

Seeking Balance in the Church

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In 1995 a movement - called the 'Evangelisch Werkverband' (EWV) - started its activities in the predecessors of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN). Eight pastors came together to pray for this church they were part of. They were worried about members leaving the church and the omnipotence – in their view – of liberal theology. In this essay I use my research on this movement as a case study to answer one of the questions of the conference 'Theology of the Holy Spirit' in Sibiu, November 2014: How do traditional churches relate to charismatic movements in their midst? And also the question: How do charismatic movements relate to the church they belong to? How do church and movement perceive each other?

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1. The EWV within the church

In 1995 eight protestant pastors wrote an evangelical manifesto. In this document they criticised the status quo of the church they belonged to and they proclaimed that they wanted to renew it with evangelical spirituality and evangelical instruments. They planned for example to introduce a hymnbook of evangelical songs, a network of small groups in every local congregation, pioneering, the practice of healing and exorcism and more room for adults who wanted to undergo a baptism ritual.

In the eyes of the initiators of this movement the decline of church membership was partly a consequence of liberal theology, lukewarm piety and absolute traditionalism. I question this characterization of the church by the movement, because the PCN can be described as a pluralistic church, with orthodox and liberal members as well, and all possible members between these two poles.

In the last decades the church has indeed lost a lot of members, and if sociologists are right, this trend will continue in the coming years. The question is: is this decline of membership a *consequence* of liberal theology, or is liberal theology an *answer* to developments in society (secularisation, urbanisation, mobility), science etc.? In my opinion this is a complex, multifaceted issue. Church member do not live in isolation. New insights and

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