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Religious power

Introduction

In this essay, I will investigate the workings of religious power. How is it possible that people exert power over each other by means of 'religion'; by reference to matters of which the existence cannot be proven, (or indeed falsified) by scientific means?

I will first describe the terms ´power´ and ´religion´, no easy task to begin with, and then merge the two into ´religious power´. A clear distinction must be made between religious power on the one hand, and the power of religious leaders and institutions on the other. Once a certain degree of conceptual clarity has been attained, I will introduce a hypothesis about the functioning of religious power. I will demonstrate this with a rather curious example of religious power known as pillarization, in the Netherlands in the first half of the twentieth century, and its relevance for the situation in the world today.

1. A matter of definition

As terms, power and religion have at least this much in common, that to reach conceptual agreement about their precise meaning seems next to impossible. This is due to the fact that we are dealing here with basic elements of human coexistence. Power and religion are both cornerstones of human life. Not only are power and religion almost too precarious to be analysed, they are also well-nigh unidentifiable. They are always present, one way or another, integrated with everything human beings are, and do. They are almost impervious to objective analysis, which demands that we isolate them from their context. Consequently, these terms need to be redefined all the time, depending on the situation, and no single definition is truly satisfying. If we are to define religion or power, we must disentangle them from life

and that is always unsatisfactory. But it can provide us with concepts that help our understanding of human life.

Religion provides an answer to the human condition. It helps human beings to come to terms with and cope with their vulnerability, fallibility and mortality. It lends human existence meaning in spite of our finiteness. It gives people the hope and courage to continue, in spite of the overwhelming evidence of hopelessness. I do not limit the term 'religion' to belief in a god. Belief in political doctrines, such as communism or fascism can also be religious in nature, as can ad hoc religious movements focussing on football stars, pop stars etc. I will not dwell on such 'implicit religion' because it is dealt with elsewhere in this volume (Ref*). It can however be subject to the same dynamics in relation to power as is religion in the more traditional sense.

When I speak about religion, I am referring to *powers, meanings or realities that transcend what is ordinarily thought of as human*. With this broad approach I avoid many of the difficulties that are discussed in the extensive literature on this topic. I avoid questions of belief and disbelief on the one hand, and ritual on the other, as well as the relationship between feeling and thought. With the phrase ´to transcend what is ordinarily thought of as ´human´ ´, the definition is substantial (rather than formal or functional), while having ample scope.

'Power' is a quality inherent in all human relationships, at least partly determining the character of a society. The significance of power to every individual makes it into something that is both desirable, intimidating, and dangerous. One might say that this alone gives power something of the sacred.

In this essay, I will make no distinction between power and social power. From this point on, I will use the term ´power´ as short hand for ´social power´. *Social power is the chance of getting people to do things*[1]. This definition is simple and abstract. It abstracts from the preconditions many experts set to be able to really speak about power. For instance, that it should involve confrontation, inequality, conflicting interests, coercion, or even violence. In my view social power can include persuasion, consensus and consent. With religious power this is often the case.

My concept also abstracts from the scope of power; in my view, it has a role to play in face to face relations, on a global scale, and anywhere in between. Power does

not necessarily require explicit decision-making, or action. In religious power decisions are often implicit or non-existent, and passivity certainly has a role to play[2].

But it still remains necessary to define the combination: religious power. Here we must distinguish between the 'power of a religion' and 'religious power'. The power of religion is the power of; of religious functionaries, of religious organisations and of institutions. Those who discuss the power of a religion usually refer to institutionalised religion, without explicating the sources of power. These need not be religious in character. Indeed, the power of religious functionaries or institutions can derive from anything. The power of the Roman Catholic Church in the early Middle Ages was based as much on its monopoly of the art of writing, as on its monopoly in providing the sacraments. The power of Cardinal de Richelieu in seventeenth-century France rested on a combination of tradition and political competence, rather than on his piety.

The power of religion is not the focal point of this essay. It is religious power, referring to the source of power. It is 'power from' rather than 'power of'. I can now define 'religious power' as follows*: the chance of getting people to do things, by making reference to 'realities' or meanings that transcend what is ordinarily thought of as human.* This working definitions will suffice for the purposes of this essay.

