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Inter-Religious Dialogue and Migrants

The Case of the Netherlands

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Abstract

In the Netherlands the first official inter-religious dialogues were initiated in the first half of the 1970s. But the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, one of the most important churches had taken the first steps towards an attitude of dialogue already in 1949 and 1950. The atrocities against the Jews and the deportation of the 90 per cent of the Dutch Jews in the Second World War as well as the solidarity deeply felt by many church members with the new state of Israel prompted this church, and later two other large mainline churches, to alter their attitudes towards Jews and Judaism. After 1970 they extended these dialogues to Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, who together outnumber the Jews today. The altered Dutch religious landscape had made inter-religious dialogue inevitable. This dialogue was held with migrants, so the position of the adherents of non-Christian religions was weaker than that of Christians. This inequality is reflected in the dialogue, for it became predominantly a dialogue of life, in which the Christians started with helping their partners to find a good position in Dutch society. The dialogue with the Jews, however, already quickly became a dialogue of the mind. In the second half of the 1990s a dialogue of the mind was initiated with Muslims, and in the first decade of the twenty-first century with some Hindus. The vulnerability of migrants was underscored by the impact of the governments in their countries of origin and by the fact that the Christians paid for almost everything. In 2000 the churches began to hesitate; nonetheless they remained in dialogue.

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Keywords

inter-religious dialogue – mission – Holocaust – migrants – churches in the Netherlands

Since the first half of the 1970s various groups of inter-religious encounter emerged in the Netherlands. Many of them disappeared again, but some of them remained, while in the meantime other people established new groups sometimes from perspectives different from the older ones. It was mostly Christians who started these groups, which is not so strange as in the beginning of the 1970s they still formed the great majority of the population of the country, whereas the other religious groups were sometimes very small minorities (website *Volkstellingen 1795–1971*; Beets 2010:18–19). Moreover, almost all non-Christians were migrants with the exception of the Jews. But the *Shoah* of the Second World War had affected the position of the Jews. Before the Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, the Jews were regarded as full and mostly accepted and respected citizens of the country, although there was also some anti-Semitism. The Netherlands had about 140,000 Jewish inhabitants; 110,000 of them were deported; only 5,500 returned (CBS 2005:98). It is understandable that many Jews felt very insecure and had lost the confidence so common among autochthonous people.

The following table reveals that the religious landscape of the Netherlands underwent a sea change in the 65 years between 1947 and 2012.¹

TABLE 1 *Religious population of the Netherlands*

	1940	1947	2012
Total population	8,900,000	9,600,000	16,700,000
Christians	7,600,000	7,900,000	7,000,000
Jews	140,000	14,347	43,000
Muslims			857,000
Hindus			101,000
Buddhists			50,000

1 Websites *Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (CBS)*; *Volkstellingen 1795–1971*. Because of the attack of the Germans the census planned for 1940 was not held. The census of 1930 counted 6,679,070 Christians and 111,917 Jews. Through an extrapolation of the figures of the census of 1930 I estimate the number of Christians at 7,600,000 in 1940.

While the first census after the Second World War does not make any mention of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists (website *Volkstellingen 1795–1971*), these religious minorities now have outgrown the only non-Christian minority of 1947, that of the Jews. The fact that the census of 1947 did not refer to Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists does not mean that they were completely absent in the country. They were certainly present, but their numbers were too tiny to be included in the results of the census. Another remarkable phenomenon is that although it is obvious that nowadays a considerable part of the Dutch population does not adhere to any of the religions mentioned in the table, the number of Christians has not significantly decreased during these years. Here it must be realised, however, that the figure for 2012 also encompasses between 516,000 and 800,000 Christians who entered the country after World War Two. They included Roman Catholics from Spain, Italy and Portugal, but also from African and Asian countries, as well as Protestants, Pentecostals, Syrian Orthodox and others (Van den Berg and De Hart 2008:32–33; Frederiks and Pruiksmā 2010:130); it was not only Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists that came to the Netherlands. Furthermore it must not be forgotten that the number of Jews would have been ten times higher in 1947, if the deportations had not taken place.

The following factors were responsible for these radical changes.

1. In the 1960s various industries needed more workers than were available in the Netherlands. Therefore the employers of several corporations recruited them from countries such as Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Tunisia, Turkey and Morocco. This is one of reasons of the rise of the number of Muslims, but it resulted also in a growth of the number of Christians (Nicolaas and Sprangers 2007:39, 44).
2. After 1973, when the recruitment of workers abroad was stopped, the number of Muslims grew further because of the immigration of the wives and children of the earlier arrived migrant workers, whereas since the beginning of the 1990s a great numbers of Muslims entered the Netherlands as asylum seekers (Nicolaas and Sprangers 2007:40–41).
3. A third important factor was the arrival of people from the former colonies of the Netherlands. In the 1950s many Christians and a small number of Muslims arrived from Indonesia. And around 1975, when Suriname became independent, a wave of Surinamese immigrants consisting of Christians, Hindus and a smaller number of Muslims entered the country (Landman 1992:204).
4. The number of Buddhists rose when Vietnamese refugees came to the Netherlands, but the number of autochthonous Buddhists increased as

well, although they are still far outnumbered by their Vietnamese co-religionists (Van den Berg and De Hart 2008:34; website *Open boeddhisme*).

In the meantime the number of Jews rose too, so that the Netherlands has 43,000 Jewish inhabitants today, 10,000 of them being migrants mostly coming from Israel. (Van Solinge and Van Praag 2010:2–3).

Currently the Muslim section of the Dutch population consists of three main groups – the Turks, the Moroccans and the Surinamese (Landman 1992:204; De Beer 2007:2) – and some smaller groups, of which the Iraqi, Somali and Afghani are the most important. Figures from 2007 reveal that in this year the country counted 323,000 Turkish Muslims and 262,000 Moroccan Muslims (Van den Berg and De Hart 2008:34). Around 10 percent of the Christians in the Netherlands today are migrants. A very large number of the 110,000 Hindus – 91,000 – are of Surinamese descent. The other Hindus are Indians, Sri Lankan Tamils or autochthonous Dutch inhabitants.²

It is evident that the radical change of the Dutch religious landscape made inter-religious dialogue unavoidable. However, this need seems to be felt less today than in the 1970s. This article will provide a sketch of the history of the official inter-religious encounters in the Netherlands. First, the focus will be on those developments in the country's most important churches which opened the minds of some of their leaders so that they decided to adopt a different attitude towards adherents of other religions. These people were no longer objects of mission, but became partners in dialogue, at least in theory. Then the developments within the encounter will be heeded. The emphasis will be on what occurred in the interaction between Christians and Muslims and between Christians and Hindus. The following section is devoted to those settings in which the migrant situation comes to the fore. In this context attention will be paid to the type of dialogue in all these contacts. At the beginning of the twenty-first century both Catholics and Protestants seemed to hesitate. What were the consequences? After having paid attention to this last subject a retrospect and conclusion will form the end of the article.

