

## The Dutch and the I.A.R.F.

At the suggestion of Yuji Inokuma, Chairman of the Japan Chapter, I am writing this contribution to the quarterly newsletter, also on the occasion of my visit to Japan in October 2012. It gives me great pleasure to be able to explain the many ties between the Dutch people and the International Association for Religious Freedom. The history is summarized briefly, followed by a description of the Dutch Chapter.



**History of the IARF in the Netherlands.** (see also “A short History” by Robert Traer, 2000)

Right from the beginning of the foundation of IARF in 1900, several Dutch theologians took an active interest in the new movement. They belonged to the liberal Remonstrant Church, the church to which I also belong, and to liberal Protestant organizations.

The first Executive Committee of the IARF included four people from the Netherlands.

The second Congress in 1903 was held in Amsterdam. Among the participants was S. Toyosaki from Japan, ( he missed the first Congress in 1901 in London), who delivered a paper.

In 1922 the IARF Congress was held in Leiden, the Netherlands, organized by the Dutch Central Committee for Liberal Protestantism.

In 1930 at Arnhem, the Netherlands, the thirty year old movement was formally organized and its Secretariat was established at Leiden, with its Professor L. van Holk as its first Secretary. By 1935 the Secretariat was staffed by three Dutch theologians: W.R.M Noordhoff, H.Faber and J.C.Bleeker. In 1936 an International Theological Conference was held at Arnhem followed by a small conference at Bentveld in 1938.

During World War II the Secretariat was closed from 1940 to 1945.

In 1949 the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress was held in Amsterdam, one year after the founding of the World Council of Churches, also in Amsterdam.

In 1961 the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress was held in Davos, with H.Faber as its first Dutch President of the International Council of IARF. At Vaticanum II in 1963 L.van Holk represented his own Remonstrant Church as well as the IARF.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress at The Hague a proposal was discussed for the IARF to make contact with representatives from the world's religions. The Congress postponed a decision on this matter and it lasted until the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1969 at Boston that “ Liberal Christianity” was dropped from the name of the IARF. It opened the door for the Konko Church of Izuo and the Rissho Kosei Kai to join IARF, followed by Tsubaki Grand Shrine in 1970.

In 1974 the Secretariat was moved from the Netherlands to Frankfurt, Germany with Diether Gehrman as the first fulltime General Secretary.. During the 1980's Lucie Meijer of the Netherlands organized the Social Service Network of IARF. Money raised in Japan by the donate-one-meal campaign helped funding projects in India, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Lucy Meijer is presently the Treasurer of the Dutch Chapter.

In 1981 a Congress was held at Noordwijkerhout in the Netherlands. Home visits were introduced into the programme and are still greatly appreciated.

At the 30<sup>th</sup> Congress at Vancouver, Canada, the undersigned was elected as the second Dutch President of the Council.

### **The Dutch Chapter (Nederlandse Ledengroep).**

The Dutch Chapter was founded in 1976, two years after the departure of the Secretariat of IARF from Leiden. At present there are around 70 individual members, nearly all above 50, if not above 60. In addition there are three membergroups of IARF: the Remonstrant Church, the Liberal Faithcommunity N.P.B., and the Association of Liberal Protestants V.V.P.

A small group of Unitarians, the Zwingly Union, merged some time ago with the N.P.B., but the foundation publishing their newsletter is an associate membergroup of IARF. The Dutch Chapter is actively seeking contact with religious organizations in the Netherlands; the Apostolic Society Nederland is interested in cooperation with IARF.

The Dutch Chapter organizes meetings twice a year for members and people interested in the activities of IARF. Spring 2011 the Dutch Chapter, together with the Remonstrant Taskforce for Ecumenical Contacts (in Europe), met to discuss the Israël – Palestina conflict.

The meeting in the fall of 2011 addressed the theme “ the dialogue of the future; the future of the dialogue”. The Dutch Chapter organized this meeting in cooperation with a combination of religious and interfaith organizations under the name of “ Towards a National Voice”. Members of this combination are a.o. United Religions Initiative – Nederland and the World Conference on Religion and Peace – Nederland.

Spring 2012 a symposium was organized about Michael Servet, a 16<sup>th</sup> century advocate of religious freedom who died at the stake for his conviction.

In May this year IARF Nederland celebrated the Founding Day of IARF May 25, 1900 with an interreligious programme. An impression of this event is given below.

The first chair of the IARF Region Europe / Middle East was the late Peronne Boddaert; the current chair is Wyske Dijkstra, both Remonstrant ministers.

The Dutch Chapter is organizing this summer the Regional Meeting Europe and the Middle East at Elspeet, the Netherlands from July 19 to July 22.

### **IARF is important.**

The purpose of IARF is important in a world where people find it difficult to be open to differences in religion or belief. Where people claim to have the only correct understanding and interpretation of religious teachings. IARF is using concepts like dialogue and tolerance to overcome these difficulties. Dialogue, not as a goal in itself, but as a sincere effort to better understand each other. Tolerance not in the negative sense “I tolerate you as long as you do not bother me” , but in the positive sense “I tolerate you because I am curious about you and your convictions”. IARF has the organization and the network to promote dialogue and tolerance. Even in times of limited funds ways can be found to organize interfaith encounters.

It is important for the future of IARF that we make more young people enthusiastic for the goals of IARF. Strengthening the Young Adult Network and using workcamps bringing people together are options open to IARF.

I send my greetings to the Japan Chapter and the Japanese membergroups of IARF.  
I look forward to my visit to Japan in October 2012.

Eimert van Herwijnen.  
Brummen, July 2012.



The vocal group



The dancer



The venue: [www.woudkapel.nl](http://www.woudkapel.nl)  
Bilthoven, The Netherlands



The Concert

### *Report from IARF Dutch Chapter*

The Annual General Meeting of IARF Dutch Chapter was held on 2012 may 25  
and followed by  
a Celebration of the Diës Natalis of the IARF.

Members and aspirant members of the IARF,  
representatives from different religious organizations celebrated together on the theme:

#### **“PEACE and ALL GOOD”**

There was an art exhibition,  
a concert with music from the 16th century  
Flemish composer Loeillet for church organ and flute.  
A dancer danced a prayer for peace “How to live”  
from the Hindu - tradition.

We read texts from the Bible, the Qur’an,  
the Bhagavad Gita and of Saint Francis of Assisi:  
all prayers for peace in the world and in ourselves.

A vocal group sang hymns from the Taizé Community, together with the audience.

The celebration was closed by singing together:  
“This is my song, o God of all the nations”  
from the Unitarian tradition.

The ‘All Good’ was represented by an intercultural, vegetarian dinner:  
we shared food together.