Professionalization and Secularization in the Belgian Catholic Pillar

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In order to prevent contamination in their argumentation, sociologists should distinguish between secularization, religious change, and church involvement. The concept of secularization should be restricted to the process of the growing independence of institutional spheres, each developing its own rationale, which implies the rejection of the overarching claim of religion. In studying this process in Catholic "pillar structures" (hospitals and schools) in Belgium, we sought to answer the question, who are the "secularizers"?

It seems that lay professionals, in the process of developing a professional rationale, are the bearers of the secular tendency: they determine the organizational structure of the hospital or the school, they marginalize religion even within the Catholic pillar structure, and they reduce religion to the interpersonal level, making it a matter of private preference. On the other hand, professionalization also undermines traditional Christian values and ethics. The dominant presence of lay professionals in Catholic pillar structures in Belgium was primarily caused by the process of democratization, the drop in religious vocations, and the increase of religious resignations. The democratization process called for larger state subsidies for the schools, which brought on state regulation of the professional qualifications of the teaching staff. We also noted some reactions on the level of legitimations and in the elaboration of statutes from the higher echelons of the Catholic pillar structure.

INTRODUCTION: SECULARIZATION AND POSSIBLE CONTAMINATION

Secularization, as used in sociology, may be defined as a pro-

cess in which, on the level of consciousness, reference to the supernatural, the holy, the sacred, the other reality, is being lost. This is related to a process of growing independence of institutional spheres such as economy, politics, education, science and family, each of these developing its own rationale, which implies the rejection of the overarching claim of religion. It is accompanied by a reduced church membership, a lesser involvement in the churches, and a growing unbelief. It is assumed that there is a dialectic relationship between consciousness and the social and cultural structures (subjective versus objective reality).

Secularization and church involvement. Studies of secularization frequently start from an analysis of church involvement — for example, church attendance, Easter communion, religious marriages, baptism, confirmation, burial, and Sunday school — as well as public opinion poll data on knowledge of religious and church affairs, and belief in God and church dogmas, or resort to it as empirical proof (Luckmann 1967, pp. 29-32; Aquaviva 1967, pp. 93-144 and 265-282). This is partly accounted for by the traditional research techniques used in the social sciences. In Glock's terms (Glock 1962, pp. s98-s110), we might suggest that, on the basis of studies on the ritualistic, ideological, and intellectual dimensions, inferences are made about the experiential dimension, namely, the subjective religious feeling or "awareness of the divine" (Glock 1962, p. s105). A declining church membership or lesser involvement in the churches is used as an indication of a diminished reference to the holy and proof of a growing secularization. Confronted with a rather high church membership and a strong involvement in the churches observed in the U.S.A. in the fifties and sixties, sociologists have gradually developed the notion of "internal" secularization. Wilson points out that the American basic values are not religious (Wilson 1969, pp. 109-112), Berger speaks of a "cultural

religion" (Berger 1961, pp. 39-57), and Luckmann, referring to Berger's book, states that "modern" America has maintained a large church membership and shows the highest degree of involvement in church religion through a process of internal secularization of the American denominations (Luckmann 1967, pp. 39-57).

From the preceding arguments the basic pattern of reasoning seems to be: a declining church involvement is an indicator of a process of secularization; this process is considered to be an empirical fact; hence a high degree of church involvement in a modern cultural setting is possible only if a process of "internal" secularization has changed the churches and denominations. For analytical purposes and in order to study more effectively the empirical connections, sociologists of religion should take Lazarsfeld's distinction between "expressive" and "predictive" indicators into consideration (Lazarsfeld 1959, pp. 49-53). The *expressive* indicators, on the one hand, describing the "underlying trait" of the secularization process, should convoke aspects of institutional differentiation, the development of institutional values and norms, and the organizational patterns of institutions and their relationships with religious organizations. The *prediction*, on the other hand, that secularization might result in a lesser involvement of the people in the churches, or the suggestion "that the traditional institutions of religion increasingly lack public support" due to the churches' loss of moral authority (Wilson 1976, pp. 21-35), could then be more fully analyzed. The impact, for example, of the people's social integration in institutions with differing degrees of secularity on various aspects of their church involvement could be studied to build not a post factum theory (e.g., Aquaviva 1967), but a theory based on hypothetical deductive procedures.

