

“YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE A SAINT OR A  
PRACTICING CATHOLIC...”  
HIGHER TENSION AND LOWER ATTACHMENT IN THE DUTCH  
CATHOLIC CHURCH SINCE 1970

*Summary: Since 1970, a controversial reorganization of the Dutch Catholic Church has taken place. Rational choice theory on religion expects that a church will grow with such a policy, but that has not happened in Dutch Catholicism. This paper tries to answer the question why. A detailed analysis of the recent history of the Church shows that the conservative policy has not become effective on the local level, and has been met with severe resistance. But also, the bishops themselves have not fully realized their conservative policy. In the end, after much wrangling, nothing has been changed in Dutch Catholicism. The confrontation of the history of Dutch Catholicism with rational choice theory poses some interesting questions regarding theory and research, particularly in regard to the future of Dutch Catholicism.*

## **1. Introduction**

The Dutch Catholic Church is known worldwide for its progressive stance. When speaking about my subject of research –the history of Dutch Catholicism-, people react with joyful memories of the discussion about celibacy, the far-reaching reforms in liturgy, the intensive ecumenical contacts and the growing influence of the laity. Less known is that after 1970, the Vatican started a process of reorganization (cf. Coleman 1978). In that year, two bishops were appointed whom the cathedral chapter did not nominate. In 1980, an extraordinary council of the Dutch bishops convening in Rome decided to rollback most of the developments in the church. Furthermore, in the nineties, a greater emphasis on the sacramentality of the church has decreased the role of the laity. This reorganization almost split the Church and has brought it into greater conflict with society -in the case of conflicting secular and Christian ethics- and with other churches - in the area of ecumenism.

It is less known also that the Dutch Catholic Church since 1970 has been suffering from a tremendous decline in attachment. The absolute number of Catholics slightly increased from 5,262 Mio. in 1970 to 5,641 Mio. in 1983, but when the new constitution instituted that year left the administration of the faithful to the churches themselves, the absolute number declined to 5,060 Mio. in 2001. Meanwhile, the relative number of Catholics declined continuously from 40.6% in 1970 to 31.7% in 2001 and sam-

ples indicate that an even lower number may see themselves as members of the Church (Census; KASKI; Jonkers/Te Winkel [1980]: 21; Dekker et al. 1997: 12). Participation in the sacraments has declined as well. In 1970, 47.2% of Catholics attended Holy Mass, but in 2000, only 9.2% did. In 2000, 87.9% of those baptized eight years earlier made their first Communion (top 1983: 98.2%) and 60.0% of those baptized 12 years earlier were confirmed (top 1985: 80.3%) (KASKI). This means that by the age of 12, 40% of the children have now lost contact with the Church. Also, the positive identification of Catholics with the Church, its leaders, and its taught faith has declined. In 1996, only 8% acknowledged visiting a priest when having problems (1966: 49%), about 17% believed in a personal God (1966: 61%), 32% said they wanted to spread Christianity (1966: 84%) and 22% mingled to a great extent with other Catholics (1966: 60%) (Dekker et al. 1997: 47, 48, 50, 52, 55, 60, 68). Although the absolute amount of financial donations has increased since they have been collected annually in an ecumenical, nation-wide action in 1972, growth has slowed down since the early 1980's (and in some years was even negative) and remained behind inflation between 1980 and 1985 and since 1990. It is more important that less than half of the addresses are actually paying and that this number has declined in the last decade (Kerkbalans). Finally, the number of volunteers in the Dutch Catholic Church rose between 1977 and 1987 from 230,000 to 332,000, but again declined to just 285,000 in 1997. Only a small minority of 4-6% of all Catholics volunteered in the Church (KASKI).

