

Human Rights or Religious Rules?

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INTRODUCTION

The many problems facing society today often raise the question of where to find ideals, principles, values and norms to deal with them. It starts with marriage and the family: how do we promote equality between husband and wife? What ideals are worth passing on to our children and future generations? How do we strike a balance between protecting our private lives and the social tasks awaiting us in our neighbourhood, suburb, city and region? The latter already takes us from the micro level of emotional security in a small, intimate circle, to the meso level of social groups, communities and institutions. Here too there are umpteen questions. What values and norms protect society against disintegration and ensure an inspiring context that people would like to belong to and from which they derive their identity? Are they the rules of the economy? But which economy? The neo-liberal one or the Rhineland model, which interrelates economic and social life? Or do we use the rules of politics? But which politics? The bureaucratized politics of the state or the politics of a deliberative democracy, rooted in civil society? Do we apply the rules of education? But which education? One in which teachers act as producers and students are their products, or education aimed at human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity? Are they the rules of the law? But which law? One in which one looks for loopholes to pursue personal profit, or what was traditionally known as 'just law'? Maybe the rules of sport. But which sport? Grinding, exploitive, exhausting sport, or sport aimed at joyous human re-creation? At the macro level of international relations such questions are even more pressing and also greater – well-nigh infinite in their magnitude. I am writing this introduction in 2009, at a time when, starting in 2008, we find ourselves in a global financial, and, concomitantly, economic crisis, the outcome of blind, neo-liberal faith in 'the market'. The real victims are those at the underside of society, especially the millions of large and small groups of people in developing countries. The World Bank estimates that the world's poor that have to get by on less than two dollars a day has grown to one and a half billion as a result of the economic crisis. The Unesco report, *A Matter of Magnitude: the Impact of the Economic Crisis on Women and Children in South Asia* (June 2009), describes the situation in that part

of the Asian continent which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Two thirds of the 20% of the world population that live there subsist on less than two dollars a day.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGION

On the basis of which values and norms should we tackle this overwhelming number of problems? In this book I deal with two approaches to this multitude of problems. The first is a human rights approach, the second a religious approach, which includes religious morality.

The first clear signs of the first – the human rights – approach are evident in the sharp protest by 16th century Spanish groups against the enslavement, exploitation and genocide of the indigenous American population, the Indians, and the fight for their rights. A few centuries later this culminated in the consolidation of these rights in institutions in which human rights were entrenched. The first of these institutions were the democratic constitutions of America and France in 1791.

The second – the religious – approach, including religious morality, is characteristic of all religions that since time immemorial have championed justice, solidarity and love and handed these values down from one generation to the next. Whether it is justice in the codex of Hammurabi, compassion in Asian religions, the duty to help widows, orphans, the poor and strangers in the Jewish Bible, universal solidarity and love in the Second Testament, or righteousness in the Qur'an – they all emphasise the moral duty to care for the indigent, needy other.

Nonreligious people opt for the first approach, that of human rights. They prefer direct, active, subjective rights that are rooted in the dignity of the human person in a democratic legal order in which the people are sovereign, and not an extramundane, sacred order with a divine sovereign at the top, represented, as they see it, by non-elected religious leaders that consider themselves entitled to dispense with any accountability to the people. They are also mistrustful of the moral claims of religions because of the way they easily tend to erase from their collective memory the many forms of bodily and mental violence, inquisition and genocide perpetrated in their name in the course of history.

Adherents of the various religions, on the other hand, tend to opt for the second approach, that of religious morality, not only because

it is an extension of their religious beliefs, but also because they may have some objections to human rights. They are said to be products of Western individualism, centring on self-concern and personal profit, with little regard for social relations or commitment to the community. In addition, religious adherents are critical about the foundation of human rights in the absence of a divine order. Is the dignity of the human person not a shaky basis? Does a doctrine of human dignity allow for recognition of historical contingency, human fallibility and evil to be qualified as human guilt? Does it offer sufficient protection in times of disaster caused by dictatorships, wars and terrorism? Do we not need a higher, ultimately supreme, unshakable guarantee of order, justice, reconciliation and, ultimately, love: God?

Choosing between the two – the human rights approach or that of religion and religious morality – is not easy. On the one hand, it should be noted that the aforementioned groups who protested against the cruel treatment of the indigenous population at the time of the ‘discovery’ of America belonged to the Catholic Dominican order in Spain. And the groups that were a major influence on the foundational documents of America, such as the Virginia Bill of Rights of 1776 and the United States Bill of Rights of 1789, included English dissenters, especially Puritans, Congregationalists, Baptists, Anabaptists, Moravians and Methodists. On the other hand, the most fervent champions of religious freedom were people who had to a greater or lesser extent shaken off the power of religion. It was mainly these people who put an end to the ferocious, bloody, prolonged and constantly recurring religious wars by introducing the separation of church and state, which is an indispensable condition for human rights. And it was they who defended the freedom of religion and selflessly championed the oppressed, marginalised religious minorities in their struggle against the religious majority, who were usually entrenched behind the unassailable walls of a state religion or state church.

HUMAN RIGHTS OR RELIGIOUS RULES?

Against this background it should be clear why I chose *Human Rights or Religious Rules?* as the title for this book on human rights and religion, and why I appended a question mark to it. Is it in fact a choice, or can one find or build a bridge, whether wide or narrow, allowing some sort of traffic between the historically divided banks of human rights and religious morality?

The term 'human rights' in the title refers to what are known as the three generations, even though this term needs some qualifications: the first generation of civic liberties, political and judicial rights; the second generation of economic, social and cultural rights; and the third generation of collective rights, including the rights to development, a healthy environment, peace, co-ownership of the common heritage of humankind, and the right to communicate. One qualification is that the three generations represent a descending order of enforceable juridical rights and an ascending order of non-enforceable moral appeals.

The term 'religious rules' in the title has a long history of various meanings, from which I cite only one salient aspect. Here it is not used in the sense that it has been used for the past millennium and a half or more (!). Its initial meaning was broader than what Tertullian had in mind in the 3rd century. He confined religious rules (*regula fidei*) to rules that governed the dogmatic core of the faith. It also had a polemical connotation against religious monarchianism, which claimed that God was only one person, thus denying the trinity. In later ages, too, religious rules were confined to the dogmatic *proprium* of the faith, especially in the era of Catholic and Protestant confession-alism, when the controversy about the trinity made way for the dispute about the authority of Scripture versus that of tradition and ecclesiastic office. But prior to this dual restriction (to dogmatics and polemical dogmatics), hence pre-Tertullian, the original meaning of religious rules was far broader, all but holistic. Until the middle of the 2nd century, for example, the 'rules of our tradition' referred to the entire corpus of beliefs and practices that one finds in the works of Clement of Rome and others of that period. These are not purely dogmatic rules, but have various other aspects, such as spiritual, moral, disciplinary, sapiential and educational aspects, which in the practical, everyday lives of, one might say, all 'ordinary' believers, constitute a unity and can only be classified in distinct areas on closer analysis and reflection. The term 'religious rules' in the title of this book is used in this original, practical-holistic sense.

Indeed, as noted already, the choice between human rights and religious rules is not easy. The problem becomes even more acute if one does not confine oneself to the past but includes contemporary history as well. On the one hand, one faces the question whether religions genuinely engage with human rights or merely pay them lip service. Are they really moved by the problems of overpopulation, and, at the

same time, the carnage that a pandemic like HIV/aids wreaks among the population? How do religious leaders justify the continued invocation of abstract principles like 'natural law' to oppose a concrete approach such as the common sense use of condoms? On the other hand one cannot deny that many religious groups at the grassroots devote great energy to the development of a human rights culture, which is essential for the active application of human rights in society. Without that culture, human rights degenerate into a beautiful but rapidly yellowing parchment in a museum showcase. But does it not suggest hypocrisy, one might add, that religions should vociferously advocate the application of these rights outside their own communities, but sometimes erect a divinely based barrier to their observance within their own walls?

DIVISION INTO CHAPTERS

These are the sort of complications explored in this book, not in the hope of solving them – that would be presumptuous – but to clarify them through patient historical, empirical and theoretical research.

To this end I confine myself to three themes, dealt with successively in the three parts of this book: religion and religions, religion and human rights, and religion and a human rights culture.

The first part is on religion and religions. It is an important theme, because in many publications on human rights religion not only gets a rough deal, but is often presented in a manner that almost fully identifies it with conservatism, even fundamentalism, or, worse still, terrorism. This part covers variations within religions and the various positions of religions in society: weak and strong, dwindling and growing, and the causes of these (chapter 1). In the midst of these diverse positions there is increasing interest these days, greater than in the past, in the religious identity of majority and minority groups. What is religious identity, what is the relation between continuity and discontinuity in that identity, and what hermeneutic and empirical aspects does it have (chapter 2)? The study of religions in society should take into account its substantial attributes without reducing it to social and psychological phenomena, and should research it both from an empathic inside perspective and the outside perspective of observation. From the combination of both perspectives, the question of 'true religion' (*religio vera*) might be approached in terms of religious 'orthopraxis' in the perspective of human rights (chapter 3).

The conclusion thus reached leads as a matter of course to the second part on religion and human rights. Is the foundation of human rights religious or nonreligious, or does it require an open approach that can be filled from a variety of religious and nonreligious perspectives (chapter 4)? Can human rights be characterised as natural rights inferred from natural law (imbedded in the divine order), or should they be interpreted in terms of the political struggle that oppressed, marginalised groups have fought in the course of history, such as citizens and peasants under the feudal order, workers under the capitalist system, blacks under apartheid, women and homosexuals in the current age of repressive tolerance (chapter 5)? The relevance of human rights is particularly evident in the interaction between majority and minority groups. The majority can take care of itself, and does so in legislation, administration and jurisprudence. This gives rise to the challenging notion that when religious minorities want to deviate from a given social norm, the onus of proof is on the majority (i.e. the state), not on the minority. Does it mean that religious minorities must be able to claim distinctive religious rights, for instance Muslim minorities in the area of personal and family law (chapter 6)?

The key question in the third part is whether, and if so to what extent, human rights are accepted as indicative of the existence of a human rights culture among religious groups as well as nonreligious groups in particular countries, in this case the Netherlands. The part of the Dutch population investigated in the final chapters comprises three groups of Christian, Muslim and nonreligious youths, as will be indicated at the end of this introduction.

The first theme to be examined is religious freedom. Having traced its historical development from oppression via passive tolerance to active tolerance, and, eventually, religious freedom, I try to determine empirically whether, and if so to what extent, the three groups of youths subscribe to religious freedom (chapter 7).

Next I deal with the separation of church and state. First I look at the historical relationship between church and state – from theocracy to church and state union to an autonomous state and eventually separation of church and state. Then I empirically examine whether, and if so to what extent, the three groups of youths endorse this constitutional principle. I focus on two problems in the area where morality affects church and state directly, namely the *res mixtae*, in this case political autonomy in regard to euthanasia and abortion respectively (chapter 8).

Then I examine the empirical question whether, and if so to what extent, religion actually has a positive or negative impact on attitudes towards religious freedom and separation of church and state. This question is important in that the answer can shed light on the contribution of religions to a human rights culture. First, the three groups of youths' religious beliefs and their participation in religious rites are examined empirically. Then follows an empirical analysis of the effects of both beliefs and ritual participation on attitudes towards religious freedom and separation of church and state. Then I reflect on the research findings from the angle of differences between religious beliefs, making distinctions between non-morally laden and morally laden beliefs, and between beliefs relating to the culture of the religion and those relating to its structure. The first two (non-morally laden beliefs and beliefs relating to the culture of the religion) appear to have a slight, ambiguous effect. The second two (morally laden beliefs and beliefs relating to structure) have a rather strong, unambiguous effect on attitudes towards religious freedom and separation of church and state (chapter 9).

These findings relate to the question the title of this book contains: 'Human Rights or Religious Rules?' To some extent religion may contribute to human rights, specifically to human rights culture, which means that in that regard the answer should not be formulated in terms of mutual exclusion but in terms of support: human rights may be supported by religious rules.

