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Religion in the Modern Netherlands and the Problems of Pluralism

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The religious history of the Netherlands during the last two centuries exhibits some of the same dynamics and tensions as those evidenced in neighbouring countries. This article selects from religious history three historiographical issues salient to transnational patterns. The first pertains to Dutch church-state relations in the nineteenth century, most notably a relatively early disestablishment. The second theme concerns the so-called 'pillarization' (*verzuiling*) of Dutch society, and to what extent pillarization – to the extent it is a useful concept at all – can be regarded as a quintessentially 'Dutch' way to manage religious pluralism. The last theme focuses on secularization, a concept which historians have used to analyse the decline of organized religion in the Netherlands, particularly the sharp decline in religious participation and adherence after 1960. Religion, however, has remained an important focus of debate in recent decades, as the Dutch sought again to renegotiate the politics of pluralism.

In religious terms, the modern Netherlands has been a country of paradoxes. For the last century, the numbers of those disclaiming any religious affiliation have been among the highest in Europe, a phenomenon strengthened by the absence of a state church. At the same time, the country's public life in the last two centuries has been characterized by uncommonly powerful religious movements that shaped – and to some degree still shape – the fields of politics, education and media. A Protestant country (nearly two-thirds of its population were so identified in the nineteenth century) with a historically Protestant-dominant state, the Netherlands became, by the mid-twentieth century, a country where the fulcrum of power lay in the hands of the Catholic political party (*Katholieke Volkspartij*), who represented a large and rather well-disciplined religious minority.[1] An Islamic power – insofar

as the Dutch colonial empire until the 1940s included the largest Muslim population in the world – the Netherlands has found it difficult to come to terms with the 'new' religion of Islam that arrived with recent immigration. In more general terms, modern Dutch history has been characterized by arrangements that gave much latitude to its many religious groups, but at the same time generated a society frequently given to religious tension, at times not far from violent forms of confrontation, but in any event a society acutely aware of its religious divisions and differences.[2]

The Netherlands' fractious religious landscape, then, is crucial to understanding not only the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but also the history of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the nineteenth and twentieth. This need not suggest that Dutch religious history is somehow unique. The country's religious history in the modern period in important respects resembles that of Switzerland and Germany, all historically decentralized, confessionally-mixed, and Protestant-dominant states, the Netherlands resembling these countries particularly in respect to the response of substantial Catholic minorities to their minority status. Seen more broadly, the Netherlands constitutes only another example of the 'ethnicization' of religious conflict that characterized Western Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that pitted not only Catholics and Protestants against each other but also anticlerical or secular movements against religious ones. In this way, Dutch religious histories show important congruities with not only Germany and Switzerland but countries like Austria or Belgium, where the contest between 'belief' and 'unbelief', between religious parties and secular ones, long helped to determine political and social identities.

In yet other ways, the Netherlands more closely resembles other neighbours. In its relatively plural and unregulated religious life, and in the relatively freewheeling ways in which religion has shaped civil society, the Netherlands more closely represents Great Britain or the United States than it does the more thoroughly confessionalized states of continental Europe, with their historic (semi-)state churches and registered religious communities.[3] Dutch religious communities have not enjoyed the same partnership with the state than is even now often the case in other parts of Europe, but they have also enjoyed greater freedom to act without restrictions, as evident

1   Herman Bakvis, *Catholic Power in the Netherlands* (Montreal 1981).

2   P. de Rooy, *Openbaring en openbaarheid* (Amsterdam 2009).

3   David Martin, *On Secularization* (Lanham 2005) 77. For a recent comparative study that draws similar conclusions about the relative closeness of Dutch churches to civil society, see Arnd Bauerkämper and Jürgen Nautz (eds.), *Zwischen Fürsorge und Seelsorge. Christliche Kirchen in den europäischen Zivillgesellschaften seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main 2009).

in the case of the Scientology church, which, in contrast with surrounding countries, has operated without impediment in the Netherlands. In its level of secularization, defined as number of people without church affiliation, the Netherlands can again be reconfigured into a wider European pattern, constituting part of a wider belt of non-adherence in Western Europe that stretches down to Belgium and France (and which also includes regions of formerly communist Europe). By another measure, the Netherlands, at least in recent years, has shown evidence of a moral ethos that clearly places it within the 'secular-rational' and 'self-expressive' values of Protestant European countries.[4] With 5.8 percent of its citizens Muslim, the Netherlands also belongs to a group of countries of Western Europe where the Islamic population is relatively high, and where, as in France (6.4 percent to 9.6 percent Muslim), Denmark (2.8 percent to 5 percent) and Switzerland (4.2 percent) there has been strong public protest against the anticipated 'Islamization' of society.[5] Like its neighbours the Dutch have found it difficult to find 'room' for Islam in its public space.[6]

Given the fact that Dutch religious history has so closely been part and parcel of various international patterns, the most prudent conclusion may be that the Netherlands stands out religiously speaking only in the high concentration of religious diversity it contains within its small territory (as the historians Joris van Eijnatten and Fred van Lieburg have suggested).[7] Perhaps another argument is that radical discontinuities have characterized Dutch religious history, as the scholar of religion Peter van Rooden has argued. Van Rooden's thesis, both influential and controversial, is that Dutch religious history is characterized by radical shifts in the relationship between religion, society and politics, most notably the shift from the confessional church to the Protestant nation at the end of eighteenth century, the shift from to the Protestant nation to a 'pillarized' regime in the late nineteenth century, and the shift to a secular or 'dechristianized' regime after the 1960s.[8]

In looking at the past two centuries alone, however, the 'relevance' of Dutch religious history can be further specified. Open to different and competing religious currents from the outside world and historically fragmented from within, the Netherlands was, no less in the modern period

4   'Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map of the World', www.worldvaluessurvey.org; Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution* (Princeton 1977).

5   Forum, *Factbook 2008. De positie van Moslims in Nederland, feiten en cijfers*; http://www.forum.nl/pdf/factbook-islam-nl.pdf.

6   Marcel Maussen, *Ruimte voor de islam?* (Amsterdam 2006).

7   Joris van Eijnatten and Fred van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis* (Hilversum 2006).

8   P. van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes. Over godsdienst en maatschappij in Nederland. 1570-1990* (Amsterdam 1996) 17, 29, 40-45; Peter van Rooden, 'Oral history en het vreemde sterven van het Nederlands christendom', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden [BMGN]* 119:4 (2004) 524-551.

than in the Golden Age, a particularly intense locus of competing claims on how to define religion in terms of both maintaining public order and guaranteeing personal and collective freedoms. These longstanding debates were defined by abiding divisions between Protestantism and Catholicism, between more orthodox and more liberal outlooks, between the defenders of religion and of secularism, and perhaps in recent years, between secularism and Islam. Perhaps precisely because the Netherlands in its recent history has been subject to negotiating a place for religion in public and in private life, it might be expected that religion would retain an unusual saliency, a contested but persistent force in shaping Dutch politics, society and the identities of its citizens, not least those who would have preferred to ignore religion altogether. Religious motivation proved enormously important in mobilizing Dutch citizens to become active in public life, a pattern that has declined in importance only in recent decades. But even now, when the decline of religion has led one sociologist to typify the Netherlands as 'one nation without God'[9], the place of religion in Dutch society remains a volatile source of debate.

In summary one could argue that the 'relevance' of Dutch history in the last two centuries is that it makes visible the dynamic role that religion has played in modernity, in particular the range of responses open to various actors – states, associations and individuals – in the face both of growing religious pluralism and in the rise of society where belief itself was no longer a given.[10]

The general focus of this contribution, then, is the impact of (organized) religion on the country's political and social structures, and not on theological or ecclesiastical developments as such – as important as these developments have sometimes been for transnational patterns. This essay will select from Dutch religious history three important themes. The first pertains to Dutch church-state relations in the nineteenth century, most notably an early disestablishment (i.e., the withdrawal of official government support of particular church bodies) and the decreasing ability – and willingness – of a Protestant 'Establishment' to determine by the late nineteenth century the social, political and religious contours of the Dutch nation-state. The second theme concerns the so-called 'pillarization' (*verzuiling*) of Dutch society, in which the country was ostensibly segmented along religious and ideological lines, replete with religious political parties that for half a century (1918-1967) maintained a solid electoral majority in Dutch politics.

9   Frank J. Lechner, *The Netherlands* (Routledge 2008); Idem, *The Netherlands: Globalization and National Identity* (New York 2008) 103-136.

