

CONTEMPORARY CHURCH IN THE NETHERLANDS CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DUTCH ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISHES IN 2008¹

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ABSTRACT

Artikel ini merenungi kembali unsur-unsur Gereja Katolik di Nederland sehubungan dengan rencana komunikasi religius kristiani tahun 2008. Tiga ciri paroki – territorialitas, struktur hirarki dan tekanan pada kepedulian- dibahas berdasarkan lima perkembangan masyarakat: menurunnya keanggotaan gereja; menurunnya jumlah relawan; berkurangnya persediaan pastor profesional; menipisnya sarana pendanaan; meningkatnya pluralisme keyakinan religius. Pembahasan ini lantas diakhiri dengan membicarakan struktur organisasional komunitas religius alternatif yang tersedia.

Key Words:

•*Crisis of faith* •*Crisis of the church* •*Plurality of religious beliefs*
•*Conformity pressure* •*Territoriality* •*Hierarchical structure*
•*Cultural models* •*Social factors* •*Macro level* •*Micro level*
•*Accommodation* •*Transformation* •*Reformation*

Although the Netherlands has a rich tradition of religious orders and congregations – mainly active in the education, health care and social services sectors – the principal place for religious communication for 'regular' Dutch Catholics is parishes. A clear picture of the contemporary Catholic Church in the Netherlands, therefore, requires an overview of the situation in Dutch parishes. In this article I focus on the challenges and opportunities of the model of parishes as the main centres of Christian faith in the Netherlands.

However interesting and active parishes may be, overall they seem to be in crisis. To a large extent this is attributable to the crisis of religion in modern Dutch society. The challenges faced by local religious communities are largely connected with the processes of modernisation and secularisation in an increasingly complex society. The numbers of the faithful are declining and in that sense it is more a crisis of faith than a crisis of the church. Although a connection between 'crisis of faith' and 'crisis of the church' seems obvious, they do not overlap completely. Felling (2004) shows that there are non-believers within the church, as well as believers outside it. While (Christian) faith outside the church is fairly rare, the number of non-believers among churchgoers is increasing. So faith and church membership do not automatically coincide – that is, if 'faith' is defined and measured according to traditional criteria of theistic belief in God and belief in an afterlife.

Against the broader background of the secularisation process there are some more specific reasons why small, local parishes are a problematic organisational model for religious communities. To say something about the future of (the organisation of) religious communities it is important to take a differentiated look at these reasons. What factors are putting pressure on the classic local parish? Firstly, the number of faithful is declining. Secondly, the number of volunteers in the church is getting smaller and older. Thirdly, there are fewer and fewer pastors available to give leadership to parishes. Fourthly, available financial means are decreasing. And finally, plurality of religious beliefs is increasing as a result of lack of conformity pressure. These are among the developments influencing smaller parishes

in the Netherlands as we know them. However, the aforementioned reasons are relevant to the classic local parish and influence it in various ways. Before going into this in more detail I will describe what is meant by 'the classic territorial parish'.

The territorial parish as an organisational structure

The Code of Canon Law defines a parish as “a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop” (canon 515 §1). In itself this description says nothing about the boundaries of a parish in a particular area, but canon 518 says that as a general rule a parish has to be territorial. This means that by definition all the faithful in a particular area are part of this parish. On the basis of their place of residence all church members belong to a particular local religious community (here, parish), just as they belong to a particular diocese on that same basis. The various dioceses and parishes do not overlap, so the principle of territorialism does not mean simply that a parish is located in a particular area or that the faithful gather in a specific place. Obviously that is also the case, just as convent churches and religious centres are always located in a particular place. After all, we cannot exist outside space, at least not in this life.

This observation is not completely redundant, as evidenced by the common remark that territorial parishes will continue to exist because people always live somewhere. This, however, does not get to the core of the problem. The principle of territorialism means a lot more than that the church is located somewhere. It includes the organisational principle that as a Catholic you belong to a particular parish because you live in a particular place. Convent churches are not territorial parishes, even though they are situated 'somewhere' on the landscape and are centres of intensive, frequently religious communication. This also applies to the so-called personal parishes described in canon 518 of the Code of Canon Law: “When it is expedient, however, personal parishes are to be established determined by reason of the rite, language, or nationality of the Christian faithful of some territory, or even for some other reason.”² Personal parishes are an alternative organisational structure alongside classic territorial parishes. They can exist separately from territorial parishes, even though their places of gathering are located within the boundaries of a territorial parish. However, they are an exception to the rule.

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

Thirdly, the definition of canon law emphasises the pastoral *care* entrusted to a pastor. Within the parish there seems to be little room for, or acknowledgment of, care provided by the faithful themselves. This model of the classic parish with its three characteristics of territoriality, hierarchical structure and emphasis on pastoral care is increasingly coming under pressure. Each of the aforementioned characteristics is a topic of discussion and controversy as a result of empirical facts and theological considerations. While society has changed, as have the Christian faith and theology, ecclesiastic structures are unwieldy and hard to change. The organisational conditions for continuity of the Christian community crop up in everyday pastoral practice too. Parish boards are confronted with them: in carrying out their policy they often have to deal with them, at least more often than is 'officially' expected of a parish board. Especially when a parish (board) is looking for a new pastor lots of questions arise about the profile and future of the religious community. What exactly do we mean when we claim that we are inspired by the gospel? How do we embody our faith in these rapidly changing times? How do we support one another in light of the stories of our Christian tradition, and how can we continue to do so? How can we remain a close, concerned community inspired by the story of Jesus of Nazareth? How can we preserve the precarious balance built up in our community over the years? How can we maintain good relations in which everybody's contribution is appreciated? Note that these questions are often negatively formulated. For instance: how do we avoid loss of our religious community's identity when we are given a new pastor? I say 'given', because according to the definition in the Code of Canon Law the parish is a community of the Christian faithful which *is entrusted* to a pastor – the community is defined in terms of the (prospective) pastor, not the other way round! And that is how the community will experience it during the crucial phase of the succession of a pastor, when the possibilities of directing the succession are exploited maximally.