Finally, a comment on the three groups of youths I studied empirically: the Christian, Muslim, and nonreligious group. In the empirical study, for which the data were collected in 2007–2008, we chose youths in the Netherlands at the end of their secondary or the start of their tertiary education. The Christian youths represent the Christian culture that forms part of the cradle of Western civilisation in the Netherlands and plays an active role, at varying levels of intensity, in that culture. The Muslim youths represent a qualitatively significant, and in major cities a quantitatively significant minority in Dutch society, which has put the theme of religion high on the political agenda. The nonreligious youths represent the largest part of the Dutch population, which over the past 50 years – like the neighbouring populations of the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, some Nordic and Baltic countries and other East European countries like the Czech Republic – has seen a

drastic decline in religious faith and participation. The first group consisted of 340 Christians, the second of 235 Muslims, and the third of 479 nonreligious youths – together 1054 youths. The three groups are pertinent to a human rights culture, because in the near future they will be the leaders on the micro and meso levels of society. The (continued) support of human rights will largely depend on them.

CHAPTER ONE

VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH

The religious state of the world today cannot be captured in a single image, if that was ever possible. In the West, particularly in Europe, there are two contrary phenomena. The one is religious weakness caused by decline, especially of the Christian religion; the second is religious strength as a result of resurgence, especially of Muslim religiosity. The long-term outcome of these two developments, whether they will influence each other and what effect that would have, are unpredictable, although there are plenty of opinions. One is that religious weakness will persist in the West and will probably drag Islam down with it. Another is that Muslim strength will persist and will pull the Christian groups upwards. A third view is that the two religions exist independently, and if they continue to develop will do so independently in whatever direction, upwards or downwards, linear or curvilinear.

Irrespective of the predictive value of such opinions, they make religious research in the West a complex but also a fascinating enterprise. The diversity of religious phenomena – that of decline and ascendance – is the feature of the religious landscape that hits one in the eye. I do not fool myself into thinking that I can reduce this variety to a few clear insights, nor is that my intention. All I hope to do is to sketch in broad outline both the religious phenomena themselves and some strategies for researching them.

This chapter first examines religious weakness in the West, more especially in Europe, to demonstrate that this is not a superficial, short-lived phenomenon but the outcome of a far-reaching process stretching over several centuries. It is by no means clear at this stage whether it entails a ‘transformation of religion’. Added to that is the problem created by the strength of Islam and its influence on Western society, specifically from the perspective of cultural and religious integration. These two developments make religion in the West a complex and variegated phenomenon (1.1).

Next I propose some strategies that can be used to direct research into the variations of religious weakness and strength. Here I settle for

three paradigms: one for researching religious variations between and within countries (macro level), one to study religious variations within countries and intergroup variations (meso level), and one for examining variations between individual group members (micro level). The first strategy I label the secularisation paradigm, the second the economic paradigm, and the third the cognitive paradigm (1.2).

1.1 COMPLEXITY OF RELIGIOUS WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH

It is sometimes said that religion is back after a period of absence, but the question is whence it has returned and whether it is still the same religion. In Europe, at any rate, there are no signs of a revival of Christianity, and the religion one finds outside it is a different one – Islam. For the time being, the weakness of Christianity continues unabated, simply because the younger generation has dropped out or is dropping out. Islam, by contrast, is conspicuous for its strength. This is largely a result of demographic factors such as the formation or reunion of families and a higher birth rate among Muslim migrants. What is back is religion on the political agenda, the causes being the a-synchronous decline and weakness of Christianity and the ascendance and strength of Islam, and the consequences this has for the multicultural societies that are increasingly manifesting in Western countries.

1.1.1 *Religious Weakness*

Whatever you think of popular TV programmes, to some extent they are a mirror of everyday culture. That applies not only to soaps, but also to talk shows and survival programmes like *Robinson Island*. They bring to light what lives in people's minds, what longings they have, what feelings and ideas they cherish. But they skip things that do not live in their minds, that do not occupy them from day to day, that they disregard. One such thing is religion. In the Netherlands, for instance, religion hardly features in soaps other than by way of conventional marriage and burial services. In talk shows, religion, if it features at all, is mostly an objectionable or ludicrous topic or something one has to put up with: objectionable because society finds it tiresome; ludicrous because some people, it is suggested, still seem to hang on to an outdated illusion; or to be tolerated because there are far more harmful developments in society than religion. In survival programmes, shot on idyllic islands with blue seas and golden beaches, it never enters the

heads on those bronzed bodies that they house the image of God. The implicit message of these popular programmes is that the secularised tabernacle we gape at every night is empty.

But not totally empty, there is still a residue: a ‘something-ism’ (Dutch: *ietsisme*), a sort of ‘something-ist’ religion among people who do not believe in a personal God but still have faith in ‘Something’: “There is Something more,” these adherents insist. Ronald Plasterk, once an internationally prominent microbiologist, now minister of education, culture, and science in the Netherlands, believed himself to be the originator of the term ‘*ietsisme*’, unaware of the fact that in his *A Common Faith* the great American philosopher John Dewey wrote about God as *Something more* as far back as the first half of the 20th century. Later Plasterk changed his rather pejorative judgment of *ietsisme*, because he preferred it, he said ironically, to another -ism: fundamentalism.

What has caused the religious decline and weakness in the West in countries where this is the dominant scenario, such as the Netherlands – together with its neighbours Belgium and Germany, some Nordic and Baltic states, and other East European states like the Czech Republic among the religiously weakest countries in Europe? To give some indication of the situation, in the period 1966–2006, the percentage of church members in the Dutch population dropped by 28% from 67% to 39%, and regular church attendance by 34% from 50% to 16%.¹

To answer the question, I fall back on the theory that sees decline of religion and its resultant weakness as the outcome of a modernisation process that has spread to the rest of the world from its source – the mercantilist capitalism of Northwestern Europe – eventually developing into industrial capitalism. It is not a matter of a changing trend lasting only a few years, nor even a structural change, however many decades it may take, but of what is known as *longue durée*: change over several centuries that radically affects society and thus penetrates religion as well.²

According to this theory, modernisation has four aspects. The first is economic modernisation. Put simply, when industrialisation

¹ T. Bernts, G. Dekker & J. de Hart, *God in Nederland 1996–2006*, Ten Have, Kampen 2007.

² H. McLeod & W. Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe 1750–2000*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003.

supplanted home industries, commercial markets emerged, profit became the prime consideration and competition replaced cooperation; that was when peaceful family and village communities with the church at their centre ceased to exist. When farming became an industry, agricultural land and its cultivation came to be expressed in terms of capital and labour, livestock turned into production units, and small farmers grew into major entrepreneurs serving markets extending far beyond national and even continental boundaries – that was when the heavenly canopy that once spanned harmonious life in the home, the countryside, and the church collapsed. Whatever one makes of it, the process of economic modernisation is unstoppable; all one can do is to channel and counteract the adverse effects on deprived groups that the process creates. That is what happened in what is known as the Rhineland model, of which the Scandinavian model is a variant form.

The second aspect is political modernisation. Economic liberalisation demanded liberalisation of the governmental structure of society, from which liberal democracy was born. This democracy replaced the alliance of king, nobility, and clergy, also known as the alliance of throne and altar. The contract that citizens entered into with themselves culminated in a constitution characterised by separation of church and state, civil liberties, later expanded into human rights, and the checks and balances of separation of powers. Through bodies of popular representatives citizens impose their will on the government of society. As is evident both in history and in our own day, the churches – which have always adapted to the prevailing social model, such as that of the Roman empire, the feudal Middle Ages, and the absolute monarchy – are still dubious about the separation of church and state, view democracy ambivalently, and in several respects pay lip service to human rights, at least inasmuch as they refuse to apply them within their own walls.

The third aspect is social modernisation. It relates mainly to migration from the countryside to the cities, whereupon the intimate village communities of yore made way for urban agglomerates in which people consort freely with friends and relatives in their own context and beyond that interaction is predominantly instrumental and functional. Thus the bond between family, school, and the church was dissolved. The family has shed many of its functions; schools concentrate on preparing students for the labour market; and the church has lost its focal position and finds shelter in obscure neighbourhoods. The upshot of all this is a loosening of traditional social ties, loss of social cohesion, and increasing individualisation – at any rate in regard to religion.

The fourth and final aspect is cultural modernisation. This finds expression in the replacement of values from the premodern period, whose validity derived from tradition and authority, with norms that support and direct the modernisation process in the aforementioned three areas. One example is the cultural codes accompanying demographic development. In premodern times, birth control, necessary to maintain a balance between death and birth rates, was governed by codes of taboos, such as the prohibition of premarital sex and the norm of relatively late marriages with a view to responsible conduct of a household. Observation of such norms prevented excessively large families that could not be permitted for economic reasons. In modern times this cultural code of birth control through marriage constraints gradually changed into birth control measures in marriage and alternative forms of cohabitation.³ This robbed the birth of children as gifts from God of its divine aura, and they became simply humanly planned and loved temporary life partners.

The weakness of religion can be seen as the result of this fourfold modernisation process: economic, political, social, and cultural. Viewed thus, the chances are that God, if he has not yet vanished from the scene, will do so in due course, unless faith in him were to change structurally in a manner compatible with the fourfold process.⁴

Among large groups, at any rate in Western Europe, religious decline can be described in terms of various phases.⁵ In the first phase people still live quite contentedly and peacefully in the unquestioned, accustomed 'faith of our fathers', albeit with occasional doubts that can still be resolved with the aid of prevailing dogma. That was typical of the premodern phase, which still has offshoots in our own age. In the second phase, questions about the traditional faith start surfacing, touching not merely the surface but affecting the very core of the inherited doctrine. Such doubts are not easily resolved and persist stubbornly. In Europe this has happened mainly since the Enlightenment. In the third phase, the churches respond to doubts by closing religious ranks and erecting a bulwark, behind which they hide and direct their poisoned arrows at the atheistic outside world. That was

³ Th. Engelen, *Van 2 naar 16 miljoen mensen: Demografie van Nederland, 1800 – nu*, Boom, Amsterdam 2009, 29–56.

⁴ J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994.

⁵ Here I am inspired by A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1988, 349–369.

the period of religious mobilisation from roughly 1850 to 1950. In the fourth phase, believers come out of their strongholds and trigger-happy bunkers, and gradually engage in open dialogue with the outside world. In Catholicism this happened during Vatican II (1962–1965) and the Dutch Pastoral Council (1968–1970). This period is marked by what one could call religious demobilisation. Top of the agenda is dialogue with the modern world.⁶ In the fifth phase, such dialogue leads to syncretistic hybrids of traditional belief and new social and cultural circumstances, to the extent that one can now say, ‘I am a modern Christian’ in much the same way as people in the early centuries identified with Hellenistic Christianity, or, in later times, with feudal Christianity, with Renaissance Christianity, or, in even later ages, with ‘enlightened’ Christianity. These phases do not proceed identically in all cases, and are certainly not linear. Some revert to an earlier phase from a later phase, such as the leadership in the Catholic church on the macro level that mostly has reverted from the fourth to the third phase. Research shows that the majority have by now started a sixth phase. They have dropped out, bid every form of religion goodbye, and live their lives as pragmatic atheists without needing to fight on the barricades for it. They are found mainly among members of the younger generation that have enjoyed advanced education and live in metropolitan areas.⁷

But modernisation is not the sole source of religious weakness in the West. Another major factor is the individualisation process that is a concomitant of social modernisation. Here we must be wary of facile generalisations such as that ‘modern people’ are individualised. The change process has been one of decline of rural communities (*Gemeinschaft*) with their accent on the common will (*Wesenswille*) and social controls attuned to it, and their replacement by society (*Gesellschaft*), with its accent on individual, reasonable, free choice (*Kürwille*) based on contractual thinking in terms of long-term, well considered self-interest.⁸ The question remains, can one speak of a dissolution of some specific social bonds, or should individualisation be regarded as a comprehensive social process, as many aver? It is rather a transformation

⁶ Ch. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2007, 465–472.

⁷ J. Verweij, *Secularisering tussen feit en fictie*, Tilburg University Press, Tilburg, 143–148.