10   Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass. 2007). For an overview of Dutch religious history since the seventeenth century which explores

religious change as the metamorphosis of a broadly defined, iconoclastic 'Protestantism', see Jan Art, 'Religie en secularisering, de voortdurende beeldenstorm', in: D.W. Fokkema and Frans Grijzenhout (eds.), *Rekenschap: 1650-2000* (The Hague 2001) 95-113.

Pillarization, sometimes hailed as a quintessentially 'Dutch' response to religious diversity[11], has come under the critical scrutiny of historians in recent years, and it is worth exploring to what extent this concept is a fruitful one for understanding Dutch religious history, and for relating Dutch history to broader transnational patterns. Finally, the third and last theme focuses on secularization, understood here as the decline in influence of religious ideas and institutions on public and private life. As a concept, secularization is certainly no less contested than pillarization, but that has not prevented historians from using it just as extensively for describing the decline of religion in the Netherlands, particularly the sharp decline in religious participation and adherence in the period after 1960. The Netherlands historically high percentages of those professing no religious affiliation, combined with a rather dramatic decline of religious subcultures in the 1960s, makes the country seem, especially in recent decades, an example *par excellence* of 'secular Europe'. But in recent Dutch history, there are reasons to doubt the usefulness of secularization as leading explanation of historical trends, as we shall see.

Church-state relations and the Dutch Protestant establishment

Contrary to the powerful European monarchies, the Dutch Republic in the pre-1795 period lacked a strong centralized government. As a result religious conformity could therefore not be as effectively implemented as an instrument of state power and authority.[12] After all, the Dutch Republic was a federation of principalities, and even within the Republic's constituent parts administration often was decentralized. As a result, the confessionalization of Dutch state and society arguably was less extensive than in surrounding states.[13] Although the privileged Reformed church was the only one to function as 'public' church in most of the Republic, there were large numbers of Catholics (well over a third of the population in 1809, in the first census), plus dissenting Protestant churches and Jews (together constituting 6 percent of the population in the first census). Even during the Republic, when there was only one public church, the relation between church and state differed from both the Scandinavian-German ones, or the Catholic states. One result of a decentralized state and church was that anticlerical feeling connected to anti-state attitudes among large sections of the population remained

11   Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation* (Berkeley 1975).

12   Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes*, 20.

13   The notion of confessionalization refers to the concept introduced by the German historian Heinz Schilling.

Document Nederland is the annual documentary photo commission awarded by the Rijksmuseum and Dutch daily newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*. It focuses on a different social phenomenon each year. In 1982-83, the assignment was 'The Changing Church', whereby the challenge was to depict the progressive and regressive changes taking place in the church.

In the Reformed Church in Almelo, rows of chairs are drawn up, on which the congregation will sit during a service of solidarity with Christian Turks. In the centre is a row of empty chairs that divides the regular churchgoers from the Christian Turks. The Christian Turks were granted asylumn in this church.
Hans Aarsman, Service of Solidarity with Christian Turks in the Reformed Church in Almelo, 9/9/1979. From the photo series The Changing Church [Dutch: Kerk in verandering]. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

relatively absent.[14] Nevertheless, opposition to the confessional state grew in the last decades of the eighteenth century. A bourgeois, Protestant *Leitkultur* rooted in the Dutch Enlightenment launched the idea of the Fatherland as a moral community, with the individual citizen as a moral subject, his conduct conducive to the common good of the Republic. It might be supposed that the decentralised way in which the Republic was governed helped clear the way for an ideology that downplayed religious doctrine and stressed bourgeois virtue. Many clergy of the Reformed church adhered to it since at least 1780. The localization of religion in the heart and the conduct of the individual accounted for a willingness to entertain the possibility of disestablishing the church, even among these clergy.[15]

The French invasion of 1795 and the creation of the pro-French Batavian Republic brought an end to the 'public' church. In August of 1796, the Reformed church was formally disestablished. All churches were put on the same legal footing, and all citizens – including Catholics and Jews – were granted full rights in theory. A relatively large number of Catholics and dissenting Protestants were in charge of the initial reforms. The country witnessed little of the violent conflict that broke out where French rule was direct, as in neighbouring Belgium, though there were some reprisals and the exclusion of Orangists from public positions. Houses of worship were expected to be supportive of the republic, not least in the cultivation of virtue and patriotism among its members. The high water mark in the process of disestablishment came in 1798, when legislation was passed in which new Reformed clergy would no longer be financed by the state. And the properties that had been in the Reformed church's possession since 1581 were to be considered the collective property of all members of the municipality with local authorities determining which religious body should make future use of the buildings in question.[16] Within a few years, though, many Reformed had begun to oppose these reforms, resenting in particular the newfound influence of the Roman Catholics. By the first years of the nineteenth century, Protestants – this time not just those who were members of the Reformed church – were again largely in control of Dutch national institutions.

The relationship between religion, society and politics in the first half of the nineteenth century was defined by a close association of enlightened Protestantism, patriotism and a sense of moral superiority among the leading classes in Dutch society.[17] Protestant clergymen, who themselves more and

14   Henry Chadwick et al., *Atlas van het christendom* (Breda 1987) 213-214.

15   Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes*, 115-119, 157, 158; for the development towards the combination of nationalism, royalism ('Oranje') and mainstream protestant orthodoxy, partly in the nineteenth

century, see: J. van Eijnatten, *God, Nederland en Oranje. Dutch Calvinism and the Search for the Social Centre* (Kampen 1993).

16   Johan Joor, *De adelaar en het lam* (Amsterdam 2000) 175.

more participated in bourgeois culture from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, did much to enhance the sense that the nation was, above all, a moral community. In 1806, schools were placed under national supervision, and were to give instruction in 'social and Christian virtues'. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the leading classes in Dutch society felt responsible for the moral elevation of the whole nation. Both church life and education were the ways in which this project had to be implemented. More than half of the school inspectors in the first quarter of the nineteenth century were ministers. Other ministers gave lectures on literature, history or archaeology. The state contributed to the inter-regional integration of the Reformed church by stimulating contacts between the different regional church councils ('classes'). The leading theological groups of the period considered the dissemination of national sentiment as a central component of the Christian message.[18]

As the Dutch government increasingly centralized under Napoleonic influence, it undertook efforts to place religious institutions under state oversight. A Ministry for Public Worship was established by Louis Napoleon, the emperor's brother, in 1808. After Napoleon's ouster, the first Orange monarch, Willem I, initiated statutes (*reglementen*) to govern the Reformed, the Jews and the Lutherans, which aimed at turning church bodies into the efficient agents of material and spiritual assistance to its members and into teachers of virtue. These *reglementen* were not only French in inspiration, but were also strongly influenced by pre-1795 ideas on the relationship between church and state.[19] The Jewish communities were in fact the first to undergo this process; already in 1810, they had been placed under French statute when the Netherlands was annexed to France, the only religious group in the Netherlands for which this was the case. In 1814 Willem I's government went further, compelling by statute that the Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews merge their bodies into one, so that poor and rich congregations might together fall under a single effective administration of charity. Portuguese and Yiddish were furthermore prohibited as languages of worship.[20] A 'reglement' for the Reformed church issued in 1816 regulated every area of church life except – crucially – doctrinal conformity, one area in which the theologically

17 For an overview of nineteenth-century religion in Europe and also the place of the Dutch case in it, see Henk van Dijk, 'Religion between State and Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe', in: Hartmut Kaelble (ed.), *The European Way: European Societies in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York 2004) 253-274.

18 Nikolaj Bijleveld, *Voor God, Volk en Vaderland* (Delft 2007) 150, 191-193.

19 R. van der Laarse, 'De Deugd en het Kwaad. Liberalisme, conservatisme en de erfenis van de Verlichting', in: J.C.H. Blom and J. Talsma (eds.), *De verzuiling voorbij. Godsdienst, stand en natie in de lange negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 2000) 12, 13; Abraham Vroon, *Carel Willem Pape 1788-1872* (Oosterhout 1992).

