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English Summary

Nowadays, the largest Christian communities are found in Africa, Latin America and Asia. This shift in the centre of Christianity affects the nature of its messengers. According to some missiologists (eg Keyes 1983), we have entered a phase of mission history that has the non-Western world at its centre. Non-Western missionaries are active in their own country and cross national borders to preach the gospel. In this study, I have specifically looked at non-Western missions in the West. This type of mission is also referred to as 'reversed mission' (a not undisputed term), to indicate that historically there is a reversal of the conceptualisation of who is sender and who is receiver.

Recently, 'reversed mission' has increasingly been a topic of research. In the relatively scarce number of empirical studies on this topic, some shared conclusions can be discerned. First, it is found that among non-Western Christians in the West, the desire indeed exists to evangelise Westerners who have lost their faith. In addition, the overall finding is that this desire is not materialised. In other words, the attempt to again fill the churches with indigenous Europeans or Americans does not seem successful.

This thesis, entitled "Importing God: The Mission of the Ghanaian Adventist Church and Other Immigrant Churches in the Netherlands" has taken shape against the backdrop of these conclusions and the underlying studies. In general, these studies can be characterised by three points. First, they primarily examine (African) Pentecostal churches. In addition, they pay more attention to 'reversed mission' than to mission among immigrants. Finally, little systematic attention is paid to explaining the lack of 'success' in reaching Westerners, other than that it is often associated with the marginal socio-economic status of non-Western immigrant missionaries. To enhance our understanding of the mission of non-Western missionaries in the West, in this study I have primarily looked at non-Pentecostal churches, examined 'reversed mission' as well as mission among immigrants, and sought to find explanations.

In this study, I take immigrant churches in the Netherlands as a case to understand non-Western missions in the West. It is estimated that there are more than half a million non-Western Christians in the Netherlands (Stoffels, 2008: 15), about 900 immigrant churches, and 200 churches offering services in languages other than Dutch (Van den Broek 2004). These churches are very diverse in ethnic and theological backgrounds - a diversity that I have sought to express in the selection of specific communities for this study. My primary case study is the church of the Ghanaian Seventh-day Adventists in Amsterdam Southeast. I also studied 14 other immigrant churches.

In my research, I assumed that mission can be understood as a dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. I have therefore used the concept of 'boundaries' to understand the ways in which mission takes shape in different contexts. Boundaries play a role when talking about who is and who is not supposed to be converted, but also in the localisation of missionary activities and in the processes and forms of conversion or lack thereof in response to mission. Both sender and receiver think and act in evolving definitions of boundaries, making mission a field of intersections of inclusion and exclusion.

The empirical part of this thesis consists of four segments: an introduction to the studied immigrant churches (chapter 2), and studies of mission discourse (chapters 3 and 4), mission practice (chapters 5 and 6) and conversion (chapters 7 and 8). In the chapters on mission discourse, it was found that most immigrant churches do not primarily focus

their mission agenda on native Dutch, but defined it within the ethnic and/or linguistic boundaries of the groups they represented. In many cases, this had to do with power relations within their ethnic and/or linguistic groups. For the Ghanaian Adventists in Amsterdam Southeast, Ghanaians in the Netherlands were the main target. They drew clear symbolic boundaries in describing non-Adventist Ghanaian Christians in terms of spiritual, moral and dogmatic differences. This discourse emerged in the context of the fact that the Ghanaian Adventists formed a minority among a predominantly Pentecostal/charismatic Ghanaian immigrant community. There was competition. Leaders of Ghanaian Pentecostal churches were portrayed as being afraid of 'the truth' the Adventists had. These so-called money-hungry leaders would therefore deliberately block the evangelising activities of the Ghanaian Adventists and distract their followers from visiting the Adventist church. Besides, the Ghanaian Adventists themselves were exposed to the ubiquitous 'Pentecostal danger' and had to be taught not to pray in tongues nor visit Pentecostal ministers for prayer. In short, the religious minority of Ghanaian Adventists in the local Ghanaian community produced an emphasis on reaching precisely that community - outreach was a form of defence and conquest. This dynamic did not appear to be unique. The importance of the relations between religious minorities and majorities within the ethnic group and the ethnicising effects on the mission agenda was a recurring pattern. Thus, the Ethiopian evangelical church focused on the mostly Coptic Orthodox Ethiopians, the Turkish ministry on the predominantly Muslim Turkish community, and the Japanese Protestant church on the predominantly Buddhist/secular fellow Japanese in the Netherlands. The religious composition of the ethnic group and the associated power relations were an important factor in the development of the mission goals of immigrant churches.