Thus, the history of the Dutch Catholic Church after 1970 can be summarized by a controversial reorganization of the Church and a subsequent decline in overall attachment of Catholic laity. In the rational choice theory on religion however, when an organization suffers from low attachment, it should be able to generate higher attachment when it increases its level of tension within society. People are then forced to invest more in the organization and so they are expected to become more attached to it. Some research conducted by Finke and Stark seems to confirm this thesis. In *Acts of Faith*, they address the example of the Roman Catholic Church in America that, since Pope John Paul II re-emphasized the spiritual rewards of the clergy, has experienced an increase in vocations. Other examples include the Presbyterian Church, whose congregations affiliated with the (evangelical) Willow Creek Association perform much better than other Presbyterian congregations, the Unitarian Universalists, which sustained growth when they began to speak about God again, and the Reform Jews, which, after they imitated several Orthodox rituals, saw a rise in membership (Stark/Finke 2000: 259-276). In another article, Finke and Stark point to the remarkable success of the revivalist, evangelical movements in the (over the whole declining) United Methodist Church, which have attracted

several thousand followers within a few years. In the same paper, they showed that Methodist pastors that supported a controversial case of same-sex marriage were less successful in their congregation (in terms of attendance, membership growth, and raising money) than pastors who protested against this case (Finke/Stark 2001). But, contrary to the expectations of the rational choice theory on religion, the Dutch Catholic Church has not increased its attachment since 1970. On the contrary: the decline of the church accelerated after 1970.

One is impelled to ask: why? Why has the attachment to the Dutch Catholic Church not increased after thirty years of Vatican reorganization? Is there something wrong with the theory, or with Dutch Catholicism? I think that, although the tension between the Church and society has increased, it has increased in such a way that Catholics do not feel the need for greater conformity to their Church. Many proposals that could have increased tension have either never been realized, or have been developed in a non-demanding way, or have been met with successful resistance on the local level. There has been a lot of controversy within Dutch Catholicism, and it has caused considerable discussion in society, but in the end, nothing has changed. Tension is still low, and thus the stakes for Catholics are still low, and higher levels of attachment are not generated. In this paper, I will analyze this thesis on the basis of information provided by official Church publications that have, until now, never been used in social scientific or historical research.

First, I will explain why the rational choice theory expects that organizations that are in tension with society will grow. Second, I will show what, after 1970, has been tried in order to bring the Dutch Catholic Church into greater tension with society. I will also try to offer an explanation for the enigma: that higher tension and lower attachment can occur simultaneously in Dutch Catholicism. Finally, I will propose some theoretical conclusions for future research.

## **2. Tension and attachment**

The rational choice theory on religion maintains that religious organizations that are in tension with society will grow, and those organizations that adapt to the environment will decline. In this section, I will explain why the theory expects this effect to happen. Here, I use the theory that has been developed by Stark, Bainbridge, and Finke.

Rational choice theory begins with the assumption that people make choices according to what benefits or hinders them. This principle is applied to religious choices as well. People are supposed to be willing to engage with a religious organization when they are convinced that they will

benefit from this membership - that is, when they have an advantageous reason to conform to the organization. Benefits can consist of religious rewards, investments, pleasures and social contacts. The more people have to gain and the less that they have to lose by attachment to the religious organization, the more they will conform to the religious organization (Stark/Bainbridge 1996: 190, 276).

The stakes people have in a religious organization can be increased artificially through the tension in its relationship to the surrounding society. In rational choice theory, tension refers to the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism in the relationship between a religious group and the “outside” world (Stark/Finke 2000: 143). The more a religious group holds distinct beliefs and practices, has separate social networks and is antagonistic to the surrounding society, the more people have to give up when switching into the organization. Thus they make a considerable investment in the organization, which, in turn, becomes more valuable to them. Likewise, those who leave the organization risk a lot, as they are certain that they will no longer benefit from the social and religious rewards offered by the organization. Tension, either forced from outside or generated by the organization itself, thus increases the stakes members have in conformity to the religious organization by making more demands on them.

The solution for a religious organization that suffers from low lay commitment because it exists with a low degree of tension within society is, from the theoretical perspective, very simple. When the organization increases the level of tension with society, its members will gain more stakes in conformity, and become more attached to the organization (Stark/Finke 2000: 262). Consequently, the members will show higher levels of commitment than in the situation that existed when there was less tension. Thus, if a religious organization increases the level of tension, it must show an increase in attachment to the organization. Why hasn't this occurred in Dutch Catholicism?