To return to my main question: why is the organisational model of the classic territorial parish sometimes problematic in the current Dutch context? And does a big organisation like the Roman Catholic Church really have alternatives? Although I do not want to give a totally negative or pessimistic picture of parish life in the Netherlands, I limit myself to the challenges because of space limitations.

Challenges to the organisational model of the classic territorial parish

Although not exhaustive, the following are five socio-cultural developments which, one way or another, complicate the classic territorial parish as described above: (1) declining church membership; (2) decreasing number of volunteers and growing numbers of aging volunteers; (3) declining number of pastors; (4) dwindling financial means; and (5) increasing religious pluralism. I describe these factors from the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands.

Declining church membership

With regard to declining church membership, it should be noted that it is difficult to determine developments in church membership. In random samples church membership is determined on the basis of religious self-definition. People are considered Catholics if they call themselves Catholics. The recent introduction of a new administrative system for church membership in the Netherlands will probably make it easier to determine developments in church membership in years to come. For the last few years local parishes have been doing a lot of administrative work, in cooperation with the Dutch Foundation for Interdenominational Membership Administration (*stichting interkerkelijke ledenadministratie*, SILA) and the Basic Administration of Local Civil Councils (*gemeentelijke basisadministratie*, GBA). Over 1.5 million people were wrongly listed in parish records, but 1.5 million 'lost' Catholics were found again. During the first few years of the new system (1998-2001) SILA figures showed a growth in church membership due to greater participation by parishes in different dioceses in this administration. But with all dioceses participating since 2001 the figures show a clear decline. In 2006 SILA registered 4,156,970 Catholics.

Table 1: Numbers of persons registered by SILA according to religious denomination in 2003-2006³

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Mennonites (<i>Doopsgezinde Sociëteit</i>)	7.901	10.051	9.509	9.411
New Apostolic Church	11.682	11.530	11.157	11.326
Old Catholic Church	5.653	5.820	5.623	5.654
Protestant Church in the Netherlands	(2.595.246)	(2.479.055)	2.458.788	2.389.669
Evangelical Lutheran Church	20.235	14.906	0	0
Reformed Churches in the Netherlands	638.237	617.284	0	0
Dutch Reformed Church	1.936.774	1.846.865	0	0
Roman Catholic Church	4.301.856	4.414.574	4.234.881	4.156.970
Free Catholic Church	656	634	662	630
Total	6.922.994	6.921.664	6.720.620	6.573.360

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) are two other important sources of church membership statistics. Both base their figures on random sample surveys among people aged 18 and over. To determine if someone is a church member the CBS asks just one question: "To which denomination do you belong?" One of the alternative answers provided is: "I do not belong to a religious denomination." The SCP uses two questions to determine if someone is a church member. First they ask respondents if they consider themselves members of a denomination and then – if the answer is affirmative – of which denomination. Apparently as a result of this methodological difference the SCP figures are lower than the CBS figures, and the decline in church membership in recent decades is more clearly visible in the SCP statistics. But both sets of statistics indicate a clear downward trend. From the 1960s onwards there has indisputably been a steady downward trend in the percentage of Catholics in the total Dutch population. According to the CBS figures it declined from 40% in 1970 to 30% in 2004 (with 41% of Dutch adults saying they do not belong to a church community). The SCP indicates 34% Catholics in 1970 and 18% in 2000. At all events, over the last decade statistics have been fairly stable.

More remarkable than the decrease in church membership is the decline in church attendance. Weekly attendance of a Sunday service has seemingly plummeted over the past 25 years. While in 1980 over 1.227.000 people went to church regularly each Sunday morning, by 2005 the number had dropped to 343.860. Put in percentages of the total Dutch Catholic population aged seven and older (according to KASKI statistics), we are talking about 23,7% in 1980 and 7,8% in 2005. The SCP gives other figures:

in 1970 71% of those who called themselves Catholic still went to church regularly (at least twice a month) compared with only 19% in 2004, and the vast majority of these are older than 61 years. In addition to declining church attendance there is a decline in participation in other sacraments. These figures show that no increase in Catholicism is to be expected in the next generation either. While in 1980 30,8% of all live newborn children were baptised, in 2004 that percentage had dropped to 17,8. Although church attendance was still declining over the past few years, the annual decrease is plainly levelling off: it is still declining, but less markedly. Has it (almost) reached its nadir? There is also a decline in the number of children that make their first communion and – an even greater drop – in the number of confirmations in light of the already dwindling number of baptisms. In 2004 there were 27.600 confirmations, being 54,4% of the number of baptisms twelve years before. Lastly we turn to marriages. In 1980 31,5% of all civil marriages were solemnised in church. In 2005 that percentage had dropped to 8,4%, whereas the number of civil marriages itself had not increased. For instance, in 2005 there were 72.263 civil marriages, the lowest number since World War II (and this in an increasing population). Thus there were over 120.000 marriages a year in the early 1970s (www.kaski.kun.nl; www.cbs.nl). While a couple of years ago there was talk about a church revival, the figures for sacraments and church rituals are still clearly declining and rather prove the opposite.

