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Summary

Radical Protestants. Emergence and development of the EO EH and the Christian Union and their precursors (1945-2007)

The Evangelical Broadcasting Corporation (EO, *Evangelische Omroep*), with its explicit Christian message and well-known personalities like Andries Knevel, is a permanent factor on Dutch radio and television. The Christian Union (*ChristenUnie*), just as the EO with a distinctly Protestant signature, is a political party to be reckoned with since its establishment in 2000. It participated in the coalition from 2007 to 2010. Both the EO and the Christian Union are the voice of a group of Protestants, belonging to a large range of denominations (Reformed, evangelical, Baptist, Pentecostal), but sharing a clear desire: they want to live their lives radically by the standards of their Christian faith. The ideal of the imitation of Jesus Christ dominates their existence.

In addition to the EO more protestant organizations were established in the sixties and seventies. A new political party was founded: the Reformed Political Federation (RPF, *Reformatrische Politieke Federatie*), one of the predecessors of the Christian Union. From the same Protestant subculture arose the magazine *Koers (Direction)*, its name was later changed to *CV-Koers* and ultimately to *De Nieuwe Koers (The New Direction)*. Also, the Evangelical College (EH, *Evangelische Hogeschool*), the student associations Ichthus and Navigators, and various organizations dedicated to evangelization and charity were established in the Netherlands in that period. Because of the mentality of this group, I label them *radical Protestants*.

Radical Protestants have their background in many denominations, ranging from orthodox Protestants within the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*), the Christian Reformed Churches (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*), the Reformed Churches (liberated) (*Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)*) and the Dutch Reformed Churches (*Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*), evangelical Protestants from Baptist and Pentecostal congregations, the Free Evangelical Congregations (*Vrije Evangelische Gemeenten*) and the Brethren

(*Vergadering van Gelovigen*), and puritan Protestants from the Reformed Union (*Gereformeerde Bond*) and the Reformed Congregations (*Gereformeerde Gemeenten*).

Many radical Protestant organizations arose in opposition to the social and cultural changes that took place in the Netherlands after World War II. Reformed and evangelical Christians were worried about what they experienced as secularization, religious liberalism and the rise of anti-Christian ideologies such as communism, socialism and feminism. Not only the churches, but also various Protestant organizations, such as the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP, *Antirevolutionaire Partij*), broadcasting corporation NCRV, the Free University (VU, *Vrije Universiteit*) and the newspaper *Trouw* (*Allegiance*), lost their orthodox viewpoints during the sixties and seventies. The establishment of the EO (1967), *Koers* (1969), the RPF (1975) and the EH (1977) was a response to these developments.

The attitude of these organizations was initially very antithetical, but in the eighties and nineties this gradually changed. They accepted that the Netherlands were now a secular country that no longer had a Christian or Protestant identity, and changed their strategies accordingly. The EO became more concerned with evangelization. The RPF stopped focussing on offering resistance to cultural change and became more concerned with offering a Protestant vision on topics such as sustainability and poverty. The EH concentrated on the preparation of future students for a career in a non-Christian society. Copying the EO, *Koers* became an all-round Christian magazine about politics, ethics and family matters. In the last decades of the twentieth century, all these organizations became less antithetic and reactionary, and more evangelizing, seeking affiliation with mainstream culture.

Structure of this thesis

There has been some sociological and historical research on the origin and development of these radical Protestants, but not from the perspective of their central organizations. However, this study does not only have value in filling that 'gap'. It also provides a deeper insight into the functioning of religion in contemporary Dutch society. Central to this thesis is the question, how these Protestant organizations emerged and evolved within a social context of secularization.

To give more structure and depth to the analysis, this thesis focusses on some theoretical notions. The most important one is secularization, and the question whether radical Protestant organizations, formed in opposition to the decline of Christianity, ultimately fell prey to a process of secularization themselves. Related to this is a second notion, namely depillarisation - or rather, the movement of 'heavy communities' towards 'light communities'. Were the EO, the RPF, the EH and related organizations part of a heavy community? Thirdly, the notion of professionalization is important. Some developments within radical Protestant organizations are part of the 'natural' growth and growing pains of organizations. Finally, we examine the question, whether radical Protestant organizations could be seen as fundamentalist and sectarian (during part of their existence).

The eight chapters of this thesis concentrate on the organizations in three 'fields': media (EO, *Koers*), politics (RPF and Christian Union), and higher education (EH). The main sources that were used are the archives of these organizations, supplemented by the study of radical Protestant periodicals and interviews that were held with key stakeholders. In order to distinguish between the two aforementioned phases in the development of these organizations, the thesis is divided into two parts: 'Revolution', focussing on the antithetical phase until the mid-eighties, and 'Reformation', focussing on the period of internal reflection and change of strategy that followed the first phase.

