

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN BELGIUM: FROM AN INSTITUTIONALIZED MANIFEST CATHOLIC TO A LATENT CHRISTIAN PILLAR

Abstract

After having described the historical basis of the process of pillarization in Belgium, the author explains the emergence of the Catholic pillar as a defence mechanism of the Catholic Church and the Catholic leadership to protect the Catholic flock from secularization. He describes the different services the Catholic pillar was offering for its members and the development of Belgium as a state based on three pillars: the catholic, the socialist and the liberal one that were all three institutionalized. This structure meant that Belgium was rather a segregated country that was vertically integrated. In the sixties of last century, the pillar was confronted with a growing secularization of the population, which forced the leadership of the pillar to adapt the collective consciousness: the Catholic credo, values and norms were replaced by so-called typical values of the Gospel integrated in what is called a Socio-Cultural Christianity. Under the impact of the changing economic situation, the politicization of the Flemish question and the emergence of Ecologist parties, the Christian pillar had to adapt its services and is now based on clientele rather than members. Only in the Flemish part of Belgium is it still an institutionalized pillar.

Key words: Collective Consciousness, Pillarization; Pillar; Institutionalized Pillar, Solidarity: Mechanical and Organic Solidarity, Vertical pluralism, Secularization.

The concept of 'pillar' and the process of 'pillarization' are translations of the Dutch terms *zuil* and *zuilvorming* to describe the special structure of vertical pluralism typical of Dutch society. Such structures we find also in Austria, Belgium and Switzerland². In Belgium three pillars were established: apart from the largest, the Catholic pillar, we had a well developed socialist pillar and a small liberal one. Before elaborating on the emergence of the Catholic pillar and the type of solidarity that was so created, we have to go back in time to understand how it grew and where the basic characteristics come from³.

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2 Righart Hans, *De katholieke zuil in Europa: Een vergelijkend onderzoek naar het ontstaan van verzuiling onder Katholieken in Oostenrijk, Zwitserland, België en Nederland*, Boom, Meppel, 1986.

3 De Maeyer Jan & Hellemans Staf, *Katholiek reveil, katholieke verzuiling en dagelijks leven in: Tussen bescherming en verovering: Sociologen en historici over verzuiling*, Billiet Jaak (ed.), Universitaire Pers Leuven, Leuven, 1988, pp. 171-200.

1. The historical basis of the Catholic pillar

In the 17th and 18th century, Catholicism was the state religion in what later became Belgium. The Church had a cultural monopoly: socialization in the Catholic culture was legally imposed. At the end of the 18th century, as a consequence of the French revolution, the alliance between Church and State was severed: the Church became a society alongside others, having to accept also rival religions at least theoretically, apart from a small number of Protestants and Jews, no other religious communities were established in Belgium⁴. However, the impact of the Enlightenment became the more and more tangible in the cities and in the rural upper middle classes (notaries, medical doctors, teachers and noblemen for example). On the other hand, the economic and social revolution in big cities like Brussels, Liège and Ghent and in the industrial basin of Wallonia produced a decline in church practices. Having to face these two transformations, the Church developed a program of "Christianization" with the help of lay people in order to intensify its bonds with the flock. This was the start of a religious revival. Missionary work, called missions, was done in the parishes by religious orders every seven years for at least a week; processions and pilgrimages were organized; local public schools were taught by religious congregations, in which a religious education was given; religious associations on the level of the parishes were established; the order of Vincentians was created in the parishes: lay people visited the poor and distributed alms, which they used to promote the religious practice of the poor. All these associations had a parochial basis.

After Belgium's independence in 1830, Liberals and Catholics worked together to organize the State. However, after an initial period of cooperation, called Unionism, the radical liberal wing, under the influence of anticlerical Masonic Lodges, resented the authoritarian Catholic hierarchy and the guardianship of the priests over culture, education and poor relief. From the second part of the 19th century on, under the impact of changing parliamentary majorities, the radical liberals were able to implement a secularist policy with the help of an emerging socialist party. By law, a liberal government reduced the impact of the Church in charitable work, in poor relief, and in allocating study grants, in other words they differentiated certain functions from religious control. Ultimately, each municipality was compelled by law (1879) to establish at least one school where religious instruction was not part of the compulsory curriculum and, from then on, the schoolteachers in such schools had to be certified by a State Teachers' Training College, which excluded teachers who had studied in a Catholic one. The Church reacted strongly in sermons, in the confessional and in refusing the sacraments. The conflict about the schools stimulated Catholic leaders to establish private Catholic schools⁵.

4 According to the first census in 1846, 99,8 % of the Belgians declared themselves to be Catholic.

5 Dobbelaere Karel, *Het 'volk-gods' de mist in? Over de Kerk in België*, Amersfoort/Leuven: Acco, Amersfoort/Leuven, 1988; 23-25, 91-92.

2. Establishing a Catholic Pillar

Pillarization started in Belgium by duplicating the state school system with a Catholic private school system, the result of “the first school war”. And to protect Catholics from the “world” and from a growing number of opportunities that were developing, the Church stimulated the further establishment of its own associations linked with the parish structure: religious societies or associations with a charitable purpose organized for the bourgeoisie, the middle classes and the farmers. These organizations had their own centre: the parish hall. In fact, the start of the pillarization was at first a continuation of the Catholic revival that began a century ago.

However, it soon became clear that the traditional Catholic responses to the modernization process were unable to stop the effects of the upheaval in the fields of economics, politics and culture. From 1883 on, some bishops stimulated the creation of associations with the purpose of promoting the material interests of the working classes: savings clubs, medical insurance and trades unions, confronted as they were with the success of such organizations established by the socialists. Voluntary associations were also established to promote social contacts for adults and youngsters, separately for men and women, with the purpose of keeping them out of the pubs, where an informal social life was developing. In fact, bit by bit the Catholic world became integrated in a pillar that comprised schools (from kindergarten to university), youth and adult organizations for the different social classes, cultural organizations, a Catholic press (journals and magazines), hospitals, trade unions, sick funds, banks, cooperatives, etc.

Contrary to the Catholics, the socialists were less present in the small cities and not at all in the rural part of the country; indeed, they did not organize the farmers, the middle class and the bourgeoisie. In cities and some little towns they established a building called “the house of the people”⁶. These centres were the local headquarters of the party and functioned as a temple decorated with paintings referring to the socialist realizations. In these centres there were meeting places for the workers; a place for cultural events, like a theatre and a cinema; and it was also a centre for theatre groups, gymnasts, cyclists, etc.

The Catholics were forced also to build their own meeting houses to rival the socialist houses of the people and to leave the parish halls. The first such buildings were called Guild houses. The name referred to the past, they were anti-socialist, and inspired by the principles of corporatism. They symbolized the harmony between the social classes under the protection of the nobility and the bourgeoisie. Their function was to elevate the lower classes to a higher moral and cultural level. However, the growing criticism against the patronizing of the lower classes by the higher classes stimulated a strong craving for emancipation of the lower classes. From the early 20th century on, separate organizations were established for farmers, workers and the middle class. These organizations also have built their own centres. Such centres were the meeting places for associations for adults and youngsters, separately for men and women. And these social classes were politically integrated in 1921 in a renamed

6 Stallaerts Rik & Schokkaert Luc, *Onder dak: Een eeuw Volks- en Gildehuizen*, Gent: Provincie bestuur Oost-Vlaanderen, 1987.

Catholic Party: the “Catholic Union of workers, bourgeois, middle classes and farmers”. Consequently, left and right were integrated in *one* Catholic party, and not separately like respectively the socialist and the liberal parties.

The solidarity between the social classes that was first intended through corporatism and paternalism was now realized within a political party able to protect, even to promote, the development of the pillar and its constituent organizations. These separate organizations were centralized at the top by respectively the General Christian Workers’ Union, the Farmers League and the National Union of the Middle Class. These umbrella organizations were represented in the Catholic Party and they coordinated the policy of the party. The local associations, being integrated in their respective national organizations were locally active and developed their local activities. The members were socialized in a meaning system that was developed by the umbrella organizations and animated locally under the guidance of chaplains. The local activities and rituals cemented a common set of beliefs, values and attitudes. Here we have what Durkheim called a form of mechanical solidarity: a social solidarity that comes from a state of conscience which is *common* to all members; there was a “collective conscience”, a common set of values and beliefs, which moulded the individual conscience.

However, the Catholic pillar has not only created a mechanical solidarity, it was also based on organic solidarity. This is a solidarity that comes from specialisation and reciprocity. Indeed, the Farmers League and the General Christian Workers’ Union gradually linked their members by the social services which they offered. It is a solidarity based on give and take: people became members and paid their dues and received benefits. In the earlier years, sometimes at the initiative of local priests, it started locally with a cooperative system that included shops, savings and insurance clubs⁷. Bit by bit they were integrated in regional organisations and later on nationally. For example in 1924 a Belgian Workers’ Cooperative was established which integrated a chain of local shops called “Welfare”, and established a People’s Insurance Company and a Savings bank. Later on a travel agency was established and holiday homes built to promote cheap vacations for the lower classes and also a publishing house to promote reading habits among them. The 1950s were the apex of the Catholic pillar.

By establishing these integrated organizations, Catholics built an organizational ‘dike’ to protect the faithful from the secularized world. If the state and the differentiated subsystems were no longer to be organized around a Catholic ideology, especially the schools, culture, the mass media and the professional world (trade unions, sick funds, political parties), then the new civic liberties provided the opportunity to establish Catholic organizations to protect believers from a secular, i.e. an a-religious or anti-religious ideology. Pillarization was a reactive policy to functional differentiation: the clergy and part of the catholic elite reverted to an older process of differentiation: segmented differentiation, that is, the duplication of services in those sectors that were functionally differentiated from the church, in order to check the impact of secularization and to preserve church control over the catholic part of the population.

7 Kwanten Godfried., *Welstand door Vereniging: De ontwikkeling van de Christelijke Arbeiderscoöperaties, 1886-1986*, LVCC: Brussel, & Kadoc, Leuven, 1987.

3. Vertical Pluralism

The pillarization integrated Belgians in three separate pillars: the catholic, the socialist and the liberal one. In the Catholic pillar, the catholic credo, values and norms were the collective consciousness that integrated the pillar. The socialist and the liberal ideology integrated their respective pillars. These pillars had their own schools and hospitals, Catholics had their catholic school and hospitals, the socialist and liberals had the state schools and hospitals. Each had their own youth and adult associations, sport clubs, trade unions, sick funds, mass media, banks, etc. In Rokkan's terms⁸, these represent the *corporate channel* of the pillars. The consequence was that Belgians lived in three segregated worlds. To give a few examples: in many cities there were a Catholic football club and a liberal (e.g. in Bruges) or a socialist one (e.g. in Liège). When I was in a catholic boarding school in Bruges, we went every other Sunday afternoon to watch the national football competition on the field of the Catholic club, never on the one of the liberal club. In my home town there were two brass bands, a catholic and a liberal one. Each one played in turn every other Sunday on the market place: Catholics went to listen when their band was playing and liberals theirs on the other Sunday afternoon. I do not remember that I ever have seen or heard the liberal brass band playing.

The interlocking of a corporate with a *political channel* allows us to speak of an **institutionalized pillar** according to Rokkan. The Catholic pillar became institutionalized in 1921 with the Catholic Union as party. All three segregated worlds had their own political party and were represented in parliament; the Catholic party has also been for decades in government, except in 1954-58 and 1999-2007. The task of these political parties was to protect their pillarized organisations and to organize social life, when new services were planned, according to the existing segregated worlds. A good example of this was the 'second school war' in the early fifties of last century. After the Second World War, more and more children went to secondary schools, that created problems for the Catholic schools, which were economically forced to raise the school fees and that could drive Catholic children from poor families to State schools, and the State schools demanded the extension of the State school system. In 1951 and 1952, a *Catholic* government subsidized by law Catholic secondary schools, to prevent the economic factor determining the choice of school, stipulating at the same time the minimum professional qualifications for teachers and reducing the teaching competences of priests⁹. The school war aggravated in 1955 when a *socialist-liberal* government reduced the subsidies for Catholic schools, making the conditions for subsidies more stringent, and planning the building of a great number of state schools. Street protest was heavy, culminating in July 1955 in a march on Brussels of about 250.000 persons organized by the Catholic pillar. After the June-elections of 1958, which the Catholics won, the *Catholic* government installed a National Commission for Education in which the three political parties were represented. On November 20th 1958 a School Pact

8 Rokkan Stein, Towards a Generalized Concept of 'Verzuiling': A Preliminary Note, Political Studies, Sheffield, Vol. 25, 2007, pp. 563-570.

9 Dobbelaere Karel, Professionalization and Secularization in the Belgian Catholic Pillar, Japanese Journal of Religious Studies, Vol. 6, No.1-2, Tokyo, 1979, pp. 51-52.

was signed by the three parties which gave the parents the right to select the school of their choice for their children and this was made possible by free secondary education for all in either Catholic or State schools. In fact many Catholic organizations involved in the school war did not use the term 'Catholic' any more but 'Christian', e.g. the Christian Workers Association, and the political party had also changed its name into Christian Peoples Party.

4. The Catholic pillar becomes a Christian pillar

In the late sixties, a public discussion began about a number of issues raised by Robinson's book *Honest to God*¹⁰, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, and the implementation of the conciliar resolutions of Vatican II. One could, for the first time, in public discourse and the mass media, acknowledge that the religious understanding of beliefs, church ethics, and church authority were very much undermined. Clergy and seminarians massively left the priesthood, an event that had repercussions upon the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of lay people. This was visible in the statistics of the Catholic Church and the results of the first wave of the European Values Studies. From 1967 till 1973 regular Sunday mass attendance dropped in Belgium from 43 to 32 percent – i.e. a decline of 11 percentage points or nearly 2 percentage points per year – and this decline continued reaching 11 percent in 1998¹¹. And if in 1981, 77 % confirmed that they believed in God, only half of them had the orthodox Christian belief in God, the other half believed in a spirit, a life force or did not know what to think. In 1999, the percentage of those believing in God had declined to 65% of which only one third had the orthodox Christian belief in God¹². These are clear indications of a growing individual secularization in two decades.

During the acute crisis in the church in the late 1960s and the early seventies, the leadership of the pillar commissioned studies and organized conferences in which the following questions were asked: what is a Catholic school? a Catholic University¹³? a Catholic hospital¹⁴? a Catholic youth movement? and the like. They asked themselves whether they should go on providing pillarized services. In the Netherlands¹⁵, the Catholic pillar disintegrated under similar pressures that affected the Catholic pillar in Belgium. In Belgium, on the contrary, the Catholic pillar did not disintegrate but it adapted its "collective consciousness" to the changing situation. Research has documented that the core philosophy no longer consisted of the strict religious rules of

10 Robinson John A.T., *Honest to God*, SCM Press, London, 1963.

11 Voyé Liliiane & Dobbelaere Karel, *De la religion: ambivalences et distancements*, in: *Belge Toujours: Fidélité, stabilité, tolérance. Les valeurs des belges en l'an 2000*, Bawin-Legros Bernadette et al. (eds), De Boek Universit , Bruxelles, 2001, p.149.

12 Voy  Liliiane & Dobbelaere Karel, *ibidem*, p. 155

13 Dobbelaere Karel, Creyf Roger & Vanhoutvinck Jan, *Professoren en het «kerkelijk karakter» van hun universiteit. Een sociologisch onderzoek naar defini ringsprocessen ter zake aan de K.U.Leuven*, Sociologisch Onderzoeksinstituut, Leuven., 1977.

14 Dobbelaere Karel, Ghesquiere-Waelkens & Lauwers Jan, *La dimension chr tienne d'une institution hospitali re. Part III: Une analyse sociologique de sa l gitimation: humanisation, s cularisation et cloisonnement*, Licap, Brussels, 1975.

15 Thurlings Jan M. G., *De wankele zuil: Nederlandse katholieken tussen assimilatie en pluralisme*, Van Loghnum slaterus, Deventer, 2nd ed., 1978, 182-225.

the Catholic Church. A new "collective consciousness" developed implying the universalization of its original Catholic ideological basis, which Jaak Billiet and I have called "Socio-cultural Christianity"¹⁶. The core values of this collective consciousness are¹⁷: on the one hand, the legitimization of vertical pluralism on the basis of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of assembly and of choice, and, on the other hand, the articulation of a Christian identity in reference to so-called typical values of the Gospel such as social justice; subsidiarity; the biblical notion of stewardship; solidarity between social classes, with special attention to marginal people; stressing not only social welfare but especially well-being; and *Gemeinschaftlichkeit*, i.e. stressing the importance of primary relations: face to face contacts and addressing the person in her or his totality, e.g. not addressing the sick person purely as a patient but taking his social, psychological, emotional and spiritual dimensions into account. This "Socio-cultural Christianity" functions now as the sacred canopy for the segmented Catholic world of olden days. These are values that have a universal appeal, and which are not specifically Christian. However, by backing them up with a religious source, the gospels, and occasionally solemnizing them with religious rituals, they acquired a sacred aura. This "sacred canopy" is still symbolized by a "C", referring to *Christian*, that is evangelical, instead of to Catholic, the latter being considered to have a more restricted appeal and to be more confining.

In fact this collective consciousness could also be called the civil religion of the Christian pillar, as it was conceptualised by Bellah for the USA: one nation under God to preserve the unity of the nation. In other words, a legitimating ideology that structures the actions of the Christian pillar. To make that clear I will compare the two major Belgian pillars, the Christian and the Socialist, on the basis of a study by Liliane Voyé and Jean Remy to stress the fundamental difference in approaching social issues. First of all, where in the socialist pillar individuals are considered with reference to their social position as worker, the Christian pillar takes also other social characteristics of the individuals, such as gender and nationality, into account. Thus, the socialist trade union is organized according to sectors of production (construction, steel, textile, etc), the Christian trade union also, but it has additional sections by nationality. They consider that immigrant workers are confronted with difficulties that native workers do not have: e.g. language problems or problems due to changes in culture especially for workers with a rural background arriving in an industrial setting. Similarly, an analysis of the periodic journals of the two women's associations shows that, on the socialist side, women are approached as workers in the industrial process; on the Christian side, space is allotted in the journals for other typically women's activities – cooking, children, repair, housekeeping, etc.. – and their emotional life: the family is also central and not only work. The policy on social housing development at the end of the 19th and in the 20th century, is also indicative of a different view: socialist societies favoured the implanting of social housing in the immediate vicinity of industries while the Christian

16 Billiet Jaak & Dobbelaere Karel, *Godsdienst in Vlaanderen: Van kerks katholicisme naar sociaal-kulturele kristenheid*, Davidsfonds, Leuven, 1976.

17 Billiet Jaak, *Kenmerken en grondslagen van het social-kultureel katholicisme, Van ideologie tot macht: Doorlichting van de bewustzijnsindustrie in Vlaanderen*, Servaes Jan (ed.), Kritak, Leuven, 1981, pp. 29-61. Laermans Rudi, *In de greep van de "Moderne Tijd": Modernisering en verzuiling, individualisering en het naoorlogs publiek discours van de ACW-vormingsorganisaties: een proeve tot cultuursociologische duiding*, Leuven, Garant, 1992, 204-214.

societies favoured the integration of social housing in urban neighbourhoods or semi-rural villages where, they considered, workers could benefit from the already existing facilities and from a socially stimulating milieu promoting integration and advancement. Another major difference distinguishes the two pillars. On the socialist side, it is considered that social changes can only come from structural changes induced by the State while the Christianised favours free enterprise based on the principle of subsidiarity, the state is supplementary. Christians have more confidence in the civil society, the effect of personal initiatives and the impact of actions by voluntary associations¹⁸.

5. The changing composition and internal inspiration of the Christian pillar

From the late sixties on, under the impact of the decline in Church involvement, especially of the younger generations, Catholic Action groups for youth, i.e. organizations for the apostolate of the laity, have seen a constant decline in membership and slowly dissolved. And the economic development had also a negative impact: in the distribution sector of the pillar, the "Welfare" shops were bought up by a big distribution chain in 1985 and the development of tourism and the multiplication of publishing houses offering cheap books signified the end of such enterprises in the pillar. In the bank sector, the bank of the Farmers League and the one of the General Christian Workers' Union merged with commercial banks around the 1990s.

The so-called Christian pillar is now especially composed of the socio-cultural movements for adults and youngsters, organized separately for men and women except on the level of the youngsters, and integrated in the General Christian Workers' Union, the Farmers League and the National Union of the Middle Classes; some independent Catholic Youth organisations; the General Christian Trade Union; the General Christian Sick Fund; the Catholic schools integrated in their umbrella organization; and *Caritas Catholica* with a special section integrating the Catholic hospitals, psychiatric institutions and old people's homes. The values of the collective consciousness are proclaimed externally and are successfully used to attract clients, students and patients who are by and large not regular churchgoers. Recent research has indicated that these values explain the success of the schools, hospitals, trade union and sick funds of the Christian pillar in Belgium. The new "collective consciousness" contains soft values that have a universal appeal and are not specifically Christian. On the other hand it should be noted that all pillar services are subsidized by the State and consequently do not cost more for the clients than state-organized services. Consequently, the public definition of the service strongly influences its success. Another consequence is that the pillar is composed of *clients*¹⁹ and not anymore of members, except in the socio-cultural movements. To show the strength of the service sector of the Christian pillar nowadays, some data are presented in table 1. The Catholic service organizations have, except at the university level and in the old people's homes, more than 60% of the total clientele in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. In the Francophone part of

18 Voyé Liliane and Remy Jean, *Perdurance des clivages traditionnels et différences d'enjeux prioritaires*, in : *La Belgique et ses Dieux: Eglises, Mouvements religieux et laïques*, Voyé Liliane et al. (eds), Cabbay, Louvain, 1985, pp. 153-173.

19 Billiet Jaak, *On Belgian Pillarization: Changing Perspectives*, *Acta Politica. Special Issue on Conscitionalism, Pillarization and Conflict-management in the Low Countries*, P.P.C.M. Van Schendelen (ed.), Vol.19, No 1, 1984, 121-122..

Belgium they serve mostly 40 to 50 percent of the clientele. As far as the trade unions and the sick funds are concerned, the socialist pillar is also strongly represented in both parts of Belgium.

It is clear that the individual secularization of the Belgian population that was described at the start of point 4 stimulated the secularization of the Catholic pillar of olden days. In earlier publications I have analyzed the institutional secularization of the Christian

Table 1 Percentage of respectively the number of students, beds and members in particular organizations of the Christian pillar on the total numbers of students, beds, unionised workers and members of sick funds in 2007²⁰.

| Christian Organisations | | Dutch speaking part of Belgium | Francophone part of Belgium |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Education | Kindergarten | 63 | 38 |
| | Primary | 64 | 42 |
| | Secondary | 75 | 58 |
| | Higher N/University | 62 | 49 |
| | University | 38 | 43 |
| Medical service | General Hospitals | 61 | 46 |
| | Psychiatric hospitals | 60 | 50 |
| | Old peoples' homes | 41 | 23 |
| Trade union | | 61 | 43 |
| Sick Fund | | 56 | 28 |

Hospitals and Catholic secondary schools in Flanders (Belgium) in the sixties and seventies²¹. I pointed out the impact of the professionalization of respectively the medical, the nursing and the teaching staff which stimulated the development of a professional ethic that reduced the impact of religious norms; the development of the medical and administrative rationalization of the Catholic hospitals that implied the marginalization of the pastoral service; and how the juridical recognition of the private life of the professionals prevented the lay off of staff when their private life was in contradiction with the Churchly norms. The religious services were also reduced in the Catholic schools.

In a recent study with Liliane Voyé, which is not yet published, we analyzed the socio-cultural movements integrated in the Christian pillar and noted that they are stimulating the their members and organise touristic trips; that they organize leisure

20 Sources : Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming: Statistische Jaarboeken van het Vlaams Onderwijs; Vlaamse Overheid (2006), Vlaams Onderwijs in Cijfers. Brussel:Vlaamse Overheid: Beleidsdomein Onderwijs en Vorming. WWW.STATISTIQUES.ETNIC.be et Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté Française: Statistiques Etudiants Personnel Recherche des Institutions Universitaires Françaises de Belgique for the educational statistics. Zorgnet Vlaanderen and Fédération des Institutions Hospitalières (francophone) for the medical service. And Algemeen Christelijk Werknemersverbond (Confederation of Christian Workers for Trade Union and Sick Fund.

21 Dobbelaere Karel, Professionalization and Secularization in the Belgian Catholic Pillar, op.cit., pp. 46-61.

time activities and that they promote courses and discussion sessions to improve the professional life of their members. They state that the evangelical inspiration is still present in their activities but that they refrain to submit their members to dogmas and institutional principles. It is clear that there also a Christian vision is present, not a churchly, and they underscore that this adaptation was needed since the younger generations are not interested in a specific Catholic inspiration. The secularization of the Catholic pillar of olden days is clearly a fact in the organisations composing the Christian pillar.

6. The political link: the institutionalization of the Christian Pillar?

Is the Christian pillar still an institutionalized pillar like the Catholic pillar was? To answer that question, we have to take into account the changing political field. Recurrent and new issues made for the emergence of new political parties since the sixties. In 1954, the Flemish question that emerged after the First World War was politically translated in a party programme for an autonomous Flanders in a Belgian Federal State by the *Volksunie*. This was a treat for the Christian party since this new party had a rather Catholic image. And a bishop intervened referring to the school war that was going on. He proclaimed that Catholics had to vote for the Christian party to save “the soul of the children”, if not they committed a grave sin. The political system reacted immediately and required that the Belgian church engaged itself not to interfere any more in the elections by using its moral power to influence the vote of its members, in other words, that the church should accept the functional differentiation between politics and religion. In the sixties, the *Volksunie* became gradually a political force in the Belgian political landscape and many Catholics voted for this party which had a negative impact on the results of the Christian party. In 2001 the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* /New Flemish Alliance (NV-A) emerged out of the dissolution of the *Volksunie*. The fact that the Christian People’s Party (CVP) changed its name in 2001 to CD&V (Christian Democrat &Flemish) to add Flemish and, in 2004, formed a cartel with NV-A, that was dissolved in 2008, is an indication that the reference to Christian was not appealing enough any more.

In the seventies, ecological topics became also a political issue. The Jesuit Luc Versteyleen promoted a movement called *Anders Gaan Leven* (Living Differently) stressing post-materialistic values. Out of this movement a political one emerged that presented lists at the elections since the late seventies and in view of a growing success a party AGA-LEV was formally erected in 1982. Since 2003 the party is called *Groen/Green!*. In the French speaking part of Belgium a political party called *Ecolo* was created in 1980. The partly Catholic origin of these parties had also a negative effect on the votes for the Christian Party (PSC/CVP)..

In table 2 are given the voting results of the CVP/PSC, the Christian People’s Party, since 1946 in percentages of the valid votes cast in the country for the House of Representatives. The importance of the language factor in structuring Belgian society is very clear in this table: in 1972 the Christian party split formally according to the linguistic division in Belgium: Dutch/Flemish and French. The same happened in the two other traditional parties, the socialists and the liberals. Already in 1971, there was a partial de facto split, in the Christian People’s Party: the CVP presented lists in Flanders and the PSC in Wallonia; in the province of Brabant there still was a unitary CVP/PSC list.

Table 2 The percentage of valid votes for each party on the total number of valid votes cast in the country for the House of Representatives in every other election from 1946 on.

Unitary Party: Christelijke Volkspartij (CVP)/Parti Social Chrétien (PSC)

| Year of the election | 1946 | 1950 | 1958 | 1965 | 1971(*) |
|---|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Percentage of the valid votes registered in the country | 42,5 | 47,7 | 46,5.5 | 34,5 | 30,1 |

(*) In 1971 there was already a de facto split between CVP (in Flanders) and PSC (in Wallonia), except in the Province Brabant where there was a PSC/CVP list.

The party split formally along linguistic lines in 1972

| Year of the election | 1977 | 1981 | 1987 | 1995 | 2003 | 2010 |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| CVP/CD&V (2001)(*) | 26,2 | 19,3 | 19,5 | 17,2 | 13,3 | 10,9 |
| PSC/CDH (2002)(*) | 7,3 | 6,5 | 8,0 | 7,7 | 5,5 | 5,5 |
| Total | 33,5 | 25,8 | 27,5 | 24,9 | 18,8 | 16,4 |

(*)CD&V(ChristenDemocratisch & Vlaams / Christian Democrat &Flemish) CDH (Centre Démocrate Humaniste / Centre Democrat Humanist)

Source: Federale Overheidsdienst Binnenlandse Zaken: <http://www.ibzdgip.fgov.be/result/nl/main.html>

Until the sixties, the Christian People's Party (CVP/PSC) obtained around 45 % of the valid votes in the country's election for the House of Representatives. In the sixties and seventies, when the strong decline in Sunday mass attendance took place and the Flemish party, the *Volksunie*, became more and more a political force, the party suffered a decline of 12 to 15 %. In the eighties and nineties, the Flemish party (CVP) lost 9 percent points more of the valid votes. By the end of the eighties, the now two Flemish linguistic parties got 10 percent of the valid votes and at the eve of the 21st century they got 15%. In the 21st century, both Christian parties changed names. The French speaking party dropped explicitly its Christian name, with the argument that this reference was detrimental to its recruitment in the Brussels region where a large proportion of the population is Muslim, and became the Centre Démocrate Humaniste (CDH). Implicitly, the word humanist refers to Christian humanism for the insiders, but not so perceived by the people at large. The Flemish party, to the contrary, explicitly confirmed its Christian character but added its Flemish Character, aware of the success of the Flemish political parties, and became the CD&V (ChristenDemocratisch & Vlaams / Christian Democrat &Flemish). However, these changes did not have a positive effect for both parties whom in the election of 2010 both had a record low result.

