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THE PRESENCE APPROACH IN NEW YORK: TWO INTRIGUING EXAMPLES

Since the release of his Een theorie van de presentie in 2001, there has been much public discussion of prof. dr. A. J. Baart's theory of the practice of presence. To this point, however, the discussion and related research have been mostly confined to the Netherlands. Slowly that is changing, with the preparation of a German translation of the book, and comparative investigations underway in South Africa and the United States. This article reports on the New York research, begun in 2002, that has evaluated Catholic social outreach projects in the light of Baart's findings. Two New York projects in particular – one a residence for prisoners and the other a 'house of hospitality' – have been the focus of extensive inquiry. Study of these empirical examples raises questions for Baart's presence theory. Given that both projects ground their presence practice in explicit religious motivations, one wonders whether the role of motivational ideology remains underexplored in Baart's theory. Another question for Baart's theory suggested by the findings concerns the 'household model' of presence practice that both projects show. Baart's theory does not give attention to the presence practice of projects that have conscientiously constructed familial-domestic environments. At the same time, Baart's theory also raises certain questions for the projects studied. In the case of the outreach to prisoners, the question is to what degree presence can be practiced in a sanctioning program.

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Geaccepteerd mei 2003

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW YORK RESEARCH

The research project began out of a desire to make international comparisons to the findings presented in Baart (2001), *Een theorie van de presentie*. Prof. Baart and I were interested to know whether findings from studies of pastoral applications abroad would expand upon, challenge or otherwise enhance the picture of the presence practice formulated thus far in the Netherlands. We determined that the New York Archdiocese offered a realistic context for making comparisons. As much as possible, we sought to be aware of key demographic similarities and differences between the American and Dutch social environments. We decided that, at a minimum, a two-stage process of acquainting ourselves with the practice of presence in New York. The first stage involved off-site and on-site explorations of projects of interest. The second stage involved intensive on-site visits and interviews at two selected projects. In particular we sought to identify projects that showed, at first glance, a strong presence orientation, according to the criteria of Baart (2001). During the week of March 2-9, 2002, we visited the following five Catholic social service projects together: 1) the Missionary Sisters of Charity soup kitchen, Harlem; 2) Covenant House crisis center for homeless youth, Manhattan; 3) Maryhouse, a Catholic Worker house of

hospitality, Manhattan; 4) Part of the Solution community center, the Bronx; 5) Abraham House, a support center for prisoners and their families, the Bronx. At each site we observed interviewed project leaders, gathered documentation and observed the project in action. Thereafter we prepared a report describing each of the projects in terms of their *organizational structure, philosophy and goals, practice, effects and signs of presence orientation*. On the basis of this information, we selected two projects for further study: Maryhouse and Abraham House. We chose these two projects because both showed a strong presence orientation, both were small enough in scale to be investigated in the limited amount of time available for return visits to New York, and both were intriguing for a variety of other reasons (the project leaders were impressive for their personal qualities, both projects were established by man-woman leadership teams, both appeared strongly grounded in belief systems, et cetera). During the week of September 22-29, 2002, I returned to New York alone to make further site visits to the two selected projects and to conduct interviews with affiliated persons. A summary description of the two projects and key findings follows.

CASE STUDY 1: ABRAHAM HOUSE

Abraham House (www.abrahamhouse.org) is an outreach and support program for prisoners and their families in the South Bronx. It is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1993 by three penitentiary chaplains, with the status of an 'affiliated' organization within the Catholic Charities system of the Archdiocese of New York. As such, it is recognized and advised by the Archdiocese, but the Archdiocese does not directly oversee or fund the project. In its outreach it is nondenominational, imposing no religious criteria for participation.

The leadership structure of Abraham House consists of a staff and a board of directors. The staff lends day-to-day leadership and carries out the various program components of Abraham House. The staff is headed by an executive director, who is a woman religious, and a spiritual director, who is a priest. These two share the highest level of decision making and responsibility in everyday matters at Abraham House. Among the other staff positions are assistant director, food pantry coordinator, psychologist, instructor, after school

program director, accountant, counselor, drug counselor, handyman, evening supervisor, grantwriter and volunteer attorney. Ten of approximately 25 staff members are paid for their work, though only two of these work full time. Abraham House's board of directors currently includes seventeen persons, including representatives of New York Catholic Charities, persons prominent in the media, priests and religious, and two former prisoners. Program funding comes from private grants and donations and New York correctional system funds transfers. Residents also contribute a portion of their wages earned while in residence. In addition, Abraham House receives city and state assistance for operation of the food pantry.