### **3. The struggle for tension in Dutch Catholicism**

#### *3.1. Holland and the Pope*

The increase in tension within the Dutch Catholic Church had already begun before the Second Vatican Council. On Christmas Eve 1960, the Dutch bishops announced the convocation of this Council to the faithful by means of a controversial letter, which outlined their position on the questions pertaining to the participation of the laity and of Papal infallibility. Because of its liberal position, this letter was sought by Catholics all over the world – and condemned by the Roman Curia, which managed to with-

draw the Italian translation from the market (Goddijn et al 1999: 182-183). After the Council, the Vatican intervened in two catechetical projects. The first one was the *Dutch or New Catechism* that was composed as a catechism for adults, addressing the questions of modern man in simple, modern words, with respect for different traditions and religions. Too liberal for some Dutch Catholics and for the Roman Curia, the New Catechism had to be supplemented with an appendix that proclaimed the Catholic faith from the orthodox Roman perspective (Borgman 1987). The second project was a school catechism made for Catholic schools in the province of Brabant. Attacked by conservative circles because of its secular content and its critical stance toward traditional formulations of the faith, Rome demanded a new curriculum or a withdrawal, which took place in 1972 (Hoogbergen 1991: 378-404). In the mid-1960's, a fierce debate on the liturgy began. After the vernacular was accepted in the liturgy, Dutch Catholics began to create their own communion prayers and, in as much as the bishops didn't agree with this development, they at least tolerated it. However, under pressure from the Vatican they had to put an end to this development. It was forbidden to use these prayers in the missal, but under pressure from their own advisory board they were included within it, and finally a new Roman Missal ended the debate in respect to how far it was allowed to use new, locally composed prayers in the liturgy (Joosse 1991: 542-557, 633-639, 678-693). Nevertheless, almost every parish created its own liturgy anew every Sunday with these prayers and only 10% of the parishes actually used the new mass book (*Infobulletin 121* 8 (4) 124-125).

The Vatican not only intervened in doctrinal questions, they also intervened in the organization and leadership of the Church. Between 1966 and 1970, bishops and lay people together with other churches assembled to address questions concerning the position of the Church in modern society at the Pastoral Council. When this council concluded and the bishops wanted to continue the democratic debate between the faithful and themselves, the Vatican intervened. After new statutes ensured the primary role of the bishop, the National Pastoral *Consultation* (sic!) was approved and is still being held every few years (Rogier 1974: 35). In the case of appointing new bishops, the Vatican commonly followed the advice of the Chapter that nominated a respected priest from within a particular diocese. After the Vatican Council, it became customary to involve other clergy and the laity in this decision-making process. However, beginning in 1970, the Vatican often ignored these nominations and since then has appointed bishops who were not proposed by the Chapter, were totally unknown to the diocese, and, most important, followed the policy of Rome and opposed the ongoing liberalization of the Church (Auwerda 1988: 9, 69, 73, 87, 96, 153, 164, 175; Hulshof 1991: 44-45). As the policy of the Vatican and of the

new bishops created strong tension within the Dutch Church and even threatened to split the Church and the Council of Bishops, the Vatican intervened and called the bishops to Rome for an extraordinary Synod. This synod was intended to foster the unity of the bishops among themselves, and that of the Dutch Church with Rome, but it was also decided to roll-back most of the developments in the Dutch Church such as the emergence of lay pastors in conjunction with the declining influence of the priests, the freedom of the theological universities, and to change the modest role of the bishops in the Church and in the public forum (Besluiten... [1980]; Van der Plas 1988: 33-35). The protests during the visit of the Pope to the Netherlands 1985 showed that there was still a long way to go before reconciliation could be achieved (Goddijn et al. 1999: 389-391, 412-413).

