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THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE FAROE ISLANDS<sup>i</sup>  
WHAT THE FRINGES OF THE FAROE RELIGIOUS CONFIGURATION HAVE TO SAY ABOUT  
CHRISTIANITY

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At the beginning of the 1980s, in the remote villages of the little North Atlantic archipelago of the Faroe Islands, some people started talking about Jesus in a different way. They said that Jesus was with them all the time, that he was their fellow, their best friend, that he opened their eyes and their hearts. They claimed that Jesus saved them by offering freedom and that they were doing some new kind of evangelization in a proselytical and aggressive way. At first, the Faroese people found they were a little strange. But with time, the Friends of Jesus—as we shall call them—became part of the Faroese religious landscape. They came from traditional religious congregations, as well as civil society, from across the islands. The elders of traditional free congregations were surprised by this change. They did not know how to react. How could they criticize such strong faith, even if it led to excessive behaviour? In fact, they did not anticipate that a religious revival would happen on the islands, their fear having been the general movement of secularization that prevailed throughout the western world. After the dramatic economic crisis that affected the country in the mid 1990s, the Friends of Jesus built new churches, and some of them were huge. Younger generations were curious to experience the presence of the Holy Ghost, and its power of healing.

This picture could easily fit other places in the world (Buckser 1995, 1996). It illustrates a phenomenon of particular interest for contemporary religious anthropology, that of the recent global expansion of neo-evangelical churches. These churches, especially neo-Pentecostals and

so-called “Charismatics”, have become markers of a deep change in the history of Christianity. In extremely diverse societies, from the five continents, Christianity is no longer associated to colonial powers but has become a tool with which to promote local identities. The second half of the 20th century witnessed profound changes in the history of Christian evangelization. For a large number of distant societies, Christianity used to be seen as an imperialist domination that generated resistance; now this same Christianity (but is it exactly and still the same?) is used as indigenous property, authentically native, to the point of reversing—especially in the South, Africa, America and Asia—the historical movement of evangelization from the North towards the South, that had been initiated by centuries of colonization (Mary 2008).

This new perspective raises major issues for the anthropology of Christianity. And from the unexpected context of small northern Scandinavian societies, I would like to suggest that the Faroese Islands provides a useful microcosm for examining processes occurring in the world as a whole.

First, this case study directly questions the colonial contexts where, in religion, there is often a reversal in the relations of domination. Christianity often becomes a tool for liberation and the affirmation of identity (Freston 2009). However, it is always after undergoing a few changes from its original colonial form that Christianity can play this role. On this point, the phenomenon appeared in the Faroe Islands long before the rise of neo-evangelical movements in the 1980s. Thus, compared to other societies where the process is occurring now, the Faroese society does not conform to the same sequence of history. But the political use of Christianity for independence, through the development of religious free denominations (Calvinist and Lutheran) remains an instructive pattern. Its foundations were borrowed from foreign sources, and gradually reframed the Faroese society as a whole. However, unlike what happened later with the neo-evangelical revival of the 1980s, this first reframing operation was remarkably contiguous with the traditional way of life in Faroese villages.

This leads us to a second question about changes and continuity that are, in the Faroese as elsewhere, particularly important. To what extent do new forms of Christianity represent a real social change, inaugurating a new relationship to history, culture and world-consciousness? (Coleman 2007) On this point, it has often been suggested that the real change is globalization, that is to say, choosing voluntarily to adopt some features precisely because we know they are shared by others throughout the world. The notion of “global consciousness” used by Simon Coleman refers to this combination of intentionality and consciousness that makes the difference between simple diffusion—or influence—and globalization: “Adopting a stance in relation to others or to external environment” (2000, 232). Somehow, globalization was active very early in the Faroe Islands, from the foundation of the first independent denominations that were quick to participate in networks of missionary evangelization. However, these denominations that made possible the invention of a “native Christianity” were pretty much focused on themselves and on their local congregations as singular examples of divine salvation and grace on earth. And it is as such that they developed contiguously to some local patterns. The break of “world-consciousness” appeared later, post-1980, with the radical second neo-evangelical religious revival. But this time it was more nurtured by a new Utopia concentrated on the individual. The change came to the Faroe Islands through a new conception of personhood, freed from the links that ties the individual to his village, kin group and congregation. Therefore the analysis of historical changes, through the study of the local uses of Christianity, must rely on a dynamic view of the native category of person. This approach is at the very heart of social anthropology (Mauss 1938). The local concepts of personhood always bear the historical and cultural features that kneaded them. Now, to capture changes one should also understand continuities (Eriksen 1993). With ideal type profiles, drawn mostly from the congregations of the Plymouth Brethren, I will try to understand some salient features of the religious man in the Faroe Islands. Of course, ideal type inevitably leads to simplification. However, it will probably help us better appreciate the recent changes. The Friends of Jesus

allowed themselves to act in a way that, previously, the "good men" in the congregations would never have done.

Consequently, there are many good reasons for the anthropology of Christianity to stop in the Faroe Islands. The question might be asked thus: What has Christianity done to Faroese society, and how has Faroese culture made Christianity its own? The islands have an unusually high rate of believers and this gives them a singular Christian status, both among the secularized Scandinavian<sup>n</sup> societies and abroad. As a Scandinavian society, the Faroe Islands are indicative of an historical matrix in the sense that it is easy to recognize their principal foundations. But as an island, the magnifying effect of insular society can also be useful for questioning the future of a society where Christianity takes up a lot of room. In the context of globalization, the Faroe Islands are probably as much heuristic as surprising—and largely underestimated—in the study of contemporary neo-evangelical Protestantism (Pons 2009). Heirs of a colonial context that is still not fully clear, with a history of domination associated with a feeling of being for a long time on the very edge of the modern world (Nauerby 1996) the Faroese people and their culture share some features with many other societies that have experienced the same feeling of being marginal peripheries of the world, and to have not participated in a world history centred on the West, the USA and Europe (Robbins 2004). It is important to keep this in mind if we are to understand why and how neo-evangelical Christianity may sometimes become an issue of exceptional magnitude. Except that, usually, the societies who nourish these feelings are located in the South and not in the North among Western people. Of course, we know that the topic does not rely on ethnic issues but on its relationship to history, to power and domination, and to cultural identities. Nevertheless, in this instance the Faroese anthropology of Christianity is discrete from the resistant North / South dichotomy.

## 1. Culture through History

### 1.1. Contemporary Religious Configuration

As an example of diversity within unity, the religious configuration in Faroese society is an invitation to anthropological analysis. This society is almost exclusively Christian with a great number of free congregations, each one independent from the others, but limited to very few denominations.

Officially, the majority of the population, approximately 85 per cent, belongs to the Faroese Evangelical Lutheran Church. This church was a diocese of the Church of Denmark until recently, when it became independent on the 29 July 2007, and one of the smallest state churches in the world. It is divided into 14 parishes with a total of 62 churches and 9 houses of prayer; there is a bishop, a dean and 21 ministers. There are some organizations and associations attached to the Faroese Evangelical Lutheran Church, among them KFUM (Young Christian Men's Association) and KFUK (Young Christian Women's Association), and also the Inner Mission, or Home Mission, called the *Heimamission*. Though, as we will see, the latter associations enjoy so much autonomy from the state Church that they ought to be considered almost as a separate denomination. Apart from some other small denominations that bring together a few people usually in the same restricted area (in Tórshavn: the Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, the Seventh Day Adventists, and a recent rise of the Baha'i Faith; in the villages of Leynar and Skælingur: mostly Jehovah Witnesses), the religious landscape of the Faroe Islands is strongly shaped by three main influences that progressively, through history, entered the country (Wählin 1986).

Initially, the Calvinist influence of the Darbyites<sup>iii</sup>, also called the Plymouth Brethren, was first introduced in 1865 with the Scottish missionary William Gibson Sloan (Kelling 1993). Today the Brethren, also called the Community of Brothers and Sisters (*Brøðrasamkoma*), number around 15% of the population and are spread all over the country in more than 30 villages (5 congregations in the island of Suðuroy, 7 in Streymoy, 2 in Vágur, 9 in Eysturoy, 2 in Kalsoy, 1 in Kunoy, and 3 in Bordoy) (Sølvará 2010).

Next, the association of the Home Mission (*Heimamíssiún*)—that we shall call here the "Missionaries"—constitutes the second strongest influence after the Darbyites. Though they still are a part of the state church, they self-rule and have little relations with it. Through history, and progressively during the twentieth century, they actually developed independently, mostly grounded in the Grundtvig Pietism influence from Denmark. Their organization is very ambivalent. They do not consider themselves to be churches, they do not have priests and supposedly do not perform any sacraments, but are instead organized and ruled almost like congregations of an autonomous denomination, performing services and rituals. Interestingly, they are spread all over the country with 31 congregations in 30 villages. Their settlement is pretty much the same as the Brethren, that is to say in the same villages and probably around the same percentage (around 15% of population), even if there is a lack of data since the Missionaries are officially recorded as part of the State church<sup>iv</sup>. The accuracy of this percentage is uncertain but testifies to two aspects. First, the Missionary community aims to present itself as being as strong as the community of the Brethren, or at least to be the equivalent<sup>v</sup>. Secondly, they wish to distinguish themselves from the majority of the state church members who “belong without believing” (Riis 1987). In their view, being a Christian is not a question of cultural transmission or background but supposes an everyday commitment of faith. This is actually an opinion they have in common with all the other free congregations that similarly denounce the secularization of the Faroe Islands. For those who proclaim themselves as “true Christians”, there is nothing worse than participating mechanically and unfaithfully in the sacraments. Though today a great proportion of the Faroese are Christians by tradition, recorded in the state church from birth, and are loyal to the Christian Lutheran tradition which has been a part of their cultural identity for centuries (Debes 1982, 1995). Actually all the Faroese people, even those of the free denominations, have in their kin group some of these “secular Christians” who never go to church on Sunday and only attend the service at Christmas, for christenings, confirmations, weddings and funerals. “True Christians” tend to say that the seculars are those who go to the pubs, smoke and drink alcohol; they have sexual intercourse before marriage; they divorce; they travel to Denmark for abortion, which is illegal in the Faroes. The Christians regret these sinful lives and are worried for their morality; they often say that they pray for them. Nevertheless relationships between “seculars” and “Christians” are quite good. They usually say that they respect each other. During family gatherings they avoid talking about topics that enhance their differences. Why don't they talk about difficult topics? In the Faroe Islands one says that people are so few that they have learnt the art of living together without provocation, avoiding controversial topics. Each lives his life his own way. Nevertheless, from a sociological point of view we must take into account the progress of that “secular portion” that, in recent years, has become an important factor in society and interferes with the religious panorama.

