

## **A CHRISTIAN BILDERBERG GROUP? THE INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP, 1948-1968**

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The American concept of leadership has strong personalist, optimistic and moral features. Individual leaders are attributed with the power to change the course of the nation. The ideal of the “Good Ruler” is that he, or she, not be a mere power wielder, but an “agent of change,” of course for the better.<sup>1</sup> These characteristics made it potentially easy to export this concept abroad in times of turmoil. An ideal example to explore the potential of this American leadership concept in action in Europe is the history of the International Christian Leadership (ICL), a group of political and religious leaders who came from America to Europe in the wake of World War II. The ICL shared some characteristics in style and some connections with participants of the Bilderberg Group, though it was less secretive, more academic and certainly more American. The ICL had a tighter organization and pursued even loftier goals of transforming Old Europe. Its activities reveal the efforts and the fate of American-inspired religious and political leadership models abroad.<sup>2</sup>

The leadership role of the United States after World War II increased in all aspects, not only in the military, economic, and political realms, but also in ethics. Many Americans believed that morally bankrupt Europe needed an injection of American ethics and energy. Moral leadership was a quality leaders in different fields could exert: generals, politicians, businessmen, as well as clergy. The expectations of this American model of transformational leadership were high on both sides of the Atlantic, especially during the two decades between 1948 and 1968, when most Europeans readily accepted America's role as a moral leader, until the war Vietnam, political assassinations and race riots undermined its reputation. The focus is on the Netherlands, which eagerly welcomed American goods and ideas and which was the launching pad of much of America's influence in Europe. As a strong supporter of free trade and European integration, this country was a significant hub for Americans who hoped to reach mainland Europe. Since the moral sphere is closely connected to religion, I will first describe the international

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<sup>1</sup> George Goethals, Georgia J. Sorenson, and James MacGregor Burns, eds., *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, 4 vols. (New York: Sage Publications, 2004) 1:xxxiv-xxxv.

<sup>2</sup> For the European roots of the Bilderberg Group see Valerie Aubourg, “Organizing Atlanticism: The Bilderberg Group and the Atlantic Institute, 1952-1963,” in Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam, eds., *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 92-105. This case-study of the ICL also contributes to the growing interest in the spiritual dimension of leadership. Robert Banks and Bernice M. Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 57-72.

initiatives of American Christians, in particular the strongest players on the field, the American Evangelicals, before turning to the activities of the ICL.

*Evangelicals and Global Leadership*

Recently, historians have begun to address the relationship between religion and foreign policy. Publications have appeared on religious issues in diplomatic relations, the role of religion in support of the Cold War, and the emerging interest of American Evangelicals in foreign policy after World War II.<sup>3</sup> When leading Evangelicals opened their eyes to foreign affairs, these issues soon acquired an eschatological meaning, as historian Paul Boyer aptly observed.<sup>4</sup> Some historians interpreted this turn to the outside world as a calculated move to increase prestige. Granted that the evangelical movement could benefit from efforts to evangelize the world and restore Christianity as the historical foundation of American society, it was more than a consolidation effort. Even the most pious of the evangelical Christians could not ignore the encroaching world, due to World War II, the United Nations, the Cold War, the Marshall Plan, and NATO. Simultaneously, Evangelicals shed their anti-intellectualism in the 1950s, which had haunted them since the symbolic Monkey Trial in 1925, when the teaching of creationism was ridiculed during a well-publicized lawsuit against the teaching of evolutionism. In an effort to regain their respectability and prove the validity of their worldview, they forcefully presented Evangelical Christianity as the only true and effective answer to the world's most pressing problems, including those of Communism and collective security.

