

## “We did not come to demolish the church but to build it up”

### Foreign Missionaries in The Netherlands

According to *Ad Gentes* the responsibility for mission work is entrusted to the local church. But as mission of the Catholic, i.e. worldwide Church, mission has a universal dimension. For this reason, new churches should participate in the universal mission of sending missionaries to other parts of the world (Ad Gentes 20). This mission started with South - South mission and is now being supplemented with mission to Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Previous research shows that foreign missionaries in the Netherlands are mainly working in territorial parishes, among Catholic immigrants and among believers of other faiths, but not among those who do not have faith or who criticize faith.<sup>2</sup> None of the international religious institutes that send missionaries to The Netherlands focus on what is usually seen as the core business of these institutes, the *missio ad gentes*, or primary evangelization.

According to one of the superior's secularism is a “bridge too far”, as secularism is difficult to understand for insiders and even more so for outsiders. The Netherlands is one of the most de-churched countries in Europe, but also one of the most spiritual.<sup>3</sup> Grace Davie describes this as ‘believing without belonging’.<sup>4</sup> The question

that will be addressed in this chapter is: How do foreign missionaries in The Netherlands deal with secularism?

#### Controversies and contested claims

Missionary institutes in the Netherlands no longer send missionaries to former mission territories,<sup>5</sup> but receive foreign missionaries to work in the Dutch society. This welcoming of foreign missionaries has been contested and is considered controversial, both from the perspective of the sending church,<sup>6</sup> and the receiving church. One of the provincial superiors whom we interviewed said that his invitation to foreign missionaries to work in the Netherlands was contested by his Dutch fellow-priests within his own religious institute who argued that the young churches overseas have themselves a shortage of priests.

This reversed mission of foreign priests is not only contested within the religious institutes, but also in the Dutch church and society at large. Whereas “reversed mission” can be interpreted and justified as an expression of the

---

4, p. 455-469.

<sup>1</sup> M. Ueffing, *Catholic Mission in Europe 1910-2010* in: S. Bevans ed., *A century of Catholic Mission. Roman Catholic Missiology 1910 to the Present*, Edinburg 2013, p. 34-43.

<sup>2</sup> F. Wijsen, *Foreign Priests in The Netherlands. Reversed mission, Mutual Assistance and International outsourcing* “Exchange” 45 (2016) no.1, p. 66-85.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. de Hart, *Zoekende gelovigen: Oude religie en nieuwe spiritualiteit*. Amsterdam 2011, p. 2201. According to De Hart, between 32% and 42% of the Dutch population are not members of a church but ‘believe in something’. See also J. de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband. Godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland*, Den Haag 2014, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> G. Davies, *Believing without belonging. Is this the future of religion in Britain?* “Social Compass” 37 (1990)

<sup>5</sup> There are few exceptions to this rule, particularly among nuns and lay missionaries. Of course, sending of old Dutch missionaries who return to ‘their mission’ after home leave, goes on.

<sup>6</sup> At a symposium organized by the Nijmegen Institute of Mission Studies about this issue on 23 May 2003, Michael Amaladoss was critical about sending non-Western missionaries to Europe. According to him, missionary institutes should ‘graciously accept that they are dying’ and should not ‘import’ new missionaries as ‘cheap labor’ to ‘fill the gaps’. See M. Amaladoss, *Mission Institutes in the Millennium*, in: F. Dokman (ed.), *The West and the Rest of the World in Theology. Mission and Co-Funding*, Nijmegen 2005, p. 66-89. In their responses to Amaladoss, published in the same booklet, Elsy Varghese and Ben supported the idea of sending non-Western missionaries to Europe.

