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Authority in question : analysis of a polemical controversy on religion in the Netherlands, 1948-1998

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Analysis of a Polemical Controversy on Religion in the Netherlands, 1948-1998

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Authority in Question

Analysis of a Polemical Controversy on Religion in the Netherlands, 1948-1998

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Whatever its strict methodic rules and claims for objectivity, I believe that scientific research always begins with highly personal preoccupations. There is much hard- and software available to academics and employed as tools for ordering materials and developing theories, but people may wonder what personal preoccupations led me to start this project and—whatever the boredom and backlash which those like us meet with along the way—how I remained focused on a topic so distant from the experience of everyday life, indeed a topic which so few would find interesting, except a few academic diehards and, alas, some family and friends.

Was it 'religion', the topic of the controversy, that interested me? To be sure, religion interests me. I consider religion and its continuing relevance for the future of our civilization a topic of utmost importance. However, I did not expect to find an easy answer to the problem. It is difficult to determine whether religion is 'good', or 'bad' or 'evil,' let alone the fact that there is still no universal agreement on what exactly we mean by the term 'religion'—e.g. what belongs to its essence and what is mere manifestation or function. For my part, the various answers to the problem of religion given in the course of the controversy surrounding Simon Vestdijk's *De toekomst der religie* were less than satisfying.

Without a doubt, some interesting people were involved in the controversy. Rather than Vestdijk, it was Sierksma who fascinated me the most. Born and bred in a lower middle-class and Calvinist environment, Sierksma studied Theology in the late 1930s. Yet, though he surely belonged to the class of believers, he began to question the very concept of religion, wondering why people believe in religious phenomena in the first place. Gradually, his attention shifted from mere questioning to developing theories by which religion could possibly be understood. A few background similarities, whether social or intellectual, caught my attention. The first thing that struck me was his extremely interesting and challenging approach to religious phenomena. Even in the early 1990s, when I started to study Religious Studies at Leiden University, the old-fashioned classification schemes of Theo van Baaren and Lammert Leertouwer were still being used as a common introduction to the study of religions.[1] Though it was a required part of the curriculum at the Faculty of Theology (what did I expect?), I found this approach disappointing. I must admit that for this reason I did not attend the course, nor did I read their book—except the first few pages on the definition of religion. Instead, I set out in search of alternatives. To my surprise, hardly twenty years before, at the same Faculty at which I was studying now, Sierksma had pointed in directions that, to me, seemed far more promising than

[1] Cf. Van Baaren & Leertouwer 1980.

anything that had been done up to that point. Rather than allowing theologians a monopoly on the subject, he preferred to involve other disciplines such as History, Psychology and Sociology in the study of religious phenomena. This is evident in the controversy dealt with in the present thesis. However, although Sierksma's answers were far more satisfying than those of his opponents, this was not a particularly important reason for studying the controversy either.

On the one hand, I admired him for his pioneering work in the study of religions. Moreover, I liked his straight, clear and logical style of writing. On the other hand, his fierce attacks on his opponents diverged drastically from the way I would expect those to react who had left the 'Ur of religion' and—enlightened by the torch of reason—reached the promised land of Israël. It contrasted sharply with the moderate and tolerant attitude of orthodox-Calvinists, who never let themselves become triggered to react to others aggressively or attack the "evil" outside world.

The problem which has intrigued me for so long—and which has proved crucial to my interest in the controversy—is why people with reasonable ideas sometimes behave so unreasonably, whereas others who believe in sheer myth often behave so rationally and self-confidently. Vestdijk knew the answer. He loved chatting with those self-confident Calvinists who did not seem to doubt—not even for a minute—the purpose of their lives. This observation has been confirmed by my own experience. I was raised in a strict Calvinist environment. Even though I did not share in the Calvinists' beliefs, their state of mind and attitude to the world often impressed me as perfectly sane and sanguine. And yet, Vestdijk accused them of being intolerant tyrants who could stand dissention from nobody. Though he went a long way in trying to understand this apparent contradiction, I was not convinced. His friend Sierksma offered me a clear counter-example of someone who did not believe in 'God', yet often behaved in the same tyrannical way which Vestdijk criticized Calvinists for. Vestdijk's theory (to which we shall return later on in this study) fails to account for fact. Thus, I felt the need to develop a theory of my own, without prejudging either Sierksma or any Calvinist. I did this by trying to find a systematic correlation between outward behavior (polemic) and social position (authority).

To outsiders, it might be a bit surprising that I was researching a controversy that, though it dealt with religion, was hardly religious in and of itself. And yet, I would like to thank all those within the confines of the Faculty of Theology and the Department of the History of Religions and Comparative Religion who allowed me to continue with the project. To my colleagues at the Faculty of Theology, I am especially grateful and I admire their tolerance. I wonder how they are able to breed so many Trojan horses among themselves. Personally, I believe that Theology (taken here to mean the study of 'God') should not be confused with the study of religious phenomena, as is done by the ('neutral') state curriculum at the Faculty. Surely, the discipline of Religious Studies might serve as an introduction to Theology. Yet, too

often it does not, at least not explicitly. To claim a legitimate position within a Faculty of Theology, however, it is obliged to do so. In the end, however, I have to apologize for not having been able to contribute to the Study of Religion, let alone to provide for any progress in Theology.

Apart from my colleagues and professors at Leiden University, I want to thank those who took issue with me during regular conferences organized by LISOR and NOSTER. They often forced me not to take things so lightly and to continue searching in areas which I was not familiar with before. Early on, Arie Molendijk offered me some newspaper articles on the issues I was studying, especially the replies by 'modernist' theologians to Sierksma. These articles indicated that a fruitful dialogue between Theology and Science is possible when the former actually belongs to the field of Religious Studies (as Tiele already argued more than hundred years ago). Tony Watling was kind enough to send me his PhD dissertation on the construction of religious identities in the Netherlands—a fine example of empirical research indicating how religion accommodates to changing circumstances and new challenges. I am grateful to Damian Pargas for editing and correcting my English. His comments clearly confirm the common wisdom that improving foreign language skills after your teenage years is almost impossible. I want to express my gratitude to the *Hotels van Oranje* at Noordwijk ZH for allowing me to finish my study at their night desk. I thank all of the colleagues who repeatedly asked me when this book would be finished. On a subconscious level, they always reminded me that pretension (being a former student of the "university") comes with obligations (such as sharing my ideas and keeping them up to date on my activities).

Despite the importance of the institutional setting as well as the professional and personal support from professors, colleagues and others, they do not deserve the respect I owe my family—my parents in particular. Whatever the positive attitude I met with at the university, my theoretical perspectives—though different—did not pose any serious threats to my professors' positions as experts within their respective fields of research. The same did not apply to those who belong to the community in which I was raised. My decision to study at Leiden University—with atheism and moral decadence lurking at every corner and taught by professors *ex cathedra*—was perceived as a threat to the orthodox-Calvinist faith and lifestyle. And yet, whatever the moral objections to some of the choices which I have made during the last few years, my parents never failed to support me. This is not only because I am their son. And it is certainly not because they do not believe that a difference between good and evil exists—on the contrary. Rather, their attitude is a perfect example of the tolerance that is terribly lacking in today's public life. I am talking about the type of tolerance that allows people to pursue their own goals, but which forces us to be accountable and, if necessary, to face our social responsibilities. It is such an attitude

that is needed in order to keep our families together and prevent our society from turning to civil war.

Whereas my parents willfully supported my endeavors—though they were free to choose whether or not to withdraw their support—I am aware that most people in the Netherlands do not have the opportunity which I have been given. My parents granted me the financial resources needed to undertake this project. And they never thought twice about spending money on a project from which they would not benefit directly and which they might have preferred to invest in other, more useful, enterprises.

I have thoroughly enjoyed researching the controversy, and so I find it only fair to express my gratitude to all those decent fellows who continue to pay taxes to be invested for educational purposes that, often, do not make any sense to them. Their generosity has given me great pleasure and the time to study a fascinating polemical conflict, as Kant wrote, "peaceably from the safe seat of critique, a conflict which must be exhaustive for the combatants but entertaining for you, with an outcome that will certainly be bloodless and advantageous for your insight."[2] And even though there might only be a few people that are able to make any sense out of the theory which I developed during this study, I hope that in the future its results might be fruitfully applied to ways of dealing with issues of public importance. However, as long as any positive effects remain purely speculative, the least I can do is to dedicate this dissertation to my fellow taxpaying citizens.

[2] Kant 1998: 647.

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INTRODUCTION: HOW TO ACCOUNT FOR POLEMICS

Instinct, intuition, or insight is what first leads to beliefs which subsequent reason confirms or confutes.

Bertrand Russell

As Plato once warned: do not believe what you hear at the marketplace. The only thing people do there is sell their stories by trying to convince you it is the truth. In the end, the only one to benefit from the deal is he who gets his merchandise paid for.

If you think truth is something to be sold at the marketplace, you are wrong. On the contrary, trade and the easy talk that accompanies it are completely different from the painstaking efforts that philosophers make to get at the heart of those things which we are used to watching from the outside.[1]

Convincing as this story at first sight may seem, the danger with Plato was that he believed himself to be somewhere beyond the marketplace. And as soon as philosophers (and their modern counterparts: 'the intellectuals')[2] take their own truths too seriously and start imposing them on reality, intolerance and totalitarianism are waiting just around the corner.[3] Whatever might be said about the stories told at the marketplace, we had better stick with them. The advantage of the latter are twofold. First, they are more easily confuted by everyday experience. Second, everybody has free access to the market, and, consequently, the chance to provide for some alternative.

In the market economy of opinions in which we live, each day we receive offers which we are free to accept or turn down. What, e.g., should we think about this one?

> *Personally, I wish Christianity to die. And, as I will try to show in more detail, it will. However, this does not mean that religion will die too. On the contrary, man has always been in need of religion, and he cannot be happy without. Even though Christianity will die, religion survives and will have a new life in the form of socialism and Buddhism.*

---

[1] Levin 2001.

[2] Bauman 1987.

[3] Popper 1945.

Who would believe such an outdated opinion nowadays? Apart from some hardheaded atheists, nobody would seriously argue any longer that Christianity will sooner or later die. Nor would anybody argue the idea that Christianity will someday be substituted by either socialism or Buddhism. At the moment, the failure of the latter two worldviews to successfully compete with Christianity is all too obvious.[4] Moreover, whether people are looking for happiness in life, and, worse, whether religion is the way to provide for it, are highly doubtful.

Yet, when the famous Dutch novelist Simon Vestdijk published an essay entitled *De toekomst der religie* ('The Future of Religion')—more than fifty years ago—things were different. In that time, any attack on Christianity and, worse, arguing for a new type of religion as its substitute was taken to be highly provocative and, in fact, caused a great deal of polemics. According to many critics, Vestdijk could only arrive at his conclusions by offering a distorted picture of Christianity. In the end, others argued, this could only be due to some mental disorder. Actually, some argued, this made him fight with 'the Angel'.

This is not to say that, today, attacks on Christianity or arguments for atheism would not trigger polemical controversy anymore. On the contrary, the topic of religion is still highly relevant to many people. Forty years after Vestdijk published his essay, Henk Versnel was invited to the centennial anniversary of the Free University of Amsterdam to explain why he no longer believed in God. According to Versnel, the arguments in favor of Christianity were too arbitrary and inconsistent to be convincing. This, he said, was not a conclusion he arrived at after a life-long struggle with 'the Angel'; one morning he woke up when the idea crossed his mind: "I believe that I do not believe any longer." Versnel's lecture triggered fierce polemics. And even though he did not wish Christianity to die, some found him guilty of denying the truth and ignoring the unmistakable presence of God in the world. Hence, according to some critics, there was no other explanation than that something was mentally or morally wrong with Versnel.[5] Similar arguments recurred after the devastating critiques of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, by people like Karel van het Reve[6] and, more recently, Herman Philipse[7], who publicly announced themselves to be atheists.

Yet, there were some crucial differences between the polemics triggered by Versnel, Van het Reve and Philipse on the one hand, and that of Vestdijk on the other.

---

[4] Fukuyama 1992, 1995.

[5] Versnel 1991; further contributions to the controversy in Maurice & Noorda 1991, Kuitert & Versnel 1993.

[6] Van het Reve 1986; the essay originally appeared in *NRC-Handelsblad*; later to be collected in Van Weerlee 1986.

[7] Philipse 1998, 2004.

First of all, whereas the controversy around Vestdijk went on for five decades, the contributions of the others failed to call attention for more than a few years. Secondly, the media and communities participating in the controversy around Vestdijk were far more diverse than those of later polemics. The cases triggered by Van het Reve and Versnel were limited to one newspaper—the *NRC-Handelsblad* and *Trouw*, respectively—and a few collections of essays. Philipse consciously addressed the broad public in his essay. Reviews appeared in some newspapers and opinion magazines. And of those, only a few felt triggered to reply or react polemically. Vestdijk's essay, however, called the attention of a wide variety of media, from literary critical magazines to religious orthodox newspapers, from media that did not belong to any specific community to opinion magazines with a clear-cut Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed or Free Reformed signature.

On the other hand, something that applies to all of the aforementioned controversies, is the diversity of ways in which people reacted to the arguments of either Vestdijk, Van het Reve, Versnel or Philipse. Whereas some were fiercely polemical, others, though equally critical, were far more moderate, if not sympathetic. Whereas some denounced the essay outright and held that its author was indeed in need of treatment, others admitted that the arguments employed deserved attentive reading and detailed discussion.

In this study, we focus on the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*. Given the diversity of reactions, as well as the developments in the reception of the essay over time, we are tempted to ask what this controversy was all about. To continue our marketplace-metaphor, what kinds of ideas did people try to sell? In order to clarify this, I will offer a summary of Vestdijk's argument in *De toekomst der religie*, followed by a brief overview of its reception during the fifty years after its publication, i.e. from 1948 till 1998. Furthermore, based on this overview, I will try to formulate the problem that I have been dealing with over the past years. Put briefly, why did some sellers attempt to prevent their potential public from buying somebody else's products? After that, I intend to develop a hypothesis which might give us an answer to the aforementioned problem. People who find somebody interfering in the market they tried to reserve for themselves, are more likely to raise their voice in order to discredit their colleagues. Finally, I will address the question whether my hypothesis transcends the polemical style of arguing. And if so, in which sense does it differ from polemics? Even though the opinion I am trying to present or sell here myself is not to be found anywhere beyond the market economy of ideas, I will try to argue that it might be very helpful in understanding the way some people deal with their competitors.

The polemic

To support his position that, even though Christianity must inevitably die, religion would survive, Vestdijk did not define religion as 'belief in God', as Christian theologians were accustomed to. According to him, such a definition could not be justified if Buddhism was to be regarded as a religion. And after Nietzsche had announced the 'death of God,' by definition, religion would then be dead too. Yet, apparently, this was not the case. Therefore, Vestdijk argued, religion had to be defined as something more universal and everlasting than the mere belief in God. According to him, interpretive psychology could be helpful. There he found religion to be the human drive towards 'lasting spiritual happiness', consisting in the 'experience of totality'. According to Vestdijk, three types of religion were available in order to achieve this goal: the 'metaphysical-projective', the 'social', and the 'mystical-introspective'. The first type he almost exclusively identified with Christianity, and Calvinism in particular. The theology of the latter focused on unity with 'God' through the substitutive death of Christ, the 'Son of God', on the cross. Personally, Vestdijk explained to his readers, he had serious problems with this conception. He simply could not accept that somebody else was supposed to take responsibility for the crimes or sins he himself had committed. Moreover, Vestdijk felt strong aversions to the intolerance that, according to him, was one of the most dramatic effects of metaphysical religion. The latter type of religion was governed by the mechanism of, what he called, 'metaphysical projection'. By means of projection, Vestdijk held, people are able to create images. Those images turn into metaphysical entities, however, when people forget that they themselves had created them; they tend to deny or ignore the fact that those images are mere dreams or myths, notably by claiming absolute validity for them; they are the Truth. In consequence, war must be declared on all those who dared deny this Truth and the claims to Justice on which it is based. This was the reason, Vestdijk argued, that the history of Christianity—and indeed any metaphysical religion, including Judaism and Islam—offered so many examples of intolerance, violence, and persecution.

The only solution for the problems inherent to the metaphysical-projective type of religion was the death of Christianity. According to Vestdijk, it had to be replaced by a mix of the social and the mystical introspective types. This union (a fusion of socialism and Buddhism) would be the only possibility for people to be at peace with each other and with their inner selves. The images of their own inner drives would only have relative value and be related to the reality of everyday life. To teach the ordinary people to live according to these rules, an élite with spiritual (rather than theological or bureaucratic) authority was needed. And this élite would himself have to be taught and trained at state-supervised institutions that would combine the best of the Catholic retreat, the English universities, and the Buddhist monastery.

This argument triggered heated controversy among Dutch intellectuals. Yet, what kind of commentary did Vestdijk get? Critics acknowledged the value of his artistic work. And even though they did not agree with his arguments, some admitted that his ideas were original and challenging. Others, however, found his statements on religion misleading and seriously doubted whether, in general, a novelist could make any legitimate claims on the future development of religion. Some tried to be reasonable, whereas others seemed outrageous. Some took his argument seriously; to others it was utter nonsense. Some praised Vestdijk for his courage to spark a debate on highly important issues, whereas others accused him of cowardice for not daring to become either a Christian or Buddhist himself. Some appreciated his generous style of writing; according to others his attitude too much resembled that of an intellectual and outsider to serve as a useful starting point for discussion. Some believed Vestdijk's argument to be brilliant, whereas others felt bothered by his apparent hatred towards Christians and, more importantly, God.

Yet, how did critics arrive at their conclusions? Some offered highly extensive discussions of Vestdijk's argument, whereas others limited themselves to short comments. Some found his essay in line with important trends in scientific research and modern thinking, whereas others dismissed the entire argument as misguided. Some disagreed, offering reasons why they believed Vestdijk to be mistaken in his conclusions. Others, on the other hand, merely declared the argument misguided. According to them, this should come as no surprise, given the fact that its author was either morally confused or suffering from a mental disorder, or perhaps even both.

Apart from these different ways of understanding the argument of Vestdijk's essay, the historical dimension of its reception shows some interesting developments as well.

The first years after the publication of Vestdijk's essay in 1947, polemic was most intense among politically progressive Netherlands Reformed theologians as well as polemically oriented literary critics. These were also the critics Vestdijk and some of his adherents replied to. With some exceptions, among the politically more conservative Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed intellectuals, reactions were far more moderate. The orthodox Free Reformed commentators were highly critical, yet only some of them were polemical. Their fiercest attacks were mainly directed against the same progressive theologians that had criticized Vestdijk for his arguments.

In general, Vestdijk's replies to his critics from 1948 onwards did not get much attention in the media. Apart from frequent re-editions of his essay, it was mainly through the intervention of a literary critic and a scholar of religion that the controversy would continue to grasp the attention of a broad public. By means of an essay published in 1952 and a theoretical study on religious projection in 1956, the debate over the issues triggered by Vestdijk, was given new momentum. And whereas the essay fiercely attacked theologians, the second publication was a massive challenge to the metaphysical presuppositions of Christianity. Polemics continued. Yet, within

some intellectual circles, attempts at serious discussion of the issues presented by both Vestdijk and Sierksma were made as well.

New impetus was given to the controversy when the third edition of Vestdijk's essay was published in 1960. It was published at the same time that the translation of an argument by the German atheist Gerhard Sczcesny became widely available. The number of polemical contributions, however, would steadily decrease, as would the interest of the broad public. A special issue of the progressive magazine *Wending* in 1963, as well as the publication of an extensive discussion of the theory of religious projection by Roman Catholic psychologist Han Fortmann, generally indicated the changing style of arguing among intellectuals that could not agree with Vestdijk's and Sierksma's arguments. On the other hand, the argument became too sophisticated to reach a wide audience.

A notable exception to the general trend towards serious discussion or sheer irrelevance would be a lecture by the journalist and historian J. Kamphuis from the Free Reformed seminary at Kampen in 1973. His was also what I consider to be the last polemical contribution to the controversy in 1998. His voice, however, would not be heard outside some orthodox religious circles.

Trying to draw some conclusions from this brief overview of the controversy triggered by *De toekomst der religie*, two things are of special importance to an analysis of polemical exchange. On the one hand, we see marked differences between people reacting polemically and those who were moderate. On the other hand, the role of polemics has decreased considerably during the fifty years of reception we are studying. These conclusions allow me to start with a more detailed discussion of the problems we must address in the course of our analysis of the controversy.

The problem

When attempting to analyze polemical contributions, we must avoid taking sides with either the polemist or the putative victim. This is something of which Monique Despret, in her thesis on the reception of *De toekomst der religie*, was not sufficiently aware. Too easily, she takes Vestdijk to be the victim of the controversy. And her antipathy for the intellectuals attacking his arguments is at times quite explicit throughout her study. The first was taking a "paternalistic" attitude, another one felt "self-imporant" and "bloated", whereas a third one merely showed "disdain".[8] According to her, these critics failed to consider Vestdijk's arguments properly. Their intolerance, she concludes, was "really shocking." And to mark her distance towards those people, she holds that, today, "we are able to admit that our opponents have the right to their own arguments." Though admitting that one of the literary critics

[8] Despret 1980: 82.

was reacting quite "facetiously",[9] she only blames the theologians for being unfair towards Vestdijk.[10] For people taking these theologians too seriously, she laments, it would be difficult if not impossible to get an idea of Vestdijk's real arguments.[11] And without properly defining what she means by "polemic", she frequently employs the term to refer to theologians who, according to her, were treating Vestdijk unfairly. Yet, this way, the term implies a mere judgment, without having much analytical value. It is lamentable that her advisor, the Belgian expert on Dutch literature Roger Henrard from Leuven, agreed with the terminology which Despret employed. Yet, the fact that he himself was part of the reception of *De toekomst der religie* by defending Vestdijk may have interfered with his own judgment of theologians.[12]

This is not to say that in polemics the arguments of the people attacked are not distorted. On the contrary, as I will argue, distorting elements always play a role. Yet, the same might be the case in moderate criticism. Some critics praised Vestdijk for things which he, in fact, had not advocated at all. Moreover it would be quite premature to exclude the possibility that an adequate picture of Vestdijk's argument might in fact be used for polemical purposes.

Instead of accusing people of being polemical, I will attempt to understand why. How should we account for the many different reactions to Vestdijk's essay? How to account for the fact that the history of its reception developed the way it did? Why did people feel tempted to react the way they did? Why did some people regard his arguments as highly provocative and feel the need to react polemically, while others did not? And why did the polemic turn out to be less interesting for an increasing number of people throughout the history of the reception we are studying? In other words, we must find an explanation for the polemical controversy surrounding Vestdijk's essay at both the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of history, while avoiding any kind of value judgment that might distort our own analysis of the facts.

In order to give some direction to the analysis, I will develop a hypothesis that might account for some important features of our controversy. Then I shall indicate how this hypothesis is put into practice in each of the following chapters. In the end, it is my ambition to arrive at a theory that can possibly be applied and tested on a wider field of phenomena than only the polemic which we are dealing with.

Hypothesis

To put things briefly, I will argue that our polemic is a means by which intellectuals attempt to defend themselves against—or establish their authority over—others who

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[9] Despret 1980: 83.

[10] Despret 1980: 82.

[11] Despret 1980: 83.

[12] Henrard 1980.

are regarded as a threat to their position as opinion leaders of a specific public. In this sense, polemic is the way in which a structural contradiction between the ambition of intellectuals and the behavior of a certain audience leads to a conflict in the media in which specific individuals try to defend themselves against—or establish their authority over—that of others, in an attempt to defeat them.

Though highly abstract, in what follows I make some further remarks on crucial elements in the definition of the hypothesis. First, I will attempt to identify in a preliminary fashion what type of people are involved in public controversies in general, and those of a textual nature in particular, whether polemical or not. Then, I will focus on what exactly those people are aiming at. If we say that authority is the ideal, what we are indicating by that? On the one hand, in the case of textual interactions, we are talking about encounters between intellectuals, deliberating, exchanging opinions, criticising each other, and at times attempting to excommunicate their opponent. On the other hand, in the case of encounters that are not limited to private correspondence, there is also a public addressed, or at least attending the show. And it is before this public that authority has to be defended or established. Thus, while polemic is the actual encounter between intellectuals, authority is the problem which stimulates the people involved to participate and try to play their role as opinion leaders for a certain group of people. Finally, we must focus not only on textual encounters in general, but define more exactly some characteristics of polemic in particular and explicitly distinguish it from other kinds of interactions between intellectuals, such as discussion, dialogue and criticism in general.

The people: intellectuals. At first sight it might seem strange to call those involved in a religious controversy 'intellectuals'. This is especially the case because many of the participants in the controversy were theologians. And how is it possible to count the latter among the intellectuals? According to many critics, theologians are the very opposite of true intellectuals.

Along with an immense corpus of literature on intellectuals, the Netherlands has an academic tradition in the field of sociology of intellectuals. Perhaps it is more accurate to speak of three different traditions. The first one started with Lolle Nauta in Groningen and was soon joined by a group of sociologists in Amsterdam. The latter were inspired by American Alvin Gouldner and organized around the figure of Joop Goudsblom.[13] The second tradition was originally developed at the Catholic and Dutch Reformed universities. In the early 1970s, Nijmegen sociologist J. Thurlings initiated his attempts to explain the process of secularization in the Netherlands, and

[13] Gouldner 1979, Pels 1987, Nauta & De Vries 1992, Pels 1993, Pels & De Vries 1994, Nauta 2000, Prins 2000, Gabriëls 2001; members are often publishing in magazines like *Kennis en Methode* and *Krisis. Tijdschrift voor empirische filosofie*.

its consequences for pillar organizations in particular.[14] The theory of American sociologist Ronald Inglehart, by which he attempted to account for the "silent revolution" that had been taking place in western societies during the 1960s en 1970s, would become highly influential and stimulated research at both the Free University in Amsterdam and Catholic University in Tilburg.[15] The third tradition started in Tilburg in the 1980s, and was closely associated with the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. C.J. van Rees and H. Verhaasdonk are the main representatives of this direction in research on intellectuals.[16]

In this study, I will draw inspiration from the more empirically oriented traditions of Thurlings/Inglehart and Bourdieu.[17] Even though Bourdieu at times does not escape from the ideological lure of defining intellectuals in a normative manner, his approach is far more sophisticated and empirically informed than that of the Gouldner/Goudsblom-tradition. As I will argue in more detail, the latter is too heavily burdened by ideological assumptions to be of analytical value.[18]

The Gouldner/Goudsblom-school of analysts defined intellectuals almost exclusively as learned people with no ties to any fixed social group whatsoever. That is why they, with Mannheim, prefer to speak of the *relativ freischwebende Intelligenz*. By that they wish to suggest that this category of people is intellectually independent from any group interests and is able to think about the common good. They are able to transcend the limited viewpoints of local and religious authorities and often reach out for the interest of the world as a whole. They are *Weltbürger*, proud to be wholly secular, i.e. enlightened and free.

This becomes especially clear in the tirades of Nauta—the latter being one of the foremost members of the Gouldner/Goudsblom-school—against a particular brand of religious authorities, namely theologians. According to him, these people completely

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[14] Thurlings 1971, Duffhues, Felling & Roes 1985, Simons & Winkeler 1987, Winkeler 1989, Luykx 2000.

[15] Inglehart 1990, 1997; Dekker 1992, 1995, Barker, Halman & Vloet 1992, Ester, Halman & De Moor 1994, Halman & Vloet 1994, De Moor 1995, Halman & Nevitte 1996.

[16] Bourdieu 1983, 1993, Van Rees 1983ab, 1985ab, 1987, 1989, Verhaasdonk 1985ab, 1989ab, Verhaasdonk & Seegers 1990, Verhaasdonk & Van Rees 1991; members often publishing in *Poetics. International Review for the Theory of Literature*, later subtitle *Journal of Empirical Research on Literature, the Media, and the Arts*.

[17] Cf. the analytical tradition inspired by Weber 1978; Shils 1968, 1972, Lipset 1972, Lipset & Dobson 1972, Ladd & Lipset 1973, 1975, Lipset & Basu 1976, Gella 1976, Bourdieu 1971, 1991, 1993, Kauppa 1996, Collins 1998.

[18] Cf. the critical tradition started by Benda 1927, De Man 1932, Mannheim 1946, Goudsblom 1960; for an overview Van Oudvorst 1991, and Robins 1990, 1993, Eagleton 1991, Nelson 1997.

failed to positively contribute to any discussion on matters of public importance in the post-war era. Among these theologians he also includes philosophers with any religious affiliations. It is especially curious that Nauta should argue so, given his own contribution to the controversy surrounding Vestdijk in *Wending*, a magazine edited by exactly the kind of people he would denounce some twenty years later.[19]

However, apart from Nauta's personal history, his attitude towards theologians is similar to that of many critics. And Despret, as we have seen, shows a similar bias. She suggested that only theologians employed the polemical style of arguing, and that a possible explanation for this would be that theologians are by nature unfair to their opponents. Here she uncritically follows the argument Vestdijk himself had defended. According to him, theologians were the people who used to sell the images they themselves had created for the truth. Their projections he called metaphysical, because these were not to be corrected or refuted by everyday experience. And every critique of their truth would trigger fierce attacks and an aggressive kind of intolerance. Today, the intolerance and inability of many theologians to take facts into account and argue reasonably is taken for granted. Critics and so-called intellectuals do not require any explanation of the kind Vestdijk offered. The opinions of theologians is no longer seen as relevant.

Nauta has correctly been criticized for ignoring the works of so-called 'progressive' theologians, mainly involved in the breakthrough-movement that attempted to get rid of the sectarian way in which Dutch society was organized. These people, mainly being members of the Netherlands Reformed Church (NHK) or outcasts within either the Dutch Reformed Churches (GKN) or the Roman Catholic Church (RKK), intended to cross the barriers of the pillar-system. At that time, the Dutch Reformed, the Roman Catholics, as well as the Socialists had their own set of organizations, ranging from scout groups to political parties and labor unions. The 'progressive' theologians tried to break through the pillar boundaries and unite all Christians to join the struggle of the Socialists against injustice, capitalism and war. Now, these theologians were surely aiming at the common good, attempting to transcend group boundaries and contribute to discussions being held in the public square at that time.

Sociologists must be grateful to especially Ido Weijers, Tity de Vries and Jan Willem Duyvendak to have qualified Nauta's verdict on the theologians (or any kind of people with religious affiliations). Yet, these critics only focused on 'progressive' theologians.[20] By that, they excluded the members of the establishment, both within and outside the pillar-structure. Were they justified in doing so? What kind of implicit criteria did they use in order to distinguish between intellectuals and other

[19] Nauta 1963.

[20] Weijers 1991, De Vries 1996, Duyvendak 1999.

public figures that were intelligent as well? The answer, I believe, is to be found in a highly specific association between persons, their social position and the content of their ideas. In any case, the people involved here are intelligent people who were at least academically trained to formulate their opinions. Secondly, they did not belong to any of the established pillar organizations that dominated the public sphere in the Netherlands till the 1960s. Thirdly, intellectuals were generally making a case for both oppressed and depressed people while employing the state as a means to create the institutional facilities to address these social problems. This way, 'the intellectuals' became the partisans of the people against the establishment of either high-class citizens or sectarian interests organized into traditional pillar associations. Rather then being the product of private initiatives, society had to be constructed by means of state intervention.[21] And this policy was to be scientifically informed by a new class of academics at state universities that, instead of being involved in any kind of sectarian interest, were advocating the common good. The fact that this development led to a new establishment, politically correct consensus, or a super-pillar or organizations, led some critics within the Gouldner/Goudsblom-school, notably Dick Pels, to emphasize the nomadism and strangeness of intellectuals.[22] In this sense, even Pim Fortuyn has been analyzed as the most recent example of intellectual dandyism.[23]

Yet, even recent developments within the Gouldner/Goudsblom paradigm in the study of intellectuals do not include any comment on intellectual developments within the academic centers originally linked to either the GKN or RKK. This way, even so-called 'progressive' elements within traditional pillar structures are ignored. And this is precisely the reason why I believe the sociological tradition initiated by Thurlings and Inglehart to be important. This school focused on the mechanisms of change within the pillar organizations and the role of intellectuals in the process of secularization in particular. Based on detailed empirical research, these sociologists concluded that, rather than being a mere 'conservative' force, clerics and theologians often acted as catalysts in the "silent revolution" that began early on in the 1950s—long before its transforming power surfaced in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The definition of intellectuals, as used by members of the Thurlings/Inglehart-school of sociologists, is highly similar to the definition employed by the tradition initiated by Bourdieu. Rather than being *freischwebend* or independent from any social group, intellectuals are considered to deal with issues of public importance. Of course, they must be intelligent. They are educated. They are able to formulate their own opinions. They have access to what Bourdieu called "cultural capital". In order to be an intellectual, however, it is important to engage in discussions of social prob-

[21] Duyvendak & De Haan 1997, Duyvendak 1999, Schuyt & Taverne 2000: chapter XI.

[22] Pels 1998, 1999, 2000.

[23] Pels 2003.

lems. That is, they do not deal exclusively with issues that they are supposed to deal with professionally (teaching or doing research at the university; visiting people who are poor, sick, disabled or on their deathbed; being a missionary or a member of the parliament). Rather they argue for their *ideas* and are able to publicly defend them against others.[24] To continue the marketplace-metaphor Bourdieu employs (as I have been doing at the beginning of this introduction), intellectuals do not merely invest their capital in the production and consumption of cultural artifacts; rather they attempt to sell these artifacts at the market.

Surely, the focus on 'progressive' intellectuals within pillar organizations might imply only the bias implicit in the selection made by sociologists of the Gouldner/Goudsblom-school. And if we consider the terminology developed by Bourdieu to analyze the field of intellectual production in more detail, often we find distinctions like those between priests and prophets, the curators and the creators of culture. Without jumping to judgments immediately, Bourdieu argues that both are struggling for the monopoly of cultural legitimacy and the right to withhold and confer this "consecration" in the name of fundamentally opposed principles: the personal authority called for by the creator and the institutional authority favored by the teacher.[25] And it seems as if, according to Bourdieu, the creators are to be regarded as intellectuals, whereas the curators, mainly because of their 'conservative' attitude and authority, are to be regarded as mere clerics. In an attempt to follow the argument developed in his study on academics, Bourdieu distinguished between people who reproduce and transmit legitimate bodies of knowledge on the one hand, and those who create new forms of knowledge on the other. This distinction has its parallel in the distinction between teachers and researchers, between professors and independent intellectuals.[26]

In an attempt to avoid the possible bias implied in the opposition between professors and independent intellectuals, I am arguing that, as soon as both enter the public sphere, they belong to the category of intellectuals. And I definitely agree with Bourdieu's observation that within the intellectual field, people are struggling for cultural legitimacy. They try to convince the public somehow, i.e. employing different styles of arguing, that their claim to the status of authority on the issues at hand is legitimate, whereas that made by the other is not. This brings us to the second important term in my hypothesis.

The problem: power and authority. A category that is often regarded as having much analytical value within the context of cultural fields is 'power'. When applied to

[24] Simons & Winkeler 1987: 23.

[25] Bourdieu 1971: 178.

[26] Bourdieu 1988; cf. Schwartz 1997: 226.

intellectuals, we speak of power exercised or aimed at by means of ideas or knowledge. The concept of power was mainly developed within the field of sociology.[27] Though originally understood to be a means to get things done,[28] later on it also designated something that makes people act according to certain rules and regulations.[29] In progressive intellectual circles, however, both senses got a bad reputation. While the first notion included the exercise of physical violence, the latter referred to the employment of so-called 'symbolic violence'[30] by means of 'ideology.'[31] And it is precisely this notion of ideology that is relevant to an analysis of fields of intellectual interaction. The term indicates a situation in which intellectual élites manipulate the categories people employ to order their worlds.[32] Essentially, ideology distorts and keeps people from seeing their own reality (Marx)—a reality that, as later theorists would argue, required scientific analysis in order to reveal its true nature as well as the ideological nature of dominant worldviews (Althusser). Every ideology was employed for the benefit of the establishment and prevented people from taking the necessary steps to overthrow the dominant political system. Ordinary people usually did not realize that their worldview as well as behavior rested on the assumption that there exists a certain class of people who not only are capable, but also competent to direct their lives. In fact, however, the norms and values that are employed to govern the life of the people are the symbolic counterpart of an economic and political system to which those people are submitted and by which they are exploited. And this symbolic system is violent because it forces people to act according to the interests of the establishment without any regards for their own interest, as Marxist and Althusserian philosophers concluded.[33]

Surely, this critical perspective on the role of intellectuals in society is highly limited. This talk of power and violence is typical for what sociologist Jacques van Doorn has called "the clerics of the proletariat".[34] The latter believe that there is an essential antagonism between the establishment or dominant classes on the one hand, and the oppressed (if not depressed) people on the other. Yet, as other philosophers and some anthropologists have argued, the suspicion of these clerics of the proletariat against the dominant classes rests on the speculative assumption that the ordinary people are always suffering. The critical approach to social phenomena fails account

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[27] Lukes 1974, Honneth 1991, Hindess 1997.

[28] Weber 1978.

[29] Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, Bourdieu 1977, 1991, 1993.

[30] Thompson 1984: 42-72, Schwartz 1997: 82-94.

[31] Thompson 1984, Eagleton 1991, Zizek 1994.

[32] Kolakowski 1990: 34.

[33] Morris 1987: 23-50; cf. Marx 1965, Althusser 1969.

[34] Van Doorn 1996ab.

for the integrative function of power and ideology. According to them, science can only provide some elements for worldviews that people employ in order to find solutions for some problem situations; in order to satisfy them and to organize and guide their social life, it has to be complemented by a set of culturally specific symbols.[35] Ideology, in this sense, does not force people to do things, even against their own will or interest. On the contrary, instinctively, people feel the need for ideology in order to get their lives in order. This focus on the role of ideology as an integrative power is typical of the functionalist approach to social phenomena.

However, whereas the Marxist/Althusserian tradition of critics claims to be speaking for the real interests of the people (as is required of 'true intellectuals' in their worldview), the functionalist tradition suggests that it is offering a true (sometimes 'thick') description of the interests of the people as well. For an analysis of a polemical controversy, these approaches do not provide any useful analytical tool. They stop where we have to start. Whereas the critical tradition simply assumes that a dominant worldview cannot be an expression of the will and interest of the people, the functionalist approach is merely stating the opposite. Apart from the fact that in present day pluralist societies worldviews often only dominate limited areas of life, they will never remain uncontested, nor do we find a society without internal conflict. If otherwise, how are we supposed to account for polemical controversy?

Rather than starting with assumptions made by other approaches, in the case of our polemic we will have to focus on the interrelationship between intellectuals, power and the people or public in more detail. And it cannot be denied that this relationship might have some violent aspects, especially when intellectuals serve political power as curators of culture. Yet, does that mean that creators of culture do not exploit the people whose very interest they claim to express? Apart from serving the interests of either power or the people, is it reasonable to assume that intellectuals do not have any interest of their own?

Again, limiting ourselves to the polemic we have to analyze, first of all, it is impossible to show empirically that people are suffering from symbolic violence as long as they themselves do not show any signs of discomfort. The only ones showing dismay about the argument that they took to be a personal attack were fellow intellectuals, rather than the ordinary public. And if they felt triggered to counter this attack by means of a polemical style of arguing, were they not exploiting the audience for their own benefit? And what about the author they tried to derogate? Were they not trying to defeat him? And if so, whose interest were they serving by that? Might it be their own interest? And if so, how should we define this interest?

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[35] Durkheim 1912, Radcliffe-Brown 1952, Douglas 1973, Geertz 1973, Turner 1974, Sahlins 1976, Leach 1976, Lewis 1977, Evans-Pritchard 1981.

It is certainly too easy to discuss symbolic violence of intellectuals directed towards ordinary people who are, in turn, dominated ideologically. Instead, the people might be a force of their own as well, directing the movements of intellectuals themselves. Here the perspective of traditional sociology must be supplemented by that of cultural studies focusing on the possibilities for resistance and turning the balance of power in favor of the people.[36]

The problem for intellectuals begins when the power of the people turns against them. Yet, does this mean that, rather than the people, they wish to be in power? When we see the concept of 'power' being broadened in this way, we might doubt whether it is still useful as an analytical tool in order to explain polemics. As I have suggested, the disciplines of sociology and cultural studies disagree about exactly where power is to be located within social systems. As soon as it appears that the concept might be applied to explain every movement within society –whether that of politics, the intellectuals or the public– then perhaps it is time to be more specific, or to even choose another term that more accurately applies to the reality of polemics.

Intellectuals are interested in something other than power alone; what they desire is authority. Authority is distinct from power in the fact that the concept excludes the possibility of physical violence or punishment for which only politics or the public have the means. And whether residing in religious or academic titles, personal signatures, styles of performance, or royal insignia, authority is a matter of "assurance, superior judgment, the ability to impose discipline, the capacity to inspire fear..."[37] As soon as these aspects of authority are employed in favor of institutional authority, critical philosophers begin to speak of symbolic violence. In my opinion, however, this is a rash judgment. Even the so-called authoritarian regimes which usually inspire fear among the populace, are based on authority rather than sheer power. And even though for outsiders it might seem like something horrible, even here authority is a matter of cultural legitimacy rather than physical violence.

Much like power, however, authority is often unstable and can be challenged.[38] As Bourdieu has summarized, each intellectual or group of intellectuals struggles for the monopoly on cultural legitimacy and the right to confer or withhold this consecration, whether being a matter of personal or institutional authority.[39] And even though the competition seems to be one between intellectuals, the public is always

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[36] Hall 1976, 1996, 1997, Hebdige 1979, De Certeau 1984, 1988, 1990, Ross 1989, Fiske 1991, 1993, Jameson 1991, 1993, Jenkins 1992, Grossberg, Nelson & Treichler 1992, Frow 1995, Storey 1996ab, 1999ab.

[37] Sennet 1980: 17-18; cf. also Ricoeur 1986: 11-15 and, of course, Weber 1978.

[38] White 1984, 1994, Derrida 1992.

[39] Bourdieu 1971: 178.

present as the third party in the ordeal. To borrow from Bourdieu once more, we might say that ideologies as a means to gain legitimacy,[40]

> owe their structure and their most specific functions to the social conditions of their production and circulation, that is, first, to the functions they perform for specialists competing for a monopoly over the competence under consideration (religious, artistic, etc.); and second, and as a by-product of this, to the functions they perform for non-specialists. We must remember that ideologies are always doubly determined, that they owe their most specific characteristics not only to the interests of the classes or class fractions they express (the function of sociodicy), but also to the specific interests of those who produce them and to the specific logic of the field of production (commonly transfigured into the form of an ideology of 'creation' and of the 'creative artists').

And even if the third party, i.e. the public, is not always (or almost never) present in a conflict between intellectuals, it nevertheless plays a decisive role. It serves as a jury, even though, in the absence of a judge to transmit the final verdict, we do not always know exactly what it says. To continue the marketplace-metaphor we have previously employed: the public is like those who, rather than buy any merchandise, merely browsing. And it is difficult to figure out exactly whether or not the public which we are aiming at appreciates the offers we are making it. What holds for sellers at the marketplace also holds for the intellectuals involved in our controversy. As long as they have no reason to doubt that many people still regard them as authorities on the issues at hand, they are likely to feel confident. On the other hand, when their position within the cultural field does not provide them with the proper environment to feel secure, they are likely to feel vulnerable when others criticize the opinions with which they identify.

What happens when intellectuals believe their authority to be threatened? How do they counter the imminent danger of losing sight of the cultural legitimacy they aim to achieve? Here we arrive at the last crucial term in my hypothesis. As I will argue, polemic is something which immediately offers itself as a means to defend one's authority before a public for which adherence is doubtful and far from secure.

The means: polemics. To say that polemic is a means of defending or re-establishing authority is one thing, but we still need to know what a concept like polemic might consist of.

There are many descriptions of polemics available. In general, however, no clear definition of the subject has been given. The controversies we are discussing are

[40] Bourdieu 1991: 169.

rather intuitively and rather uncritically classified under this label. Another striking feature of these studies is the fact that they are almost always focused on either ancient times (Biblical, polemics between Jews and Christians, Protestants and Catholics, ideological dispute and controversy within early science) or other cultures and religions (artistic circles, Zionism, Afro-American Christianity, Islam). With the advent of so-called Modernity, polemic became superfluous and out of place.

Surely, there has been extensive discussion on intellectual controversies in general. Whereas theologians and philosophers have advocated dialogue as an ethically superior kind of discourse, whether religious or not,[41] philosophers and historians of science have dealt with the problem of either scientific progress,[42] the conflict of paradigms,[43] or scientific controversy in general.[44] In the field of linguistics and rhetorical studies, on the other hand, scholars have focused on the structure, rhetoric and resolution of scientific, judiciary, political as well as public controversy.[45]

Yet, like Despret in her study of the controversy surrounding Vestdijk, all of these analyses and descriptions suggest that polemic belongs to a period in history which we haven't been able to transcend. Ours is a time of progress through serious discussion and dialogue. Polemic belongs to times past or portions of society that are governed by irrational behavior or religious beliefs. Often, it is assumed that the process of secularization has been a civilizing process as well. And whereas theologians, with their authoritarian style of arguing and intolerance towards people of different opinions, are usually classified among the primitives, today's intellectuals are considered to be the prime examples of reasonable thinking.

This, however, ignore the role polemics continue to play, not only in everyday life, but also in scientific and highly intellectual discourse. As my own analysis will show, theologians might well be polemical in their way of dealing with opinions of their opponents. On the other hand, we will find many examples of theologians deriving their status from institutional authority, thus keeping themselves miles away from any kind of polemical attack.

The only person who has devoted part of his work to the definition of polemic, as well as its role in social life, is the philosopher-linguist Marcelo Dascal. It is striking that Dascal defines polemics so broadly, including all kinds of disagreement in everyday life, whether leading to conflict or closure. Contrary to critics assuming polemics

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[41] *Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society* 1970-, *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 1991-, Pranger 1994, Yankelovitch 1999, Waardenburg 2000.

[42] Popper 1959, 1963, 1972, Lakatos 1970, 1976, Lakatos & Feyerabend 1999.

[43] Kuhn 1970, Laudan 1977, 1981, 1984, 1990, 1996, Donovan 1992.

[44] Engelhardt & Caplan 1987, Dascal & Cremaschi 1999, Machamer, Pera & Baltas 2000.

[45] McCloskey 1985, Dascal 1985, Tyler 1987, Nelson, Megill & McCloskey 1987, Simons 1989, 1990, Gross 1990, Hariman 1991, 1995, Simons & Billig 1994, Dascal & Gross 1999.

to be a mode of conversation typical of other times and cultures, Dascal does not think it even necessary to persuade his readers of its central place in our public and private discursive life.[46]

> Whichever way we look, we are entangled in endless polemizing: from daily domestic quarrels, through disputes over parking places or office space, to political decisions; from mild disagreement, through bitter bickering, to schism; from critical book reviews, through congress round-tables, to scientific controversies; in matters of literary taste, in courtrooms, in the workplace, in parliaments, and at home.

Dascal thus equates polemics with criticism, making things quite complicated when he continues to argue that the latter is "primarily a form of dialogical activity, which manifests itself most naturally in polemical exchanges of various sorts."[47] Instead of distinguishing polemics from dialogue, he prefers to define three types of polemical exchange, i.e. discussion, dispute and controversy. According to Dascal, "all involve at least two persons who employ language to address each other, in a confrontation of attitudes, opinions, arguments, theories and so forth."[48] These types of exchanges differ only in the way in which the other is confronted. While discussion is a logical way of solving problems and finding truth, and dispute tries to win a contest between ideologies, controversy is a deliberative attempt to persuade a critic and the audience by means of facts, evaluations, attitudes, goals and methods. "Whereas a discussant is prepared to admit defeat if the adversary provides a knock-down argument against her position and a controversialist is prepared to acknowledge the weight of the opponent's reasons, a disputant begins and ends the dispute (whatever its 'external' outcome) convinced he is right."[49] Whatever the facts or arguments employed in the case of a polemical move, dispute makes use of evidence that does not need to be valid or true, but only has to be 'effective' vis-à-vis the intended addressee and audience.[50] Though neither discussion nor controversy have the intention of ending in agreement, they might end as such. Dispute, on the other hand, never ends in agreement, but only attempts to gain victory over the other.

I would like to make some critical remarks concerning Dascal's categorical distinctions. First of all, his definition of polemics as an exchange between at least two persons fails to take the public nature of this type of exchange into account. Several times he mentions the audience, but it does not play any decisive role in the analysis

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[46] Dascal 1998: 1-2.

[47] Dascal 1998: 2.

[48] Dascal 1998: 5.

[49] Dascal 1998: 7.

[50] Dascal 1998: 10.

of polemics. And that is exactly what I shall attempt to do in my explanation of the controversy on *De toekomst der religie*. Secondly, Dascal extends the category of polemics too far, while including such diverse types of interaction as discussion, controversy and dispute. For that he equates polemics with criticism. And, I believe, he is correct to point to an element of criticism in all of these different types of exchange. Yet, as he himself seems to acknowledge, both discussion and controversy, are more or less opposed to dispute; unlike the former, dispute merely attempts to overpower the other. When compared to this fundamental difference, those between discussion and controversy are of minor importance. Thirdly, Dascal interprets polemics as a form of dialogical activity. In this case, I believe, he extends the category of dialogue too far. And even though he follows a linguistic tradition,[51] it is almost impossible to include the definition of dispute Dascal has offers into a useful conception of dialogue. At least dialogue, as it is commonly known, has the intention of arriving at some kind of agreement, and, consequently, has some similarities with discussion and controversy, rather than dispute. As such, it also doesn't have much to do with polemics that, which, like dispute, does not aim at finding an agreement between opponents either.

Continuing our line of thinking in a more positive direction, I would like to interpret controversy rather broadly, including discussion, dialogue and polemics. And, instead of taking polemics broadly, I prefer to emphasize its similarities with dispute, while adding some further elements which are, according to me, highly important for a proper analysis of polemics, i.e. its aggressive nature, as well as its personal and public nature.

Derived from *polemos*, polemic stands out for its violence in the way it treats others. It is "the art of attack" according to Richard Griffiths definition.[52] It is a war-like interaction of attack, defense or counter-attack by means of words. Even in the case of defense, polemic is an intensive and violent form of aggression.[53] In this manner, it distinguishes itself from dialogue. Both are highly personal encounters. However, whereas dialogue aims at mutual understanding, even when trying to convince others, polemics is merely an attempt to gain victory over the other.[54] On the other hand, whatever the difference between these forms of interaction, both are to be distinguished from discussion for their subjectivity. Whereas polemics and dialogue are personal encounters, discussion pretends to be an attempt to find a common ground without any respect for the persons involved. For this reason, people tend to

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[51] Bakhtin 1981, 1986, Tyler 1987.

[52] Griffiths 1991: 3.

[53] Smith 1997: xv.

[54] Griffiths 1991: 103.

regard it as a more objective way of communication.[55] Discussion may also include criticism, even though the latter usually shares something of its violence with polemics. Moreover, criticism may also be personal. But, whereas mere criticism resembles a contest in private, polemic is a contest on public display.[56] Taken together, we may define polemic as an attack directed against a person before a public by means of words in order to overpower the opponent.[57]

Involved in a struggle for authority, why would intellectuals turn to polemics? Why not limit themselves to criticism or discussion, or try to find a common ground by means of dialogue? Why employ such an intensive and violent form of aggression? To answer these questions, I shall turn to sociological and psychological studies on so-called 'excessive' violence. As has been argued, there might be historical and situational explanations for particular persons becoming victims of this type of violence, though these do not include their own immediate harmfulness or aggression towards the people attacked. In private, victim and aggressor might even be friends. Thus, as social-psychologists Kelman and Hamilton concluded, "their selection as targets for violent attack at a particular time can be ultimately traced to their relationship to the pursuit of larger policies. Their elimination may be seen as a useful tool or their continued existence as an irritating obstacle in the execution of policy."[58] In psychological experiments, an aggressive response is most likely to occur when the subject is either physically attacked—that is, when pain is inflicted, usually by electric shocks.[59] In social life, the same result is achieved when the subject's self-concept, self-esteem and social image are threatened. This holds for all mammals, man included.[60] Apart from physical abuse, however, in the case of human beings, abuse, insult, verbal attack and criticism can give rise to anger and aggression as well. In sociological and social-psychological theory it is argued that the latter type of reactions are most likely to occur in an unstable environment in which individuals feel insecure and their sense of self-identity is easily questioned.[61]

The person, as well as the pattern of behavior constituting the core of my hypothesis, is aptly described by Robin Robins and Jerrold Post in their study of individuals suffering from paranoia.[62] Earlier, I considered polemic as a distortion of ar-

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[55] Dascal 1998: 7.

[56] Agassi 1988: 1-2.

[57] Foucault 1984: 381-382.

[58] Kelman & Hamilton 1989: 14.

[59] Staub 1989.

[60] De Waal 1996, Baumeister 1997, Aureli & De Waal 2000.

[61] Berkowitz 1962, Bandura 1973, Baron 1977, Sennett 1980, Averill 1982, Giddens 1991, Baumeister, Smart & Boden 1996, Bushman & Baumeister 1998, Baumeister 2001.

[62] Robins & Post 1997.

guments in order to defeat the opponent. Here, this activity is explicitly linked to a specific personality disorder.[63] And even though this might seem to constitute a highly subjective judgment on others, there are several criteria that will prove helpful in identifying the people involved. First, the latter are accustomed to being highly suspicious. Without sufficient basis, they may think that others are exploiting or harming them. To the paranoid, things are not what they seem to be. The paranoid man does not permit himself to be distracted by apparently innocent facts, but claims to see through them. He searches continuously for hidden meanings, for clues to the enemies and threats he believes to be real.[64] Secondly, for the paranoid man, everything has meaning in reference to him. Actions and comments that do not necessarily have anything to do with him are interpreted as being directed against him; he feels he is the object of great interest. And being of interest, he perceives attacks on his character or reputation that are not apparent to others.[65] Thirdly, the paranoid is quick to react angrily and aggressively. He is belligerent and irritable, extremely sensitive to slight. He is "combative" and "quarrelsome", "tightly wound" and "bristly defensive". And this "defensive posture" contains a "poised readiness to attack", as Robins and Post argue.[66] According to them, the character traits just mentioned are triggered by the inability to stand and give in to external pressure or authority. Unable to tolerate imperfection or to accept compromises, the paranoid finds himself in constant warfare with both real and imaginary adversaries that threaten his autonomy. Yet, whereas suspicion is the hallmark of paranoia, the imagination transforms a perceived state of affairs into something determined by external causes.[67] In order to defend oneself against unbearable feelings of insignificance, the paranoid man develops a compensatory grandiose delusion. From the unbearable reality of being fired "as a dishwasher" he constructs the preferable reality of becoming "the king of the world", as Robins and Post remark. And, they concluded, though feeling highly insecure and living in a world full of threats, "the paranoid appears self-centered and arrogant, with little concern for the needs and feelings of others." In fact, however, "he is extremely concerned with how others feel about him. The arrogance is a mask, concealing pervasive uncertainty and profound self-doubt."[68]

To apply all of this to polemical controversy, attempting to publicly denigrate somebody else is a method employed by intellectuals as a way of defending or re-establishing their authority. This must be done, because their position as legitimate

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[63] Akthar 1990.

[64] Robins & Post 1997: 8.

[65] Robins & Post 1997: 10.

[66] Robins & Post 1997: 10; cf. also Shapiro 1967.

[67] Robins & Post 1997: 11, 13; cf. also Meissner 1978.

[68] Robins & Post 1997: 14-15.

spokesperson on an important issue is threatened by the argument of their opponent. And as I have indicated, it is not only the one who developed the argument that is perceived as a threat, but rather the feeling that there is an audience that might take it seriously. Unlike discussion or dialogue, polemic is not merely a competition between ideas and ideologies; rather it is a personal attack. And this attack must necessarily be personal in order to compensate for an imbalance in the social conditions that determine whether one will be taken as an authority on important issues or not.

The issue to which we shall now turn is whether it is possible to analyze our controversy in the light of the hypothesis outlined before (and if so, how). For this we must have an idea of both the quantity and the quality of our materials as well as the methods which will be employed to study them.

Materials

With respect to the quantity of sources available to test my hypothesis, I have identified almost 180 contributions to the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*. Certainly, these do not account for all of the references to the essay in the media during the period we are focusing on. With respect to the quality of the materials, I will focus merely on the ones that paid substantive, rather than exclusive, attention to either Vestdijk's argument or the future of religion.

Most of the sources I have used are provided by bibliographies on Vestdijk's oeuvre in general, and *De toekomst der religie* in particular. First of all, the work of Jean Brüll was of much value. Especially important was his six-volume survey of both the writings of Vestdijk and the reviews his oeuvre triggered in literary and generally cultural magazines from 1930 till 1972.[69] In addition, Brüll published a survey of the reception of Vestdijk in books, magazines, newspapers and broadcastings till 1980.[70] Second, whereas most of his sources are to be found in Brüll as well, the second edition of Fokke Sierksma's *Tussen twee vuren* offers some further references.[71] Soon, however, it became clear that these bibliographies were far from exhaustive. Some contributions to the controversy referred to material ignored by either Brüll or Sierksma. The bibliographies of the works of K.H. Miskotte and H. Kraemer clearly indicated that, apart from the reviews and discussions already included in other reference works, they did not write anything else on Vestdijk (or Sierksma).[72] On the

[69] Brüll 1977-81.

[70] Brüll 1992.

[71] Sierksma 1979: 147-149.

[72] On Miskotte, cf. Berkvens-Stevelinck 1998; on Kraemer, cf. Retnowinarti 1988.

other hand, bibliographies of the writings of J. van Heugten, H. de Vos, G.C. Berkouwer and Sierksma pointed to some other contributions.[73]

With respect to the quantity of sources, some significant progress has been made since the work done by Monique Despret till 1980. Even though the bibliographies by Brüll were not fully completed at the time she conducted her research, the second edition of Sierksma's essay was already available. Given these circumstances it is surprising that she counted only sixty sources. This is partly due to her focus on contributions that analyzed *De toekomst der religie* exclusively. Yet, to study the reception of the essay in its entirety as well as the way it was judged by critics, the perspective must be broadened considerably. Whereas Despret does not include the controversy between Kraemer and Sierksma on issues originally presented by Vestdijk, already the fact that, apart from Sierksma also Vestdijk and his ideas are commented upon is sufficient reason to include their contributions into the analysis. Whereas Despret counted sixty sources, I found at least a hundred more.

For the period after 1980 –the last year covered by the bibliographies of Brüll– I was forced to research newspapers and opinion magazines myself. Given the fact that the interest for Vestdijk's work had already steadily declined during the 1970s, apart from the essays published in the *Vestdijkkroniek*, this task provided me with a few interesting sources. It is possible that in the future more material will be discovered. In general, I believe that the material gathered thus far is rich enough to offer opportunities for serious analysis. The question, then, is by which methods our materials are to be analyzed.

Method

In this study analysis of the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*, I shall apply four different methods. This will be done in four chapters. In each of these chapters the material will be analyzed according to the rules determined by the method relevant to the perspectives developed.

The first chapter will offer a broad outline of trends and developments within the history of the reception, and indicate the role played by polemics. The next two chapters are meant to analyze the mechanisms characteristic of polemical texts. The final chapter will link historical developments in general and polemical contributions in particular with their social context.

In chapter I, the historical method will be applied. Previously, I argued that there is a synchronic as well as a diachronic dimension to the way our controversy has unfolded. Whereas the latter points to some general developments, the former might

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[73] On Van Heugten, cf. Van Heugten 1954: 189-195; on De Vos, cf. Nauta & Sperna Weiland 1966: 235-240; on Berkouwer, cf. Van der Marel 1988 and Van Keulen 2000; on Sierksma, cf. Kalma 1983.

indicate the specific role played by either polemic or any other style of exchanging opinions throughout the history of the reception of *De toekomst der religie*.

For the sake of analysis, different periods will be identified, more or less corresponding to the years in which certain important contributions to the controversy were published. Vestdijk's essay became available in 1947. The first period began with the first reviews in 1948 and lasted till 1951. The second period began with the publication of both the second edition of *De toekomst der religie* and Sierksma's essay *Tussen twee vuren* ('Between Two Fires') in 1952; it ended with the controversy between Sierksma and Kraemer in 1959. The third period began with the third edition of Vestdijk's essay; it ended in 1972. The fourth period, finally, began with both the first issue of the *Vestdijkkroniek* ('Vestdijk Cronicle') and J. Kamphuis's study *Vestdijk en de kerkgeschiedenis* ('Vestdijk and Church History'); it ended with the last polemical contribution in 1998, again by Kamphuis.

Apart from the date on which certain important essays and studies appeared in print, other criteria determined the way in which I distinguished between different periods as well, i.e. the role played by polemical contributions, the role of the controversy within the general public sphere as well as the variety of people contributing to it. Yet, even then, we must look at the contributions in more detail. This will be done in chapters II and III.

In chapter II, I will employ methods derived from linguistics in order to identify the distinguishing feature of polemical texts and to figure out which contributions can be classified into this category. Terminology will be derived from poetical analysis (as it has been inspired by psychoanalysis[74]). Even though mainly applied to literary texts, I agree with Hayden V. White that the mechanisms underlying these artifacts are equally relevant for the study of other textual material. White himself has employed them for his analysis of historical narrative and cultural criticism.[75]

Based on the insights offered by this direction in textual analysis, it will be argued that any exchange of opinions involves summary or condensation of arguments. Significant for polemics, however, is the fact that it substitutes or displaces the argument for its author. Instead of taking the text as its main object of attack, in polemic a subject is created in order to account for the contradiction between the opinions defended in the text and the ones held by the critic. And rather than countering the argument, it is rendered invalid simply by derogating the author imagined behind the text. This is done by questioning the moral, mental or professional capacity of the subject accountable for the argument. As will be shown, the mechanism, previously defined as paranoia, is similar to that identified by Freud in his study on wit-work.

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[74] Freud 1938, Jakobson 1956, Lacan 1966, Laplanche & Pontalis 1973, Weber 1977, Rice & Shofer 1983.

[75] White 1973, 1978, 1987; cf. also Ankersmit 1994.

In chapter III, the method of rhetorical analysis is employed in order to identify how critics attempt to convince their public. Terminology will be derived especially from the work of Robert Hariman on political style.[76] The latter identified four different styles that function as ideal types for the conduct of public figures. And even though texts are not to be confused with political reality, in both cases there is always an element of pretense. As in the case of paranoid personality disorder, with its arrogance and compensatory grandiose delusion, styles are employed in order to create a sense of authority, rather than to reflect some actual state of affairs. Hariman identifies four different political styles, namely realist, republican, bureaucratic and authoritarian ones. With the help of others I will attempt to translate these styles of conduct into ways of arguing as exemplified in texts.[77]

Based on the insights offered by this direction in textual analysis, it will be concluded that the authoritarian style of arguing is often employed in polemics. This fits with the way arguments are substituted by their author. Rather than attempting to convince the public by being realistic, moderate and referenced, critics tend to merely declare the author unfit, and by that, the argument is declared invalid. For that they do not need any support; their personal judgment must be sufficient to remove the contradiction between the arguments developed in the text and those held by the critic involved. The interesting question to be answered is whether the personal and authoritarian style is tied to the personal authority of which Bourdieu wrote. The latter type of authority he thought to be characteristic of 'cultural creators'. In order to come to a conclusion about that, we cannot limit ourselves to textual analysis only.

In chapter IV, I will apply the method of sociological analysis. By this I mean to identify both the institutional network in which intellectuals participate and their relationship with the public. Rather than employing the so-called secularization thesis to account for the trends in the history of the reception of *De toekomst der religie*—as other students of polemics have done—, I intend to focus on the position of each individual within the field of cultural production. Of particular interest here is the sociology of Bourdieu[78], as well as the sociological direction within the discourse analysis stimulated by Michel Foucault and further developed by Norman Fairclough.[79] This approach requires us to move from the text (or primary sources) to secondary material offering clues to the context of the controversy. Instead of assuming that texts do not have any link with the outside world, I agree with Bourdieu that the ideologies developed in polemic are always doubly determined. More speci-

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[76] Hariman 1995.

[77] Jowett & O'Donnell 1986, Leith & Meyerson 1989, O'Keefe 1990, Carter & Nash 1990.

[78] Bourdieu 1971, 1977, 1991, 1993.