Last but not least, the Pentecostals, first of Norwegian influence, have been on the Faroes since the end of 1920s but only gained significant strength during the revival of the last thirty years. It is difficult to say exactly how many they are, also because a lot of free Pentecostal believers attend private religious services at home, so called “cellar services” (*kjallarasamkoma*). It is often said that they are around 6% but this rate remains approximate and includes diverse denominations—often youths and moderate Pentecostals—that can be attributed to the category of “neo-Evangelicals” (Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals and Charismatics) that appeared in the third post-1970s wave of religious revival (Freston 2001, 290). In all, there are 13 churches<sup>vi</sup>. What is important to note is that all these churches are of growing influence, now playing a key

role in the local religious panorama. They focus on the intimacy of relationship with Jesus on the one hand and on a theology of personal success on the other. In addition they have provoked some dramatic changes in the way locals conceive personhood, what it is to be a person (Pons 2012).

Thus the rate of 85 per cent of the whole population belonging to the Faroese Evangelical Lutheran Church does not represent the full complexity of Faroese religious configuration. This rate does not distinguish the members of the Missionaries and the many free believers who attend independent churches, both (neo-)Pentecostal and Lutheran Charismatic, but who continue to be recorded as belonging to the state church. Actually many villages are structured according to religious membership with symbolic divisions: firstly, the Lutheran state church and the seculars, secondly the Brethren, thirdly the Missionaries, and fourthly the neo-evangelical churches of Charismatics and Pentecostals. It is valid, more or less, to consider the whole interaction between those religious belongings as a *total social fact* (Mauss 1950) if we want to understand something about religion in the Faroe Islands. The Brethren and Missionaries are historically of great importance. Interestingly their relations have always been very strained, much more than with seculars. It is also because in each community there have always been some seculars, while there are no Lutherans among the Brethren and no Calvinists among the Missionaries. Even today, these two communities remain relatively sealed-off from each other, with a high rate of endogamy.

## 1.2. 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: the uses of religious influences

How should we understand the process of such a configuration? Where does it come from and what is its specificity? In the Nordic Scandinavian societies, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, religious movements promoted an asceticism that laid down the principle of a personal relationship with the divine. For the most part, these pietistic movements constituted the front line of the churches' contestation. The first expressions of this asceticism were found in some groups practising mysticism, such as Haugianism in Norway, religious awakening in Sweden and Finland, and ecstatic groups in Denmark since the 1790s (Thorkildsen 1997: 145). But in those contexts where clerical power was the main tool of State control, such a spiritual crisis was also a temporal revolution nourishing the process of Nordic Enlightenment. Historians (Sørensen 1997; Tägil 1995) pointed out the originality of the Scandinavian pattern of Enlightenment that was rooted inside a Christian ethos and led to a progressive loss of clerical control, thus resulting in freedom of religion being gradually achieved, first in Norway and Denmark in the 1840s. Similarly, before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Faroese were not allowed to leave the territorial churches of the Danish kingdom in order to found free churches.

But despite this conformity to the main Nordic pattern, for a long time Faroese society was far from undergoing such a process. One of the great differences was the absence of spiritual crises prior to the very end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. As it was pointed out by many scholars (Wylie 1987: 129), in earlier times the faith in the Faroe Islands was not so deep and strong as it is now. Until recently, the Lutheran orthodoxy, along with popular beliefs, formed the basis of spiritual life and faith. Resuming this situation, Jóan Pauli Joensen explained that "their place in the cosmos was seen in relation to a remote king, to the past and to all kinds of supernatural beings who populated and animated the natural environment. Besides, there was the relationship to God and the Hereafter" (1989:15). Inevitably this has to do with a long history of isolation based on a local economy of subsistence, a situation Bjarne Stoklund described according to the Braudelian pattern of marginalization and periphery (1992). After being converted to Christianity in the year 1000, the Faroese were reformed at a distance and remained for a long time far away from continental influences (Cant 1984). The reformation in

the 16<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the unification of the administration of the state and the church into one territorial system<sup>vi</sup> and during the last centuries the monopoly of the Danish Crown regulated every kind of trade to and from the islands.

Somehow, this distance and the “religion of everyday life” probably explains why the islanders had a fierce reaction against the first missionaries who reached their islands. In a book in memory of the Scot, William Gibson Sloan (1838-1914)—the first missionary who founded the Plymouth Brethren in the northern Atlantic isles—it is stated that although the missionaries met with some success in the Shetlands, they had an extremely arduous time in the Faroes (Kelling 1993). During his first missions in 1876, the preacher was considered with suspicion and fiercely rejected when he baptized the first people in 1880 (*ibid*:139-148); his meetings attracted only a handful of curious people and he often had to confront both local populations and Danish ministers. The Brethren Community, settling in the Faroes for the first time in 1865, reached no more than 0.2% of the whole population in 1900. It was more or less the same for all other foreign missionaries; the Missionary Community, present in the islands since 1895, amounted to fewer than 70 persons in 1912. The Seventh Day Adventists started in 1893 with a little more success.

Compared to the later evangelical commitment by a huge part of the society, this disinterest toward asceticism and the suspicion *vis-à-vis* foreign missionaries depicts a curious and paradoxical contrast of attitudes. In less than half a century a substantial portion of the society radically changed, adopting new forms of Christianity that were rapidly acknowledged and re-created as a local cultural stance. In his study on the religious awakening of the Faroe Islands, Gerhard Hansen (1986) also pointed out these opposing attitudes of initial rejection and exaltation after 1920. For him it indicates a great change both in the religious and the social history of the Faroe Islands. Indeed, during the period that precedes the rise of conversions, between 1880 and 1910, some great transformations occurred in the society and people's minds.

At first, it is worth noting that the population increased remarkably. From the Middle Age to the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Faroese population remained relatively steady at around 3 to 4,000 inhabitants. After that the progression was rapid, from 8,000 in 1860 to 18,000 in 1911. Inevitably, the rise had major consequences for many diverse aspects of life: on the organization of kin groups and the solidarity within the unity of the villages; on participation in collective working tasks, mostly fishing and shepherding cooperation. These transformations notably modified the disparity between rich and poor people, even within a same kin group, accentuating also the apparition of almost “social classes”<sup>vii</sup>.

Secondly, the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also the right time for independent and pre-nationalist awakenings. Several factors were responsible for this, but with the end of the Danish monopoly and the possibility—and desire—of new economic perspectives, the growing numbers of young Faroese people studying in Denmark were progressively inspired by the national reconstructions they discovered in the Scandinavian world. When they came back to the Faroes, they nourished this desire for independence or, at least, sovereignty. Yet, at this time, the model of development in the Scandinavian societies rested on two foundations. Firstly a Christian ethos that had been growing since the pietistic movements, and secondly a cultural construction of Nordicism as a supreme, and enduring, reality able to bring together all the Scandinavian countries in one single common origin, distinct from the rest of Europe (Østergård 1997). But for the Faroe Islands, the path to follow between these two foundations had a narrow entrance. On one hand religion—and its representative church—was fully associated with the main tool of Danish control. Thus, inevitably, the independent Faroese process opposed (to varying degrees) the territorial church that was ruled by a Danish clergy who spoke Danish during services. Gerhard Hansen supposed that this point explained why, at first, the “independent process” was above all culturally and politically based, and turned its back on the religious aspects (1986). But, on the other hand, the process managed to build

very little on the foundation of Nordicism. Because of their lack of ancient literature, the Faroese suffered from a representation of illegitimacy in the eyes of Scandinavian history. Compared to their neighbours in Iceland, who were said to have maintained the original tongue, literature, and culture of the Vikings, the Faroese were seen—from the mainland—as people who, far from having preserved the original Norse inheritance, had let it degenerate (Pons 2009). For such a small colonized society, that had to build its self-representation through the eyes of the continental Scandinavian lands, this handicap was symbolically difficult to surmount. Many authors showed the complexity—but also the richness—of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which saw fights for the right to publish in the vernacular and to talk Faroese at school with native teachers. It was supported by a small intelligentsia and a nationalist association based in Denmark from 1881, that progressively appeared in the islands after 1888/89 (Wylie 1982, 1983, Wåhlin 1989, Debes 1995).

Lastly, this situation could explain that cultural self-affirmation, rather than proceeding through the Viking reference, followed the second path of the Scandinavian development, that which was founded on a Christian vision as the spiritual unit of Nordicism. After analysing the influence of this Christian concept in the process of the Enlightenment, Nina Witoszeck argued that it was a “founding tradition of Scandinavian cultures, based on the powerful, modifying presence of Christianity” (1997:73). One of the great figures was the Danish theologian Nicolai F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) who was known as the founder of the Nordic folk high schools (*föroya fólkaháskúli*) that became the cradle of nationalism and Nordic patriotism, first in Denmark in the early 1800s and afterwards in other Scandinavian countries. A follower of 18<sup>th</sup> century pietism, Grundtvig claimed that the fate of Christianity was to be decided in the North: “There was an inner unity between the spirit of God and the Nordic spirit, and he saw the Nordic nation in terms of ‘a new Jerusalem’” (Thorikildsen 1997:152). Though Grundtvig also supported references to the identity of Old Norse, his concept of “Nordic spirit” was more rooted in images of nature, of a small agrarian society and idealized values of the individualist but also of an egalitarian free peasant community. With some delay compared to other Scandinavian countries, Grundtvigianism gained some influence in the Faroe Islands where it had been introduced through the nationalist movement of the Faroese students in 1889. Later, a Grundtvigian folk high school was founded in 1899 that was to be an important step in the struggle for linguistic and cultural legitimacy. Among the foreigners who supported the Faroese claims was a Danish linguist and folklorist who played an important role: Svend H. Grundtvig (1824-1883), the son of Nicolai F.S. Grundtvig (Nauerby 1996). Little by little the movement, embedded in a reinvention of identity that was projected on to Christianity, nurtured the appearance of religious assemblies in the villages. Based on many of the same dissatisfactions as those experienced by the early Grundtvigian movement, these many indigenous assemblies sought to rescue the population from an indifference to religion and stressed the importance of “being a community”, of experiencing a cathartic and emotional conversion to Christianity. They announced a changing moral order that was the local way of seeking distance from a territorial church that was perceived to be too Danish. The reinvention of Faroese culture was then developing through the ideal of a local Nordic peasantry and a universal Christianity.