Church involvement: The secularization and compensation theses. In explaining church involvement we are confronted with alternative theories such as the "comfort hypothesis." This hypothesis stems from the compensation thesis, which, according to Fürstenberg, sums up, together with the secularization and integration theses, the views of sociologists of religion on the relationship between religion and society (Fürstenberg 1964, pp. 13-20). Thung supplemented the theses of Fürstenberg with two others: the emancipation and the pillarization theses (Thung 1976, pp. 81-83). In this paper we consider some aspects of the relationship between secularization and pillarization, but first we want to ask some questions about the relationship between compensation and secularization.

The comfort hypothesis or compensation thesis purports to explain the origin of religious groups and individual involvement in them as compensations for individual or collective deprivation. In the analysis of involvement in churches and denominations, both the compensation and the secularization theses to a certain extent use the same social variables. In his studies Glock points to sex, age, and social status as indicators of social deprivation. The secularization thesis adds the opposition between urban and rural areas; the deprivation or comfort hypothesis employs marital and family status variables (Glock, Ringer, and Babbie 1967, pp. 38-98; Glock 1965, pp. 247-259). While both theories base their conclusions on the same variables of sex and age and refer to the same variation in involvement, the sociologists defending the secularization thesis start from the observation of lower church practice in the lower social strata; those advocating the compensation thesis, on the other hand, point out the higher church involvement of those people of lower social strata who are members of churches or denominations. This specification was not directly clear in the study on the origin and evolution of religious groups, but was elucidated

in a comment on a replication of the study "To comfort and to challenge" (Glock, Ringer, and Babbie 1967, pp. 75-98; Glock and Babbie 1975, pp. 383-384; Hobart 1974, pp. 463-470).

The foregoing comments raise the problem of the relationship between the compensation and the secularization theses. Does the first belong to the social-psychological level, the second to the historical one? Do they deal, respectively, with "the meaning of religion for the individual's self-understanding: religion as compensation for individual and social destiny" and with historical trends which make an abstraction of the people involved (Laeyendecker 1974, p. 19)? Is religion a compensation for those who are marginalized in the historical process of change? If so, it still remains unclear who takes refuge in religion and who seeks other forms of compensation. Is this connected with the integrative function of religion in the societies concerned? The relationship between the two theses calls not only for theoretical study but for an empirical foundation as well.

Secularization, church involvement, and religious change. Sociologists should not only distinguish conceptually between the *process of secularization* and *church involvement* in order to be able to confront different explanations of the latter. They should also heed Yinger's recommendation that "religious research and analysis would be better served by distinguishing between *secularization* and *religious change*" (Yinger 1963, p. 72). "Berger's thesis ... that religion affirms the 'O.K. World' ... [and] supports the dominant values and institutions of society, ... that the church has too little relevance for the 'prophetic task' of reforming the world ..., is not secularization" (Yinger 1963, p. 71), even if called *internal* secularization.

We might then conclude that in order to prevent contamination in their argumentation, sociologists should distinguish

between secularization, religious change, and the individual's church involvement, and study their interrelationships. The concept of secularization, sensu stricto, should then be restricted to the "process of growing independence of institutional spheres (such as economy, politics, education, science and family), each developing its own rationale, which implies the rejection of the overarching claim of religion." As a result of this process, religion is reduced to the level of an institution among other institutions with a limited public impact, and is consumed in the "private" sphere (Luckmann 1967, pp. 85-95). In this paper we limit ourselves to the study of the process of secularization, sensu stricto, in Catholic "pillar structures" in Belgium.[1]

A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SECULARIZATION PROCESS

In discussing the secularization thesis on previous occasions, we have developed a general focus of criticism concerning it, and in particular we have urged that too little attention has been paid by previous writers to the question of just which people in just which social positions become the "sacralizers" or "secularizers" in given situations. Referring specifically to Berger and Luckmann's work (Dobbelaere, Billiet, and Creyf 1978), we summarized our criticisms in these questions: In what social situation does a social definition — such as the definition of religious commitment or the definition of religion itself — become problematic? What social categories, groups or quasi-groups are likely to challenge it,