The goal of Abraham House is to break the cycle of crime in families by providing an alternative to incarceration for criminal offenders and a program of support for family members of prisoners. The chief means Abraham House applies to realize these goals are a residence for offenders, a program of services for prisoners' families, and a parish community for (ex-)prisoners and their families. This combination of means is novel, with no known equivalents in the US or elsewhere. (A possible point of comparison in the Dutch context could be the houses of Exodus Nederland – cf. www.stichtingexodus.nl – a project that seeks to help prisoners with societal reintegration at the end of their period of detention.)

Catholic spirituality plays an important role in Abraham House's philosophy and practice. Abraham House offers daily Mass and prayer opportunities for residents and two weekend Masses that are open to a broader parish community of family members of prisoners and ex-prisoners. Abraham House's leaders emphasize the importance of keeping the program small, so that the house does not show the dehumanizing quality found in the prison system. They also advocate taking a long-term and gradual approach with prisoners and their families, asserting that the seriousness of the problems encountered cannot be resolved with a short-term approach. Abraham House seeks as residents prison candidates who are truly amenable to changing their lives.

Abraham House consists functionally of three inter-related program areas: an alternative-to-incarceration residence program, a program of services for prisoners and their families and a parish for prisoners and their families. A description of these program areas follows.

The priest co-founder of Abraham House, whose job title is spiritual director, has the responsibility of selecting candidates for the residency program and overseeing their participation. Up to ten men at a time may be accepted to live at Abraham House's Bronx location in lieu of a prison sentence. These men live under the supervision of Abraham House staff members. To be considered for placement at Abraham House, an inmate must be a first-time offender, not convicted of a violent or sex crime or arson. The offender must be drug-free at the time of entry into the Abraham House program. In his screening process, the spiritual director looks for men who demonstrate a willingness to change their behavior and seriously pursue a new kind of life. The spiritual director interviews applicants and their lawyers and families as well. Judges have the authority to place offenders who have met the Abraham House criteria in the program. Normally residence lasts one to three years. Those placed may be in the sentencing stage or near the end of their term of incarceration. In the latter case, they are paroled to Abraham House for at least one year, remaining under the jurisdiction of the courts. Abraham House is required to report on residents' progress on a monthly or bimonthly basis.

To graduate from the Abraham House residence program and be set free by a judge, participants must meet educational requirements, receive counseling, remain drug free, take personal and community responsibility, seek to rebuild family connections and get a job and keep it. The men in the Abraham House program work in paying jobs outside the house during the day, which are arranged by or in cooperation with the Abraham House staff. Residents are expected to come directly home at the end of their work day. At times, they share the evening meal together, though this is not required. They also have the opportunity to share in Mass and prayer occasions offered in the house during the week. Residents have work responsibilities within the house as well. On Saturdays, for example, they serve the community meal that follows Mass and clean up afterwards. Thereafter residents may have, depending on their prior conduct, the privilege of spending the night with their own families, away from Abraham House.

Abraham House provides services to the families of prisoners as well, under the auspices of its Family Center. The Family Center seeks to rebuild family connections and support for prisoners and ex-prisoners

