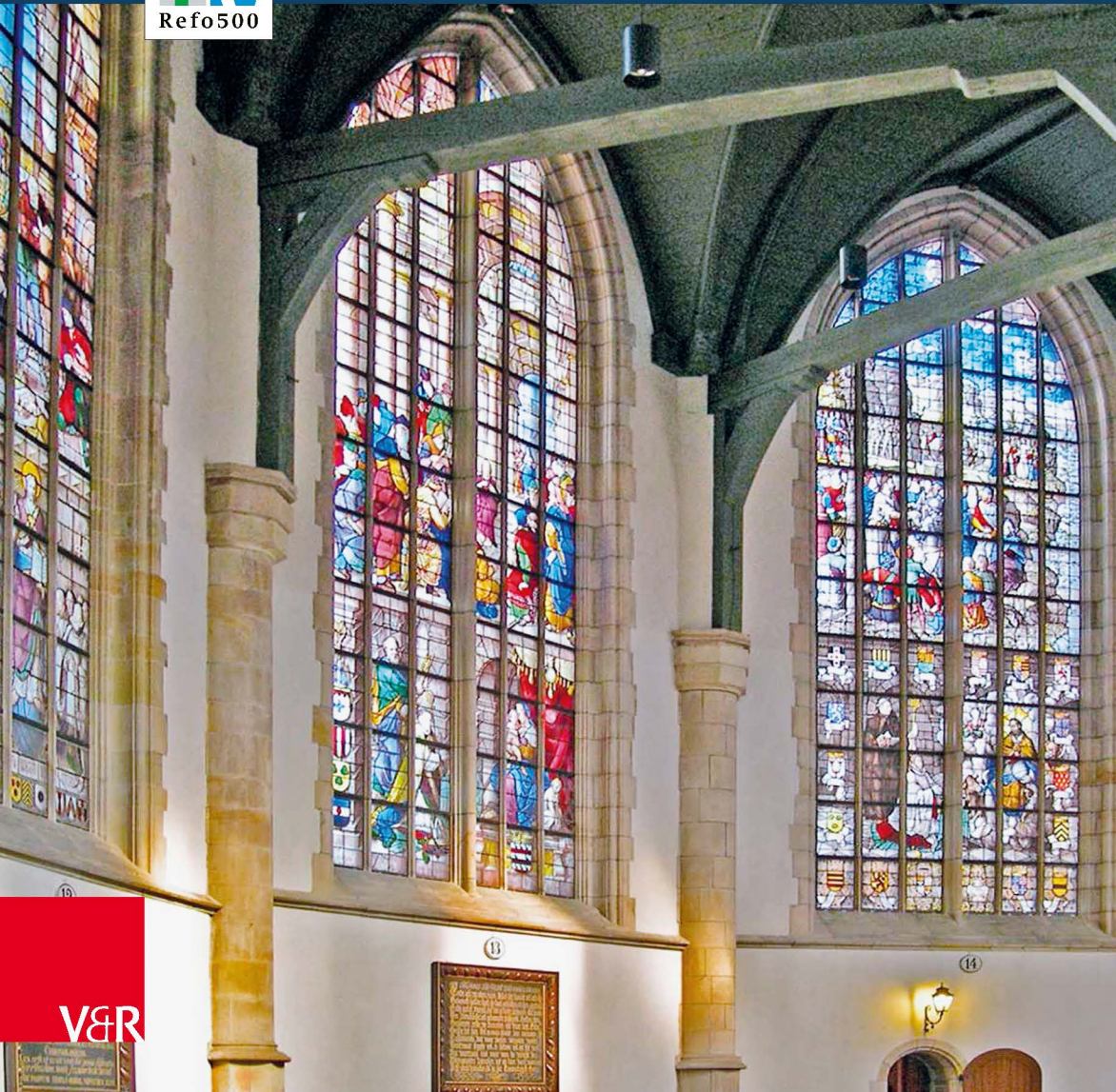


Herman J. Selderhuis (ed.)

# Handbook of Dutch Church History



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Herman J. Selderhuis, Handbook of Dutch Church History

# Handbook of Dutch Church History

edited by  
Herman J. Selderhuis

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Herman Selderhuis

Herman J. Selderhuis

## Introduction

### Interest

Foreigners visit the Netherlands in order to marvel at the Delta works, to learn of the world famous – and for some infamous – Dutch tolerance, as well as to buy Dutch soccer talent. Less in the news, but equally remarkable, is the foreign interest in Dutch church history and this interest requires good textbooks. This book desires to be one of these. The name of this book immediately brings to mind three problem areas which are relevant to its user.

In the first place, there is the problematic nature of a handbook. On one hand, a handbook means that a complete overview has been given, and yet, on the other hand, that there is more to say about Dutch church history than can be accomplished in this book. A handbook is intended as an instrument, as a means, that is to say: it is a good tool but also has its limitations. The user may therefore expect much, but will also note that this book stimulates and necessitates the use of other books.

