

Dutch 'distaste' at revelation that royals were baptized as Mormons by proxy

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Utrecht, The Netherlands (ENInews)--There is public criticism in the Netherlands of the Mormon practice of baptism by proxy after a Dutch newspaper revealed May 9 that several members of the royal family were posthumously "baptized" into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, colloquially known as the Mormon church.

The daily newspaper Trouw quoted unpublished documents in the Mormon church's global genealogical database that show the late Queen Juliana, her husband Prince Bernhard and Queen Beatrix's late husband Prince Claus were all baptized as Mormons after their deaths.

Mormons believe the proxy baptism ritual allows deceased people from other religions to enter the afterlife. The church has urged Mormons only to posthumously baptize their own ancestors.

However, last February, Jewish and Hindu groups reacted with anger at revelations that Jewish Holocaust victim Anne Frank, Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi and the parents of Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal had been baptized Mormons by proxy.

Some Dutch parliamentarians are calling on Home Affairs Minister Liesbeth Spies to counsel regional government archives against cooperating with the Mormon church, Trouw reported May 10.

The denomination has made an offer to the country's 12 provinces to digitally scan all their births, marriages and deaths records for use on computers, free of charge. However, the aim of this is to collect more names to baptize by proxy, Trouw said.

Parliamentarian Anja Hazekamp has tabled parliamentary questions, asking the home affairs minister how cooperation with the Mormon church for cost-cutting ends can be reconciled with the right to privacy.

Archivists too are debating whether financial or ethical concerns should prevail. The province of Gelderland has agreed to have the Mormon church digitalize its archives, but Utrecht has refused and Overijssel has doubts.

The Mormon Church in the Netherlands will examine the possibility of setting up a register of people who do not want to be posthumously baptized, spokesman Hans Boom told the public broadcaster NOS on May 10.

At present, it is not possible for the Mormon Church to guarantee someone that they will not be posthumously baptized, he said.

Boom told the NOS that he will discuss the opt-out scheme with the denomination's global leadership in the United States. The baptism of Prince Claus took place two years after his death in 2002, at a Mormon temple in Brazil. This may have been done by "over-enthusiastic members," Boom told Trouw, adding it was a "gesture of love."

Prominent Dutch theologian Huub Oosterhuis, who preached at Prince Claus's funeral, called the posthumous baptism of the Dutch royals "tasteless."

The Mormon Church in the Netherlands on its website republished on May 9 an earlier statement, dated February 21, 2012, in which it rejected baptism by proxy of Holocaust victims.

The statement concludes: "It worries us when someone deliberately violates the church's policy, whereby something that should be seen as an offering of love and respect, gives rise to conflict."

In an May 11 editorial, Trouw points out that the Mormon practice of posthumous baptism is well-known and that Mormons are not violating any rules in accessing publicly available data. "Privacy rules are formally only for the living." However, "it would be good if those of us who are alive are already given the opportunity of registering somewhere that under no circumstance will this posthumous act of charity be appreciated."

Furthermore, public authorities can be expected to digitalize their files themselves. "It would demonstrate good trusteeship and respect for deceased citizens if public records are not handed over in their entirety to organizations that want to use them for other purposes."

The Dutch government's information service has not reacted to the newspaper revelation of the Mormon baptisms of members of the royal family.

The church says there are about 9,000 Mormons in the Netherlands. The only Mormon temple in the country is in Zoetermeer, near The Hague.