[79] Foucault 1971, 1972, 1980, 1982ab, Fairclough 1992; cf. also Geisler 1994, Clark & Ivanic 1997, Ivanic 1998.

fically, I wish to explain the subject (or content) and style (or form) by systematically relating them to social conditions by which attacks are shaped. The framework to be employed for this kind of analysis is the one constituted by the oppositions between 'dominant' and 'marginal' intellectuals or between 'the established' and 'the outsiders'.[80] Contrary to what studies on the activity of intellectuals within the public sphere suggest, to be 'dominant' or belonging to 'the establishment' does not always imply figuring prominently in media forms which we consider important. Applied to the context of the Netherlands from 1945 till 2000, some intellectuals might have been dominant within their own local community, without having had much influence in wider society. Significant developments within the country did not prevent people from staying within tightly structured pillar organizations. We must remember that the public sphere was highly fragmented, and that reactions to Vestdijk's essay depended upon the relative position of each single intellectual within certain public areas. On the other hand, people we are used to calling 'outsiders' are often far from 'marginal' and, instead, holding key positions at universities or within the political arena. Also, however, for those intellectuals, their relations with the public will be considered of the utmost importance in understanding their contributions to the controversy which we are studying. And rather than being 'dominant' or belonging to 'the established', it was precisely the marginal figures and outsiders among the intellectuals that used to fancy themselves a higher and better order of human beings, asserting their superiority over others and casting a sidelong glance on the others as people of a lesser breed. The centerpiece of this moral configuration is an uneven balance of power and the tension inherent within it.[81]

Put briefly, throughout this study I will argue that polemic is a means by which intellectuals attempt to identify or defend themselves before an audience of people that might have some doubts about whether or not to assign their opinion leaders and spokespersons any authority.

Hypothesis: scientific or not?

I shall now devote what remains of my introduction to confronting criticism by those who find my hypothesis unfit because it includes some value judgments. These critics might even doubt whether my claims are any different form the methods employed in polemic and, consequently, conclude that they are not scientific at all.

First of all, does the fact that I interpret some contributions to the controversy as polemical include a value judgment on my part? Critics are correct in believing detailed arguments not to be value free for the mere fact that they are detailed. There is

[80] Bourdieu 1971, 1991, Elias 1994.

[81] Though employing the terminology of Elias, actually my hypothesis turns it upside-down; cf. Elias 1994: xvii, xx.

surely always an element of instinct, intuition and imagination in any kind of description and analysis of facts. And the latter are selected according to the limits set by the questions for which both description and analysis are meant to provide an answer. In concert with the postmodern authorities which I have invoked throughout my study, I believe that even the ego of scientists always plays an important role in the enterprise. Yet, I definitely do not believe that science is to be reduced to any kind of personal aberration on the part of the scholars involved. If that would be implied by postmodernism, I definitely do not agree. I do not believe that there is no qualitative difference between the personal judgments we found in polemics on the one hand and my judgment that in polemics, arguments are distorted and people launch attacks against others that cannot be justified by means of facts about the other. *Personally, I wish Christianity to die.* This statement by Vestdijk surely included a personal judgment. He did not deny this. The point is that he tried to offer reasons for why he wished Christianity to die. Yet, his opponents did not let themselves be deceived by that. According to them, nobody could reasonably argue such a claim. Moreover, Vestdijk was a novelist rather than a theologian or scholar of religion. Instead of taking his argument seriously, they attempted to suggest that he was either mentally or morally disturbed. To be sure, somebody arguing that he, personally, wishes Christianity to die might be insane. The point, however, is whether this is a fact or mere speculative inference. Without serious discussion of the symptoms that are usually linked to mental disorders, we might be incorrect in judging people that are, in reality, quite sanguine and sane.

Popper did not consider science to be completely different from other opinions expressed within the public sphere either (and polemical exchange has to be included, as well). On the contrary, he agreed with Russell that science begins with instinct and intuition as much as any other cognitive enterprises. The fundamental difference between scientific claims on the one hand, and other statements on the other, is that the former can be rationally tested and, in the end, either confirmed or refuted.[82]

Thus, though I admit that my hypothesis began as a matter of intuition and imagination, I believe that subsequent analysis will be both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the polemical remarks made by those contributing to our controversy. Certainly, I make claims about the personal situation of my objects as much as these did of Vestdijk and his opponents. Yet, instead of being mere speculation, I

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[82] Popper 1959, 1963, 1972; cf. the quote from Russel 1953: 19 used at the beginning of this chapter.

have attempted to develop these claims as parts of a hypothesis that will be further outlined in this thesis.

I – THE POLEMIC: ITS HISTORY

…the end of the book and the beginning of writing…

Jacques Derrida

Introduction

Shortly after the World War II, the *Zondagspost* announced the publication of certain works by some important Dutch writers.[1] Among those were some novels and essays written by Simon Vestdijk during the period of German occupation. In a way, this came as no surprise, as even before the war Vestdijk had been the acknowledged *primus inter pares* of Dutch literature. Though others would soon join him, after the death of Menno ter Braak, Edgar du Perron and Hendrik Marsman, Vestdijk was the only one left of a pre-war generation of leading literary critics.

Though he did not doubt whether or not his reputation was justified, Adriaan Venema, in his study on writers, publishers and their collaboration with the Germans, minutely described Vestdijk's activities during the war. He concluded that it was extremely difficult to situate him between the extremes of good and evil. At all times, Vestdijk had written and published in what Venema called the twilight zone of protest, adaptation, and adjustment, or even collaboration.[2]

Even though those people who still venerated Vestdijk felt offended by Venema's critique, and refused to believe that their hero had ever collaborated, Venema's conclusions did not differ considerably from what Sierksma had said forty years earlier. According to Sierksma, by giving the Germans the idea that he did not pose any threat to their authority, Vestdijk had just been trying to save his neck.[3] As historian Jacques Presser once summarized the point, people like Vestdijk "collaborated in order to obstruct, and tried to obstruct while leaving the impression they were collaborating."[4]

The facts were already available to anyone who did not wish to keep his eyes shut. The only thing that had changed was the way in which critics judged public figures that did not participate in the resistance. As Regine Grueter observed in her discussion of the Weinreb-affair, it was only from the 1960s onwards that criteria of good and evil were more systematically applied to persons playing a public role dur-

[1] October 28, 1945.

[2] Venema 1991: 8.

[3] Sierksma 1948: 5.

[4] Presser, *Ondergang* (1965); quoted in Venema 1991: 231.

ing the war. According to her, this was typical of a period in which public sentiment turned against a pre-war-yet-still-powerful establishment.[5] Surely, it is only in this kind of atmosphere that the painstaking efforts by Venema make sense; not only Vestdijk, but many other once famous writers were shunned for having collaborated with the wrong side during the war.[6]

Immediately after the war, however, Vestdijk was not openly judged for his contacts with the Germans. On the contrary, people remembered him as one of the intellectuals taken hostage by the enemy. For the broad public he was the only famous Dutch writer remaining from the prewar period. Nobody asked why he had been released by the Germans so early in the war, while others would have to remain imprisoned until the very end. His fellow hostages may have been jealous, as Vestdijk himself observed,[7] but they were not aware of the reasons for which the Germans let him go. Only a small circle of friends were told of Vestdijk's promise to become a member of the *Kultuurkamer*, a society of leading Dutch artists and writers supervised by the German occupiers.[8] For the broader public he was merely one of the heroes that after the war would take the lead in Dutch culture and society again.

In this post-war atmosphere, the publication of *De toekomst der religie* was announced by the *Zondagspost*, though it was actually published two years later. The publisher was well known for its publications in the field of psychology. Clearly, Vestdijk had written a study on religion from a psychological and humanist perspective. At that time, it was likely that such an essay from one of the Netherlands' foremost writers would call attention. In fact, people from a wide variety of intellectual circles felt challenged.

Vestdijk expected a reaction to his arguments. The essay consisted of a series of lectures that were originally meant to be delivered before his fellow hostages in Beekvliet. Yet, even though an earlier series of lectures was received enthusiastically, the one on religion did not receive much attention. Only the first lecture was delivered, and with only one person in attendance, the lecture series was discontinued.[9] According to Vestdijk, in a letter to his friend Theun de Vries from early 1944, the series was boycotted by "orthodox theologians", who were by nature, as he put it, unable to appreciate his style of arguing. "Here we get a foretaste of its public reception," he wrote to Theun de Vries. "We have to be careful with the book. I got

[5] Grueter 1997: 272-276.

[6] Venema 1988-92

[7] Visser 1987: 311.

[8] Venema 1991: 250.

[9] Visser 1987: 317.

enough experience with this scum. I will have to proceed cautiously in these matters."[10]

To conclude that the attention Vestdijk received was due to his status as a famous writer is one thing. However, to understand why it triggered the intense debate it did is something quite different. At first, Vestdijk's fellow hostages could simply deny him any attention. But, as soon as the essay became available to a wider public, this approach would not do anymore.

We are dealing here with quite a lengthy essay, numbering 365 pages. And for many critics, for many different reasons, it was not easy to swallow. Nevertheless, it triggered many responses (180), from many people (almost 100), over a considerable period of time (50 years). Certainly, attention waned over time. Every time the essay was re-edited, it received some response. However, at the end of the 20th century, interest had died out almost completely. Upon the occasion of Vestdijk's 100th birthday in 1998, critics mentioned that hardly anybody read his novels anymore. And, with the exception of one critic, nobody paid much attention to his essay on religion anymore.

In the present chapter, I will outline the history of literary responses to Vestdijk's *De toekomst der religie*. No attention will be paid to the essay itself. Though it was published shortly after the war, in a sense, the job was not finished yet. On the contrary, whereas the writing process had initially been hidden from the eyes of the outside public, the real work in fact began immediately after the public started reading the end product and tried to make sense of it. In the words of Derrida, a book ends as soon as it becomes available for consumption; from that moment on, the process of re/writing begins.[11]

Four periods in the history of writing on Vestdijk's essay will be distinguished. From a synchronic point of view, each period consisted of polemical as well as non-polemical contributions. From a diachronic point of view, we will see the polemics becoming increasingly marginal. Only in the last chapter will an explanation be given for why some critics reacted in a polemical manner, and why their influence receded in the course of the controversy.

The periods of the reception

In the present chapter, I wish to focus on the chronological sequence on the one hand, and the interconnections between contributions on the other. The first will be done in order to indicate developments, the latter to identify some specific traditions within the history of reception. With respect to the developments, different periods can be distinguished. For this, I propose to use the following three criteria.

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[10] Vestdijk & De Vries 1985: 168.

[11] Derrida 1976: 6.

First of all, I think it is important to focus on the intensity of the exchanges. Each period has a specific ratio of contributions that are to be considered as polemical. Which contributions count as polemical will be discussed in the next two chapters; here we shall simply make distinctions in a preliminary fashion. Secondly, the institutional context is important, for it indicates the radius of both the essay and each contribution to the history of its reception. As we will see, in the early periods, it is easy to define groups of intellectuals according to their institutional memberships and contributions to the media. As in the case of the intensity of the exchanges, we shall deal here with these contexts only in a preliminary fashion; in the last chapter, I will offer a detailed discussion of the issue. Thirdly, in accordance with the dynamics in any history of reception, the changing role of the text itself will be an important feature of each period. In general, it developed from being the main focus of almost every single review, to increasingly becoming part of a discussion either of single issues or of other writings. As such, it participates in a continuous process of production and progress of reflection, in which it gradually shifted into the margins of public attention.

These three criteria are more diverse and specific than the ones employed by Monique Despret, on whom I have commented extensively in the introduction. Whereas she only distinguished between two periods (the first from 1948 till 1950, the second from 1950 till 1980), I shall distinguish between four.

The first period (from 1948 till 1951) started with the early reactions in the media, and ended before the publication of Fokke Sierksma's *Tussen twee vuren* ('Between Two Fires'). This essay also marked an era in which almost all contributions exclusively focused on both Vestdijk and *De toekomst der religie*. This period was the most intensely polemical. By far the most contributions were written during this time. The diversity of people responding, as well as the role of the media, were more intense than in later periods. On the other hand, it is quite easy to identify several distinctive traditions of criticism, partly made up by pillar organizations, and partly by independent magazines. This also holds true for the next period.

The second period (from 1952 till 1959) started with the publication of the second edition of Vestijk's book. Sierksma's essay played a far more important role in the controversy. The latter focused on both Vestdijk and the polemics around *De toekomst der religie*. On the one hand, this triggered new polemics. On the other hand, however, Vestdijk was forced to share attention with Sierksma. Far less immediate references were made to Vestdijk's essay in this period. Far less people responded, and, in general, the media—newspapers and opinion magazines—were less interested in publishing the issue for a wider public.

The third period (from 1960 till 1972) continued the tendencies started earlier. An important catalyst for discussion was the publication of Sierksma's *De religieuze projectie* ('The Religious Projection'). Only some opinion magazines paid any atten-

tion to this study; the discussion became far too abstract for the general public. *De toekomst der religie* was often mentioned, but played only a marginal role. However, the publication of a third (1960) and fourth (1965) edition of the essay showed that there were still people interested in the topic which Vestdijk had dealt with. Yet, even in these cases, he was forced to share attention with Gerhard Szczesny's *De toekomst van het ongeloof* ('The Future of Unbelief') and Han Fortmann's *Als ziende de onzienlijke* ('As Seeing the Invisible'). For most commentators, Vestdijk seemed a part of history, and even an expression of the modern mentality in general. Traditions of criticism in this period were less easily identified than before, primarily through ecumenical tendencies in formerly well-established institutions. Not surprisingly, the end of the period was marked by a theological critique by theologians from highly diverse backgrounds.

The fourth period (from 1973 till 1998) began with the founding of a special magazine devoted to the study of Vestdijk's work, as well as a critical study by J. Kamphuis. The publication of the fifth edition of the essay (1975) was only briefly mentioned in the media; discussion was limited to highly esoteric circles of Vestdijk fans. The publication of the last edition of the essay (1992) did not receive any attention at all. The edition ended up in discount bookstores. In general, interest for Vestdijk's work, and his essays in particular, had sharply declined. By the end of the century, only Kamphuis felt challenged by the arguments formulated in *De toekomst der religie*.

After briefly summarizing the reception of Vestdijk's essay, I now wish to turn to a more detailed discussion of the different periods. First, I wish to discuss each period of reception more specifically and to identify the writings on the essay by means of their authors and the media involved. Secondly, I will attempt to draw some conclusions with respect to the developments and traditions within the reception and the appropriation of the essay.

Period 1 – 1948-1951

After the war, religious differences still dominated public life. It is the institutional aspect of these differences that will be employed in order to classify the contributions to our polemic. Church membership, university positions end media activities will be considered as the most distinguishing features. As was previously mentioned, during this period it is quite easy to classify the people who participated in the controversy. Many of them belonged to tightly knit organized institutions; others contributed to media forms that held a more or less independent position within the public sphere in the Netherlands. Given this analytical difference, the Free Reformed Churches (VGKN), the Reformed Churches (GKN) and the Roman Catholic Churches (RKK) are to be counted among the highly organized institutions. The Netherlands Reformed Church (NHK), as well as both cultural 'breakthrough' and literary critical

magazines, did not belong to any well-established institutions. Yet, instead of viewing institutions as whole entities and judging the relationships within the outsiders' media harmonious, I shall attempt to identify conflicts and hierarchies between dominating and marginal intellectuals. Next, I shall attempt to present the intellectuals who contributed to the polemic during the first period of the reception.

Reactions from the intellectuals of the VGKN, an orthodox group which continues with its critiques to this very day, came early on. It is, however, unlikely that these were the theologians to which Vestdijk had referred in his letters to Theun de Vries. Dominated by the dogmatist K. Schilder,[12] this group had separated from the GKN in 1944. Though well known for his polemical style of arguing, Schilder did not play any role in the controversy around Vestdijk. Instead, three other intellectuals from the VGKN commented on *De toekomst der religie*, namely 'Marnix' (pseudonym for A. Zijlstra), M. Siesling, and P.A. Hekstra.[13] Whereas the first two critics were highly critical, if not polemical, the latter was much too involved in exchanges with intellectuals from the GKN or NHK to follow their styles of criticism.

Though generally critical, some members of the GKN reacted to Vestdijk quite positively. G.C. Berkouwer, the dogmatist of the *Vrije Universiteit*, devoted one of his weekly commentaries in *Trouw* on *De toekomst der religie*.[14] For the Reformed opinion magazine *Bezinning,* he wrote a more detailed critique.[15] Yet, surprisingly, both of these reviews were highly sympathetic and far from polemical. Something similar held true for the commentary of J.H. Bavink, the prominent missionary theologian of the GKN.[16] Another leading intellectual, S.J. Popma, made some positive remarks as well.[17] These replies differed considerably from the commentary of relatively marginal intellectuals like A. Wapenaar in *Trouw*[18] as well as J. Wytzes and Chr.W.J. Teeuwen in the Reformed opinion monthly *Horizon*.[19]

A sympathetic review of *De toekomst der religie* was offered by a leading philosopher at the Catholic University in Leuven, J.H. Walgrave.[20] Though critical, he did not attempt to attack Vestdijk. The only polemical contribution during this period

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[12] Cf. Bremmer 1978.

[13] Marnix 1948, Siesling 1948, Hekstra 1948; on Marnix cf. Akkerman 1978; on *De Reformatie* cf. Harinck 1993; on *Ontmoeting* cf. Zwart 1998.

[14] Berkouwer 1948a; on Berkouwer cf. Van Keulen 2000; on *Trouw* cf. Van der Ros 1993a, Bak 1999.

[15] Berkouwer 1948b.

[16] Bavinck 1949; on Bavinck cf. Visser 1997.

[17] Popma 1948.

[18] W[apenaar] 1948.

[19] Wytzes 1948, Teeuwen 1951.

[20] Walgrave 1949; on Walgrave cf. Struyker Boudier 1986: 93-100, 170-174.

was written by J. van Heugten.[21] A Jesuit and chief editor of the opinion monthly *Streven*, Van Heugten could be regarded as one of the main cultural and literary critics of his group, though not quite a widely acknowledged religious authority.[22] In turn, Van Heugten was criticized by G.H. Barneveld.[23] Both were representatives of rival student parties shortly after the war.[24]

Besides Van Heugten, the most polemical contributions during this period came from the middle-orthodox[25] and politically progressive 'breakthrough' circles of the NHK.[26] Here we find the most intensive and lively interaction between Vestdijk (and later on Sierksma) and his critics. It is likely that these were the 'orthodox' theologians which Vestdijk had mentioned in his letters to Theun de Vries. Banning made only a passing critical remark regarding Vestdijk,[27] but the review of the Groningen philosopher H. de Vos in *Het Parool* was highly polemical indeed.[28] For this he received criticism by G.H. Barneveld and O. Noordenbos.[29] It is likely that upon reception of this criticism, De Vos attempted to justify his comments.[30] The reaction that followed, however, turned out to be no less polemical than the first one. Vestdijk himself wrote a counter-critique,[31] which was not accepted by *Het Parool*. De Vos did not answer Vestdijk. The same thing happened after the highly polemical contributions by G. van der Leeuw, the leading Groningen phenomenologist of religion whose review appeared in *Wending*,[32] and K.H. Miskotte, a famous dogmatist at Leiden who wrote for *Vrij Nederland*.[33] Neither did they reply to Vestdijk's critiques.[34] *Vrij Nederland* allowed only for some comments by readers of the magazine

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[21] Van Heugten 1948.

[22] Cf. Asselbergs 1954.

[23] Barneveld 1948ab.

[24] Cf. Ligtenberg & Polak 1990: 157, 195.

[25] Cf. Berkhof 1951, the first to define this modality within the Netherlands Reformed Church as something between liberal and orthodox denominations, while being more orthodox than liberal.

[26] Cf. Rasker 1986: 310-311.

[27] Banning 1948.

[28] De Vos 1948a; on De Vos cf. Ponsteen 2001; on *Het Parool* cf. Mulder & Koedijk 1996.

[29] Barneveld 1948ab, Noordenbos 1948a.

[30] De Vos 1948b.

[31] Vestdijk 1948c.

[32] Van der Leeuw 1948; on Van der Leeuw cf. Waardenburg 1978; on *Wending* cf. Braams 1989, Berkelaar 1999.

[33] Miskotte 1948; on Miskotte cf. Miskotte 1981.

[34] Vestdijk 1948d, 1949a.

who were not immediately involved in the controversy.[35] A response to the polemical comments made the by Netherlands Reformed literary critic J.G. Bomhoff in *Wending* would be made only later, in what I call the second period of the controversy.[36] To this we shall later return, among other things because Bomhoff's contribution marked another era of discussion regarding Vestdijk's oeuvre in its entirety.

Even though her contribution was also polemical, a kind of dialogue took place between the Mennonite reverend A. Mankes-Zernike and Vestdijk. She wrote a critique in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, to which Vestdijk responded in the literary critical magazine *Criterium*. She again responded, but Vestdijk was allowed the last word.[37]

Compared to the more polemical contributions just mentioned, the comments made by C.J. Bleeker in a liberal theological magazine were tasteful. Vestdijk wrote a response, though Bleeker did not react to it.[38] Both knew each other from 'Beekvliet'. Why both Vestdijk and Sierksma counted his among the core polemical reactions to Vestdijk's essay is difficult to say. He was a theologian and a member of the NHK, to be sure. But so were others, to which Vestdijk (and, later on, Sierksma) did not react. There was S.F.H.J. Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, who wrote a moderate yet critical review in a newspaper.[39] Then there was the contribution of P.J. Roscam Abbing, which appeared in a theological magazine.[40] And, finally, there was the philosopher P. Sterkman, invited by P.H. Ritter, Jr. to comment on Vestdijk's essay before the AVRO microphone. Later, his remarks were published in a book magazine.[41] All of those contributions received at least as much publicity as that of Bleeker, but they were never regarded as part of the polemic.

Critical, but far more respectful, than the theologians were the intellectuals with esoteric liberal and literary critical orientations. Some of them belonged to the theosophist circle. They used to operate independently from every other religious group. N. Kluwer,[42] the editor of *Mensch & Kosmos*, an esoteric magazine, offered a sympathetic review of *De toekomst der religie*. After that, in the same magazine, D.H. Prins wrote a more critical essay in which he criticized Vestdijk's reductive approach

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[35] Grashoff 1948a, Uitman 1948, Grashoff 1948b.

[36] Bomhoff 1952a, Marja 1952a.

[37] Mankes-Zernike 1948a, Vestdijk 1948a, Mankes-Zernike 1948b, Vestdijk 1948b; on Mankes-Zernike cf. Mankes-Zernike 1956, Kalma 1988; on *De Groene Amsterdammer* cf. Hartman 2002.

[38] Bleeker 1949, Vestdijk 1949b; on Bleeker cf. Wagtendonk 2001.

[39] Berkelbach van der Sprenkel 1948; cf. De Groot 1978.

[40] Roscam Abbing 1948; on Roscam Abbing cf. Van Andel, Geense & Hoedemaker 1980.

[41] Sterkman 1948, 1949; on Sterkman and Ritter cf. Van Herpen 1982.

[42] Kluwer 1948.

to religion. Unlike other monthly magazines like *Wending*, *Mensch & Kosmos* allowed Vestdijk to respond. Afterwards, Prins wrote a response to Vestdijk's counter-critique.[43] Likewise, another esoteric magazine, *Theosophia*, published the private correspondence between J.J. Poortman and Vestdijk. Poortman had offered a sympathetic, yet critical, review of Vestdijk's essay. Vestdijk responded, though Poortman was allowed the last word on the subject.[44] A critical, yet cordial, commentary of *De toekomst der religie* was made by the humanist H. Redeker within the context of an essay on existentialist philosophy.[45] Redeker's contribution was published in *Het Woord*, a literary critical magazine that was sympathetic to esoteric tendencies in literature.[46] Even as one of its editors, Redeker had close contacts with the editors of *Podium*. On several occasions the latter invited him to join their circle.[47]

Equally sympathetic, and far more critical of theologians, were the socialist critics. Among them was O. Noordenbos, who wrote a positive review of *De toekomst der religie* in a moderately socialist opinion monthly, *De Nieuwe Stem*.[48] In a similar monthly, *De Vrije Katheder*,[49] he criticized theologians like De Vos, although he did remark that Berkelbach van der Sprenkel served as a more humane example of theological critique. In the same magazine, upon the occasion of Vestdijk's fiftieth birthday, Theun de Vries wrote an article in which he made some critical remarks on *De toekomst der religie* from a socialist perspective.[50] So too did H. van Praag in a sympathetic yet critical review which appeared in the opinion magazine *De Vlam*.[51]

Another commentator, G.H. Barneveld, was also positive about Vestdijk.[52] His first contribution to the controversy was published in the Amsterdam students' weekly, *Propria Cures*, of which he was one of the editors.[53] In this period, *Propria Cures* did not have the polemical style for which it would later become famous (or notorious).[54] Further positive references to *De toekomst der religie* by Barneveld were

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[43] Prins 1949, Vestdijk 1950c, Prins 1950; on Prins cf. Kuilman 2001: 22-24.

[44] Poortman 1950ab, Vestdijk 1950d, Poortman 1950c; on Poortman cf. Scharwächter 1988.

[45] Redeker 1948.

[46] On Redeker and *Het Woord* cf. Calis 1999: chapter 1-2.

[47] Calis 1999: 145-146.

[48] Noordenbos 1948b; on Noordenbos cf. Trapman 1999: 103-121, on *De Nieuwe Stem* cf. Faber 1995.

[49] Noordenbos 1948a; on *De Vrije Katheder* cf. Van den Burg 1983.

[50] De Vries 1948.

[51] Van Praag 1948.

[52] Barneveld 1948a.

[53] On Barneveld and *Propria Cures* cf. Ligtenberg & Polak 1990.

[54] Ligtenberg & Polak 1990: 157, 165.

published in a contribution on Vestdijk as an essayist.[55] Barneveld wrote a sympathetic review in a literary critical magazine, *Libertinage*.[56] He fiercely criticized theologians such as De Vos, Van Heugten, and Mankes-Zernike. The only criticism aimed at Vestdijk was the latter's betrayal of the concept of 'human dignity'. For this criticism he was attacked by Sierksma, the main editor of the literary and opinion monthly, *Podium*.[57] Barneveld, in turn, wrote an equally polemical reply to Sierksma's critique.[58]

Apart from the polemic between Barneveld and Sierksma, an interesting polemic was triggered by an extensive criticism of *De toekomst der religie* by the editor of *Libertinage*, H.A. Gomperts.[59] The latter, pretending to be a true heir of the *Forum*-tradition (a famous and influential pre-war magazine edited by Menno ter Braak and Edgar du Perron), attacked Vestdijk for his objective and impersonal style as well as for his positive arguments regarding religion. He also accused Vestdijk, who had also been one of the *Forum*-editors, of betraying his own past. However, while Sierksma published his critique of Barneveld in *Podium*, Vestdijk was allowed to counter Gompert's criticism in *Libertinage* itself.[60] Gomperts responded.[61] Later on, Sierksma defended Vestdijk's position against Gomperts in *Podium*.[62]

From other intellectual circles, Ben Stroman, who published a review in *Algemeen Handelsblad* as well as *Kroniek voor Kunst en Kultuur,* was highly sympathetic, though somewhat critical.[63], Paul Rodenko expressed his appreciation for Vestdijk's arguments on freedom, tolerance and democracy in an essay on Vestdijk and religion published in *Podium*.[64] Similar points were made by J.H.W. Veenstra in an essay on Vestdijk as cultural critique,[65] published in the same collection as Barneveld's article on Vestdijk as an essayist.

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[55] Barneveld 1948d.

[56] Barneveld 1948b; on *Libertinage* cf. Calis 1999: chapter 6, 2001: chapter 4.

[57] Sierksma 1948; on *Podium* cf. Sicking 1986, Calis 1993: chapter 3-5, 2001: chapter 5-7.

[58] Barneveld 1948c.

[59] Gomperts 1949a; on Gomperts cf. Calis 1999: 339-344.

[60] Vestdijk 1949c, 1950ab.

[61] Gomperts 1949b, 1950ab.

[62] Sierksma 1950, 1951a.

[63] Stroman 1948ab; on *Algemeen Handelsblad* cf. Dijkstra 1998, on *Kroniek voor Kunst en Kultuur* cf. Bavelaar & Verheyen 1998.

[64] Rodenko 1948; on Rodenko cf. Hilberdink 2000.

[65] Veenstra 1948; like Vestdijk, a critic of *Het Parool*.

The main contributions, however, came from the essayist Fokke Sierksma.[66] First of all, he gave Vestdijk the opportunity to publish his counter-critiques against theologians like De Vos, Van der Leeuw, Miskotte, and Bleeker in *Podium*. Secondly, he himself attacked Barneveld. Thirdly, he wrote a highly polemical essay against Mankes-Zernike, De Vos, Van der Leeuw, Miskotte, Bleeker, Van Heugten, and Gomperts.[67] Finally, however, he also criticized Vestdijk, especially for his theory of projection. To this critique, Vestdijk responded.[68] Here for the first time we find the issues that will be elaborated upon after the publication of Sierksma's *De religieuze projectie*.[69] The latter book, along with a reprint of Sierksma's essay, intended for a wider public under the title *Tussen twee vuren*[70], would become landmarks in the history of our polemic. Moreover, the latter also offered a reprint of the critiques made by Mankes-Zernike, De Vos, Van der Leeuw, Miskotte, and Bleeker, as well as Vestdijk's counter-critiques.[71]

As we shall later see, the contributions by Sierksma would set the stage for other periods. The first period, however, would be by far the most polemical. A great diversity of people criticized Vestdijk's essay. Minor intellectuals, politically progressive theologians from the NHK, the Mennonite community as well as literary critics were among the most aggressive opponents. Vestdijk himself launched counter-attacks against some of these opponents. Apart from Sierksma, Noordenbos and Barneveld would join him. The controversy was played out in newspapers, opinion monthlies and literary magazines. Both the intensity of the polemic and the range of public that it reached differed considerably from later periods. Yet, whereas in the first period the public consisted of more or less isolated groups of people, during the second period Sierksma's widely available essay challenged especially the theologians to continue discussion in order to counter his attacks.

Period 2 – 1952-1959

As has been previously mentioned, the second period started both with the publication of the second edition of Vestdijk's essay and the publication of Sierskma's essay for the wider public. Critiques of theologians had been written for *Het Parool*, *Vrij Nederland*, and *Wending*, but the editors had not allowed them to be published. And though Sierksma offered Vestdijk the opportunity to let them appear in *Podium*, the

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[66] On Sierksma cf. Beck & Jenner 1982, Kalma 1988; on Sierksma as a polemist cf. Delvigne 2000.

[67] Sierksma 1950, 1951b.

[68] Sierksma 1951a, Vestdijk 1951.

[69] Sierksma 1956.

[70] Sierksma 1952.

[71] Sierksma 1952: 97-144.

commentary did not reach the public it was intended for. Sierksma's response did not get much attention either as long as its audience was limited to the readers of his magazine. All this changed after Sierksma's essay, together with Vestdijk's response to some polemical contributions, became widely available through the well-known Amsterdam publisher *De Bezige Bij*.

The massive challenge that Sierksma's essay put to Vestdijk's opponents did not trigger any response from those whom he was actually criticizing. Philosopher and literary critic J. Bomhoff paid some attention to *De toekomst der religie* in his overview of Vestdijk's work. A friend of Vestdijk and Sierksma, A. Marja (pseudonym for J.J.A Mooij)[72], made some positive comments regarding Sierksma's essay in both *Algemeen Handelsblad* and the *NRC*, and included Bomhoff in the list of critics whose polemics had been successfully countered by Sierksma.[73] Bomhoff responded in the *NRC*, though Marja was allowed the last word in this controversy.[74] Later, Marja would return to this case in a review of *De schandalen*, one of Vestdijk's many novels, which appeared in the literary critical magazine *Vandaag*.[75] Referring to a speech in Parliament made by Reverend P. Zandt[76] in which Vestdijk was criticized as a representative of godless modernity, Marja claimed to be surprised that Vestdijk's work was even notorious among the ultra-orthodox Protestants. He concluded that writers become especially well-known when they have a bad reputation. In Vestdijk's case, he held not only theologians such as Van der Leeuw and Miskotte accountable, but Bomhoff as well.

Other contributions mainly focused on *Tussen twee vuren*, without even mentioning the reprint of *De toekomst der religie*. Th.P. van Baaren made some positive comments for Northern Netherlands Broadcasting (RONO), later published in *Literair Kwartier*.[77] O. Noordenbos wrote a review for *De Nieuwe Stem*.[78] The editors of the latter (moderately socialist) magazine also mentioned the publication of Sierksma's essay and proposed a dialogue between Vestdijk and the theologians. Within this context they referred to a review of *Tussen twee vuren* by J.M. de Jong, a prominent liberal theologian of the NHK.[79] In this review, published in an important progressive opinion weekly, *Vrij Nederland*, De Jong especially criticized the style of contributions such as those of De Vos, Miskotte, and Van der Leeuw. And here we meet

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[72] Cf. Hazeu 1985, Van Delden 1985.

[73] Bomhoff 1952a.

[74] Marja 1952a, Bomhoff 1952b, Marja 1952b.

[75] Marja 1954.

[76] Cf. Florijn 1988.

[77] Van Baaren 1952; on Van Baaren cf. Hofstee 1987, Hak 1994.

[78] Noordenbos 1952.

[79] Editors of *De Nieuwe Stem* 1952, De Jong 1952; on De Jong cf. Van Leeuwen 1998.

with a new tendency within politically progressive religious circles: to aim at dialogue rather than to denigrate.

A clear example of the trend towards dialogue is observable in the contributions by H. Kraemer,[80] one of the prominent members of the past Dutch People's Movement (*De Nederlandse Volksbeweging*), the PvdA, as well as a reformer of the NHK, and a regularly contributor to *Wending*. In the latter monthly, he initiated something which, according to him, was meant as a serious attempt at dialogue with both Vestdijk and Sierksma. He admitted that the polemical style previously employed by theologians was not justifiable. Instead, he attempted to initiate an extensive discussion of some of the most relevant topics. At the same time, he aligned himself with the attacks on *De religieuze projectie* previously launched by Mennonite J.A. Oosterbaan and humanist Kwee Swan Liat.[81] Moreover, he heavily criticized the liberal theologian L.J. van Holk for being too sympathetic towards Sierksma's arguments.[82] Even though his main target was Sierksma, he expected Vestdijk to be more ready for dialogue. Yet, Vestdijk did not feel forced to engage in the type of dialogue which Kraemer pursued. In fact, it was Sierksma who responded, without, however, expecting too much to come out of the discussion. Kraemer offered a counter-critique, while the editors of *Wending* allowed Sierksma to close the discussion.[83] Of course, this was a generous gesture of *Wending* to an acknowledged 'unbeliever,' as was its previous offer to Sierksma to engage in a dialogue with Van der Leeuw on crucial matters of faith ten years before.[84] The discussion with Kraemer, however, was more polemical than that with Van der Leeuw. And it is not at all clear why *Wending* offered Sierksma the opportunities to respond, while they did not accept Vestdijk's critique of Van der Leeuw immediately after the publication of *De toekomst der religie*.

Liberal theologians of the NHK distanced themselves from the type of dialogue initiated by Kraemer in *Wending*. Certainly, Vestdijk and Sierksma had to be taken seriously, as Remonstrant J.C.A. Fetter and H. Faber previously argued in opinion and church magazines. Theologians had to justify their stance not only towards orthodox tendencies, but also to the outside world.[85] Van Holk advocated a similar point of view. In addition, P. Smits and G.J. Sirks supported Van Holk in the liberal protestant church weekly *Kerk & Wereld* against the attacks of Kraemer.[86] Especially

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[80] Cf. Jansen Schoonhoven 1978.

[81] Oosterbaan 1957, Kwee 1957; for a reply cf. Sierksma 1957.

[82] Kraemer 1959a; reference to Van Holk cf. 1957; on Van Holk cf. Van Leeuwen 2001.

[83] Kraemer 1959a, Sierksma 1959a, Kraemer 1959b, Sierksma 1959b.

[84] Van der Leeuw & Sierksma 1949.

[85] De Fetter 1952, Faber 1952; on De Fetter cf. Witteveen 2001, on Faber cf. Faber 1993.

[86] Smits 1959a, Sirks 1959; on Smits cf. De Jong 1998: 298-302, Meijering 2002: 28-33; on Sirks cf. Luca 1988; on *Kerk & Wereld* cf. Veldkamp 1995.

after the publication of an article by Smits—in which he confessed that, like Vestdijk, he refused to believe in the substitutary death of Jesus on the cross for sins committed by Smits himself—he received lots of criticism from middle-orthodox circles within the NHK. One of the fiercest and most influential critics was J.J. Buskes, who attacked Smits in the NHK monthly *In de Waagschaal*, while in *Wending* the reverend H.C. Touw made some polemical remarks.[87] Attempts at dialogue in order to settle the case did not succeed. In the end, Smits resigned as the chief editor of *Kerk & Wereld* and was suspended from his duties as a minister of the NHK. Though Vestdijk did not figure in the rest of this polemic, indirectly he contributed to the case as a means by which liberals and middle orthodox defined their boundaries. And, as we will see, Smits would on several occasions express his sympathy for Vestdijk, as well as for Sierksma.

The exchanges and increasing interaction between Mennonite and NHK theologians and their opponents were not the only contributions to the controversy. GKN-theologians contributed as well. Berkouwer offered a review of both the reprints of *De toekomst der religie* and *Tussen twee vuren*.[88] At the time, he gave commentary on recent social and religious currents in *Trouw*. Apart from that, he had discussed Vestdijk's arguments extensively throughout his dogmatic studies.[89] Though critical, we see in this period the beginnings of an increasingly ecumenical spirit among the Dutch Reformed opinion leaders. Berkouwer, for example, did not spare theologians for their personal attacks without accusing Vestdijk and Sierksma of the same weaknesses. He warned his own brothers about committing the same mistakes. This becomes especially clear in his review of collected polemical essays by Vestdijk,[90] as well as in his comments on the literary exchange between Sierksma and Kraemer.[91] Even more sympathetic, though critical, was the GKN psychologist A.L. Janse de Jonge. He published an essay in *Bezinning* in which he offered an extensive review of *De religieuze projectie*. He also used this opportunity to criticize both *De toekomst der religie* and *Tussen twee vuren*. For this he made positive reference to early comments on psychological approaches to religion and religious projection by Berkouwer and Bavinck.[92] Though the topics were similar, his style differed from that of a prominent member of the NHK, Kraemer, in that he did not use personal invectives. His approach was also much more sympathetic and moderate than that of minor GKN

[87] Buskes 1959, Touw 1959; on Buskes cf. De Jong 1998, on Touw cf. Rasker 1986: 315-316.

[88] Berkouwer 1952.

[89] Berkouwer, *De mens het beeld Gods* (1957), *De zonde I. Oorsprong en kennis der zonde* (1958).

[90] Berkouwer 1956.

[91] Berkouwer 1959.

[92] Janse de Jonge 1956; Berkouwer 1948b, Bavinck 1949.

intellectuals like A. Wapenaar and A. Pos, who attacked Vestdijk for his arguments against Christianity in *Horizon*.[93]

Whereas Hekstra's comments just after the publication of *De toekomst der religie* were mainly directed against intellectual trends within the GKN,[94] his contributions to the second period of the controversy were equally polemical towards the politically progressive intellectuals of the NHK.[95] In a series of articles on Vestdijk and Schilder published in the Free Reformed opinion magazine *Ruimte*, P.A. Hekstra emphasized the superiority of both over their opponents, particularly Miskotte. One article was simply a reprint of Siesling's critique of *De toekomst der religie*. Here he even criticized his fellow member of the VGKN, 'Marnix' (A. Zijlstra), for his personal attack.[96] Yet, as soon as he started to focus on Vestdijk exclusively, his style turned polemical as well.[97]

Apart from people like Wapenaar, Pos and Hekstra, who focused exclusively on *De toekomst der religie*, and others like Kraemer, Berkouwer and Janse de Jonge who dealt with both Vestdijk and Sierksma, literary critics also treated Vestdijk's essay within the context of his oeuvre in its entirety. According to them, a discussion could be useful to illuminate themes and characters figuring in his novels. Though they greatly appreciated his artistic qualities, he was constantly criticized for the moral confusion thought to be characteristic of his novels. According to these critics, there was an immediate link between this confusion and his atheism. This ambivalence was clear in the contributions by Bomhoff.[98] A similar notion holds true for the reviews by Popma in *Horizon* and Van Heugten in *Streven*.[99] The latter defined Vestdijk's novels as mirrors of their own time. Vestdijk's friend and literary critic Jeanne van Schaik-Willing as well as sculptor and art historian Bernard 'Majorick' (pseudonym for J.J. Beljon) appreciated his work in much the same way.[100] Yet, with the exception of Popma, all of these critics were highly polemical. Catholics like Josine Meyer and Th. Govaart were more moderate, thus more resembling Popma himself.[101]

One important contribution of this period has yet to be mentioned: namely the two-volume study on the future of western civilization, written by the prominent

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[93] Wapenaar 1952, 1953, Pos 1958, 1959; on Pos cf. De Jong 1997: passim.

[94] Hekstra 1948.

[95] Cf. Woldring & Kuiper 1980, Brinkman 1983.

[96] Hekstra 1957abc; references to Siesling 1948, Marnix 1948.

[97] Hekstra 1954.

[98] Bomhoff 1952a, 1957abc.

[99] Popma 1957, Van Heugten 1957.

[100] Schaik-Willing 1952, Majorick 1953; on Schaik-Willing cf. Schaik-Willing 1977.

[101] Meyer 1958, Govaart 1958.

socialist intellectual F.L. Polak.[102] Polak reviewed Vestdijk's arguments regarding religion extensively, and made some interesting points of criticism. Without being polemical, he admitted that he understood why Vestdijk's style of arguing had driven some critics so furious. In his counter-critique, Vestdijk praised Polak for his intelligent and careful treatment of the issues, yet explained why he believed that his critics needn't get angry at all.[103]

Apart from the exchanges between Vestdijk and Sierksma during this period, the dialogue with Polak was the only example in which Vestdijk took the opportunity to counter his critics. In general, however, interaction between intellectuals of different traditions was increasing. First of all, the humanist literary and cultural critics such as Marja and Noordenbos continued to criticize the 'breakthrough' theologians and critics of the NHK, of whom Miskotte, De Vos and Bomhoff were among the most challenging. Apart from them, two other groups of intellectuals were equally critical of both these theologians and their critics, notably Vestdijk and Sierksma. On the one hand, a clash arose between middle-orthodox and more liberal theologians within the NHK. Kraemer, Buskes and Smits played a leading role within this context. On the other hand, theologians and critics from the GKN and VGKN, as well as intellectuals from GKN and VGKN, such as Berkouwer and Hekstra, commented upon the polemics between Vestdijk and these theologians as well. Yet, after all, the 'breakthrough' theologians of the NHK who were organized around *Wending* changed their rhetoric with respect to 'unbelievers', explaining to their readers that dialogue was the style required in order to properly engage with their critics. The contribution of Kraemer offered a genuine attempt to follow this strategy.

These tendencies towards interaction were favored by Sierksma's essay on Vestdijk and the polemics surrounding *De toekomst der religie*. A period of reflection had begun. Partly overlapping with this tendency, critics no longer focussed exclusively on Vestdijk's arguments. The only exceptions were some minor intellectuals of the GKN, who still seemed to be isolated from other critical traditions. All others preferred to view Vestdijk's essay as either part of his work as a whole, or as an exponent of the modern mentality. Given these trends, it is not surprising that essays, rather than reviews, prevailed in this period. These essays were mainly written for opinion monthlies or published as (a chapter or part of) a book, rather than as articles in newspapers.

In general, contributions were limited to certain intellectual circles. However, though there was less diversity among the critics, reactions became more serious and thorough. This also meant that the public aimed at was more limited, especially with

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[102] Cf. De Vries 1996: 149-167.

[103] Polak 1955, Vestdijk 1956a.

respect to educational level and expertise. This tendency would become even more pronounced in the third period.

Period 3 – 1960-1972

As we observed during the previous period of the controversy, contributions no longer focused exclusively on *De toekomst der religie*. This trend continued into the period which we shall now discuss. In 1960, the third edition of Vestdijk's essay was published. Yet, without any exception, every review that mentioned it focused mainly on Gerhard Szczesny's *De toekomst van het ongeloof*.[104] From different religious perspectives, the latter essay was commented upon primarily, and only within this context was any reference made to Vestdijk's arguments, mostly to point out the similarities between the two authors.

P.A. van Stempvoort wrote a polemical review in the politically conservative *Elseviers Weekblad*. To this Vestdijk responded, arguing that Van Stempvoort was mistaken on some matters of fact and, as a man of science, should be more careful. Even though it initiated some new attention for *De toekomst der religie*, critiques of its third edition also triggered the very last reply which Vestdijk would make to his opponents. After that, neither Vestdijk nor Sierksma would contribute to the controversy anymore. Van Stempvoort wrote a counter-critique, in which he avoided the points made by Vestdijk, and focused, instead, on the role played by Western intellectuals in general. Yet, as previously indicated, Vestdijk had written his final contribution to the controversy, and would not respond to Van Stempvoort anymore.[105]

The Roman Catholic magazine *Roeping* devoted a volume to *De toekomst van het ongeloof*.[106] The editor, C.W.M. Verhoeven, was highly polemical in his comments on the essay.[107] He also drew some parallels between Vestdijk and Szczesny.[108] Lambert Tegenbosch did something similar for both *Brabantsch Dagblad* and *Nieuw Eindhovensch Dagblad*.[109]

Far more sympathetic were critiques from either the Humanist, GKN or NHK perspective. O. Noordenbos wrote an extensive and positive review in *De Nieuwe*

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[104] Szczesny 1960; translation of Szczesny, *Die Zukunft des Unglaubens* (1958); cf. also Korsukéwitz 1979 on the controversy.

[105] Van Stempvoort 1960, Vestdijk 1961, Van Stempvoort 1961.

[106] Contribution by Verhoeven, followed by a discussion between Lambert Tegenbosch, Bernard Delfgaauw, and Verhoeven himself; on Verhoeven cf. Jager 1982, Struyker Boudier 1992a: 332-342.

[107] Verhoeven 1961a.

[108] Verhoeven 1961b.

[109] Tegenbosch 1961.

Stem.[110] On the other hand, GKN S.J. Popma in *Bezinning*[111] as well as NHK J. Sperna Weiland in *Wending*,[112] were highly critical of the arguments offered by both Szczesny and Vestdijk. Nevertheless, their style of arguing was moderate and they did not use any personal invectives.

Apart from this focus on Vestdijk in the wake of Szczesny's essay, *De toekomst der religie* received further attention within the context of the ongoing debate on Sierksma's *De religieuze projectie*. It was still possible to distinguish between different critical traditions. On the one hand, 'breakthrough' intellectuals from both NHK and Remonstrant Society continued their search to find the proper way in which to deal with the issues at hand. On the other hand, intellectuals from the RKK drew wide attention with their highly sophisticated critiques of Vestdijk and Sierksma.

A special issue of *Wending* was devoted to 'religious projection'.[113] As the editors, H.J. Heering[114] and A.J. Nijk,[115] explained, the volume was intended to offer a serious theological reflection on the problems raised by Vestdijk and especially Sierksma. The issue started with two articles written by two experts in their fields. The psychologist J.H. Plokker dealt with the psychology of projection, while the chemist C.J. Dippel focused on the problem of observation in the natural sciences. As a kind of intermezzo, two philosophers' articles were devoted to the problem of communication between secular and theological viewpoints. The first, written by A. Dumas, dealt with the relevance of the concept of projection as developed in the Marxist tradition. The other, written by L.W. Nauta[116] offered a detailed summary of both Vestdijk's and Sierksma's arguments, after which the possibilities for a fruitful dialogue between scientists and theologians was discussed. The contributions by J. Sperna Weiland, A. Th. Van Leeuwen, and C.W. Mönnich were clearly theological. The article by Nijk, a liberal protestant theologian, triggered some critical comments from C.J. Dippel, one of the foremost middle-orthodox intellectuals of Dutch Protestantism.[117] Heering attempted to draw some conclusions relevant to theologians. After reading the contributions, it seemed more difficult than ever to find a common ground between scientists and theologians. While the first clearly did not take God into account, the latter continued to include God in their reflections, arguing that scientific theory was

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[110] Noordenbos 1960.

[111] Popma 1961.

[112] Sperna Weiland 1961.

[113] Contributions by Heering & Nijk, Plokker, Dippel, Dumas, Nauta, Sperna Weiland, Van Leeuwen, Mönnich, Nijk & Dippel, and, again, Heering.

[114] Cf. Kuiper & Van Leeuwen 1998.

[115] Cf. Van Steeg 1980.

[116] Cf. Pels & De Vries 1994.

[117] Cf. Van Dijk 1985, Van Berkelaar 1999.

too limited to understand reality. The problem, however, became even more complicated since believers did not agree on the means by which the existence of God could be known. Heering thus referred to a problem that had been pressing since the rise of liberal Protestantism. Important in this case, however, was the fact that a discussion arose regarding theories offered by acknowledged unbelievers. And it seemed as though the editors did not truly believe in a dialogue between unbelievers and theologians. Unlike Kraemer, they invited neither Vestdijk nor Sierksma for a counter-critique.

Serious and extensive discussion and criticism was initiated by progressive intellectuals within Roman Catholic circles. First, the Leuven philosopher W.A.M. Luijpen published a book on phenomenology and atheism.[118] Though it has since been reprinted several times, his critique of Sierksma was only reflected upon by S.M. Benjamins—who published an essay on Sierksma's oeuvre—and C.W.M. Verhoeven, both of which featured in the Roman-Catholic literary and opinion monthly *Raam* (the successor of *Roeping*).[119] Apart from Luijpen's contribution to the issue, the psychologist H.M.M. Fortmann presented a lecture for the prominent Roman Catholic intellectuals' society, the *Thijmgenootschap*.[120] Yet, the latter's four-volume study entitled *Als ziende de onzienlijke* ('As if seeing the unseen') received far more attention.[121] In this book, Fortmann offered an excellent summary of Vestdijk's and Sierksma's theories of projection as developed by both Vestdijk and Sierksma. His critique, however, was extremely sophisticated and serious in tone. Even though the study's arguments were highly theoretical and abstract, it got several reviews in newspapers and opinion monthlies. Among others, the Netherlands Reformed Reverend C. Aalders wrote a laudatory review in *Het Vaderland*, while the psychologist H. Faber offered some sympathetic comments in *Wending*.[122] In *De Volkskrant*, the Roman Catholic literary critic Gabriël Smit wrote a page-long article in which Fortmann was presented as the man who had, together with Jung, saved religion from the reductive criticisms of Marx and Freud, Vestdijk and Sierksma.[123] Interesting from an ecumenical point of view was the extensive review in *Wending* written by the Ro-

[118] Luijpen 1963; on Luijpen cf. Struyker Boudier 1987: 107-117.

[119] Luijpen 1967, 1979; translated as *Phenomenology and Atheism* (1964); Benjamins 1964, Verhoeven 1964.

[120] Fortmann 1961; on Fortmann cf. Van Gennip 1973, Westhoff 1996.

[121] Fortmann 1964-68; full title *Een cultuurpsychologische studie over de religieuze waarneming en de zogenaamde religieuze projectie* ('a cultural-psychological study on religious perception and so-called religious projection')

[122] Aalders 1965, Faber 1965; on Aalders cf. Van Belle 1976.

[123] Smit 1969.

man Catholic philosopher-psychologist H.J.L. van Luijk.[124] Like Fortmann, Van Luijk was highly critical of Sierksma. However, the fact that he—as a Catholic—published for the progressive *Wending* indicates the development of a tighter network between intellectuals of originally independent traditions.

For the first time since he had attacked Vestdijk immediately after the publication of *De toekomst der religie*, NHK H. de Vos felt ready to make some moderate comments in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*.[125] Employing the arguments offered by Fortmann, he criticized Vestdijk and Sierksma, and defended Bleeker, Kwee, and Kraemer against the two. Yet, nowhere did he get personal, the way he had almost twenty years earlier. The fact that he, like Fortmann, positively referred to GKN psychologist Janse de Jonge, might count as more evidence of the ecumenical spirit of the times.

In general, it seemed as though the trend towards integration of different traditions was triggering a far more moderate approach to Vestijk and Sierksma. However, as was observed in the case of Verhoeven, the more intimately Catholic circles continued their polemical way of arguing. As in the previous period, the more conservative circles, at that time represented by Hekstra, even employed Vestdijk in order to attack revolutionary tendencies within the intellectual scene. Something similar happened in the case of Father A. van der Wey. He wrote a critic for the Roman Catholic newspaper *De Tijd-Maasbode*, in which he asked himself whether Vestdijk had indeed been correct in his opinions on the future of Christianity. He mentioned several secularizing tendencies, especially within Catholicism, of which he was highly critical.[126]

To return to Janse de Jonge, his case must be seen as somewhere in between the usual positions taken by other critics. As early as the second period, he was dealing with Vestdijk and Sierksma. In an essay published for *Horizon*,[127] he focused on Vestdijk's views on religion as underlying themes of his novelistic work. Other critics were interpreting *De toekomst der religie* either as a work with an explicit statement on the themes underlying the rest of Vestdijk's work, or as a general sign of the times. The first approach was typical for literary critics.[128] The more theologically oriented

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[124] Luijk 1970.

[125] De Vos 1966.

[126] Van der Wey 1965; on Van der Wey cf. Van der Wey 1976, Struyker Boudier 1987: 85-89.

[127] Janse de Jonge 1962.

[128] Cf. especially R.A. Cornets de Groot. In a variety of literary and opinion magazines he analyzed poems, novels, and essays in which he referred to *De toekomst der religie* in general, and Vestdijk's typology of religious man in particular in order to understand the characters. He published his essays in *Maatstaf*, *Merlyn*, and *Kentering*, but also in *Raam* and *De Gids* (1964, 1965abcd, 1966ab, 1967, 1969ab, 1971abc). For J.J. Oversteegen in *Merlyn*, *De toekomst der*

scholars usually chose the second interpretation. These scholars belonged to either the GKN or the NHK. They offered clear examples of our earlier observation, namely that Vestdijk had become a part of history and was no longer a main target for criticism; indeed, his was taken to be just another expression of the modern mentality.[129] In any case, the polemical style that had been characteristic of many earlier contributions no longer appeared in these volumes.

Two cases might further illustrate the non-polemical attitude within ecumenically oriented circles. First of all, the Smits-affair of the late 1950s within the NHK was resolved more than ten years later. As a critic of the *NRC/Handelsblad* wrote,[130] in the end the NHK decided that the disciplinary measures against Smits were no longer an adequate answer to differences of opinion, even on matters concerning theology. In the early 1970s, the NHK granted him the salary of a retired reverend and the rights of a Church professor. As we shall see, Smits was even allowed to publish his opinions in the NHK media.[131] Thus, he would argue in *Hervormd Nederland*, anybody who truly wanted a dialogue with the 'unbelievers' needn't look outside, but rather look in the mirror and search for the 'unbeliever' within. Though he did not agree with everything that both Vestdijk and Sierksma had argued for, the polemic against the two was, according to him, a black page in the history of Christianity.

Secondly, outside the NHK, a study which was published by three theologians at the end of what I have been calling the third period of the controversy was clearly ecumenical. Together with Lutheran J.T. Bakker, Remonstrant H.J. Heering and GKN G.Th. Rothuizen made some passing comments on Vestdijk and Sierksma.[132]

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religie offered a typology of religious personalities that frequently returned in the rest of Vestdijk's oeuvre (1962). The same topic occurs in the analyses of Govaart (1967); cf. also Martin Hartkamp, Hella Haasse and Jeanne van Schaik-Willing, in their contributions to *Maatstaf* at the occasion of Vestdijk's death (1971).

[129] In several volumes of his *Dogmatische Studiën*, Berkouwer just continued the approach he had been starting in the second period of the controversy already; cf. *De Zonde II. Wezen en verspreiding der zonde* (1960); Kraemer in his *God, godsdiensten en het christelijk geloof* (1958), De Vos in his *Christendom en de andere godsdiensten* (1962), Sperna Weiland in his dogmatic studies for *Wending* (1963), Miskotte in his 'mirror of the times' in his famous *Als de goden zwijgen* (1965). So also J.M. de Jong & C.J. Dippel in the first volume of their *Geloof en natuurwetenschap* (1965). More attention is paid to *De toekomst der religie* in Bleeker's *Christ in Modern Athens. The Confrontation of Christianity with Modern Culture and the Non-Christian Religions* (1965).

[130] De Ruiter 1971.

[131] Smits 1977.

[132] Bakker, Heering & Rothuizen 1972.

Though critical, these comments were far from polemical, simply confirming the tendency previously identified. Almost nobody, even within theological circles, took offense anymore. The important point to be later determined is whether or not this should be attributed to the fact that *De toekomst der religie*, *Tussen twee vuren*, and *De religieuze projectie* had become a part of history, or to the far less controversial status that theological critics had employed as compared to earlier periods.

Polemics arose concerning issues brought to light after the release of *Blue Movie*, a film which, according to its director Wim Verstappen, had been based on Vestdijk's ideas on religion and sexuality.[133] This movie was criticized for its sexual morality, and was regarded as 'pornographic' by the Dutch film censure. Verstappen defended its 'pornography' by referring to arguments developed by Vestdijk himself in his "widely acknowledged" and "serious essay" *De toekomst der religie*. Eventually, Verstappen succeeded in convincing his critics, and the movie passed censure. His defense of the movie was published in *Skoop, Krities Filmblad*, together with a polemical critique of the Netherlands Reformed theologian and film specialist A. Dronkers.[134] The latter had not only stated his problems with the movie, but also with Vestdijk's opinions regarding religion in general. On the other hand, Charles Boost, one of the editors of *Skoop*, criticized the Dutch film censure in *Haarlems Dagblad*. According to a critic of *De Volkskrant*, B.J. Bertina, Dutch film censure would have made a mistake if it had not allowed the film to be released.[135] Under the rubric 'laughing about', a critic of *De Telegraaf* wrote that s/he had laughed her head off when s/he heard about the objections of the Dutch film censure against *Blue Movie*.[136] This polemic on 'pornography' shows that problems with Vestdijk's opinions on religion and sexuality did not cause any shock among the broader public; only the intellectuals of certain (not only clerical, but also political) circles were still highly critical in an attempt to resist the rising tide of 'moral anarchy'.

To conclude, several aspects distinguish this third period from the previous ones. We don't find any contributions that deal exclusively with Vestdijk's essay, even though its third and fourth edition were published in these years. Other essays, as well as the study by Sierksma, *De religieuze projectie*, called the most attention in the form of critiques that referred to *De toekomst der religie*. The essay was mentioned in magazine articles and books that were primarily published for an expert public of theologians, philosophers, psychologists and literary critics. On the high level of discussion in the Netherlands concerning the problem of religious projection (as com-

[133] *Blue Movie* 1971.

[134] Verstappen 1971, Dronkers 1971.

[135] Boost 1971, Bertina 1971.

[136] *De Telegraaf* 1971.

pared to Germany), H. Faber published an essay,[137] and in the U.S. Lee W. Bailey and Van A. Harvey have recently drawn attention to the interesting contributions by Vestdijk, Sierksma, and Fortmann.[138] Yet, not only the level, but also the increasing interaction between intellectuals previously separated by ideological and church boundaries during this period is striking. The media involved allowed for contributions from experts formerly excluded from their pages. Fortmann got laudatory reviews for his thorough arguments by theologians from GKN, NHK and Remonstrant communities. An RKK psychologist was allowed to write an extensive review of Fortmann's books in the 'breakthrough' magazine *Wending*. GKN, Remonstrant and Lutheran theologians published together. Conflicts within the NHK regarding Vestdijk, among other things, were resolved.

Polemics were limited to the more isolated and lay circles within the RKK and VGKN. Certainly, when it came to new media like cinema and television, positively rewarded in newspapers and film magazines, even NHK critics were prepared to attack their opponents. Isolation and the wider public were two important aspects of the polemical contributions during the fourth period.

Period 4 – 1973-1998

This period started with the founding of a magazine wholly devoted to the study of Vestdijk's work, the *Vestdijkkroniek*, as well as J. Kamphuis' inaugural address at the VGKN Seminary at Kampen, entitled *Vestdijk en de kerkgeschiedenis*.[139]

Those contributing to the *Vestdijkkroniek* came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Whereas some were independent literary critics, others belonged to either the RKK, NHK or *Humanistisch Verbond* (HV, 'Humanist Association'). Even though most intellectuals within this circle were faithful to Vestdijk's person and opinions, a few dared to criticize the master. An example of the first category is Mrs. L.G. Abell-van Soest, who wrote an article on Vestdijk and the problem of evil.[140] Far more critical was Harry Bekkering in a review of a short study by J. Kamphuis on Vestdijk and church history, originally presented as a lecture for students at the Free Re-

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[137] H. Faber, 'Das Problem der Projektion in der Religion,' *Pastoraltheologie. Wissenschaft und Praxis in Kirche und Gesellschaft* 75/7 (1986): 327-337.

[138] Lee W. Bailey, 'Religious Projection. A New European Tour,' *Religious Studies Review* 14/3, (1988): 207-211; Van A. Harvey, 'Projection as Perceptual Grid,' *Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 252-263; cf. also Stewart Elliot Guthrie, 'Projection,' Willie Braun & Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London & New York: Cassell): 225-238.

[139] Kamphuis 1973.

[140] Abell-van Soest 1976.

formed Seminary at Kampen.[141] Bekkering agreed with certain points of Kamphuis' critique of Vestdijk.

In his lecture, Kamphuis attempted to paint a clean picture of Vestdijk's arguments concerning religion. He also made clear that he did not agree with those arguments. This becomes especially evident at the end, when he compared his own belief regarding the future of religion with that of Vestdijk. But all this had more an air of confession about it, rather than any kind of critique intended to discredit Vestdijk as a person or a specialist. For Wim J. Simons, however, Kamphuis's study was an opportunity to write a polemical review for the conservative *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* in which Vestdijk was presented as a hedgehog hunting for God.[142] After a reprint of Kamphuis's lecture as a chapter of a book on the voices of their times, far more moderate comments were made by K. Nolles,[143] literary critic for *Nederlands Dagblad*, a newspaper for members of the VGKN, to which Kamphuis himself belonged.[144] Kamphuis's last book, and the chapter on Vestdijk in particular, received a moderate critique by Jan Kooistra[145] in the literary critical magazine *Argus*. In general, however, the contributions made by Kamphuis and his critics played a marginal role. As will be argued in the last chapter, his isolated position within the public sphere must have been decisive here.

Apart from Kamphuis, only one polemical remark was made in *Hervormd Nederland*.[146] The literary critic and minor intellectual J. Noordegraaf argued that it was clear to everybody that Vestdijk's opinions on religion were at least disputable, if not dubious. Moreover, his agreement to collaborate with the Germans during the war was telling as well.

Yet, in all other contributions, whether in religious or literary critical media, *De toekomst der religie* received sympathetic, though often critical attention. In the same magazine in which Noordegraaf had published his review, Smits published an article on both Vestdijk and Sierksma. And this time he again took their side against their theological critics.[147] Even A. van der Wey took Vestdijk's critique of Christianity seriously in *Trouw*, and took issue with his modernist fellow Catholics over the question of whether or not they were still Christians.[148]

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[141] Bekkering 1977; on Kamphuis cf. Valkenburg 1974: 133-148.

[142] Simons 1974.

[143] Kamphuis 1978, Nolles 1979.

[144] On *Nederlands Dagblad* cf. Breuker 1993.

[145] Kooistra 1979.

[146] Noordegraaf 1975.

[147] Smits 1978.

[148] Van der Wey 1978.

In the literary critical magazine *Maatstaf*, René Marres discussed the value of Vestdijk's essay in the light of historical developments since.[149] He concluded that on many points, Vestdijk had been correct, while on other points he had been wrong. However, the latter conclusion was not meant as a critical remark; it may be that Vestdijk was wrong precisely because of his historical intervention by means of his essay.

In 1980, the 'Vestdijk circle' organized two symposia on *De toekomst der religie*. The lectures presented on that occasion were published (of course) in the *Vestdijkkroniek*.[150] Smits' contribution[151] triggered a personal critique from Martin Hartkamp;[152] so also within the 'Vestdijk circle' did people differ on certain points, and they were not afraid to argue their opinions in public. Martin Ros made some comments regarding the two symposia in *Boekblad*. Specific attention was paid to the contribution of Hartkamp. He also referred to the study of Kamphuis, and that of Monique Despret, who, under the supervision of Henrard, had written a doctoral dissertation on the reception of *De toekomst der religie*.[153] Finally, Ton Oostveen, commentator of the Roman-Catholic opinion weekly *De Tijd*, published a review of the two symposia. According to him, the contributions showed that Christianity seemed to be learning the lessons it had received from Vestdijk in his critique of metaphysical religion. (He also mentioned a biological critique of Vestdijk's opinions on religion by A. de Froe, not published in the *Vestdijkkroniek*).[154]

Besides the more thorough contributions previously mentioned, there were only short announcements concerning the reprint of *De toekomst der religie* in 1975 and of *Tussen twee vuren* in 1979, mainly from local newspapers like the *Graafschapsbode*, *Gooi & Eemlander*, *Hasselter Courant*, *Provinciale Zeeuwsche Courant*, as well as the AVRO. They did not add any opinions to the controversy. Also, two opinion weeklies in which, long before, highly polemical reviews had been published, namely *De Groene Amsterdammer* and *Vrij Nederland*, paid some attention to the reprint.[155] Only the latter magazine refered to Vestdijk's main arguments against Christianity (its intolerance) and the polemic that it later triggered. According to *Vrij Nederland*, it would be inter-

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[149] Marres 1977.