Interest in religion increased at the close of World War II in the wake of an optimistic affirmation of America's common purpose, of which civic faith was rediscovered as an valuable part. Evangelicals went a step further and called for a national revival, which soon transcended the national borders. They recognized the opportunities for spreading their faith in the world after the war. The war had stimulated a tidal wave of moral energy and had broadened the horizon of millions of Americans. Millions of men and some women in the military traveled great distances and encountered other cultures. This new generation had seen the assets of

<sup>3</sup> Andrew J. Rotter, "Christians, Muslims, and Hindus: Religion and U.S.-South Asian Relations, 1947-1954," *Diplomatic History* 24.4 (Fall 2000); Seth Jacobs, "Our System Demands the Supreme Being: The U.S. Religious Revival and the 'Diem Experiment,' 1954-55," *Diplomatic History* 25:4 (Fall 2001). Dianne Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Leilah Danielson, "Christianity, Dissent, and the Cold War: A.J. Muste's Challenge to Realism and U.S. Empire," *Diplomatic History* 30 (September 2006): 645-669; Axel Schaefer, "Neo-Evangelikalismus, amerikanische Außenpolitik und die NATO, 1941-1961," in Berthold Meyer and Werner Kremp, eds., *Religion und Zivilreligion im atlantischen Bündnis* (Trier: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001), 235-55. Contemporary world events could be taken as signs of the times and fulfillment of Biblical prophesies. Schaefer identified four pillars of the foreign policy interest: the personal conversion experience as a model for nations to follow, the redemptive power of nations, communism as a false religion, and the prominent place of Israel. My research fits into his first pillar.

<sup>4</sup> Paul S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994).

advanced communication technology at work and was eager to apply these to other activities, such as missionary work. Postwar planning initiatives to secure peace and prosperity through the United Nations and the Marshall Plan led to professionalization of civic nonprofit organizations while economic prosperity could underwrite a growing variety of voluntary associations. The rising numbers in higher education resulting from the GI bill provided a host of able staff. Aided by a sense of moral superiority belonging to the victors, energized by the new global threat of Communism, and building on a strong missionary and interdenominational tradition that based the expectations of a religious revival on efforts to evangelize the world, the number of missionary candidates swelled from 12,000 in 1935 to 18,500 in 1952.<sup>5</sup> The Evangelicals continued to increase their share in protestant missions. In 1935 they filled 40 percent, in 1952 50 percent, and they reached a top of 90 percent of the 35,000 American missionaries in 1980.

After World War II, Americans renewed their commitment to Europe through generous material and spiritual assistance. Material assistance came to Europe through the Marshall Plan, while numerous religious organizations and churches brought relief. Also worldwide religious cooperation received a new impetus. The World Council of Churches, meeting since 1938 until it was formally founded in 1948 in Amsterdam, put the ecumenical movement on a sound footing and held its second assembly at Evanston, Illinois, in 1954.<sup>6</sup>

Simultaneously, American Evangelicals first founded a national organization in 1942 and soon wished to revive international cooperation. They pushed for the establishment of a World Evangelical Fellowship in 1951 in Woudschoten, The Netherlands, after a number of pre-conferences.<sup>7</sup> When in 1945 twenty-seven year old Billy Graham became involved in nation-wide evangelism, he joined Youth for Christ "International" which clearly prepared itself for a global mission. The war experience echoed in the choice of words to announce YfC's activities: in the spring of 1946 the first Americans "invaded Europe with YOUTH FOR CHRIST," as their first report put it.<sup>8</sup> While Graham and his associates addressed the young generation

<sup>5</sup> Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press 1997), 177-186. Statistics on page 184.

<sup>6</sup> W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (London and Philadelphia: SCM Press and Westminster Press, 1973), 244-253. See for a categorization of the various strands in the evangelical and ecumenical movements: Jan J.B. Jongeneel, "Slotbeschouwing," in André Droogers a.o. eds., *De stereotypering voorbij. Evangelischen en oecumenischen over religieus pluralisme* (Zoetermeer, the Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 1997), 247-258. John Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: Christian Churches and Human Rights* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Ian Randall, "American Influence on Evangelicals in Europe: A Comparison of the Founding of the Evangelical Alliance and the World Evangelical Fellowship," in Hans Krabbendam and Derek Rubin, eds., *Religion in America: European and American Perspectives* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2004), 263-274.