These are hard facts. The decline in church membership is not confined to the Roman Catholic Church, though, but is happening in all major religious communities in Western Europe. How does one explain it? What is the consequence of this lapse of church membership? Why has it become so sharply noticeable now, in the past few decades? Or is it symptomatic of a development that has been going on much longer? Schillebeeckx (1968, 305) asked almost 40 years ago whether increased non-religiousness is perhaps merely the exposure of pseudo-religiousness that persisted only because of social pressure. But he simply posed the question, no more. It is also possible that lapse of church membership is symptomatic of a new phenomenon. In that case the full churches of the past were in fact a sign of authentic (but non-reflective) religiousness, which was possible in those days but no longer is. That implies that religious authenticity varies with circumstances, culture and time. The plausibility of a certain type of faith may be lost, but would it have fitted nowadays anyway? Is not everything in our society subject to permanent rational criticism? Would it be right to long for complete religious plausibility insofar

as this means that we must never question our faith? Of course we need forums where our faith, our search for meaning and our certainties are discussed; but we also have to talk with each other about our unbelief, our experiences of meaninglessness and our uncertainties. But having said that, the question remains unanswered. If lapse of church membership is a relatively new phenomenon, how are we supposed to interpret it?

I am afraid there is no straight answer. The explanatory models are numerous and varied. Firstly, there are cultural models, such as the hypothesis that increasing philosophical and religious pluralism, as well as plurality of norms and values, would make the person's own tradition 'relative'. This relativity would lead to less involvement, as evidenced by declining church membership and church attendance. Empirical research shows that this argument does not (at least not always) hold water. Religious pluralism can in fact cause greater involvement with one's own tradition (Sterkens 2001). The rise in average educational level over the past fifty years could play a part in this too. This is not the same as claiming that educational level and church membership correlate inversely. A second type of explanatory model focuses on social factors like individualisation, fragmentation of community life and changes in marriage and family life. A third group of explanatory models concerns characteristics of the church on the macro level: church (leadership) fails to demonstrate its relevance, it is experienced as reactive or even reactionary, and its statements seem to be out of touch with contemporary reality. A fourth chain of factors concerns characteristics of the church on the micro level of religious communities: the local parish is not (or no longer) experienced as a vigorous religious community. This applies especially to liturgy and church welfare work. Churchgoers or potential churchgoers feel there is little liturgical creativity and lack of solidarity with regard to material or spiritual need (cf. Van der Ven 1998, 28-30).

Finally there are so-called economic theories that shed light on lapse of church membership. I want to look into these more deeply, not just because they are quite new but also because they are highly controversial. A first example is rational choice theory (Stark & Bainbridge 1987; Friedman 1996). This theory rests on the assumption that people are constantly looking for rewards in life. When the desired reward does not materialise, they content themselves with a compensator (an alternative).⁴ Sometimes people's desires are so sweeping that they simply *cannot* be fully satisfied. Consider, for instance, the desire for love, for attributing meaning or for life after death. Only a supernatural or divine authority would be able to – literally – offer plausible alternatives to these desires. Religious traditions

and their churches put themselves on the market as purveyors of supernatural compensators, so to speak. Applied to the problem of declining church membership, the theory yields three propositions. Firstly: when a religious organisation reduces its focus on transcendence (the divine, gods or God), it weakens. It undermines its potential for offering worthwhile compensators. Secondly: religious movements that nurture faith in the supernatural will offer more plausible compensators. Thirdly: when society is not able to offer the rewards people ask for the demand for (religious) compensators will rise.

The benefit of this theory is that it seems to explain movements within and between religious institutions. It appears to account for the fact that liberal churches are facing greater losses than more conservative or orthodox churches. And does it not also explain why traditional mainline churches seem to be losing influence in favour of charismatic groups and movements? But the answer is 'no': the theory does not explain that! The fact is, rational choice theory is very vulnerable to criticism and cannot stand up to thorough analysis (Bruce 1999; 2002). A first objection is that the presupposition of compensations for rewards is not an adequate general theory to describe religion. This is not to say that religion never functions as comfort or compensation for dissatisfaction in human life. For some people, under certain circumstances, that will definitely be the case. But to make this a general, basic assumption about all religion is wrong. Secondly, advocates of rational choice theory may misinterpret the empirical facts. There is no more an exodus from traditional to charismatic churches than there is an exodus from more liberal churches to orthodox churches. The success of charismatic churches lies in the availability of potential members who are no longer tied to any church. The potential increase is larger because there are more ecclesiastically unaffiliated people. Moreover, the huge decline in traditional church membership is on a completely different scale than the small increase in new religious movements. Thirdly: the theory does not take sufficient account of factors like social belonging and social pressure. Rational choice should not be understood as if consumers strategically calculate profits and losses with no regard to the normative and religious truth claims of the tradition. In other words, did one make a perfectly free choice of a religion? Isn't the freedom to choose a religious tradition always relative? Consequently, is it possible for someone to freely abandon a tradition? I don't think so.