## 2. Reframing Society through Religious Congregations

### 2.1. From Individual to Congregation: Identity of the Self as a Commitment

Today, current members of Christian congregations often know the story of their oldest ancestor who was the first, in the family, to “meet God” and to pledge to follow him by building



a church in the village. Jogvan for instance, a Calvinist member of the Torshavn assembly of Brothers, reports that his grandfather was a notorious alcoholic whom no one trusted<sup>ix</sup>. However, overnight the grandfather vowed to stop drinking a single drop of alcohol. Nobody believed him. But he said the Lord had saved him and he soon joined the group of the very first Darbyites who founded the congregation of Brethren in a southern island. Those who, like Jogvan, have an ancestor among the pioneers who built the first churches are generally very proud of their heritage and gladly report what they know about it. Yet among denominations, and in particular the Brethren, the feeling of pride is not valued because it is a deviation from humility. In this case, Jogvan knows he has no reason to be proud of a grandfather he little knew. It is perfectly legitimate to respect him, but not to be proud of him or to gain some profit from him because he is his descendant. Jogvan explains that he must pay attention to this pernicious feeling; the idea that one may acquire respect and social prestige through filiation is a highly suspicious one. It opposes the morality according to which prestige can only be gained—and never claimed ostentatiously—by personal actions and attitude. Thus, for what is socially recognized and valued as a moral personal quality, any alien contribution that would come from someone else is perceived as a fraud.

Thereby we approach the complexity of feelings according to morality, the individual constantly questioning what is right or wrong not only to do, but also to feel and think. Within the individual's own Christian congregation, everything that comes from his parenthood is considered with suspicion precisely because it might be a source of pride that has not been acquired individually. Thus it might distract from a personal commitment to God, which is the only way to gain legitimate and valued social prestige and authority. In this way, this equilibrium of feelings means that people, families, and congregations have a complex relation to the notion of inheritance. At a social level, personal inheritances are depreciated in comparison to the collective heritage of the congregation. Indeed, the congregation's heritage is highly valued because it symbolizes the church, that is to say the gathering of believers in the name of the Lord. It is then legitimate to be proud of a centennial church that creates a piece of the kingdom of God on earth. In contrast, an individual's pride in his lineage does not refer to spiritual but temporal filiation. The short narratives that tell stories of the first converts illustrate this tense relationship between the temporal inheritance of lineage and the spiritual heritage of the congregation. Indeed, for the kin group, the short narratives are almost "family mythologies" that designate the starting point of the Christian identity of the whole lineage. Jogvan, like many other men in the congregation, inevitably feels proud of his grandfather and, after him, of his father who suddenly died, quite old, during a Sunday service right after having blessed the congregation and thanking the Lord for a faithful and good life. Almost immediately he tries to correct his feelings because this singular family pride should rather serve the unity of a "myth of origin" for the whole congregation. It is actually done elsewhere with a written compilation of short narratives that constitute a collective work tracing the adventures of a church, or the entire community of an island. In this way, these narratives of the early converts reflect the ambivalence of the concept of filiation, sometimes impaired when it concerns the temporal dimension of individuals and lineages, sometimes glorified when it relates to the spiritual dimension of the church and the realization of the whole community, i.e. all the congregations together. Ultimately, this means that independent congregations were immediately considered to be realities of a higher order supplanting any other reality, tradition and lineage.

Significantly, in the beginning, the small independent congregations started to enjoy some success by using the rhetoric of breaking away. Exactly like Jogvan's grandfather, each convert experienced a radical break, becoming a laudable man, a hard worker, a faultless and trusty person, a teetotaler. According to the contemporary Christian people, alcohol was at that time a plague that ravaged men and villages. Many peasants were said to have lost the little they had in alcohol. Aquavit consumption really caused dramatic poverty in the small northern

insular societies and in his book *Feðgar á ferð* (The Old Man and His Sons), Heðin Brú (1940) painted a picture of daily misery. Therefore, in a society that was undergoing profound changes, whose population had grown rapidly and where the disparities of wealth became more pronounced, it is not unlikely that Christian congregations also played—at village level—a Weberian role of creating and belonging to moral unities within which trade, loan, cooperation and sharing could be done in confidence and with less risk (Weber 1922, Wilson 1974).

However, the conversion of drunks has always been a “classic” evangelical proselytizing argument. One can find it in the Faroes as elsewhere since the 19th century, and still today the topic is massively used by neo-Pentecostals and contemporary born again Charismatics (Robbins 2003). It enhances the idea of radical transformation; unexpected conversions are always possible, even for those who wallow in sin. Thus it means that if the individual really wants to, he can escape from the worst through the discovery of the best to become, in the process, the living proof of the power and mercy of God. But the topic also refers to another essential concept, namely that the Christian identity is neither transferable nor heritable but must be intentionally desired in the choice of a personal commitment to God. This notion of commitment has little to do with salvation; “salvation” is more on a spiritual level while “commitment” engages people right now, in this temporal world. The Brethren, for instance, are Calvinist and consequently faithful to the doctrine of predestination. For them salvation is not given according to Christian behaviour, but depends on divine election which is unknowable to human beings. Though, the ignorance of what is going to happen in the last days does not mean that the individual should not behave as a Christian. On the contrary, the decision of being personally engaged in this world, as a Christian, in order to contribute to the work of God on earth, means that the individual is a true believer who does not only seek selfish salvation. Whereas the Home Missionaries are Lutherans, they share with the Brethren this notion of commitment. And for the Pentecostals, even if salvation could be personally decided on earth, in no way can it be transmitted or given by other men.

From a doctrinal stance, the fact that the individual cannot be Christian if he does not take the decision himself has several important implications. The community of believers—that is to say the church or the congregation—is supposed to be constituted of only those who decide to be a part of it. In other words, it is fully accepted by churchmen that children and disabled persons who cannot consciously make this choice cannot be part of the church. Moreover, everyone is free to make the other choice of not taking part in the congregation, of not personally committing oneself to God. It is of course a difficult choice and usually people prefer to adopt a passive and distant attitude (somehow becoming “secular”) instead of fully breaking down social ties with the congregation. Whatever the case, doctrinally the congregation should be not considered as bringing together all the descendants of all the pioneers who founded it in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century! But from a sociological stance, it is actually the case. Here the analysis of filiation and transmission within congregations underscores an important gap between the doctrinal ideal of change, and the sociological reality of continuity.

On the one hand, there is this great Utopia—almost for over a century—to create a new community that breaks with the flow and the past. For the individual as well as for the community, the Christian commitment must always be a rupture, a radical change experienced as a rebirth. When the first independent churches occurred, they were strongly nurtured by the idea of being of a higher order, of a divine reality supplanting any other realities such as traditions, lineages, and so on. The churches immediately perceived themselves to be essential references, achievements of God’s grace on earth, sometimes called pieces of “New Jerusalem”. But on the other hand, opposite to the ideal of change embedded in a personal commitment to God, the congregations are mostly composed of the lineages that come from the first founding members. Although the congregations wish newcomers to join them, for decades there have been few new conversions. Compared to the appeal of the neo-Pentecostals and the Charismatics, the influence of the Brethren and the Missionary congregations is now

decreasing. Consequently, both of these communities experience a high rate of membership reproduction from within the same congregations, from parents to children. In addition, as it was pointed out before, there is a dominance of endogamy which means that people from the Missionaries and from the Brethren have few relations. It is something that will change in the future; everyday teenagers are breaking down the barriers. But still today, marriage between Calvinists and Lutherans remains exceptional and, without doubt, it is easier to marry a secular than someone from another denomination. Though, the only “new blood” that enters a congregation comes from other congregations from other villages and islands, but of the same community.

### *To be or not to be baptized*

A shift that greatly affected the society, both doctrinally and sociologically, was the question of the baptism of infants. For the Brethren and more recently the Pentecostals, it is unthinkable to force someone to commit to God against their will. That means that baptism must not be done if the person is not mature enough to understand its meaning. It is probably difficult to represent what it meant, for other villagers, to reject a ritual that had become so important since the conversion to Christianity in 1000. Baptism was not only important as it protected newborns in the case of an early death, but also because it was the sacrament that symbolically transformed “alien newcomers”—babies—into human beings entering the social dimension of the living (Pons 2002). Through centuries, in each village of each island, baptism was the basis of the “everyday religion” described by Jóan Pauli Joensen (*op.cit.* 1989), and since the Reformation the first stage in a set of rituals (baptism, confirmation, marriage, funerals). Thus, baptism marked both individual biographies and the social time of collective life. The refusal of this sacrament quickly became a matter for controversy and the use of the word *babtistar* (baptists) was used to stigmatize the Brethren. Among the Brethren and the Pentecostals, baptism is usually decided during the teenage years while in the Lutheran churches teenagers are prepared for confirmation. The usual criticism Brethren and Pentecostals launch on the Lutherans is that, under the influence of secularization, the sacraments have lost their deep spiritual meaning: child christenings are almost like weddings, that is to say a family event without faith, and the rite of confirmation has become a party for teenagers seeking for presents. The desire to focus on the essence of faith required a return to a pure form, generally solitary, of being baptized. Usually the ritual is not even separated from a regular Sunday service. The immersion is done at the end of the service, and then the “new born Christian” is congratulated. But somehow, the most important element of baptism happened before the sacrament, when the young person faced alone the question of whether to choose God or not.