20 Bart Wallet, *Nieuwe Nederlanders. De integratie van de joden in Nederland, 1814-1851* (Amsterdam 2007).

latitudinarian king and his advisors showed a studied lack of interest. It was an omission that would later function as the basis for sustained theological conflict within the Reformed church.[21] Already in the 1830s, the first Calvinist dissenters, disturbed at its laxity and motivated by an exacting pietism or a more rationalist embrace of Reformed orthodoxy, would secede from the state-directed Church. The *Afscheiding*, or Separation of 1834, would anticipate a much larger departure from the church in the 1880s.[22]

For the time being, however, Willem's most daunting task in regulating the country's religious affairs lay in his relationship to the Roman Catholic church, whose adherents, with the inclusion of Belgium into the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, now constituted over 70 percent of the population. The king's efforts to punish the recalcitrant Belgian bishop De Broglie, restrict correspondence with the Holy See, monitor monastic life, and above all to regulate Catholic theological education by closing smaller schools and requiring that seminarians attend the government-controlled school in Leuven, fomented deep unhappiness among his Catholic subjects. Although Willem had initially sought to create a national Catholicism independent of the Holy See, the government felt obliged in 1827 to conclude a concordat with the papacy that sought to regulate and improve the relationship between church and state.[23] In the wake of the successful Belgian revolt in 1830, however, the Concordat became a dead letter on both sides of the new frontier, and it signalled the failure of Willem's reforming efforts to assert a measure of state control over the Catholic church.

The liberal reforms of 1848, including the promulgation of a new constitution in effect to the present day, signalled an end to systematic efforts by the state to direct religious life. The state now let Jewish and Protestant bodies regulate their own affairs, and in 1853 made clear that the Roman Catholic church was free to reintroduce an episcopal hierarchy to the Netherlands, after a hiatus of 275 years. All this did not mean that church and state were radically and immediately separated; it took more than twenty years for all the *reglementen* to be terminated, and the state continued to subsidize churches until the early 1980s, although with sums that did not substantially surpass the financial levels of the 1840s. In the early 1850s, parliament stipulated that church bodies, not government, were primarily responsible for the care of the indigent, even if in practice much

21 I.A. Diepenhorst, *De verhouding tusschen kerk en staat in Nederland* (Utrecht 1946) 74-78.

22 There is an enormous literature on the *Afscheiding*, the secessionist movement of 1834; for a recent introduction, see Harm Veldman, *Hendrik de Cock, 1801-1842. Op de breuklijnen in theologie en kerk in Nederland* (Kampen 2009). The

most thorough work is C. Smits, *De Afscheiding van 1834* (9 volumes, Oudkarspel, Dordrecht 1971-1991).

23 A. Houkes, 'Het succes van 1848', in: Jurjen Vis and Wim Janse (eds.), *Staf en Storm. Het herstel van de bisschoppelijke hiërarchie in Nederland in 1853. Actie en reactie* (Hilversum 2002) 90.

of poor relief fell to the municipalities.[24] Furthermore, parliament further legislated the ban on Catholic processions. The state might well have become liberal, but historians recently have stressed that the leading voices of Dutch society remained stoutly and consciously Protestant long after 1848. The massive protests against the return of the Catholic hierarchy in 1853 was but one sign of this.[25] And well into the twentieth century there continued to be proponents who championed a special place for the Reformed church in state and society. This sentiment received an impulse in the 1940s, when in response to the war and wider trends within international, ecumenical Protestantism, the Reformed church for the first time systematically staked out its own claim to public authority.

Disestablishment, moreover, meant anything but a rigorous neutrality in the Dutch colonies. The Dutch government's West Indian policies differed from those for the East, with policies in both colonies tailor-made to fit local conditions. In the East Indies, the presence of tens of millions of Muslims inhibited Dutch colonial authorities from working out with any consistency the notion of a religiously neutral state. Not legal prescriptions but a deep sense of probity, the Indonesia-born legal scholar W.H. Alting von Geusau argued in 1917, was the highest aim at which the colonial government could aspire in its treatment of the different religions. In practice, colonial religious policy meant a closer working relationship with leading Christian churches (the Protestant church was disestablished from the colonial government only in 1935), and, after an initially reserved stance, an increasingly extensive partnership with Christian missions, as pillarization processes in the Netherlands had their effects on Dutch missions in the overseas colonies.[26] It meant, moreover, a recognition of Islam that left worship unimpeded and made provision for Islamic law in local judicial bodies, but which at the same time included efforts to suppress any 'political' expression of Islam, a danger regarded as subversive both to social progress and to Dutch rule. It meant, finally, a hostile stance toward 'pagan' religion, as evident in the prohibition of Winti (an amalgam of Indian ritual and African voodoo) in Suriname in the 1870s on the basis of its 'idolatry'.[27] Certainly in the colonies the liberal constitutional ideal was far from realized.

24 Peter Jan Margry, *Teedere quaesties. Religieuze rituelen in conflict. Confrontaties tussen katholieken en protestanten rond de processiecultuur in 19e-eeuws Nederland* (Hilversum 2000).

25 De Rooy, *Openbaring en openbaarheid*, 31; Vis and Janse, *Staf en storm*.

26 K.A. Steenbrink, 'Staat en religies in koloniaal Nederlands Indië', in: J. de Bruijn et al. (eds.), *Geen heersende kerk, geen heersende staat. De*

verhouding tussen kerken en staat, 1796-1996 (Zoetermeer 1998) 180-181.

27 Steenbrink, 'Staat en religies', 193; W.H. Alting van Geusau, *Neutraliteit der overheid in de Nederlandsche koloniën jegens godsdienstzaken* (Haarlem 1917) 19-20, 77, 95; C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Nederland en de Islam. Vier voordrachten gehouden in de Nederlandsch-Indische Bestuursacademie* (Leiden 1911).

Despite the persisting ties between church and state, and between Protestantism and the Dutch nation, it can be said that ecclesiastical disestablishment, begun in the 1790s and decisively confirmed in 1848, took place earlier than elsewhere in Europe. By the time that other countries in Europe and Latin America were grappling with formal separation of church and state – Hugh McLeod argues that this issue was a major issue in many countries between 1860 and 1930 – the Netherlands had already put the issue to rest.[28] This hardly meant, as we shall see, that the place of religion was settled in public life, but simply that the issue of institutional establishment, often so central to public debate elsewhere, played no important role in Dutch politics after 1848. This might be seen as a logical if not inevitable consequence of a relatively weak religious establishment, in which the old 'public church' did not possess the same public authority vis-à-vis its competitors as did the state churches in other countries. The formal distance between church and state was likely encouraged by one of the central tenets of the latitudinarian Protestantism that had become dominant in the Netherlands: the idea that religion was essentially moral, not to be defined by church membership, and so first of all a matter for the free individual.[29] Van der Laarse makes clear that the progressive liberalism of the time had a legalist stance and tended to separate the different spheres of life, and for whom religion was now regarded as private.[30] Moreover, for Protestant liberals of the mid- to late nineteenth century, the church could no longer be considered as the most important vehicle for educating the people; state schools had taken over that position.

In the short run, the reforms of 1848 paved the way for liberal dominance of a Dutch bourgeoisie who were self-consciously tolerant, committed to social harmony and at the same time showed little inclination to share political power with wider segments of the population. Having abandoned earlier efforts to channel religious activity, they were increasingly concerned that religious passions and commitments served to divide Dutch society rather than to unify it. Stemming both from dissenting Protestant groups and the Reformed church, liberals also began to gravitate toward forms of unbelief. As in Britain and the United States, it was in the 1860s that a handful of Dutch Protestant clergy first voluntarily resigned their offices on account of their agnosticism. It was partly from this group that a sustained pattern of formal disaffiliation from the church, numerically greater than elsewhere in Europe as shall be outlined below, would take place

28 For an overview of church-state relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see De Bruijn et al., *Geen heersende kerk, geen heersende staat*, particularly J.A. Bornewasser, 'Twee eeuwen kerk en staat. Een veelledige confrontatie met de moderniteit', 29-60; Hugh McLeod, 'Kerk en staat in West-Europa sinds 1789', 13-18.

