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AN ANALYSIS OF THE PASTORAL LETTERS OF BISHOP ALOYSIUS
FERDINAND ZICHEM FROM 1990 – 2002 WITH RESPONSES FROM THE
CHRISTIAN COUNCIL (CCK) OF SURINAME.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- CCK: Committee Christelijke Kerken (Christian Council of Suriname)
- CSsR: Congregatio Sanctissima Redemptoris, Congregation of the Most Sacred Redeemer- A religious congregation within the Catholic Church.
- CV: Caritas in Veritate- Encyclical on integral human development in Charity and Truth issued by Pope Benedict XVI.
- EBGS: Evangelische Broeder Gemeente Suriname (Moravian Church)
- ELKS: Evangelische Lutherse Kerk Suriname (Evangelical Lutheran Church Suriname)
- GS: Gaudium et Spes- Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.
- HKS: Hervormde Kerk Suriname (Reformed Church Suriname)
- KTPI: Kuam Tani Persatuan Indonesia (Indonesian Peasant Party)
- NDP: Nationale Democratische Partij (National Democratic Party)
- NPS: Nationale Partij Suriname (National Party Suriname)
- SAP: Structurele Aanpassings Programma (Structural Adjusted Program)
- SPA: Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid (Suriname Labour Party)
- SRS: Sollicitudo Rei Socialis- Encyclical on the concern of the Church for the Social Order issued by Pope John Paul II.
- VHP: Verenigde Hervormings Partij (United Reformed Party)
- QA: Quadragesimo Anno- Encyclical on the reconstruction of the social order issued by Pope Pius XI.

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ABSTRACT

This study will analyse the pastoral letters of Bishop Aloysius Ferdinand Zichem, the first Surinamese bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Suriname, against the background of the challenges in socio-political realities of the years 1990 – 2000 in that country. Available sources will be used to describe the difficult socio-economic situations of the period and its causes. The study attempts to show the Christian response of the bishop, based on the principles derived from the Social Teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Also responses of the Christian Council of Suriname regarding the situation and the pastoral letters will be given and analysed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The background of the most reverend Aloysius Zichem

Aloysius Ferdinand Zichem C.Ss.R was born in Paramaribo on February 28, 1933. Three days later he was baptized in the St Rose church. After completing the pre-secondary school, he left for Curaçao for high school because there was no high school yet in Suriname. There he decided to dedicate his life to God as a priest. After studying at Curaçao, he pursued theological studies in the Netherlands. He entered the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists) on September 8, 1955, where he was ordained a priest on August 14, 1960. Shortly thereafter he went to Rome for further study in Canon law. In 1966 he returned to Suriname, and in the same year he was appointed assistant parish priest of the Sacred Heart parish. Two years later, he was appointed assistant parish priest of Saint Boniface parish. On October 2, 1969, he was appointed as Auxiliary Bishop of Paramaribo. He was also appointed as the Titular Bishop of Fuerteventura¹. Eventually he was named the first Surinamese bishop of Paramaribo on February 8, 1970 by Archbishop Luigi Barbarito, Nuncio in Haiti and Apostolic Delegate for the Caribbean on behalf of Pope Paul VI. At the time of his episcopal ordination, Bishop Zichem at the age of 38 was the youngest bishop of the Catholic Church (Mac-Nack 1). Bishop Zichem began his task with great enthusiasm and was soon regarded as a bishop who was a shepherd in the midst of his people.

¹ According to Can. 376 of the Code of canon Law 1983; Bishops to whom the care of some diocese is entrusted are called diocesan; others are called titular. Thus, a Titular Bishop is a Bishop that is not in charge of a diocese

He spoke to people, listened to them, and he was very open and caring². On August 30, 1971 Zichem was appointed as successor to Bishop Kuijpers as Bishop of Paramaribo. His installation took place on October 24, 1971. As motto for his coat of arms, Zichem chose *Amore traxit omnia* (by love he drew everything to himself).

On January 1, 2003, Zichem suffered a stroke. As a result, he was forced to offer his resignation, which was granted on August 9, 2003.

Zichem was the first born Surinamese Bishop who stood at the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Suriname; his predecessors and his immediate successor were all Dutch missionaries. Which role does Bishop Zichem's pastoral letters play in encouraging the faithful Catholics? This thesis will seek to investigate what the effects are of the pastoral letters for the Christians in Suriname.

1.2 Aim of Study

The aim of this research is to analyse how the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem are a response to particular situations in Suriname, especially in the period of Surinamese history from 1990 – 2000.

² If someone had no food, he was willing to give that person food or money to buy food. He was compassionate to the needs of the people especially the poor and the marginalized in society. This information was given by Paul Tjon Kiem Sang who was the secretary of Bishop Zichem for seven years, from January 1996 to December 2002.

1.3 Scope of Study

Bishop Zichem wrote several pastoral letters from 1970 – 2002 which are published in a booklet called: “De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader Zijn Wij” which is freely translated in English: “The Beloved Children of One Father Are We”. This research will be focused on the period from 1990 – 2000. This is the period from the restoration of democracy in 1991, the period of the “Structural Adjustment Program” in 1993, and the period of striving for good governance and moral re-orientation in 1996 to 2000.

1.4 Significance of Study

A pastoral letter is an open letter addressed by a Bishop to the presbyters or laity of a diocese or to both, which contains general admonition, instruction or consolation, or directions for behaviour in particular circumstances. In the Catholic Church, such letters are also sent out regularly at special ecclesiastical seasons, in particular at the beginning of fasts. This study will review how Bishop Zichem used the method of see, judge and act, which is known in the Catholic Social Teachings³, to encourage the Catholic faithful as well as Christians of other denominations within the Christian Council in Suriname.