The reader has to realize that this article will view the inter-religious dialogue for the larger part from a Christian perspective, although this does not mean that there will be no attention to the perspectives of participants belonging to other religions. Furthermore this is not the first article about the

2 Bakker 2005:29 notes 40 and 41 gives 101,000 Hindus. The sources the author used there did not include the Sri Lankan Tamils who emigrated to the Netherlands in the 1980s, their number being 3275 on 1 April 1985 (Alink 2006:88). Today they claim that they are 20,000, but 10,000 is a more probable estimation. The great majority of them are Hindu.

inter-religious encounter in the Netherlands, but it is certainly the first one observing the developments in this interaction from the perspective that it was almost always a dialogue between indigenous and migrants. Consequently the theological developments will receive less attention.³

The sources of this article are interviews with a number of important participants, in particular on the Christian side, minutes and reports of the dialogue groups functioning under the umbrella of the National Council of Churches in the Netherlands and a number of books and articles published about this subject.⁴

Some Theoretical Remarks

However, before we turn our minds to inter-religious dialogue in the Netherlands, it is necessary to give some more insight in what we mean by inter-religious dialogue. The literature often distinguishes between three types of dialogue:

1. the dialogue of life, taking place where people of various religious background live together and meet one another;
2. the dialogue of the mind, organized between scholars and religious experts;
3. and the dialogue of the heart, occurring between monastics, mystics and other people with an antenna for mysticism (Küster 2004:78–79; Race 2001:9–10).

The German Protestant theologian Volker Küster (b. 1962) explains that in the dialogue of life people may experience the rites and festivals, but do not necessarily have detailed knowledge of the principles of the other religion. He qualifies this type of dialogue as pre-conceptual. It aims at good living

3 Other publications are those written by Simon Schoon on the dialogue between Jews and Christians, including his article 'Recent Developments in Christian-Jewish Dialogue' (Schoon 2010), and those written by authors such as Jan Slomp, 'Christians and Religious Pluralism in the Netherlands' (Slomp 2000) and 'The Churches in the Netherlands and Their Texts on Islam' (Slomp 2010); Freek L. Bakker, 'The Hindu-Christian Dialogue in Europe: The Case of the Netherlands' (Bakker 2006); and Alle G. Hoekema, 'The Council of Churches in the Netherlands and its Encounter with Islam' (Hoekema).

4 In this context it is appropriate to point out that the present author was also one of the partners in dialogue. For years he participated in the dialogue group of Hindus and Christians of the Dutch Council of Churches.

together. The second type of dialogue is conceptual and serves the search for common truth. The dialogue of the heart is post-conceptual. The diverse practices of meditation form the central meeting place. Mutual enrichment through spiritual experiences and a search for common ground is central (Küster 2004:78–79).

Sometimes dialogues can lead to good and intimate relationships, which made a Hindu friend of mine say that real dialogue is only possible between friends. In such a relationship it is only a matter of course that both partners become well acquainted with what the other believes or even does not believe. The contents of this belief are, however, not preached to the other but related often only after the other showed genuine curiosity. When the contents of one's faith are related in circumstances like these, this is no longer a matter of evangelism, but a matter of dialogue. Evangelism, which I use as a synonym of mission in this article, is "the presentation of the gospel to individuals and groups by such methods as preaching, teaching, and personal or family visitation programs" (Website *Merriam-Webster*).⁵ The sequel of the present article will disclose that in the Dutch churches some tension is felt frequently between an attitude of evangelism and an attitude of dialogue. Those preferring an attitude of evangelism frequently criticize those going for dialogue and vice-versa.

The Attitudes of the Mainline Churches

Above it was noted that the Dutch religious landscape has radically changed today. Inter-religious dialogue has become unavoidable. In the 1970s there were various Dutch who were convinced of this need already and therefore initiated the first official inter-religious meetings in the Netherlands. But the first signs of an altering attitude in the mainline churches already stem from the first decade after the Second World War. For in 1949 the biggest Protestant church of the time, the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (Netherlands Reformed Church – NRC) decided to institute an annual Israel Sunday on the first Sunday of October, in the season of the Jewish Holy Days (Schoon 2010:377). One year later its Synod accepted a new Church Order which explicitly stipulated that the relationship with Israel would be characterized by dialogue and not by mission (Schoon 1976:52; Bastiaanse 1995:480). So the NRC decided to stop evangelising the Jews. Ten years later the church issued a manual for this dialogue entitled *Israël en de Kerk* (Israel and the Church). This book affirmed Israel's enduring

5 Of course, there is much more to say about this subject, but that transcends the scope of this article.

election and involvement in the covenant (Schoon 2010:377), thus renouncing the ancient substitution theology in which the church was regarded as God's people replacing Israel (Bastiaanse 1995:569–581). Unfortunately the study never functioned as a manual for dialogue; it proved to be far ahead of its time (Bastiaanse 1995:588–589). The drive for mission still filled the hearts of many church members at that time.

The other large Protestant church, the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – RCN) needed much more time and it was 22 November 1971 before the RCN Synod decided to put an end to its mission among the Jews. On this date the Synod appointed a minister in Nes Ammim and thereby declared itself in agreement with the declaration of the principles adopted by the international Nes Ammim movement, which stipulated that the movement would refrain from proselytism (Schoon 1976:47, 52, 55, 57; Van Klinken 1996:567–568). Nes Ammim was a kibbutz founded by Christians in the North of Israel as a sign of solidarity with the Jews who had survived the Holocaust (Schoon 1976:9–16, 19–20). The other Protestant mainline church, the NRC, as well as another smaller Reformed church,⁶ was also deeply involved in this project.

The third large church, the Roman Catholic Church, made a major step with the promulgation of the *Nostra Aetate* declaration on 28 October 1965. The document refers to “the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock” (4) and “implores the Christian faithful to ‘maintain good fellowship among the nations’ (1 Peter 2:12) . . . , and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men, so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven (5).” *Nostra Aetate* exhorted dialogue not only with Jews, but also with Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. The influence of the declaration extended beyond the borders of its own church, for the document inspired many Protestants as well.

