

# WESTERN SPIRITUALITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHT INTO SMALL PROTESTANT COMMUNITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

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## ABSTRACT

In a time of increasing secularization where one would think that religion comes far behind in an individual's priorities, scholars like Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Penny Edgell and others have shown how adaptive techniques, both from churches and from people, are used to reach the still existing demand for spiritual satisfaction. Along new ways of experiencing spirituality – the New Age movement – Protestant forms of Christian religion have been set in the modern environment adapted to the social paradigm of individualism, as with less stricter rules and more focused on the individual. An organizational paradigm shift that changes the locus of focus from material resources to human resources.

One objective of this paper is to verify in a practical way, through observation and in depth interviews, Durkheim's theory of religion, where religion is seen as a process of idealization that allows the transfiguration of the society in something divine. The second objective is to describe how a church employs modern methods and instruments of a consumerist society for the promotion of its ideology and to maintain a high degree of customer satisfaction. The article is based on a research I conducted in 2012, in Bergen op Zoom, Brabant province, during my one year stay in The Netherlands.

**Key words:** Secularization, religion, spiritual, satisfaction, consumerist society, organizational.

We shall not cease from exploring,  
And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.<sup>7</sup>  
(T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, poem, 1942)

## MOTIVATION

In 2012 I had the opportunity to work as a volunteer in a Dutch Christian organization for one year. Connected with protestant churches of different denominations, and, as for myself, coming from an orthodox background,

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questions arose regarding this new spiritual world that surrounded me. I was intrigued by the lax environment in which the sermons were held and the strong fellowship character of the congregation, different from what I was used to. Why is their attendance so sustained? What does church mean for them? Why do they all sing together? How can a gym hall be called a church? These questions and many more pushed me to find answers and, although my resources were limited, I got to quench my thirst for knowledge and surprising new findings made my staying in The Netherlands a scientific delight.

The present study is based on six Protestant churches in Bergen op Zoom, a town in the Brabant province of the Netherlands, with mainly catholic citizens with low church attendance and a higher attendance of the Protestant citizens. The interviews were collected between March and June 2012.

### **RELIGION. SHORT THEORETICAL FOCUS**

Religion has been a topic of ardent discussions since the inception of Sociology as a science. It remains a source of scientific inspiration as long as its flexibility in adapting to certain modes of social organization pervades.

A comprehensive definition was stated by Durkheim that considered religion a unitary system of beliefs and practices regarding the sacred items that unifies, in the same moral community, the Church, those who adhere to it. He saw religion as a system of ideas which the individuals use to represent the society that they are part of and the intimate ties that connect them to it. It contains the essential truth that there is something more important than us and casts society in the image of a god as a greater body, a sacred body that makes its presence felt with more vigour when the collective conscience holds a high degree of excitation. In that state of mind, in order to understand the sensations that assault their bodies, the individuals invest close objects with extraordinary powers. On the profane world is imbricated another, that, in a way, exists only in their mind but to which they assign a higher authority (Durkheim 1995).

Weber's study on religion described its manifestations, regarding several types of religious perspectives, as a rational approach towards the world. Each religion has a distinct principle that guides all its actions in a subjective meaningful way, for Confucianism, the religion of the intellectual, the principle is to adapt to the mundane world, Buddhism rejects it, Islam, the religion of the warrior, urges him to rule it, Judaism with its paria hopes of revenge on the upside-down social order, assigning them a low status despite the fact that they are God's people and Protestantism has the rational economic principle which manifests in constant efforts of succeeding economically and proving in this way that they are elected by God (Weber 1998). Weber describes how different societies formed political rules, social norms, sexual behaviour, artistic and

professional activities according to religious principles, his detailed study is a masterpiece that analyses religion's manifestations but not its essence as in Durkheim's work.

Viewed as an 'opium for the masses', Marx and Engels explained religion as an efficient instrument for an established political order or for an emerging one to impose itself. They have confounded the religious phenomenon with the tool of mass manipulation used by the church in alliance with the political. Marx and Engels considered religion a painkiller for the lower classes suffering, to appease their frustration and legitimate the existing political order (Marx and Engels [1878] 1964, 16 apud Finke and Stark 2001, 112). This applies on a 'sacralised' medieval society where most of the institutions of society were intertwined with religion. The church was the place of the scholars, it empowered the king to rule as the anointed one and it had close supervision over family ethics. Religious monopoly which supports and is supported by the political elite inserted itself in most sectors of public and private life acting as a guardian for the medieval social order (Ibidem, 115). Nonetheless in a secular society this view is obsolete and the emphasis is on other social functions.

The main function of religion in any time or society is to establish the inner equilibrium of man and, as a consequence, the ties between the individual and society are to be strengthened. This is done mediated by secondary functions as entertainment, therapy, self-assurance, group acceptance and status confirmation.

Every religion is not only a spiritual discipline but also a technique that allows man to confront the world with more confidence. By stating a higher authority, in the Christian case, God the Father, man delegates the responsibilities of maintaining the social and physical order (Durkheim 1995, 178) creating a defence mechanism against the knowledge void that surrounds him.

Art, as an independent form of expression, had first to separate itself from the religious cult that complied, besides the primary function of confirming the unity of the believers, that of entertainment. The universe of religious things is partially an imaginary universe that allows the spirit to express itself through singing, dancing, mimetic movements and mythology stories. The intense dynamic of intellectual forces channels parts of this energy in activities that relax the believers and allows them to return to the profane world with hardened forces (Durkheim 1995, 353-354). Things happen in a different environment at present times but the forms through which this function reaches its goal had little changed. The resemblance between the old and new forms of worship is staggering. In a tribal religious ceremony the Australian Aborigines sing and dance, imitate their sacred animal under the 'gaze' of the totem, while in a protestant evangelic church, that might be held in a school gym, the Christians raise their hands and sing in one voice praising songs, having the cross as their totem. The Charismatic's Christians<sup>1</sup> way of expressing is more eloquent in this

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<sup>1</sup> Stream of Christianity that emphasize speaking in tongues, prophecy and faith healing.

regard. They respect more closely the pattern of tribal ceremonies engaging in disheveled moves fuelled by intense feelings sustained by loud music, repetitive verses and tonalities.

The Pentecostal movement, with many charismatic elements in its worship, presents itself as a paradox: 'Claiming the status of the youngest form of Protestantism, arose out within the radical arm of evangelical Protestantism' but with different ways of worshipping than those in older Protestant streams (Anderson 2004, 439), it innovates through using mystic spiritual practices for communicating with the divine. Communication through glossolalia, trance inductive sounds and moves are seen as the way of reaching god. These practices had been used by the prophets of ancient religions of the Near East (Mansell and Pattison 1968, 73-86) and now represent the fundament of Pentecostal worshipping, the newest form of Christianity. The paradox lays in the usage of ancient techniques with so much success in modern times. Monotonous and repetitive sounds, rhythmical movements and the contagious excitation induced by these, leads to automatism movements, fainting, seizures, and other physical and psychological states that resemble those experienced by adherents of ancient cults.

I have stated some explanations of religion to give the reader an overview of the analysed phenomenon but the purpose of this paper is by no means to give and exhaustive presentation of the phenomenon. Its main goal is to verify that religion's main social function of strengthening social ties is still available in a secular society and, in order to exert this function, some of the religious institutions – the case of the churches studied in the present research – approach people through methods of a consumerist society.

#### **RELIGION IN THE NETHERLANDS. A HISTORICAL INSIDE**

The tie between politics and religion in The Netherlands has deep historical roots which cast their effects in present day social arena. Religious conflicts determined the geopolitics of the country and the religious identities of the people living in the Dutch Republic. The clash between Protestants and Catholics had been fed by dissidents groups of clergymen with Erasmian and Lutheran conceptions that were supported by books printed in Antwerp (Van Rooden 2004, 148).