29 Van Eijnatten en Van Lieburg, *Nederlandse Religiegeschiedenis*, 262.

30 Van der Laarse, 'De Deugd en het Kwaad'.

People on their way to the morning service in a church of the Reformed Association [Dutch: Gereformeerde Bond] in Alblasserwaard. In this extremely orthodox area, it is not unusual for people to go to church twice a day, morning and evening.
Oscar van Alphen, Reformed Association Church in Alblasserwaard, summer 1983. From the photo series The Changing Church.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

in the decades after 1880. If their preeminent political position would be increasingly challenged after the 1870s, liberals would continue to make their mark on Dutch society. There were echoes of this ideology in the liberalism that persisted into the twentieth century. During the Interbellum liberals tended to yearn for a unified society. Their ideology, with its moral inclination as was sometimes evident in international affairs[31], was clearly indebted to the Enlightenment. It can be argued that the Dutch socialism and the Christian pacifism of the Interbellum was quite akin to this vision of a harmonious, unified society as was the movement that strove for the political unity of all progressive parties in the 1940s, in the wake of the Second World War.[32]

But in the long run, the most important consequence of the disestablishment of 1848 was not a certain liberal ambivalence toward the role of religion in society, but powerful reassertions of religion in public and private life. The new terms of 1848 did not settle the place of religion in the Netherlands, but opened it up, allowing new religious forces to contend for their own place in society.[33] The areas that now came into conflict were those issues traditionally defined as the *res mixtae* (that is, those areas traditionally thought to be the concern of both church and state): most notably education and care of the poor.[34] The Constitution of 1848 in effect encouraged the Roman Catholics, the anti-Roman Catholic Protestants of the period and the dissenters of the *Afscheiding* into their own organizations that defined and advanced their own religious interests. A return to the situation before the Constitution was no longer conceivable.[35]

If the Netherlands diverged from other countries in an early disestablishment, in the religious mobilization of citizens in the last half of the century it was part and parcel of a wider transnational development. As a result, and as in other parts of Europe, the nineteenth century, particularly the last third of the century, was a 'second confessional age' in the Netherlands, that pitted newly disciplined and newly-organized religious forces, Catholic and Protestants, against more secularly-minded citizens – and against each other.[36] From the mid-nineteenth century onward new

31 Michael John Riemens, *De passie voor vrede* (Amsterdam 2005).

32 Van der Laarse, 'De Deugd en het Kwaad', 2-45, 15, 24, 36, 41-43; For the 'bourgeois' element in this leading ideology see: H. te Velde, 'How High did the Dutch fly? Remarks on Stereotypes of Burger Mentality', in: A. Galema, B. Henkes and H. te Velde (eds.), *Images of the Nation: Different Meanings of Dutchness 1870-1940* (Amsterdam 1993) 59-79; for the echo of this national-church

bias in the Reformed church of the second half of the nineteenth century see A. Houkes, *Christelijke vaderlanders. Godsdienst, burgerschap en de Nederlandse natie, 1850-1900* (Amsterdam 2009).

33 Ido de Haan, *Het beginsel van leven en wasdom* (Amsterdam 2003).

34 Bornewasser, 'Twee eeuwen kerk en staat'.

35 Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes*, 30, 31.

36 O. Blaschke (ed.), *Konfessionen im Konflikt. Deutschland zwischen 1800 und 1970. Ein zweites konfessionelles Zeitalter* (Göttingen 2002).

associations increasingly became the vehicles for religious and political groups that challenged the dominant liberal vision of state and society.[37] In the Netherlands, this process traditionally has been described as 'pillarization', in which Dutch society was increasingly segmented along religious and ideological lines. But how does this narrative – to the extent that it is helpful at all – tie into wider historical patterns?

Religious fragmentation and Dutch 'pillarization'

Despite formal restrictions on associational life that had existed before 1848, Dutch society, to a large extent defined by the domination of its towns and small cities, possessed a relatively strong tradition of local associations and other private initiatives. The strength of this self-regulating tradition must, at least in part, be explained by the traditional political decentralization of the country. It was a decentralization that was affirmed by the Constitution of 1848 and in the decades that followed there was a surge in local organizational life, led by parts of the local liberal bourgeoisie and other local leaders. A part, but only a part, of these organisations would later help constitute the religiously and ideologically networks of associations known since the mid-twentieth century as 'pillarization' with its suggestion of separate columns together supporting Dutch state and society.

Indeed, since that time pillarization has been considered by historians and laity alike to be a central constitutive element of modern Dutch history. Political and social segmentation enhanced the country's political stability by effectively channelling, and thus 'pacifying' Holland's religious minorities (Catholic and orthodox Protestant) and its ideological ones (the social democrats and the liberals).[38] As an explanation for the paradox of religious divisions and political stability, pillarization was first analyzed in the 1960s by social scientists. But in the last three decades it also has been the field of labour of many historians who have attempted to explain the origins, and the dynamics, of the Netherlands' strikingly pluralist landscape.[39]

The mass mobilisation of both Roman Catholics and orthodox Protestants owed its success to a number of changes in Dutch society as a whole. The social geographer Knippenberg has argued that infrastructural

37   Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Civil Society, 1750-1914* (New York 2006).

38   Lijphart, *Politics of Accommodation*.

39   D.F.J. Bosscher, 'Confessionele partijen en politieke stabiliteit', in: P. Luykx and H. Righart (eds.), *Van de pastorie naar het torentje. Een eeuw confessionele politiek* (The Hague 1991) 93-103; H.

Knippenberg, 'Nationale integratie en 'etnisering' van katholieken en protestanten. De rol van onderwijs', in: H. te Velde and H. Verhage (eds.), *De eenheid en de delen. Zuilvorming, onderwijs en natievorming in Nederland 1850-1900* (Amsterdam 1996) 177-196, 193; Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes*, 17.

improvements during the second half of the nineteenth century was of essential help to the leaders of the new movements in communicating their message to their followers. Socio-economic modernization opened up traditional local society and brought people into contact with new developments. The increased chances for both upward and downward social mobility, and of migration resulting from growing differences in prosperity between different regions, could result in alienating people from traditional commitments, and more open to participation in 'modern' movements.[40] Especially the liberals' advocacy of state schools that were to be shorn of a religious character generated a backlash among the lower classes, ultimately stimulating responses by Roman Catholics and orthodox Protestants who, historians now agree, were no less 'modern' in their competing organizations than were the liberals they contested.

Historically, most Roman Catholics had not been much interested in the state or in the Dutch nation at all. But some of them even in the first half of the nineteenth century felt compelled to defend themselves against the sometimes aggressive claims of Protestant nationalism.[41] The constitution of 1848 and the reintroduction of the hierarchy gave Catholics new chances to assert themselves, though it took two decades before Dutch Catholic leaders clearly chose for the Ultramontanist line that would characterize their stance from the late 1860s on.[42] In mobilizing themselves, Dutch Catholics resembled their co-religionists in Switzerland, Austria, Germany, seeking to defend themselves from the onslaught of a secular modernity.[43] At the same time, Dutch Catholics were, in contrast with the situation in Prussia, not compelled to fight a protracted *Kulturkampf*.[44] Dutch liberals seemed so confident of their own preponderance that they saw no need for such a conflict and Dutch Catholics themselves seemed content to build up their own subculture.[45]

40 Knippenberg, 'Nationale integratie', 185, 186.

41 Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes*, 32; Van der Laarse, 'De Deugd en het Kwaad', 7, 18; Van Eijnatten, *God, Nederland en Oranje*, 461, considers this anti-Roman Catholic ideology as typical for the nineteenth century. Only the Roman Catholic hierarchy was rejected, with Catholic believers granted a theoretical place as Christian citizens of the Dutch nation.

42 Henk van den Berg, *In vrijheid gebonden. Negentiende-eeuwse katholieke publicisten in Nederland over geloof, politiek en moderniteit* (Nijmegen 2005).

43 Hans Righart, *De katholieke zuil in Europa. Een vergelijkend onderzoek naar het ontstaan van verzuiling onder katholieken in Oostenrijk, Zwitserland, België en Nederland* (Meppel 1986).

44 For the Dutch reception of Bismarck's policies, see Pieter de Coninck, *Een les uit Pruisen. Nederland en de Kultuurkampf, 1870-1880* (Hilversum 2005).

45 De Rooy, *Openbaring en openbaarheid*, 30; J.M.M. Leenders, 'Zijn dat nu handelwijzen van een herder…' Hollands katholicisme 1840-1920 (Nijmegen 2008).