2. Power and barter, capabilities and desires

To understand the exercise of power it is useful to view it as a kind of barter. From this perspective, the exercise of social power can be seen to depend on the relationship between capabilities on the one hand, and desires on the other. Someone's power obviously depends on his own capacities to provide what the other party desires. But it also depends on the intensity of those desires. If that intensity is low, if the other party hardly cares whether or not his desires are fulfilled, the resulting power based on a capacity to provide for those desires is not very great. If the desires are intense, if the other party feels hardly able to cope without their fulfilment, the resulting power is very great. Examples from the erotic sphere immediately spring to mind. The mistress whose lover will do anything for one glance, one kind word, loses this power as the latter's love diminishes. The economic power over an ascetic monk is a good example of what I mean. By mitigating his

material desires the hermit can practically shake off economic power. Another relevant example is the suicide terrorist, whose lack of desire to live gives him power over his opponent, whose only hope is to get back home safely. If power depends on both capability and desire, in the physical, economic, and erotic fields, what about religious sources of power?

3. A function for religion in the survival of the human species

Religion derives from the human capability for transcendence. Here I do not understand 'transcendence' as a divine attribute, a characteristic of a god or godly place, but as a human capability[3]. The capacity to transcend is the imagination to look beyond the here and now. It enables human beings to shift the limits of their world beyond the immediate horizons of space and time. They can imagine worlds imperceptible to their senses. They are also able to transcend their own physicality. They are able to imagine places or ways in which they will continue to live on after death.

This human capability has advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages is that human beings are capable of creating their own worldview, implying that they are partly capable of creating their own world. Thus the great variety of worldviews and cultures greatly exceeds what has been determined biologically. This increases the species´ chances of survival. It helps human beings to fight the threats posed by the physical world. For instance it is transcendence which enables human beings to build dykes against a possible rise of the sea-level, or to irrigate the desert. Both on the societal and on the individual level, the capability to transcend the here and now makes it possible to plan for the future and thus increase the chance of survival.

But the human urge to transcend the here and now also has significant disadvantages: human beings can become awkwardly, indeed terrifyingly aware of the ultimate hopelessness of their situation. They know they will die, they fear they might suffer, they are anxious that they might fail. They sense that the cultural 'reality' they live in is shadowy, and that 'reality' and 'truth' are continually being tampered with. Such insights can lead to a paralysing fear, cancelling out the advantages of this capacity to transcend. Ultimately, people can survive, physically and emotionally, in a

state of such *ontological insecurity*[4] only for a limited period of time. They have a strong desire for anything that can liberate them from this paralysing condition.

Luckily, the capacity for transcendence, that is the source of this lurking anxiety, can also provide its solution. The ability to doubt, to the point of total despair, also implies the ability to imagine 'realities' or develop meanings that can limit the damage; that can give a purpose to this state of misery, or compensate for it. These realities can but need not be gods, or spirits. Any reality, specific or abstract, that is conceived of as outlasting, overcoming or surpassing human frailty can perform the job.

Religion then is a player in the contest between human frailty and transcendence. It is the alternation between an awareness of finiteness and vulnerability on the one hand, and faith in 'realities' or meanings that can mitigate this paralysing fear, on the other. Victory is when fear is turned into its opposite: hope. What people need, therefore, is perhaps not religion as such, but ontological security. They need to feel that their world view, the meanings they attach to the world around them, will hold.

Wherever and whenever ontological security becomes shaky, or shows serious defects, a desire arises to repair it. A wide variety of strategies has been developed to maintain the state of ontological security[5]. Human beings are thus occupied in repairing and strengthening their worldview and boosting their ontological security for a substantial part of their lives.

Ultimately, however, this reparation and strengthening of a world view cannot be done in human terms. An anchor is needed, which can be thrown out to steady the ship, and allow it to weather the storm. There is a fundamental need for a superhuman 'reality', an ultimate guarantee against the undermining of a worldview and the fear and despair that ensue. Religion provides for this need. It offers 'salvation' from human fallibility and the fallibility of the humanly constructed worldview. It is the final antidote against the negative effects of man's capability to transcend. From this perspective, religious meanings that manage to guarantee steadfast ontological security are essential to the continued existence of the human species.

4. Symbolic and religious power

In order to gain a better understanding of religious power, it is important to investigate its relation to symbolic power. Whoever is capable of satisfying the desire for ontological security possesses symbolic power[6].

