

# RELIGION AS A SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED COGNITIVE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

## An attempt to define religion within the modern context from a social scientific perspective

Carl Sterkens

*Radboud University Nijmegen - Netherlands*

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### **Abstract:**

Modernisasi, sekularisasi, dan pluralisme kini telah memproduksi kesadaran akan pluralisme agama-agama dalam societias modern, sebuah kesadaran hebat, lebih hebat dari sebelum-sebelumnya. Kesadaran akan pluralisme memungkinkan pendekatan baru terhadap agama-agama. Artikel ini, dengan beranjak dari teori kultural sebagai sebuah proses sosial pembentukan nilai dalam societias, berminat menyuguhkan studi baru tentang pendekatan agama-agama. Fakta pluralitas komunikasi antarindividu yang berbeda dalam dunia dan tradisi kultural, telah memberikan implikasi-implikasi mengenai cara-cara kita mendefinisikan agama. Secara khusus, halnya terjadi dalam cara-cara bagaimana komunitas menyusun nilai-nilai religius kehidupan mereka.

**Keywords:** Religion, social construction, meaning, knowledge, modern, rationalisation, colonisation, culturalisation.

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In this article I will look into the distinctive nature of religion, and its place and significance in the increasingly modernised society. When defining religion one can proceed in various ways, and from various premises. One can, for example, view religion in an ecclesiastic context, in which case one's point of departure would be the concept "church". Or one could base one's definition on the distinctive character of the Catholic Church, hence on the concept of catholicity. Another possible point of departure would be the content of religious education (either in academic or non-academic contexts), including such facets as revelation, the Bible, tradition and doctrinal authority. I shall not follow any of these routes, however. Religion is defined here in terms of cultural theory as a social process of constituting meaning. In so doing, religious traditions are regarded as both sources and products of this social process. The definition of religion is worked out, and in some respects corrected, by relating these phenomena to the processes of modernisation, secularisation, multiculturalism and pluralism in society. But the analysis of religion is conducted within the

broad framework of the phenomenon of world-view. We decided on this framework for two reasons.

Firstly, as a result of the aforementioned developments in society religion is characterised by a high degree of plurality. This plurality in the totality of processes of constituting meaning has not only had an impact on the various religious traditions; it has also led to considerable modification of relations within particular religious traditions, between different religious traditions, and between religious traditions and non-religious or immanent world-views. Lack of institutional organisation often makes it difficult to observe or even discover immanent world-views. But that does not mean that they don't exist. Consequently we feel that the position and function of religion can be depicted most accurately by examining religion in the broad perspective of world-view.

Secondly, religion shares a number of attributes with non-religious forms of world-view. Both aim at discovering the ultimate meaning of life. That does not mean that religion is completely assimilated to world-view. Its focus on the relationship with the transcendent distinguishes it from immanent forms of world-view.

## **1. Religion as a social process of constituting meaning**

The phenomenon of religion has long been a focal subject of study in sociology (of religion). Thus one could say that it is a major factor in the works of the two classical sociologists – Marx and Weber – when they deal with the dialectic relation between material and spiritual processes in history. To Durkheim, too, religion is a key concept. He describes it as a comprehensive explanation of the human experience through which both individuals and entire societies attribute meaning to their lives or their existence.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to the meaning that people attribute to reality, Berger and Luckmann speak of symbolic universes. They define symbolic universes as “bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality [...]”.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the meanings constituted in a given society are represented and presented in symbolic universes. On the basis of this definition of symbolic universes we will proceed to define world-view (which includes religion). World-view in our context is conceived of as the social process of constituting meaning in the quest for the point, value and sense

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1 Emile Durkheim, *The elementary forms of religious life*, New York: The Free Press, 1995, 556-597.

2 Peter Ludwig Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991, 113.

of human existence, activities undertaken in this regard, and the legitimization of the totality of notions underlying the constitution of meaning. This definition indicates that religion relates to the conceptions, ideas, notions, opinions and views which are prevalent in a society and the effective behavioural patterns which, so people believe, accord with such notions.

