

## **The Steps of MoTiv Delft**

### Chaplaincy as discourse of disclosure

Ton Meijknecht

As pastors of MoTiv, formerly known as Delft University Chaplaincy, we have, over the course of some thirty years, experienced a very drastic development, a metamorphosis in our task interpretation and the way we approach our work field.

Such a transition process never takes place in a straightforward way, but tentatively, struggling, in doubt, with an insight surfacing now and then, as a confirming experience. As someone involved in such a process, it is not easy keeping your distance and putting into words how that development has taken place. The fact that we make an attempt to do so in this article can largely be attributed to the thesis Arnold de Jong wrote on the Delft University Chaplaincy<sup>i</sup>.

In his thesis, Arnold does not merely sketch in detail the different stages in the history of this particular chaplaincy; he also places the developments in a theoretical framework. To do so, he consults the views of Zen master and Jesuit Ama Samy on the interreligious dialogue between Zen Buddhism and Christianity. Arnold places the Delft experiment in the broad interpretational framework of Ignatian spirituality. And thereby tears down walls, making the experiment accessible for people with comparable experiences.

A lot has changed in what is collectively referred to as chaplaincy or non-parochial ministry. In the care sector, within the judiciary system, in education, in the army, in all of those places where pastors once had an acknowledged position, the old patterns have fallen into disuse. The institutions in which they work are no longer the same. Where their ecclesiastical signature used to be tangible in all their activities, they now focus on their primary process and ask pastors if they can contribute to that: contribute to medicine, to preserving law and order and peace, contribute to raising our young people. If pastors can contribute, then they are very welcome to do so. Many chaplains have excellent experience in working within such a context.

This focus on the primary process of the institution and the question what a pastor's contribution to it could entail, is relatively new. Thanks to Arnold's study, Mo Tiv's experience can contribute to a further development of the modernization of this ministry. He introduces the reader to a concept to be found with Samy: discourse of disclosure<sup>ii</sup>. This concept points to a special form of communication that...

*...is created when people are willing and able to accept the 'otherness' of the other person, his vision of reality. Only then, a discourse of disclosure is possible. Here, we rid ourselves of borders, and are on the verge of a transition into another space, where the other person is the other person and we are ourselves, and where an actual meeting of minds and communication takes place. Such a discourse of disclosure becomes possible in what Ama Samy refers to as a process of passing over and returning. Passing over, transitioning, occurs when we leave our vision of reality to go to another vision of reality to experience it as it were from within, and to*

*really live through it. This transition is followed by a return, a recurrence to one's own vision of reality. However, we arrive there in an altered state; different from when we left. We went through another vision of reality, and have thereby not only gained new insights, but have really changed and transformed ourselves.*

Later on, we will further elaborate on the concept of 'discourse of disclosure'. Here, we will remark that for us as pastors, it offers us an important starting point to better understand our own development and position. It creates a new self-awareness. The speechlessness that we experienced as a burden for such a long time, as a weakness we would one day hopefully be able to overcome, now marks our own spiritual identity: Are you capable of being silent if that which is at the forefront of one's mind takes a path of its own? Can you make room for someone else's revelation?

Then it suddenly became a challenge to revisit the mental road we had travelled. What had been the steps we had taken so tentatively? What had been the stages of our journey in the light of latter insights? We knew how to distinguish three steps, three phases on the road from a vague knowledge to a clear positioning. The first step is overcoming the fear of the new and the unknown. The second step is the unexpected illumination of the night, the gift after a long period of doubt. And the third step is the step of spiritual leadership, of daring to publicly stand for the discovered insights.

These three steps are described in the next part of this essay, based on the experiences of three people mentioned by name. That is a literary procedure, contributing to an accurate image, but also slightly violating the truth. In reality, more people were involved besides these three. They had colleagues who, in the course of those thirty years, were in the same team with them for a longer or shorter period, and have contributed to the ideas that would develop into the identity of Mo Tiv. Their names are too many to mention here. For three of them, we make an exception here. Without the hard work of Medard Hilhorst, Otto Kroesen and Trudie van Ginkel, Mo Tiv would never have developed into the MoTiv of today. With our thanks to them and the other colleagues, we now return to our story.