³ Catholic social teaching is an effort to spell out just what it means to take up “the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties” of our sisters and brothers all around the planet. The body of principles, guidelines, and applications has developed in a rich fashion. It provides a compelling challenge for responsible Christian living (DeBerri xi)

1.5 Research Methodology

This study will rely on a historical research methodology, which deals with “written documents or spoken record, or interpretation, or study of all that has happened up to the period of research” or for a specified period as delimited in a study (Leslie 95). The research will be based on a combination of both primary and secondary research sources; the primary sources will be obtained mainly from the book containing the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem and the archives of the diocese of Paramaribo and the Library of the Office of Faith, Culture and Communication of the diocese, while the secondary sources will come from published and unpublished works relating to the pastoral letters in general.

1.6 Literature Review

The information for the research is mainly based on the book with the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem, which is mentioned above, and also from the Paramaribo Diocesan Publication *Omhoog* from 1960, 1970 and the period from 1990 to 2000. Information is also gained from local newspapers such as “De Ware Tijd” and “De West”, and other documents related to the period of research such as minutes of meetings, joint press releases and, releases of the Suriname Trade and Industry Association, and reports of international institutions.

In addition, for a comprehensive presentation and general understanding of the historical situation in this research, secondary sources will also be consulted. Authors such as Buddingh, Hoefte, Dew, Janssen, and Ramssoedh will be used.

1.7 Design of Study

The study is divided into 5 chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction to the study under the sub-headings: Statement of the Problem; Aim of the Study; Scope of Study; Significance of Study; Research Methodology; Literature Review; and the Design of the Study.
- Chapter 2: 1990-1996 pastoral letters in relation to the context of the country.
- Chapter 3: 1996-2000 pastoral letters in relation to the context of the country.
- Chapter 4: The responses of the Christian Council to the situation and the Pastoral letters.
- Conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

1990-1996 PASTORAL LETTERS IN RELATION TO THE CONTEXT OF THE COUNTRY

This chapter will first give a brief description of the history of Suriname in the period 1990-1996, in the context of which Bishop Zichem's pastoral letters were issued. "Newspaper articles and television reports of the eighties stereotype Suriname in this period [i.e. the 80's] as a republic corrupted by militarization, mismanagement, drug trafficking, money laundering and human rights violations" (Ramsোধ, "Playing" viii), a situation which continued in the nineties. After giving the historical background, an analysis will be given on the pastoral letters in relation to the historical situation. In his letters Bishop Zichem used the method of Catholic Social Teachings. This method is known as the "see, judge, and act" method which was developed by the Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967). These letters can also be seen as an encouragement for the faithful in the particular period in which they were written. It is common knowledge that bishops usually do not personally write their pastoral letters. However, the letters were all written by Bishop Zichem himself⁴. He had a group of theologians or priests whom he asked about their views on certain subjects. A characteristic of his letters were the long sentences which were his style and method of writing.

⁴This information was given by Paul Tjon Kiem Sang.

2.1 Historical background of the period 1990 in relation to the pastoral letters.

The year 1990 can be characterized as the year of economic and political crisis. An editorial in *Omhoog* of 18 February 1990 stated: “The private group that now uses the government as an instrument is the drug cartel. This has a great impact on life: the unaffordability of our daily bread, the destruction of our houses and our historical monuments, the destruction of human lives.”⁵ Suriname’s ever-deteriorating social-economic situation of the late eighties and the beginning of the nineties was caused by the civil war⁶ (Janssen 191).

In the context of the civil war the mood among the populace had changed into one of despair, pessimism and apathy because of the murders and assassinations in Paramaribo⁷ and the open threats to the police by a leader of the Tucayana Amazones⁸ during a January 1990 press conference (Goldman 17). This despair was fuelled by the political impotence of the civilian government, which led to the so-called "telephone coup"⁹ on Christmas Eve of that same year in which the army again took over. With this simple act, the elected civilian government was

⁵ De particuliere groep die de regering nu als instrument gebruikt is het drugskartel. Deze heeft grote invloed op het leven: de onbetaalbaarheid van onze dagelijks brood, de vernietiging van onze huizen en onze historische monumenten, de vernietiging ook van mensenlevens.

⁶ This was the war between the army and a group of Maroons named “Jungle Commando” who were fighting against the military dictatorship of lieutenant colonel Desiré Delano Bouterse (Buddingh 348) and to restore democracy. The leader was Ronnie Brunswijk, a former personal bodyguard of Bouterse (Ramsoedh, “Democracy” 37).

⁷ The killing of the Ronnie Brunswijk’s bodyguards, the murder of Police Inspector Herman Gooding and the attempted assassination on human rights activist Stanley Rensch.

⁸ A group of Amerindians who had revolted and who were also dissatisfied with the disdain the interior and its inhabitants received for a long time and with the fact that they had no entitlement to the lands on which they lived. (Ramsoedh, “Playing” 104) They also rejected the Korou peace agreement because they had not been consulted in making this peace agreement. This agreement entailed the release of prisoners and a loan for acute material needs in the interior, guarantees for a safe return of refugees as well as job creation. Also that some members of the Jungle Commando would be part of a special police unit for the interior which had as their role the protection of the returning refugees. Moreover, an amnesty regulation and the abolition of the state of emergency (Buddingh 350-51). According to Hoeffte, the Kourou Treaty would encroach on the autonomy of the Amerindians in the interior (153). If Jungle Commando “police” were going to be stationed throughout the interior, this would take away the Amerindian’s autonomy (Dew 171)

⁹ The president of the country at that time Ramsewak Shankar was removed by a telephone request from the military leader Desire Delano Bouterse. A few days earlier he (Bouterse) resigned as military leader because he did not want to work any longer with a ‘joker’ as Shankar (Buddingh 353) a man without pride, without honour, without dignity because Shankar was waiting outside Lubber’s office where the media took photo of the President ‘lingering in the rain’ (Janssen 239).

dismissed. The army then proceeded to form a non-elected cabinet, with the mission to organize a new election within six months (Dew 181). They tried to win over the people by providing cheap food for the local market, distributing land and promising civil servants a wage increase. (Ramsoedh, "Playing" 104).