The change in the attitude of the Dutch mainline churches towards the Jews finds its origin in three motives. First, many were shocked by the enormous scale of the atrocities of the Second World War and the powerful influence of the Nazi ideology at the time. Second, they were ashamed of the deportation of such a large portion of the Dutch Jewish population during this war. Third, many Christians, particularly the Protestants among them, saw in the proclamation of the State of Israel a sign of God showing that He returned to his

6 The Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken. Other Protestant churches in the Netherlands and in Germany, Switzerland and the United States of America also supported the project. But the three Dutch churches formed a special contact committee that canalized their ecclesial support for Nes Ammim (Schoon 1976:7, 26–28; Van Klinken 1996:552–568).

people and maintained His covenant with them (Schoon 2010:377). Many Dutch, again in particular the Protestants among them, felt a deep solidarity with this state especially when it was attacked by its Arab enemies.⁷ It must be admitted, however, that this change of attitude did not take place directly after the end of the war, but much later in the 1950s and 1960s. Besides the new policy of dialogue was always confronted with cries of protest from those who maintained that the church had to stick to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16–20, which in their opinions also includes a missionary attitude towards the Jews (Van Klinken 1996:610). The Dutch province of the Catholic Church moreover followed *Nostra Aetate* only with much hesitation (Poorthuis and Salemink 2006:663–672). In fact, it was not until 1995 that the Dutch bishops officially recognized and deplored the contribution of church and theology to the attitude of anti-Semitism and pleaded for a “new, vital solidarity of Christians and Jews” and for real meeting one another with respect for each other’s identity (Poorthuis and Salemink 2006:744–746). Nevertheless, there were some Catholic theologians who adopted the new attitude expressed in *Nostra Aetate* already in the 1970s. The three mainline churches were open for a dialogue with the Jews, while the Roman Catholic Church had already turned its eyes towards a more open attitude to the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. However, later we will see that the resistance against this policy had not disappeared.

First Official Inter-Religious Meetings

In 1973 Simon Schoon (b. 1944), a minister of the RCN, went to Nes Ammim. During his stay, which lasted till 1981, he made contact not only with the Jews but also with Palestinian Christians and Palestinian Muslims. Thus he became a go-between who was sometimes distrusted by all parties (Website of *Nes Ammim*). Under Schoon’s guidance Nes Ammim started to become a place of dialogue of people who almost never met one another (Website of Simon Schoon). The attitude of witness included an attitude of dialogue.

Around the same time, in the first years of the 1970s Dirk Cornelis Mulder (1919–2014) took the initiative to start a dialogue group called Joden – Christenen – Moslims (JCM). Mulder was a professor at the Vrije Universiteit (Free

7 For elaboration of these motives, see: Bastiaanse 1995:569–580; Van Klinken 1996:454–455, 499–501, 594–606; Poorthuis and Salemink 2006:575–579, 600–601, 610–624.

University)⁸ in Amsterdam and a theologian belonging to the RCN. He had also roots in the mission, because before his professorship at the Vrije Universiteit he worked for more than twenty years in Indonesia. Mulder hoped that the Christians could act as a bridge between the Jews and Muslims. In 1979 the group was discontinued.⁹ The biggest problem was that the Muslims were unable to send real experts of their religion to these meetings. A second problem was that the Christians far outnumbered both the Jews and the Muslims.¹⁰

Continuing Oscillation between Mission and Dialogue

In 1974 the Nederlandse Zendingsraad (Dutch Mission Board) established a Working Group on Islam. The mission board was a body in which the two big Protestant churches (NRC and RCN) and some smaller Protestant churches coordinated their missionary activities. In 1978 this working group was placed under the umbrella of the Section for the Inter-religious Encounter of the Raad van Kerken in Nederland, the Dutch National Council of Churches, in which the Roman Catholic Church also participated. The members of the mission board were of the opinion that the relationship with the Muslims had to be characterized by dialogue and no longer by evangelism. This view was, however, not shared by all members of the participating churches. It is even probable that the people who did not agree formed a majority at the time, at least in the Protestant churches. In 1978 two small Reformed churches,¹¹ which did not participate in the mission board and the national council of churches, established, in cooperation with two mission organizations, the IZB Vereniging

8 Vrije Universiteit means literally Free University, but this university clings to its Dutch name to prevent the misunderstanding that the education at this institution is for free.

9 In the time of the Gulf War in the 1990s JCM was re-established. The delegations of the three religions counted only three persons each. This time the Muslim delegation included well-informed and fluently Dutch speaking members like Sajidah Abbas Sattar and Abdul Wahid van Bommel. In 1994 the organisation was discontinued again (Interview with Jan Slomp, 22 May 2012).

10 At the time the author was part of the Instituut voor Godsdienstwetenschap at the Vrije Universiteit. He himself heard Mulder's views. Unfortunately I was unable to find out when this group exactly started, whether it was in 1973, 1974, 1975 or 1976. It is certain that there were meetings in 1976. The rest of the information comes from an interview with one of the later participants, Jan Slomp, 22 May 2012.

11 The *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* mentioned in note 4 and the *Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt*. Later another small Reformed church joined in, the *Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken* (E-mail sent by Jan Slomp, 3 July 2012).

voor Zending in Nederland (IZB Association for Mission in the Netherlands)¹² and the Morgenland Zending (Morning Land Mission), a foundation called Evangelie en Moslims (Gospel and Muslims). This organization adopted a more missionizing attitude.¹³

In 1976 the RCN appointed an executive secretary, Jan Slomp (b. 1932), for the Muslim Christian working group which for two years was placed under the umbrella of the Dutch Council of Churches. He started his work in 1977. Before 1977 he had worked in Pakistan in service of the RCN mission. In 1983 the NRC appointed Gé M. Speelman (b. 1955), who closely cooperated with Jan Slomp. However, both the deteriorating situation with regard to the church finances and an increased hesitation towards inter-religious encounter means that nowadays the Protestant Church in the Netherlands has no more than one official responsible for the contacts with Muslims, Jan Post Hospers (b. 1953).

Helping the Migrants

The Dutch Roman Catholic Church started its inter-religious activities from another point of departure. The arrival of many Spanish, Italian and Portuguese workers, of whom the great majority were Catholic, incited the church to found the organization Cura Migratorum (Care for Migrants) in 1975 to help the Dutch parishes to take care of them or to organize separate communities guided by Spanish, Italian or Portuguese pastors. It was this organization that saw the problems of the Turkish and Moroccan migrants as well and wished to help them. Yet, the mission also had an influence here because in 1976 Cura Migratorum asked a former missionary, White Father Piet G.M. Backx (d. 1992), to take care of the Turks and the Moroccans (Van Oers 2001:16–21). Already in 1974 Backx had taken the initiative to issue the journal *Begrip – Moslims – Christenen* (Understanding – Muslims – Christians) to promote understanding between the adherents of these two religions. A few years later theologians of the two large Protestant churches also participated in the editorial board.¹⁴

12 This mission organisation belonged to the *Gereformeerde Bond* (Reformed Alliance), the conservative section of the NRC.