One of the most important outcome of the 'Revolt' is the independent political entity resulted in the North 'which had introduced the Reformation in its Reformed variety, standing over against the southern provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands – which had been reconquered by Spanish troops and where Protestantism had effectively been wiped out by a militant counter-Reformation' (Ibidem). In this territory – 40 mile wide belt stretching from the south-west to the north-east through the middle of the present-day Netherlands – the Reformed church had exercised its dominion in alliance with the state crushing attempts of

Catholic reorganization. The population became homogeneously protestant but 'The areas to the south and east of this Protestant belt that were conquered by the armies of the Dutch Republic after 1625 – Twente, Brabant and Limburg – have remained solidly Catholic to the present day' (Ibidem).

In the seventeenth century, 'the confessional nature of the Dutch Republic rested upon the toleration of other religious groups, who were always accorded a lower social status. The Reformed Church had a monopoly on public expressions and manifestations of religion. It was supported by political authority, and was financed from public funds. Public office could not be held by those who were members of other religious groups. On the other hand, no laws forced people to attend the services of the public church or to take part in its rituals ... Over time, all those who did not explicitly belong to other religious groups were considered to be Reformed' (Ibidem, 149).

The bureaucratization introduced in the state administration after Napoleon's fall reorganized the churches and involved them in the project of 'building and creating citizens. During the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, the Dutch Protestant churches, supported by the state, sponsored the primary education system, engaged in an unprecedented process of religious education, even as it confirmed the processes of cultural class formation which formed the basis of the new Dutch nation state. The ideal of the nation as a community of moral individuals was considered to be the true expression of Protestantism' (Ibidem, 150).

In 1834, the secession movement struck the socio-political order of the new Dutch Kingdom by questioning the approach that the 'public' unified church and the government was regarding citizenship, knowledge and piety. This dissent was handled with armed troops 'and in general did the utmost to make their lives miserable' (Ibidem). The movement grew in spite of the efforts engaged by the authorities and a new community of churches appeared in 1880, the neo-Calvinist Gereformeerde Kerken in the Nederland which allied with the Catholics, helping them in the emancipation process from the status of second class citizens. The secessionists lobbied for confessional schools independent of the public system which was according with the new divided nature of the nation.

The 'pacification' of 1917 rested upon introduction of universal suffrage and the equal financing of public, Catholic and Protestant primary school. The right to vote, granted universally, led to a period 'of 50 years in which Christian political parties would pole more than half of the vote. During the better part of the twentieth century, religion was a more important aspect of social identity in the Netherlands than class or region. Organizationally, Christianity was promoted by means of all the elements of modern social life: schools and universities, journals and magazines, mass political parties, associations and cultural organizations, organized sports and cultural activities, trade unions and employers' organizations. [...] Intellectually, Christianity had become an ideology, a total conception of the whole world and of all history from a self-conscious partisan viewpoint, meant to engage people in a social movement' (Ibidem, 152).

‘The modern Dutch welfare state caused through its policies an acute state of dechristianization. More than half of Dutch people living at the end of the twentieth century did not reckon themselves to belong to any church. Those who did were less involved with their churches than ever before. The main Dutch Protestant churches, the former national church, the Kuyperian neo-Calvinists, and the Lutherans were in an interminable process of reunion, all the while suffering a massive haemorrhage of members. Orthodox Calvinists, descendants of those followers of the 1834 Afscheiding who had not joined up with Kuyper, had since the 1970s built up their own organizational world, in the wake of the collapse of the Protestant pillar. Yet this new Protestant world was no longer a pillar. It was not one of several building blocks of the Dutch nation, but a ghetto. Many of its children are escaping this sect by joining the Evangelical movement in the Netherlands, which holds out a promise of a warm piety that is not linked with a total social world and a particular and restrictive lifestyle’ (Ibidem, 152-153).

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In the next part I will describe the church in an organizational perspective, the process of founding and sustaining a church, its internal and external environment and the way responsibilities are shared amongst the church’s departments.

### **CHURCH™**

Secularization brought a ‘shift from religious to secular control of various of the erstwhile activities and functions of religion’ and a seemingly ‘decay of religious institutions’ (Wilson 1982, 149 apud Finke and Stark 2003, 112). Less time and energy is devoted to religious practices but how can it be explained then, that many churches flourish despite the decline in proportion of the resources spent by individuals to ‘super empirical-concerns’? The actual blossoming of religious organizations with different new approaches than the traditional ones contradicts the affirmation of the decaying religious institutions. Paradoxically, the societies confronted with the uncertainties induced by the rapid technological, social and cultural change are the ones in which belief proliferates. Individuals choose independently their own systems of signification that offer a meaning to their existence and the communal affiliations that support their belief (Hervieu-Léger 2003, 182). As a side effect of this fragmentation of the religious institutions, the ability to influence other important social institutions is diminished, lacking ‘the social consequences they would have in a society in which this or that religious tradition or practice constitutes a challenge to the authority of political leaders or social elites’ (Chaves and Stephens 2003, 94). It is the traditional religious institutions that lose their influence and monopoly, leaving other organizations to satisfy the spiritual consumer’s demand. In a modern society that stresses

individualism, one of religion's adaptive forms is that of the 'New Age' spiritual groups. The core religious belief of this ensemble is centered upon individuals and their personal experience through which they achieve personal accomplishment. They are not dedicated to a truth outside the self, everyone has his own individual truth and no authority imposes an external norm upon the individual. The self-perfection sought is attained through access to a higher state of being by using physical and spiritual practices that borrow from a wide range of techniques adapted from the great traditions of spirituality. The salvation sought through this work of self-perfection is exclusively concerned with life here below. It is a question of attaining the goals which modern society offers as something attainable by all: health, well-being, vitality, and beauty (Ibidem, 184).

'The social bond between the aficionados of this nebulous spirituality is, in effect, comprised of episodic recourse to resource centres: bookstores, educational facilities, convention centres, and so forth. To the degree that these individuals meet there regularly and create more or less stable bonds between themselves, these resources can constitute spiritual cooperatives, at the core of which are exchanges of information, addresses, the titles of books, and so forth. These bonds bear witness to spiritual affinities more or less recognized by the participants, but do not bind them 'religiously' together. What prevents one from being able to speak of 'religion' is a common reference to a shared reality, constitutive of a tradition-making authority' (Hervieu-Léger 1993 in Ibidem, 188).

However, a small scale system of belief can emerge as they have the urge to share their experience with others who share in the same type of spiritual aspiration but its limitation resides in the absence of an external authority that validates their meanings.

With the lack of such a support '– if no one ever affirms *What makes sense to you also makes sense to me* – the odds are high that individually produced meanings will not make sense on the long term' (Idem).

If we see the church as an essential element for a religion to sustain its meaning and reinforce it, as moral community of members, in the way stated by Durkheim, with the same representation of the sacred world that translates this representation in identical practices (Durkheim 1995, 51-54), then we might say that the New Age movement seems to have a short life ahead. The church is an important spiritual and organizational element as the meeting place of believers. Viewed in an organizational perspective, the church is a system of coordinated effort towards reaching the goal of a certain group, in this case the community of believers. The official goal can be stated as reaching God through repentance, being blessed or enjoying eternal life, but it has the overall meaning of spiritual satisfaction. Its mission is to provide a gathering place for believers where they can most validate their world view through the actual support of others by fulfilling the same practices and expressing the same opinions, and where the community is organized and its efforts directed towards the outside world. A church can be a

school gym, someone's living room or any place that constitutes a meeting place for the believers. The religious organizations we studied have their headquarter in the church building and some of the services are delivered in different environments – bible studies held in someone's home – and some of the administrative issues are dealt with in other buildings but the main part of the religious activities, the sermon, commensality events, praying gatherings, are held in the church building.