[150] Mrs. Abell-van Soest, Martin Ros, Martin Hartkamp, R. Henrard, and B. & N. Verwey offered a sympathetic description and attempts at understanding of Vestdijk's arguments on religion, while N. Beets, A.L. Constandse, Smits, and H.A. Wage also formulated some criticism.

[151] Smits 1980.

[152] Hartkamp 1981.

[153] Ros 1980b; Kamphuis 1978, Hartkamp 1980, Despret 1980.

[154] Oostveen 1980.

[155] *Groene Amsterdammer* 1975, *Vrij Nederland* 1975.

esting to study this polemic more closely, but more as an amazing piece of history; Vestdijk's opinions themselves no longer seemed relevant. After the reprint of *Tussen twee vuren*, similar comments were made by Hans Warren in the *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant* and Rob Schouten, at that time a critic for *Algemeen Dagblad*.[156]

Though originally intended as media for highly isolated groups, both *Hervormd Nederland* and *Trouw* showed a trend towards integration of different religious perspectives. Besides theologians, other intellectuals argued for a general kind of religiosity. This trend is especially clear in the reflexive comments made by Rob Schouten in a page-long article in *Trouw*.[157] He gave a summary of Vestdijk's arguments and concluded that, though Vestdijk had made some apparent mistakes, in many respects his projections had turned out to be correct. Especially the differences between religions and religious denominations were less clear than before. And, clearly, *Trouw* itself was proof of those developments. It had developed from a strictly Dutch Reformed newspaper to a daily newspaper for a broader public with a general religious interest. After the end of *De Tijd*, many Roman-Catholic journalists and commentators joined *Trouw*. Van der Wey and Verhoeven are only two examples of this trend. Similar trends were observed earlier between Roman-Catholic circles and *Wending*. We need only remember the essay on Fortmann by Luijk.[158] Another example is offered by L. Laeyendecker. He contributed to an issue of *Wending* on the future of Church and Christianity.[159] In this article he attempted to distinguish between a sense of history and the future on the one hand, and scientific prognosis on the other. Thirty years later he applied the same categories to *De toekomst der religie* in an article for the *Vestdijkkroniek*.[160] He concluded that the essay touched upon themes that have since caused much religious reflection. With many of its conclusions, however, the public need not agree. From a scientific perspective it contained too many mistakes. And with respect to the future, for the most part it was little more than wishful thinking. A similar critique was offered S.W. Couwenberg in a special issue of *Civis Mundi*.[161]

Yet, whereas some traditions lost their character and became less easily identifiable, others remained solid and highly isolated from the wider public sphere. VGKN member Kamphuis, mentioned before, offers an interesting example. As a member of

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[156] Warren 1979, Schouten 1979.

[157] Schouten 1996.

[158] Luijk 1970.

[159] Laeyendecker 1970.

[160] Laeyendecker 1999.

[161] Couwenberg 2001.

the orthodox-protestant denomination, he remained extremely critical of the religious arguments presented in *De toekomst der religie*.[162]

I regard Kamphuis's critique to be the last polemical contribution to the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie* that had begun exactly fifty years before. During the last period, only two intellectual circles still seemed to be highly interested in the arguments presented by Vestdijk in *De toekomst der religie*: those with an orthodox-protestant persuasion on the one hand, and the members of the brotherhood of Vestdijk friends or fans on the other. While the latter attempted to interpret Vestdijk's work and discuss its relevance, the others remained highly critical and denied his work of any value for the contemporary world, nor for the future of western culture. We might submit that especially within the latter circle, Vestdijk is still widely read.[163] Among the more ecumenically oriented intellectuals he was only mentioned as a great figure who, however, belonged to a past in which his polemical arguments were relevant. The discussions of *De toekomst der religie* began to fade away. As we have seen, the reprint of 1975 did not call much attention. The reprint of 1992 got a worse reception—it ended in the ramsj. In general, this period showed a dramatically decreased interest in Vestdijk's oeuvre. Upon the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birthday, critics busied themselves with attempting to answer the question why a great artist like Vestdijk is not read anymore. Most concluded that it must be a matter of content and writing style. Moreover, the medium does not enjoy much popularity anymore; people prefer to watch television and movies, rather than read books. Ironically, filmed versions of Vestdijk's novels have been quite successful.

Conclusions

Looking back at the history of the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie* after its publication in 1947—during the first period (1948-1952)—we see polemics being triggered from a wide variety of critics. Apart from literary critics, many theologians attacked Vestdijk (and later on Sierksma). Whether these theologians belonged to the 'orthodox' group which Vestdijk had mentioned to his friend Theun de Vries is difficult to determine. It seems as if he used the term somewhat uncritically. Whereas philosophers and theologians who could reasonably be called 'orthodox' (i.e. those of the RKK and GKN) were in fact quite moderate, 'middle-orthodox' theologians of the NHK and 'orthodox' literary critics and commentators of RKK, GKN as well as VGKN were often highly polemical.

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[162] Kamphuis 1998; on *Reformatorisch Dagblad* cf. Van der Ros 1993b.

[163] In courses of Dutch literature at orthodox-protestant secondary schools and colleges, Vestdijk's historical-philosophical novels are still recommended; they are only allowed to be read together with Kamphuis' study on Vestdijk and church history.

With regards to the institutional traditions from which critics came, things did not change considerably during the second period (1952-1959). Sierksma's contribution only initiated a process of increasing interaction between different traditions on the issues brought forth by Vestdijk. The middle-orthodox theologians of the NHK attempted to moderate their style of arguing, but polemics still prevailed among them. All of this changed during the third period (1960-1972). With regards to theologians, we see different traditions merging and ecumenical tendencies gaining ground. In the end, polemics ceased to play their dominant role. Only limited circles of literary critics who still belonged to some institutional tradition (mainly RKK) or specific media (as diverse as *Elsevier* and *Skoop*) continued to attack Vestdijk. However, the latter's work was still widely recognized. This changed during the fourth and last period (1973-1998). Apart from critics belonging to isolated intellectual strata, nobody felt triggered to attack Vestdijk anymore during this period. First, we found one literary critic who contributed to a generally theological magazine. Furthermore, there was a theologically oriented cultural critic from the VGKN, who fiercely criticized Vestdijk's arguments. One commentator, finally, felt urged to follow the latter's attack on Vestdijk. All the others regarded the essay as interesting at best. Apart from a few bookworms, few people seem to read his work—not even his novels—anymore.

To understand the intensity of the controversy during its history, the following overview might be helpful. For each period, I shall indicate the total amount of contributions that were made. The third column shows how many of those were polemical. Finally, the percentage of polemical contributions for each period will be given.

Period		*Total*	*Polemical*	*Per year*	*Percentage*
I	1948-1951	60	30	7.5	50
II	1952-1959	50	25	3.0	50
III	1960-1972	40	10	0.8	25
IV	1973-1998	30	3	0.2	10

If counted per year, these trends would appear even more significant. And even then we would have to remind ourselves that the public became more and more limited over time. Thus, the relative importance of the controversy cannot be estimated by means of numbers only. Yet, as we have seen in the outline of the developments I have already given, focus on the *De toekomst der religie* gradually shifted either towards

other contributions or to a broader discussion of matters concerning religion in general.

These trends should be no surprise, if we take into account the way in which the history of literary reception often develops. To be sure, some books do not call any attention, but are recovered many years later only to become best-sellers. Especially in the case of an already famous author, however, books are eagerly awaited and reviewed immediately after publication. And so it was in the case of Vestdijk's essay. Its publication was announced shortly after the end of the war and it triggered plenty of comments. Of course, it was not only because of Vestdijk's fame that the essay got so many reviews; the way in which its arguments were presented and the topic itself must have been relevant to a broad spectrum of media and opinion leaders.

After its initial enthusiasm, interest usually declines. This is understandable when we remember that public is faced every day with new books that gain attention, and new authors that become famous as a result. Besides, the original publication might trigger its own history by challenging people to elaborate on the topics discussed. In any case, any book has to share attention with other books and authors.

Then the question arises whether these circumstances are the only factors which account for declining interest. It might be reasonable to assume that the issues dealt with lost their relevance for later generations, or that its writing style had become old-fashioned. As I will argue in the last chapter of this study, both of these factors were indeed the case. Yet, this might explain why the number of contributions generally decreased, but it cannot adequately account for the fact that compared to declining interest, the percentage of polemical pieces declined even more dramatically. In any case, the central question of this study should still be answered, i.e. how to understand why some people feel challenged to counter arguments polemically whereas others do not.

In order to answer this question, we must still clarify the concept of polemics and then analyze the role which this style of arguing developed during the fifty years of the controversy. In this chapter, I have discussed personal attacks and polemical styles in reference to texts. In order to categorize the authors of these texts, I discussed opinion leaders on the one hand, and minor or marginal intellectuals on the other.

In chapter II, I shall focus more specifically on the way in whcih attacks were personal in the case of Vestdijk and why I believe that to be an important characteristic of polemics. Later, the problems of polemical style (chapter III) and the institutional position of the those contributing, as well as the social context of the controversy (chapter IV), will be dealt with in more depth.

II – THE POLEMIC: ITS SUBJECT.

> *When two principles really do meet, without any chance to be reconciled, then the people involved declare each other a fool and heretic.*
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein

Introduction

In the previous chapter, a general overview of the reception of *De toekomst der religie* was given. Within this tradition, I distinguished intuitively between polemics, critical discussion and attempts at dialogue, without paying much attention to the specific characteristics of these types of interactions. However, in a study focusing on polemics and its function in particular, the terms employed must have analytical value. Therefore, we will have to distinguish between those terms and define the specific features that might help us to identify polemical contributions within the history of the reception of Vestdijk's essay.

Previously, I defined polemics as a highly personal encounter meant to scorn and denigrate 'the other'. In the present chapter, I will focus on the question how 'the other' has been identified in the course of the controversy we are dealing with. As I will argue, in the context of polemics, it is imperative to show how an argument is transformed in such a way as to offer an image of its author. This means that the text becomes interpreted as if it were simply the effect of a certain state of mind or morality. Of significance for the way polemics are pursued is a focus on the subject supposed to be present in the text, while in fact being the person behind the argument. Critics try to create somebody to be held accountable. Especially when people feel attacked, it is important to counter its threat, whether real or imaginary. This can be done by showing the argument to be entirely false. Yet, depending on the force by which these people feel challenged, it is highly unlikely that they will leave it at that. Not only the argument, but also its author needs to be attacked. More likely even, the latter is ridiculed without paying much attention to his line of reasoning at all.

To identify polemics, I will focus on the way persons supposed to be responsible for something perceived as a threat, are defined. For the moment, I am not interested in 'the author' of the arguments. Nor do I intend to argue with those contributing to the controversy whether or not their judgment of 'the author' is in fact justified. On the contrary, I merely wish to read the available texts and limit myself to the terms that are actually employed in order to create an opponent.

This does not mean that I hold 'the author' defined in the course of the polemic to be the real person behind the text. On the contrary, to adopt a notorious phrase of Derrida, at this stage we assume that there is nothing, i.e. no referent, outside the text. This does not mean that I really believe that there is nobody outside the text (just as it would be naive to think that Derrida tried to argue such a thing). Already my attempt to explain polemics by referring to the social positions of the people involved suggests in which direction I am looking for the person behind the text. In chapters III and IV, I will elaborate on that. As long as we don't know anything about the historical background of the intellectuals contributing to the polemic, and as long as we don't know anything about the principles meeting here—to borrow from Wittgenstein—, it is too early to draw conclusions about that. And It is definitely too early to assume that the persons characterized in the controversy are the same as those outside the text. Instead, I would like to argue, the polemic is about fun rather than the truth. Again, in the present chapter, we are not talking about principles, but rather about the fools people are making of each other, as Wittgenstein had already observed.[1]

Polemics: humor rather than truth

In polemics, people are not interested in the essay or in what Vestdijk wrote; on the contrary, they refigure the content of the text in a way that allows for derisive laughter. In fact, as I will argue, the mechanisms that are at work in polemics are similar to those identified by Sigmund Freud in his analysis of humor.[2]

This is not to say that the whole controversy was intended to be merely a joke. Rather I think that there are important similarities between polemics on the one hand and witticism on the other. As in the case of jokes, polemical remarks are meant to shift the sympathy an argument might trigger away from 'the author' involved, while trying to change the picture in favor of the critic. As Freud already indicated, at least three parties are involved in joke-work. First, there's the one who writes something that will turn out to be witty. Secondly, jokes need an object to be laughed at. Finally, there must be a person or public that feels triggered to laugh at the object. And the fact that people are laughing already constitutes witticism. Similarly, already the fact that some people take something personally and feel the need to attack the person they hold accountable, is enough for me to speak of a polemical controversy. I will not make any attempt to find intentions behind the text, while the process of selecting sources is far too arbitrary to be of any relevance to the type of analysis I have in mind. Trying to recover intentions would lead us into an analysis of his text by means of hermeneutic and historians' critical methods. I am neither inter-

[1] Wittgenstein 1970: 611; translation mine.

[2] Freud 1938.

ested in intentions, nor in the various sources Vestdijk used for his argument. For me the concept of intention starts from a highly simplistic idea of man and fails to consider unintended consequences. To study something ineffable, like sources the argument has been derived from, requires a student far more erudite than I. Worse, it does not explain why polemics arise in the first place. And the latter issue is precisely what I am dealing with in this study.

Instead of looking for either intentions or sources, I will try to take the essay itself— i.e. the actual collection of letters, terms, sentences and whatever other textual elements there are—as a starting point for my investigations. Without implying that other methods and aims are irrelevant for the study of literary texts in general, I believe that in my case they do not offer the proper means to analyze the polemic at hand. Those methods only work with a certain intuitive concept of polemics, while for my purposes, I need to have a clear idea of what exactly is meant by 'polemics' and what are the techniques employed in this type of symbolic interaction. What interests me here are the differences within the history of the essay's reception. I need to know which different mechanics are typical of the reactions to Vestdijk's arguments. Especially interesting are the different ways in which they are re-working the materials offered in the original text. More specifically, I will try to show that persons and their intentions are created discursively in the process of reading and polemical reaction. In other words, remembering Kolakowski, what I am interested in are the ways in which language is manipulated in order to, borrowing from Michel Foucault, create human beings as subjects of textual exchange.

This points to the question why I think polemics is about creating subjects whereas Freud focussed on the object of a joke. According to me, the object in the case of polemics is the argument. Yet, it is difficult to win people for a war against an evil power of which the face cannot be identified. To wage a war, it is far more effective to define evil in terms of defects that we know from our everyday experience with people living nearby. For that, as has already been indicated, behind something abstract like a text, a subject to be held accountable has to be imagined.

First, I wish to look more closely at the mechanism of the type of writing we call polemics. For that, I need to compare the original text with its offspring, to use a romantic metaphor. Even in the case of polemics, with all its distortions, misunderstandings and disagreements, this metaphor certainly applies. We need only remind ourselves that links between parents and their children are not always harmonious either. Something similar has been argued with respect to the oeuvre of James Joyce. This might have something to do with the esoteric character of the textual corpus he wrote. A similar notion would apply to Vestdijk, whose work has been compared with that of Joyce.[3] However, the same could be argued for literary texts in general.

[3] Beekman 1983, Fokkema & Ibsch 1987.

To quote Derrida, who was in fact commenting on Joyce and the reception of his oeuvre:[4]

> Whatever the difference between them, even if, as in the present case, it is immense and even incommensurable, the 'second' text, the one which, fatally, refers to the other, quotes it, exploits it, parasites it and deciphers it, is no doubt the minute parcel *detached* from the other, the metonymic dwarf, the jester of the great anterior text which would have declared war on it in languages.

Yet, all that which we have been arguing till now applies to any employment of language, whether it be quotation, commentary, critique, controversy, discussion, dialogue, or, as in our case, polemic. We still have to find what exactly distinguishes the latter from other linguistic activities. It is my objective to identify the mechanisms governing polemical exchanges, arguing that it is displacement that distinguishes polemics from other kinds of writing. Furthermore, I wish to identify what exactly displacement consists of and is aiming at while creating an image of the subject behind the argument trying to question its authority. Only after these theoretical explorations will the practice of polemics be dealt with in more detail. Finally, some concluding remarks in which I will specify the interconnection between the theory and practice of polemics will conclude the chapter.

Polemics: the mechanics of humor

We need to investigate how exactly a subject is created and what kind of textual mechanisms are employed in order to subject the author to criticism. As previously indicated, the subject presented in the course of the controversy is not taken here as a real picture of Vestdijk himself. Instead, we are dealing with an artificial construction. And in the process of writing, several techniques are used in order to arrive from the argument to a picture of its author. Thus, at least for polemics applies the concept of truth that Nietzsche had defined long before. After having asked himself the question of what he understood 'truth' to be, he concluded that it was simply a movable host of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms.[5]

The techniques identified by Nietzsche as constitutive forces in the process of creating truth, are highly similar to the mechanics we find in wit. In the following I will argue that the analytical framework Freud developed in order to understand wit might be helpful to make sense of polemics as well.

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[4] Derrida 1984: 148.

[5] Nietzsche 1999; translation mine.

Though at first sight it might seem strange to draw from the study of jokes and jests, it is possible to argue that there are some structural similarities between wit-work on the one hand, and war-like activities like polemics on the other. In his *Semantics of Humor*, Victor Raskin even asserted that "laughter is born out of hatred and hostility."[6] Freud himself drew attention to the aggressive character of jokes. Attempting to determine the tendency of wit, while leaving out his own obsession with obscene wit, we find it to be hostile, he argued, "serving as an aggression, satire, or defense."[7] The means which serve to make a person comical, he continues, are transference into comic situations, imitations, disguise, irony, unmasking, caricature, parody, travesty and the like; on other occasions he also mentions exaggeration as a means of providing comic pleasure. "It is quite evident that these techniques may enter into the service of hostile or aggressive tendencies," Freud concluded.[8] As Linda Hutcheon says, "it can mock, attack and ridicule; it can exclude, embarrass and humiliate." This applies even more to irony; it always has an edge, it is always polemical, "belonging to the armory of controversy, and not fitted to any entirely peacable occasion."[9]

Thus, while jokes are meant to create pleasure among an audience, actually, they serve to shift the attention away by creating a subject at which the laughter is directed. The effect of ridicule is a bond between people as well as between the public and the author of the joke. As Hutcheon emphasizes in her study on irony, it "can be used as a weapon has always been known: the social put-down and the satiric barb have their corollary in the critics' wielding of authority over texts, and especially over previous imperceptive readers."[10] According to Freud,[11]

> in the case of the aggressive tendency, wit by the same means changes the original indifferent hearers into active haters and scorners, and in this way confronts the enemy with a host of opponents where formerly there was but one. […] By the pleasure premium which it offers […] it overthrows critical judgment which would otherwise have examined the dispute in question; […] it shatters the respect for institutions and truths in which the hearer [or reader, HvdB] had believed, first by strengthening the argument, and secondly by resorting to a new method of attack. Where the argument seeks to draw the hearer's reason to its side, with strives to push aside this reason, there is no doubt that wit has chosen the way which is psychologically more efficacious.

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[6] Raskin 1985: 11.

[7] Freud 1938: 693.

[8] Freud 1938: 758, 768.

[9] Hutcheon 1995: 40.

[10] Hutcheon 1995: 9-10.

[11] Freud 1938: 723.

Apart from identifying the movement, Freud also indicated for what purposes wit could be employed. According to him, "a person is ridiculed in order to render him contemptible, or to deprive him of his claims to dignity and authority."[12]

Does this hold for polemics as well? The answer, I believe, is yes. The most important difference between humor and polemic is a matter of perspective. Whereas for the one something might trigger laughter, for the other it seems more aggressive. The former perspective is likely to be held by people that do not identify with the object of a joke. The latter perspective, on the other hand, is usually shared by people who take the joke to be directed against themselves as people. Yet, both humor and polemic share an affective intensity that is likely to be derived from a structural similarity between the two. And it is exactly because of this similarity that I find it useful to employ Freud's analytical framework in order to understand how polemics works.

What kinds of techniques are employed in order to make writing, or any other use of language, witty? First of all, according to Freud, language has to be 'expressive'. A term more frequently employed in this context is repetition. This repetition might occur at the level of sounds or letters (as in the case of alliteration, assonance, and rhyme), terms, sentences, or more extensive elements of texts. In wit, however, they get their expressive character through an element of incongruity, either between two terms related to each other in the text (so-called 'verbal irony') or between terms and their context ('situational irony').[13] In the previous chapter we saw how Vestdijk wrote about the "orthodox theologians" he met in St. Michielsgestel during the war. He warned his friend Theun de Vries to beware of them. "I got enough experience with this scum," Vestdijk told him. Clearly, the link between "orthodox theologians" and "scum" is no verbal irony, but rather a situational one. Instead of the usual gestures by which ordinary people show their respect for theologians, Vestdijk is scorning them. It is likely that the apparent incongruity between the attitude of the people towards theologians and that of his friend triggered the laughter of his friend.

Yet, how does expressive language create a humorous effect? According to Freud, it is employed as a 'condensation'. By this he indicates a process by which elements from an original text are selected, re-connected and deconstructed in order to represent its meaning like something of a summary. One might doubt whether it is justified to speak here of a summary, especially when we hear Laplanche & Pontalis define it as the process by which "a sole idea represents several associative chains at whose point of intersection it is located." They continue:[14]

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[12] Freud 1938: 768.

[13] Jongbloed 1991: 281.

[14] Laplanche & Pontalis 1973: 82-83.

> Condensation should not, however, be looked upon as a summary: although each manifest element is determined by several latent meanings, each one of these, inversely, may be identified in several elements; what is more, manifest elements do not stand in the same relationship to each of the meanings from which they derive, and so they do not subsume them after the fashion of a concept.

Especially within the context of humor, I believe that they are right. As far as we can speak of a summary here, it always includes a sense of ambiguity. According to Lacan, a process of transformation is essential. In order to clarify his point, he links the movement of condensation (*Verdichtung*) to that of a metaphor. Here the link with the Nietzschean terminology becomes clear. By this he simply means that one term is substituted for another without losing the implicit meanings that constitute the link between them; on the contrary, the first term is both employing and indicating the ambiguity in the second term.[15] To return to the example given before, if we used to think of "orthodox theologians" as honorable persons, the term Vestdijk chooses as a substitute points to the other side of the coin. The word "scum" cannot be taken as a summary of the term it replaces; it only emphasizes one aspect of the different meanings that can possibly be attributed to "orthodox theologians".

As soon as the process of condensation starts to become confusing or offensive, the idea of a summary completely disappears. And this is always the way in which both humor and polemics develop. Here, condensation turns into 'displacement'. In the terminology of Laplanche & Pontalis, displacement is[16]

> the fact that an idea's emphasis, interest or intensity is able to be detached from it and to pass on to other ideas, which were originally of little intensity but which are related to the first idea by a chain of associations.

Here we have a link with the concept of metonymy employed in earlier quotes of both Nietzsche and Derrida. According to Lacan, as in the movement of metonymy, the possible meanings of a term are reduced, while in effect leading to a shift of focus (*Verschiebung*).[17] This is clearly the case in Vestdijk's substitution of "scum" for "orthodox theologians". Any positive association is excluded; only the negative aspects of a group of people are highlighted. Moreover, by employing "scum" as a characteristic of theologians, the latter are discarded as morally inferior. And even though we don't know who exactly he was pointing at, the qualification is certainly to be under-

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[15] Lacan 1966: 125, 129.

[16] Laplanche & Pontalis 1973: 121-122.

[17] Lacan 1966: 124, 129.

stood as an attack on the persons (other entities cannot be held accountable for some state of affairs).

Surely, displacement can be employed in many different circumstances. However, as I will try to explain, it is the shift from argument to author that is a distinctive characteristic of polemical controversy. And just like wit, in the course of this process a subject is created for humorous effect.

Polemics: humor by means of a subject

Again, I wish to emphasize that it is not my aim to find out whether either Vestdijk or his critics were justified in treating each other the way they did. I am not interested in whether or not they intended to attack their opponents personally. Such a perspective would imply that we are discussing fixed subjects and, for instance, that Vestdijk had some specific people in mind when he was writing. As we have seen before, they probably belonged to the middle-orthodox circle of theologians within the NKH, of whom some prominent members were among his fellow hostages in St. Michielsgestel during the war. But even then, it remains unclear who exactly he was hinting at in his letter to Theun de Vries about the "orthodox theologians" who, according to him, had been trying to prevent his lectures from being presented to a possibly interested audience. On the other hand, it is striking that none of his fellow hostages ever responded to his essay in public. Only more than twenty years later would Kraemer attempt to start what he called a dialogue on the issues presented by Vestdijk (and Sierksma). Surely, his fellow middle-orthodox theologians were highly polemical. And, contrary to his dialogue-talk, Kraemer did not offer any exception to this rule.

Yet, even though Vestdijk might be regarded as the poor victim of the controversy triggered by his essay, he was not as innocent as his contributions suggested at first sight. As he argued, he personally wished for Christianity to die.[18] Yet, in a letter to his friend De Vries, August 1943, his remarks on Christianity became far more personal. "Within hundred years, it will be impossible to root up Christianity, (unfortunately)," he admitted. "You can try, but you will never exterminate the Christians; on the contrary, they will exterminate you, because they are far better than anybody else in those matters." Having substituted Christians for Christianity, Vestdijk continues quite polemically. According to him "they cannot be enlightened either; they will, damn, not allow anybody to do so, and if you try, they become extremely offensive. I have seen things in Gestel that were highly interesting from a psychological point of view, but even made me doubt whether I myself was sane.

[18] Vestdijk 1947: 327.

Such a dogmatic and strong faith in God—terrifying, especially because of the intolerance that always accompanies their beliefs."[19]

Just like the critics who were quite polemical, neither could Vestdijk avoid substituting persons for concepts. And the predicates he used in order to qualify Christians did not apply to Christianity. A human being can be enlightened; in the case of Christianity this is far more difficult. A person can be offensive; a religion, however, cannot. Men and women can have a strong faith; it is difficult to imagine anything similar with respect to Christianity. Only a highly anthropomorphic understanding of the concept of Christianity can be regarded as intolerant. However, as we will see later, Vestdijk told his readers that he would not have too many problems with Christian dogmas; what almost exclusively bothered him was "the intolerance of its believers."[20]

Whether intentionally or not, both Vestdijk and his critics were somehow triggered to react polemically. This meant that they were creating an image of their opponent that, whether intentionally or not, might have some humorous effect. Yet, again, this did not mean that the orthodox theologians or Christians that Vestdijk was referring to existed somewhere outside of the letters he sent to his friend. It could even be seriously doubted whether or not there would have been people among his fellow hostages who recognized themselves in the picture he had painted of them.

As has previously been argued, instead of simply assuming any identity between the names mentioned in the text and the persons outside of it, I will simply try to figure out how subjects are created and made ridiculous in the course of the polemic, and how this process triggers reactions that, in their turn, counter and re-formulate their own subjectivity. As we will see, in order to question the authority of somebody else, the validity of his statements is rendered problematic by pointing out the moral defects of their author. In short, I will deal here with the question how a seemingly objective text (the collection of letters available to/observable by everybody) is turned into something subjective by giving it certain anthropomorphic features. In other words, in the terminology defined before, I will try to identify the processes by which the argument (the essay) is displaced by its author (Vestdijk) in the course of polemics.

In her essay on the creative potential of language, Judith Butler argues that, "being called a name is one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language."[21] In wit, often this is just enough to cause laughter. But in the case of polemics, the subject mostly receives some predicates that indicate either intellectual or moral deficits. This process resembles humor as far as it establishes an incongruity

[19] Vestdijk & De Vries 1985: 105.

[20] Vestdijk 1947: 328.

[21] Butler 1993: 2.

between the things people expected from a text or author on the one hand, and what, in fact, is exemplified in the argument on the other. Yet, as has already been mentioned, by this it is not the argument that the critic tries to let people laugh at, but rather "the author," which is something suggested to be inside while often being projected behind the text.

If we apply the terminology of Nietzschean philology to these processes, the following development appears. As far as the text itself is critically summarized, and the author remains implicit, authority is questioned by means of metaphor. As far as a critique of the text leads to some conclusions applying to its author, we are speaking of metonymy. And, finally, as far as human attributes are assigned to this subject, the process of anthropomorphism has been employed.

Butler maintains that the subject projected behind an utterance appears only as "a consequence of the demand for accountability. […] The requirements for blame figure the subject as the 'cause' of an act. In this sense, there can be no subject without a blameworthy act, and there can be no 'act' apart from a discourse of accountability and, according to Nietzsche, without an institution of punishment."[22] Anyhow, there needs to be someone culpable, resurrecting the 'subject' (which could just as well be a corporate group or entity as an individual) in response to the demand to seek accountability for injury.

Yet, Butler asks, is such a location of the subject as the 'cause' of injurious language justified?[23] Personally, I believe that there is no general answer to this question. Often we do not recognize whether a text offers a genuine judgment on the original one. Of course, some reduction has taken place. A metaphor is not to be mistaken for reality, though it might emphasize some important aspect of it. Nor can we take a metonymy merely to reflect some causal relation outside the text. Detailed historical research on the person responsible for a text taken to be injurious might show some, or even many, similarities with the subject created. Yet, too often it simply remains highly speculative whether or not there is any likeness between the image of an 'author' and the way other people see him, let alone his real existence (whatever that might be).

The practice of creating subjects through polemic

Thus far we have outlined how arguments might be transformed into a subject from a theoretical point of view. In the following, we must focus on the way in which this was actually done in the course of the controversy which Vestdijk's essay triggered.

As we have seen, despite the objectivity which Vestdijk claimed to be aiming for, he also included personal confessions that clearly indicated the subjectivity of his

[22] Butler 1993: 46.

[23] Butler 1993: 78.

argument. Yet, even in these cases, we can better not take his statements at face value, as if they refer to actual states of affairs. Rather, consistent with our aims here, I interpret them as attempts by Vestdijk to create a subject ('Vestdijk') of his own.[24] Not surprisingly, he presented his character as somebody to be taken seriously. He began by emphasizing that he did not pretend to be a prophet. Instead, he was trying to be scientific, though he admitted that this approach was limited with respect to the future. In so doing, he allowed himself a few more or less speculative remarks. What critics made of all this, we shall soon see.

Pretentions –Vestdijk attempted to avoid at least one risk right from the start. Since he was writing about the future, he feared that some might see him as a prophet, and he clearly did not wish to be regarded as such. According to him, the future was a closed book, as it was for everybody else (9). Instead of issuing warnings of certain inevitable events yet to come, he simply tried to develop certain logical predictions. In doing so he immediately linked himself to Western scientific tradition, though not in the sense that he would be able to offer a clear picture of what would happen in the future. He was not promising anything, on the contrary. Only after long critical and theoretical reflection would he attempt to uncover certain secrets of a history not yet born. And as usual in the case of predictions, he acknowledged that he must proceed cautiously, fumbling and limiting himself to some provisional statements (9). However, Vestdijk maintained, even though speculative imagination would play an important role, logical reasoning always needed to be invoked as well in order to criticize and check the results of creativity. In matters concerning the future, knowledge could never be as reliable as in the natural sciences. In the humanities, Vestdijk claimed, one must always find a balance between imagination and critique, combinations and bare facts, constructive fantasy and exact knowledge (9). For this reason he did not pretend to offer more than "hints" for the future (361).

The question then arises how Vestdijk wished to meet the limited pretentions he had formulated. The method by which he attempted to gather clues for the future, he discovered within the discipline of interpretive psychology, as it had become well-known by this time, especially in Germany (10). This method aimed at understanding human phenomena such as religion by studying the workings of the human mind. For that, it required a basic sympathy (10) and intuition (11). As such, however, it was subjectively determined. It did not make any sense to dissimulate or deny this aspect of argument in matters concerning the humanities. On the other hand, in order to be as objective as possible, one must also be prepared to keep some distance and dare to be critical. The latter perspective required more specific capacities, such as being reasonable, impartial, righteous and moderate (11). It was a matter of charac-

[24] In the following, references to *De toekomst der religie* will be included in the text.

ter rather than intellect. From a strictly scientific point of view, interpretive psychology was something in between natural science and art (11). At least, it required the skill—almost the art, according to Vestdijk—of keeping a critical distance from one's own inclinations. In general, it was better not to have any opinion at all than to defend a position that did not allow for critique. Personal convictions must never get the chance to dominate arguments in matters of science, Vestdijk concluded (12).

However, Vestdijk admitted, things were not that easy. When trying to be reasonable, impartial, righteous and moderate, especially in matters of religion, he argued, critics would suspect us to be outsiders rather than insiders or true believers. And in a sense, the critics would be right (12). We must keep some distance and even be highly critical of religion. Believers however, Vestdijk maintained, simply attempted to convince their public that critics of religion were as subjective as they recognized themselves to be. The only difference between believers and critics was that the former took each other seriously, whereas the methods of psychology to them were interpreted as sheer nonsense (89). Vestdijk found this way of reasoning highly misleading. We must always be prepared to admit our subjectivity, he contended, while at the same time trying to be as objective as possible. For example, he argued (13),[25]

> the future of religion for us, people of the West, primarily turns around the question how Christianity will develop and adapt itself to new circumstances. All of us, we are involved. We are the heirs of a culture that has been created by Christianity. We would be nobody without this tradition. We would still be walking around in furs, believe in Wodan, gambling away our wives and children, no, we would have massacred each other. While being part of this particular history, we cannot avoid to have a highly personal relation to this tradition. And even the most objective argument will not do without some kind of subjective judgment.

Yet, he also allowed himself to express some desires which, he believed, would not necessarily become reality. So, he was clear when, after a lengthy discussion, he informed his readers that, personally, he preferred Christianity to die (327).

In the next chapter, we will see how Vestdijk tried to substantiate the claims made in the introduction of *De toekomst der religie*. Here we must describe what his critics made of it in order to create a subject to be held accountable for the arguments with which they were faced. Thus far, however, it is clear that Vestdijk did not explicitly assign himself the role of a prophet, but, instead, merely attempted to make his subjective opinions sound serious, reasonable and scientific (13).[26] Commentators,

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[25] Not surprisingly, all sources employed for this thesis are in Dutch. Translations are mine.

[26] Cf. also Vestdijk 1956: 3.

on the other hand, took him to be a prophet and easy talker at the same time. And it was perfectly understandable—and even to be expected—that Vestdijk failed to meet his own standards, being anything but scientific.

Prophet – For some, Vestdijk's attempt to present an inspired and eloquent vision of the future turned him into a prophet or apostle. Whereas many were not trying to be ironic,[27] others clearly were. According to these critics, the prophets of the Old Testament, as well as the apostles of the New Testament, had been famous for their revelations and vivid pictures of the future. Of course, critics warned their public, reading Vestdijk would be highly disappointing compared to reading the ancient prophets and apostles.[28]

De Vos argued that rather than presenting himself as a prophet, Vestdijk simply proclaimed "his own pious wishes" for the future of religion, presenting them as "highest wisdom."[29] Yet, De Vos and Miskotte agreed that there was nothing profound in Vestdijk's argument.[30] Kraemer's points were similar; according to him this was exactly why Vestdijk could not be counted among the great prophets of older times.[31] Zijlstra simply took Vestdijk to be a false prophet.[32] Van Heugten referred to the ancient Israelites who had once asked themselves: "Is Saul also among the prophets?"[33] He also compared Vestdijk's style of arguing with the missionary fervor of St. Paul, the apostle. This was highly ironical from Van Heugten's point of view, because of the incongruity between Paul's zeal for Christianity on the one hand, and that of Vestdijk for Buddhism on the other.[34]

On the other hand, some critics were far more sympathetic, appreciating Vestdijk's cautious style of arguing. Berkouwer and Wapenaar acknowledged that Vestdijk denied himself the title of a prophet.[35] Rodenko did not find any "exciting perspectives" in the essay. Yet, according to him, this could not be regarded a failure on Vestdijk's part, because the latter did not intend to offer any exciting perspectives. If he resembled anything of a prophet, then the psychologist was always prepared to

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[27] Berkouwer 1948b: 13, Barneveld 1948a: 255, 1948b: 73-74, Rodenko 1948: 64, Veenstra 1948, Walgrave 1949: 70, Sierksma 1952: 22, Marres 1977, Van der Wey 1978, Oostveen 1980.

[28] W. 1948, De Vos 1952, Miskotte 1952, Pos 1959: 161, Verhoeven 1961b: 40.

[29] De Vos 1952: 107, 108.

[30] De Vos 1952: 107, Miskotte 1952: 117.

[31] Kraemer 1959a: 750.

[32] Marnix 1948.

[33] Van Heugten 1948: 692.

[34] Van Heugten 1948: 699.

[35] W. 1948, Berkouwer 1948b: 13.

prevent him from flying too far. Vestdijk did not merely declare his opinions concerning the future, but his style of exposition exemplified the method of careful reasoning that he himself had advocated. First, he offered a theory. However, he immediately added some counter-examples which people would certainly be able to relate to from everyday experience. Thereby he indicated that his ideas had only relative validity.[36] Rodenko appreciated this method, as did Barneveld and Veenstra.[37] Walgrave concluded that the whole style of arguing was reminiscent of the Echternach-procession; for every three steps forward, two steps were taken back.[38] Polak would later admit that it might be taken as an example of "intellectual hygiene," while, in fact, he was left wondering whether it was a matter of "honesty" or just an attempt to take the wind out of his opponent's sails. At least, he observed, nowhere in the essay were counter-examples taken as refutations of the theory. According to Polak, this implied that Vestdijk's scientific pretentions had only relative validity.[39]

Scientist – Vestdijk argued that, by means of his interpretive method, he was too much of an artist to be regarded as a natural scientist, and, at the same time, too much a scientist to be regarded as just an amateur.[40] Some critics, however, found an incongruity between his scientific pretentions on the one hand, and his artistic preferences on the other. According to others, he lacked the artistic sensibility to be scientific. Still others found his interpretation of the facts and authorities which he had added to his argument highly insufficient. In short, even if his modesty had been taken into account, he had failed by any scientific standard.

Some admitted that, as an artist, Vestdijk was indeed great. According to some, his artistic intuition even made him a great interpretive psychologist.[41] Miskotte argued, though sourly according to Sierksma,[42] that following intuition was doing a big job.[43] Others, no less ironic than Miskotte, spoke of a world of dreams (Wapenaar),[44] lyrical descriptions (Mankes-Zernike)[45] and poetic visions (Schaik-Willing),[46] as well

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[36] Rodenko 1948: 60, 64.

[37] Barneveld 1948b: 73-74, Veenstra 1948: passim.

[38] Walgrave 1949: 65.

[39] Polak 1955b: 110; cf. Vestdijk 1956b for a counter-critique.

[40] Vestdijk 1947: 9.

[41] Berkelbach van der Sprenkel 1948, Van Praag 1948, W. 1948, Berkouwer 1948ab: 13, Walgrave 1949: 63-65, Sierksma 1952: 64, Wapenaar 1952, 1953: 243, Govaart 1958: 844.

[42] Sierksma 1952: 38.

[43] Miskotte 1952: 119.

[44] W. 1948, Wapenaar 1953: 244.

[45] Mankes-Zernike 1952: 103.

[46] Schaik-Willing 1952: 1310.

as adventurous flights of the mind (Kraemer).[47] The arguments which Vestdijk had offered were artificial,[48] providing merely, as Bomhoff remarked, a "fashion show."[49] More explicitly, Vestdijk's argument was too artistic to be taken seriously (Schaik-Willing, Majorick, Pos),[50] and to be regarded as scientifically appropriate (De Vos, Miskotte, Van der Leeuw, Bomhoff).[51] For Mankes-Zernike, this was reason enough to put her own feelings in the middle in order to make her point against Vestdijk.[52] To this, Sierksma answered that the intuition for which women were famous might in some specific cases play an important role, but that in matters of science, it could not be allowed to determine any decisive argument.[53]

Miskotte and Bomhoff argued that Vestdijk was not artistic enough to identify with his subject and protect himself from any negative judgment.[54] Instead of sympathy and a positive attitude, Van Heugten, Schaik-Willing and Verhoeven only found sharp cerebrality and intellectualism.[55] And, Schaik-Willing added, something similar was true for his adherents and followers.[56] This was the reason why, Kraemer argued, Vestdijk could not be counted among the great artists in history. A similar critique was levelled against Gerhard Sczcesny. The arguments of the latter even died, Cornelis Verhoeven maintained, in mere phraseology.[57] Kamphuis took issue with Vestdijk's hermetic language. If this was meant to suggest profundity, we should be disappointed. Kamphuis, in the end, felt that Vestdijk did not look at theologians with a warm and respectful eye.[58]

Whereas Berkouwer found Vestdijk too careful in his reasoning and too scientific to be regarded as a prophet,[59] others saw him as not scientific enough to even be taken seriously. According to the latter, Vestdijk had chosen his sources and theoretical instruments in a quite arbitrary fashion.[60] Moreover, he could not be regarded as a

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[47] Kraemer 1959a: 726.

[48] Kraemer, 1959a: 762, Noordegraaf 1975.

[49] Bomhoff 1952: 614.

[50] Schaik-Willing 1952: 1323, Majorick 1953: 111, Pos 1959: 161.

[51] De Vos 1952, Miskotte 1952, Van der Leeuw 1952, Bomhoff 1952: 614.

[52] Mankes-Zernike 1952: 103.

[53] Sierksma 1952: 24.

[54] Miskotte 1952: 117, Bomhoff 1952: 606.

[55] Van Heugten 1948: 701, Schaik-Willing 1952: 1318, Verhoeven 1961b: 39.

[56] Schaik-Willing 1952: 1322; reference to Veenstra 1948.

[57] Verhoeven 1961a: 640.

[58] Kamphuis 1973: 7, Van der Kooij 1979: 467.

[59] Berkouwer 1948b: 13.

[60] Miskotte 1952: 116, Bomhoff 1952: 614, Verhoeven 1961b: 40.

phenomenologically oriented scholar[61] or theologian.[62] Only the latter were commonly regarded as specialists in matters of religion. Vestdijk did not belong to any of these circles. Thus, his pretension to offer a scientific discussion of the future of religion was simply ridiculous, especially since he ignored acknowledged authorities in the field,[63] choosing instead to study unknown, irrelevant authors.[64] What was worse, Van Heugten argued, was that even during the German occupation Vestdijk did not mind employing the results of German *Forschung* and *Wissenschaft*.[65] G.H. Barneveld held that though he was not professionally involved in the scientific study of religion, Vestdijk took the stance of a "professor", teaching students the prolegomena of his discipline; actually, however, he failed to move beyond the prolegomena and offer a synthetic argument.[66] The professorial stance, Miskotte remarked, might then be taken as an attempt to provide the argument merely with the air of scientificity, to render his beliefs reasonable and beyond doubt. "Of course," he concluded, "it was not to be expected that Vestdijk, whatever his brilliance, would be able to carry the burden of supporting his *gross simplifications* scientifically."[67]

Instead of a scientific treatise, Miskotte and Kraemer concluded, Vestdijk's essay had more of "a sermon" and "atheist confession," "full of vindictiveness,"[68] "shouting out his frustrations,"[69] much like the way Russian communists did.[70]

Apart from those critics who maintained that Vestdijk failed to meet any scientific standard, only a few admitted or agreed with Vestdijk that, in general, his arguments were appropriate and to the point.[71] O. Noordenbos even noted that his competence in matters of science was remarkable if one would take Vestdijk's own warning more seriously than did critics like De Vos and Van Heugten.[72] As we have seen, Vestdijk never presented himself as a specialist; instead, as he wished to make clear right from the start, he was merely a layperson, though, according to P. Smits, a highly intelligent one.[73]

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[61] Van der Leeuw 1952: 125.

[62] De Vos 1952: 107.

[63] Miskotte 1952: 116, Van der Leeuw 1952: 125.

[64] Miskotte 1952: 117.

[65] Van Heugten 1948: 694, 696, 698.

[66] Barneveld 1948a: 254, 1948b: 74.

[67] Miskotte 1952: 116, his italics; cf. also Van Heugten 1948: 699.

[68] Miskotte 1952: 117, Walgrave 1949: 72, Schaik-Willing 1952: 1316.

[69] Kraemer 1959a: 764.

[70] Miskotte 1952: 119.

[71] Berkouwer 1948b: 13, Sierksma 1952: passim.

[72] Noordenbos 1948a.

[73] Smits 1959a: 1.

Intellectual – Though perhaps failing to meet scientific standards, Vestdijk at least attempted to apply his theories to create an ideal for future society. Dealing as such with issues of public importance, his was an argument worthy of any "intellectual." Yet, in general, this was not regarded as something positive. According to many critics, intellectuals were outsiders playing with a topic that they happened to find interesting enough to spend some time pondering.

Some argued that intellectuals were used to being merely interested in—rather than committed to—religion.[74] And whereas Bleeker held that religion always had to be taken the way its believers took it,[75] Sterkman, Van der Leeuw and Kraemer all went further, suggesting that Vestdijk simply lacked religious sensibility. According to the them, any attempt to understand religion along the same lines which their opponent had pursued was undoubtedly doomed to failure.[76]

While Vestdijk generally agreed that religious phenomena had to be understood the way their adherents did, he maintained that, with respect to the future, a critical distance towards religion could not be avoided.[77] According to De Vos however, Vestdijk himself had argued that outsiders as such were better equipped to study religion—as if only distance guaranteed a certain objectivity. On this issue, De Vos definitely did not agree with Vestdijk; editors of a newspaper, he remarked, would never let music be reviewed by somebody who did not have any musical sense.[78] Sierksma countered. According to him, it was far from self-evident that music reviews were never written by people without any musical sense; some newspapers even allows for professors who don't know what a decent review looks like, he concluded.[79]

Other critics held that Vestdijk did not show enough respect for religion. This was especially clear from his writing style. He proved himself to be just an "eclectic" and "dilettante" (Miskotte, Van der Leeuw and Kraemer),[80] and even a "clown" (Verhoeven).[81] On this serious topic, they argued, he was "too frivolous" (Mankes-

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[74] Van Heugten 1948: 703, Van der Leeuw 1952: 126, Kraemer 1959ab, Stempvoort 1961, Kamphuis 1973: 10, Noordegraaf 1975.

[75] Bleeker 1952: 138.

[76] Sterkman 1948b: 134, Van der Leeuw 1952: 126, Kraemer 1959a: 732, 1959b: 254; cf. also Banning 1948.

[77] Vestdijk 1952: 140-141.

[78] De Vos 1952: 108.

[79] Sierksma 1952: 29.

[80] Miskotte 1952: 116-117, Van der Leeuw 1952: 125, Nauta 1963: 324.

[81] Verhoeven 1961b: 40.

Zernike),[82] took the attitude of an "easy talker," (Bomhoff and Kraemer),[83] used to conversations at "the coffee table" (Verhoeven),[84] "participated in one of those cozy literary circles talking about Freud as if he was a friend" (Van der Leeuw).[85]

Vestdijk admitted that psychology might seem a little frivolous. And, he confessed, he sometimes preferred a chat with one of those self-confident Calvinists.[86] Yet, Vestdijk did not believe that interpretive psychology was such nonsense that it should not be taken seriously. In fact, his critics were not even able to falsify the conclusions which he had derived from this method of thinking.[87] And, Vestdijk argued, to suggest that he belonged to some cozy literary circle in which intellectuals enjoyed discussing Freud, was purely speculative. He wondered what Van der Leeuw knew about the intellectual circles he used to visit. How, Vestdijk asked, did Van der Leeuw know that he liked cozy circles?[88] "Of course, he just tries to suggest that what I have been writing is superficial, employing some of Freud's formulas, without thinking them over, pretending too much familiarity with his theories, while using them only arbitrarily, without understanding their implications. *Something* of this," Vestdijk held, "must have been intended by the association of my essay with the things people are used to writing in literary journals."[89] All those commentators, however, that had criticized him for being a Freudian, ignored the fact that he had been far more critical to Freud than their comments suggested, as even a superficial reading of his essay would make clear to anyone less biased than his critics, Vestdijk concluded.[90] Moreover, according to Sierksma, Vestdijk had offered much more about Freud than one would ever find in the work of his critics. He added, not without irony, that one would have expected the comments of these critics from literati, exactly the people whom they seemed to despise. For years already, Vestdijk had been living in Doorn (a small village near Utrecht), and he had been the only man of letters in that area. Thus, Sierksma concluded, the insinuations simply turned out to be lies.[91]

Many others, however, appreciated Vestdijk's style of writing as worthy of an intellectual. According to Barneveld, he sometimes sounded like a prophet, a professor,

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[82] Mankes-Zernike 1952: 98.

[83] Bomhoff 1952: 614, Kraemer 1959a: 748, 761.

[84] Verhoeven 1961b: 40.

[85] Van der Leeuw 1952: 125.

[86] Vestdijk 1947: 89.

[87] Vestdijk 1952: 100; cf. also Veenstra 1948: 67, Sierksma 1952: 46.

[88] Vestdijk 1952: 127-128; cf. also Sierksma 1952: 45.

[89] Vestdijk 1952: 128, his italics.

[90] Vestdijk 1950ab.

[91] Sierksma 1952: 46.

though at other times he sounded more like a talker.[92] The essay, others argued, was neither a novel, nor a scientific treatise, neither a phenomenology, nor a history, nor a psychology of religion; it was a combination of all of these genres.[93] His friend Veenstra called Vestdijk a philosopher of culture.[94] According to Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, however, he could not be labelled as such because he did not try to build a system.[95] Certainly, Veenstra admitted, Vestdijk was not a philosopher in the usual, academic sense of the word—not because he was less familiar with the work of Descartes, Kant or Hegel than university professors (he definitely was not, Veenstra concluded), but rather because his style of presenting problems did not fit that of professors who held a chair. He simply was not an architect.[96]

Yet, whatever the way critics tried to suggest that Vestdijk had merely experimented with his topic, all agreed that he was often highly ironical. One never knew whether or not he was being serious, Barneveld and Bleeker complained.[97] Vestdijk merely observed religion from a distance. Wapenaar and J. Noordegraaf referred to a poem by Gerrit Achterberg in order to show that Vestdijk was simply playing a game:[98]

> On matters of salvation he is fighting with theologians,
> yet the child inside watches … and smiles.

Bourgeois – The playfulness of Vestdijk's way of arguing did not have only to do with ironical distance between himself and his subject. According to his friend Sierksma, it was also due to his habit of not betting on one horse.[99] Josine Meyer argued that Vestdijk's critics forgot that he had repeatedly defended the right of the artist to keep himself from taking sides in political struggles.[100] Instead of joining these struggles, intellectuals had to continue writing on topics of public importance from the perspective of individual freedom, she held.[101] And even though she disagreed with him

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[92] Barneveld 1948ab.

[93] Berkelbach van der Sprenkel 1948, Berkouwer 1948ab, Bleeker 1952: 130, Popma 1957: 338-339.

[94] Veenstra 1948: 60.

[95] Berkelbach van der Sprenkel 1948.

[96] Veenstra 1948: 60.

[97] Barneveld 1948b: 72, Bleeker 1952: 130.

[98] Wapenaar 1953: 246, Noordegraaf 1975; reference to Achterberg 1948: 26.

[99] Sierksma 1952: 22.

[100] Meyer 1958: 273.

[101] Meyer 1958: 277.

on several issues, Meyer praised him for his brave attempt to reflect upon so difficult a problem as the future of civilization.

Critics found this attitude wanting, especially when dealing with ultimate problems. In fact, they blamed it on a lack of nerve. According to Van der Leeuw and Kraemer, Vestdijk was simply unable to make a choice between God and the devil.[102] Whatever their intelligence, brilliance and commitment, these critics (together with Miskotte and Teeuwen) concluded that Vestdijk and Sierksma simply remained "bourgeois" intellectuals.[103] In this context, Noordegraaf referred to a comment by one of Vestdijk's contemporaries and fellow hostages in Beekvliet during the war. Always and everywhere, the latter argued, Vestdijk was seen writing, but never taking part in discussions. He was an outsider. Noordegraaf linked this observation explicitly to Van der Leeuw's judgment on the bourgeois. This way he seemed to suggest that Vestdijk was somebody living far away from the world of everyday life. He preferred not to risk his life in the search for truth. That was one of the reasons why Vestdijk became a member of the *Kultuurkamer*, rather than staying with his fellow hostages.[104]

A similar, yet far more severe critique than that of Sierksma, came from Barneveld and H.A. Gomperts. According to the former, Vestdijk could not help whispering "human dignity," as if, in the end, he suffered from a lack of nerve to bid religion a farewell.[105] "Always," Gomperts scorned, "when I hear people talking about 'human dignity,' I think of somebody wearing tails and plastron tie, at least some dress that has to be put off when nothing remains but our vulnerable and mortal body."[106] According to him, it was merely a scholastic justification of an established, religiously determined morality.[107] True intellectuals needed only a set of personal values for which they stood and for which they would fight till death (Gomperts was almost certainly hinting at his hero Menno ter Braak, who had fought the Germans with the word and committed suicide as soon as they invaded the Netherlands). And this was not because any higher cause was needed to justify their activities; rather they believed their ideas to be pragmatic solutions to actual problems.[108] Vestdijk, however, with his scientific pretentions and religiously inspired morality, was not personal

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[102] Van der Leeuw 1952: 126, Kraemer 1959a: 759-760.

[103] Van der Leeuw 1952: 126, Kraemer 1959a: 755; also Teeuwen 1951: 191, Miskotte 1952: 116.

[104] Noordegraaf 1975.

[105] Barneveld 1948b: 74.

[106] Gomperts 1949a: 129.

[107] Gomperts 1949a: 130.

[108] Gomperts 1949a: 137.

enough and failed to be the man behind his argument and stand up for his case, Gomperts concluded.[109]

Vestdijk countered his critics by first of all asserting that he would not respond to their comments because he felt personally attacked. According to him, their comments were proof that those who'd felt the need to criticize him had not read his arguments properly. Such a defense from a former editor of *Forum* might have been disappointing.[110] This literary critical magazine had always looked for the man behind the argument. Not the artistic form, but rather the person was to be held accountable—and responsible for the ultimate explanation—for its creativity. As the editors emphasized in their founding statement: "We intend to be polemical, if necessary. For us, it is a way of defining the person. People who try to hide behind a careful and decent objectivity, show they do not understand polemics to be a way of life."[111] Vestdijk, however, denied to have any polemical intentions.

According to Vestdijk himself, he had been able to keep distance enough to allow his essay to be attacked by others, even if by theologians.[112] Yet, he concluded, nobody had been able to refute any of his statements. The only thing he asked for was a bit more respect for the arguments which he had put forward. He did not want his arguments to be dismissed that easily. In the future, of course, others might find better arguments. He did not regard his essay as a finished product, once and for all. "Beyond a certain critical limit," he argued, "my work must be burned. That is, I think, a quite normal idea, even though it is seldom formulated explicitly."[113] Gomperts replied that he did not understand why, if he had really taken so much distance from his work, he was still trying to defend it against all kinds of attacks. According to him this was the strangest reaction he could imagine. In this way, Vestdijk only cheated himself.[114]

Sierksma argued that already the fierceness with which Vestdijk had defended his essay indicated a strong personal commitment.[115] As stubborn as a terrier, he had fought critics from both left and right.[116] According to Sierksma, however, this should come as no surprise. Artists always reveal something of their inner selves to the public. Vestdijk was writing about religion in a time of war. This he did not deny. As he admitted: nobody, fighting something charged with emotions like religion (Dutch:

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[109] Gomperts 1950a: 455, 1950b: 54.

[110] Vestdijk 1949c: 381.

[111] Editors *Forum* 1932: 3.

[112] Vestdijk 1949c: 381.

[113] Vestdijk 1950a: 50.

[114] Gomperts 1949b: 455, 1950a: 53, 54.

[115] Sierksma 1950: 558.

[116] Sierksma 1952: 12.

godsdienst), could deny being convinced of the relevance of a religion without God (Dutch: *religie*).[117] Yet, Sierksma maintained, even though artists might give the impression of saying the 'last word,' they at least must also have the right of not saying the 'very last word.'[118] Vestdijk himself had argued something similar. He admitted that critics might have been disappointed that not every statement in his essay was derived from his private life. Yet, he continued, if they think that this is what *Forum* intended, then they are wrong. It is also part of the *Forum* tradition to refuse to deal with questions which the work under review does not give rise to, Vestdijk concluded.[119]

Why, if the topic was not treated seriously enough, did critics pay any attention to Vestdijk's arguments rather than merely ignoring the issues brought up for discussion? According to Zijlstra and Van der Leeuw, it might be dangerous to let the wider public read Vestdijk without any serious criticism from intellectual opinion leaders.[120] And, as Van der Leeuw and De Vos argued, his attempts were consciously directed at keeping people from choosing the correct faith.[121] Kraemer asserted that the psychological approach to sacred phenomena is chilling, killing all religious sensibility and spontaneity.[122] On the other hand, Sierksma held that, instead of being too cold, some had been grateful for the psychological perspective on religion which he had developed. Many had written him letters of thanks for showing them new ways of appreciating religious experiences. Thus, Kraemer's insinuations were easily countered by the facts, he concluded.[123] In general, though not quite serious, the argument might be highly influential among the public and attractive to those less easily convinced of the truth which theologians were used to telling them.

According to Sierksma, however, critics who maintained that Vestdijk had merely been joking and was not serious about religion, were mistaken. They had forgotten that irony was merely the manifestation of another type of seriousness.[124] His attitude of superior objectivity, in fact, dissimulated a subjective hyper-sensitivity, Sierksma argued. On this point, Vestdijk's irony differed completely from that of Gomperts, for whom irony merely provided an air of superiority. It is striking that Gomperts' irony ceased immediately when he got serious, something which Sierksma had observed in Miskotte's attack on Vestdijk as well. However, that his irony was artificial

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[117] Vestdijk 1956a: 3.

[118] Sierksma 1952: 12.

[119] Vestdijk 1951: 313.

[120] Marnix 1948, Van der Leeuw 1952: 126.

[121] De Vos 1952: 108, Van der Leeuw 1952: 126.

[122] Kraemer 1959a: 757, 1959b: 223.

[123] Sierksma 1959a: 79.

[124] Sierksma 1948b: 758, 1950: 558; Veenstra 1948: 67-68, Schaik-Willing 1952: 1321-1322.

was not the worst thing—that his seriousness failed to be to the point was dangerous, something which Barneveld also accused theologians like De Vos and Van Heugten of. It was better, Sierksma continued, to see people being passionately serious when there was no room left for irony.[125] Ultimately, irony was a gift of the happy few. And both theologians and a certain type of literary critics failed to appreciate the seriousness of it. Whereas for Barneveld only professors were serious,[126] Gomperts resembled more a minister.[127] Though this might sound strange, whereas both were used to criticizing the Dutch tradition of minister-poets, Sierksma preferred the seriousness of theologians, for he though the latter to be naïve and choleric in their attempts to save their religion. Instead, both Barneveld and Gomperts, though part of the literary bourgeois, were only afraid of religion.[128] They should not feel too ashamed to be ministers, Sierksma contended. According to him, the latter had his own dignity, besides that of the French bourgeois (and his double, the libertarian) and the German *Feldwebel* (and his counterpart, the professor).[129]

Theologian – If Vestdijk was indeed neither religious nor scientific, neither serious nor personal enough to earn any respect—as his critics contended—then who *was* qualified to make any legitimate claims on religion? Unfortunately, there didn't seem to be any specific answer to that question. No critique even attempted to make explicit what a serious critic was supposed to look like. Surely, as we have seen, the different styles of writing were necessary in order to deal with such a complex problem as the future of religion. Yet, concluding that polemical attacks were mainly launched by so-called theologians, Noordenbos argued that he did not wish to simply leave it to the kinds of specialists that these people thought they were. "Why should only theologians be allowed to discuss subjects of public importance like religion?"[130] Theologians could not accept the notion that a non-theologian and unbeliever even claimed the right to speak out on matters concerning religion.[131] Moreover, as other critics argued, theologians are always biased by their 'belief', whatever their relation to a specific religion.[132]

In his own responses to theologians, Vestdijk tried to make clear that he was far more competent dealing with religion than his opponents suggested. After all, they

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[125] Sierksma 1949: 718.

[126] Sierksma 1948b: 757.

[127] Sierksma 1949: 720.

[128] Sierksma 1948b: 757, 759.

[129] Sierksma 1949: 721.

[130] Noordenbos 1948a.

[131] Noordenbos 1952, Editors *De Nieuwe Stem* 1952, Marja 1954, D. 1975, Schouten 1996.

[132] Barneveld 1948a: 253, Noordenbos 1948a.

had not been able to refute his arguments.[133] Sierksma agreed.[134] Though he found some mistakes in Vestdijk's account of the facts, in general, his statements were sound and convincing, and certainly serious enough to invite thorough discussion. His critics, however, failed to even offer him the opportunity.

Though some critics took Vestdijk's intention to interpret religion psychologically seriously,[135] others regarded his approach as merely an attempt to reduce religion to a psychological phenomenon, or even to explain the reality of religion away.[136] Vestdijk's and Sierksma's was an essentially atheist philosophy in which there was no room left for biblical anthropology as a possible alternative, as J.A. Oosterbaan complained.[137] They, however, were unable to indicate why their anthropology was superior to that of the Bible,[138] or indeed any kind of belief in the supernatural, as Kwee Swan Liat argued. Without any support for their own ideas, these were no more than mere beliefs as well. Consequently, Sierksma's way of arguing did not differ considerably from that of theologians.

Kraemer found it significant that Sierksma had excluded theologians from his interdisciplinary team of scholars to study religious projection. By ignoring their judgments, Kraemer warned, intellectuals and scholars would always fail to understand anything of religion. Whatever the expertise needed to understand religion properly, to know what religion is really all about, he argued, we must believe in God and be able to think systematically about this reality. According to Sierksma, however, it was not clear what Kraemer meant by theology. If he had been referring to Old and New Testament studies, church history, the history of dogma, then Sierksma agreed. If Kraemer meant dogma, then he would have to object. Theology in this sense did not meet the standards of scientific methodology. Instead, it entered the domain of metaphysics.[139] According to Kraemer, however, this suggested a highly naïve conception of science, beginning with the belief that objectivity is possible. Instead, we needed to admit that science is at least partly a subjective enterprise, in which we, as men, are personally involved.[140] If taken this way, Sierksma argued, and dogma continued to play a role in theology, then we had to determine whether it was justified to teach theology at the university. Maybe, Sierksma challenged his opponent, Kraemer

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[133] Vestdijk 1952: 127.

[134] Sierksma 1959b: 22.

[135] Sterkman 1948ab: 134, Bleeker 1952: 131, Van Holk 1957: 70-71.

[136] Wapenaar 1953: 244, Oosterbaan 1957: 80, De Jong 1957: 64, Pos 1958, 1959, Kraemer 1959a: 729, 733, 735, 754, 759, 1959b: 247-248, Van Stempvoort 1960, 1961.

[137] Oosterbaan 1957: 79.

[138] Oosterbaan 1957: 80, Luypen 1963: 265, De Vos 1966, 420.

[139] Sierksma 1959a: 88.

[140] Kraemer 1959b: 241.

would be able to explain to him where theology—defined as something between dogma and the scientific study of religion—belonged. Especially if he, like Oosterbaan before him,[141] thought that he could give up the natural scientific method that easily, perhaps it was justified to ask whether theology should still be taught at the university, or limited to the seminary?[142] Kraemer admitted that there might be some confusion about the position of theology at the university, but for the moment he was not able to clarify it.[143] However, he maintained, both Sierksma's and Vestdijk's approach to religion was far too limited in order to account for the reality it referred to. In an attempt to be interpretive psychologists, especially their theory of projection not only failed to offer a proper understanding of religion, but it was also taken as a polemical attack on the reality behind religion.[144]

Kraemer went so far as to assume that when a psychologist teaches phenomenology of religion (according to the rules of this difficult art, of course), in general, the effect will not be the feeling of awe required for an appreciation of religion. On the contrary, Sierksma's approach was chilling and killed religious spontaneity, and at the same time claimed to understand everything. By that, Kraemer did not wish to suggest that it was Sierksma's intention to distort religious experiences, but everywhere, he argued, we feel this tendency in his theoretical expositions.[145] Sierksma dismissed this as pure speculation.[146] Yet, Kraemer answered, whatever his intentions, he needed to be aware that he was getting a bad reputation.[147] This didn't seem to bother Sierksma. He countered that if one intended to start a dialogue, like Kraemer said he did, the reputation as well as the person of the other needed to be abstracted from the content of the argument.[148] That his courses at the university were chilling and killed religious sensitivity, Sierksma took as a personal insult, and he asked Kraemer to apologize if he wanted to continue a dialogue. Kraemer, of course, had himself felt offended when Sierksma discarded biblical anthropology as a serious alternative to the results of empirical research. Worse, according to Sierksma, since the first could only be argued as a sermon, and not as part of a scientific discussion.[149] Kraemer took this critique to be proof of a value-judgment that could not be justified

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[141] Sierksma 1959a: 89.