⁸ F. Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Leipzig 1887.

of rural social bonds into those of urban society, which are not based on connection by birth (ascription) but on free choice (achievement). Apart from religion there is a flourishing social middle ground between family and state, in which people form relationships in networks based partly on mutual sympathy and friendship and partly on mutual utility (e.g. among colleagues), pleasure (e.g. sport clubs and other recreational associations), or solidarity (e.g. working for the disadvantaged in the local or wider environment).⁹ Individualisation is more of a differential, marginal phenomenon. By differential I mean that it does not apply to all social domains to the same extent; by marginal I mean that it crops up mainly in domains that are considered to have marginal social significance, such as political parties, trade unions, and churches. For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that political parties, trade unions, and especially churches do forge social bonds for a limited group of core members.¹⁰

At all events, religious individualisation certainly exists. It is accompanied by processes of religious de-institutionalisation and de-traditionalisation, which jointly result in de-standardisation of the religious lifespan and the emergence of a religious free choice biography. The symptoms of de-institutionalisation must not be misunderstood. As I indicated earlier, in Northwestern Europe church membership and participation have dropped by scores of percentage points over the past 50 years. The decline has been less dramatic in South-Western Europe, because there church participation has always been lower. There are also clear signs of religious de-traditionalisation. Religious ceremonies at birth, marriage, and death are declining in frequency, albeit less rapidly, and when they do happen they increasingly deviate from standard religious programmes, unless church leaders resist tooth and nail, which in its turn promotes emigration from the church. This is increasingly leading to consumption of selective religious menus (*religion à la carte*), also known as religious *bricolage*. All this is collated in a religious free choice biography.

⁹ According to T. van der Meer, *States of Freely Associating Citizens, Cross-National Studies into the Impact of State Institutions on Social, Civil, and Political Participation*, ICS Dissertation Series, Groningen, Utrecht, Nijmegen 2009, p. 60, social participation is about twice as high in Southern Europe compared to Northern Europe, whereas Eastern Europe is somewhat in between.

¹⁰ J.A. van der Ven (ed.), *Individualisering en religie*, Ambo, Baarn 1994.

Of course, one can play down these phenomena by pointing to the low level of church involvement in earlier ages. Thus the inhabitants of Hippo in North Africa struck Augustine as ecclesiastically lax, for the vast majority only attended church on feast days.¹¹ As for the Middle Ages, church participation was no greater than in present-day Republic of Congo – that is, marginal.¹² In early premodern Italy there were many ecclesiastically organised processions, but they did not always reflect genuine religiosity. Thus in 1663, the new Cambridge graduate Skoppon commented on a procession in Genoa, noting that many of the flagellants that joined the procession were dock hands and were actually street people. They appeared to be making some sort of game of it, even though they were hired by the rich to execute the penances on their behalf.¹³ In 19th century Italy, a substantial minority appeared not to have attended Easter rituals, the reasons advanced being involvement in non-church folk religiosity, lack of motivation, and laziness.¹⁴ In 1847, Berlin pastor Krummacher stated that only 6% of residents attended church regularly¹⁵ and in the early 20th century religious indifference was increasing steadily, as in Brie, France where by 1903 church attendance had dwindled to 2.4%.¹⁶ Such data lead to the unavoidable insight that full-out church membership and participation are unattainable wishful thinking, and, equally undesirable, a utopia that can only be achieved through spiritual paternalism or even dictatorship. Elements of that are discernible in the programme of church discipline since the Fourth Lateran Council and the concomitant programme of shame, guilt, and penance, which sought to activate the populace ecclesiastically until well into the 20th century.¹⁷

¹¹ F. van der Meer, *Augustinus de zielzorger: Een studie over de praktijk van een kerkvader*, Spectrum, Utrecht/Antwerpen 1957.

¹² P. Raedts, De christelijke middeleeuwen als mythe, *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 30(1990)2, 146–158.

¹³ P. Burke, *Stadscultuur in Italië tussen Renaissance en Barok*, Contact, Amsterdam 1988, 34.

¹⁴ Burke, *Stadscultuur*, op. cit., 65.

¹⁵ G. de Bertier de Sauvigny, *De kerk in het tijdperk van de Restauratie (1801–1848)*, *Geschiedenis van de kerk. Deel VIII*, Paul Brand, Hilversum/Antwerpen 1965, 203.

¹⁶ R. Aubert, De kerk van de crisis van 1848 tot Vaticanum II, in: *Geschiedenis van de kerk, Deel Xa*, Paul Brand, Bussum 1974.

¹⁷ J. Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur, La culpabilisation en Occident (XIII–XVIII siècles)*, Fayard, Paris 1983; Id., *Le catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris 1971; Id., *Peur en Occident: une cité assiégé*, Fayard, Paris 1978.

But when such attempts at religious discipline fail, it does not, strictly speaking, lead to the kind of religious de-standardisation that we find in our time. The standard may remain in place, even if not complied with. It is handed down from one generation to the next, even if not applied in practice. The family, together with the church, is – or one should say, was – the religious socialisation context *par excellence*. What is new in our time is that the importance of the family for religious socialisation – which in rural society used to be a key context for religious transmission of what Goethe calls the chain of generations – is very much on the decline. Counter to all sorts of claims, this emerges from empirical panel research measuring changes over time, in which respondents are questioned at intervals about their religious education and church involvement. Thus Vermeer shows through meticulous regression analyses among 184 respondents, first questioned in 1983 and again in 2007, that the influence of religious socialisation in the family on church involvement has declined by roughly three quarters.¹⁸

There have been many reactions to these phenomena of modernisation and individualisation. Some groups want to revive the policy of religious mobilisation from the third phase at any cost. Some do not even flinch from fundamentalist orientations. Other groups are on the borderline between the third and the fourth phase, maintaining a middle position and espousing a balanced ‘middle orthodoxy’. Yet other groups are on the borderline between the fourth and the fifth phase and strive to launch or maintain dialogue with modernity. There are those who have already emigrated inwardly without renouncing external religious membership. Others have tacitly elected to vote with their feet and have vacated the church. When one speaks about religion today, in this case the Christian religion in Europe, one is speaking about a complex diversity of beliefs and rites and community and leadership forms in an ocean of growing agnosticism and pragmatic atheism.

¹⁸ P. Vermeer, *Religieuze opvoeding in het gezin: doet dat er (nog) toe?* In: C. van Halen et al. (eds.), *Religie doen, religieuze praktijken in tijden van individualisering*, KSGV, Tilburg 2009, 42–58, table 3: in 1983: R^2 .58, in 2007: R^2 .15. Id., *Religious Socialization and Church Attendance in the Netherlands between 1983 and 2007, A Panel Study*, *Social Compass* 2010 (to be published).

1.1.2 *Religious Strength*

While religion is playing, by and large, a far lesser role in our day than in earlier centuries, a new actor has entered the religious landscape – one which, apart from large parts of the Iberian peninsula and the Balkans, was previously unknown and now ensures religious turbulence: Islam. This turbulence is a result of a far-reaching, worldwide process that is having an impact on religion as well, namely globalisation.

Globalisation manifests itself in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres, resulting in a global economy, a global polity, a global society, and a global culture.¹⁹ The expansion of space and time that it entails paradoxically leads to a compression of space and time, for instance via information and communication technology, which is a major factor in this regard.²⁰ Social globalisation has led to relatively large-scale migration, comprising guest workers and their descendants, legal and illegal economic refugees, and asylum seekers, resulting in substantial African and Asian populations in many parts of Europe. This has given the European population a sample of what one could call religious globalisation: it has come into contact with a religion, Islam, that, except for a few southern and eastern regions, has hitherto only sporadically penetrated their countries. Gradually it has become clear that a worldwide religion like Islam has to be viewed in terms of its own historical roots, premises, and beliefs and not simply as a non-Christian religion, because then it is not measured from its own assumptions and criteria, but according to what it lacks, what it is not. Neither can it be characterised as a ‘world religion’ – a Western construct that obscures the variability of multi-centred belief systems typical of this and other religions.²¹ In fact, for a long time Islam was denied recognition as a world religion because it was seen as Arabic in origin, deriving from the spurned Semitic race, in contrast to, for example, Buddhism, which is reputed to stem from superior Arian roots.²²

¹⁹ The classification into four dimensions corresponds with the paradigms of Wallerstein, Meyer, Robertson, and Luhmann; see P. Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, Sage, London 1994.

²⁰ M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network-Society*, Blackwell, New York 1996.

²¹ H. Vroom, *Religies en de waarheid*, Kok, Kampen 1988, 241ff.; C. Ram-Prasad, Teaching South-Asian Religions in Britain, *Religious Studies News*, Fall 2001, 3–6.

²² T. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2005.

The influx of numerous highly visible and vocal groups from Muslim countries made European society aware that it is in fact multicultural – a situation that has existed in Europe with its many national minorities for a long time but that had been firmly suppressed since the 19th century because of the ideology of the nation-state. But the strong Muslim presence has heightened this awareness and actually turned it into a problem. It is not only because Muslims manifest a different culture and practise a different faith, but also because they are located on the fringes of society. They have disproportionately high school dropout rates, unemployment rates, levels of unskilled labour, and criminality, and are under-represented in schooling, skilled labour, and leadership professions, also at the micro level. The problem of social inequality that this exposes also raises questions regarding social cohesion, which has already become problematic as a result of the fundamental difference in their culture and religion. After all, social inequality and social cohesion are interrelated.²³ From a demographic perspective, however, this problem is refuted, because it is said to promote adequate generational replacement in Europe, which, through a mismatch of low fertility and mortality and high life expectancy, is in danger of becoming unbalanced.²⁴ But this demographic opinion is heavily contested.²⁵ That makes multiculturalism an even hotter issue in the public debate.

The issue is exacerbated by the question whether the new immigrants and their second and third generation descendants will actually want or be able to integrate with what to them is an alien society. To answer the question, we need to distinguish between integration and some relevant but contrasting terms like assimilation, separation, and marginalisation. To this end, I use a matrix of acculturation strategies in religious minorities groups (figure 1).

²³ W. Ultee et al., *Sociologie: vragen, uitspraken, bevindingen*, Wolters-Boordhof, Groningen 1992, 640ff.

²⁴ J. Chamie, World population in the 21st century, *Justitiële Verkenningen* 27(2001)5; E. Guild, *Moving the Borders of Europe*, Inaugural address, Radboud University Nijmegen 2001.

²⁵ According to Engelen, op. cit., 179, few prognoses are as unreliable as demographic ones. He adds that fertility, which has dropped sharply to below replacement level since 1960, could increase again if, for example, the Netherlands were to implement the Scandinavian policy by properly regulating parental leave and child care.

lasting relationship sought with other religious groups and nonreligious groups	+ ↑ ↓ -	maintenance of religious heritage & identity + ←————→ -	
		(1) integration	(2) assimilation
		(3) separation	(4) marginalization

Figure 1. Acculturation strategies in religious minorities. Adapted from J.W. Berry et al., *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, 354.

The horizontal dimension refers to the extent to which a religious group engages in maintaining, keeping alive, and developing its own religious heritage, culture, and identity. The vertical dimension relates to the extent to which the group engages in lasting relationship with other religious and nonreligious groups and expands them. Relating these two dimensions yields four ideal types in the Weberian sense: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation.²⁶ The typology includes scales on both dimensions, ranging from positive (+) to negative (-). Integration in cell 1 refers to the group's striving to keep its own religious heritage, culture, and identity alive and at the same time maintaining lasting relationships with other groups. Assimilation in cell 2 also stands for a group's aspiration to develop such relationships, but without concern for its own religious heritage and identity. In the separation model represented by cell 3, this concern is vitally present, but the desire for enduring relationships is absent. Marginalisation in cell 4 is characterised by the absence of both interest in its own religious identity and interest in relationships.