Revolution

In chapter one, the focus lies on the first decades after World War II, a period in which there was not yet a radical Protestant community. The evangelical movement in the Netherlands was very small and the major Protestant churches were struggling to find new ways to bring the faith to the people. Hoping to spark a Christian revival, several foreign evangelists visited the country in the fifties. The tours of the German Herman Zaiss (1952) and Americans Billy Graham (1954, 1955) and T.L. Osborn (1958) were the most notable. As a result, the numbers of the evangelical and Pentecostal movements started to grow. Organizations such as Youth for Christ, the Maranatha Movement (*Maranathabeweging*) and Flows of Power (*Stromen van Kracht*) played an important role in this process. Moreover, a dialogue started between this evangelical movement and people from the established Reformed churches.

Both shared a concern about the future of Protestantism, which, it was thought, could easily fall prey to liberalism and secularization. These (orthodox, evangelical) Protestants became more influential within the churches, and they also wanted to propagate their message on the radio. However, the Protestant NCRV gave very little room to the evangelical voice. Orthodox and evangelical Protestants became increasingly critical towards this broadcasting corporation. Johannes de Heer, member of the board of the NCRV and leader of the Maranatha Movement, was the most prominent of these critics. Among conservative Protestants in politics there was a similar fear of marginalization of the orthodox, anti-revolutionary sound. The magazine *Tot vrijheid geroepen (Called to freedom)* became a platform for concerned politicians from the ARP, the Christian-Historical Union (CHU, *Christelijk-Historische Unie*), the Political Reformed Party (SGP, *Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*) and the orthodox Reformed Political Union (GPV, *Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond*). The revivalists in evangelical corner on the one hand, and the concerned Reformed politicians on the other, had virtually no contact with each other in the fifties.

This changed in the sixties, which are the central years in the second chapter. The two largest Reformed churches became more liberal. The ARP and the CHU, the two largest Protestant political parties, became more moderate and the ARP had a progressive wing, which was growing in strength. In the media progressive journalism became the dominant current. In politics as well as the media, orthodox and evangelical Protestants were marginalized. This encouraged this group to found their own organizations. From 1965, opposition to the NCRV brought together the reformed and evangelical Protestants, who founded the EO in 1967. The Broadcasting Act of 1968 gave new organizations the opportunity to transmit via public broadcasting. The EO was among the first broadcasting corporations to profit from this act: from April 1970 it was allowed to transmit its programmes on radio and television. The more and more liberal tone of *Trouw* also led to resistance, which resulted in the foundation of a magazine and a newspaper. People from the orthodox and puritan wings of several Reformed churches started the magazine *Koers* in 1969. And in 1970 the first edition of *Reformatorisch Dagblad (Reformed Daily)* was published, coming from puritan Calvinists. New student associations arose, like Ichthus and the Navigators (both with ties with Youth for Christ), the puritan CSFR and several organizations associated with the Reformed Churches (liberated). Concern about the changing political profile of the ARP and the CHU led to several initiatives. In 1963 VERAR (a

group of concerned members of the ARP) campaigned for orthodox Protestant politicians. In the second half of the sixties, there arose some pressure groups, such as the Anti-revolutionary Dialogue Group (*Gespreksgroep van AR-gezinden*) in the ARP and the Central Dialogue Group (*Centrumgespreksgroep*) in the CHU. The most important new movement was the National Evangelical Union (NEV, *Nationaal Evangelisch Verband*), founded in 1966. The initiative for the creation of the NEV came from the GPV, a party exclusively associated with the Reformed Churches (liberated). The GPV wanted to use the NEV to recruit concerned members of the ARP and the CHU, who were not reformed-liberated and therefore could not be members of the GPV. The NEV copied its political program from the GPV, but over the years increasingly sought an independent position. It was inspired by the success of the EO as cooperation between Protestants from different denominations. In 1972 the GPV ended its association with the NEV, and the latter continued as an independent political party.

In chapter three and four, the seventies are the central period. Contacts between the new organizations in media and politics became increasingly intensive. The radical Protestant community consisting of reformed and evangelical Protestants took shape. The NEV, the Anti-revolutionary Dialogue Group and several other groups formed the RPF in 1975. This political party unsuccessfully took part in the elections of 1977, but in 1981 it gained two seats in national parliament. Around 1970, the Free University, orthodox Protestant in its roots, also began to transform: it let go of its pursuit of Christian Science. As a result, there were no institutions in higher education with an orthodox Protestant identity anymore, except for some small colleges (Felua and De Vijverberg in Ede, the puritan De Driestar in Gouda and several colleges associated with the Reformed Churches (liberated). The ambitious experiment of the EH, founded in 1977, was meant to change this. The EH wanted to become a creationistic university to replace the VU. The institute had several branches, including the Basic Year (*Basisjaar*), a preparatory year for future college or university students, a teaching academy, the Evangelical School for Journalism (ESJ, *Evangelische School voor Journalistiek*), and the International Christian University (ICU, *Internationale Christelijke Universiteit*). The EO also expanded significantly: under the leadership of chairman Willem Glashouwer Sr. and director Bert Dorenbos the broadcasting corporation became the centre in a multi-media empire that also exploited a publishing house, a record company and several magazines. There even were plans to build a biblical

theme park and to house the EH within the walls of the EO-building, although these last two plans were never realized.