The interesting aspect of the organization's headquarter, is the church's building. Traditional Reformed Protestant churches have modest buildings with a simple decorated interior while the Evangelic Protestant churches can be a school gym, a Lamaze practice room or a classroom. The headquarter building depends mostly on the members financial power because they are the ones that rent or buy the church building. Its founder is mostly a man with leadership experience, with a different approach towards preaching the Gospel and with the experience of calling, a spiritual experience through which the believer senses that he is right for preaching. In relating the story of their calling one can observe that certain factors led to it. In one case, the most met in the evangelical environment, the future pastor felt unsatisfied by the preaches he attended to, the style and the focus of the speaker didn't resonate with him and felt that he could preach better and he could reach others with the same needs as his :

*'He talked about his plans of having a church with different colour and purpose, not just to present nice things but also to invest in people to become a disciple of Jesus, to help people with health spiritually'. (S. worship leader evangelical church)*

In another case the calling was experienced in a turning point and rationalized as to see it as a future purpose in life:

*'I found myself in the parking lot praying 'Lord if you should call me for a full time ministry I am here to serve you and to do the full time' and the Lord heard my prayer and my engineer job came to an end (fired n.a.)' (K. Pastor, Baptist church)*

A founder of a church has leadership qualities, organizational skills and he is a good communicator reaching his target groups by adapting the bible stories to their needs. The first step he makes in funding a new church is to make his circle of friends and acquaintances aware about his intention. He invites them, most often in his house, and holds an informal bible study with songs and preaches. The ones invited spread the word if the bible study met their expectations and the circle of listeners grows until there is the financial power and the will to rent a bigger space. The founder lets the other pastors in the area know about his actions, he announces his presence in the religious organizational environment.

Publicity is the main form of promotion but in the first part of the promotion campaign, news-paper, internet or/and TV-adds can be posted in order to cover more communication mediums.

With a bigger church, mainly of reformed protestant denomination, one that has a building of its own and has a lot of experience in the market of spiritual services, the ways of attracting new consumers is by using the actual members' personal contact network, their friends and their neighbours. Adds on local newspapers and TV channels are posted but the focus is on personal contact network because it functions like a primary filter, it selects the new members through the knowledge that the old ones have about them. In one case, the administrative body of the town communicates with the church and information about a person or a family that has moved recently in that town is transmitted promptly to the church's pastor and then he sends a team of 'welcomers' that present the church and invite the new comer to a sermon:

*'The most important is personal contact, so for example you start living in BoZ. I receive a message on my computer from the National Protestant church that has a big computer system. Everybody that is baptized is registered in that system and when somebody is moving, there is a notice from the town hall to that computer. So I know if there is someone of 22 years old from Amsterdam. And then we have a system that people are going from our church to give a book and to say welcome, a brochure with all the info about our church.'* (V., pastor)

The internal organizational structure of the church is hierarchical with more hierarchical steps in a traditional Protestant Reformed church:

*'All the members of the church are on top. We have a semi-democratic system that the people from the church put people forward for the board and the board consists of deacons and elders and in my church we have only men that can become an elder or a deacon and then we have an ambt and you got 3 ambten and the dominae the priest. The priest is a special elder because he is the one preaching and the elders and the deacon are forming the board of the church. There are different churches or a lot of them same as this and in a part of the country you have classes and the priests are forming the board of the classes a kind of cluster where internal things are discussed.'* (J., deacon)

The process of election of the board members is semi-democratic in the way that the board writes a list of possible candidates and then the members are allowed to vote for the ones on that list.

The external organizational structure acknowledges local, national and international bodies. Conflicts amongst members of the church are discussed between its walls but discontentment of members with the church board is discussed in the 'Classes', a body formed by priests and elders of all of the churches with the same name. Decisions of the classes can be attacked in the 'Particulieren Sinod', it holds sessions once a year and the members are elected from the Classes. For major social issues, like homosexuality, or gender related topics, the 'National Sinod' marks the meeting place of discussion at every four years.

While the internal structure of the Protestant churches is almost the same, the external one differs regarding their approach, traditional or evangelical. Protestant Evangelical churches are connected with a national independent body, Rafael Netherlands that ties them to the international Protestant environment represented by 4 Square<sup>2</sup>. These bodies help the churches' board members to exchange opinions and experience regarding certain subject by organizing international conferences. It is a place of contact making and where ideas of future collaboration arise. New types of services for church members or new ways of reaching people might result from these conferences and new adaptive skills to the spiritual environment.

The Protestant church's structure is highly hierarchical, 'without it, religion, like virtually every other major functional sphere, would have little hope of operating as a differentiated social domain at all' (Beyer 2003, 54). Every member has his part in the current of events. The church is seen as the body of Christ, with Jesus as the head of the organization. He gives inspiration to the human leaders and directs their future actions. The members are interdependent as parts of the human body and are appropriately assigned for a healthy functioning:

*'We believe that the church is the body of Christ, it is written in the bible and the protestant church decides that Jesus is the head of the church so we have to ask God to send us people in the church to be leaders, so we pray for it and then come together and ask each other what God told you. We feel that as the church is the body of Christ and every member is a part of the body, everybody has to take his place in the church, it doesn't matter if he puts chairs or pours coffee we are all very important in the body but some are more talented, gifted as a leader, not only physical but spiritual as well.'*  
(J., youth club leader)

Same as any other organization that sells its services to those interested, a church has departments that deal with every target group classified by age and sex criteria. These departments generally do not have a physical boundary, the board of the church assigns responsibilities to some members or groups of church members. There are persons that handle the crèche for toddlers and others that prepare the Sunday school lessons for children between 6-11 (ages might differ but the life cycle of the individuals is the same, childhood, puberty, teenage or youth). Youth groups are designed for two age groups 11-14, 14-17 or 12-17, 17-25. This type of segmentation is established so the message of the church sent through the youth leader will be adapted to the life cycle of the young members:

*'In the age to 12-17 the program is completely different from the age to 17-25. The older ones are coming by their own initiative not sent by their parents and we can ask them what we are going to do, so we decide in the group. We are going to do bible studies and discuss a certain issue and sometimes we eat together and have a nice time together to know each other*

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<sup>2</sup> An evangelical Christian Pentecostal organization that has churches in 144 countries. A supra-organizational body through which evangelical churches from different countries communicate. <http://www.foursquare.org/>.

*better. In the 12-17 group, the leaders would decide what to do, they try to teach them the values of being a Christian. Sometimes they have themes like friendship, the values of friendship, relationships between boy and girl and how do we see that as a Christian. Those issues are talked about every now and then.* (J., youth club leader)

Bible studies groups are the adult version of a youth group. Many churches with a number of members that allows them group them on gender terms, have weekly or by-weekly men's or women's bible study meetings. These meetings are a place where personal networks get built or refreshed and a place where individuals share their experiences regarding certain social roles:

*'There are certain things that men talk about when it is just them and same with women...we have a women ministry and they focus on the disciplining of woman and one that focuses on man, where men come together and challenge each other to be the husbands that bible teaches us to be, just to be good disciples to sharpen each other.'* (D., pastor)

*It's an exchange of ideas of how to fulfil your role as a man?*

*Yes, as you study the bible those issues arise, how to be good. One says about his experience and the other says you should try that, it builds a sense of community in a larger community.'* (D., pastor)

Another department, represented in some churches by the deacons, help adult church members with financial problems offering them financial advice and in some cases lending them money. Teams of councillors offer support and advice in personal problems. Some might not be officially trained and qualified for such a job but this is changing and some churches started supporting training programs for members that want to be councillors on domestic issues.

Church events that take place in an open door environment are the responsibility of another department. Children and youth camps are organized in collaboration with other Christian organizations specialized in these activities, or in collaboration with churches from other countries or cities. Annual gatherings that celebrate major episodes of Jesus' life are the responsibility of these departments.