### *Social process of constituting meaning*

A key factor in the analysis of the phenomenon of religion is the knowledge current in a society and ideas about the meaning of that knowledge. With a view to such an analysis we shall first examine the concept of knowledge. In this context we need to conceive of knowledge in the broadest sense of the word. It is not simply a matter of scientific propositions about the world but includes every form of knowledge found in a society. It refers to the whole of human knowledge: scientific information and expertise, values and norms, literature, but also behavioural patterns, relations of authority and roles and institutions in society. This knowledge is generated by constant, ongoing interaction between individuals, between individuals and groups of individuals, and between different groups of individuals. In such interactions definitions of reality are given concrete shape. These definitions of reality provide a common frame of reference for people's social behaviour. By means of language people arrive at a construction of the world, of their relationship to it and their relations to individuals and groups in that world. Hence we can define knowledge as the product of the social constructions of the world or reality that people are continually making. It is not, however, a fixed end-product. Knowledge is the outcome of an ongoing process. After all, new situations and fresh information require modification of social constructions. This leads to altered roles and institutions, coupled with the acquisition of transformed knowledge about the surrounding world.<sup>3</sup>.

### *Superindividual order of meaning*

On the one hand knowledge can be defined as a product of social constructions of reality; on the other human behaviour is organised and structured by these social constructions. Humanly created roles and institutions function as regulatory behavioural patterns which make it possible for people to live together. When they appropriate the totality of prescribed roles and institutions, we speak of internalisation. But this internalisation is not uncritical. Each person has his or her own notions and expectations regarding the constructed reality and the prescribed roles and institutions,

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3 Cf. Kenneth Jay Gergen, *An invitation to social construction*, London: Sage, 1999.

and these notions and expectations determine their behaviour (see below). In other words, knowledge is not just a human product but is also the basis and prerequisite for people's dealings with one another, their dealings with the environment, and their interpretation of reality. Their interpretation of reality and their communication about it is possible only if there is a common, shared knowledge with which participants in the communication are conversant and whose meaning they assume to be accurate or true. This common knowledge makes it possible to attribute meaning to the social reality in which they live. In this sense the totality of knowledge in a society may be regarded as a superindividual order of meaning. It transcends the individual in that it is used as the premise and basis of communication by most people. It provides a common frame of reference which makes it possible for individuals to live together and attribute meaning to their world. This superindividual order of meaning which functions as a basis and prerequisite for the constitution of meaning is not always (consciously) experienced as a product of human activity. Often it is experienced as a given, independent reality, external to and distinct from human beings. In that sense, one could have the impression that there is a certain opposition or discontinuity between humans as producers and the order of meaning as a product. Hence product and producer are no longer recognised as such in this interrelationship. When this situation arises – as is unavoidable and in fact essential for society to function – we speak of the objectification or reification of reality.<sup>4</sup>

### *Legitimation of the superindividual order of meaning*

Despite the “reification” of reality situations may arise in which the superindividual order of meaning is experienced as problematic rather than as self-evident. This happens mainly in inter-generation and intra-generation conflicts. The superindividual order of meaning then needs to be legitimised in order to regain its plausibility.

Inter-generation conflicts occur when a new generation is incorporated into an existing society. The new generation learns the language, roles, institutions, conventions and relations of, and in, a given society. In this way it becomes conversant with the collective order of meaning of that society. Because the new generation was not involved in the social construction of reality, the order of meaning may forfeit plausibility, in the sense that members of the new generation do not experience themselves as producers of the superindividual order of meaning. And once that order loses its plausibility for the new generation, legitimation becomes important.

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4 Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981; Kenneth Jay Gergen, *Toward transformation in social knowledge*, London: Sage, 1994.

Intra-generation conflicts are situations arising within a particular generation which undermine the plausibility of the order of meaning. An example would be confrontation with inescapable suffering and death. We have said that the superindividual order of meaning makes it possible to attribute meaning to human life. When people come up against radical barriers and are confronted with the senselessness of life or society, the superindividual order of meaning is strained. In addition the plausibility of their personal order of meaning may be strained by confrontation with alternative systems of meaning or a different culture.