People are continuously helping each other to maintain or restore their ontological security by confirming commonly understood meanings. In this sense, everybody possesses a certain amount of symbolic power over everybody else. Everybody can to some degree give, or withhold what others desire to have: confirmation of meaning and ultimately ontological security. This bartering process takes place on many different levels, from the interior monologue of the individual to ordinary conversation and to the mass media. Of course inequality plays a role here as in any other sphere of power. Some are more in need of confirmation and others are better equipped to give it.

This exchange of reassurances is highly complicated, particularly in our ever more complicated society. Confirmation of meaning has a temporal dimension: people can appeal to ancient texts or to fragments of a forgotten movie, but also to expectations for the future. Anyone who loses his way and fails to maintain his sense of ontological security, can call upon experts: from clerks to personal coaches.

Here the religious dimension enters in. Anyone who is unable to solve the problem by normal means, that is, by mutual confirmation of meaning, might crave for a stronger antidote. This desire for ultimate security creates the opportunity and scope for religious power. When ordinary, human participants in the interaction fail to uphold ontological security, superhuman 'realities' which surpass human shortcomings, still can. This is the domain of religion. Whoever has the capacities to affirm, strengthen, or restore ontological security by means of superhuman realities and meanings can wield religious power[7]. Here as in other spheres of power, capability meets desire.

The need for religious confirmation of a worldview, of the definition of the situation, of the aspirations people might have, of the role they perceive for themselves, and so forth, occurs more frequently than one might expect. Whenever a crisis looms, a worldview comes under pressure and religious reinforcement becomes a welcome and even indispensable supplement to other means of symbolic power. Most people will however seek and find a supra-human or religious confirmation of their worldview well before the first cracks appear.

5. Religious empowerment

So how do superhuman realities or meanings guarantee ontological security?

People imagine that something or someone who surpasses the limitations of human beings, human bodies and minds, can guarantee the adequacy of their worldview. The way Descartes managed to anchor his worldview is an example of this in its most naked form. God, Descartes claimed, is perfect, and a perfect being would not lie to him(Descartes:1996). In this way, God guarantees ontological security for Descartes, providing him with a foundation for his thoughts and actions. Thus, Descartes left doubt behind, boosted his worldview, and found new energy in his notion of divinity.

Other people have similar experiences, though they express it in a more emotional way: "I had the feeling that God approved of what I thought or did or wanted." Or, a more subjective, secular variant: "something inside me told me it was right."

This is one of the functions of prayer: evoking ontological security by the assumed contact with a superhuman reality, to empower the believer to continue with his or her life. Prayer is empowerment, in so far as it gives people the reassurance they need to act. Such empowerment is made possible by the human imagination. It can be considered as self-empowerment, as power people exercise over themselves.

It becomes social power once other people become involved: witnesses, who confirm the existence of a superhuman entity or principle. Because people are social beings, who depend on others for their ontological security, society always plays a role. This is even the case for self-empowerment, based on imagination. Imagination works within the bounds of tradition, or at least uses tradition as a springboard. The god who confirmed the worldview for Descartes was the traditional, Christian god. The strength of that tradition made it very easy for this god to escape from the philosopher's radical doubt.

So what appears to be a solitary experience is in fact a social act. Religious self-empowerment depends on interactions that have taken place in the past, of common meanings the believer has internalised. People praying often simply do what they have been taught. They are using their 'religious capital' acquired through years of training, to boost their worldview and ontological security. The same holds for

Descartes. In regaining ontological security people make good use of a well tested way of thinking, a ripe set of meanings and rules, even when acting in utmost privacy.

What Descartes and praying believers do, is use their religious capital to give their worldview an unassailable certainty. This capital is institutionalised religious power, in so far as it provides for the individual's desire or need, to anchor his ontological security. Through the individual, the worldview could be said to reaffirm itself.

