The Netherlands has a long tradition of immigration. After the Second World War (1939-1945) immigration has been dominated by ‘guest workers’. Mainly from Turkey and Morocco, young men came to Western Europe to join the labour force working for the rehabilitation of the various countries. As it turned out the ‘guest workers’ stayed far longer in The Netherlands than would have been expected. ‘Guest workers’ turned into ‘immigrants’ and from ‘alien Dutchmen’ they become ‘fellow-countrymen’ and finally members of an ‘ethnic minority’. This process of changing names reflects the change in appreciation of the newcomers by the indigenous people of the Netherlands.

The changes in the composition of the Dutch population and the development of what is called the ‘ideological border-contacts’ lead to the definition of the theme of this study and the formulation of its research questions:

Does the Juliana van Stolberg School and its three year method of inter-religious education create the necessary conditions for mental processes that favour religious development and more specifically the development of the God concept for its indigenous and immigrant pupils?

From this subject we derive the following questions:

1. Can we trace changes over a period of time in the God concept of the pupils of the Juliana van Stolberg School and the pupils of the Prinses Margriet School, and if so is this a matter of development?
2. Does the change or development of the God concept differ between the pupils of the Juliana van Stolberg School and the pupils of the Prinses Margriet School, and if so what is the nature of the difference?

It is not only school that influences the religious development of children. Therefore we add the following question:

3. How is the change or development that we expect related to:
   a. gender of the pupil
   b. cognitive development
   c. religious tradition
   d. religious socialisation in the primary social environment
   e. self-image

The research questions are answered by means of a qualitative study amongst the pupils of the two primary schools mentioned above. Since the object of our study, being the religious development of both Christian and Islamic pupils in a
multicultural and inter-religious educational context is a new field of study, qualitative research methods were selected to conduct the study.

After we have explained the research design in the first chapter we describe in the second chapter the consequences of the more permanent settlement of people from another culture on the nature of Dutch society. Initially the Dutchman is the ‘host’. The expectations towards the ‘guest workers’ change over time. The host society prefers an assimilation or an integration of the guests. Public demand is rather for ‘an integration emphasizing one’s own culture’.
The prolonged stay in Dutch society of men from Turkey and Morocco, and, at a later stage, the stay of their families as well, also influences the newcomers’ culture. In their culture the Islamic religion plays a special role. For Muslims, the influence of Islam extends beyond the religious domain. More than the Christian identity of the Dutch, being a Muslim permeates further than the religious domain only. Apart from being a religious attitude, Islam is also a way of life, a lifestyle.
The reunion of families contributed to the visibility of the newcomers in larger areas of society. In migrant cultures, people differ in the way they emphasize their relation to the host society. Whereas the guest worker mainly considers the question: ‘when can I go home?’, the immigrant realizes as time passes that he will never go home again. The change of perspective from ‘when can I go home?’ to ‘We are not homeward bound, we are at home already’ marks the beginning of the process of obtaining one’s own position in Netherlands society.

In the second half of the last century the society of the Netherlands developed from a homogeneous monoculture to a heterogeneous multicultural society whose main characteristic was cultural pluralism. The distinct cultures that are in appearance in our society do not only differ, they may also be conflicting. A significant example illustrating this is the difference in one aspect of awareness of reality, which is the situating of the Self. Dutch culture knows a self-awareness that is person-oriented. Turkish and Moroccan cultures are called position-oriented. This relates to the education of boys and girls and the educational opportunities offered to them.

Meeting other cultures is not the only trigger for change. Within cultures patterns shift and move also. Culture is changing continuously. Although in the middle of the last century the culture of the Netherlands might be considered homogeneous from an ethnic perspective, we can distinguish different groups having their own culture. Especially in the domain of religion there was a cultural diversity of different denominations. The organization of society based on religious boundaries is called ‘denominationalism’ or ‘pillarization’ or corporate pluralism. The pillarized Dutch society of that period can be seen as an example of diversity within a homogeneous culture, as a specific case of ‘unity in diversity’. The differences at the base of society might have caused instability. This danger during the age of pillarization was neutralized by close co-operation among the leaders of the various groups of the population. The common men of the groups trusted their leaders completely. However, in the last decennia of the last century the complete trust changed into conditional support. People communicated more
Children and God narrated in stories

and more across the boundaries of the pillars, which stimulated the process of depillarisation.