In inter-generation and intra-generation crises a weakened superindividual order of meaning may be legitimised by means of symbolic universes that embody a theoretical tradition which integrates diverse domains of meaning and encompasses the institutional order in a symbolic whole. Symbolic universes are not experienced in day-to-day living but constitute a unity in which all experience occurs and all meanings are integrated. On the one hand they far transcend everyday life, on the other they provide an all-encompassing frame of reference in which the processes of constituting meaning are integrated. Symbolic universes locate the world in a universe of meaning and so create a place where people can feel "at home". According to Berger and Luckmann<sup>5</sup> this is evident in the order that they introduce into people's collective history and their individual lives. (a) Symbolic universes locate collective history in a coherent whole of past, present and future of which the members of society are part. They feel that they are put in a meaningful relationship with their forebears and their unborn descendants. In this way symbolic universes make society possible, with the necessary shared, minimal values and norms that are embedded in its history. (b) As for the individual lifespan, the various stages of human life – childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age – may be regarded as symbols representing the totality of human meanings. People's confrontation with death illustrates the function of symbolic universes. Death, too, has to be integrated with the meaningful totality of symbolic universes to enable individuals to carry on living after someone else's death and to live with the prospect of their own. Berger and Luckmann maintain that death is integrated with a symbolic universe not only by means of mythological, religious and metaphysical images, but that modern atheism, for example, does the same by assigning death meaning in terms of progressive evolution or revolutionary history. Indeed, these authors consider the legitimization of death and its integration with social reality one of the principal benefits of symbolic universes.

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5 Peter Ludwig Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, New York: Doubleday, 1966.

A symbolic universe is characteristically experienced as a given phenomenon. According to the members of society, its origin and ontological basis cannot be traced to human activities in history. Symbolic universes refer to other realities which give rise to, and legitimise, the "life world" and the meaning of life. They provide the frameworks which make it possible to constitute meaning. In other words, they provide the framework within which world-view – in the sense of the process of constituting meaning – comes about. In symbolic universes one can distinguish between pre-reflexive and systematic, theoretical forms of world-view.

We take pre-reflexive world-views to be the more or less elaborate notions of an individual or individuals which, within the framework of existential interpretation, serve to explain, legitimise and clarify what goes on in life and the world.<sup>6</sup> These pre-reflexive forms of world-view are notions in a loose, pragmatic relationship which individuals apply to solve real-life problems confronting them and which direct their actions. Pre-reflexive forms of world-view are expressed in such things as proverbs and folk wisdom, and in stories, legends and fairytales.

A pre-reflexive form of world-view can be worked out more systematically at a higher level of abstraction. Then it becomes a systematic, theoretical world-view or *Weltanschauung*. A systematic, theoretical world-view may be defined as a body of theoretical concepts, ideas and beliefs relating to the interpretation and constitution of the meaning of reality. It consists of notions and conceptions resulting from carefully considered reflection on the world and human actions in that world. Such *Weltanschauungen* are found in every society, but only a limited number of people is directly involved in working out theoretical interpretations of reality. This does not detract from the influence that such Systematised *Weltanschauungen* can have on individuals' quest for meaning. In fact, Berger<sup>7</sup> points out the interaction and dialectic between pre-reflexive and systematic, theoretical forms of world-view. In our exposition of world-view below we have both forms in mind.

### *World-view and religion*

So far we have confined ourselves to the definition of world-view (including religion) in general. When the code 'transcendence' features in processes of constituting meaning we are dealing more specifically with religion. In religion meaning derives from a reality that transcends human

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6 Ellen Hijmans, *Je moet er het beste van maken: een empirisch onderzoek naar hedendaagse zingevingssystemen*, Nijmegen: Instituut voor Toegepaste Sociale Wetenschappen, 1994.

7 Peter Ludwig Berger, *The sacred canopy: elements of a sociological theory*, New York: Doubleday, 1967.



beings and the empirical world. Religion refers to people's relation with the transcendent. The transcendent can be conceptualised in diverse ways. Thus it might refer to absolute transcendence, immanent transcendence or an absolute immanent God. The transcendent may also refer to the sacred as experienced in real life.<sup>8</sup> Hence world-view is narrowed down to the concept of religion when it refers explicitly to the transcendent. In other words, there is a substantive element in the formal definition of world-view when the frame of reference in which meaning is constituted is a transcendent reality. In the rest of the text we shall use the term "immanent world-view" when we speak of processes of constituting meaning that do not refer to transcendental reality in any way.