6. Bearers of religious power

Even though self–empowerment is social, its social nature can remain well–hidden. People experience it as a private activity, and only a few hermits feel it fully satisfies their needs. Humans are social creatures, and that means they require confirmation which is explicitly social in nature. That is what is enacted in religious, social ritual. In this setting people can help each other achieve a state which Durkheim calls *effervescence* (Durkheim:1915), in which emotions and intellect join forces to raise one's worldview beyond doubt. This common experience can be recalled later, in interactions, or in memory. The very memory of *effervescence* can lead to self-empowerment, both individual and collective, in other situations. But not only that. By cherishing this collective memory, by repeating parts of it or by adjusting one's behaviour to it, people have time and time again been able to reaffirm the reality of the divine anchor of their worldview. Because people depend upon each other to fulfil their desire for anchorage and their need for collective ritual, they can be said to wield religious power over each other. Collective religious empowerment implies mutual religious power. This collective self-empowerment can lead to peace of mind and provide self-confidence and sometimes more than that.

But collective enhancement of ontological security has its drawbacks. Memories are not very precise, living together is always ambiguous and others can undermine self-confidence or punish arrogance. Conflict threatens. People may seek to use the religious power they have over others to pursue certain agenda's or to organize collective ritual or reaffirm religious memories in exchange for other advantages and privileges. Thus religious power becomes yet another weapon in the power struggle that constitutes human society.

The need arises eventually for persons with religious authority, to impose decisions with regard to religious conflicts or dilemmas. Generally, the preference is for someone in a special position, which means someone a) devoid of personal interest and b) closer to the unassailable divinity. In family conflicts, this could be the head of the family, in tribes the head of the tribe. In the self–empowerment of a New Age adherent, it could be an Indian guru. What people are actually doing when they submit their dilemmas and doubts to religious authority is to delegate their own religious power to somebody else, hoping for a higher return. In their quest for a superhuman guarantee for their worldview, they realize that the efficacy of their own self empowerment or mutual exchange is insufficient. The task of religious empowerment is now transferred to somebody who is seen to wield sufficient religious power to be able to fulfil the desire for a guarantee.

This in my view, is the source of power of the religious specialists. I would call such a specialist *priest* in so far as the religious power delegated to him is institutionalized in such a way as to grant him a near monopoly. The functionary is invested with a special dignity, and his position is marked with special attributes, which place him somewhere in between the believers and the divinity. He will wear special clothing, and display special behaviour and even perhaps his lifestyle is distinctive and special an may include such practices as celibacy. All of this to underline his special status.

Religious questions will be submitted to such a person, who's answers will be seen as being beyond doubt, given his special position and knowledge. There are ways in which he can achieve a further expansion of his power, for instance by means of canonisation[8]. Through this process, certain 'holy' texts are characterised as being absolutely reliable, and the word, or the recorded tradition that is contained in it, as the only option. This strengthens the position of the priest who is linked to these texts, at the expense of other would-be specialists. But it turns out that even such clear-cut holy texts need constant reinterpretation. The ensuing uncertainty offers new avenues for power Whoever gives the most plausible and appealing interpretation gains in power. As the establishment of a canon represents a seizing of power, so can making an end to further interpretation make for a consolidation of power.

Priests come in different sizes and shapes, from vicars to gurus and from monks to shamans. Basically the source of their power is the same. The institution of priesthood undergoes a development, and becomes a part of religious capital. The

interpretation of institutionalised religion is entrusted to these religious specialists. A priest is a religious dignitary who exercises his religious authority on behalf of the community, and hence the power a priest possesses ultimately is and remains delegated power. Such power can, in time, be removed, if the priest's performance in terms of ontological reassurance is not satisfactory. He can be opposed by a competing specialist and with the support of the believers, be cast aside.

7. Interim Summary

The model I have used so far explains why people need religious reassurance and how this need draws them subsequently to obey religious commandments and dignitaries. Religion offers the fulfilment of a basic need: ontological security. Religion can confirm and guarantee the worldview on which life depends in a way that no other system of belief and practice can. This is because it connects the worldview to something or somebody who is unassailable in that it transcends human frailty. People may try to maintain their ontological security by other means, but in the end these prove insufficient in themselves.

The model outlined above tries to make clear why religious power is such a strong power. It attempts to explain why people are willing to sacrifice themselves for religion. It is not so much the virgins in paradise that inspire suicide terrorists, it is the conviction of the final and indubitable triumph of their worldview over all else[9]. Compared to that individual survival becomes relativity insignificant.