<sup>8</sup> "Report, Sun. March 24 [1946]," Youth for Christ, European Teams: Letters and Reports; March-April 1946; May-June, 1947, The Papers of J. Stratton Shufelt, 1930-1979, n.d., box 1, folder 17.. Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, Illinois, USA (hereafter BGCA). The military terminology can be understood from the special attention to servicemen. For an overview of military terminology in missionary

in big stadiums mostly in the United Kingdom in the late forties and early fifties, another organization addressed the Continental elite in a opulent hotel in the dunes of Noordwijk, the Netherlands. The force behind this outreach was Abraham Vereide (1886-1969), the secretary-general of the International Council for Christian Leadership. He possessed all the qualities of a charismatic leader: emotionally expressive, enthusiastic, driven, eloquent, visionary, self-confident, and responsive to others.<sup>9</sup>

*Abraham Vereide: Self-Confident and Responsive*

Abraham Vereide was a Norwegian immigrant, born in 1886, who had traveled to the United States in 1905 with the intention to study there, but who had ended up in Butte, Montana, and had become a Methodist evangelist in the Midwest. During World War I he combined pastoring a church in Seattle and other cities on the West coast, with relief work for the poor and other social service activities. When a crisis threatened to deadlock labor relations in the city, Vereide took the initiative to meet with labor and business leaders and hold common devotions, which eased the tension. His work brought him to the East, where he advised governors and relief workers during the Depression. His biographer Norman Grubb points to this period as his break-through to men in high places, most notoriously presidents, whom he advised and to whom he witnessed his Christian faith.<sup>10</sup> In the terms of the nestor of leadership studies, James MacGregor Burns, he became a transformational leader. He motivated his associates to perform beyond their expectation and reach the highest level, while showing a sincere interest in their well-being. Vereide spread the concept of prayer breakfasts for businessmen in Seattle throughout the country and brought the idea to the capital in 1942, where it developed into the National or Presidential Prayer Breakfast in 1953 for members of the U.S. Congress, the Administration, and representatives of foreign nations. He expanded his foundation, originally called the National Committee for Christian Leadership, to an international organization known as the ICL and occupied offices in Washington in 1944 in a location later known as Fellowship House.

Vereide was able to inspire others to serve transcendent goals. He was convinced that every man had a desire to know God and saw it as his task as God's diplomat to make Him known, boldly and simply. His target group was the political, business, and educational elite, whom he hoped would improve the world. Their conversion would prompt them to act morally. He encouraged them with intellectual stimuli. His weekly meetings of leaders would start with a Bible reading and

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activities, see Richard Pierard, "Pax Americana and the Evangelical Missionary Advance," in Joel Carpenter and Wilbert R. Schenk, eds., *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 155-178. Also J. Elwin Wright, the chairman of the National Association of Evangelicals went on European tours in 1946, 1948, and 1949. "Report on the Recent European Journey of Dr. J. Elwin Wright," collection 338, file 2, box 9, BGCA.

<sup>9</sup> See for an exposé on those qualities *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, 1:159-160.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Grubb, *Modern Viking: Abraham Vereide, Pioneer in Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), 47-51. He quotes Vereide as a companion to Franklin D. Roosevelt and as head of the Social Service portfolio.

exposition, prayers, and testimonies and were directed to attract men who had little knowledge about or feelings for the Gospel in the hope they would see the light and spread the news.<sup>11</sup> He was able to bridge the differences between the mainstream and Evangelicals by avoiding to be drawn into a discussion about the infallibility of the Bible. This issue had alienated many European Christians from their American brethren because they did not want to be drawn into an exclusively Fundamentalist camp. Right after the war Vereide's attention turned to devastated Europe, linking up with European leaders and with the American delegation preparing the U.N. meeting in Paris in 1947. His contact person in the Netherlands was Ms. Corrie ten Boom, a resistance heroine, who traveled to the United States to share her amazing story of her courage and personal sacrifice in hiding Jews, and her faith, betrayal, and forgiveness in the concentration camps to an eager and impressed audience. In the Netherlands she tried to arrange an audience with Queen Wilhelmina for Vereide.<sup>12</sup> This meeting took place at his next visit in the summer of 1950. He found a kindred soul in the former Queen, who had abdicated the throne in 1948 and from that date had taken the title of Princess Wilhelmina. He told her: "you are the channel through whom God will work," a message she was pleased to hear.<sup>13</sup>