A second example of an economic approach to the issue of lapsed church membership is Hirschman's (1970; 2002) theory of consumer

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

In the context of declining church membership two more observations about these three options are called for. First, the options can occur on two levels: local and further afield. One can disagree with the situation in one's own parish (local) or with the policy of church leadership (supra-local level). In the hierarchically structured Roman Catholic Church it can happen that one level is troubled, to put it mildly, by the other level. With regard to the local parish level, critical parishioners who realise they have the options of exit, voice and loyalty at their disposal will be prepared to travel a little further to a neighbouring religious community. In this instance the option of loyalty will take the form of driving to another district if religious satisfaction is not obtainable nearer home. SILA calls such people who choose to go to a parish other than the one in whose area they reside 'preferential members' (*voorkeursleden*). Their motives to go to another church are a combination of push and pull factors, as is the case in all emigration processes. On the one hand they may be pulled by the open ambience, communication, beautiful liturgy and the social network. On the other hand they may have been pushed to leave their former parish because they did not feel comfortable with its religious beliefs, sometimes in

combination with the (authoritarian) leadership of the local pastor. Secondly, the responses of exit and voice are mostly the consequence of multiple disappointing experiences and not the direct outcome of one particular conflict. Often there is a latent or prolonged dissatisfaction with one's own 'territorial' parish that causes a specific negative experience to precipitate the break. This also applies to volunteers. When one feels that one's own beliefs do not (or no longer) accord with those of one's religious community (or one's pastor), one will be more inclined to leave that community because of a minor conflict (cf. Hirschman 2002, 67).

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

Decreasing number and increased average age of church volunteers

Together with a decline in church membership there is a decrease in the number of volunteers and an increase in their age. However, the average effort per volunteer has grown over the past few years. I will not go into the phenomenon in detail but will only examine the motives of (church) volunteers to dedicate themselves (to the church). These motives should be taken into account in the organisational structure of the church, also when modifying it. Otherwise there is a danger of losing more volunteers and triggering a downward spiral. When fewer and fewer volunteers (some of them older and less vigorous) try to achieve the same results, they will get frustrated. It boils down to taking timeous action.

Volunteers are of such importance that the sociologist Berger (1967) calls the 'church of volunteers' the theological and ecclesiastic ideology of the necessity of customer relations! This is borne out by statistics: volunteers attend church more often, participate more in activities and pay

more church membership fees than non-volunteers (Veerman & Spruit 2000; cf. Van der Ven 1993, 382-385).

What are the motives, then, to dedicate oneself voluntarily to perform pastoral duties? Van Gerwen (1990, 19-23) distinguishes three motivations for volunteers to do pastoral counselling: achievement motive, relief motive and affiliation motive. (1) Achievement motivation means that the pastoral volunteer will concentrate on handling and/or religiously interpreting the experiences of fellow parishioners. (2) The pastoral volunteer will realise that he or she is helping others to give meaning to an experience. In this sense it is a relief motive, which can be intrinsic or extrinsic. It is intrinsic if the pastoral duties are performed for the sake of contributing to the well-being of a fellow parishioner who is given assistance. The motive is extrinsic if the duty is performed to earn approval from others. (3) The affiliation motive is when the volunteer seeks a personal relationship with fellow parishioners. Fellow parishioners needing help are less likely to accept this guidance, because they are interested in dealing with experiences and searching for meaning and perspective. Van Gerwen makes it clear that these three motives can have a religious element: the volunteer considers it important that religious interpretation should play a part in dealing with experiences, emotions and attitudes. But is it of overriding importance? Do pastoral volunteers commit themselves *because* they are religious, *for the sake of* the gospel? Not always, as empirical research shows, and in fact not primarily! And this applies to *pastoral* voluntary work like catechesis, pastoral counselling or activities relating to proclamation. Conceivably it will apply even more to other kinds of voluntary work like secretarial work, building maintenance and flower arrangement. Pastoral volunteers are not primarily motivated by religious factors. Research shows that nonreligious factors are more important. But although religious motivation emerges less clearly, this does not mean that we can dismiss it completely. Religion may not be the core of the motivation, but it does colour and direct it (Van Gerwen 1990, 165-171).

Nonetheless the foregoing justifies a scrutiny of general motivation theories with regard to church voluntary work. There are many theories, but from the point of view of practical applicability I confine myself to that of Herzberg (1974). He developed his theory in the context of paid professional work, but many elements are directly applicable to voluntary work. Herzberg describes two factors influencing the motivation to work: satisfiers and dissatisfiers. Satisfaction stems from the actual tasks. They dispose one favourably to the work: appreciation shown, the nature of the work, responsibility taken, achievement and the fact that one is learning

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

What has all of this to do with church organisation? How does volunteers' motivation relate to the subject of this article, namely the future of the classic local parish? The answer is simple: if one wants to preserve the church as a vigorous community with the aid of volunteers, the aforementioned factors will have to be taken into account in its organisation. Let me illustrate this with two examples relating to the classification of satisfiers and dissatisfiers. (1) Insofar as the classic territorial approach stresses pastoral *care* – its third characteristic – making parishioners responsible for the work and showing appreciation for it will, in the long term, offer insufficient incentives to motivate and maintain a corps of parishioners/volunteers who build up the church. The content of the work, assigning responsibility and the perception of appreciation happen to be the real satisfiers that Herzberg discerned. (2) I have pointed out already that interpersonal relationships resulting from the job are dissatisfiers. In plain language this means that social contacts as such do not motivate people to do (voluntary) work, but a lack of social contacts soon demotivates them. When reorganisation of religious communities (e.g. a merger) causes social contacts to crumble, motivation suffers. When existing social contacts break down for some other reason – for instance because of conflicts or a pastor who keeps everything in his own hands and does not want to share duties and responsibility – volunteers become demotivated. A bureaucratic corporate culture or an authoritarian organisation can also lead to demotivation. In short, the organisational structure of the church, both locally and at macro level, affects these satisfiers and dissatisfiers.