In the second place, the term “Dutch” (*Nederlands*) is problematic. Although in Dutch, the name *Nederland* is spoken of in the singular, it is significant that this country in French is called “les Pays-bas”, in English “the Netherlands”, and in German “die Niederlande”. Accordingly they are all plurals. The Netherlands is a plurality and that is also noticeable in its church history with a great variety in each region, town, and village. For the historian, this means that it is not easy to give a complete picture. In addition to describing the whole church history of the Netherlands, it must take into account what this country was in the past. For example, the Netherlands included what is now Belgium and also had territories overseas. That means that this handbook is a history of the so-called northern Netherlands, but this does not mean that the southern areas outside of its national boundaries since the establishment of the Republic are completely ignored. This is in contrast to the former Dutch colonies. Yet even this delineation is not watertight. It also must not exclude, for example, the Dutch refugee congregations established in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Germany and England, since



these were of such great importance for the development of Dutch protestant churches. Also an excessive concentration on the Netherlands would exclude the influence of, and contact with, foreign countries, without which Dutch church history would have taken a very different course.

Finally, there is the problem of the third term in the name of this book: church history. This concept demands its own separate section.

## Church history as a discipline

The name of this handbook is a conscious choice. A title as ‘The history of Christianity in the Netherlands’ was deliberately not chosen. For a long time, this was in fact the name of the church history course in public faculties, but this term is less prevalent now and strongly evokes the idea of the whole of Christian culture. Nor is this handbook a history of the Christian religion in the Netherlands. Not only because much attention is given here to the church as an institution, but also because issues such as education and poor relief are discussed. Moreover it is true that the church is the dominant factor of the Christian religion. From the church, the Christian faith came into the Netherlands and at the very moment that it did the church was organized here. Religion and Christianity itself were determined by the message of the church as well as through the structures and development of the church.

This does not mean that a history of the Christian religion or of Christianity in the Netherlands is not possible or even that it is incorrect to do so, but that these matters best realize their potential by creating a church history of the Netherlands. It is essential here as to what one understands as “church.” Does this concern institutions, individuals, beliefs, and creeds? What about the people and groups outside of the official church that have been affected? The official Roman Catholic view is that the Roman Catholic Church is the mystical body of Christ or even the continuing incarnation of Christ; church history then describes how this particular body moves through history without significant development. The Reformation view – both among the Reformed, Lutheran, and Anabaptist version of reformational thinking – is: the church is diffuse because each church or movement within Protestantism has its own understanding of the church. Among many church historians, the view was common that the course of the church was determined through the schema “reformation after deformation,” in which it could be quite clearly identified who deformed the church and then who sought its reformation. In the meantime this approach has been abandoned by most church historians, and has been by this book as well. For the authors of this handbook, the object of church history is anything which presents itself as a church or as its representative. This definition is not very specific, but among

other things, it intends to indicate that people and groups that have gone other ways than those of the Reformation or of the Roman Catholic Church are described here. Simultaneously – and this is another large question – church history is described in the context of political and social developments. We have not attempted to give a recitation of facts, but rather to tell the story of the Christian church as an integral part of the fullness of life. Also, the authors have sought to describe both the faith as it has been learned and as it has been believed, both the faith of the priest and of the parishioner, the pastor and the churchgoer, as well as of regular men, women, and children.

According to the Bible, the church is a house of living stones (1 Peter 2:5) and for that reason alone church history can never be only a description of the history of its institutions and doctrines. The Church consists of people who believe, who are working from that faith, which grows up into a religion, who arrive at the same religion or at just that point they differ again. Everything associated with these developments also belongs to church history. It is not always possible to describe the faith as it was lived, as this description is greatly dependent upon the availability of primary sources. For most centuries, there simply exist more resources for what the Church taught than resources for how people gave shape to the teaching in their practice.

## Theology or History?

Another question is how theology and history relate when it comes to church history. Is it about what churches or theologians have said over the centuries or about how people have lived or experienced their faith through the centuries? What political, cultural, and psychological factors play a role in the history of the church?

These questions are in fact, for many, the question of whether or not theology, church history, or history belong together. It would take too much time here to give an overview of the discussion which has taken place over the last fifty years on this question, but the result of the discussion thus far does interest us: Church history is primarily a theological discipline that can only be properly practiced if it employs the tools that are conveyed from the historical sciences. Ecclesiastical interests especially have resulted in the subordination of (church) history to theology. As a matter of principle, the specialty, however, is at home in both faculties, as it is the epitome of an interdisciplinary science. Within theology, church history is indispensable for understanding the developments in the history of dogma and theology. Within history, church history is indispensable because church and religion are such an essential part of history. The result of this situation is that the

church historian needs both a sufficient dose of theological understanding as well as a great proficiency in dealing with historical material.

