“Official” Doctrine and “Unofficial” Practices: The Negotiation of Catholicism in a Netherlands Community

TONY WATLING

This article examines the Dutch Catholic Church. It is based on a qualitative ethnographic analysis of a particular Dutch Catholic community. It seeks to demonstrate that despite a decline in the church since the 1960s many Dutch parishioners are becoming active in redefining the church and attempting to revitalize Catholicism, creating democratically organized local communities where laity and local clergy, women and men, work together as equals in negotiating change, but argues that this may involve “unofficial” practices, possibly at odds with “official” church hierarchy controlled doctrine, which may resist acknowledging them and resist change. By examining these issues, the article aims to understand the dialectic and tension between what could be termed “popular” and “orthodox,” “private” and “public,” beliefs and to examine the constraints or possibilities this may place on the church. In this sense, the article also aims to explore how religion, thought to be vulnerable to recent change encouraging individual independence from social institutions, may negotiate (or reject) new developments. Although challenged, Catholic identity may still be valued and provide individuals with resources for negotiating new developments. However, the success or failure of this may depend on the nature of the struggle for authority and influence between “official” and “unofficial” versions of Catholicism.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores recent developments in the Dutch Catholic Church. Dutch Catholicism may be evolving within a tension between what could be termed “official” doctrines and “unofficial” practices (Watling 1999; see Badone 1990b; D’Antonio 1994; Dillon 1999a, 1999b; Kowalewski 1993; McGuire 1997). The former are represented by the church hierarchy, dictating authoritative interpretations of Catholicism, the latter are represented by the practical actions of the laity, adapting Catholicism to new developments, in consultation with local clergy. What this has resulted in is a church that, on the one hand, has formal (church hierarchy controlled) structures dictating male domination, priestly celibacy, ritual, and symbolic “rules,” and rejecting abortion, contraception, ecumenism, and many secular changes, while on the other has informal (laity controlled) practices rejecting male domination, celibacy, ritual, and symbolic “rules,” favoring female emancipation, abortion, contraception, dialogue with other churches, and accepting many secular changes (Watling 1999). The article aims to understand this situation and explore how it is negotiated, examining what could be termed the “contestation” of Dutch Catholic “knowledge,” which is reorganizing the church and creating a struggle for authority between institutional “structures” and lay “movements” (Dillon 1999a:10). It argues that despite a decline in the church since the 1960s, resulting in a loss of priests and lack of commitment and mass participation by a majority of parishioners, many parishioners, despite their differences with “official” views, still value and retain Catholic identity, using it as a base to negotiate new economic, political, social, and technological developments, and are active in recreating it. This article demonstrates that, in alliance with local clergy, these parishioners are redefining Catholicism in a new democratic way, encouraging individualism, initiating lay workgroups addressing catechism, liturgy, and pastoral work, and striving to revitalize the church via local activism, and argues that in this sense they may be becoming as much arbiters of Catholicism as the church hierarchy, at least in
their local communities. However, it also argues that many of these developments may remain somewhat “unofficial,” as the church hierarchy still holds to “official” “traditional” views, which may make much lay activity a somewhat silent discourse and limit the church’s acceptance of change.

This situation poses interesting issues and may highlight important implications for the church and for religion in a modern world that is developing rapidly and has been seen to challenge traditional authorities, destroying frameworks that previously supported or controlled individuals, freeing them from social obligations (Featherstone 1990; Giddens 1991; Lash and Friedman 1992). Understanding the situation may allow an understanding of the interrelation of individuality and religious orthodoxy and highlight empowerments, disempowerments, conflicts, and negotiations, and the ability of religion to control (or reject) wider-level social change (Badone 1990a, 1990b; Brandes 1990; Casanova 1994; Dillon 1999a; McGuire 1997). The authorities, images, meanings, and practices associated with “traditional” institutional religion are thought to be endangered as churches lose their control of social life (e.g., education, politics) to secular bodies, and as individuals seek new ways of experiencing their beliefs (i.e., secularization, privatization) (Beyer 1994; Bruce 1996). However, “religion” may not simply decline. It is no unitary thing; dominant religions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, or Islam, may have defined large populations but they have been diverse. Therefore, although there is some consensus that recent change has led to secularization and privatization and lessen ed the impact of these major religions, nevertheless, they may still be a valid way of ordering personal and social beliefs and identities. Although recent change may have alerted individuals to new possibilities, there is no reason why religion should not be one of these possibilities. This may be especially so as, although possibly emancipating, recent change may cause instability, with individuals possibly becoming isolated from moral resources (Giddens 1991). “Religion” is a complex social process; a combination of individual and social, private and public, actions within power relations in particular contexts (Casanova 1994; McGuire 1997). It may, therefore, reform rather than decline (something it may always have done). Because of this it is capable of adapting to new developments. Although changes may occur, individuals and groups may order and control them, lessening their impact (Featherstone 1990). “Traditional” religions may still survive, therefore, along with “new” religious movements and secular bodies (Beyer 1994; Bruce 1996).

As a “traditional” religious form, Catholicism may have declined in terms of numbers as its authority (i.e., the church hierarchy and its legitimated doctrine) has been challenged (or rejected) by individuals more concerned with their private beliefs than “official” “church” ones (Bruce 1996). Nevertheless, these individuals may still retain a Catholic “identity” (Dillon 1999a; Greeley 2000). Recent change may even encourage them to express this more forcibly, taking the initiative (and authority) for reinventing Catholicism (Badone 1990a, 1990b; Brandes 1990; D’Antonio 1994; Dillon 1999a, 1999b; Hornsby-Smith 1989; Kowalewski 1993; Wallace 1993; Watling 1999). Catholicism still may be a way for individuals to negotiate their identities and experience the world. In this sense, it may survive and may still have a large base of potential followers and the potential to influence the world. However, in order to reclaim and retain many of these believers, encourage their mass participation, negotiate change, and regain influence, the church hierarchy may need to “officially” recognize “unofficial” local practices and allow the local bodies more authority (see Reader 1994; see also D’Antonio 1994; Holland 1989a, 1989b). Local religious practice by individuals puts ideas into action, transforming churches and religions. Despite attempts by the church hierarchy to promote “uniform” doctrine, Catholicism is and may have always been diverse—a variety of conjunctions between doctrine and practice, theology and organizational details, clergy and laity, in different contexts (Bax 1989; Casanova 1994; Dillon 1999a, 1999b; McCaffery 1990). “Officially” recognizing, understanding, and encouraging this may be a way to revitalize the church; not doing so may lead to further decline. I examine these issues in the context of the Dutch Catholic Church, concentrating in particular on local developments in the village of Aalten, in the province of Gelderland, which is in the eastern part
of The Netherlands, providing a qualitative ethnography of Catholicism. However, I relate these issues to wider Catholic issues of identity and difference and to the national context, where the domination of the social and political arenas by Dutch Reformed beliefs may have influenced Dutch Catholicism via a national identity based around diversity and dialogue. By examining Dutch Catholicism’s particular conjunction of doctrine and practice in this way I aim to highlight the constraints and possibilities of Catholicism and of religion in general.

