Imams in the Netherlands: Home made Better than Import?

In February 1988, the Dutch government published a policy document concerning imams and their training. In previous years, it had strongly advocated such training. The policy document was the preliminary conclusion of a - sometimes heated - debate: Who is in control of future imams? Will the Dutch borders be closed to imams from Turkey and Morocco?

The Netherlands counts approximately 700,000 persons of Islamic background. Most belong to immigrant communities in the Netherlands and Morocco, which settled in the Netherlands in the 1940s and 1950s. Between 200 and 250 Islamic mosques can be found in the Netherlands; in the smaller houses of prayer the religious leaders are usually unqualified. The majority of these imams are recruited in the country of origin: Turkey or Morocco. The majority of the Turkish imams have been dispatched by the Directorate General for Religious Affairs, while the Moroccan imams have been recruited by imams from elsewhere; and 3. Restriction on entry for new imams from abroad if candidates in the Netherlands are available.

In February 1988, the Dutch government published a policy document on imams and their training. In that document, the government means that the training of imams in the Netherlands is more an ideological image than an ideological reality. They blame the present generation of Muslims in the Netherlands for the decreasing number of existing and new mosques. They blame the present generation of Muslims for not only within the confines of the mosque but also in other social structures, such as hospitals and penal institutions. These institutions have a tradition of spiritual care for their clients, which is different from the tradition in the Netherlands. They point to the training that current and future imams have in their country of origin: Turkey or Morocco. They doubt if the same level of religious knowledge can be obtained by means of other means. They doubt that it is not possible to train imams in the Netherlands.

The plea for Dutch imam training is further substantiated by the idea that there is no way to train imams who are more positive about the universal truth of the Islamic teaching, they mean that it is essential to further develop the Islamic teaching in the Netherlands.

On the other hand, imams who have a more positive attitude about the Islamic teaching should not only function within the confines of the mosque but also in other social structures, such as hospitals and penal institutions. These institutions have a tradition of spiritual care for their clients, which is different from the tradition in the Netherlands. They point to the training that current and future imams have in their country of origin: Turkey or Morocco. They doubt if the same level of religious knowledge can be obtained by means of other means. They doubt that it is not possible to train imams in the Netherlands. They blame the present generation of Muslims in the Netherlands for the decreasing number of existing and new mosques. They blame the present generation of Muslims for not only within the confines of the mosque but also in other social structures, such as hospitals and penal institutions. These institutions have a tradition of spiritual care for their clients, which is different from the tradition in the Netherlands. They point to the training that current and future imams have in their country of origin: Turkey or Morocco. They doubt if the same level of religious knowledge can be obtained by means of other means. They doubt that it is not possible to train imams in the Netherlands.