[142] Sierksma 1959a: 92.

[143] Kraemer 1959b: 256.

[144] Kraemer 1959a: 754.

[145] Kraemer 1959a: 742-743.

[146] Sierksma 1959a: 81.

[147] Kraemer 1959b: 223-224.

[148] Sierksma 1959b: 738.

[149] Sierksma 1957: 140.

in an open and fair dialogue.[150] At that, Sierksma answered that he left it to the intelligent reader to judge whether he was right to call the argument for biblical anthropology as it was made by Oosterbaan a sermon or not.[151] According to Smits, Sierksma was perfectly correct on this point.[152]

The controversy was not just one between theologians on the one hand, and atheists on the other. The fact that Smits agreed with Sierksma already testifies to this. Kraemer, for his part, had attacked L.J. van Holk. Even if theologians agreed on some issues with Sierksma, this did not mean that they counted him among their friends. Here, Sierksma took the opportunity to criticize Van Holk (as much as he could have other liberal-protestant theologians[153]) for his ignorance towards scientific theories that implied a serious threat to the truth in general, and theology in particular. Van Holk already warned the "traditional theologian" that Sierksma's argument would be a shock, because, according to him, it did not leave any room for apologetics.[154] By this, Kraemer argued, Van Holk seemed to regard the truth-claims of Christianity ridiculous, as it was for all modern avant-garde leaders and the intellectual plebeians who followed them.[155] With apparent pleasure, he sent the orthodox believers to the stake, as if Sierksma's theory did not apply to himself as well. Here, clearly, Kraemer meant to disqualify Van Holk as a faithful believer. According to Kraemer, it was the advantage of any radical psychological approach: it applied to "liberal theologians" as much as to any other religious thinker.[156] In defense of Van Holk, Smits stated his opposition to Kraemer. By taking both Vestdijk's and Sierksma's arguments as clear confessions of the modern unbeliever, Smits argued, Kraemer ignored the fact that others—even members of the church—agreed with him on some points.[157] According to him, Kraemer was taking the projective nature of Christian dogmas too easily.[158] In fact, the image of Christ dying on the cross, as well as his resurrection some days later, were myths.[159] In this sense, there was no difference between liberal Christians and non-Christian believers.[160] "I was really

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[150] Kraemer 1959a: 733-734.

[151] Sierksma 1959a: 81.

[152] Smits 1959a: 2.

[153] Faber 1952, De Fetter 1952, Smits 1959ab, Sirks 1959, Hidding 1959.

[154] Van Holk 1957: 71.

[155] Kraemer 1959a: 730.

[156] Kraemer 1959a: 731.

[157] Smits 1959a: 2.

[158] Smits 1959a: 2, Sirks 1959.

[159] Smits 1959a: 2, 1959b: 2.

[160] Hidding 1959: 6, Sirks 1959: 2.

angry [with Kraemer]," Smits admitted many years later.[161] According to Smits, Kraemer failed to pursue the dialogue he pretended to offer. In fact, he limited himself mostly to polemical remarks. Instead of polemics, he continued, what they needed was real dialogue in order to clarify the modern predicament.[162] Later on, in a truly moderate fashion, he would even argue that dialogue with the unbeliever had to start by looking in the mirror, looking oneself in the eye.[163]

Yet, Kraemer simply declared that behind their mask of scientificity, they could not hide their own struggle with the angel or, perhaps more accurate, the devil.[164] The personal background of Sierksma's critiques also justified his personal style of arguing, Kraemer maintained. According to him, in matters of such importance as the study of religion, one must be clean and honest. People like Sierksma could not pretend to be scientific and modest, while at the same time treating Christianity with aversion and arrogance, being unwilling (and therefore unable) to reach the level of a truly phenomenological approach, as he prescribed when dealing with other religions. Sierksma failed to understand the Christians, Kraemer argued, not because he lacked the knowledge, but rather because he did not want to understand them. And he needed the theory of religious projection in order to try to get rid of God. He hated Him, he was afraid of Him, he was like a hedgehog, following His trail, hunting after him. Clearly, God did not leave him in peace! And if there was no other proof of His existence, then the examples of both Vestdijk and Sierksma would suffice, Kraemer concluded.[165] Strikingly, this argument recurred many years later in the contributions of J. Kamphuis.[166]

Getting closer to the subject: irony turning into outright scorn

As we have seen, Vestdijk did not wish to be regarded a prophet. However, according to many critics, in fact, his pretentions were obvious. Already by writing an essay on the future of religion, he had assigned himself the role of a prophet. And, even though the contemporary world was looking for a prophet, Vestdijk failed to meet the standards. According to them this was partly due to his scientific stance, which implied a certain critical distance from the object with which he was dealing.

While Sierksma and Smits countered critiques of people accusing Vestdijk of indecent behavior, Vestdijk himself had already asserted that the religion could only be properly studied by somebody with the right character or personality.[167] In order

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[161] De Ruiter 1971.

[162] Smits 1959a: 2.

[163] Smits 1977.

[164] Kraemer 1959a: 738.

[165] Kraemer 1959a: 754.

[166] Kamphuis 1973: 10, 1998; cf. also Simons 1974.

properly studied by somebody with the right character or personality.[167] In order to avoid the danger of presenting a distorted picture of religion, Vestdijk argued, creative fantasy did not suffice. On the contrary, without having the right personality, this fantasy would be pursued in the wrong direction. Apart from theoretical reflection, he asserted, sympathy is an absolute prerequisite. However, in short, Vestdijk employed too much theoretical reflection according to his critics. Moreover, they seriously questioned whether his sympathy with Christianity was sufficient. If his understanding of its basic tenets were to be measured in this case, it would even be justified to doubt whether or not he had any sympathy for Christianity. It seemed far more reasonable to argue that he hated Christianity, and felt haunted by its God. His essay was interpreted as a polemic with God, and, as such, an attack on Christianity—and in particular with its theologians. Even his critical distance and so-called objectivity could not dissimulate that, in actuality, he was driven by negative effect. The theories and typologies he had used were merely employed in order to derogate religion. Curiously, his critics often forgot that Vestdijk had advocated religion (Dutch: *religie*), which critics took to be religion without God, while remaining highly critical of the definition of religion as belief in God (Dutch: *godsdienst*). His fiercest critics concluded that the essay, though denying God, had actually been born of a struggle with God. God clearly did not leave him be. Vestdijk felt bothered, was obsessed, felt outraged, and tried to get rid of him. While trying (or better: pretending), to be objective, the argument was driven by subjective sentiments. His theoretical framework was merely a projection of his own frustrations, and, though sounding methodologically appropriate, all this was sheer nonsense. In the end, critics held, a proper judgment of the argument could be made only when the intentions and sentiments of the author were included.

And here, as will also become clear in the next chapter, we find a difference with those critics who provided for arguments against Vestdijk's position without trying to derogate the person behind them. They simply did not agree with him. They, however, refrained from any attempt to insult, tease or personally critique; rather they questioned the validity of his arguments, sometimes even interpreting them as projections. Though his statements could not always be justified according to those critics, they did not question the sincerity of his intentions and the intelligence of the author. On the contrary, though they were critical—and though they didn't always offer a summary of his arguments or fail to understand them the way they were meant to be—at least they did not question his authority.

Every exchange of arguments might be taken as a matter of discussion or criticism as long as the position of the author is appreciated as plausible, whether an attempt to find common ground is made or not. Polemic starts when, in addition, persons are

[167] Vestdijk 1947: 11.

presented as unfit to offer a proper understanding and judgment of the problem at hand. And that was precisely what some critics tried suggest. They explicitly argued this point of view and did their best to convince the public to believe them. If Vestdijk pretended to be a prophet, he was either a false prophet, or no prophet at all. How he could be regarded a prophet? And, as we will see in the next chapter, critics believed that they were justified in questioning Vestdijk's authority, because, according to them, he did not even take religion seriously.

According to many critics, only one conclusion could be drawn from all of this. To wit, do you know the story of Vestdijk the prophet? No? You are right, he merely pretended to be one. Surely, he was not the right person to be a prophet. For that, he were "too naïve," his pretensions "ridiculous," Van der Leeuw argued.[168] Teeuwen argued that Vestdijk was just a "cynic," discussing the future and treating his fellow human beings with disdain without offering them anything positive.[169] His essay was a "complete disaster," De Vos concluded.[170] According to Miskotte it was merely a matter of "jolly woolgathering," a kind of "juggling" with words,[171] or, as Kraemer argued, "vulgar libertarian language," "irresponsible talk," accusing Vestdijk of "talking his way out too easily."[172] Kraemer continued, "even the most trivial anti-Christian mountebank in Hyde Park would not advocate such ideas."[173] Nowhere do we find anything profound, De Vos and Kraemer agreed.[174] Yet, Teeuwen and Van der Leeuw argued, he seemed to be "highly self-satisfied," "horribly self-indulgent," and a "self-gratifying bourgeois."[175] Behind all of that, there was a seriousness that turned all the self-confident arguments into an "angry sermon" full of "atheist pathos," Miskotte continued.[176] He did not seem to realize that these qualifications, when applied to the same essay, contradicted the earlier accusation of jolly woolgathering. According to him, whatever Vestdijk turned out to be, the effect was no more than a "miserable confession."[177] It was merely a matter of "shouting," Kraemer remarked.[178] According to him, Vestdijk's arguments were full of "affective judg-

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[168] Van der Leeuw 1952: 125.

[169] Teeuwen 1951: 191.

[170] De Vos 1952: 107.

[171] Miskotte 1952: 117.

[172] Kraemer 1959a: 748, 761.

[173] Kraemer 1959a: 763.

[174] De Vos 1952: 107, Kraemer 1959a: 762.

[175] Teeuwen 1951: 191, 192, Van der Leeuw 1952: 126.

[176] Miskotte 1952: 119.

[177] Miskotte 1952: 117.

[178] Kraemer 1959a: 764.

ments."[179] Nevertheless, whatever the affects involved, De Vos assured his "worthy readers, the essay would "not arouse their affect."[180] For that, Van der Leeuw found it "too boring;" and, he warned his readers, it "will not make you jump up from your chair."[181] "Pity for all the costly paper that could have been used for better purposes," De Vos concluded.[182]

According to Noordenbos, those critiques exemplified the "professorial arrogance" and "self-confidence" typical of theologians, and it was completely unjustified.[183] What, he asked himself, is a theologian more than just a specialist in formulating the prejudices of a specific religious tradition and who prefers the elegant, clear and lucid volumes of the great Karl Barth above the well-written arguments of Vestdijk? Even some theologians admitted that "angry ministers" and "journalistic professors" did not treat Vestdijk the way he deserved.[184] Nevertheless, Kraemer could not help adding, Vestdijk himself sometimes gave way to the style of his critics.[185] Vestdijk, together with Sierksma, accused some theologians and other critics of "ignorance," "sins against logic," "specialist's arrogance," "dictator's aspirations," "careless reading," "insinuations," "infantile reactions," "scientific sale," "existential sermons" and "romanticism," "stupidities," "emotional predilections," "aggression," and "word-salads exemplifying a kind of schizophrenia."[186] Moreover, the fierceness with which those critiques were formulated suggested, according to Vestdijk, "bad faith" if not sheer "intolerance."[187] At the very least, theologians had shown themselves to be highly "indecent" towards people who did not agree with their absolute viewpoints. The effect was "sling-and-fling pieces,"[188] "some barking," and something that sounded more like "vomiting" than any sensible dialogue.[189] According to Barneveld, De Vos was as dry as dust.[190] Noordenbos took him to be ludicrously insolent, arro-

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[179] Kraemer 1959a: 731.

[180] De Vos 1952: 107.

[181] Van der Leeuw 1952: 126.

[182] De Vos 1952: 107.

[183] Noordenbos 1948ab, 1952.

[184] De Jong 1952; Editors *De Nieuwe Stem* 1952, Berkouwer 1956, 1959, Smits 1959b, Janse de Jonge 1962.

[185] Kraemer 1959a: 734, Berkouwer 1959.

[186] Vestdijk 1952: 100, 104, 111, 122, 123, 129, 144, Sierksma 1952: 22, 24, 26, 29, 31, 37, 38, 40, 43, 47, 1959a: 84, 89, 90, 94, 97, 1959b: 737, 738, 740.

[187] Barneveld 1948ab, Noordenbos 1948ab, 1952, Editors *De Nieuwe Stem* 1952, Vestdijk 1952: 144, Marja 1954: 64-66, Sierksma 1959a: 101-102.

[188] Vestdijk 1952: 109, Sierksma 1952: 25.

[189] Vestdijk 1952: 112.

[190] Barneveld 1948b: 72.

gant, non-informative, a careless reader, and incorrect because he failed to understand anything of Vestdijk's argument.[191] Vestdijk's was a serious argument—nowhere did it give the impression of trying to derogate Christianity right from the start.[192] As Van Praag also noted, his was a sympathetic, positive style, without falling into the trap of hair-splitting critique that often characterizes attacks on Christianity.[193] One would expect serious attention and interest from theologians, yet, in fact, they had only snarled at him.[194] Among theologians, only one reasonable and sane remark was made; the rest needed to be refuted by experts on religion who could not be regarded theologians.[195] Critiques by whole or half theologians—even professors like Van der Leeuw and Miskotte—might account for the fact that Vestdijk's name had become so well known among a-cultural circles of ultra-orthodox moralists. In Parliament, Reverend Zandt, or one of his fellows, fulminated against godless modern writers under whose guidance the world was—according to him—going awry.[196] Those theologians and professors raged against Vestdijk. Sentences were distorted, taken out of their context—so much so that, consequently, something ridiculous, blasphemous or immoral appeared in its place. The polemic shows how otherwise reasonable and sound people are lured by this method of attack when they feel that their positions are threatened. Typical of this tendency is Bomhoff, who, after offering many interesting details on Vestdijk's oeuvre, shifted to religion and complained loudly, much like the theologians and professors before Sierksma's intervention.[197] "Sure," Marja held, "in this country, religion, the Christian in particular, is a weak point. And if we are talking about vindictiveness, then it is in the arguments which some believers are using. Although, these are otherwise brave people when they cannot see somebody else employing reasonable means to refute what is of crucial importance to them, like a taboo is for the primitive, a neurosis for the neurotic," Marja concluded.[198] Sierksma had already suggested that all this careless reading and quoting must have something to do with bad faith, or at best, common anxiety for the prospect of losing one's security. This does not mean that Vestdijk was justified in claiming that Christianity would (have to) die. "Yet, if Christianity was what it claimed to be, it did not need this type of apologetics employing those dubious means," Marja remarked quite ironically. "Our dear Lord would take care of his own

[191] Noordenbos 1948a.

[192] Noordenbos 1948a.

[193] Van Praag 1948.

[194] Noordenbos 1952.

[195] Noordenbos 1952.

[196] Marja 1954: 63.

[197] Marja 1954: 64.

[198] Marja 1954: 65.

business."[199] And "even if his work contained something scandalous," he continued, "modern culture needs a sewer's network in order to solve its inner tensions and contradictions and to avoid mass destruction and terror. Against moralists,[200] it was fun to mention that Vestdijk already characterized his own oeuvre this way before critics would do it.[201] Where did we see the artistic *hybris* being abandoned out of human solidarity? According to Vestdijk, man is a scandal. And as such, whatever his philosophy concerning the future of Christianity, he is far closer to the infallible authorities his critics referred to. Their critique would have been far more relevant if they took his interest more seriously. Then they would also have recognized the vanity of the arguments of McCarthy and bubble blowers."[202]

At least, as Sierksma concluded, countering Kraemer's argument in particular, all this "makes us lose costly paper that could have been used for better purposes."[203] Worse, because Kraemer had argued for a serious dialogue. He stated that he felt responsible for finding the truth on matters of utmost importance.[204] For that, we needed to be open-minded and discard the monologues that theologians were used to. Instead, we had to listen to each other.[205] And he had honestly tried to, as Smits argued.[206] According to Sierksma, however, Kraemer did not succeed because he simply held onto his own dogmatic starting-points without any intention of taking scientific approaches very seriously. Moreover, he argued, Kraemer's personal attacks on Sierksma did not fit within a dialogue. In this way, Sierksma concluded, Kraemer's attempts were bound to fail.[207]

True, Kraemer had been quite personal in his criticism of both Vestdijk's and Sierksma's arguments. As we have seen, according to him, they were chilling and killing the religious sensitivity of people.[208] And though he later admitted that this might not have been their intention,[209] other qualifications indicated that he regarded them as driven by emotions that could only damage people's access to God's revelation. In fact, they were "tormented by an irritating and ineradicable Christianity"

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[199] Marja 1954: 66.

[200] Marja 1954: 69; reference could have been to Teeuwen 1951: 191.

[201] Marja 1954: 69; reference to Roland Holst & Vestdijk 1950: 11.

[202] Marja 1954: 73; reference, of course, to Joseph McCarthy, the US Senator who has been blamed for the persecution of Communists during the Cold War.

[203] Sierksma 1959b: 737.

[204] Kraemer 1959a: 728.

[205] Kraemer 1959a: 725-726.

[206] Smits 1959a: 2.

[207] Sierksma 1959a: 77, 1959b: 735.

[208] Kraemer 1959a: 743.

[209] Kraemer 1959a: 743, 1959b: 223.

and, while clearly being "anti-Christian," continuously "scorning Christianity."[210] According to Kraemer "they hated metaphysical projection" and were among its fiercest persecutors.[211] Kamphuis would later be even more explicit. According to him, Vestdijk's arguments were merely a "confession of hate against God's love." And, whatever his pretended indifference, all of the caricatures Vestdijk had made of Christianity and its God could only be accounted for by some inner "vindictiveness." He simply "hated the belief that God sent his Son to atone for the sins of human beings."[212] Behind the hypocrisy of indifference and scientificity, Kraemer believed that both Vestdijk and Sierksma were "struggling with the Angel,"[213] much the same way Miskotte believed Vestdijk to be "tragically at war with God."[214]

Though less explicit, other critics formulated similar points against Vestdijk (and Sierksma). According to Walgrave, Vestdijk was driven by vindictiveness.[215] Schaik-Willing agreed. Accordint to her, his vindictiveness was the result of his loss of traditional faith. His was a disintegrated personality, a skeptic mind, without any respect for others.[216] He had teased the people, triggering a great deal of polemic. Given his way of arguing, he was understandably driven only by vindictiveness.[217] Yet, Th. Govaart asked, "is he fighting with the remnants of a past religion and its God? If we look at some of his poems, we might get that impression, or is this malicious exegesis?"[218] According to Berkouwer, Vestdijk's style of arguing did not differ much from that of the theologians. His tone was highly personal, Berkouwer concluded. He asked himself, rhetorically, whether this might have been the effect of feeling powerless and impotent, as Sierksma maintained, with respect to other polemists.[219] Van Baaren remarked that though Sierksma was correct in his critique, he regretted that his attacks were often so fierce. This would not be so bad if it supported his case, but it did not. On the contrary, his style fueled alienation and misunderstanding. Apart from that, however, he had offered an extensive critique of his opponents' arguments, Van Baaren concluded. Thus, Berkouwer argued, with respect to Vestdijk's essay, people could make up their own minds.[220]

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[210] Kraemer 1959a: 726, 729, 746, 747.

[211] Kraemer 1959a: 734, 735, 763.

[212] Kamphuis 1973: 16, 17; cf. also Kraemer 1959a: 748.

[213] Kraemer 1959a: 738, 743.

[214] Miskotte 1952: 117.

[215] Walgrave 1949: 72.

[216] Schaik-Willing 1952: 1316.

[217] Schaik-Willing 1952: 1321.

[218] Govaart 1958: 841.

[219] Berkouwer 1959.

[220] Van Baaren 1952: 3, 6.

On the one hand, Vestdijk had cleared the ground with his arguments.[221] Van der Leeuw's complaints about hypocrisy, failure and lack of nerve were understandable. On the other hand, Vestdijk's opinion of Van de Leeuw as a swindler ignored the truth in the latter's confession. In any case, the controversy showed that, essentially, we were neither dealing with clever discussions, nor merely with psychological theories, but with the truth of the Cross.

What also became clear from Vestdijk's arguments was that we did not need to become upset with the Church, but rather realize that the Gospel of the Cross wa still able to move people beyond psychology, even in our times, Berkouwer concluded.[222] Yet, although Berkouwer did not seem to be particularly confident about all this, Hekstra seemed to feel far more comfortable with Vestdijk's struggle. "That is also," he claimed, "why I think that this book, despite its anti-Christian tendency, is comforting. Is not this attempt of one of the greatest spirits of our age to find the essence of faith a triumph of God?" he asked rhetorically.[223]

De Vos regarded Vestdijk as a novelist, widely read and heavily criticized. The latter's work was accessible, but not as scientific as that of Sierksma. The controversy surrounding Sierksma's arguments had not been satisfactorily concluded, De Vos complained. Especially theologians failed to deal properly with the challenge he'd put forth.[224] However, according to him, Kraemer took a pastoral attitude that did not work in his exchange with Sierksma.[225] Now, on the other hand, Fortmann's work had been published. Though heavily scientific, requiring a lot of patience and perseverance from the reader, his argument was interesting and important.[226] One critic made a similar remark with respect to Kamphuis's study on Vestdijk. Even though, he argued, Kamphuis's language was highly esoteric, the argument was interesting because it tried to shed some light on the background behind Vestdijk's attitude towards Christianity and his ideas on the future of religion.[227]

Conclusions

To summarize, and in order to distinguish between polemical and non-polemical contributions, we might say that Vestdijk had attempted to argue instead of attack people personally. And personal attack is something which we had identified as the determining feature of polemic. In this type of encounter, critics attempt to create a

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[221] Berkouwer 1956.

[222] Berkouwer 1952.

[223] Hekstra 1954: 68.

[224] De Vos 1966: 416.

[225] De Vos 1966: 417.

[226] De Vos 1966: 416.

[227] Simons 1974.

subject behind a text. This subject provides them with the means to denounce and denigrate the argument. By using personal invectives, and by questioning the trustworthiness of its author, those critics cast doubt upon the truth of the argument. By pointing to the latter's mental state, his intellectual capacities and moral characteristics, they question the authority of the person responsible for the mistakes and damaging arguments put forth.

The central issue, as I have attempted to identify it, was the question whether or not Vestdijk was really a prophet. Apart from the question whether or not he pretended to be one, many critics took this as a starting point to launch their own judgments. Could Vestdijk be seen as a prophet? they asked themselves. Do not make me laugh! Was he a scientist then? You are kidding! For that his approach was too abstract, playful, and ironic; moreover, his argument was driven by vindictiveness. Instead of being either a prophet or a scientist, he was simply a bourgeois intellectual. He did not have the nerve to be either a theologian or an autonomous individual. According to the theologians, only they were able to deal properly with the issue of religion and its future. According to other cultural critics, Vestdijk wanted only to eradicate religion; people had to decide on their own which future to build. In any case, Vestdijk's essay was not to be taken seriously.

Critics tried to convince their public that there was a blatant incongruity between pretense and result in *De toekomst der religie*, between reasonable expectations and the competence to accomplish. In this way, they suggested, Vestdijk's entire argument Vestdijk was merely a joke! And the entire controversy, as far as it had been polemical, was no more than an—sometimes highly elaborate—invitation to ridicule the subject behind the argument and to belittle the threat which it posed to the critics involved.

In general, two categories of exchange are to be distinguished here. The one is directed at the subject behind a text and is, consequently, polemical. The other is more sympathetic to the subject, or author of the text, and is non-polemical. In the following chapter, I wish to suggest that things are a bit more complicated than that. For the moment, however, it is enough to classify the people contributing to our controversy into these two categories. Depending on whether or not they employ any personal verdicts, I distinguish between polemical and non-polemical critics. Taking each of the four periods we have defined in the previous chapter into account, we can draw the following conclusions.

Especially during the first period of the history of the essay's reception (from 1948 till 1952), many critics attempted to disqualify their opponent by using a highly personal style of attack. In this period, Vestdijk was the main subject being attacked, and a few counter-attacks were launched. The fiercest—clearly polemical—attacks were launched by Zijlstra, Van Heugten, Sterkman, Mankes-Zernike, De Vos, Miskotte, Van der Leeuw, Teeuwen and Wapenaar. Apart from them, Gomperts, Barneveld,

Veenstra, Noordenbos and, most importantly, Sierksma were active on the polemical side of the spectrum. Others, far more moderate and to the point in their critique were Berkouwer, Bavinck, Popma, Walgrave, Bleeker, Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, Roscam Abbing, Van Praag and Rodenko.

As becomes immediately clear, the polemical nature of an attack did not influence the issue of whether or not Vestdijk responded to his critics. To the assaults of Zijlstra, Van Heugten, Wapenaar and Teeuwen, he never responded. To the others, however, Vestdijk's response was particularly harsh. And he did not fail to mention that he found his suspicions towards Christians confirmed in the works of several of his critics. Gomperts simply failed to meet the standards of a decent intellectual. Several critics joined Vestdijk in his attack on theologians, for example Noordenbos and Barneveld. The latter, together with Gomperts, was attacked by Sierksma. Even more than Vestdijk, his friend Sierksma fiercely defended the arguments made in the essay—not only against literary critics, but also against theologians.

During the second period (from 1952 till 1959), it is striking to see the polemists of the first period keeping silent, despite being heavily attacked by Sierksma. Sierksma's contributions kept the issues brought up by Vestdijk during the first period on the agenda. Bomhoff, De Jong, Oosterbaan, Kwee and Kraemer were responsible for the kind polemical attacks made by theologians during the former period. Consequently, they were heavily criticized by Marja and Sierksma. The only one countering these critiques was Kraemer. Apart from Vestdijk and Sierksma, he attacked liberal theologians like Van Holk, who, according to him, were too sympathetic towards the enemy. Smits took sides with Van Holk as well as with Vestdijk and Sierksma. Though critical of Sierksma, Berkouwer made some personal remarks concerning the polemists among the theologians. Wapenaar, who had not been criticized by either Vestdijk or Sierksma, continued his war against the atheists. Though highly critical of the theologians, Hekstra would soon join him. The same held for Pos. Others issuing rather personal attacks were Schaik-Willing and Majorick. Their line of criticism, however, would soon be concluded by Verhoeven.

The third period (from 1960 till 1972), starting with critical discussions on Sczcesny, showed some fierce critiques from the likes of Verhoeven and Van Stempvoort. The latter, after Vestdijk's counter-critique, apologized and turned more moderate, avoiding qualifications which were too personal. After that, Luypen made some polemical remarks against Sierksma, whereas De Vos returned to Vestdijk and Sierksma, almost twenty years after he had launched his attacks. Though ready to employ the arguments of Fortmann, he still could not keep himself from making personal comments. Yet, only some isolated circles continued their personal invectives. The same trend we see during the fourth and last period (from 1973 till 1998). Some polemical remarks were made by Noordegraaf, whereas only Kamphuis managed to call attention to the issues raised decades before. Most commentators, how-

ever, while looking back on the history of the reception of *De toekomst der religie*, seemed surprised that Vestdijk's essay had ever been able to trigger so much controversy. And whereas they found Vestdijk a victim of the war his critics had waged against him, only Kamphuis referred to his correspondence with Theun de Vries. Vestdijk had argued that personal invectives were out of place, because he wanted to be taken seriously. Kamphuis, however, was not convinced, especially after Vestdijk called theologians "duffers" and "scum."[228] And, as we have seen in this chapter, he used many more invectives after he was attacked by the theologians.

In this chapter we have seen how critics attempted to discuss and derogate the argument on the future of religion as well as Vestdijk as an author, while questioning his putative status as an authority on matters of religion. Whether deliberately or not, by that they displaced the text by the subject 'hiding' behind it.

On the other hand, as we will see in the next chapter, critics always somehow attempted to substantiate their claims on the subject which they had identified. Apart from displacement, we must also focus more closely on the process of condensation. And, in order to show that polemic really has anything to do with authority (getting closer to my theory as developed in the introduction), we must focus not only on the way in which authority was questioned, but also how it was established and defended. Whereas in this chapter we have dealt with the subject created within the course of the controversy, in the next chapter we must deal with the rhetorical style by which authority insinuated itself into the encounter between Vestdijk and the commentators of his text. The latter objective will allow us to refine our analytical tools to identify polemics and distinguish it from non-polemical or merely moderate encounters and their different relations to the problem of authority (the principle Wittgenstein was talking about), as they will be studied in the last chapter.

[228] Kamphuis 1973: 8; reference to Vestdijk & De Vries 1985: 105, 168.

III – THE POLEMIC: ITS STYLE

Has any historical narrative ever been written that was not informed only by moral awareness, but specifically by the moral authority of the narrator?

Hayden V. White

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we observed how 'Vestdijk' was created as a subject failing to meet the standards of his own pretensions, as well as those of his opponents. We also observed Vestdijk—and later his friend Sierksma—sometimes contesting the picture his critics had painted of him. And, given the criteria formulated before, those counter-attacks were polemical as far as they attempted to show that the critics, in their turn, had failed to meet the standards required of people pretending to be able to write reviews. Instead of being directed at the argument, these attacks often aimed at the person behind the argument.

In this chapter, I will attempt to show how critics tried to substantiate their judgments. More specifically, we shall look at the ways in which those intellectuals who contributed to the polemic attempted to provide their statements with positive authority. In this context, we must determine which style of arguing is significant for polemic as a way of establishing or defending authority. I shall also offer some additional characteristics of this type of intellectual encounter or exchange.

In this chapter it will also become clear that the usual distinction between content and style is difficult to apply when it comes to the analysis of texts. As Nelson Goodman remarked, "Obviously, content is what is said, style is how." However, he continues, "a little less obviously, that formula is full of faults."[1] Even content is a matter of how things are told. It is also possible to pass judgment upon others either by quoting them, or employing our own language by trying to translate their terms, sentences and arguments. It is possible to criticize others by attempting to explain what their arguments imply. By way of irony, one may also repeat them without making any explicit comment, if he is certain that everybody already believes that the other's remarks are sheer nonsense. Even the processes of condensation and displacement are important for a stylistic analysis of the texts involved in the controversy with which we are dealing. And though in polemics those processes are employed in order to create a subject as a prerequisite for a personal encounter between authors,

[1] Goodman 1975: 799.

specific arguments and lines of reasoning certainly play an additional role in the contest. Statements condensed or displaced in ways that amount to either caricature or ridicule, are likely to influence the public's attitude toward its author. Though, if avoiding direct personal attack, it might seem reasonable and contribute positively to the authority of the critic.

Whereas the processes indicated before (and described in more detail in the previous chapter) are employed in order to question the authority of the other, polemics require other techniques which intend to provide one's own statements with some kind of positive authority. These techniques constitute styles of arguing which are intended to justify both criticism of the other's position, as well as positive remarks which are made in order to formulate alternatives to the other's argument. Though presented here as two separate techniques, in fact, they are not always so easily distinguished in the practice of writing.

Some polemical contributions might be explicit in their criticism of the other, offering a highly elaborate justification for their conclusions by indicating every single point on which their critique is based. Sometimes, they also offer an alternative to the other's position. In such cases, even though the latter technique employs a rather positive method of debate, just by being different it implies a critique of the other. However, we must in such cases determine whether or not this has polemical implications.

In order to clarify the point, let us return to some of the remarks which Vestdijk made in his letters to Theun de Vries. According to Vestdijk, Christianity was destined to die. Yet, this was likely to take hundreds of years. It would be "impossible either to root up Christianity" or to "exterminate the Christians." However, "they could not be enlightened" either. Given these circumstances, one might wonder why then he had written his essay on the future of religion in the first place. If he had been serious when he argued that emotions and religious energies could not be countered by theoretical insights, why then did he continue lecturing against the dogmas of Christianity and the intolerant attitudes of the Christians? Vestdijk himself seemed to have anticipated this question when he argued that, indeed, dogmas were not to be countered homeopathically. "To me it seems," he argued, "that it is better to use tricks in order to weaken dogmatic systems, rather than to counter them by means of alternative dogmas."[2] I would suggest that the tricks of which Vestdijk was speaking point to a certain style of arguing. Rather than employing a dogmatic kind of authority, he wished to counter such authority while simultaneously employing another style of making authoritative statements.

In order to determine which styles of arguing are more suitable for polemics, it is useful to begin by defining what is meant by the very concept of style. Next, the

[2] Vestdijk & De Vries 1985: 105.

different styles will be identified. Finally, we will attempt to establish the relationship between each of these styles on the one hand, and polemical controversy on the other. As might already be clear from the foregoing argument, the concept that ultimately links these layers of textual encounter is 'authority.' As Hayden White correctly emphasized, whatever the genre we meet with in textual analysis, authority is always at stake. A narrative is not only a story about good and evil (moral awareness) but also about the status of the narrator and the legitimacy of his claims (moral authority).[3] The purpose of the present chapter is to indicate in which sense this applies for polemics.

The relationship between style and authority

Whereas the creation of a subject serves to denounce the argument and denigrate its author, styles of arguing construct relationships between critics and the public. The former strategy is negative, but the latter is a positive attempt to create a sense of authority. The ways in which relationships between critics and the public are constructed belong to what Robert Hariman has called 'the artistry of power'.[4] In order to be effective, political activity needs a specific style of conduct.

In accordance with Hariman's definition, style will be defined here as a "*coherent repertoire of rhetorical conventions depending on aesthetic reactions for political effect.*"[5] When defined more directly in accordance with my theory, style must be regarded as a set of rules meant to create a sense of authority in order to be regarded as effective.

Whether or not style is employed intentionally is a question which I shall not attempt to answer. First of all, in most cases where almost no comments by authors regarding their own texts exist, it is almost impossible to determine whether or not one has consciously chosen a particular writing style. And even if such comments were available, we could not be certain whether or not they were simply justifications made after the fact. In general, every statement made by human beings must be interpreted according to the circumstances in which they are made. As long as we do not have any criteria by which we are able to judge whether or not they are true, we shouldn't simply take them for granted.

In order to be able to consciously choose a certain style of writing, space to make up one's mind is prerequisite. There must be distance between the author as the subject writing on the one hand, and the object which s/he is writing about on the other. However, in some styles of writing the link between subject and object is far more immediate, and therefore likely to be unconscious. In the latter case, reactions tend to be emotional rather than reflective. Given the intelligence and writing skills

[3] White 1987: 13, 21.

[4] Hariman 1995.

[5] Hariman 1995: 4, italics his.

of the people contributing to any textual exchange, even attacks seem extremely sophisticated at first; yet, the processes of condensation, and especially displacement, indicate that there haven't been many reflective moments in the course of writing. As I will argue in the present chapter, the style chosen for polemics points to a lack of conscious reflection. All too often, this style of writings turns out to be counter-productive, as it increases public interest in those who are being attacked. Yet, time and time again we see intellectuals attempting to outwit real or imaginary opponents by means of polemics.

In short, a style of writing does not need to be chosen intentionally in order to be effective in extinguishing the other from the scene of positive public attention. Vestdijk took time to elaborate on his statements in an attempt to prevent people from ignoring him as a serious partner for discussion. Few of his opponents, however, actually dealt with the reasons which he had given for the views developed in his essay. Instead, they attacked him personally. People like Hendrik Kraemer recognized that this tactic of criticizing Vestdijk were not effective and could better be substituted by dialogue. As we shall see in the present chapter, Kraemer took time to elaborate on his criticism and conclusions about Vestdijk. Nevertheless, he failed to live up to the ideal which he had so explicitly formulated; he did not succeed in avoiding polemical attack, as we observed in the previous chapter.

Thus, whether or not it has been intentionally chosen, style is a set of conventions employed in order to create a sense of authority. Polemic seems to fit perfectly in Hariman's conception of political style. We may even be inclined to say that polemic itself *is* a style of activity. It stands out for its aggression. That is why it is called a polemic: it is a war waged with words against another. This is partly a matter of restating the position of the other and/or simply seeking or defending a different view. Yet, as we have seen, this aspect of polemic has much to do with the creation of its subject. Here we must focus on its style. Thus, I would argue that polemic *has* a style.

Given the diversity of ways in which a war of words can be waged (and I do not wish to limit myself to extreme and clear-cut examples of polemic), it is difficult to define polemic as a style of political conduct in and of itself (political in the sense of specifically addressing a public). Therefore I will attempt to distinguish between different styles that might be used in polemics in order to create a certain political effect. As we will see, these differences depend on the interplay of three aspects governing the process of constructing authority: first, that of the author with his opponent; secondly, that of the author with his public; and finally, that of the author and the reality he refers to in order to create a sense of authority.

When focusing on style as a means to create a sense of authority, we are immediately reminded of the concepts Max Weber developed in the course of his analysis of

the problem of authority.[6] According to Weber, it was possible to identify traditional, rational and charismatic styles of political conduct. By these, however, he referred to actual states of affairs within society. They were ideal-types and analytical tools used to describe historical processes in which one type of authority was substituted for, or lost its dominance to, another. Thus, Weber argued, in the West experienced a development from traditional to rational authority, with the charismatic variant of authority sometimes interfering. When a certain type of authority failed, it led to its replacement by another type of authority. Even in the case of charismatic authority, in those cases where it was able to institutionalize itself, it was easily transformed into either a traditional or rational kind of authority.

With these concepts of authority, Weber referred to political realities. Important to him was the way in which government established itself and became an establishment, whether by consent of the people or not. And though he linked his rational type of authority to bureaucratic institutions, he did not focus on political interactions on the level of textual exchange. For this, Michel Foucault's definition of different polemical styles might serve as a better starting-point. According to him,[7]

> polemic defines alliances, recruits partisans, unites interests or opinions, represents a party; it establishes the other as an enemy, an upholder of opposed interests against which one must fight until the moment this enemy is defeated and either surrenders or disappears.

Yet, whereas Foucault's definition of polemics allows for the analysis of interactions on the level of texts, his concept is only two-dimensional. It merely establishes relationships between author and opponent, as well as a certain kind of reality. The same critique holds true for White's distinction between anarchism, conservatism, radicalism, liberalism, fascism and reactionary discourse. These categories point to the way in which critics deal with certain topics or political issues. However, as in the case of Foucault, the relationship between the author and some possible public remains outside the picture. And all of these dimensions together are required in order to properly analyze the style of authority employed in the production of texts.

The limitations of both Weber's, Foucault's and White's concepts of authority when applied to polemics, bring us to the typology of political styles as defined by Hariman. The advantage of the latter's approach is its value for the analysis of textual authority. At least Hariman acknowledges the fact that a political style does not imply any actual state of affairs. On the contrary, style is always a matter of acting 'as if'. Moreover, according to him, this is not something to be criticized or countered. Our

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[6] Weber 1978: chapters III, XI, XIV, XV.

[7] Foucault 1984: 382.

encounters are inescapably rhetorical. We can better understand how things work between an author and his public, rather than denounce the entire process right from the start.

Four styles of creating authority

For analytical purposes, Hariman distinguishes between four styles of political conduct: the realist (or descriptive), the republican (deliberative), the bureaucratic (documentary) and the authoritarian or courtly (declarative) ones. First, I will explain more fully what is implied by these categories. In the following, Hariman's typology will be linked to particular genres normally employed in the analysis of texts. Also, I will attempt to connect the different styles to the question of which of them is typical for polemical encounters. For that, I will return to the work of Bourdieu.

To begin with, the *realist* style radically separates power and textuality, constructing the political realm as a matter of fact. The voice of the author is (almost) absent, merging instead with a state of affairs.[8] The textual nature of the arguments is dissimulated by giving the impression that things are being described as they are. It does not venture any ethical ideals and it avoids drawing attention to the rhetorical nature of texts. This style suggests expertise; and, in general, expertise can be an important element in the creation of credibility.[9] The realist style is usually associated with scientific and journalistic reports,[10] whether presented in books, articles or lectures as professional/professorial opinions.[11] The public is intended to recognize the authority of the author by the simple language used in the argument. Analysis of readers' reactions to academic texts suggests that in such cases the public appears ready to submit to the argument as long as it remains uncontested by another authority.[12]

The *republican* style develops a model of oratorical virtuosity for public performance. The voice of the author is prominent in a deliberative presentation of the argument. The ingenious use of syllogism is further employed to support the author's original statements. And, although this gives the impression of objectivity, in general the subjective nature of every argument is readily admitted. It is important to suggest not so much expertise but rather trustworthiness and personal integrity here. Moreover, these elements refer to group norms and common values, and can be important to the credibility of an author. The embodiment of the author of those civic virtues is

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[8] Black 1992: 147.

[9] Jowett & O'Donnell 1986: 164; O'Keefe 1990: 132; cf. also Haskell 1984, Geisler 1994: 53-55.

[10] Black 1992: 152.

[11] Leith & Meyerson 1989: 11-12; cf. also Geisler 1994, Bourdieu & others 1995.

[12] Geisler 1994, Clark & Ivanic 1997, Ivanic 1998.

the basis of his authority.[13] For that, the text is elaborately orientated to its subject matter as well as to its audience, in such a way as to suggest both immediacy of experience and objectifying distance—the community of author and those addressed in the performance of the address, their joint contemplation of events in which they have had no part, but from which moral virtues are to be drawn.[14] Those who employ the republican style always attempt to solve problems by way of dialogue and discussion (or polemic?), though this does not mean that they will come to an agreement in the end. The republican style can be found in sermons, newspaper editorials, political oratory, as well as debate, discussion and day-to-day arguments.[15] In many respects these media employ the language of the lecture. A statement is held up for contemplation and the community or public is implicitly asked to draw upon its own experience of modern life to test the validity of the proposition.[16] In many respects, however, sermons and debates are quite unlike lectures. The performer does not need to be a professional or professor. S/he holds a dialogue not only with the audience but also with another (opposing) voice (even though this voice might be absent or imaginary). The public might be divided on particular issues, and so the orator must try to win them over to a particular view.[17]

The *bureaucratic* style consists of the communicative conventions that together constitute office culture, including jurisdictional priority of writing. Indeed, as Jack Goody concluded, writing is critical to the development of bureaucratic states.[18] On the other hand, however, in the time of classical legal assemblies disputes on matters of law were not resolved by recourse to a specialized group, but were debated openly in public. They were therefore more like the political oratory following the republican style. It is only with the rise of a lawyer-group that our concept of law as hieratic and reified emerged and with it a repudiation of free dispute.[19] In the bureaucratic style, the voice of the author is dissimulated by using other voices and, more specifically, other texts (whether it be the text of a direct opponent or the text of other authorities). This style culminates in references to authors' names, numbers or titles of texts, years of publication and page references, marking composite identities rather than a clear personal voice as in the republican style. The bureaucratic style refers the public to the rights and rules offered by, and found in, the words written by other

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[13] Hariman 1995: 122, Jowett & O'Donnell 1986: 165-166, O'Keefe 1990: 132-133.

[14] Hariman 1995: 123, Carter & Nash 1990: 146.

[15] Leith & Meyerson 1989: 19-27; Carter & Nash 1990: 137-142.

[16] Leith & Meyerson 1989: 19.

[17] Leith & Meyerson 1989: 19.

[18] Goody 1986: 91.

[19] Leith & Meyerson 1989: 32.

authorities. It is the drama of (rational) discipline and assimilation to it by the ordinary people.[20]

Finally, the *courtly* style is centered on personal sovereignty. Legitimacy derives from the successful performance of the principle of hierarchy.[21] This principle hallows the people as part of the court-structure. All of them pretend to be, or speak in the name of, the sovereign. Their speech is declarative and often presented with an aura of divinity or sacrality.[22] Any reference to this aura is meant to put an end to reasonable discussion, which clearly distinguishes the courtly style from both the republican and bureaucratic styles. Moreover, facts brought up against declarative statements are ignored or discarded in the courtly style. Rather, the authoritative statements are themselves regarded as matters of fact. The crucial difference, then, between the facts which figure in the realist style and those of the courtly style is that the former are justified by the facts themselves without any value judgment, while the latter depend upon the moral authority of the author, who simultaneously represents and transcends the community.

As Edwin Black concluded, in such cases there is no story to be told, but rather all is a matter of drama and display.[23] The sermon has features of the courtly style. In some respects it recalls the language of the lecture, in that a statement is presented for contemplation. However, one is not supposed to test the validity of the proposition. Rather the public is expected to submit, believe the statements which have been made and follow their prescriptions. Those who refuse to do so may be put under censure or sanction, whether that of the sovereign or that of the people who submit to its power and persecute in the name of sovereignty.[24] The courtly style is necessarily cruder, and more doggedly assertive, than the republican and bureaucratic styles.[25] Curiously, however—and of interest to my theory of polemics—Hariman points out that this style involves incessant plotting for higher rank and constant anxiety about the precariousness of one's position.[26]

Today, Hariman argues, this style has little purchase institutionally, but seems to be particularly resurgent within mass media representations of political events. In this context, Habermas even speaks of a re-feudalization of modern society.[27] According to Hariman, however, the courtly discourse will not feature as dominant style; it

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[20] Weber 1978; Bourdieu 1991b: 194-201, 216-219.

[21] Hariman 1995: 55.

[22] Foucault 1980: 55.

[23] Black 1992: 148; cf also Jowett & O'Donnell 1986: 166.

[24] Jowett & O'Donnell 1986: 166.

[25] Carter & Nash 1990: 139.

[26] Hariman 1995: 57.

[27] Habermas 1989: 200.

floats because it is no longer limited to or controlled by some political cast, and because it is marginal to the major discourses and institutional strategies of acquiring legitimacy in modern society. It attaches itself to a specific locale, because it constitutes communicative relationships with institutional form, stability and assurances suited to the social relations structuring that environment, and because it provides a tacit means of persuasion to those holding or attempting to gain advantage there. This activation of style is most likely to occur where social experience is already or still organized around some form of personal sovereignty.[28]

The style of polemical texts

Which style might be characteristic of polemical exchange is the final question to be answered by the theoretical exercises which serve as preliminaries to the present chapter. Generally speaking, the style employed in the former chapter, by which critics tended to attack each other personally, seemed to be mostly declarative in its denouncement of Vestdijk as the subject of *De toekomst der religie*. Yet, whereas some were indeed declarative, others clearly attempted to substantiate their scorn by employing different styles of arguing. As we will see, the use of these different styles increased in popularity during the history we are studying. What this means for the polemical nature of later contributions is something which will be investigated in the following.

We must avoid falling into the trap of linking authoritarian or declarative styles of arguing to an actual possession of authority. It might well be the case that the employment of a declarative voice points to a lack of authority. This is precisely the case which I wish to make in this study. According to me, intellectuals who feel their authority being threatened tend to attack others personally without attempting to substantiate their scorn by use of elaborate arguments or moderate judgments of the issues with which they are faced.

In fact, as we will see in the next chapter, critics who express their viewpoints in the authoritarian style definitely did not belong to the powerful networks or well-established political environments within Dutch society. This conclusion need not come as a surprise if we start from the assumption stated earlier, namely that the subject created in texts does not need to have any referent outside the text. Something similar holds true for the style of the texts which we are studying here. A declarative style of arguing can be used in order to suggest political reality, or some ideological implication which does not necessarily exist in everyday life. Again, texts constitute realities of their own. They interfere with the outside world and are meant to transform, in an attempt to shift the balance of power in favor of those who create them. Which style is better equipped to change the political context depends on the situa-

[28] Hariman 1995: 78.

tion. The question we must answer here is whether one of the styles defined earlier seems to be favored for polemical exchange. In other words, since we have a typology of political styles, it remains to be established whether a link exists between, on the one hand, style as a means by which power, authority, or influence are suggested to the reader, and on the other, the feeling that authority is being threatened by changes in society.

The problem is how to determine which style is employed in polemics in order to establish or defend authority. According to my theory, a sovereign with a strong hold on power need not be polemical. If it turns to personal attack, it only suggests some fatal weakness dissimulated by drawing attention to the faults of the other. Employed as a means to counter imminent threats, such an attack is directed against something, and is therefore reactionary. According to me, and contrary to Bourdieu,[29] I would argue that this type of discourse is extremely violent.

Yet, if we maintain that reactionary discourse employs a courtly style of arguing, how can Hariman maintain that it functions in an environment already organized around a person with authority? To clarify this point, we must ask ourselves from which perspective this authority has should be considered: from that of the public, or from the standpoint of those who claim to hold authority, but feel it to be threatened? This is in accordance with another remark by Hariman, claiming that, today, the courtly style has little purchase institutionally, but seems to be particularly resurgent within mass media representations of political events. This might even lead us to the conclusion that polemics are a structural feature of modern discourse. Always and everywhere, authority is at stake. This seems to support my theory that polemic is a means by which intellectuals attempt to defend themselves at a time in which they believe their authority to be threatened. Polemics (at least the most violent forms) only arise in a context that is politically unstable and insecure, in which a public is not easily identified, and in which authority must be defended against other political opinions. This also implies that polemics are not necessarily pursued in order to restore challenged authority, but may also be employed in a struggle to establish new social and political alternatives to established authority. Here, however, we find ourselves on the verge of historical analysis, attempting to identify the institutional, social and political context of polemics—something to be dealt with in the next chapter. It is time now to apply the analytical tools which we have developed in the foregoing argument.

Different styles in practice

As we observed in his discussion of the pretensions usually ascribed to people who write about the future, Vestdijk began with both the republican and bureaucratic

[29] Bourdieu 1991b: 32.

styles of addressing the public. For him, it served as a way of coming out without making any reference to authorities which exceeded the boundaries of his own person ("I"), or the discipline he employed ("we"). He himself did not pretend to be a prophet, and he and his fellow interpretive psychologists had to find a balance between facts and fiction, between the creative mind and critical distance. Clearly, he did not aim for anything other than to offer a few hints for the future.

Yet, in the following, we will see in more detail how Vestdijk attempted to justify his arguments.[30] This, then, must be compared with the ways in which his critics attempted to make sense of his arguments. For that, the most important topics of discussion between Vestdijk and his critics will be analyzed. First, I wish to summarize the most important points in advance.

The polemic began with the attempt to declare Vestdijk unfit to offer any proper understanding or judgment of matters concerning religion. Some critics explicitly argued this point of view and attempted to convince the public to believe them. Even though according to them, Vestdijk pretended to be a prophet, he was either a false one or, worse, no prophet at all. How then could he be regarded as a prophet? He did not even take religion seriously, they suggested. To prove their point, they took issue with Vestdijk's definition of religion.

According to his critics Vestdijk reduced religion to an essentially human phenomenon. Moreover, they interpreted his theory of projection as an attack on religious truth. After all, if all religious images were interpreted as products of the human imagination, based primarily on wishes and needs, then it would be impossible to decide whether or not God existed. By suggesting this, critics maintained, Vestdijk simply attempted to ridicule a phenomenon which had its true base in divine revelation. And though Vestdijk responded that, according to him, projection as such was inevitable and essential to human beings, and certainly nothing ridiculous, critics continued to take issue with his critique of its metaphysical variant.

In general, polemists ignored the fact that Vestdijk needed this theory in order to explain one specific characteristic of a metaphysical religion like Christianity: its intolerance. As soon as projection turned into absolute claims of 'truth' and the repression of doubt, Vestdijk argued, intolerance and repression were inevitable. He did not have any problem with the content of religious 'truth' as such, but he absolutely rejected the attitude of those who took it too seriously. This led critics to argue that Vestdijk not only did not understand the Christian religion, but was in fact himself intolerant. Similar points were made against Vestdijk's thesis that metaphysical pro-

[30] In the rest of this chapter, authors employing the courtly style will always be mentioned in the text. That does not mean that all people figuring in the text are polemical; if they are not, I will indicate this specifically. References to other people are generally to be found in footnotes. Page references to *De toekomst der religie* will be included in the text.

jection was intimately linked to the repression of sexuality. He not only failed to understand the Christian concept of sex and marriage, but he clearly lacked a basic religious education. This should not have come as any surprise after his confession that he had preferred to talk about philosophy instead of dogmas with his Sunday-school teacher.

Critics also did not understand why Vestdijk preferred socialism and Buddhism to Christianity. At least, they refused to take Vestdijk's own explanation regarding this issue seriously. According to Vestdijk, those religions and ideologies were far more tolerant and did not repress man's natural functions. Basically, his critics argued, Vestdijk was merely searching for a religion without a God. He hated God. That was why He had to die, not for Vestdijk's own sins, but rather because Vestdijk wanted to get rid of Him. That was also why Christianity, interpreted as the only true belief in God, had to die. Vestdijk simply could not accept that, if Christianity were to die, the Church as a community of faithful believers would not. And, surely, it would never die, because God did not want it to. Vestdijk's ideas of a new religious establishment, bred at institutes that combined the best of the Christian retraite, the Buddhist monastery, and the English university, were simply ridiculous.

This, in short, is the manner in which critics attempted to justify their points against Vestdijk. Yet, for an analysis of the styles employed in order to convince the public, we must offer a more detailed discussion of the issues raised in the course of the controversy. The main topics to be analysed here are as follows: the definition of religion, the theory of religious projection, intolerance and sexual repression in Christianity, the value of socialism and Buddhism as alternatives, and Vestdijk's personal hints regarding the future of religion. These topics will be discussed respectively. First, I will give a short overview of the arguments offered in *De toekomst der religie*. Next, the critical comments of his opponents will be summarised. Finally, I will analyse Vestdijk's (and Sierksma's) replies to these critiques. In all of these cases, the styles used to present the arguments will be identified.

The definition of religion – The conflict which arose regarding the question of what exactly religion was all about, developed in two different directions. On the one hand, Vestdijk and many theologians debated an issue often posed by psychologists, namely whether the religious spirit stemmed from essentially human needs or whether it was primarily derived from an ultimate reality which believers called God. On the other, Gomperts and Vestdijk debated the question of whether religion was about spiritual happiness or primarily employed in order to counter a certain insecurity by means of pleasure.

Apart from all other qualifications, as we have seen in the previous chapter, most critics acknowledged that Vestdijk wished to be judged as an interpretive psychologist. Some admitted that he was justified in doing so. After all, by means of his artistic

talents he was able to understand people's motives; this offered him the means by which to account for the actions which people take in order to fulfill their religious needs.

Yet, others felt it necessary to question the validity of psychology itself; some even denied that it could provide any fruitful knowledge. According to many critics, psychology failed to account for a God who was the essence of religion. For psychologists, God was simply an element of religion, rather than its beginning and end. A discipline such as interpretive psychology aimed at understanding religion as an essentially human phenomenon. God and human behavior were taken to be products of the human mind. Critics as diverse as Wytzes, Wapenaar, Sterkman, and De Jong complained that, by exclusively employing human psychology, Vestdijk simply wished to explain the reality of God away.[31] With such an approach, as Pos and Van Stempvoort argued, religion disappeared in man.[32] Even Sierksma did not agree with Vestdijk on this issue. Yet, whereas other critics failed to explain why they believed Vestdijk to be mistaken—other than declaring their faith in God to be universally valid—Sierksma was far more elaborate. After a long summary of Vestdijk's ideas, Sierksma argued that it was too simplistic to assume that we could put the reality referred to as "God" into our pocket. Nietzsche tried to, and everybody knew the results: he got angry. According to Sierksma, it was both stupid and impossible to deny that there was something,[33] or as he remarked on another occasion, though he did not believe in God, he still knew there was an 'X' behind our backs, governing us.[34] The others, as usual in the courtly style, merely counted their own judgments without the slightest reference to the details of Vestdijk's argument. Sierksma, on the other hand, paid tribute to Vestdijk by recognizing the manner in which he had elaborated his points, while arguing the reasons why he disagreed, thereby following the rules of both the republican and bureaucratic styles.

Instead of oversimplifying God (as Sierksma believed), other critics believed that Vestdijk called for a religion without a God. Marnix, Sterkman, Van Heugten, De Vos, Miskotte, Van der Leeuw, Wapenaar, Pos, Kraemer, Van Stempvoort and Kamphuis were very clear about this.[35] Surely, Vestdijk had said words to that effect. As he argued, nobody fighting something charged with emotions like religion (Dutch: *godsdienst*), could deny being convinced of the relevance of a religion with-

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[31] Sterkman 1948ab: 133, Wytzes 1948a: 24, Wapenaar 1953: 244, De Jong 1957: 64.

[32] Pos 1959: 158, Van Stempvoort 1960.

[33] Sierksma 1952: 78.

[34] Van der Leeuw & Sierksma 1949: 15.

[35] Marnix 1948, Sterkman 1948ab: 133, Van Heugten 1948: 699, De Vos 1952: 107, Miskotte 1952: 118, Van der Leeuw 1952: 126, Wapenaar 1953: 244, Pos 1959: 169, Kraemer 1959a: 743, 762, Van Stempvoort 1960, Kamphuis 1973: 10.

out God (Dutch: *religie*).[36] Yet, these critics only made this point in order to indicate their disagreement and their belief that no reasonable person could agree with such a statement. They took an authoritarian stance.

That other styles of criticism were available was shown by other critics, who definitely did not agree, yet, according to the republican fashion, did not question the legitimacy of Vestdijk's point of view.[37] Still others questioned Vestdijk's arguments only after they had offered an extensive summary of his arguments, giving reasons or even facts for why they disagreed. These critics employed a complex mix of bureaucratic, republican and realist styles.[38]

In the first definition he offered of religion, Vestdijk maintained that religion was synonomous with "belief" (19). But, he emphasized, the question remained: "belief in what?" Sierksma would later argue that religion was "the belief that there is something."[39] Vestdijk, however, preferred a broader definition. According to him, religious belief encompassed "totality", consisting of, what he called, a state of lasting spiritual happiness (16). Though subscribing to totality, he did not imply lasting health nor the experience of temporary pleasures. A doctor who cures pain, Vestdijk contended, was not a religious figure. Neither did sexual intercourse with a woman belong to the category of religious experience. By religion, he did not mean just one aspect of our existence as human beings. On the contrary, it included man in its totality: his mental and bodily functions as well as a focus on the (fancy) world around him. It was much like a dream in the sense that people for the most part remained unconscious of the process involved. The concepts of either man or God are too limited to refer to this state of bliss, Vestdijk concluded (20).

Whatever de difference between Vestdijk and Sierksma on matters of religion, they both agreed that it had to be defined rather broadly in order to include Buddhism. Buddhism has always posed a problem in the study of religion.[40] To identify religion with one's own belief, or the belief in God only, was to reduce the varieties of religious experiences and phenomena. Such a reduction could not be justified in the scientific world. On the other hand, belief in God was not to be excluded either. Vestdijk even confessed that he sometimes also believed in God.[41] This was not to deny that there was a reality to be experienced. Yet, this experience was not to be

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[36] Vestdijk 1956a: 3.

[37] Berkouwer 1948b, Prins 1949, 1950, Poortman 1949abc, Popma 1957, 1963.

[38] Bavinck 1949, Berkouwer 1950, 1957, Janse de Jonge 1956, 1962, Fortmann 1961, 1964-68.

[39] Sierksma 1956: 135.

[40] Vestdijk 1947: 19, Sierksma 1956: 162.

[41] Vestdijk 1950d: 89.

equated with the belief in God. Consequently, it had only relative value.[42] To understand the nature of this belief, and the fact that some claimed their religion to be an absolute truth while believing God to be a reality outside of it, the theory of religious projection was developed. Advocated as a reasonable way to make sense of a plethora of religious phenomena, and offering detailed arguments for it, projection became part of a discourse pursued in the republican style.

In order to discuss religious projection, according to Vestdijk, one must first define religion. For this reason did he feel the need to define religion in the beginning of his essay (13). Distinct from belief, which is merely an aspect of our world, Vestdijk claimed that religion is directed toward a future state of "lasting spiritual happiness" (29). The question whether or not God is instrumental in attaining this happiness, or rather whether or not God is its primary source, sparked a heated debate.

Religion, Miskotte declared, was a state of awe—it was being impressed by some outside "power."[43] Van Heugten agreed.[44] How, they asked themselves, could Vestdijk ignore this? Why had he not read Rudolf Otto, Van der Leeuw or W.B. Kristensen on this matter? Both Van der Leeuw and Banning suggested that Vestdijk was not familiar with the literature on the issue.[45] Without indicating why this was important, these critics limited themselves to mere declarative statements. Vestdijk countered that anyone who claimed that he had not mentioned Otto had in fact not read his book. In a rather bureaucratic fashion, he referred to those pages in which he had discussed the ideas of Otto. Moreover, he argued, his own notion of totality included everything that had to do with transcendence.[46]

Other critics were a bit more specific. Whatever the notion of transcendence in Vestdijk's concept of religion, it was not a movement of man towards God, according to these critics. Rather God approached man in order to reveal the misery in which he was living and to save him from his sins and guilt. Moreover, Wapenaar, Hekstra and Pos argued, Christ did in fact die for our sins, whether Vestdijk wanted to believe it or not. However, only those who believed, and cried and prayed out of misery: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" and admitted that "this happened, o pity, because of my sins", would be saved. Those who denied God's grace would be condemned, sooner or later. "We, as much as the heavens, are the work of His hands. Woe unto those who, in the end, would fall into the hands of God's wrath."[47] Kamp-

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[42] Vestdijk 1950d: 89-90.

[43] Miskotte 1952: 116; for a definition of religion in terms of 'Power' (Dutch: *Macht*), cf. Van der Leeuw 1933: 6.

[44] Van Heugten 1948: 697.

[45] Miskotte 1952: 116, Van der Leeuw 1952: 125, Banning 1948.

[46] Vestdijk 1952: 121-122.

[47] Wapenaar 1953: 248, Hekstra 1957c: 12, Pos 1959: 163.

huis also passed judgment over the unbeliever. "Woe unto those, who refuse to believe this Truth," he concluded.[48] Similarly, Miskotte held, when "faced with this Reality, our images, inclinations, and emotions will fade away to their own happiness."[49]

Miskotte's statement did not leave any room for discussion. With Mankes-Zernike, on the other hand, Vestdijk attempted a dialogue. She had argued that those who pursued happiness would fail to find it; instead, happiness was something conferred to them from the other side.[50] To this, Vestdijk responded that happiness did not need to be consciously pursued, as he had previously argued. Why couldn't people feel happiness and still be impressed by a higher being?[51] Certainly, Mankes-Zernike declared, awe might include a sense of happiness which people were not aiming at, either consciously or unconsciously.[52] But, Vestdijk asked rhetorically, what about Christians, then, who consciously sought peace for their souls?[53] And what should be done, Sierksma added, with a Greek farmer who asks Artemis to bless his herd of young goats? Did he not engage in a religious act, even though Artemis is an acknowledged goddess? And if he did, was this an act of contemplation, accompanied by a feeling of awe? According to Sierksma, such a farmer was interested in the growth of his herd. With more goats, he would be happy. And what about the Buddha, he asked, who strived for happiness as well? "Everyone who argues that religion is not aimed at happiness ignores ninety-five percent of all religious phenomena," Sierksma concluded.[54]

Whereas the above mentioned critics believed 'God' to be the primary source of religion, both Vestdijk and Gomperts believed Him to be of instrumental value. The latter two, however, sparked a heated debate on the idea of "happiness." Gomperts believed religion to have been invented and developed by man in order to get rid of man's *cafard*, a term indicated here to mean a vague feeling of uneasiness, suffering, or the state of unhappiness.[55] Vestdijk responded that it was a misunderstanding, if not a matter of careless reading, to reduce his concept of religion to a kind of therapy to cure unhappiness. To suggest such a thing was to ignore the spiritual dimension of religion—"goddamn it." Besides, it was far too easy to tell a suffering cancer patient that his hope in God was merely *cafard* and would pass away. Vestdijk even confessed

[48] Kamphuis 1973: 22.

[49] Miskotte 1952: 121.

[50] Mankes-Zernike 1952: 97.

[51] Vestdijk 1952: 101.

[52] Mankes-Zernike 1952: 103.

[53] Vestdijk 1952: 105.

[54] Sierksma 1952: 24.

[55] Gomperts 1949a: 12.

that he had slapped his knees with vicious mirth after reading Gomperts's remarks on this issue.[56] Gomperts retorted that he had not referred to cancer patients in his account of people suffering from *cafard*. Vestdijk himself failed to read properly. Moreover, he had not deserved the latter's "goddamn."[57] "You do not convince me that your *cafard* had only to do with feelings," Vestdijk sneered.[58] How, Gomperts asked, "when I have even argued explicitly that it was only a matter of feeling?"[59] In any case, the fact that Gomperts did not limit himself to temporary feelings and physical suffering was something which Vestdijk took as a concession to his concept of religion as something aiming at lasting spiritual happiness.[60] In response to this, Gomperts simply replied with an "amen."[61]

Indeed, Gomperts retained his idea that the physical element of happiness was not to be excluded from religion. According to him, in Vestdijk's conception of religion, desires were to be extinguished. However, he argued, this was to ignore the role of sexuality in the history of religions. It also excluded the possibility that sexuality could offer pleasure. And what about the Indian Kali and Rama-Krishna movements, the Greek and heathen orgies, as well as some Christian sects?[62] Vestdijk answered that, generally speaking, sexuality was not to be regarded as a positive value within the field of religion. This was a fact, and did not serve as an argument for religion.[63] Of course, Vestdijk admitted, desires played a role. They were, however, to be controlled and directed, rather than extinguished, as a proper reading of his essay should have made clear. And, Vestdijk maintained, he did not ignore sexuality. On the contrary, there was a lot to be found on orgiastic sects and sexual problems.[64] However, he did not believe in the orgiastic fantasies, as Gomperts did.[65] Similarly, Sierksma even went so far as to call Gomperts a phallus-swinger.[66] Yet, Gomperts asserted that he merely believed that phallus- and Priapus-cults were healthier than the ascetic tricks of mystics. Whether his critics were justified in calling him a phallus-swinger or ascribing him any orgiastic fantasies, was open to debate. At least he did not denigrate

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[56] Vestdijk 1949d: 376.