and to support the family members themselves. The two focal points of the Family Center activity are service provision and community building. Among the services offered are counseling (for substance abuse, spousal abuse, parenting, legal issues, housing problems, et cetera) and the distribution of food, clothing and emergency services. Abraham House also offers educational programs, such as literacy and language classes. In addition, Abraham House provides practical help for dealing with the immigration and social service bureaucracies. Apart from making services available, Abraham House tries to build a community of mutual support among offenders, ex-offenders and their families. In practice this entails developing bonds between those who share the experience of having a family member in prison and the difficulties incumbent thereof, including social ostracization and economic pressures. Abraham House provides frequent opportunities for families of offenders to come together and to discuss problems held in common. (The opportunity to worship together is an extension of this community building.) Long-time members of the community play a key role in helping others to find solutions to everyday problems. A major component of Abraham House's outreach to families is the after school program for children (ages 5-15) of inmates and ex-inmates. This program offers tutoring to children in a homelike atmosphere. The children receive a meal when they arrive and have the opportunity to play when their lessons are done. Abraham House's parish community gathers in the same building where the prisoners live. A chapel takes up most of the first floor. On the weekends two Masses take place, with the Abraham House spiritual director being the usual presider. A community dinner follows the Saturday Mass. Besides the Masses, the parish holds other sacramental celebrations (baptisms, marriages, funerals) and has a religious education and neighborhood outreach program as well. Abraham House's alternative-to-incarceration program has proven to be impressively effective. Thus far only one of more than one hundred graduates of the residents program has been returned to prison for a second offense. Admittedly, Abraham House selects only those prisoners who are most likely to succeed, but the success rate remains striking nonetheless. In the course of my visit I encountered testimony to the program's effectiveness among current and past residents, family members of prisoners, and paid staff and volunteers (cf.

Anderson, 2002). Informants repeatedly described Abraham House as a ‘family.’ Praise for Abraham House can also be found in the recently published book of a Manhattan Supreme Court Justice who has sent prisoners to the residence program (cf. Snyder, 2002). According to its own report (Abraham House website, September 2002), Abraham House distributes 125 bags of food to families each week. It also opens its clothing closet on a weekly basis. During my visits I was struck by the warmth of the atmosphere. The children and adults I encountered (including residents) seemed at ease and were open and welcoming.

SIGNS OF PRESENCE ORIENTATION AT ABRAHAM HOUSE

The following five characteristics and associated tendencies (see table 1) are hallmarks of the presence approach described in Baart 2001. After briefly describing the characteristics and tendencies, I then consider whether they are observable in the practice of Abraham House.

According to Baart’s theory, presence practitioners tend to follow others rather than expect others to come to them (e.g., for an office appointment). This tendency applies to time as well as place: they follow the life rhythm of others, on a daily and long-term basis. Presence practitioners also, according to the theory, work in an integrated fashion, seeking to immerse themselves in an unfragmented and unconditional way into the whole life system of others. A third tendency of presence practitioners Baart identifies is the tendency to involve themselves in lived life. That is, they seek connections with others not only in the problematic areas of their life but also in the mundane and joyous aspects of daily life, and in its minutiae. A fourth tendency of presence practitioners is to prioritize the good of the other, keeping a low profile for themselves and

opening themselves (attuning themselves) to the agenda and lifeworld of the other. Finally, presence practitioners, according to Baart, find meaning in the experience of counting for one another. That is, they value making a difference in the lives of others (counting for others – even for a single person), but they also value that the reverse is true as well: those encountered are allowed to make a difference in the life of the presence practitioners.

While noting these tendencies, we should keep in mind that the presence approach is more than a methodology. It has its own base philosophy, which runs against the grain of many prevailing approaches to social action. Its vision of the human person focuses on personal dignity and allows the other to be other. The presence approach also has a characteristic answer to social questions, which prioritizes relationship formation and gives special attention to human suffering. It has a normative and personal stamp. In other words, rather than being an alternative methodology (to professional ‘intervention’), the presence approach is a characteristic sort or quality of professionalism.

Using the above named characteristics and tendencies as a reference frame, we can say that Abraham House is strongly presence oriented in its approach. In its practice it shows three, and perhaps all five, of the typical presence tendencies. Its practice is *integrated*, being connected to the complete life world of the prisoners served. It is set in a struggling resource-deprived neighborhood, which is a characteristic point of origin and residence for prisoners and their families, and it has established fast ties with institutional domains that include the criminal justice system, the world of work, the Church, the educational system and the social welfare system. Abraham House’s practice also involves an *immersion in everyday life*. There is much opportunity for informal, daily connection among those associated with Abraham House. Residents share meals, conversa-