**Catholicism: “Tradition” and/or “traditions”?**

“Catholicism” means “universal,” as opposed to “sectarian,” and is a qualification of “Christian,” “religious,” and “human” (McBrien 1994:3–7). As a religion, therefore, it should be inclusive and all embracing, composed of many “churches” and a diversity of beliefs and practices (Dillon 1999a). It should (and perhaps does) cover all Christian thinkers, theologians, and spiritualities, and encompass a totality of Christian experience and tradition—canonical, doctrinal, institutional, liturgical, spiritual, and theological—in a socially diverse milieu (McBrien 1994:15–16). In particular, McBrien (1994:11–15) argues that Catholicism involves an overall experience, or “spirit” of sacramentality, mediation, and communion: seeing the spiritual in the material (God achieving through human action), made possible via a community of faith (experienced via traditions, carrying revelation), and involving reason, critically applying faith, analogy, seeing similarity in difference, and universality, being open to all truth (Greeley 2000). In this sense, Catholicism should be a flexible, encompassing, processual religion, expanding and diversifying with new developments (as individuals personally judge developments) yet coordinating the diversity of interpretation, enabling common understanding (individuals creating church communities and entering dialogue).

However, Catholicism also involves a particular history involving schism and union and the creation of institutional structures organizing and legitimating religious belief and practice. In particular, it has become communicated by an authoritative body; the church hierarchy centered in Rome—hence Roman Catholicism (McBrien 1994:3–8:65:70). It has an ecclesial dimension. A major question, therefore, is how much Catholicism is, or should be, identified with its historically created authority, as opposed to its ongoing lived experience? How can Catholics distinguish between “Tradition”—the “living faith”—and “tradition”—the customary ways of organizing faith, between Catholicism and Roman Catholicism, and how will this affect the way they and the religion develop, especially when faced with rapid change? (McBrien 1994:63). This is something analyzed by Dillon (1999a), in particular among American Catholics. Her analysis concentrates on how Catholics cope with dramatic (and possibly traumatic) changes, challenging hierarchical authority yet sustaining a Catholic identity. Her argument notes that Catholicism as a religion legitimizes diversity and encourages criticism (and may always have done so). In this sense, although historical developments have created particular “technologies of truth” (Foucault 1979; Rabinow 1991), legitimating particular authorities and practices, constraining diversity, nevertheless, individuals and groups can legitimately challenge these and change them. Catholicism, Dillon (1999a:10) notes, is “contested knowledge”; Catholics (or any believers or individuals) have agency, they reflexively create their identities within hegemonic structures, practically adapting their religion to new developments (Kowalewski 1993). They are not merely coerced nor do they blindly follow. Social life is both constraining and emancipating, disempowering and empowering, the combination (more or less constraint or emancipation, slow or rapid) being dependent on particular conditions. In this sense religions are not homogeneous, monolithic, static entities (despite appearances) but rather heterogeneous and fluid (Casanova 1994; McGuire 1997). Catholicism, therefore, is and has always been a dynamic interpretative process of private meanings publicly enacted (Dillon 1999a:27:30).

The question remains, however, of what level of constraint or emancipation there is in Catholicism. McBrien (1994:8–9) suggests that pre-Vatican II the “spirit of Catholicism” was
dominated by the ecclesiastical office of the Petrine ministry and the church hierarchy, while post-Vatican II it involves a more inclusive, democratic “configuration” of characteristics, involving not only the church hierarchy but also a body of doctrines, a variety of spiritualities, liturgical life (especially communion), religious congregations, and systematic theology, with greater lay and female activism, and ecumenical contact (see also D’Antonio 1994; Dillon 1996; Hastings 1991; Hornsby-Smith 1989; Laishley 1991).3 Exactly how this occurs, however, may depend on local developments. Dillon (1999a; see also 1999b) sees the (American, “pro-change”) laity somewhat separated from the church hierarchy (its authority still carrying more weight), but nevertheless still remaining Catholic, still identifying with Catholic doctrine (D’Antonio 1994; Greeley 2000; Kowalewski 1993). In this sense she sees them gaining emancipation and authority, reinventing or reclaiming Catholicism, by individually interpreting doctrine and negotiating it in dialogue, creating lay movements and structures. She sees magisterial authority as possibly contravening or deviating from Catholicism, that is, Catholic identity, its “spirit” (Tradition) a “living” combination of faith and reason, scripture and sacraments, rather than merely its sociocultural history (traditions) by suppressing diversity and dialogue, denying certain sections of the Catholic population (i.e., women, homosexuals, married males) their “Catholic” rights (i.e., the right to be “officially” active in the church, legitimately celebrating Catholic rituals, and having their interpretations recognized and listened to). Of course, as she recognizes the laity (or the church hierarchy for that matter; see Bax 1989) are not homogeneous, nevertheless she sees them challenging “official” views (see D’Antonio 1994; Kowalewski 1993).

The church hierarchy, therefore, may create institutional structures that legitimate particular doctrine and their interpretative authority, creating an arena of taken-for-granted assumptions that they control, but this is not the only form of Catholicism. Lay Catholics may create their own arenas of interpretation, creating new taken-for-granted assumptions legitimated through their practice. In The Netherlands, this situation has been developing since Vatican II. Vatican II initially had a big effect; the Dutch Catholic Church attempted to cement its findings in its own National Pastoral Council from 1966–1970 and embrace change (Bakvis 1981; Coleman 1978; Goddijn 1975). Although this was stalled by the church hierarchy, its suggestions may now be being implemented by a more active and influential (although reduced) laity, in consultation with (reduced) local clergy. The decline in the church after Vatican II, resulting in a loss of priests and lack of commitment and mass participation by parishioners, may in this way be slowly being redressed by local level activism by more independent members. Of course, how far this develops and how much influence it gains may depend on the “flexibility” of the church hierarchy, on how much acknowledgement and encouragement it gives (Dillon 1999a, 1999b; Greeley 2000).

**METHODS**

The analysis is based on qualitative ethnographic fieldwork in the village of Aalten carried out over a period of 15 months as part of a study comparing the identities and interactions of four churches: the Catholic Church, the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk), the (re)Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk), and the Christian (re)Reformed Church (Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk) (Watling 1999). The aim was to analyze how diverse churches (and their members) may retain identities yet negotiate with each other and with new developments and the secular world, something that also led to an examination of religious reaction to and influence over the national identity. Qualitative analysis was used to provide understanding of the social construction of religion; the interrelation of private and public meanings. The comparative method was used to highlight diversity and the negotiated nature of religion and provide a more complex understanding. The comparative sense proved useful for understanding Dutch Catholicism. The dominance of Reformed belief politically and socially after the Reformation may have influenced
the church in several ways: encouraging it to become insular before Vatican II, something exacerbated by the pillarized political system of the 19th and 20th centuries that allowed religious groups to live separate existences; and influencing the national identity to be diverse and dialogic, which may have influenced the church’s rapid attempt to embrace change and create new egalitarian structures after Vatican II, something that although stalled may have emancipated the laity from authoritative doctrine and left a lasting sense of criticism (I develop these ideas more fully below).