Unable to lure Princess Wilhelmina to the United States for a conference, he decided to organize the first international meeting of his organization in the Dutch North Sea resort town of Noordwijk in 1952, meanwhile encouraging the Princess to mail her spiritual pamphlets to the crowned heads of Europe. Her *Christ the Great Unknown* expressed the hope for a new world, founded on a spiritual awakening under "leadership of Christ." She was searching for new ways to present the Christian truth and saw in Vereide's ICL a new, practical, and yet devout instrument. Princess Wilhelmina accepted the honorary presidency of the ICL in 1951, which she kept for a decade till 1961. She believed her task to be "to lead the great diversity of men all over the world to Christ in unity."<sup>14</sup> Wilhelmina's personal secretary, Thijs Booy, remembered Vereide as her best friend in her final years, for whom she fostered a deep respect. Once she confessed to Booy: "Later it will be assessed that Dr. Vereide was a great man," to which testimony Booy added that she was usually not very generous with such compliments.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Grubb, *Modern Viking*, 123-127.

<sup>12</sup> Corrie ten Boom to Abraham Vereide, 27 May and 28 July 1947, file 46, box 242, collection 459, BGCA.

<sup>13</sup> A. Vereide to Queen Wilhelmina, 11 July 1950, BGCA, collection 459, box 242, file 47 and A. Vereide to Corrie ten Boom, 28 August 1950, BGCA, collection 459, file 46. Cees Fasseur, *Wilhelmina. Krijgshaftig in een vormeloze jas* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2003), 551-557. Soon the Dutch royal family, especially Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard became involved in the transatlantic Bilderberg Group.

<sup>14</sup> Princess Wilhelmina to A. Vereide, 7 May 1951, file 47, box 242, collection 459, BGCA. Notulen van het Hoofdbestuur, 28 juni 1961, inv. 1, ICCL archief, Utrechts Archief, The Netherlands.

<sup>15</sup> *Mededelingen ICL* 1969.2, 1-3. Vereide spent four days in Palace Het Loo between 18-22 May 1956 (see report "My European Mission," 3 pages, file 7, box 243, collection 459, BGCA).

*Vereide's Message*

An inspirational speaker rather than an intellectual, Vereide was committed to, as he called it, "Christianity in Action." He identified three layers of conflicts in the world: the most fundamental conflict raged between secular and religious people. This conflict worked itself out between the autonomous person and the individual who accepted a higher law. Based on this conflict was the conflict between totalitarianism, in the guise of Communism, and free democracy. This battle could only be won by rebuilding a sound society, in which industry provided the means for prosperity.<sup>16</sup> He sensed that religious meetings would overcome partisan political divisions, believed it could work in the economy as well, and envisioned an international dimension. Since people created structures, changing people would change society—a common evangelical notion and a clear contradiction of the Marxist adagium that life determines consciousness.

Despite its positive tone, his basic attitude to world cooperation was sober: it could only work through submission to a higher authority, to "Christ's Plan"—as Princess Wilhelmina called it. It was his strong belief in the force of a transcending power, which provided an umbrella under which opposing people could safely embrace. This approach had worked in domestic conflicts and should be tried internationally. When the Dutch and American participants witnessed the reconciliation between German delegates and their former enemies after intense religious exercises at the 1952 meeting in Noordwijk, their confidence in this approach received a great boost.