Zacharias, Jogvan's oldest son, told us about this proof of faith. Today Zacharias is a little more than twenty years old and can clearly recall his anguish. He was not even nine years old when he really began to think about the meaning of life and to fear the end of the world. For a long time, when he felt insecure, he prayed to the Lord and asked Jesus for help. It was what his parents and the congregation had always taught him to do. Usually it was beneficial; he felt extremely good after praying. He believed that Jesus heard and understood. But getting older, the issue of sins and of what actions and thoughts are forbidden became increasingly obsessive. At thirteen years old, Zacharias was frightened by the uncertainty of his salvation. Having no knowledge of what awaited him was unbearable. And gradually this uncertainty gave way to the certainty that, in the final days, he would not be of those whom God would save. This other perspective—of damnation—frightened him even more. From then on, he no longer wanted to go to church on Sundays. At school, he discovered that for other Christians it was slightly different. Among the pupils, his friends in the Missionary congregations said that their salvation depended on their behaviour on earth; they would go to heaven if they behaved as

Christians and did not kill. Zacharias did not believe in that. They were surely wrong. How could it be otherwise? How could men decide eternal salvation for themselves? That would be too easy. Salvation must be a decision of God. Zacharias thought that Lutherans were a bit naïve and very pretentious to imagine such a thing. But at the same time he had a double feeling of jealousy and injustice, and he felt even more ridiculous to envy them. At the same time he also discovered that there was a theory that explained the world and the creation without divine intervention. Darwin's theory of evolution was taught in school. But at the youth meetings of his congregation, on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, they talked extensively on this topic. Opinions were divided, sometimes with fierce reactions. The adult who led the debate tried to calm everybody down and to guide the debate in favour of creation. This was something Zacharias discerned very well and he worried that adults themselves were disturbed in their faith by evolution. But if the world was not the work of God, what was he himself? Nothing at all? Dust in the cosmos? Then, in fear of damnation and hell, Zacharias also became frightened of nothingness, the non-existence of God. Zacharias did not want to talk any more about this and stopped participating in the youth Christian meetings during the week. But on Sunday, when he joined his congregation at church he was submerged by his doubts: little by little doubt turned into anguish and arose in floods of tears he could no longer contain. It was worse at every service until he decided to tell his family that he would not return to the cult. His parents asked no questions. They only said they would respect his choice. But almost systematically, on the following Sunday, Zacharias returned to the congregation. How could he not go? He was used to going there every weekend since childhood. He knew everybody; all his friends were there, as well as his cousins, uncles, aunts and grandparents on both sides. The few times he respected his decision to not go, he was terribly bored. He saw his family enjoy this special excitement that he was no longer involved in. In the morning everyone was busy to get ready on time, well dressed and presented. His father left first with his little sister to attend Sunday school at 10 a.m. His mother, assisted by her stepmother, always woke up earlier to prepare the meal that would await them upon their return at 1 p.m. Everyone left the house by 10.45 a.m. for the service at 11 a.m. and Zacharias waited for them all. His mother returned first, probably because she knew he was alone at home. The family Sunday lunch was still going until at least 2 p.m., sometimes longer. Afterwards everyone was free to do what they wanted. Usually Zacharias liked to return to the Church at 6 p.m. The service was different from the one in the morning: more peaceful, it lasted for less time and had more songs. Zacharias took part in the choir with his parents. He was particularly fond of these Sunday evening after the service; people did not immediately return home. Many were still chatting and drinking tea. Then there was choir rehearsal which often dragged on, sometimes beyond 10 p.m. They sang and laughed together. To not participate in these meetings was, for Zacharias, a real hardship. But he wanted to respect his decision, as his parents had accepted his choice when he had told them. They just said they could not do anything for him and advised him to rely on the Lord.

One Tuesday evening, however, Zacharias returned to a youth meeting. That evening, the adult who spoke to them had chosen to deal with hell. Zacharias was petrified. He returned home and promptly fell on his bed where he could not restrain the tears that wanted to flow without interruption. His mother visited him in his room to comfort him. But as he pushed her away, she simply advised him to ask Jesus for help. "He is the only one who can help you," she said. Zacharias tried to think about him, but when he closed his eyes he saw nothing but flames. He then repeated several times without stopping, "Jesus save me, Jesus save me..." The fear gradually disappeared. Zacharias fell asleep. The following days when anxiety and doubt came again, he took refuge in praying to Jesus. Little by little he acquired the feeling that Jesus was really there and now Zacharias says that this short period of doubt gave him a taste of what life would be like without Jesus. A few weeks later, he decided to no longer entertain doubt. And Jesus was there to protect him against it. Then Zacharias decided to be baptized at the age of 16. His parents told him they were very happy. They were also very proud but they did not tell

him. A week after being baptized Zacharias was once again seized, in a totally unexpected manner, by distressing doubts. He could not stop thinking that his conversion was the fruit of his environment, his education, his parents. He was worried that everything had been arranged since his birth for him to meet Jesus. This time he decided to be stronger than the doubts and to fend off the nagging question of the actual existence of God.

One week later he finally had the profound feeling of being victorious, of having resisted these evil thoughts, the temptation to move away from God. Since that time, Zacharias says he has not experienced similar doubts. He is certain that God has accepted him among his people.

## 2.2. The Ambivalent Mimesis of the Brethren and Missionary Communities

The Brethren and Missionary communities enjoy a surprising symmetry wherein each seems to have modelled itself on the other. First, as we have already noted, they share an extraordinary similarity in statistical terms: but for a few exceptions, they both number around thirty congregations spread across the same thirty villages. They also settled the Faroe Islands in about the same historical periods, and according to the same rate. After some difficult times in the late 19th century, the two religious influences grew stronger in the first few decades of the 20th century, enjoying a boom in the 1920s. Gradually the villages split into two distinct groups of Christians that would differ from the rest of the population by their ascetic morality. Both strove to live in strict observance with what is said in the Holy Scriptures. Inevitably this led to a withdrawal into one's self; by attending the same service every weekend, close links were forged between members of the congregation and people quickly developed a separate sociability that overlapped with networks based on friendship, work and kinship. In sum, the Weberian process of ties and relations strengthened by belonging to a church clearly operated here (Weber 1920). However, because this phenomenon occurred in villages and not in urban settings, this Weberian pattern needs to be qualified. It could be said that a strict separation from the rest of the society has always been more theoretical than real, especially for the Missionary community which remained in the dominant Lutheran state church. In addition, they have always maintained close ties with the whole of society. Comparatively, the Brethren distanced themselves more from society, and developed more internal links through politics, productivity spheres, and marriage exchanges between congregations.

The two communities had in common their opposition to the Danish Crown and the territorial Lutheran Church that was the Crown's main tool of control. However, only the Brethren really broke away, going so far that they constrained themselves to a withdrawal that was "marked symbolically" with the rejection of infant baptism. On the contrary, the Missionaries were historically less radical but more ambivalent towards colonial power. Brethren and Missionary congregations were born of a desire for democracy within the church. They sought a direct relationship with God wherein they could talk freely to him in their native language and not be subjected to the hierarchical authority of a Danish clergy that reserved for itself the right to speak and pray in the Danish tongue. The influence of Grundtvigian religious thought allowed for this prospect. Thus missionaries developed new congregations that allowed free and specifically Faroese religious expression. "Among themselves", they could speak, give testimony, deliver a sermon, sing psalms, and pray the way they wanted. These new congregations were not much different from those that developed simultaneously with the Brethren, but they could not be confused with the buildings of the national church. Therefore, exactly like the Brethren, the Missionaries built their own separate buildings. Today the Missionaries all have their own separate Lutheran worship spaces, except for the congregation in Argir<sup>x</sup> which meets in the national church of the village. However, since the Missionaries remain institutionally linked to the state church, they do not have distinctive clerics and therefore do not perform any services or sacraments on Sunday. Historically their primary

action was to lead the evangelization within the country, that is to say, mostly take over the Sunday catechism (called "Sunday school") that is taught to children, while their parents are expected to attend the service at 11 a.m.

In fact, while the number of children who attend catechism on Sunday is very high in the Faroe Islands (including both those from the Missionary congregations and ordinary members of the National Church), the rate of adults who regularly attend worship is much more restricted. Indeed, among the members of National Church, more and more of them adopt the secular way of only attending church for special events<sup>vi</sup>. Curiously, however, the Missionaries no longer regularly attend the Sunday service. Even if they are more faithful than ordinary Church members, their participation remains low compared to their attendance of the second "service" that takes place, later in the afternoon, in their own building. Indeed, usually at 4 p.m., they gather for worship without a pastor. Formally, because of their leaderless mode of organization, the worship resembles very closely what is practised on the other side of the street, among the Brethren. The collective dimension of the congregation is highly enhanced. The absence of a minister accentuates the autonomous relationship of each believer with God. Everyone is encouraged to take part in the collective performance of worship by preaching freely, giving testimony, reading, praying... So, similar to the Brethren, the practice of sincere devotion is measured in terms of spontaneous collective improvisation. However, this ideal of "freedom" is not always practical and often a minimal amount of planning is required in order to clarify in advance who gives sermons and on what topics, and thereby avoiding awkward silences. Though, delivering publicly a sermon or engaging oneself in the exegesis of a scripture is neither fortuitous nor accessible to everyone. This significant act clearly distinguishes those who do it. Although this planning should always remain relatively loose to not lock out spontaneity. Therefore, this congregational form of organization, which is deliberately communitarian, is a classic model of the dissident assemblies of believers and it is particularly amazing to see it at work among the Lutherans. In this curious way, they become "Lutherans without shepherds" while remaining linked to their national orthodox church by a stunning form of loyalty.

This ambivalent relationship to the State church also attests to an ambiguous approach toward Danish colonial power. On one hand the desire for autonomy motivated the Missionary project, while on the other the Missionaries were inspired by a Danish religious movement. This paradoxical, almost "schizophrenic", attitude perfectly illustrates this trait of pusillanimity that Wåhlin noted in the nationalist movement that occurred in 1888: "both the nationalist leaders and the majority of the people, in spite of daily complaints, generally respected the efficiency, honesty and benevolence of Danish rule [...]. The worst enemies of the Faroese were and still are the Faroese—not the Danes in power in Copenhagen" (1989:22, 30). Conversely, acknowledging a non-Scandinavian Calvinist influence coming from Scotland, the Brethren willingly distanced themselves and developed a series of distinctive marks of change that Missionaries have, in turn, almost symmetrically reproduced.