13 They were inspired by Professor Johannes Verkuyl of the *Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam, a theologian belonging to the RCN, who always pleaded for ‘mutual witness’ and for the ‘right to convince’ (See for example: Verkuyl 1994:134–140). In practice, however, the people of *Evangelie en Moslims* reserved almost no space for the testimony of their partners in their meetings (Information from Jennifer van Werkhoven, June 2012).

14 Interviews with Jan Slomp, 22 May 2012, and Berry van Oers, 29 May 2012; *Begrip – Moslims – Christenen*.

In his work for Cura Migratorum Backx was assisted by other former missionaries and nuns, who had mostly lived in Arab countries. This gave them the necessary knowledge of the culture and habits of these migrants. In 1981 Piet Backx was replaced by another White Father, Piet Reesink (b. 1933); today Berry van Oers (b. 1958) is the Catholic official responsible for the inter-religious dialogue (Van Oers 2001:27–29; interview with Berry van Oers, 29 May 2012).

The advent of the Surinamese around 1975 gave also a new impetus. Many of the Surinamese Hindustanis¹⁵ went to The Hague. Consequently members of the two large Protestant churches and the Catholic Church initiated local groups to help them to find houses and to provide clothing and other things they needed.¹⁶ About 80 per cent of the Hindustanis were Hindus, which led to new initiatives, now for dialogues with Hindus, in particular in The Hague. The encounter with the Hindus always remained the responsibility of local ministers, such as Jan Peter Schouten (b. 1949), Freek L. Bakker (b. 1951) and Jan H. Buikema (b. 1941).¹⁷ But also in many other towns and cities people, including many church members, tried to help the migrants in their neighborhood with finding houses, spaces for worship and guiding them through the many administrative problems to get the necessary permissions for what they wished to organize and arrange. It was a time when a Muslim imam could ask a Catholic nun to talk with a Muslim woman who had many problems (Interview with Berry van Oers, 29 May 2012). People helping Hindus succeeded in arranging that the crematoria of The Hague gave the time at the end of the day for Hindu cremations so that they had sufficient time to perform their rituals before the actual cremation itself (Bakker 2006:24–26).

15 In Suriname and the Netherlands the term Hindustani has an ethnic character and refers to people of Indian descent of whom the family lived for some time in Suriname. This means that there are Hindu Hindustanis, Muslim Hindustanis and Christian Hindustanis. The word has no associations with the meanings given to the term by Indian Hindu nationalists.

16 Leaflets spread among church members in April 1976 of some Protestant churches in the western part of The Hague; a list of people attending the first meeting; a letter written by the organising personalities to the local Sanatan Dharm association, and a report in a church magazine, *Gereformeerd Den Haag*, 4 December 1976.

17 The local congregations of the region of The Hague appointed Buikema as a minister responsible for inter-religious encounter in the region of The Hague from 1983 till 2003. Officially, however, he was responsible for evangelizing activities, but he implemented his task by creating all sorts of contacts including many inter-religious ones, predominantly with Surinamese Hindus. Schouten and Bakker were ministers of various local congregations and are still active in the field.

More Institutions Established

In 1978 the Dutch National Council of Churches set up a Section for Inter-religious Encounter and placed the Working Group Islam under this department. At the same time the group was extended with representatives of the Dutch Catholic Church. From now on the inter-religious encounter was a common activity of the three mainline churches, in which often also individuals belonging to the Council's smaller member churches participated. In 1985 the section was extended with two other working groups, one for the encounter with Hindus and another for the encounter with Buddhists. For a short time there was even a working group for the encounter with people following the New Age tradition (Interview with Jan Slomp, 22 May 2012; Bakker 2006:26).¹⁸

The dialogue with Jews was not placed under this section. This was on purpose, as the Jewish religion was no longer regarded as another religion. In the view of the Christians both Jews and Christians served the same God, the God of Israel. In 1981 a number of Jewish organisations and Christian churches founded the *Overlegorgaan Joden en Christenen* (OJEC – Consultation Body of Jews and Christians).¹⁹ For two reasons this development is significant. It showed that the Christians continued to consider the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists to be adherents of other “pagan” religions and therefore the call to evangelize these people was never silenced. The step meant also that the inter-religious dialogue had become a dialogue with migrants. Although the position of the Jews was affected after World War Two, they were not really migrants.

In 2004 the Catholic Church initiated a separate *Contactraad voor de Interreligieuze Dialoog* (CID – Contact Council for Inter-religious Dialogue) chaired by one of the bishops, which organises annual seminars where the bishop and one of the Hindu and Buddhist leaders give a lecture. The bishop sometimes also invites these leaders in his own home, which is greatly appreciated (Interview with Berry van Oers, 29 May 2012). Apparently this decision suggested that the Catholics disassociated themselves from the mainline Protestant churches in the common approach of the adherents of other religions, but this was time and again denied.²⁰ The participation of a bishop in

18 The Buddhist dialogue group did not exist very long. Some years later there was a restart, but then again the group fell apart after some time. Today it is non-existent.

19 Nowadays four Jewish organisations and eight Christian ones are members. The Jewish organisations have a double seat to create a better balance in the body (Website *OJEC – Overlegorgaan Joden en Christenen*).

20 Statements made by the Catholic representative, Berry van Oers, in various meetings of the section in 2005 and 2006.

this committee can be explained as taking the inter-religious dialogue more seriously than before.

The migrants themselves also formed organizations. However, after 1983 the Dutch government did not wish to give financial support to religious organizations, because of the separation between church and state. Therefore the migrants mostly formed all sorts of non-religious so-called “cultural associations.” Yet, these bodies also organized religious festivals including the necessary rituals (e-mail sent by Jan Slomp, 3 July 2012).²¹ Halfway through the 1990s the Dutch government changed its policy, became less hesitant and started to finance religious organizations as well. It even initiated Dutch trainings for imams, for it learned that it could influence the views of the students becoming imams and prevent an influx of imams from abroad, in particular from the Arab world.

The Muslim migrants founded organizations reflecting their various ethnic backgrounds. Therefore there are Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese-Indian and Moluccan associations. Since 83 per cent of the Hindus are Hindustanis, almost all Hindu organizations are Hindustani. Both the variety in their ethnicity and other more religious rifts caused many conflicts among the Muslims, which made it very difficult to form one national Muslim board. The Hindus had also many conflicts, but they succeeded in forming a Hindoe Raad Nederland (HRN – Hindu Council of Netherlands) in 2004. Halfway through the first decade of the twenty-first century the Muslims had two separate umbrella-organizations: the Islamitische Raad Nederland (IRN – Islamic Council of the Netherlands) established in 1992, in which the Turkish, Moroccan and many Surinamese Muslims are united, and the Nederlandse Moslim Raad (Dutch Muslim Council), which consists of many Muslims coming from other ethnicities. But in the meantime the IRN has already fallen apart.