## 2. Religion in the modern present-day context

The previous section clarified the concepts of world-view and religion on the basis of social constructionist theory. In our vision this theory is still inadequate to portray the phenomena of religion and world-view in the modern world of today. The superindividual order of meaning and its legitimation – at any rate as described by Berger and Luckmann – are insufficiently illustrated with developments in present-day society. In modern society the superindividual order of meaning and its legitimation by means of symbolic universes are exposed to the processes of modernisation (2.1), secularisation (2.2) and growing multiculturalism (2.3). These phenomena influence the process of constituting meaning in present-day society to such an extent that we are obliged to refine our definitions of religion.

### 2.1. Modernisation

Because of the modernisation process, the superindividual order of meaning and its legitimation can no longer depend on the assent and acceptance of all members of society. The plausibility of symbolic universes is widely questioned. Following Habermas, we define modernisation as a growing tendency to view the world in a rational perspective (A) and as the dominance of rationality in politics and economics in regard to the social and cultural domain. We call the latter the colonisation of the life world by the economic and political systems. But this colonisation is only half the picture. It needs to be supplemented with the observable influences of the life world on the system. This is called the process of "culturalisation" (B).

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8 Cf. Thomas Luckmann, *Die unsichtbare Religion*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981; Johannes A. van der Ven & Berdine Biemans, *Religie in fragmenten: een onderzoek onder studenten*, Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag/Kampen: Kok, 1994, 60-62; Hans-Georg Ziebertz, Discontinuity and continuity: a practical theological reflection on religion and modernity, In: *International Journal of Practical Theology* 1998, 14-15.

## A. Rationalisation

We define modernisation in terms of a process of rationalisation in regard to four distinct domains: the economic, political, social and cultural domains. In the economic and political domains the rationalisation process – more particularly instrumental rationality – has led to the relative autonomy of these domains. In the social domain the rationalisation process takes the form of individualisation and de-institutionalisation. In the cultural domain it refers to the growing autonomy of cultural institutions and a proliferation of values, norms and cultural forms.<sup>9</sup>

### *Rationalisation in the economy*

Most archaic societies were characterised by a collectively experienced social environment in which human interaction took place. Spatially, temporally and substantively the life world was strictly circumscribed and taken for granted. These archaic societies had some sort of mythical world-view, in which reality was “seen” holistically. Within the homogeneous, collective life world the various domains, such as economics, politics, social life and culture, formed a diffuse whole. In the course of time growing scientific and technological knowledge led to greater differentiation of labour, which permitted greater affluence. Greater affluence manifested itself in increasingly diverse needs and increased material production to meet these. To continue meeting these needs, the economy was organised on a larger scale and more efficiently. Although a religiously based work ethic might have functioned as an external motive force for economic development, the growing importance of money as a medium of exchange permitted the independent functioning of the economy. Maximisation of profit became the guiding principle in an economy that increasingly dissociated itself from social and cultural life. The autonomy of the economic system, and of free trade within it, was facilitated by institutionalised recognition of the right to property.<sup>10</sup>

### *Rationalisation in politics*

Labour differentiation, the creation of hierarchies and rationalisation resulted in a politically organised society and the evolution of an independent political system in which power was to play an ever greater role. The massive scale of the economy demanded more complex and more comprehensive policy structures which took the form of formal, abstract regula-

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9 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1978.

10 Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1976, 31-121.



tions and procedures. In early modern societies the political system was legitimised by a religio-metaphysical world-view. In modern societies today religion seems less important to legitimise politics, although it can still play a role in it, and even it is possible religion is used.

The growing importance of the media, power and money further promotes the independent functioning of politics and economics. The increasing complexity of the political system has led to further differentiation within that system, evident in the emergence of institutionalised operational systems such as defence, the judiciary and policy mechanisms at various levels. Such functional differentiation has led not only to the autonomy of political systems, but to a separation between the public and private domains. For political systems could secure their autonomy only after the establishment of a public domain within the life world in which the state had acquired explicit or implicit recognition. Only recognition of the legitimacy of the state gives officialdom the bureaucratic capacity to function. Any conflicts that ensued in the public domain could be resolved by judicial means.<sup>11</sup>

### *Rationalisation in the social domain*

Rationalisation in the social domain implies that people's notions about reality, their conceptions about norms and values, their dealings with others and their individual identity are no longer determined by traditions, religions or philosophical world-views but are open to criticism and argument. That is to say, people no longer submit unquestioningly to a super-individual order of meaning, but critically question its merits. They need sound reasons to accept specific ideas or normative premises. People's social conduct, too, is marked by a demand for arguments to justify a particular course of action. Rationalisation in the social domain has led to the processes of deinstitutionalisation and individualisation.<sup>12</sup>

Deinstitutionalisation means that social institutions are no longer experienced as based on respected, intrinsically meaningful traditions but are judged according to their usefulness and applicability to the individual in a given situation. This means that institutions are considered meaning-

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11 Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, II, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981, 229-265.