Declining number of pastors and members of religious orders and congregations

The third pressure on the classic territorial parish is the declining number of pastors. The word 'pastors' is commonly used in the Netherlands to indicate all sorts of paid pastoral professionals: priests, deacons and pastoral workers. Insofar as one proceeds from a canonical framework, in which final administrative and pastoral responsibility rests with the priest, the biggest problem for the organisational structure of the classic territorial parish is the declining number of priests. As mentioned above, the parish is defined as a community of the Christian faithful which is entrusted to a pastor (CIC 515 § 1).⁵ With the exception of Poland and Romania a decline in the number of priests is a trend across the European continent. Sometimes the decline is spectacular, for instance in Belgium, Austria and Switzerland. Translated into a percentage of the total number of priests in the early 1970s, France and the Netherlands top the list: a drop of nearly 50% in thirty years (cf. Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2005)! As long as a one-to-one relation between parish and priest is retained, the declining number of priests is a crucial problem for the classic territorial model of the parish, since so many parishes cannot continue to exist (as parishes) without priests.

Should we therefore speak of a 'lack of priests', so pastoral care can be entrusted to others (cf. canon 517 § 2)? The answer to this question is bedevilled by normative claims and ideological principles. More than that, the question itself is fraught with theological views and norms. It presupposes that delegating pastoral work to non-priests is at most a second-best solution. This could apply in some cases for pragmatic reasons: a priest rarely has a family to support and often has no partner. This arouses expectations and hopes that he will be freely available to the religious community, or at least have more time than pastors with a partner and/or family. Sometimes that expectation is founded, sometimes not. But overall, for the vast majority of the faithful celibacy is not something they require from their pastor. In 1992 about 92% of Dutch Catholics thought that priests should be allowed to marry and 66% thought that the priesthood should be open to women (cf. Schepens 1992; cf. van der Ven 1993). More recently, according to a questionnaire completed by pastors in the Dutch Catholic Church, 6% of priests answered affirmatively to the question whether they have a partner, 45% answered 'no', and 49% answered 'not applicable', the latter being a fairly rare response category in other research populations (Schilderman 2005, 310). Of course, one can interpret this

response category in different ways: maybe these respondents find the question inappropriate; maybe they want to underline that priesthood supposes celibacy; maybe the subject is taboo and they don't want to answer the question, et cetera. In the official teaching of the church, however, priesthood, celibacy and sex are intrinsically related.

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

Recently the discussion on church and ministry was very much in the limelight (again) in the Netherlands. In September 2007 the Dutch Province of the Dominican order sent a discussion document (explicitly described as “not a guideline or doctrine”) to all Dutch Catholic parishes. The document pointed out some contradictions between the ideas of church authorities and daily practice. The discussion is not new and the arguments in the document are not original, neither are the objections against it. What was new was that reflection on this matter was called for, not by an individual author (or a group of authors) but by a province of a religious order. On the one hand the document was praised for the courage and the willingness of a group of professionals involved in pastoral care to take responsibility with a view to safeguarding the future proclamation of the gospel in the Netherlands. On the other hand there was criticism both of the distribution as such (without prior consultation with the bishops) and the contents. The contents were explicitly condemned by the Dutch bishops, who declared on the day of publication that the document's plea regarding the Eucharist and the one permitted to confect it is completely contrary to the faith of the Roman Catholic Church (Press Release, Dutch Bishops' Conference). The document offers pastoral and theological arguments for parishes to be more autonomous in choosing their pastors (lay and ordained ministers) by urging them to request the bishops' approval (by laying on of hands). Ultimately, however, the people of God have priority over the hierarchy. Consequently, in the undesirable situation where a choice has to be made, the sacrament of Holy Orders is seen as subordinate to the celebration of the Eucharist. The following passage in particular provoked irritation and charges of ecclesial disobedience from some, while it was recognised as an

authentic desire for less dependence on the church hierarchy by others: “If a bishop should refuse such a confirmation or 'ordination' on the basis of arguments not involving the essence of the Eucharist, such as obligatory celibacy, parishes may be confident that they are able to celebrate a real and genuine Eucharist when they are together at prayer and share bread and wine” (*Nederlandse Dominicanen* 2007, 37).

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

All this makes it hard give a clear-cut answer to the question whether we are dealing with a lack of priests. Statistically 'lack of priests' is relative, theologically it is controversial. Apart from diocesan and parish priests, there are members of male and female religious orders and congregations as well as lay people involved in pastoral work. But their numbers, too, are decreasing. In general there is a lack of competent 'professionals' in religious communication. This can be concluded from the difficulty of filling a vacancy speedily and to the complete satisfaction of the faithful in both territorial (parish) and categorical pastoral care (hospitals, prisons, etc.). Overall the number of pastors is decreasing. The following statistics of the Catholic socio-religious institute KASKI speak for themselves. At all events, it goes without saying that a smaller staff means that local religious communities cannot continue to operate in the same way. That is a challenge to parishes and parish boards alike.