The model also tries to clarify the motives and reasons for obedience to religious specialists. Their power derives from a (delegated) capacity to anchor ontological security and thus to fulfil the desire for ontological reassurance. In principle people empower themselves and each other. The empowerment by the specialist is delegated by them. The rules and regulations, the sanctions, positive and negative, with which priests exercise their power, are ultimately accepted only because they confirm the omnipotence of the divinity, who provides the ultimate legitimacy of the world view and is thus the guarantor of ontological security.

7. Religious power: its effect on culture

The importance of religious power for the development of a culture can hardly be underestimated. Because religious power is fundamental to the development and consolidation of worldviews, its significance for culture, its *Kulturbedeutung,* to use Weber's term, is decisive (Weber,1920: 30;205). There is extensive literature in which the significance of religious power for culture and society is elaborated and discussed. The most well-known example is the debate on Weber's *Die protestantische Ethik und die Geist des Kapitalismus (Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism).* Weber's position is, briefly, that there is a *Wahlverwandtschaft,* a elective affinity between the ethics flowing from Protestantism on the one hand, and the mindset of Western capitalism on the other. The two are supposed to have reinforced each other[10].

In terms of the model developed in this article, more can be said about this affinity between religion and mindset. It is not merely a case of mutual reinforcement between religion and economic practice. Protestantism did more than reinforce the capitalist worldview. It sanctioned it by giving it superhuman connotations. The ultimate legitimacy of making a profit was a divine one. Whereas the Medieval God forbade lending or investment for interest, the Protestant god positively required it. It was to attain inner peace that Protestant believers acted according to the requirement of maximizing profit, as the Catholic believers had done before them by abstaining from money lending for profit. In both cases believers wield power over themselves via their religious institutions.

A second discussion with regard to the cultural importance of religious power is less focussed; that on the genesis of the nuclear family[11]. The power of the clergy over the family began with their control of the institution of marriage. The Church managed to gain jurisdiction over marriage, by monopolizing the sanctifying of the tie between man and woman. One of the most unstable and precarious relationships was given divine sanction. It is a particularly good example of what religious power means: what threatens to be unstable, is put on a firmer foundation by means of reference to a higher power. People are willing to discipline their sexual desires in order to honour and obey this higher power, and the priests representing it on earth, because their need for ontological security is paramount. As other sources of ontological security become available, the divine sanction of marriage loosens, and instability returns.

To gain and consolidate their ontological security people bestow priests and their organisations power, and this power is used to generate even greater power. For instance the powerful Catholic priesthood used its power to introduce confession, and subsequently, to make it obligatory. This greatly increased the grip the Church had on individuals which it used to further enforce sexual and conjugal ethics.

Consequently, strict family ethics were imposed which were divinely sanctioned, and controlled by Gods representatives on earth. Here again people, believers, were ultimately exercising power over themselves, via the priesthood. The increasing availability of other options for boosting ontological security, coinciding with the arrival of contraceptives, led people to withdraw, from the priests, the power over sexual conduct and keep it in their own hands.

8. Religious power: constellation and convertibility

The foregoing provides an overview of what religious power consists if in theory, and I now move on to discuss what role it can play in practice, in the everyday world. One thing that becomes apparent from these examples of religious power, is that it is fairly diffuse, and connected to other forms of power. In daily life, we mainly see mixed forms of power. Religious power in its pure form is rare. It is always connected to other forms of power.

I have argued that religious power exists thanks to the ability to sanction a worldview and thus fulfil the need for ontological security. This implies that it is not limited to a special sphere. Religious power is rooted in and is relevant to everyday life. That means religious power, like power from other sources, appears in complex constellations. Religious power is intermingled with economic, sexual, political power and so on.

This merging of different kinds of power in power-constellations presupposes power-convertibility. All power is convertible. This means that religious power, based on the capability to guarantee a worldview by means of an appeal to the authority of a superhuman reality can generate other forms of power. The priest can demand from his followers that they invest him with political and economic power. On the other hand, religious power is often delegated to somebody who already possesses much social power. This is where the distinction between religious power and the power of

religion is to be located[12]. Religious dignitaries can wield power coming from all kinds of sources. But also other persons, such as pop stars, military heroes or statesmen can be given religious power by a multitude craving for ontological security. If warring popes are an example of the first, Joan of Arc and Hitler surely are examples of the second. In short: religious powers always appears mixed with other kinds of power, and conversion between different sources of power is constant and continuous

The most conspicuous form of power with which religious power connected is political power. The key role of religion in society means that it is usually connected, in one way or another, with the existing societal elites. Or again those awarded religious power become members, perhaps of a new societal elite. Such constellations can result in a theocracy (in which the priests hold political power) or in caesaro-papism (in which politicians hold religious power).