Christians and Muslims

One of the first initiatives of the new Section for Inter-religious Encounter was that it decided in 1978 to send greetings every year at *‘id al-fitr* to all Muslim friends and mosque associations in the country. Besides church members were given the opportunity to use the letter with salutations as well,

21 E-mail sent by Jan Slomp, 3 July 2012. I myself once attended such a festival in the city of Groningen in the 1980s.

to send them to the friends and associations they themselves had contact with (Slomp 2000:216).²²

Mostly the churches tried to make contact with local organisations and houses of worship. Thus inter-religious dialogue often started on a local level. When it came to national inter-religious organizations the representatives of the Muslims and Hindus participated mostly as private persons, although it was always attempted to get persons with great authority in certain big Muslim or Hindu organizations. A serious problem was, in particular in the first decades of the establishment of dialogue groups, that persons with great religious authority mostly were not able to communicate in Dutch, but that those who could speak Dutch were not really well acquainted with religious affairs and also lacked the authority to speak about these affairs. This called repeatedly for extra consultations. In the meantime the group was never sure whether the other party really supported its policy. An imam or *pandit* (Hindu priest) could always cast a veto.

Furthermore it is important that the Netherlands Council of Churches did not only have a section for inter-religious encounter, but also another one called *Pluriforme Samenleving* (Pluriform Society), which tried to help migrants in general without paying attention to their religious background. They focused on anti-racism, learning the Dutch language and differences in culture. Until 1995 the Muslim migrants were denoted by their ethnic identities, not by their religious backgrounds. Therefore Slomp and Speelman always made contact with ethnic Turkish and Moroccan associations, whereas the representatives of the Hindu-Christian group tried to get contact with Hindustani organizations, not with Hindu ones.

The dialogue group of Christians and Muslims held a number of meetings and seminars with these groups on themes such as the construction of mosques; holy space; tolerance and the limits of tolerance; education including religious education; or the *shari'a* in Europe. Political and social subjects dominated the agenda in the dialogue with the Turkish and Moroccan Muslims, whereas the dialogue with Surinamese Muslims also paid attention to theological subjects. The reason was that they spoke Dutch fluently, which they already had learned in Suriname (Interview with Jan Slomp, 22 May 2012; Hoekema 2010:449–469).²³

After the appointment of Gé Speelman contacts were made with Muslim women, in the beginning in particular with those belonging to *al-Nissa*, an

22 Hoekema writes that they started to send the letter in 1982 (Hoekema 2010:452–453), but, according to Jan Slomp, Hoekema made an error (Interview with Jan Slomp, 22 May 2012).

23 Dutch is the national language of Suriname.

association of native Dutch women married to foreign Muslim men. Today *al-Nissa* also includes Muslim women of non-Dutch background (Interview with Gé M. Speelman, 18 May 2012). If a woman, such as Gé Speelman, enters the scene to speak with men, she can be asked to come into the kitchen to speak with the women there. Almost automatically the contacts are no longer confined to men. Migrant women are often invisible in these meetings, as they are mostly only asked to cook and to prepare delicacies for the guests visiting the mosque (Interview with Gé M. Speelman, 18 May 2012).²⁴

In this period the events organized by the various inter-religious bodies guided by the church officials that assisted them could attract large audiences of hundreds of people (Interview with Jan Slomp, 22 May 2012).

In the 1980s Jan Slomp started writing manuals for the encounter with people of other faiths. He began with a booklet for the encounter with Muslims, which was followed by similar publications for the encounters with Hindus and Buddhists. In 1991 these three booklets were compiled to one book entitled *Wereldgodsdiensten in Nederland* (World Religions in the Netherlands), which focused on the forms these religions had adopted in Holland and on the opportunities for dialogue between Christians and adherents of these religions. But the first part concerning the Dutch forms of these religious traditions was most important, as they can differ greatly from what is written in the academic manuals about these religious traditions (See also Hoekema 2010:456–457).

Both the dialogue group of Muslims and Christians and the group of Hindus and Christians published a booklet intended to become a helping hand to partners belonging to Christianity and Islam, or to Christianity and Hinduism, when they decided to marry (Speelman *et al.* 1995; Schouten 1995).

The prayer meeting of the Pope in Assisi in 1986 (Bard 2012; Filteau 2012) raised the question whether the churches in the Netherlands could organize a similar prayer meeting, but the idea was dropped when the Dutch Council of Churches could not reach consensus. Yet, it resulted in a book entitled *Bidden tot dezelfde God?* (Praying to the Same God?) being published by the NRC and the RCN, after being refused authorisation by the National Council of Churches (Van Cuilenburg *et al.* 1991). Three years later Gé Speelman published another book entitled *Bidden in meervoud* (Plural Praying), in which various authors related how people pray in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Speelman 1994). Although the national council of churches was negative, various local churches and religious communities incidentally organized inter-religious prayer meetings in the years that followed. Best-known of them

24 This is confirmed by an experience of my wife, Hanneke Atsma, who in the 1990s was involved in the inter-religious encounter in a local context in Beverwijk and Heemskerk.

was the inter-religious prayer meeting before the start of the meetings of the parliament initiated by the Raad van Religies en Wereldbeschouwingen (RRL – Council of Religions and World-views) of The Hague in September 1999.²⁵ The meeting followed the pattern of the prayer for peace of the pope in Assisi: praying one's own prayer in the presence of others belonging to another religious tradition. The fact that at the same time an exclusively Christian prayer meeting was held elsewhere in the city, demonstrates that even this modest form of praying together met severe criticism (Slomp 2010:182–183). Nonetheless the inter-religious prayer meeting before the opening of the parliament was repeated every year (Website *Kerk in Den Haag*), but the exclusive Christian one also.

A more regular form was found in two or three monasteries for some time, such as, for example, the Sint Willebrords Abdij in Doetinchem, the Abdij Maria Toevlucht in Zundert and the Tiltenberg, the center of the Grail movement in Vogelenzang, where Catholic monks and nuns inspired by Zen masters practiced Zen meditation.²⁶ It lasted until 2003 before the National Council of Churches had the courage to issue a guide entitled *Samen vieren, met mensen van andere religies* (Celebrating together with People of Other Religions). The booklet carefully discusses various possibilities and warns that it is necessary to take the sensitivities in the field into serious consideration, but it does not forbid anything (Beraadsgroep 2003). Almost all books published by the dialogue groups or by members of these bodies were meant for Christians to help them to accommodate their views and attitudes to the new multi-religious context of their country.