“mutual missionary assistance of Churches”,<sup>7</sup> Dutch Catholics ask themselves, what is the “assistance” that foreign priests bring, and in what way is it “mutual”? And, assuming that “reversed mission” can be compared with outsourcing in international businesses, and outsourcing is based on the principle of demand and supply, people ask, what is the demand, or whose demand is it?<sup>8</sup> Foreign priests are compared with clerics within Muslim communities, brought from Turkey and Morocco, who are estranged from the Dutch situation, and are in need of civic integration courses.<sup>9</sup>

A pamphlet entitled *Church and Ministry* that is popular among progressive Catholics, distributed by the Provincial and Council of the Dutch Province of the Dominicans mentions among others “importing priests from abroad” as a strategy of the “Church authority” to meet the shortage of priests and to reduce the number of “Services of Word and Communion” in the parishes. It notes that “many church communities are, to say the least, unhappy with this situation”.<sup>10</sup>

On the one hand Dutch Catholics understand that “reversed mission” is a consequence of a globalizing world and church. On the other hand, they do not accept that their church and country are seen as a “mission territory”, and that they are only at the receiving end, and no longer have something to offer to the world.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Nuntiandi*

<sup>8</sup> F. Wijsen, op. cit., p. 66-85.

<sup>9</sup> See D. Haag, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties 2001; M. Ti-jssen, Inburgering van geestelijke bedienaren. Een bijzonder doelgroep of gewoon nieuwkomers? in: “Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid”, 5 (2014) no. 3, p. 42-54. *Recently government funding for civic integration courses for clerics was terminated.*

<sup>10</sup> See Bestuur Nederlandse Dominicanen, *Kerk en ambt: Op weg naar een kerk met toekomst*, Nijmegen 2007. A translation in English circulates widely on the internet, for example, on the ecumenical website of resources and reflections on liturgy, spirituality, and worship for individuals and communities, [http://www.liturgy.co.nz/worship/matters\\_assets/Church\\_and\\_Ministry.pdf](http://www.liturgy.co.nz/worship/matters_assets/Church_and_Ministry.pdf), (2.05.2014). In 2015 this website was closed.

<sup>11</sup> Already in their preliminary report for their 1993 *Ad Limina* visit to the Pope, the Dutch bishops suggested

Simply reversing the “one-way street” sign is not “mutual” either. Also, other studies which were conducted in countries including Germany and the United States,<sup>12</sup> show that there is an ambiguity or uneasiness in the relation between foreign priests and the receiving churches.<sup>13</sup>

There is also an ambiguity and uneasiness on the side of the foreign missionaries. Some of them came to the Netherlands to convert Dutch people, e.g. to bring back the gospel to those who forgot about the gospel. They are well aware of the paradox, that it was often Dutch missionaries who brought the gospel to them,<sup>14</sup> e.g. to the “young Churches” in the southern hemisphere for which they are very grateful.

---

that The Netherlands had become mission country. Some of the progressive Catholics discussed the use of the term ‘mission’. Among others, see E. Borgman, *De missionaire opdracht van de Nederlandse kerken*, “De Bazuin”, 12 maart 1993; R. van Rossum, *Over welke missie gaat het bij ‘Nederland Missieland’?* “Trouw”, 21 januari 1993.

<sup>12</sup> For the German study, see K. Gabriel, S. Leibold, R. Ackermann, *Die Situation auslän- dische Priester in Deutschland*, Ostfildern 2011; K. Gabriel, *Ausländische Priester in der deutschen Kirche: Zwischen Notlösung und welt-kirchlicher Avantgarde, Lebendige Seelsorge*, “Zeitschrift für praktisch-theologisches Handeln” 65/1 (2014), p. 2-7. For the American study, see D.R. Hoge, A. Okure, *International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities*, Minnesota 2006; D.R. Hoge, A. Okure, *International Priests in America. Two Coming Issues*, “New Theology Review” 2006, May issue, p. 14-22.

<sup>13</sup> See J. van Butselaar, *An Uneasy Relationship: ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Churches in Western Europe*, in: K. Bediako (ed.), *A New Day Dawning: African Christians Living the Gospel*, “Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum” (2004), p. 179-192. This article deals with immigrant communities within the Netherlands Protestant Church, but the ‘uneasiness’ applies also to the reversed mission of foreign priests in the Catholic Church.