True church history should take to heart the warning that comes from someone who does not usually have a good name within the church. It is the discourse of Friedrich Nietzsche on the practice of history. In an 1874 publication, Nietzsche distinguishes three types of history: the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical. The monumental historiography describes the great moments and important people. Frequently it is to make their own history into a great occurrence. This form of church history mainly legitimizes one's own ecclesiastical and theological position. The other form which Nietzsche rejects is the antiquarian, in which church history molds into such a detailed description of all facts and data that it is not located in a larger context and there is no distinction between major and minor issues. Thus, Nietzsche arrives at a critical historiography. In this one, the sources, data, and people are critically assessed and then the lines and connections become clear. This critical approach, however, does employ what is valuable from both the monumental and antiquarian historiographies, so that it contains the elements which only the critical approach allows.

## Developments

In the past several decades a number of interesting developments have occurred in church history courses. This has to do with the closer collaboration between historians and theologians in this field, as well as also with social developments. Here one only has to think of the interest in regional and local history. The drive for European unity has strikingly strengthened people's interest in their own national, regional, and especially local history. For Dutch (church) history, it follows that the emphasis no longer rests in what happened in Holland, and the growing awareness is that Holland has penetrated only a limited portion of the Netherlands. Furthermore, the research of church history increasingly focuses on the role and place of women. It is also important that more research occurs in the history of religion and spirituality and in the place of the so-called "common man and woman" in ecclesio-historical developments. The quantitative research which simply counts people is helpful here, as here and there it paints a very different picture of a past event.

Another development is that church history is less described from a confessional perspective. This has led to a quest for a more objective history, and certainly for greater collaboration between (church) historians of different denominations or beliefs. Nevertheless, the appreciation of an approach based on a confessional perspective has remained because this approach can function as a

stimulant and a corrective. The significance of all of this is that theology is not marginalized. For the most part, church history is theological history. Also, the most important events of church history cannot be understood without the theological background. Simultaneously, for events that have occurred church history accounts for more than just political, economic, and psychological aspects. Although it is very clear that the historians and theologians differ on the importance of these various aspects, all believe that church history is a scientific discipline that deserves attention. The authors of this handbook have differing ecclesiastical backgrounds. It is not their church membership, but their expertise that is the reason they have contributed to this handbook. Thus it must be said that this was not intended as an ecumenical handbook; however, a handbook such as this could promote ecumenism well. Church history can indeed show that ecclesiastical and theological disputes were much more than doctrine. Just as church history can clarify the reasons why people and churches parted ways, it may also assist in identifying ways to bring churches back together.

## Divisions and Synopses

From the table of contents, it is clear what periodization has been chosen. There were discussions for every choice that was made. Not so much to limit such discussions as much as possible, but rather to reduce clutter, a periodization was chosen which expressed the diversity of the ages. For the 16th to the 21st centuries, it is fairly clear. For the previous centuries it is something else entirely. The division occurs at the year 1200. In the course of reading, one will notice that the authors are well aware that historical developments are not bound to the limits of the beginning and end of a century.

In the planning of the chapters on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, greater account is taken of the fact that in this period the church has become quite broad, meaning that this period is characterized by the emergence of various Christian organizations in political and civic matters, which are often indicated by “compartmentalization” and “depillarization”. That the so-called “small church history” is discussed in a more limited fashion than some users may wish rests on the fact that this is also a general handbook that wishes to give a comprehensive view.

Each section begins with a brief historiographical overview. At the same time, ecclesiastical events are always set within a greater framework of political, social, and cultural developments for which reason each author has taken the liberty to describe their own method. This handbook is written from the knowledge and awareness of what previous summaries have received and on the basis of the current state of research. The authors are therefore also immediately aware of

their limitations. To further clarify this survey, the user will find in this book tables, diagrams, and illustrations. Also there are many source texts integrated into the narration. These texts are intended to bring the described events and people closer and, as it were, to let them speak with their own voices. Even in a book of this size, a reader could be of the opinion that it is wrong that several names and facts are missing. We, the authors, would like to know what they are, and such readers will find an open ear. Those who want to go further can make use of the references to the literature.

Finally, a word regarding the aforementioned user of this book: this handbook is intended for students and teachers, and for anyone else who desires to learn more about this fascinating phenomenon that has brought so much joy and frustration, so much blessing and misery: the church and its people in that small strip of earth called the Netherlands.