### **Step I: Fear of the unknown**

1982, Faculty Civil Engineering in Delft

A hallway in a building of armored concrete. A building that, in all of its peace and quiet, is evidence of the strength and value of this material. This is the building for civil engineering in Delft. Sunlight pours through the windows and displays the construction at its best. A sign on the rough concrete wall proudly states how many kilos each square meter floor can bear. In the hallway, there is an oak bench. On it sits Ton Meijknecht, alone. Ton is a pastor, appointed by the bishop of Rotterdam to aid these students. He has become aware of the fact that his position has become untenable. He has been here for a few years now. It is 1982, and he has worked in this profession since 1975. Initially, everything was still very traditional. Students were drawn to his conversational groups because with him, they found what they had found in their parents' church: a sense of

direction in their life. The old pillar was still erect, if only just. Students still had faith in him as an official. But that soon deteriorated. Every year, the interest waned. Each year, he made an even greater effort with even fancier brochures and catchy titles. To no avail; he is and will always remain an outsider.

He waits. It is a bench just outside the office of the study association Practical Study. Inside, the board has a meeting on a proposal. Two civil engineering students with whom he has put the proposal together, are in there as well, pleading. Will the board be willing to accept the proposal?

The proposal is a rather unusual one. In this building, tangible things like concrete and steel are usually highest on the agenda. Here, it is about the power of the water and the strength of the ground. Blue, radiant blue, is the signature color of this University of Technology, as blue as the sky on this bright February day. The world is a rational place that is what this color conveys. In the end, you can calculate anything and everything. Maybe not now, not yet, but ultimately, you will be able to. The study association works in this spirit. In a playful manner, students learn the game of the elders. They are busy with students' interests where their studies are concerned, with internships and excursions with future employers and with typical student pranks, such as stealing the totem pole of a rivaling association.

The proposal they are now discussing is new. Will the association cooperate with a plan to make professors talk to students about their choices? The proposal is: 'Look at your choices from the beginning of a career, from the middle of a career and from the end of a career'. What do you expect at the beginning of your life as an engineer, and what has come of that at the end? Or: what kind of career would you like to look back on? Students adopt the proposal, and a new activity is born. The concept is simple. The professor shares his experiences with the students. Students do not expect him to have any doubts. After all, he made it! How strange it is to discover that this man acknowledges that he is becoming increasingly doubtful as he gets older. Not where his calculations are concerned, he masters that part of his profession. But he does doubt the usefulness of his designs, the political game surrounding them, or worries about the corruption in the building world. This has a deep impact on young people, hearing those things from someone of experience and distinction. It impresses them more than the words of any pastor could.

In the chaplaincy's Policy Council, where Ton and his colleagues had discussed the developments in their work with the students involved, the plan had been made to perform an experiment. If one thing does not work, you have to be bold, take a risk, and try something else. He applied for the experiment. With a couple of civil engineering students, they hatched a plan. Accept the fear of the crumbling pillar. Overcome your own fear. And take in the insecurity all around you. Students do not know what they got themselves into either. Ask them a question once in a while. And ask their professors the same question. Why do I do this work or the studies educating me to do this job?

With this plan, they now arrive at the study association. He is not a member himself and has to wait outside for the outcome. He is left alone, surrounded by silence. They emerge again, and yes, the proposal has been accepted. A warm feeling of gratitude washes over him. Strange, how deep that emotion runs. Apparently, there is a lot at stake for him. That is what surprises him most. His identity as a pastor is on the line. That becomes perfectly clear in this experiment. The enthusiasm of the students means that his effort is deemed valuable and is not rejected. That experience affects him deeply.

## **Step 2: Discovery in the night**

1997, campus of Delft University of Technology

Night has fallen on the Delft campus. The buildings look deserted in the dark. At this hour, no one is at work in the labs anymore. The library is closed. Only the streetlights are on. It is well past midnight. Through the night rides Renske Oldenboom, on her bicycle. She is on her way home, after a long and intensive conversation with a group of architecture students. She does not know exactly what time it is. It is late. But it was worth the effort. She goes home with a feeling of contentment.