<sup>14</sup> As is shown below, the Dutch Church had an overwhelming number of missionaries working in mission territories between the First World War and the Second Vatican Council. Three factors explain this historical fact. Whereas traditional missionary countries such as France and Germany had to restore their economies after the First World War, the Netherlands did not have this problem as it had remained neutral during the First World War. Moreover, due to a new constitution that guaranteed equal treatment of religions, the Catholic community was emancipating itself from the Protestant domination at that time, and world-wide mission boosted the Catholic identity. Last but not least, the then Prefect of the *Propaganda Fide* was Dutch.

Once they are here they discover that many Dutch people are no longer members of the church or know about the gospel, but that they are deeply spiritual and do a lot of charity work.<sup>15</sup> It goes without saying that the group of foreign missionaries is not homogeneous. They come from different religious institutions and different countries, and their views of church and mission vary accordingly.

### Quantitative data

Between the First World War and the Second Vatican Council missionary institutes in the Netherlands sent an overwhelming number of missionaries to the mission territories. In 1950, 1 out of 550 Dutch Catholics was working as a missionary overseas, and 1 out of 9 Catholic missionaries in the world was Dutch.<sup>16</sup> But, since the beginning of the 21st century, this mission has been reversed. The number of foreign missionaries working in The Netherlands has more than doubled over the past seven years,<sup>17</sup> as the following table shows.

	2006	2013	2014	2016
Priests	45	101	109	95
Brothers	10	19	18	17
Active Nuns	109	292	288	263
Contemplative	21	61	74	66
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>441</b>

In 2014, 8,83% of the total number of members of religious institutes (N=5538) was “foreign”, in 2016 9,3% of the total number (N=4717) of

<sup>15</sup> See A. Kunnekkadan, *Nederlanders zijn diep in hun hart spiritueel*, “Informatiedienst. Woord en Wederwoord”, juni 2011, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> See A. Camps, V. Poels, J. Willemsen, Dutch Missionary Activities. *Nijmegen 2005. In 1968 there were about 10,000 Dutch missionaries working overseas. Among others, this history has been described by J. Roes, Het groote missiejaar 1915-1940: Op zoek naar de missiemotivatie van de Nederlandse katholieken, Bilthoven: Ambo 1974; J. Derix, Brengers van de Boodschap: Geschiedenis van de katholieke missionering vanuit Nederland van voc tot Vaticanum ii, Nijmegen 2009.*

<sup>17</sup> ‘Foreign’ is defined here as ‘born outside The Netherlands’.

members of religious institutes was “foreign”. The database of the Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes does not distinguish between European and extra-European foreigners, but it is estimated that two thirds of the foreigners are extra-European. The enormous growth over the past years can partly be explained by the fact that some provinces of Netherlands religious institutes merged with other European provinces which caused mobility within these provinces. About one fifth of the foreign missionaries are involved in the administration of their religious institutes. And again, one fifth of the foreign missionaries belong to new religious institutes that were founded outside the Netherlands.<sup>18</sup> These statistics are not complete because not all new religious institutes are members of the Conference of Netherlands Religious Institutes, and their foreign missionaries are not included in the database. Also, foreign priests and nuns working in dioceses are not included in these statistics.

If we look at individual religious institutes, the Dutch Province of the Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) has 47 members in the Netherlands of which 9 are from Asia and 1 from Latin America. The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) has 59 members in the Netherlands - Belgium Province out of which 18 are from Asia and Africa.<sup>19</sup> The Congregation of the Holy Ghost (CSSp) has 60 members in The Netherlands; 44 of them are Dutch and 16 are African.

At the European level, the Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) has 754 members in Europe from which 79 members are non-Europeans, that is 10.5 percent.<sup>20</sup> Out of 79 members mentioned above

<sup>18</sup> See further G. Moorman, *Learning What it Means to be Part of the Multicultural Body of Christ*, “Exchange” A\ (2012) no. 1, p. 71-73.

<sup>19</sup> Worldssps, *Personnel Distribution*, 31 December 2016, <https://www.worldssps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Slide2.jpg> (12.10.2017). Erica Op’T Hoog, “De SVD werkt aan de toekomst: In gesprek met de oude en de nieuwe Provinciaal,” *KNR bulletin*, 5 March 2017, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Worldssps, *Personnel Distribution*, 31 December 2016, <https://www.worldssps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Slide2.jpg> (12.10.2017).