In many parts of Western and Central Europe, Catholicism could rely on a politically experienced and assertive laity. Historically disadvantaged, Dutch Catholics were weaker in this respect but the Dutch church increasingly developed a wide array of Catholic institutions that succeeded in representing the vast majority of Dutch Catholics. Research in the Vatican archives has shown that the acceptance of popular sovereignty by leading Dutch Roman Catholics dated back to the pre-1853 era and was advanced by the Holy See. The introduction of the episcopal hierarchy partially changed this pattern: the bishops tried to build up their own 'clerico-hierarchical system' within the Dutch national context, but were impeded by a new theological emphasis on papal authority that now emanated from Rome. After 1853, the faithful were more directly and more frequently confronted by new mandates from the papacy. Relations between 'Rome' and 'Utrecht' (where the archbishop was ensconced) were not in the least characterized by one-way communication, as De Valk has pointed out. Church authorities and leading Catholics did not conform to Rome's instructions and interventions without a fight, but they did often have to give in. As a result, the development of the Catholic pillar in the Netherlands was influenced to a much larger extent by the attitude of the Holy See than had been assumed.[46]

Knippenberg has called the new religious formation 'pseudo-ethnic' groups and points out that the Netherlands were unique in that it was the only country in which orthodox Protestant subculture(s) flourished. In this respect the early disestablishment of the Protestant church served to mobilize Dutch Protestants, more than their co-religionists in other parts of Europe, into action, with various factions vying for their own vision of what the place of religion must now be in Dutch society. Changes in 1852 to the charter of the Reformed church – reforms already begun in the early 1840s but also were precipitated by 1848[47] – ultimately resulted in the first ecclesiastical elections of 1867, in which nearly all of its male members (in sharp contrast to parliamentary elections of the time) could vote. In a church badly divided by an extremely wide range of theological opinion and lacking any organ empowered to determine ecclesiastical doctrine, these elections served as a catalyst for further mobilization *outside* the church. In the 1860s, the Dutch theologian and pastor Abraham Kuyper began to mobilise the orthodox Calvinist believers by means of the press and a political organisation. Kuyper's political mobilisation of Protestants further precipitated mass mobilisation

46 J.P. de Valk, *Roomser dan de paus? Studies over de betrekkingen tussen de Heilige Stoel en het Nederlands katholicisme, 1815-1940* (Nijmegen 1998) 368-371.

47 Bijleveld, *Voor God, Volk en Vaderland*, 82, 194; Vroon, *Carel Willem Pape*, 136-139; C. van den Broeke, *Een geschiedenis van de classis. Classicale typen tussen idee en werkelijkheid (1571-2004)* (Kampen 2005) 163-168, 549; see also: Van der Laarse, 'De Deugd en het Kwaad', 24, 25.

in church matters. This pastor-cum-politician, who founded a newspaper, a university, a political party and a church, dramatically changed the social and political constellation of the Netherlands, galvanizing his supporters to work out a 'neo-Calvinist' vision of life that effectively contended with the liberals for political power.[48] In its success and in its scale he generated a form of political Protestantism without parallel in Europe, though Dutch Protestant activism, neo-Calvinist or not, paralleled initiatives taken much earlier in Anglophone countries, and were indeed influenced by them.[49]

The partial fragmentation of Dutch societies into 'pillars' did not result in the 'balkanization' of the country. Indeed, the rise of subcultures or pillars had a strong integrative effect on the country. Regional or local groups, for a long time accepting liberal domination, now found common cause with new compatriots at the national level. Mass mobilisation and education along the paths of the subculture brought orthodox Protestants from Groningen in the north from Zeeland in the southwest together organizationally, as it did Roman Catholics from The Hague with their counterparts in Twente, near the German border. 1870 functioned as a watershed: Dutch politics around that time changed from debate based on regional interests to debates centred on ideological difference. In this shift, the position of private religious schools was a major issue of contention, with both liberals and champions of these schools vigorously defending their own educational visions.[50]

The formation of national subcultures meant that the discipline within each of these groups could be strengthened; churches, for example, were able to regulate the behaviour of their members more tightly than before. The importance of bearing children was heavily emphasized among orthodox Protestants and Catholics, with more children born among these groups than among socialists or liberals from the 1880s on. Knippenberg points to the decrease of the mixed Protestant-Roman Catholic marriages in the second half of the nineteenth century, paralleled on the side of the Roman Catholics by the official preference for a marriage in the church and disapproval of mixed marriages in the *Syllabus errorum* of the *Quanta cura* encyclical of 1864.[51]

By 1920, Dutch Roman Catholics and orthodox Protestants had succeeded in obtaining a strong political and social position; their schools were fully financed by the state, and together they formed a political majority that would last for half a century. Subcultural institutions would continue to

48 Jeroen Koch, *Abraham Kuyper. Een biografie* (Amsterdam 2006).

49 Maartje Janse, *De afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland. 1840-1880* (Amsterdam 2007).

50 De Coninck, *De natie in pacht*, 70-78; R. op den Camp, 'God, Vaderland en Broederbond. Nationaal besef, vereniging en schoolstrijd in het ANMV', in: Te Velde and Verhage, *De eenheid en de delen*, 85-97, 95; Knippenberg, 'Nationale integratie', 190, 193.

51 Knippenberg, 'Nationale integratie', 187.

Young people line the route of the annual procession of St. John [Dutch: St. Jan], the patron saint of Laren. St. John's procession expresses the hope given to the world by the apostle John. His name, which means 'God will show mercy' in Hebrew, inspires confidence in the future.
Hans Aarsman, Annual St. John's Procession in Laren, 27/6/1982 [Dutch: Jaarlijkse St. Jansprocessie in Laren, 27-6-1982]. From the photo series The Changing Church. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

be developed, reaching the height of their expansion in the 1950s. As McLeod notes, the separation of church and state in the Netherlands led not to laicist regime as in France, but to a situation that paralleled the outcome in newly-independent Ireland: a non-sectarian state largely in control of those who were sympathetic to, and financially supportive of, various forms of religious endeavour.[52]

The conceptual problems of pillarization

The development of a pillarized society has served to generate several important historiographical debates among Dutch historians. One issue has focused on the extent to which pillarization was primarily a modernized manifestation of earlier confessional cleavages, or to what extent the modern national state itself created a wholly new dynamic of religious conflict. Van der Laarse thinks that already in the first half of the century a considerable number of local officials dissented from the enlightened Protestant view of state, morality and the church, while Van Rooden has denied that before the successful mobilisation of the 1870s there was anything like a coherent orthodox Protestant body of believers. Before 1875, congregations which were *later* clearly in a liberal or conservative camp called pastors without much discernible theological pattern; only in the provinces of South Holland and Friesland were geographical patterns of (un)orthodoxy visible earlier, with ministerial callings showing a pattern from 1825 onwards.[53] It might be argued that the active presence of orthodox secessionists in the 1830s does reveal an older confessional divide, and that Van Rooden's emphasis on a radical discontinuity between modern pillarization and older confessional

52   Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (New York 2000) 56. McLeod sees Britain and Germany taking a middle position between France on the one side and Ireland and the Netherlands on the other, though it might be said that the level of clerical influence in Ireland was greater than Dutch churches, Protestant and Catholic together, were able to exert on Dutch private and public life.

53   Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes,* 182-185.

battle lines may be overdrawn.[54] But Van Rooden is certainly right in stressing the national character of orthodox Protestant mobilisation from the 1860s onwards: local conflicts followed dividing lines that originated at the national level. Certainly, too, the late nineteenth century necessarily was accompanied by the invention of traditions; orthodox Protestants, Roman Catholics and liberals, too, used history as the common ground from which they constructed their ideology. All these ideologies were mixtures of nationalism and the different religious identities of these respective groups. Whatever variations there might have been, in all the competing narratives, a quintessentially Dutch tolerance was posited.[55] Seen this way, various efforts to develop distinctive religious cultures drew less from confessional traditions and more from common contemporary sources, not least modern nationalism.

A second issue pertains to the false symmetry and uniformity that the metaphor of 'pillarization' at least sometimes suggests.[56] It has been a matter of some debate whether social democrats or liberals can usefully be described as part of the pillarized system, since they were differently ordered

54 It is still unclear whether Van Rooden's opinion that there had been no recognizable group of orthodox Protestant believers before 1860 holds true. Local examples show that at least some members of leading families sided with the *Afscheiding* and also suggest that the churches of the *Afscheiding*, slowly drawing more and more orthodox people from the Reformed church, pushed the local church boards towards more orthodoxy because they wanted to stop this desertion. This process was evident long before the mobilization of Kuyper's neo-Calvinist movement. Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes*, 30-32, 187, 195, 196; Jasper Vree, 'Hervormd Groningen (Stad en Ommelanden) in de eerste kwarteeuw na de Afscheiding'. Address at Conference *175 Jaar Afscheiding van 1834*, Theologische Universiteit Kampen, 13 October 2009; J.P. Zwemer, 'De Doleantie in Serooskerke. Ottoland op Walcheren', *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800*, nr. 58 (July 2003) 43-62, 47. Attention for an early (1820s) dissenter, J. Mazereeuw, has mostly concentrated on his unorthodox ideas and prophetic presentation, not on his orthodox background and language.

