

Religious rituals in conflict: Confrontations between Catholics and Protestants around the procession culture in the Netherlands in the 19th century*

Peter Jan Margry

This study investigates what significance the reintroduction of Roman Catholic public religious rituals and the related 'processional question' (the conflict between Protestants and Catholics on the permissibility of religious processions in The Netherlands) had for Dutch society in general in the 19th century, and for the emancipation process of Dutch Catholics in particular. Furthermore there is the connected question of to what degree the public manifestation of these rituals contributed to the segmentation of The Netherlands along confessional lines (the construction of parallel 'pillars' and their institutions, or *Verzuiling*). Upon analysis, the many confrontations and conflicts which took place in the 19th century concerning the public manifestation of religion appear to be interrelated; these interrelations permit the formulation of a new image of the socio-religious relations in Dutch society of that day.

Although the genesis of the processional question can to some extent be explained on the basis of religious relationships from before 1795, it is paradoxical that the problem was so protracted and intense. The key moments in the origins of this vexed question were in fact the proclamation of the Rights of Man (1795), of freedom of religion (1796), and the coming into being of the new constitution of 1814 and 1815. The freedom of religion achieved and the explicit authorization for processions and other public religious rituals subsequently served as a source of religious-ideological inspiration for Dutch Catholics. From their 'accommodated' or 'silent' Dutch Catholicism they were able to introduce, reintroduce or revitalize 'forgotten' ritual and devotional aspects from pre-Reformation times. In this process public ritual functioned as a source for the shaping of a self-awareness as Catholics. This development stirred up opposing forces among the Protestants and Protestant-oriented governmental authorities that sought to stem the threatening, massive introduction of processions and other public liturgical expressions of the Catholic Church. They reached back to the tried and tested strategies of the Ancien Régime to do this. On the one hand, particularly through the printed media a negative, anti-papist image of Catholics was created; on the other side, an offensive of regulations began in political-administrative circles. This latter gained speed and strength through the unification with Belgium and the fears which this created of the loss of the Dutch 'Protestant' identity, and for the disintegration of the country.

The ritual freedom which was granted legally in 1814 would in practice appear to have remained quite limited. Shortly after the unification in 1815, under the influence of Enlightenment thinking and Josephite ideas, Willem I and his government began the systematic regulation and control of the Catholic Church, and especially of its public manifestations, as mentioned above. The 'policy' which was carried out to this end was strongly *ad hoc* in character, its execution taking place along a line of constant termino-

* *Teedere quaesties – Religieuze rituelen in conflict: Confrontaties tussen katholieken en protestanten rond de processiecultuur in 19^e-eeuws Nederland* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000) 688 p.; ISBN 90-6550-065-0. Promotie op 21 januari 2000, Theologische Faculteit Tilburg.

logical discussion and through regulations, circulars and missives, the legal force of which was not always clear.

The conflicts and confrontations which arose from this had a complex, even capricious stratification, with diverse actors such as governmental authorities, church bodies and population groups operating in various times and in geographically distinct locations. For the rest, there was just as little mutual coherence among the views of the diverse actors. Moreover, there appear to have been variant opinions and alliances which existed across various disparate segments. Participants and organizers of processions showed a strong idiosyncrasy in terms of how the practice of their faith was filled in, and sometimes explicitly distanced themselves from their own Church authorities.

For the 19th century, the conflict situations with regard to public rituals can be categorized in three phases. The first period, 1795-1830, is characterized by spontaneous initiatives on the part of laity who wished to take to heart the acquired and desired liberties. The government reacted with a series of decrees that were intended to repress the processions in the Southern provinces and, through the Royal Decree of 1822, suppress those in the Northern provinces. However little this policy resulted in lasting, structural measures, because of the long duration and hard approach, one can still, in a number of respects, speak of a governmental strategy. During this period a form of consensus politics was practiced, in which the government involved the leadership of the Catholic Church in the control of the problems. Viewed tactically, the government focused initially on the more extreme and questionable processions. The effectiveness of a governmental strategy carried out in this way was considerably increased because bishops and vicars, as it appeared from previous experience, in part in light of their own ecclesiastical civilizing mission, were more prepared to lend their support than before. That meant that stronger regulation on the part of the state initially encountered little opposition from Church authorities. For the rest, the policy carried out in regard to this question was also to an important degree inspired by the requisite *apaisement* toward the Protestant population, who felt threatened by the growing manifestation of Catholic faith.