### 3.2. *Church unity and identity*

After they were appointed, the new bishops attempted to foster the unity of the Dutch Catholic Church. First, they did this by excluding and marginalizing their critics. They refused to appoint a lecturer at the Catholic Theological Academy in Amsterdam (*Infobulletin* 121 4 (19) 447), and a (female) lay pastor because of her involvement in the progressive Acht Mei Beweging (121 22 (6) 11). They also dismissed married priests from the theological academies (Winkeler 1992: 72-75) and planned to withhold their financial support from organizations like the Ecumenical Council of Churches, the student's chaplaincy, and the Council for Catechesis (121 9 (22) 507). In the 1990's, the bishops tried to provide a positive, spiritual identity for the Catholic Church. They asserted the centrality of the sacraments for the Catholic Church. According to the bishops, following official post-Vatican II theology, Jesus Christ had given the sacraments to the Church which, secured by apostolic succession, is thereby enabled to continue his divine mission. The pastoral letters on this issue primarily served inner-church goals: the decline of participation in the sacraments and the rise of alternative, non-sacramental liturgies (*In Christus' naam* 1992). However, the letters have had severe consequences in other areas as well. The increased emphasis on sacramentality confirmed the status and position of the ordained clergy in the local congregation, especially in relation to the lay pastors and the volunteers (Hulshof 1991: 48; Nederlandse Bisschoppenconferentie 1999), it affirmed the reservation of the priesthood for men, and it highlighted the central theological and juridical position of the bishop in the Church. The increased attention to sacramentality has also hindered ecumenical contacts and especially the common practice of intercommunion between the churches often practiced on the local level (*Infobulletin* 121 6 (10) 261 and 7 (7) 163-165).

There has also been an attempt made to foster the unity and group-identity of Catholics in other ways. It is now a common practice to invite the confirmands of a certain year to the cathedral of their diocese and there have been (unsuccessful) attempts to found a national Catholic magazine (*121* 26 (7) 5). Finally, the international celebration of the year 2000 would have been an excellent opportunity to redefine and mobilize the Catholics in the Netherlands. The Dutch national committee had the aim to create more unity in the church, to reveal the relevance of faith to society, to mobilize the Catholics for their faith and to bring people from different cultures, churches and religions together (*121* 25 (14) 11-12). Early in 2001 however, both the committee and Cardinal Simonis admitted that the year hadn't contributed much to the identity and unity of the Church (see also Margry 2001). Although the last ecumenical goal may seem to contradict the other goals, the results in this area were hailed as a success: other churches participated in the *Catholic* festivities for the year 2000 and in 1999 the national committee issued an ecumenical liturgy for the year 2000 (*121* 29 (4) 15-16; cf. *121* 26 (18) 13 and *121* 27 (16) 15). In the meantime, the bishops issued three, not very well received dogmatic letters in 1997, 1998 and 1999 proclaiming the Catholic faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In 2003 on the occasion of the festivities concerning the re-installation of the Catholic hierarchy in 1853, the bishops started a campaign that was intended to deepen the faith of Catholics and their relation with the Church, and to raise the profile of the Church in society (*121* 30 (18) 5).

### 3.3. *Schools and catechesis*

Thanks to subsidies from the state, Catholic schools have sustained great development in Dutch society. For this reason, the schools, as an instrument to socialize young children in the Catholic faith and Church (cf. Van Kemenade 1968: 152-203), have always had the special attention of the bishops. After 1960 however, more and more schools were secularized. They became separated from the parish, they accepted non-Catholic pupils, friars and nuns withdrew from the schools, religious education was changed to an introduction to religions, and some even changed their typical Catholic names to more neutral ones (cf. Tuijn 2000). As early as the 1970's, the bishops reacted. They decreed that every school board had to have one member assigned as a liaison with the church's pastoral and catechetical organizations and with the identity of the school (*Infobulletin* 121 1 (2) 33-35). In 1977, the bishops defined anew the identity of the Catholic school. They saw the Catholic school as the place where there should be 'pure relationships between people', where children can 'discover the meaning of life' and where they are taught 'fundamental respect for everything that ex-

ists' (*Infobulletin 121 5 (3) 49-51*). That the Catholic school could introduce children to the Catholic Church and faith was seen as of only secondary importance but, stimulated by Vatican documents (e.g. *Catechesi Tradendae*), they tried to give religious education a more religious and catechumenal character (*Infobulletin 121 10 (6) 109-112*; *Infobulletin 121 10 (10) 203-204*). However, the curriculum they approved in 2001 was still marked by an 'open' Catholicism. It appealed to the 'big questions of life', taught the children that 'being religious is a plausible option', and developed the spiritual 'skills' of the children (*121 29 (1) 28*).