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1. "Pillar structures" (*zuilorganisaties*), are the conglomeration of organizations founded and run by committed church members, including priests (or in the case of the corresponding political "pillars," committed party members). Their purpose is to serve church members (or party members) with respect to various social functions which in some other European countries have been particularly the concern of the state (or, in America, of commercial agencies) and of voluntary associations, and which elsewhere may be organized without unions, cultural association, mass communications, etc. In Belgium, the most important pillar structures are either Christian or Socialist.

to change it, or to reinterpret it? Which categories of people seek to sustain definitions that have already been formulated, and that are part of a received tradition? How does conflict about such issues as religious commitment and religious functions arise? As this last question has been put by Lauwers: "By what mechanisms do those who occupy different social positions attempt to put into effect their definitions of religion? Where and how well do they succeed? What other groups or quasi-groups are marginalized by this process, and how does this take place? How are conflicts between people in different social positions concerning the realization of their conception of religion resolved? What are the results of this realization for the organizational patterns in which it takes place, as well as for other related social structures?" (Lauwers 1974, p. 120).

Thus, we tend to agree with Weber, who analyzed the impact of the life style of social strata and social positions – for example, intellectuals, literati, business classes, warriors, peasants, magicians, prophets, priests, monks, etc. – on the development of religions and their economic ethics (Weber 1958, pp. 267-301). Our approach is very reliant on the social problem approach we applied to the school issue in Belgium, as well as to the question of maintaining or abolishing Catholic hospitals (Dobbelaere, Billiet, and Creyf 1978). These subsystems – Catholic schools and Catholic hospitals – are important parts of the Belgian Catholic pillar.[2]

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2. If pillarization were to be defined as the organization of all kinds of social functions and activities on a *religious* basis (as is the case in Dutch society, in the analysis of which the concept of pillarization was originally deployed), there would be only one pillar in Belgium: that of the Catholics. It embraces the majority of schools, hospitals, youth movements, newspapers, libraries, etc. It also has a sick fund, a trades union, and a political party – the Christelijke Volkspartij or C.V.P. (Christian People's Party). Although this party has officially been non-denominational since 1945, it continues to play a central role in organized Catholicism. The two other traditional political parties, however, have developed similar structures, so we can readily identify both a "socialist" and a "liberal" pillar as well. In other words, in Belgium, pillarization characterizes the institutionalization of opposing religious and ideological systems, in which the political parties play a central role (Meynaud, Ladriere, and Perin 1965, pp. 24-70; Steininger 1977, pp. 242-257; Lorwin 1971, pp. 141 ff.).

SECULARIZATION AND PILLARIZATION

At first sight and when superficially analyzed, pillarization seems to be a sacralization process, or at least an attempt to maintain a "Catholic state" within the secular Belgian state. Church authorities and a church elite tried, in the past, to develop, and now hope to maintain, a more or less closed Catholic pillar to perform such societal functions as socialization, the provision of information, care, and social security. This attempt at insulation, however, partly failed, and that this should have occurred is easily understood in an era of mass communication, when television and radio invade the home with alternative ideas. Our study does not pertain to this fact, but rather to a process of secularization resulting from specialization within Catholic subsystems (a process of change supported by professionals), as well as from a diminished interest in religious and philosophical matters (socioeconomic issuses being considered more relevant).

Professionalization, marginalization, and privatization: Christian hospitals. In a study of the Christian dimension of a hospital, we examined the social conceptions of Catholic hospitals entertained by their administrators and managers, and by the superiors of religious congregations working in state hospitals (Dobbelaere, Ghesquiere-Waelkens, and Lauwers 1975; Dobbelaere, Lauwers, and Ghesquiere-Waelkens 1973, pp. 535-568; Dobbelaere 1973, pp. 475-483).

A Catholic or Christian hospital[3] is first of all a hospital and should provide good *medical service*. In order to care for the spiritual well-being of the sick, *pastoral service* is also provided. Both services, the medical and the pastoral, are organized and function separately. They are independent of each other, develop according to their own rationale, and

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3. Readers should note that in the Belgian sense, "Christian" is almost synonymous with "Catholic" since more than 90% of the Belgian population is Catholic; less than 1% is Protestant.