In the second phase, roughly between 1830 and 1870, the processional question was particularly manifest during the crucial years 1847-1856. An inflated fear of Catholics and rituals linked with the restoration of the episcopal hierarchy led to far-reaching legislation against processions. This time the leadership of the Church did not just passively accept the governmental intervention. But despite resistance from the Catholic Church's leadership, from the provinces of Brabant and Limburg, and from the side of the Liberals, the rising tension culminated in a constitutional ban on processions in 1848 and furthermore, stimulated by the 'April Movement', in the rigid law on church communities, the 'emergency measure' of the tumultuous year 1853, which further banned every public appearance by clergy in official regalia. On this basis the Public Prosecutors began a systematic prosecution and through this were, in a few years, able to bring the problem largely under control. In response to this, the authorities - civil and military - also felt compelled to distance themselves from the participation in processions in some Catholic regions which had been prescribed by specific traditions and earlier French regulations.

The third period, 1870-1900, was characterized by a short-lived but fierce revival of the processional question. Particularly as a result of outside influences, religious feeling in The Netherlands became heated. From the one side, Europe experienced a wave of new devotions and processional pilgrimages, and on the other side The Netherlands felt

the pressure of the arrival of monks and nuns from Prussia, as a result of the *Kulturkampf*. Given this conflict, Dutch Catholics too became active in pushing initiatives and demanding their rights, and there followed a brief period of repression. In Limburg this led to an 'open season' on processions. The situation for the Catholics there was worsened still more through new jurisprudence that still further restricted processional customs. Meanwhile, however, police intervention and the protracted court cases concerning violations of the ban on processions in these years had attracted so much attention nationally that the parties involved had gotten their fill of the constant confrontations and uncertainties, after which the processional question more or less disappeared quietly from the agenda.

In general, the national government came up short with regard to this question through their consistently half-hearted and more or less ignorant action. Moreover, the authorities were hindered by the fact that religious rituals are, in general, difficult to regulate. Again and again it became clear how powerfully rituals could manifest themselves and were able to provide a certain basic shape for human life, in this case for Catholic life and Catholic identity. This also explains the great importance that Catholics attached to the exercise of public rituals. The structuring of daily life through public signs, including the Cross and others, by kneeling and praying, ringing of church bells, funerals, processing the bodies of deceased believers to the church and parochial processions, reinforced this development.

Since the fourth decade of the 19th century the concrete structure of a network defined by devotions had already been systematically supported by homilies and popular preaching missions, religious rituals, confraternities and processional pilgrimages. This process, termed devotionalization, further contributed to nationally subdivided networks which were coupled with group pilgrimages to the sites of new national saints and devotions.

In addition, with regard to Catholics and their ways of expressing their faith, it appears that one can speak of a continuation, and sometimes an intensification, of spiritual tendencies which began in the Ancien Régime. This development, however, runs parallel with instrumental-ritual needs which were growing still more strongly. The introduction of processions and group pilgrimages in connection with devotions to Mary or other saints promoted this instrumental experience of faith, possibly a consequence of the fascination that proceeds from rituals and devotions. In the first half of the 19th century this need was chiefly articulated by the laity; in the second half of the 19th century it was cultivated by ecclesiastical authorities, who wished to further open up a Catholicism which had become turned inward, and sought tools for reinforcing internal cohesion and Catholic identity.

In the early 19th century the ambition of Catholics to engage in processions, pilgrimages in the form of processions, whether or not facilitated by confraternities, resulted in a further structuring of Catholic life. The shaping of public images regarding this, and the 'sensitive questions' about Catholic rituals, dominated a substantial part of political and social life during the 19th century and through this had a crippling effect on the mutual relations between Christian denominations. They were a reciprocal incentive for further reshaping of public opinion and stereotyping, in both anti-papist and anti-Protestant senses. The repercussions that the processional question had on socio-religious, cultural, legislative and political-administrative areas therefore also was a strong stimulus for the social-cultural segmentation or 'pillarization' of The Netherlands.

It is difficult to calculate the full influence the processional question has had. Its significance should not be underestimated, for rituals and, to an even greater extent, conflicts about rituals, touch on the essential values of any society. As important as a procession was for one person, so dangerous and objectionable was it to another. Moreover, like the proverbial tip of the iceberg, problems about rituals in the public domain only reflect a part of the then vital dissension and potential conflicts. The difficulties for the authorities were increased still more by the imbalance between the cultural traditions in The Netherlands. There were great contrasts. Thus, in some regions the ritual practices had continued to exist relatively unimpaired, while in others they had almost disappeared.