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## Timeline

- 313 Edict of Milan – ends Christian persecution
- Circa 343 – 384 Bishop Servatius, the episcopal seat of Tongeren moved to Maastricht
- Circa 400 the first Christian community from the current Netherlands lives in Maastricht
- Circa 500 King Clovis is baptized, the Franks and the people cross to Christianity
- 538 – 594 Gregory of Tours, in his Histories, mentions a large temple built by Bishop Monulphus in Maastricht
- Circa 630 Frankish troops take Utrecht; King Dagobert I (623 – 639) founds a Christian church
- 639 The south Gallic monk Amandus from Aquitaine is consecrated a missionary bishop and departs to the Franks, he founded several monasteries, Bishop of Maastricht 648 – 651
- Around 650 the Franks are again displaced by the Frisians from across the northern rivers, a church destroyed in Utrecht
- 658 – 739 Willebrord
- 678 – 679 Archbishop Wilfrid of York preaches the Gospel in Friesland beyond the major rivers
- 690 – 730 Missionary activity in the Low Countries by autonomous groups of Anglo-Saxon missionaries (North-Holland Wulfram and Adelbert, South Holland, Utrecht, Zeeland, Gelderland and North Brabant Willibrord with his helpers, etc.)
- From 695 the Utrecht castellum serves Willibrord as the primary focal point for the Frisians Mission
- 695 In Rome, Willibrord is consecrated archbishop of the Frisians by Pope Sergius
- Circa 700 Bishop Hubert moved the episcopal seat from Maastricht to Liège
- 714 – 741 Charles Martel
- 719 Boniface makes for Utrecht, helper of Willibrord
- 719 Willibrord is able to return to Utrecht and repair the damage, permanent settlement bishop, church organization is going
- 722 Boniface (Winfried) goes to Rome, appointed bishop, receives name “Boniface”
- 739 Willibrord dies in the monastery of Echternach; Utrecht is still an exceedingly vulnerable center of the diocese of the Frisians
- 743 – 809 Liudger completed the Christianization of the Low Countries
- 754 June 5 near Dokkum Boniface murdered along with his helpers

768 – 814	Charlemagne, Roman emperor from 800
770	Willehad from Northumbria preaches at Dokkum and in Drenthe
784 – 790	Theutbert, bishop of Utrecht
785	Revolt of Widukind conquered, Widukind converted to Christianity and baptized, Liudger returns to the area
from 785	Frisians recognize Carolingian authority, Friesland permanently incorporated into the Frankish empire
792	Saxon revolt against Charlemagne, Liudger must flee the mission area again
805	Liudger, first bishop of Münster
810	Godfrid the Dane plunders Friesland and estimate puts war
820 – 835	Frederick Bishop of Utrecht, Carolingian scholar
843	Treaty of Verdun; Carolingian Empire divided into among others a German Empire and the Kingdom of France, the Netherlands mainly part of the Duchy of Lorraine. Viking raids.
854 – 917	The bishops of Utrecht resort outside of Utrecht; first Roermond, later Deventer
857	Utrecht taken by the Vikings
863	Dorestad ransacked by the Vikings
890	Nijmegen taken by the Vikings; Maastricht and Tongeren ransacked
900 – 917	Radbod bishop
917 – 975	Balderik bishop; Vikings driven off from Utrecht, bishopseat returns to Utrecht, rebuilding Utrecht cathedral
972 – 1008	Notger prince-bishop of Liège; restoration
976 – 990	Folkmar (Poppo) bishop of Utrecht
990 – 995	Baldewin bishop of Utrecht
995 – 1010	Ansfried bishop of Utrecht (count of Brabant)
Around 1200	The southern part of the Netherlands covered with monasteries and abbeys
1006 and 1009	Tiel ransacked and destroyed by Vikings
1017	Utrecht cathedral heavily damaged, restored by bishop Adalbold, dedicated 1023
1024	bishop of Utrecht becomes count of Drenthe
1027 – 1054	Bernold bishop of Utrecht
1040	bishop of Utrecht becomes Lord of Groningen and Overijssel
1076 – 1099	Conrad bishop of Utrecht; new collegiate church St. Mary; number of collegiate increases from 60 to 140
1096	First Crusade; 1099 capture of Jerusalem



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- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 1114 – 1126      | Godebald bishop of Utrecht, last bishop also representing the emperor |
| 1122             | Concordat of Worms; emperor loses right to appoint bishops            |
| 1126 – 1139      | Andries van Kuyck bishop (coming from a regional, noble family)       |
| 1139             | Count Dirk I. from Flanders undertakes pilgrimage to Jerusalem        |
| 1147 – 1149      | Second Crusade  |
| 1147             | Bernard of Clairveaux preaches at Maastricht                          |
| 1157, 1177, 1184 | Crusades undertaken from the Netherlands                              |
| 1187             | Saladin conquers Jerusalem  |
| 1189 – 1192      | Third Crusade   |
| 1198 – 1204      | Fourth Crusade; capture of Constantinople                             |
| 1213             | Golden Bull; Emperor loses authority in appointment of bishops        |

Frank van der Pol

## The Middle Ages to 1200

### 1. Representation of the Dark Ages

For centuries the Middle Ages have been viewed as a dark period. The term usually evokes negative associations. Among humanist circles, the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire were deemed the *medium aevum*, that is, the in-between period. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, in their opinion, came darkness. Only after a thousand years did it come to an end when the light of humanism shone upon the world. Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century spoke of an interim middle period (*media tempestas*). Before him, in the fourteenth century, Francesco Petrarch spoke of a middle time (*medium tempus*). Well before Cusa and Petrarch, Walter von der Vogelweide, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, had already described an interim period of decline. The contempt for the period between 500 and 1500 continued until the nineteenth century. “The Dark Ages” or “The dark Middle Ages” were common expressions. Meanwhile, this negative portrayal has become outdated. Today it is recognized that this thousand years contained the roots of our current European civilization and the indispensable influence of Christianity in European culture. Between our time and the Middle Ages there are a multitude of relationships.