In the pastoral letter of 1990¹⁰ Bishop Zichem states: "We have to pick up the cross of others, of our brethren and of our society in which we live and for which we share responsibility."¹¹ Bishop Zichem continues: "Every day we are receiving the shocking news messages of crime which were bringing feelings of uncertainty and insecurity."¹² According to Bishop Zichem the moral problem of society is because of "how we interact and live together. The rights of the strongest are more and more in control of the interpersonal relationships."¹³ He observed that with simply using money, business relations, social or political positions and even violence, those with power in the community could control social and economic events and use them to their own advantage. This was evidenced by the safeguarding and defending of its own dominant position and group interests at the expense of the entire country. It was this struggle for power and profit, which produced corruption, tax evasion and all kinds of criminal practices. The consequences of the civil war were the scarcity of food, unpredictable prices for necessary goods and the poor functioning of public administration. This emergency situation made it particularly difficult for the poor and vulnerable to survive and meet normal obligations. Every effort was being made to live and survive, but often one seemed to be subject to unfair practices. Bribery was accepted as a

¹⁰ Christus volgen op de weg van liefde en gerechtigheid, de weg te leven (To follow Christ in the way of love and justice, the way of life) (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 58).

¹¹ Wij moeten ook het kruis van anderen opnemen, van onze medemens, het kruis van de gemeenschap, waarin wij leven en waarin wij duidelijk aanwijsbare verantwoordelijkheden dragen. *ibid.*

¹² Met de dag worden wij steeds meer opgeschrikt door schokkende berichten over afschuwelijke misdaden en allerlei vormen van geweldpleging, die gevoelens van onzekerheid en onveiligheid bij ons achterlaten (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 59).

¹³ Het komt door de wijze waarop wij met elkaar omgaan en samenleven. Het recht van de sterkste is de onderlinge verhoudingen steeds meer gaan beheersen (*ibid.*).

normal system for doing business and making money. “The deep cause is a moral problem, which cannot be avoided.”¹⁴

The solution Bishop Zichem pointed out was being sought in all kinds of measures and provisions of a political nature and in financial-economic interventions. Revision of society’s moral conduct, of actual living conditions, of attitudes towards each other and society were the first issues to be resolved. Also, the values that were lost in the attempts to fulfil what had been promised must be recovered. All institutions should function justly by conscientious duty fulfilment and by correct performance in the service that was expected from every office or profession. Bishop Zichem states:

“It is a long and difficult way to overcome the problems. On this path of righteousness and truth, we will also come into conflict with the evil powers in the world that threaten us and seek to entice us. We also see in our immediate environment how good, honourable citizens succumb to temptation to easily and quickly make money and increase promotion opportunities. Others are put under pressure by intimidation and pulled into a network of corruption, oppression, and exploitation. Often, one’s actions are more determined by impotence than by bad will, although one cannot easily seek excuse in the particularly difficult circumstances under which we now live and work.”¹⁵

The emphasis in this letter is a life lived in truth and justice which must bring about the change in the moral fibre of society. For instance when one’s word or promise was given, it must be kept.

¹⁴ De diepe oorzaak is een moreel probleem, waar we niet omheen mogen draaien (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 60).

¹⁵ Het is een lange en moeizame weg om de problemen te overwinnen. Op deze weg van gerechtigheid en waarheid zullen ook wij in botsing komen met de kwade machten in de wereld, die ons bedreigen en door verlokkingen proberen mee te krijgen. We zien ook in onze naaste omgeving, hoe goede, eerbare burgers zwichten voor de verleiding om gemakkelijk en snel geld te maken en promotiekansen te vergroten. Anderen worden door intimidatie onder druk gezet en meegetrokken in een netwerk van corruptie, onderdrukking en uitbuiting. Dikwijls wordt iemands handelen meer door onmacht dan door onwil bepaald, hoewel men niet te gemakkelijk een verontschuldiging mag zoeken in de bijzonder moeilijke omstandigheden waaronder wij thans moeten leven en werken (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 60).

2.2 Historical background of the period 1992 in relation to the pastoral letters of 1992, 1993, and 1994.

At the elections in 1991 "Front" added the small "Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid" (Surinamese Labour Party, SPA) to its ranks and renamed themselves "New Front". Even though they lost ten seats, they held on to their majority. The new administration, spearheaded by President Ronald Venetiaan, indicated it would give high priority to reducing the role of the army in politics in order to satisfy the demands for Dutch development aid (Buddingh 359). Additionally, it made an attempt to curb drug trafficking clues to which were pointing to the direct involvement of the army's high command¹⁶. Two-thirds of any illicit drugs intercepted in the Netherlands in 1990 reached that country via Suriname (Ramssoedh, "Playing" 105). The Venetiaan administration can be commended for not shrinking away from a confrontation with the army and had high priority in reducing the role of the army in politics (Ramssoedh, "Democracy" 39).

Finally, in August 1992, after mediation by the Organization of American States (OAS), the government signed an agreement with the Tucayana Amazonas (c.f. section 2.1 above), and the Jungle Commando in exchange for the development of the interior. This was however not a lasting peace, nor was it a disarmament or restoration of the traditional authority and village structures among Maroons and Amerindians. The government in Paramaribo was shown to be powerless in large areas of the interior. They, however, did succeed in taking control of the army high command at the end of 1992, forcing Desiré Bouterse to step down as commander in chief. This concluded in Suriname and the Netherlands to sign a "Raamverdrag" (Framework Treaty)

¹⁶ In 1986, DEA officials arrested Etienne Boerenveen, a high military commander, who was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment in Miami on the charge of setting up drugs lines to the United States of America (Ramssoedh, "Playing" 109).