The meaning of integration can be explored in greater depth by means of two Aristotelian concepts. The first is the dialectic between the one and the many, in terms of which a population constitutes an integrated whole inasmuch as it is one entity, albeit comprising a mul-

²⁶ J. Berry et al., *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, 353–357; J. Berry, Contexts of Acculturation, in: D. Sam & J. Berry (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, 27–42, here 34–35.

tiplicity of mutually differing groups.²⁷ How does such multiplicity-in-unity come about? The answer lies in the second Aristotelian concept: the dialectic between the part and the whole. An ethnocultural group contributes to the whole of a population insofar as it reflects (i.e. expresses and actualises) the whole in its beliefs and practices. A plurality of ethnocultural groups contributes to the whole of a population insofar as they participate in each other's beliefs and practices while still nurturing their own identity. Such mutual participation is essential, for the whole of a population does not transcend the groups; it is not something that descends on them from a vacuum beyond. Its wholeness in fact consists in their mutual participation. Wholeness is not overarching but consists in interpenetration. It is not a canopy but a network. There is no wholeness without participation, no integration without interpenetration.²⁸

Our description of integration from an Aristotelian perspective may sound delightfully idealistic, but is it adequate, or even remotely realistic? Naturally, integration is a worthwhile goal, and an Aristotelian explanation in terms of participation and interpenetration sounds admirable. But it is doubtful if that goal is – even partly – attainable. After all, in which religious and nonreligious beliefs and practices of indigenous European groups can and should a Muslim group participate? Conversely, in which religious beliefs and practices of these Muslim groups can and should indigenous European groups participate? What interpenetration of which religious and nonreligious beliefs and practices is involved?

When one reflects on it, one is faced with a bewildering complexity. As noted already, the indigenous European, in this case the Dutch population, is highly diverse, ranging from religious to nonreligious, and within this overall picture there is an almost infinite range of religious responses to the processes of modernisation and individualisation in Christian communities. They are split into Catholic and Protestant denominations, to whom ecumenism – after the brief euphoria of the 1960s and 1970s – seems more distant than ever.²⁹ Protestant

²⁷ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, Edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1984, 1054a 20ff.

²⁸ Aristotle, 210a16, 1023b29.

²⁹ According to A. Felling, J. Peters and P. Scheepers (red.), *Individualisering in Nederland aan het einde van de twintigste eeuw, Empirisch onderzoek naar omstreden hypothesen*, Van Gorcum, Assen 2000, p. 241, the diversity of confessional cultures is still actively present.

churches are themselves divided into rigidly orthodox, moderately orthodox, and liberal communities with almost no dialogue between them. Apart from the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, which, after decades of overtures, was established in 2004 through a fusion of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, there is no Protestant integration.

Among Muslim communities too, one sees no sign of integration. They are no less varied, as Dutch statistics show. With a membership of some 850,000, they are the second largest religion in the Netherlands, constituting about 5% of the total population.³⁰ Their adherents are spread over two main persuasions – mainly Sunni focusing on in principle four different schools of law, and Shia, in principle focusing on three different schools of law – while each community in its turn is marked by national differences and within those national differences by ethnic distinctions. In addition there are Alevites, a branch of the Shiite school, and mystical brotherhoods like the Sufi. Of the two biggest minorities in the Netherlands, Turks and Moroccans, 95% consider themselves to be Muslim, although not all of them take part in mosque services. A quarter of the Turks and a third of Moroccans attend these services no more than once a year, if at all.³¹ Among youths there is a manifest decline in mosque attendance and prayer practices, albeit a heightened sense of Muslim identity. The latter may be seen as a need for cultural identity, all the more desperate as the harshening multicultural climate of the past decade relentlessly drives them into a minority position.³²

For the time being, the aim of intra-Christian and intra-Islamic integration remains an alluring prospect and an inspiring ideal, but a great deal of water will have to flow into the sea before, on the macro level, the first signs of it, effectively put into practice, become discern-

³⁰ Centraal Bureau van de Statistiek (CBS), The Hague 2007.

³¹ J. Dagevos & M. Gijsberts (eds.), *Jaarrapport Integratie 2007*, Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, The Hague 2007, 163–191; CBS, *Religie aan het begin van de 21ste eeuw*, Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, Den Haag 2009, tabel 13.1, p. 118.

³² K. Phalet & J. Ter Wal (eds.), *Moslim in Nederland. Religie en migratie: sociaalwetenschappelijke databronnen en literatuur*, Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, The Hague 2004; Id., *Moslim in Nederland. Diversiteit en verandering in religieuze betrokkenheid: Turken en Marokkanen in Nederland 1998–2002*, Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, The Hague 2004; Dagevos & Gijsberts (eds.), *Jaarrapport Integratie 2007*, op. cit., 163–191.

ible. Does not the ideal of Christian-Muslim integration in an Aristotelian perspective provoke even greater skepticism – even on the humble scale of a strategy aimed at lasting relations between the two religions (see cell 1 in figure 1)? Participation of religious groups is actually characterised by bonding instead of bridging. It establishes contacts and trust between people within the same group (bonding) and none or little engagement with (people of) other groups (bridging).³³ Integration by participation represents a goal that can only be achieved in the long term, all circumstances being favourable.

In other words, in many European countries, pre-eminently the Netherlands, we are faced with long-term, concrete, actual separation; hence, a variety of religious movements and communities exist more or less in isolation from each other, with no sign of a strategy aimed at forming lasting relations. The picture is further complicated by the fact that Christianity in Europe, again pre-eminently in the Netherlands, is fast becoming a minority in the midst of a secularised majority. As a result of the steady decline, this minority, as noted already, is marked by clearly discernible religious weakness, whereas Islam is so far supplying a growing need for religiously informed cultural identity. In short, this kind of separation characterised by variety appears inescapable at present. What paradigms can we use for research to map such a variety of religious movements and communities so as to form a clear picture of them in order to better understand them? That is the topic of the next section of this chapter.

1.2 THREE PARADIGMS FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS VARIETIES

To study varieties of religion, one can use three research strategies that, in my view, cover the whole field, though I do not profess that they are the only ones. As pointed out in the introduction, I deal with the secularisation, the economic, and the cognitive paradigms. The first is suitable for studying variation in religious weakness and strength at the macro level of differences between and within countries. The second can be used to investigate variations at the meso level of differences within countries and intergroup differences. The third can be

³³ CBS, *Religie*, op. cit., pp. 8–9, 139–140.

used to study variations at the micro level of individual differences and then to link these to intergroup differences. Of course, this does not preclude looking for direct relations between the macro, meso, and micro levels.

A few comments are called for. When we speak about paradigms it must be acknowledged that it is not easy to pinpoint what a paradigm is. Thomas Kuhn, originator of modern paradigm thinking, employs 22 different meanings. He also offers a broad definition. A paradigm, he says, is an overall constellation of concepts, values and techniques.³⁴ Concepts comprise theories, definitions, and models; values include guidelines like consistency, coherence, simplicity, and transparency; and techniques include data collection, data construction, data analysis, et cetera. The debate between schools of thought always centres on concepts, values, and techniques. Often it is unproductive, because in practice researchers tend to opt for an eclectic approach. There is nothing wrong with that, provided the researcher is prepared to account for her eclecticism in what may be called a reflective eclectic approach.

1.2.1 *The Secularisation Paradigm*

I have said that I shall examine the question of the origin of religious differences between countries at macro level in terms of the secularisation paradigm. That paradigm is under great pressure at present. According to Thomas Luckmann, secularisation is a ‘modern myth’.³⁵ Is secularisation a dead duck? In my view, scholars have been over-ambitious, trying to explain too many phenomena by means of this one paradigm; but that does not mean it must be scrapped altogether. It should, however, be critically reappraised.³⁶

Apart from secularist phenomena in the distant past, such as Confucianism and Greek philosophy, ‘modern’ secularisation in Western society may be regarded as a centuries-old process dating back to the struggle between church and state: the Investiture conflict. The histori-

³⁴ Th. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1970.

³⁵ Th. Luckmann, *Säkularisierung – Ein Moderner Mythos*, in: Th. Luckmann (ed.), *Lebenswelt und Gesellschaft*, Paderborn, Schöningh 1980, 161–172.

³⁶ D. Pollak, *Säkularisierung – Ein Moderner Mythos?* Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2003; P. Norris & R. Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religions and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge University, Cambridge 2005.

cal date was 1122: that was when, in the Concordat of Worms (following the Concordat of London in 1107), the Roman patriarchate agreed, at least in principle, to put an end to both Caesaro-papism (political power over religion) and hierocracy (religious power over politics). In their place, two separate centres of power were established: the church and the state. In the one text of this concordat, the *Heinricianum*, the emperor, Henry V, guaranteed free election and consecration of bishops, and ceded the right to invest them with sacred authority by presenting them with the episcopal ring and staff; in the other text, the *Calixtinum*, the pope, Calixtus II, granted the emperor the right to attend episcopal elections and give bishops worldly authority by presenting them with the sceptre. In this perspective, the original meaning of the term 'secularisation' was applied, centuries later, to the state's expropriation of economic goods previously owned by the church, especially in France in 1789, when the church may have owned as much as one sixth of the national territory.³⁷ Paradoxically, whereas the French church suffered from such secularisation, in the 19th century the German church welcomed it as a source of religious renewal.³⁸

The emerging separation between church and state, which started with the Concordat of Worms and became ideologically and politically effective in the age of the Enlightenment and the French revolution, was the judicial outcome of a process of functional differentiation that had been at work in Western society for centuries.³⁹ Functional differentiation means that society is no longer organised in terms of social stratification – that is, estates and classes – but in functional terms. It evolves into functional systems with their own codes, operating according to their own logic, and with their own characteristic actors. Examples are the economic system (money, profit/loss, producer/consumer), the political system (coalition parties, power/opposition, politicians/voters), the health care system (quality of life, sick/healthy, caregiver/patient), the education system (job allocation, literate/illiterate, teacher/student). As a result of functional differentiation, the various systems develop fairly autonomously, albeit with some mutual

³⁷ L.J. Rogier, *De kerk in het tijdperk van Verlichting En Revolutie. Deel VII*, Brand, Hilversum, Antwerpen, 1964, 166.

³⁸ H. Lübke, *Modernisierungsgewinner: Religion, Geschichtssinn, direkte Demokratie und Moral*, Fink, München 2004, 35–45; Id., *Die Zivilisationsökumene, Globalisierung kulturell, technisch und politisch*, Fink, München 2005, 187–188

³⁹ M. Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement Du Monde: Une Histoire Politique De La Religion*, Gallimard, Paris, 1985.

influencing by what is called interpenetration. In the case of religion there are two possible perspectives. From the other systems' point of view, secularisation means their emancipation from the religious system. From the religious point of view, it means that religion has less influence over these systems. Thus secularisation is a consequence of functional differentiation.⁴⁰

In this age-long process of functional differentiation, the focus of the various systems was no longer on religious or moral issues but on rationality. This rationality was not what Weber called *Wertrationalität*, but *Zweckrationalität*, characterised by an emphasis on cause-effect and means-ends relations and on efficiency and efficacy. This *Zweckrationalität* found expression in the economy, especially in all kinds of markets like those of land, production, labour, trade, consumption, and money; in politics, especially in contracts like the constitution, coalitions, and contracts with voters; in social life, in aspects like the marriage contract, family life, and the establishment of functional associations; and in culture, in the rationalisation of science with its orientation to rationally controllable hypotheses, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Science enables us to probe the most remote corners of the universe and the innermost depths of molecules, atoms, and electrons. Whereas in the 17th century Pascal still associated both the mystery of the cosmos and the intriguing mystery of atoms with the mystery of God's presence, by the beginning of the 20th century Max Weber was speaking of a disenchanted world (*Entzauberung der welt*). By this he meant that the world had lost its divine lustre, having become a measurable and make-able scientific research object and material for technological control and intervention. This applied (and still applies) not only to the disenchantment of the external world by the natural sciences, but also to that of the social world by the sociological and politico-scientific disciplines and the inner world of human beings by psychological disciplines.

It was not so much a matter of scepticism about religion as a result of scientific explanations, although the effects of Darwin's evolution theory on the doctrine of creation, for instance, should not be underestimated.⁴¹ It was rather that the rational *Zeitgeist* permeated and still

⁴⁰ N. Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1977; Id., *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1998; Id., *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2002.