The Christian religion, and particularly the Western variant, shows a wide range of different power constellations. It must be added that dignitaries of the various streams in the Christian religion have been exceptionally adept at the game of power convertibility.

9. Religious regimes and Modernization

When religion plays a dominant role in power constellations, we can speak of religious regimes[13]. Religious regimes give us another insight into the functioning of religious power. Pillarisation in the Netherlands in the 19th and 20th century can serve as an example.

In the Netherlands, religion has traditionally been connected to society in a special, conflict-ridden way. The history of what would later be called the Netherlands was defined as religious history, however complex it might have been in reality. In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Dutch rebelled against the Catholic oppressors from Spain. The Protestants emerged victoriously from this battle, and, as they believed, God rewarded them with a wealth that had no parallel at that time, turning Holland into the new Promised Land.

Religion was therefore part and parcel of the political power struggles. Exercising power was legitimised in religious terms; social mobilisation was inspired

by religion. This special place of religion in Dutch society lasted well into the twentieth century. Its importance was reflected in the social prestige and political power of protestant vicars. The Netherlands was a country of vicars.

It is not surprising therefore, that in the Netherlands, the social and cultural unrest, which are now referred to as 'the process of modernisation', would be given a religious interpretation. People attempted to use religious meanings to find their way in the insecurities caused by this turbulence. If they opposed the ideas of the French Revolution, it was in the name of the Gospel. In the early nineteenth century, Protestant leaders, among whom Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876) was the most important, called upon their followers to resist ´the spirit of this century´. According to them, the French Revolution had unleashed a wave of anti-religious hostility over Europe, and this had to be opposed. It was essential to react, not only against that part of the Enlightenment thinking that openly rejected God, but also against so-called 'modern theology', which attempted to combine Enlightenment values with religion.

This 'Anti-Revolutionary' movement was successful. It was the theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837 – 1920) who had the deepest understanding of this success. He gradually came to realise that his supporters were not opposed to modernisation as such, and were even willing to grasp the opportunities that modern society offered. What they were afraid of, and what they resisted, was the moral desperation that modernisation could lead to. What they were afraid of were the existential insecurities of modern life. They feared the collapse of a worldview, within which they felt ontologically secure and at peace. Kuyper's answer was: modernisation, but within the secure boundaries of faith.

It was on the basis of this understanding of the importance of a religiously guaranteed context for the modernisation process, that Abraham Kuyper rose to power, becoming one of the most influential politicians in the nations history ever. Modernisation was, in his view, in his policy, to be fitted within the framework of a strong Calvinist faith. It was to be supported by a sharply defined community of believers. To that end all sorts of religiously defined organisations were created: schools, mass media, housing corporations, employers union, workers union, a university and a political party.: all working within the framework of the orthodox Protestant faith, led by protestants on every level, and with an all protestant membership.

The example of the orthodox Protestant group was followed by the Catholics, and even organisations without a religious background had little option but to do likewise, explicitly labelling themselves as neutral. Thus the system was developed known as 'pillarization'. Its dividing lines were not horizontal, as in so many other countries, but vertical. The dominant structure was not a class structure, but a structure of ´pillars´. A 'pillar' was a conglomerate of organisations, defined in terms of a particular worldview or religion. Typically it included persons of that worldview from low to high. Catholic workers were joined in the pillar to Catholic entrepreneurs, and separated from their fellow workers of Protestant conviction, with whom they were severely encouraged not to mix. Every type of organisation, from school to broadcasting corporation, had a Protestant, Catholic and non-denominational variant, allowing the Dutch to live their life from cradle to grave without really getting to know their neighbours from another denomination. But they did feel that much closer to persons of their own belief system, from whatever walk of life. Thus social organisation supported the consolidation of the worldview. As the country modernised, ontological security was guaranteed.

This, briefly, is the process of pillarization. It came to pass peacefully, but not amicably. Group solidarity was maintained and reinforced, by the service to God, and, if necessary, by demonising other groups. Kuyper in particular invoked strong feelings against 'enemies' from other denominations. But at the top the pillars cooperated, reaching a consensus which prevented violence.