People that take care of Sunday school or the Bible studies groups are involved in the preparations of such events or in fund raising and can even act as marital councillors, so the departments' staff is fluid making use of their talents in any domain they can.

#### 4Ps

Viewing the church as an organization one thinks of the socio-economic environment in which it functions and that is a religious market in a religious economy 'consisting of all the religious activity going on in any society, including a 'market' of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organization(s)' (Finke and Stark 2003, 100). Compared to other markets, 'the

religious sector is highly decentralized, organizational practices vary broadly, and a number of differing organizational forms can be identified. The field is not regulated by federal or industry rules or standards and there is no centralized institution that controls access to resources' (Sherkat 2003, 153).

#### **PRODUCT: 'BROTHERS AND SISTERS'**

The 'market' of adherents is highly segmented, with niches of clients with different needs and expectations that are satisfied by a plurality of religious firms that target their message by interpreting the bible in the clients' desired terms, stressing, in the Protestant case, one of the basic elements of the Christian faith: prayer, virtuosity, spirit, compassion, word, sacrament, (Foster 1999). The dynamic of this economy is market-driven, one of the reasons is that the state no longer regulates it through a monopoly imposed by one of the main traditional churches (Catholic, Protestant) so other firms can compete for reaching consumer demands (Finke and Stark 2003, 100).

The services offered satisfy the spiritual needs of the 'client', eternal life in heaven, 'explanations for the meaning of life' (Sherkat 2003, 152), 'happiness and satisfaction in marriage and parent-child relationships' (Edgell 2003, 164), 'social connections that provide people with a subjective sense of belonging to a group and the perception that they are loved and cared for by other people, they also can put people who lack specific tangible resources (e.g., food, housing, clothing, safety, money, transportation, job prospects) into contact with people who are willing and able to help them acquire these tangible resources' (Idler and Kasl 1997 in McCullough and Smith 2003, 105). Besides the spiritual consolation, a religious organization generates 'nonreligious social rewards by giving access to a social network useful for finding a love partner or a business partner, friendship networks for children and social status' (Sherkat 2003, 153).

The organization inserts the individual, or the family in a community of believers and offers support and care in case of illness, financial advice, entertaining events for children and adults and the most important one, the feeling of us, of community. It can be seen as an insurance for life after death and against social isolation.

#### **PRICE, 'MORE THAN SAYING YES TO GOD'**

We see two types of services, the spiritual one manifested through a sense of belonging, a meaning of life through a world view, security in face of the unknown, and the social one that helps the individual be more socially mobile by using his social contacts acquired through the religious organization. Its services

respond to a basic human need, that of social belonging and it uses the image and written words of God to attract its consumers. Same as a product, wrapped in a glittery package, or a service presented through commercials as a solution to a problem or need, the religious service is presented through publicity, books, radio or TV shows, as a solution to the anxiety produced by the unknown. It sells salvation by promoting repentance and using the example of Jesus, a religious and historical character with a powerful symbolic content. It's a service destined apparently to everyone and the price to pay is time, money and the will to interiorize the organization's culture based on the bible and interpreted according to the organization's Christian values.

The status of a 'consumer' is acquired differently, depending on the way each faith tradition conceptualizes membership. 'In the Catholic Church, for example, membership is virtually a birthright. Infants are baptized into the church by their parents without any conscious election on their part. In most Protestant churches, baptism is prohibited until a person is of an age to make a personal witness to God. In Baptist churches, one is not considered a member until he/she is baptized. Some denominations require that baptism be performed by full immersion, others argue that sprinkling is appropriate, and each has their own belief about the appropriate age at which baptism can occur. Similarly, some denominations require members to attend religion classes before becoming a member, while others simply ask for a declaration of faith' (Chang 2003, 131).

The religion classes help the ones willing to be part of a church to know the organization's ideology and to internalize it. The classes can span from a few months for new members to a few years, in case of children of church members.

*'I had 6 years of classes from 12 to 18, every week 30 weeks a year, but when you are an adult you don't need a course of 6 years but I think is good to learn the church confession and ideological things your church stands for and if you say yes to the church you say yes to those as well and you should take those things in consideration of course you say first yes to God but in front of the members of the church and these members promise that they will take care of your belief and if they think that you are doing wrong decisions in your life that your faith is not that strong, then, it is the obligation of the members of the church to tell you that.'* (J.K, deacon)

Usually, before these classes, a discussion between the future member and one of the elders is held. The reason of this conversation is to let the organization profile of the new comer, find out his personal story, his religious past and obtain the proof of his Christianity (a written proof as a certificate). If the organization's representative accepts the new member then he is supposed to attend the religion classes and, in the end, when obtaining full membership, he has to pay a membership fee adjusted according to his socio-economic profile. Baptism has a very important role in becoming a full member. It is a social event through which the individual makes his choice, of following Jesus, known through public confession. It is a celebration of the faith where all the members strengthen their

faith through the individual that gets baptized, it is a proof that they are right in their belief and get assured of this by the new comer's confession.

I have described the process of membership based on the churches (Protestant reformed and Protestant reformed evangelical) studied for this research. It may differ in some aspects in another environment and for other denominations but the general lines are respected, if there are no religion classes there will be a longer talk with the pastor, or a few sessions of discussions for the new member to know what the church stands for. The member's fee is general a condition for membership in the protestant churches studied.

Everyone is welcomed to church but not anyone that comes to church is a member. In order to benefit the religious goods entailed by the church, the individual has to accept to be part of the 'big family', to know it and to 'pay his contribution' in time and money.

#### **PROMOTION 'LET YOUR CHILDREN COME TO ME'**

As I have stated before, the main modality of a religious organization to increase its customers is word of mouth, publicity. Friends of church members and neighbors are talked to about their faith, the church and invited to attend to one of the Sunday sermons. If the potential customer feels that the service is appropriate to him he then agrees to go through the process of becoming a member. Along publicity some churches use news-paper and TV announcements or internet sites (in the case of churches with more funds that allow the maintenance of an internet site) and brochures handed on different events. These last forms of promotion are described as efficiently low because of the absence of the human factor. By focusing more on direct contact some churches have created a PR strategy where small teams have the role of reaching and presenting the religious organization to the potential customers with the purpose of establishing a long term relationship. These 'small groups' can invite people from their social circles and start the discussion by approaching daily life issues and evolving around the church and the sermon:

*'We learned to be open to people in our neighborhood and we started the small groups that gather every 3-4 weeks and it is very easy to invite people to the small group where we discuss problems that are social, problems that you cope with.*

What is the role of the small group for the outside people?

*People that don't go to church can go first to the small group for some explanations about the church you can ask and get better prepared for a sermon to understand it better.*

How do people come to the small group?

*By inviting people.*

Where from?

*It doesn't matter from where.' (J., deacon)*

The selection of personnel of the small groups takes into account the members of the church and enthusiastic people that know the bible and are gifted

speakers. These individuals are selected from the bible studies classes, they are not members yet, just 'private preachers' helping potential customers to understand the bible better and give them information about the church they represent.

*'We don't have only the small group we also have people in bible study a small course of 3-4 months, if people become enthusiastic they can become a member of the small group after that. Right now we had a very successful class and we have 3-4 people that are going in the small group now.'*  
(J., deacon)

In another case, discussed shortly above, the pastor receives a message from the National Protestant church, connected with the political administrative body of the city. It announces the pastor of the new people that moved in the city along with a short socio-economical description. This allows the pastor to send a team of two people to welcome the person or family and inform about the church.

The different departments described in another section have an important role in assuring future customers for the religious organization. Sunday school and youth groups have an easier job in reaching its target mainly because it is guaranteed (at least what concerns Sunday school) by the church's members, that is, their children. Here lies a very interesting phenomenon by which a company increases its clientage through the children of their present customers. Although it is a long term investment and sometimes not very sure – some children, becoming adults, might change their religious preferences due to personal or social events (Elster 1983 in Sherkat 2003, 153) – the assurance of future generation of consumers presents itself as an interesting phenomenon in an economic market.