Table 1 Presence Characteristics and Tendencies Identified in Baart 2001

Characteristic	Associated Tendency
1. Mobility, in place and time	1. Following the other
2. Space and boundaries	2. Working in an integrated fashion
3. Seeking connection	3. Being involved in lived life
4. Attuning oneself	4. Prioritizing the good of the other
5. Meaningfulness	5. Counting for one another

tion, prayer, work and some counseling sessions with other residents and with the professional staff. Weekends bring the opportunity to gather in a relaxed setting with family members and with members of the Abraham House parish community. Moreover, Abraham House's practice is clearly oriented toward *counting for one another*, with staff, residents and family members associated with Abraham House all testifying to how others at Abraham House had made a positive difference in their lives and describing how they were touched by these encounters. Clearly, too, the project is oriented toward the betterment of the lives of persons who might not otherwise count: for prisoners facing the most pronounced form of societal exclusion (in-carceration) and for their family members who often know an especially high level of social ostracization. The two remaining characteristics (and associated tendencies) identified from the table show up in the practice of Abraham House in more ambivalent fashion. Although Abraham House shows the characteristic of *mobility in time* in the sense of establishing long-lasting contacts with prisoners and their families (residents live at the house for one to three years; former residents and families members of prisoners may remain in the Abraham House network of support indefinitely), it does not show the associated tendency of *following the other*. Prisoners and their families must come to Abraham House and must conform to the expectations (including meeting times) of Abraham House, and not the other way around. Notably, however, this expectation is not generated within the model of an office or clinic or 'center.' Instead Abraham House opts for the model of a *house*. One might also speak of a 'home' atmosphere, given that so many respondents choose to speak of Abraham House as a 'family.'

A second presence characteristic showing up in ambivalent fashion in the practice of Abraham House is the characteristic of *attuning oneself*, which is associated with the tendency to *prioritize the good of the other*. Abraham House's practice is clearly focused on benefiting the persons the project is present to and Abraham House representatives show a decided readiness to be open to the dignity of they individual persons they serve, refusing to be turned away by unpleasant and antisocial behaviors and frightening social contexts. On the other hand, a clear vision of what the good of the other entails conditions the practice, and the openness to the other is bounded by

plainly stated behavioral expectations and the power to sanction that Abraham House representatives possess. The vision of the human person applied by the topmost leadership and by the majority of the staff is strongly informed by a Catholic worldview and related normative expectations for behavior. In addition, as far as prisoners are concerned, nonconformity (to house rules, for example) carries with it the possibility of a return to prison. Even in the after school program, one finds explicitly stated expectations for behavior, along with the rewards and punishments that accompany (non)conformity.

In short, within the practice of Abraham House three of the five presence characteristics and associated tendencies turn up in similar fashion to how they appeared in the practice of the Dutch pastoral workers. But two characteristics and their associated tendencies (*following the other, prioritizing the good of the other*) show up in ambivalent fashion. Or at least – they show up in ways that demonstrate an alternative modality for being present.

CASE STUDY 2: MARYHOUSE

Maryhouse is a Catholic Worker house of hospitality in the historically poor but now gentrified Bowery neighborhood of New York City. It serves as a residence for women (and some children) in need and for others committed to the Catholic Worker movement. Maryhouse offers a daily lunchtime meal for women who come in from off the street and offers multiple other kinds of support to persons as necessary. The Catholic Worker was founded by a journalist named Dorothy Day and an itinerant philosopher named Peter Maurin in 1933. Sharing a common point of view as radical Catholics, they joined efforts to publish and distribute a newspaper, 'The Catholic Worker,' to promote and act upon their beliefs. They also began to establish houses of hospitality and farming communes to welcome the hungry, homeless and forsaken. Protest actions (against injustice, war and violence) have also played a key role in the Catholic Worker's activity. At present there are over 175 Catholic Worker communities around the world, with more than 130 of these in the United States. (At least two Catholic Worker houses can be found in the Bijlmer section of Amsterdam. The Jeannette Noëlhuis and Rhimouhuis both offer hospitality to refugees. Cf. *Bijeen* May, 2002,

and *The Catholic Worker*, May, 2000.) These communities are for the most part functionally independent, with no official tie to the Catholic Church. There is no leadership hierarchy, bureaucracy or standardized set of rules to oversee the movement. On the contrary, the *Catholic Worker* shows an antipathy toward bigness and bureaucracy, which translates into the smallness of scale and personalism we see in Maryhouse's approach. Maryhouse itself has no formal leadership structure. Informally, however, there is implicit agreement that a number of persons have authority to make key decisions. This authority is recognized on the basis of longstanding ties to the movement, qualities of practical competence, intelligence and virtue, and a reputation for being 'responsible.' Maryhouse has a functional relationship to two other Catholic Worker operations: St. Joseph House, a residence and soup kitchen located two blocks to the south, and Peter Maurin Farm, in Marlboro, New York. Each of these entities has its own self-generated leadership and operational structure, but they share resources and there is much communication and personal traffic between the three. Maryhouse, which opened in 1975, includes a dining room and kitchen, a large hall where the newspaper is prepared for mailing, a chapel and private bedrooms on the upper floors.