Between 1994 and 1997 the Muslim Christian dialogue group and the officials of the Turkish Diyanet or department of religion of the Turkish government held various inter-religious meetings of Turkish imams and Protestant and Catholic clergymen on a national and a regional level (Slomp 2000:216; Hoekema 2010:454–455). Alle Hoekema observes that in this first period it seemed slightly easier to cooperate with Turkish and Surinamese Muslims

25 Jan H. Buikema and the Catholic pastor Frans Wüst were deeply involved in the organisation of these prayer meetings (See also Hoekema 2010:458; Slomp 2000:217–218; 2010:182).

26 The Zen meditations in the Tiltenberg, the Sint Willebrords Abdij and the Abdij Maria Toevlucht started in the 1970s. In the Tiltenberg they were discontinued in 2003, when the centre was transformed into an institute for ecclesial education, but in the Sint Willebrords Abdij and Abdij Maria Toevlucht they are still practised. See further Poorthuis and Salemink 2009:319–322 and the websites of the Sint Willebrords Abdij and Abdij Maria Toevlucht.

than with Moroccan Muslims (Hoekema 2010:455). Speelman explains that the Turkish government promoted inter-religious dialogue, because they believed that it helped Turkish migrants to integrate in Dutch society, although they at the same time wished to keep control over the Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands. The Moroccan organizations suffered from dissension about the political situation in their home country. King Hassan II headed a dictatorial regime until his death in 1999 (Interview with Gé M. Speelman, 18 May 2012). So the political situation of the home countries of the migrants also influenced what occurred in the inter-religious dialogue.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Jan Post Hospers continued on this track, but he focused more on the local context. He had worked in Indonesia until 2000, where he had learned to organize meetings of pastors and imams at a local level. Back in the Netherlands he succeeded in making contact with the department for the East Netherlands of the Islamitische Stichting Nederland (ISN – Islamic Foundation of the Netherlands), which is related to the religious attaché of the Turkish ambassador in Deventer. Together they founded *Sohbet*. *Sohbet* is a Turkish word for “open dialogue about essential affairs.” *Sohbet* arranges monthly meetings of imams and pastors in the eastern part of the country to gain acquaintance with each other and each other’s faith and to see how they together can contribute to the wellbeing of the place of residence. They read parts of each other’s Holy Scriptures, discuss hot issues, such as the Danish cartoons and problems of social backwardness both in the Netherlands and in Turkey. It is always hard to get the administrators of the Christian congregations and mosque boards involved as well. A positive development is that the younger board members often speak Dutch fluently and know more of their religion (Interview with Jan Post Hospers, 14 May 2012; Dane and De Jong-Van den Berg 2009:74–78). Similar meetings are organized also in other contexts, such as the *Werkverband Moslims en Christenen in Noord-, Oost- en Midden-Nederland* (Working Network of Muslims and Christians in North, East and Central-Netherlands). Here some regional institutions of the Protestant Church, local pastors and, again, the Turkish religious attaché in Deventer played an important role.

Another initiative was the dialogue dinner initiated by Nelly van Doorn-Harder, professor at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, but living in the United States. She knew of these dinners in her country of residence and tried to organize similar meetings in the Netherlands between 2006 and 2008. Some participants gave small talks at these dinners which formed a starting point for a discussion about, for example, feeling at home, religious education, women in religious institutions, and so on (Dane and De Jong-Van den Berg 2009:79–91).

The more negative attitude of many Dutch towards foreigners at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century urged the participants of the Muslim Christian dialogue group to publish, in 2006, a working document entitled *Op elkaar aangelegd* (Made for One Another) in which they tried to formulate – in the midst of heated debates about the limitations of tolerance – a well-balanced definition of integration, built on the earlier views and tradition of the Dutch Council of Churches. The document stated: “Integration is a joint effort for a peaceful or decent society based on equal citizenship”. It also indicated that the socio-cultural integration of new citizens has failed altogether. Yet, dialogue continues to be necessary to achieve a relaxation of tensions. Simultaneously it should be possible to indicate points of contention openly, even if this sometimes leads to confrontation (Hoekema 2010:460). Hoekema comments that the document too easily labels critical essays on the integration debate and others as “one-sided” without entering into a real discussion about their concerns, which many Dutch natives share, and that the recommendations at the end of the text remain too lofty and general (Hoekema 2010:461).

The Section for Inter-religious Encounter also participated in the so-called Cairo Beraad (Cairo Consultation), a cooperation body, founded in 2007, of the Contactorgaan voor Moslims en Overheid (CMO – Contact Body of Muslims and Government), the Nederlands Israelitisch Kerkgenootschap (Dutch Israelite Church Society), the Nederlands Verbond voor Progressief Jodendom (Dutch Alliance for Progressive Judaism) and the Section. The CMO is an umbrella organization of mosques and Muslim organizations of different ethnic backgrounds cooperating for the promotion of the interests of Muslims established in 2004 (website of the Contactorgaan voor Moslims en Overheid), whereas the Nederlands Israelitisch Kerkgenootschap and the Nederlands Verbond voor Progressief Jodendom are the main organizations of the orthodox and liberal Jews. The Cairo Consultation often becomes active when serious political problems darken the Dutch horizon. So, it went to Cairo to meet Egyptian religious leaders, when in 2008 the Dutch politician Geert Wilders (b. 1963) planned to release his film *Fitna*, which was meant to be an attack on Islam and could harm the relationships between the Arab countries and the Netherlands. Furthermore it came into action, when in 2011 and 2012 the Dutch parliament threatened to adopt a bill interdicting the Jews and Muslims from slaughtering animals in accordance with the rules of their respective religious traditions (Interview with Jan Post Hospers, 14 May 2012; website of the Contactorgaan voor Moslims en Overheid).

Christians and Hindus

The Hindu-Christian dialogue went through a similar development. After the start at a local level in The Hague, the national dialogue group of Hindus and Christians participated in the initiative of Slomp and it also published a guide for the encounter of Christians and Hindus. Moreover, one of its members, Jan Peter Schouten edited a booklet to help people of Hindu and Christian backgrounds when they planned a marriage ceremony. The group, however, also published two extra books. The first one dealt with theological issues concerning the relationship between Hindus and Christians. The gap many Christians felt to exist between Hinduism and Christianity made the book necessary (Bakker 1996:in particular 31–32). The second book discussed the role of chaplains in hospitals and other medical institutions, because the activities of the Christian chaplains differed in many respects completely from the actions performed by Hindu priests (Van Dijk 1998; see also Bakker 2006:28).