A first key marker of change by the Brethren was the translation of the New Testament into the vernacular by Victor Danielsen in 1937. Just a few weeks later the Lutherans published another translation, by Jákup Dahl, that was authorized by the Faroese Church. The "translation race" continued in the following years with the translation of the Old Testament in 1949 by Danielsen (Brethren) and in 1961 by Dahl and Kristian Osvald Viderø (Missionaries). While being doctrinally legitimate (Danielsen's translation of the New Testament was based on modern languages whereas Dahl's translation was based on the original Hebrew text), this competition of two opposed forces standing up to each other strengthened their respective senses of belonging.

A second common and dividing characteristic was their approach to evangelization. The Brethren became a guiding model for overseas missions: today many Faroese Brethren missionaries, often adult couples with children, are doing humanitarian and Christian work in

churches all over the world. They therefore take great pride in these numerous missions. Many are appointed by international networks like New Tribe Mission and Operation Mobilization. Photographs with names of the missionaries are usually pinned on a large mural world map and are exhibited in the entrances to congregational buildings. Unlike the Brethren, the Missionary congregations have focused on evangelization at home; they too have a lot of people doing this kind of work but mostly in the Faroes. However, since 2000, they have been sending people abroad. They have other networks, such as "Youth with a Mission" and "Lutheran Mission" in Denmark, and some other structures generally from Scandinavia.

Finally, these distinctive identities and policies were accompanied, not surprisingly, by opposing political affiliations that are still relevant today. Brethren tend to support the Self-Government Party or Separatist Party (*Sjálvstýrisflokkurinn*) whereas Missionaries favour the Unionist Party (*Sambandsflokkurinn*) which wants to maintain the Faroe Islands' union with Denmark.

### *Internal organizations*

All the congregations, whether Brethren or Missionary, are independent from each other. Historically they were founded separately and today they remain independent on many different issues: finance, doctrine, organization, liturgy and so on. This autonomy sometimes describes large disparities even within a same community. For example, there are some important liturgical interpretations among the Brethren that are hugely different from one village to another. It is usually presented as a matter of "style". For instance, do the elders authorize, or not, the presence of women at the Sunday morning service? Do they allow them, or not, to preach in public? Do they accept, or not, new lyrics and musical instruments (electric guitars, drums....) during the service... The list of topics that may be an issue of "style" is quite long.

Since these congregations are leaderless (without a pastor), the executive power of decision resides, apart from a few exceptions, in the hands of a board of elders that is strictly male and generally comprises around ten persons. Somehow, this council—which is the upper level of a concentration of power—betrays the communitarian ideal where everyone should participate in a collegial way of life as soon as they enter the congregation. That also explains why people are always a little embarrassed when they have to talk about this leadership system to someone who does not belong to the congregation like, for instance, an anthropologist. It is indeed a delicate issue that enhances the undemocratic, inegalitarian, and untransparent characteristics of how their organizations are ruled. However if people—especially the Brethren—dislike talking about their organization, it is because the topic leads to a lot of misunderstanding between them and people who do not belong to the denomination because, as they say, outsiders have difficulty understanding that certain persons occupy the position of "elder" for the simple reason that they are destined for the job and do what is best. In other words, autocratic organization might be a very good system if the leaders are morally strict and sincere. Here again we find, astonishingly, a similar organization among the Lutherans of the Missionaries community. Though, on this topic they are quick to distinguish themselves from the Brethren by stating that the identities of the elders of each Missionary congregation are officially known and accessible to anyone, at least in theory. Among the Brethren, in contrast, where the collectivist ideal of equality is paramount<sup>xii</sup>, it is unwarranted to say who the elders are or to designate someone as an elder. The contradiction between the concentration of power in very few hands on the one hand, and a communitarian ideal of equality on the other, sometimes causes embarrassment, especially during official exchanges with external institutions<sup>xiii</sup>.

At the national level of the whole community the organization is even vaguer but the congregations are linked together by two important phenomena. The first is a huge meeting held once, formerly twice, a year in Torshavn that brings together all the congregations. Today

it is often three days long but in the past it lasted a week; people worshipped, prayed, lectured, and the elders debated diverse issues. It was also the occasion for dinners and parties, and the opportunity for young people of different villages to meet each other. The second phenomenon is of great importance. It is a piece of land with some buildings on it that belonged to the whole community. This common heritage, called the *Zarepta*, has been collectively shared by the Brethren since 1965. Located in the centre of the archipelago of the Faroe Islands, the *Zarepta* is a vast complex of collective accommodation for several hundred individuals. It also enjoys a leisure infrastructure that makes it even more attractive (indoor pool, tennis courts, outdoor games, etc.). From June to September the *Zarepta* is fully occupied as a summer holiday resort for Brethren. It starts in June with the first weeks dedicated to young parents with babies. Then, week after week, schools of children come to the resort according to their age, from 9 to 17/18 years old. Children are supervised by older children so that children learn very quickly how to cooperate and assume responsibilities. Almost all of the Brethren children go to the *Zarepta* and most of them spend a few weeks there every summer from childhood. Mornings are for Bible studies and the afternoons are free; the evenings are for organized meetings and collective discussion about any subject. It is not a second Bible school but the aim is to get to know each other, to be part of a Christian spiritual family. The *Zarepta* is considered to be the house of this Christian family, and the most noteworthy feature is undoubtedly the general mode of organization which relies entirely on "symmetrical" joint management. The principle is that any person staying at *Zarepta* must be able to rest and have nothing to do but talk, live and share with their spiritual family. Thus, weekly residents are supported by a team of volunteers who handle everything, from meals to household chores and any other material and logistical issues. Later, these volunteers will take their vacation week at the *Zarepta* where, as guests, they will be served by other volunteers. During the winter, activity at the *Zarepta* calms down but the camp is still opened every weekend to host each of the diverse congregations in turn. This time, the principle of joint management operates between congregations, from village to village. For one weekend a congregation will be supported in the *Zarepta* by another congregation and, later in the winter, the supporting congregation will be the guest in the *Zarepta*.

The incredible success of the *Zarepta* can be considered to be a true performance by the Brethren of the "art of community", of living and being together. Undoubtedly this "art of community" caused some envy among the Missionary community. Indeed, Missionaries acquired a similar centre in *Nesvík*, located further north, but also in the centre of the archipelago. The place was turned into a complex similar to the *Zarepta*, where almost the same things are done but with a more formal organization. On a broader scale, this formal organization applies to the entire rule-system of the Missionary community: at the top there is a general board consisting of nine representatives who meet seven times a year. They deal with future projects, possible difficulties and the programme for the *Nesvík*. These board meetings are organized and led by a general secretary who, along with twenty-two other employees, is a full-time worker for the "national organization of the Missionary community" which is based in *Nesvík*. The *Nesvík* centre and its team depend on financial aid from the congregations and show no ambition govern over them. Their main activity is the *Nesvík* centre itself. But they may also be involved in various, more local, actions for the congregations and they also support the publication of the Missionary community newspaper, the *trúboðin*, that comes out two or three times a month. Somehow, the creation of the *Nesvík* centre was the opportunity not only to make up for lost time in comparison to the Brethren, but also—and maybe even more—to create greater distance from the National state church by recentralizing all the congregations around a new institutional hub.

### *The art of community*

The ideal of leaderless and collective organization looks like an "art of community" that depends on a delicate balance between the moderate participation of all the members; if they



do not participate sufficiently or if they take part to excess, they might cause unbalance and malfunction (Gullestad 1992). The *Zarepta* centre—and to a lesser extent the *Nesvík*—illustrates one of the finest expressions of this art of living together, among people who are supposedly equals in the life of the church, and according to the ideal of a typical 19th century Protestant sect. Especially in the Brethren case, the historical continuity through the generations of this art of community is particularly remarkable, also because it is supposed to work in everyday life. Therefore this “art” also addresses the question about what conditions are required to make it possible. On one hand the art of community is the result of a profound change due to the rise of free Protestant congregations in the Faroese villages; but on the other hand, curiously, it also recalls some long term “patterns” of sociability in these same villages (Pons 2009).

Indeed, it is relevant that the many diverse congregations laid down a new religious landscape that, far from the former unity of the territorial church, looked like a mosaic that remained in continuity with the traditional form of living that involved living in distinctive villages as units. From the time of the Vikings to the contemporary period, Faroese society has always been a collection of independent villages (Stoklund 1980). The traditional territorial division followed the boundaries of villages, in accordance with common grazing lands and collective fishing activities. One hundred villages (*bygdur*) composed the “indigenous construction of communities”, based on the mutualization of sheep farming and boat sharing (Hansen 1986: 310). As stated by many scholars, this continuity of pattern and a “strong sense of place” were not without negative effects on the entire country. On nationalism, Jóan Pauli Joensen suggested that many “Faroese used to belong more to their village than to the nation, which is also a sign of the incomplete production of the Faroese as a societal political entity” (Joensen, quoted by Bærenholdt 2006: 8-9). On an economic level, concerning policies for village or local development (*bygdmenning*), “people from one village were reluctant to pay taxes to a municipality that also, or primarily, made investments in other villages” (Hovgaard et al. 2004:15). Religious configuration remained until recently quite similar, i.e. congregation membership was structured along the lines of a communitarian village within a village, that is to say, overlapping with familial, political and business bonds. Therefore, contiguity between the process of the emergence and the development of congregations, the original pattern of settlement in the islands, and the persistence of a village policy, is neither fortuitous nor metaphoric. It is evidence of a continuity in history, and bears witness to the fact that the Faroe Islands were a fertile ground for the communitarian social organization of the Protestant free congregations or sects. Most sociological studies on the Faroe Islands have highlighted this perpetuation of social relations that are densely centred on narrow territories (Hovgaard 2002). It leads us to a second point of unexpected long term continuity, associated with expected social behaviours.