⁴¹ E.J. Browne, *Charles Darwin. Vol. 1: Voyaging. Vol. 2: the Power of Place*, Pimlico, London, 2003.

permeates all culture and thus the whole of social and individual life, which led and still leads to the notion that fundamentally all problems are rationally soluble, at least in principle.⁴²

However appealing a hypothesis the secularisation paradigm may be, it is subject to serious doubts. One of these concerns its point of departure: is it correct to relate secularisation to functional differentiation? The cardinal counter example is the USA, which is inarguably characterised by functional differentiation, but (apparently) not (so much) by secularisation. What is true is that traditional denominations are experiencing a decline in the USA, parallel to that in Europe.⁴³ According to research in 2004, in the last ten years they lost more than 10% of their members, which is more than 1% a year.⁴⁴ At the same time, the Catholic Church keeps its membership on par because of the influx of Spanish-speaking Mexicans. And conservative Protestant churches, such as evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal communities, have a consistent following, and some of them are even experiencing growth. While the outward phenomena in these churches may astound one, at a deeper level the substance of their proclamation and liturgy, Sunday schools and Bible study appears to be subject to inner secularisation. Thus traditional doctrine is said to be adapting to the conventions of the dominant liberal culture, resulting in what is known as 'easy-believism'.⁴⁵

At all events, this (apparently) quite powerful religiosity is explained in terms of extra-religious factors. Firstly, the USA is said to have embarked on the process of functional differentiation and modernisation later than Europe, so that secularisation on that continent lags

⁴² S. Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996; K. Dobbelaere, Towards an Integrated Perspective of the Processes Related to the Descriptive Concept of Secularization, *Sociology of Religion* 60(1999)3, 229–247; Id., *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels (Gods, Humans & Religion)*, P. Lang, New York, 2002; Id., Assessing Secularization Theory, in: P. Antes, A.W. Geertz & R.R. Warne (eds.), *New Approaches to the Study of Religion. Vol. 2: Textual, Comparative, Sociological, and Cognitive Approaches*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 2004, 228–253.

⁴³ W. Roof, *Religion in the Nineties*, Sage Periodical Press, Newbury Park, Ca. 1993; Id. *Americans and Religions in the Twenty-First Century*, Sage Periodicals Press, Thousand Oaks, CA 1998; W. Roof, W. & M. MacKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 1987.

⁴⁴ <http://www-news.uchicago.edu/releases/04/040720.protestant.shtml>

⁴⁵ S. Bruce, The Curious Case of the Unnecessary Recantation: Berger and Secularization, in: L. Woodhead et al. (eds.), *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, Routledge, London/New York 2001, 89–90.

behind. Secondly, the demographic picture is said to be distorted: in absolute figures the Catholic Church as well as the evangelical, charismatic, and Pentecostal churches' religious market share appears to be stable or even growing, but not percentage-wise. In addition, the link between ethnicity and religion is considered an important factor. Religion is said to contribute to ethnic identity, a need felt by American migrant groups that are more numerous and extensive than their European counterparts. The separation of church and state, which is more rigid in the USA than in (many) European countries, appears to be a further factor. As a result, there is fierce competition between American churches, causing them to focus more on their members' needs – an argument we shall encounter again further on when we deal with the economic rational choice paradigm. In addition, the relatively poor development of the social welfare state in the USA compared to Europe means that American churches feature more prominently as centres of social interaction and cohesion and as a social safety net.⁴⁶ Finally, the overall American culture, said to be more masculine than the predominantly feminine culture in Europe, allegedly contributes to religiosity: the more masculine, the more religious; the more feminine, the less religious.⁴⁷

But it is not just disparities between Europe and the USA that are at issue. The prominence of religion in non-Western countries and in the interaction between Western and non-Western countries in recent years raises the question whether the secularisation paradigm has not been done to death in the literature. One should also be wary of rash generalisations, as is evident in studies of secularisation in countries on the African continent, which is by no means as 'incurably religious' as it is said to be.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, have we not been sadly mistaken ever since the Enlightenment, when "there was the honest conviction that

⁴⁶ Norris & Inglehart, *Sacred*, op. cit., 106–110.

⁴⁷ S. Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults*, Oxford University Press Oxford/New York, 1996; J. Verweij, *Secularisering tussen feit en fictie: Een internationaal vergelijkend onderzoek naar determinanten van religieuze betrokkenheid*, Tilburg University Press, Tilburg, 1998; G. Hofstede & G.J. Hofstede, *Allemaal andersdenkenden: Omgaan met cultuurverschillen*, Contact, Amsterdam, 2005.

⁴⁸ E.M. Metogo, *Dieu Peut-Il Mourir En Afrique? Essai Sur L'indifférence Religieuse Et L'incroyance En Afrique Noire*, Éd. Karthala, Paris, 1997; A. Shorter & E. Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa: A Case Study: Nairobi City*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, 1997.

churches must, after all, move with the times"?⁴⁹ Is it not a matter of 'exit secularisation' rather than of 'religion R.I.P.'?⁵⁰ It is not America that is the exception, as Europeans sometimes think; rather it is Europe that is the global exception.⁵¹ "There is no reason to think," says Peter Berger,⁵² "that the world of the 21st century will be less religious than the world of today." Sometimes this carries a rider: there is some hope even for Europe, but then religion would have to make a paradoxical choice. Instead of resisting functional differentiation, it should adapt to it altogether. If it does that, the argument goes, the removal of religion from the public space and its privatisation will be arrested and may well be turned around.⁵³ Time will tell whether this hypothesis is correct.

That secularisation is not an irreversible, linear, natural process, but a social one, meaning that it is open to varying human preferences and interventions, is evident in the anti-secularisation movements in many countries. To understand these, one needs to consider a number of factors. The first concerns the carriers of social movements and counter movements. By this we mean that social processes like rationalisation of the economic, political, or cultural system do not operate like the ticking of an automatic clock, but are always carried by socially stratified groups. If these groups are influential, the process is facilitated; if they are a minority, society carries on more or less without them. Thus urban groups are more favourably disposed to rationalisation, and rural groups are less so if at all, just as highly educated people are more inclined to support such processes than less educated ones. It depends which groups are dominant in a particular area and in a particular period of time.

The second factor concerns social conflicts. These erupt when the carriers of social development are thwarted by emerging power groups. An example is the struggle between businesspeople and the

⁴⁹ P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. Vol. 1: The Rise of Modern Paganism*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1966, 343.

⁵⁰ R. Stark, Secularization, R.I.P., *Sociology of Religion*, 60(1999)3, 249–274.

⁵¹ G. Davie, Europe: The Exception That Proves the Rule? In: P.L. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Ethics and Public Policy Center, Eerdmans, Washington, D.C./Grand Rapids, MI 1999, 65–84; Id., *Europe, the Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*, Sarum Theological Lectures, Darton, Longman & Todd, London 2002.

⁵² Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization*, op. cit., 12.

⁵³ J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994.

petty bourgeoisie in 19th century Germany. The former favoured economic rationalisation and were sceptical about religion. The latter were fearful of rationalisation in industry and cherished the (ostensibly) religious Middle Ages. The unresolved conflict between these two groups continued until the rise of national socialism.⁵⁴ Another example is present-day Iran. Under the last shah there was economic rationalisation, backed by businesspeople, scientists, and technologists, also inasmuch as it included an a-religious cultural policy. With the 1979 revolution, these groups changed sides, since they could no longer contain the rebellion of the lower strata of the population against the shah's rule; today they support the theocracy.⁵⁵

The third factor, known as non-synchronicity, stems from the previous two. It means that each system develops at its own pace. Thus political democratisation may lag behind economic development, leading to social inequality and social unrest, as happened in Iran and is currently threatening to happen in China. Or morality, under the influence of religion, may get bogged down in absolute prescriptions and prohibitions of specific, concrete actions, instead of developing rationally towards an ethics of responsibility.⁵⁶ A conservative morality can halt rational development in other systems such as the economy and politics.⁵⁷

The crucial question in this section is this: can religious differences between countries be explained as differences in the degree of secularisation? To answer the question, we need to distinguish between countries with high or low degrees of functional differentiation. The former are far more secularised than the latter. But this does not mean that secularisation is a linear, irreversible, natural evolutionary process. It is a social process, influenced by all sorts of societal – also nonreligious – factors, both conducive and inhibitory, such as demographic development, the relation between ethnicity and religion, separation of church and state, level of social welfare, and the masculine or feminine nature of the culture. One also has to allow for counter movements

⁵⁴ J.B.L.M. Peeters, *Burgers en Modernisering: Historisch-sociologisch onderzoek naar burgerlijke groeperingen in het moderniseringsproces van de Duitse Bond 1810–1870*, Dissertation Nijmegen University 1984.

⁵⁵ Bruce, *The Curious Case*, op. cit., 95.

⁵⁶ W. Schluchter, *Die Entwicklung des okzidentalen Rationalismus eine Analyse von Max Webers Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Mohr, Tübingen 1979.

⁵⁷ M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Mohr, Tübingen 1920/1978, 252.

and the social conflicts they cause, as well as the support they receive from conservative political and religious leaders, in whatever part of the world.

1.2.2 *The Economic Paradigm*

When one views religious density on earth from a helicopter, one is struck by religious differences not only between countries, but also within countries. Where do these come from? The economic rational choice paradigm could help to answer the question. However, this paradigm, too, is disputed, especially by proponents of the secularisation hypothesis. This is not surprising, for rational choice researchers came into the limelight because of their criticism of the secularisation paradigm. Hence they oppose each other fiercely and vociferously.

Yet the two paradigms cannot be viewed in isolation from each other. As noted already, functional differentiation in society led to the collapse of the sacred canopy of one, all-encompassing religion, and its replacement by a plurality of religious and nonreligious worldviews. This pluralism forms the premise of the economic paradigm, since it leads to competition between worldviews, more particularly religious ones. Their rivalry prompts various developments, such as rational adaptation of the religious supply to human needs, application of the principles of efficiency and efficacy, professionalisation of religious staff, and the resultant bureaucratisation of religious institutions – to mention only a few common characteristics among variants of the economic paradigm.⁵⁸

The economic paradigm provides a conceptual framework for the study of these processes. It is based on certain assumptions that culminate in an empirically researchable hypothesis. These assumptions are as follows: (1) All people are driven by a religious need. (2) All societies have a natural, relatively stable set of 'stalls' on the religious market, and there is an unvarying level of at least one potential religious need. (3) Religious organisations are distinguishable by the extent to which they adapt their supply of religious wares to a religious need. (4) This adaptation is promoted by the demolition of religious monopolies, separation of church and state, deregulation of the religious market,

⁵⁸ S. Chai, *The Many Flavors of Rational Choice and the Fate of Sociology*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta, GA, 2003.

and escalation of religious competition. (5) Religious pluralism does not weaken the plausibility of religious institutions but strengthens it, since the constant variation they have to introduce to secure current and potential clients leads to greater religious activity. (6) To the extent that a religious institution's supply differs from that of another, it becomes more attractive and religious consumption increases. This applies particularly to the sect-to-church process, in which the transition from a sect with high doctrinal, ritual, and social thresholds to an established church with low thresholds, is characterised by reduced religious consumption. (7) In such a religious free market, individuals, on the basis of rational cost-benefit analysis, can join the religious institution that offers them the greatest religious benefit at the lowest cost, which satisfies their striving for religious profit maximisation. (8) Since the greatest religious benefits, such as ultimate reconciliation and/or eternal bliss hereafter, are not immediately forthcoming, their attainment has to be deferred, which is made possible by offering compensation: the promise of ultimate reconciliation and/or eternal bliss. This is anticipated in religious experiences, backed up by religious rituals, religious counselling, religious education, and religious community building.⁵⁹ Some avoid the term 'compensation',⁶⁰ but not the underlying idea: the exchange relationship with God⁶¹ presupposes trust fraught with risks that are insured against by ritual, prayer, and mystical experience.⁶²

I have said that these assumptions culminate in an empirically researchable hypothesis. It reads as follows: countries with an open religious market have greater religious participation than countries with closed, monopolistic religious markets. In short, pluralisation and deregulation result in religious revival.

On the basis of this economic paradigm, we would posit that secularisation, particularly in Europe, is not attributable to functional differentiation in society and concomitant rationalisation, but to overly regulated religious markets and the absence of healthy competition. Religious institutions that are protected, subsidised, and accommo-

⁵⁹ R. Stark & W.S. Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, Toronto Studies in Religion, Vol. 2, P. Lang, New York 1987.

⁶⁰ R. Stark & R. Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2000, 84.

⁶¹ Stark & Finke, *Acts*, op. cit., 88–96.

⁶² Stark & Finke, *Acts*, op. cit., 106–113.

dated by the state lack efficiency and efficacy, hence fail to attract religious clientele. This insight tallies, it is said, with the empirical fact that there is considerable religious faith in Europe but little church involvement. So the hypothesis reads that there is 'believing without belonging'.⁶³ In the USA, the reasoning goes, people move from one church to another rather than leave the church, because American churches fight for clientele – although this argument overlooks the decline of established denominations.

