

A Great Multitude One Can Count

A Statistical Study on the Spatio-Temporal Development of the Reformed
Denominations in the Netherlands Between 1892 and 2015

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THEOLOGISCHE UNIVERSITEIT VAN DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN
IN NEDERLAND TE KAMPEN

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A Statistical Study on the Spatio-Temporal Development of the Reformed
Denominations in the Netherlands Between 1892 and 2015

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Summary

The aim of this study was to describe, as exhaustively as possible, the statistical characteristics of the *Gereformeerde* denominations in the Netherlands between 1892 and 2015. These denominations formed a notable minority in Dutch society, comprising 10% of the population at their peak. Nevertheless, the *Gereformeerde* denominations have a varied and interesting history and are still a distinct part of Dutch society. Therefore, making an overview of their temporal and geographical development represents a useful addition to the existing discourse on their history and future. Following the lead of Knippenberg (1992) and Bernt & Berghuijs (2016), I have tried to give an overview of the development of these denominations and an explanation for their growth, demographic makeup, and geographical distribution. To this end, I developed the following main research question:

What does the spatio-temporal development of the Reformed denominations in the Netherlands between 1892 and 2015 look like, and how can it be explained?

That question was in turn divided into three sub-questions:

4. What does the temporal development of the Reformed denominations in the Netherlands between 1892 and 2015 look like?
5. What does the spatial development of the Reformed denominations in the Netherlands between 1892 and 2015 look like?
6. How can the spatio-temporal development of the Reformed denominations in the Netherlands between 1892 and 2015 be explained?

All of the statistics and information pertaining to these questions can be found in the preceding parts of this study, this summary will give a short overview of the basic data that were found.

The temporal development of the Reformed denominations in the Netherlands between 1892-2015

The findings in part II regarding the temporal and statistical development of the various denominations in the Netherlands can be summarised in the following table:

Denomination	Years in dataset	Members at beginning year	Members at peak	Members in 2015 or final year	Members gone in schisms	% confessing members beginning year	% confessing members 2015 or final year
GKN	1892-2003	328,240	874,591 (1974)	650,892	5,000 (1926); 80,000 (1944)	45	60
CGK	1919-2015	9,976	76,276 (1985)	71,869		52	62
GKv	1946-2015	77,350	128,227 (2003)	120,295	8,000 (1967)	52	65
NGK	1970-2015	23,478	33,366 (2012)	32,926		51	65
GG	1948-2015	56,781		106,897	8,000 (1953)	48	55
GGN	1954-2015	8,817		24,182	3,000 (1981)	48	50
HHK	2010-2015	56,418		58,821		46	46
GB	1973-2015	598,041	677,175 (1989)	333,961			

The spatial development of the Reformed denominations in the Netherlands between 1892-2015

The information presented in part III of this study can be summarised in the following table:

Denomination	Largest province i.r.t. Netherlands	Largest province within denomination	Most populated area of urbanisation	Least populated area of urbanisation	Dissimilarity index
GKN	Friesland	Zuid-Holland	Highly urbanised	G4 ⁴	0.43 ⁵
CGK	Flevoland	Zuid-Holland	Highly urbanised	G4	0.64
GKv	Groningen	Overijssel	Highly urbanised	G4	0.62

⁴ G4 stands for *Grote 4*, the four largest cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag and Utrecht

⁵ The dissimilarity index measures the relative number of people who would have to change location to attain an even spread of a minority population over the majority population.

NGK	Flevoland	Gelderland	Highly/moderately urbanised	Not urbanised	0.7
GG	Zeeland	Zuid-Holland	Highly/slightly urbanised	G4	0.8
GGN	Zeeland	Gelderland	Slightly urbanised	G4	0.88
HHK	Gelderland	Gelderland	Slightly urbanised	G4	0.84
GB	Utrecht	Zuid-Holland	Slightly urbanised	G4	0.77

Explanations for the spatio-temporal development of the Reformed denominations in the Netherlands between 1892-2015

The final part of this study looked into possible explanations for the findings in parts II and III by testing several hypotheses. A number of conclusions were drawn. First, the growth of the *Gereformeerde* denominations is not related to that of the general Dutch population or of other denominations. Instead, they all follow their own, similar pattern: a new denomination is founded, experiences strong growth, stabilises, and then starts to decline, after which it sometimes merges with another denomination. During the period of growth, conflicts leading to a schism are not uncommon. Denominations initially grow by attracting members from other denominations to their new movement, but after the initial enthusiasm dies down, their main source of growth is births. If the birth rate declines, denominations generally also start to shrink. While the Dutch population can still grow due to immigration, churches attract almost no new members. On the contrary, they tend to lose large numbers, either to other – sometimes Reformed – denominations or to secularisation, as not all members who leave join another church.

The geographical distribution of Reformed denominations can be explained partly by historical factors and partly by other factors. On the historical level, we must therefore note that Reformed denominations can be found in places that are not Catholic, or largely non-religious. One of the other factors is urbanisation; churches have a hard time thriving in large cities. In earlier years, the situation was different, but the suburbanisation move that occurred in the Netherlands in the 1960s was even stronger in churches. Another factor influencing the geographical distribution of the denominations is their tendency to cluster. The presence of other denominations seemed to benefit the size and growth of churches. When most of an area is already Reformed, all Reformed churches in that area will be stimulated in their social and cultural persistence. Finally, the location of Reformed schools affiliated with particular denominations also showed a strong relationship with the size and growth of those churches in the neighbourhood of the schools, although the location of such schools is itself, of course, also heavily influenced by the distribution of the denominations.