A related factor that undergirded the mission focus on fellow ethnics was the fact that Christian immigrants often changed churches or no longer went to church at all. Sometimes this was due to economic reasons. In the case of the Ghanaian Adventists, the central religious practice of keeping the Sabbath was often difficult to sustain, especially for undocumented workers who had little power to determine their working hours. Leaders of other churches also mentioned the busy working lives of immigrants to explain their absence from church. Another frequently mentioned issue was that immigrants sought out churches where they could worship God in their own language and culture. In some cases, this involved a change of church. Before there was a Ghanaian Adventist church, many Ghanaian Adventists ended up in Ghanaian Pentecostal churches. Church leaders also stressed the impact of the secular way of life in the Netherlands, as well as various logistical problems, as the causes of the high level of drop-outs. Out of a strong sense of connection with former fellow church members, several church leaders focused mainly on fellow ethnic drop-outs.

Another factor that was important in the development of an ethnically oriented mission discourse was participation in global, established denominations. Several immigrant churches were part of such a structure, and it appeared that these churches were often created at the initiative of or in conjunction with the higher tiers of their denomination. This was the case for the Persian-speaking Jehovah's Witnesses, the Cape Verdean community within the Church of the Nazarene, and the Chaldean and Spanish-speaking Catholics. National and international leadership of the respective denominations let these churches emerge to serve specific ethnic communities. Immigrant churches received this specific role within the wider, global church community they were part of.

This dynamic also explains why the Ghanaian Adventists had an ethnic and local mission agenda (i.e. Ghanaians in the Netherlands), in contrast to the often strongly internationally oriented Ghanaian Pentecostal churches. Participation in a worldwide denomination ensured that the Ghanaian Adventists maintained many transnational relations despite their local, ethnic focus. In addition, they acquired a significant role because of this very focus. By being 'ethnic', they became 'global'.

In many churches, there was an additional mission discourse about reaching native Dutch people. Churches that were part of denominations which were established in the Netherlands differed in several respects from their often more liberal Dutch brothers and sisters in faith. The differences were frequently attributed to the negative influence of Dutch 'culture'. There was also an interest in reaching out to the wider Dutch society, the secular condition of which was mainly explained by the high level of socio-economic welfare in the country. Simultaneously, in most cases there was ambivalence in this ideal of mission: evangelists to the Dutch were clearly needed, but the immigrant church leaders doubted whether they were the ones who were called. They referred to social boundaries marked by colour, language, class, and various group-specific biases. Some projected their mission ideals on their children, who, as second-generation immigrants with a higher socio-economic status, would be more likely to succeed in winning the native Dutch.

The chapters on mission practices concluded that these too took shape within the confines of immigrant groups. On the one hand, this was the result of the intentions that were discussed above, which were expressed creatively in seeking to appeal to specific ethnic groups in the multi-ethnic public domain and in the churches themselves. On the other hand, it was not only a direct result of intentions. There was a strong relationship between evangelism on the one hand and the shaping of everyday (church) life on the other. One aspect of this was the dynamic that I call 'using the church work twice'. Church activities were often not clearly marked as either intended for outsiders (mission), or intended for members. These two objectives were mixed, as churches sought to use their scarce resources efficiently. Because of the ethnic character of most immigrant churches, the dual function of church activities gave mission practices an ethnic touch, for example with regard to language, cultural items, and themes. Another aspect of the strong relationship between evangelism and the production of everyday life were social networks. Church members formed and maintained social contacts particularly within their own ethnic group, both on local and transnational levels, to (re)produce cultural identities and socio-economic security. At the same time, evangelism was often channeled through networks and in that way became 'ethnicised'. This also took place at the level of churches, who were invited by other parties within the ethnic community to participate in certain activities. For example, the Ghanaian Adventist choir was invited by other Ghanaian churches to participate in local concerts, and Serbian Orthodox priests were asked by less active Orthodox Serbs to give a blessing at specific events.

In contrast, evangelising the native Dutch was not an extension of the existing practices of churches and church members. Some immigrant churches invested in building bridges to reach natives, for example by teaching about Dutch culture or working together with Dutch Christians. In addition, they used spiritual techniques such as prayer and fasting, as well as spontaneous meetings in public life. However, social boundaries

marked by language and skin colour restrained the evangelising of the Dutch without a doubt. In addition, some church leaders were caught between the desire to serve a specific immigrant community on the one hand and wanting to reach the native Dutch on the other: between choosing a black or a white guest speaker, for example, or between establishing a church in Amsterdam Southeast or a 'whiter' part of Amsterdam. The efficient dynamic of 'using the church work twice' did not apply to the evangelisation of the Dutch.