62 are from Asia.<sup>21</sup> The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) has 250 foreign missionaries working in Europe out of a total of 1126 SVD missionaries in Europe.

### Qualitative data

How do the foreign missionaries themselves experience and understand mission in Europe? Here I refer to three of them in an exemplary way, namely Sr. Melina Polo SSpS from the Philippines, Fr. Avin Kunnekkadan SVD from India, and Fr. Charles Eba'a CSSp from Cameroon.

Sr. Melina Polo came to the Netherlands in 1991. She had a preference to be sent to Papua New Guinea, but she was appointed to the Netherlands. "After such an appointment we may think about it for two weeks. I was unsure, afraid for the unknown. Of course, The Netherlands is different from Papua New Guinea. Europe is more difficult. We had heard about secularization, but what was it? That people find it more difficult to speak about God. But how? That was the idea that I came with. Now I experience it myself, now I know what secularization is". After she came to the Netherlands she started to study theology so she could have a better understanding of what the situation was, and what to do as a missionary sister. "In my own country, the task was rather easy to find: catechesis, recollection. In the Netherlands this could not be done in the same way". When she started with a bible group, the interest was not that big. "People wished to read the bible, but in a different manner: they prefer bible study above bible sharing". And she continued, "In the Netherlands we do not like vagueness. A pastor must be down to earth. Dutch people want to keep the faith for themselves; it must not be too expressive". In a bible group she experienced that people preferred bible study rather than bible sharing. It shows that people prefer intellectual discussions above showing the bible text and how it relates to their life. When asked how she looks at mission in Europe, she says: "Those who go as

missionaries to Europe don't need to bring money ... Not action is central that much, but accompanying people, be with them, and walk with them on their paths". She specifies further, "You are challenged to share your faith, not only with people who still go to church, but also with others. The Dutch experience their faith by helping people, not that much by going to church. And of those who do go to Church, you cannot always say that they are social-minded". Asked whether she has changed as a religious sister living in the Netherlands she says, "I have got a broader horizon ... I appreciate the openness of Dutch people. I learned not to judge the life of others. The intention of mission cannot lie in putting up structures which are not yet present. And to conclude she says. "I don't need to talk about God always and everywhere. I may not force others to share my faith. This cannot be. Every person has his relation to God. I have to appreciate it. And sometimes, I experienced, I can learn from this."<sup>22</sup>

Fr. Avin Kunnekkadan came to the Netherlands in 2005. He describes his initial experience as follows. "In India I had my regular job, a certain status as a religious missionary which I lost here in the beginning. I was used to working in a fixed structure within the institutionalized church. I had my own identity. As it was lost it was very painful ... I was helpless and had to begin anew like a child ... The emptiness within and the loneliness and helplessness made me sad". According to Fr. Kunnekkadan, the situation in Europe calls for a new way of doing mission, "to be a religious missionary in Europe is to be closer to the people, particularly the poor and strangers and faith seekers. To belong to them, to the seeking people, and listen, share their concerns and give them some hope in life was the new way." Although he defines himself as a missionary, he understands his task "not to convert" people, because in his view, "the Dutch are Christian enough. There is a lot of neighbor love and charity. People help each other and collect money for philanthropic aims", but to bring everyone together as a

<sup>21</sup> A. Brand, *Address to the Euro-Assembly of Provincials/Regionals and Formators*, in Official communications 210 (Rome: General Administration Mission Congregation Servants of the Holy Spirit, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Liever bijbelstudie dan 'bible sharing', interview with T. Boesten, Kerk Wereldwijd, 2016, p. 14-16; Van de mensen leerde ik wat ik met hen aan goeds kan doen, in: Mensen met een Missie, Op Vaste Grond, Week Nederlandse Missionarissen, 2002, p. 61-68.



family. Asked to describe his missionary priesthood in the Netherlands he says, “building bridges is an important part of it.... I find building bridges important... building bridges between people diverse people and cultures and forms of spirituality, encourages us to creativity”.<sup>23</sup> What he admires of the Dutch is their openness. “If you are gay or prostitute you do not need to keep it secret, like in India”. Asked about gay marriage he says it is “up to the Bishops to decide”, but in his parish gay are welcome. They are also “Children of God. They belong to the Catholic family”. Asked about other liberal values in the Netherlands, such as euthanasia, he says “Difficult issue. If you suffered from cancer for many years ... Not long ago a parishioner who was severely ill came to me to talk about euthanasia. I talked with the whole family. As a pastor I said to them: support and accompany each other. Pain and suffering are also part of life.