For a defence of his orthodoxy see the edition of J. Mazereeuw's *Geschriften handelende over de ware onderlinge bijeenkomst* (Leiden 1941), especially the introduction by C. Sluys, 1-52.

55 Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes*, 196, 197; H. Blom, 'Vernietigende kracht en nieuwe vergezichten. Het onderzoeksproject verzuiling op lokaal niveau geëvalueerd', in: Blom and Talsma, *Godsdienst, stand en natie in de lange negentiende eeuw*, 203-236, 227; For the pietistic groups see: F.A. van Lieburg, *De stille luyden. Bevindelijk gereformeerden in de negentiende eeuw* (Kampen 1994); Te Velde and Verhage, *De eenheid en de delen*, 38-40; P. Raedts, 'Tussen Rome en Den Haag. De integratie van de Nederlandse katholieken in kerk en staat', in: Te Velde and Verhage, *De eenheid en de delen*; G. Harinck, H. Paul and B. Wallet, *Het gereformeerde geheugen. Protestantse herinneringsculturen in Nederland, 1850-2000* (Amsterdam 2009).

56 P. van Dam, 'Sind die Säulen noch tragfähig? Versäulung in der niederländischen Historiografie', *Schweizer Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 102 (2008) 415-433.

than religious groups and often less intensively. More relevant to the focus of this article on religious history, however, are the differences between Roman Catholic and orthodox Protestant forms of pillarization. Whereas the Roman Catholics could see themselves as members of one church and adherents of one political party, orthodox Protestants were divided, splitting in the 1890s into two major political parties, with other, smaller parties competing with them in the course of the twentieth century. In addition to this, the Reformed church was seriously challenged by the Calvinist free churches (most notably Kuyper's *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*), which contained some 8 percent of the population, and which, in their energetic organizational drive, were more influential in public life than their numbers alone suggest. In any event, Dutch Protestant orthodoxy never spoke with one voice, an advantage in flexibility in the long run, with believers able to shift from one denomination to another, or change their voting preferences.[57]

Although sociologists and a number of historians have stressed the unanimity of the Roman Catholic pillarized subculture between 1880 and the 1950's, the mass mobilization of Roman Catholics was never so successful as the one led by Kuyper. In other words: the mechanism that accounted for different versions of orthodox Protestant identity, the formation of different parties and free churches, did not function among the Dutch Roman Catholics – dissidents, to the extent that they existed, tended to be absorbed by the Roman Catholic party over time.[58] Historians have disagreed to what extent the Dutch Catholic milieu allowed for internal dissent. On the one hand, Dutch Catholicism, as noted above, was generally highly self-disciplined, with church attendance and levels of subcultural participation that surpassed those in surrounding countries. The threat of spiritual sanction helped keep the Catholic flock remarkably faithful to their shepherds.[59] In contrast, Luykx has argued that unanimity and unity never existed among Dutch Roman Catholics during pillarization. Adherence among Dutch Roman Catholics meant something different than it did among orthodox Protestants with

57 D.J. Wolffram thinks these changes suggest that the differences in orthodoxy between the Reformed denominations were rather small and that the splitting up of Dutch Calvinism had not so much to do with religion. See: *Bezwaarden en verlichten. Verzuiling in een Gelderse provincestad, Harderwijk 1850-1925* (Amsterdam 1993) 249; See for the stabilizing working of this mechanism on the local level in a non-Dutch setting: L.J. Taylor, *Dutchmen on the Bay: The Ethnohistory of a Contractual Community* (Philadelphia 1983).

58 P. Luykx, '"Van de dorpspastorie naar het torentje". Kerken en de macht van de confessionele partijen', in: Luykx and Righart, *Van pastorie naar het torentje*, 35-71, 50.

59 For two sharply contrasting visions, see Piet de Rooy, 'Onheilig moeten. Drie studies over aspecten van het katholicisme'; Paul Luykx, '"Andere katholieken". Een nieuwe visie', and De Rooy, 'Naschrift', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden / The Low Countries Historical Review [BMGN /LCHR]* 124:1 (2009) 65-84.

Otto Tatipikalawan, Meeting in the mosque. A woman passes round snacks, 1983.
From the photo series Moluccan History and Culture in the Picture.
Moluccan Historical Museum/Museum Maluku, Utrecht.

indifference to official teachings and to the hierarchy of clergymen a common response.[60] Furthermore, in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century there existed a liberal-minded Roman Catholic bourgeoisie, though from the beginning of the pillarization process it formed an ever decreasing minority. Moreover, it cost the Roman Catholic political party very considerable effort to keep the working class Catholics at its side. An outstanding number of clergymen were mobilised to lead and appease the working class organisations, while in parliament there always had to be working class representatives among the Roman Catholic deputies. Party leaders feared that large numbers of their working class supporters would cross over to the socialists and yielded to working-class demands, willingly or reluctantly.[61] The vicissitudes of the *Katholieke Volkspartij* in the Roman Catholic parts of the province of Zeeland after the Second World War suggest that there was a fierce rivalry between the upper classes and the large working class population, each party struggling for control of municipal government until the battle ultimately resulted in a victory for the Catholic workers, at least for a number of years.[62] In this case, the vacuum created by German occupation revealed the very significant tensions within the Catholic pillar.[63] In the years after the Second World War, Catholic politics would, largely with success, attempt to bridge the divide between its bourgeois and proletarian wings.[64]

In these respects, then, pillarization occludes real conflict within the pillars, certainly within Protestantism, more controversially within Catholicism. Historical research, moreover, has highlighted a third issue: how elusive it has been to empirically verify pillarization as a national process. Local studies on pillarization narrate quite different patterns, in which subcultural formation failed to materialize in the period collectively studied by a large-scale historical project (1850-1925). Indeed, Dutch society seemed

60 P. Luykx, *Andere katholieken. Opstellen over Nederlandse katholieken in de twintigste eeuw* (Nijmegen 2000) 12, 41, 281, 317, 326; P. Luykx, '*Daar is nog poëzie, nog kleur, nog warmte!' Katholieke bekeerlingen en moderniteit in Nederland, 1880-1960* (Hilversum 2007).

61 S. Stuurman, 'De overwinning van de zonde. Over de verhouding tussen seculiere en confessionele cultuur in de Nederlandse geschiedenis', in: Luykx and Righart, *Van pastorie naar het torentje,* 11-34, 20.

62 J. Zwemer, *Zeeland 1945-1950* (Vlissingen 2000) 277-297.

63 J. Rogier pointed to the anti-union and anti-socialist stance of the Catholic representatives of the liberated provinces who tried to influence Queen Wilhelmina in London during the winter of 1944-1945. See *Een zondagskind in de politiek en andere christenen. Opstellen over konfessionele politiek in Nederland van Colijn tot Cals* (Nijmegen 1980) 78, 87; H. Termeer reports that they were afraid of a presumed (future) socialist and communist dominance in the part of the country that was still under siege, 'Het bestuur aan de ondergrondse', in: J.A. van Oudheusden and H. Termeer (eds.), *Tussen vrijheid en vrede. Het bevrijde Zuiden september '44 - mei '45* (Zwolle, Den Bosch 1994) 92-115, 112.

64 Luykx, *Andere katholieken,* 232-236.

rather unevenly affected by the process. Leading historians attached to this project have wondered if we must not move 'beyond' pillarization or regard it as a mere metaphor.[65] Local differences were just too great to speak of a national, pillarized pattern. Moreover, historians have often been confounded by the issue of to what extent non-religious groupings – namely the liberals and the social democrats – could also be called pillars. In particular, liberals, being only loosely organized, did not act as if they belonged to pillarized institutions, and consciously 'neutral' organizations eschewed any pillarized identity.