which aimed to strengthen the democracy and to establish good governance. In addition the government also achieved a measure of success in the financial and economic field by implementing a Structural Adjustment Program¹⁷. In the following four years, the Venetiaan administration was able to present a balanced budget, stabilize inflation and the exchange rate and could also boast of a substantial amount of gold and foreign currency in the treasury. However, all this did not alleviate the social effects of the partly implemented structural adjustment program (1994-1995) and the impoverishment of the population grew substantially (Ramsoedh, "Playing" 105). This ushered in a new time of suffering for the population, especially under the influence of high inflation and the stagnation of employment. It was particularly hard for the wage earners and pensioners who had to watch their purchasing power significantly reduced. The increased poverty did not only manifest itself in declining incomes. "The quality of health care, partly due to a shortage of medicine, degenerated seriously in quality; moreover, due to compulsory personal contributions, care is no longer accessible to everyone. There have been numerous cases of malnutrition among children, a phenomenon that was virtually unknown in Suriname after the Second World War." (Buddingh 368-9)

2.3 The Pastoral Letter of 1992

In the pastoral letter of 1992, Bishop Zichem encouraged the society to look after the poor and the needy. He states that "Today's world, with increasing disbelief and religious indifference, impoverishment and social injustice and loss of moral values, calls for liberation and

¹⁷ This program was necessary because the financial situation was getting worse which was the implication of the measures of the NDP administration after the telephone coup. (Buddingh 362)

truly human living, which were highlighted in Christ's message.”¹⁸ The situation in Suriname showed a growing distance between people living in poverty and others who were prosperous. The lives of large groups of people were increasingly under pressure and the impoverishment of a significant part of the community increased. The poor called for liberation from their humiliating position. The rich were called upon to free themselves from the grip of power and possessions upon them, and to contribute to the well-being of all. Thus, the principle of the universal destination of goods¹⁹ which is a direct consequence of the principle of the common good were deemed important, as well as solidarity and the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable.

“The gospel summons us on behalf of our poor, half-living fellow citizens, burdened by poverty and mental distress, to provide enough living opportunities. In the light of the gospel, we must consider the crisis we are facing today as a challenge addressed to us. This is a call for a new living attitude towards the needs of our fellow human beings, for concrete actions in the form of local relief, through existing organizations, through action groups, through conscientious action by governing bodies that we ourselves have chosen, such as “De Nationale Assemblée” (Parliament), the Government, so that through proper policies and governance, clear opportunities will be provided for the entire Surinamese population.”²⁰ The notion of the principle of

¹⁸ De wereld van vandaag met toenemend ongelooft en godsdienstige onverschilligheid, verpaupering en sociaal onrecht, verlies van morele waarden, roept om bevrijding en menswaardig leven, die in de boodschap van Christus besloten liggen (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 68)

¹⁹ In the word of the Second Vatican Council: “God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity (GS 69).

²⁰ Het evangelie roept ons op onze, door armoede en geestelijknoed, nog slechts half levende medeburgers voldoende levenskansen te bieden. In het licht van het evangelie zullen wij de crisis waarin wij vandaag verkeren, moeten opvatten als een uitdaging aan ons adres. Een oproep om vanuit een nieuwe levenshouding onszelf in te zetten voor de noden van onze medemens, met concrete daden in de vorm van buurthulp, via bestaande organisaties, middels actiegroepen, door gewetensvol optreden in bestuursorganen die wijzelf hebben gekozen, zoals de Nationale Assemblée, de Regering, en zo door behoorlijk beleid en bestuur op structurele wijze levenskansen te bieden aan de gehele Surinaamse bevolking (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 69).

subsidiarity²¹ is important here and the church communities must play their part. “As church, we will have to listen again to the voice of the gospel, calling on us to be a "poor serving church" for the benefit of the life God wills for his people. Especially in our days, the unfair distribution of knowledge, capital and power has continued in an unprecedented way in our society.”²² This call for service and care for fellow human beings, Zichem suggested, must be answered in the intimate circle of ordinary daily lives; by renewed commitment in fulfilling ordinary duties of everyday life in the family and at work; by being a reliable person; by delivering good quality work. Further by attending to the needy, such as neglected children, elderly, and unemployed.

2.4 The Pastoral Letter of 1993

Bishop Zichem saw that the serious crisis Suriname experienced in 1993 was emphasized by the scarcity of basic needs, because of the sharp rise in prices that made life unbearable. The increasing violence and the brutal robberies gave a persistent sense of insecurity and fear. Sudden strikes caused ongoing turmoil in the society. “We are beset by a sense of impotence when we see that Suriname is victim of evil practices such as profiteering, smuggling and drug trafficking.”²³ Experienced and skilled qualified labourers from Suriname were leaving the country, the so-called “brain drain”. This entailed an increase in the work for those left behind, who was already overworked. The emigration of persons of goodwill was also a sign for Suriname, a charge against

²¹ It is wrong for high for higher levels of social organization or government to do for individuals and groups what they can accomplish by their own initiatives and hard work (QA 79).

²² We zullen als Kerk weer opnieuw moeten luisteren naar de stem van het evangelie, dat ons oproept een “arme dienende Kerk” te zijn, ten dienste van het door God gewilde leven voor zijn mensen. Vooral in onze dagen, nu de onrechtvaardige verdeling van kennis, kapitaal en macht zich op een ongekende manier in onze samenleving heeft doorgezet (De Bemide Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p70).

²³ Wij worden bevangen door een gevoel van onmacht als wij lijdelijk moeten toezien, dat Suriname het slachtoffer is van allerhande kwaadwillige praktijken als woekenwinsten, smokkel en drugshandel (De Bemide Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 71).

current working conditions. People went away because they were not given the opportunity to deploy and develop their potentialities; they were opposed or forced to deal with corrupt practices.