12 Ulrich Beck, *Risikogesellschaft: auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992; Ulrich Beck & Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization and precarious freedoms: perspectives and controversies of subject-orientated sociology*, Cambridge: Blackwell Publ., 1996; cf. Jan Peters & Peer Scheepers, *Individualisering in Nederland: sociaal-historische context en theoretische interpretaties*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000; Manfred te Grotenhuis, & Peer Scheepers, *De gevolgen van de de-institutionalisering, rationalisering en privatisering voor culturele individualisering*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000.

ful and valuable in one set of circumstances but are rejected as nonsensical in another. Marriage, for example, is often no longer considered a lifelong commitment not to be broken by human beings, but has become an institution that is experienced as worthwhile only under certain conditions and in certain circumstances.<sup>13</sup> Institutions are no longer inviolable, permanent components of an unambiguous, superindividual order of meaning. In modern society their foundation and legitimation on the basis of a symbolic universe have lost significance or have become subject to individual appraisal. Individuals judge an institution in terms of their own frame of reference and weigh its advantages and disadvantages.

This brings us to the process of individualisation. Individualisation means that people are constantly making appraisals with a view to attaining certain goals that they have set themselves: "Why should I enter into a relationship with this person and what are the pros and cons attached to it?" Individuals' appraisals of the meaning of their world, their norms and values, have been "emancipated" from the constraints of communal structures. Individuals act according to their own criteria. In the private domain people's behaviour is not coordinated judicially but is characterised by individual appraisal. Individuals work out for themselves which notions, roles or social relations in a group or community they are prepared to subscribe to. In this sense individualisation coincides with rationalisation. Individual assessment of the totality of roles, relations, institutions and the order of meaning in a group or society means that the superindividual order of meaning has lost its uniformity. Not all members of society endorse the contents of that order in the same way. People are not simply part of the status quo; in a sense they also distance themselves from it. They consider and evaluate the totality of roles and institutions and decide on a course of action accordingly. The order of meaning is no longer assessed and recognised unequivocally but may be described as fragmentary. Its unassailability and immutability, once guaranteed by its collective character and legitimation by symbolic universes, have declined considerably. Nowadays the substance of the order of meaning is in the hands of individuals who – depending on the situation – may adjust their own frame of reference, radically change it and legitimise it according to a self-chosen symbolic universe. As a result of such individualisation world-view has become a constantly changing, pluralistic process.

The processes of deinstitutionalisation and individualisation are not only closely interrelated, they are also mutually reinforcing. Since the individual has gained in stature, institutions are longer taken for granted. This loss of plausibility in its turn means that individuals increasingly have to

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13 Cf. Ludwig Heyde, *De maat van de mens: over autonomie, transcendentie en sterfelijkheid*, Amsterdam: Boom, 2000.

determine their own priorities and appraise institutions for them. Institutions are no longer frameworks which direct human behaviour but in a sense are objects to be evaluated and used by individuals inasmuch as they are suited to the realisation of personal goals.

### *Rationalisation in the cultural domain*

Rationalisation in the cultural domain is evident inter alia in the growing autonomy of various cultural institutions. Science, morality, education and teaching, art and religion are all components of cultural life and exist fairly independently of other social domains. This independence is a concomitant of functional differentiation in society.<sup>14</sup> Apart from their growing autonomy, cultural forms are becoming increasingly pluralistic. Rationalisation in the cultural domain implies that the norms and values underlying human behaviour are not determined solely by the religious tradition to which people adhere. Not only do the various philosophical world-views and religious traditions have different notions; adherents of the same tradition have differing norms and values as well. Not only inter-individually but also intra-individually there are differing norms and values, depending on the issue to which they must be applied. Plurality seems to have found its way into people's minds. An example of this is the relation between religious and moral values. Studies of European values show that among people who regard themselves as religious, moral and religious values coincide, but the correlation is fairly poor. This implies that religious values and moral values represent separate areas that function more or less autonomously. Quite a large group of people who claim to adhere to a particular religious tradition display morally permissive behaviour. Thus religion and world-view are in no way convincing indicators of people's norms and,<sup>15</sup> which implies that members of the same religious tradition may have divergent norms and values. This finding does not apply to views on the bio-ethical problems of euthanasia and abortion. Here opinions correlate quite strongly with religion. The more strongly people believe in God, the more they reject euthanasia and abortion.<sup>16</sup>