This study is the first to describe not only the course of the conflict, but also 19th century processional practice itself. It is quite clear to see how, within the practice of faith, between 1795 and the end of the 19th century the ritual repertoire developed from its limited scale into a nationally-encompassing structure of processional pilgrimages, and into the introduction of parochial processional cycles throughout The Netherlands. The ban on processions also influenced Dutch processional culture through ritual innovations. 'Alternative' forms such as silent processions and semi-religious marches and cavalcades are characteristic of these innovations, which partially neutralized the prohibitions. In addition, the ban, and Protestant aversion to open display, also led to the development of special 'closed' spaces and devotional complexes for the open-air performance of larger scale liturgical rituals. Further, the 'problems' surrounding the showy processions of the pilgrimages also then disappeared, because after the 1870s the majority of the pilgrims switched over to 'closed' trips by train rather than arriving publicly and on foot. This logistic innovation considerably limited the number of potential conflicts.

The processional question died down in the 1880s, in part thanks to these innovations. Despite the fact that since then administrators and jurists have increasingly considered the question as a superseded issue arising from intolerant legislation, for conservative Protestant groups it remained a sensitive point.

It is striking that in the 19th century there was comparatively little political-administrative opposition against the repression from the Catholic side. The inertia around 1848 is perhaps to be explained from a still limited development in political emancipation and, in connection to that, from a political reticence to too strongly emphasize the subject of processions, which had become too sensitive in the public mind. Nevertheless, after 1880, when there were wider political possibilities to revise the controversial legislation, the Catholics refrained from broaching the issue, nor did Catholic clergy of that day provoke massive test cases with the hope of undoing the restrictive decisions of the Supreme Court. Apparently, after the severe actions of the 1870s, the episcopacy had grown more cautious, and once again were seeking a certain consensus. Only in 1917-1918, stirred to the effort by the new constitutional revisions, did Catholic clergy begin the offensive anew. The results of the decisions which flowed from this led to a reversal of the burden of proof - favourable to the Catholics - and a 'revocation' of the galling decision of 1875.

Despite this outcome an effective conservative Protestant lobby in politic and administrative circles in The Hague was able to assure that the ban on processions would not disappear from the Constitution for the time being, and that the so 'sensitive' processional question, with all the conflicts which accompanied it, would continue until far into the 20th century. Only the modernization within the Catholic church in the 1960s and ecumenical tendencies in Dutch society made changed

attitudes possible. This led to Dutch Catholics no longer experiencing processions and various other public rituals as essential for their position and identity. These new attitudes permitted a deconstruction of the ban on processions, and therefore of the processional question.

Faith in cremation liturgy: A pastoral-liturgical research on cremation liturgy within a Roman-Catholic context*

André Mulder

The liturgy for cremation is from various perspectives a specific phenomenon of christian communication. First of all it is a ritual concerning the human experience of *death*. It deals with handling death in a meaningful way. Secondly cremation liturgy is one of the so called life cycle liturgies. The participants of these rituals differ in religious profile from participants at the sunday mass. Thirdly there has been no empirical research concerning cremation liturgy. These aspects motivated us to choose cremation liturgy as our research object.

In the Roman Catholic Church cremation is allowed for catholics only since Vaticanum II and the National Conferences of Bishops have published models for cremation liturgy. Recently an investigation brought to light that these church approved models are not fully in use in parishes in the Netherlands any longer. Pastors create their own models from various components, according to their own convictions and to the situation of the deceased and the relatives. This situation raises the question of adequacy: what is from a pastoral-liturgical point of view a good liturgy of cremation? In our study we report an empirical research project concerning cremation liturgy in a Dutch Roman-Catholic context.

The first chapter sketches the context of Roman-Catholic cremation liturgy today. From several perspectives the cultural situation of death and mourning, death rituals and cremation liturgy is outlined. What are the consequences of the process of modernisation of society for the construction of meaning in the situation of death? Is death still hidden from public discourse? Processes of rationalisation, medicalisation, compartmentalisation, desacralisation and individualisation are discussed. We stress that mourning has become a process which lays a heavy burden on the shoulders of the individual. Also the construction of a meaningful ritual of cremation is complicated by the pluralistic composition of the group of participants in view of their religious attitudes and praxis. Moreover the attitudes of priests and other pastors to cremation and to the wishes of participants who are at a distance to the church and the eucharist are not always the same. Many mourners who request a catholic funeral feel insecure about the ritual of cremation, the christian faith and the attitude of the pastor. We argue that the church has to fulfil an important task in supporting mourners by giving them the opportunity to construct a meaningful christian ritual for cremation in which they can express their religious identity.

* *Geloven in crematieliturgie: Een pastoraalliturgisch onderzoek naar hedendaagse crematieliturgie in een rooms-katholieke context* (Baarn: Gooi en Sticht, 2000) 291 p.; ISBN 90-304-0992-4 (UTP-katern 23). Promotie op 4 februari 2000, Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen.