Is there a future for the Apostolic Society in the United States of America? Bauke van Oosbree is not so sure. ‘Fortunately there are many people like us who wish to do well, so what does it matter what we call it?’, the pastor of San Francisco wonders.

Do not expect him to ask for attention for the apostolic belief at the corner of the street, waving with a Weekly Letter. ‘What do I have to offer? We do not believe, do we, in an all-ruling God, nor that Jesus died for our sins. That is the conviction of most believers here’, Bauke van Oosbree from Fresno, United States, says. For many years now he has been pastor of the small community of San Francisco. The preacher at the corner of the street, Bible in hand, is a familiar sight in the United States. Entire streets in suburbs are full with churches, the one even more stricter in doctrine than the other. Van Oosbree makes his statement in a conversation with the Dutch anthropologist Frederique Demeijer. She visited him in the context of a study into the experiences of apostolic people. She wanted to know what it is like to be apostolic in his daily life. ‘You do not want to live with feelings of hate, you do not want to give negativity a chance, for it gnaws at you. I feel good about the mission to see what I can do for the other, to work towards a better world. That is the conviction I want to pass on’, Van Oosbree says. ‘For the apostolic Jesus was the first who accomplished such a way of living, but for very many believers here it is mainly about the thought that he died for their sins. I hate to think that this is what it is about. There are greater differences, for instance that you hold God responsible for all that happens in the world. That is just not for the apostolics. We want to be responsible ourselves and not think that you would do or think things by order of something or someone. And when I tell people here, that we ourselves are responsible for our doings, they say that it is not in the Bible.

For us the communion is an important moment during the service. We actually do something then: we forgive ourselves for what went wrong and decide to do it differently. For many believers in the USA it is too much, for they say that only God can forgive. My wife, too, points it out to me. She is not open to the apostolic belief. Maybe it will change, but not now. The...
Apostolic identity is a way of life. Of course there are more people who work towards a better world, but they do it in a different way.’ Because of the great differences Van Oosbree expects that the apostolic work in the United States has little chance with the population. It is because the believing part of the population is far too traditional. Bible Solid. And those who do not believe, have no desire for an organization or movement. ‘What should I have to do to let the apostolic belief develop here?’ Bauke Van Oosbree asks somewhat hopelessly. ‘I do not think it is impossible, but I cannot do it. Maybe someone else will succeed.’

Frederique Demeijer started in October 2014 a doctoral research for four years at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam at the Faculty of Theology, at the Praxis section (lived faith, plurality and identity). With six generations of members and ex-members of the apostolic society, she will investigate to what extent the apostolic religion was and has been decisive for their identity and how they experience the religion nowadays. Then there will be more understanding of the way in which apostolic people experience their belief, how religious identity is formed and what role religion and meaning plays.

Frederique Demeijer

Bauke van Oosbree

In the fifties the Van Oosbree family emigrated to the United States. The father was a grandson of the apostle J.H. van Oosbree (1862-1946). Bauke van Oosbree (1941) was fifteen years old and had to say goodbye to his life in Amsterdam and to his school and friends. That was not easy. His mother, too, found it difficult to start all over in a stranger country without knowing the language and culture. She missed the many contacts she had in Amsterdam with the other apostolic people, where many of whom came to visit them after the service every Sunday. When apostle L. Slok came to the USA three years after their emigration and announced that there would be meetings, it was a real godsend for her. ‘It was extremely important to her’, Bauke van Oosbree says. For him as a teenager it was less important. Eventually Bauke had a good job with an energy company, had an early retirement and for ten years worked as a real estate agent. Both his wife and he have stopped working now. They hope to make some nice trips. ‘We are saving for it.’