The *Catholic Worker* newspaper, published seven times a year, serves as a voice and sounding board for the *Catholic Worker*, and in particular for Maryhouse, St. Joseph House and Peter Maurin Farm. Persons living at Maryhouse take on a majority of the production and distribution responsibilities. The paper generates donations that are Maryhouse's primary source of income. Money is apportioned between the two houses and the farm according to need. As a matter of principle, Maryhouse does not claim a non-profit, tax-exempt organizational status with the US government. Catholic Worker communities are grounded in a firm belief in the God-given dignity of every human person and express commitments to non-violence, a green revolution, voluntary poverty, prayer and hospitality for the homeless, exiled, hungry and forsaken. These beliefs (printed each May in the newspaper as 'The Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker') find outlet in 'works of mercy' (such as feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, visiting prisoners) and in protests against injustice, war, racism and violence. Interestingly enough, the acceptance of worldly failure in these efforts is an

explicit part of the heritage of the Catholic Worker movement (see the 'Aims and Means' text). At Maryhouse, judging by the reports of informants, philosophical and theological reflection are not incidental but fundamental parts of the community life. There is an ongoing practice of holding weekly meetings for the 'clarification of thought' and Maryhouse tends to attract well educated and articulate volunteers. Approximately seven out of twenty-five Maryhouse residents may be considered to be 'volunteers' in the sense that they reside there more by choice than out of a specific socio-economic need. Some community members stay just briefly, but others remain for years. (Multiple examples of decades-long residents were identified.) Those who live in the house primarily out of need are all women and children who have faced problems such as homelessness, poverty, abuse and other forms of trauma. A central part of Maryhouse's practice is to serve as a no-cost residence for women (and sometimes their children) for extended periods of time. Not all who come to the door can be taken in. The lack of turnover often keeps Maryhouse from helping people who need temporary shelter. These persons are referred elsewhere.

Maryhouse opens for lunch five days a week. Women come in from the street for lunch, and house residents and others with ties to Maryhouse also wander in. The dining room seats about twenty-five persons at a time. Maryhouse also has a clothing room, where clothing donations are redistributed, and a shower room. When needed, Maryhouse volunteers help people get medical attention. Housekeeping tasks, which include cooking, shopping, cleaning and making repairs, are divided among the Maryhouse residents. One key duty is called 'taking the house'. The person who takes the house typically cooks and answers the door and telephone. But the atmosphere at Maryhouse does not suggest that the focus is on task accomplishment. A better description, based on my own observation, would be that people seem to spend a lot of time 'hanging around' and talking. Informality prevails and there is no clear segregation between the volunteers and persons in need.

Production and distribution of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper provides another focal point for Maryhouse activity. A Friday night lecture series keeps alive the spirit of the 'clarification of thought' concept. Organized prayer at Maryhouse takes the form of a Mass on

Thursdays in the dining room and minimally attended vespers nightly. The location of the Mass was changed to accommodate a resident who cannot climb the stairs. Political action in the form of prayer vigils and demonstrations is a practice pursued by some but not all associated with Maryhouse.

Maryhouse offers no-cost housing to approximately twenty persons in need and seven volunteers each day of the year. In the course of the week it serves lunch to approximately forty persons a day. The house of hospitality also offers regular opportunities for worship and shared prayer, informal conversation and reflection. Other services provided include the offer of clothing, showers, a mailing address and help in obtaining medical and social welfare services. The newspaper has a broad reach, with a circulation of more than 86,000. The movement has had notable off-shoots, including the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists and Pax Christi, USA. Catholic Worker alumni can be found on the editorial staffs of major publications, on university faculties, in labor unions and in monasteries. During its history, the Catholic Worker has often adopted 'prophetic' standpoints that have challenged both Church and State. One of the most distinctive features of Maryhouse's practice is its open-to-all and open-ended approach. This approach allows Maryhouse to serve those who may not be able to be served by other kinds of social intervention projects (because they do not qualify or fit in) and to enjoy (very) long-term relationships with people.

Signs of presence orientation at Maryhouse

Returning to the five presence characteristics and associated tendencies identified in table 1, we find that Maryhouse shows three of the five characteristics/tendencies in a pronounced and similar way to what we find in the practice of the Dutch pastoral workers. The two remaining characteristics/tendencies also show up, but in ways distinct from the practice of the Dutch practitioners.

The practice of Maryhouse is like that of the Dutch practitioners in that Maryhouse affiliates *work in integrated fashion*, immersing themselves into the complex life system of those they are present to. Catholic Worker 'volunteers' have chosen to live within the same house and same (traditionally) poor neighborhood as those they are present to. They share voluntarily in the poverty of those persons and thereby

come into contact with many of the same daily realities (a shortage of resources, crime, struggles with the social welfare bureaucracy), though of course their level of vulnerability does not approach that of those who are involuntarily poor. Catholic Worker affiliates also *involve themselves substantially in the lived daily life* of those they are present to. Maryhouse provides a setting in which meals, conversation, games, worship and celebrations are shared. Such contact is realized among many persons at Maryhouse in daily life over the course of years and even decades. In addition, we see that Maryhouse is strongly oriented toward *counting for one another* in its practice. Attention goes preferentially to marginalized and, even stronger, outcast members of society – that is, to people who often do not count in American society. Maryhouse serves these people by offering a residence to some and food to many more, but the project goes beyond resource distribution when it applies its concepts of voluntary poverty and living together in a house of hospitality. Repeatedly I heard Maryhouse volunteers voice the sentiment that they were touched by/challenged by/educated by the less advantaged persons they live with. In other words, significant relationships appear to have been formed, wherein persons of greater and fewer advantages count for one another.

Regarding the two remaining characteristics and their associated tendencies, we find some notable contrasts with the approach taken by the Dutch presence practitioners. As with Abraham House, Maryhouse does not go to the people – that is, they do not *follow* people as the Dutch pastoral workers do. Instead, the people come to the house. Interestingly, Maryhouse, again like Abraham House but unlike the Dutch practitioners, also adopts the 'house' or home/family model (as opposed to the possible alternative of an outreach 'center). As for the characteristic/tendency of *attuning oneself*, what is striking is that the Maryhouse affiliates show this characteristic strongly – in the form of a low personal profile and a high tolerance for the chosen preferences of the other – but this low profile and openness was often found to be grounded in a very explicit Catholic mindset (as was also the case with Abraham House). That is, the openness to and tolerance for the other found justification in strongly held religious principles that encourage just such an approach. This offers another intriguing point of contrast with the Dutch findings, given that in the Dutch context the

religious and/or ideological motives always remained in the background. With Maryhouse, and Abraham House as well, the religious motivation is explicit and central.

CONCLUSION

Having briefly considered a number of findings from the New York research, two questions remain. The first is whether the findings have the possibility of improving or expanding upon the conclusions presented in Baart (2001). The second is whether Baart's presence theory has anything to offer to the practice of Abraham House and Maryhouse.

In response to the first question, it appears that Baart's theory might well be improved by taking into consideration the 'household' model seen in both the Abraham House and Maryhouse projects. Whereas the Dutch presence practitioners consistently are present by *following people* into their lives (cf. Baart 2001, p. 61, 67), Abraham House and Maryhouse both show that it is also possible to be highly present to people by opening up a house in their midst. Note that this is still a limited kind of following – the houses are expressly located in the areas where the target population already lives – but once there, the people of Abraham House and Maryhouse (i.e., the staff and volunteers) do not go out to find, meet and share with people as much as they remain still and let the people come to them. The intensity of the presence experience comes from the living together in a homelike setting over time, wherein a whole array of life experience is shared. Baart's theory would do well to consider what this alternative model has to teach us.