At the end of the 1980's the bishops reclaimed their jurisdiction over the Catholic schools (*Infobulletin 121 15 (13) 523-529*, Hulshof 1991: 42). However, later in that decade, the agents for the Catholic schools said that the schools aid in the humanization of society, and not the goals of the Church (*Infobulletin 121 26 (2) 63-64*). Meanwhile, more and more non-Catholics were appointed as teachers in Catholic schools. A bishop appealed for better selection and education of teachers on the basis of their religious identity. However, the bishop said, "they don't have to be saints or practicing Catholics", as long as they identified with the 'identity' of the school it was all right (*121 25 (15) 23*; Dezaire 1990: 29-33). In 2002, the bishops again tried to bind the Catholic schools ideologically and juridically to the Church and the Hierarchy, and they demanded a more 'religious' identity for the schools (Nederlandse Bisschoppenconferentie 2002). They announced that there would be consequences when schools didn't heed the call of the bishops, but these were not specified.

#### 3.4. Church and society

Finally, the bishops tried to increase their influence on society, especially through greater control of Catholic social organizations (cf. Van Dijk/Salemink 1986: 21-31). From Catholic health organizations, they demanded that they should not appoint Catholic pastors without permission of the bishop (*Infobulletin 121 17 (13) 8*), a decree that was followed by the Union of Catholic Hospitals one year later (*Infobulletin 121 18 (6) 5*). But the union of pastors in health organizations protested, arguing that the bond between church and pastor existed in their 'standing in a tradition of faith', and that a mission therefore was unnecessary. In the 1980's, the Netherlands became known for its liberal stance on ethical questions. Abortion and euthanasia were, though not legalized, under certain circumstances free from legal consequences. Recently, the recognition of gay marriage drew worldwide attention as well. The new bishops continuously condemned these practices (e.g. Kohnen et al. 2002) and tried to keep them away from the Catholic subculture. For example, a questionnaire held in the mid-eighties revealed that a large majority of the Catholic hospitals had a license

for abortion. The bishops, obviously shocked by this result, announced the start of talks with the hospitals in their respective dioceses about their policy on this issue (*Infobulletin 121 13 (13) 403-405*). At the end of the 1980's, the Vatican initiated talks about artificial insemination with the Catholic universities in Europe. Though condemned more than once by Roman decrees, the Catholic University in Nijmegen decided to continue this practice, even after the Dutch bishops put pressure on it to stop. The University said it has its own responsibility in this respect and had to follow its own conscience (*Infobulletin 121 16 (19) 787; Infobulletin 121 16 (21-22) 870-871; Stevens 1990*). The bishops not only protested against ethical questions, but also against social injustice, as is shown by their letters on poverty, debts of the third world countries (Goddijn et al. 1999: 381-382), justice and peace (*Tot vrede in staat?* 1996), immigration (*Ik was vreemdeling* 1998) and other themes (Hulshof 1991: 51-52).

### 3.5. *Apart from the hierarchy*

Aside from the Hierarchy, there have been several 'private' initiatives that increased or have tried to increase the tension of the Church. The sanctuary of the H. Martyrs of Gorcum has been taken over by a conservative group, which has made of them a symbol of Dutch-Catholic pride and power again, departing from the emphasis on ecumenism that was common until the late 1970's (Hersbach 1994: 29-31). The Association for Latin Liturgy informs Catholics where they can attend a Latin Mass (*Infobulletin 121 14 (22) 751*). In 2002, for the first time since the Reformation a procession was held in the city of Utrecht (*121 30 (15) 7*). A Catholic newspaper was founded, there was an attempt to found a Roman Catholic Broadcasting-organization (apart from the secularized Catholic Broadcasting Organization) (*Infobulletin 121 15 (10) 408-410*), and a small, but unsuccessful, Roman Catholic Party was founded (*121 3 23 (4) 25-26*). At schools, the teachers' association 'Saint Bonaventura' developed a curriculum that emphasized the Catholic component in Dutch history (*121 25 (2) 21-22*) and the Radboud-foundation called Catholics to engage more as Catholics in the public debate (Derkse s.a.).