Perhaps just as problematically – and this is a fourth issue – is that pillarization obscures Dutch history from international trends.[66] Pillarization has been studied by Dutch historians as a national phenomenon, and they have not been particularly interested in relating this national problematique with international trends, with the exception of some historiography on transnational Catholic patterns.[67] Belgian and German scholars have offered transnational perspectives on religious mobilization, perhaps most notably the Belgian historian Staf Hellemans.[68] Problems have remained, however; the preference of German-language scholarship for the concept of Catholic 'milieu' vis-à-vis a Belgian-Dutch focus on a more pluralist process of 'pillarization' reveals the difficulties in constructing a transnational historiography on religious mobilization between 1850 and 1960. And it is important to stress that the creation of 'heavy' communities which encouraged tight networks of groups with the same religious outlook was a broader pattern within the development of civil society in Western Europe and North America, with Catholics and conservative Lutherans establishing similar subcultures in the United States, for example.[69]

Seen from this last perspective, there is nothing unique about Dutch pillarization. Perhaps one could argue that more than elsewhere

65 J.C.H. Blom and J. Talsma, *De verzuiling voorbij*; P. de Rooy, 'Zes studies over verzuiling', *BMGN* 110:3 (1995) 380-392.

66 For a recent discussion of this issue, see Henk te Velde, 'Inleiding. De internationalisering van de nationale geschiedenis en de verzuiling', *BMGN/ LCHR* 124:4 (2009) 494-514.

67 Luykx and Righart, *Van pastorie naar het torentje*; Theo Clemens, P. Klep and L. Winkeler, *Moeizame moderniteit. Katholieke cultuur in transitie* (Nijmegen 2005).

68 Staf Hellemans, *Strijd om de moderniteit. Sociale bewegingen en verzuiling in Europa sinds 1800* (Leuven 1990).

69 For a critique of national limitations in this field and an alternative transnational concept of 'heavy community', see P.H. van Dam, 'Religiöse Traditionen in der Zivilgesellschaft. Westdeutsche und niederländische Gewerkschaften, 1945-1976' (PhD dissertation Münster 2009). For a brief comparison with developments in the United States, see Mark A. Noll, *Old Religion in a New World* (Grand Rapids 2002) 235-236.

the thoroughgoing process of subcultural segmentation resulted in (some historians might say: confirmed) a country in which there were only minorities. Political power in Dutch society remained strongly fragmented for about a century: there was not one leading group, but several. This means, as the sociologists of a 1985 investigation put it,

> In the Netherlands there are a number of churches with nearly equal rights since the middle of the last century. One does not have to be a number of any one of them in order to be a fully respected member of society. [70]

This observation may downplay too much persisting hierarchies in Dutch society, where liberals and Protestants remained culturally and political prominent for a long time. But this situation did generate over time a *modus vivendi* where public goods were proportionally divided among the Netherlands' minorities, evidenced in its low-threshold parliamentary democracy (0.67 percent of the vote required for a seat) and easy access to state subsidies for associations with a religious identity (though not for religious organizations *pur* sang, which were excluded from most subsidies). Pillarization, too, may have contributed to what is still a politically quiescent society, with a live-and-let-live mentality reducing the motivation for vigorous political and social protest.[71] The relatively rapid acceptance of homosexuals in Dutch society has been attributed to the room that was made for their 'pillarized' associations, and subsidies to Muslim and Hindu groups from the 1980s was justified on the same principle. The extent to which the Dutch were willing to finance the institutions of even tiny religious minorities prompted one studying the 1990s to praise the equitability of Dutch arrangements in contrast to countries like the U.S., England, Germany and Australia.[72] And striking in Dutch history is not only the high degree of self-regulation that has been shown by religious groups, but the willingness of the state to accommodate these groups. The ability to give a meaning and a shape to their own collective existence characterizes Dutch society, traditionally and nowadays, top and bottom, asserted the humanist thinker Rob Tielman in the 1990s.[73]

70 Chadwick, *Atlas van het Christendom*, 215; Mady A. Thung and L. Laeyendecker, *Exploring the New Religious Consciousness: An Investigation of Religious Change by a Dutch Working Group* (Amsterdam 1985) 4.

71 R. van Splunder in: cnv-*nieuws* (January 2002).

72 Rob Tielman, *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1982); Stephen V. Monsma and J. Christopher Soper, *The Challenge of Pluralism* (Lanham 2008); John Lucas Hiemstra, *The Role of Worldviews in the Politics of Accommodation* (Calgary 1993).

73 Rob Tielman, 'Is Nederland van God los?', *Civis Mundi* 33 (November 1994) 125.

After their First Communion, a group photo is made of the children in Den Bosch's cathedral (the St. Janskathedraal). In the Roman Catholic church, children first take part fully in the 'eucharist' around the age of six.
Oscar van Alphen, Children After Their First Communion, Den Bosch 5/6/1983. From the photo series The Changing Church.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Secularization and recent Dutch religious history

Throughout the twentieth century, the Netherlands has been characterized by an uncommonly high percentage of those claiming to be religiously unaffiliated, and a relatively high percentage of active churchgoers, especially before the 1960s (even now, 11 percent of Dutch say they attend religious services weekly, a relatively high rate for northern Europe[74]). For Dutch Protestants in particular, church membership was less coextensive than it was for their counterparts in Scandinavia or regions of Germany with being a member of society or of the nation, one of the effects, presumably, of the incomplete confessionalization of the Netherlands and the early disestablishment discussed above. The politicization of religion in the late nineteenth century may furthermore not only have mobilized believers, but alienated religious liberals from church membership. Whatever the precise reasons by 1930 some 14 percent of the Dutch population disclaimed religious affiliation. Although former Catholics and orthodox Protestants also helped constitute this group, it was drawn disproprionately from those born into the Dutch Reformed church, the older dissenting churches (such as the Lutherans), and the Jewish community. After 1870, many Jews cut or reduced their ties to their synagogues, drawn by the opportunities of social assimilation that Dutch society, in relative terms, afforded, whether into the bourgeoisie or working class movements. That this assimilation had its limits has been debated by historians as a factor in the unusually high percentage of Dutch Jews (75 percent) who perished in the Shoa.[75]

But as elsewhere in Western Europe and North America, the real drop-off in church attendance and affiliation in the Netherlands would not occur until the 1960s. In the Netherlands, the fall would seem particularly fast, given the dominance of religious organizations. In 1966, consistent with a much longer pattern, half of the Dutch population attended church weekly, a very high percentage by the standards of postwar Northern Europe. Starting in the 1960s and paralleling international developments, however, this high level of church attendance began to fall off very significantly. 'Depillarization' occurred roughly simultaneously, in which religious organizations either disaffiliated, merged with 'neutral' organizations, or, probably most commonly, broadened their religious identities. The large Protestant and Catholic parties merged into a Christian Democratic party, with scholars debating whether this shift was primarily motivated by a new ecumenical

74 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS), *Religie aan het begin van de 21e eeuw* (The Hague 2009).

75 J.C. H. Blom, R.G. Fuks-Mansfeld and Ivo Schöffer, *Geschiedenis van de Joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1995); Evelien Gans, *Gojse nijd & joods narcisme. Over de verhouding tussen Joden en niet-Joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1994).

élan or a response to the fact that they had gone from representing more than half to just one-third of the electorate.[76] By the mid-1980s, nearly half the population claimed to have no ties with a religious body, though religious sentiments held by the population remained higher than this statistic may suggest.[77] 'One might perhaps say', wrote a body of Dutch sociologists in 1985 on Roman Catholic and Calvinist churches,

> that people's ties with the churches were weakening all over Western Europe. But whereas elsewhere this was manifested by decreasing participation in church life, the Netherlands showed a decreasing number of church-members.[78]

The sudden decline of what was once a highly disciplined Roman Catholic subculture was perhaps the most dramatic religious change in postwar Holland. Luykx, as well as the Belgian historians De Maeyer and Hellemans, hold that Roman Catholicism, in reaction to the modernisation challenge of the nineteenth century, precipitated a religious revival culminating in the pronounced pillarization of the Interbellum. The depillarization and secularization of the 1960s and after was simply the counterpart of this upsurge, a return to a 'normal' level of adherence to Roman Catholicism. Seen this way, the secularization of the 1960s and after was not a unique occurrence within European Roman Catholicism, but was a return to the pre-1850 situation. Like Luykx, De Maeyer and Hellemans, Wintle sees Dutch pillarization as a phenomenon that could only be temporary. In the nineteenth century, new groups knocked on the door who wanted to become an integral part of the nation. After these new groups had taken in their positions, pillarization began to lose its function and faded away. Van Rooden, one of the few who did research on Dutch religious history along four succeeding centuries, in fact follows all the explanations mentioned before about the quick secularisation since the sixties. He thinks, like Luykx, that the strong adherence to church life of the fifties originated in the mass movements

76 Rutger Zwart, 'Gods wil in Nederland'. Christelijke ideologieën en de vorming van het CDA (1880-1980) (Kampen 1996); Dick Verkuyl, Een positieve grondhouding. De geschiedenis van het CDA (The Hague 1992).