The section on armed pilgrimage (5.1) handles the contribution of Flanders, Friesland and Holland on the Crusades. Given contemporary Europe and the Islamic world, this is certainly a topic of interest. Motivations and justifications for the first Crusade draw attention from modern, Islamic, and Jewish reactions. Also medieval spirituality is a current topic. An academic focus on the period has increased significantly. The early Christian influence on the Netherlands is the subject of international research. Research is being conducted into the forms of medieval lay piety. Historians have discovered that hagiography (a specific genre of texts, namely which are biographies of saints) is a valuable source for reflection on the religious and social function of the saint and his cult. All forms of piety, but particularly of the early

medieval period, are still relatively unknown. It is an exciting business to depict the influence of the Church and Christianity on medieval society.

This chapter treats the history of the church in the Netherlands to the year 1200 after Christ. The following chapter describes the continuation of medieval church history. For the defined period we employ, especially in the chronological sense, sometimes, the periodization terms early and high Middle Ages. From a sociological, anthropological, and theological viewpoint, the periodization of the Middle Ages is supported by a division around 1200. Around the aforementioned time the process of moving from a surface Christianization to a deeper Christianization with a more established Christianity is concluded (see § 2.4.1. and § 3 on the Christianization process).

The church history of the Netherlands begins in the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages. For this transition zone only few written sources are available. This is applicable especially for the northern part of the Netherlands. The description of church history up to 1200 is permanently hindered by material filled with lacunae. Through the lack of sufficient data, it is not very clear, for example, how Christianity was introduced in the fourth century in a world of indigenous and Roman religions. This is also applicable for the ecclesiastical life of the early Christians in our country, namely in Maastricht. The lists of bishops of Tongeren-Maastricht-Liège are historically unreliable. New research gives a new date for the first bishop of the Netherlands, Servatius, the bishop of Tongeren, who moved to Maastricht. It is a century later than was previously accepted. The appearance of the early Christianization of the Netherlands north of Utrecht suffers from a paucity of data and there is very little known about the pre-Christian period of the Frisians. Of course, the history of the bishops of the diocese of Utrecht is not lacking, but the details of the bishops of Utrecht in the early period until the tenth century are scant. There is not a single Utrecht manuscript before the ninth century. Furthermore, little data is available on medieval heresies in our country. It is difficult to establish deviations from church doctrine in the Netherlands up to 1200.

The focus is not explicitly limited to the institutional, that is, with topics such as church leadership, church doctrine, and church organization. Where possible, it is written from a theological perspective. The lack of the aforementioned data has, however, a significant impact on the theological content of the description up to 1200. For the Utrecht diocese, for example, there is but little data available on the lay piety in the aforementioned period. Therefore, the focus inevitably proceeds to the ecclesiastical organization. To the extent that data are available, attention is paid to the faith and spirituality lived both inside and outside of the religious context. This is particularly true of medieval piety, hagiography, and formation of belief. The Bible surely played a crucial role in the shaping of medieval identity, culture, and social structure. The Christian religion

gave meaning to nearly every aspect of daily life. The monastery as a special form of life will receive specific attention in a separate section, where possible from a direct theological and spiritual perspective. The monastic way of life is dedicated to spiritual pilgrimage. But the pattern here is still difficult to fill in. For in the area between Marsdiep and Eems, which was Christianized late, there were not monasteries located there until the twelfth century (outside of Staverden and Dokkum; whose records have not survived). Also, in the earlier Christianized region of what would later be Holland, there were no monasteries founded before the tenth century. A general outline of the *officium divinum* (the sacred service to God) with the liturgical prayer times leaves a certain impression of the daily routine of a monk. Using data regarding the Egmond abbey and its annals, some coloring [of the details] is still possible.

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## 2. The First Christians of the Netherlands

### 2.1 The Political and Economic Context up to the Eight Century

From the Roman point of view, what we call the Netherlands belonged to the most northern, peripheral zone of the Western Roman Empire. Along the left

bank of the Rhine River, the Romans built roads and fortifications. The area south of the river, combined with present-day Belgium, was part of this realm until the fifth century. The military frontier ran through the present Netherlands. Frisian, Saxon, and Frankish tribes inhabited this region. In the south lived the Franks. The Frisian area was along the coast of present-day Zeeland beyond the current northern boundary of our country. The Saxons inhabited the higher sandy ground in the east.