Since the 1990's, the remains of the Catholic social organizations have been trying to redefine their identity with respect to the Church, the state, society, and the shrinking Catholic subculture. In a time of rationalization, individualization and economization, they saw for themselves, as religiously inspired organizations, an important role in the humanization of society. Therefore, they kept appealing to the government that this special role should be recognized and respected, both idealistically and financially (*Infobulletin 121 19 (17) 15; 121 24 (2) 8-9; Hulshof 1991: 41, 42*). The Catholic Council for Church and Society argued, for example, that only

vivid and recognizable religious tradition can contribute to the humanization of society. But this official board also thinks that the Catholic Church no longer can uphold this identity for Catholics. Therefore, they sought to create a new Catholic identity, from the bottom up. This new Catholic identity would consist of a modern reading of the bible, attention to the liturgy, and a special concern for the weak in society. This identity would be created in small, local groups, where Catholics can share their experiences and keep in touch with local society (121 23 (10) 17-18; 121 24 (3) 17-18). These groups have, however, never been formed. The only result has been an internet-portal for Catholic organizations and initiatives: ([www.tempora.nu](http://www.tempora.nu)).

Finally, Catholic tension was raised by progressive Catholic organizations. On the basis of their faith, these protested against certain social developments. They fiercely argued for peace, disarmament, and against nuclear weapons (*Bazuin* 54 (31) 4-5 and 58 (3) 4-6), and demanded a change in the economic and political relations between North and South (*Bazuin* 84 (8) 4-5), particularly attacking the responsibility of multinationals (*Bazuin* 67 (38) 1-2, 4), the IMF (*Bazuin* 66 (45) 10-11) and the World Bank for the devastating situation found in many Third World countries. They also proposed alternatives for marriage and ways of thinking about sexuality (*Bazuin* 63 (40) 4-5) Apart from inter-church discussions, three themes were especially important for these progressive Catholics. First, they asked for ‘a different way of living’, that paid attention to the environment, that spared natural resources (*Bazuin* 84 (12) 16-19) and didn’t exploit the weak and poor, and reduced the dependence on certain kinds of technology (*Bazuin* 70 (33) 8-9), especially nuclear energy (*Bazuin* 59 (18) 4-5). Second, they defended the position of the foreigners in the Netherlands, starting with the guest workers (*Bazuin* 54 (8) 1-2 and 63 (16) 1-2), later the refugees (*Bazuin* 84 (10) 6-9 and 84 (17) 4-5). From this, a genuine engagement with a multicultural society and inter-religious dialogue (*Bazuin* 84 (21) 10-12 and 84 (16) 24-26) developed, especially after September 11, 2001. Third, they demanded a change in the thinking about employment and unemployment and social security. Work should above all be meaningful (*Bazuin* 59 (20) 2-3), and from this stance they attacked the growing poverty and social inequality in the Netherlands (*Bazuin* 70 (21) 3-4 and 80 (19) 6-9).

### 3.6. Lower tension on local level

On the local level however, the tendency to decrease tension prevails. As Watling (2001) has shown, this local level is very successful in creating their own Catholic identity, its own leadership structures, its own liturgy, its own symbols of faith, against the official decrees and declarations of the Dutch Catholic leadership. Many examples of this tendency have been de-

scribed above. The agents for the Catholic schools maintained their independence from the Church. The Catholic hospitals independently decided about abortion and artificial insemination. The Catholic Council for Church and State disqualified the role of the Church in defining a Catholic identity. Only a minority of the parishes used the official missal and mass book. Pastors' associations marginalized the responsibility of the bishops in the daily work of the pastors and decreased the differences between lay and ordained pastors (cf. Laeyendecker 1999: 98-102). Finally, the attempts of the Catholic social organizations to create a new, Catholic identity more closely resembled a universal-Christian nature than an exclusively (Roman) Catholic one, oriented to the society and not necessarily Church-oriented. Negatively, the policies of the bishops demonstrated that there is still a sizeable progressive praxis in the Dutch Catholic Church, not always documented, that had to be 'corrected' from the Episcopal standpoint.