Bishop Zichem states:

“We are constantly hearing complaints about the lack of service, fraud and deception in the daily life of people with each other and in the civil service. It is right to say that serious economic and financial problems are the basis of the current crisis in the country. National problems always pose a challenge to seek together for solutions, and to grow in unity as nation.”²⁴

The crisis drove the population apart rather than drawing people together. Moreover, driven by the urgent need, people and groups went their own way and became rivals or even enemies in the hard struggle to live and survive. Exclusive economic advantage of persons or groups were then pursued at the expense of fellow citizens and even of essential national interests. “If there is talk of indignation about political unwillingness to take decisions in the public interest, then one knows that a fierce conflict of interest is at the bottom of it.”²⁵ On the other hand, there was also a lack of willingness to cooperate with the government on measures to restore the economic situation. Certain individuals created disorder and chaos because they could use the chaos to their own advantage. “Suriname is faced with a serious moral problem: it is about our attitude towards citizens, the way we interact and live together. We [Catholics], who are part of this Surinamese community, are ourselves responsible for making or breaking this community.”²⁶ All that was

²⁴ We horen voortdurend klachten over het gebrek aan hulpvaardigheid, over bedrog en misleiding in de dagelijkse omgaan van mensen met elkaar en bij de ambtelijke dienstverlening. Terecht mag gesteld worden dat ernstige economische en financiële problemen ten grondslag liggen aan de huidige crisis in het land. Nationale problemen op zich vormen altijd een uitdaging om gezamenlijke wegen te zoeken voor een oplossing, en zo in eensgezindheid tot een natie te groeien (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 71-2).

²⁵ Als met verantwoordiging wordt gepraat over politieke onwil om op volksbelang gerichte besluiten te nemen, dan weet men dat een felle belangenstrijd daaraan ten grondslag ligt (ibid).

²⁶ Suriname heeft op de eerste plaats te kampen met een ernstig moreel probleem: het gaat om onze houding als burgers tegenover elkaar, de manier waarop wij met elkaar omgaan en met elkaar samenleven. Wij, die deel uitmaken van deze Surinaamse gemeenschap, wij zijn zelf, die deze gemeenschap maken of breken (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 73).

being done to overcome the crisis, such as projects and programs like the SAP, only had the chance to succeed if the population gave adherence to it.

2.5 The Pastoral Letter of 1994

“We must not ignore the poverty and suffering of families. Poverty of the ever-increasing number of brothers and sisters affects human dignity and deforms humanity as a whole: a scandal that calls for solidarity and justice.”²⁷ This is one of the statements of the pastoral letter of 1994. Many families were so poor that they lacked the most basic means to feed their children and to provide basic education. There were so many families that did not had a proper home. Unemployment became more widespread and raised poverty in many areas. Mothers who had been abandoned carried the heavy burden of care for their children alone. As a result, young people often ended up on the streets and resorted to taking illicit drugs, alcohol and violence. Families went into crisis through relationship problems and psychological difficulties. The economic and social problems of society worked disruptively in family life. The call was for charity and solidarity²⁸ with the needy families. There were people who were helping others. The little they had was shared with the needy. According to Bishop Zichem this should be encouraged.

²⁷ Wij mogen niet voorbijgaan aan de armoede en het lijden van gezinnen. De armoede en de steeds groeiend aantal broeders en zusters tast de mendelijke waardigheid aan en misvormt de mensheid als geheel: een schande die roept om solidariteit en gerechtigheid (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 75-6).

²⁸ According to *SRS* 38: “Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of many people, both near and far. It is a firm and preserving determination to commit oneself to the common good, to the good of all and each of individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” However, even though there is an undeniable aspect of obligation in the principle of solidarity, at its core it is an expression of love, because to love another is to desire their good and to be willing to act in order to secure it. (CV, 7).

2.6 Conclusion

The political situation in the eighties had serious implications on the economy and the social structure of the country in the nineties. The Bishop was against social injustice arising from and giving rise to corruption, indignity of the human person, crime, bribery and the increasing distance between the rich and the poor. In this context the Bishop let his voice be heard on behalf of the poor who needed to be liberated from the inhumane situation. Frequently the government, the Church, and the people of Suriname were encouraged to change the ways in which they lived life with and related to each other. The next chapter will deal with the situation from 1996 to 2000.

CHAPTER 3

1996-2002 PASTORAL LETTERS IN RELATION TO THE CONTEXT IN THE COUNTRY

The period 1996 to 2000 can be described as the period of striving for good governance and moral re-orientation. This chapter, like the previous, will first give a historical description of the period 1996 to 1999. After the description, an analysis will be done on selected pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem in relation to the historical background.

3.1 Historical background of the year 1996 in relation to the pastoral letter

The period treated in chapter 2 can be characterized as economic-, social-, and political crisis. This next period can be characterized by a lack of ethical decision making. Despite its political and economic success, the New Front alliance lost seats in the May 1996 election. This meant that they needed to affiliate with other parties for the election of the president and vice-president with a two-thirds parliamentary majority. When it did not achieve that majority, a “Verenigde Volks Vergadering” (United People’s Assembly, VVV²⁹) had to be constituted to elect the two government officials by simple majority. The meeting of this particular Assembly in 1996 revealed the strength of opportunism in Surinamese politics and the growing power of the informal forces (Ramsোধ, “Democracy” 40). According to Hoefte the new informal elites, mercantile in

²⁹ The VVV consisting of delegates from parliament, district and provincial council’s members totaling 869 members.

character, had come to the fore in the 1980s. They were composed of civilian and former military millionaires, who had earned their riches in import and export trade (197). In September dissenters from the VHP joined with the KTPI and several smaller parties to elect NDP Vice Chairman Jules Wijdenbosch as president of a NDP-led coalition government, made up of the National Democratic Party, (NDP), the Hindustani or East Indian Progressive Reform Party, (VHP), the Javanese Indonesian Peasants' Party, (KTPI), and several smaller parties. He was elected president of the country shortly thereafter by the VVV. The Wijdenbosch administration ended the economically rigorous program (SAP) of the previous Venetiaan government, deeming it unfair to the nation's poor, but failed to come up with alternatives beneficial to the poor. As a result, tax revenues fell as taxes implemented by the Venetiaan administration lapsed (Coleman 10-11). The government relations between Suriname and the Netherlands disintegrated, and by late 1997 new Dutch development funds were frozen, as the Netherlands' government realized that Bouterse was operating as 'shadow president'. They not only refused to accept Bouterse as a political force but now officially accused him of drug smuggling and started legal proceedings against him. In August 1997, the Netherlands issued an international summons for the arrest of the former commander of the Surinamese army for his role in the Suri cartel³⁰ (Ramssoedh, "Playing" 105-6).