Since 1998 the Section for Inter-religious Encounter has also sent annually salutations to all Hindu friends and organizations it had contact with to congratulate them with the Holi festival, one of the two principal feasts in Surinamese Hinduism (Minutes of the meeting of 12 March 1997 of the Hindu Christian dialogue group).²⁷

In the twenty-first century the Hindu Christian Dialogue Group started to organize a yearly seminar on topics of interest for adherents of both religions, such as reincarnation in Hinduism and Christianity, rituals in Christianity, Hinduism and the secular world, and the meaning of guilt and penance in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and in jail. The discussions within dialogue group itself increasingly touched upon subjects found in the sacred scriptures of both religions, such as the birth of Rama and Jesus, the Golden Rule, the creation of the universe and the meaning of the "hidden God" in Isaiah and the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.²⁸ Before this they had almost always dealt with more organizational affairs. Since all Christian ministers involved in this group had full-time jobs in other fields, they were unable to initiate more,

27 Minutes of the meeting of 11 March 1998 of the Hindu Christian Dialogue Group. In 1991 the Group had already asked the section to send these salutations, but the request was declined in 1992. In 1997 the section itself asked the Hindu Christian Dialogue Group to prepare a letter (Minutes of the meeting of 12 March 1997 of the Hindu Christian Dialogue Group).

28 Jaarverslag van de Contactgroep Hindoes-Christenen 2010–2011; 2011–2012. Freek L. Bakker elaborated some of these discussions in academic articles (see Bakker 2010; 2013).

so that the activities of this group always lagged behind in comparison with those of the Muslim Christian group.²⁹

A Dialogue with Migrants

Earlier it was already pointed out that the dialogue with Muslims and Hindus is a dialogue with migrants. This is reflected in the interaction between Muslims and Christians and Hindus and Christians. In the beginning, in the 1970s and 1980s the focus of these meetings was on helping the newcomers to find a good position in Dutch society. This included actual help by giving clothes, assisting them to find homes, locations for houses of worship and later by helping them to get consent to slaughter the animals or cremate their dead family members in accordance with the rules of their separate religious traditions.

Both groups were also involved in publishing all kind of booklets and other writings which had the intention of opening the minds of church members to an attitude of dialogue with people of other faiths and to discover how the ideas and cultures of these persons could enrich Dutch society and culture. As related earlier, these writing activities culminated in 1991 in the publication of *Wereldgodsdiensten in Nederland*. In this way the two dialogue groups tried to make space for Muslims and Hindus in the country, which was not self-evident at the time, also not for many people outside the Christian churches.

The third phase was the increasing space for discussion about intrinsic theological subjects in the context of the inter-religious dialogue. Of course, it had always been there, but it is known that Father Backx tried to avoid such dialogues, as he was of the opinion that these themes could only be discussed by well-trained theologians or religious experts (Slomp 2000:214). His view was confirmed by the developments in JCM, which fell apart in 1979 because of the lack of theological expertise of the Muslim participants. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the number of migrants with adequate knowledge of the theology and contents of their own religion who also could speak Dutch fluently had grown, so that now this kind of dialogue became fruitful.

The first decade of the twenty-first century also shows that the Christian partners in the dialogue sided with the newcomers against the increasing discrimination and xenophobia of many other Dutch people. They still did their utmost to make a home for the migrants where they could feel safe and happy. In spite of the good intentions of both sides the inter-religious dialogue was

29 See for a more detailed delineation of the activities of this group: Bakker 2006:24–33.

also hampered by the fact that it was a dialogue between natives and migrants. Gé Speelman formulates the following three questions: "Who talks with whom? About what? And why?" Or, in other words: who sends the invitations? Who determines the agenda? And what is it that motivates the people initiating a dialogue? Putting these questions helps to discover who are the most powerful in the interaction. If you arrange the various groups in the population according to their religions, it is important to realize that the Dutch society consists of a large group of Christians (around 40 per cent) in a secular environment, Jews who were decimated 70 years before and Muslims and Hindus who have just arrived. The difference of the positions of the adherents of the various religions has its impact on the dialogue. But there are also other differences in their positions. The Christians and Jews speak their mother tongue, are mostly well educated and have good jobs. Many people in the mosque and the *mandir* (Hindu temple) still have difficulties in expressing themselves adequately, although the situation is changing. A second problem is representativeness. It is very important that it is visible that the leaders of various religious backgrounds have dialogues with one another, but the migrants often lack really representative organizations. The third problem is the position of women. All these problems exert influence already before one word is spoken (Dane and De Jong-van den Berg 2009:30–31). I would add a fourth problem: money. Mostly the Christians paid the bulk of the expenses needed for all kinds of inter-religious activities, which only underlines their superior position.

The political situation of the mother countries is important as well. It has already been noted that the Moroccans lagged behind in the 1980s and 1990s because they were divided about the political situation in Morocco and did not trust one another. At the same time the Turkish government was positive about inter-religious dialogue so many Turks started to participate in the 1990s. The antagonism between India and Pakistan has an impact as well. Hindus showed less tendency to have a dialogue with Muslims after a violent attack by Muslim terrorists in India. At the same time the Muslims have problems with dialogue with Christians because of the violence of the colonial powers in the past. In their eyes these colonial powers were Christian powers. The situation in the Middle East had an impact as well.

The fact that the inter-religious dialogue was a dialogue with migrants likewise exerted influence on the type of dialogues that took place. When we look back at the interaction between Muslims and Christians and Hindus and Christians, it becomes clear that the great majority of the encounters that took place were dialogues of life. It was not really necessary to know much of each other's religion to meet and to discuss subjects as religious education, tolerance and the limits of tolerance and the way to get permission to arrange a

mosque. Cura Migratorum, the Catholic institute that initiated the contacts with Muslims, did so from the perspective of the care for migrants and started with neighborliness, while during the first years Father Backx explicitly advised against entering in the dialogue of the mind. And in its first official document about the attitude towards the Muslims issued in 1991 the RCN also first and foremost advised to be friendly and neighborly to them and did not say any word about the dialogue of the mind or of the heart (General Synod 1991). So it is no surprise that the dialogue of the mind was rare, but it was there! In the first period it occurred in the interaction between Christians and Surinamese Muslims. In the second half of the 1990s it took place on a somewhat larger scale, now also between Christians and Turkish Muslims. In some places dialogues of the heart took place, although mostly only incidentally and in a modest form or on a very small scale, in the yearly prayer meetings in The Hague and by monastics in a few monasteries and most of the time only during a confined period.