This first of a series of conferences came about in the wake of the arrival of another American minister in Europe, Wallace E. Haines. He had caught the vision from Vereide and in 1951 became the ICL European representative to plant new organizations in each country and stimulate European cooperation. His Dutch liaison brought him into contact with Gaele van der Veen, a former manager of a plantation in Sumatra, who was completing his doctoral dissertation on the economic support for developing countries at the Calvinist *Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam.<sup>17</sup> Van der Veen organized a Dutch board with a strong representation of expats from Indonesia and a remarkable input of scions of influential Protestant families. Dr. Pieter Idenburg was secretary-general of the Netherlands-Indonesian Union. His father had served as governor-general of the Dutch East Indies and minister of the Colonies. Also Dr. H.A. Colijn had occupied positions in international business in the Dutch East Indies. His father had made a career in the military, the oil business, and politics, rising to the position of prime minister in the 1920s and 1930s. The fourth key player was General M.R.H. Calmeyer, deputy chief of staff of the Dutch army after a military career in the Dutch East Indies, who had been jailed in a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany. A fifth supporter was Professor J.H. Bavinck, who had

<sup>16</sup> Grubb, *Modern Viking*, 142.

<sup>17</sup> G. van der Veen, *Aiding Underdeveloped Countries through International Economic Co-operation* (Delft: Meinema, 1953). Different sources list different contact persons: the Rev. G.J.H. Gijmink and a Mr. Ubbens, a publisher. See "Minutes of the Business Session of the Annual Meeting of the International Council for Christian Leadership Conference The Hague, Saturday 24th May 1952" (Wallace Haines), file 3, box 243, collection 459, BGCA.

served on Java, before he became the first Calvinist missiologist at Kampen Seminary. Many of them had experienced a religious awakening during their stay in the Dutch colony, had been part of informal bible study groups, or had come under the influence of the Oxford Movement in the 1920s and 1930s. This Oxford Movement was a liberal evangelical revival movement, which mobilized the elite, held mass meetings and gained notoriety under Frank Buchman, until it lost its credibility in the peace campaign preceding World War II and changed its name to Moral Rearmament.

Haines tapped into this loosely organized inspirational laymen's movement and associated women's groups and learned that these Dutchmen were willing to assist in organizing a first international conference, under American supervision and responsibility. In the years following 1952, he stimulated the foundation of national groups in Europe. Van der Veen was willing to take on the job as European secretary on a meager monthly salary of \$ 200, received directly from Haines. He accepted this insecure financial situation as an exercise in trusting God. Since the ICL did not want to become a bureaucratic organization with pressing financial responsibilities for Europe, it resisted channeling regular structural funds across the Atlantic. The organized infrastructure was limited to the headquarters in Washington, where meetings were held at Fellowship House, and regular newsletters.<sup>18</sup>

Van der Veen believed that the ICL in the Netherlands might become a kind of Christian rotary, functioning as a fellowship, but with a grander goal. He wrote to Haines: "We need of [*sic*] Christian revival and nothing less. We need it badly in Europe, as only in this way we can survive in the dangers of this time, in which life is being hollowed out by materialistic [*sic*] conceptions and practice."<sup>19</sup> He had envisioned copying the American structure, including a European Fellowship House, but financial constraints prevented this course of action.

The Dutch ICL succeeded in recruiting a prestigious membership, but soon learned that providing leadership to leaders was a difficult task. Haynes warned Van der Veen; "men like Colyn, and Idenburg (not to mention the Princess) are persons of strong personality who will require daring aggressive leadership."<sup>20</sup> Thanks to the personal coaching of Vereide and Haines, Van der Veen could maneuver amidst these egos, but he could not secure the long-term direction of the organization due to his untimely death in October 1957 during an American tour. After five years, the Dutch ICL lost its central figure, who had closely followed the American model. He had faithfully emphasized the informal character of the fellowship, encouraging daily meditation, bible reading, and prayer as essential factors for renewal of daily life. He hoped the ICL would act as a catalyst for revival of Christian living, as a

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<sup>18</sup> Wallace Haines to Gael van der Veen, 9 September 1952, file 3, box 243, collection 459, BGCA.

<sup>19</sup> Letter G. van der Veen to Wallace Haines, 15 December 1952, file 3, box 243, collection 459, BGCA.