The year 1996 was proclaimed by the United Nations as the year for the eradication of poverty. According to Bishop Zichem: "The earth provides the opportunities and resources needed to feed all humanity. Only we must use them wisely, with respect for the environment and the rhythm of nature. In order to do so, a fair distribution of the riches of the earth is not an unreachable

³⁰ A criminal enterprise that used Suriname as the pivot point for smuggling between Colombia and Brazil.

utopia.”³¹ Where men and women turn to the gospel, such a righteous distribution could become a reality. “Therefore, society must change excessive consumer behaviour, resist indifference to others and neglect of our duties and responsibilities.”³² What is seen in the wider world is also seen in Suriname: poverty does not occur by chance. Driven by greed and profiteering, evil forces, which constitute a network of corruption, had a decisive influence in society. “Moreover, poverty and hunger have the root cause in the unequal income distribution. So the root of this misery lies in the heart of man and is a moral problem. The solution, therefore, lies in conversion, the creation of a new mentality which put food in the mouths of the poor.”³³ Bishop Zichem heard the testimony of a poor mother who said: “I have nothing, but if I encounter someone who has less than me, I will always find a way to assist.”³⁴ Later, in a letter of 2001 Bishop Zichem gave certain examples of this new mentality like the pastoral love and care when a woman who took a street urchin in her home, gave him food and cared for him. Or a man who was dedicated himself to take care for drug addicts.

³¹ De aarde verschaft de mogelijkheden en middelen die nodig zijn om heel de mensheid te voeden. Alleen moeten wij ze verstandig gebruiken, met respect voor het leefmilieu en het ritme van de natuur. Een eerlijke verdeling van de rijkdommen van de aarde is geen onbereikbare utopie (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 79).

³² We zullen ons overdreven consumptief gedrag moeten wijzigen, onze genotzucht moeten bestrijden, weerstand bieden aan onverschilligheid tegenover anderen en aan de tendens onze plichten en verantwoordelijkheden te verwaarlozen (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 79).

³³ Armoede en honger hebben als diepe oorzaak het doelbewust in sand houden van de ongelijke inkomensverdeling. De wortel van deze ellende ligt dus in het hart van de mens en vormt een moreel probleem. De oplossing ligt dan ook in de bekering, de nieuwe mentaliteit door hen eten te geven (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 80).

³⁴ “Ik heb niets, maar als ik iemand ontmoet, die minder heeft dan ik, weet ik er altijd iets op te vnden om te helpen.” (Ibid)

3.2 Historical background of the period 1998 in relation to the pastoral letter

From 1998 to 2000, administrative chaos, political instability and economic recession have defined the picture of Suriname. The economic policy of the NDP government plunged Suriname into its greatest crisis ever. According to Coleman in “Countrywatch” Suriname review 2018:

“Economic growth slowed in 1998, with a decline in the mining, utility and construction industries. The fiscal deficit grew due to unrestrained government spending, poor tax collection, an excess of civil servants, and reduced foreign aid in 1999. The government attempted to curb the deficit through monetary expansion, but as a result, inflation soared and the exchange rate depreciated rapidly. Teachers and civil servants suffered from extremely low wages, and the health system neared collapse.” (11)

Within two years, the country had been totally impoverished and the economy virtually destroyed. An IMF report published in 1999 bluntly stated that the Wijdenbosch government was incapable of running a country (Hoefte 198). Throughout 1997, 1998 and 1999 there were several strikes against the ineffective policies and unethical activities of the Wijdenbosch administration. In October 1998, the political opposition, labour movement, industrial sectors and various other social groups had joined to form a “Gestructureerd Samenwerkingsverband” (Structured Cooperation Association)³⁵. This association had serious doubts about the democratic credentials of the Wijdenbosch government and attacked the informal forces behind its political wings. Personal enrichment and the accumulation of massive private capital were far more important than public service (Ramsodh, “Playing” 106). According to the association, these developments had led to the destruction of the production infrastructure, impoverishment of the population, moral and ethical decay, corruption, and abuse of power and the destruction of political and social

³⁵ The Structured Cooperation Association consisted of labour unions, trade unions, the Suriname Trade and Industry Association, and the political parties of the opposition.

institutions. It demanded the resignation of the government and the installation of an interim cabinet³⁶.

In May 1999, an estimated fifty to seventy thousand people, led by the Structured Cooperation Association, and in particular, the trade unions staged demonstrations³⁷. They took to the streets to protest against the enormous rise in the cost of living. They called on the government to resign, but the government denied that there was an economic crisis at all. At another rally later that month the police dispersed the crowd with tear gas. In response to the demonstration, President Wijdenbosch asked his cabinet to resign and agreed to consult with the opposition to form a new government. A national strike, which resulted in the closing of most schools and banks, renewed appeals for Wijdenbosch's own resignation. The opposition and unions threatened to call more strikes if the president did not step down immediately and allow an interim president to govern until elections could be held. Wijdenbosch's coalition asked him to resign, as well. The National Assembly, which has the power to terminate and replace the president with a two-thirds majority, voted on June 1, 1999, and a significant 27 of the 51 members of the National Assembly insisted that the president resign his post. In the end, the sitting president had fixed May 25, 2000, as the date for the early elections. As a result, Suriname was saddled for another year with a president who had lost moral authority and whose stay in office no one really appreciated. The election results of May 2000 dealt a devastating blow to Wijdenbosch, as his party was annihilated and the opposition parties gained a great majority in parliament.