Fieldwork methodology comprised a variety of analytical methods: sociohistorical analysis; analysis of church literature; interviews (118 in all; 28 Catholic—4 priests, 1 deacon, 6 pastoral workers, 17 lay parishioners); attending meetings (87 in all; 13 Catholic) and services (45 in all; 9 Catholic); and participant observation among the church communities (Watling 1999). I initially approached the Catholic community by attending services and observing and taking notes throughout. During these I also participated in communion (despite being non-Catholic). I also attended first communion and confirmation services.

I concentrated my interviews on individuals most active in church affairs as my aim was to understand how Catholics explicitly attempt to use Catholic identity to negotiate change (rather than ignoring or rejecting it). I arranged to see the parish pastor (a married male deacon) first, then the priest for the area, and then interviewed lay members of the parish councils, many of whom represented workgroups concerned with catechism, liturgy, pastoral work, or ecumenism. Interviews were informal discussions, for a minimum of two hours, undertaken in interviewees homes. I also met informally with the dean, several priests, ex-priests, and ex-seminary candidates, working at a wider level than the parish or in other parishes. Discussions varied around what it means to be Catholic (or religious), the roles of laity and clergy, and the role of Catholicism in private and public arenas.

Concerning meetings, I attended those of the main parish councils first and then parish workgroups and wider councils and workgroups at the deanery and provincial level. I also visited several care homes and a local prison (where I attended a service). Along with these “structured” methods, I conducted participant observation and follow-up chats, either at parishioners’ homes, after meetings or at other (ecumenical; village) events. The age range of parishioners I mostly interacted with was from 30–60 years (I observed the children at church and school and talked to some older parishioners), being split fairly evenly between men and women, and nearly all representing “liberal” views. In addition to this interaction, I consulted church literature: the parish produces an annual “plan” and a monthly booklet that detail community activities, inform parishioners of Catholic and religious issues, and express clerical and lay views, and has also commissioned books exploring the history of the community (see Beukelaer 1992; “... en als je vals zingt, vindt hij dat niet erg”).

The Dutch Catholic Church

The reasons behind Dutch Catholicism’s present developments can be initially understood with an outline of Dutch religious (and national) history, for it is through this that its particular nature can be appreciated. The Dutch situation may reflect wider developments in Catholicism in general; rapid change and the struggle for authority occurs throughout the church (and religion in general, something that may always have occurred), something exacerbated since Vatican II (Badone 1990b; Beyer 1994; Bruce 1996; Casanova 1994, 1997; D’Antonio 1994; Davie 1994, 2000; Dillon 1995, 1996, 1999a, 1999b; Flis 2000; Hastings 1991; Hervieu-Legier 1997; Hoge et al. 1995; Holland 1989a, 1989b; Hornsby-Smith 1989; Kowalewski 1993; McBrien 1994; Rice 1990; Wallace 1993). However, the wide-ranging diversity of Catholicism in different contexts means that there will be many different interpretations of it, both in terms of “tradition” and “change.” Different historical conditions, or different social and political structures, may affect the nature of Catholicism’s development (Badone 1990b; Casanova 1994; Davie 2000; Dillon...
1999a; Inglis et al. 2000; Warner 2000). It is important to stress, therefore, that the developments I explore are context dependent, they are Dutch Catholic (and specifically Aalten Catholic), developments, although they may highlight and allow an understanding of important wider issues.

In The Netherlands religion has been intertwined with economic, political, and social developments. The Dutch Revolt (against (Catholic) Spain, then the ruling power), which delineated the boundaries of the nation, occurred at the same time as the Reformation, and these events reinforced each other. Indeed, in “Calvinist” thinking (dominant at the time) the Revolt and the aspiring nation existed for the sake of the Reformed church—it was seen as the “sacred” struggle of the “chosen people” (Watling 1999; see also Duke and Tamse 1981). Although this thinking became compromised (by other religious beliefs, the Enlightenment, the scientific revolution), the Reformation initiated important changes in belief and doctrine (and society), notably that lay individuals could be as “spiritual” as the clergy. Authority became egalitarian (thus there were Reformed churches, locally based, rather than a national Reformed church). This thinking led to disputes in the 19th century after the Reformed churches were reorganized into the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk), a state church run along hierarchical lines, instead of traditional Reformed Presbyterian ones. Schisms, or “re-reformations,” occurred where “orthodox” groups, rejecting this hierarchical development and what they perceived to be its “liberal” ideas, accepting change over strict interpretation of Reformed doctrine, split, reclaiming Reformation ideals and creating Gereformeerde, or “(re)Reformed” churches—in 1834 the Afscheiding, or “Secession,” and in 1886 the Doleantie, or “Protest” (Knippenberg 1992:244–47; see also Andeweg and Irwin 1993; Shetter 1987; Watling 1999; Wintle 1987). These disputes stimulated a philosophy of devolution, termed soevereiniteit in eigen kring, or “sovereignty in the individual social spheres,” where different groups demanded control of their own affairs (Wintle 1987). Other, smaller schisms also occurred (and still do); Reformed beliefs initiated a search for the morally perfect life, causing a diversity of interpretations of religion in constant movement, each legitimated in their particular search. These ideas led to the political system of verzuiling, or pillarization, that created equal but separate subcommunities based on different ideological ideas (“Protestant,” “Catholic.” and “Unchurchly,” although there could be smaller divisions) with the country run by a coalition, a situation that has been called the “politics of accommodation” (Lijphart 1975).5

Although verzuiling has since declined, these ideas may have left their mark in political and religious diversity and a culture of accommodation (Andeweg and Irwin 1993; Bagley 1973; Eldersveld et al. 1981; Galema et al. 1993; Goudsblom 1967; Newton 1978; Shetter 1971, 1987). Influenced by the schismatic nature of Reformed religion, and reinforced by the political process, Dutch individuals strive (are encouraged) to realize and express their beliefs, and coordinate and negotiate them in democratic organizations. The Reformation stressed religion as a personal quest rather than obedience to authority, encouraging individuals to experience a “calling” (roeping), through which to seek the “truth” (Watling 1999; see also McGrath 1994:222–25; Weber 1991). Self-discipline, in this scheme, replaces the enforcement of doctrine (“orthodoxy” is “popular” faith, “official” arises from “ unofficial”; see Badone 1990a, 1990b; Knippenberg 1992:246–47; see also Belzen 1999). This means responsibly engaging with the world, something that involves creating an ordered organization—roles and duties that coordinate catechism, confessions, education, evangelism, sacraments, and services—allowing others to achieve the “calling” (and legitimating it), what is termed the ambt or “office” (Watling 1999). Diversity and order, “ unofficial” and “official” views, are, in this sense, in dialectical dialogue, rather than opposed. This has had important implications for the Dutch nation (and thus Dutch Catholicism). Through social and political influence these ideas may have created a discursive national identity based around the ideology of activism and social partnership; a constant reaffirmation of difference and cooperation (Andeweg and Irwin 1993; Bagley 1973; Eldersveld et al. 1981; Goudsblom 1967; van der Laarse 1989; Lijphart 1975; Shetter 1971, 1987). This may not be altogether harmonious. Schism is always a
possibility, with individuals and groups separating over relatively small differences. Furthermore, it can be oppressive, revolving around constant vigilance, intense thought, and “correct” action, something known as *zwaren*, or “heaviness”—belief as a heavy burden weighing on the conscience (Watling 1999; see also Belzen 1999; Knippenberg 1992; Tennekes 1988; Weber 1991). Nevertheless, these ideas may link the nation, possibly creating a Dutch nationalism based around Calvinist reformed morality (see van der Laarse 1989:445; see also Boissevain and Verrips 1989; Duke and Tamse 1981; Galema et al. 1993). In this sense, Dutch Catholicism may have, as many informants emphasised, Calvinistic, or Reformed, influences: a stress on activism, democracy, and dialogue.