[57] Gomperts 1949b: 453.

[58] Vestdijk 1950a: 49.

[59] Gomperts 1950a: 51.

[60] Vestdijk 1950b: 234.

[61] Gomperts 1950b: 235.

[62] Gomperts 1949a: 128-129.

[63] Vestdijk 1950a: 50-51.

[64] Vestdijk 1949b: 385, 387.

[65] Vestdijk 1950a: 50.

[66] Sierksma 1949.

sexuality as Vestdijk had done in *De toekomst der religie*.[67] Vestdijk maintained that he had not been insinuating that Gomperts enjoyed his orgiastic fantasies; only that Gomperts' claim that orgiastic behavior had healthy effects was a bit fantastic.[68] Sierksma added that it was highly doubtful that intercourse within the realm of phallus- and Priapus-cults could be regarded a matter of religion.[69]

The exchange between Gomperts on the one hand, and Vestdijk and Sierksma on the other, showed a curious mix of several writing styles. Often we find arguments supported by examples from the history of religion, combined with attempts to show logical inconsistencies in the other's way of reasoning. This clearly points to a realist style of arguing. We also often find personal invectives and declarative statements which are intended to be taken as judgments, yet without any justification by facts or references to other authorities. The way Gomperts and Vestdijk blamed each other for "poor reading," if not "bad faith," was similar to a verdict in the courtly style. Vestdijk's "vicious mirth" and his "goddamn it" did not belong to any reasonable discussion either. And, finally, Sierksma's metaphorical judgment of Gomperts, comparing him to a "phallus-swinger," could not be included in any kind of realist, republican or bureaucratic discourse.

For Vestdijk, a religious man aimed for totality, i.e. a "naturally-perfect man," living in a reality in which subject and object are fully integrated. This led him to a third definition of religion: "*Religion*," he argued, "*is based on the unexpressed and unconscious pursuit of unification with the ideal embodied* realiter *by naturally-perfect man, or naturally perfect humanity*…"[70]

Many critics simply interpreted Vestdijk's definition of religion as "the projection of needs and desires,"[71] or "the pursuit of unification with an ideal or ideal man, who by means of 'projection' has been made into a god."[72] In this he was merely repeating Feuerbach,[73] or even earlier, Xenofanes.[74] Yet, whereas most critics limited themselves to these ironical statements, as we have seen in the previous chapter, De Vos had concluded, based on the fact that Vestdijk did not refer to these forebears, that Vestdijk was dishonest in his attempts to derogate religion.[75] Both De Vos and Van

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[67] Gomperts 1950a: 54.

[68] Vestdijk 1950b: 233.

[69] Sierksma 1949: 732.

[70] Vestdijk 1947: 37, his italics.

[71] Berkouwer 1948b: 13, Van Praag 1948, Bavinck 1949: 108-109, De Vos 1952: 107, Wapenaar 1953: 243, Hekstra 1957c: 9.

[72] Van der Leeuw 1952: 125.

[73] Van Praag 1948, Berkouwer 1948b: 13, De Vos 1952: 107, Rothuizen 1972: 146.

[74] Sterkman 1948ab: 133, Van Stempvoort 1960.

[75] De Vos 1952: 107.

der Leeuw also pointed out that Vestdijk's interpretation of religion as mere human projection smacked of Freudianism. According to De Vos, Vestdijk offered us a surrogate of Feuerbach mixed with some Freudian sauce.[76] Van der Leeuw argued that Vestdijk's arguments frequently heard within intellectual circles that discussed Freud intimately, as if he were a friend.[77] Yet, both De Vos and Van der Leeuw failed to offer any details which might have corroborated their speculations. These critics were clearly limiting themselves to declarative judgments, employed mainly to disqualify Vestdijk. But what exactly had Vestdijk argued with respect to religious projection?

The theory of religious projection – Early on, Vestdijk warned that there was something contradictory about the mechanism of projection. On the one hand, its religious variant was aimed at totality, in an attempt to integrate subject and object in their entirety. On the other hand, however, projection was primarily a function of the human psyche. Vestdijk's discussion of the issues at hand shows patterns characteristic of the republican style. He attempted to convince people by arguing a theory, while simultaneously including the possible objections by critics.

What exactly was to be understood by projection? According to Vestdijk, it was the transformation or recreation of subjective, intra-psychical elements into subjectively determined—though taken to be objective—ideas. According to Kant, we 'project' the entire perceptual world 'out' of ourselves. The world as we see it does not exist. Something, we do not know what, stimulates our senses; and according to the structures of our mind, this is transformed into an image. Thus, we only externalize what we have in mind, though we interpret it as reality (78). We believe this reality to be the true and only reality. The moment we all agree on this reality, however, we do not believe anymore; instead, we speak of *knowledge* (79). The way Vestdijk defines projection has nothing to do with knowledge in this sense. In his conception, the senses do not stimulate the mind; rather, images are created because of certain emotions, needs and drives, dislike and inclination, dream and reflection, anxiousness and self-interest. In short, characteristic for projection is its psychic background, i.e. that which remains after the influence of both senses and reasoning has been abstracted (79). The possibility always exists, however, that the images we've created could be countered or corrected by sensory perception or reasoning. And this is what distinguishes mere projection from metaphysical projection. Of course, this is perfectly understandable; neither senses nor rationality could suffice to determine the existence of God. And though he did not exclude them from the workings of the heart, Pascal had earlier stated: *Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît pas*. The

[76] De Vos 1952: 107.

[77] Van der Leeuw 1952: 125.

heart has its own reasons, which, according to Vestdijk, were the laws of the psyche. It was exactly those laws which provided projections with their reality-effect (88).

According to Vestdijk, the metaphysical type itself did not recognize the mechanism of projection. Asked about it, he would laugh in your face. Of course, the ways in which psychology scrutinized human personality may sometimes sound frivolous (89). In fact, according to many critics, it was too frivolous to consider the absolute character of religious belief seriously.[78] "And when I realize this myself," Vestdijk confessed, "I go and chat with a Calvinist. He is as sure of his supernatural world as 'normal' people are of three-dimensional reality, even though Kant told them that also this world was merely subjective" (89). One critic regretted that Vestdijk did not speak more often with Calvinists.[79] After all, there was nothing strange about them. This might surprise Vestdijk, in much the same way that Kierkegaard was surprised when he found out that the tax collector he met in the street was a Calvinist—only the circle to which Vestdijk belonged consisted of intellectuals rather than tax collectors.[80] However, though a Calvinist interpreted everyday life as a matter of fact, he did not doubt that God existed. We would not convince him otherwise by suggesting to him that God the Father was merely a projection of earthly fathers, as we knew them; on the contrary, he would probably answer that earthly fathers were imperfections of our Great Father in Heaven (89). For the metaphysical type, Vestdijk argued, the mechanism we called projection simply did not exist. He might ask you skeptically: "Where is this projection?" (89). "Show me this mysterious function of the human mind, with which you defend your horrible habit to of denying the existence of God, and we will see whether it is more than just a projection of your own unbelief" (90).[81]

Vestdijk admitted that this was a conflict between absolute beliefs. And the psychologist always ran the risk of being accused of metaphysical projection. Certainly, he admitted, we sometimes forget that our constructions are theories rather than reality.

Critics such as Berkouwer and Bavinck employed this argument to suggest that Vestdijk's theory was itself no more than a dream—merely a projection of his own inner desires.[82] They based their argument on Vestdijk's own theory. Indeed, Vestdijk recognized that atheists who continually emphasize the non-existence of God, merely give the impression that they secretly long for God as metaphysical entity (91).

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[78] Mankes-Zernike 1952: 98.

[79] Mankes-Zernike 1952: 98.

[80] Van der Leeuw 1952: 126.

[81] Vestdijk 1956a: 371.

[82] Berkouwer 1948b: 16, Bavinck 1949: 108-109.

Yet, critics as diverse as Mankes-Zernike, Wapenaar, Kamphuis and Simons, though they did not recognize that he had argued a similar notion, interpreted Vestdijk's argument as a desperate cry by someone who could not keep himself from resisting the appeal and apparent truth of God. To them, Vestdijk's argument against God was proof of His existence.[83] Yet, this was clearly a declarative statement which could not be supported by any facts. And, as their contributions show, these critics did not even attempt to prove their inferences, neither by referring to matters of fact, nor to their own personal faith or the work of other authorities.

Vestdijk's own argument, however, as he himself and Sierksma remarked, might merely be seen as directed against other opinions rather than against some reality.[84] The problem with people who believed their ideas to be the absolute truth, is that they were not able to account for the subjective nature of their opinions. According to Vestdijk and Sierksma, projection was ineradicable. This was true for every opinion, including their own. Yet, in general, Vestdijk maintained, the atheist knows his ideas are just projections and, thus, have only relative value; for metaphysical types, on the other hand, projection is absolute, i.e. its products are beyond doubt (93). Vestdijk himself, Sierksma argued, did not believe in his own ideals of the future; while, on the other hand, he was confident enough about them, to offer and defend them before an intelligent public of critics.[85]

In the end, Vestdijk maintained, the metaphysical variant of religious projection failed to integrate subject and object by imagining the latter as absolutely transcendent. In fact, metaphysical religion was characterized by its disintegrative tendencies (230).

Critics such as Van Heugten, Sterkman, De Vos and Miskotte, however, ignored the relationship between metaphysical projection and disintegration between man and his environment in Vestdijk's theory. Instead, they preferred to take issue with the reductive nature of his theory of projection in general, as if Vestdijk, like Freud, had argued that religion was merely an illusion. Worse, these critics tried to attack Vestdijk personally, suggesting that he was not adequately familiar with Kant's philosophy.[86] Yet, without indicating how Kant should then be interpreted, or in which sense Vestdijk had failed to understand him, these critics clearly employed a personal and declarative style, judging Vestdijk to be incompetent and attempting to disqualify him as a reasonable partner in any discussion on Kant's philosophy. Vestdijk answered

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[83] Mankes-Zernike 1952: 99, Wapenaar 1953: 244, Kamphuis 1973: 16-17, Simons 1974.

[84] Vestdijk 1952: 99-100, Sierksma 1959a: 93.

[85] Sierksma 1950: 563

[86] Van Heugten 1948: 700-701, Sterkman 1948ab: 134, De Vos 1952: 107, Miskotte 1952, 117.

De Vos by telling him that he had read Kant without, of course, offering any guarantee that he had understood him correctly.

Vestdijk, however, did succeed in showing his critics, by means of many page references, that they had failed to read his essay properly.[87] Sierksma agreed and even argued that Vestdijk offered a better summary of Kant than he had ever read in the works of his critics.[88] Hekstra added that it was a pity to see only minor theologians attack Vestdijk. Of course, he argued, when even Van der Leeuw failed to offer a proper critique, what were they to expect from others? For this reason it would have been interesting if Schilder, according to Hekstra an expert on Kant and equally attacked by second-rate critics like Miskotte, would have taken the opportunity to give his opinion on Vestdijk.[89] Though he took Vestdijk's side, Hekstra clearly employed the courtly style to denounce both his and Schilder's opponents.

Yet, De Vos, Kraemer and Van Stempvoort, together with Miskotte and Van der Leeuw, maintained that Vestdijk had invoked the wrong (Freud, Nietzsche[90])—and sometimes even obscure (Ziegler! Jaensch![91])—authorities to support his case. And though he attempted to be objective by choosing a theoretical framework in which to connect religious typology to psychology, his concepts—such as metaphysics and disintegration—were distorted by value judgments and could not serve as neutral descriptions of religion.[92] Moreover, Van Heugten, Sterkman and Kraemer suggested, in general his argument was too theoretical, or even cerebral, and arbitrary to arrive at a proper understanding of the essence of religion.[93]

The critics mentioned thus far, with the exception of Vestdijk and Sierksma, limited themselves to a declarative style of arguing. They questioned Vestdijk's authorities and his reading of them, without offering any detailed discussion of the essay, nor any elaboration of their own statements by either explaining why they took something to be true or indicating which authority had argued something similar. They simply took an authoritative stance that did not seem to require any further elaboration or empirical justification, as if there could be no doubt about their judgments.

As we previously observed, Vestdijk had already argued that projection was inevitable and necessary (Kant). With Nietzsche he maintained that the lie of projection is

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[87] Vestdijk 1952: passim.

[88] Sierksma 1952: 20.

[89] Hekstra 1957a: 8, 1957c: 10, 12.

[90] De Vos 1952: 106, Kraemer 1959: 732, Van Stempvoort 1960.

[91] Miskotte 1952: 116.

[92] Mankes-Zernike 1952: 99, Polak 1955: 116-117.

[93] Van Heugten 1948: 701, Sterkman 1948ab: 134, Kraemer 1959a: 743, 749-751, 1959b: 237-241.

the Mother of all of us.[94] And whereas Berkouwer had argued that Vestdijk's own ideas of the future were projections as well,[95] Vestdijk would simply have agreed with such a statement. However, if Berkouwer meant that, as projections, Vestdijk's ideas were not worth considering, he would have been polemical. Yet the fact that, time and again, he returned to Vestdijk's projections,[96] wrestling with the problems they posed to him without the urge to denounce them right from the start, shows that he took them seriously. Also later commentators, in line with much of what Berkouwer had emphasized, admitted that the interpretation of Vestdijk's ideas as mere projections was not enough to discredit them; rather it simply implied that they could not be taken as absolute truth.[97] And Vestdijk agreed with that. Even the theories he had developed were, in a sense, lies. However, in the case of metaphysical projection, the lie became more an illusion or hallucination (Feuerbach, Freud). This judgment especially had triggered the anger of theologians. This made it perfectly understandable that they did not always treat him on the level he deserved, as Berkouwer tried to account for the attitude of critics.[98]

Sierksma, moreover, tried to integrate the theory of projection with a philosophical anthropology. By dealing with projection within the context of the psychology of perception, he tried to save it from associations with the pathological. However, he maintained, the world created by perception, but especially in the case of projection, is always a subjective appropriation of an objective world and must be understood as a kind of adaptation and way of dealing with the unknown world outside. Man, conscious of his distance from the world and his radical excentricity (Plessner), needs these projections in order to create a unified and meaningful universe in which to live. According to Sierksma, God as a projection was necessary to fill the *terra incognita* beyond the world of subjective perception. And by projecting a God, religion was born.

In general, after Sierksma's study on religious projection, published in 1956, and especially from the 1960s onwards (marking the third period in the history surrounding *De toekomst der religie*) critics changed their opinions concerning the relevance of discussions on this topic. Previously, commentators had argued that one could only be for or against projection, though they took the theory of projection as just another case of people attempting to reduce reality to human wishes. Increasingly, critics accepted an element of wishful thinking into their own theologies and beliefs, while being unable to deny that the formulation of the theory of projection was highly

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[94] Vestdijk 1956a.

[95] Berkouwer 1948b: 16.

[96] Berkouwer 1950, 1957.

[97] Jansen de Jonge 1956, Rothuizen 1972: 146.

[98] Berkouwer 1952, 1956, 1959, Rothuizen 1972: 146.

sophisticated and could not be bluntly rejected.[99] Thus, discussion and serious dialogue were needed in order to find common ground.[100] While some acknowledged a subjective element in the concept of God, other critics tried to avoid the Kantian premises of Vestdijk's and Sierksma's theories of projection. Among the most important were Oosterbaan, Kwee, Kraemer, Luypen and Fortmann.[101] These critics set out to argue at great lengths why projections should not be taken as subjective additions to an unknown, objective world. Instead, they tended to reject the subject-object dichotomy which was characteristic of projection. Following this line of reasoning, some maintained that this implied that philosophy rather than psychology should determine the nature and reality of God.[102] Yet, whatever the disagreement on important issues like these, commentators felt increasingly obliged to deal with them by means of the realist, republican or bureaucratic styles, rather then the authoritarian style which had previously been employed by many fellow critics.

Nevertheless, abandoning the declarative style of arguing does not exclude the possibility of polemics. The way these two layers of textual encounter are combined in the exchange with both Vestdijk and Sierksma is exemplified in the contributions of Luypen, Kwee, and Kraemer. All of them found especially Sierksma arrogant in his preference for psychology as the discipline to help him explain religious phenomena. According to Luypen, this attitude was accompanied by a vindictive attitude towards phenomenological psychologists such as Van Lennep and Van den Berg.[103] This was a declarative statement, unsupported by careful reasoning and reasonable discussion, that generally characterized Luypen's style of arguing. And it is striking that neither Van Lennep nor Van den Berg felt triggered to launch any kind of counter-attack. On the contrary, Van Lennep's review of *De religieuze projectie* was highly sympathetic.[104]

Other critics, equally accused of being more polemical than the authors mentioned before, declared that both Vestdijk's and Sierksma's conception of projection failed to account for religion. According to Kwee Swan Liat, the theory of religious projection was a theoretical construct, or "magical formula", and a projection of

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[99] Janse de Jonge 1956, Berkouwer 1957, De Jong 1957, Kraemer 1959ab, Nauta 1963, Sperna Weiland 1963, De Vos 1966.

[100] Janse de Jonge 1956, Van Holk 1957, Kraemer 1959ab, Sirks 1959, Hidding 1959, Fortmann 1961, Nauta 1963, Luypen 1963, Fortmann 1961, 1964-68, De Vos 1966.

[101] Oosterbaan 1957, Kwee 1957, Kraemer 1959ab, Luypen 1963, Fortmann 1961, 1964-68.

[102] Oosterbaan 1957: 80, Luypen 1963: 265; cf. also Nauta 1963: 341, De Vos 1966: 420.

[103] Luypen 1963: 265; meant are J. van Lennep and J.H. van den Berg, by then well-known psychologists employing the so-called phenomenological method of scientific research.

[104] Van Lennep 1957.

Sierksma himself.[105] "How," he asked, "can Sierksma maintain that his psychology is neutral, when it only takes the world of man into account, and, implicitly, regards God as an invention of man and a side-effect of history?" His claims were unjustified, his anthropology "insufficient and false."[106] Kraemer went even further. According to him, Sierksma's methodological rules, whether intentionally or not, exemplified the hypocrisy of people who advocate their agnostic religion. Why is it, Kraemer asked rhetorically, that Van der Leeuw sounded more honest and authentic when discussing these matters?[107] Instead, Kraemer continued, Vestdijk's and Sierksma's psychology was a theoretical construct merely invented in order to deny God. In this sense, their theory of projection was just another manifestation of modern atheist mentality, an attempt to kill religious sensitivity, Kraemer declared.[108]

Yet, instead of sustaining their claims, both Kwee and Kraemer took their judgments to be factual. Kraemer, as we have seen in the previous chapter, took it to be a fact that called for an explanation in terms of some existential drive. According to him, Vestdijk's and Sierksma's atheism was not so much the result of theoretical reflection as it was an attempt to cut out religious sensibilities; worse, their attitude was part of their struggle with God, the Angel.[109] Kamphuis made similar comments regarding Vestdijk.[110] However, apart from its declarative nature, this way of arguing has already been identified in the previous chapter as typical of polemics.

Sierksma, however, wondered how Kraemer was able to see any anti-Christian sentiment in his theory of religious projection when it was explicitly developed for an objective anthropological exposition. Everywhere, he concluded, we see theologians taking a-religious confessions to be directed against Christians.[111] This style of dialogue, however, would always fail to arrive at an understanding of each other's positions.[112] De Vos agreed with this, and even called Kraemer's approach "pastoral" in the negative sense of the word.[113] On the other hand, Smits, though generally far more sympathetic towards Vestdijk and Sierksma, at times found Kraemer's attempt at dialogue extremely valuable.[114] Even though these conflicting judgments might seem surprising, the problem might be resolved by pointing out the fact that any

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[105] Kwee 1957: 81.

[106] Kwee 1957: 84.

[107] Kraemer 1959a: 743.

[108] Kraemer 1959a: 729.

[109] Kraemer 1959a: 754.

[110] Kamphuis 1973: 10, 1998; cf. also Simons 1974.

[111] Sierksma 1959a: 94.

[112] Sierksma 1959b: 738.

[113] De Vos 1966: 435.

[114] Smits 1959a: 1.

attempt at understanding does not exclude the possibility of personal attack, as has become clear from the contribution of Van der Leeuw. As we have seen before, Van der Leeuw simply attempted to better understand Vestdijk in order to disqualify him as a serious partner for discussion.

Comparing the different styles employed in order to counter Vestdijk's and Sierksma's arguments regarding religious projection, many critics employed personally critical strategies. Yet, only a few of them turned to verdicts formulated in a courtly fashion. Especially their personal attacks, not finding any support in the texts of either Vestdijk or Sierksma, can not be regarded as anything but declarative judgments. We found Sterkman, De Vos, Miskotte, Van der Leeuw, Van Heugten, Wapenaar, Van Stempvoort and Kamphuis employing this style of arguing, whereas Hekstra used it in order to defend both Vestdijk and Schilder from attacks by others. By the end of the second period, we find a shift towards more elaborate arguments which suggested that polemical attacks could be supported by states of affairs, disciplinary discourse or personal convictions. We observed Kwee and Kraemer following this line of arguing. Luypen continued this style of reasoning into the early years of the third period of our history.

Many critics did not take Vestdijk and Sierksma seriously when they argued that they did not have any problems with God, but rather felt troubled by the attitude of the people who believed in Him. The only one who admitted that there was an important connection between projection in its metaphysical variant and the intolerance and repression in Christianity was Van Stempvoort.[115] But here we arrive at another important topic of the controversy.

Christianity as an intolerant and repressive religion – To begin with Vestdijk's arguments on this point, according to him, Christianity was the paradigm of metaphysical religion (101). As such, he had no problems with it; what was disturbing was that its adherents could not avoid being intolerant and coercive in matters of faith. Apart from that, it was highly repressive towards passion and it hampered sexuality. To support these statements, he offered some carefully crafted arguments.

Early on in his essay, Vestdijk made an attempt to solve the problem which he had posed regarding his definition of religion: if God was not necessary for religion how then did this concept come into being? According to Vestdijk, the issue could be fully explained by what he called his concept of metaphysical projection. As an interpretive psychologist, he needed to imagine a human being for whom this type of projection was an inner necessity. The metaphysical type, Vestdijk maintained, is a family man. He loves his wife and children, his work and property. However, being religious, this love cannot be limited to his family and individual property; it must

[115] Van Stempvoort 1960.

tend towards totality. Yet, intuitively, this man feels that, extending his love to his father, mother, neighbors, other human beings or even humanity as a whole, would cause him to lose everything he claimed to have rights to (96). Thus, his religious drive urges him to project an image of totality in the form of a Holy Family, consisting of a Father as creator, lawgiver and ultimate authority, a Mother representing life-giving powers, from whom also the figure of the Holy Spirit has been derived; and, finally, the naturally-perfect man in the figure of Eternal Man or the Son (97). This Holy Family has all types of mythological features and manifestations. However, as soon as man forgot that these were merely his own creations, that the Holy Family was only a dream or myth, the projection became metaphysical. By this Vestdijk meant that ideas could not be refuted anymore by reference to the facts of everyday life.

Yet, Vestdijk argued, this implied that the metaphysical type was living in a world built of two poles: his own family and his supernatural or -familiar family (what Vestdijk called: *het boven-gezinnelijke*). He, as a man, loved his wife and children, his work, and his family property (96). And for the most part he was an excellent husband and father (98). It would be too easy to derogate this way of life by calling it lowbrow, narrow-minded or petty bourgeois (Dutch: *kleinburgerlijk*), Vestdijk warned his readers. The family could truly be a microcosm of individuals that formed a relatively integrated totality (99). However, as previously mentioned, the individual, being a religious person, could not limit his love to his family. On the other hand, he intuitively knew that if he extended his love to his father and mother, neighbors and other human beings, his family would disintegrate (96). Thus, in order to save it, he felt it necessary to project that love outward—to heaven. Thus began, Vestdijk concluded, the projection of the Holy Family (97).

Certainly, this way of life had religious value. But again, this value was limited, because, in this conception, the world outside the family *and* outside the Holy Family did not have any religious interest. Relations with the wider family, friends, colleagues, competitors, enemies—they were all matters of business. To love your neighbor was by this concept merely a matter of obligation, rather than religion (99). According to Vestijk, this family structure led to a repression of sexuality. A religion that was sublimated into a relationship with God could only allow for negative images of sexuality. This, Vestdijk argued, was especially clear in the Book of Paul (338). The latter advocated marriage in order to avoid the practice of fornication. According to him, it would have been better if man did not need a woman at all. But if he could not do without, then it was preferable to marry. Yet, Vestdijk complained, Paul did not explain *why* it would be better not to marry. It seemed as if one felt the need to control sexuality for *moral* reasons rather than *religious* ones: sexuality had to be controlled in order to avoid fornication, while, in fact, Vestdijk argued, it frustrated the attainment of totality. This, he continued, seemed to be confirmed by

the practice of marriage. In matrimony, sexuality was no longer a problem; fornication between man and woman became something perfectly legitimate (339). Especially Protestants used to denigrate fornicators who were not married. This sexual hypocrisy, however, had to be seen as one of the most important reasons for people to dislike Christianity, Vestdijk concluded (340).

According to Miskotte, Vestdijk's critique on the Christian concept of sexuality only made apparent what Vestdijk himself had been arguing, namely that he lacked a proper catechism. Otherwise, critics argued, he would have known that sexuality was sanctified within the context of marriage, and that that was what made Protestantism superior to both Catholicism and Buddhism, since the latter religions renounced sexuality. And if sexuality received a bad name even among Protestants, this was because of Platonic influences, rather than an overzealous interpretation of the Scriptures, as also critics such as Van Stempvoort, Hekstra and Kamphuis argued.[116] Yet, though these critics made similar points to those of Miskotte, only Van Stempvoort joined him in using a declarative style of arguing. It was only after being countered by Vestdijk that he turned to a republican and bureaucratic style in which both limited claims and authorities in the field were employed in order to make his case. Before that he had attributed Vestdijk's misinterpretation of the Book of Paul to a lack of catechist education.

Vestdijk answered that his critic's view of his Sunday-school practice was mistaken. Though, as we have seen, Vestdijk himself admitted to having been a bit careless with his story. With his teacher, he had discussed philosophy only after dogmatic issues had been given proper attention. Such an interpretation of what he had written was perfectly understandable, Vestdijk continued. Thus, his teacher (Reverend Engelkes, who, Vestdijk supposed, could not defend himself anymore) was not to be blamed for anything. Though he did not say so explicitly, this comment suggested that he believed Van Stempvoort to be highly biased towards his religious education. At least, critic was too quick with drawing his conclusions. Worse, he continued, "if my critic assumes that my picture of Sunday-school practice stems from arrogance on my part, I must disappoint him. On the one hand, my arrogance is bigger than Prof. Van Stempvoort estimates. On the other hand, to argue that my description of the master-student relationship was a matter of arrogance, is wrong," Vestdijk concluded.[117]

Responding to Vestdijk, Van Stempvoort apologized for his insinuations. Yet, he insisted that Vestdijk had not given proper attention to the historical context behind Paul's teachings. As a Jew, he did not reject sexuality, but merely tried to limit its value within the context of the coming of the Kingdom of Christ in the near future.

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[116] Van Stempvoort 1960; cf. also Hekstra 1948, 1954, 1957c, Kamphuis 1973, 1998.

[117] Vestdijk 1961.

His writings against fornication applied to the specific situation within which the seaport of Corinth found itself. Paul simply had an open eye for the problems of his times. If there was anyone to be blamed for the misconceptions of sexuality which modern intellectuals held, it was the Church and its clerical tradition. This tradition failed to read Paul's message properly. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, one must read carefully, even more carefully than we were used to. This might imply a change of insight on our part, Van Stempvoort argued.[118]

Thus, even though Van Stempvoort offered a late example of polemics pursued in the courtly style, his reply to Vestdijk's critique made him change strategies in the same way that we have detected in other traditions of criticism in the history of the reception of *De toekomst der religie*. Nevertheless, like Hekstra and Kamphuis, he failed to recognize the link which Vestdijk had established between metaphysical projection, biblical statements on sexuality, and the hypocrisy which many felt to be characteristic of Christian practice. This exact point would later recur toward the end of the third period of our history.

The editor Wim Verstappen employed exactly the same method of reasoning which Vestdijk had used in his essay. *Blue Movie*, a film directed by Verstappen, was rejected by the Dutch film censure for being pornographic. In his response, Verstappen referred to Vestdijk's arguments about the link between sex and religion. According to him, metaphysical sexuality led to intercourse for merely reproductive purposes. On the other hand, the kinds of sexual intercourse with which he had experimented in his movie were meant to express feelings of love and the experiences of totality of which Vestdijk had spoken. *Blue Movie* was intended to show that love was not limited to married couples; on the contrary, there were other kinds of relationships that allowed for feelings of care and concern.[119] Yet, as soon as people of the metaphysical type see naked bodies, they do not see human beings anymore, Verstappen complained.[120]

Whereas most critics focused on the damage which the Dutch film censure had caused to the release of the movie, Ad Dronkers simply declared that the film completely failed to accomplish its goal. Being highly "pornographic," he could not find anything in the movie that convinced him of the positive moral value of the pictures. However, he did not tell his readers exactly what he had seen and why he did not think it to be worth considering. To think that the type of sexuality with which Verstappen's movie dealt could ever be regarded as superior to its Christian counterpart was to be highly simplistic, Dronkers concluded.[121] Verstappen responded by

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[118] Stempvoort 1961.

[119] Verstappen 1971: 3.

[120] Verstappen 1971: 7.

[121] Dronkers 1972: 38.

claiming that it was wrong to assume that he did not value Christianity. Being an archconservative, Verstappen confessed, "I am of the opinion that children can only be raised in a metaphysical environment." Yet, according to him, Christianity had to be removed; it did not belong in a country like the Netherlands. As long as its mentality dominated public discourse, Verstappen argued, we would not be allowed to say any sensible word on religion. The fact that *Blue Movie*, after it passed the film censure, turned out to be a success, clearly showed that its metaphysical variant did not play any decisive role in Dutch society anymore.[122]

Though sympathy for metaphysical religion might seem a contradiction to the belief that Christianity had to die, the fact that Vestdijk had previously argued that the latter variant of metaphysical projection was the most terrible one served as a background for Verstappen's remarks. Neither Vestdijk nor Verstappen denied that they had constructed their argument with specific reference to Christianity. This was the case not only because it was the religion they felt and, as Verstappen said, personally related to (101), but also because it manifested most clearly how a metaphysical system should be developed and to which results an absolute and rigidly dogmatic religion leads (102). On the one hand, it isolated the individual from his fellow human beings. On the other hand, the radical difference between man and God made certain that they would never be identified. The very notion of the possibility of a unity between God and man would be scorned by theologians. However, Vestdijk argued, this meant that man could never be certain about his future. He had a calling; he had to cultivate his own little garden (105). But in return he would receive only a matter of divine grace. Generally speaking, man did not deserve anything. Even somebody who had worked hard all of his life, who had performed his work and whatever else was necessary in order to support his family, could never be certain of how God would judge him. Nevertheless, a man was expected to perform his work *as if* he would receive benefits in the afterlife. In the end, however, only God decided who had been a good gardener, as Vestdijk concluded in his discussion of Christian—especially Calvinist—morality. According to him, a Calvinist could never be certain of his final judgment. It was even be possible that Voltaire—an atheist—would in the end be judged a better gardener in the eyes of God than a faithful believer (106).

Perhaps it would be relevant here to add a short dogmatic exposition, Vestdijk continued. What exactly, he asked himself, is the relation between true belief and good deeds (or, being a good gardener)? According to Protestants, "good deeds" do not need to be recommended. As Luther used to say: "A good tree bears good fruit". For Lutherans, this meant that good deeds indicated the inner state of a believer. They feared those who merely pretended to be righteous, but who in fact were sin-

[122] Verstappen 1972: 39.

ners at heart (334). For Calvinists, such behavior was perceived as less of a problem. They believed that if one was indeed among the chosen, he would necessarily bear good fruit, though he should burn his friends at the stake. We see this in Calvin himself. Though he attacked the Church's claims of absolute authority, he attempted to lay his own (individual) claims to Truth in its place. In the end, Calvin was more orthodox, rigid, energetic, inflexible, and fanatic than all of the Catholic theologians together (234). Compared to Luther, Vestdijk concluded, Calvin was a gnawed Dolomite peak who had withdrawn from the world and, instead of fighting the devil with ink, as Luther did, regaled his own brothers in faith with the stake (235). This, Vestdijk asserted, was the immediate consequence of the belief that a good tree is still good even if it in fact bears only a waspsnest (335).

Berkouwer and Popma disagreed with this image of Calvin. However, they did not argue with Vestdijk, leaving it to everybody interested in the issue to develop his own point of view. They even admitted that it was justified to question Calvin's activities in Geneva, though in general they preferred a different perspective regarding what exactly happened during that time.[123] Sierksma, agreeing with Vestdijk, went even further by arguing that Calvin was a religious dictator who attempted to establish his dogmatic ideal state through blood and fire.[124] Kraemer retorted that this was vulgar libertarian language, more reminiscent of 19th century intellectual circles than of a scientist—educated in the disciplines of history and psychology—attempting to apply the method of *epochè*.[125] However, instead of making explicit their own ideas on the subject, critics like Kraemer and Wapenaar suspected both Vestdijk's and Sierksma's opinions and distortions of Calvin and Calvinism to be triggered by rancor and vindictiveness.[126] Smits, whatever his sympathies for the victims, found this verdict justified.[127] Even if appropriate according to the methods of phenomenology, Kraemer argued, how must one account for Sierksma's judgment of Calvin as a religious dictator possessed by the devil of intolerance?[128] The latter maintained, however, that whatever discussion there might be about the facts, he could never support the persecution of those who hold different beliefs.[129]

Even though their critique seemed to be formulated in the courtly fashion, neither Berkouwer nor Popma attacked Vestdijk personally. However, Wapenaar, and especially Kraemer, did. Whereas the former critics left it to their readers to judge the

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[123] Berkouwer 1948b: 13, Popma 1948: 189-190.

[124] Sierksma 1952: 41.

[125] Kraemer 1959a: 748.

[126] Kraemer 1959b: 228, Wapenaar 1953: 246.

[127] Smits 1959a: 2.

[128] Kraemer 1959b: 228.

[129] Sierksma 1959a: 86.

author of the argument with which they themselves disagreed, the latter wished to impose their opinions on the public by means of declarative statements.

Vestdijk's argument on Christianity, of which his remark on Calvin was merely an aside, was even more elaborate than we have suggested thus far. In fact, he continued to establish a link between metaphysical religion and intolerance. According to him, we had to ask ourselves whether absolute projection would not inevitably turn into its opposite, namely doubt (107). If people can never be certain of divine judgments, he asked, how then can they be certain in their belief in God himself? We observed how the metaphysical type projected the purpose of his life onto heaven. But what if this life does not make so much sense anymore? Then he would feel abandoned, not only by his fellow human beings, but also by God (108). This theory might account for facts which could be denied. Twenty centuries of Christian civilization have been twenty centuries of murder, egotism, intolerance and hypocrisy; in short: crimes committed in the name of love (109). Perhaps things would have been worse without the influence of Christianity. This is almost certain. Essentially, however, every metaphysical religion cultivated something of a devil in human beings. And Vestdijk believed that through his theory, we might be able to understand why (109).

According to Zijlstra, Vestdijk clearly showed his arrogance by daring to judge "the freedom of the Church of our Lord."[130] Still, Vestdijk continued, doubt had to be repressed violently in favor of absolute truth. The devil within, as well as the one without, had to be fought. In the end, the metaphysical type was *intolerant*, not only toward his doubts, but also to everything that seemed to confirm those doubts. Whatever the doubt – or perhaps even because of those doubts – the claims of his dogmatic system were absolutely normative and applied to everybody. And whether triggered by doubts or by absolute conviction, those claims to truth urged him to convert others, if necessary, even by means of violence and coercion. All this could take place with the best intentions. And who on earth would not prefer the stake to the torments of hell? Vestdijk asked his readers (111).

Miskotte responded that he was surprised to hear Vestdijk argue against coercion in matters of belief. As far as he knew, everyone was free to choose his own confession, a practice which he believed must be tolerated as much as possible.[131] According to Sierksma, Miskotte confused public intolerance with psychological pressure. And, he concluded, this *Fehlleistung* revealed Miskotte's aspirations. Behind a mask of tolerance hid a religious dictator. Moreover, Miskotte believed that tolerance should be advocated everywhere, but in practice it should ideally also be highly suspicious of others. Miskotte's tolerance clearly doubted its own intentions, which was far more

[130] Marnix 1948.

[131] Miskotte 1952: 119.

dangerous than open intolerance, Sierksma concluded.[132] For this reason, Sierksma called the Christian love "dubious."[133] Kraemer replied to his opponent that, after reading such charged accusations, he found it difficult to keep his temper.[134] Sierksma countered that it would be better if Christians became more conscious of the fact that love can be a highly ambiguous force, and that it too often embraces an aggressive attitude. In this way he also addressed Kraemer's difficulties in keeping his temper. According to Sierksma, this was typical of Christian intolerance towards those who would be free from theological boundaries.[135] Kraemer answered that to call something "dubious" within the context of a scientific argument was far from decent. Personally, he preferred a serious debate regarding the issue of Christian love.[136] Yet, Kraemer did not admit, as Miskotte would later, that requests for the legitimacy of unbelief were justified if we took into account the entire history of the Christian monopoly of power in the West.[137] To limit others' movements, Noordenbos declared, was always arbitrary and tyrannical, and characteristic of a people mentally deficient and intolerant.[138]

In addition, Vestdijk argued that he had nothing against projection; as such it was even inevitable and necessary.[139] Personally, however, what almost exclusively bothered him about Christianity was the intolerance of its believers. To him, it did not make much difference whether it manifested itself in outright intolerance, or in pity, arrogance or honest attempts at conversion without seriously considering whether or not the other was interested in changing his belief (328). Generally speaking, neither did Noordenbos particularly like the "imperialistic" attitude of Christians towards unbelievers, as he admitted in a review of Gerhard Szczesny's essay on the future of unbelief.[140] Ultimately, both Vestdijk's and Noordenbos's rejection of Christianity did not have so much to do with the content of its beliefs. If necessary, Vestdijk admitted, he would not have any problem accepting the Christian dogmas. Rather, it was the obsession implicit in these dogmas that frightened him. He even confessed that he would be eager to accept them if people tried to keep him from believing them. His resistance did not have anything to do with belief as such, nor with the form it took; the problem was the attitude of its believers (328). On the other hand, he doubted

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[132] Sierksma 1952: 32.

[133] Sierksma 1956: 230.

[134] Kraemer 1959a: 748.

[135] Sierksma 1959a: 93.

[136] Kraemer 1959b: 245.

[137] Miskotte 1960: 560-561.

[138] Noordenbos 1960: 751-752.

[139] Vestdijk 1956: 4.

[140] Noordenbos 1960: 758; Szczesny 1958, 1960.

whether things were that simple, because these dogmas allowed the dogmatic to behave that way in the first place: intolerance was a prerequisite for those who represented metaphysical religion. "Then," Vestdijk admitted, "I shall also turn against the dogma, against metaphysical projection; and besides that, I have ten other reasons to do so" (329).

According to Miskotte, this was a miserable confession. Only children and naughty boys reacted this way.[141] Together with his *Fehlleistung* mentioned before, Sierksma found this remark, again, revealing. It caused him to worry about the tolerance to be expected from Christian theologians.[142] J. Kamphuis however, rather polemically declared that he did not take Vestdijk's willingness to believe in the Christian truths seriously. To him, this confession was merely one of his ironical tricks, typical of Vestdijk's style of arguing, especially since he regarded Christianity as an essentially intolerant religion. Vestdijk, Kamphuis held, would never believe in the absolute claims made by Christians.[143] Vestdijk had in fact argued a similar notion, though without implying that this contradicted his former statement about his willingness to believe in the Christian truths as long as they were presented as projections of relative value (328).

While Protestants and Catholics were supposed to remain intolerant of each other, Protestants had learned to be tolerant (330). And Vestdijk had not even mentioned those sects which had always been "liberal". Mennonites and members of the Remonstrant community remained separate, not because they regarded their own tradition to be absolute, but because they were still highly attached to their history; or perhaps simply because the Dutch felt comfortable in small groups. However, "being a child of Remonstrant parents, Vestdijk said, I went to catechisms by a Mennonite minister (330), because in the village in which I lived there was no Remonstrant community. I never perceived any dogmatic differences, not only because I was not interested –with my minister I preferred discussing matters of philosophy— but because those differences were completely irrelevant" (331).

As we have seen, Miskotte and Van Stempvoort felt that Vestdijk lacked a proper religious education. However, though Vestdijk reflected upon his youth within the context of his argument on projection and intolerance, his critics curiously took up this point in their attempts to counter Vestdijk's criticism of the relationship between sex and marriage within Christianity.

Dronkers was highly critical of Verstappen's images of the social type of sexuality, whereas Gomperts accused Vestdijk of what he called "défaitism towards the pas-

[141] Miskotte 1952: 118.

[142] Sierksma 1959: 32

[143] Kamphuis 1973: 19.

sions."[144] Yet, according to Gomperts this was unavoidable if one was to regard Buddhism as the religion of the future. But before turning to his critics, let us further analyse Vestdijk's arguments for socialism and mystical-introspective religions such as Buddhism. Generally speaking, Vestdijk maintained, Buddhism did not repress the sexual functions of man. Moreover, it was, as previously indicated, far more tolerant than Christianity. It also seemed better equipped to take the dignity of human beings into account, as we shall see. Thus, we are ready to ask ourselves whether or not it will indeed become the religion of the future.

Socialism and Buddhism as religions of the future – According to Vestdijk, Christianity could never become the religion of the future. Apart from being intolerant (something which Vestdijk personally detested), it lacked an adequate conception of human dignity. According to Vestdijk, this was a prerequisite for (what he called) an integrated and healthy personality. It was because of this that he preferred socialism and mysticism, especially Buddhism, as religions fit for future generations. Whereas the first option led to integration with others, the last one aimed at integration with oneself. Yet, what critics found particularly disturbing about this notion was that it would inevitably lead to a religion without God. Besides, others complained, Vestdijk's preference for Buddhism was inconsistent with his arguments in favor of socialism; Buddhism, according to them, was essentially a religion which bred egotists, rather than socially responsible individuals.

Though he limited himself for the most part to a broad and general discussion of religion and its future (272), Vestdijk sometimes also directly referred to the personal problems which some might have with Christianity (273). Here, as Berkouwer remarked, his otherwise highly balanced argument turned into a personal defence.[145] Surely, whereas Vestdijk generally employed a realist style, his confession was clearly made in the republican fashion.

Besides the intolerance of Christians, Vestdijk rejected the Christian notion of "human dignity." His own personal sense of responsibility did not allow him to identify with a religion in which salvation was brought about by another person; we ourselves wish to earn that salvation, he told his readers. For us, he continued, it is humiliating to be told that Christ died on the cross for our sins, especially since we were never asked whether or not we agreed with that. "We refuse to be killed by so much generosity. Without denying the fact that somebody has died on the cross, we do not need to accept the meaning that has been metaphysically ascribed to it" (273). Smits agreed with Vestdijk on this matter. Indeed, he argued, the concept of someone dying on the cross for our sins was purely metaphysical and had to be understood

[144] Gomperts 1949b: 455-456.

[145] Berkouwer 1948b: 13.

as a myth. Agreeing with Vestdijk, he confessed that he would never agree to be saved by another's credits. "Count me out!" (Dutch: *Geef mijn portie maar aan fikkie*) he told his readers and colleagues.[146] This triggered a great deal of polemics, especially from J.J. Buskes, who bluntly rejected Smits's position.[147] He also agreed with Vestdijk that if we did not accept the truth that Christ died on the cross for us, we were no longer Christians.

That God, in the manifestation of Christ, had died on the cross presented for most people no real problem, Vestdijk argued; they probably admired it as just another sign of God the Almighty. However, the notion that those who were supposed to benefit spiritually from Christ's death were also the very reason he had to be killed was a notion which Vestdijk found too embarrassing to accept. Many people simply did not wish to be parasites, he argued.. And since people can call themselves Christian merely by partaking of the blessings which came forth out of the crucifixion, those who refused to be parasites could necessarily not call themselves Christians (274).

Vestdijk did not suggest that the notion of sacrifice lacked any symbolic meaning. This motif, he argued, was to be found everywhere and was even to be regarded as essentially human. Yet, to maintain that this was the only way in which to attain salvation was a bit too much. Instead of letting someone else die for you, it would be far more noble and impressive to give your own life for others. This idea, however, was not to be found in any Christian dogma. The possibility of human beings laying down their lives in order to save God, or God himself dying on the Cross, did not seem to have ever occured to theologians. Some hints toward the latter idea were only suggested in mystical literature (274).

The idea of Christ dying at the cross for our sins was directly linked to the idea that we needed to be saved in the first place. We needed to be saved because we were sinners. To be human was to be a sinner. According to the doctrine of original sin, we were guilty. To be human was to be guilty. Every single movement or observation was sinful—everything we did was something to feel guilty about (276). Without denying the symbolic value of the myth of the fall, Vestdijk contended, others did not continually need to remind him that he was a "sinner"; his own introspection sufficed to convince him of that. He made mistakes, Vestdijk confessed; but, he felt truly sorry for them, and he tried not to commit them anymore (277). When others claimed the right to call him a sinner, however, and justified themselves in doing so by referring to theology, then he firmly objected. Of course, he admitted, this was a personal reaction; others, in their turn, were not obliged to agree with him. However, he believed that talking too much about sin and guilt, and building

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[146] Smits 1959b: 2.

[147] Buskes 1959ab; cf. also Touw 1959.

up a theology, made people forget that they themselves were sinners, though they did not seem to feel guilty at all. All too often, humility toward God went hand in hand with arrogance toward other human beings. Though outwardly Christians, too many people were selfish egotists inside, Vestdijk argued (278).

Just because he refused to make his own sinfulness the cornerstone of his world-view, Vestdijk remarked, this did not imply that he would forget to take the realities of sin and guilt seriously. He did not agree with Nietzsche, who argued that "guilt" was a concept invented by priests in order to make people responsible for their own fate instead of offering them the possibilities to fight them. According to Vestdijk, this was the voice of the polemist, rather than the psychologist. Moreover, people who suffered from guilt were usually strong characters, able to support some remorse and punishment (279).

Guilt, Vestdijk maintained, was characteristic of disintegrative natures. Whatever their metaphysical status, unconsciously disintegrated persons felt guilty toward their fellow human beings. They refused their neighbors proper attention, support, sympathy, responsibility and love. However, given the metaphysical orientation of their personality, these people would always believe to have failed in fulfilling their duties. And instead of letting themselves suffer excessively from their guilt, they tended to hold God accountable for it. Yet, in the end, it was God who held them accountable. And since they were not able to change the figure, they simply remained the same that they had always been (280).

The projection of guilt, Vestdijk held, precluded any change whatsoever (281). To remain the way you were was made even easier by letting somebody else pay for your sins. That was why Christ had to die on the Cross (282). It did not matter who we were, or whether we ourselves had suffered or not. Whatever sins one committed, Christ had just paid for them. This was what Vestdijk called "the *capitalistic* aspect of the metaphysical idea of guilt." (283). Christ died for human beings in exactly the way that a capitalist lets people labor for him in order to make the profits necessary to pay off his debts. This link with the capitalist mentality is not merely a highly subjective idea, but is confirmed by the Catholic dogma of good works. Theoretically, one can pay off his debts to Christ by performing good works; yet, in the end, it is the Church that counts these profits and decides who has paid enough for his sins (283). According to Kraemer, this entire argument was utter nonsense and was not meant to be taken seriously.[148] Wapenaar, on the other hand, could not conceive why Vestdijk had ignored the fact that the Calvinists had attempted to get rid of the Catholic variant of state-capitalism. In fact, thus, Vestdijk's critique applied to the Catholics, rather than to the Calvinists.[149] Moreover, Vestdijk had reduced Paul's discussion of guilt to

[148] Kraemer 1959a: 761.

[149] Wapenaar 1953: 248.

a judiciary-metaphysical construction and a kind of administrative morality. According to Wapenaar this could only be taken as sarcastic criticism and a matter of scorning faith. Paul himself, however, wrote: "we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor that of the rulers of this age; none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory".[150]

Critics, with the exception of Hekstra,[151] ignored the link which Vestdijk had established between guilt and disintegration. Starting with the connection between those two concepts, his remarks regarding the parallel between capitalistism and Christ's crucifixion for the sins of other human beings were perfectly reasonable. Yet, while according to these critics a psychological approach was out of place, the reference to capitalism could only be regarded as a "jest" or "sarcastic criticism," as Kraemer and Wapenaar concluded, and could therefore not be taken seriously. However, this seemingly self-confident judgment is clearly an example of displacing the argument for the intentions of the author.

According to Vestdijk, continuing along the lines of his psychological approach, the ideas of original sin and guilt had been rightly criticized by mystics and more "liberal" theologians (276). Also, the doctrine of predestination mitigated the personal implications of original sin; if we were not free, than God had to be held accountable for our sins, rather than we ourselves as human beings (277). Critics either maintained that God Himself had in fact died on the Cross, or that the doctrine of substitutive death was an invention of the Church. These critics argued instead for a more original and pure form of Christianity which derived immediately from Jesus' own teachings. In a sense, Christ himself was the first socialist (278). And surely, the idea of Christ dying for our sins did not correspond to the biblical narrative. In the Gospels we do not find the concepts of "sin" or "guilt" (281). Christ not only focused on the law that requested people to love their neighbor; he also showed people how to fulfill this law while paying for their debts. Guilt was no longer a metaphysical category, but, instead, became a social-mystical one. Christianity, however, failed to follow the example of Christ (282).

According to Vestdijk, the attempt to integrate Christianity with a social type of religion could only be a tactical move. For Westerners, Christian socialism or social Christianity was unlikely to be of much appeal. Its philosophical justification was too complicated for ordinary men. And its history had offered too many examples of violence in the name of love to be a plausible alternative. As Nietzsche rightly argued: *Im Grunde gab es nur einen Christen, und er starb am Kreuz* (250).

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[150] Wapenaar 1953: 247, reference to Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians 2: 6.

[151] Hekstra 1954: 68.

However, Vestdijk admitted, without any idea of God or Christ, it might seem strange to call socialism a religion, especially when considering its 'materialistic' conceptions (118). Whereas according to socialists religion was only a surrogate, theologians believed that socialism itself was a surrogate for religion (119). Yet, Vestdijk argued, like metaphysical projection, the socialist's ideals stemmed from a drive towards totality. The socialist would substitute relations with parents for those with humanity. Moreover, such ideals were largely derived from Christianity (119). On the one hand, there was the Gospel of love, and on the other hand, the doctrine of human equality before God (with thanks to Menno ter Braak for this insight). It was even possible to maintain that Christ had been "the first socialist," while, in fact, his disciples preferred to emphasize the metaphysical tendencies of his teachings, and interpreted details that were meant as symbols, literally (120). And, as far as they remembered the words of Christ, they transformed them into images of a future in which Christ would return to this world (121).

According to Vestdijk, metaphysical religion differed fundamentally not only from social, but also from the mystical-introspective religion. While metaphysical projection was imaginary and did not have any direct connection with everyday life, in social religion naturally perfect man as a symbol had been substituted for a realistic and factual approach of the reality symbolized, i.e. for natural perfect humanity. In this case, religion was not a relationship between God and man; rather it was a mutual bond between human beings. According to Berkouwer, Vestdijk's picture of metaphysical religion tended toward caricature. Surely, from this perspective, the history of Christianity must be that of disintegration. Yet, are we obliged to regard the social bonds of friendship and *communitas* as something different from the Covenant between God and Abraham, His friend? On the contrary, Vestdijk clearly showed that he did not understand the notion of friendship in Christianity.[152] Here, however, Berkouwer ignored the fact that Vestdijk did not deny any friendship between God and man, but instead argued that exactly this friendly relationship made man forget about his relationship with humanity as a whole. Though clearly a distortion of Vestdijk's argument, this was not meant as an attempt to derogate his abilities as a theorist on Christianity. Rather, Berkouwer attributed Vestdijk's distorted picture of Christianity to his theory of projection, thereby allowing a possibility for discussion. Later, Berkouwer dealt extensively with the issue of religious projection himself,[153] as would some of his friends and followers.[154]

Whereas the social type of religion was social or collectivist, mystical-introspective religion, on the other hand, was orientated toward the individual.

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[152] Berkouwer 1948b: 15.

[153] Berkouwer 1951, 1957.

[154] Janse de Jonge 1956, 1962, Rothuizen 1972.

Moreover, while social religion was orientated towards the future, the mystical type focused on the here and now (158). The social type pursued social improvements, equality and unity; it tried to improve the mutual relations between people, and man could be happy when, through his activities, at least part of that ideal was realized during his own life. The mystical type, however, tried to realize the ideal completely during his lifetime. He did not believe in naturally perfect humanity; rather he tried to embody naturally perfect man by himself. The only things he believed in were the religious possibilities of his own soul (158). Yet, whatever the differences, both the social and mystical types rejected all metaphysical projection, creating an unbridgeable distance between human beings and God. That was also why these types were better equipped to deal with the problem of human dignity than the metaphysically oriented religion of Christianity.

Whereas Christianity produced highly disintegrated figures, the other religious types were far more integrated. The difference between the social type and the mystical-introspective consisted of the direction of their movement toward integration. Whereas the first was outwardly directed, the latter tended to turn inwardly. Noordenbos (as well as Sierksma, though not without qualifications[155]) maintained that such a religion was original, illuminating and appropriate for making judgments of the cultural predicaments of the time.[156] At least they found Vestdijk's arguments worth considering.

Without explaining why, or by merely declaring that religion was simply the 'belief in God', what bothered many critics—notably Sterkman, De Vos, Miskotte, Van der Leeuw, De Jong, Oosterbaan, Kraemer and Van Stempvoort—, was the fact that Vestdijk employed these typologies in order to argue for a religion without God, if that could still be regarded a religion.[157] Yet, Van Heugten argued that discarding God implied that Vestdijk and Buddha were no longer religious, but rather mere atheists. Thus, he ignored the fact that, according to Vestdijk, Buddha viewed religion and atheism as one and the same thing. Van Heugten, on the other hand, preferred to follow other authorities by claiming that the Buddhist method was a-religious. "And, of course," he continued, "Vestdijk is free to call whatever he likes religious; one can also call a pencil a shoelace." Yet, Aristotle had written that if one wished to make a statement, one must use the terminology that is usually employed in such cases.[158] In this case, one had to take into account what human beings for

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[155] Sierksma 1952: 17-18.

[156] Noordenbos 1948ab.

[157] Sterkman 1948ab, De Vos 1952, Miskotte 1952, Van der Leeuw 1952, De Jong 1957, Oosterbaan 1957, Kraemer 1959ab, Van Stempvoort 1960.

[158] Van Heugten 1948: 694.

centuries already had understood by religion. They had always believed religion to be a relationship between man and a supernatural power.[159]

Already at the beginning of his essay, Vestdijk explained his disagreement with the definition of religion as 'belief in God'. This definition excluded Buddhism from the religious scene because it failed to account for a religion without God (19). In this sense, being radically opposed to any metaphysical tendency, Vestdijk preferred the mystical-introspective religion to the social one. More than the social type, the mystical type was aware of the problems associated with metaphysical projection. For example, Vestdijk suggested, Buddhism—at least if we believed its sources, and we did not have any reason not to—warned us of its dangers (160). If one intended to root out suffering, one had to fight metaphysics. Buddha had been extremely radical in this; he simply ignored all projections that pretended to be metaphysical. When asked: "Do the gods exist or not?" he answered: "Why do you ask me?" Buddha was simply not interested in the gods, and so he did not feel the need to talk about them either (161).

Yet, Vestdijk asked himself, if the alternative to metaphysics was mysticism, what exactly was meant by that? He concluded that mysticism was meant to be interpreted as introspection aimed at self-analysis and self-criticism. As such, Vestdijk believed mysticism to be the opposite of projection. Contrary to Rudolf Otto, who argued that mysticism was impossible to imagine without theism, Vestdijk maintained that both were radically different (162). According to him, Buddhism was the perfect example of mysticism (163).

Several critics took issue with Vestdijk's preference for Buddhist mysticism precisely because it denied any kind of outside reality. Buddha was as ascetic as Luther was when he was suffering under the Roman yoke. However, as soon as he started reading the Scriptures and found Jesus Christ, Luther felt released. Buddha, on the other hand, found peace after he decided to interpret reality as an illusion.[160] This implied that Buddha preferred to integrate himself with Nothingness. However, by that, his dignity also faded away.[161] Being integrated with everything and humanity as a whole, abandoning his wife, children, relatives, friends, personal property and the world, he failed to see man as a concrete human being.[162] Buddha confused individualism (the individual as absolute) with individuality (human life as a gift of God), as Wytzes noticed.[163] Seen within this context, Pos asked his readers whether Buddhist

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[159] Van Heugten 1948: 695.

[160] Pos 1958: 258.

[161] Pos 1959: 166.

[162] Pos 1959: 165.

[163] Pos 1958: 260; Wytzes 1948a: 28.

solidarity was of more value than Christian love.[164] Surely, he maintained, everybody had the right to take Buddha as the spiritual summit of the world; yet, then, one also had the right to ask what the consequences of that would be. Buddha was merely the prophet of religious nihilism. And, Pos asserted, "I know those lyrical songs on Nothingness being ultimate happiness, nihilism being totality, emptiness being fullness." According to him, however, "this was spiritual suicide, leaving the world behind in ruins when nothing remained to sing about anymore."[165]

There would be no truth, no dignity left. Or, Pos asked his readers, did they think that to sink into nothingness was more dignifying than to enjoy the lilies in the fields, even though we acknowledged that God's beautiful world would always be threatened by the powers of darkness?[166] Something similar held true for Vestdijk, Wapenaar believed. According to him, utility rather than truth was decisive for his worldview. The images which man had created had been useful in bringing about a basic level of civilization, much the same way some liberals found the Bible useful in so much as it justified their holy properties. However, as soon as man, being a wild animal, understood that society was built merely on illusions, the time would come when his animal instincts would be given free reign.[167] Only a cynic could argue for Buddhism, Teeuwen remarked. Human beings did not matter. Their lives were simply built of pathologies and sexual aberrations. Nothing positive was left here. That is why only Buddhism could offer solutions.[168] Similarly, Gomperts complained that, following Vestdijk's recommendations, in the end, we would abandon this world, masturbating between heaps of rotting *sauerkraut*.[169]

By using this style of arguing, these critics attempted to support their verdicts on Vestdijk: his proposals were irresponsible. Without making any detailed references—either to facts, professionals or Vestdijk's arguments—they simply denounced the latter's proposed solutions for the problem of disintegration from which Western religion had been suffering. Their comments were either ironical or arrogant, and denied of any value the reasons which Vestdijk had been given for his way of thinking. Though sometimes references were made to textual traditions, critics did not justify their judgments by explaining what exactly was wrong with Vestdijk's arguments.

As if responding to his critics in advance, Vestdijk argued that Buddhism could not be translated as "Nothingness" because this term suggested something negative

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[164] Pos 1959: 165.

[165] Pos 1958: 261, Pos 1959: 161.

[166] Pos 1959: 160.

[167] Wapenaar 1953: 245.

[168] Teeuwen 1951: 191-192.

[169] Gomperts 1949b: 456.

(172). Buddhism was not nihilistic; it only used negative terms to urge man to analyze the existing order and the ideals intended to change them, in an attempt to encourage him to follow inner drives and strive for the better (173). Here mysticism resembled psychology (170), while metaphysics simply did not matter (171).

As mysticism, Buddhism offered an extreme example of a-metaphysical tendencies; and as such it had no equal in human history (174). Western mysticism has always been a compromise between true mysticism and theology. When theology became too symbolic, it was deemed heretical and in violation of the metaphysical pretensions of the Church. Those symbols functioned as means to attain unity with Christ, and implied autonomy from the Church as mediator of Christ on earth (177).

Christianity is the "scapegoat," Van Heugten complained, whereas Buddhism seemed to be a "lap dog."[170] Pos stated, ironically, that Vestdijk seemed to be running into the arms of Buddha.[171] Oosterbaan and Kraemer blamed Vestdijk and Sierksma for not actually doing so. According to them, if the latter two were ready to accept the natural consequences of their ideals, why did they not convert to Buddhism?[172] Writing *Brahman*, nor *Atman*; nothing was permanent. Even *Nirvana* did not mean anything.

Some critics suggested that both Vestdijk and Sierksma, being interested in original Buddhism, took Buddha to be a historical figure. According to them, there was a strange incongruity here. On the one hand, they questioned Christ as a historical figure, suggesting that we did not know anything about Him for certain. On the other hand, however, they took Buddhist Scriptures at face value. Taking into account the time-span and historical distance, the sources about Jesus were far more reliable than those about Buddha.[173]

"Does not this show a curious prejudice towards Christianity?" Kraemer asked. "It is just a question…"[174] Both Vestdijk and Sierksma responded by reminding their critics that they were conscious of the historical problems. Yet, the historical figures, though important, were not crucial for their argument. What mattered to them was the fact that people had created an image of both Jesus Christ and the Buddha. Yet, critics continued, why did both Vestdijk and Sierksma attempt to distinguish between Jesus as a historical figure and Christ as a metaphysical construction by Paul and the Church. Moreover, why did they focus on the history of Christianity for their judgments, when they were comparing it to a self-made ideal of Buddhism? Why did they take the original variant of Buddhism to be the correct interpretation of Bud-

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[170] Van Heugten 1948: 700-701.

[171] Pos 1959: 165.

[172] Oosterbaan 1957: 73-74, Kraemer 1959a: 759.

[173] Kraemer 1959a: 757.

[174] Kraemer 1959a: 758.

dha's teachings, thus ignoring the metaphysical tendencies in the history of Buddhism? When they write about Buddhism, one feels their inspiration, Kraemer asserted. Theirs is a passionate argument, he continued. Yet it lacks existential and religious drama.

Kraemer knew the right antidote for that. "If one, instead, wants to get some impression of what I miss in these arguments, I would suggest (though I doubt Vestdijk and Sierksma would appreciate this) to read Karl Barth on mysticism and atheism as critical movements against religion. This argument is of a power and depth which all psychologists and philosophers of religion together could never offer me."[175] And Barth stood by his beliefs. Both Vestdijk and Sierksma, on the other hand, failed to make an existential choice for one religion or another. Convinced of the truth in Buddhism, its denial of any personality, the emptiness of reality, they preferred to retain their individualism and concept of the world as a given. Consequently, they stopped halfway. Thus, the question arose what would be the alternative if the wishes of Vestdijk, Sierksma, and Verstappen came true and Christianity indeed died and disappeared? Here we arrive at the last topic of our discussion.

Some hints for the future – Many critics have taken issue with Vestdijk's personal opinion that it was not only plausible that Christianity should one day disappear, but also preferable. Yet, he did not wish it to disappear too rash and quickly. Christianity, Vestdijk claimed, had to die a worthy death. I must not leave any vindictiveness behind. "Sir does not wish to let any anger or envy remain for the people who would lose something along the way. How nice, isn't it?" Zijlstra scorned.[176] Vestdijk did not think it necessary to indicate a timeframe. It certainly needed some time, either to lose its dominant position or to develop into something else that would no longer be recognized as essentially Christian. "Imagine a Christian," Vestdijk told his readers, "waking up one morning and arriving at the conclusion that, in fact, he was a Buddhist" (331).

Vestdijk believed that psychoanalysis would have to play an important role in the religion of the future. For that, however, it was to be changed from a method of treating patients into pedagogy. The youth, especially students, had to practice meditation, rather than merely being informed about sexuality, as in the Freudian analytical method (351). Courses on the symbolism of the Father, the Mother, and the Son were to be included in the curriculum. Afterwards, courses for the metaphysical, social and mystical-introspective types would be useful. We might take a lesson here from the Indian yoga methods: the Raja-yoga would be perfect for the mystical-introspective, the Karma-yoga for the social, and the Bhakti-variant for the meta-

[175] Kraemer 1959a: 756.