have their own specific experts. There are only a few exceptions to this mutual neutrality: church ethics impose certain obligations on the physicians — although these arise in rather marginal situations: euthanasia, abortion, sterilization, artificial insemination, and birth control. Moreover, doctors and nurses are expected to give the chaplain timely warning when the administration of the last sacraments is necessary. In recent times, these ethical standards of the church are more and more challenged under the pressure of medical rationality. In the conception of our research population, religion was primarily reduced to its ecclesiastical aspects, that is, to its ethical standards and its sacramental practices. But it was also expected that the Christian spirit should be apparent in the general human atmosphere of the hospital. Man, not illness, is the focal point of health care. This *humane approach*, the third element in the definition of a Christian hospital, is stipulated as something the hospital management should ensure, but it is counteracted by economic and medical rationales (Querido 1960, pp. 26-51, esp. pp. 52-55). Staff restrictions, cost reductions, etc. are cited to justify a segmented and functional job-division in contrast to a holistic approach to the patient, which would require extensive, frequent, and sustained communication. Actual communication is segmented, formal, and authoritarian, because it is entirely determined by the medical rationale. Such a relationship is *gesellschaftlich*; the humane approach, on the contrary, is rather *gemeinschaftlich*. Furthermore, it was maintained that this constituent element of the Christian approach could not be organized. Except for sacraments and certain aspects of medical ethics, religion was relegated to the plane of informal and interpersonal relations. On the hospital level, this element was defined as an atmosphere of love, tolerance, respect, sociability, etc.; on the level of social relations, it emphasized patience, selflessness, availability, compassion, charitable servitude, kindness, openness, devotion, etc. In

furtherance of this element of the definition of a Christian hospital, and since religion at this level could not be organized, a distinction was made by hospital managements between *lay* nursing staff and *religious* nurses. The first were regarded as experts, and their function was consequently chiefly instrumental. The religious nurses were expected to implement the Christian human values referred to above in their appearance, attitude, and philosophy. Thus their function was regarded as essentially expressive.

The combination of two elements of the definition of a Catholic hospital — the radiation of the Christian spirit in a Christian philosophy of life, suffering, and death, as well as in a humane atmosphere — and the attempt to realize and maintain this combination within their institutions, is typical of what we should like to call the "secularizers" of the Catholic pillar. They refer to the patient's individual freedom of religion in order to maintain private Catholic hospitals versus public ones. Meanwhile they privatize religion in such a way that in the concrete activities of health care, it operates only at the inter-individual level, even within the private Catholic institutions. Christian values are so individualized that they no longer determine the concrete structures of the institution. On the one hand, there is a division between the medical service and the pastoral service, the latter realizing the Christian philosophy of life, suffering, and death in church services and ethics. On the other hand, there is a medical and economic rationale which impedes the realization of the second element of the Christian spirit, namely, the humane atmosphere. Moreover, it is believed that this *Gemeinschaftlichkeit* cannot be organized, since it exists only at the level of inter-individual action, so it is considered as the domain of religious nurses. Thus here again a division is made between the sacred (the religious staff) and the secular (the lay staff).

The Christian hospital is thus based on concepts that are typically involved in secularization theories, particularly the

contrasting concepts of private and public. It is organized on the basis of differentiated and specialized services, this differentiation and specialization itself being the result of processes underlying the so-called secularization process. Only specifically ecclesiastical aspects of religion are organized. The Christian humane approach to patients is regarded as something beyond the possibilities of formal organization, although it is seen, according to the ideology, as something that should ideally prevail. Responsibility for such a humane approach is regarded as differentially appropriate to those in different positions: it is expected of the religious rather than the lay staff, who are secular. Thus religion is specialized, privatized, and loses its function as an "overarching meaning system."

Professionalization, marginalization, and privatization: Catholic secondary schools. Since the year 1950-51, Catholic secondary schools have been subsidized by law (13 July 1951), and this law instituted at the same time minimum qualifications for teachers. Earlier there had been state control over the execution and the level of the teaching programme: schoolwork and examinations could be controlled by the Commission for the Homologation of Diplomas, and there was class inspection. But there had been no requirements as to the qualifications of teachers. As a result, priests could teach any subject whatever in Catholic schools.