Pillarization is an example of a religious regime offering a context for a peaceful process of modernization. The religiously defined pillars, organising practically all aspects of daily life in a religious way, helped many Dutch people to enter modernity without losing their sense of ontological security. This example offers a perspective to people undergoing and experiencing the seismic changes produced by the present day processes of modernization and globalization.

The side effects of modernization, in terms of the loss of ontological security cannot be underestimated. The ensuing anxiety can stimulate people to delegate religious power to 'specialists' or persons with a potential for charisma who will rise to the occasion, and increase the religious power offered them by conversion to other types of power. The Dutch example shows that if this process is understood, it need not lead to extremism and violence. Modernization within a religious context can

provide for the ontological security which modernization coupled with secularization may undermine.

Conclusion

In this essay I have tried to develop and apply a model of religious power that is based on the human need for ontological security. Whoever is able to fulfil this need with religious means that transcend the ordinary human shortcomings possesses this kind of power.

Religious power has characteristics that are identical to those of other kinds of power. It is very unstable and unpredictable, like any form of power. It can be conversed in other kinds of power, for instance financial power. It can be part of power constellations. When it dominates these, we might speak of religious regimes. The significance of religious power for the development of society cannot be underestimated, and is studied intensively.

SUGGESTED READING

Met opmaak: Engels (Groot-Brittannië)

A still useful overview of the theorizing about power is Clegg (1989) and Wrong (1979).

For the defining of religion, see Platvoet and Molendijk, eds. (1999.) and Hamilton (1995).

For the anthropological relevance of concept of transcendence, see Luckmann (1967)

For ontological security, see Giddens (1984; 1991)

For another view on symbolic and religious power, see Bourdieu (1991) and Foucault (1979;1980)

For an modern, empirical study of religious empowerment, see for instance Juergensmeyer (2001)

For the role of the collectivity in religion, see Durkheim (1915, 422)

The classic on the power of priests is Weber (1963)

On the *Kulturbedeutung* of religion according to Weber, see Poggi,(1983) is useful.

For the influence of religion on the making of the family, see Goody, (1983) or Flandrin, (1984).

On religious regimes, see Bax (1987; 1995)

For the history of pillarization, see Kossmann (1978)

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Met opmaak: Nederlands (standaard)

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Met opmaak: Engels (Groot-Brittannië)

[1] Here I use the term 'chance' rather than 'capacity' because social power is depending on a social process of which the outcome is not only dependent on the capacity of the actors, but also of the dynamics of the process itself. (cf. Max Weber 1980: 28).

[2] A good general overview of the problems relating to power remains that by Clegg (1989).

[3] This anthropological perspective on transcendence is inspired by Luckmann (1967), although it is not identical to it.

[4] The term ´ontological insecurity´ is a counterpart to Giddens´ *ontological security* (Giddens: 1984). This term refers to the philosophical impact that we are talking about: what is at stake here is the grip on reality.

[5] Compare Berger and Luckmann (1967: 104; 147). They only provide a few strategies, which can be supplemented and varied on.

[6] The term *symbolic power*, but not the definition, derives from Bourdieu (1991).

[7] Religious power, as defined here, is a sub-category of symbolic power.

[8] For canonisation as a means of power, see M.B. ter Borg. (1998).

[9] This is how Juergensmeyer´s evidence (Juergensmeyer 2001) should be interpreted.

[10] For an concise overview of the never ending discussion of the so called Weber-thesis, see Hamilton(1995), 165f.. and Poggi (1983).

[11] The next two alineas are based on the work of Flandrin (1984) and Foucault (1979).

[12] They key issue is the distinction Robertson Smith makes between ´´community cults´´ and ´´religious communities´´ (Casanova 1994: 45) In the first instance, social power has been converted into religious power, and in the second, religious power has been converted into social power. The distinction is parallel to that between Caesaro-papism on the one hand and theocracy on the other.

[13] In Dutch sociology, the term was first used by M. Bax, who defines it as follows: ´´A religious regime can be described as a more or less formalised and institutionalised constellation of dependency relationships, legitimised by a thought process propagated by religious specialists´´ (M. Bax 1985: 25).