Fr. Charles Eba’a came to The Netherlands in 2006. After his study of philosophy in Gabon and theology in Nigeria, he wanted to work in Brazil or Belgium, because he already knew French, but he was sent to The Netherlands. “What I knew about the Netherlands was that it was the land of euthanasia and other strange things, legalized prostitution, a lot of water and cold weather. And I knew that there were many Muslims in The Netherlands”. Asked about his first experiences he says, “The lack of spontaneity and joy in the Church is big in The Netherlands. There is quite some piety, but this exists in quiet modesty. This will not last long”. Asked what his answer to this would be he says, “Bring back joy to the church”. “Christianity that was brought to Africa from Europe is fading away. As African you ask yourself whether this was fake, whether they [Europeans] now reject what they [Europeans] brought to Africa. But you can also look at in a

different way. Now the African Church is blossoming. She [the African Church] can help Europe in its turn to make sure that the faith bears fruit here”. In the past, the older generation has criticized the church, and they left the church behind them. They let the ecclesial structures collapse. Now the youngsters remain with empty hands. “I want to bring back the faith in a way that fits the present time”. But, “this is not only a task for priests”, says Fr. Eba’a. “The church in Europe must learn that being Church does not depend on the presence of clerics. If you gather with few people as Christians - with two or three in his Name - you can be Church. Just do it together”. In the beginning it was not easy for him. “I found it difficult to accept how children spoke to their parents, at the same level, without respect. And in the church, I could not get used to women who were leading liturgical services in the church. This was really shocking”. However, his experience in the parish made him open-minded. “Now I appreciate if I am present when a woman leads the service ... the stage of tolerance is past. Now it is acceptance”. Asked how the Netherlands’ culture changed him he says, “I am now more open to the world. If I am back in Cameroon, I have more difficulty with the hierarchy and how homosexuals and lesbians are there looked at”. His missionary life is nurtured through interaction with young people and visiting families. “I think that it is important that the church goes where the people are, to places where the action; then people can discover in you what the church is”.<sup>24</sup>

### Presence, Project and Diakonia

From the 1970’s onwards, religious institutes in the Netherlands developed an approach that could be described as “Christian presence” in harmony with the spirituality of Charles de Foucault.<sup>25</sup> So, when these institutes invited foreign missionaries to the Netherlands they

<sup>23</sup> A. Kunnekkadan, *HIRCOS: A Roscommon Experiment*, in: M. Ueffing (ed.) *Inter- culturality*, Sankt Augustin 2013; “Deze niet-westerse voorgangers komen ons het geloof brengen,” interview with Willem Pekelder in *Trouw* October 14, 2017, p. 11; *Missionair in de parochie*, in: *Kerk aan de Waterweg*, “Magazine van de Parochie De Goede Herder”, najaar 2014, p. 12; *Missieproeftuin en bet religieuze leven*, in: S. Kuppens e.a., *15 jaar Missionair Project*, Den Haag.

<sup>24</sup> Thuis geraakt, Jan Franken in gesprek met Charles Eba’a, in *VPWinfo*, December 2016, p. 6-7; Zaaïen op een plek waar het vuur van het geloof bijna uitgaat. Interview van Dick Vos met Charles Eba’a. In *Spinet. Spiritijns Nederlands Tijdschrift*, November 2017, p. 9-12.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. R. van Rossum et al., *Op zoek naar sporen van God*, vol. 2, The Hague: CMBR 2004; G. Moorman (ed.), *Charles de Foucault: Missionairepresentatie toen, nu en in de toekomst*, Nijmegen 2006.