The laws of 13 July 1951 and 17 December 1952 specified the requisite qualifications for teachers in the subsidized secondary schools, and since then the teaching competence of priests has been reduced. According to the actual regulations (Royal Decrees of 17 March 1967 and 25 October 1971) priests are "sufficiently" qualified because of their education in philosophy and theology to fill the posts of principal, vice-principal and duty-master; to teach Latin, Greek, history, geography and a first language – Dutch or French[4] – in all

classes of secondary schools; and to teach the second national language, modern foreign languages (English, German, Spanish, etc.), mathematics, natural sciences, and economics in the first three years of secondary education provided they have the corresponding university degree of candidate (equivalent of a B.A.). For all those branches they are "sufficiently" qualified, and as such they are by law possible substitutes for those who are "fully" qualified, that is, those having the corresponding required degrees, for example, the licentiate (M.A.) in classical languages, history, etc. In the last three years of secondary education, they need the corresponding university degree of licentiate to teach the second national language, modern foreign languages, mathematics, natural sciences and economics, and are then "fully" qualified, as lay teachers are, on the basis of their university diploma. Religious are "fully" qualified, on the basis of their studies in philosophy and theology, only to teach religion.

To fill the new posts, principals of Catholic schools had to recruit qualified people. As can be seen from table 1, the total number of teachers followed the increase of the student population in Catholic secondary schools. The number of lay teachers increased correspondingly, but the number of religious teachers, though stable in absolute terms until 1961-62, dropped in relative terms between 1957 and 1962. In 1957 one out of every two teachers was a religious; in 1962 it was one out of three. In the following years (1962-77), because of a drop in religious vocations and an increase in resignations among the religious, the absolute number of religious teachers declined with the result that in 1976-77 the ratio of religious to lay teachers was one to eight. The average annual increase in the number of teachers was 5.5% during this twenty-year period, whereas the average annual

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4. In Flanders the first language is Dutch, the second French; in the French-speaking part of Belgium it is the reverse.

TABLE 1

Students and Teachers in Catholic Secondary Education
in Belgium, 1957-1977

Academic Year	Students		Teachers				
	Number	Index	Total		Religious		Percentage of Religious
			Number	Index	Number	Index	
1957-58	98,103	100	8,831	100	4,940	100	56
1961-62	145,818	149	13,122	149	4,906	99	37
1966-67	178,367	182	17,162	194	4,394	89	26
1971-72	206,890	211	20,251	229	3,663	74	18
1976-77	233,520	238	25,650	290	2,967	60	12

Source: Nationaal Secretariaat Katholiek Onderwijs, Dienst voor Statistiek en Planning.

decrease of religious teachers during the same period was 2.5%. The importance of lay personnel in Catholic secondary schools can also be seen by analyzing directorates according to the religious status of those who comprise them. In 1959 only 1% of the principals were lay people; in 1976 this was the case with 28%.

Not only was there an absolute and relative decrease of religious teachers and principals in Catholic secondary schools, there was also an age increase relative to lay teachers (see table 2). According to the available figures, religious teachers were on the average 11 years older than lay teachers in 1958-59, while in 1975-76 they were nearly 15 years older. Whereas 50% of the lay teachers were less than 27-28 years old twenty years ago, and as of 1975-76 some 50% were still under 31-32 years of age, half the clerical teachers were over 39-40 years of age twenty years ago, and by 1975-76 some 50% were over 48-49 years. The modal age of lay teachers shifted from 24 to 29 and that of religious teachers from 36 to 50. As a result the age gap between religious and lay teachers, and between religious teachers and students is growing.

TABLE 2

Age Structure of Religious and Lay Teachers
in Belgian Catholic Secondary Education

Academic Year	Teacher Ages					
	Lay			Religious		
	Mean	Mode	Median	Mean	Mode	Median
1958-59	30.8	23.6	27.7	41.8	35.5	39.5
1975-76	32.9	29.2	31.6	47.4	50.3	48.4

Source: Nationaal Secretariaat Katholiek Onderwijs, Dienst voor Statistiek en Planning.

Fifty percent of the lay teachers were born after World War II, whereas more than 50% of the religious teachers were born before 1930.