The new radical Protestant organizations arose primarily as a reaction to depillarization and secularization. It was only natural to react by trying to establish a new 'pillar', a new heavy community. The RPF and EH were devoted to the formation of a network. The EO, the leading organization in radical Protestant circles, chose a more independent position. The links between these organizations were not strong enough to speak of a heavy community. Organizationally speaking, all three were still in the pioneering phase: the internal structure of the EO, the RPF and the EH was weak, leadership was informal and still in the hands of the founders. The atmosphere in society was highly polarized in the sixties and seventies. The EO, the RPF and the EH went along with this and wanted to fight a 'spiritual battle'. Because of the religious devotion and the autocratic leadership, one can certainly say that these organizations had fundamentalist and sectarian characteristics.

Reformation

In the eighties and nineties, the atmosphere in society changed. The Netherlands could be gradually considered as a 'secular' country. Liberalism and market thinking replaced the ideological polemics of earlier decades. The EO, the RPF and the EH adapted themselves gradually, but not before all three underwent deep crises. These crises are the topic of chapter five. Within the EO, tensions surrounding the leadership of Glashouwer Sr. and Dorenbos were already growing since the mid-seventies. Not everyone supported their authoritarian style and the expansion of the number of activities. Moreover, several personalities within the organization clashed. By a coup from within, in which Rev. H.J. Hegger played a crucial role, Glashouwer was dethroned. Dorenbos remained, but got a second director beside him. With J. Meulink and Rev. J.H. Velema as new chairmen the EO became stable again. Within the RPF, conflict revolved around two factors: firstly, the debate about the identity of the party (was the RPF a restoration of the ARP, a copy of the GPV or the political branch of the EO?) and secondly the conflict between the MP's Meindert Leerling and Aad Wagenaar. This longstanding conflict ended in 1985 with the departure of

Wagenaar from the RPF. The conflict in the EH revolved around its ambition to become a university, which became a huge burden to the institute. The university-in-formation, led by Matthijs Oudkerk, became increasingly dominant within the EH. This, combined with the eccentric ideas of Oudkerk, increasingly yielded resistance. In the winter of 1990-1991, the conflict escalated and the four founders of the EH came to stand diametrically opposed to each other. Proponents of a more modest ambition won their case, Oudkerk was fired and plans to establish a university were frozen. From this moment, the core business of the EH consisted of the Basic Year and the ESJ.

In all three cases, pioneers and founders were removed from the organizations to make room for new managers. The calmer waters in which the EO, the RPF and the EH came after the conflict, were used to professionalize. At the same time this was also a period characterized by the stagnation of growth: the radical Protestants did not really know yet, how to react to the changed social reality. This process is the topic of chapter six.

From the mid-nineties this changed, as can be read in the seventh chapter. The EO received new leadership in the persons of chairman Arie van der Veer and directors Ad de Boer and Andries Knevel. The broadcasting corporation devoted itself to evangelization and sought connection with mainstream culture. The EO grew explosively in 1990-1991 and by the end of the nineties it was the largest public broadcasting corporation in the Netherlands. The RPF strengthened its political profile under Senator Egbert Schuurman and political talent Andre Rouvoet. This was rewarded in 1994 when Leerling quit and the RPF grew from one seat to three seats in parliament. Of the three organizations, only the EH was unable to find the way uphill again. There was a new conflict, between its two directors Herman Bos and Rob Plattèl. The financial problems and discussion about the ambition of the college continued.

The first years of the twenty-first century were a period of stability and success. This is the subject of chapter eight. The EH had relinquished the ESJ in the nineties and had also said a final farewell to the university ambition. Under director Els van Dijk the organization was healthy and successful. The EO and to the RPF were also successful. In 2000, the RPF united with the GPV to form the Christian Union. At the same time, there was criticism about the changing strategy of these organizations. EH eminent Willem Ouweneel criticized the idea of the infallibility of the Bible. Also, the EH was no longer exclusively creationist. The EO distanced itself from the way it had convicted homosexuality in the past. The Christian Union

also struggled with that topic. Moreover, inspired among others by programmes of the EO, ideas about the role of women changed. Were these changes signs of a process of secularization in radical Protestant circles? It is difficult to answer this question at this time. On the one hand, there were clear links between the aforementioned ideological changes and the development the ARP, the NCRV, *Trouw* and the VU had gone through in the sixties and seventies. On the other hand, a radical choice for the Protestant faith remained the primary motive of the EO, the EH and the Christian Union, and the changes in strategy can also be part of an attempt to catch up with the modern culture without denying ones own faith. Proof that secularization is taking place is not (yet) delivered. There is a real possibility that these organizations will form the core of a radical Protestantism, which will remain a vital force during the twenty-first century.