77 That secularisation was more gradual than believed at the time, was shown by a working group of sociologists who found that in 1975 about a quarter of the male Dutch population denied 'Christian or transcendent references'; M.A. Thung, L. Laeyendecker et al., Exploring the New Religious Consciousness: An Investigation of Religious Change by a Dutch Working Group, Amsterdam (Amsterdam 1985) 148-149. The census data for non-church affiliation are 17,1 percent of the overall population in 1947, 18,4 percent in 1960, 23,6 percent in 1971. Probably the quickest development was between 1975 and 1985: in the last year 48,7 percent of the population was found to be non-church affiliated.

78 Luykx, Andere katholieken, 39-41, 241, 242, 257, 283, 320; Stuurman, De overwinning van de zonde, 26, 27; Thung and Laeyendecker, Exploring the New Religious Consciousness, 4, 209.

dating back to the second half of the nineteenth century. He also thinks neo-Calvinist and Roman Catholic leaders around 1960 no longer required strong organisations as the social, economic and political 'emancipation' of their groups had been quite successful. With religious leaders increasingly expressing equivocation about the value of traditional religious views and habits, the centralised structures they had built now served not to maintain faith but to enable the rapid spread of the doubts some members may long have held, doubts that further were stimulated by the growing mobility of the Dutch population.[79]

This explanation may account for the long-term background of Dutch secularization, but there also must have been more direct causes. The crumbling of the Roman Catholic pillar and the quick diminishing of the adherence to church life was precipitated by the quick growth of prosperity from the end of the 1950s onwards. Sociologists and researchers on the comparative history of religion have long held that this growth worked out negatively on church adherence and beliefs. Chadwick and Evans conclude that participation in church life diminishes when populations concentrate in still larger and larger towns and when heavy industry grows. Religious notions and relations generally are based on personal ties and smaller forms of community and so are influenced negatively by size and large proportions. The same is true for social and geographical mobility.[80] Just as important, however, was the rise of the welfare state which eliminated dependence on religious bodies for support and education which undermined the authority of traditional institutions and leaders.

More than one Protestant theologian however thinks that the quick secularisation since the 1960s was furthered by the churches' engagement with aims and movements in the social field. Recently E.P. Meijering has claimed that the churches, in reaction to the threat of quick modernisation, embraced so many inner-worldly values (environment, peace movement, fighting poverty) that they made themselves superfluous. For the attainment of these moral goals, one needed not partake in church life and the unique message of (Christian) religion tended to fade away by wave of strong engagement.[81] Some scholars have argued that the fast rate of religious reform that characterized the Dutch Catholic church in the 1960s may

79 Luykx, 'Andere katholieken', 241, 242; J. De Maeyer and S. Hellemans, 'Katholiek reveil, katholieke verzuiling en dagelijks leven', in: J. Billiet (ed.), *Tussen bescherming en verovering. Sociologen en historici over zuilvorming* (Leuven 1988) 171-200; Hellemans, *Strijd om de moderniteit*; M. Wintle, 'Natievoming, godsdienst en onderwijs in Nederland, 1850-1900', in: Te Velde

and Verhage, *De eenheid en de delen*, 13-28, 25; Van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes*, 17, 29, 40-45.

80 Luykx, *Andere katholieken*, 40; Stuurman, 27; Chadwick, *Atlas van het christendom*, 212.

81 E.P. Meijering, *Het roer moet om! De kerk van Jezus Christus is meer dan een Jezusbeweging* (Zoetermeer 2008).

have contributed to the decline in participation by rather abruptly shifting from religious observance that was external in form to a new emphasis on individual conscience.[82]

The result of these changes was, arguably, a secular and consciously post-Christian society, aware of the break that had been made with a religious past, and for a time, anxious to break with what by the 1970s was generally regarded as a repressive past. Many young people were raised without any religious ties, though a large majority of them continued to attend (often nominally) religious primary and secondary schools. The legalization of abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage were undoubtedly reflections of a society that now conceived of morality in emphatically secular terms, though other signature features of Dutch social policy – such as drugs policy – were not seen in light of the perceived transition from religious to secular society.

Still there were reasons that historians and other scholars have doubted the secularization thesis as applied to recent Dutch history. Some of them have emphasized that religion was 'transformed' after the 1960s. For a brief time, in the 1970s and 1980s, the Netherlands led the world in the number of its citizens engaged in the 'new social movements', including those dedicated to peace, human rights and the environment, and many engaged in these movements were in part religiously motivated.[83] The Christian Democrats may have shrunk to a quarter of the electorate and for themselves loosened the nexus between religion and politics, but they remained a leading contender in Dutch politics, and religiously-based organizations, from the Christian trade union to publicly financed broadcast associations and schools, have continued, for the time being, to shape the contours of Dutch public life. As the welfare state receded, religious organisations, especially on the local level, were seen by both the government and the public as significant contributors

82 Van Rooden, 'Oral history en het vreemde sterven van het Nederlands christendom', 119:4 (2004) 524-551; James C. Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw. Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam 1995) 82-116; John A. Coleman, *The Evolution of Dutch Catholicism, 1958-1974* (Berkeley, Los Angeles 1978); Johannes Matthias Gerardus Thurlings, *De wankele zuil. Nederlandse katholieken tussen assimilatie en pluralisme* (Nijmegen 1971).

83 James Kennedy, 'Recent Dutch Religious History and the Limits', in: Eric Sengers (eds.), *The Dutch and their Gods: Secularization and Transformation of Religion in the Netherlands since 1950* (Hilversum 2005) 26-42; Jan Willem Duyvendak, *Tussen verbeelding en macht. 25 Jaar nieuwe sociale bewegingen in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1992); Remco van Diepen, *Hollanditis* (Amsterdam 2004); Beatrice de Graaf, *Over de muur. De DDR, de Nederlandse kerken en de vredesbeweging* (Amsterdam 2004); E. Meijers, *Blanke broeders - zwarte vreemden. De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland en de apartheid in Zuid-Afrika, 1948-1972* (Hilversum 2008).

to civil society.[84] Moreover, more individual forms of spirituality became evident, though the impact of these sentiments were difficult to measure. A consciously democratic and individualistically-minded evangelicalism, shaped by American influences, changed the character of Dutch Protestantism in the postwar years, for example.[85] Just as important, religion remained an important factor for many immigrants who arrived in the Netherlands in large numbers between the 1960s and the 1990s, including the roughly 850,000 Muslims and some 1.3 million Christians who are reckoned to be of foreign origin.[86] It was the former group that came to draw most of public attention, not least because of filmmaker Theo van Gogh's murder at the hands of Mohammed Bouyeri, an Islamic jihadist. Though largely non-practicing – perhaps a quarter to a third of Dutch Muslims regularly attend a mosque – Muslims' very presence prompted many Dutch to wonder whether the Netherlands was incontrovertibly a secular country, as they once had supposed it was.

Once again, then, at the beginning of the twentieth century, religion had become a central element in public debate. In this, the Dutch were not unique; whether in Amsterdam, Mumbai or New York, migration and other patterns of globalization have compelled publics to come to terms with the religious pluralism that is one of the consequences of these processes.[87] Although some Dutch observers now longed for the relative stability of pillarization, it seemed clear enough that the old forms of segmentation could no longer be applied to the twenty-first century. But how then should religion be ordered? Opposing multiculturalists were those who now insisted that the Netherlands reassert a secularist or some kind of 'Judaeo-Christian' *Leitcultuur*. Those active in organized religion were now relatively small minorities, but their proper place in Dutch society, and the kind of consideration they ought to receive, has become a persistent issue. Now, as in the past, the struggles in which the Dutch have attempted to order their religious pluralism is worthy of international attention. ◄

84 James C. Kennedy, *Stad op een berg. De publieke rol van protestantse kerken* (Zoetermeer 2010) 64-72, 88-98.

85 Hans Krabbendam, 'The American Impact on Dutch Religion', in: Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis A. Van Minnen and Giles Scott-Smith (eds.), *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations* (Amsterdam 2009) 1027-1038.

86 M.M. Jansen and H.C. Stoffels (eds.), *A Moving God. Immigrant Churches in the Netherlands* (Munster 2008).

87 Markha Valenta at the Universiteit van Amsterdam is working on a project linking religion in these three cities with processes of globalization.

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