The pastoral letter in 1998 dealt with the economic, political, and social situation during that year. "We experience it first-hand that Suriname shows deterioration in all sorts of areas, becomes entangled in continuous tensions and intrigues and is less and less a harmonious and

³⁶ Proclamatie Resolutie GSV, October 22, 1998.

³⁷ Nicknamed the 'march of the foolish citizens' (Ramsoedh, "Democracy" 40)

friendly society.”³⁸ In its memorandum "Waarachtigheid, Behoorlijk Bestuur en Welzijn"³⁹, the Christian Council (CCK) pointed out the causes of this situation. Bishop Zichem reinforced what CCK said:

“The untruthful way in which we deal with each other is the basis of the current crisis. This untruthfulness permeates the entire society. The only way out of the crisis is that we repent, and move toward a new attitude to life, characterized by truthfulness in dealing with each other. Honesty is the most fundamental building block in the formation of our personality and in building a healthy society.”⁴⁰

Bishop Zichem observed that honesty means to speak the truth. In the broader sense of the word, honesty stands for integrity. People are honest when, for example, they are sincere in their intentions with others, are trustworthy, do good quality work for the compensation that they receive, do not deceive others, are not corruptible, do not abuse their position, do not cooperate with unfair practices. Dishonesty makes a viable society impossible. Where the truth is clearly violated, the sphere of trust that unites the society is affected. “Our people, for example, have often lost their faith in the manner of politics because they experience that politics seems to have become synonymous with unfairness. Things are presented to us differently than they actually are.”⁴¹ Promises once made were not being fulfilled. Programs were not executed. Laws and rules were often not observed. Getting rich quickly and material prosperity then appeared to be more important to many than honesty and truthfulness.

³⁸ Wij ervaren het aan de lijve dat Suriname op allerlei gebied achteruitgang vertoont, verstrikt raakt in oortdurende spanningen en intriges, en steeds minder een harmonieuze en gemoedelijke samenleving is (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 86).

³⁹ "Truthfulness, Good Governance and Wellbeing."

⁴⁰ De onwaarachtige wijze waarop wij met elkaar omgaan aan de basis ligt van de huidige crisis. Deze onwaarachtigheid doortrekt de gehele samenleving. De enige weg uit de crisis is dat wij ons bekeren om zo te groeien tot een nieuwe levenshouding, gekenmerkt door waarachtigheid in ons omgaan met elkaar. Eerlijkheid is de meest fundamentele bouwsteen in de vorming van onze persoonlijkheid en in het opbouwen van een gezonde maatschappij (ibid).

⁴¹ Zo heeft ons volk zijn geloof in de wijze van politiek voeren veelal verloren omdat zij ervaart dat politiek synoniem schijnt te zijn geworden met oneerlijkheid. Zaken worden ons anders voorgesteld dan ze in feite zijn (De Beminde Kinderen van een Vader zijn Wij, p 87).

3.3 Conclusion

Throughout the pastoral letters that were analysed, Bishop Zichem was concerned about the economic, political, and social situation in the country. Using the see, judge, and act method he was able to open the eyes of society and encourage them. His concern was the poor and vulnerable to whom a preferential option must be made, which in turn would give rise to greater calls for charity, solidarity and a change in moral perception. In the next chapter, the responses of church leaders within the Christian Council of Suriname (CCK) to the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem will be considered.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESPONSES OF THE CHRISTIAN COUNCIL TO THE SITUATION AND THE PASTORAL LETTERS

This chapter will analyse how representatives of some members of the Christian Council of Suriname (CCK)⁴² responded to the situation and the pastoral letters. It must be noted that there were also joint statements issued by the CCK. The information gained for this chapter is from personal interviews with the respective church leaders within the council. The emphasis is on the other Christian denominations which are the founding members of the CCK and with whom Bishop Zichem had a good relationship. These are the Moravian Church (EBGS), the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELKS), and the Reformed Church (HKS)⁴³. For the Moravian Church Pastor John Kent, bishop of the EBGS, was interviewed, Pastor Marjorie Slagtand and Mr. Ewald van Ommeren of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and, Pastor Diana de Graven of the Reformed Church. In addition, a questionnaire consisting of four questions (see Appendix on page 31) was developed which was sent to those leaders prior to the personal interview. It must be noted that Bishop Zichem was the principal representative of the Roman Catholic Church in the CCK, was also involved in the preparations of joint statements on the respective situations. Such joint statements were issued in December 1994 and February 17, 1998. The pastoral letters relate

⁴² The goal of the CCK is to promote the common interests of the churches. It studies questions in the field of individual and corporate ethics that the churches find important for action and commitment.

⁴³ The CCK was founded in November 23, 1942. The membership also includes the Salvation Army, and the Anglican Church.

primarily to the responsibility as bishop to address Catholics in matters regarding the moral issues in society.

4.1 The Moravian Church (EBGS)

Although, the EBGS are members of the CCK the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem are not known to them. They only knew about these letters through the public media. Moreover, the topics which were addressed and discussed in the letters were not highlighted during their services. Therefore, these letters were not discussed during the services. According to Pastor John Kent, there was no tradition within the EBGS of pastoral letters such as those of Bishop Zichem (Personal Interview). However, in “Kerkbode”, the official weekly publication of the EBGS, there are writings of Pastor Emile Ritfeld who, writing in his own name, addressed the situation at that particular time and also encouraged the Surinamese society. For instance, he wrote an article in “Kerkbode” in January 21, 1990 regarding safety and peace for the nation. He wrote this because of the threat of the leaders of the Tucayana Amazones⁴⁴ to the police while the military leaders who were present did not reprimand them. “We therefore call on the responsible authorities of our country to do everything possible to guarantee the peace and security of the people.”⁴⁵

The joint statements issued by the CCK were published in “Kerkbode”, but these statements were not discussed within the church. Also, although “Kerkbode” of March 15, 1998

⁴⁴ See chapter 2 on page 7.