The Christian art of living together in congregation is also contiguous with a traditional communitarian way of life. For instance, scholars have stressed that the ideal of the Faroese community finds its most remarkable expression in the practice of whaling (*grindadráp*). The hunting of pilot whales (*Globicephala melaena*), which has long been a crucial subsistence and culturally meaningful practice, illustrates the specifically egalitarian Faroese organization. Schools of whales are sighted offshore and then driven into bays by small fishing boats where they are slaughtered. The whole process requires great organization and division of labour. Spoils are distributed equally to all participants, even to villagers who do not participate. There is no commercial profit made from these hunts and the general share of meat and blubber includes old people and those with disabilities. Regarding such a general distributive system, Dennis Gaffin argued that the complex exchange of *grindadráp* is testament to the whole Faroese mechanism, whereby the communal institution helps to maintain social order. The same process is found with shepherding, which is also partly communal. The shepherds elect one person, a “sheepman”, to be the primary caretaker of the sheep and of fencing for their area. But “leadership rotates, in typically Faroese unauthoritarian, egalitarian style” (Gaffin

1996:51). Gaffin, who specifically studied those aspects of village (*bygd*) organization, argued that common property institutions make for high demands on conformity and austerity, and little competition for prestige within the predominantly egalitarian order (1995). As a general consideration, he stated that “there is little differentiation in economic standing among people of the same age. (...) every house and car resembles others in size and quality, and no man or family stands out as wealthier or poorer than the next” (1996:28). In short, Gaffin’s observations accredited that living together without provocation, by avoiding delicate topics that might result in conflict, is a long historical Faroese ability that one can find both among congregation members and in society as a whole. Often Faroese people acknowledge this point but refute the idea that it could be cultural, explaining that it is only because they are very few and that living together in such a small place requires them to neutralize conflicts. This causal explanation does not work at all. It is easy for anthropology to collect examples that give evidence to the contrary: small societies regulating conflicts by confrontation, fighting, and feuding<sup>xiv</sup>. Somehow, the question is less about wondering if conflicts are neutralized and more about knowing how they are expressed.

### 3. Prestige and transgression of individual identities

#### 3.1. Being a "good man"

A recurring feature in the history of the Faroese congregations is their tendency to deal with internal splits that usually lead, after a while, to the creation of a new congregation. As we may suppose now, these creations often happened “quietly”, as a “best solution” for everyone. Considered through generations, the process of split and creation is fairly conventional in the sense that it is often the usual way for community expansion. In fact, the schismatic process is not considered to be bad. Instead, it is perceived as a normal phenomenon. Subdivision is healthy when a church reaches a critical size and gets too big. Moreover, it is an answer to temporal arguments between men, but remains also consistent with the Gospel’s order to go forth and multiply. There is little doubt that the origin of splits has often to do with an attempt by some people to exercise domination over some other people. It is a classic story. It is typical of the history of the Pentecostal Church since the 1920s in the Faroe Islands as in many other places. But among churches that are based on a leaderless organization, the attempt of subdivision may appear as a threat to the fragile balance of the congregation. This is particularly true in the villages where sometimes the symbolic authority within the congregation overlapped with political and economic power. Without doubt many divisions originated in such confrontations. But a conflict usually needs a catalyst to create the split. Once again people will not confront or publicly accuse each other and it is very rare for people to say explicitly that a split occurred because certain men were unable to bear others. However, division often comes from a theological, a doctrinal, or a liturgical issue; matters of “style” and modes of relation to God and his son Jesus have recently provoked a lot of radical positions and splits, especially in favour of the neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Therefore it is tempting to look at doctrinal issues as pretexts for social expression. In other words, the real issues would be more pragmatically related to power, politics, economics, kinship, and so on, but the way to get out of them would be to argue and fight on doctrinal topics. This hypothesis is probably not false, and it must be kept in mind for any future analysis. Nevertheless, we must not reduce religion to a simple expression of social relationships. If we did, we would likely exclude the indigenous discourse when people say that it is actually controversial points of theology that divide people. As is pointed out by many people, this is especially true since the last neo-evangelical revival, in

the 1980s, when a large proportion of Christians called for a new relationship with Jesus. Consequently, it seems particularly important to note that religious integrity is, in the Faroe Islands, a true and essential reference for many people, a standard for self-respect and the respect of others. The image of this religious integrity is the ideal type of the "good man".

The "good man" (*góður maður*) is an indigenous concept referring to highly respected social values. It is at first a religious conception particularly embedded in the spirit of the congregation, but hugely extended into civil society. We have already evoked the profile of the good man through Jogvan, Zacharias, the elder, the personal commitment to God, and the complexity of the right feelings and actions. Among the Brethren and the Missionaries, saying about someone that he is a "good man" implies recognition of his high Christian morality. In fact, this quality is never officially ratified; it is not a status but a collective appreciation of the congregation towards individuals, according to their compliance with an exemplary set of attitudes of mind, behaviour and action. The typical profile of a "good man" is a *pater familias*, who is married, has children, is a hard worker, a good speaker and active in his church. His sermons are fair and faithful to the Scriptures. He is sincere when he gives testimony<sup>v</sup>. In sum, he endorses the qualities of a "shepherd" able to guide, who knows his surroundings, able to listen to others and to lead them if necessary. These qualities are acquired at an early age through a Christian education, dispensed gradually, that focuses on moral accountability, sincerity of feelings, and honesty in the personal relationship with God. Jogvan and his son Zacharias gave us a primary illustration of this subtle category of honour. They were both concerned with the same morality of not only doing the right thing, but also being motivated by the right feelings. For Zacharias, going through a bad time of doubt was essential to the construction of his own identity as a "good man". It was an empowerment process in which he had to make the right choice for his personal commitment to God. One remembers that his parents left him alone with his fears. They only advised him to look for Jesus's help. This proof of faith was a founding moment that Zacharias had to cross alone. Even if they said nothing, the parents were undoubtedly very proud of Zacharias who finally overcame the evil temptation of doubt. Families and all the congregation members have to accept that their child may fail when facing this test of personal commitment. They know full well that some of them will not succeed and will even take a step backward into the secular world. And, basically, this is perfectly normal. People are not equal in their spiritual commitment to God. They are not equal either in their temporal Christian actions. By recognizing and identifying the "good men", the congregation accepts to respect people according to their faith and actions in the temporal world.

Interestingly, the status of "good man" should not be deliberately sought to gain social recognition. The status is quite subtle, or ambivalent, because on one hand the "good man" must not have any ambition for himself, or desire for a leadership position, but on the other hand men who possess those qualities of humility are often asked to be an elder, i.e. to take this prestigious seat that gives individuals a very high social prestige. However, it remains socially unthinkable to be proud of this authority or to behave haughtily. The "good men", elders or whoever else, must stay humble and listen attentively to the people; this accessibility confirms their hierarchical position. But every "good man" is not elder. A "good man" may also occupy various positions within the congregation and also being a simple ordinary man of high value. But an important point to note is that, within a leaderless congregation where everyone is equal in their commitment to God, the distinction of "good man" cannot refer to inherited qualities, or be acquired by filiation to social status or financial power. Nobody can be the heir of a "good man". The status of "good man" refers to prestige individually earned through personal actions. It is not an election but a talent that the individual gains according to his adherence to an ideal type of religious morality. And within the congregations, "good men" always encourage other people to experience the same type of encounter with God they experienced themselves, and to nourish it through a personal and exemplary relationship that is similar for everyone.

Therefore, it is important to stress that the spiritual relationship with God is developed in “conformity” with everyone else.

It is significant that this highly respected concept of “good man”, that combines both criteria of distinction and of conformity, is relatively popular in islands that are ruled by a communitarian organization, with no hereditary chiefs but a collegial governance operating within the segment of a village unit. And from that perspective, it is particularly tempting to compare the Faroese “good man” with the “big man” of Melanesian societies. At first, the “big man” also acquired power through his own merits. His prestige was not inherited and, in principle, not heritable. This merit comes from the superiority he has shown in carrying out various actions (Godelier 1996:254). Secondly, as suggested by Marshall Sahlins, this type of figure arises more frequently in “free societies hereditary chiefs, leaderless, composed of a number of local groups, equal in political terms, managing for themselves their material resources and labour power” (Sahlins quoted by Godelier *op.cit*, 255). In short, societies that are structurally close to the organization of Faroese villages segmented by religious congregations, a pattern relatively unusual in a European context<sup>vi</sup>. We know that the anthropological pattern described by Sahlins was widely criticized. However, the analogy between “big man” and “good man” may suggest, at least, that some specific social organizations produce specific forms of social prestige. And, from this viewpoint, it is reasonable to suppose that a continuity exists from the very traditional organization of segmental units (lineages in the village) to the invention of religious communitarian membership at the beginning of 20th century (Pons 2009). But we must not overuse the analogy, especially since the “good man” cannot become more important than the congregation.

A major distinctiveness between “big man” and “good man” is that the former always seeks to increase his authority and social prestige by distributing gifts and goods to the individuals around him. And some time later the people he favours will have to directly give back to him some goods according to the very well-known principle of *don contre-don* (Mauss 1950). Therefore the dominating power of the “big man” depends on his distributive capacity: his prestige is proportional to his capacity to make others indebted to him (Godelier 1996). The “good man” is not only different because he is supposed to remain an exemplar of morality and not increase his power, but also because within his congregation he does not exist as an individual but as a member of the community. The prestige he gains never comes from the personal relationships he develops with individuals, but from the collective approbation of the whole community. Within the congregation he belongs to, the “good man” is less an individual man and more a piece—an exemplar—of a highly considered category: elder, missionary, preacher, and so on. But interestingly, seen from this viewpoint, the last revival of the neo-Evangelicals introduced a real shift: indeed, the figure we call Friend of Jesus is curiously closer to the concept of “big man” than to that of “good man”.