Sunday school has the role of teaching and entertaining the children while the sermon is being held. The speech of the pastor might be too complicated for them to understand and the Sunday school teacher adapts the biblical stories to the children. Children that attend the Sunday school are divided in age groups so the messages are better targeted. The messages are biblical stories with simplistic day to day examples that help the children understand at their level who Jesus is. For some, the first part represented by the biblical story, is not attractive and considered boring but the incentive of the games held in the second part of the Sunday School lesson keeps them motivated. It has been found that religious education is not so efficient in socializing children in the Christian life-style but 'taking part in church services where there is a lot of participation in the ritual is more effective' (Garrison 1976 in Argyle 2000, 14). Social influence such as conformity to group norms and attachment to the group and its leaders is a better tool of forming attitudes and behavior than education (Idem) but, what if the education that children receive in Sunday School meetings induces symbols and meanings of which they become spontaneously aware at a later age? In this case, Sunday School classes for children might efficiently tap in the subconscious mind of the child through stories and form their later perceptions, by using the unconscious learning methods, which helps the later stages of the religious socialization be more effective.

The youth groups present the same pattern as the Sunday school. According to their ages they are split in pre-teen and teen agers groups. The study of bible is the main activity but it is done by approaching issues related to the youth's age and giving examples from the bible that help them cope better with their problems and apply the biblical examples to daily life:

*'In group of 12-17 the leaders would decide what to do, they try to teach them the values of being a Christian. Sometimes they have themes like friendship, the values of friendship, relation with a boy/girl, how do we see that as a Christian. Those issues are talked about every now and then.'*  
(J., pastor's wife)

Singing is a very important part of the youth groups' gatherings and of the church sermon, this subject will be discussed in a following section.

Special attention is given to younger generations by organizing activities only for them. Youth camps and youth exchanges have the purpose of motivating and sustaining the Christian belief of the young members and their loyalty to the organization.

The segregated bible studies that divide men and women in two different groups are used to create a safe and pleasurable environment where an exchange of experience takes place regarding specific social roles. The church uses the community feeling, the sense of belonging and the opportunity of networking not to only satisfy the consumers need for those, but to disseminate its ideology and to strengthen the consumers loyalty towards the church. Friendships are built, couples engage, business flourish, and all this helped by the Christian environment that the church assures. Once immersed in the community of believers by strong social ties, the spiritual consumer becomes loyal to the 'brand' – the church – and only if his spiritual needs are no longer satisfied, a case that often happens, he turns to searching for another religious organization that resonates to his new desires.

Bible studies and youth groups are the means through which the church promotes its view of the world based on Christian principles found in the bible and translated in every age group's language and examples that resonate with them:

*'So we try to reach or to provide moments for every generation, we want to give people personal attention when they need it'* (V., pastor)

Family is another medium through which the church promotes its culture. Parental influence has an important role in children's religious consumption, it 'dominates religious beliefs and attachments throughout the life course (Acock and Bengtson 1978; Acock 1984; Willits and Crider 1989; Myers 1996; Sherkat 1998 in Sherkat 2003, 170) by 'shaping other social ties that channel to lifelong socialization' (Ibidem).

This leads us to another interesting aspect where we can see how the church creates 'satellites of influence', represented by parents, able to promote the church's message with increased efficiency because of their status of trustworthy

advocates. Parents play the role of TV stars (as in personality promotions) that become the representatives of a certain brand and product, in our case, the church's brand, ideology and its spiritual services, and promote it constantly in a domestic environment. The efficiency of this way of promotion cannot be stated well enough. For a TV advertisement of a specific product, the consumer has a few minutes of exposure, if we add the outdoor and internet commercials this time it slightly increases, but still it does not have the same power of influence as the messages communicated through parents in a clutter free environment as the family.

PR promotion is a valuable way of raising awareness of a church's presence in the community. The preferred times for PR campaigns are the symbolic celebrations of Christmas and Easter but some churches make innovations in terms of scheduling their campaigns and approaching potential customers. Presenting biblical scenes through drama plays, city guided tours, having mass prayers or singing in a central city place are ways of raising awareness but not so successful in terms of enlarging the market share:

'You went in the city and what did you do exactly?

*City guide tours, you could find out stories, we had a trip through the city center.*

And how did you get the people to make a tour?

*It was a Friday night on Christmas and there were a lot of people and you could ask them to join or people just came because the performances were near the stores.*

How was this connected with the church?

*The church organized it and the teenage group performed a really cool play on Jesus and how he ended up on the cross and at the end of this story you could have hot chocolate and there were people who would mingle with the crowd and there was a band playing. It was a way of interacting.*

Did you have new members after this?

*No.*

*We let the people know about us, that there is a church in BoZ and I think we should go to them rather than they come to us' (J., youth group member)*

During holy celebrations Christian churches of different denominations make a partnership and organize events that gather believers that adhere to the churches' denomination. Non-believers are welcomed but the target is the actual members and the reason for these events is to strengthen their loyalty to the church and to its ideology. The events consist in jazz concerts or parades where biblical values are sung on jazz or pop music.

Partnerships are initiated for purposes of promoting the Christian values in a general view, with less focus or none, on the particular organizational culture of those involved in the partnership. In some cases, the initiatives started from this type of cooperation targets believers that are already clients of a religious organization, but some churches start projects aimed at enlarging their market share in the long run. Those in view of these projects are youth, Christian and non-Christian. This

segment cannot contribute financially by itself in a short term perspective but it can act as a connection to the parents:

*'Rock solid, a program for youth, and our church in collaboration with the evangelical church ran this project. The youth came together, played games while learning something from the bible. The leaders were reading the bible and explained it and learned some things from society and God's meaning for society.'*

What was the purpose for this project?

*The main purpose was to show to other kids that don't go to church what God can do for you, who God is and you show that in the way of how you live, as an example for those kids.*

How did they reach the kids that don't go to church?

*It was like a miracle, such a group starts with youth from church and they were telling other children how nice it is and then the children who were bored on Friday evening came and the group started with 15 and then it grew on to 60 people.'* (J., deacon)

Projects like this aim at forming a new generation of believers, but at the same time sustain and strengthen the belief of those in charge of the project.

Every Christian society has moments of refreshing its belief, Christian celebrations, like Christmas and Easter, help the society of believers to reaffirm themselves as a group and to strengthen the ties between them. Another way of doing this is by organizing festivals with Christian music and speeches by already famous spokesmen. In the Dutch society these festivals, with a strong evangelic influence, are very popular and very specialized. The festivals are organized by national Christian organizations and have a specific audience, some focus more on families (Flevo festival) others on youth (Opwekking, Jongerendag). The way the speakers approach biblical subjects in their speeches depends on the level of the Christian education that the participants have, regarding this aspect and the age criteria, some festivals stress more the musical activities:

*'The one in Arnhem (Jongerendag) is more for beginner believers, for those that don't believe so much. It's more focused on music and the speech is simpler. At Opwekking the speech is more spiritual'* (N., youth leader)

The festival is a place 'where you sing and pray with 35000 people', where the community aspect is at its peak and the Christian values are celebrated through songs and actions made as one:

*'It's really nice to be in a big tent with a lot of people and sing, and we do music and it's nice to share with others to see how they do it, or it's making me very enthusiastic, we always go with a group of friends'* (P., youth group participant)

The collective conscience of the believers exerts its influence and homogenizes the mass of believers affirming their identity as Christians. Here we

can see Durkheim's idea manifest, the practices engaged in the festivals (singing, praying) have the role of affirming their moral unity and this is stronger in the festival environment than in a church because of the high number of participants:

'The rites are, in the first place, the ways in which the social group reaffirms itself periodically. On this path maybe we can reconstruct hypothetically the way in which the totemic cult was born. The people that felt united through blood ties, but more through their community of interests and traditions, gathered and began to be conscious of their moral unity (...) they represented this unity as a very special type of consubstantiality: they considered themselves as the followers of a given animal. On these terms they will declare their existence in a collective way: affirming themselves as animals from that species, not only in their conscience but through material acts, the rites (...) the naïve gestures, the rudimentary procedures translate and sustain a feeling of proudness, of trust and veneration comparable with the one expressed by the believers of the most idealist religions when, gathered together, they proclaim as being the children of an all-mighty God. In a case as in the other, the feeling is composed from the same impressions of trust and respect woken in the individual consciences by a great moral force that dominates and sustains them: the collective force' (Durkheim 1995, 350).