The Catholic Church in The Netherlands has been in a disadvantaged position throughout most of Dutch history since the Reformation, because Reformed belief, being bound up with the Dutch Revolt, became central to the nation. Because of this, two things occurred: the church became insular but it also became influenced by Reformed thinking, which dominated the national identity. The former allowed the church a solid base to seek emancipation in the *verzuiling* system, the latter may have partly influenced the major changes in the church after Vatican II, when parishioners (and local clergy) sought to create a new, egalitarian church (Bakvis 1981; Coleman 1978; Goddijn 1975). Until 1853, the church was denied normal church government and at times subjected to social and political disadvantages. Because of this it developed an “underground” mentality, something consolidated via *verzuiling* when the church, despite being emancipated socially and politically, followed isolationism. This allowed Dutch Catholics to organize and influence the government without compromising their faith. The church, therefore, became a model of obedient *Roman* Catholicism. This situation began to change during World War II when all Dutch churches worked together and began to question separatism. This led to growing unrest among the laity in the years after as the church hierarchy demanded strict adherence to “official” Catholic doctrine, rather than building a new church for a new era. In the 1960s, this situation led to radical change as the church hierarchy refused to compromise with the laity, who followed the “liberal” changes suggested by Vatican II, resulting in a loss of clerical candidates and mass participation by parishioners.

The changes suggested by Vatican II were initially welcomed by the Dutch Catholic Church. Dialogue replaced control as the dominant strategy. Furthermore, the cohesive structure of the church and the episcopal situation, where bishops worked as a collegial body, enabled a unique communication network that allowed new ideas to prosper and spread, with part of the Dutch uniqueness being the speed of change (Coleman 1978). The church was de-mythologized: a new Dutch catechism was introduced; confession was removed from the confessional and replaced with a para-sacramental confession; ecumenical agreement was initiated over baptism; greater emphasis was placed on deaneries and parishes and lay advisory boards established; Latin was rejected as the church language; papal infallibility was criticized; there were new attitudes toward inter-faith marriage and divorce; transubstantiation in the communion was challenged (Coleman 1978). This change resulted in the National Pastoral Council. Conceived as a follow up to Vatican II, representatives were elected from each diocese, deanery, and parish to discuss, propose, and implement changes.

This rapid change was not without challenge, however, and gradually the old, “traditional” structure began to reassert itself. Conservative bishops were appointed by the church hierarchy and the church began to retreat from dialogue. The pace of change slowed. The church stagnated, unable to return to past values, unable to move forward to new ones (Bakvis 1981; Coleman 1978; Goddijn 1975). That this should have occurred may not be surprising. Change entailed risk: there was a danger of schism, the possibility of mistakes, and opposition groups could challenge and hinder progress. Furthermore, much change involved only a few representatives and could not represent the life experiences of all Dutch Catholics, at least not immediately. What was needed was more time. Despite this stalling in the rate of change, many of the new developments remained in place, and in spirit the majority of the laity favored change.
Parishioners, therefore, slowly began embracing change. Furthermore, because of a loss of priests and a decline in congregations, remaining parishioners still committed to the church had to become independent and organize their communities. This development has been gathering speed in the last decade or so, with a more “liberal” local clergy working together with committed parishioners to create new church “structures” and redefine Dutch Catholic belief. Women and married men are becoming active and visible in church affairs, ecumenical dialogue is increasing, and parishioners are engaging with formerly prohibited issues (e.g., abortion, contraception, euthanasia).

These developments, however, are “unofficial.” The church continues a “traditional” hierarchical system, which means that parishioners are still “officially” expected to abide by church hierarchy controlled doctrine, which may be at odds with their own, local developments. Because of this the church has what is termed randkerkelyke membership, that is, there is a kern, or core, of active parishioners (kernleden) working for the church in church councils, workgroups, or services, committed to negotiating new Catholic meanings, surrounded by a rand, or rim, of passive parishioners (randleden) reluctant to participate in the church as they see it to be unresponsive to their needs (Knippenberg 1992:249–50; see also Davie 2000). However, parishioners, active or passive, may still identify with Catholicism. They may still recognize the value of its “Tradition” for negotiating social life. Furthermore, some of its “traditions”—symbols and rituals, such as, for example, the Virgin Mary, religious icons, regular communion, and the clergy—may also be valued (as an informant stated: “Catholic tradition is more full of joy. I like the rituals ... Protestants have too few ways to express emotions, they only have words”). They do not unduly reject these or want to “overthrow” them; they recognize that these traditions have worth, but they want them to be more amenable to their personal and local experiences (Dillon 1999a). The more active parishioners are intent on providing such a church, at least at the local level initially. Through their activism they are attempting to gain authority and legitimation for a church that encourages independent Catholics to interpret the world through their consciences and in their community.

**Redefinition of “Catholicism”: Aalten Catholic Church**

The history of religion in The Netherlands has resulted in an unequal distribution of religious groups. The north is mainly Protestant, although diverse, the south Catholic; the east is thought to be more conservative than the west; and there is a conservative Protestant region running from south-west to north-east. Different towns or villages may also favor different churches: some may be Nederlandse Hervormde dominated, others Gereformeerde, or Catholic (or secular) dominated. This distribution follows lines initially established by the Dutch Revolt and later complicated by the diversification of the Reformed churches with local authorities following the new beliefs (Andeweg and Irwin 1993; Knippenberg 1992). Religion in Aalten diversified after the Reformation (the village lies on the border of the Protestant north and Catholic south), albeit within a Gereformeerde influence. Up to World War II, this was controlled within a sectarian pattern corresponding to verzuiling. Since then, however, the situation has developed into a more ecumenical pattern. At present the village has 14 main church groups (not all have places of worship in the village), in a population of around 18,000 (only 2,000 are seen as nonchurch; the majority, around 11,400, belong to Reformed churches). These groups are central to life in Aalten; they compete to influence what can be termed a “moral discourse” that influences the village’s inhabitants. Therefore, religion is in evidence in other areas of social life besides inside the churches. The dominant political party is the Christian Democratic Alliance (Christen Democratisch Appel), and there is also an “orthodox” party, the Reformed Political Federation (Reformatorische Politieke Federatie).  All but one of the 10 schools are religious influenced: three primary schools are Hervormde, three Gereformeerde, and two Catholic; the one secondary school is ecumenical. Alongside politics and education are Christian social groups relating to leisure,
sport, or work. Aalten’s Catholic Church, therefore, is committed not only to creating a defined Catholic identity and community but also to discourse with other churches and to providing a religious arena that benefits all.