There have been various objections to this paradigm, both its assumptions and the hypothesis. In regard to assumptions (1) and (2), it is a moot point whether all people are driven by and aware of a religious need. In other words, the proposition which has to be demonstrated is taken for granted. This boils down to a methodological failure, because the hypothesis to be tested turns into an assumption which is taken as a self-evident truth. Besides, as noted already, Europe presents an exception, which makes the question of an innate religious need all the more intense and sharp. All in all, the human brain has no demonstrable area, or set of areas, where a talent for 'religious musicality' is located.⁶⁴ Nor can such areas ever be located, for even if they existed, it would still require interpretation of the firing of innumerable neurons and this must perforce derive from culturally determined religious traditions. The point is, firing neurons do not communicate about God, they do not witness, they do not pray. Religion is a cultural rather than a natural phenomenon,⁶⁵ and in that sense is not a genuinely universal but a quasi-universal, mainly cultural phenomenon, as will be seen below.⁶⁶ There is a further point. Some founding fathers of the economic paradigm define religion as faith in an omnipotent actor, who, in exchange for the offer of eternal peace, demands investment in a religious organisation.⁶⁷ This would make religion a barter transaction that merges into barter-oriented institutionalised religion. This idea

⁶³ G. Davie, *Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?* *Social Compass*, 37(1990)4, 455–469.

⁶⁴ P. Thagard, *The Emotional Coherence of Religion*, *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 5(2005)1/2, 69–72.

⁶⁵ J. Feith, *Probing Neurotheology's Brain or Critiquing an Emerging Quasi-Science*, Paper presented at the Critical Theory and Discourse on Religion Section. The American Academy of Religion Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, 2003.

⁶⁶ D. Brown, *The MIT encyclopedia of the cognitive sciences*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1999.

⁶⁷ Stark & Bainbridge, *A Theory*, op. cit., 39.

overlooks the notion of religion as a gratuitous gift, not to be paid for but freely and gratefully received and wholeheartedly cherished.

If assumption (3) is interpreted strictly, it poses no problem. Religious organisations undeniably distinguish themselves from each other by the extent to which they adapt their supply to the contextually determined religious demands of human beings. This applies not only to differences between churches and denominations, but also to those within churches and denominations. An example may be found in present-day Italian Catholicism, in which the church leadership competes with various religious organisations within this church (associations, congregations, confraternities, religious orders, movements) which focus on expressions of popular religiosity like the veneration of sacred images and relics, pilgrimages, processions, vows, counting the rosary, et cetera.⁶⁸ But if one translates this descriptive statement into a prescriptive rule, in the sense that churches have to adapt maximally to human demands, then religion is reduced to a commodity. Businesses get rid of old products because they are not in demand on the market, and replace them with new ones. But churches cannot and must not do that; they are bound by their religious identity, origin and tradition.⁶⁹ This realisation is not confined to religious leaders and professionals; it is shared by church members. Hermeneutic continuity with sources and traditions, experienced and valued by both clergy and laity, is intrinsic in religious institutions. It cannot be 'sold out'.

If assumption (4) is read in conjunction with (5), one is caught up in the economic and political debate that has raged ever since Adam Smith and Alexis de Tocqueville. Assumption (4) posits the economic hypothesis that competition on the religious market will lead to religious growth; assumption (5) posits the political hypothesis that the abolition of a state church or an established church is conducive to religious growth. The two hypotheses need to be tested separately. That this does not always happen is evident in research based on the economic paradigm that was conducted in Europe.⁷⁰ In this study, testing of the political hypothesis (assumption 5), led to erroneous conclu-

⁶⁸ F. Zaccaria, *Participation and Beliefs in Popular Religiosity: An Empirical-Theological Exploration among Catholic Parishioners in the Diocese of Conversano-Monopoli in Italy*, Dissertation Radboud University Nijmegen, 2009.

⁶⁹ S. Bruce, *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 1999, 124–129.

⁷⁰ L. Iannaccone, The Consequences of Religious Market Structure: Adam Smith and the Economics of Religion, *Rationality and Society* 3(1991)2, 156–177.

sions about the economic hypothesis (assumption 4), since the abolition of a state church or an established church does not automatically result in religious competition.⁷¹

Assumption (6), too, is debatable. The sect-to-church theory may hold water for Protestant churches, especially in the USA, but not for the Catholic Church, because its doctrinal, ritual, and social structure does not fit the identity of a sect. It may display certain sectarian features, as when it seeks to manifest itself forcefully from a marginal position in society, for instance in the Netherlands after 1853 (restoration of episcopal hierarchy), and certainly after 1870 (Vatican I), when it displayed sect-related features of high religious consumption, especially from 1879 to 1960;⁷² but even then there was no question of a sect in the strict sense of the word.

The objection to assumption (7) concerns the way human beings, hence believers, are reduced to calculators that rationally weigh costs and benefits, settling for profit maximisation. Firstly, one could question whether people in fact make choices when it comes to religion, since in this respect they are motivated by ascription rather than achievement, which means that one is born into a religious community rather than consciously and voluntarily choosing one's religious affiliation. Secondly, if and inasmuch as they do make such choices, are these based mainly or even exclusively on their assessment of costs and benefits? Are they not based more on psychological processes, such as emotional attraction and identification, and social processes like imitation and convention? Besides, if choices are made by weighing costs and benefits, does it not lead to equilibrium between costs and benefits rather than profit maximisation?⁷³ Finally, if this appraisal is made, is it as rational a process as the economic paradigm would have it? Even in the economic sphere, appraisal occurs mainly unconsciously, driven by emotional motives, incorporated rule systems,

⁷¹ M. Chaves & D. Cann, Regulation, Pluralism, and Religious Market Structure, *Rationality and Society* 4(1992)3, 272–290.

⁷² E. Sengers, "Al zijn wij katholiek, wij zijn Nederlanders": *Opkomst en verval van katholieke kerk in Nederland sinds 1795 vanuit rational-choice perspectief*, Eburon, Delft 2003; Id., "You Don't Have to Be a Saint or a Practicing Catholic...": Higher Tension and Lower Attachment in the Dutch Catholic Church since 1970, *Antonionum: periodicum trimestre* 78(2003)3, 529–545.

⁷³ L. Cosmides & J. Tooby, Neurocognitive Adaptations Designed for Social Exchange, in: D.M. Buss (ed.), *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ 2005, 584–627, here 617–619.

social customs, and social desirability, without any rational explication, let alone rational monitoring.⁷⁴ On the whole, conscious processes are the exception rather than the rule, as will be seen when we deal with the cognitive paradigm.⁷⁵

Finally, assumption (8) likewise denigrates the value of religion. It is quite bizarre to speak of religious processes like religious experience, counselling, rites, and community building as compensations, as though they merely offer a surrogate for the eschatological promise hidden in the end-time. It disregards the intrinsic value of these religious processes, which represent ends in themselves. The compensation idea also does not do justice to the human existential constitution of time, based on the dialectic between present, past, and future. It separates present, past, and future by ignoring the discontinuous continuity between them. The past is the past of the present, the future is the future of both the past and the present, and the present is the past of the future.⁷⁶ This dialectic stems from the polarity between human actions like promise and hope, desire and anticipation. Rational choice theory reduces all that to what is attainable – or rather, for sale – here and now, while what will be attained later rather than here and now must be compensated for. This is religious bookkeeping taken to the nth degree.

That brings us to the hypothesis in which rational choice theory culminates. It posits, as noted already, that deregulation, competition, and pluralisation will result in religious revival. In the early 1980s its validity was tested in countries with a Catholic population of more than 80 percent: Ireland, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Austria, and France. According to the economic paradigm, one would expect them to have low ‘religious consumption’, but it turned out that they vary greatly:

⁷⁴ V. Welten, *De Surfer Op De Golven: Psychologie Van Cultuur En Gedrag*, in: A. Felling & J. Peters (eds.), *Cultuur en sociale wetenschappen. Beschouwingen en empirische studies*, ITS, Nijmegen 1991, 31–50; Id. *Greep op cultuur: Een cultuurpsychologische bijdrage aan het minderhedendebat*, Catholic University (now Radboud University), Nijmegen 1992; J.S. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, The Jerusalem-Harvard Lectures, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1990; J.F. Yates & P.A. Estin, *Decision Making*, in: W. Bechtel & G. Graham (eds.), *A Companion to Cognitive Science*, Blackwell, Oxford 2002, 186–196.

⁷⁵ P. Hagoort, *Het zwarte gat tussen brein en bewustzijn*, in: N. Korteweg (ed.), *De oorsprong: Over het ontstaan van het leven en alles eromheen*, Boom, Amsterdam 2005, 107–124.

⁷⁶ P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative. Vol. I–III*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1988.

from extremely high (Ireland) to extremely low (France) ‘consumption’.⁷⁷ Among Protestant countries, too, one finds examples that appear to falsify the hypothesis, namely the USA, Canada, Australia, and in Europe, especially Britain and the Scandinavian countries.⁷⁸ An even greater reason for rejecting the hypothesis is the religious density in Islamic countries. On the whole this is not a result of religious pluralism, even though there may be other, socially peripheral religions, and certainly not of serious religious competition. Yet religious density is extremely high. This may be ascribed, however, to mutually advantageous alliances between religious and political leaders in these countries.⁷⁹

Does all this mean that the economic paradigm is totally worthless? No, that would not be true. One can cite countries where it does have limited validity, as in Africa and Latin America where the independent churches are experiencing turbulent growth. Even though the two continents differ greatly – in Africa they are reacting against pagan society, while in Latin America they spring from Christian soil – there are parallels, most notably that their members are living in situations of economic poverty, political oppression, social uprootedness, and cultural alienation. The churches offer a refuge in that they represent a community of fellow sufferers, try to offer a way out of destitution, and above all afford faith and hope, so their members do not drown in total despair.⁸⁰ In Brazil, for instance, there are signs of the operation of a religious market, reinforced by competition between the charismatic independent churches and the Catholic Church. While this church tries to adapt itself to the needs of the poor by developing charismatic rituals inside and outside its own official liturgical context, its share in the ‘religious market’ lags behind because of its links with the traditional church hierarchy. So in this case, the internal hierarchical structure of the church is the issue rather than the religious market. We should be wary of distortion, however, for in Brazil only eight to ten million Catholics belong to the charismatic movement, as opposed

⁷⁷ Chaves & Cann, *Regulation*, op. cit.

⁷⁸ Bruce, *Choice*, op. cit., 58–120.

⁷⁹ G. Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2004.

⁸⁰ Ph. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 2002, 72–78.

to the remaining 122 million Catholics who practise a form of traditional folk Catholicism.⁸¹

The question in this section, then, is this: should differences between religions, churches, and denominations within countries be seen as differences in (intentional) interventions in the religious market? I am not inclined simply to swallow the economic rational choice paradigm's forceful insistence that pluralism and the concomitant competition lead to religious vitality. Human beings cannot be reduced to organisms driven by profit maximisation and religion to a machine set by default on competitive barter relations between religious production and consumption. Instead of this rather radical position, I would propose a more moderate one: within the framework of their hermeneutically explicable continuity with their origins and traditions, religious institutions indeed differ in their sensitivity to the specific requirements and needs of specific groups, which leads to greater religious engagement, such as among rural and urban communities, youths and the aged, educated and less educated people, the cultural majority and minorities, religious conservatives and liberals. A striking example of the latter two is that hellfire preaching at 'the market of evil and sin' is characterised by higher religious consumption among conservatives than among liberals.⁸²

1.2.3 *The Cognitive Paradigm*

At the outset of this section, it should be noted that the question about differences in religion cannot be answered exclusively in terms of macro level secularisation processes or economic rational choice processes at meso level. This does not alter the fact that macro level secularisation has a very real influence on the micro level, for instance individual secularisation as a result of the compartmentalisation of religion in relation to the rest of the personal life world.⁸³ Deregulation of the religious market at meso level likewise affects the micro

⁸¹ M. Vasquez, Book Review of A. Chestnut, 2003, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73(2005)2, 524–528, here 525.

⁸² S. Cameron, *The Economics of Sin: Rational Choice or No Choice at All*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham 2002.