This was The Night of the Philosophy. It was an initiative by students in architecture. They had come up with this plan out of dissatisfaction with the one-sided communication at their faculty. The distance between students and professors is enormous, most education is one-way traffic. The master speaks, while the pupil listens. He sometimes speaks in wonderful images, but he is the only one allowed to speak. The others have no role, other than listening. Students felt the need for a more equal and more personal conversation.

In the Night of the Philosophy, the wish for another form of communication found its way. No arrangement like that of a lecture room, with the standard division of roles, but a number of adjacent round tables. At each table, ten students and a renowned architect are seated. There is no set subordination within this format. Each student talks from his or her own anger and dreams. The great man at the round table suddenly turns out to be a human being with his own anger and dreams of his own, as well. A little further ahead in his career, but at his level, clearly occupied with the same questions. What a relief. Students are having a great time. The familiar signature color of the TU, clear blue, turns out to be the color of a thin surface layer: Within, there is a fiery red core of love for the profession and love for what you can accomplish with it for the people around you.

The idea had stemmed from a meeting of a group of students with an architectural critic. Renske Oldenboom had ended up in this flow. With pleasure, with her own approval, but still, she was overcome by it. On her bicycle on her way home, she tries to think of what was so fascinating about this night that it kept her up this late. The feeling is good. But how reliable is that feeling?

Coming from a church community, the work among students is a new challenge. When a spot became available in Delft for a Protestant student pastor, and a

friend drew her attention to that, she saw it as the opportunity she had been waiting for.

She comes into contact with a group of students in architecture. With them, she feels at home, but at the same time, she senses a limitation. Her skills as a church pastor abandon her. Then, her role was still clearly defined by the tradition and the expectations of the people in her congregation. These students expect something from her as well. What that something is, they could not say. There were clear signs of their appreciation, but that was it. The rest is up to her.

That is what she was doing that night on her bicycle. Figuring out what her role was. Within the group, she had started with something practical and had begun to pour the coffee. Her intuition told her that she had to become part of the group and had to start operating in an 'embedded' way. She was no ordinary member. She was clearly older, but could not have been their mother yet, and that wasn't necessary either. So what was her identity, the strength that would satisfy the other person, as well as herself? Not a pastor, like in her old work, no second mother, no fellow student, no famous architecture connoisseur.

Slowly it is beginning to dawn. A light shines in the night. She finds a new role. She discovers that she stands for intimacy and confidentiality in the conversations. Because of her, famous people can show their vulnerability. Students overcome their fear to speak freely. Students, professors and professionals meet at a personal level. They share their doubts, insights, worries and inspiration with each other. She has discovered her new identity: the pastor has become a coach and has at the same time remained a pastor. She is greatly enthused by the idea.

### **Step 3: Radical choices**

2002, Mo Tiv House in Delft

Gradually, these revelations are forcing the team of pastors to make a choice. Choosing always hurts somehow. Somebody will feel it at a certain point. Sooner or later, the new insight will have to gain its spot in publicity. And, in the process, encounter resistance.

When the pastor becomes a coach, his work changes as well. A pastor has his pastoral care and a teacher has his teaching. But what label doesn't the work of this coach have? In a practical sense, this question was solved by calling the work OD 18, in reference to the address of the house it was established: Oude Delft 18. A fitting logo to emphasize the general awareness of this name.



In 1992 however, the work had to move, and a problem arose. With the relocation, the old name lost its validity. A temporary solution was found; a logo with a puppet keeping its balance with a long stick, against a backdrop of a rising sun. Then it became clear that the old name OD 18 with its secular aura had veiled a question. Which name should be put next to the puppet?



'Studentenpastoraat' (student chaplaincy) maybe? That name had been obsolete for a long time. Couldn't anyone think of anything more appropriate? Nobody could, so the obsolete name stayed. At least, for the time being. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it became fully clear that the term 'pastoraat' could no longer be used. It evoked an atmosphere of paternalism, of knowing what is best for the other person, a pretension that at this moment, nobody could or wished to live up to any longer. Coach had become a more valid job description. The chaplaincy's Policy Council then decided to launch a project group called New Name. The working group's mission was: finding a name that their target group would be able to recognize. Meaning that they would come up with a name, a logo and an appropriate 'corporate identity'. Within the group, a student of industrial design led the search process. He would later on gain reputation as an entertainer. Two other students and a board member acted as a sounding board. Hans van Drongelen became the 'middle man' with his own organization.