**New Church “Structures”**

Aalten parishioners, active and passive, young and old, men and women, favor change and the active ones take the lead in developing a “community of belief”—the local community is central—where this can occur, where laity and local clergy, men and women, can work together on equal terms. The church has 3,800 members and is centered around the church building (a recent addition, the old Catholic building now houses the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*), the *pastorie*, or pastor’s residence, and the *parochie centrum*, or parish center, where major meetings are held. There are two major decision-making bodies: the *parochievergadering*, or “parish meeting,” made up of elected representatives (men and women) from various parish workgroups that make up the backbone of the church, and the *parochiebestuur*, or “parish council,” which prepares the issues to be discussed in the *parochievergadering*. The local priest (because of the shortage, Aalten shares one with several other parishes) is the unelected chairman of both the *parochievergadering* and *parochiebestuur*, presumably for “official” purposes, although in practice the elected lay vice-chairman controls proceedings (the priest acts as a guide, parishioners make the decisions). These councils decide parish policy, initiate new developments, and stimulate activism by delegating tasks and responsibilities to parishioners (de Beukelaer 1992; see also Hornsby-Smith 1989). To guide this activism they initiate an annual *beliedsplan*, or “management” plan (similar to the church orders of the Reformed Churches). This details the personnel, services, and workgroups in the parish and proposes visions for the future. It emphasizes that the church is given form through “learning,” “celebrating,” and “serving,” corresponding to practical categories of catechism, liturgy, and pastoral work, within which workgroups are organized. These are seen as interlinked parts of a belief developing the moral responsibility needed to create a new Catholicism. They are used as catalytic areas, delineating roles and tasks, combining ritual, organization, and activism, with the aim of guiding parishioners in their personal and social religious quest.

The future of the community demands education in the fundamentals of belief. The two Catholic schools in Aalten are, therefore, also seen as important. They teach Catholic beliefs (along with others—they accept non-Catholic children), and inculcate a Catholic “identity.” The youth council, similarly, stimulates youth activism (although it works closely with *Hervormde* and *Gereformeerde* youth councils). Consolidating these is the catechism that coordinates the first communion, confirmation, parish catechism, and discussion groups. The first two areas concern children, aged seven and 12 respectively, who are ritually “announced” to the parish in special services (around 30 per year each ritual). The latter two groups explore the meanings of Catholicism. The number of members attending these groups is small at present. However, these and others groups are being organized to address this by developing new ideas for the future. The parish catechism, in particular, is a good example of the changing face of Dutch Catholicism. It involves discussions between volunteers and parents with the aim of teaching (and learning, for many of the parents have little contact with the church) new beliefs. This is a difficult process because instead of “following” or “receiving” church hierarchy legitimated doctrine, parishioners are encouraged to strive to create their own meaning and encourage others to do the same. This can be a difficult process, involving a lot of thought and commitment (and something that possibly risks loss of faith as individuals may find secular ideals and arguments as pervasive as religious ones). This is why the local community is stressed, enabling individuals to support each other, thinking, acting, and believing in common (in dialogue). In this vein intermediate structures mediating between parishes (and the church hierarchy) have also been set up. The East Gelderland Pastoral Workgroup (*Pastorale Werkgroep Oost Gelderland*) assists local parishes
in organizing and controlling their own communities. It provides education and stimulation, as does the East Gelderland Pastoral School (*Pastorale School Oost Gelderland*), which trains lay volunteers in theology and pastoral issues (both of these are run by laity and ex-priests). The *dekenaten*, or deaneries, have also been reorganized on a more democratic basis, with lay representatives elected to deanery councils, to coordinate parish councils and workgroups on a wider level.\[^{11}\]

### Redefining Material Symbolism and Ritual Communication

New ideas are envisaged by parishioners to have two applications in the community: liturgical celebration and social activism. The former is coordinated by the *liturgisch beraad*, or “liturgical council.” This involves the services, *akolieten* and *misdienaren*, or altar boys (and recently girls), *lectoren*, or lay preachers, and Sunday schools. The services (there are three a week) still somewhat represent the “official” show of clerical authority—wearing official robes, observing rituals of deference to the altar and “tabernacle” (a container for communion bread), preaching the gospels, leading the praying and confessions (there is no longer any private confession), and blessing the communion—although the laity are becoming more active than formerly, and read lessons and “take” communion (by hand) rather than “receiving” it (on the tongue).\[^{12}\] This may be why only around a 10th of the membership (mostly older people and children) regularly attend (i.e., one service a week, although different parishioners may attend different services, which may up the figure). Services less represent parishioner activism (although with more lay control of them this may change) and are somewhat less revered than formerly. This shows a change in material symbolism and ritual communication. The power of “traditional” images, dictated and controlled by the church hierarchy, is no longer as effective as formerly. For example, the church holds open days every now and again, where parishioners and Aalten villagers can learn of Catholic objects and images. However, this may be a form of “religious tourism”: parishioners see the objects as relics, rather than seeing them the “traditionally” accepted way. Chapels, communion bread and wine, crucifixes, statues, or other symbols of “holiness” are no longer taken literally or thought of as “higher” images; they are viewed as part of Catholic “tradition”—sociohistorical objects.\[^{13}\] As an informant stated:

> A lot of Protestants think we believe in transubstantiation and worship statues. We do not. Most Catholics believe the same things as Protestants. The clergy obey the Pope but the local view is different. It is critical rather than mystical. You cannot teach people that bread, wine, and statues, are actual people.