⁸³ Dobbelaere, *Secularization*, op. cit., 169–172.

level, as evidenced by the religious revival in Italy.⁸⁴ But these explanations are not exhaustive; individual persons are not swallowed up by their environment. The question is: could differences in religion possibly be attributed, in part, to processes in individuals at micro level? If so, which processes, and in what sense do they differ from one person to another? I have said that I shall try to answer these questions in terms of the cognitive paradigm that is peculiar to cognitive religious studies, a discipline that developed from cognitive neuroscience about twenty years ago.

First we must look into the term ‘cognitive’. It may be misconstrued as synonymous with such terms as ‘conscious’, ‘knowledge-oriented’, ‘rational’, or ‘rationalistic’. In general one could say that the cognitive paradigm relates to information, communication, and meanings generated by the interaction between the brain and lower and higher cognitive functions. The interaction entails processes like sensation, perception, automatic responses, emotion, motivation, frames, scripts, memory, thought, imagination, volition, evaluation, planning, decision making, and action. Studies of this interaction have shown that traditional concepts like experience, thought, and meaning have a neurological basis, so that one may speak of a ‘biology of meaning’, which statement can gradually be enriched by empirical research.⁸⁵ We must reiterate: many of these processes occur unconsciously: “Our brains are constantly processing information that does not penetrate consciousness but does direct our behaviour”.⁸⁶

How are these processes coordinated? What agency directs them? The literature gives diverse answers, each more complex than the other. One thing is certain: the brain has no central agency that functions as a director or general, a homunculus, an ‘I’ that regulates its processes. Neither does rationality fulfil a directive function, as philosophers and theologians have supposed for centuries. Here, especially in view of religious experience that will be our next focus, I fall back on Tooby and Cosmides, who maintain that emotions fulfil a coordinating function. According to them, emotions direct and orchestrate

⁸⁴ M. Introvigne & R. Stark, Religious Competition and Revival in Italy: Exploring European Exceptionalism, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 1(2005)1, 3–20.

⁸⁵ J.A. den Boer, *Neurofilosofie: Hersenen, Bewustzijn, Vrije Wil*, Boom, Amsterdam 2004, 223–240; A.R. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain*, Vintage, London 2004.

⁸⁶ Hagoort, *Het zwarte*, op. cit., 108.

the coordination programme. Through the emotions, the processes of sensation, perception, motivation, cognition, thought, planning, et cetera are assimilated into the human neuropsychological architecture, where they are harmonised.⁸⁷

A much simplified input-throughput-output model would explain the interactions thus. Emotions are stimulated by sensations and perceptions in a given situation that affect the person's ideas, interests, and values (input), on the strength of which these emotions stimulate memory and thought processes and imaginative and interpretive processes (throughput), whereupon planning and decision-making processes are triggered and action is taken (output). In other words, environmental input is regulated by emotional throughput to culminate in a particular action aimed at effecting equilibrium between persons and their environment with a view to survival (Lazarus 1991). I have said that the model is much simplified, and moreover suggests a linear process with, as it were, three separate phases. Nothing could be further from the truth. Not only does environmental input affect throughput; the latter in its turn retroacts on the input, and the relation between throughput and output is similarly interactive. There is no question of a linear process because of these constant feed-forward and feedback interactions.⁸⁸ That is why the by now traditional computational models, such as Pinker's,⁸⁹ which entail serially linked processes, have been replaced by a connective model that allows for parallel links between mutually influencing processes.⁹⁰

Below I try to clarify religious experience within the cognitive paradigm by making a selection from the diverse processes involved. The selection is confined to sensation, perception, and response processes; feeling and processing of emotions; spiritual experience; and actual religious experience. Although this list suggests that we have empirically validated knowledge at our disposal, we know very little as yet about the interaction between neural and cognitive processes, and

⁸⁷ Cosmides & Tooby, *Neurocognitive*, op. cit., 52–61.

⁸⁸ A.R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, Harcourt Inc., New York 2000, 55.

⁸⁹ S. Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, Norton, New York 1999; Id., *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Viking, New York 2002.

⁹⁰ Den Boer, *Neurofilosofie*, op. cit., 123–190.

much of it is speculative. To my mind, however, it presents a promising prospect.⁹¹

First of all, every religious experience arises from an event in our environment that triggers a particular sensation. Bending over a cradle arouses tingling excitement, sitting by the deathbed of a loved one causes gnawing pain. These sensations stimulate perception, as does looking at a person we feel committed to, listening to the sound of his voice, touching his hand, inhaling his familiar smell, tasting his skin when kissing him. Such perceptions trigger a complex of electrochemical processes that evoke automatic responses, resulting in four possibilities: approach, withdrawal, freezing on the spot, or remaining contentedly where we are. The particular automatic response will depend on the pleasantness or threat ascribed to the perception. Seeing a baby attracts and makes us bend even lower over it. The sight of an exhausted body tends to repel, although we surmount that response through the ensuing emotion.

Emotions are important, especially primary ones like positive emotions of joy and surprise, and negative emotions of fear, revulsion, and grief, all of which are probably universal and innate.⁹² Secondary emotions are complex, comprising elements of primary emotions; they include embarrassment, shame, and guilt, which are similar in that they make one blush and try to hide one's face. Guilt entails the realisation that one has harmed the other, and shame is felt when that guilt is discovered by others.⁹³ Emotions are important because they provide nonverbal information and assign meaning to our situations, which we communicate to others.

In addition, they impart a sense of personal involvement: I am the one feeling these emotions, it is my body in which they are expressed. Even primary emotions are not purely a result of genetic disposition, for they are influenced by culture, particularly as regards the situations

⁹¹ P. Hagoort, *De toekomstige eeuw der cognitieve neurowetenschap*, Inaugural address Radboud University Nijmegen 2000.

⁹² A.R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, Putnam, New York 1994, 149–164; Id., *The Feeling*, op. cit., 279–295.

⁹³ Ch. Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Introduction, afterword and commentaries by Paul Ekman, HarperCollins, London 1999, 250–277, 310–344; P. Ekman, Afterwoord, in: Darwin, *The Expression*, op. cit., 363–393.

in which they are felt or repressed and the manner in which they are expressed.⁹⁴

Feeling of emotions is followed by processing of emotions. The difference between the two processes is that the former is largely unconscious and the latter partly conscious, partly unconscious. Perhaps for that reason the latter may be called ‘feeling of feeling of emotions’.⁹⁵ Once processed, emotions become material for higher processes like attention, cognitive framing, memory, imagining, scripts, and the like. The interplay of attention and framing intensifies them. Interplay with memory deepens and enriches them, and blending them with imagination opens up a broader horizon of fictional conceptions, unsurmised perspectives, and possible, hitherto undreamt of worlds, which broaden one’s cognitive and behavioural repertoire.

Spiritual experience may be located in the processing of emotions. This experience could happen in the aforementioned situations – the birth of a child or the death of a loved one – but not only there. It is also triggered by situations of moral self-sacrifice, the grandeur of nature, the tone of music, or scientific wonderment. It leads to partly unconscious, partly conscious reflection that, according to Darwin, distinguishes humans from all other living beings: reflection on life and death, origin and goal, transience and finitude.⁹⁶ When we bend over a cradle, we are moved by the vulnerability of the infant, the uncertainty of its future life; when we moisten the lips of a dying loved one, we are aware of the helplessness attending both living and dying. Not that life is living towards death (*sein zum Tode*), but at any rate ‘living until death’.⁹⁷ At a more abstract level, such spiritual processing of emotions entails the dialectics between contingency and absolute-ness, between finitude and infinity.⁹⁸

According to the psychiatrist and geneticist Cloninger, such experiences, which he calls experiences of self-transcendence, have three aspects: absorption, identification, and mysticism. Absorption means

⁹⁴ Ekman, Afterword, op. cit., 392; R.M.L. Winston, *The Human Mind: And How to Make the Most of It*, Bantam, London/New York 2003, 52–55, 225–227.

⁹⁵ Damasio, *The Feeling*, op. cit., 36–37, 279–295.

⁹⁶ Ch. Darwin, *The Descent of Man: And Selection in Relation to Sex*, Penguin, London 2004, 105.

⁹⁷ P. Ricoeur, *La critique et la conviction*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris 1995, 236; Id., *La memoire, l’histoire, l’oubli*, Seuil, Paris 2000, 459–480.

⁹⁸ L. Ferry, *L’homme-Dieu: Ou, le sens de la vie*, B. Grasset, Paris 1996; L. Ferry & M. Gauchet, *Le religieux après la religion*, Bernard Grasset, Paris 2004.

that one is so fascinated by the infant in the cradle that one as it were forgets oneself. Identification implies a strong sense of solidarity, so that one virtually merges with the other, yet without losing oneself as at the bedside of a dying person with whom one has shared one's life. Finally, mysticism means that one is mesmerised by the inexpressible, unfathomable wonder of it all – the wonder that one may experience in the (sometimes tragic) dialectics between identity and difference, dependence and independence, self-regard and other-regard, meaning and meaninglessness of suffering, the beginning and completion of life, the human species and the unique individual human person, the individual and the community. They may be seen as the aporias of human existence which we may wonder about and reflect on, without being able to get to the bottom of them and solve the enigmas.⁹⁹ Such experiences happen (irrespective of gender, ethnicity and age, albeit more powerfully after the age of 40) when we are confronted with life's paradoxes.¹⁰⁰

Spiritual experiences of self-transcendence may be regarded as a necessary, albeit not sufficient condition for religious experience. That implies that they should be distinguished from each other more clearly than usually happens. Following the neuro-geneticist Hamer, the distinction can be described as follows. Spiritual experiences, at any rate when conceived of as experiences of self-transcendence, are neuro-genetically determined. That means that they occur throughout our lives, to a greater or lesser extent, more or less intensely and more or less frequently, in many situations or only rarely. At all events, they are inherently part of human life. They may be regarded as universal experiences, even though they are undeniably subject to cultural influence as regards their intensity and expression. But they are primarily innate.¹⁰¹

Religious experience builds on spiritual experience but is not confined to experiences of self-transcendence, since it entails experience of the transcendent itself, the Supreme, the Eternal, the Infinite, the deity, God. These experiences are not just a matter of absorption, identification, and mysticism of the kind described above, but go beyond these. They are experiences in the presence of the One and All in Greek

⁹⁹ P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992.

¹⁰⁰ C. Cloninger et al., A Psychological Model of Temperament and Character, *Archive of General Psychiatry* 50(1993), 975–990.