Table 2: Active priests, permanent deacons and pastoral workers in the Netherlands (1980-2004). Source: www.ru.nl/kaski

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2002	2003	2004
Priests	3.374	2.661	2.138	1.610	1.242	1.112	1.029	1.013
Permanent deacons	-	43	120	201	234	243	243	252
Pastoral workers m/f	302	392	543	702	783	774	791	797
Total (pastors)	3.676	3.096	2.801	2.513	2.259	2.129	2.063	2.062

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

Table 3: Active conventuals (nuns), priestly religious, brothers and friars in the Netherlands (1980-2006). Source: Dutch Conference of Religious Orders and Congregations (www.knr.nl).

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2003	2004	2005	2006
Active conventuals	17.768	15.081	12.235	9.414	7.362	7.042	6.506	6.189
Priestly religious	4.555	4.051	3.409	2.806	2.358	2.259	2.219	2.183
Brothers and friars	1.690	1.366	1.079	856	862	621	583	558
Total	24.013	20.498	16.723	13.076	10.582	9.922	9.308	8.930

Reduced financial means

The fourth pressure on the classic territorial parish is the relative decrease in available financial means. Although in most parishes income from church membership fees remains stable or has even increased slightly, the situation is becoming precarious because of the increasing cost of salaries and building maintenance. Of the total income of the Dutch Church Province in 2005 (€165.933.000) 68% comes from church membership fees, collections, gifts and income from church services, and 32% from church property, rentals and investment revenue. Church membership fees (*Kerkebalans*, an annual national, interdenominational drive to raise money for churches) amount to €59.477.000, being 36% of total income. For some years now expenses have exceeded income, which means the church is slowly eating into its capital. The financial burden of building maintenance in particular is forcing the church to take measures. In 2005 39% of expenses in the Netherlands were on building maintenance or payments on the buildings (churches and presbyteries). Demolition and sale will remain necessary to guarantee continuity of church activities and maintenance of the remaining buildings (cf. *Interdiocesane Commissie Geldwerving* 2007).

Table 2: Expenditure per diocese on buildings, staffing, payments and other expenses in 2005 expressed in thousand euros (k €); percentages of costs relate to the total (per diocese).

2005	Buildings		Staff		Payments		Other		Total
	k €	%	k €	%	k €	%	k €	%	k €
Utrecht	13.168	34	18.615	49	3.700	10	2.823	7	38.306
Haarlem	9.769	38	12.258	48	2.500	10	947	4	25.474
Rotterdam	13.217	49	9.707	36	2.442	9	1.663	6	27.029
Breda	5.034	33	7.651	50	1.764	12	802	5	15.251
Den Bosch	15.197	40	16.661	44	3.773	10	2.126	6	37.757
Roermond	10.639	39	10.890	40	4.248	15	1.789	6	27.566
Groningen	2.839	40	2.973	42	902	13	324	5	7.038
Total	69.863	39	78.755	44	19.329	11	10.474	6	178.421

In the 1973-2006 period 310 churches were closed down and 155 new ones were brought into use. New church buildings are on average smaller than those closed down. The number of seats also decreases more than one would assume on the basis of percentages of closed church buildings. At the end of 2006 the seven Dutch dioceses together had 1.721 church buildings in use. For the last few years, though, the decrease in number of parishes is greater than that in number of church buildings in use, which can be explained by the advent of cooperation or fusion. At the end of 2006 the number of Roman Catholic parishes was 1.425, 159 less than in 2001 (KASKI 2007). Lack of funds puts pressure especially on local parishes in small villages. Because house building is not allowed in the surroundings of small villages and because the religious community is close to extinction, this is also referred to as the 'small-centre issue'. Often the (expensive) church building is the last central meeting place. A vast majority of the Dutch population thinks government should guarantee one church building to remain for assembly in every village. This issue is currently being considered by different authorities, sometimes successfully. The Province of North Brabant, for instance, has recently taken the initiative in creating a 'church fund'. But this does not remove the uncertainties. Here too (some) parishes face a challenge, which means that the structure as such is challenged.

Increasing religious pluralism

Finally, the classic territorial parish is challenged by increasing religious pluralism. Perhaps this is the most fundamental factor, because it greatly influences the others. I confine myself to pluralism in the Christian tradition and leave aside other religions, because pluralism between different religious traditions does not affect internal church structures directly. Pluralism is a challenge because it can threaten the cohesion of the religious community. It can be divisive, although not necessarily. The issue of division is important, not just at the level of the parish (horizontal) but also at the level of the church as an organisation (vertical). In simplified terms pluralism is sometimes expressed as 'conservative', 'progressive', 'premodern' and 'modern' (even 'postmodern'). Sometimes there is talk of 'literal', 'anti-literal' and 'mythological' interpretations of religious language (Hunt 1972). The reality, however, is more complicated. I give some examples regarding two central themes in the Christian tradition: God and Jesus Christ. But there are also divergent views on the Spirit, liberation, eternal life, church, sacraments and so on.