This is not to say that material symbolism or ritual communication are not valued, they are—the church building (and its religious objects and rituals) is still seen as a focal point—but as part of a historical identity, rather than as a defining part the “spirit” of Catholicism. The symbolism being celebrated in Aalten is one of “community”; the buildings, objects, and rituals are seen as celebrating that, as bringing Catholic individuals together—these things define the history of their local church (see Hornsby-Smith 1989).\[^{14}\] And in this sense the new “structures,” discussed earlier in this article, the councils and workgroups, may be seen as “ritual communication” for they too represent the community (this may be a Reformed influence: organization in Reformed belief (the *ambt*) is the social manifestation of individual calling (the *roeping*)—belief in action—Aalten Catholic organization may follow similar lines). This is why social activism is stressed as important; it involves creating and protecting the community, something that involves local, national, and global concerns. Material symbolism and ritual communication, therefore, are being redefined as catalytic areas, enabling parishioners to reflexively create their identities—they are used as points of contact (with the religion, the community, *and* the church hierarchy) rather than as “authoritarian” images.
Redefining “Authority”

The above changes affect the nature of church “authority,” something that particularly involves the position of women in the church. Aalten parishioners want a redefinition of authority: less hierarchy and more democracy. This has in fact been occurring in Aalten since the 1960s and especially in the last decade, when the community has been without a full-time priest (a full-time deacon was employed from 1991–1994). This has led to lay autonomy. In other parishes it has led to lay parishioners working as qualified “pastoral workers” (titled “pastor”; a priest is titled pastoor, or “pastor-priest”), taking on the full priestly role (see Wallace 1993). These workers study, often for as long as a priest, and include women, but “officially” cannot perform sacraments, except in revised forms (deacons, married males, can baptize and marry). However, inevitably perhaps, many now fulfill the full priestly role. In some instances bishops have disciplined these workers but generally the situation is tolerated (or ignored) because it is subtly carried out, the communities within which the pastoral workers work choose them, and because, quite simply, without them Dutch Catholicism would not function. In many cases the tension is eased because the pastoral workers work together with priests, who provide the “official” seal to their “unofficial” process.15

This change in the nature of Dutch Catholic authority is why celibacy is not so much of an issue in The Netherlands and why the position of women is changing. Celibacy is challenged by new developments: parishioners (both active and passive, young and old, male and female) prefer someone on their level, with similar experiences, to guide them. However, because most of the church workers these days are laity the issue does not cause that much tension (furthermore, although the clergy remain celibate “officially” many may not be in reality; see Rice 1990; see also Badone 1990b; Dillon 1999a; Laishley 1991; McBrien 1994). The position of women, however, may cause some tension and is, perhaps, the area where new developments are most highlighted. Many women now take an active role in church affairs. In Aalten as many if not more women than men take an active role (and wield (elected) power in the church councils). Many work as pastoral workers (at present only “officially” allowed to work in care homes, hospitals, or prisons; male pastoral workers can work in parishes). These women bring new ideas to the church. They are less concerned with “rules” and more with “people”: their activism concerns practical, pastoral motives—social work—as much as church-based or spiritual ones (or rather, their spiritual motives stimulate pastoral activism, which redefines the church from the bottom-up, from practice), which means they are possibly more likely to accept change (see Dillon 1999a, 1999b; Hastings 1991; McBrien 1994; Wallace 1993). This means they, and other male pastoral workers (and local priests), have a difficult task, juggling, in a sense, two “moralties”: on the one hand they are expected to abide by static moral rules legitimized by the church hierarchy; on the other they personally improvise these moral rules to practical situations, somewhat challenging and changing them (a practice that is “unofficially” legitimate, i.e., it is most appropriate for the situation, but “officially” illegitimate as it may be against church hierarchy legitimated doctrine). Because of this dilemma they and the parishioners they guide and support may find difficulty in resolving their existential dilemmas—their struggles to make sense of their lives and the world they live in—in line with the “official” church, which may make them feel somewhat silent and unsupported (see D’Antonio 1994:380–81; Kowalewski 1993). As a parishioner stated:

We cannot be honest about what pastoral workers do. Similarly, a priest cannot openly admit to breaking celibacy or being homosexual, even though it happens. We have to live according to “rules.” The church hierarchy does not worry about the lack of priests, nor officially encourage lay workers, it only cares about its own “image” of the church.

This situation may be exacerbated as pastoral workers and laity see Catholicism (as opposed to Roman Catholicism) as amenable to change, as morally flexible. In this sense they may see
“official” moral rules as morally suspect and illegitimate. And although their activism is gaining in (moral and practical) authority, enabling them to challenge “official” moral rules, the tension created shows their commitment to Catholicism and to the church hierarchy. They want (and perhaps need) the latter to acknowledge and discourse with them, to commit to redefining Catholicism as much as they do, to feel fulfilled in their beliefs.16

Redefining Catholic Boundaries

These developments have led to parishioners seeking ecumenical contact. Aalten Catholic Church is heavily involved in ecumenical discourse. The decline of 

**verzuiling**

allied to secularization initiated ecumenism between Dutch churches as they came to recognize their (human) similarities more than their (church) differences. Local level ecumenism began in general (i.e., not church legitimated) meetings and workgroups. Since World War II this has been increasingly organized in a legitimated “ecumenical movement.” This takes the form of local councils coordinated by a national committee, what is called the *Raad van Kerken*, or Council of Churches. Aalten’s ecumenical movement began in 1969 and supervises a network of workgroups active in educational, spiritual, and social issues that form a neutral arena for Aalten’s churches to enter dialogue. It encourages ecumenism through practice, organizing activism around areas such as environmentalism, gender, liturgy, pastoral issues (e.g., abortion, euthanasia), social inequalities, or third-world issues (in this sense, in the ecumenical movement at least, “unofficial” Catholicism may become consolidated “officially” and gain in influence) (Hastings 1991; McBrien 1994; Tavard 1991; Watling 2001).17

An important ecumenical group that Aalten Catholic Church is part of, the Committee for Ecumenical Services (*Commissie Oecumenische Diensten*), promotes ecumenism through more traditional arenas of prayer and sermon. It works in cooperation with pastors, who are invited to perform ecumenical services (five times a year, given in the Reformed churches and the Catholic Church in rotation; a Catholic pastor in a Protestant church, *Nederlandse Hervormde* in *Gereformeerde*, and vice versa). It is also involved in promoting ecumenical communion (see Laishley 1991:226; McBrien 1994:828). This is considered a big step, even though some areas have already done so, because “officially” it is forbidden. The major stumbling block concerns transubstantiation; many Protestants still think that Catholics believe in a literal change of bread and wine into body and blood and this to them is idolatry (“officially” Catholics do believe in this even if “unofficially” they do not). Protestants are also refused Catholic communion “officially.” However, some *Hervormde, Gereformeerde*, and Catholic believers have taken each others’ communion “unofficially,” which is the stimulus. At present, therefore, the churches work “unofficially,” something that causes problems among some Protestants who would like more “official” agreement. For them official rules come from personal calling, from conscience, and they struggle to understand how a Catholic conscience can be “unofficial” and disagree with official teachings (the answer for them would be to split, which is why so many schisms have occurred). They do not compromise for the sake of wider, universal identity as Catholics do. However, at present in the ecumenical movement they do. They are willing to create a “new” ecumenical “identity” for particular occasions and causes (“orthodox” Protestants refuse to do this) (Watling 2001).