<sup>20</sup> Wallace Haines to Gael van der Veen [between September and December, 1952], file 3, box 243, collection 459, BGCA.

force against apathy, materialism, and discouragement, without depending on a tight organization.<sup>21</sup>

This concept greatly appealed to Princess Wilhelmina, who according to Haines was friendly, while she continued to act queenly. She enjoyed the casual atmosphere with impromptu prayers, and dismissed compliments addressed to her as redundant, since she considered this task to be her calling. What she called “Christ inspired initiatives” were really spontaneous actions, with a minimal organization, which she had come to like. “We need individual Christians who will really live the Christian way of life and Christ works in all areas of life.”<sup>22</sup> She put her money where her mouth was and took care of the airfare and accommodation of Haines and offered royal hospitality to those associated with the organization. The American ICL supporters were intrigued and charmed by her. Reporting on the success of the first international meeting Haines wrote: “The Princess tried to be democratic, too. Had tears in her eyes when acclaimed honorary chairman for life.”<sup>23</sup> Her presence attracted many other influential people, but also kept the size of the group meetings within bounds. Wilhelmina decided against inviting Billy Graham to the 1954 conference, since she believed that the quiet, meditative atmosphere would be upset by the sensationalism associated with Graham, even if he kept himself quiet.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Conferences and Activities*

The most public display of the ICL was at the biennial international conferences which were held at the luxurious hotel Huis ter Duin in Noordwijk, the Netherlands between 1952 and 1960. They were perfectly organized, even had simultaneous translations and drew wide public attention, thanks to the presence of Dutch royalty, while restricting admittance to about two hundred delegates. These meetings were the ICL’s main instrument to promote itself.

The first conference lasted for four days, from 22 to 25 May 1952, included delegates from twelve nationalities and had its climax in a meeting at the central political assembly hall, the *Ridderzaal*, in The Hague where eight hundred people listened to a German, president Ehlers, whose reconciliatory address impressed the Dutch audience. The optimistic tone and inspiring contacts made the conference a resounding success and Van der Veen took the initiative to launch biweekly study and prayer groups or link existing groups to ICL. Expectations ran high.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Letter G. van der Veen to participants 1952 Conference, June 1952, from Den Haag, file “Stukken betreffende wereldkonferenties, 1952-1967,” Archief van het International Council for Christian Leadership Nederland, 1952-1989, Inv. 39, Utrechts Archief.

<sup>22</sup> “European Address of Wallace Haines,” [1952] and “Mr. Wallace Haines’ talk to a small group meeting at Fellowship House on Sunday, February 24th, 1952, Washington D.C. in connection with his visit to Princess Wilhelmina,” file 3, box 243, collection 459, BGCA.

<sup>23</sup> Letter “From Wallace Haines,” 29 May 1952, file 3, box 243, collection 459, BGCA.

<sup>24</sup> Letter Princess Wilhelmina to A. Vereide, 19 March 1954, file 3, box 243, collection 459, BGCA.

<sup>25</sup> Letter “From Wallace Haines, Konigswinter, 29 May 1952,” and G. van der Veen, “Answer and comment on Questions in the letter of Mr. Abram Vereide of Aug. 8th 1952,” file 3, box 243, collection 459, BGCA.



After Van der Veen's death in 1957 the ICL Netherlands faced a moment of truth, and decided to loosen its ties with the American mother organization.<sup>26</sup> The promise of the unification of the scattered parts of Christian civilization motivated Princess Wilhelmina to invite representatives of Calvinists and Roman Catholics to her Palace, the Loo, close to Apeldoorn, in 1959. The organization believed it was the Holy Spirit moving when fifteen local chapters were founded in its wake. Though the goal of the ICL was not to fuel the ecumenical movement, in practice it had to do so to remove obstacles for practical cooperation.<sup>27</sup> For some supportive members the involvement of (and soon the alleged domination) by Catholics was a reason to lose faith in the movement and, as a consequence to pull out, while Dutch Catholics found the atmosphere overwhelmingly Protestant.<sup>28</sup> In the 1960s almost all of the original founders passed away, the Princess in 1962, Vereide in 1969.