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14 Cf. Thomas Luckmann, *The privatization of religion and morality*, Cambridge, Blackwell Publ., 1996; Karel Dobbelaere, *Towards an integrated perspective of the processes related to the descriptive concept of secularization*, 1999.

15 Loek Halman, et al., *Traditie, secularisatie en individualisering: een studie naar de waarden van de Nederlanders in een Europese context*, Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1987; Paul van Tongeren, *Radical transcendence and the unity of morality and conception of life*, Kampen: Kok, 1995.

16 Cf. Gerald A. Larue, *Euthanasia and religion. A survey of the attitudes of world religions to the right-to-die*, Los Angeles: The Hemlock Society, 1986; Leonardus Spruit, *Religie en abortus: interactiemodellen ter verklaring van de houding tegenover abortus*, Nijmegen: Instituut voor Toegepaste Sociale Wetenschappen/ 's-Gravenhage: KASKI, 1991.

## B. Colonisation and culturalisation

Having developed into autonomous systems as a result of rationalisation, economics and politics greatly influence the social and cultural domains. This is known as the colonisation of the social and cultural domains by economic and political systems. Colonisation is a major influence on the form and legitimation of the superindividual order of meaning. But the colonisation hypothesis needs to be put in perspective. It is not just a matter of economic and political systems influencing the social and cultural domains; the reverse also happens. Then we speak of culturalisation.

### *Colonisation*

The autonomy of economics and politics means that these systems develop through self-generating and independent processes that are only marginally influenced by the totality of roles and institutions in a society. In these systems there are rules that regulate behaviour in a manner that is directed and determined by the media of money and power, independently of the superindividual order of meaning. Thus relations between actors and the regulation of individual behaviour within the economy are governed by the principle of maximisation of profit, while behaviour in the political system is determined by the acquisition, retention and exercise of power. Religion – in the sense of a totality of processes of constituting meaning in terms of a superindividual, transcendental order of meaning and its legitimation on the basis of symbolic universes – appears no longer to play any role in the economic and political systems. In these systems the quest for meaning does not feature; the principles that determine behaviour are profit maximisation and governability.

Our outline of the increasing autonomy of politics and economics makes it clear that the phenomenon of world-view is under pressure in these two systems. It should be noted, however, that the picture of their independence from the life world does not always correspond with empirical data in this field. Thus there appears to be a definite correlation between world-view (more specifically the Christian faith) on the one hand, and views on politics and economics on the other. People who may be characterised as economically conservative but not conservative in regard to maintaining order and tradition are found mainly among atheists and non-churchgoers. Those who are conservative in regard to order and tradition but not economically conservative are found mainly among staunch believers and church members.<sup>17</sup> Partly on the basis of empirical data we can conclude that, whereas the autonomy of economics and politics has

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17 Albert Felling, et al., *Geloven en leven: een nationaal onderzoek naar de invloed van religieuze overtuigingen*, Zeist: Kerckebosch, 1986, 103-107.

put the phenomenon of world-view under pressure in these systems, there is no question of a radical separation between economics and politics on the one hand and the phenomenon of world-view on the other.