He had been called as a Reformed protestant university chaplain to Delft, because he thought of this work as the only significant kind of theological work. It is his first job and in this job, he finds the opportunity to realize the vision on spirituality and missiology that he has developed during his training at the Free University of Amsterdam. He believes, maybe more so than his colleagues in Delft, that reality is secular in nature. Theologians should take this as a starting point, if they really want to realize some of their spiritual claims.

In the course of the development of the logo and the name, it became apparent how tricky it is to position an ecclesiastical organization in a secular environment. The search process takes two years. In 2002, the project group presents the result. The name MoTiv is introduced, together with a logo.



The logo is a gear wheel, in it, a man with outstretched arms, forming the letter T, as the center of the word MoTiv. Naturally, the gear wheel stands for the world of technology, whereas the man stands for humanity, one of the better translations of the theological concept of salvation in a secular jargon. At the bottom, two core concepts are stated, technology and spirituality. This design is recognizable for the target group. Before long, the name becomes a household name. When the pastors explain what Mo Tiv means, the full meaning of the word, motivation, appeals to the students. Motivation is a spiritual thing, something they comprehend, even if they can't really word what it entails. The new name evokes their curiosity, which was precisely what it was set out to do.

But if Hans van Drongelen thought that his task was accomplished with the presentation, he was mistaken. The target group might have been won over fairly easily; the church community was having a hard time with this change of name and identity. The criticism is that in the name, the religious origin is not recognizable. It does not stem from the familiar vocabulary. People cannot and are not willing to place it. Because it hurts.

For Hans, this develops into a dilemma. As a pastor, he does not want to hurt anyone; he'd rather take someone's pain away. As a coach, he wants to able to do his job and reach his target group. Stuck in the middle between the church community and his target group, he is in two minds. The confrontation forces him and all his colleagues to make a radical choice. They choose their target group. That is where their heart lies; that is also where their task lies, their mission.

Since that confrontation, no one will ever cast any doubt on the name Mo Tiv again, not even in church circles. Willingly or unwillingly, everyone has to recognize that there is no realistic alternative.

### **Discourse of disclosure**

We go over the three moments in time, outlined above, once more, this time in reference to Ama Samy and Arnold de Jong. Below his reading of the process, cited from his thesis.

*I suspect that the religious communication of the Delft student pastors takes place primarily at this level of discourse of disclosure. They initially open themselves up to the otherness of the secular, and to the spirituality they find there. That is a process of unleashing oneself, of dissecting oneself. All language, all forms, all symbols and all rites that the pastors were familiar with from their own Christian spirituality, have become incomprehensible*

*and without any value here, and have to be left behind. Like a robe they will have to take off the old, familiar forms if they really want to transition into this foreign, secular world, and to really be able to come near the 'foreign' other person in that world. Initially, this transitioning is an experience of nakedness. And first and foremost, one of speechlessness. The familiar, religious language is not understood in this secular context and cannot be used here. At first, this speechlessness is based on shyness; the old words no longer suffice, and new words have not yet been found. But if the temptation to fall back on the old idiom can be resisted, then persisted speechlessness can turn out to possess an extraordinary quality: it can become a quiet, safe and sacred place, in which the other person can and dares to speak. At many of the activities organized by MoTiv, the pastor's reticent way of speaking has a methodical quality to it: it is an essential part of a praxis that aims to bring their conversation partners – technology students and others - in contact with their own intuitions, their own desire, their own hidden powers and qualities, their own deepest truth - in short, their own spirituality. The methodically sustained speechlessness of the pastors makes room for a new language, with which the new experiences can be interpreted and appropriated. A language that comes into being in the course of conversation, a language that opens up a view to one's own spirituality, a discourse of disclosure in itself. And the pastors observe and experience this new spirituality with them, a spirituality that up till then had been new and foreign to them.*

