

Between mobility and sedentariness: Pentecostal and Evangelical communities in Belgium in a context of religious globalisation

Liège, 14 November 2013

Both in Belgium and in Europe, debates about immigration are generally dominated by a problematized Islam which tends to overshadow the current religious pluralisation in our societies. However, since several decades multiple forms of religious recomposition have been taking place, in particular within the Christian field. In contrast with the decline of the traditional churches, a new dynamic can be observed as a consequence of migration and missionary movements (South-North and West-East), such as Pentecostal and Evangelical movements.

Pentecostalism(s) can be considered the main form of religious transnationalisation of the last century, with spectacular expansion in Africa and Latin America from the end of the 1960's on. Due to this phenomenon, the centre of gravity of Christianity seems to have moved South in the last decades. But when we take a closer look, we are compelled to consider this centre as mobile and translocal as a consequence not only of incessant circulation of pastors, the networking logics of these churches and the increasing use of online and mobile communication technology.

Although the most dramatic recent transformations are largely due to intra-European or transnational migrations, European Pentecostal communities have also been influenced by campaigns of international evangelists or the retreat of North-American missionaries. Whether Belgian or migrant Churches, all have their peculiar origins and references, which make the current evangelical landscape in Belgium both diversified and atomised. As a result, it should be properly considered a plurality of *Pentecostalisms* and *evangelical groups*, which is irreducible to a homogeneous whole.

As such, religious practices and discourses differ due to both doctrinal diversity (Pentecostal, Evangelical, Charismatic, Neo-Pentecostal, etc.) and to the place given to geographic and social otherness, which one hopes either to conquer or to connect to.

During this study day, we aim to discuss the religious mutations that have occurred in Belgium during the last decades, through different forms of mobility: migration, intra-European mobility and the transformation of native Churches. In particular, we will examine how the tension between local community and globalisation, mobility and sedentariness, local belonging and transnational networks are brought about by these Churches.

- How does religious globalisation, to which these communities participate, reflect on the local level?
- How do transnational networks, or the symbolic or imaginary reference to Christian universalism, recompose the belonging to the local, to the global society, and to the Protestant world?
- Between will for independence and quest for recognition, does religious proselytism build up walls or does it enable to cross spatial and social boundaries?
- How do churches and believers interrelate in this pluralizing Belgian Protestant field (collective dynamics, competitive logics, communitarian enclosure...)?
- Which reactions and relations do Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches generate in society on the level of neighbourhood, institutions, or politics?

The logics of mobility and sedentarity of these Churches may be approached from different angles (strategy of implementation, religious recomposition, request to local recognition, transnational networks, etc.), levels (individuals, Churches, community) and temporalities (day-to-day life, religious and migratory carriers, institutions). Special attention will be given to interactions between Churches, with other religions, and with society at large.

This study day is open to researchers in all disciplines and/or from all parts of the country. It aims to draw up the major tendencies in the Pentecostal and Evangelical landscape in Belgium and to set up a study group to enhance regular meetings with researchers who are working on Pentecostal and Evangelical movements in Belgium.

Proposals for a presentation of 350 words maximum should be sent before 30 July 2013, to Sarah Demart sarah.demart@ulg.ac.be or Elisabeth Mareels elisabeth.mareels@uclouvain.be. Presentations will be given in either English or French.