Another way the New York findings challenge Baart's theory is in their coupling of a strong presence approach with an explicit religious mindset and impulse. There is no mistaking the Catholic identity of either Abraham House or Maryhouse. Mass and prayer opportunities are regularly offered in both houses. Project staff members and volunteers show a high level of religious intentionality in their words and actions. And though neither project shows a conscientious orientation toward realizing religious conversion among project affiliates (on the contrary, interviewees consistently showed a wariness about imposing their own religious identity on others), one cannot get around the fact that Catholic notions about human dignity and the presence of God among and within all people and Catholic ethical norms

inform the practice of both projects. This contrasts with what we find in Baart (2001), where the religious dimension of personal motivation remains under-explored, in regard to both the pastoral workers and Baart himself. (Only 30 of the 900+ pages of Baart's book address the issue of personal motivation directly. Admittedly, however, it was Baart's express intention to delve into this matter more thoroughly in Baart 2001 – see p. 27, line 8 in the table, and p. 39-41 – and this shortcoming was partially amended in Baart and Vosman, 2003.) The question of the relationship of religious motivation and thought to the practice of presence continues to be pressing, complex and worthy of further investigation. Given that a noticeably high portion of the presence practitioners encountered in the New York projects appeared to do so for religious reasons, what does this imply for Baart's theory? Are religious motivations and thought operative but submerged in the Dutch presence practitioners and in Baart's theory? Why are they not explicit as in the American examples?

At the same time, Baart's theory also suggests questions that can be posed in regard to the practice of the two New York projects. One such question concerns the possibility of practicing presence within a context where the threat of sanction is a constant. This question is most pressing in the case of Abraham House, where residents face the possibility of a prison sentence if they fail to conform to the Abraham House agenda. How much genuine personal reciprocity can be achieved in such an environment? This is not meant as a critique of the Abraham House's approach to dealing with its residents, since the practice there appears to be reasonable, humane and effective. Rather this question means to highlight the challenge facing a project like Abraham House when it seeks to be truly open to the life experience and priorities of the people the project serves. Tremendous barriers – resulting from individual and collective prejudgments and fears – stand between those convicted as criminals and those who seek to learn from them, value them and be open to them. All of the baggage accompanying the authority to reward and punish may stand in the way of being genuinely present to such persons, even when the best of intentions apply.

NOTE

Institutional sponsorship for the New York research was provided by Actioma research and activation institute (Den Bosch) and by the Katholieke Theologische Universiteit te Utrecht.

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SAMENVATTING

In 2002 deed de auteur samen met Andries Baart in (het aartsbisdom van) New York onderzoek naar gestalten en varianten van presentiewerk aldaar.

Na een eerste verkenning in het veld van een ruim aantal 'presentieprojecten' werden er twee, onderling sterk verschillende, uitgelicht voor een nadere casestudy. In deze bijdrage wordt daarvan verslag gedaan.

De eerste is Abraham House, gevestigd in de Bronx. Enerzijds worden daar, gebonden aan strenge regels en ter bevordering van een goede terugkeer in de samenleving, veroordeelde misdadigers gehuisvest *in plaats van in de gevangenis*; en anderzijds wordt er aan familieleden van gevangenen een zeer breed spectrum van opvang en steun geboden. De andere is Mary House, gebaseerd op de filosofie van de *Catholic Worker* (zie ook het Jeannette Noëlhuis in Amsterdam). In Mary House zien we het intense samenwonen van burgers die hun kop goed boven water kunnen houden en anderen die om uiteenlopende redenen grote moeite hebben het leven aan te kunnen. Zij delen voor kortere of (zeer) lange tijd, dikwijls in een gezamenlijke levensovertuiging waarin vrede en soberheid centraal staan, elkaars leven

in alle facetten. De auteur vergelijkt beide *houses* niet alleen onderling maar beschouwt ze ook in het licht van Baarts presentietheorie. Daarbij blijkt enerzijds dat – naast een frappante overeenkomst – met behulp daarvan beide adequaat beschreven en begrepen kunnen worden en anderzijds dat zij ook bijzondere kenmerken hebben die een uitdaging vormen voor de presentietheorie. Twee zaken springen er daarbij uit: beide presentieprojecten steunen op een uitgesproken, zeer sterke en goed onderhouden levensbeschouwelijke *mindset* – zo sterk zelf dat deze een *sine qua non* lijken te zijn voor het werk zelf – en beide zijn niet zo zeer *outreaching* (naar de mensen toe gaan), maar bieden een 'huisachtige' voorziening aan waar mensen zeer welkom zijn.