*In transitioning to the secular reality of technology, the pastors have had to lay down all forms of their familiar Christian spirituality, so that only speechlessness remained. Still, they turned out to be capable of the spiritual leadership required to guide this process. True; the forms of their own Christian spirituality could not make that transition with them, but the person they had become in the passage through their own Christian tradition did go through that process. Before, they had in their own Christian spirituality gained experiences of trust, of being accepted, of longing, of a calling, of love of one's fellow-man, of becoming truly human, of resurrection. These experiences made them into what they are, and along with their personality, these experiences go along in the process to a different, foreign vision of reality of the secular realm. Not with the forms of their own Christian spirituality, but in the personal embodiment of it, they open up their own spirituality in a discourse of disclosure with the secular vision of reality, they make themselves available to the other person. Their Christianity is realized here as a limitless openness to the other person. Incidentally, that is merely exercising then Christian virtue of representative substitution. This occurs when we, out of love for the other person, connect fully to him, place ourselves in his situation, his fate, questions, hopes and life. That is truly surrendering to the other person, entering his perspective of reality. That also requires from us a deconstruction of ourselves, and a resurrection, for the sake of the other person. That is what the pastors experience as well: in sharing the situation and the spirituality of their target group, they are transformed too. Their profession, for instance, changes from pastor into 'partner'.*



*After the passing over, after the transition into and the passage through the vision of reality of the other person, a return follows in the discourse of disclosure, a return to one's own ideology. However, we arrive there in a changed way, we view our own philosophy of life differently. We are unwavering in our loyalty to our own tradition, but stand in our tradition with a newly gained openness and creativity. We would like to share our experiences, gained in our passage to another vision of reality, but once again, we are stopped by a boundary. It becomes apparent that we are unable to express these experiences, gained within a different horizon of understanding, in the language of our own vision of reality in which we have returned. That seems to have happened to these university pastors as well. If they, within their own tradition, want to relate the miraculous stories they have experienced in the secular situation, the insights they have gained, it seems to be hard to convey the meaning and the depth of those stories. They are barely heard. Still, drawing from their experiences, they do have something to mediate in their own tradition. But once again, that is first and foremost a mediation within the person. In their passage through the secular spirituality of their target group, experiencing and living as it were the situation and the perspective of reality of their target group, the pastors have transformed as people. They have become different kind of Christians, a different kind of church. They now have the experience to be at home and grounded in their own Christian tradition, as well as in the secular spirituality. In a sense, they stand, to use an expression introduced by Ama Samy, in the in-between, on the doorstep in between the visions of reality, in which the meeting takes place. They are the 'medial subject' personified, the mediating in-between, in which the discourse of disclosure occurs. They have unbolted their own Christian tradition in order to be available to the secular other; they have opened up the secular spirituality to be transformed through it and by it in their own profession of the Christian faith. Thus, then communication between the Christian tradition of faith and the secular realm takes place in a spiritual anthropocentric way, in the person of the one willing to go through the process of transition and return, time and again.*

### **A method of working is reborn**

Thus, the new identity has evolved, from intuition through inner wording to external acceptance. It has taken thirty years, from 1982 to 2012, and it has unleashed a creativity in many. In the end, each person that is or has been involved is pleased with the way it has turned out. It works well. Within the secular context, the work flourishes. From being viewed as problematic, the work is now appreciated. Students can now say without a trace of embarrassment that they have a meeting at MoTiv. The somewhat pitiful image that was once attached to it has disappeared entirely. Now, it is exciting to be seen at MoTiv. An old profession is reborn.

**Hans van Drongelen** (Rotterdam 1955)

I am convinced that modern culture is a fundamental driving force behind creative and innovative activities of a large number of people. There is a strong belief in our culture that we can surmount the deep and challenging problems we are facing today. For me hope and desire for a better life for all is inclusive and part of human endeavor. As a theologian and campus chaplain it is my task to recognize the characteristics of spirituality in study and professional life and to reshape what often seems to be self-evident to so many students and professionals. By assigning to them their hidden and sometimes forgotten drives I support them in developing their talents and mastering their skills to become a true and leading professional. I received my Master in Divinity at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 1989 and I am working at the Delft University of Technology in The Netherlands for more than twenty years. Since 2008 I am a partner at Mo Tiv, Spirituality and Technology.