In the same period the process of secularisation develops in the Netherlands. In this process certain aspects of culture are not longer driven or dominated by religious institutions and symbols. The various fields in which people engage, like the field of family-life, the world at work, in school or during their time off, are not longer considered to be under the ‘sacred canopy’.

The extent to which a minority-group perceives itself as dissimilar from the environment is an important aspect in pillarisation and de-pillarisation. The same holds for the extent to which the groups are resistant against influences that threaten their identity. The process of depillarisation is characterised by different strategies that people employ. One of those is the strategy of self-appointed isolation. Another is the strategy of ideological border-contact, which means a continuing dialogue with dissidents in the context of progressive desegregation. In our study we explore the influence of ideological border-contact within education on the religious development of children.

The third chapter is spent on the changes in the educational system resulting from the permanent settlement in the Netherlands of people from other cultures. In the context of a changing Dutch society fundamental alterations have taken place in education. The arrival of foreign pupils gives schools food for thought. The Protestant and Roman Catholic schools consider how to cope with this new group of children and especially how to cope with the ‘other’-ness in faith of these children. Across the pillars we notice similarities in the preliminary answers that parents, teachers and governors provide to this question. In some schools exclusiveness dominates, in others inclusiveness; another group specialises in creating the prerequisites for inter-religious dialogue. One of those prerequisites for inter-religious dialogue is the provision of information about the ‘other’. The government fulfils the need for the transfer of knowledge of other cultures and religions by introducing the subject of World Religions in Dutch educational system. We distinguish three approaches in the dialogue on cultures and religions: (cultural and) religious socialisation, religious communication as transfer of knowledge on the topic of religions and religious communication as clarification of religious beliefs and faith. A fourth approach could be the flexible interaction of the three approaches above aiming at religious communication in a process of development.

The Dutch situation is not unique. In neighbouring countries like England, Belgium and Germany there has also been consideration of the question of students with ‘different religions’ in education. As in the Netherlands, the Belgian government does not interfere with the content of religious education. This is unlike England and Germany, where government and church co-operate in establishing the curricula for religious education in school that is mandatory for all students. Just like in the Netherlands, in Germany experiments are being carried out in the area of inter-religious education.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the changes in thinking about God. Communication about God is situated within the frame of reference of the Christian and Islamic tradition. Within these religious traditions, thinking and
Children and God narrated in stories

speaking about God has changed over time. By speaking about God people relate the visible reality of life and everyday experiences to the invisible reality. Most aspects of the God concept are time and context related. The God concept in Christianity is influenced by the Jewish concept stating God as Liberator and Creator. Christianity started as a Jewish movement with a pivotal role for the prophetic teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The authors of the books in the second testament (or New Testament) share the belief that God’s word incarnated in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the personification of God on Earth, he is the ‘Son of God’. Jesus, being the Son of Man, makes God visible to men as a Father. People experience God’s almighty power and force in the Holy Spirit. In our time the solidarity between God and suffering men is emphasised.

For Muslims, God is the Creator. God created angels and *djinn*. They are the cause of deprivation and perversity in this world. Therefore God created men and appointed them as *khalifa* on earth. The Creation with all its affluence is available for men. Man gives himself into God’s hands. The believer calls God *rabb*, master. That is one of the fine and lovely names of God. Each name stands for an aspect of His holiness. God leads men and shows them the right path. God holds men accountable for their own responsibility. No man, however, shall have to bear more than he can cope with. Mentioning other gods next to God is the only sin God does not forgive. In our time, Muslims emphasize the responsibility of each believer for his personal relation to God.

In the fifth chapter the concepts of education and development are central. Parents and the school assume responsibility for the education of the children including value-oriented education and RE. The educators introduce the child into new situations where he learns to participate in the cultural context. Not only the adult educator induces participative learning, the child itself also tries to find out actively what and why others behave as they do. Children learn not only from adults, they also learn by adults. Educators support their children in various ways by providing them with knowledge to participate as an able and skilled citizen in society.

We distinguish different educational styles with both Dutch and Turkish or Moroccan parents. Priorities in educational goals differ with indigenous and immigrant families. Religious education for instance is awarded a higher priority in immigrant families then in the Dutch families.