[176] Marnix 1948.

physical type. Even though metaphysics might turn out to be just a "primitive" stage in the history of religions, everybody needed to know it by experience. Contrary to what many critics have made of his arguments, Vestdijk argued that people had to be taught to control their metaphysical projections, rather than to simply become atheists (352). On several occasions Vestdijk made some positive comments regarding metaphysical religion as a necessary stage in Western culture. Some critics, however, took these to be highly ironical.[177] By those recommendations, Wapenaar and Kraemer held, Vestdijk merely tried to dissimulate his negative judgment on Christianity. In the end, he simply preferred a religion without God. And (though this point mainly arose in the controversy with Sierksma) he wished to be free from theology. Surely, his idea of a religious elite for the future was quite clear about that.

In fact, Vestdijk preferred a psychoanalytical pedagogy, which required a specific kind of teacher. According to him, this specific type of pedagogy was not just a matter of transmitting specialist knowledge and keeping order in the classroom (353). To educate teachers, specific methods were needed. People were not to be educated how to teach, but rather how to behave. And this required a so-called *para-pedagogy*, Vestdijk argued (354). As teachers, they only needed to exist; they only needed to be examples through their self-control, benevolence, open-mindedness, courage and perseverance. As such they were the opposite of the meddling bragging that in Europe is sold for pedagogy, Vestdijk concluded (355).

This way, Vestdijk maintained, a new type of *homo religious* would replace the age-old priest (356). For that, however, the problems of sexuality, death and resentment (envy) needed to be resolved (357). The psychologist that was needed to accomplish this goal was found in the mystic (359). The advantage of the latter was that he did not have any relationship with the world; he did not own anything. He would not ask for any momentary pleasure—not a wife, nor a family, nor any property, honor or status. He would not even own himself, neither his mind nor his body (359).

Yet, Vestdijk asked, how were we to imagine this para-pedagogy? According to him this was immediately linked to the question of its legitimacy. There would always be a danger that this para-pedagogy would end in metaphysical projections of a superhuman, ultimate spiritual authority—God. And who would be the highest pedagogue in the hierarchy? Who would decide who has the right to exercise the highest authority? (360). Berkelbach van der Sprenkel asked who would appoint this new elite. Who was supposed to build this future? How was this elite to be provided with authority? Vestdijk's proposals reminded Van der Sprenkel of the famous adventures of Baron von Münchhausen, who pulled himself out of the swamp by his own

[177] Wapenaar 1948, 1953: 144, Kraemer 1959ab: 761.

pate.[178] Curiously, these were the same words which Vestdijk had used to indicate the problem. Vestdijk added that in matters of the mind, jumping from the swamp were the order of the day. We only had to be careful not to change the figure, and assign those miracles to any divine intervention. Mystics did not derive their authority from anything other than themselves (361). Also Van der Leeuw referred to these mystics as later variants of Baron von Münchhausen.[179] While Rodenko mentioned Sancho Panza, who, much like Vestdijk, struggled with the nihilistic tendencies of his soul,[180] other critics had simply invoked their hero for ironical purposes. While Vestdijk admitted that there was indeed something ironical about the enterprise, many commentators, without indicating that Vestdijk himself had been conscious of the difficulties, simply attempted to invalidate his ideas by means of this analogy. Kraemer argued that Vestdijk was talking his way out here. The result, indeed, was disappointing.[181] According to De Vos, Vestdijk was merely jesting.[182]

Vestdijk, nevertheless, continued his argument. Mystics needed to be educated in solitude. Monasteries, supervised by the state, were to receive a highly selective group of students; those students were to follow a specific curriculum and graduate as pedagogues. And not only future pedagogues, but also anybody else who intended to play an important role in public life, would be required to achieve this grade. Besides that, of course, they would be allowed to study at normal universities (361). More specifically, Vestdijk imagined a kind of monastery that would be more or less a synthesis of the Roman Catholic *retraite*, the Buddhist monastery and the English university. And even though participation would be voluntary, there would have to be strong discipline. The curriculum would aim at competence in psychology and the practical methods of mysticism, and, more generally, "spiritual care": the student must be able to concentrate, control his bodily functions, be able to express his inner feelings; he needed to understand himself; follow gymnastics, be able to work in community (362). In general: the student must be able to live a solitary life as much as he must be ready to guide the people if necessary (362).

Critics have scorned Vestdijk's new elite for its solitariness. Moreover, the institutes at which the new elite was to be educated—especially Vestdijk's curious mix of the Catholic *retraite*, the Buddhist monastery and the English university—were regarded as absolutely ridiculous. Many found it incredible how Vestdijk had come up with such a ludicrous idea! What was worse was that he wanted to place these institutes of higher learning under state-supervision. Vestdijk found the intolerance of

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[178] Berkelbach van der Sprenkel 1948.

[179] Van der Leeuw 1952: 126.

[180] Rodenko 1948: passim.

[181] Kraemer 1959a: 761.

[182] De Vos 1952: 109

Christians highly problematic, but he himself suggested that his ideas for the future be enforced by means of state power! Previously, he had argued that those who refused to be tolerant should be forced by the state. Together with the reign of his new elite, this implied nothing other than intolerance towards Christians. With this remark, Wytzes tried to indicate some contradiction in Vestdijk's argument.[183] Even more critically, Kamphuis concluded that Vestdijk's ideal of the future sounded similar to the situation which the atheist regimes of Eastern Europe had created for the Church. The times of the Inquisition would return.[184]

While the critics were correct in their judgment of Vestdijk's intolerance towards the intolerant, as well as in their view that people could only differ on the value of this kind of intolerance, things were somewhat more complicated in the case of state-supervised institutes for religious education, as a thorough reading of Vestdijk's argument shows. According to him, both their selection and their being sanctioned by the state would make students feel privileged, while at the same time providing them with authority over the "profane" masses, including future students. And the people would submit to these pedagogues, rather than show their usual disdain for traditional prigs (363). If, through the activities of some unqualified masters, authority seemed to be threatened, the state had to take its responsibility. And we had to be careful, Vestdijk warned. Pedagogy might easily turn into mystagogy and myth mania; an attempt might even be made to legitimize authority by metaphysical projections (364). This remark was all the more striking when Kamphuis judged Vestdijk himself to be a mystagogue.[185] However, Vestdijk continued, because mystics did not have any authority above them, they were, strictly speaking, of a higher order than the Catholic saints. That also meant, however, that they would always run the risk of being venerated rather than followed, as we also see in the Indian tradition (364). Vestdijk knew it would be extremely difficult to create a system of masters whose authority did not need to be legitimized by any "higher" or supernatural power. Yet if there were no difficulties, we would not need to wait five centuries (or more) to realize this project (365).

Vestdijk seemed to argue that a kind of enlightened politics was needed as long as the masses did not regard the new elite of spiritual masters to be legitimate. How difficult it would be to make this new hierarchy of powers function properly, Vestdijk indicated by the significant amount of time it would probably take to realize the project. Moreover, both Vestdijk and Sierksma added another important fact. To critics who found a contradiction between the ideals for which they advocated, and the fact that neither of them had converted to either mysticism or Buddhism, they

[183] Wytzes 1948a: 26.

[184] Kamphuis 1973: 21.

[185] Kamphuis 1973: 11.

answered that for Westerners it would be impossible to get rid of the old mentality and to become accustomed to the Eastern methods of spirituality. Kraemer told Sierksma that he was surprised to see him attack Prof. Oosterbaan's "intelligent remark" that, while proposing Buddha and Buddhism as the only scientifically appropriate answers to the religious problems of the West, he refused to become a Buddhist himself and thus attempted to avoid an existential decision.[186] Of course, Kraemer continued, "I do not want to deny him the right to his own heroic existentialism. Yet, he fails to account for this inconsistency between argument and personal choice, especially given his scientific arrogance. He cannot escape by referring to the 19th century prudery: *Religion ist Privatsache*. One must have the courage to pay for his high voice," Kraemer concluded.[187] Yet, Noordegraaf would later suggest that we should not expect this kind of courage from Vestdijk; his attitude during World War II and his membership of the *Kultuurkamer* were telling enough.[188] Surely, these were self-confidently derogatory and highly personal declarations by Kraemer. And, clearly, he did not justify them with references to any other authority than his own. However, he might have thought that, together with the other points which he had previously made, these just indicated a negative obsession. For people with some sensibility, he claimed, it could be felt everywhere.[189] Wapenaar pointed to a certain ambivalence in Vestdijk's attitude towards Christianity. The latter had confessed several times that he appreciated the contribution of Christianity to our culture. It was the same with his attitude towards God: even though he denied His existence, he did not seem to be free from Him. As an old catechist manual by Reverend Hellenbroek answered the question whether there were people who denied God's existence: "Yes, but this is more a wish than a firm belief."[190]

Both Wapenaar and Kraemer employed a courtly style of arguing. Though we previously observed how they invoked the spirit of Barth, in this case they took responsibility for their own verdict on Sierksma. This time, Wapenaar referred to an authority of his own religious tradition, Hellenbroek. Yet, the latter's statement was not invoked in order to point out facts concerning people under similar circumstances as Vestdijk; on the contrary, it was only used in order to lend even more credibility to the verdict passed on Vestdijk. In the end, by means of declarative statements, both Wapenaar and Kraemer attributed Vestdijk's (and Sierksma's) way of reasoning to a lack of nerve. They clearly did not limit their judgments to the actual arguments of their opponents.

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[186] Kraemer 1959a: 759; references to Oosterbaan 1957: 80 and Sierksma 1957: 138.

[187] Kraemer 1959a: 760.

[188] Noordegraaf 1975.

[189] Kraemer 1959a: 726, 731.

[190] Wapenaar 1953: 244.

Whereas Berkouwer attempted to explain Vestdijk's caricatures by referring to his preference for Buddhism, limiting himself to the text, Kreamer simply believed that both Vestdijk and Sierksma were agitated.[191] They simply despised Christianity, Christians, and God.[192] According to Kamphuis, they felt haunted by them, they tried to get rid of them.[193] The influence of this mentality on the masses was considerable and "dangerous," some critics argued. Many young people had mistaken those caricatures for the truth, and consequently abandoned the faith of their parents.[194]

Both Vestdijk and Sierksma considered it stupid to conclude that they hated Christianity, Christians, and God, based solely on the caricatures created by their opponents. In his polemic with Kraemer, Sierksma even explicitly asked him to refute his accusations, both personally and publicly, if he wished to have any type of meaningful dialogue. "Whatever we have against Christianity," Sierksma confessed, "we cannot deny that we are Christians ourselves. Whether we like it or not, we are too Christian to become Buddhists, even if we wanted to. This is already sufficient reason against Oosterbaan's and Kraemer's attempts to have us converted to Buddhism."[195] Continuing in this personal fashion, he told his readers: "I am not anti-God, nor anti-religious. You either believe in God, or you do not. Does that mean that I am anti-Christian?" According to Sierksma, Kraemer was forgetting that criticism of Christianity did not mean that he held Christianity personally responsible. Finally, he asked, "Am I anti-theology? I am simply not interested in it. For me, it is a matter of endless discussion. Barth, venerated by Kraemer, I find boring, except when he is discussing Mozart." Certainly, he continued, "apart from theology there are theologians, and Kraemer, with his personal comments, forces me to answer this point. I am working at a theological faculty. Though I deal with the Study of Religions, attending Church ceremonies is requested. Yet, if refraining from either Church or theological business has any serious consequences for me in the sense that I am treated like an outlaw, then I have the right to be seriously disappointed. If Kraemer reads some anti-theological sentiments in my books, then the background of all this might be clear. If he wants personal, he will get it: I will treat him as a symptom of a scientifically and theologically dubious situation."[196]

Apparently shocked by Sierksma's critique, Kraemer attempted to shift from a declarative and personal to a republican style of arguing, containing personal confessions

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[191] Kraemer 1959a: 762.

[192] Kraemer 1959a: 763.

[193] Kamphuis 1973: 16-17, Simons 1974, Nolles 1979: 5.

[194] Marnix 1948, Van der Leeuw 1952: 125, Van Stempvoort 1960, 1961, Kamphuis 1973: 22, 1998.

[195] Sierksma 1959a: 97.

[196] Sierksma 1959a: 101-103.

together with friendly remarks towards his opponents. Unluckily, however, Sierksma felt the need to conclude that he did not find Kraemer's remarks to the point. The required common ground needed for a proper dialogue was missing. Their exchange was neither conversation nor polemic, neither scientific discussion nor literary controversy.[197] If we are not able stand aloof from personal backgrounds, Sierksma concluded, we will never find common ground together.[198] Kraemer had not taken his scientific intentions seriously, Sierksma complained. According to Kraemer, some personal obsession was behind all of this. Everything scientific about his arguments was dismissed as a pose. Yet, Sierksma confessed rather ironically: "I do not want to refute his belief, just like I do not want to refute his belief in metaphysical projections.[199] I simply find him a highly incompetent psychologist and a careless reader. And all of this led to a useless exchange that did not deserve the paper and the energy spilled upon it," he concluded.[200]

Conclusions: to be polemical or not

In this chapter, we have seen critics try to establish or defend their authority by means of different rhetorical styles. While it was impossible to touch upon every single issue that came up during the controversy, I have selected the most important issues which triggered polemical comments by critics.

Strikingly, we have met with different people holding the same opinions. Neither Berkouwer, Bavinck or Van Praag, nor De Vos and Wapenaar agreed with what they understood to be Vestdijk's argument, namely that religion was merely a projection of human needs and desires. And even though not every single theologian made an issue of it, none of them would have agreed that Christianity was necessarily intolerant and repressive. Likewise, nobody—not even literary critics—would ever admit that Buddhism was superior to Christianity and should therefore serve as its substitute. Finally, none of the theologians would have agreed that Vestdijk's parapedagogues were better equipped to solve social problems than theologians.

Yet, the style with which critics formulated their disagreement differed considerably from one case to another. Some of them tried to argue with facts (as in the realist style), or reference to established authorities in the field (the bureaucratic style), or sometimes readily admitted that they were offering a personal opinion (republican style). Others, however, denounced Vestdijk's or Sierksma's opinions outright by suggesting (whether consciously or not) that their own authority was enough to outwit their opponent. Instead of offering critical remarks which countered the ar-

[197] Sierksma 1959b: 735.

[198] Sierksma 1959b: 738.

[199] Sierksma 1959b: 736.

[200] Sierksma 1959b: 737.

guments by their opponents, they merely declared them to be inferior to their own opinions.

In the present chapter I have tried to give many examples of the declarative style of arguing. To put things into perspective, I have sometimes compared these instances with comments made by critics who employed other writing styles. While Vestdijk generally limited himself to a non-declarative style of reasoning, it was relatively easy to demonstrate the differences. He argued either in a realistic or republican fashion, offering elaborate arguments, often referring to authorities in the field, and sometimes allowing himself to make some personal confessions. Yet, as we have seen in the previous chapter, even Vestdijk could not avoid attacking others personally. Similarly, whatever the careful way of reasoning by which he proceeded, he also sometimes employed the declarative style of arguing, as we have seen in his dialogue with Gomperts. The same held true for Sierksma. Though arguing carefully, Sierksma aimed even more often than Vestdijk to denounce other opinions in a courtly fashion, as became clear in his attacks on Gomperts and Barneveld.

As usual in the case of critics, they disagreed with Vestdijk and Sierksma. Yet, critics as diverse as Berkouwer and Fortmann kept themselves far from the declarative style of arguing which was often employed by their like-minded fellows. Other exceptions were Walgrave, Bavinck, Popma, and Janse de Jonge and, for the most part, Luypen. Yet, though the latter agreed on most issues with Fortmann and used a similar style of writing (the realist one), he failed to restrain himself from criticizing Sierksma's state of mind in order to denounce his argument against phenomenology—without, of course, being able to support his statements by facts or psychological research. We have frequently observed this kind of reasoning in the present chapter directed against the persons of both Vestdijk and Sierksma. We have seen Zijlstra, Wytzes, Van Heugten, De Vos, Miskotte, Van der Leeuw, Teeuwen, De Jong, Kraemer, Pos, Van Stempvoort and Kamphuis complain that God had been explained away by the way in which religion had been defined in *De toekomst der religie*—without attempting to make clear why this was a bad thing. Apart from being a simple observation, it functioned to denounce Vestdijk's approach. The latter's theory of projection was discarded as a matter of jest or a product of his own imagination by people like Mankes-Zernike, Wapenaar, and Kamphuis. The argument that Christianity was necessarily intolerant and repressive, as also supported by Verstappen, was countered declaratively by Zijlstra, De Vos, Van der Leeuw, Miskotte, Wapenaar, Kraemer, Van Stempvoort, Dronkers and, again, Kamphuis. To prefer Buddhism to Christianity was baseless and ought to be discarded, as people like Sterkman, Van Heugten, Wytzes, Van der Leeuw, Teeuwen, Wapenaar, De Jong, Oosterbaan, Pos, Kraemer and Van Stempvoort made clear. Concerning Vestdijk's prospects for the future and his proposals to actively solve the problems of the West, some critics reac-

ted with scorn, such as Zijlstra, Wytzes, Van Heugten, De Vos, Van der Leeuw, Wapenaar, Kraemer, Van Stempvoort, Noordegraaf and Kamphuis.

On all of these issues, an impressive list of contributors to the controversy employed the courtly style. This does not imply that they did not manage any other style of arguing. On the contrary, some critics used the declarative style less systematically than others, who only used it incidentally. Some changed their style according to the circumstances. After the interventions of Sierksma, we see the courtly style being less often employed. Kraemer and Van Stempvoort became more moderate and realist in their later contributions.

We must imagine a continuum between the two poles of polemical attacks on the one hand, and non-polemical interventions on the other. It is possible to distinguish between clear cases that are to be classified closely at both ends of the continuum. At the polemical side are those contributions in which critics used a declarative style together with personal invectives. Apart from those, we have met with examples which are far less easily classified. Sometimes the latter aspect of polemics is combined with systematic application of other styles of arguing. Also, sometimes the declarative style is not used within the context of arguments *ad hominem*. So, generally speaking, we can identify four different categories. The first is employing both the declarative style of arguing and personal invective. Needless to say that this is providing for the most aggressive kind of polemics. The second does not use any personal invective. Its critique, however, is declarative. By trying to impose the authority of the critic over that of the opponent, it is polemical as well. The third does not use a declarative style of arguing. Though moderate, I take it to be polemical because it employs personal invective. Only the final category, neither referring to personal characteristics of the opponent, nor trying to impose one's own authority on the public, can safely be excluded from the field of polemics.

Putting together the results of our analysis as carried out in chapters II and III, we get the following picture. For each period in the history of the reception of *De toekomst der religie* I will indicate who belongs to which category.

In the first period (1948-1951), Wytzes's and Wapenaar's contributions did not show any attempt to denigrate their opponent; yet they used the courtly style to counter Vestdijk's arguments. Consequently, these critics belong to the second category. People like Barneveld, Gomperts, and Noordenbos, on the other hand, employed a non-declarative style of arguing, at times together with personal invectives. They are thus classified as belonging to the third category. Critics such as Zijlstra, Van Heugten, Teeuwen, Mankes-Zernike, De Vos, Miskotte, Van der Leeuw, Bomhoff, Vestdijk and Sierksma clearly belonged to the first category; they used to employ both personal invectives and a courtly style of writing. The rest of the contributors to the reception during this period did not show any polemical inclination.

With respect to the second period (1952-1959), only Van Schaik-Willing is to be classified as belonging to the third category, since she used (some) personal invectives. Smits and De Jong employed a declarative style of arguing and, consequently, belong to the second category. Critics such as Wapenaar, Majorick, Oosterbaan, Kwee, Pos and Kraemer offered the most significant polemical contributions of this period. The rest of the intellectuals remained moderate and to the point.

Considering the third period (1960-1972), we have seen Dronkers denounce Verstappen's arguments in favor of both Vestdijk and his own film in a courtly fashion. He belonged to the second category. Offering a highly sophisticated discussion of the problems which Sierksma (and Vestdijk) had formulated, at one point Luypen could not keep himself from personal invective. Other contributors paid tribute to the intelligent arguments which Sierksma had put forward and admitted that they felt positively challenged to respond to him. The only one who offered a significant polemical contribution was Van Stempvoort. Something similar held for Noordegraaf and Kamphuis (and those who identified with the latter's opinions). Their contributions, belonging to the first category of our scheme, were written during the final period (1973-1998) of the reception.

In accordance with my theory, I must attempt to find correlations between the textual strategies as outlined and illustrated in the last two chapters, and the social conditions of their employment as means to arrive at certain ends. In other words, I must define the context within which those encounters, whether polemical or not, occurred. This, as I have previously mentioned, will be my objective in the next chapter.

IV – THE POLEMIC: ITS SOCIAL CONDITIONS

> *It is not enough to say these are antiauthority struggles; we must try to define more precisely what they have in common.*
>
> Michel Foucault

Introduction

In this chapter, I wish to focus on the context of polemical exchanges between Vestdijk and his critics after the publication of *De toekomst der religie*. At first sight, this might surprise readers who remember my references to Derrida, who argued that there is nothing outside of the text. To be sure, I only held this statement to be valid for the moment, i.e. for our analysis of the content and style of the contributions to our controversy. First of all, I warned not to take the picture which critics painted of Vestdijk (and Sierksma) at face value. Clearly, critics did not denounce the Vestdijk who lived in Doorn, went for daily walks with his dog in the countryside near his home village, and, upon returning to his house and maid, either played the piano or continued working on his books.[1] This was the Vestdijk whom none of his reviewers knew. On the contrary, critics tried to create a subject ('Vestdijk') who, according to them, could be held accountable for the errors and distortions written in *De toekomst der religie*. Secondly, many commentators employed a declarative style of arguing in order to insinuate some kind of authority to the reader. According to me, however, this does not necessarily mean that these intellectuals were in fact acknowledged as leading authorities on 'Vestdijk' and the topics about which he had written. Through both subject and style, critics tried to impose their opinions of Vestdijk (or Sierksma) on their public. Yet, we must remain critical; we cannot take these opinions merely for granted without any further investigation. As long as there is nothing indicating that their picture of Vestdijk is confirmed by the facts available, nor by the critics' actual authority, it is perfectly legitimate to hold that there is nothing outside of the text by which we can determine whether or not we can take them seriously.

Yet, still then, I must clarify in which sense we are to discuss the context of our controversy. According to me, it is again Freud who indicated a way to solve this problem. In chapter II, we saw how words were used to create subjects. We found some striking similarities between the way this was done in polemics on the one hand, and the processes of condensation and displacement in witwork on the other.

[1] Visser 1987: 430.

In both cases, a subject was created and taken as the source of a text, while at the same time becoming the object of laughter. However, as Freud emphasized, apart from the aforementioned processes, two other things are required. For a text to be effective and create laughter there must be an author (the one who writes something that might be received in jest) and an audience (those who interpret the text as a joke). Thus, while in general the techniques of condensation and displacement suffice to identify a story to be potentially humorous, without the consent of the audience it fails to be recognized as witty.[2] This is even worse if the public believes that the author intended to be humorous. In that case, the author himself could become the object of laughter. Yet, it is unlikely that the critics who contributed to the polemic had the intention of making fun of themselves. In general, stories are told in order to create mirth at the expense of somebody else. For this, the content of the joke does not need to be true or justified from our point of view as outsiders. Mostly, however, truth is not an issue which people consider when they laugh. To ask oneself whether or not a joke is justified is to miss all the fun. To conclude that a joke is indeed unjustified might create anger, rather than laughter. Yet, as long as there are people who share in the fun, the story is effective. Its effect satisfies the author because s/he thereby gets the consent of the public which s/he was aiming for. This public is often not self-evident; rather it has to be created by means of the text. The techniques of condensation and displacement are employed for the purpose of getting the consent of the audience.

Still the question remains how to imagine the audience which constituted the context of the polemic which we are studying here. Norman Fairclough proposed an answer in his work on discourse analysis. According to him, employing language as discourse is a social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or an expression of situational variables. This has at least three implications, he argued. Firstly, discourse is a mode of action. As we have seen in previous chapters, apart from creating a subject in language, it also tries to establish relationships between author and audience. As Fairclough says, discourse is a form in which people act upon the world as well as upon each other. Secondly, being a mode of action, discourse has a link with social structure. It contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it: its own norms and conventions, as well as the relations, identities and institutions which underlie them.[3] It is precisely the social dimension of discourse that is of interest for our purposes. Fairclough explicitly links his approach to that of Foucault, who had argued that language was highly important in constituting realities, yet he never believed that an analysis of discourse could be

[2] Freud 1932, English 1994.

[3] Fairclough 1992: 63-64; cf. also Foucault 1982ab.

limited to texts only. As Ian Hunter summarized Foucault's arguments on the issue, texts did not have an inside (in thoughts) nor did they have an outside (in things).[4]

> Foucault's reformulation of the concept of discourse derives from his attempts to provide histories of knowledge, which are not histories of what men and women have thought. Foucault's histories are not histories of ideas, opinions or influences nor are they histories of the way in which economic, political and social contexts have shaped ideas or opinions. Rather they are reconstructions of the *material conditions* of thought or 'knowledges'. They represent an attempt to produce what Foucault calls an *archeology* of the material conditions of thought/knowledges, conditions which are not reducible to the idea of 'consciousness' or the idea of 'mind'.

Applied to the analysis of our controversy, critics do not need to be conscious about the conditions that determine their discursive intervention; nor does somebody need to choose consciously for polemic as the proper means of dealing with a given situation. The only thing that is relevant for us is to define which are the social, i.e. discernible, conditions which make polemic inevitable, or at least understandable. In this way, the discursive event which we call polemic is not to be taken primarily as an expression of an individual's ideas or intentions, but rather as the outcome of the material conditions that actually determine which direction the activities of somebody (or some body) will take.

In the words of Foucault, polemic is not consciously directed against authority. It is rather a matter of countering a threat to one's own position and recognition before a public that one is not necessarily conscious of either. That this is a theory worth considering can only be shown by discerning what polemical contributions have in common, not merely on the textual level, but also with respect to their social conditions.[5]

We must then ask ourselves what these conditions are. In the case of intellectuals, it is highly unlikely that these are economic conditions.[6] On the contrary, we are talking here about forms of cultural capital. These include the means available to define the other, while creating relationships of subordination and some kind of hierarchy.[7] As has previously been indicated in the introduction, intellectuals are people with the ability to formulate opinions. They are used to identifying topics and persons and elaborating on them. By that, however, they also establish their position over both opponents and the public. These two dimensions of discourse are necessary

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[4] Hunter no date; quoted in Kendall & Wickham 1999: 35.

[5] Foucault 1982b: 211.

[6] Bourdieu 1984.

[7] Bourdieu 1984, 1988; cf. also Foucault 1980, 1982b.

in order to provide for the authority for which intellectuals strive, according to my theory.

In order to search for and select the proper conditions, it might be useful to focus on some factors that possibly influenced the way in which our controversy developed. In the first chapter, the polemical reviews declined, even relative to the actual number of contributions to the reception of *De toekomst der religie* in general. How can this development be explained?

First of all, as we have suggested earlier, the aforementioned trend might be attributed to the mechanisms peculiar to any history of textual appropriation. Thus, whatever the relevance of the topics dealt with in the controversy, attention will sooner or later turn away from the text with which everything began. This could be the case because discussion becomes more rational, i.e. realistic, republican, or bureaucratic and less personal. According to this approach, controversy naturally shifts from polemics towards serious discussion, dealing with the real issue rather than the mind or morals of the author held accountable for the original text. However, without ignoring the progressive tendencies in history, I do not believe that the field of textual exchange develops autonomously—rather it is influenced by outside factors and factors attributable to context. This is suggested by the fact that since the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*, debates among intellectuals over religious issues were never as widespread and lasting as the one triggered by Vestdijk (and Sierksma). Thus, there is more to it than only textual history.

Three other explanations will be considered in the following. The first one, often referred to as the so-called secularization-thesis, might help to account for our polemic by pointing to the changing role of religion in the postwar Netherlands. The second one is seeking to explain polemics by considering the position of intellectuals within the public sphere. The third one, finally, presents us with a more sophisticated version of the second explanation. Here we are trying to relate the position of each intellectual within the different public spheres in which they were acting.

The secularization-thesis

With regard to the changing role of religion in the public sphere, sociologists and theologians have endorsed the so-called secularization-thesis. Yet, the thesis is a bit complicated, given the fact that the term secularization has been conceptualized into three different directions.[8] First, it means that religion is declining. People are less religious than before. Religious activities become less important for the lives of those involved. Second, secularization means that religion itself becomes more secular. Depending on the circumstances, it has adapted itself to the sensibilities of the people. Religious claims are less rigid and dogmatic than they are supposed to have been

[8] Dekker 1992: 38.

before. Third, secularization means that the influence of religion on public life has decreased. Religion is no longer the principle by which people are organized into groups or even pillars, as it was during the first half of the twentieth century.

According to me, these definitions of the term secularization are highly problematic. This mainly has to do with the way the term 'religion' is employed here. How are we able to determine whether or not people are less religious than before? One of the main critiques of the secularization-thesis has to do with the fact that people still believe in supernatural beings or powers exceeding human control; and they still devote part of their lives to activities related to these beliefs. Instead of being less religious, many people have simply shifted towards types of religion that are generally more invisible or implicit.[9] It is possible that when scholars argue that people are less religious nowadays, they merely wish to suggest that the latter no longer attend church every week. It is also possible—and this is indicated by the second definition of secularization—that people no longer take for granted what theologians tell them. Whether this accounts for, or rather is an effect of the fact that these theologians tried to formulate the gospel and related dogmas in a more popular way, employing the language of the secular disciplines, is something we do not know for sure. Yet, this also implies that theological discourse, rather than 'religion' has become secularized. Moreover –and this is something indicated by the third definition of secularization– churches and/or networks of clerics, rather than 'religions', were the true foundations of pillar organizations. Surely, as some concluded, the "churches do not have any direct influence on the major decisions of society, but all indicators of religious commitment indicate stability or even increase of religious sensibility."[10] This is precisely the way people have always been 'religious', as Peter Raedts argued. According to him, only with the christianization efforts during the nineteenth century did people start to involve themselves intensely with church activities. Thus, we must realize that the so-called secularization process is actually a return to things as usual in the history of Christianity.[11]

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[9] Luckmann 1967; cf. for recent developments in this area Bailey 1997, 1998, 2002 as well as the journal *Implicit Religion*; whereas Ter Borg 1991 offers a philosophical reflection on the issue, the historiography and anthropology of *Volkskultur* (German) or *volkscultuur* (Dutch) mainly provides textual as well as fieldwork materials on those aspects of culture that remained implicit in old-fashioned and official histories; on the Netherlands, cf. Rooijakkers & Van der Zee 1986, Gijswijt-Hofstra & Frijhoff 1987, Boissevain & Verrips 1989, Roodenburg 1990, Rooijakkers 1994, Watling 1999, Dekker, Roodenburg & Rooijakkers 2000.

[10] Halman & Riis 2003: 3; relevant data for the Netherlands in Dekker 1997, Becker & Vink 1994, Becker, De Hart & Mens 1997, Becker & De Wit 2000.

[11] Raedts 1990; cf. also Van Rooden 1996.

Whereas 'religion' is a concept too vague to be employed within the context of the secularization-thesis,[12] discourse and related social institutions are categories empirical enough to be useful for our own purposes. Yet, even then the question remains in which sense the thesis is relevant for the analysis of the controversy we are dealing with. In the first chapter we observed that, after the second period, literary critics no longer contributed to the polemics. This might allow for the conclusion that to them, even arguments their fellow intellectuals did not seem to be a challenge any longer. However, this does not apply for theologians and critics with ties to church-related institutions. At the very least, we must distinguish here between intellectuals from several different communities. Whereas some critics from the NHK were among the fiercest during the first period, as early as the third period almost all of them had become moderate, if not outright sympathetic towards Vestdijk and Sierksma. Though generally far more moderate, among the intellectuals of the GKN and RKK we do not find any polemical contributions from the third period on. In which sense do all of these facts fit the secularization-thesis? Moreover, some critics from the NHK and the VGKN continued to attack Vestdijk. These two facts cannot be equally covered by our thesis.

The institutional position of intellectuals

A third explanation for the way in which the polemical controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie* developed, concerns the positions which each of the communities of intellectuals identified before it was held within the public sphere in the Netherlands after World War II. To begin with the literary critics, they had always been both at the margins of intellectual life and internally highly divided. To say that there was something of a clash between artists and the breakthrough movement of the 1950s, as Ido Weijers has argued,[13] is to overestimate both the unity of the former and the importance of the latter. With regards to the overall situation in the public sphere, recent studies by Tity de Vries and Jan-Willem Duyvendak have generally focused on the movements that were either of special interest for their own personal development, or have from our point of view come to dominate the intellectual scene.[14] They seem to regard the public the way Habermas did in his study on the structural transformations of the public sphere.[15] He took this public sphere to be a set of relations between intellectuals ending up in a uniform group of people communicating through rational debate. Research indicated that this thesis is highly problem-

[12] For recent overviews of attempts to define 'religion' cf. Platvoet 1990, Asad 1993a, Van der Veer 1996, Platvoet 1999.

[13] Weijers 1991.

[14] De Vries 1996, Duyvendak 1999.

[15] Habermas 1962 in German, 1989 translation in English.

atic. The public never consisted of one uniform community of intellectuals. On the contrary, the public sphere has always already been highly fragmented. And, finally, that debate was rationally conducted, is something that cannot be reasonably defended in the face of past controversies.[16] Whatever the manners governing public meetings,[17] communication in the sense of aiming at mutual understanding has seldom been its objective. And this is confirmed by our observations of the situation in the Netherlands during the period we are studying.

The literary field has always been divided and relations between writers highly inflammatory. Generally speaking, however, till the 1960s the intellectual élites were no less fragmented than anyone else, notably by religious and political affiliations which separated them into groups that were easily identifiable by membership to specific institutions, whether church, political parties or media. This held for three communities which are relevant to our analysis, namely those organized around the RKK, GKN and VGKN. The latter pillar organization marked a serious rift within the Dutch Reformed community, though without shaking the structure completely. Till the 1960s, both the RKK and GKN evolved internally, adapting to criticism from within and successfully meeting the challenges from without.[18] Only after this period, during the 1960s and 1970s, did these two pillar institutions lose their grip on their public. Before that time, the so-called breakthrough movement failed to gain ground among members of the other communities. Originally, this movement was meant as an attempt to mutually refuel socialism and religion, mainly supported by theologians from the NHK.[19] From the early 1960s onwards, an ecumenical trend started, eventually leading to a new super-pillar.[20] Intellectuals from the RKK and GKN joined all kinds of breakthrough institutions. Only members of the VGKN, as well as those of the conservative liberal circles, continued independently from other organizations.[21]

In general, we might conclude that, from the perspective of authority, both literary critics and intellectuals from the breakthrough movement up until the 1960s were likely to regard Vestdijk's argument as a serious threat to their own positions. Their fellows from the pillars either felt secure within their own communities or were welcomed into the breakthrough circles from the 1960s on. However, even when

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[16] Cf. Calhoun 1992, Israël 2001.

[17] Cf. Elias 1978, Burke 1993, Van Vree 1999.

[18] Kuiper 1972, Duffhues, Felling & Roes 1985, Simons and Winkeler 1987, Winkeler 1989, Dekker 1992, Luykx 2000, Kuiper 2002.

[19] Bank 1978, De Keizer 1979, Weijers 1991, Duyvendak 1999.

[20] Ruiter & Smulders 1996: 285-287.

[21] Jongeling 1979, Dijkstra 1998.

formulated in this way, this thesis does not cover all of the polemical contributions made during the period which we are studying. Further refinement is thus required.

A fourth explanation developed here—elaborating on the critique leveled against critics such as Weijers, De Vries and Duyvendak—concerns the position of each intellectual, not only within the public sphere as a whole, but also within each pillar in particular. The same way it's possible to distinguish generally between secure and more vulnerable authoritative positions, we can also separate dominant intellectuals from marginal ones within pillared communities. There are several indicators which might help us to classify each individual whom we must analyse with in this chapter. Bourdieu referred to the university as the primary institution through which to provide people with authority and a dominating position within the hierarchy of intellectuals. However, even if this was the case, this would not exclude the possibility of other important institutions—or even more detailed distinctions—determining the outcome of the struggle for recognition within the field of intellectual production.[22] We can safely argue that on the topic of 'religion', especially during the first two periods of the reception, disciplines like theology and phenomenology of religion were generally regarded as more competent and valid than psychology and literary criticism. It is here that the secularization-thesis again rears its head. During the 1960s, disciplines which had originally been recognized as authoritative on matters of religion lost ground to more worldly ones within the universities.

Certainly, all this might sound highly abstract. When applied to our study of the controversy surrounding Vestdijk's *De toekomst der religie*, we can better begin by identifying the polemical frontiers along which people attempted to either defend or identify their authority before a public that did not seem to have previously accepted their judgments as self-evident. Thus, let us turn to the facts as we analyse each of the major groups evident in the public sphere of the postwar Netherlands. The literary critics, the Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed, breakthrough, and Free Reformed intellectuals will in the following be dealt with consecutively.

Literary and cultural critics

It has been argued that literary critics, as outsiders to the intellectual establishment, are far more polemically inclined than any other group in the field. Especially Weijers, in his study of the conflict between literary critics and members of the breakthrough movement, offers a clear example of this tendency.[23] Yet, as we have seen in previous chapters, it was exactly the latter group of critics that contributed extensively to our controversy. Moreover, Weijers treats literary critics too much as a

[22] For the Netherlands, cf. the early research done by sociologist F. van Heek; Van Heek 1945, Van Heek & others 1958; also Keulemans, Idenburg & Pen 1953.

[23] Weijers 1991.

category distinct from the rest of the intellectual scene; he also underestimates the potential for conflict within the field of literary production itself.

In order to develop a more adequate picture of the literary scene, I will first attempt to identify the networks and magazines that played a role in the polemic, and attempt to locate those who had contributed to it. Secondly, I will indicate the status differences between the institutions and individuals, and suggest how relations of hierarchy triggered polemical attack. As far as I can tell, the position of literary critics is structurally similar to that of cultural critics that neither belonged to established pillar structures, nor could reasonably be counted among the theologians of the breakthrough movement. For this reason, I include these cultural critics in my discussion of the relevant social conditions of their literary counterparts.

Immediately after World War II, the field of literary production was defined in terms of a struggle between reconstruction and experiment.[24] The most challenging creators and critics, formerly organized around *Forum*, did not survive the war experience. Ter Braak committed suicide, Marsman drowned in an attempt to flee to England, and Du Perron died of a heartattack. Their devastating critique of the literary trends that had dominated in the pre-war period left room for new developments and experiments later on. At the same time, however, it allowed post-war critics to fight over the heritage of these forebears. Reconstructive efforts mainly pivoted around the question of what the *Forum*-tradition implied for the contemporary situation. The first problem with which critics struggled was how to create an image of the modern individual; the second issue upon which they focused was the proper relationship between artists and their social environment.

To put things briefly, the very attempt to reconstruct the meaning of pre-war criticism for contemporary problems created space in which to experiment. Many different anwers to these problems now seemed to be available. Novelists and poets began to experiment with new ways of expressing the modern sentiment. Anna Blaman, Gerard Reve and Willem Frederik Hermans are often mentioned among the novelists, whereas Hans Andreus, Remco Campert, Hugo Claus and Lucebert were among the poets referred to by critics.[25] These experiments received their institutional counterparts in publishing houses and a plethora of newly founded journals. *Van Oorschot*, *De Bezige Bij* and *Bert Bakker* were prominent on the publisher's market. Together with smaller enterprises, they also provided for the great number of journals which appeared immediately after the war, such as *Columbus*, *Proloog*, *Het Woord*, *Ad Interim*, *Criterium*, *Podium*, and *Libertinage*.[26] Though identified as being inspired by

[24] Anbeek 1990: 178-179, 1997, Ruiter & Smulders 1996: 279-286.

[25] Anbeek 1986, Goedegebuure & Anbeek 1988: 51-63, Anbeek 1990: chapters 10-11, Weijers 1991, Anbeek 1997.

[26] Bakker 1985, Calis 1993, 1999, 2001.

some explicit and well-established world view, and as such regarded as part of existing pillar organizations, even journals like *De Nieuwe Stem*, *Roeping*, and *Ontmoeting* experimented with new ways of thinking about contemporary issues. It is difficult to see them as merely the successors of pre-war magazines like *De Stem*, *De Gemeenschap*, and *Opwaartsche Wegen*. Just as the role *Roeping* had played before, the newly founded journals explicitly tried to transcend old pillar boundaries. The attempts failed. *De Stem* was not able to get the attention of a public outside of the circle around *Het Humanistisch Verbond* (HV). The public of *Roeping* was limited to members of the RKK, whereas readers of *Ontmoeting* mainly belonged to the GKN (members of the VGKN would soon found their own journals). Yet, the fact that these magazines preferred not to bear the names of older journals was clearly meant to indicate a break with the pre-war period in which the public had been marginalized and cut off from the wider social environment.

Of the journals mentioned above, only some got involved in the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*. This has to do with the fact that magazines like *Columbus* and *Proloog* did not survive the first few years after the war. *Criterium* only allowed Vestdijk to counter an early critique by A. Mankes-Zernike. By means of mergers and new initiatives, editors of these journals did not lose their employments. Paul Rodenko, who had been an editor of *Columbus*, joined *Podium*. The same happened with Hermans. He had been one of the editors of *Criterium*. As such, he got into a fight with Sierksma and J.B. Charles, who were among the main editors of *Podium*. When they left, Hermans did not have any problem with joining the *Podium*-circle. Another former editor of *Criterium*, Hans Gomperts, founded his own journal, *Libertinage*. And between *Podium* and *Libertinage* arose one of the fiercest polemics on *De toekomst der religie*.

Apart from *Podium* and *Libertinage*, also *Ontmoeting*, *Het Woord*, *Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift*, *Vandaag*, *Roeping, Het Boek van Nu*, as well as more cultural critical magazines such as *De Vlam*, *De Vrije Katheder* and *De Nieuwe Stem*, would eventually become involved with the controversy. P.A. Hekstra only criticized GKN as well as the breakthrough theologians for their (possible) way of dealing with Vestdijk. More critical and polemical comments on Vestdijk were published by Hekstra in VGKN magazines such as *Stijl* and *Ruimte*. Marja took issue with the so-called breakthrough theologians in *Het Algemeen Handelsblad* and the *NRC*, triggering a reply by J. Bomhoff. Hans Redeker offered some sympathetic—though highly critical—comments on Vestdijk in *Het Woord*. Polemical contributions on Vestdijk were published by Jeanne van Schaik-Willing and editors of *Roeping*, such as Cornelis Verhoeven and Lambert Tegenbosch. After he was invited to offer his comments on AVRO radio, P. Sterkman published the text of his review in *Het Boek van Nu*. The same held for H. van Praag, who wrote for *De Vlam*. Finally, O. Noordenbos attacked both a Ro-

man Catholic cleric and breakthrough theologians in magazines such as *De Vrije Katheder* and *De Nieuwe Stem*.

Whether arguing for or against Vestdijk's ideas, all of the commentators involved shared a critical—if not polemical—inclination. Why? What was it that—despite their different points of view—all of these critics held in common?

As a literary critic, Hekstra was clearly involved in a kind of authority struggle with the establishment of theologians within his own pillar community.[27] On the other hand, together with his fellow members of the VGKN, he saw equal threats in both the GKN and the theologians of the breakthrough movement.[28] Later in this chapter, I will consider the relationship between Free Reformed intellectuals and the wider public sphere in more detail.

Critics such as Noordenbos, Marja, Redeker, Rodenko and Sierksma shared much in common.[29] All belonged to what was called the regional initiatives (either from Utrecht, Groningen or Friesland; in any case outside of Amsterdam, the cultural capital of the Netherlands), which fueled the cultural debate in the postwar Netherlands.[30] Noordenbos, Marja and Sierksma studied theology, though they did not count themselves among the believers. Redeker was a student of philosophy, whereas Rodenko was very much interested in psychology. Their position within the field of literary criticism was marginal compared to that of the intellectuals that had studied in Amsterdam and belonged to its inner circles. Even though they participated in new initiatives, each of these critics stayed outside of the institutional-political scene. Noordenbos, Redeker, Marja were (board)members of the HV (as was D.H. Prins).[31] This association had been founded in order to unite those who neither belonged to any church nor aimed at the establishment of a political party. Institutionally, they continued the ideals of the NVB, while refusing to support breakthrough theologians and socialists in the PvdA.[32] And given their opposition towards the political institutionalization of socialism, as well as the role played by theologians in that process, they fiercely rejected the theologians' criticism of Vestdijk's arguments on religion. Whatever their potential disagreement with Vestdijk, they preferred to emphasize

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[27] Literary critics do not figure in the historiography of the VGKN; cf. Jongeling 1979.

[28] The contributions of Hekstra and fellow critics like M. Siesling and D.J. Buwalda to magazines like *Stijl* and *Ruimte* indicates this; for the conflict in the field of theology, cf. Brinkman 1983: part 2.

[29] On Noordenbos cf. Trapman 1999: 103-122; on Marja cf. Van Delden 1985, Hazeu 1985; on Redeker cf. Bakker 1986: 366-369; on Rodenko cf. Calis 1993, 1999, 2001, Hilberdink 2002; on Sierksma cf. Jenner 1982, Calis 1993, 1999, Delvigne 2000.

[30] Bakker 1985: 229.

[31] Kuilman 2001: 22-24.

[32] Van Baalen 1998.

their common interest in religion, and contested the authority of theology as the only legitimate arena in which to speak out on the issue. As we have seen in previous chapters, especially Noordenbos, Marja and Sierksma were quite explicit about that. And whereas Vestdijk's counter-critiques of the theologians were not published in other media, Sierksma offered his friend the opportunity to have them published in *Podium*. Similarly, Hermans agreed to publish a response by Vestdijk in *Criterium*.

Yet, it is far too easy to conclude from this that there was anything like a fixed faultline between breakthrough intellectuals on the one hand, and 'humanist' literary critics on the other. The latter can only be placed under the same label for the sake of convenience; internal conflicts prevailed over polemical controversies with so-called outsiders. At the end of the 1940s, a fierce polemic occurred between Rodenko (and Hermans) on the one hand, and Sierksma on the other (each of their contributions were published in *Podium*).[33] Later Sierksma joined Hermans in his attack on J.B. Charles (former editor of *Podium*, contributing to *De Nieuwe Stem*) in the early 1950s.[34] A humanist like Kwee Swan Liat (member of the HV) joined progressive theologians in their polemics against Sierksma in *Vox Theologica* at the end of the 1950s. Intellectuals such as P. Smits (editor of *Kerk & Wereld*), on the other hand, referred positively to Vestdijk and Sierksma in their debates with fellow theologians (*In de Waagschaal*) in the late 1950s. And contrary to his earlier support of Sierksma, Marja attacked his friend in a review for *In de Waagschaal* in the early 1960s.[35]

Other opponents in the field of literary criticism supported Vestdijk's critique of the theologians as well. G.H. Barneveld attacked a Roman Catholic cleric as well as certain breakthrough theologians for their polemics against Vestdijk. His attack on Father J. van Heugten can be explained by the fact that both were intimately involved in the polemics between the Amsterdam Student Corps and the Catholic student association *Thomas* (of which van Heugten was president at the time when Barneveld was a student).[36] Barneveld's scorn for breakthrough theologians had to do with their cultural and political activities, as well as their dominant positions within the PvdA. Although he—along with Gomperts—disagreed with Vestdijk on some important topics in *De toekomst der religie*, both were moderate in their critique. Yet, as we have seen, their reviews triggered polemical attacks by Sierksma, and Vestdijk himself failed to restrain himself against Gomperts. The question to be answered is why? What did Vestdijk and Sierksma have in common with the other critics which might account for their polemical attitude?

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[33] Delvigne 2000: 66-67; cf. also Calis 1993: 289-290, 301-306, 321-324.

[34] Delvigne 2000: 69-72.

[35] Hazeu 1985: 117.

[36] Ligtenberg & Polak 1990.

Even though Gomperts and Vestdijk seemed to belong to the same area of cultural activity (the latter being even more prolific as a creative artist), there still existed a kind of hierarchy. According to Ton Anbeek, Gomperts was unparalleled as a literary critic during the first decades after the war.[37] To begin with, more than any other intellectual Gomperts was recognized as one of the foremost heirs to the heritage of *Forum*, especially the tradition of literary criticism begun by Ter Braak.[38] Surely, Vestdijk's reputation had been built up by the opportunities which Ter Braak offered him to publish in *Forum*, as well as the latter's positive reviews during his lifetime, and the well known essay *De duivelskunstenaar* ('The magician').[39] Yet, during the war, it became clear that he did not feel comfortable with the thought of having a friend who apparently did not want to make any compromise with the Nazis. Vestdijk himself, though he'd been taken hostage, did not dare to stand up against the Germans during the rest of the war.[40] It is likely that he felt vulnerable to criticism by somebody who—apart from being persecuted under the Nazi regime—could convincingly count the master among his mentors.[41] Since Gomperts had defended Ter Braak in *Propria Cures* against attacks by the Roman Catholic literary critic Anton van Duinkerken, they met each other frequently. His contribution to *Propria Cures* indicates a second significant factor which contributed to Gomperts's reputation. Secondly, having been a student in Amsterdam and, more importantly, a member of the Amsterdam Student Corps, his network created a significant advantage over people from the provinces (mostly in Groningen and Friesland). It was only after the war that Vestdijk got involved in the cultural scene in Amsterdam, or, as he himself called it, a "mondane artist's life".[42] Jeanne van Schaik-Willing introduced him into this world. Through her, he met with his first wife, Henriëtte van Eyck. However, instead of going to live with her in Amsterdam, he stayed in Doorn, far away from his fellow artists. Only after long periods of either hard work at home or treatment in mental hospitals, did he find the time to visit his wife.[43] Thirdly, at the time that Gomperts entered into our controversy, he just had replaced Vestdijk as the main literary critic of *Het Parool*. The latter left after a serious conflict with the editors of the newspaper.[44] The fact that they did not publish his response to the attacks of H. de Vos—to whom we will return later—might have played a role. Anyhow, even

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[37] Anbeek 1997: 24.

[38] Von der Dunk 2002: 86.

[39] Anbeek 1990: 163, 1993: 154, Van Dijk 1994: 118.

[40] Visser 1987: 271-277.

[41] Calis 1999: 341-342.

[42] Visser 1987: 350.

[43] Visser 1987: 340, 389.

[44] Visser 1987: 371-372.

though Ben Stroman invited him to write for *Algemeen Handelsblad*,[45] it is difficult to imagine that his relationship with *Het Parool* and Gomperts was not influenced by recent developments.

Apart from the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*, Vestdijk's letter to Hermans in another case with Gomperts offers a second example of his attitude towards the latter in this period. In 1950, Gomperts published a review in *Het Parool* of *Het petitionnement*, a novella written under the name of Max Croiset. Instead of Croiset, Gomperts suspected Vestdijk to be its real author; and far from being a masterpiece debut, according to Gomperts it was only a mystification. In *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Vestdijk denied that he had authored the novella. Gomperts, however, did not believe him. Hermans offered to attack Gomperts in Vestdijk's stead. Vestdijk agreed, and emphasized that the article could "not be dirty enough".[46] Eventually, Gomperts publicly admitted that he had been wrong and that Croiset, rather than Vestdijk, had indeed written the novella.[47]

Yet, whatever the competition between Vestdijk and Gomperts to gain the status of prime literary critic in the Netherlands, Gomperts's position was even more threatening to Sierksma. The latter desparately tried to enter into the cultural scene of Amsterdam. In the late 1940s, attempts were successful, and the editors were able to inaugurate what they called the 'Podium Building', somewhere in the Jordaan.[48] Yet, one of the editors, who was happy to leave Amsterdam soon after, admitted in private correspondance that he felt ambivalent about *Podium*. On the one hand he was proud to have been part of it. And he admired the "intellectual exercises" by Sierksma and Rodenko. Yet, on the other hand, he had always had the feeling "that they were living above their means, that they were playing a game."[49] Whereas the status difference between the cultural scene of Amsterdam and that of the province posed a first threat to a positive sense of self-identity among the editors of *Podium*, a second problem was increasing the pressure on Sierksma *cum suis*.

After Gomperts quit his activities for *Criterium*, he founded *Libertinage* together with W.F. van Leeuwen. The two editors knew each other from the Corps. Moreover, the father of Van Leeuwen—the director of a yeast and meths factory in Delft—served as the mecaenas of the magazine. He also financially guaranteed the by then famous publisher *Van Oorschot* in Amsterdam if subscriptions declined.[50] *Podium*, on the other hand, had problems finding a proper publishing house almost right from

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[45] Visser 1987: 372.

[46] Delvigne 1997: 61.

[47] Visser 1987: 388.

[48] Calis 1993: 231-232.

[49] Calis 1993: 350-351.

[50] Calis 1999: 375.

the start. For years, the editors ran from one to another. Founded as an illegal paper during the war, the editors contacted *Van Gorcum* in Assen after liberation. For two years this company published the magazine. At the end of this period, the printing quality did not satisfy Sierksma any longer.[51] Talks with *Proloog* were initiated in order to arrange a merger. From the side of the latter magazine, Marja took the initiative.[52] Apart from being interested in extending their public, the people at *Podium* were mainly focused on their publisher, *Contact* in Amsterdam. The merger failed. Yet, when *Proloog* finished its activities soon after, *Contact* was prepared to sign a contract with *Podium*. After a year, however, the publisher was disappointed with the profits. The editors either had to agree on a change of layout, or look for another publishing house. Sierksma then decided to initiate talks with *Criterium*. He knew that a merger would be difficult, but business with *Meulenhoff* would be promising for the image of his journal. Yet, as was to be expected, the editors could not come to an agreement. And as soon as *De Driehoek* in 's-Gravenland showed interest for *Podium*, Sierksma decided to cut off talks and continue on his own. The cooperation lasted from 1948 till 1950.[53]

It was exactly at the time that the editors of *Podium* struggled to get their magazine pubished that Sierksma began his polemical attacks on Gomperts and another critic belonging to the latter's circle, G.H. Barneveld. The latter published a critique of *De toekomst der religie* in *Propria Cures*, as well as *Libertinage*. Moreover, like J.H.W. Veenstra—another literary critic from this circle who often wrote for *Het Parool*—Barneveld contributed to a volume published for Vestdijk's fiftieth birthday in which some highly sympathetic comments on both the author and his work were made. Barneveld allowed himself only one critical remark. Yet, for Sierksma, this was reason enough to attack. According to me, this was not just because he disagreed with Barneveld (and Gomperts). Without taking into account the difficulties with which Sierksma had to deal at that time, it is difficult to understand his aggression.

Whereas Sierksma—along with Hermans—often clashed with Gomperts,[54] Vestdijk did not seem to be interested in a polemical exchange with the latter. In general, he did not have much to complain about regarding the reception of his essay by critics belonging to the Gomperts circle. Ten years after their controversy, Josine Meyer wrote a sympathetic critique of Vestdijk's arguments on religion in *Tirade*.

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[51] Calis 1993: 237.

[52] Calis 1993: 240.

[53] Calis 1993: 360-366.

[54] Delvigne 1997: 61-62, 2000: 70; Calis 1999: 360, 378-379, 2001: 269-270, 278-279, 333-336.

Her closest intellectual mentor was Jacques de Kadt.[55] He had been one of the other moving forces behind *Libertinage*, generally regarded as the precursor of *Tirade* in the *Forum*-tradition.[56]

P. Sterkman did not belong to any of the circles which I have outlined thus far. Rather than a literary critic, Sterkman was a philosopher who participated in liberal-protestant circles that still dominated the 'neutral' or 'independent'[57] broadcastcorporation *AVRO* in the early years after World War II. It was usually the highly regarded critic P.H. Ritter jr. who reviewed literary work for the *AVRO*-microphone.[58] For this special occasion, however, he invited Sterkman to comment on an essay that went far beyond the competence of ordinary literary critics. Yet, whereas Ritter had a firm reputation within the field of criticism, of Sterkman only a few interventions in the public sphere can be traced. His review of *De toekomst der religie* was one of three contributions for the book program of *AVRO*.[59] Sociologically speaking, Sterkman was only a marginal intellectual. In accordance with the hypothesis I developed throughout this study, it should come as no surprise that Sterkman allowed himself a few polemical remarks. Ritter, on the other hand, offered the readers of *Het Boek van Nu* a highly sympathetic interview with Vestdijk.[60]

The only literary critic with whom I have not dealt till now is Jeanne van Schaik-Willing. She was a close friend of Vestdijk's. As we have seen, she was the one who introduced him to Henriëtte van Eyck, who soon after became his wife. His friendship with Jeanne remained, as correspondence between the two clearly shows.[61] Vestdijk would dedicate his essay *Het eeuwige telaat* ('Eternal Belatedness') to her.[62] She contributed to a collection of essays edited by Max Nord upon the occasion of Vestdijk's fiftieth birthday.[63] Vestdijk, in his turn, attempted to boost her reputation within the literary scene. He even called her the "Virginia Woolf of the Netherlands."[64] And she indeed gained a reputation. She wrote several novels, of which one together with Vestdijk.[65] She was awarded several times for her oeuvre. She published

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[55] Van der Burg 1983: 159-161, 163-170, Calis 1999: 359-360; on De Kadt, cf. Havenaar 1990, Pels 1993.

[56] Bakker 1985: 367, Anbeek 1990: 244.

[57] Hillen & Arens 1998.

[58] Van Herpen 1982.

[59] Van Herpen 1982: 242, 249, 258, 308.

[60] Ritter 1947.

[61] Visser 1987: 349.

[62] Vestdijk 1947.

[63] Van Schaik-Willing 1948.

[64] Hartmans 2002: 108-109.

[65] Van Schaik-Willing & Vestdijk 1947.

in *De Gids*, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, *Critisch Bulletin*, and sometimes, being a Catholic, in the *Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift*. Only her contacts with the latter magazine might have been a point of discussion with Vestdijk. Maurice Roelants was one of the editors. The latter had been involved in *Forum*-activities, until he got into a conflict with Ter Braak over the publication of a "pornographic" story. According to most commentators, tensions between the secular and Roman Catholic—between the Northern and the Southern—Netherlands eventually announced the end of the most influential literary critical magazines that were published shortly before the war.[66] Whereas Ter Braak continued writing for *Groot Nederland*,[67] Roelants joined *Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift* and was an editor from 1946 till 1952.[68] In precisely this magazine, she made her polemical comments on Vestdijk. Whereas the other magazines accounted for her status in the field of literary production, *Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift* did not have the reputation that other periodicals had, and this clearly put Roelants in a marginal position compared to the status of Vestdijk as an heir of *Forum*. Moreover, the magazine's public clearly differed from the public she wrote for in the Northern Netherlands. It might well be that in Flanders she was a stranger in her own Catholic country. Attacking Vestdijk could have been very helpful in establishing her status among both Flemish artists and their public. Whereas *Podium*, the magazine with which Vestdijk was associated during the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*, was notorious for its polemical style,[69] *Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift* preferred to include every literary eruption and offer a general collection of Flemish artistic creativity.[70]

The case of Schaik-Willing shows how important immediate social conditions can be for the way in which people react to things with which they are faced. Even a friend can become an opponent if the public requires it. Certainly, Schaik-Willing had been a Catholic convert. One of her spiritual leaders had been M. Schoenmaekers, "an important philosopher and defendant of esoteric Catholicis," as she would say.[71] The episcopacy, however, banned the kind of mysticism for which he advocated and Schoenmakers himself was excommunicated.[72] He was also one of the "para-philosophers" whom Cornelis Verhoeven recognized as inspiring.[73] Much like Schaik-Willing, Verhoeven contributed to the polemics surrounding Vestdijk. The

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[66] Oversteegen 1969: 375-376.

[67] Van Dijk 1994: 52-55.

[68] Bakker 1985: 290.

[69] Calis 1993: ch. 3 and 5.

[70] Bakker 1985: 288-289.

[71] Schaik-Willing 1977: 59.

[72] De Jager 1992: 11-12.

[73] Verhoeven 1973: 40-49.

same was true for the art historian Bernard Majorick—who wrote for *Nieuw Vlaams Tijdschrift*[74] and Lambert Tegenbosch, who was together with Verhoeven one of the editors of *Roeping*.[75] Even though they were only loosely connected with Catholic organizations, the magazines for which these critics wrote remained too closely associated with them to be recognized by contemporaries as creative leaders in the field of literary critical production.[76]

Schaik-Willing, Verhoeven, as well as Tegenbosch—a fellow editor of *Roeping*—are intermediate figures; they fit somewhere between literary criticism and the Roman Catholic pillar structure. The intellectuals with which we shall deal in the next part of this chapter clearly belonged to the latter.

The Roman Catholics

As previously mentioned, literary and critical journals such as *De Gemeenschap* and *Roeping* played a marginal role within the Catholic intellectual community. These magazines were founded by the younger generation during the 1920s in order to create a platform for radical criticism of the pillarization process, which culminated in the foundation of a Catholic university in Nijmegen. This new generation wished to cross borders with the outside world. Artists and intellectuals from other communities were permitted to publish in these Catholic magazines.[77] And the latter gained a public far beyond the one limited by pillar boundaries. In this way Gomperts was able to counter the attack of Anton van Duinkerken on Ter Braak in *De Gemeenschap*. On the other hand, Van Duinkerken remembered, during his studies at the seminary, he did not dare openly read his favorite magazine *Roeping*. His mother provided him with copies, carefully wrapped in the laundry she sent him.[78] And even lay intellectuals such as Gerard Brom, one of the founders of the Catholic University and a professor of literary studies, did not wish to get involved in any way with the two journals.[79] According to him, the younger generation was far too radical and limited itself to a small élite of intellectuals within the Catholic community. These intellectuals did not understand, according to Brom, that their style of arguing could have devastating consequences for the future of Catholicism itself. As we will later see, younger intellectuals such as K. Schilder and K.H. Miskotte would receive the same criticism when they raised their voice against 'the establishment'.[80]

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[74] Calis 1993: 156.

[75] Bakker 1985: 141.

[76] Anbeek 1997.

[77] Luykx 2000: 29-30.

[78] Van der Plas 2000: 52, 54.

[79] Luykx 2000: 141-142.

[80] Harinck 1994.

However, as sociologist Herman Bakvis summarized the position of these critical voices, even though this rather amorphous group—often referred to as an 'undercurrent' in Dutch Catholic life—might not have caused any immediate change in public opinion, its activity had nevertheless long-term consequences.[81] The threat of imminent war changed the attitude of some leading Catholics. Together with Van Duinkerken and others, Brom agreed to join the *Comité van Waakzaamheid*, which was established in 1936 by Ter Braak and Du Perron in order to counter the spirit of National Socialism.[82] The humanist H.J. Pos and the socialist Jan Romein participated as well. Shortly thereafter, however, Catholic political leaders as well as the episcopacy urged Van Duinkerken *cum suis* to keep away from this "communist cell". Ordinary Catholics might after all get easily confused and develop doubts about their membership of Catholic organizations in general. One after the other gave in, leaving the *Comité*.[83] Yet, as soon as the war ended, some Catholics joined the initiatives of the NVB as well as the PvdA and participated with their own *Katholieke Werkgemeenschap*. Even the Bishop's Mandement of 1954 failed to end these activities. This shift became even more pronounced when the 'undercurrent' became dominant not only in politics but also in the Church itself, particularly in many of the seminaries as well as the theological faculty at the University of Nijmegen.[84]

Whereas the literary critics had early on indicated directions, in the end, intellectuals with university employment would take the lead. They would mediate the increasing role of lay people within the community. The leading position of both theology and philosophy of morals within the hierarchy of disciplines would be substituted by the more secular approaches of pedagogy, psychology and psychiatry. The role of the latter in the advisory boards of the bishopric would steadily increase during the 1950s, and eventually become dominant during the 1960s and 1970s.[85] Yet, even though the progressive theologians and intellectuals were influential, the church leaders played an active role in the process. Whereas the early historiography interpreted the Bishop's Mandement of 1954 as a serious blow to dissenting groups within the Catholic community, detailed research indicates that already at that time a "silent revolution" was taking place. The Mandement was only supported by a small majority of the clerics.[86] And, as soon as Bernard Alfrink became cardinal in the Nether-

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[81] Bakvis 1981: 98.

[82] Luykx 2000: 118-121, 142-143.

[83] Luykx 2000: 121-127.

[84] Bakvis 1981: 98.

[85] Luykx 2000: 192-197; cf. also the historiography starting with Thurlings 1971 and continued by Coleman 1978, Bakvis 1981, Duffhues, Felling & Roes 1985, Simons & Winkeler 1987, Winkeler 1989.

[86] Spiertz 1994, 1995, 1996.

lands and a young generation of bishops was appointed, new developments were eventually even supported by the hierarchy.[87]

With these developments in mind, the question is whether or not it is possible to account for the polemical contributions by intellectuals from the Catholic community. The answer, I believe, is in the affirmative. For that, however, it is especially important to distinguish between the period before 1960 on the one hand, and the one after 1960 on the other. In the first period, the difference between literary critics and clerics teaching at the university is dominant. In the second period, it is mainly the difference between literary critics and philosophers on the one hand, and psychologists on the other, which is striking.

The first polemical contribution to the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie* came from the ordained priest, J. van Heugten (1890-1963). Though a cleric, his reputation was largely built from his work as a critic for Jesuit magazines such as *Boekenschouw* and *Katholiek Cultureel Tijdschrift Streven*.

Van Heugten definitely did not belong to the 'undercurrent' of critical voices that began to dominate Catholic public opinion. He never contributed to progressive papers such as *De Gemeenschap* or *Roeping*. According to Van Duinkerken, Father Van Heugten was typical of the intellectuals working within the paradigm that attempted to mediate between received dogma and the everyday experience of educated lay people.[88] This was a method of prescription and example, rather than one of empirical research. He definitely did not employ the new methods of phenomenological and systematic psychological description of literary and religious activities.

However, the question is whether a conservative spirit within some specific pillar community is enough to account for his polemical attack on Vestdijk. As we will later see, adjusting to recent developments within scientific disciplines does not necessarily moderate one's attitude towards outsiders. This becomes clear when we compare Van Heugten's review of Vestdijk to that of Cornelis Verhoeven. The latter—an editor of *Roeping*—was closely associated with one of the main protagonists of the phenomenological movement, namely Bernard Delfgaauw.[89] Delfgaauw frequently contributed to the magazine. Yet, these contacts did not prevent Verhoeven from being highly polemical. On the other hand, this does not imply that adherents of the phenomenological method necessarily react agressively towards those who employ other methods or hold other beliefs. As we will later see, the Catholic tradition offers several examples of intellectuals who received extensive training in the application of

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[87] Luykx 2000: 189-192; on Alfrink cf. Van Schaik 1997.

[88] Van Duinkerken 1954: 11, 13.

[89] On Delfgaauw, cf. Bakker & Hubbeling 1982, Struyker Boudier 1991a: 171-181, Bartels 1997: 284-297.

phenomenological methods, yet who were highly sympathetic in their attitudes towards Vestdijk and Sierksma.

Thus, if we must decide whether paradigms, or the social status of the people involved, have the most explanatory value in the case of polemics, the examples which I have given suggest the latter. In their case, employing different paradigms had more to do with living during different periods of time. If we ask ourselves what they had in common, we are forced to conclude that Van Heugten did not belong to the inner circle of Cartholic authorities throughout his whole life, nor did Verhoeven during the first decades of his carrier.

Critics have highlighted the positive character traits of both Van Heugten and Verhoeven. According to Van Duinkerken, his friend Van Heugten was not a man who was used to receiving attention. Instead, he used to let people have it their way. His authority did not impose itself on others, but spontaneously flowed from his presence, as Van Duinkerken remembered. Students always liked to cooperate with him and his readers never felt limited by his critiques to develop their own opinions. At times he engaged in debates, but the shy smile with which he received scorn and derision convinced the public that they were right.[90] Something similar could be said of Verhoeven. Critics mention the soft voice with which he used to speak in public. His style of writing was also cautious and careful, as if he continuously warned himself not to be rash in his judgments of the object which he wished to approach and describe. His method consisted of trying time and again, from different angles, to describe things of which he admitted he could not say everything. On the contrary, he acknowledged that every single thing was intimately connected and associated with so many other things that every attempt to define it must be taken as a form of violence against something that is ultimately inexplicable.[91]

Yet, if all this is true, what then should we make of their scorn for Vestdijk's arguments? Another story about Van Heugten tells that he in fact did not accept any attack from students. He even urged the board of the Catholic student association to dismiss the leaders of the movement whom he felt were threatening his authority.[92] And Verhoeven, in his turn, became well known for his controversy with Hermans and Frits Staal on issues raised by Wittgenstein.[93]

As I have previously suggested, I believe that we must take a look at the social status of these two intellectuals if we wish to find an explanation for their polemical attacks against Vestdijk. Van Heugten was never appointed to a university or seminary. And even though he was one of the editors of *Streven*, his activities were lim-

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[90] Van Duinkerken 1954: 14-15.

[91] Jager 1982, Nagel 1993, Vergeer 1996, Derkx 2001, Schomakers 2003.

[92] Joosten 1964: 119.

[93] Struyer Boudier 1982b: 4-5.

ited to literary criticism. At the time he got involved with the controversies regarding Vestdijk, Hermans and Staal, Verhoeven was an editor of *Roeping*, a magazine of literary and cultural developments. Only in the 1980s was he recognized as one of the foremost literary critics and philosophers of his age. He got the P.C. Hooft award for his oeuvre and was appointed professor of Ancient Philosophy and Metaphysics at the University of Amsterdam.

As I have been arguing, intellectuals that do not belong to the leading circles of their communities tend to be more aggressive towards those who are perceived as a threat to their positions as spokespersons for a certain public. Yet, this critique could as easily turn against the fellow Catholics. At the end of the 1950s—in the same magazine in which Van Heugten published his review—Th. Govaart attacked all of those critics who rejected Vestdijk's arguments on religion, and admired Vestdijk's gift as a writer. Here we see the progressive 'undercurrent', though it was still made up of outsiders within the community of Catholics, feeling free to associate with intellectuals outside of the community itself. Something similar, though in a different period, is observable by clerics such as A. van der Wey during the 1960s and 1970s. The distance which Van der Wey felt between himself and the mainstream of Catholic critics was great enough to prompt him to use outsiders in order to attack his fellow theologians in—at that time—progressive newspapers such as *De Tijd* and *Trouw*.

Thus, with respect to the problem of outsiders within the Catholic community, we might conclude that in the period before the 1960s a conservative literary critic like Van Heugten preferred to attack Vestdijk, whereas the more progressive Govaart took his fellow Catholics as objects for his verdicts. On the other hand, during the period after 1960 a progressive like Verhoeven felt triggered to scorn Vestdijk, whereas Van der Wey later preferred to criticize Catholic theologians even by positively invoking the theories which Vestdijk had been putting forward.

Yet, what about the intellectuals who played a more significant role within the Catholic world? As we have seen in the case of Van Duinkerken and other literary critics, their magazines remained in the margins of the general field of cultural production. As early as the nineteenth century, Struyker Boudier argues, the reputation of theology and philosophy grew after they developed into separate disciplines, to be distinguished from the arts as well as the other sciences. The cultural paper *De Katholiek* turned into a theological paper— dubbed the *Studia Catholica*—in the early 1920s, after it was adopted by the Theological Faculty of Nijmegen University as its medium. Only in 1960 did the theological experts show any interest in a lay audience when they renamed the magazine *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*.

Especially Jesuits and Dominicans attempted to raise the general level of contributions to dogmatic thinking.[94] The former had established their position in the media during the ninetheenth century through their magazine *Studiën*. This, however, was a generally religious and cultural critical paper. Shortly before the war, the theological and philosophical faculties of the Jesuit Seminaries in the Netherlands issued *Bijdragen* to allow for more specialized contributions to Catholic thinking. After the war, *Studiën* changed its name into *Katholiek Cultureel Tijdschrift*, soon to be called simply *Streven*, being the Dutch counterpart of the Belgian paper *Streven* which had been established fifteen years before. Since 1930, the Belgian Dominicans had their own paper, namely *Thomistisch Tijdschrift*, later renamed *Kultuurleven*. This magazine, however, did not offer any thorough philosophical articles. Thus, just like the Jesuits, they founded the *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie* at the end of the 1930s to offer the experts space in which to publish their contributions. During the first decades, this magazine would generally be recognized as highly important to the development of Catholic thinking.[95]

Against this background, we must consider the status of J.H. Walgrave (1911-1986).[96] Though he did not agree with Vestdijk's arguments, he avoided polemical attack. His status as a leading intellectual was already well established at the time the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie* was launched. First of all, his contribution appeared in *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*, the magazine of which he was chief editor and to which he of course frequently contributed. Secondly, he was one of the foremost representatives of the so-called 'Leuven School' of Dominican philosophers, founded by cardinal D.J. Mercier in the late nineteenth century.[97] Concentrated in the Higher Institute for Philosophy (HIW, *Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte*), this tendency within the Catholic intellectual scene took neither tradition nor the authority of the Church as its point of reference. It even managed to emancipate itself from theological tutelage, advocating a purely rational science of its own.[98] Not surprisingly, there was a lot of freedom for thought and difference of opinion, along with an openness to scientific developments in physics, biology and psychology—all of which were taken to be disciplines that posed important challenges to theology and philosophy.[99] The members of the 'Leuven School' tried to apply the insights derived from other disciplines to political science, sociology and economics.[100] Thirdly, Walgrave

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[94] Struyker Boudier 1991a: 13.

[95] De Clercq 2000: 17, 25-27.

[96] On Walgrave, cf. Struyker Boudier 1986: 93-100, 170-174.

[97] Ter Meulen 1988: 13-16.

[98] Sassen 1960: 117.

[99] Sassen 1960: 118.

[100] Sassen 1960: 124.

played an important role in the movement known as *Katholieke Actie*. This initiative, which was supported by some progressive clerics, was meant to encourage lay people to involve themselves more closely in church activities.[101] Walgrave himself emphasized that it was absolutely necessary to encourage lay people to play a more important role within the church. Only through them was it possible to keep in touch with the outside world. And though their critical attitudes were sometimes "unpleasant,"[102] lay people had to be frequently consulted by theologians and church leaders in order to help them formulate a policy.

Yet, whatever his activities in favor of developments that would change hierarchies within the Catholic community, according to Walgrave clerics needed to remain in control of the people—the same way that philosophy was necessary to keep control over other, more secular disciplines. Institutionally, then, his approach was conservative. And even though it was still dominant during the late 1940s and early 1950s, thereafter more progressive intellectuals would successfully challenge the status quo. Especially during the 1960s, secular disciplines such as sociology and psychology would gain ground within the theological faculties of the Catholic universities. At the same time, Catholic philosophy would increasingly be practiced at state universities. A clear example of the latter development was the growing influence of Delfgaauw, who had been a student of H.J. Pos at the University of Amsterdam, and taught there till 1960 when he became a professor of philosophy at Groningen University. It would be interesting to see whether, or in which sense, these circumstances determined the heated debates that arose within the *Vereeniging voor Thomistische Wijsbegeerte* ('Society for Thomistic Philosophy').[103] In any case, Delfgaauw is regarded as having launched a definitive blow to the tradition of the 'Leuven School', while developing the phenomenological method for philosophy.[104]

It is possible to consider W.A.M. Luijpen (1922-1980) as one of the last representatives of the old philosophical tradition.[105] Even though he was an Augustinian rather than a Dominican, he had studied in Leuven. And as we have seen in his contribution to our controversy, he still regarded philosophy as the queen of all sciences. Soon after his studies at the HIW, he became a teacher in Eindhoven and visiting professor at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Only in the late 1960s did he receive appointments to the universities of Tilburg and Delft. At the time in which he attacked Vestdijk and Sierksma, he was young and lacked an established position among his fellow philosophers. According to my theory, the social condi-

[101] Luykx 1978.

[102] Cf. Simons & Winkeler 1987: 242.

[103] Struyker Boudier & Struyker Boudier 1984.

[104] Sassen 1960: 172, Struyker Boudier 1982a: 21-22.

[105] On Luypen, cf. Sassen 1960: 176-177, Struyker Boudier 1987: 107-117.

tions to which Luijpen was subject did not favor a sympathetic treatment of the arguments offered by opponents who advocated a psychological approach to religious phenomena.

Whereas the authority of the 'Leuven School' was questioned during the 1950s, and Luijpen was not able to save its position, the University of Nijmegen took the lead in extending scholarly activities within the Catholic community. The HIW had favored these developments, but the intellectuals of Nijmegen continued by subverting the traditional hierarchy between philosophy and the more secular disciplines.[106]

In order to secure the position of the clergy, the episcopacy had ordered the foundation of a Catholic university in the early 1920s. Ironically, however, some of the most progressive intellectuals were involved in the process. Gerard Brom and Johannes Hoogveld played a decisive role. And to indicate their position within the Catholic community, it is worthwhile to mention that both, along with Titus Brandsma—one of the first professors of philosophy in Nijmegen—joined the *Comité van Waakzaamheid* in 1936.[107] After World War II, Nijmegen, guided by Brom and L.J. Rogier, would become the most important catalyst of lay emancipation.[108] Whatever the objections made by the clerics, in 1952 Van Duinkerken was appointed as a successor of Brom at the chair of general literature and Dutch literature in particular, even though he had to renounce his membership of the PvdA.[109] The trend towards secularization would become more powerful with the establishment of the medical faculty in 1951, and the faculties of mathematics and physics in 1957, which were soon followed by the establishment of an independent social faculty in 1964. Moreover, scientific disciplines would become increasingly fragmented, and research would become increasingly professionalized.[110] The most significant result of all this was the shift from theology and morality towards mental health psychology, along with intensive treatment in psychiatric hospitals.[111]

The most prominent representative of the tendencies just indicated was H.M.M. (Han) Fortmann (1912-1970), a secular priest who from 1956 until his death was a professor of pastoral and cultural psychology at Nijmegen University.[112] Together with the members of the so-called 'Utrecht School' he would become an inspiring and one of the most important spokespersons on matters concerning mental health.[113]

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[106] For a general overview, cf. Struyker Boudier 1991ab, Brabers 1998, Schreuder 1998.

[107] Luykx 2000: 119-120.

[108] Rogier & De Rooy 1953; cf. also Bornewasser 1985: 64-65, 81-82, Brabers 1998: 304-306.

[109] Brabers 1998: 382-383.

[110] Brabers 1998: 282-283.

[111] Cf. Berger & Janssen 1980, Abma 1983, Ter Meulen 1988, Westhoff 1996.

[112] On Fortmann, cf. Van Gennip 1973, Ter Meulen 1988: 149-171, Westhoff 1996: 309-317.

[113] Weijers 1991.

By this he definitely did not pretend to offer a theologogical or specifically religious conception of man. Rather he focused on the ways in which pastors should take care of human beings who found themselves in problematic situations. His approach showed some striking similarities with that of non-Catholic psychologists of the same period, especially as employed by J.H. van den Berg.[114] Both represented a development in the direction of an increasing freedom from Church authority for the arts and scientific disciplines.[115] Surely, psychology became more important and was applied to areas such as education, mental health care, social services of the governent, pedogogical institutes, and emergency centers.[116] Continuing the line started by Hoogveld—who before the war had founded the empirically oriented study center for youth education—and together with F.J.J. Buytendijk, J.J.G. Prick[117] and his own student H.J.L van Luijk,[118] Fortmann attempted to fully integrate the results of psychological research into a religiously inspired worldview. Whereas most Catholics did not include any findings of the social sciences into their concepts, the scholars mentioned faithfully tried to come to terms with an approach that might easily be taken as a danger to dogmatic systems.[119] Yet, soon after, psychologists understood that the truth claims of religion could not be saved by this approach. Either they continued along empirical lines, or they turned psychology itself into a kind of religion.[120]

Fortmann represented a period of transformation in which intellectuals attempted to reformulate religious inspirations in order to make them seem respectable to outsiders. For these purposes, they employed a wide range of different media, from articles in newspapers, to lectures to the educated public, to highly specialized books. Within his own community, Fortmann's position remained unquestioned. And at the time in which he contributed to the reception of Vestdijk's essay, his authority was widely acknowledged and his books regarded to be well informed, reliable, and useful as guides for psychologists and psychiatrists as well as politicians alike.[121]

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[114] Van Belzen 1997: 75.

[115] Schreuder 1998: 204.

[116] Eisenga 1978: 180.

[117] Westhoff 1996: 280-282.

[118] Struyker Boudier 1985: 128-129.

[119] Berger & Janssen 1980: 28-30, Westhoff 1996: 279-280.

[120] Berger & Janssen 1980: 30-34, Schreuder 1998: 206, 246-247.

[121] Simons & Winkeler 1987: 160-161, 165-166, De Groot 1995: 113-114; cf. Brinkgreve, Onland & De Swaan 1979, Achterhuis 1980, De Swaan 1982, 1983, Brinkgreve 1984: 217-223, Gastelaars 1985, Jonker 1988, De Swaan 1989, 1993, Achterhuis 1999, Duyvendak 1999, and Schuyt & Taverne 2000: chapter XI for a general overview of the links between the movement for mental health and welfare policies.

In the wake of these revolutionary developments at one of the key Catholic institutes, media with similar inclinations merely followed the line indicated by Fortmann's initiatives. This way, the leading literary and cultural critic of *De Volkskrant*, Gabriël Smit was able to include some positive references to Vestdijk and Sierksma in his review of *Als ziende de onzienlijke*. Supported by the authority of a Catholic psychologist, the two critics just mentioned did not pose any threat.[122] The same way, Catholic intellectuals felt when they were either invited or allowed to publish their comments in ecumenical and even secular media. Van Luijk's review of Fortmann's magnum opus appeared in *Wending*, originally a Netherlands Reformed breakthrough monthly. Sociologist L. Laeyendecker contributed to the *Vestdijkkroniek*. S.W. Couwenberg, an expert on constitutional law, made some neutral comments on Vestdijk in *Civis Mundi*, a magazine devoted to commentary on political and cultural issues.

It is worthwhile to remember that all of these developments were the eventual outcome of tendencies which began as undercurrents critical of the dominant role that both episcopacy and traditional theology used to play within the Catholic community. Within this context, Buytendijk needs to again be mentioned. He surely had strong links to the phenomenological approach exemplified by the research program of Fortmann at Nijmegen University. However, other than Fortmann, he had not grown up in a Catholic environment. In the early 1920s he was a member of the GKN. While teaching at the Free University of Amsterdam, he got into a conflict with the establishment and left the community. Soon, he would become a professor at Utrecht University. At the latter institute he founded, together with H.C. Rümke, the 'Utrecht School' of interdisciplinary phenomenological studies, to which also J. van Lennep belonged.[123] In the meanwhile he converted to Catholicism. In the late 1950s he would be appointed to the University of Nijmegen.

This career not only suggests the way in which progressive elements were integrated into Catholicism, but it also invites for a comparison with the situation within the GKN. Buytendijk's move towards the RKK might indicate some difference between the intellectual atmospheres in the Dutch Reformed community and that of the Roman Catholics. And whereas the Catholic authorities in the 1960s were far from polemical towards Vestdijk, the Dutch Reformed might have been. On the other hand, this is to overlook a time gap of forty years. Upon leaving the Free University, Buytendijk went to Utrecht and was for a long period merely a marginal Catholic. During his stay in Utrecht, and especially after World War II, things had changed rapidly at both the Free University and the Catholic University at Nij-

[122] Cf. Vree 1996 on the place of *De Volkskrant* within the progressive wing of the Catholic community.

[123] Weijers 1991.

megen. Far from being different, in fact, the changes within the Dutch Reformed and Roman Catholic communities were parallel, as will become clear from our account of the developments within the GKN.[124]

The Dutch Reformed

As mentioned above, Buytendijk started his carreer as a physiologist at the Free University of Amsterdam. The latter institute was found by the Dutch Reformed political leader Abraham Kuyper in 1880. He founded the university as an attempt to defend the orthodoxy against attacks from secular tendencies at the other theological faculties. The Law of Higher Education (*Wet op het Hooger Onderwijs* of 1876) provided those faculties with a so-called *duplex ordo* structure. This meant that dogmatics, ethics and practical theology became separated from literary and historical courses taught according to secular methodologies. Kuyper aimed at a university independent of both state and church. Nevertheless, although he tried to involve orthodox movements struggling with secular tendencies within the Netherlands Reformed Church, eventually his Free University became associated with the Dutch Reformed Churches.[125] He thus created an institute at which politicians and lawyers, doctors and natural scientists, writers and literary critics could be educated. Yet, according to Kuyper *cum suis*, *simplex ordo* theology had to remain above all other sciences, much as philosophy had been for generations of the Catholic clergy.[126]

Like all other disciplines, psychology had to be based on theological principles, as was widely admitted among Dutch Reformed specialists. The main advocate of this approach, L. Lindeboom, was even called a "theological imperialist."[127] Not surprisingly, when in 1907 a chair of Psychology was established at the Free University, it was established as part of the Theological Faculty. In addition, the 'Valerius-clinic' was founded three years later as a kind of laboratory for the academic study of insanity.

Soon, however, the position of theology as the leading source of authority would be questioned. In the early 1920s, a young generation of theologians, highly interested in philosophical and psychological approaches to religious phenomena,[128] tried to challenge the supremacy of the orthodox, dominant and often aristocratic brand of

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[124] Kuiper 2002: 173-193; cf. the historiography started by Hendriks 1971 and Van der Zouwen 1971, 1972, and continued by Dekker & Peters 1989, Dekker 1992, 1995, Veerman 1995, Ellemers 2000; on the orthodox Reformed communities cf. Janse 1985, Dekker & Peters 1989, Zwemer 1992, Stoffels 1995.

[125] Wieringa 1980: 12-13.

[126] Stellingwerff 1971: 40, Van Belzen 1989: 15-17.

[127] Van Belzen 1989: 23.

[128] Ter Meulen 1988: 125-126, Van Belzen 1989: 69.

leading intellectuals.[129] The exegesis of biblical texts in which every story was taken literally, was no longer taken for granted by all theologians. This even led to an internal crisis when the Synod of the GKN banned all alternatives to revived interpretations and dogmatic thinking. Pastor J.G. Geelkerken was dismissed, and went on to found his own church.[130] Apart from banning theological dissent, church leaders also forbade students to become members of the NCSV ('Dutch Christian Student Association'). According to its critics, participation in activities related to those kinds of ecumenical organizations was a betrayal of the GKN. Likewise, J.B. Netelenbos, who had argued for a future merger between GKN and NHK, was dismissed.[131]

Whereas some were forced to leave, others simply decided to look for other opportunities after their intellectual mentor, Herman Bavinck, died in 1924. Pos left the Free University for the University of Amsterdam, while Buytendijk and the Dutch Reformed psychiatrist L. Bouwman switched over to Utrecht. Pos, on the other hand, turned towards the humanists, whereas Buytendijk became a Catholic. Together, they would become members of the *Comité voor Waakzaamheid*.[132] Here Buytendijk met with the repression from which he had been trying to escape when he left the Dutch Reformed community. And like his fellow Catholics, he decided to terminate his activities for the *Comité* after talks with members of the episcopacy. Bouwman would be the only one of the 'progressive' elements to stay with the GKN. At the State University of Utrecht, however, he felt free to follow his intellectual preferences. Much like Fortmann, he challenged the supremacy of theologians within their respective communities. Instead of eternal truths, the claimed, they cared more about the mental health of the believer. Instead of teaching psychology of religion, they focused on pastoral psychology, by which they clearly tried to avoid any theological claims.[133] Bouman—a professor of psychiatry, neurology and theoretical biology—argued for autonomy for the psychological approach from any dogmatic claims. Significantly, his work did not include any biblical references.[134] While offering his students introductions to the theories and methods of phenomenology, his courses easily fit into the discourse developed by the 'Utrecht School' of Rümke and Buytendijk.[135]

Bavinck's other students all remained at either the Free University or the Reformed Seminary in Kampen. We are tempted to think here of leading authorities

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[129] Kuyper 1972, Derkx 1994: 50-76, Kuyper 2002: 112-115.

[130] Kuyper 2002: 142-145.

[131] Kuyper 2002: 131-134.

[132] Derkx 1994: 109-110, 1998: 133-134.

[133] Van Belzen 1997: 75, 1999: 22-23.

[134] Van Belzen 1989: 50, 61-62.

[135] Dekkers 1985, Van Belzen 1989: 42-46, Weijers 1991, Van Belzen 1991, 2000: 94-95.

like G.C. Berkouwer,[136] J.H. Bavinck and S.J. Popma,[137] as well as K. Schilder.[138] Yet, not until the war would they become leading intellectuals in their own right. For the moment, dogmatic conservatives dominated the intellectual scene within the Dutch Reformed community.[139] In the field of psychology, J. Waterink continued the tradition started by Lindeboom.[140] And even Schilder claimed that psychology belonged to the field of theology.[141]

Yet, in dogmatics, the tradition which Schilder had begun as an editor of the weekly magazine, *De Reformatie*, would continue as an undercurrent of 'progressive' critics of the 'conservative' establishment. *De Reformatie* was meant as an alternative to orthodox Dutch Reformed magazines such as *De Standaard* and *De Wachter*, as well as the progressive Netherlands Reformed *Bergopwaarts* that would later be succeeded by *Wending*.[142] After the schism within the GKN at the end of the war, *De Reformatie* would become the leading magazine of the VGKN.

Another strand within dogmatics, which was more favorable towards developments within psychology, would create the undercurrent which prepared the Dutch Reformed community for the silent revolution of the 1950s and 1960s. Of all the critics who contributed to the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*, Popma, Bavinck and Janse de Jonge played a leading role in this development. Yet, without Berkouwer, who has been regarded as the primary mediator between a generation of established dogmatics on the one hand, and that of people representing the more secular disciplines,[143] it is doubtful whether or not they would have been able to help accomplish the revolution for which they are credited.

Before the war, G.C. Berkouwer (1903-1996) continued a tradition of dogmatic thinking which merely served apologetic purposes. Only after the war did he begin to feel increasingly attracted to more progressive tendencies within theology, especially the tendency inspired by phenomenology, or what has in general been called the trend towards verification of dogmatic presumptions.[144] Whereas before the war he took part in the polemical controversy between Neo-Calvinists and Barthians, from the mid-1950s onwards he published some highly sympathetic commentaries on

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[136] Even though Berkouwer was not a student of Bavinck, he was very much influenced by his theological conceptions; cf. Meijers 1979, Meijering 1999: 88-89.

[137] Stellingwerff 1987: 353-356.

[138] Puchinger 1971.

[139] Kuyper 2002: 115-119.

[140] On Waterink, cf. Vogelaar 1990.

[141] Ter Meulen 1988: 129.

[142] Harinck 1993: 38-40.

[143] Meijers 1979, Meijering 1999: 87-102.

[144] Meijers 1979: 275-280, Veenhof 1980: 82-83.

Barth and some of his followers, such as Miskotte, Van der Leeuw and Kraemer.[145] His contacts with theologians of the NHK and RKK are widely recognized.[146] And his dogmatic work on anthropology would even be of much help to phenomenologically oriented psychologists such as Janse de Jonge.[147]

It is difficult to imagine a field of intellectual activities within the Dutch Reformed community in which Berkouwer was not involved. Though he was a leading dogmatic at the Free University from 1940 till 1973, he educated generations of theologians. His series of dogmatic studies would be the most ambitious project undertaken by any Dutch theologian during the second half of the twentieth century. It would serve as a point of reference for intellectuals tied to the GKN, yet trying to meet the intellectual challenges posed to them by new developments in modern thinking. His opinions on issues of public importance were available in *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*, monthlies such as *Horizon* and *Bezinning*, and weeklies such as *Centraal Weekblad* and *Gereformeerd Weekblad*. He reached his widest public through his Saturday column in *Trouw* from 1948 till 1953, as well as through his bi-monthly contributions from 1953 till 1963.[148]

The dominance of the phenomenological paradigm, as well as the increasing influence of psychological approaches, can be shown by the work of other leading Dutch Reformed intellectuals. Before the war, S.J. Popma (1899-1988) frequently contributed to *De Reformatie*.[149] Besides that, he was elected to the Synod during the war.[150] The Germans regarded him as one of the leading Dutch Reformed intellectuals. He was therefore taken hostage to Haaren, where came into close contact with Kraemer.[151] Shortly after the war, he was a student-pastor in Amsterdam, where he met his Catholic fellow Van Heugten. Popma also worked with Janse de Jonge at the Valerius-clinic. He was appointed a teaching position at the University of Utrecht. After Janse de Jonge died, Popma was appointment to the Free University.[152] Janse de Jonge himself (1917-1964) had been a student of Bouman, remained faithful to the phenomenological approach[153] and would become one of the main representatives of a Dutch Reformed 'School' of mental health psychology.[154] Together with Popma,

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[145] Brinkman 1983; cf. also Berkouwer 1959 as mentioned in the second chapter.

[146] Van Keulen 2000, Van der Kooij 2001: 54-55.

[147] Kuilman 1980: 178.

[148] Van Keulen 2000.

[149] Harinck 1993: 440.

[150] Stellingwerff 1987: 313-315.

[151] Puchinger 1971: 22.

[152] Puchinger 1971: 7.

[153] Stellingwerff 1987: 14.

[154] Kuilman 1980: 171-179.

Berkouwer and C.A. van Peursen (professor of philosophy at the University of Leiden, later at the Free University),[155] he would play a decisive role in the overthrowing of orthodox tendencies within the Reformed community.[156] In 1963, one year before his untimely death, Janse de Jonge was appointed professor of psychiatry and psychopathology at the Free University.[157] Finally, J.H. Bavinck (1895-1964), the nephew of the late Herman Bavinck, was generally acknowledged as the leading missionary of the Dutch Reformed community.[158] In the 1920s, he was a member of the NCSV, of which Kraemer was president. And even though the Synod warned students not to get involved in the activities of the NCSV, but rather strongly advised them to join the *Gereformeerde Studentenbeweging* (GSB), Bavinck did not give in to these kinds of pressures.[159] On Java, he met Kraemer again. And whereas at home contacts between the Dutch Reformed Churches on the one hand and the Netherlands Reformed Church were scarce, in the East missionaries of both communities often worked closely together. And both Kraemer and Bavinck also participated in the International Missionary Conference at Tambaram in 1938. After his service in the East, Bavinck was appointed professor of missionary theology and psychology at both the Calvinist Seminary in Kampen and the Free University at Amsterdam.

None of the Dutch Reformed intellectuals mentioned thus far was ever polemically involved in the controversy surrounding Vestdijk and Sierksma. In this sense the position of Berkouwer might be comparable to that of Walgrave (even though Berkouwer's role was more decisive to the future of his community). Similarly, the position of Popma and Janse de Jonge might be comparable to the place occupied by Fortmann (even though the latter's role was likely to be far more important than that of the other two).

However, as we have indicated, some of these intellectuals—Bavinck in particular—had close contacts with Kraemer. The latter's activities had been developed quite independently from theology as well. Yet, whereas the above mentioned intellectuals did not scorn Vestdijk, Kraemer became notorious for his personal attacks on Vestdijk, and especially Sierksma.

In terms of paradigms, the intellectuals involved here were phenomenologically oriented; yet their attitude towards arguments such as those offered by *De toekomst der religie* differed completely. Why? Why did Kraemer—along with outstanding theologians and scholars of religion such as Miskotte, Van der Leeuw and De Vos—react so

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[155] Schippers 1985.

[156] Kuiper 1972: 401, 406.

[157] Kuilman 1980: 177.

[158] Cf. Veenhof 1992, Visser 1997.

[159] Veenhof 1992: 30-32, Visser 1997: 35.

aggressively, whereas leading intellectuals from both Catholic and Dutch Reformed communities remained moderate, if not sympathetic, towards Vestijk and Sierksma?

Following my hypothesis, this can only be explained by referring to the status of these opinion leaders within their own communities. First of all—especially compared to critics like Kraemer, as we will later see—the intellectuals, as members of the Dutch Reformed Churches, could safely count on a public that was still highly faithful to the pillar-structure to which it belonged. And, secondly, all of them held key positions—whether at the Free University or the Synod—within the very structure which they supported with their activities. This was exactly the way in which the status of Popma differed from that of Van Heugten. Both were student-pastors at the time that they began to contribute to the controversy, but Popma had already been playing an important role in church politics, whereas Van Heugten would never be more than a literary critic.

Furthermore, whether or not the status of intellectuals in fact determines their way of arguing must be confirmed by those whom we have identified as having polemical attitudes towards Vestdijk. Compared to Bavinck, Pos (1888-1971) was a minor figure within the field of missionary activities. He played an important role in the East. He advised colonial authorities, taught at the seminary and visited many congregations in the archipel.[160] Together with Bavinck and Kraemer, he attended the conference in Tambaram.[161] Yet, back in the Netherlands, he would never receive a teaching post at a university. And he did not contribute frequently to leading media in the Dutch Reformed world. Something similar held for Teeuwen (1898-1964),[162] Wapenaar (1883-1967),[163] and Wytzes (1908-1987). Though respectively practicing as an ordinary minister, a poet and a high-school principal, none of them would play any dominating role in the intellectual scene. However, pretending to be literary and cultural critics—as Van Heugten did for part of the Catholic community—they felt the need to face the challenge of *De toekomst der religie*. They could not count on the approval of the public, as leading intellectuals like Berkouwer and Bavinck could. So, they had to find a way to compensate for their lack of authority within the field of Dutch Reformed criticism. And, in accordance with my theory, they did so by launching polemical attacks on Vestdijk, attempting to disqualify the latter by employing a declarative style of arguing.

Now that we have dealt with both the Roman Catholic and the Dutch Reformed opinion leaders, it is time to draw some preliminary conclusions before I proceed to the polemical affair that received by far the most attention within intellec-

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[160] De Jong 1997: 146, 188.

[161] De Jong 1997: 236.

[162] Harinck, Huizinga & Seijlhouwer 1995: 25-27.

[163] Witvoet-Wapenaar 1984.

tual circles. Among the Catholics Van Heugten, Jeanne van Schaik-Willing and Cornelis Verhoeven took a polemical stance, whereas from the side of the Dutch Reformed especially Teeuwen, Wapenaar, Wytzes, and Pos distinguished themselves from other—far more moderate—voices. Other than what is suggested by their declarative style of arguing, these were only minor intellectuals who contributed to magazines which played a minor role within the respective communities. Van Heugten, Van Schaik-Willing and Wapenaar were literary critics without the status ascribed to the main theological, philosophical and increasingly psychological trends within the intellectual scene at those times. Yet, theologians such as Teeuwen and Pos also only played a secondary role in the intellectual interactions. Verhoeven was in the early 1960s already a very prolific writer. However, as a critic who wrote for a magazine of only minor importance within the community, he clearly did not have the authority which he would receive in later years. I would say that his comments on Vestdijk are comparable to those of Van Duinkerken on Ter Braak in the late 1930s. Young and without any secure position within the Catholic environment, both felt the need to attack any outsider with whom they—given their positions as outsiders or even *enfants terribles* within their own community—could easily be associated.

Immediately, then, the question arises whether all of this also holds for the intellectuals with whom we still have to deal in the rest of this chapter. We will focus here on progressive theologians and philosophers who seemed to hold highly respected positions at universities and within churches, but yet who were fiercely polemical. Can our hypothesis help us to shed some light on this problem?

Breakthrough intellectuals

The intellectuals who constituted the progressive intellectual community actually did not belong to any structure comparable to that of the Roman Catholics or Dutch Reformed communities. Some were members of the NHK, whereas others counted themselves either among the Mennonites or Arminians. And, as we will see, they were even internally divided on dogmatic issues, though not one of them was a dogmatic theologian. Yet, even these conflicts lasted only till the 1960s. After that time, we see a growing tendency towards integration between members of not only different factions within the NHK, but even between intellectuals of other churches, congregations and associations as well. And this was the period in which progressive elements succeeded in their attempts to create what has been called a 'super-pillar'.[164] The main characteristic of the intellectuals who belonged to the networks constituting this super-pillar was their solidarity with those who neither agreed with their opinions, nor shared their way of life. This attitude was shared by the progressive

[164] Ruiter & Smulders 1996: ch XI.

elements within the old pillar-structures. Instead of being organized around churches, the 'super-pillar' was founded on an intricate web of university departments, welfare organizations and civil servants. This was the world on which, Weijers, De Vries and Duyvendak, as mentioned before, focused their studies on the post-war intellectual developments.

Already in the early 1920s and late 1930s we find outsiders within the established pillar-structures trying to join broader intellectual and political movements. Dutch Reformed students and theologians contacted the NCSV. Roman Catholics were intent on playing a leading role in the anti-Nazi movement. And, as we will see in the case of Schilder, too much involvement in the protest against Nazism was perceived as a threat to official pillar-policy.

Yet, whereas intellectuals such as Van Duinkerken, Buytendijk and H.J. Pos were prepared to support Ter Braak's activities for the *Comité van Waakzaamheid*, G. van der Leeuw, who was invited to participate as well, is reported to have replied that he preferred to join the fascist dictatorschip of Franco. Likewise, in 1937 the editors of *Het Vaderland* asked Van der Leeuw to review Ter Braak's *Van oude en nieuwe christenen*.[165] In his attack on *De toekomst der religie*, Van der Leeuw wrote that he regarded his piece on Ter Braak to be "a devastating critique."[166] Without taking Ter Braak's reply to the earlier review in account (which wouldn't be published until many years later)[167], Van der Leeuw regretted only that he "did not try to understand his opponent and, consequently, did not destroy him." However, that was exactly what he attempted to do to Vestdijk. By denouncing the latter's arguments as expressions of a tortured soul, he clearly tried to outwit his opponent.

Why did Van der Leeuw feel the need to "destroy" both Ter Braak and Vestdijk? It was not the result of a conflict with the *Comité* in general. Shortly before he was invited to join, he co-edited an international protest against the national-socialist anti-semitic policies. Both Van Duinkerken and Buytendijk participated in this initiative.[168] Later on, the latter two would accept Ter Braak's invitation for the *Comité*. Why did Van der Leeuw refuse, and fiercely attack Ter Braak and Vestdijk?

In application of my hypothesis, I would suggest that people like Van der Leeuw on the one hand, and Ter Braak and Vestdijk on the other, were competing for an audience that did not belong to the old-school and still strongly established pillar-structure.[169] And even though during the first few years immediately after World War II the breakthrough movement seemed to be successful, it would soon become clear

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[165] Cf. Van Dulken 1985: 105.

[166] Van der Leeuw 1948.

[167] Cf. Van Dulken 1985: 106.

[168] Cf. Van Dulken 1985: 105.

[169] Cf. Ruiter & Smulders 1996: 262 for a similar argument.

that politics and society turned out not to be that easily transformed as these revolutionaries had been expecting. Van der Leeuw's carrier offered a striking example of that.

Van der Leeuw's role within the public sphere after he left The Hague did provide for a place among the dominant intellectuals. And even though he was a prolific writer, he did not hold a position which was easy to demarcate from competing intellectuals. First of all, being an intellectual belonging to the NHK, he could never count on an audience comparable to that of the leading voices within the Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed communities. True, his record as a professor in the Phenomenology of Religion at the University of Groningen was astounding. He was president of the International Association for the Study of Religion. He also participated in the international *Eranos*-meetings between leading intellectuals such as Eliade and Jung. His introduction to its method and materials has long been regarded as a landmark in the history of the academic discipline.[170] Yet, his ambitions were also extended to other areas of Dutch culture. His appointment to the cabinet of Drees and Schermerhorn in 1945 as Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences might have come as a surprise. Yet, the essays he had written on issues of public importance are likely to have called the attention of the more politicially involved intellectuals within the breakthrough movement. However, his attempts at reform and the extension of state influence on educational matters were doomed to fail. After one year, when new elections were held, Van der Leeuw returned to the University of Groningen, where he had previously been professor of Theology and the Phenomenology of Religion. Even within his own party, he did not find support for his ideas for an active cultural policy.[171] And while it was already impossible to unite Catholics and Protestants, Dutch Reformed critics asked themselves how on earth Van der Leeuw planned to create a sense of national unity.[172]

Not having been too successful as a minister, Van der Leeuw's authority in the public sphere was mainly associated with the role he played as editor of—and frequent contributor to—the opinion magazine *Wending*.[173] This magazine would play an important role in the controversy surrounding Vestdijk and Sierksma. It is thus quite relevant to ask ourselves how we should to situate this periodical within the contemporary field of cultural production.[174]

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[170] Waardenburg 1973; cf. also Van Dulken 1985: 94-95, Kippenberg & Luchesi 1991, Hofstee 1997, Platvoet 1998a: 130-133.

[171] Van Dulken 1985: 156, 160.

[172] Van Dulken 1985: 162; cf. also Woudenberg 1982, Strijers 1983.

[173] Rogier 1982: 6.

[174] Newspapers as a genre have generally been a more interesting topic of research; cf. Schneider 1943, 1949, 1968, Hemels 1969, 1981, 1983, Cuilemburg 1977, Schneider & Hemels

As Margreet Braams observed in her study of *Wending*, the magazine is hardly mentioned in any of the secondary literature on postwar Dutch history. According to her, this is perfectly understandable because it cannot easily be classified within a pillar or political party. Surely the magazine had some affinity with the newly established PvdA. Yet it was certainly not the voice of the party, nor did it have any official connection with the PvdA. The same held for its link with the NHK; there was a clear kinship with its dominant ideals, yet no official bond existed between the two. And, consequently, the paper was difficult to include in the standardized conceptual distinctions made for ordinary description.[175] It is only due to ecumenical tendencies within the Protestant communities that *Wending* was included into the bibliographical projects mentioned before.[176] Also, within the same Protestant context, a short overview of the history of the magazine was published.[177]

Yet, given the fact that periodicals are only recently receiving scholarly attention, Braams's explanation for the fact that *Wending* does not figure prominently in the historiography needs to be qualified. Surely, the magazine was meant for outsiders of the established pillar organizations. Yet, this is not the reason why it did not get the attention it certainly deserved according to Braams herself. Here, history has been interpreted by means of the concepts used by the subjects under study, rather than those developed from an analytical historian's point of view. Moreover, the fact that literary critical magazines were the first to receive serious attention clearly testifies against Braams's earlier remarks.

In general, magazines edited and meant for outsiders are often of far more interest to historians than the more 'conservative' ones. Previously, I mentioned *Roeping* and *De Reformatie* as 'progressive' journals within their communities. These magazines are frequently mentioned in the historiography of both the Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed traditions, whereas *Streven*, *Horizon*, and *Bezinning* are not. Yet, when Braams characterizes *Wending* as a "progressive Netherlands Reformed monthly,"[178] we are tempted to ask ourselves what precisely is meant by 'progressive'.

1979, Scholten 1982, Lockefeer 1996, Van Dijk 1997, Hemels 1999, Van Hoof 2000. Magazines for a long time were at the margins not only of public interest, but also of scholarly attention. Only quite recently weeklies and monthlies are subjected to more systematic research. Descriptions of literary critical magazines are available; cf. Bakker 1985, Calis 1989, 1993, 1999, 2001. Bibliographical projects have been started both for Dutch Reformed and Roman Catholic periodicals; cf. Harinck 1995, 1999, Coo-Wijgerinck, Lankhorst & Roes 1989, Lankhorst 1999. Yet, these projects are still far from finished.

[175] Braams 1989: 1.

[176] Cf. Everdingen, Harinck & Seijlhouwer 1990: 194-195.

[177] Berkelaar 1999.

[178] Braams 1989: 1.

Often the postwar Netherlands has been characterized as a conservative country. Apart from a few attempts at experimentation within the fields of art and literature, intellectuals and politicians dominated in their attempts to restore the prewar situation of confessionally organized parties. The Netherlands was a pacifist democracy and society in which different interests were settled by means of compromise. This image has long reigned under the guidance of eminent political scientists such as Lijphart and Daalder, as well as historians such as Kossman.[179] Following their line of reasoning, Braams asks herself the question how *Wending*, being a progressive magazine, fit within the general picture of restoration and regression.[180] She quite hastily concludes that *Wending* belonged to the broader movement that tried to break through the established pillar-structures. Its initiatives were directed against restoration and regression.

Yet, remembering the developments within both the Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed communities which I have already covered, it might become clear that it is difficult to apply terms such as 'regression' to their intellectual developments. A binary opposition like the one between progress and restoration is also difficult to apply if we want to identify the difference between *Wending* on the one hand, and *Roeping* and *De Reformatie* on the other. The latter two magazines allowed for criticism of established traditions within their communities. And whereas the editors of *Horizon* and *Bezinning* terminated their activities in the early 1960s, the others simply continued—though in the case of *Roeping*, this was accomplished by reformulating ambitions and a name change. On the other hand, *De Reformatie* and an editor of *Wending* such as Van der Leeuw have at times been counted among the 'conservative' movements within the Dutch public sphere.[181]

To me, all intellectuals who actively try to change the discourse and social institutions of their communities or disciplines, in a way that allows for the development of an assumed potential, can be designated 'progressive'. In this sense, we can find 'progressives' both inside and outside the established pillar organizations. Given this fact, it is unlikely that the term 'progressive' will help us to clarify why some turn to polemics while others do not.

For this reason I object to the way in which Weijers, De Vries and Duyvendak take the term 'progressive' as synonomous with such a concept as 'the intellectual'.[182] I completely agree with Duyvendak's conclusion that Lolle Nauta was entirely wrong when he argued that theologians were by definition not intellectuals. At the same time, Duyvendak tends to limit the theologians among the intellectuals to the mem-

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[179] Lijphart 1968, Daalder 1974, 1990, 1993, Kossmann 1992.

[180] Braams 1989: 3.

[181] Van Dulken 1985: 103, 101-108, Harinck 1993.

[182] Weijers 1991, De Vries 1996, Duyvendak 1999.

bers of the breakthrough movement or the 'Utrecht School'; or, more generally, to those theologians that did not teach at the Free University or the Catholic universities, whether in Nijmegen or Tilburg.[183] This, according to me, shows a curious predilection towards all those people and professors who argue from their own institutional settings (whether churches, universities or pillarized media) on issues of public importance. Rather than investigating whether they indeed had something to say, Duyvendak merely assumes or decides that their contributions were not worth noting. The question is why these people and professors are excluded from the picture. It cannot be for the content of their arguments; in general, these did not differ considerably from that of the members of the 'Utrecht School'. So, it must be their institutional position and their association with the 'primitive' pillar-structure that determines the way in which they tend to be judged by others. However, I do not find myself justified in arguing from intentions. What is significant to me is the fact that all intellectuals during the first decades after the war directed their opinions to a highly limited public. Whatever their intentions, the audience of the breakthrough magazines did not surpass that of the traditional ones which to the pillar communities. And whether the former played a more significant role in the transformation of the public sphere in the postwar Netherlands than the latter has never been empirically verified. With respect to the terminology employed by Duyvendak *cum suis*, rather than being determined by the facts, it is founded upon ideological assumptions.[184]

This is not to deny the differences between 'progressive' intellectuals within established pillar organizations and those who were active outside of this institutional tradition. For most intellectuals, this holds true for at least the first two decades after the war. It was only during the 1960s that progressive elements engaged in a network of people and institutions of a so-called 'super-pillar'. The difference with opinion leaders from pillared organisations is that they refrained from polemics, whereas 'progressive' intellectuals tended to react aggressively. And whereas these 'progressive' intellectuals reacted polemically, from the 1960s on, their attitudes changed. Instead of trying to attack their opponents, they shifted toward more moderate styles of arguing as soon as they became part of a pillared environment.

According to my hypothesis, the main difference between the critics had to do with the institutional network in which they moved. The circles around *Wending*, *Het Parool*, *Vrij Nederland* and, though less markedly, *De Groene Amsterdammer* were 'progressive' in the sense that they turned against the pillar structure in an attempt to

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[183] Duyvendak 1997, 1999: 31-35; reference to Nauta 1990, 1991.

[184] Van Doorn has been calling the so-called 'progressive' intellectuals the "clerics of the proletariat"; by that he clearly pointed to the fact that, contrary to their own claims, their ambitions were far from universal or, for that matter, of interest of the nation as a whole; cf. Van Doorn 1996ab.

transform the political scene of the postwar Netherlands. Neither the audience nor the editors of the media with which we are dealing can easily be identified. There surely was a network of people pulling the strings. This was especially the case with *Het Parool*, *Vrij Nederland* and *De Groene*, which were closely linked to each other by means of personal unions. And when, shortly after the war, *De Groene* and *Vrij Nederland* lost subscribers, *Het Parool* supported both magazines financially. It also helped *Vrij Nederland* to develop into the main 'progressive' alternative to *Elseviers Weekblad*.[185]

However, tight connections did not prevent conflicts. Even a merger between *Vrij Nederland* and *De Groene* would turn out to be impossible.[186] At the same time, Vestdijk had problems with *Het Parool*. Through his friend Max Nord, who was one of the editors, he got involved as a literary critic. Yet, readers often complained that his pieces were 'too difficult'. Vestdijk became weary of such criticism. In the summer of 1949, after receiving an offer by *Algemeen Handelsblad* to write a weekly commentary on literary matters, he left *Het Parool*.[187] Even though there is no proof, it is tempting to speculate whether De Vos played any role in this case. The latter had written a 'dirty' critique of Vestdijk, as Vestdijk himself complained. Yet, the editors did not permit him to reply. Instead, they asked De Vos to write a second review in which he clarified some of his points against *De toekomst der religie*. Vestdijk sent a counter-critique. Yet, the editors refused to publish it. This also held for opinion magazines such as *De Groene*, *Vrij Nederland*, and *Wending*, none of which permitted Vestdijk to answer his critics. He was a regualar contributor to the first magazine, and an avid reader of the latter two.

Vestdijk's contributions, and the fact that he, together with his friend Sierksma, read these kinds of papers, shows that the 'progressive' media was attractive to a broad public. As Mulder and Koedijk argue in their study of *Het Parool*, there was no media for that had defined a group of people based on social, religious, political or geographical characteristics as possible subscribers. Though loosely connected to NVB and PvdA, magazines like the ones mentioned here did not enjoy the close links that *Trouw*, *De Waarheid*, *Het Vrije Volk*, *De Volkskrant*, *NRC* or *Algemeen Handelsblad* had with their respective communities of writers and readers, whether ARP, CPN, PvdA, KVP or VVD.[188] Not until the early 1960s would a certain distance be

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[185] Mulder & Koedijk 1996: 238, Hartmans 2002: 172.

[186] Mulder & Koedijk 1996: 240, Hartmans 2002: 174.

[187] Visser 1987: 371-372, Mulder & Koedijk 1996: 204.

[188] Mulder & Koedijk 1996: 9-10; ARP = Anti-Revolutionaire Partij ('Anti-Revolutionary Party'), CPN = Communistische Partij Nederland ('Dutch Communist Party'), PvdA = Partij van de Arbeid ('Labour Party'), KVP = Katholieke Volkspartij ('Catholic People's Party'), VVD = Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie ('Liberal Party').

created between the media and its political counterparts. Only *De Waarheid* would remain an exclusively CPN paper. Yet, it would require more a thorough investigation to determine whether the generally 'independent' position of the four media forms which we are dealing with here had anything to do with the 'polemical temperaments' which Koomen speaks of with respect to *Vrij Nederland* at the end of the 1970s.[189]

As previously mentioned, whether or not the intellectuals that used these media forms as vehicles for their ideas were more 'progressive' than their colleagues from the 'pillar-communities' is a matter of perspective. With respect to content, 'progressive' ideas did not differ considerably from ideas developed by 'conservatives'. Like the former, the latter were mainly inspired by phenomenology and existentialism. Both were attempting to qualify these intellectual tendencies by Christian dogmatic terminology. And, in a sense, Weijers is correct when he states that the anthropological project of the 'Utrecht School' was turned into a highly successful pastoral project organised around the religious expert. As he says, phenomenology became the national science of spiritual regeneration.[190] Yet, Weijers is wrong in supposing that this only held for the 'Utrecht School'; a similar tendency was present in both the Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed intellectual communities.

In a sense, the paradigm of existential phenomenology helped to transcend the traditional pillar-boundaries. Religious experts, whether theologians or not, participated in the newly established Association of Scientific Research (*Verbond voor Wetenschappelijke Onderzoekers*).[191] Apart from members of the 'Utrecht School' like Buytendijk, Rümke, Langeveld and Pompe, also intellectuals such as Banning, Van der Leeuw, Dippel, Heering, and Nauta (all of whom were contributors to *Wending*) participated in this circle of intellectual élites. And whereas theologians like De Vos, Miskotte and Buskes bolonged to the NHK, other leading intellectuals like Janse de Jonge, Fortmann, Van Peursen and Delfgaauw did not. Yet, whatever the progressiveness of all these intellectuals, only a few of them felt triggered to react polemically to the challenges posed by Vestdijk and Sierksma. And keeping the argument of the previous chapters in mind, many of these names turned up in my introductory overview of the history, subject and style of the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*.

Of those critics we found Mankes-Zernike, Banning, Van der Leeuw, De Vos, Miskotte, Bomhoff, Buskes, Oosterbaan, De Jong, Dippel and Kraemer reacting polemically, whereas the others were far more moderate, if not friendly, towards Vestdijk and Sierksma. Immediately, then, the question arises how we should ac-

[189] Koomen 1999: 95-109.

[190] Weijers 1991: 18.

[191] Molenaar 1994.

count for this difference. Which characteristics can be identified in the former intellectuals, who fiercely attacked the arguments which Vestdijk had put forward? In which sense did their position differ from that of critics like Heering, Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, Roscam Abbing, Nauta, Bleeker, De Fetter, Van Holk, Smits, Sirks, Hidding, Nijk, Sperna Weiland, and H. Faber?

One important difference is that the members of the first group were socialists who contributed to *Het Parool*, *Vrij Nederland*, *De Groene* or *Wending*, and a liberal theological magazine with breakthrough sympathies like *Vox Theologica*.[192] Most of these people held highly respected positions at various state universities and within the social-democratic Labour Party. Banning was professor of the Sociology of Religion at Leiden University.[193] Van der Leeuw served as a professor History and Phenomenology at the University of Groningen[194] and served as a minister in the first postwar cabinet.[195] De Vos (in much the same manner as Van Heugten: "a highly sympathetic person"[196]) was a professor of the Philosophy of Religion in Amsterdam and Groningen,[197] whereas De Jong, rector of the Theological Seminary of the Netherlands Reformed Church at Hydepark,[198] was actively involved in Church politics. The same held for Dippel. The latter—a chemist at the Philips laboratories at Eindhoven—also played a leading role in the Dutch Association for Scientific Research (*Vereniging voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek*).[199] Together with Banning,[200] he was one of the founding fathers of the PvdA.[201] Kraemer, who was a missionary by profession and a professor of the History and Phenomenology of Religion at Leiden University, played an important role in the NVB.[202] Buskes, minister in Amsterdam, and Miskotte, the later Professor Dogmatic Theology at Leiden University, were among the first to sign an official letter encouraging people to vote for the PvdA.[203] And Bomhoff, being a teacher of Philosophy in Enschede and professor of Literary Studies at Leiden University, was a member of the PvdA and a close friend of Banning,[204] Mis-

[192] Van Leeuwen 1998.

[193] Zunneberg 1978, Smits 1988, Ter Borg 1988.

[194] Waardenburg 1973, 1978.

[195] Van Dulken 1985.

[196] Ponsteen 2001: 547.

[197] Ponsteen 2001: 548.

[198] Van Leeuwen 1998.

[199] Van Dijk 1985: 46-47, Molenaar 1994: 126-130.

[200] De Vries 1996: 198-208.

[201] Van Dijk 1985: 42.

[202] Jansen Schoonhoven 1978.

[203] De Jong 1998: 276-277.

[204] Bomhoff-Van Rhijn 1988.

kotte[205] and De Vos.[206] Though we do not know about any kind of active involvement in the PvdA, Mankes-Zernike—a Mennonite, and the first female minister in the church history of the Netherlands—was highly sympathetic towards socialism and participated in the leftist study group of modern theologians.[207] She clearly was 'progressive' in the sense that she was ahead of her time, playing an active role in the public sphere.[208] Another Mennonite, J.A. Oosterbaan, was one of the main figures in the community, professor of the Philosophy of Religion and Ethics at the University—as well as the Mennonite Seminary—of Amsterdam.[209] Equally polemical was Kwee Swan Liat, prominent member of the 'Humanist Association' (HV, *Humanistisch Verbond*),[210] and professor of Philosophy at the Technical University in Eindhoven.[211] Even though he was not a theologian in the strict sense, his contribution to the controversy appeared in the progressive magazine *Vox Theologica*. Kraemer, finally, was a chief member of the NVB and PvdA, highly prominent within the NHK and a professor of the Phenomenology of Religion at Leiden University.[212]

As we have seen, the media forms in which the fiercest critiques were published did not hold any fixed positions within the public sphere. As Mulder & Koedijk concluded, there were no magazines that defined a group of people based on social, religious, political or geographical characteristics as possible subscribers.[213] Moreover, the contributors also belonged to highly diverse intellectual circles. Authors always had to take colleagues or readers into account that would not agree with their statements. If authors wanted to get some attention, as I have suggested throughout this study, they could do so by attacking others and making fun of them.

Intellectuals who contributed to *Het Parool*, *Vrij Nederland*, *De Groene* or *Wending* could not be sure about the way their public would react to Vestdijk and Sierksma, let alone their commentary on the arguments developed by those two. And even the editors of the papers just mentioned did not always agree with each other. Some of them, like Max Nord, were friends of Vestdijk's, and allowed him to publish frequently. Others clearly did not mind including reviews of Vestdijk's essay, like those of De Vos, Miskotte, Mankes-Zernike and Van der Leeuw, but remained highly

[205] Bomhoff 1954-1962.

[206] Bomhoff 1966.

[207] Kalma 1988.

[208] Werkman 1997: 255.

[209] Hoekema & Voolstra 2000, Hoekema & De Jong 2001.

[210] Kuilman 2001: 29-31.

[211] Govaart-Tjia 1988, Haaksma 1988.

[212] Jansen Schoonhoven 1978.

[213] Mulder & Koedijk 1996: 9-10; also Hartman 2002: 163-169 on rapidly changing positions on political matters.

critical of Vestdijk's opinions. Moreover, none of these papers offered Vestdijk the opportunity to defend himself against his critics. This at least meant that, for the moment, his opponents had won the battle for recognition. Except in *Vrij Nederland*, where short excerpts of other critiques—as well as a letter of P. Grashoff in which he attacked Miskotte—were published, nobody else had the guts to take Vestdijk's side. This was all the more striking because, especially among the liberal Netherlands Reformed theologians as well as those from Remonstrant circles, there were those who were sympathetic to Vestdijk's arguments. And, in my opinion, it was precisely because of the factions and possible fissions within their own environment that the critics involved felt triggered to attack their opponent in order to ruin his reputation once for all. When this strategy failed, critics started to question each other openly. Within this context, we must place Kraemer's critique of Van Holk, Buskes' attack on Smits, and Dippel's attempt to conquer Nijk's position.

Dutch Reformed and Roman Catholic intellectuals, like their counterparts within the NHK, were struggling to integrate theological viewpoints and approaches with the more secular psychological ones. Yet, other than their colleagues outside the established pillar structures, they worked well within the pillar structures until the 1970s. The position of theologians at the state faculties in the Netherlands, however, did not offer any security comparable to that of the Free and Catholic universities. Even though Van Iersel speaks of a 'Leiden' tradition in the Study of Religions, leading missionaries such as Kraemer definitely did not belong to it.[214] On the other hand, one representative of 'Leiden', K.A.H. Hidding, continuing the approach developed by C.P. Tiele in the late nineteenth century, was recognized as providing important steps towards the autonomy of Religious Studies from the authority claims made by theologians.[215] This might explain why Kraemer, rather than the more liberal theologians, chose to attack both Vestdijk and Sierksma polemically.

Not one of the liberal theologians would ever attack either Vestdijk or Sierksma. At that time, the middle-orthodox denomination within the NHK dominated the public sphere. In the *Nederlandse Protestanten Bond*, they looked for support among the Arminian Brotherhood. J.C.A. de Fetter, who wrote for cultural magazines like *De Gids*, was an Arminian minister in Rotterdam and an important thinker on matters concerning anthropology and pastoral care.[216] H. Faber was an intermediate figure. He contributed to *Wending*, but early on he commented on *De toekomst der religie* in a church periodical. And though highly sympathetic to the phenomenological approach of intellectuals like Janse de Jonge and Fortmann, he never showed any aggressive inclinations towards either Vestdijk or Sierksma. This also held for others

[214] Van Iersel 1991: 105, Platvoet 1998a: 135-138.

[215] Van Iersel 1991: 102-104, Platvoet 1998b; reference to Sierksma 1977.

[216] Witteveen 2001.

who only contributed to the controversy in purely theological magazines. They merely addressed the inner circle of faithful adherents, open to new developments within Psychology of Religion and Religious Studies in general. Roscam Abbing was a professor of Biblical Theology, Practical Theology and Christian Ethics at Groningen University.[217] Bleeker taught at Groningen after he replaced Van der Leeuw during the latter's ministry. Yet, his approach was far more open to psychological and sociological approaches to religious phenomena.[218] Van Holk[219] even acknowledged the right of anti-metaphysical tendencies within the Philosophy and Psychology of Religion, as his comments on Sierksma clearly show. The same held for Sirks and Hidding.

The conflict between the so-called middle-orthodox theologians and the liberal ones within the NHK reached its most dramatic episode with a contribution of the Leiden sociologist and theologian P. Smits to the magazine *Kerk & Wereld* at the end of the 1950s. At Easter, he wrote in the liberal weekly that he did not believe that Christ had died for our sins (in Dutch: "Geef mijn portie maar aan fikkie"). Though many colleagues agreed with him, others demanded he defend his argument.[220] The fiercest critique he received, however, came from Buskes, who wrote several articles on the case for the moderately or middle-orthodox monthly *In de Waagschaal*.[221] According to him, Smits's way of practicing theology was much like that of "a showman in a shooting gallery." Yet, whereas the Synod of the NHK decided that Smits could no longer remain a member, Buskes protested. Nevertheless, Smits' rights as a retired minister and professor were taken away and he was forced to leave his editorship of *Kerk & Wereld* to others. Not until the early 1970s was he rehabilitated and allowed to become a member of the NHK again. When Sierksma died, the editors of *Vrij Nederland* asked Smits to write a long obituary, in which he took the time to elaborate on the ideas which he appreciated in both Sierksma and Vestdijk.

As in the case of the traditional pillar organizations, the 1960s were also a turning point for the so-called 'progressive' institutions. Previously, breakthrough theologians had been eager to attack critics like Vestdijk and Sierksma as well as liberals like Smits *cum suis*. After the 1950s, we see the struggles between middle-orthodox and liberal strands within the NHK coming to a close, and new ecumenical tendencies developing together with representatives of the old pillar organizations. Also, the conflicts with outsiders began to cease. Miskotte and De Vos did not feel the need to scorn Vestdijk anymore. And, in general, the people at *Wending* changed their attitude

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[217] Van Andel, Geense & Hoedemaker 1980.

[218] Wagtendonk 2001.

[219] Van Leeuwen 2001.

[220] Meijering 2002: 28-33.

[221] De Jong 1998: 299.

towards new trends in the study of religions, as their discussion of Sierksma's contributions shows. Taking a more cooperative attitude towards intellectuals who did not belong to breakthrough institutions in the strict sense, they expanded their potential public considerably. Apart from the more thorough discussions, editors tried to address a broader public by including more popular contributions as well. This was the time when its leading intellectuals started to take positions that were more closely connected with the everyday experiences of the ordinary people. The amount of subscribers rose considerably during this period.[222]

At that time, *Wending* had been through a period in which the liberals dominated. Even though Banning had to be counted among them, he never played a significant role in the direction of the magazine. As we have seen, the attempts at dialogue by Kraemer had also sadly ended in disaster. However, under the editorship of J.M. van Veen, and especially J. Sperna Weiland, the magazine initiated its own attempts at debate with new trends in scholarship, theology and social policy. Dippel, as an orthodox Barthian and one of the most utopian thinkers of all of the PvdA-members, attempted to counter the modernist developments, but he did not succeed. As Sperna Weiland formulated the new direction which *Wending* would take, there would be room for dialogue, controversy, and a clash of opinions. Yet, the main difference with the former period was that the editors did not expect to reveal any truth, but merely offered the reader some points for consideration, and the facts to make up his or her own opinion. In this manner, *Wending* took sides with both cognitive relativism and the cultural revolution in the Netherlands during the 1960s. As A.J. Nijk argued, the aim was to publish a 'progressive' magazine that would exemplify the ideals of socio-cultural training and a radical democratic society.[223] Intellectual trends such as neo-marxism and liberation theology became *en vogue* among most of the contributors. Yet, their aims were far less utopian and more pragmatic than they had been at earlier times when Van der Leeuw attempted to change the political scene. Sperna Weiland successfully saved the Central Interfaculty at Erasmus University—of which he was the rector magnificus at that time—from financial cuts ordered by Minister Wim Deetman in 1983-84.[224] Despite the more pragmatic the approach, however, public interest in *Wending* steadily decreased from the early 1970s on. For a long time, subsidies from the publisher prevented the magazine from an early death. Not until the fall of the Berlin Wall, and finally of the Soviet Union, did the editors decide terminate their activities for the magazine.[225]

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[222] Braams 1989: 45; whereas from the mid-1940s till the mid-1950s, only 5-6.000 subscribers were counted, in 1965 the editors held an official record of 11.000.

[223] Berkelaar 1999: 198-199; for Nijk, cf. Noordegraaf 2001.

[224] Peper 1990.

[225] Berkelaar 1999: 212-213.