The law of 11 July 1973 regulating education in general provided for the recruitment of "sufficiently" qualified teachers in the secondary schools if "fully" qualified teachers were not available. In the national commission preparing the Royal Decrees for the administration of this law, the representatives of the National Secretariat for Catholic Education indicated that in future they would not claim special consideration for priests in order to allow them to substitute for "fully" qualified teachers. This attitude derives from the fact that the number of available priests is declining and that they are needed for religious instruction, for which they are "fully" qualified. On the other hand, more importance is also being attached to specialization, that is, to having "fully" qualified teachers for all branches rather than teachers who were only "sufficiently" qualified.[5] In fact, in secondary

5. Representatives of the National Secretariat for Catholic Education, confronted with a shortage of religious, are now accepting criticisms that educational specialists of other affiliations were leveling more than twenty-five years ago, e.g., that it was a mistake to allow religious without a university degree, and particularly philological training, to teach Greek, Latin, and a first national language in senior high schools (cf. Huysmans 1976, pp. 191-192, 197).

education over a period of twenty-five years the demographic situation and the growing importance of specialization will have more or less restricted the professional positions of priests and religious to religious instruction and directorates.

As a consequence of this evolution, religious education has become specialized: religious, "fully" qualified specialists in religion, now teach religious classes — and almost only these. On the other hand, the number of liturgical services has also been reduced in Catholic schools. In the fifties, compulsory daily mass attendance was practically the rule; now mass is limited to a weekly service in school at the most. Thus religion has been marginalized: it is one class among others, taught by a special teacher; there are fewer religious services in the school; and even the requirement of Sunday mass attendance by pupils has been abandoned. This tendency can also be documented by a reaction of the General Council of Catholic Education. The specific character of the Catholic school should, according to this council, express itself not only in religious lessons and liturgy but also in the school community itself and in the religious outlook conveyed in the "profane" subjects taught by lay teachers. In a declaration on the specific character of Catholic education they stated, "The teachers of so-called profane subjects have an equally important task because it is precisely they who, in collaboration with the priest or the lay catechist, can best elucidate a religious view on the whole of reality" (Algemene Raad van het Katholiek Onderwijs 1975, p. 5).

The council reacted not only to the reduction of Catholic education to a few specific aspects — enforced religious instruction and liturgy — which are marginal in the teaching programme, but also to the privatization of the out-of-school life of the staff members. In their declaration it is claimed that "the staff member should be aware that his private life may have implications for his mission as an educator — a mission which should not be seen purely as a transfer of knowledge

but rather as an offering and demonstration of values. When a teacher's educational work is contradicted by an extra-scholastic life situation that openly contradicts the values that he or she is expected to demonstrate, a humane solution should be found with the knowledge and assistance of the teacher concerned" (Algemene Raad van het Katholiek Onderwijs 1975, p. 6).

More recently the reaction has not been limited to declarations. Statutes have been elaborated and a Deontological Board has been established to find, according to the General Council of Catholic Education, a "humane solution" if the extra-scholastic life situation of teachers openly contradicts the values they are expected to demonstrate. Since 1 August 1977, the Deontological Board is to be consulted if conflicts about "the specific obligations arising from the Christian orientation of the school" occur. According to the General Council of Catholic Education, the Deontological Board functions to advise the Governing Board of Catholic schools about decisions to be taken if conflicts emerge. The specific obligations of the teachers have been enumerated in article 2 of the "General regulations applicable to the staff of Catholic schools." Deontological disputes which could arise as a result of the specific character of Catholic schools are enumerated in article 30. This article has to do with "facts or situations" in which a member of a Catholic school:

"— deviates in the execution of his task from the above mentioned foundations [Catholic beliefs and ethics], because he does not want, or is not in conscience able, to adhere to them;
— attacks Catholic doctrine publicly;
— in his behavior publicly and lastingly deviates from the fundamental rules of this doctrine."

The Governing Board may, on the basis of the unanimous advice of the Deontological Board, according to the same article:

"— establish that the facts or situations are such that an immediate discharge, without notice or indemnity, is warranted;
— decide that the person is to be dismissed with notice;
— decide that the person should be transferred to another position in the same school or to the same or another position in another institution;
— decide to take measures other than immediate discharge, dismissal with notice, or transfer to another position or school."

In a few years we should be able to analyze the cases that have been brought before the Deontological Board and the "solutions" that have been reached.