¹⁰¹ D. Hamer, *The God Gene: How Faith is Hardwired into Our Genes*, Doubleday, New York 2004.

philosophy; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as recounted in the Jewish Bible; the God of Jesus the Christ as recounted in the Christian New Testament; and of Allah, the God of his prophet Mohammed, as taught in the Muslim Qur'an. They are not primarily innate, but are the result of knowledge and especially familiarity with a culturally determined religious tradition, of which one is part and in which one lives. Hence they are primarily cultural, even though they presuppose a neuro-genetic foundation. The point is, spiritual experience is something that can happen to anybody but religious experience is not, because inner connectedness with the culture of the relevant religious tradition plays a crucial role. This is not to deny that the disposition to become conversant with a religious culture is traceable to the person's genetic makeup. But actually becoming conversant with a particular religious culture among a host of other religious cultures and getting to understand its language from the inside are not primarily natural but cultural processes. The same distinction applies to the disposition to learn a language and actually learning a particular language among a host of other languages.¹⁰²

The difference between spiritual and religious experience becomes even more apparent when one looks at the specific function of the latter, namely religious attribution – a function not found in spiritual experience. Attribution generally is part of what is known as information processing, which relates to the interpretation of events in everyday life. To this end, people look for information to enable them to put events in a meaningful perspective. Attribution is a special form of information processing, in that the events are ascribed to a particular cause or causes. Thus phenomena in the physical, biological, social, and psychological domains are attributed to physical, biological, social, and psychological causes. But how does attribution work when people are confronted with experience of an existential nature, such as questions concerning the origin and goal, the meaning of existence, of life and death? According to the evolutionary psychologist Bering, this is where attributional-domain thinking ends and meta-attribution takes over, in which the events that triggered these existential experiences are related to God or ascribed to his causation. This divine causation

¹⁰² K.R. Popper & J.C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism*, Routledge, London/New York 2000, 48; H. Schilderman, *Wat is er geestelijk aan de geestelijke zorg?* Inaugural address Radboud University Nijmegen 2009.

may be seen as an efficient cause (*causa efficiens*), a teleological or final cause (*causa finalis*), or an appealing, example-related cause (*causa exemplaris*). That is how religious attribution works.¹⁰³

As I have said, this element is not present in spiritual experience in the sense of self-transcendence, but is the hallmark of religious experience. Some cognitive scholars believe that such religious experience is marked by an ‘attribution fallacy’ that lures people into a ‘cognitive illusion’, in which they yield to ‘over-belief’.¹⁰⁴ But how will those scholars respond to nonreligious experiences of the meaning of life? People may express that meaning by saying: ‘this is my lot, I must bear it’, ‘that’s how it’s got to be’, ‘this is my task in life’. What are ‘my lot’, ‘how it’s got to be’, ‘my task’ if not signs that the person is rising above the immanent attributional domain and reaching out for that which transcends it? Is it not an indication of the meta-attribution which I’ve just mentioned, albeit a nonreligious one? Without it their lives would be void and meaningless, which would be intolerable.¹⁰⁵

Or does religious meta-attribution make God a ‘God of the gaps’ (*Lückenbüßer*) who is gradually eclipsed as science forges ahead in the immanent domains? That strikes me as an untenable proposition, however frequently it crops up in the debate, for the simple reason that the existential questions raised in the religious domain can never be answered fully by science. However much science may enable us to intervene in human life, to shift the boundaries of birth and death, even to ‘make life’, the fundamental questions about ‘human’ life, its origin and goal, chance and destiny, freedom and conditioning, vocation and destination continually hover round the enigma of human existence – in religious terms, the mystery of the human being and his or her God. The significance of religion is that it enables the human person to deal with these questions explicitly in ritual and prayer rather than repress them, however insoluble they may be, as is evident in religious

¹⁰³ P. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, Basic Books, New York 2001, 196–202.

¹⁰⁴ S. Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York 1993; D.J. Slone, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn’t*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 2004, 58.

¹⁰⁵ J.M. Bering, The Evolutionary History of an Illusion: Religious Causal Beliefs in Children and Adults, in: J.E. Bruce & D.F. Bjorklund (eds.), *Origins of the Social Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and Child Development*, Guilford Press, New York 2005, 411–437; J. Bering & D. Johnson, “O Lord... You Perceive My Thoughts from Afar”: Recursiveness and the Evolution of Supernatural Agency, *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 5(2005)1/2, 118–142.

people's tales about bereavement. When they complain that God has forsaken them and express it in lament or even accusations against God, they bring it into their relationship with God.¹⁰⁶

Once again, I give a global answer to the question of where religious differences come from, this time between individuals at the micro level. To this end, I mention three conditions for people's varying religious experience. The first concerns emotions that play a major role in religious experience, for instance joy, sorrow, gratitude, shame, and guilt. People differ not only in the way they feel their emotions, but also in their processing and expression of emotions. It is a result of both genetic disposition and cultural influences. Some cultures encourage the experience and expression of emotion, others repress it. Anyway, the differences between individual people depend on the extent to which they are predisposed to the feeling and processing of emotions. Some people are good at it, others less good.

The second condition concerns spiritual experience as an experience of self-transcendence, which is a necessary condition for religious experience. The three processes involved – absorption, identification, and mysticism – should be seen as three scales. One pole of the continuum is a low degree of intensity, the other a high degree. People vary on these three scales: the experience of self-transcendence happens more easily for some, less easily for others. In other words, the difference between peoples' religious experience depends partly on the extent to which they are predisposed to absorption, identification, and mysticism.

The third condition concerns the extent to which people have appropriated the religious culture of a particular tradition and are conversant with it, for there can be no religious experience unless the narratives, images, ideas, and concepts of a religious tradition have been internalised. Here, too, individuals differ. It is said that the decline in religious knowledge is responsible for the fact that the younger generation has fewer religious experiences and that these leave them indifferent: "They don't even know what Christmas and Easter are about." What they lack is not so much knowledge, although such knowledge may well be necessary, but familiarity with a religious tradition, and this is precisely where people differ. Some genuinely base their lives on their

¹⁰⁶ P. Zuidgeest, *The Absence of God: Exploring the Christian Tradition in a Situation of Mourning*, Brill, Leiden/Boston 2001.

religious tradition, others are lukewarm, yet others more or less indifferent. In secularised countries the last category is, of course, growing. At all events, differences in people's religious experience depend on familiarity with their religious tradition.

In the foregoing discussion, I have taken a theoretical decision that warrants separate mention, since it is based on a fundamental choice. It concerns the perspective from which one should approach the operation of (some of) the higher cognitive functions, which include religious experience. Theoretically, there are three possible points of departure: (a) the area of the brain; (b) the interaction between brain and mind; or (c) the interaction between brain, mind, and the surrounding culture. Applied to religious experience, these perspectives raise the question: does religious experience occur in the area of the brain, in the interaction between brain and mind, or in the interaction between brain, mind, and the surrounding religious culture? The problem in choosing between the alternatives is that it is not clear what is meant by 'mind'.

Some cognitive neuro-scientists settle for the first option, but keep silent when they are unable to describe and explain certain higher functions, such as faith, hope, and love, or more mundane matters like goal setting and planning, in terms of brain functioning. It also applies to complex problem solving, writing a book, making a sculpture, composing a fugue – even delivering an inspired sermon. This is not to deny the need for the infrastructure of brain processes in these sublime areas. On the contrary, there can be no faith, no hope, no love, no recital, no sermon without the brain.¹⁰⁷ This condition, although necessary, is not sufficient. Yet these scientists prefer to close their eyes to the problem, hoping that research will advance to a point where it is possible to provide the required explanations for, say, faith, hope, love.

Other cognitive neuro-scientists choose the second alternative. They believe that mind should be seen as the conversion of third-person perceptions involved in brain research into first-person experiences of people executing the aforementioned creative artistic and religious activities. These activities are said to 'emerge' from brain processes – hence the term 'emergentism'. But how does one understand this emergence of first-person experiences from third-person perceptions in the

¹⁰⁷ Hagoort, *De Toekomstige*, op. cit., 5.

brain, and how do the experiences, once they have surfaced, influence the brain in their turn? Another term used is 'supervenience', but again one must ask whether this means more than the metaphor that first-person experience builds on – hence the term 'supervenience' – neurological processes without explaining what such 'building on' actually entails. At this stage, one cannot prove more than that the processes (i.e. third-person perceptions and first-person experiences) correlate. Certainly there is no variation in religious experience without variation in neural processes, but co-variance is not the same as causality. Other scientists introduce the concept of self-organisation. But what exactly does it mean if one argues that the connectivity of neural-perception processes results in a system of higher cognitive functions that is self-organising and not reducible to individual neurological functions? It sounds tempting, but the empirical meaning of this sheer speculation remains hidden for now.¹⁰⁸

The reader will have noticed that I have provisionally chosen the third option – albeit not blindly and dogmatically, for as yet there are insufficient research results to make a final choice, if that is ever possible. But at this stage I would say that without the culture of a religious tradition, in which the person concerned participates more or less intensely, it is not possible to have a religious experience, defined as an experience of transcendence, and distinct from spiritual experience, defined as self-transcendence. I base this on the view that religious experiences, like many other higher cognitive processes, are not merely embodied in people, but are also embedded in cultural wholes. Some researchers believe that cognitive processes occur wholly in the mind and that culture is simply an extension of these, a kind of dependent variable. But in a connectivist approach, culture also contributes input to these processes in the form of stimuli, examples, models and strategies, inspiration and challenges – a kind of independent variable. After all, are higher cognitive processes such as imagination, creative thought, composing music and poetry, as well as religious experience, not expressed specifically in culture and language? In other words, do

¹⁰⁸ J. Kim, *Mind in a Physical World: An Essay on the Mind-Body Problem and Mental Causation*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1998; A. Stephan, *Emergenz: Von der Unvorhersagbarkeit zur Selbstorganisation*, Dresden University Press, Dresden 1999; S. Pihlström, A Pragmatic Critique of Three Kinds of Religious Naturalism, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 17(2005)3, 177–218.

they not emerge from brain processes in interaction with mind and culture?

These questions are not gratuitous. In cognitive science of religion, for instance in the work of McCauley and Lawson, two leading scholars of ritual, one encounters a cognitivist limitation, albeit in the guise of a naturalistic form of religion among non-literate peoples, which they consider to be a model for all religion. By stressing the function of the brain, they set up their naturalistic approach in opposition to a culturalist approach.¹⁰⁹ McCauley¹¹⁰ goes so far as to claim that religion antedates history and culture. But surely religion cannot exist without prescribed rituals, conducted in pre-existent communities, by pre-existent leadership, in designated social venues, at socially set times, which exert the necessary influence on the participants' intra-psychic experience.¹¹¹ The problem, clearly, is how to theoretically balance (neural) nature, mind, and culture – probably by alternately treating them as independent and dependent variables. This is the significance of Popper's 'three worlds', the material (neural), cognitive, and cultural worlds, and his notion of a 'self anchored in world 3', to which I would add a 'religious self anchored in world 3'.¹¹²

Again, I conclude the section by asking whether interpersonal differences in religion can be explained in terms of differences in cognitive functioning. In view of the foregoing debate on whether and in what sense one can confine oneself to neural processes when it comes to religion, or whether one should view them as interactive with mind and culture, some caution is called for. My answer, therefore, is

¹⁰⁹ R. McCauley & E. Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK/New York 2002, 38–88.

¹¹⁰ R. McCauley, The Naturalness of Religion and the Unnaturalness of Science, in: R.A. Wilson & F.C. Keil (eds.), *Explanation and Cognition*, MIT, Cambridge, MA/London 2000, 61–86, here 80.

¹¹¹ G. Flood, Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry in the Study of Religions, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74(2006)1, 47–58, here 49–51.

¹¹² Popper & Eccles, *The Self*, op. cit., 36–50, 144–147; cf. T.W. Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*, W.W. Norton, New York 1997, 409–410; J.S. Jensen, *The Study of Religion in a New Key: Theoretical and Philosophical Soundings in the Comparative and General Study of Religion*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus/Oxford 2003, 258, 273; M. Day, The Ins and Outs of Religious Cognition, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 16(2004), 241–255; W.E. Paden, Comparative Religion and the Whitehouse Project: Connections and Compatibilities? *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 16(2004)3, 256–265; Schilderman, *Wat is er geestelijk*, op. cit.

conditional. If and inasmuch as religious experience is in part culturally determined – which is my assumption at this stage – interpersonal differences in religion, here religious experience, are not dependent solely on their disposition to all kinds of perceptions, feeling, and processing of emotion, and spiritual experience (defined as an experience of self-transcendence), but also on the extent to which people participate in and are conversant with the culture of a particular religious tradition.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to clarify the varieties of religious decline and ascendance between and within countries in terms of secularisation at macro level, with due regard to nonreligious factors influencing their range, profundity, and rate, as well as to the counter movements and conflicts to which they give rise. Secondly, I tried to explain the differences within countries and between groups in terms of the economic rational choice model at meso level. However, since its strong thesis of religion as a compensatory barter relationship with God aimed at religious profit maximisation contradicts the essential nature of religion, I defended the more modest position in which differences between religious institutions may be confined to differences in sensitivity to the ‘religious market’ within the hermeneutically reconstructible continuity with the origins and traditions of religions. Next, I tried to account for the varieties at micro level in terms of the cognitive paradigm, and traced them to differences in disposition to perception, feeling, and processing of emotions and spiritual experience, and participation in and familiarity with the culture of a particular religious tradition. Finally, I pointed out the interaction between phenomena at macro, meso, and micro levels as they condition one another. In so doing I provided three broad outlines for future research projects.

Three strategies may be used to trace, study, and interpret the varieties of religious weaknesses and religious strengths in terms of differences between and within countries, and between and within groups. This can help to clarify the influence that the a-synchronicity of religious strength and religious weakness exerts on a society that is increasingly characterised by multiculturalism and multi-religiosity. It can also facilitate interpretation and evaluation of the variety of religious phenomena that feature on the political agenda.