### 3.2. The last revival or the revenge of the failed “good men”

The Friend of Jesus’s activism, which was briefly depicted in the introduction, is now a topical and stunning success far beyond the small society of the Faroe Islands. Indeed, throughout the world, Jesus has become an intimate partner for a growing number of people. To date, he has probably never forged so many mystical alliances with so many individuals from societies so diverse and distant from each other. Today, they are millions who claim to be “married” to him, to talk and listen to him, and to see and enjoy him every day of their lives, insisting that he lives among them. It is therefore a global “mystical crisis”, but somehow of a “second type” compared to the classical Christian history of the Mystics (Pons 2009b). In this instance it is not an abstraction by which the individual is spiritually absorbed by God, but a relationship with an anthropomorphized entity that becomes a partner, a friend, a fellow, even sometimes a lover. In all cases, this partner is fully accessible to all; he is no longer the

frightening image of the father but a protector who reveals the individual to himself in his lifetime. Somehow, this is not completely new: there has always been with Jesus an ambivalent entity that is both human and divine, when Christianity asserted itself in the 2nd century as a different approach to monotheism. However in recent times, during the 20th century, this aspect of the Christian religion was subject to a remarkable influence especially within Protestantism (Daiber 2002, Troeltsch 1911) which saw the emergence of a third wave of neo-evangelical churches: the Pentecostals and the Charismatics.

In the Faroe Islands this “mysticism for all” progressively entered the society with the rise of the Friends of Jesus who were significantly perceived to be the expression of a major break in history. Contrary to what had occurred in earlier periods of religious revival that gave birth to the Brethren, the Missionaries and even the first generation of Pentecostals, the change was this time associated with social processes of transgression that nurtured the invention of a new social prestige. Indeed, the alliance with Jesus allowed people to behave in unexpected and upsetting ways, breaking the social codes that had long existed in the society. Because of his alliance with Jesus, the individual can distance himself from his congregation. He is no longer of lesser importance in comparison to the Church. If God orders him to accomplish a larger project through his son Jesus, it means that he is highly relevant and even may be more important than the church. This focus on the individual is a change that makes a great difference. The individual has no alternative other than to accept God’s will, and no one will blame him for that. Therefore, the effect induced by the mystical alliance is quite paradoxical because on the one hand the individual is extremely dependent on divine authority but, on the other, this extra-submission to God allows him to break out from social coercion. Quite explicitly, the individual becomes God’s possession. He confesses his weakness by considering that God knows better what is right for him. He accepts to give his life to Jesus who will use it wisely. In exchange, the individual knows that he will not burn in hell and that his soul will be saved for eternity. But beyond this spiritual investment in the after life, he also obtains a few earthly advantages. He is freed from the material constraints that dominate life down here. He realizes the true value of things. He asserts his own profound nature in opposition to the social identities and statuses assigned to him from outside. This idea of releasing the “original self” is quite clearly formulated—and highly prized—by born-again Christians: in the alliance with Jesus, they say they are finally free to do what they want. Consequently, there is a great difference between this idea of the liberation of the original self and the commitment to God we talked about earlier with Zacharias. But the gap is actually less of a doctrinal issue than the daily exercise of life. In practical terms Friends of Jesus are born again to themselves. This indicates that this “new Jesus alliance” is the fruit of modernity in the sense that it comes from this process of subjectification through which the individual thinks about himself independently from his group. It is a process of individuation that progressively first occurred in Western countries with modernity, and that settles now little by little all around the world (Taylor 1989). In religion this process often modifies personhood. It is associated with the fantasy of entry into modernity and the theological discourse of personal success. It is seen as an anthropological phenomenon that induces substantial global changes in the traditional concept of the person (Robbins 2003a). But from the “modern individual” point of view, this autonomy gives to the individual the opportunity to act newly in the world, in a way that was unthinkable for the “good man” who remained locked into his status. The Friend of Jesus believes he can do what he wants so long as he is acting as a servant of God. Since then, the Friends of Jesus’s “revolution” has undoubtedly provoked dramatic changes in local Faroese society.

One of the first major dissents in relation to social norms was to be a proselyte. Until now, during the summer festive season, Friends of Jesus from various churches and faith movements gave public testimony about their encounter with Jesus. Sigurð, for instance, regularly participates in this active evangelization that consists of talking directly to people, and not to wait for them to enter a church. Sigurð is now about fifty years old. He says that he really

met Jesus when he was at university in Denmark and Austria. Like many other young persons when they travel outside the islands, he took the opportunity of being abroad to attend many churches of diverse denominations. Originally Sigurð was a Brethren like his parents and his grandparents from his mother's side. He belonged to a small congregation in a village of Streymoy Island. When he returned home, he was initially very welcomed by his congregation. Sigurð said to his fellows that he was changed and that he wanted to actively be involved in the congregation. He proposed to be in charge of the organization of youth meetings and he did it. At the beginning he was widely encouraged but, as he says, relations gradually deteriorated as the work proceeded. Sigurð was pushed by a wind of change that brought him to make more and more proposals in order to develop the actions of his congregation: making the service more attractive by inserting new songs and instruments, and so on. But he did not even realize that he was progressively changing habits, and thus became a threat for the congregation. Finally his temporal commitment to the congregation, that would normally lead him to become an elder, was working in the opposite way. But what could the congregation really criticize him for? Certainly not what actually was the problem, namely his excessive investment in the congregation in comparison to the norm. The first remarks of disapproval began to spread. Soon after, he withdrew from the responsibility of youth meetings. Sigurð was very affected by this decision. At this point he started to distance himself from the congregation and took part in other actions that led him elsewhere, out of his congregation. He met a group of young people, not yet dissidents, who were in a similar position with their Missionary congregation on Esturoy Island. They were organizing an evangelical camp during the summer. The phenomenon relied on a pattern of summer concert festivals and gained a rapid success in the 1980s. Motivated by this new medium, Sigurð became even more proselytistic. He decided to display on his house, located in the heart of the village, a large sign on which he wrote in big letters "Jesus loves you!" This symbolic act immediately provoked disapproval from his Brethren congregation: some of the elders visited him at home and asked him to take the sign down. In the Faroe Islands, people do not proselytize at home but abroad where the Brethren community sends its troops of missionaries<sup>viii</sup>. In the village, however, excessive zeal was frowned upon: with secularization it is contrary to the principle of social conflict avoidance, and with Christians it appears to be a provocation against competing churches. Except during the service of worship, only proselytizing by example is locally acceptable. It means that here again we turn back to prized values of the "good man": while remaining discreet and humble, the "good man" must make people want to be like him through his behaviour. Therefore, nothing like the excitement of the spirit of conquest of the Friends of Jesus who practised in the villages what was then being done in foreign lands. Subsequently, they did not stop there. Now they walk on Saturday nights in the streets to encourage people to stop drinking, following them sometimes even into pubs. Sigurð finally left the Brethren in the late 1980s. He was then joined by some other dissidents, for the most part his direct relatives. With the dissenting group of Missionaries, they founded a new church, officially without denomination but largely inspired by the Swedish faith movement *Livets ord*.

Since then, the Friends of Jesus claim with immodesty that they love people and want to help them do their best. Again, if the substance is Christian, the form irritates the traditional congregations. And one of the causes of the irritation is their success. During the following decade, many Lutherans, Calvinists and Seculars joined the meetings of the first faith movements, the Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches. They organized new types of meetings around foreign guest preachers. These collective acts of worship are for large but diverse audiences. Gradually, the way of attending the meetings also changed the way of belonging to the churches. For a new generation it is now possible to be curious and nomadic by attending various cults in many churches. This new form of belonging—or of not belonging—to a congregation is the result of the partner relationship with Jesus. Because Jesus is currently with him, the Friend of Jesus no longer needs to take root in a community of believers. The

church, therefore, is no longer this reality of a higher order as it was formerly, an island of the kingdom of God on earth. In the view of a Friend of Jesus, this vision of the congregation is now changing from a church to a network, a school mission, a Christian Facebook page or whatever else that may serve as a sporadic means with which to advance his career as a Friend of Jesus. In the end, the goal is to work on a divine plan that, with globalization, is supposed to have no borders.

Thus, compared to the “good man”, if the Christian morality remains almost the same, the Friend of Jesus affirms a temporal authority that has also changed his vision. He now exceeds the boundaries of the village and the archipelago, supposedly ready to leave his church to serve elsewhere a broader mission as a new apostle. Jesus, in turn, gains a faithful soldier ready to serve him and to engage in the Christian battle. Indeed, the terminology has also changed; war metaphors are now widely-used. Jesus is a captain who brings together troops for the total victory of the kingdom of God on earth. He has chosen each one of his friends, and entrusts them with the mission that God has decided for them. And this is how the individual acquires a new social power and prestige. By engaging the public to follow him, by telling the public about his intimacy with Jesus, the issue of his individual distinction rests on his ability to make conversions, that is to say to redistribute the grace he has himself received from the Holy Spirit (Coleman 2004). In this anthropological gift system, the gift is the grace given by the Holy Ghost through the alliance with Jesus, and the Friend of Jesus gives back this gift through evangelization. By distributing this grace he earns a new social prestige, a “charisma” that allows him to compete for ministry leadership. Now this challenge properly recalls the social prestige acquired by the “big man” through the system of giving goods and wealth.

## Conclusion: Ideal Type, Continuity and Changes

In this paper, I aimed to understand the Faroese society through the fringes of its religious configuration, questioning what has been in the past the local uses of Christianity, and how asceticism came to the Faroe Islands. Originally, the adherence to ascetic Christian movements—both Lutheran and Calvinist—was a local reaction against colonial power. On this point, the situation in the Faroe Islands demonstrates how much the country was embedded in a Scandinavian matrix wherein it needed to use a religious revival to create an identity and independency; it is basically a “classic” of many colonial contexts. But beyond labelling the process as a “generic pattern”, I have tried to capture a series of distinctive features that enhance the contrasting local and cultural dimensions. First, the religious revival was not homogeneous but led to a division of the society into many autonomous congregations, each one forging strong ties of sociability, productivity and kinship. Somehow the process recalls the Weberian development of Protestant sects but at a village level, this being due to major sociological and demographic transformations. The congregations were remarkably numerous for such a small society and were quickly organized around two main poles, the Calvinist and the Lutheran, each one “federating” all its congregations into its community networks. It is probably here, at the level of this local construction of congregations and communities, that cultural singularities best reveal themselves. Among these, I tried to identify some aspects that may also serve as clues for the anthropology of Faroese society. For instance the Utopian ideal of leaderless organization that indicates a very ambivalent relationship with domination and power, and that leads to a surprising way of “living together” involving conflict avoidance. Also, interestingly, the moral complexity of feelings, especially compared to what people inherit: is personal filiation right? Can we—do we have the right—to be proud of a symbolic or material inheritance? Of course there is here the weight of a Calvinist asceticism that is now well established. But beyond this influence, there is also the concept that the community is of higher importance than the

individual. The autonomy and responsibility of the individuals as members of a congregation are major features that recall the themes of honour and shame, topics that were long associated with the anthropology of the Mediterranean but who find in the Faroe Islands a second breath. The ethnography was mostly based on profiles, drawn from the Brethren congregation, that illustrate these model notions of voluntary choice and personal commitment that are embodied in the ideal type of the “good man”. Finally I emphasized the uniqueness of these characteristics, showing they were partly of long-term continuity. In some ways, the extreme model of the sects/congregations that was invented in the early 20th century tells us a lot about social equity across the whole of Faroese society. And curiously, continuities also revealed themselves when they suddenly stopped under the effect of a change: the rise in the number of Friends of Jesus. But still there is, again, continuity in this anthropological phenomenon of change: the break away by the Friends of Jesus emphasizes the importance of religion in the process of constructing individual identities, and belies the expected phenomenon of disenchantment.