wanted them not “to do many things”, but simply “to be there”.<sup>26</sup> The foreign missionaries, however, came from churches that are mainly project-oriented. Coming from so-called developing countries, many of them saw mission primarily in terms of offering social services to people in need.<sup>27</sup>

Sr. Polo says that “foreign missionaries don’t need to bring money”. But, “the dimension of social justice is included in it [presence]. Also, in the Netherlands there is much to do in this field”. And, “The Netherlands may be a rich country with a well-organized social system. But also, in the Netherlands there are poor people. People who have to struggle for life ... For those people I want to be present”.<sup>28</sup> By offering social services to people in need it is seen as a way to make present the gospel values in peoples’ lives. The missionaries are always ready to answer anyone who asks them to explain the hope they have in them (1 Peter 3:35). The foreign missionaries, however, do not make the distinction between “sacramental” and “social” ministry. Coming from non-Western cultures, they tend to think in more holistic terms. They speak about “integral development”, in which material and spiritual development, development of body and soul, go together.

In a well-fare state, material needs are catered for by the government. Due to neo-liberal politics, the state’s social services are minimized, and churches fill in the gaps. The tragedy is that Dutch priests think that immigrants and people at the underside of the society need social ministry, but these people increasingly go to the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches where their spiritual needs are taken seriously.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> One of the foreign missionaries, however, noted a paradox. The foreign or ‘new’ missionaries have become the ‘project’ of the old Dutch missionaries.

<sup>27</sup> One of the ‘old’ missionaries noted that there is no contradiction between presence and project. Presence (or insertion into the local situation) is a necessary stage in developing a project. New missionaries argue that this stage is repeated again and again by new foreign missionaries, so there seems little continuity and stability.

<sup>28</sup> See Liever Bijbelstudie dan ‘bible sharing’, 16; Van de mensen leerde ik, 65.

<sup>29</sup> See J.Maaskant, *Afrikaan en Katboliek in Rotterdam*:

## Parish, Mission, Missionary Parish

Because of the emphasis on “presence”, until recently it was common practice in the Netherlands, members of religious institutes did not take responsibility for parishes. Many Dutch missionaries — who returned home after serving as missionaries overseas - did not see it as their primary task to “fill in the gaps” in parishes, but to perform extra-ordinary ministries in addition to parishes. In many cases they set up a parallel structure.

However, most foreign male missionaries are trained in their seminaries to be parish priests.<sup>30</sup> They do not see a conflict between parish and mission, but tend to think in terms of missionary parishes, or pastoral mission, in accordance with the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*.<sup>31</sup>

In their view, if parishes were run by missionaries they would simply duplicate the existing parishes, indeed they would not add anything to traditional parish structures. But foreign missionaries want to show alternatives and add their own voices to the plurality of voices in the church.

In contrast to the diocesan priests, who tend to focus on herding the “church-goers”, foreign missionaries focus more on the “lost sheep”, or “spiritual seekers”<sup>32</sup> Fr. Kunnekkadan concludes, “We can use the parish structure to be present ... By being present in parishes we are more visible and we can be more open”.<sup>33</sup>

## Spirituality and community life

Apart from being one of the most secularized countries in the world, the Netherlands is also

---

*Waar kerkje dan*, Nijmegen 1999, p. 98.

<sup>30</sup> In one case a foreign missionary narrated that his superior failed to organize a courtesy visit to the local bishop. So, he organized it himself.

<sup>31</sup> See John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate Redemptoris Missio*, no. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. J. de Hart, *Zoekendegelovigen...*, op. cit., p. 2201. According to De Hart, between 32% and 42% of the Dutch population are not members of a church but ‘believe in something’. See also J. de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband...*, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> See: De SVD werkt aan de toekomst.

one of the most de-institutionalized societies in the world. Coming from an era in which the Netherlands was extremely church-centred, divided into neatly separated “pillars” (Catholic, Protestant, socialist) in which life was collective, the Dutch nation has become highly individualized.

Coming mostly from non-Western societies which are perceived as more communitarian, new missionaries want to show in the Dutch context that community life is valuable. “In the Netherlands there is a lot of loneliness”, says Fr. Kunnekkadan. Therefore, they stress the value of family and family ministry.