In the sparsely populated Roman border area to the south of the Rhine, all kinds of immigrants settled. Soldiers who comprised the frontier defense and Gallic colonists established the new cities founded by Rome, such as Tongeren, Nijmegen, and Voorburg. At Maastricht there was a trade route from Cologne to the coast of the English Channel. The tribes to the north of the Rhine in the Frisian and Groningen mound area had a trade and barter system with the south. Frisians also enlisted in the Roman Army

In the fifth century, the Roman Empire collapsed. This century was part of what was called the time of tribal migration. Roman urban centers such as Maastricht, Tongeren, and Tournai were repeatedly plundered by Frankish invaders. Also, when the English province broke with the Roman Empire, much of the need for communication overseas ceased. The forts along the Rhine lost their *raison d'être* and the primary land route between Cologne and the Channel coast was eliminated. For the most part, the Netherlands lost their political and economic function.

On the remains of Roman culture, the Merovingian kingdoms were established. The southern Netherlands grew into a Frankish domain. This process gained momentum when King Clovis defeated the Roman authority figure Gaul in 486. The traditional image of primitive and savage Frankish immigrants in our region is firmly established. Recent archaeological research of the Frankish lifestyle between the Rhine and the Meuse rivers, however, suggests that it was elitist and self-conscious. Among them were found skilled goldsmiths.

The Frankish dominion extended along the Schelde River to the region of the midland Dutch rivers. A southward movement of Frisians temporarily interrupted this Frankish expansion. Among the Frisian princes, King Radbod (680 – 719) is the best well-known. From his base at Utrecht he acted as a warlord (primarily in conflict with the Franks).

As to population we do not have precise population statistics. As to around 1469, there is a probabilistic calculation of about 520,000. What was it a millennium earlier? In the Roman era, the country was relatively well inhabited, but the period of the so-called migrations drew most inhabitants to the regions where the Roman Empire had been situated. From the end of the third century, large parts of what is today called the Netherlands were uninhabited. The absence of coastal dikes led to flooding, a high water table, and salinization of the

ground. Because Friesland and Groningen were under water a great part of the year, a portion of the mounds were abandoned. Zeeland was as good as empty. Then there were the less fertile areas. On the ridges along the length of the great rivers one could still find some people. The adjacent marshes and bogs, as well as the wide river mouths, were uninhabitable. In the interior dense and vast forests obstructed passage.

After the sixth century, the population gradually began to increase, but only with the advent of the Carolingians would a great number of settlements be established.

Even though some areas were practically uninhabited – Zeeland, West-Friesland, and the bogs – the people who did live there were primarily Frisian. Saxon influence was limited. And with respect to the Franks: only Nijmegen and Maastricht were Frankish settlements of some importance. The heyday of Dorestad occurred in the eighth century. The famous king Radbod controlled the area surrounding Utrecht on both sides of the Rhine until he was defeated by Pepin II. When we speak about the Netherlands before Willibrord, we should probably think of a primarily Frisian population.

In the eighth century, the Frankish kingdom grew into a political superpower. The Carolingians seized power from the Merovingians. The main Frankish center of this region was Aachen. Charles Martel (714–741) and Charlemagne (768–814, Holy Roman emperor from 800) brought an end to the freedom of the Frisians in phases. The whole Dutch region of the Zwin in the south to the mouth of the Weser River in the north was called Friesland at that time. The area to the south of the great rivers was conquered by the Franks in 695. The northern part remained independent for some time. Charles Martel conquered from Friesland to Vlieland, and the areas around Utrecht and the Veluwe to the IJssel River, in the middle of present-day Netherlands. In 734 he also conquered a large part of the northern region of Friesland to the Lauwers. From 785 onward, the Frisians recognized the Carolingian authority and were definitively incorporated into the Frankish empire. Dorestad was an important border settlement of the north-western part of the Carolingian Empire and it eventually grew into an international trade settlement. Medemblik (for the trade through the Vecht and the Almere to Scandinavia) and Domburg (on the route by the Meuse to England and the Channel coast) were more important. All transport to and from the Frankish core regions in the Rhineland and Meuse valley occurred via these three cities.