Professionalization, professional ethics, and legitimations.
Professionalization is not only linked to the marginalization and privatization of (church) religion, it may also promote a conflict with traditional Christian values and ethics. In Catholic hospitals, the specific church ethic concerning abortion, sterilization, artificial insemination, and birth control is more and more being called into question under the pressure of medical rationality. Medical doctors point to the complexity of these problems and the specificity of their field; they seek to solve them by using a broader ethical framework and their specialized knowledge. In order to be prepared for an expected change in the Belgian law on abortion, *Caritas Catholica* established an "Ethical Commission" composed of administrators, medical doctors, and other representatives of the Catholic hospital world to determine future policy in such matters. Because of conflicting views, the discussion in these meetings enlarged the domain and stimulated a debate on all bio-ethical problems. Aware of "deviant" medical practices, some members of the commission urged the gathering of data on these practices and on the principles to which medical doctors referred to legitimate them. In this way, it was intended that

the bishops should become better informed and that a greater impact would be made on church ethics. As a result, the establishment of ethical commissions in pilot hospitals was proposed and accepted, not only to advise medical doctors as to the teachings of the church, but at the same time to discuss ethical problems and to register both the ways physicians solved the problems with which they were confronted and the principles on which these solutions rested. In one diocese, however, the bishop rejected the proposal on the ground that there were no problems since the ethical norms of the church were very clear, strict, and definite.

In his study on the Christian dimension of social work organized in the framework of the Confederation of Catholic Sick Funds, De Cort diagnosed the existence, since 1970, of a tension between the professional approach to clients and the Catholic world view of the organization. The deontology of the social worker implies the acceptance of the world view of his client, which could confront him with conflicting values when working on such specific problems as abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, etc. (De Cort 1976, esp. pp. 103-107, 124, 133, 141-142, 147-148, 154, 155-156, 160 and 162-163). Some social workers referred to these conflicts explicitly, and at least one-third were unable to answer the question of whether the Christian dimension of their work could and should be made visible, and if so, in what way. An ideology of a "humane approach" to the needy was certainly present. This aspect of the comforting function of religion was also present in our study of Catholic hospitals referred to above.

The impact of professional rationality is also present in the discussion about Catholic schools. Here one finds opposing standpoints. From a pedagogical viewpoint the National Secretariat of Catholic Schools defends the need for a coherent world view for young, immature persons, and suggests that a Catholic school should offer such a perspective to

pupils. The mainly Catholic opposing groups — for example, members of the editorial staff of the Catholic periodicals *De maand* and *La revue nouvelle*, young Catholic intellectuals, students of pedagogy at the Catholic University of Leuven, young Christian Democrats who form a pressure group within the Christian People's Party (CVP) and some officers of the Christian Workers Movement *(Manifesten . . .* 1971; *Naar een open gemeenschapsschool* 1973) — defend openness and pluriformity through contacts between students and teachers having a diversity of attitudes and opinions. They claim that relativizing one's own viewpoint and world view is the most important aim of education. As a result they oppose not only Catholic schools but also state schools organized on the principle of neutrality. A school cannot force its inter-pretation of reality as "the" true definition of reality on young people, but neither is education neutral. It has to do with values and norms. On the occasion of the revision of the School Pact, these "opposing" Catholics propagated a new school for Belgium: the open community school, which would replace the two existing separate school systems and where pupils would be confronted with divergent views and be stimulated to develop their own ideology. They rejected the dichotomy mature/immature, and suggested that especially these people, who in their youth were confronted with alterna-tives and uncertainties and thus learned to orient themselves in the world, had a better chance of becoming mature persons. In a changing world it would be wrong to absolutize one's own world view; young people should be educated to openness and be made conscious of new, and perhaps better, opportuni-ties. They needed an education which incorporated a certain counterpoise to the tendency to absolutize one's own values and existing situations *(Naar een open gemeenschapsschool* 1973, pp. 38-39, 11, 24, 26, 31, 33, and 64-65). In other words the pluralistic school would be better adapted to a "secular" society in Becker's sense.

Although many socialists and liberals – the traditional defenders of the state school system – ranged themselves with the promotors of the open, pluralistic community school, it was supported mainly by Catholics who also favoured a re-alignment in the political and socio-economic fields, that is the formation of the so-called progressive front (Billiet 1977, pp. 56-65). The new School Pact Law of 1973, however, confirmed the existing pillarization and the influence of the three traditional political parties – the Christian People's Party, the Liberals, and the Socialists – on educational prob-lems. Although the "pluralistic" school would further laiciza-tion, it has never obtained the necessary political support from the Liberal or from the Socialist parties. Factors other than purely philosophical have played a role in determining the political parties' course of action. The traditional parties were not at all prepared to risk losing the educational harmony they had obtained so painfully.