Moreover, the new missionaries who have lived in the Netherlands for a longer period of time understand that most Dutch people are not secularists, atheists or even agnostics, but “spiritual seekers”. As Fr. Kunnekkadan says, “deep in their heart the Dutch are spiritual”.<sup>34</sup> What is lacking in the Church is happiness and a sense of humour. “In Cameroon faith was a feast ... This is lacking in The Netherlands”, says Fr. Eba’a. “Not without reason evangelical Churches in The Netherlands attract more people”.<sup>35</sup>

## Epilogue

Bishops who invite religious institutes and foreign missionaries to work in their dioceses expect a revitalization of the local church. The little evidence that we have got suggests that this has not happened. A critique is that the foreign missionaries are not so visible in the Church.<sup>36</sup>

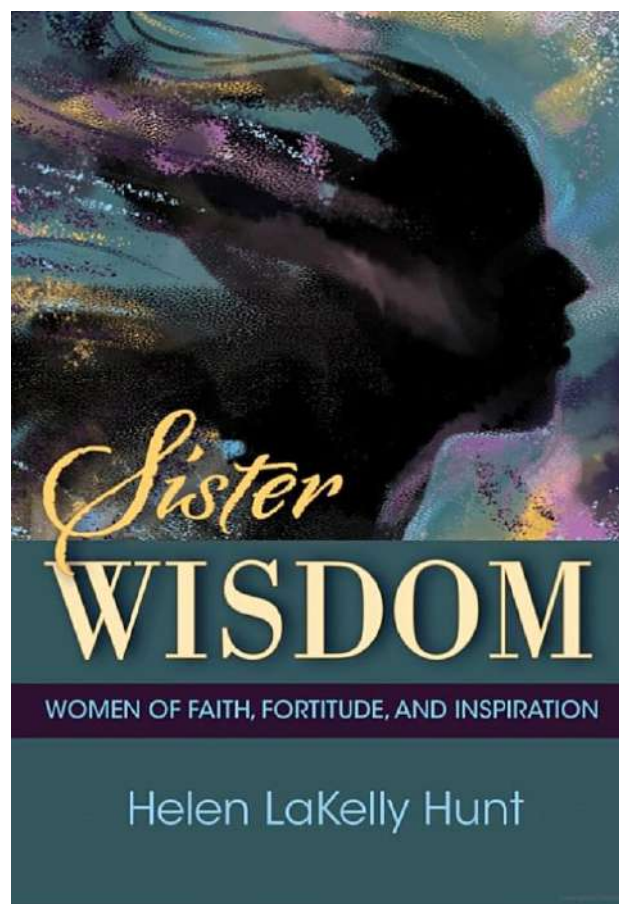
The question that was addressed in this chapter was: How do foreign missionaries in The Netherlands deal with secularism? First, secularism is not easy to be defined, and most foreign missionaries experienced that

secularism does not necessarily signify unbelief. Many Dutch are spiritual and support charity works. Foreign missionaries are not encouraged to address the issue of secularism by their religious superiors. According to them it is almost impossible for foreign missionaries to get accustomed to secularization. It is a bridge too far.

The foreign missionaries themselves say that they are used to non-Christian environments, coming from India, where Christians are a minority, or China, where religious expression was restricted until recently. And, according to them, when Dutch missionaries went to their mission territories, they also had to get accustomed to the surroundings that were different from the ones they came from. The same applies to foreign missionaries coming to the Netherlands.

(Ref: *European Mission Studies*, No.2, 2020, pp.153 - 165)

\*\*\*\*\*



(Gift from Orbis Books to SEDOS Library)

<sup>34</sup> See Kunnekkadan, *Nederlanders zijn diep in hun hart spiritueel*.

<sup>35</sup> See Zaaen op een plek, 10-11.

<sup>36</sup> See J.C. Guerra, *Niet voor kerkgebouwen maar voor*

*de mensen. Een onderzoek naar de inzet van nieuwe missionarissen in het missionair-diaconaal pastoraat in de Schilderswijk*, Nijmegen 2018, p. 37.