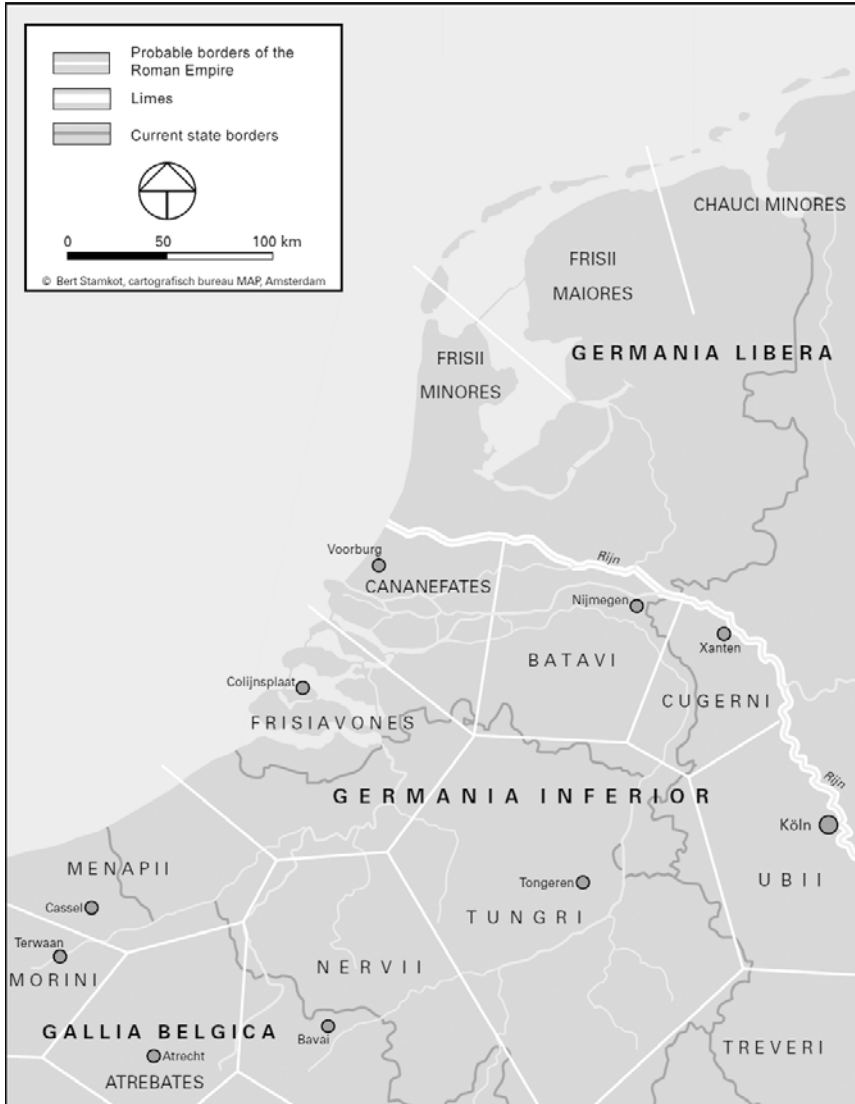
At the end of the eighth century, the Franks also conquered the Saxon area. Even in 772, the Saxons destroyed Deventer-on-the-IJssel. The economic importance of the trade route through this settlement was clear. Now that the economic and political context up to Charlemagne has been explored directly, we will concentrate upon the earliest church history.

## 2.2 Christianity in a Gallico-Roman Environment

Christianity came within the Roman world when, with the imperial Edict of Milan (313), there was a definitive end to the persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire. Emperor Constantine protected Christianity and began to christianize his empire. A full generation after Constantine, Latin Christianity had developed in the south of Gaul. Half a century later, the gospel preaching of Martin of Tours confronted the pagan religion in the north of Gaul. The Christian church also reached areas of the Roman empire around the Rhine and Moselle rivers. Cities such as Rheims, Trier, and Cologne, as capitals of Roman provinces, were the main centers. The expanding Christianity came into the Netherlands in the fourth century as the official religion of the empire. The Roman emperor already had laws against paganism. But the area of the Netherlands, *Germania Inferior* (later *Germania Secunda* which included *Gallia Belgica*) was a border region on the northwestern edge of the empire. Moreover, the might and unity of the Roman Empire was reduced. The time of the migrations came, and the empire suffered many Germanic invasions.

In our environs, the Roman and indigenous gods were still highly revered. In 1990, at Empel in North Brabant, a Gallico-Roman temple complex was discovered, dedicated to Hercules Magusanus. The temple of Empel in the Batavian residential area was built by the Romans or the Batavians. The name of the deity worshipped in the sanctuary contains Roman (Hercules) and native (Magusanus) elements. This suggests a high level of syncretism between Roman and native religious beliefs. Temples from the Roman period are also famous at Elst (a large stone shrine of 23 – 31 meters wide with a height of nearly 17 meters), Kessel, Valmont, Grobbendonk, Nijmegen, Maastricht, Tongeren, and Domburg. During the seventeenth century in the dunes of Domberg stone altars were discovered that were related to the sanctuary of Nehalennia, a Gallico-Roman patron goddess of sailors. In 1970, a fishing boat pulled up similar stones from the bottom of the Oosterschelde. The rest of the second Nehalennian-temple lay underwater. Archaeological research eventually brought 240 votive altars and images to light. The archaeological finds in Domburg and Colijnsplaat originate from the second and third centuries. In those centuries there was evidently an active worship site of Nehalennia among the Roman settlements in Zeeland. On most stone altars, the goddess is depicted with a fruit basket at her feet and sometimes accompanied by a dog. Frequently next to the name of the goddess is also the name of the client and an abbreviation such as V.S.L.M (*Votum Solvit Libens Merito*: The vow is redeemed freely and deservedly). The merchant or sailor had a prosperous voyage and return, which was his reason to thank Nehalennia. Originally Nehalennia was a Celtic or Germanic goddess. She was incorporated by the Romans into their polytheism. The Nehalennia cult was, like

that of Hercules Magusanus, a mixture of indigenous and Roman religion. In this world of Roman religion and religious hybrids of indigenous beliefs, Christianity emerged in the fourth century. There is hardly any other data beyond this.