So, the conclusion is inevitable that the first type of inter-religious dialogue, the dialogue of life dominated the scene. Only in a later stage, in the second half of the 1990s and on a larger scale in the twenty-first century the migrants were able to send representatives with sufficient knowledge of Dutch and of their own religious traditions to participate adequately in the dialogue of the mind. Exceptions were the Jews and the Surinamese Muslims, but the Jews are not really migrants.

The dialogue of heart was something incidental, although on a small scale people participated in it more regularly. It is evident that the predominance of the dialogue of life has much to do with the situation of the migrants. If their position had been equal to that of the Christians the other types of dialogue probably would take place more frequently, in particular the dialogue of the mind. This is illustrated by the developments in the Jewish-Christian dialogue. This dialogue led to the establishment of many *leerhuizen* (theological study groups), where Christians were educated by Jews and vice-versa. There are also many who wish to learn more about Islam, but in that case the teachers are mostly indigenous non-Muslims, often Christian Islamologists rather than Muslim migrants.

Hesitations in the Mainline Churches

Despite the continuing contacts and dialogues the mainline churches voiced some hesitations. On 5 September 2000 Pope John Paul II promulgated the declaration *Dominus Iesus*, which stipulated that the participation of the church in the inter-religious dialogue did not mean that it promoted pluralism.

It reasserted “that Jesus Christ is the mediator and the universal redeemer” (11). *Dominus Iesus* did not oppose inter-religious dialogue, but placed it in the context of the church’s evangelistic mission (2; 6). The declaration has, however, a very broad view of mission: it comprises everything the church is doing. Mission is not confined to explicitly evangelizing activities.

Something similar occurred in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the new church founded in 2004 as result of a merger of the NRC, RCN and the Lutheran Church. For in 2011 the synod of this church discussed a so-called Islam Memorandum entitled *Integriteit en respect* (Integrity and Respect) (Reitsma 2011: in particular p. 36).³⁰ The difference between this document and the pastoral letter of 1991 was that it was now explicitly emphasized that Islam is a religion different from the Christian faith and that the dark sides of Islam may not be disregarded. At the same time, however, the church members have to give expression to the love of their Lord, Jesus Christ, and see the Muslim as a neighbor given by God. They have the task to create good relations with him, eliminate prejudices by personal encounters and come to mutual witness of each other’s faiths (Reitsma 2011:15–20, 32–35).³¹ At the conclusion of the debates about this memorandum in April 2013 the Synod thanked all church members having close contacts with Muslims for their initiatives and activities and emphasized tolerance and an attitude of co-operation with the Muslims in the social sphere (General Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands 2013). In fact, the discussion ended in promoting a continuation of the already existing mutual encounters and co-operation. In both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches the hesitation led to an underscoring of their faith in Jesus Christ without putting an end to the existing practices of dialogue, mutual encounter and co-operation.

Some Concluding Observations

It is time to draw some conclusions. It is clear that the Dutch mainline churches started with a change of their attitudes of mission into one of dialogue with the Jews. The shame of the deportation of 90 per cent of the Dutch Jews, the

30 The website of the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (<http://www.pkn.nl/actueel/Nieuws/nieuwsoverzicht/Paginas/Tien-jaar-9-11.aspx>, accessed 15 June 2012) explicitly states that the memorandum is “adopted unanimously”, while an email of Jan Post Hospers dated 18 June 2012 and information provided by other sources report that it was withdrawn to be improved and presented again on the synod in 2013.

31 See also: Rev. Peter Verhoef, Chair of the synod on the website of the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland.

astonishment about the appearance of the new state of Israel and a deeply felt solidarity with this state formed the underlying motives for this transformation. The Jews were increasingly regarded as co-believers. The NRC made this change already in the 1950s, the Catholic bishops halfway through the 1990s. In 1965 *Nostra Aetate* extended this attitude already to Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, although in this case there continued to be much resistance from a great section, possibly even the majority of the church members which was explicitly expressed in some church documents issued in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, it seemed impossible to go back on the path of dialogue: in fact, the mainline churches do no longer deliberately develop missionary activities to the members of these minorities. *De facto* they are in dialogue with them.

The experience of many missionaries formed a second motive to initiate inter-religious dialogues, for it was very often former missionaries, in particular in the beginning, who started concrete dialogues. They had apparently learnt that it is better to enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions than to evangelize them. The third motive for this new attitude was the care for migrants. Those helping Catholic migrants in the Catholic Church extended their help also to migrants of non-Christian background and as a consequence they also entered into dialogue with them.

The dialogue was in most of the cases a dialogue of life. Only the dialogue with the Jews and, since the second half of the 1990s, the dialogue with a part of the Muslims became also a dialogue of the mind. The dialogue of the heart remained something incidental or something performed by very small groups only. The preponderance of the dialogue of life reflects the circumstance that the inter-religious dialogue is predominantly a dialogue with migrants. This situation is underscored by the fact that these dialogues were almost always initiated, organized and financed by the Christians, which up to today gives the partners in this dialogue unequal positions. Another reflection of these circumstances is the prominent role played by the Turkish attaché in the meetings between Christians and Turkish Muslims.

Epilogue

The inequality of the partners in dialogue also raises a question about mission. Is it ethical to do mission in a situation of inequality? The Dutch mainline churches officially discontinued their mission to the Jews. They advanced other motivations, but the unequal situation was often a topic brought forward by the Jews when they asked the Christians to stop their mission (Schoon

1976:19–20). But perhaps the antagonism between evangelism and dialogue is not one between evangelism and dialogue but one between closeness and openness, or better between fear and trust, certainly if evangelism is not conceived as a specific missionary activity only. Jesus was also in dialogue with the people surrounding him. Yet they heard and often knew what he stood for, exactly what today can occur in real dialogue. My dialogue partners know who I am and what I stand for. They observed it in the years we were in dialogue with one another. We learned to respect the faith of the other, we professed what we believed, and we were changed, all of us. My partners in dialogue now know better the contents of my faith than if I had evangelized them. For then they would have turned their backs to me.

This article disclosed that the core of the tension perhaps lies in the fear felt by those promoting evangelism that in almost all cases one's own belief is not communicated in a dialogue, which would be in contrast to what Christ demanded in the Great Commission. The dialogue demonstrated that friendship helps in communicating one's belief. Many evangelists know this and also do their utmost to establish good relationships with the people they approach, but even then the evangelist runs the risk of imposing his opinion on his partner. For it takes time to arrive at a situation of friendship and one is not always successful in pursuing such companionship. That is the reason that I believe that it is about an antagonism between fear and trust: the fear preventing one to take time for a real encounter and the trust committing everything ultimately in the hands of God and thus making space for patience, the patience trusting on the mercy of God.

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