Not only have the economic and political systems become autonomous; they also impinge on the social and cultural domains as external factors. Habermas<sup>18</sup> refers to this as the colonisation of the life world by systems. In the life world there are interpretive frameworks and a reservoir of knowledge which people use to reach consensus on the truth, accuracy and validity of claims. The colonisation of the life world by the economic and political systems largely determines the superindividual order of meaning. As a result of colonisation this order – which we have defined as the common frame of reference in which social behaviour, roles, institutions and the interpretation of reality are conceptualised – focuses less on questions of truth, accuracy and validity and is increasingly directed by economic and political principles. “To the extent that the objectifying descriptions of society migrate into the lifeworld, we become alienated from ourselves as communicatively acting subjects.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the domination of power and money subjects the collective order of meaning to the criteria of profit maximisation and governability. Besides, legitimation of the superindividual order of meaning is becoming increasingly dispensable as a result of this reduction to the economic and political systems. Money and power systems are characterised by the principle of self-maintenance. They know how to keep themselves going in an unstable and complex environment by means of exchanges with the environment, so that every condition within the system fulfils a function in maintaining the whole.<sup>20</sup> The autonomy of the economic and political systems, and of related institutions (eg institutions relating to economic trade, the judiciary, national defence), means that society as a whole and its superindividual order of meaning no longer need external legitimation. The segments of society maintain themselves as independent domains. When that happens, world-view as a social process of constituting meaning on the basis of a superindividual order of meaning comes under pressure.

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18 Jürgen Habermas, *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986; Id., *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988; Id., *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurs-Theorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992.

19 Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurs-Theorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992, 141.

20 Harry Kunneman, *Grondslagenproblemen van de sociale wetenschappen*, Heerlen: Open Universiteit, 1987.

### *Culturalisation*

The critical question at this juncture is whether there are any pointers to the influence of economics and politics on social life and culture. Habermas does not analyse the influence of life world on economics and politics any further. He refers to an insight of Weber's which he, Habermas, phrases thus: the system determines the life world, whereas the life world functions as a switch that allows systemic processes to occur. The question is, does the metaphor of a switch or a link do justice to the complex relation between system and life world? One can cite various examples of institutions which suggest some mutual influencing between system and life world. On the one hand there is the influence of systems on the life world ("colonisation"); on the other hand there is the influence of the life world on systems ("culturalisation").<sup>21</sup> Thus the functioning of infirmaries or hospitals is not governed exclusively by the law of supply and demand – certainly not when it comes to things that affect the human dignity of the patient. The conduct of educational institutions is not entirely determined by practical considerations, particularly not when it comes to educating students holistically. Juridical institutions constantly perform a critical function in regard to economic and political systems, especially as regards the extent to which the judiciary is legitimised by pragmatic, ethical and moral application of practical reason.<sup>22</sup> In all these institutions we find neither unilateral colonisation nor unilateral culturalisation. Influencing is mutual. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the institutions are situated in the twilight zone between system and life world. Secondly, in this twilight zone the pragmatic, ethical and moral application of practical reason plays a major role, transcending unilateral principles of profit maximisation and the acquisition, retention and exercise of power. In other words, the relation between colonisation and culturalisation is dialectic.<sup>23</sup>

### **2.2. Secularisation**

Secularisation may be regarded as a form of modernisation in the cultural domain, more specifically in regard to religion. We deal with it separately and in some detail, since secularisation has to do with the consequences of rationalisation for religion. By describing the consequences we

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21 Id., *Van themutscultuur naar walkman-ego: contouren van postmoderne individualiteit*, Amsterdam: Boom, 1996, 261-280.

22 Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurs-Theorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992, 197-201; Id., *Justification and application: remarks on discourse ethics*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993, 1-19.

23 cf. Johannes A. van der Ven, Hendrik J.C. Pieterse, & Jaco S. Dryer, Religious consciousness in a transformative perspective: a study in practical theology, In: *International Journal of Practical Theology* 1997, 110-135.



can form a clearer picture of the functions and meaning of religion in present-day society. We use the word “secularisation” as an umbrella term for the following four developments: a declining interest in religion in the other social sectors; the diminishing influence of religion on people’s lives and dealings with one another; the change process within religion itself; and a decline of religious beliefs and practices. To form a proper picture of the secularisation process in Western society we need to distinguish between these meanings, here treated as four aspects.<sup>24</sup>