Festivals are a gathering place where believers can share their belief and spiritual experiences and at the same time it adapts the topics of discussions on socio-political issues:

*'We have the Flevo festival, there are lots of things to do, first, you have music and lots of discussions, about Palestinians about Jews, about politics about being a young teenage mother. It's a very social festival you can do a lot of things, sport, it is inter-Christian, lots of different types of Christian' (J., deacon)*

One way of promoting Christianity and consolidate the Christian identity of a person is by using the Manichaeism approach to 'encourage and inspire' individuals to adhere to the cause of helping the oppressed Christians. Organizations like Open Doors offer ways of helping that can span from being a promoter in one's own country, participating in Christian events, concerts as a volunteer, open praying sessions or getting involved by travelling in the affected areas where Christianity is not tolerated. The 'attractions' of these travels may be the meeting with a persecuted person, participating in a sermon in a persecuted church or trafficking bibles. The individual that attends this 'pray journey' has the opportunity to decide if he is to engage in missionary work in that country after his first trip. Inspired by the trip he, or she, will become a motivated promoter of Christianity in his own land. Open Doors targets individuals by age and sex groups having appropriate messages for every segment, events for children and teenagers and inspirational speeches for adults. Overall, Open Doors offers hype experiences by transporting Christians as tourists in a place where Christianity is not tolerated and giving them the feeling of doing God's work by becoming bible smugglers and inspiring them through a 'face to face' presentation of the reality of the persecuted people.

### PERSONNEL

The personnel that deliver the spiritual services have a strong knowledge of the bible and of the ways in which to present it to laymen. They are trained directly through bible studies, missionaries courses and informal discussions. The priest has years of theology studies behind. Indirectly, through books, radio or TV shows the Christian authors and VIPs send indications of an efficient way of spreading the word:

‘Let us get to know those around us. I am thinking of those we live near and those we work with and those we meet at the grocery store and the gas station. Now, if we really pay attention to those around us – learning their interests, needs, hopes, hurts, dreams, fears – we will be given what we need to say. Our lives will preach Christ, and our words will confirm and make specific the message of our lives’ (Foster 1998, 232-233).

Every member of the church is part of the personnel and makes his contribution in specific steps of delivering the spiritual services. Some initiate contact, others with better speaker abilities sustain it and some with a strong will and faith try missionary work. In some cases due to low personnel numbers problems of church members cannot be solved efficiently which results in loss of members:

*‘It took a few weeks until somebody came and there was both of us talking to him but I wanted to talk to someone in private and he started the conversation like we were already divorced and going to hell, he didn’t say that but he started with divorce is a bad decision but we hadn’t made a decision yet. Then, the next talk was with 2 men, although I asked them to come with a woman but they didn’t. At this time I divorced. They don’t have people, they have a lack of people and the elder that was supposed to handle it couldn’t do it.’ (T., church member)*

Professional training in domestic problems is not offered often to the ones that later are to counsel the families in need. As a consequence, customer satisfaction lowers which might bring a shift in their preferences to other religious organizations. The main traits that enable the church member to sell the values of his church are ‘acceptance, love and patience’, ‘always smiling’ ‘inviting to people’, ‘a great listener’.

### THE ‘BIG FATHER’

In a company its employees are bound to the rules of the organization through a system of compensations and punishments, surveillance mechanism, direct bureaucratic means or cultural control. Control by corporate culture relies primarily on acceptance of values and peer enforcement; it is seen as the last frontier, in that it has enabled organizations to generate sentiment and emotion, simultaneously internalizing control and linking personnel with corporate identity’

(Ray 1986 in Thompson and McHugh 2002, 114). The salary, trainings, team-buildings and classes form ‘the apparatus of discipline and reward to elicit co-operation and compliance’ (Edwards 1979, 18 in Thompson and McHugh 2002, 104) while the pre-established written rules and the clear assigned responsibilities constitute the bureaucratic system. The set of values, norms, myths embodies the culture whose management mobilizes to unlock the commitment and enthusiasm of employees, to the extent that it can make people feel that they are working for something worthwhile (Thompson and McHugh 2002, 191).

All these systems, technical, bureaucratic and cultural collaborate in order to maintain a productive workforce but, in some organizations, one of these are getting more used than others. In our case, the culture forms the main method of control used to elicit the desired attitudes and behavior from the church members. The religious organizations studied have a culture based on the Christian doctrine represented by the bible and this is taught, in some churches, intensively through long classes for children (four to six years) or bible classes for adults and constantly brought to mind in Sunday sermons and bible study sessions. Along the lines of cultural control, the expectancy of social and spiritual benefices exert a powerful influence, as in a reward-punishment system.

The guiding principle of the churches’ culture, their vision and mission is stated through their motto, like the next two:

‘Omdat de Here houdt van jij’ (Because The Lord loves you):

*He loves us, he sent us Christ and because of that, we, not the Jews, became part of his kingdom, saved from slavery. It all came because he loves us and he freed us.* (J., Deacon)

‘Leren, dienen, vieren’ (Learning, serving, celebrating):

*‘These are the main words, learning, serving and having sermons together, but also having fun.’* (V., Pastor)

The first motto belongs to a church with a long historic background, an elitist group that had strong ties with politics and leverage in the educational system and press. This background is manifest in present times through a strong political discourse in sermons and the conservative approach towards the community. The second motto synthetizes the emphasis on ‘*giving service to the world and having fun*’ being more direct in stating the pragmatic imperative, which most religious organizations are organized around, ‘to provide a caring community for members and compassionate outreach in the broader community’ (Ammerman 1997 in Edgell 2003).

In order to keep receiving the spiritual services the members have to respect and follow the church’s view of the world based on biblical principles, in day to day activities, and to pay the established monetary contribution. The routine of every-day life of the members is set according to the example of Jesus, a moral conduit represented by the highest model of morality:

*'Because of my faith in Jesus I know that I have to follow him to take my cross every-day that I have to read what he has done and what is written in the Scripture and what are God's purposes with this world and my mind and my thoughts are changed and they go in the direction that God wants them to go for me that is making my faith practical.'* (S., worship leader)

*'Every morning is a new choice of devotion, when I don't do it I feel there is a distance between me and God. It's very important for me to do that in the morning, to make a choice.'* (J., youth group member)

But what happens when a believer breaks moral rules? When he hurts himself and others that depend on him, and more importantly how does the organization find out about his wrong doing?