Dutch Catholics are becoming more openly involved in a “moral discourse” (or “moral competition”) to define religion and society. In this respect they are in dialogue with (“liberal”) Protestant churches and learning from them. However, they also compete to show that Catholic beliefs have as much relevance as Protestant ones and attempt to influence the ecumenical discourse their way (see Casanova 1997:133). Parishioners are committed to their religion and seek (and may be gaining) more of a voice and more visibility. Whether this form of Catholicism is possibly beginning to filter upwards to the church hierarchy, and whether the hierarchy will “officially” accept it, is debatable and depends perhaps on what is perceived by Catholicism—which manifestation, the individual, local, national, or global is considered the most legitimate
and by whom (D’Antonio 1994; Dillon 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Kowalewski 1993). There may be no perfect resolution. In a sense this problem may always have existed because Catholicism has always been diverse and contested. What may count, perhaps, is the redefining and balancing of Catholic “authority,” giving greater voice and recognition to “unofficial” views to the satisfaction of parishioners, while retaining a “symbolic community” represented by the church hierarchy (Casanova 1997; D’Antonio 1994; Dillon 1999a, 1999b; Kowalewski 1993).

CONCLUSION

Religion is a complex, diverse process of identity formation within particular hegemonic structures—a combination of individual and community, unofficial and official, private and public, with variations dependent on context (Casanova 1994; McGuire 1997). Understanding how these elements interact (or separate), constraining or emancipating individuals, creating new religious forms (inside or outside of traditions) may enable an understanding of how religion may accommodate, challenge, or control change. In this sense, Dillon (1999a) argues that Catholicism is not monolithic but diverse, comprised of a variety of groups, some resisting change, others favoring it, within a “community of meaning,” an overarching identity (see also D’Antonio 1994; Bax 1989; Kowalewski 1993; McBrien 1994; MCaffery 1990; Watling 1999). Different Catholic populations (i.e., laity (and some clergy), in different contexts) may have their own interpretations of Catholicism that, despite possibly being at odds with church hierarchy legitimated doctrine, may still be considered Catholic. In this article I have examined these issues in the context of Dutch (Aalten) Catholicism, arguing that it is progressing via “unofficial” beliefs and practices, based around individual conscience and community activism, favoring change, somewhat at odds with the “official” doctrine of the church hierarchy that may resist change (although local clergy mediate somewhat).

That this situation is so is because of a particular religious and national history. In The Netherlands to a certain extent individual empowerment may have always occurred, at least since the Reformation, through the interrelation of religion, politics, and culture, legitimating religious and cultural diversity (Knippenberg 1992; Watling 1999). These influences may have produced what Taylor (1983:73) calls an “elastic conservatism,” a balance of “orthodoxy” and “liberalism,” tradition and change, something Knippenberg (1992:2:246) argues is a struggle to crystallize Dutch consciousness between preciezen, or “defining,” and rekkelijken, or “stretching” of beliefs (see van der Laarse 1989:2–6; Wintle 1987:5). The Netherlands, therefore, has been and may still be involved in “reformation,” individuals independently interpreting events and negotiating them in dialogue, creating a diverse and dialectical society (i.e., the roeping, or “calling,” and ambt, or “office”) (Watling 1999; see also Shetter 1987). In this respect, Dutch Catholics may be said to have “Reformed” influences. How much may be debatable. Catholicism is in spirit a diverse, processual religion (Dillon 1999; McBrien 1994); nevertheless, Reformed thinking may have added to and stimulated this spirit (directly via ecumenical dialogue or indirectly via the national identity), encouraging parishioners to take as much responsibility for redefining Catholicism as the church hierarchy. Dutch (Aalten) parishioners value Catholicism. They identify with the church, valuing it as an organizing principle and existential anchor (which is why they do not split like Protestants). However, they want it to be more amenable to their experiences and more under their control. They are less inclined to passively “receive” belief and more inclined to actively “create” it. They are recognizing the validity of their views outside the church hierarchy’s authority. This has led to many passive members becoming unwilling to participate in the church (although they may see themselves as Catholic). However, other active members are legitimating their views in new forms of organization in local communities that favor dialogue over leadership and are striving to encourage others to follow suit. In this endeavour they are supported by local clergy who act as a source of expertise, guiding them in their quest for knowledge and authority, providing Catholic guidelines for them to use (Giddens 1991).
At present, however, the church hierarchy seems to keep a distance from these developments. It recognizes parishioners, active and passive, as Catholic but it refrains from acknowledging their views. Yet it doesn’t outright condemn them (except on isolated occasions). Why is debatable. The hierarchy may feel that change needs to be carefully and slowly approached within a firm base of belief to avoid schism or secularization. Change may have always occurred and been monitored and subtly influenced. Catholicism is also a wide-ranging religion, with many views; Dutch Catholicism is only one variant, other individuals in countries with different historical, social, or political conditions may have different interpretations, which may constrain acceptance of change (Badone 1990b; Casanova 1994; Davie 2000; Dillon 1999a; Inglis et al. 2000; Warner 2000). As it is, therefore, the church hierarchy still somewhat favors (and controls) the wider “traditional” Roman image of Catholicism. And this may be no bad thing; a unified image may provide stability, allowing different interpretations the flexibility to develop within guidelines. Change is not easy, it involves challenging internalized identities, which can be confusing. However, the church hierarchy may need to acknowledge diverse developments more openly and allow them more authority if it is to retain some influence among a majority of believers. Not doing so may lead to greater passivity and further decline. In the context of The Netherlands this may mean adopting a more “Dutch” (Reformed) approach, accepting diverse interpretations and entering dialogue with them, negotiating change dialectically. By doing so it may possibly revitalize Dutch Catholicism.

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NOTES

1. When referring to the “church hierarchy,” I mean those holding “sacred office” in the church, i.e., the Pope, the Vatican, and the college of bishops (magesterium) (Dillon 1999a:10; McBrien 1994; Kowalewski 1993). I distinguish the church hierarchy from the laity, and also from the local clergy—the parish priests, deacons, and pastoral workers (and to a certain extent the deans).

2. Because of these issues I refer to the Catholic religion as “Catholicism,” the Dutch church as “Catholic,” and Dutch parishioners as “Catholics,” using the universal form (the “Tradition”).

3. Similar developments may have occurred before Vatican II, it being part of a longer historical process of contestation; nevertheless, Vatican II may have involved some revolutionary principles and exacerbated change (D’Antonio 1994; Dillon 1999a; Hastings 1991; McBrien 1994).

4. Despite telephoning and writing to the bishop, I did not get to meet or interview him. He may simply have been too busy. However, it may also be that the situation is too delicate for him to talk about. Bishops tend to keep a distance from local developments, they have to be visible in keeping to “official” doctrine and, therefore, although knowledgeable of developments do not explicitly acknowledge them (to do so would mean “officially” condemning them and disciplining individuals involved, which occasionally they do if the same become too visible, although a warning may be given first, see notes 11 and 15).

5. Verszulling in this sense may possibly have caused religious and political divisions to obviate class, ethnic, or racial divisions (van der Laarse 1989).