A Friend of Jesus only exists as an ideal type that helps us to understand a new use of Christianity that came to the Faroes and constituted a real break away. Of course, the deep introspection of a relationship with the divine is not, in the Faroe Islands, a recent invention of the last decades. In the late 19th century conversions occurred within an intimate and enthusiastic experience of the divine presence. Individuals who were not considered as believers said they were suddenly touched by grace, changed their life and joined the first Darbyites or Lutheran congregations. Their social statuses were profoundly modified as they occupied new places within the hierarchies of “good men”, which slowly emerged into the villages. Thus, the novelty of contemporary times is neither the collusion between religion and social prestige, nor the profound side of introspection that leads to the divine. The actual novelty is, on the one hand, the growing autonomy of the individual who is now distancing himself from a religious congregation; it is not that he is without church but rather that he adopts a nomadic behaviour, free to attend several churches over his lifetime. In comparison, the “good man” was affiliated to his congregation for life, almost in an organic way. On the other hand, the distance from the church is also accompanied by a relative distance from God the Father, in favour of a stronger personal commitment to Jesus the son. In short, both on spiritual and temporal levels, the dissent alliance *per se* is supplanting a civilized affiliation to the congregation.

For the anthropology of Christianity in the Faroe Islands, some of the major effects of this change put new future perspectives and questions on the agenda. First, traditional congregations have been forced to re-evaluate themselves. They realized they could not be the same for ever but that they should take note of the innovations introduced by the Friends of Jesus, especially if they wanted to stop the outflow of the young generations increasingly attracted by new forms of devotion. But by doing so, they also introduce a new vulnerability and provoke debate. In particular, the issues of charisma and leadership. Significantly, the leaderless organization is often threatened, even among the Brethren where new hybrid organizations, with pastors, are now emerging. The issue of “style” is also a sensitive subject. In the past, liturgical points of doctrine were of high importance, especially around those related to baptism. Today the debates have moved toward a matter of “style”. The concept of style is unclear but essentially refers to what every church agrees to incorporate—or not—as a novelty in rituals; it mostly concerns music. The issue of gender arises too with women's claims for independence. The concept of “good man”, that we have outlined above, focused formerly only on men but women are also participating in the alliance with Jesus and this leads them to new social and clerical aspirations. All of this, consequently, forces the congregations to question themselves and their future, which is obviously a source of dissension and possible splits. The current period is therefore characterized by a great agitation of religious life. Many churches seek to reorganize themselves entirely. Of course, it increases competition between denominations.



The goal is not only to maintain the presence of a church in some areas, but also to gain new territories. In this view, the new small “suburbs” of Torshavn are particularly meaningful for the observation of strong competition and little territories battled over by different churches.

The proselytizing caused by the Friends of Jesus has finally influenced all the denominations. But it has also led to unprecedented collaboration between denominations, this time turned towards the evangelization of the Seculars in the Faroese society: A new translation of the Bible, the creation of a Christian radio station, soon a Christian TV channel... These actions, locally named as “ecumenical”<sup>xviii</sup>, are also surprising because they demonstrate that, beside divisions, Christians are able to unify *vis-à-vis* non-Christians. Whatever their internal differences, denominations gradually tend to create a “new” Christian front that may confront a “second front”, less clearly identified but that would be the secular one. Because of the principle of conflict avoidance, so deeply embedded in Faroese minds, nothing has as yet been explicitly described in such terms. However, in recent years, the opposition of Christian versus Secular starts to appear sporadically in relation to issues that formerly would not have been debated. Among these debates, there is the issue of women's status and the right for abortion, illegal in the Faroes but allowed in Denmark. Also discussions about creationism and Darwin's theory of evolution have taken place in public conferences. Though the debate was organized by Christians and the secular voice was not really heard. This question also leads us to the other issue of the teachings that should be given in public schools and, soon, in private schools that the Friends of Jesus will probably open one day. And, last but not least, the question of the recognition of rights—and social acceptance—of lesbians and gays. In 2002, perhaps for the first time, a debate really divided the society on this issue. The challenge was to write into the constitution a new article stipulating that no one should be discriminated because of their sexual orientation. The debate was the occasion for society to reflect on what a commitment to God means, thereby strengthening the Christian political party. In the near future these issues will probably go on multiplying, creating the risk of generating a new division within Faroese society.

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<sup>ii</sup> By Scandinavian societies I mean Denmark, Norway, Sweden, as well as Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

<sup>iii</sup> John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), Irish born in London, was an evangelist who founded the original Plymouth Brethren, and today considered as a father of modern Dispensationalism.

<sup>iv</sup> In most of the villages there is a balance between the *Brethren* congregations (BS) and those of the *Missionaries* (MH), excepted for the southern islands where the *Brethren* had little influence. Therefore, on *Suðuroy* there is 1 BS in Sumba and 1 in Porkeri, 1 MH and 1 BS in Vágur, Tvøroyri and Hvalba. In the island of *Skúvoy*, only 1 MH. No BS in *Sandoy* neither in *Hestur* but 1 MH in Sandur, Skopun, Dalur and *Hestur*. No BS nor MH in *Nólsoy*. In *Streymoy*, 2 BS and 1 MH in Tórshavn, 1 BS and 1 MH in Argir, in Kollarfjørður, in Vestmanna, 1 BS and 1 probable MH in Hoyvík, 1 BS in Kaldbak, 1 MH in Hvalvík and Haldarsvík. In *Vágar*, 1 MH in Sandavágur, 1 BS and 1 MH in Miðvágur and Sørvágur. In *Eysturoy*, 1 BS and 1 MH in Eiði, in Fuglafjørður, in Leirvík, in Gøta, in Toftir, in Søgdarfjørður, in Skáli, 1 MH in Elduvík, in Rituvík, in Glyvvar, in Strendur, in Selatrað, and 1 BS in Saltangára. 2 BS in *Kalsoy*, 1 BS in *Kunoy*. In *Bordoy*, 1 BS and 2 MH in Klaksvík, 1 BS in Viðareiði, 1 BS and 1 MH in Hvannasund.

<sup>v</sup> For practical reason, I use the term "congregation" for each assembly of the denominations of the *Brethren* and of the *Missionaries*. I call the collection of all the *Brethren* congregations "the *Brethren* Community". The same applies to the *Missionaries*.

<sup>vi</sup> There is one Charismatic church in Tvøroyri (Suðuroy), in Sandur (Sandoy) and Pentecostal cellar meetings in Skopun (Sandoy). In Streymoy, 3 Pentecostals churches in Tórshavn, 1 Pentecostal and 1 Lutheran Charismatic in Hoyvík, and 1 Pentecostal in Vestmanna. In Eysturoy, 1 Charismatic church in Søgdarfjørður and in Skálabotninn. Finally, in Bordoy, 2 Charismatic churches in Klaksvík.

<sup>vii</sup> Greenland was here an exception in the sense that it was not Christian prior to its late colonization.

<sup>viii</sup> Wählin (1989) is very critical about many historical studies that do not consider sufficiently the weight of social divisions induced by industrialization and modernization. But he underlines that during the 19th century the nationalist movement did not adequately take into consideration the social classes that were already in place and preferred talking of one people, one language, one nation, one culture. For the author, this rhetoric was as far from local reality as the Home Mission from the religious Faroese life. On this question, see also Hans Andrias Sølvará, 2010.

<sup>ix</sup> For reasons of privacy, all names have been changed.

<sup>x</sup> In Streymoy, the village of Argir is today almost a suburb of Torshavn.

<sup>xi</sup> Though it is a relative tendency, compared to what happens in Denmark or Iceland for instance, the attendance at Sunday services remains at a high rate in the Faroe Islands.

<sup>xiii</sup> The congregation, as a moral and patrimonial entity, is the property of all the members. It implies, juridically, that all material goods (the building and everything inside) do not belong to anyone in particular and cannot be divided.

<sup>xiii</sup> This was the case during an ecumenical project to publish the Bible. Most of the free denominations participated, with the exception of the *Brethren* who returned consistently to several sets of elders/speakers without anyone deciding in the name of the denomination. Probably it was like this because no one was motivated enough to participate in the project. And ultimately, the *Brethren* did not take part.

<sup>xiv</sup> Those examples could even be found in closed places where conflicts were openly faced, even sometimes over-exaggerated. I refer here to the difference of policy between Faroe Islands and Iceland, both today and in the past (Pons 2009).

<sup>xv</sup> Here the notion is only considered for men, but should be as well be investigated for women.

<sup>xvi</sup> Unusual but not unthinkable. We find similar models in the Shetlands for instance. See Coffre-Baneux 2001.

<sup>xvii</sup> Lately, *Jesus's Friends* followed other missionary networks : *Youth With a Mission*, *Jesus Army*, *Jesus Revolution...*

<sup>xviii</sup> Even if it is said to be ecumenical, it only brings together Christian denominations that share a common doctrinal ground. Consequently, for example, the Jehovah Witnesses are never included.