Many other examples of this lower tension on the local level can be given. A poll by the *Gay-magazine* revealed that a majority of pastors were willing to bless a relationship of homosexuals in the Church and that a large majority of them said homosexuals could participate in the sacraments (*121* 29 (1) 8). Student parishes tried (and still try) to raise the social and political consciousness of their visitors, and celebrated their ecumenical contacts with intercommunion (*Infobulletin* 121 4 (15) 335-340 and 9 (17) 386-389). The (official) advisory board of the Catholic Council for Church and State criticized the bishops and the Vatican after the unexpected appointment of the late Mgr. Bomers as bishop of Haarlem for not listening to the wishes of the faithful and the needs of the local Church, thereby straining the relationships between bishops and Church members. The Catholic youth organizations want to 'enable youth in the framework of the Catholic tradition and faith community to experience and share religious experiences and to increase their social and religious consciousness and actions' (*121* 29 (12) 21-22). Although the Vatican more than once appealed to the Catholic universities to express their faith and to follow the authority of the Church in the norms of faith and ethics (*Infobulletin* 121 18 (16) 3-6), the Catholic universities in Nijmegen and Tilburg both proclaim an 'open Catholicism' where there is a place for students and lecturers of every or no confession or religion. The University in Tilburg has recently left the 'C' out of its name, calling itself University of Tilburg, though retaining its confessional identity in the subtitle with the words 'inspired by the Catholic tradition' (*121* 29 (1) 25). The association of Catholic theologians in the Netherlands protested against the oath of loyalty, demanded by the Congregation for Doctrine, for deacons and priests and for professors in theology since 1989 (*Infobulletin* 121 17 (6) 3-4), arguing that the truth reveals itself in different ways to the people and not only in the Roman way and that there should be

a place for critical discussion within the Church (*Infobulletin 121* 19 (3) 13; cf. Van den Hoogen 1989; Laeyendecker 1999: 56-60).

#### 4. Conclusion

Since 1970, there have been many developments in Dutch Catholicism that have resulted in an increase in tension between the Church and society. The Vatican intervened in the local Dutch situation several times, thus giving the Church a more distinct Roman and religious character instead of an adapted, Dutch, secular character. The bishops have tried to foster unity among Catholics and to heighten their group identity. They have developed a new, positive (sacramental) identity that must ultimately bind Catholics more closely to the Church and the clerics once again. With this emphasis on sacramentality, the Church has defined itself more distinctly from other churches. The Catholic identity of the schools and the teachers at these schools, and the control of the bishops over them have been increased. The bishops fervently defended Catholic ethics and values against what they saw as the moral derailment of society. They increased their jurisdiction over the Catholic organizations and over the pastors working in health (and, by the way, other) organizations. Finally, there have been private initiatives to make Catholicism play a more influential role in Dutch society, in both 'conservative' as well as 'progressive' ways, and there have been attempts to give Catholic social organizations a new, distinct identity. In a formal way, in terms of rational choice theory, the Dutch Catholic Church has increased its tension with society, as it has taken steps to become more separate, different, and even antagonistic toward prevalent social norms.