The crucial question was how to channel the positive experience of the international conferences to the daily activities of the ICL. The leadership was aware that it was more than purely spiritual factors that attracted people to the ICL conferences. The charming setting of a luxurious hotel, an enthusiastic audience, the energetic Americans, the gifted speakers, the presence of members of the Royal Family, the public attention for important people, the candid Christian atmosphere and refreshing devotions, the perfect organization, a vacation mentality and the absence of demanding consequences: all these made the conference rewarding and stimulating, but the monthly meetings of assorted leaders needed more, especially more participants. Indeed, the circumstances proved crucial, as the Dutch found out at the first conference held outside the Netherlands, in Paris. The Dutch delegates returned somewhat disappointed, because of the high costs, the distance between convention center and sleeping accommodations, and the bustling city around them.<sup>29</sup>

After this conference, international conferences were held in Bad Godesberg in 1964 and in Cambridge, United Kingdom, in 1966, until the last one was again held in Noordwijk in 1968. The next year Vereide died and in 1970 the ICL was dissolved as a corporation, with national organizations taking over the functions of organizing meetings. This capped the growth of the organization in the Netherlands, which witnessed a gradual decline from its peak of 720 members in 1970 to 400 in 1980 to 300 in 1990 and its dissolution in 1994. In 1982 the Dutch organization dropped "Leadership" from its name and became the International Christian Fellowship. Its meetings dropped from two to one annual national convention in

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<sup>26</sup> "Langzaam maar zeker wint de overtuiging veld, dat het Amerikaanse ICL patroon niet zonder meer universele geldigheid bezit, maar dat nationaal naar een eigen vormgeving dient te worden gestreefd." [Slowly, but certainly the conviction grows that the American ICL model does not possess universal validity, but that nationally one should pursue a shape of its own]. *Mededelingen ICL*, December 1958.

<sup>27</sup> Grubb, *Modern Viking*, 152.

<sup>28</sup> J.G.M. Willebrands from Warmond, statement in file "Stukken betreffende wereldkonferenties, 1958," ICCL inv. 39, Utrechts Archief.

<sup>29</sup> "Inleiding", ICCL inv. 12; Board Minutes (notulen hoofdbestuur) 10 October 1962, ICCL inv. 1, both in Utrechts Archief.

1980 to an occasional conference. A discussion on Zen meditation signaled the Dutch ICL's drifting away from its original Evangelical moorings.<sup>30</sup>

*Leadership in Context*

The history of the ICL reveals the intense religious transatlantic activity in the post war world. America's sense of moral leadership after World War II activated international outreach and generated a virtual competition between Ecumenicals and Evangelicals. Both found receptive audiences in the Netherlands. As a liberal evangelical organization the ICL drew a dedicated group of supporters which invested much in biennial conferences of repute. By the late 1950s the Dutch ICL had gained full independence from its American source.

While the ICL avoided the divisive element of the inerrancy debate raging in America, it very much promoted an American inspired model of the transformational leader. This model attracted a group of supporters with intercultural experience. After the passing away of the founders, the successor succumbed to the (Dutch) desire for rational control and the expectation of specific results. The strong tradition in the Netherlands of Christian political party formation based on sophisticated ideological principles and restraint in public expressions of personal faith left little room for the inverse combination of private beliefs expressed in public and vague political ideas kept private current in the ICL. When the Dutch ICL replaced American spontaneity by Dutch bureaucracy, the original impetus died out. Since the Netherlands had more than 2,000 national Christian organizations with financial requests and in need of volunteer staff, defining a profile and recruiting personnel was extremely difficult. The major attractions of the ICL—its ecumenicalism and internationalism—could also be found in other established organizations. Orthodox Christians were closest to the religious atmosphere of the ICL, but distrusted the presence of more liberal believers who wished to break through the old party lines.<sup>31</sup>

