative criteria are participation and orthodoxy. The service church imperative has other normative criteria. In conclusion, I would like to suggest some characteristics of the specific ecclesiology that is at work in service churches. Central to its own understanding is that it regards itself as a representative of the *catholic* (*katholikos*: throughout the whole) Church. Catholicity is one of the ecclesial notions (*notae ecclesiae*) that are commonly regarded as “summarized” in the expression of the *unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam* (Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed).<sup>57</sup> The notion of catholicity expresses the extent to which the Church holds salvation available to the whole of God’s people.

Closely related to this notion is a positive attitude towards the natural longing for God. This is the belief that an orientation towards God is already present in human beings. God is present in creation, and so God is more or less hidden in authentic human experiences. The task of the Church is to cultivate and direct this longing in the right direction, namely, in the direction of a Church that continues the life and work of Jesus Christ. Central to its mission, therefore, is to give access to the word of God and the sacraments. In a critique of congregationalism in systematic theology and church polity, I have argued for this aspect of Roman Catholic ecclesiology after the Second Vatican Council.<sup>58</sup> Above,

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54 Joseph Tamney/Stephen D. Johnson/Kevin McElmurry/George Sanders, *Strictness and Congregational Growth in Middletown*, in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, 2003, 364.

55 Davie, *Europe*, 19.

56 See: Jan Reitsma/Peer Schepers/Manfred te Grotenhuis, *Dimensions of Individual Religiosity and Volunteering in Europe*, Paper presented at the University of Warwick, 2005 (<http://oase.uci.kun.nl/~jreitsma/warwick.pdf>).

57 See: Gordon W. Langthrop/Timothy J. Wengert, *Christian Assembly. Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic Age*, Minneapolis (Fortress Press) 2004, 17-36. Langthrop and Wengert offer a brief history of these marks of the Church.

58 Kees de Groot, “Wij Zijn de Kerk!” Maar Wie Zijn Wij? In *Discussie met het Congregationalisme*, in: *Collationes*, 36, 2006, 303-320.

I have identified a particular notion of *communio* with the ethos of a service organization. To put this idea in less technical terms: the church has something to offer, like beauty and comfort, salvation and healing. Believers are not required, primarily, to invest in their church as loyal members, but, most of all, to open their hearts and their minds to God's grace and to care for their neighbours and the world at large. The Church, as a service organization, enables believers to do just that.

Nicolas Jesson, a Canadian researcher who studies the interrelations between Catholics and Evangelicals, has written an extensive commentary on the influential free church ecclesiology of Miroslav Volf, a very articulate spokesman of congregationalism.<sup>59</sup> Jesson's work shows quite convincingly that free church ecclesiology fails to see the implications of the notion that the Church is not only an assembly of believers, but also a spiritual space, in which the spirit of Christ operates. Not just from a sociological, but from a theological perspective as well, the Church may rightly be regarded as a service organization, in a particular sense: the Church serves the solidarity among the faithful and between the faithful and Christ, so that their lives may bear fruit. At the same time, all those participating are partaking in the process we call Church.<sup>60</sup>

Dutch parishes are challenged to fulfill this mission in a culture where even Catholics tend to keep the Church-as-an-institution at a distance, seeing it as a multinational organization with some vague congregational tendencies. Of course, the future is uncertain. The Dutch situation is characterized, not only by a growing number of non-participating members, but also by a decline of people socialized in Christianity as such. From an organizational perspective, this may seriously hamper people's perceptions as religious clients or recipients of religious services. If, however, Dutch parishes will persist in accommodating their organizations to the desires of individuals, who prefer to receive high quality service now and again rather than to commit to a particular congregation, then the expression "going Dutch" may take a special meaning in congregational studies. Practical theology faces the challenge to explore the opportunities for such a highly individualized conception of community in a tradition that, on the one hand, considers the group around the historical Jesus as the archetypical Christian *ekklesia*,<sup>61</sup> while, on the other hand, has not entirely forgotten the notion of the Church as a public institution.<sup>62</sup> The

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59 N.A. Jesson, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Miroslav Volf's Free Church Ecclesiology*, [www.ecumenism.net/archive/jesson\\_volf.pdf](http://www.ecumenism.net/archive/jesson_volf.pdf), accessed March 2003; Miroslav Volf, *Trinität und Gemeinschaft. Eine ökumenische Ekklesiologie*, Mainz/Neukirchen (Grünewald/Neukirchner) 1996.

60 De Groot, *Wij Zijn de Kerk!*

61 Gerhard Lohfink, *Wie hat Jesus Gemeinde gewollt?*, Freiburg (Herder) 1983.

62 R.G. W. Huysmans, *De Parochie in de Nederlandse r.k. Bisdommen Voorbij? To Close or to Cluster?*, in: A.P.H. Meijers, ed., *De Parochie van de Toekomst*, Leuven (Peeters), 1998, 35-60.

ongoing practice of individuals lighting candles in chapels and churches, the popularity of pilgrimages, and the broadcasting of religious services suggest that the Christian tradition, in fact, does leave ample space for non-congregational modes of religious involvement, namely highly accessible, service-oriented forms of church that honor the catholicity of Christian tradition and address the natural human longings for God. It is up to practical theologians to translate the commitment of the people into such ecclesial models.

### Zusammenfassung

In den Vereinigten Staaten sind viele Studien zur organisierten Religionskultur auf das Paradigma der Kirchengemeinde fokussiert. Am Beispiel der römisch-katholischen Gemeinden läßt sich zeigen, dass eine solche, auf die parochialen Phänomene konzentrierte Perspektive in mancherlei Hinsicht zu eng sein dürfte. Gemeinde lässt sich nämlich nicht nur als ein freiwilliger, bewusster Zusammenschluss Gleichgesinnter begreifen, sondern auch als Untereinheit eines multinationalen Konzerns, der religiöse Dienste anbietet. In der niederländischen Gesellschaft der Gegenwart bezeichnen sich ein Viertel aller römisch-katholischen Christen spontan nicht als Mitglied einer Gemeinde. Wie reagieren die Leitungsorgane römisch-katholischer Gemeinden auf diesen Sachverhalt? Der Artikel präsentiert empirische Daten, die die spezifische Herausforderung der Gemeindesituation darin identifizieren, ein christliches Profil behaupten zu müssen und zugleich in Kontakt mit der weithin säkularisierten Öffentlichkeit bleiben zu wollen. In empirisch-hermeneutischer Perspektive lassen sich dabei, wie die vom Verf. angestrengte Studie zeigt, drei Idealtypen ausmachen: die Parochialgemeinde, die offene Gemeinde und die einladende Gemeinde. Betrachtet man die Ergebnisse genauer, dann gewinnt man häufig interessante Einblicke in die impliziten Motive der Gemeindeleitungen. So zeigt sich beispielsweise, dass das verbreitete Bestreben, sich einem weiteren Publikum zu öffnen, offenbar nicht nur eine Konzession an die spätmoderne Konsumhaltung ist, sondern sich einer spezifisch europäischen Tradition, der Idee der Institution nämlich, verdankt. Ist Religion nicht mehr sozial obligatorisch, sondern individuell gewählt, dann, so lautet das Fazit, sollten die Kirchen nicht mehr nur für die Beteiligungsgemeinde optieren, sondern verstärkt auch die Chancen einer Sichtweise wahrnehmen, der die Kirche als ein Serviceinstitut gilt, das christlich-religiöse Traditionen und Rituale pflegt und auf die Gottessehnsucht der Menschen zu reagieren versucht.