Education is normative in its goals and therefore in its methods. Educating in self-reliance or solidarity can be done only by creating opportunities to act in a self-reliant way or to show solidarity. The same applies to educating in inter-religious coexistence which can be only done by creating opportunities to learn how to live in an inter-religious society.

In our research project we study the development of the God concept of indigenous and immigrant children in the context of the educational situation mentioned above in the multicultural society in the Netherlands. Religious development can be studied from different perspectives. We first distinguish the retrospective approach, studying the process of development from the perspective of the end-‘product’ such as the God concept in adulthood. Secondly we consider the prospective approach, studying development with an open perspective to
Children and God narrated in stories

change with respect to the self defined starting situation. Context plays an important role in development. The family and the school are the external environment of the child. The different domains such as the cognitive and social-emotional domain, are the internal environments in which the religious development of the child is situated.

Research into religious development has brought forward the formulation of a number of theories on the relevant domain of development. We discuss the theories of Goldman, Fowler and Oser and Gmünder.

We present a number of studies into religious development from a bird’s eye perspective and elaborate on three of them: the study of Goldman in England, that of Tamminen in Finland and Hutsebaut’s study in Belgium. The design as well as the results of these research projects inspired our own study which we place in their research-tradition.

In the sixth chapter we describe different approaches to religious education. For each of the three models of religious education a school will be described as an example. A model for inter-religious education has been developed in the Juliana van Stolberg School. We describe this school as an example of the way interreligious education can be implemented. Pupils from the Juliana van Stolberg School participate in this study as well as pupils from the Prinses Margriet School. The Prinses Margriet School is an example of Christian education. Although no students of the El Inkade School participate in the study the school is presented as an actual example of education in an Islamic school.

In two primary schools in a multicultural and multi-religious context we observed children during a longitudinal study of ten years duration. Our research project starts at the moment that they reach the age of about ten years, and are in group six in 1990-1991. One group of children consists of pupils from the Juliana van Stolberg School; the other group being from the Prinses Margriet School. In various ways we observed what children narrated about God, directly from their own experience and as a reaction to stories told about God. In this way answers were sought on the question of possible influences of inter-religious learning on the development of the God concept of children. Like Goldman we presented our research population with stories from the religious tradition and shared opinions about these in interviews. We also discussed with the children photos based on drawings from Goldman’s study. Like Tamminen our study is designed longitudinally and multi-focused on different aspects of religious development. Subjects in Tamminen’s research project, as in ours, are both young children and adolescents. Adolescents and young adults are the research population of Hutsebaut. Both Hutsebaut and Tamminen studied next to development also the personal commitment of their population with faith and the church as an institution. So did we in the last year of this researchproject.

In chapter eight, the last chapter, we discuss our results. Also we make some recommendations for further research. What makes our study special is that for the first time a mixed population of Christian as well as Muslim children and adolescents were subject of the study. Apart from that we have studied not only the religious education within the familiar tradition but have explicitly considered
also the inter-religious education. By using fourteen different research instruments we have studied and documented the religious development of the population of our study over a period of ten years. ‘God can do everything, He is very great’, say all children in group six, that is in both groups the one of Islamic as well as the group of Christian socialisation. ‘Let’s play together, because it says so in the Koran’ and ‘God forbids stealing’. Those are practical consequences expressing the meaning of God for children. Over the years a difference between Christian and Muslim raised children emerges in the practical implications of religious commitment. A difference that arises from the difference in the way God is referred to.

The results of the study give cause for a cautious optimism about inter-religious education. This system of education stimulates religious development in the (religious or not-religious) philosophy of life that is the tradition in the family at home.

In a situation where Muslims and Christians risk being brought into an opposed or polarised situation, the results of this study provide an interesting reference for education in the context of the multicultural and multi-religious Netherlands society.

One of our recommendations is aimed at the commitment of parents to education at school. Given the importance of the interrelationship with the religious development stimulated at home, we recommend further studies on the methods of reinforcing joint efforts of parents and school in religious development. Thus the external environment of the child is done justice. Together with this the internal environment of the child needs to be challenged by the development of a religious domain and the God concept within. The way the children reacted to the stories told gave us the impression that the specific complications of emotional layering in stories needs further study, before these stories are told to children. The development of the social-emotional domain of the child, and the development from simple to more complex emotions comprised therein, should be such that the emotions that resonate in the story should be appropriate to the child’s world of experience.