Whereas the attitude of *Wending* editors towards people like Vestdijk and Sierksma changed considerably during this period, the polemical attack by P.A. van Stempvoort was published in a magazine that was commonly regarded as the enemy of the 'progressive' media, namely *Elseviers Weekblad*. Van Stempvoort was a professor of Ancient Christian literature and the New Testament at Groningen University, and was often invited to discuss current issues from a biblical perspective for the NCRV. Though regarded as an expert on matters concerning the New Testament, he did not belong to any close circle of intellectuals. Yet, in his work he often referred sympathetically to 'progressive' authorities such as Kraemer and Van der Leeuw[226]. He also offered, together with Delfgaauw, an introduction to an essay by a revolutionary Roman Catholic intellectual.[227] It is likely that the editors of *Elseviers* only invited him because he was well known for his comments on a lot of different issues, including business ethics.[228] The least we can say is that he did not write for this magazine on any regular basis. And whereas *Elseviers* oriented itself on liberal theology, even inviting humanists to discuss with representatives from Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed communities, the position of 'progressive' intellectuals before an audience like that of *Elseviers* was far from secure.

This might also explain why a theologian such as Berkelbach van der Sprenkel did not feel the need to be polemical. Again, as I have argued in the aforementioned cases, this possibly had something to do with the institutional position of the two. Van Stempvoort's chair at Groningen University did not have the high status that was associated with Berkelbach van der Sprenkel's chair of Dogmatic and Practical Theology at Utrecht University. And the crucial role of the latter within the organisation of the NHK is generally acknowledged.[229] But even that does not explain everything. Miskotte's chair at Leiden had a similar status as the one at Utrecht. Moreover, Berkelbach van der Sprenkel had strong ties with the 'Utrecht School'. Being a theologian among outstanding psychologists such as Rümke, J.H. van den Berg and P.A.H. Baan,[230] it is far from certain that he would feel at ease in this setting. Yet, the most important institutional difference between him and Van Stempvoort was their respective stage of performance. The medium was the message here. As a newspaper, the status of *Utrechts Nieuwsblad* was originally far less controversial than that of the outspoken and more 'progressive' papers such as *Het Parool*, and the other aforementioned opinion magazines.[231] And for the broad public, psychologists did not hold the

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[226] Van Stempvoort 1961, passim.

[227] Van Stempvoort 1963.

[228] Cf. his contributions to Borst 1961, Renooy 1961.

[229] De Groot 1978.

[230] Van Belzen 1995.

[231] Schneider & Hemels 1979: 208.

authority that they would from the 1960s on. Thus, it is likely that the position of Berkelbach van der Sprenkel was likely to be far less controversial than that of Van Stempvoort, at least for the public of a liberal magazine like *Elseviers*.

Whereas intellectuals who held leading positions within the super-pillar that provided for the new establishment during the 1960s and 1970s would change their attitude towards outsiders like Vestdijk and Sierksma, it is still important to retain the distinction which we made earlier, namely that between dominant and marginal intellectuals. Ad Dronkers and J. Noordegraaf, who offered the last polemical contributions from the 'progressive' theological circles, are clear examples of the latter category. Whereas Dronkers was a film critic, Noordegraaf focused on literary artifacts. They neither belonged to the theologians in the strict sense, nor to the group of professionals that dealt with problems of mental health, both within the church and in society in general. Something similar, though at an earlier stage within the history of our controversy, is observable in the last institutional setting which we shall discuss within this context, namely the VGKN.

The Free Reformed

The intellectuals that we will deal with here held different positions within the community organized around the Free Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (VGKN). These were founded by K. Schilder after the Synod of the GKN decided that his political viewpoints could no longer be tolerated. Together with the VGKN, a new Theological Seminary was also opened in Kampen. Later, a newspaper and several literary magazines would follow.

Historian George Harinck counts Schilder among other leading apologetics of his time, in the sense that he sought a new modus between traditional (liberal) dogmatic theology and the more existential and phenomenological approaches to religion. According to Harinck, within this apologetical movement, Schilder acted on the same level as Van Duinkerken and Miskotte.[232] Even though they were not literary critics, Miskotte and Schilder clearly perceived modern literature as a challenge for academic theology.[233] Whereas Van Duinkerken clashed with Roman Catholic authorities and Miskotte joined the NHK breakthrough initiatives, Schilder found himself in his own conflicts with the leading intellectuals of the GKN. All of them played dominant roles within the critical media of their respective communities. Whereas Van Duinkerken was an editor of *De Gemeenschap* and *Roeping*, and Miskotte of *In de Waagschaal*, Schilder acted as the main editor of *De Reformatie*, even after his schism with the GKN.[234]

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[232] Harinck 1994.

[233] Werkman 1990, De Vlieger 1990, De Wijer 1997.

[234] De Vries 1979: 62.

Of the so-called 'younger generation' within the GKN, Schilder was the most challenging intellectual, and by far the most difficult character to deal with. According to him, the authority of Kuyper especially need not remain unquestioned, but rather had to be tested against both the Scriptures and the reality of modern everyday life. By this he did not intend to downplay the important role which Kuyper had played in both church and society. On the contrary, at that time he had been a revolutionary force in theology and politics. Yet, unlike V. Hepp and H.H. Kuyper (the so-called "epigones" of Abraham Kuyper[235]), Schilder believed that the master's achievements should be tested and, if necessary, corrected. Especially through *De Reformatie*, Schilder tried to attack the established positions. And it was through this weekly that he gained a reputation for his polemical style.[236] Yet, he was not the 'progressive' critic that some of his fellow members of the younger generation would've liked to think. On the contrary, apart from Dutch Reformed intellectual leaders,[237] he fiercely attacked Netherlands Reformed breakthrough-theologians such as Miskotte and O. Noordmans.[238]

Within the context of my own investigations, it is worth considering the explanation which other critics have developed in order to account for Schilder's polemical style of writing. Surely, the separation of GKN and VGKN was, at least partly, due to the obstacles which his style formed to everybody who tried to find a compromise. Yet, many years later, even his opponents would wonder why the conflict had ended as it actually had. Miskotte found the attitude of the Synod unjustified, whereas Berkouwer—many years later—felt sorry for the part he had played in the affair. But why did they not try to hold Schilder himself accountable for the failure to find a solution to the conflict?

The entire history might be due to Schilder's polemical style of writing itself. Yet, this does not answer the question why he turned to polemics in the first place. Some have tried to find an answer by focusing on Schilder's inspiration. As J. Veenhof says, on the one hand he was kind and hated people who behaved grandly; yet, on the other hand his polemics were often bitter and insulting. He was always honest; however, he often played with people and did not mind showing personal preferences. He was highly suspicious towards others' intentions, always having the sense of being a misunderstood genius. But what exactly was the source of this feeling? This is an interesting and important question for which we do not yet have an answer, Veenhof concludes.[239] Some have speculated that he, being a genius, used to create his own

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[235] Jongeling 1979: 14.

[236] Harinck 1989.

[237] Harinck 1993.

[238] Harinck 1989, Brinkman 1983, 1990.

[239] Veenhof 1991: 55.

world. That must have been the background of his communicative distortions.[240] While honest, Veenhof argues, his polemics must have stemmed from the frustration of realizing that his attempts at convincing people of his ideas were failing. That made him feel acutely disappointed. It also explains why Schilder is still highly intruiging as a polemist.[241] Yet, where exactly did his fierce reactions come from?

According to Harinck, Schilder's polemical style of arguing found its source in his "existential commitment" to the convictions of Groen van Prinsterer and Kuyper. The Reformed community was independent and needed to develop its own principles. Based on these principles, it had built an impressive web of institutions, for instance Christian schools, Christian journalism, Christian politics, Christian sciences, and even Christian social and literary culture. The completion of these institutions, however, had made its people weak. Members had lost the conviction that these institutions were born not of financial transactions and attentive organization, but through persistence with the Reformed faith.[242] Curiously, Harinck argues, historians in general do not pay attention to the real inspiration behind the process of pillarization. They tend to forget that history, to borrow from Huizinga, is the spiritual form in which people account for the/ir past. According to him, studying Schilder's polemics might be used as a corrective to the historian's neglect.

Yet, whether or not Harinck—or Huizinga, for that matter—is correct cannot be an issue for us to discuss here. According to me, the spiritual aspect is taken too seriously, as if it is somehow an expression of a reality-out-there. Yet, being an outsider, I am not allowed to choose for either Schilder or his opponents. Neither am I allowed to decide whose theology offers the correct account of the relationship between either God and man, or Jesus Christ and culture. I can try to explain why Schilder felt the need to attack intellectuals like Hepp, Kuyper, Miskotte and Noordmans polemically. And when Harinck says that this had to do with the danger which their ideas, ideals and theologies posed to the Reformed community, I am inclined to agree. However, this can hardly be taken as a 'spiritual' account of polemics; rather it is a social-psychological one. I definitely do not agree with Harinck' argument that, ultimately, Schilder did not deal with persons or institutions, but rather with the principles behind these manifestations.[243] What Harinck calls the "ultimate" for me is merely a matter of marking one's position from that of others who are taken to be threats to one's own acclaimed status within the field of intellectual production. According to Harinck, however, Schilder saw in his polemics a stimulus for contact and reflection, even with opponents. It was the task of a polemist to cre-

[240] Brinkman 1983, 1990.

[241] Veenhof 1991: 61.

[242] Harinck 1989: 27.

[243] Harinck 1989: 28.

ate a sense of community. That is why Schilder could write that to forget about polemics was like abandoning your brother. He wished for an open discussion of divergent positions. In this manner he gained a sense of community, or to use the terminology of the church, ecumenality.[244] The point is that Harinck confuses open discussion with polemics. When others say that Schilder was playing with people, it is difficult to imagine how this serves a serious debate on issues raised by opponents. Rather it suggests that he tried to outwit his opponents in order to experience a sense of community, not so much with the ones whom he attacked, but instead with a public that heartily agreed with his arguments and was prepared to accept his authority.

I believe that Harinck's observations are equally inadequate when he tries to find the commitment shared by intellectuals as diverse as Schilder, Van Duinkerken and Miskotte. According to him, the spirit of these three 'young' intellectuals was governed by their experiences of World War I. The war forced them to rethink the Christian tradition.[245] Yet, it does not explain why they reacted polemically, or why, as Harinck wonders, Van Duinkerken became far less agressive than Schilder toward the end of his life.[246] As I have previously indicated, Van Duinkerken was able to successfully integrate into mainstream Roman Catholic culture, whereas the newly established Free Reformed community still had to identify itself between Reformed Churches on the one hand, and the Netherlands Reformed 'breakthrough'-movement on the other. The same held for Miskotte, who, being a member of the latter movement, did not belong to any established party, whether before or immediately after World War II.

Van Duinkerken attacked Ter Braak, but later treated Vestdijk kindly. The latter, however, was severely criticized by Miskotte. Schilder, on the other hand, did not refer to Vestdijk at all. According to my theory, this shouldn't come as any surprise, because Schilder should not have felt threatened by the argument put forward in *De toekomst der religie* the way Miskotte did. Similarly, intellectuals who, according to their expertise, felt the need to comment on Vestdijk did so in a very moderate and even sympathetic way.

The poet and essayist P.A. Hekstra was far less critical of Vestdijk than he might have been if there had been no conflict with members of other churches. Of the various angles from which intellectuals could criticize Vestdijk's essay, he felt that both the traditional and modern intellectual paradigms within the GKN were inadequate. Moreover, he defended Vestdijk against the critique of Miskotte. More generally—as a special branch of the 'younger generation' within the Reformed tradition

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[244] Harinck 1989: 31.

[245] Harinck 1994: 23, 35.

[246] Harinck 1994: 34.

had recently separated from the GKN and become utterly hostile to the breakthrough movement—it is even likely that Hekstra, as well as literary and cultural critic M. Siesling, were more eager to counter other, far more imminent dangers. Even Vestdijk's arguments could be helpful in this war. Surely, they did not agree with his ideas, nor with his ideals; yet, apparently there was no reason to attack him. Hekstra even criticized 'Marnix' for doing so.

Both Hekstra and Siesling are examples of the type of critics we found in the RKK earlier on. Occupying a place in the margins within their own community, such as Govaart and Van der Wey, they tended to employ the criticism of outsiders (like Vestdijk) in order to attack intellectuals more closely associated to their own institutional background and theological convictions. From previous chapters we know that 'Marnix' and Kamphuis took another direction.

'Marnix' was the pseudonym under which A. Zijlstra (1874-1968) published his comments on current issues in a local newspaper when he was still active in Groningen politics and journalism. His sharp and fashionable critiques on important matters caught the attention of Kuyper. The latter even invited him to write for *De Standaard*. After Kuyper's retirement in the early 1920s, Hendrik Colijn asked him to become Kuyper's successor as chief commentator of this leading periodical within the Dutch Reformed community. Like Schilder, Zijlstra would become a journalist in the polemical tradition of Kuyper and Groen.[247] His fiercest attacks were directed against Karl Barth and his friends at the NCSV. Early on he chose to side with Schilder. Apart from his journalistic activities, he was a member of Parliament for the ARP. Like many other important public figures, he was taken hostage and sent to Buchenwald during the war. And like their fellows in Beekvliet, they spent their time deliberating on the future of the Netherlands after the liberation from the Nazis. Yet, he did not believe in any kind of breakthrough-politics and refused to participate in ecumenical dialogue.[248] Not surprisingly, he followed Schilder's example and left the GKN and ARP. He was one of the moving forces in the VGKN, as well as the founder of the Reformed Political Association (*Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond*). He also became one of the chief commentators on current political and intellectual issues for *De Reformatie*. During the first few years after the war, it was unclear what exactly the future would hold for this magazine. The editors had to find their place among the other media. It had to transform itself from a leading Dutch Reformed magazine into a Free Reformed periodical. It was meant to offer direction to people who had become confused by recent developments within the churches. Moreover, Zijlstra needed to define a new public after he left his fixed position as "coregroup"-

[247] Akkerman 1978: 42, 134, 162.

[248] Akkerman 1978: 111.

member[249] within the old pillar-structure. Under these circumstances, it is possible to imagine that he worried about the threat which Vestdijk's "atheist" arguments posed to the authority of intellectuals who were still struggling to find their proper niche within the field of cultural production. And from his own work during that period, it becomes clear that, as a politician, he felt hampered when faced with attacks from outside. He realized that, under the present conditions, it was impossible to forbid the publications of unbelievers, even if they were of an "atheist" spirit.[250] If he couldn't forbid it, then he certainly took the opportunity to attack the spirit of atheism—a threat disguised behind the figure of Vestdijk.

Yet, whereas Schilder was without any doubt that the leading figure within the Free Reformed community, Zijlstra, would remain "the intellectual of the small people" (*intellectueel der kleine luyden*).[251] Though erudite, he would always remain the schoolteacher who had not finished his university studies. This did not hold the same way for figures like Siesling and Hekstra. Literary criticism was their job. And within the confines of their expertise, they seemed to feel quite confident, at least with respect to Vestdijk; they used to fiercely attack theologians from both the GKN and NHK. Apparently, they did not feel the need to attack Vestdijk. Schilder himself did not even respond to *De toekomst der religie*. And whereas the other two critics were faithful to the authority of Schilder, Zijlstra had his own career, though he was not quite sure of his status compared to the other opinion leaders within the community. In addition, he was used to commenting on issues of which he was not an expert. And Vestdijk's book certainly dealt with problems in which he was not professionally experienced.

Something similar held for the Free Reformed minister J. Kamphuis. After the death of Schilder in 1952, the professors at the Theological Seminary became the editors of *De Reformatie*. Soon troubles arose and the publisher appointed new editors, of whom the Free Reformed Reverend J. Kamphuis would become the most prominent.[252] He remained the chief editor of the magazine until 1970. In 1972 he began to contribute to the community newspaper *Nederlands Dagblad*. During this time, he was commonly regarded as one of the major opinion leaders within the Free Reformed community.[253] Yet, his authority did not remain unchallenged. In 1958, the Synod appointed Kamphuis as professor of Church History. Yet, immediately afterwards, a polemic flared with regard to the competence of Kamphuis. His reputation, critics suggested, was built more on his authority as a journalist and a commen-

[249] Kuiper 1972: 598.

[250] Zijlstra 1950: 426.

[251] Akkerman 1978: 22, 36.

[252] De Vries 1979: 67.

[253] Valkenburg 1974: 133.

tator, than on his expert knowledge of history. This was only the beginning of the troubles.[254] In 1967, he would become one of the most important players in a conflict between theologians and opinion leaders.[255] Yet, Kamphuis remained a leading authority within the community. Soon after, he was appointed ordinary professor of Church History. At that time, he made made some polemical comments on Vestdijk in a lecture given to students at the Seminary in Kampen.

In 1979 he accepted the most prestigious chair of Dogmatics at the Seminary. And even though his polemical comments on Vestdijk were re-published during this period, he did not return to the topics which he had covered in his lecture. Only at the end of the 1990s, after he was invited to comment by the editors of the *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, did his polemical attitude towards Vestdijk resurge. Why?

According to the hypothesis which I have developed, arguments are *means* rather than the *ends* of any polemic. What is really at stake in this kind of exchange is the authority of the intellectual involved. It is not my intention to explain in which sense Kamphuis felt his authority to be challenged in his conflict with his own colleagues. I shall leave it to others to study this matter in more detail. The question I wish to answer is why he felt the need to attack Vestdijk personally. Many comments on *De toekomst der religie* were to the point; others, however, were unmistakably directed against the man behind the argument. What made Kamphuis react in this way?

In his lecture at the Seminary in 1973, Kamphuis recognized that Church History was a marginal enterprise within the field of Theological Studies. We are thus tempted to infer that his attack on Vestdijk might have been a way to compensate for the general lack of authority which historians have within orthodox communities, especially when compared to disciplines like Dogmatics and Ethics. Moreover, Kamphuis could not formally figure as an expert within his area of teaching. He never earned a doctorate. Whether his appointment to the chair of Dogmatics in 1979, was taken as a final victory over his critics within the Free Reformed community is of little importance for our purposes. Yet, like Zijlstra, he would always remain the journalist, ready to comment on a variety of issues far beyond any professional competence. Never would he be the kind of professor that kept himself within the limits of his research topics. And if invited to, Kamphuis did not mind moving beyond the boundaries of his own limited community. In 1998, upon the 100th anniversary of Vestdijk's birthday, he agreed to comment on Vestdijk's oeuvre in general and *De toekomst der religie* in particular. Yet, he did so for a public that did not so much belong to the VGKN as to an association of different churches. In addition, even

[254] De Vries 1979: 67.

[255] Cf. his own comments on the polemical controversy in Valkenburg 1974: 140-142.

though dogmatics are still highly esteemed among these people, rising levels of education renders them far more critical towards authorities than ever before.[256]

Conclusions

In summary of the material which I have offered in this chapter, it is again striking to see such sustained polemics on a single essay by such a highly diversified group of people during a period of fifty years. This fact, of course, has to do with the relevance of the topic; apparently, many people recognized that it had something to do with their positions within the field of cultural interactions. Yet, as I have argued, this is not only a matter of topic. Surely, the fact that people felt triggered to react had something to do with their interest in matters concerning the concept of religion, ideas about the future of Christianity, the question of whether the latter religion was necessarily intolerant and repressive, the value of Socialism and Buddhism as possible alternatives, etc. However, the problem dealt with throughout this study is how to explain why some intellectuals reacted polemically, whereas others, though highly critical, were far more sympathetic to Vestdijk's arguments and refrained attacking him personally. It has been impossible to show that those with polemical inclinations were ideologically more distant from Vestdijk than others; on the contrary, it is striking that so many orthodox-Protestant critics reacted so moderately, while literary critics—whose ideas more closely resembled those of Vestdijk—often reacted aggressively and denigrated Vestdijk personally. So, I believe we should search somewhere else for an explanation of polemics. As I argued before, it is not the topic, but rather the social position of intellectuals within the field of cultural production that determines whether or not they are likely to react aggressively.

First of all, we found conflicts within the field of literary and cultural criticism. Two frontiers were especially important here. The first was between literary critics contesting authoritative positions that, according to me, were likely to be perceived as dominant within the field. The second was between literary and cultural critics on the one hand, and theologians on the other. None of these groups could reasonably be counted among either the cultural or political establishment. Whereas literary critics would never dominate the public sphere, the theologians whom we have discussed here either belonged to the breakthrough movement within the NHK or to the minor cultural critical circles within the pillared communities. The 1960s (the third period in the reception of *De toekomst der religie*) formed a turning point in the history of polemics around Vestdijk. Literary critics did not participate in the controversy at this time. It is likely that this had much do to with the fact that they no

[256] Cf. Stoffels 1995: 189-190, on the critical attitude of the public as well as the process of secularization within the orthodox communities; also Graafland 1990, De Jong, Koppelaar & De Vries 1991; and Velema 1993 on the controversy around Versnel 1991.

longer perceived theologians as a threat to their position. It is likely that the process of secularization rendered religious authority obsolete. Whereas the breakthrough movement had begun to lose momentum soon after the war, theologians in general lost their dominance as a distinct category of intellectuals. They got involved in more mundane issues, such as mental health. Whereas the discipline of Theology had played an important role within the public sphere till the 1960s, afterwards it was Psychology and Psychiatry, together with professionals working within the psychotherapeutic disciplines, that would begin to dominate both the intellectual and political scenes.

This brings us to the second category of intellectuals who contributed to the controversy, namely the 'progressive' theologians within the NHK and the Mennonite community. They were among the fiercest critics. All of them belonged to the breakthrough movement. The latter movement not only lost its momentum soon after the war, but it would take even less time for theologians to become highly disappointed with the result of their own interventions. In their struggle for 'religion' to play a more important role in public life, they perceived Vestdijk's arguments as a threat to their positions within the field of politics. By the end of the 1950s, sympathetic comments on Vestdijk made by liberal theologians from NHK, as well as Arminian circles, would mark the last episode in the struggle of the breakthrough movement with *De toekomst der religie*. During the 1960s they would join the process by which a new super-pillar would be established, together with the liberal theologians whom they had previously loathed. Apart from the increasing role which Psychology and Psychiatry played within the field of theology, they welcomed contributions by intellectuals from the traditional pillar organizations. And whereas the breakthrough movement failed to accomplish its objectives during the first decade after the war, they would eventually come to dominate the field of social organizations which mediated between the individual and the state, thanks to 'progressive' circles within the traditional pillars. Only marginal intellectuals would continue to react polemically.

Thirdly, apart from those intellectuals who acted without any secure institutional foundation to support their initiatives, within the pillar organizations polemical contributions were also to be found—namely by intellectuals who belonged either to the RKK or the GKN. And similar to the 'progressive' intellectuals within the NHK after the 1960s, only who played a marginal role would feel triggered to react polemically on Vestdijk and Sierksma—not only literary critics, but also minor theologians who had failed to dominate the public for which they were writing. However, apart from making fun of outsiders, they frequently attacked leading (at least more dominant) authorities within their own pillar organization as well. Within the Roman Catholic community, this pattern continued till the late 1970s.

Finally, the pattern indentified with respect to the aforementioned pillar organizations can also be found in a community that commented upon *De toekomst der religie* throughout the entire history of its reception. Again, whereas leading intellectuals did not comment on the essay, marginal figures reacted highly polemically, either towards Vestdijk or towards theologians from the communities competing for their public. Worse, by the end of the fifth period of our history, we not only see the last real intellectual interest in Vestdijk's arguments on religion, but these last comments also indicate the end of an era in which theological discourse played a role in public life. Even here, theologians struggled with the first signs of secularization, without any strong indication of a merger with the networks and webs of institutions which provided for the aforementioned super-pillar.

The secularization thesis—often invoked to explain ecumenical tendencies, dialogue as well as consensus, as the primary goal of public discourse—cannot serve to illuminate the history of the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*. Certainly, it might be helpful to understand why literary critics no longer feel the need to scorn Vestdijk's argument. In other cases—especially at the end of the last period of the reception—it cannot be applied. Without a doubt, secularization made ecumenical tendencies and dialogue worth pursuing; it turned out to be the only way for theologians to reatin at least some influence within the public sphere. On the other hand, however, consensus as the primary goal of public discourse is not intrinsic to the process of secularization. As Lijphart has argued, at the time that the old pillar organizations still dominated the public sphere in the Netherlands, consensus had already been regarded as indispensable in matters of practical politics, and parties did so with the permission of church authorities and leading theologians. This did not mean that the latter agreed with their political opponents. Yet, they understood that in a plural society like the Netherlands, tolerance and compromise was at times inevitable. A similar attitude can be recognized in our controversy. The leading intellectuals of the established pillar organizations were highly moderate in their replies to Vestdijk's arguments. Only after the theologians of the breakthrough movement became integrated into the main trends within the public sphere, did they abandoned their previously employed polemical style.

Instead of secularization, it is the social condition of each single individual—or intellectual, in our case—that determined the manner in which they responded to the challenge which Vestdijk (and Sierksma) put forward. Whether minor intellectual or member of a circle that could not count on an established relation to the public which they were aiming for, I have reasons to believe that those who reacted polemically to Vestdijk's arguments in *De toekomst der religie* perceived their authority to be threatened. And, given the material which I have presented throughout this study, it is understandable that they employed a polemical style of writing in order to counter the possibly dangerous effects which Vestdijk's way of reasoning might have

on their own credibility, and, consequently, their legitimacy as spokespeople for a certain public.

GENERAL CONCLUSION: AUTHORITY IN QUESTION

The analysis of the controversy triggered by Simon Vestdijk's De toekomst der religie confirms my initial hypothesis. As I argued, polemic is a means by which intellectuals try to defend or establish their authority before a public against real or imaginary threats.

Starting with Vestdijk's conclusion that Christianity should die—and that, according to him, in the long run it would—we have seen various reactions from various people. While some agreed with Vestdijk's arguments, others fiercely rejected them. Some limited themselves to points which Vestdijk had made throughout his essay, while others felt challenged to account for the way he had formulated his arguments. Some found the argument wholly convincing, while others questioned Vestdijk's competence in handling the issues to which he pretended to give answer. Some arrived at their own conclusions after seriously pondering Vestdijk's arguments, while others merely rejected them outright.

I have posed the question of how different people were able to arrive at so many different conclusions of one and the same text. In addition, it is striking to observe critics using employing different styles of arguing to make their points. For our purposes, the polemical contributions to the controversy have been the most interesting. In the introduction, I defined polemic as an attack directed against a person before a public by means of words. Compared to other kinds of intellectual exchange, both subject (always a person) and style of polemic (whether autocratic or declarative) provide for its distinctive character.

As we have seen in the second chapter, there is something about the subject of a polemic that sets it apart from other types of intellectual exchange. Whereas 'normal' discussion focuses on the arguments and the line of reasoning, polemics tend to substitute an author for the arguments. If a polemical critic considers the line of reasoning unsound, he does not limit himself to that conclusion. Rather, he tries to account for it by creating a subject behind the argument. Instead of reaching any positive conclusions about the subject or 'author', he will try to derogate him before the eyes of the public. The reason why the arguments of the 'author' are so widely off the mark is that s/he is either incompetent or, worse, mentally or morally disturbed. True, the judgment might be correct. But in polemic, the facts and reasons offered in order to make the case against the other are questionable from a scientific point of view. First, the conclusions on the other's arguments are not made after serious discussion or analysis of the issues at hand. Second, apart from the argument, random facts about the life of the 'author' are sporadically invoked to further justify the conclusions drawn from the text. In general, the attack always lacks the thorough and systematic analysis of both text and biography required in order to support the final

verdict. The only thing which the critic accomplishes is in fact to create an incongruity between expectations (serious discussion, the truth, respected author) and the outcome (distortions, nonsense, stupidity or personality disorder). This is the mechanism which Freud identified as indispensable for humor and its most violent manifestations in scorn.

Some critics derogated Vestdijk for pretending to be a prophet. Even though there are many ways to talk about the future, linking an essay written by a novelist to the grand prophetic traditions of biblical times was clearly meant to trigger laughter among the public. Vestdijk himself seemed to have expected this. He explicitly warned his readers not to overestimate his ambitions. His careful way of reasoning and consideration of the facts were more similar to the modest attempts made by scientists to understand the world in which we live. Apart from the fact that a scientific approach does not preclude disagreement, his critics already found it humorous that a novelist pretended to discuss a topic which, they claimed, belong to their field of expertise. Especially theologians made an issue out of this. Vestdijk cum suis countered that theologians could not be regarded as legitimate experts on religion either. They could better limit themselves to dogma, rather than scientific theory. The theologians in their turn argued that religious belief did not exclude the possibility of scientific approach. They scorned the pretensions of atheists, who laid claim to value-free judgments, but who merely belonged to the herd of intellectuals and petty bourgeois who merely observed religion from outside its walls without having the nerve to choose either for God or the devil.

Yet, apart from creating an incongruity between expectations and actual outcome, how did they attempt to convince their public of these statements? As we have seen in the third chapter, critics could choose between four different styles of arguing in order to suggest competence and create a sense of authority. The problem for us has been to figure out which one is most likely to occur in the case of polemics—and here appears a striking difference with serious discussion and dialogue. In polemical controversies, neither facts nor references to other—commonly regarded as competent—authorities play a significant role, as is common to the realistic and bureaucratic styles. Whereas serious discussion strives to reach an adequate representation of reality, and dialogue requires agreement on some policy as an objective, polemic is simply employed in order to conquer the position supposedly held by the other. Apart from attacking the authority of the opponent, it implies an unlimited claim on authority by the critic himself. This style focuses on the person who is trying to make his point. Yet, rather than being modest, as is typical for the republican style of arguing, the autocratic or declarative style does not leave any room for doubt. And given the aggressive nature of polemics, the latter style is characteristic of this kind of controversy.

Some critics tried to suggest that Vestdijk had failed to meet his scientific ambitions because he denied that God even existed. According to Vestdijk, religion was not so much the belief in God as the belief in the possibility of arriving at a sense of totality and lasting spiritual happiness. Yet, whereas Vestdijk tried to convince his readers by means of extensive and elaborate arguments, his opponents simply discarded his conclusions without explaining why. Vestdijk's theory of religious projection, meant to account for the particular form which ideas of God usually took, was a mere sophism. His argument that Christianity was an essentially intolerant and sexually repressive dogmatic system was an outright scandal. That Christianity would someday die and be substituted by Socialism and Buddhism was simply ridiculous. And the idea that future religious leaders would be bred at institutes which combined the best of the Christian retreat, the Buddhist monastery and the English university, made critics burst with laughter. Yet, were there any specific reasons to react in this manner? If so, these critics failed to sufficiently clarify their objections in order to let their style of arguing be counted among the realist, bureaucratic or republican alternatives commonly associated with a sophisticatedly political or scientific attitude. They failed to clarify why Vestdijk should be regarded as a 'false' prophet rather than a scientist—a mere intellectual and bourgeois, rather than an interesting challenge to meet. The only means employed to make us believe them, was the authority of the critic himself, aggressively imposing itself on the public.

Having identified its important characteristics, I tried to account for polemic in a way that differs from the one employed in the very contributions which I defined as polemical. It would be too easy to conclude that the intellectuals involved in the controversy were merely distorting Vestdijk's argument—even worse if I were to simply attribute this to either mental or moral disorder. Yet, as I have been arguing, the manner in which polemists react to some real or imaginary threat is highly similar to what Robert Robins and Jerrold Post identified as the paranoid personality disorder. I employed this concept to connect the sense of threat which I assumed to be at the root of any polemical attack on the one hand, and the subject and style characteristic of polemics on the other. Still then, the question remains why people feel threatened. For that, I referred to the conceptual dichotomies available in sociology, namely that between dominant and marginal intellectuals or between establishment and outsiders.

I developed the following hypothesis. According to me, polemic is a means by which intellectuals attempt to defend or establish their authority before a certain public against real or imaginary threats. Authority can be attributed to anybody who is recognized by a certain public as a legitimate spokesperson. Intellectuals, taken here to be intelligent individuals who speak out on issues of public importance, aim for authority. It is supposed that especially those at the margins of the public sphere, or outsiders to specific circles of intellectuals, are quick to feel their authority at stake.

On the other hand, members of the establishment, regarded as the opinion leaders of their communities, are likely to feel far more self-confident and secure. And whereas I assume the reply of outsiders to perceived threats to be polemical, those by dominant intellectuals are likely to be less aggressive, more modest and to the point.

In order to test whether this was indeed the case, the final chapter was meant to correlate the polemical contributions identified in chapters II and III to specific positions within the public sphere. With respect to the public in the Netherlands in the first two decades after World War II, its highly fragmented nature is particularly striking. It is even possible to speak of many different public spheres. Each of the pillared communities provided for its own media and public. This implies that we can safely speak of a Roman Catholic, a Dutch Reformed and a Free Reformed sphere in which the authority of its leading intellectuals was heavily institutionalized and hardly challenged by outsiders to their own circle. On the other hand, the intellectuals at the margins of these pillar-communities tended to react highly polemical, towards both opinion leaders within their own communities and to outsiders. The same held for intellectuals outside of the established pillar-organizations. In general, 'progressive' breakthrough intellectuals reacted polemically to the challenge posed by De toekomst der religie. The latter were attacked by literary and cultural critics that did not belong to their circle. Yet, even though they held different—if not directly opposed—positions within the controversy, they could not count on a fixed public. Whereas literary and cultural critics generally belong to the outsiders, the breakthrough intellectuals had to find their own niche within the public square. Whereas the first group had always been institutionally disadvantaged compared to other circles of intellectuals, the second group would only become dominant during the 1960s. In the end, the latter would be successful in breaking through the established pillar boundaries and building their own 'super-pillar'.

Are these findings confirmed by historical developments within the course of the controversy itself? In the case of the 'progressive' breakthrough intellectuals, the answer is yes. Within the traditional pillar-communities, things changed in the sense that institutional boundaries became increasingly obsolete. Within breakthrough circles, these processes signaled a shift from polemics towards dialogue. Apart from the contributions to our controversy, the debate between atheist R.F. Beerling and certain leading theologians was also clear proof of the changing climate.[1] And whereas opinion leaders within the pillared communities had not reacted polemically towards outsiders, marginal intellectuals would not limit their attacks to outsiders. Instead, they began to question the authority of the 'progressive' élites within their own communities as well. As previously indicated in the introduction, this tendency continued well into the 1990s when, upon the centennial anniversary of the Free

[1] Beerling 1973; contributions by H.J. Heering, H. Berkhof and H. Adriaanse.

University in Amsterdam, the Leiden professor Henk Versnel was invited to explain why he thought it reasonable not to believe in God. Dutch Reformed opinion leaders certainly did not agree with him. Yet, fierce attacks only came from circles that felt increasingly cornered by 'progressive' intellectuals which they perceived as just as threatening as atheist outsiders like Versnel.[2] The 'progressives' on the other hand, organized a public session in which Versnel was allowed to continue his critique on Christianity as exemplified in the work of leading theologian Harry Kuitert.[3] Elaborate criticism of religion by Herman Philipse did not trigger any controversy comparable to the one around Vestdijk (and Sierksma) fifty years before. According to my own hypothesis, this must be explained by the fact that, at the end of the twentieth century, religion in general—and Christianity in particular—no longer played any significant role within the public sphere in the Netherlands. From a dominant institutional factor both religion and Christianity turned private and became largely implicit.

Whatever proponents of the secularization-thesis—who believe that religion is at the root of every controversy—might suggest, it does not mean that only with the disappearance of Christianity from the public sphere that polemics died out as well. On the contrary, even today we frequently see this type of intellectual exchange. As we have seen, many theologians reacted moderately—some were even sympathetic—to Vestdijk's arguments. Moreover, economy, politics or any other cultural issue might also trigger disagreement and—if authority is perceived to be threatened—aggression and attack.

Even though my research confirms the hypothesis which I have put forward, the possibility still exists that it will fail to stand future tests. First, some might disagree on the criteria which I have developed to distinguish between polemical and non-polemical contributions. By means of different concepts, reviews and replies which I have classified as polemical might turn out not to be polemical at all. Then the link I established between text and context will also fail to make sense. Second, those who agree with the way I defined polemics might disagree on the position which I assigned to each of the intellectuals within the public sphere. Future statistics and detailed biographical research on individuals about whom I did not find many sources, might arrive at radically different conclusions than I did.

On the other hand, as a theory, my proposal to explain polemics might be fruitfully applied to other cases as well. In my introduction, I have referred to Norbert Elias, who developed a theory to explain the relations between established leaders and outsiders in a small village community. In his work, this community becomes a microcosm which illuminates a wide range of sociological configurations, including

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[2] Versnel 1991, Velema 1993.

[3] Versnel & Kuitert 1993.

racial, ethnic, class and gender relations. Another example is offered by anthropologist Talal Asad in his study of relations between British intellectuals and Muslims in the wake of the Rushdie affair. As he says:[4]

It is common knowledge that the Rushdie affair precipitated a sense of political crisis in Britain. Large numbers of Muslims publicly expressed their anger and distress at the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, demonstrated in London, petitioned Penguin Books to withdraw the book, and then the government to ban it. The government rejected the call for banning and warned Muslims not to isolate themselves from their host society. Newspapers and television almost unanimously condemned the "fundamentalism" of Britain's Muslims. On February 14, 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini issued his shocking death sentence on Rushdie. This greatly aggravated the sense of crisis in Britain, although most prominent Muslims there publicly dissociated themselves from it. Ten days later, home secretary, Douglas Hurd, made a speech at a gathering of Muslims, emphasizing the importance of proper integration for ethnic minorities, the need to learn about British culture without abandoning one's own faith, and the necessity of refraining from violence. At the beginning of July, his deputy, John Patten, wrote an open letter among similar lines, to "a number of leading Muslims." Two weeks later, he produced another document, entitled "On Being British," which was circulated to the media [...] First I want to pose a question. Why did the British government feel the need to make these statements at this juncture? Why were these statements widely applauded by the liberal middle classes, whose pronouncements both before and after the government's intervention repeatedly denounced "Muslim violence"? This was not because there was an unmanageable threat to law and order in the country [...]. The Rushdie affair in Britain should be seen primarily as yet another symptom of postimperial British identity in crisis, not—as most commentators have represented it—as an unhappy instance of some immigrants with difficulties in adjusting to a new and more civilized world.

Asad goes on to argue his case in more detail. His analysis could be equally applied to the Netherlands, and in particular to the rise of populist Pim Fortuyn. Yet, the controversy which he triggered indicates a dimension ignored by both Elias and Asad. Rather than being merely a conflict between Muslims and either British or Dutch identity, we must include the relations between intellectuals and politicians within the field of cultural production. Whereas Asad argues that the dominant attitude of British intellectuals was highly critical about the supposed Muslim failure to integrate, in the Netherlands it took a fierce polemic between Fortuyn and his political opponents to change the attitude of government. Rather than being directed at Muslims,

[4] Asad 1993b: 239-241.

the argument was about the definition of—as well as the proper way to address—the problem which Muslims supposedly presented to Dutch society. And this is also the context in which Fortuyn's conclusion that Islam represented a backward culture should be understood. Personally, he did not have any problems with Muslims *per se*. Asked whether he knew any Muslims personally, he answered that with some of them he had even shared the bed. He only detested those cultures which bore the imprint of Islam. Yet, his public claims on Islam were not merely the expression of personal opinion. On the contrary, his statements were framed in such a way as to tease his opponents in both politics and the media.[5]

Yet, given the proximity of time and topic, the controversies around Rushdie and Fortuyn are likely to be charged with public sentiment. The fact, already, that leading intellectuals, including university professors, found it necessary to offer their own opinions on the issues as well as the persons involved implies a serious disadvantage for proper analysis. The advantage of the history I described is that it seems far less relevant today. It is therefore possible to exclude value judgments which might interfere in the case of more recent polemics. Moreover, the material available to test my hypothesis is quantitatively far more impressive than that offered by Asad or any analysis of the controversy around Fortuyn until now. And, whereas Elias did not deal with intellectuals, my hypothesis is qualitatively more sophisticated than the one suggested by Asad, as well.

Whatever the advantage of my research over that done by others, it still belongs to the marketplace of ideas. This means that others might not find my argument to be convincing at all. And, as I have previously stated, I am looking forward to meet their arguments. To repeat: far from pretending to offer truths, my study must be read as an invitation to look at the textual and historical material available from a particular point of view. I would already be grateful if my thesis triggered people to develop theories which are better able to account for more facts than I have attempted account for. In this sense, theory is like technology employed in order to produce commodities. I will only be able to sell them when people consider them useful either to make sense of the reality in which they find themselves or to explore new worlds which they have hitherto never thought of. And rather then being economically profitable, again, I would be glad to have played my little part in—what Popper called—the evolutionary growth of knowledge.

[5] For a description of the controversy, cf. Pels 2003, Wansink 2004.

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In this bibliography, I distinguish between primary and secondary sources. The first category includes all the contributions to the controversy around *De toekomst der religie* I found during my research. These sources are mainly referred to in chapters I, II and III. The second category includes, first of all, the bibliographies relevant to our controversy; secondly, the biographical literature on the intellectuals contributing to the controversy; thirdly, works concerning the theories developed in throughout my study; and, finally, literature on the historical developments within the Netherlands in general as well as the pillared communities and disciplines constituting its public spheres in particular. These sources are referred to in both the introduction and chapter IV.

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SUMMARY

In this study I have attempted to show that polemic is a means by which intellectuals defend or establish their authority before a public against real or imaginary threats. First of all, polemic has been defined as a war waged with words in order to overpower another individual. Second, those who participate in this kind of war are intellectuals, defined here as intelligent individuals who speak out on issues of public importance. Third, rather than issues of public importance, it is authority which is really at stake in polemics—authority being attributed here to intellectuals who are recognized as legitimate spokespersons by the/ir public. These three elements are tied together by the concept of the paranoid personality as described by Robin Robins and Jerrold Post. As they argue, paranoid people constantly look for hidden meanings because they are insecure. These hidden meanings are interpreted as attacks on their person by somebody regarded as the enemy. Not being able to stand this attack, they try to neutralize its effects by means of launching a counter-attack. The enemy has to be defeated in order to support a compensatory grand delusion of being the only legitimate authority. I assumed all of these elements to be present in the case of polemical exchange.

In this manner, I believe that we are able to understand certain aspects of the controversy surrounding Simon Vestdijk's *De toekomst der religie*, which lasted from 1948 until 1998. Given the fact that some critics felt triggered to react polemically, whereas others did not, I asked myself how we should account for the differences. The historical overview offered in the first chapter shows that the role played by polemic in the controversy declined after 1960. And even though critics continued to pay attention to the arguments put forward by Vestdijk, only a few polemical references were made by the end of the period which I have studied. Yet, what exactly is the difference between polemical and non-polemical contributions? Two aspects are important within this context. The linguistic analysis pursued in the second chapter focused on the personal attack as typical for the polemical manner of addressing Vestdijk's arguments. The rhetorical analysis pursued in the third chapter focused on the autocratic or declarative style of arguing as a distinguishing feature. Finally, a sociological analysis was employed to correlate the findings of the previous chapters to the institutional position of the critics who contributed to the controversy.

In his essay, Vestdijk argued that, sooner or later, Christianity would die. And, as he admitted, he would have no problem with its eventual demise. In the end, he found Christianity a metaphysical religion that mistook its own images for absolute truth. Understandably, such a religion could only be intolerant, as its history of violence and persecution made clear. Moreover, its rigid dogmatic system did not allow for sexuality to flourish, as religious energies were directed away from worldly pleasures. Instead of focusing exclusively on his relationship with God, the Christian had

to become integrated with his fellow human beings and with himself. However, Socialism and Buddhism would be the religions of the future, Vestdijk predicted. Instead of theologians, teachers bred at institutions which resembled the Christian retreat, the Buddhist monastery, and the English university, would become the future leaders of the western world.

Whereas some found Vestdijk's arguments quite interesting, many critics staunchly opposed. This was especially the case during the first years after the initial publication of *De toekomst der religie*. Over time, the intensity of reactions decreased, both quantitatively and quantitatively. Based on these two aspects, I have identified four different periods. During the first period (1948-1951), contributions almost exclusively focused on Vestdijk's essay. The fiercest attacks were to be found immediately after its publication as well. During the second period (1952-1959), the way in which Fokke Sierksma sided with Vestdijk heavily influenced the controversy. His severe criticism of certain opponents triggered new attacks. Yet, replies were generally more moderate and thorough. Attention was no longer limited to Vestdijk's essay either. During the third period (1960-1972), *De toekomst der religie* became part of other discussions, either on the development of the modern mentality in general, or on Vestdijk's oeuvre as a whole. During the final period (1973-1998), critics continued to focus on the essay. Interest, however, was limited to small circles of either Vestdijk fans or marginal religious communities.

These developments in the history of the reception of the essay become far more specific when we make an analytical distinction between two kinds of contributions: polemical and non-polemical. I defined polemics as an attempt to discredit another person before a certain public. The difference with non-polemical has been demonstrated in detail by means of both linguistic (chapter II) and rhetorical analysis (chapter III). Whereas the first type of analysis primarily refers to the textual mechanisms specific to humor and scorn, the second one employs the concept of style as repertoire of conventions depending on aesthetic reactions for political effect.

As we have seen in chapter II, some critics tried to counter the line of reasoning Vestdijk which had developed throughout his essay by means of detailed discussion. Others, however, created a highly distorted image of the argument. This process of condensing the other's statements went together with an attempt to account for the argument by means of creating an image of its author as incompetent, or even suffering from mental or moral disorders. I defined the latter approach as indispensable for polemics. Even though Vestdijk warned his readers not to mistake him for a prophet, critics accused him of pretending to be one; and, as was to be expected, he failed. Certainly, Vestdijk pretended to follow the rules of scientific description. According to his critics, however, he was a mere amateur—an artist at best. And even though he tried to understand religion, the fiercest among his opponents regarded him as an outsider—not so much because they found him unable to understand religious peo-

ple, but rather because he did not wish to take them seriously. Keeping outside of the church, observing rather than participating or submitting himself to the one and only God, Vestdijk was a bourgeois. Yet, friends of Vestdijk countered, did these critics mean that only theologians were able to make legitimate claims on issues concerning religion? How could these people be taken seriously? If Vestdijk failed to live up to the scientific ideal, it was even worse for the theologians, Sierksma (among others) argued.

As we have seen in chapter III, some critics tried to counter Vestdijk's ideas either by referring to facts or other authorities in the field of scientific research, or by venting their own personal opinions. Others, however, tried to impose on the public their verdicts of both the argument and its author by means of an autocratic or declarative style of reasoning. This style is employed in order to let readers take judgments for granted merely because the one who is expressing them is saying so. Intellectuals who make these judgments do not show any sign of restraint or second thoughts. Whatever Vestdijk had argued, critics simply declared that Christianity would not die—because it represented the truth about man and his place in the world. Rather than focussing on man's relationship with God, love for one's neighbors was part of one's devotion towards his Creator. Instead of a mere procreative act, sexuality was regarded as holy-yet-limited to marital relationships. And whereas Socialism was integrated into the Christian Gospel, Buddhism could not be legitimately called a religion at all. Clearly, the fact that they did not agree with Vestdijk had little to do with facts, legitimate personal preferences or other authoritative references. On the contrary, their argument was simply true in and of itself. Vestdijk's distortion of the issues was attributed to mere incompetence or, worse, a personality disorder.

The final issue, dealt with in chapter IV, is how to explain for the polemical reactions to Vestdijk's argument in *De toekomst der religie*. I have attempted to employ the secularization-thesis to account for the way in which our controversy developed. However, taking secularization to be the process by which religious institutions and authorities lose hold over the public sphere, the question is how it can be linked to the number and intensity of polemical contributions. The results of this type of analysis are twofold. On the one hand, we find polemics die out because religion no longer dominated the public sphere in the Netherlands. This holds especially for the ways in which circles of literary and cultural critics dealt with the issues at hand. On the other hand, polemics did not play any role within circles in which religious authorities, and theologians in particular, still enjoyed a strong authoritative hold on discussions of public importance within their specific spheres of influence. The situation within the tightly organized pillar structures of the Dutch Reformed and Roman Catholic churches is a case in point. These conclusions point to a more detailed dis-

cussion of developments within the public sphere/s in the Netherlands from 1948 until 1998.

Rather than the secularization-thesis, I have applied a postmodern sociological analysis in which the position of intellectuals within their institutional setting was assumed to determine their behavior and the development of their ideas. Two factors are important here. First, do intellectuals belong to a tightly organized institutional environment in which authorities enjoy a close relationship with their public? If not, then they are likely to react polemically. If in fact they do belong to some highly organized environment, the question of whether they holding dominant or marginal positions is important to consider. Whereas dominant intellectuals usually remain moderate, even when faced with offensive arguments, marginal intellectuals often react highly polemically. This hypothesis is confirmed by my analysis of the sources which deal with the controversy surrounding *De toekomst der religie*. Literary and cultural critics were polemical in their replies to both Vestdijk and the theologians. They held marginal positions within the public sphere. Even though in the historiography considerable attention has been paid to the group of 'progressive' breakthrough intellectuals, until the 1960s they did not belong to a well-established institutional framework. On the contrary, their links to the public were still under construction. Only during the 1960s, when the traditional pillar-structures broke down, were they able to build a network of institutions that would dominate the public sphere until the turn of this century. And whereas breakthrough intellectuals during the late 1940s, as well as the 1950s, were generally inclined to polemics, from the early 1960s on they abandoned this style of arguing—with the exception of a handful of critics at the margins of the 'progressive' public sphere. The same held for critics who were part of the traditional pillar-structures. Intellectuals that held important positions within the Dutch Reformed and Roman Catholic institutions did not react polemically to either Vestdijk or Sierksma. Only the marginal intellectuals fiercely criticized Vestdijk, and often even other critics who belonged to the same pillar organization. The latter tendency was observable within the Free Reformed community as well.

Thus, I would argue, polemic—being a personal attack performed in the authoritarian or autocratic style of arguing—becomes relevant in cases where one feels that s/he is an outsider to the established or dominant circles of power. And it must be interpreted as an attempt by which intellectuals strive to defend or establish their authority against perceived threats in the same way that others argue their own ideas and ideals.

SAMENVATTING

Met deze studie heb ik willen aantonen dat polemiek een middel is waarmee intellectuelen proberen hun autoriteit te verdedigen dan wel te vestigen voor een bepaald publiek tegenover reële dan wel denkbeeldige bedreigingen. Om te beginnen heb ik polemiek gedefinieerd als een oorlog die gevoerd wordt met woorden met de bedoeling een tegenstander te verslaan. De mensen die zich met dergelijke vorm van oorlogvoering bezighouden zijn intellectuelen, dat wil zeggen: intelligente mensen die gewend zijn zich uit te spreken over zaken van algemeen belang. Ik ben er tenslotte vanuit gegaan dat laatstgenoemde issues niet de eigenlijke reden zijn voor de polemiek. Waar het werkelijk om gaat is door het publiek erkend te worden als een autoriteit die met recht kan gelden als woordvoerder met betrekking tot zaken die het algemeen belang aangaan. Deze drie elementen uit de hypothese komen bij elkaar in het door Robbins en Post ontwikkelde concept van de paranoïde persoonlijkheid. Geplaagd door gevoelens van onzekerheid, is deze altijd op zoek naar verborgen betekenissen. Die betekenissen worden gezien als even zovele aanvallen op zijn persoon door iemand die hij bij gevolg als zijn vijand beschouwt. Niet in staat dergelijke aanvallen te weerstaan, probeert de paranoïde persoonlijkheid het negatieve effect daarvan te neutraliseren door middel van een tegenaanval. De ander zal hoe dan ook verslagen dienen te worden om te helpen bij het creëren van de idee de enige legitieme autoriteit te zijn. Iets van dit alles speelt, naar ik aanneem, een rol bij polemiek.

Op deze manier zijn we in staat om enkele aspecten van de controverse rond *De toekomst der religie* van Simon Vestdijk te begrijpen. Het feit dat sommige critici polemisch reageerden, terwijl anderen gematigd kritisch zo niet positief waren, riep voor mij de vraag op hoe dit verschil kon worden verklaard. Het historische overzicht zoals ik dat in het eerste hoofdstuk gegeven heb, laat zien dat polemiek na 1960 snel aan belang inboette. En hoewel critici nog altijd interesse hadden voor de visie van Vestdijk, aan het eind van de door mij bestudeerde periode waren er nog maar enkelen die zich uitgedaagd voelden tot een polemische interventie. Maar wat is nu precies het verschil tussen polemische bijdragen enerzijds en niet-polemische anderzijds? Twee aspecten zijn in dit verband van belang. In de linguïstische analyse die ik heb uitgevoerd in het tweede hoofdstuk worden persoonlijke aanvallen gezien als typisch voor een polemische wijze van reageren op argumenten die Vestdijk naar voren bracht. De retorische analyse van het derde hoofdstuk vestigt de aandacht op de autocratische en stellige manier van argumenteren zoals die door polemisten wordt gehanteerd. De sociologische analyse van het laatste hoofdstuk, tenslotte, is bedoeld om het aldus gecreëerde onderscheid tussen polemische en niet-polemische reacties te relateren aan de institutionele positie van de verschillende mensen die een bijdrage leverden aan de controverse.

In zijn essay beweerde Vestdijk dat, vroeger of later, het Christendom zou sterven. En, zo voegde hij eraan toe, hij zou er geen traan om laten. Volgens hem was het Christendom een metafysisch georiënteerde religie die haar eigen beelden voor de enig ware werkelijkheid hield. Zoals te verwachten kon een dergelijke religie niet anders dan intolerant zijn, zoals een lange geschiedenis van geweld en vervolgingen heeft aangetoond. Bovendien leidde een rigide dogmatisch systeem tot de repressie van seksualiteit en onderlinge solidariteit doordat religieuze energie zich richtte op het bovennatuurlijke in plaats van de medemens. In plaats van uitsluitend gericht te zijn op zijn relatie met God, diende de mens te streven naar integratie met zijn medemens en met zijn eigen zelf. In plaats van het Christendom, zouden volgens Vestdijk Socialisme en Boeddhisme de religies van de toekomst zijn. In plaats van theologen, zouden leraars die waren opgeleid aan instituten die het beste van de Christelijke retraite, de Boeddhistische kloosters en de Engelse universiteit in zich verenigden de toekomstige leiders worden van de westerse wereld.

Terwijl sommigen de ideeën van Vestdijk met veel interesse lazen, waren er anderen die zeiden zijn visie op geen enkele wijze serieus te kunnen nemen. Dat laatste was vooral tijdens de eerste jaren na de publicatie van *De toekomst der religie* het geval. Na verloop van tijd zou zowel het aantal als de toon van de reacties veranderen. Op basis van die twee criteria is het mogelijk om vier periodes te onderscheiden. In de eerste periode (1948-1951) richtte reacties zich vrijwel uitsluitend op het door Vestdijk geschreven essay. De felste kritieken volgden direct na publicatie. In de tweede periode (1952-1959) werden reacties sterk beïnvloed door de wijze waarop Fokke Sierksma zich aan de kant van Vestdijk schaarde. Zijn scherpe kritieken gaven aanleiding tot nieuwe aanvallen. Over het algemeen waren reacties gematigder en hadden ze meer diepgang. Vestdijk speelde een beduidend minder grote rol in deze periode. Deze trend zette zich door in de derde periode (1960-1972). *De toekomst der religie* werd onderdeel van een bredere discussie over de ontwikkeling van de moderne mentaliteit in het algemeen dan wel over het gehele werk van Vestdijk. In de laatste periode (1973-1998) bestond er in bepaalde kringen nog altijd belangstelling voor diens essay. Het ging hier echter om vrij geïsoleerde groepen fans enerzijds en marginale religieuze gemeenschappen anderzijds.

Deze ontwikkeling wordt specifieker wanneer we een analytisch onderscheid aanbrengen tussen twee soorten reacties: polemische en niet-polemische. Ik heb polemiek gedefinieerd als een poging iemand anders in diskrediet te brengen voor een bepaald publiek. Het verschil met niet-polemische bijdragen heb ik meer in detail aangegeven door middel van zowel een linguïstische (hoofdstuk II) als een retorische analyse (hoofdstuk III). Terwijl de eerste vorm van analyse zich in de eerste plaats richt op taalkundige mechanismen die specifiek zijn voor humor en spot, wordt bij de tweede vorm gebruik gemaakt van het begrip stijl—opgevat als een

repertoire van conventies dat probeert politiek effectief te zijn door in te spelen op mogelijke reacties van het publiek.

Zoals in hoofdstuk II is duidelijk geworden, waren er commentatoren die op de argumenten van Vestdijk reageerden door middel van een uitgebreide samenvatting en (soms gedetailleerde) kritiek. Anderen, echter, gaven een zeer vertekend beeld van de inhoud van *De toekomst der religie*. Het proces waarbij de woorden van iemand in gecondenseerde vorm worden samengevat en weergegeven ging in dergelijke gevallen veelal gepaard met een poging het resultaat te verklaren door een beeld van de auteur op te roepen als was het iemand die incompetent zou zijn als hij al niet leed aan mentale dan wel morele storingen. En deze manier van argumenteren zie ik als essentieel element in polemiek. Ook al had Vestdijk zijn lezers gewaarschuwd hem niet voor een profeet te houden, critici beschuldigden hem er niettemin van te pretenderen een profeet te zijn; en, zoals te verwachten viel, hij wist zijn zogenaamde pretenties niet waar te maken. Vestdijk pretendeerde de regels van het wetenschappelijk handwerk te volgen. Volgens zijn critici was hij echter niet meer dan een amateurtje—een kunstenaar in het meest gunstige geval. En hoewel hij probeerde religie te begrijpen, beschouwden zijn felste criticasters hem als een buitenstaander, nog niet eens zozeer omdat hij niet in staat was religie te begrijpen, maar vooral omdat hij volgens hen religie niet serieus wenste te nemen. Door van buitenaf naar religie te kijken zonder eraan deel te hebben of zich te onderwerpen aan de ene ware God, week Vestdijk in niets af van de doorsnee bourgeois, zo oordeelden zijn tegenstanders. Vrienden van Vestdijk daarentegen vroegen zich af of dit betekende dat alleen theologen geacht konden worden legitieme uitspraken te doen over zaken die betrekking hadden tot het religieuze? Volgens hen konden die evenmin serieus worden genomen. Als Vestdijk al niet voldeed aan de regels van het wetenschappelijk ideaal, dan gold dat nog in veel sterkere mate voor de theologen, zo oordeelde Sierksma (en anderen met hem).

Zoals we in hoofdstuk III gezien hebben, probeerden sommige commentatoren hun kritiek op Vestdijk te onderbouwen met een beroep op feiten, het werk van bepaalde autoriteiten binnen de wetenschap of hun eigen persoonlijke overtuiging. Anderen, daarentegen, gaven er de voorkeur aan hun oordeel over zowel argumenten als auteur publiek te maken door hun beweringen op autocratische of autoritaire wijze te uiten. Deze stijl van argumenteren wordt gebruikt om lezers te overtuigen dat iets waar is simpelweg omdat degene die de bewering doet het zegt. Intellectuelen die zich van deze stijl bedienen vertonen geen spoor van twijfel. Wat Vestdijk ook aan argumenten naar voren bracht, critici stelden gewoonweg dat het Christendom toch niet zou sterven. En het zou niet sterven simpelweg omdat het de waarheid omtrent de mens en zijn plaats in deze wereld openbaarde. In plaats van zich uitsluitend te richten op zijn relatie met God, was liefde voor de medemens onlosmakelijk verbonden met de aanbidding van de Schepper. In plaats van slechts een

reproductieve activiteit te zijn, was seksualiteit voor christenen heilig zolang het deel was van het huwelijk tussen man en vrouw. En terwijl het Socialisme heel goed met het Christendom kon samengaan, was er volgens critici geen twijfel aan dat het Boeddhisme geen aanspraak kon maken op de status van religie. Het oordeel van deze critici diende niet door feiten, anderen autoriteiten te worden ondersteund. Het werd ook niet als geloofswaarheid gepresenteerd. In tegendeel, hun beweringen waren gewoon waar. En de wijze waarop Vestdijk de waarheid had vertekend kon slechts worden verklaard uit incompetentie of, erger nog, een persoonlijkheidsstoornis.

In hoofdstuk IV wordt tenslotte de vraag behandeld hoe polemische reacties op de door Vestdijk naar voren gebrachte argumenten zijn te verklaren. Ik heb een poging gedaan enig licht te werpen op de ontwikkelingen in de receptie van *De toekomst der religie* met behulp van de zogenaamde secularisatie-these. Echter, wanneer we secularisatie beschouwen als een proces waarbij religieuze instituties and autoriteiten hun invloed op de publieke ruimte verloren, dan rijst de vraag hoe daarmee de afnemende rol van polemiek verklaard zou kunnen worden. Twee conclusies zijn gerechtvaardigd in dit verband. Enerzijds verliest polemiek aan belang doordat religie op een zeker moment de publieke sfeer in Nederland niet langer domineerde. Als verklaring is dit vooral van belang voor de wijze waarop literaire en culturele critici zich mengden in de discussie. Anderzijds, religieuze autoriteiten, in het bijzonder theologen, die een belangrijke rol speelden in de processen van opinievorming binnen hun eigen gemeenschap, blijken zich van polemiek te onthouden. De situatie in hecht georganiseerde zuilstructuren zoals die rond de GKN en de RKK zijn in dat verband illustratief. Deze conclusies impliceren dat een meer gedetailleerde studie van ontwikkelingen binnen de publieke sfeer in Nederland van 1948 tot 1998 noodzakelijk is.

In plaats van de secularisatie-these, heb ik me vervolgens gebruik gemaakt van een postmoderne sociologische analyse waarin de positie van intellectuelen binnen een bepaalde institutionele setting wordt verondersteld hun gedrag en de ontwikkeling van hun ideeën te bepalen. Twee factoren zijn van groot belang in dit verband. Allereerst: behoren intellectuelen tot een goed georganiseerd institutioneel milieu met als specifiek kenmerk de hechte relatie tussen autoriteiten en hun publiek? Zo niet, dan zijn zij geneigd polemisch te reageren. Maar als zij, vervolgens, wel behoren tot het eerder genoemde institutionele milieu: bezetten zij daarin dominante of marginale posities? Terwijl intellectuelen met een dominante positie gewoonlijk gematigd zijn, zelfs wanneer ze geconfronteerd worden met zware kritiek, hebben intellectuelen die zich in de marge van een bepaalde gemeenschap bevinden veelal zeer polemisch zijn. Deze hypothese wordt bevestigd door mijn analyse van het beschikbare materiaal met betrekking tot de controverse rond *De toekomst der religie*. Literaire and culturele critici waren polemisch in hun reactie tegen zowel Vestdijk als de theo-

logen. Gewoontegetrouw bezetten zij marginale posities in de publieke sfeer. Hoewel in de historiografie relatief veel aandacht is besteed aan de groep van zogenaamd 'progressieve' doorbraak-intellectuelen, behoorden zij tot de jaren 1960 niet tot enig goed georganiseerd netwerk van instituties. In tegendeel, aanvankelijk konden zij in het geheel niet beschikken over een achterban. Pas in loop van de jaren 1960, toen het grootste deel van de oude zuilenstructuur in elkaar zakte, zouden zij in staat zijn zich de dominante rol in de publieke sfeer te verwerven zoals wij die kennen. En terwijl doorbraak-intellectuelen van eind 40-er en 50-er jaren over het algemeen geneigd waren tot polemiek, werd er vanaf de jaren 1960 radicaal afscheid genomen van deze stijl van argumenteren—behalve door critici die zich in de marge van de 'progressieve' publieke sfeer bevonden. Hetzelfde gold voor intellectuelen die deel uitmaakten van de traditionele zuilstructuren. Critici die zich op centrale posities bevonden binnen de Gereformeerde en Rooms-katholieke organisaties reageerden niet polemisch op argumenten van Vestdijk en Sierksma. Alleen intellectuelen in de marge hadden de neiging Vestdijk dan wel hun collega's binnen dezelfde zuil aan te vallen. Dezelfde tendens zagen we ook onder leden van de Vrijgemaakt-gereformeerde gemeenschap.

Kortom: als persoonlijk gerichte aanval waarbij gebruikt gemaakt wordt van een autoritaire of autocratische wijze van argumenteren, is polemiek een middel waarvan alleen intellectuelen zich bedienen die geen deel uitmaken van het establishment of een dominante positie hebben binnen de institutionele omgeving waartoe zij behoren. Het dient dan te worden gezien als een poging om de eigen autoriteit de vestigen dan wel te verdedigen tegenover de dreiging die voor hen uitgaat van de manier waarop anderen hun overtuiging verkondigen.

Curriculum Vitae

Hans van de Breevaart (1971) attended Grammar School in Rotterdam (1984-1990). After that, he studied History and Religious Studies at Leiden University. From 1998 till 2002, he worked as a Ph.D. student and graduate assistant at the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR). Upon the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the death C.P. Tiele, the academic founder of the Study of Religions in the Netherlands, Van de Breevaart published (together with Arie Molendijk and Gerard Wiegers) a catalogue for the exhibition at the Leiden University Library, entitled *Religie in de academische arena* (Leiden: Universiteitsbibliotheek, 2002). He also contributed to the collected proceedings of the LISOR-conference entitled *Religious Polemics in Context* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2004). Van de Breevaart is currently writing on the relationship of State and Education in the Netherlands since the times of Thorbecke. His articles on the subject have been published in *Liberaal Reveil* and on the Internet.