### 2.3 The Sees of Tongeren, Maastricht, and Liège

Christianity established itself in the urban areas. Some cities had their own clergy and bishop. For example, the Gallico-Roman settlement of Tongeren, which is the oldest town in present-day Belgium, did. The Romans had founded the city as an administrative center and garrison town situated along the Roman road from Cologne to the coast. Bishop Servatius (Dutch: Servaas, French: Servais) dedicated the church at Tongeren to Our Beloved Lady. The remains of Servatius' church are under the current basilica.

#### 2.3.1 The See of Tongeren located near Maastricht

When the forces that weakened and broke apart the Roman Empire could not be reversed, Servatius moved the See of Tongeren to Maastricht. Tongeren had lost much of its significance, whereas Maastricht was the new economic and religious center. The first Christian community in the current Netherlands was this fortified Roman camp along the Meuse River. Regarding the Christianity introduced by the Romans, most if not all traces of it have disappeared. Some tombstones unearthed in and around St. Servatius' church from around 400 demonstrate that a Christian community existed in Maastricht. These tombstones are among the oldest testimonies of Christian life throughout present-day Netherlands. A number of other much older archaeological artifacts found between 1995 and 1999 in Nijmegen and in Wijchen bear the Christian characters X and P (the chi-rho, the first two Greek letters of "Christ"). One, a rolled lead plate found in a graveyard in Nijmegen dating to the fourth century, was dated to approximately 220.

These artifacts attracted a great deal of attention because such a sign of Christian influence is considered surprisingly early. Scientific research has now shown that most of the objects are authentic, but that all five bearing Christian symbols are fakes. This simply means that the Maastricht tombstones are the older witnesses of earliest Christianity in the Netherlands.

The episcopal church of the bishop in Maastricht was the *Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk*, situated within the former Roman fortress (*castrum*), right beside an ancient Roman temple. During excavations, the rear wall of the temple was found in the garden of *Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk*. Its location points to a church which had replaced the pagan temple. A similar issue of Christianization, for example, is the use of an inverted Jupiter column (as found in Maastricht) as the base of a Christian altar. The church was a distant ancestor of the present Romanesque, twelfth-century church building. Bishop Servatius was buried in the old Roman churchyard, along the Roman road to Tongeren. His grave developed into a place of veneration and pilgrimage. At the grave of the first Dutch bishop there was a

wooden chapel, and later a little stone church. In ancient Roman urban centers, sometimes a graveyard was built where a saint was buried. St. Servatius Church is a good example.

After the death of Servatius, Maastricht remained an episcopal city for two and a half centuries. The last bishop of Maastricht was Lambertus. His successor, Hubertus, moved the See to Liège. The subsequent one constructed medieval lists of the bishops of Tongeren, Maastricht, and Liège attempting to trace the founding date of the episcopal See as far as possible in history to the apostles. Apparently, the goal was to increase the prestige of the ancient See. For the ten bishops of Tongeren mentioned on the list, there is no historical evidence. Of the twenty-one bishops of Maastricht, after a critical evaluation, only about ten remain. Of most of these, there is little known more than their ecclesiastical feast day, the date and veneration of their relics, and for some, participation in a council or a commissioning of a church building.

Regarding Bishop Servatius, fact and fiction run together, history and legend are interlaced. According to legend, he lived from about 343 to 384 and moved in the middle of the fourth century to the episcopal See at Maastricht. This was once generally accepted but is now debated. New research places him mid fifth century. The historical identification is based on the identification of Servatius with Sarbatios, who in the third century participated in various councils, but his venue was much farther south than Tongeren and Maastricht. A century after the death of Servatius, Bishop Gregory in the Gallic city of Tours had heard of him and reports of a flood that came close to his grave. He used the tale in his chronicle about the history of the Franks. On the basis of Gregory of Tours, who is the oldest hagiographical source of information regarding Servatius and the veneration of Servatius in Maastricht and its environs, more extensive legends arose, culminating in a poem by Henry van Veldeke in the second half of the twelfth century.

The name of the “good St. Servatius” became legendary in the course of the centuries. The legend explains why Servatius moved the episcopal See from Tongeren to Maastricht. In the time of the invasions of the Huns under Attila, so wrote Gregory, there lived a Bishop Servatius. He traveled to Rome in order to pray at the grave of Peter and in order to avert the threat of invasion. But the apostle Peter made it clear to him that the city of Tongeren would be laid waste by the Huns. Servatius returned to Tongeren, announced the bad news, took his leave, and departed to Maastricht. The core of the legendary message lets us feel something of the political tension of that day. Within a Roman empire that had become unstable, the first Bishop of the fledgling Dutch Church made his way.