*'When people have these private problems and we know it because people can be very sneaky, there is a variety of ways to help but first people have to want to be helped'* (V., pastor)

*'If you don't say anything we can't correct you but the way people talk or they are living says everything of their belief so if you are making small mistakes like lying about small things maybe no one will see, as well as for big mistakes. If you find something you should go to that person and talk about it.'* (J., deacon)

Deviant behaviour, like drugs or alcohol abuse are, in most cases, confessed to fellow members. Some of the believers are ex-addicted and these problems are already known and easy to recognize. The trust they enjoy from the community allows them to admit their 'falling' and to ask for help. Specialized institutions are contacted if the problem needs serious attention leaving the church members help the one in mishap with prayers. In these cases some people from church are assigned to provide emotional support:

*'We have volunteers in our church that can be a buddy so when somebody needs we have people that can join those in grief, have a cup of coffee with them in the morning and talk to them.'* (V., pastor)

The surveillance system of control acts through each member of the church, anyone can be a 'watchdog', a camera that records and brings the complaint first to the fellow member that has broken the organization's rules of conduct, then, if the complaint has not been handled in private it can be brought to their superiors, the elders.

The procedure initiated for members that refuse to respect the Christian moral principles ends with the revocation of the status of membership. The individual, after several attempts of 'protecting his faith', is not accepted any more in the community and all the services refused:

*'First you have a one to one conversation if that doesn't help you, ask an elder or the priest, if that does nothing then it is announced in the*

*congregation that someone did something, there is no name mentioned and if he doesn't change, the name is said so people can pray for him/her. When nothing happens after that, the person is out of church not a member of the church anymore.'* (J., deacon)

Gradual pressure in front of the public opinion (the community of believers in our case) is used as a deterrent and, as a last option, the dispossession of the spiritual and social services.

For the leading body of the church, pastors, elders, there are courts of law part of the religious organization that solve conflicts between the leaders and their subjects, or leaders that do not respect the Christian values:

*'If a member goes to prison for abuse, we have a court of law, the National Church. There is an agreement: suppose that there is a building contractor that builds a building for me, a part of the house and I don't pay taxes, then, the tax institution bills me but also the church that punishes by not letting you being a vicar for a month or whatever. We have a system and that is a problem in the Catholic Church where they don't have a court.'* (V., pastor)

Also the Classes and the Particulieren Sinod (discussed above) act as courts of law in case of problems between members or members and leaders.

#### **JESUS'S GOVERNMENT ON EARTH. THE POLITICAL ROLE OF THE CHURCH**

Kings have sought support from the church in their efforts of keeping their subjects in awe and this help spread in the attempts of conquering new lands. The kings were of divine nature and the popes had a tight collaboration with the state in the pursuit of power over society. This collaboration between the worldly and heavenly kingdoms took another form in the Reformation and, 'in most early democracies, one or more major parties emerged with the explicit or tacit backing of powerful churches' (Manza and Wright 2003, 299). In modern times direct links between parties and churches are cut but even now 'adherents of particular religious traditions sometimes line up consistently with one party (with electoral campaigns making more or less explicit attempts to mobilize voters on religious grounds)' (Ibidem). Studies have shown the general relationship between religious and political involvement is a strong positive correlation (Cassel 1999; Hougland and Christensen 1983; Macaluso and Wanat 1979; Martinson and Wilkening 1987; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993 in Campbell 2004) and this can be seen in this study as well. Asked about the role of church in the political arena, members of evangelical churches and strict protestant churches (with a strong political history) admitted that what happens during the church service is effective if it influences the members' behavior in the society, including the political aspect:

*'Yes, I think it is very important that sermons and what is going on in church touches real life now and here and we are citizens of The Netherlands and that is very important.'* (S., worship leader)

*'In our church the connection is quite tight because we had our own political party, and people from the church were voting for that party if not you were not a real member of the church. You were allowed to do that but not much. That changed, but still when there is a campaign we have posters for a party, I think it is not a good thing. It is a good thing to show people that there is a party that takes the bible serious but it is not good to put a political view to the people through church, a church should not tell people what to vote. If a priest is becoming a politician then he takes the people with him.'* (J., deacon)

#### **BACK TO THE DURKHEIM'S THEORY OF RELIGION**

Durkheim used the totemic cult, as the simplest form of religion, to explain the phenomenon as a system of rites and beliefs that help the believers represent their society and the intimate ties that connect them to it (Durkheim 1995). Through a system of classifications the totemic principle organizes the hierarchy of the clan, regulates the interactions between its members and maintains the unity of the clan.

The totem is the materialization of the diffuse energy common to all the clan members, the essential principle that ties them together, people and animals, or plants, members of the same clan. It is the primitive version of the Holy Spirit that unites the Christians into a community of God's children.

The image of the totem is engraved on shields, masks even on skins, being a coat of arms for the indigenous that adopts a plant or animal as a badge which represents him and his clan. This badge is analogous with the heraldic blazon used by knights and nobles of the Middle Ages or even with the tattoos of commercial brands that some modern people use to express their life-style and the values which they stand for. In the case of the primitive clan, the tattoo is sign of affiliation to a community, that of the clan, in the modern case, it is a sign of affiliation to the brand community and, of course, cases in which the cross is tattooed can be seen as a mark of membership in the wide Christian community.

This last part of the study will try to verify Durkheim's theory through case studies and to describe the way in which elements of the religious sermon influence the attitude and behavior of the individual.

**CASE STUDY 1****SEX: F****AGE: 27**

T. has grown in a conservative Protestant family, baptized as a baby and had Bible classes which were rigid and did not resonate with her. Her choices were imposed by her family and the church. The way of communicating with God was set through the religious education received in the Bible classes and inside her family. The mediation of T.'s relationship with God by the church was constraining her and she was not able to fully express herself.

*'The bible classes were quite boring you had to memorize a lot, I knew a lot, I knew bible verses but I couldn't live it, it was as theory... The problem with Vrijgemaakte kerk is the relation, it is not real for me, it wasn't a living thing... You can have a relationship with God and I knew that it was like you have to do this and you have to do that, you had to, instead of something that was your own choice and responsibility.'*

The relation with her family has always been cold and rigid. Her church attendance is high, participating 3-4 times a month at the service, although admitting that the sermons are not inspiring for her. After several disappointments, the church could not offer her emotional support and proper marital counseling, she took the decision of being a member of another church, an evangelical reformed church that focuses more on the member than on the doctrine, caring and offering emotional support for the members. This focus on the member is as a client relations management strategy that aims at raising customer satisfaction by showing interest in his complaints and problems towards the product or service, in our case spiritual and social services.

*'They are on to themselves, my dad, once a boyfriend told me: you all live in the same house but I see you there, your dad is doing his stuff your brother also, we had our meals together but that was it...I go every week at church, even without them (parents). I guess I like the people and I felt more this human thing in Tholen (the other church), I was greeted, I smoked outside and a man talked to me, asked me and then told me his story about his divorce, and I went inside for a drink and then again he came and asked me: should I get some sisters to pray with you? And that is what he did, got a few women and they prayed with me.'*

Asked about her favorite part of the sermon she mentioned the singing because:

*'The whole human thing part, you can be you, if you don't want to sing because you are angry on God you don't sing. I love to sing, music calms me down. Even when I am home I listen to music, the one that we sing in church, and I like that, when we sing happy songs in church everybody is happy, and in Vrijgemaakte they say they are happy but they don't show it, they look like something bad happened.'*

The human presence and interaction that takes place in praying days is one of the reasons of her attendance to these moments. She frequently joins the praying sessions motivated by the community feeling expressed through bible verses and the thought of helping others in need by praying.

*'A single help call can be much stronger than many but there is in the bible when two or more are gathered in God's name he is there and he is with one person as well but you can share things and you help each other you pray for each other. It is really a good thing.'*

#### STUDY CASE 2

**SEX: M**

**AGE: 32**

Raised in an evangelical environment and a family background with inter-parental conflicts, S. got baptized at 14, after a talk with his father that helped him make the choice of public confessing his faith through the baptism. He then became a full member of the church he was attending to at that time. He became an active believer at the age of 9 because of the feeling that God protects him in the unsafe home environment.