Does the Christian pillar now still have a formal link to these two parties, which are

still identified as the continuation of the united CVP/PSC, so that we still can consider the Christian pillar an *institutionalized* pillar? This is certainly the case of the Flemish Christian pillar. On the CD&V list of candidates for a political mandate, one finds exponents of the Christian pillar. They are labelled, also in the press, as representatives of particular Christian organisations integrated in the pillar, quite often emerging in the political arena after having been employed in pillarized organisations. However, this is not the case of the Francophone pillar. The MOC, the Christian Workers Movement, for example, is pluralistic and has its representatives also in the ministerial cabinets of socialist and Ecolo ministers. Only the Flemish Christian pillar is still institutionalized, having formal links with the CD&V

7. Conclusions

Could the reduction of the services that the pillar provides (see point 5) mean the collapse of the pillarized structure of Belgium? I do not think so, there are indeed three pillars: the Christian, the socialist and the liberal one, all three buttress the Belgian system. As long as pillarization is used as a political key in the allocation of finances for services, provided by the pillars, like healthcare, education, social security, etc., the pillars will continue to maintain themselves in Belgium. Since ideologically speaking the originally catholic pillar, the largest of Belgium, has undergone a great change and the political support that the Christian parties can offer has greatly been diminished (table 2), the pillar depends mostly on its image and its services. The ideological change in a non-denominational Christian pillar is a great challenge: will its new collective consciousness appeal to a growing unchurched population? Since members have become clients, the quality of its services will most probably be determinant. And the results of a recent study of economists Frank Verboven and Koen Declercq, published in the newspaper *De Standaard*²², reporting that, controlling for other social factors, the chances to pass successfully the first year at the university level are 10 to 14 percent points higher for students coming from catholic schools than from the other Belgian schools. This is of course a boost for these schools and implicitly for the Christian pillar.

Will the loss of a large number of voters that the Christian parties registered have an effect on Belgian politics? In the last fifty years, the Christian Parties have been in government except for eight years. In the first part of this period (1999-2003), an ethical conflict emerged since the government, under the pressure of the free masons, proposed some changes in traditional ethical laws, which were controversial: the liberalization within certain limits of euthanasia, the legalisation of soft drugs and of homo-marriages. In the future, there may be a possibility that laicized governments will introduce proposals to change laws that it considers not adopted to a pluralist society. In Belgium, there is always a latent tension between humanists and religiously inspired persons and organizations. This may result, for example, in proposals to reduce the financing of the Belgian Catholic Church by the State and in changes in protocol, since Napoleon the first in rank in Belgium is the Cardinal and Humanist societies ask since more than a decade to change that. That are possibilities which we will be able to study in the future.

22 Tegenbos Guy, *Richting en net bepalen slaag kans*, *De Standaard*, Vol. 87, No 225, Brussels, 2010, pp.12-13.

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РЕЛИГИЈА И ПОЛИТИКА У БЕЛГИЈИ: ОД ИНСТИТУЦИОНАЛИЗОВАНЕ КАТОЛИЧКЕ МАНИФЕСТАЦИЈЕ ДО ЛАТЕНТНЕ ХРИШЋАНСКЕ ПОТПОРЕ

Резиме

Након што је описао историјску основу процеса стварања католичког ослонаца у Белгији, аутор објашњава појаву католичке потпоре као одбрамбеног механизма Католичке цркве и њеног вођства у намери да заштити своје стадо од секуларизације. Он описује различите врсте услуга које је католичка потпора понудила својим члановима, али и развој Белгије као државе засноване на три стуба: католичком, социјалистичком и либералном од којих су сва три институционализована. Оваква структура показује да је Белгија прилично подељена земља која је вертикално интегрисана. Током шездесетих година прошлог века, овај ослонац био је суочен с нарастајућом секуларизацијом становништва, што је натерало његово руководство да своју потпору прилагоди колективној свести народа: католички кредо, вредности и норме замењени су тзв. типичним вредностима Јеванђеља интегрисаним у оно што се зове социо-културно хришћанство. Под утицајем промене економске ситуације, политизације фламанског питања и појаве еколошких политичких партија, хришћански ослонац натеран је да прилагоди своје услуге које су сада усмерене више на клијентелу, него на чланове. Само у фламанском делу Белгије још увек постоји институционализована потпора.

Кључне речи: колективна самосвест, стварање католичког ослонаца, потпора; институционална потпора, солидарност; механичка и органска солидарност, вертикални плурализам, секуларизација.

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