The ICL's leadership derived its legitimacy from Christian sources, with strong Evangelical elements (such as prayer, testimonies, quiet time, bible study, social action), in combination with the inclusive attitude of the ecumenical movement. The ICL maintained a bridge between the movements till the 1960s where after the European branch lost its evangelical contingent and the ecumenical movement had its own established vehicles (and problems). While the Dutch Christians shared the American Evangelicals' commitments to the Bible, to the crucial importance of the cross of Christ, and to social action, they shied away from the American emphasis on a specific conversion experience and in stead underscored the notion of responsibility. The ICL shared this emphasis on a life-changing moment with the Oxford Group. Many of the original ICL members had been involved in this group. Its emphasis on life-changing experiences through personal relationships, confessions to other members, as an act of surrendering to God, which came with

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<sup>30</sup> Annual Reports (Jaarverslagen), 1971, 1975, 1976 and 1982, ICCL inv. 11, Utrechts Archief.

<sup>31</sup> Letter dr. H.A. Colijn to Philip [no surname], 8 July 1957, file 1, box 244, collection 459, BGCA.

immediate supernatural guidance and a minimum of organization, closely resembled the ICL structure.<sup>32</sup>

Due to the mediating role of the Dutch chapter and the generous royal attention the ICL in the Netherlands raised high expectations. It succeeded in bringing together political, economic, labor, academic, and religious leaders from a variety of backgrounds. In the light of the recent horrors of global warfare, the desire for such a movement was great. From this perspective it is no wonder that the former Dutch Queen gladly wanted to be part of this process of change. ICL initially provided a good balance of continuity (religious message) and innovation (promote international goodwill).

The ICL clearly embraced the concept of the transformational leader identified by James MacGregor Burns. It promoted this type of leadership among a Europe elite and gave it a new role to play. This new position was attractive to the older elite, which saw its traditional sources of power disappear, undercutting their means to deliver. The transformational leadership model supplemented their position with an inspirational role. They built their own position in the process of stimulating others to be agents of moral change. ICL's followers were disciples who carried on the mission. Transformational leadership offered tools for a basic qualitative alteration of values in society, but the personal change strategy, which had worked in the United States, did not catch on in Europe. When the ICL traded in its elite orientation for a broad audience, it ironically lost its main appeal, something which the Bilderberg Group carefully maintained.

The Dutch ICL did not find a proper balance between carefully planned action and spontaneous inspiration and thus failed to maintain and expand its attraction. The ICL Netherlands missed the modernizing management aspects of the American leadership concept and stuck to a select group of males in traditional positions of power. They failed where the kindred organization of Youth for Christ was successful: reaching a large, young audience with modern means of communication. However, the ICL had more in common with current leadership trends than we might conclude from this historical fate. The current growth of leadership recommends the development of authenticity, self-analysis, inner resourcefulness, and reciprocal coaching. Similarly, the pursuit of a service ideal can be found in the features that the ICL once displayed.

In the United States, the ICL remains a factor of importance, even to such an extent that some recent commentators on the ICL vilified the organization as a "Christian Mafia" and accused it of Nazi sympathies.<sup>33</sup> It allegedly attracts the very politicians who seek to escape accountability for their actions. These allegations may be read as an acknowledgment of its strength rather than as a serious assessment. Politicians do not hide their connections with the ICL. Mainline believers, such as Hilary Clinton and Al Gore, have expressed their appreciation for the organization. Moreover, the international history of the ICL, for instance in the

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<sup>32</sup> Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 238-268.

<sup>33</sup> Joel Carpenter, "Youth for Christ and the New Evangelicals' Place in the Life of the Nation," in Rowland A. Sherill, ed., *Religion and the Life of the Nation: American Recoveries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 137.

Netherlands, belies these extremist accusations. The ICL did attract some conservative businessmen and politicians, but it equally welcomed progressives. Princess Wilhelmina, who rejected anyone with a Nazi past, would never endorse a movement with sympathies for her former arch enemy.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> [Www.insider-magazine.com/ChristianMafia.htm](http://www.insider-magazine.com/ChristianMafia.htm), accessed on 19 December 2006. A more moderate, but still critical, article is written by Jeffrey Sharlet, "Jesus Plus Nothing: Undercover Among America's Secret Theocrats," *Harper's Magazine* (March 2003).