The baptism was a public event that excited him and made him feel in the center of attention, he was supported and cheered by the whole community, giving him a strong feeling of acceptance from the community:

*'I was a teenager and it was cool, some of my friends were present and people came to know that I was baptised and people came to me at school and talked about it. It was something to think about.'*

His family chose another church after its failure to understand their familial problems. The new church, an evangelical one, had the same 'focus on the client' approach that made his parents decide on becoming its members:

*'There was more acceptance and love and patience. It was more feeling. People could really pray and have pity on you.'*

The need of emotional support followed him throughout his life and together with his future mentor, the one that becomes like a father for him, creates a church, a small community of 'brothers and sisters who are a family and have one father and helping each other to follow Jesus Christ'. He is the worship leader of the church, guiding the members' singing and trying to make the feeling of 'us' stronger through music:

*'I have a talent of leading people to sing and putting a heart in it and songs are very common to people. They like to sing together, singing in unity at the same time together in one voice and sing praise to God. I think praise*

*to God can be really strong with all people also the bible teaches us that praising brakes things, if you are sad and start singing you thoughts can just start float away.'*

Music has a therapeutic effect on him as well on other members of the church. Sung individually but preferably together with other people, connecting them through the same sounds and meanings of the praising songs, music brings them closer to each other and to God:

*'I think worship songs can be a strong weapon to get peace and joy. Through worship I can really sense the presence of God. I feel it in my body and my spirit and soul... Singing and music are a part of my being and I like to sing, to praise God in such a way. Worship is really an important part because it makes you come closer to God through singing and it makes you open to listen.'*

Music and the socializing element are his favorite parts of the church sermon. He attends to two churches, the one formed with his mentor and another one with more members of his own age, where he goes once or twice a month. He likes the sermon of the second church more because the intergenerational gap between the members is not so pronounced and he can resonate better with others in terms of life style and age:

*'I feel family in the church I go in Eten-Leur. There are different stresses and also the people and the leadership are more friendly like. People have more interest in each other and like to spend time with each other. Maybe because of the differences in age of members and maybe in BoZ there are less opportunities for me to be equal with somebody in terms of age.'*

Christian festivals are for him an opportunity to discover and be receptive to other 'brands of Christianity', to see the progress of the Protestant cults in Holland but most of all to be 'a small part in a big whole and 'to worship together in a large setting. This is the moment when the Christian community is at its peak, it is a moment of 'revival' of affirming the ties that connect them to their Christian society, their 'clan' or 'tribe', as in Durkheim's affirmation stated above (Durkheim 1995, 18).

**STUDY CASE 3  
CHURCH BAND  
SEX: 2 F, 4 M  
AGES: BETWEEN 19 AND 26**

The band came into being through participating in the teenager's church group. It evolved, new members came because of romantic feelings, couples engaged, others broke, but the friendship that formed in more than 7 years of attending the same church groups keeps them together and allows them to work

well as a church band. Some of the new members of the youth group chose the church because of the social aspect of the community, others because they fell in love of a youth group member, while some because of the music festivals:

*'It's not only the religion they feel more the presence of God and the Holy Spirit (the Pentecostal). Here, in the Netherlands, the Catholic church doesn't know all its people, most of them go to church, they sit down, sit there and after the sermon they go home and that's it.*

*The Pentecostals have a more dedicated life style, other activities in the week with the people from the church not just on Sundays, the Catholic have it but just a few people go and a few live what they preach.'*

*'Opwekking (Revival), festival on Pinksterdag, you have preaching, singing and more outgoing, you go camping and all kind of games, I really enjoyed it...I liked the most the moment with the people from church, special nice moment, not the preaching, well sometimes the singing, you can jump and feel yourself, it's more like a concert, not like in church.'*

Asked about their favorite part of the church sermon the youth group members answers had something in common, the social parts where people are connected through different means, may it be music or simple conversations during coffee time:

*'I like to be with the people because there are people who are pleasant to talk to, to be part of the community. Sometimes the preacher has something to say and maybe I can learn from it but it is not very useful. I like to be among other people.'*

*'I like the time after the service, the coffee, small chit-chatting.'*

*'People, after the sermon to meet people.'*

I tried to verify Durkheim's theory by analyzing three case studies and revealing the motivations of church attendance of different church members. It shows that the social element, the community feeling, is the main motivator of those questioned. May it be in church or at festivals with huge crowds, this feeling brings people together and takes the form of an omniscient God that is praised through rituals that can take the shape of the church sermon, commensality events, music festivals, youth group gatherings and other means through which the church members get together.

Music occupies a special place in the church gatherings, making more than half of the time of these moments. It is used as a therapeutic tool for emotional problems, induces light trance states making the listener more suggestible (Hays and Minichiello 2005, 2) and it is an efficient way to memorize and internalize the values of the Christian community:

*'And as soon as you discover that is nice to sing and the words you are singing are an expression of your belief, that is why they are singing, an*

*expression of our faith in God, sometimes we sing scriptures and it helps you remember, when you sing. When I try to learn a scripture by mind it is hard but when I sing a scripture is so much easier. You notice when it is a popular song on the radio and before you know it you are singing it in your head, it is the same with Christianity, when you think God is important for you and you want to express your faith it is easier and much more fun to sing'. (J., pastor wife, administrator of church)*

*'The singing is part of tradition liturgy but singing has been part of worshipping God and there is something about music that affects you in a certain way if you hear a song from childhood it brings you back to that moment to that simple time of being a kid. There is a story in a bible, king Jehosaphet had to fight three nations and God told him to send his worship team and they went, played music worshipping God and the armies turned at each other and fought each other in chaos and they all died. Music is a powerful thing in our humanity. In church music is a part of worship, it is a powerful expression of praising God. You can do that through words, corporately as a church or just as a priest, it is not right or wrong that I start with joyful songs and that I try to get the flow to a more quiet reflective place, some songs can bring you to tears other songs make you move, and so we bring that experience to God: you are amazed looking at the world, at what you have created, we just want to praise you in a place of personal reflection or a personal prayer, and people respond to that, to music. Look at a rock concert how people pound their fists, is the same with God, people getting their hands together in reverence of who he is.'*

The main function of music is to influence the attitude of the listener and through this to modify his behavior (McAllester in Merriam 1964, 220). This influence is made by inducing the basic emotions and using the musical text (the verses) to rationalize those emotions. It is a powerful instrument that strengthens the sense of identity of a community, it resonates deeply with the listeners and acts as an incentive to continue with the chosen path. It helps people connect easily by tapping into the emotional field of experience and creates a proper environment for socializing. It is, at the same time, an effective instrument to induce trance and to make people more suggestible.

Music is used in churches to create a certain environment of trust and suggestibility. Solidarity is higher when the members of the church do the same thing for the same purpose, in this case, singing praising songs, and, considering the effect of music on the human mind, it makes it a more efficient activity that keeps the community's identity strong.

Another interesting aspect of the Protestant churches studied is the last part of the church service, the coffee talk. It has been indicated that this last part is amongst the favorite ones of the members. This is the moment when all the members of the church have the chance to talk with each other about worldly aspects of life, 'chit-chatting' and small talking, getting to know a new member, setting business appointments or meeting the future spouse, this moment is the one for building social networks. As an

orthodox I saw this part of the church service as an innovation meant to help the community know its members and to build itself. In an urban center where church attendance is low and where this last part of the service is missing, the churchgoers do not constitute themselves as a community, it remains an aggregate that dissipates with the end of the service.

### CONCLUSION

This effort has by no means the purpose of generalization. The number of cases analyzed in this study are too few to allow such a statement. It is a scientific exercise that allows the researcher to see western spirituality through durkhemian concepts and to describe how the consumerist society has made some institutions adapt its pattern. The view upon the churches studied and the depiction of their methods was strongly helped by my orthodox background that enabled me to see all this ‘outside’ the culture in which I was a visitor for nine months. It has been a process that enriched me spiritually and urged me to discover more, but, this time, in my own culture.

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