**Arnold de Jong** (Schiedam 1972)

I am studying theology at the School of Catholic Theology, Tilburg University. I am interested in the encounter of Christian spirituality with the spirituality of others. Specifically, I am exploring how I myself, sourcing from Christian tradition in dialogue with other traditions, can assist others in finding their own truth, their own deepest desire, their own faith, as expressed in their own language and embodied in their own context and practices, regardless of how different they might be from mine. As a Christian myself, I feel the desire to meet the spiritual needs of my neighbors in a selfless and selfgiving way, that is, without imposing any impeding conditions of my own first. I believe it requires boundless openness from my part, the ability to commit myself to the other by taking on his or her specific situation, context and language, while still embodying my own truth, desire, and faith. As a former engineering student at Delft University of Technology, I deeply sympathize with the chaplains of MoTiv, who in my opinion are doing just that within the field of engineering, embedded as they are in the engineering community.

**Ton Meijknecht** (Groesbeek 1944)

After more than thirty-five years of pastoral service, I focus on what I perceive at the background of day to-day turmoil: emerging religious movements in a time of institutional decline. What do people really need in order to live a good life? What are the sources of their hopes?

It is often after a moment of silence that such questions are expressed. Silence became more and more my way to the soul, my own one and the ones of the people I meet. Gradually, I discovered that religion is the paramount issue of today, even when it lacks the right words to express itself.

So after each moment of silence, I'm keen on discovering new words to communicate on the level of the self. Sometimes those words are just the old ones. More and more often they come as a surprise, as a gift. And hardly would have been understood by former generations.

To calibrate such new words is my professional ambition as a theologian, every day more.

I hold a Master in Theology and a PhD in History.

From 1975 till 2008 I was appointed as a Roman Catholic chaplain at Delft University of Technology and in 2008 became partner in Mo Tiv Spirituality and Technology.

**Renske Oldenboom** (Koog aan de Zaan 1957)

I have always been interested in the process of learning and the capability of people to learn new skills, new behavior and attitudes and to develop new beautiful insights (that work!). What kind of motivation is the driving force to learn and grow as a person and, as we are living and working together, as a group? Vital to my own motivation is the experience of a common process of digging up old sources and disclosing new sources of inspiration in a working environment. As a chaplain and coach in the spiritual field, it is my specialty to lead groups of students and professionals to enjoy a high quality in cooperation, including integrity awareness, vision development and mutual encouragement of using all talents.

With building stones from theology and ethics, I seek to contribute to the quality of professionals and find constructive ways to support them to be leaders in their fields in a multi-religious, globalized world.

I received my Master in Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 1987 and I have been a university chaplain at Delft University of Technology since 1996. In 2008, together with Hans van Drongelen and Ton Meijknecht, I founded the firm Mo Tiv, Spirituality and Technology, a training and coaching organization for companies and schools.

**Gunther Sturms** (Hulst 1979)

I joined the MoTiv-staff in 2009. Together we reveal the sacred in secular life and society. We offer students of the Delft University of Technology workshops, symposiums and coaching. We are dealing with motivation and inspiration. We discuss the relationship between technology and society.

I am a Roman-Catholic university chaplain for the diocese of Rotterdam and hold a BA (mus), MA, STB, STL. I studied Theology, Religious Studies and Musicology at the Universities of Nijmegen, Utrecht and Louvain. Before joining MoTiv, I worked at the Oikos Foundation, an ecumenical institute for international development.

I am actively involved in inter-religious dialogue, especially in contacts with Catholics and Judaism.

Colofon

© MoTiv, Delft

Text: Ton Meijknecht

In cooperation with Hans van Drongelen, Arnold de Jong,  
Pieter Luteijn, Renske Oldenboom, Gunther Sturms

Translation: Eline Haks, Efficient English

Design: Jannet Mulder, Rosemarijn van Limburg Stirum

Photography: Stairway Trappen b.v. (cover),

Rosemarijn van Limburg Stirum

Typography: Sieca, Delft.

Delft, The Netherlands, June 2012

MoTiv

Creating Leading Talent

Voorstraat 60

2611 JS Delft

The Netherlands

info@motiv.tudelft.nl

www.motiv.cudelft.nl

---

<sup>i</sup> Arnold de Jong wrote his thesis as a graduation project on the subject of Church History at the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology. He finished the thesis in 2011. Currently, he is editing it for his master's degree.

<sup>ii</sup> Ama Samy has adopted this concept of 'discourse of disclosure' in his turn from David J. Krieger, and linked it to John Dunn's concept of 'passing over'.