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

Even though religious pluralism is more in evidence than it used to be, it is not a new phenomenon. Schoonenberg (1991, 21-44) identifies two models in early Christian references to Jesus: Spirit Christology and Logos Christology. Spirit Christology is the oldest model. We find it primarily in the Gospel of Mark, but there are also traces of it in the other synoptic Gospels and in Paul. Typical of Spirit Christology is an emphasis on Jesus being filled with the Spirit of God, the idea being that "Jesus becomes the Son of God, or at least becomes more the Son of God" (Schoonenberg 1991, 54). In Logos Christology the emphasis is on the Word that Jesus became. With some qualifications one could say that in Spirit Christology Jesus becomes (more) the Son of God, hence ascends to increasing equality with God, while in Logos Christology the Son of God descends. Although on the face of it these two images of Jesus seem contradictory, Schoonenberg sees them as complementary. Each expresses what is implicitly present in the other. Hence he harmonises the two models in wisdom Christology, which speaks of the Spirit and the Word together. This distinction between an ascending and a descending Christology is confirmed by empirical research into images of Jesus. In research among Nijmegen students Van der Ven and Biemans (1994, 91-94) distinguish between seven types of images of Jesus. After statistical analysis three distinct types of Christologies emerge: an ascending Christology, a descending Christology and a humanistic Christology. (1) An ascending Christology highlights Christ's closeness to humans and God. Van der Ven cites Schleiermacher's liberal-theological orientation and Schillebeeckx's

Jesuological Christology as examples of this type. Schleiermacher takes Jesus as the archetype of the right human attitude towards God and other people. Schillebeeckx stresses that Jesus' behaviour demonstrates salvation for all people through God. (2) In a descending Christology Jesus is taken to be the Son of God 'coming from above', who offers humankind a radical choice. Karl Barth's theology is an example of this approach. (3) In humanistic Christology Jesus is taken to be a special, good human being, but no more. Every reference to a transcendent reality is renounced.

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

Renewal in the organisation of Christian congregations

In the previous section we discussed five developments that influence the three characteristics of the organisational model of the classic territorial parish in different ways. Does our description give cause for pessimism? Does the future of the church hold (only) trouble and affliction? No, that is not what we have been saying. After all, the church does not coincide with its legal definition.

In the rest of this article I discuss some possible policy strategies, which could serve as an answer to the five socio-cultural challenges to the classic territorial model of the parish. I divide these strategies into three categories: accommodation, transformation and reformation. Hence it is not a case of accommodation, transformation and reformation *of or within* the classic parish. They are different organisational models for Christian belief against the background of the five socio-cultural challenges outlined above. The accommodation strategy concerns adaptations and reorganisation without formally abandoning the organisational model of the classic territorial parish. The transformation strategy tries out alternatives that abandon (some) characteristics of the classic parish, but in so doing explicitly adhere to canon law. Finally, the reformation strategy introduces new structures based on free initiatives by the religious community without undue concern about legal niceties – but generally also without seeking to oppose them. Thus this trichotomy is not based on an internal canon law criterion, neither do I strive for canon law precision in what follows.

Accommodation

Accommodation models try to find solutions to the challenges of the five socio-cultural developments within the structure of the classic local parish. The resultant 'redrawing of the parish landscape' assumes four different forms: personal union, inter-parochial association, merger or closing down. (1) A personal union is when the bishop appoints one or more persons in several parishes. It could be a pastor, but also members of the parish board or the parish assembly (Stassen & Van der Helm 2002). (2) The inter-parochial association model goes one step further by legally unifying parishes in a federation. A federation is a legal person with its own board. It can be organised depending on circumstances, although the separate parish boards will lose all or part of their authority. Besides its own board, an inter-parochial association can have other bodies like a pastoral team, working groups, assets management, buildings management and so on. The federation creates a new committee tier between parish and deanery (or between parish and diocese), which could be an additional source of administrative conflict. (3) In a merger the existing parishes are disbanded and reconstituted as one new parish. Usually the decision to proceed to a merger is made only when other forms of cooperation fail to bring about a vigorous, unified religious community (cf. Stassen 1998). (4) Closing down is a final, drastic solution. When a parish does not pass the

general test of viability (insufficient church members, volunteers, money and/or pastors) the bishop may decide to incorporate it into the territory of a neighbouring parish. The latter will then include the defunct parish (Stassen & Van der Helm 2002).

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

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

Transformation

In the transformation models renewal is pursued by means of organisational structures which abandon (some of) the characteristics of the classic parish, but which explicitly observe the legal framework of the church. Although very different in nature, the personal parish, construction of a personal prelature and the principle of custom formation fall in this category.

The organisational form of the *personal parish* is not based on a geographic criterion, but is established by reason of the rites, language or nationality of the Christian faithful in some territory, or even for “some other reason”, for instance members' shared objectives or convictions (cf. canon 518). This covers student parishes and immigrant parishes. They abandon the principle of territoriality but – theoretically – not the characteristics of hierarchical structure and the emphasis on care, even though in practice these religious communities are often characterised by great openness and a non-hierarchical organisation.

The so-called *personal prelature* (canon 294-297) is a second example in the transformation category. It is an organisational form that exists autonomously alongside the diocese and falls under the direct authority of the pope, although the members will still be part of the diocese in which they live. A prelature is aimed at carrying out specific pastoral duties. At the moment there is only one example: Opus Dei, which is aimed at advancing the ideal of holiness in ordinary life by working according to Jesus' model (Opus Dei 1982). At the request of the local bishop, Opus Dei's priests and lay people can perform tasks within a diocese, even though its priests are not diocesan functionaries. Conversely, diocesan priests cannot join Opus Dei, but they can belong to an affiliated association. The personal prelature abandons the characteristic of territoriality and 'modifies' the characteristic of hierarchy by – in some respects – bypassing the diocesan level, which does not mean that Opus Dei is not hierarchical. Opus Dei is controversial and is often classed with the conservative right wing of the church.⁵ Some church lawyers think that it does not comply with the requirements of the personal prelature (Aymans-Mörsdorf 1997, 747f), while others cannot hide their enthusiasm (Lo Castro 1993).