CONCLUSIONS

The studies we have discussed give us a clue as to how to answer two of the questions that we think are vital in an analysis of secularization: who are the "secularizers," and how are conflicts resulting from a challenge to social definitions resolved, that is, what are the results for the organizational pattern in which this kind of conflict occurs?

It seems to me that lay professionals, developing the pro-fessional rationale, are the carriers of secular tendencies, for it is they who determine the organizational structure of hospi-tal and school and who marginalize religion even within the Catholic pillar, reducing it to the interpersonal level as a matter of private preference. Professionalization also under-mines traditional Christian values and ethics. In Catholic hospitals medical doctors challenge the Catholic ethic by performing sterilizations, abortions, etc., thus indicating to nurses, patients, their families, and the population at large that

they follow a different system of values from that of the church. Social workers in a Catholic organization challenge the value of the Catholic ethic as a guideline for the solution of the specific problems with which they are confronted. More important, the Catholic school system, the cornerstone of the Catholic pillar, is challenged on the basis of pedagogical principles. The people supporting the professional rationale, taking secularization for granted, are the professionals and, in general, young Catholics with a university degree who also favor a realignment in the political and socio-economic field. They oppose the traditional mechanisms of problem-solving in Belgian politics which operate along ideological lines through the pillar structure – a procedure supported by the traditional political parties.

We noted also some reactions at the level of legitimations and in the elaboration of statutes, reactions from the higher echelons of the Catholic pillar structure – for example, the National Secretariat and General Council of Catholic Education, and *Caritas Catholica* – to the secularization process that we have documented. But their response could well be an empty gesture, without real impact on the actual behavioral process in medical practice or in the school situation.

This process of secularization, due to an increase of lay professionals in Catholic pillar structures, was primarily caused by the process of democratization, the drop in religious vocations, and the increase of religious resignations. In Catholic schools, the increase of pupils made it necessary to recruit lay teachers, which resulted in a relative decrease of religious teachers in the early stage of the process. In later years, the drop in religious also resulted in an absolute decrease of their numbers. The religious teaching staff also grew older. In Catholic hospitals, the lack of vocations and the increase of religious resignations had a similar impact on the nursing staff. In the early seventies, according to reliable estimates, only 1 out of 8 nurses was a religious nurse and, while 50% of the lay nurses

were under 25 years of age, 50% of the religious nurses were over 50 (Dobbelaere 1973, p. 478).

The democratization of secondary education produced the need for subsidizing Catholic schools, which resulted in laws stipulating the professional qualifications of the teaching staff. The democratization of medical service also resulted in larger subsidies. In the hospital world subsidies were not made dependent on the qualifications of the nursing staff (though a Royal Decree is now being prepared that will specify the different nursing positions and the professional qualifications for each). In our opinion, this difference in treatment by the traditional Belgian political parties was due to the fact that education implies the socialization of a world view, which caused "school wars" (Dobbelaere, Billiet, and Creyf 1978), whereas nursing "only" implies the comforting of the sick, a traditional and nonthreatening function of the churches.

Does the secularization of the Catholic pillar adumbrate the end of pillarization in Belgium? As long as pillarization is used as a political key in the allocation of finances for health care, education, youth care, etc., the pillars will continue to maintain themselves in Belgium, even if — ideologically speaking — they have undergone a great change. This ideological change is such that the Catholic pillar continues to attract a wide following. As we have documented in another study, membership in organizations that make up the Catholic pillar has been, if not growing (Billiet and Dobbelaere 1976, pp. 72-77), at least very stable over the years, although a sharp drop in church practices has been documented.

The "real" problem for the Catholic pillar will be to redefine its ideology as a non-denominational pillar, and to establish social control with accepted symbols and rituals. The basic values of the developing ideology seem to be democracy, harmony, solidarity — an equitable balance between "capital" and "labour" — private initiative, and freedom (Billiet and Dobbelaere 1976, pp. 84-85). *De mens eerst* ("people first")

is advocated for institutionalization in humane services. *Gemeinschaftlichkeit* or a humane atmosphere is demanded in Catholic hospitals and schools and is considered a typically Christian value. Could a socio-cultural Christianity develop as a surrogate for church-religion? Such a Christianity would seem to have all it takes to become an "invisible religion."

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