⁴⁵ We doen daarom een beroep op de verantwoordelijke instanties vans ons land, alles in het werk te stellen om het volk de nodige rust en veiligheid te garanderen (p 4).

published an explanation of the joint statement of the CCK by Bishop Zichem under the title “De huidige morele crisis” (“Present day Moral Crisis”)⁴⁶, neither was this discussed or acted upon.

Although the EBGs is one of the founding members of the CCK, the letters of Bishop Zichem were not known to them and therefore not used in sermons or services. The opposite was the case with the ELKS and the HKS.

4.2 The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELKS)

The pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem were known within the ELKS and some of the topics that were raised in the pastoral letters were also discussed during the Sunday service in sermons. Especially those letters regarding ecumenism⁴⁷ in which human flourishing is important. Also in meetings within the church were these topics discussed.

Similar themes like those treated in the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem, were published in the monthly journal “Protestanten blad” as reflections. However, there were no similar statements in direct response to situations that the church leaders had perceived in society. According to both Pastor Marjorie Slagtand and Mr. Ewald van Ommeren the ELKS does not have a tradition of writing and publishing letters regarding the situation in the country (Personal Interview). “The pastors were afraid to be in conflict with the church council” Mr. van Ommeren stated. Both are admitting that the RK and the EBGs are the churches within the CCK which were critically addressing the situations in the country. However, Mr. van Ommeren stated that Bishop

⁴⁶ A situation of increased poverty and the government administration as well as the parliament were not functioning properly. Also there was corruption and there was no honesty, solidarity, and sincerity.

⁴⁷ He meant the pastoral letters of the years 1994 and 1998.

Zichem was “the man” within the CCK who was concerned about the situation in the country and was addressing it.

The church leaders totally agreed with what Bishop Zichem wrote about the situation in the country. According to Ewald van Ommeren, “in all the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem he was concerned about the poor and to protect the human person.” (Personal Interview) The joint statements issued by the Christian Council of Suriname were discussed within the church in sermons because as Pastor Slagtand stated “we are also part of the society and country and we are also experiencing these problems and difficulties.” (Personal Interview)

4.3 The Reformed Church (HKS)

According to Pastor Diana de Graven, the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem were known within the HKS. She saw these letters as an eye opener for the society and claimed the subjects raised in the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem were treated or discussed during the services and in Bible studies. These letters were used in relation to a Bible text which placed the Word in the socio-political context and in relation to society. Also these letters were published in the weekend publications of the HKS. She further states that “for Bishop Zichem the human being always stood on the first place and that things must be said without unnecessary trampling on someone’s feelings.” (Personal Interview)

However, the HKS did not produce pastoral letters like those of Bishop Zichem. Pastor de Graven mentioned that “the HKS subscribed to what was written by Bishop Zichem and therefore stood one hundred percent behind it.” In her view it was not necessary to reinvent the wheel while the matter was already addressed. Moreover, as part of the CCK the HKS was, and continues to

be involved in joint statements on Suriname's issues which statements are discussed in church services.

4.4 Findings

Regarding the first question of the questionnaire (see appendix) only two of the three denominations within the CCK have known the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem. Both the ELKS and the HKS used these letters within sermons during the service, and in Bible studies or in meetings.

Neither of these denominations produced pastoral letters similar to those of Bishop Zichem. In addition, none of these denominations wrote independently about the situation which they had observed in society. However, in the EBGs there were publications of individuals aimed to encourage the community. The ELKS did not have a tradition of making public statements and the pastors were afraid to be in conflict with the church council. The HKS subscribed to what was mentioned by Bishop Zichem.

Finally, regarding the last question only the ELKS and the HKS produced sermons on the joint statements of the CCK. The EBGs only published these statements in "Kerkbode" but they did not produce sermons on them aimed at explaining it to the congregation. Therefore, there was no follow up after publication of these statements. Thus, the joint statements of the CCK were known by these denominations. In addition, the other members of the CCK did not write independently but within the CCK.

4.5 Conclusion

What has been seen in this chapter is that the other founding members of the CCK produced joint statements for publically highlighting the social issues and providing a church's response. Bishop Zichem followed the tradition of bishops within the Roman Catholic Church. He also issued information and directives to his own flock in addition to what had been put out by the CCK in the preparation of which, as a founding member of the CCK, he was also involved. Consequently, the possibility existed that there was influence in both ways. In other words, he could have influenced the joint statements of the CCK with his pastoral letters or the joint statements of the CCK could have influenced his pastoral letters.

CONCLUSION

Bishop Aloysius Ferdinand Zichem, the first local Suinamese bishop was concerned about the social- political situation in the country. The pastoral letters analysed in the thesis were continuously addressing issues like poverty, corruption, growing inequalities, and selfishness in society in accordance with the pastoral letters. The implications are that these ends arose from the background of political situation such as the civil war (1985-1992) and mismanagement of economy which are cited in the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem.

Questions can be raised how effective were these letters from point of view bringing about the change in moral perspectives the letters were calling for. The pastoral letters were primarily addressed to his flock but also the fact of that routine practice of issuing the letters every year probably did not contribute to their effectiveness in stirring up actions. These letters called for moral regeneration in society which would be required to overcome these issues.

There is a certain lack of specificity in many of the letters. Not in all the letters the details of the situation in the country was mentioned. Nevertheless the letters do manifest certain courage on the Bishop's part because presenting these situations, people would realize the finger pointed at individuals and/ or groups, especially the rich and the powerful, whose behaviour is challenged in the letters.

APPENDIX

Questions for Personal Interview

1. Are the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem known within your Church? And were the subjects that were raised in the pastoral letters also discussed during the services?
2. Were there similar writings like the pastoral letters of Bishop Zichem, which were written by the leaders of the respective churches regarding the topics emphasized within the above mentioned letters?
3. Were there similar writings in response to situations that the church leader him- or herself had perceived in society? If yes, when and how often were these letters addressed to the community? Can you give a few examples?
4. There were also joint statements issued by the Christian Council of Suriname. Were these statements discussed within your church? Or were there sermons devoted to it?

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