6. Dillon (1999:195) analyzes the possibility of two “cultures” of Catholicism in America: the institutional church with its associated power structures and doctrine and the “community of vital believers” that challenge these (see D’Antonio 1994:380). Similar arguments could be applied to The Netherlands. However, I agree with Dillon that the two may be linked; individuals in practice interpreting doctrine their way, possibly in dialogue with the church hierarchy. Culture is never one way, nor is it static (McBrien 1994). The question, perhaps, is if, on what level, and how quickly, “unofficial” practice might change “official” institutional structures and doctrine?

and older may be active parishioners (this averaging at 37 percent). He defines “activity” as attending church once a fortnight, although he recognizes that this may only be one indicator. Similarly, in Aalten although only around a 10th of parishioners attend services “regularly” as I define it (i.e., one service a week), different services (three a week) may attract different parishioners, which may up the figure. Furthermore, many who do not attend services regularly may still be active in other areas of church life (i.e., in schools, councils, or workgroups) and for different periods over the year. These different indicators make it difficult to ascertain accurate figures, although around 20–25 percent of parishioners may be said to be active in the sense I describe it (with the most active being around 40–55 years old).

8. Although The Netherlands may be said to be embracing “liberal” developments overall, the stress on diversity and dialogue does not preclude some parishioners favoring more “orthodox” Catholicism. However, even those would want it under their control, with the church hierarchy responding to their local initiatives (Bax 1985, 1989; see note 16).

9. The “liberal” (re)Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk) and Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk) have 6,000 and 5,000 members, respectively; the “orthodox” Christian (re)Reformed Church (Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk), with 400 members, is also influential.

10. Parishioners also use a nationally organized plan as a guide—the Algemeen Reglement voor het bestuur van een parochie van de Rooms Katholieke Kerk in Nederlands (General Rules for Parish Councils of the Roman Catholic Church in The Netherlands).

11. There is also the bisdomraad, or bishopric council, containing all bishops and deans. However, parishioners (or even local clergy) do not have contact with this. They have little contact with bishops; the dean is more amenable as are the local clergy—it these who act as “middle-men,” along with pastoral workers, between “official” and “unofficial” views and face role conflict as a result (see note 19). A favorite phrase of parishioners (and local clergy), therefore, is “do not tell the bishop”; they recognize that to officially highlight their unofficial activism to the bishop would be to bind him to “officially” denounce it and possibly takes steps to outlaw or control it. A good example of this is that parishioners invited Protestant representatives (including pastors) to the ordination of a local deacon (Protestants do the same for Catholics), including the taking communion from the bishop, but that this was kept quiet. An opposite example is when a young priest in a nearby town told the bishop of pastoral workers performing as priests, with the result that the bishop disciplined them and they left the church (see notes 4 and 15).

12. Parishioners may also take communion from other lay members, either fully blessed earlier by a priest, or partly blessed without a priest present (at a local prison a female pastoral worker carries out services and supervises the communion (of bread only) that has been “pre-blessed” by a male priest).

13. The church is not overly laden with objects: there is the altar (facing the congregation, rather than as it was formerly), the tabernacle (open during communion, closed other times), a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and statues showing the stations of the cross. A few crucifixes and candelabras are on show, but most regalia is stored in a backroom and rarely used (except for communion chalices). A statue of St. Helena (the parish is dedicated to her) stands outside, as does a tree dedicated to St. Ludger. Former chapels to Joseph and Mary have been replaced (with an organ and a lectern for lay preachers) and the old communion benches for parishioners to kneel on go unused (parishioners rarely kneel), as in most cases does the “holy water” at the entrances to the church (parishioners rarely cross themselves).

14. When celebrating the 25th anniversary of the local priest, Aalten parishioners asked him to nominate gifts he would like. One was the extension of the chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, allowing access at all times not just during services, to encourage parishioners to pray together even when the church was locked (or just to meet). Another was that parishioners write down their experiences of Catholicism, good and bad, and what they envisage as its future, in a published booklet, in the hope that this would stimulate interest in Catholicism and dialogue among diverse Catholics (see “..., en Als Je Vals Zingt, Vind Hij Dat Niet Erg?”).

15. For example, at a local nursing home a female pastor leads prayers, performs sermons, conducts services, and performs and blesses sacraments (especially for the terminally ill, who prefer her to do so because they have more direct, personal contact with her and because she has had similar (lay) experiences), “supervised” by a male priest, who “officially” takes responsibility (although she has been warned by the bishop about this) (see notes 4 and 11; Wallace 1993).

16. Morality, as Howell (1997) argues, is a diverse process—a dialectical combination of the “ought” and the “is.” Moral rules are always applied (and thereby changed) in practice. In this sense, Catholic morality is flexible, always changing, and allows individuals to make sense of the world on their own terms. The issue in this situation is about power and legitimacy, about who defines and controls the moral rules and their application (or who has the right to), and about identity—pastoral workers and parishioners identify with the church hierarchy and its legitimate moral rules; these are part of their self-identities as much as other areas of Catholicism. Their reluctance to compromise or interact is, therefore, a challenge to individual selves as much as it is to Catholic culture—parishioners want and need them to engage with their self-identities to make sense of the world and feel alienated and disenchanted if they cannot or will not (which is why the church has randkerkelijke membership) (Watling 1999; see also D’Antonio 1994; Dillon 1999b; Greeley 2000; Jensen 1998).

17. Not all parishes, or all Aalten parishioners, favor the new pastors. Some may be unsure of them as individuals because they do not take priestly oaths, others may be unsure of their roles—their “authority.” They may be confused by the official/unofficial dichotomy or merely by the process of change; they may possibly be faced with a “grieving process”—letting go of previously internalized beliefs and embracing and creating new ones (Wallace 1993:34–39).
In this sense some (older) parishioners may retain more "traditional" views (possibly more so than local clergy), something Bax (1985, 1989) argues for parishioners in south Netherlands (see note 8). The same problems, of course, may affect priests, with them being unsure of their role or how to go about it, although they could be said to be more trained to cope with such problems (Hoge et al. 1995).

18. This ecumenical engagement with social movements may be somewhat similar to the change from religious (parish-based) to "humanitarian" (diffuse transnational) commitment that Hervieu-Leger (1997) argues for France. However, in the Netherlands the local community—the parish—is still seen to be the main arena of Dutch Catholic identity and practice; new developments originate from and discourse with the local councils (informants see religious and human commitments as linked) (Hornsby-Smith 1989). That this is so may be because of a perceived need (possibly Reformed influenced) to order change.

19. A “schism” occurred in the Dutch church in 1723, creating the Old Catholic Church (“Oud-Katholieke Kerk”) of Utrecht.

In 1916, a schism in this church also created the Free Catholic Church (“Vrij-Katholieke Kerk”). These churches still exist but are very small: 5,999 and 759 parishioners respectively (Coleman 1978:30; Knippenberg 1992:185–94).

20. Local clergy may still attempt to influence the laity to believe the “official” way (although they do so in dialogue as colleagues rather than as leaders). In this sense, much responsibility for the acceptance of change “officially” may lie with them. They guide and encourage parishioners in their unofficial practices, and thereby participate in them, and in doing so may influence the parishioners to accept and adapt official doctrine. However, they also negotiate with the church hierarchy, participating in the official doctrine, and the question arises of how much influence they may wield in that relationship, how much they may be able to influence official doctrine to accept and adapt unofficial practices (see note 11).

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