Custom formation is the last policy strategy in the transformation category (canons 5, 23-28). Unlike the personal prelature, it is initiated from the base. Because of custom formation in local congregations, certain practices can acquire legal force after 30 years, even though this does not make them laws. It is also possible to obtain legal force sooner if it is specifically approved by a competent legislator. The competent legislator can be the local bishop, according to church lawyer Huysmans (1993, 128), inasmuch as he considers approval of the custom beneficial to the mental well-being of the faithful. Torfs (2003) writes that whereas custom cannot abolish law, it can erode it. By this he means that at a parochial or diocesan level space is created, while 'universal' legal rules continue to prevail and are not directly opposed. Approval of existing customs, while enacted by the legislator, is not a legislative act.

Within the scope of custom formation many alternatives are possible, hence the extent to which characteristics of territoriality, hierarchy and emphasis on pastoral care are 'transformed' depends on the specific circumstances. It is possible, for instance, to abandon the principle of territoriality in this model. Although in a sense the hierarchy remains intact, because customs must be approved before they obtain force of law (cf. Walf 2004, 262), in practice it can be weakened or eroded. Also the model can reorganise care into mutual care among all parishioners.

Reformation

In conclusion there is the free initiative of the faithful. Examples are the formation of base communities, a phenomenon found mainly in the Latin American context, although it also occurs in the Netherlands, Italy and France. They describe themselves as groups of believers who want to restore the original form of the church, but who have no ambition to start a new institution. In the course of church history there have been regular calls for a return to the source and purity of the origin: *ecclesia semper reformanda*. That is why I call this category 'reformation', although it is not a very fortunate choice. The ecclesiology underlying the free initiative of the faithful could be called congregationalist. It is less strongly directed to rules governing church life, which are (primarily) based on ministry and sacrament. Here, too, the principle of territoriality is abandoned, the hierarchy is sometimes ignored and pastoral care is a concern of the faithful (Haarsma 1981, 212-235).

Conclusion

In this article I gave an overview of some relevant organisational and structural aspects of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands in 2008. To this end I discussed three characteristics of the classic organisational structure of the parish – territoriality, hierarchical structure and emphasis on care – against the background of five socio-cultural developments. I then presented some alternative organisational structures of religious communities. Against this background, how can we evaluate the organisational model of the territorial parish for future Christian religious communication in the Netherlands? In other words: how should we assess the territorial parish as the core of church organisation in the Netherlands? Maybe we should not be too negative. The fact is, in the course of history the parish has proved to have one abiding merit:

the 'parish on site' has often been able to bring together heterogeneous (groups of) people to communicate about finding meaning on the basis of the Christian tradition. In many spheres parishes have been able to build bridges between rich and poor, highly and less educated people, men and women, the underprivileged and the 'lucky devils', immigrants and natives, young and old. In a positive sense, then, the principle of territoriality can be understood as the church's offer to be fundamentally open to everyone: it is a meeting place for all! Against this, it could be argued that at least some of the aforementioned alternative organisational structures run a risk of becoming sectarian or elitist. Space constraints prevent me from exploring this point further.

In the description and analysis of the five socio-cultural developments, however, some points emerged which are highly relevant to the existence of the territorial parish. Firstly, the binding principle of territoriality on individual believers could be questioned, even though in practice it has already been breached. Secondly, structures have to be geared to motivating volunteers. The hierarchical aspect and the emphasis on (hierarchic) care in particular have become problematic these days. Thirdly, theology of ministry would benefit by a powerful injection of professionalism. Fourthly, reorganisation must take place when financially necessary, but at the same time the faithful should be encouraged to take responsibility. Finally, religious pluralism should be recognised and acknowledged, horizontally (local congregation) as well as vertically (church structures and church law). Here, too, the last recommendation is the most important one and outweighs all the others: it guarantees the openness of the church. This observation highlights the point that the structure of an organisation is determined by its identity, and vice versa. Organisational structures are not value-free: general test of viability (insufficient church members, volunteers, money and/or pastors) the bishop may decide to incorporate it into the territory of a neighbouring parish. The latter will then include the defunct parish (Stassen & Van der Helm 2002).

End Notes:

1. This article is based on a lecture at the formation programme of the annual international pilgrimage of the Sisters of Charity of St Charles Borromeo (CB sisters) in Maastricht, the Netherlands on 24 August 2007.

2. Dioceses are also able to deviate from the rule of territoriality in terms of canon 372, although the reasons differ from those for parishes. Particular churches (dioceses) can be erected in the same territory on the basis of the right of the faithful “or some other similar reason”. So there is no lack of escape clauses which allow leeway in the sense of reinterpreting the rules.
3. The figures in brackets for the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in 2003 and 2004 are the sum of the three big Protestant churches that united to form the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in 2005. Since 2005, therefore, the figures for the Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Evangelisch-Lutheraanse Kerk*), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*), and the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*) are not given separately.
4. Compensators are “sets of beliefs and prescriptions for action that substitute for the immediate
5. For example, in 1997 Opus Dei ended up on a list of sects in the final report of the Belgian parliamentary committee of inquiry. The list named groups that were discussed or mentioned in this committee. The normative value of this list is subject to debate.

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