In the chapters on conversion, it was again apparent that it was mostly fellow ethnic immigrants that turned to certain types or aspects of Christianity in response to the existence and activities of immigrant churches. In many cases, this had to do with wanting to (re)produce ethnic identity (exemplified by non-Christian Koreans who initially joined the Korean Reformed church for 'cultural' reasons) and socio-economic security (exemplified by new Ghanaian immigrants who joined the Ghanaian Adventist church because they knew more established immigrants there). The considerations were however also directly religious: in their ethnic or linguistic group, immigrants generally sought for a church that was aligned with their theological convictions as much as possible. In some cases, the choice of a church even went against socio-economic security, such as in the case of the Ghanaian Adventists, who often gave up work and social status to be part of the church that had 'true knowledge'.

On the one hand, the migration context complicated evangelism and conversion due to many factors (visa problems, time and space limitations, the Dutch weather, the mobility and diffusion of immigrants, the problem of drop-outs, etc.). On the other hand, this context promoted the conversion of immigrants. This was already illustrated by the above-mentioned cultural and socio-economic reasons. Another aspect was that immigrants from countries where Christianity is a (suppressed) minority experienced the Netherlands as 'Christian' and as a place where it is easier to become Christian. While it is known that especially African Christian immigrants are surprised and feel hindered by the lack of Christianity in Europe, it seems that immigrants from less Christian countries are more likely to convert in a historically Christian country like the Netherlands.

As could be expected on the basis of existing studies, conversion of native Dutch people was generally uncommon. However, there were few churches where no Dutch person could be found. Often the Dutch attendees were converts who had become Christians or had adopted another form of Christianity (e.g. Protestants that had become Roman Catholic, or Roman Catholics who had become Orthodox). There were two major dynamics that undergirded the conversion of the Dutch. The first consisted of various forms of 'love and care': marriage relationships with immigrant Christians, the experience of immigrant churches as warm communities, and socio-economic support (especially relevant for Dutch people from lower social classes). The second dynamic was that immigrant churches proved particularly attractive to Dutch people when they offered something 'new' on the religious market. For example, the specific bodily practices of Ghanaian Adventists, such as their music, dance, faith healing, and exorcism, were valued by Dutch people and Dutch Adventists in particular. A special case was the Russian Orthodox parish, where one third of the attendees were native Dutch, even though the church hardly focused on evangelism. Here too it appeared that Dutch people were attracted to an immigrant church because it brought something new in terms of spiritual experience (emphasis on the senses, 'authenticity', 'depth', 'emotion', etc.). Furthermore,

this case illustrated that an immigrant church that seeks a lasting influence on natives should not just offer something that is unknown, but combine this with the familiar, such as the Dutch language or the presence of other native Dutch people.

Based on the empirical chapters, I conclude the following in the final chapter of this thesis. First, this study confirms existing works dealing with ‘reversed mission’; evangelism was focused on fellow immigrants, not on native Dutch. As others have suggested, this was partly due to the marginal position of immigrants, who were hampered by social and symbolic forms of exclusion and their limited command of the Dutch language. On the other hand, this study has shifted the understanding of the mission of immigrants by highlighting a number of other factors that paint a more balanced picture. These factors show that the emphasis on evangelising immigrants actually strengthened the position of immigrant churches. Evangelising immigrants helped the churches to establish themselves locally. In doing this, the churches capitalised on their strength to offer a cultural home to immigrants, who were looking for precisely that. Moreover, by evangelising immigrants, immigrant churches positioned themselves in the best way in the inter-church and inter-religious forms of competition that prevailed in the ethnic groups they represented. Further, the ‘ethnic’ nature of the mission of immigrant churches in some ways attracted native Dutch. This was evident from native Dutch people’s appreciation of the innovative social and religious practices of immigrant churches. Finally, immigrant churches acquired a significant place within global denominations by focusing on the evangelism of groups that their brothers and sisters in faith found difficult to reach. Considering this complex picture, I conclude that the emphasis on evangelising immigrants was not just the result of the marginal status of immigrant missionaries, but a way to strengthen their position in various social domains.