Still, all of these developments have not led to a greater attachment of the Catholics to their Church, as prophesied by the rational choice theory. Why? I think it is because, despite higher tension, the increase in tension has been accomplished in such a way that Catholics have not been forced to increase their stake in conformity to the Catholic Church. When we look more closely at the situation, as is done in this paper, the increase in tension hasn't been as successful as it superficially seems to be, and it hasn't been carried through as consistently as maybe it should have been. The schools have not been used as a means to socialize children to the Catholic Church, and the teachers are still not expected to be active members of a Catholic congregation. Moreover, the bishops more than once confirmed the 'open Catholicism' of the schools and of the curriculum for religious education. Although non-compliance to ethical values may result in excommunication according to canon law, this has never been made explicit in the Dutch context. The bishops hesitated to dismiss all critical persons and organizations, knowing full well that being overly radical would leave them with

only a very small band of followers. The increase in group identity and group bonding has occurred sporadically and with many failures. Most of the initiatives died before they were realized because of opposition or a shortage of money. The celebration of the year 2000 has not been for Catholics exclusively and the central committee has not made any attempt of its own to mobilize and identify Catholic group identity. Most of the private initiatives have failed or still occupy an only marginal position in Dutch Catholicism and in Dutch society.

Moreover, the initiatives for higher tension have been met successfully with resistance on the local level. Pastors, lay people, and Catholic organizations generally define for themselves what they see as Catholic and how they act accordingly. They claim the freedom for an 'open Catholicism' that is engaged with social problems, is ecumenical, and is explicitly democratic and discursive, against the policy of the Church leaders. When there is so much resistance on the local level, the policy of the bishops to increase tension becomes useless. That is also why Catholic organizations and progressive Catholics in particular, although they take a more or less deviant position in society, don't contribute to an increase in attachment to the Church as a whole. First, because although they take a deviant position, they are not deviant organizations by nature. They propose more individual freedom in Church and society, a stronger engagement of the Church with social problems, a better understanding between religions, et cetera. All of these are points that a true deviant organization would not propose. Second, because they formulate a new Catholic group identity apart from and partially in opposition to the Catholic Church, they may increase attachment but not in a way that becomes visible in the official Church statistics concerning sacraments, attendance, membership, agreement with the doctrines et cetera.

Thus, the initiatives for higher tension in the Dutch Catholic Church have been countered by their non-deviant character or content. The net effect is that Catholics are not forced to invest in the Church at all and thus they do not develop the necessity to conform more to the Church again. Resistance on a local level against these measures adds to the feeble way in which the tension has been increased and will not help to make the Catholics feel a greater need for conformity. Consequently, Catholics cannot perceive the increased need to participate in the Catholic Church and they will not show higher levels of attachment.

## 5. Discussion

The recent history of the Dutch Catholic Church has provided some interesting consequences for future theory and research. On the theoretical level, it has become clear that the degree of deviance and the way people

develop stakes in their conformity belong together, although they are separate factors. Not every increase in tension necessarily increases the stakes people have in conformity. If that is the case, more tension does not necessarily lead to greater adherence. So, one cannot speak about the tension of a religious organization, let alone make propositions on the variance of this factor, without speaking about the social and religious rewards that a religious organization offers in order to make the members conform to the expectations of the organization.

On the research level, it becomes clear that in order to establish the necessary degree of tension, it is not sufficient to look at the official Church. What happens at the local level has much more importance for the commitment of members and future members than the official policies. This is especially the case when there is conflict between leadership from the top and grass roots activity, as is the case in Dutch Catholicism. Dutch Catholicism is an extreme example of what Chaves describes as the dual structure of denominations (Chaves 1998), with all the consequences following from this. Although his paper doesn't theorize at great length about the consequences of duality in church organizations in terms of commitment, in combination with rational choice theory it can be very helpful in understanding the influence and importance of micro-, meso- and macro-level decisions on the choices and levels of commitment of church members.

In the case of Dutch Catholicism, I don't expect an increase in attachment unless people are really forced to invest in this Church again. This demands a change in policy that I don't think will happen in the near future. First, it would require a complete and thorough reorganization of all of the levels of the Church. Second, it would make participation in the Catholic Church more costly in the Dutch context, which would initially lead to a decline in membership and attachment. Both are far-reaching consequences, and I don't think the Dutch bishops are willing to pay this price for an unsure increase in attachment that may take place over a period of at least a generation. However, as long as this new policy is not in force, I don't expect the increase in attachment propounded by the rational choice theory on religion to happen.

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