The first aspect of secularisation is the declining interest in, and influence of, religion in the other sectors of societal life. We have noted, for instance, that religion no longer plays a significant role in the economic and political systems. Economic and political behaviour is coordinated by means of money and power and by the principles of profit maximisation and governability. Sometimes these principles are at odds with the principles of justice, solidarity and love as we find them in the gospel. We also observe that institutions which were once firmly linked with religion – such as the family, marriage and organisational life – have clearly forfeited some of their meaning. Cultural institutions like schools and universities, too, which once occupied a dominant position in a particular ideological sphere, have become profane institutions whose names are often the only reminders of their religiously inspired past.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, secularisation refers to the declining meaning of religion for individual and collective human life. Various studies all over the world indicate that traditional (Christian) religion has become less meaningful for individual life. The dwindling importance of religion does not mean that it has become totally meaningless for people’s individual and collective life. Religion may be meaningful to individuals, but that meaning is both differential and partial. It is differential because religion has meaning for particular domains. It is partial because in those domains where the religion plays some role, it is only one influence among many. Nonetheless secularisation does not imply that religion has no influence at all on people’s individual and collective lives. In regard to its influence on individual behaviour in the economic and political systems, we have noted that faith in God can correlate with the degree of economic reformism and political conservatism (see above). Empirical research also shows that religion influences people’s evaluation of social institutions. Thus people who are

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24 Cf. Karel Dobbelaere, *Secularization: a multi-dimensional concept*, London: Sage Publications, 1981; Jose Vicente Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

25 Cf. Bryan Wilson, *Religion in sociological perspective*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, 148-179; Id., *Reflections on many sided controversy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

religiously committed attach greater importance to marriage than those who are not. Partners continue to value their union and set high standards for their marriage. When the partners (can) no longer meet these requirements they terminate the marriage, not because marriage has become less meaningful but because they are no longer partners to one another.<sup>26</sup>

When assessing these data one needs to remember that these researches were inquiring into religious salience within the framework of traditional (Christian) religion. In other words, they were measuring the salience of traditional religion. One might well ask, however, whether religion as a process of constituting meaning at an individual level might not reveal patterns, contents and forms which reflect a completely personal construction or reconstruction of elements from diverse philosophical traditions and trends. That brings us to the third aspect of the concept of secularisation: the adaptation and substantive modification of religion under the influence of modern society. Thus the God images of people who consider themselves Christians do not necessarily correspond with traditional Christian God concepts. In modern societies, just like there is unbelief within the church, there is also belief outside the church.

Related with the third aspect is the fourth aspect of secularisation: the decline of religious beliefs and religious practices. Especially in western Europe we see a huge decline in institutional religious practice like church visit, but also among younger generations of Muslims mosque visit is declining.

One could now ask in how far a country like Indonesia is a secularized society? Answering this question is complicated, because there are different meanings of secularisation. It is a question one cannot answer with yes or no because there is not one single concept of secularization. The whole secularisation debate – whether something like secularisation exists, and if so whether it comes to an end or not – is fruitless when one is not willing to test the validity of each of the four aspects independently (!) of each other. The secularisation theory as the main analytical framework through which the social sciences have viewed the relationship between religion and modernity is useless without making distinctions between different secularisation theories.<sup>27</sup> Thus it is fallacious to argue that the permanence or even increase – to name one aspect – in religious beliefs and practices serves as empirical confirmation that the theory of secularisation

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26 Albert Felling, et al., *Geloven en leven: een nationaal onderzoek naar de invloed van religieuze overtuigingen*, Zeist: Kerckebosch, 1986.

27 Cf. Jose Vicente Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 211ff. cf. Robert W. Hefner, *Secularisation and citizenship in modern Indonesia*. In: Paul Heelas (ed.), *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*, Oxford: Blackwell: chapter 8.

is a fairy tale. Likewise it is not valid to 'prove' empirically that the continuing high levels of religious adherence in societies such as Indonesia (among others like Brazil, but also the USA) provide counter-evidence to the secularisation hypothesis 'in general'. While a traditional (generalising) secularisation theory is falsified, better distinctions within the colourful concept of secularisation have been made since then. The four aspects are four very different and unintegrated propositions, even when they relate to each other. In that sense, it can be the case that Indonesia is rather strongly secularized when one describes the country against the background of the relative independence of the economical, political, social and cultural domain. It is secularized to a lesser degree (compared with Western Europe) when one looks at the influence of religion in the daily of individuals, even when we would come to the conclusion that religion only has a partial and differential. Indonesia is secularised in so far the content of belief is permanently changing and interpersonal religious differences are more important than intergroup-difference, and to the extent the individual religious belief system is (maybe luckily) under limited influence of religious institutions. And finally, with regard to the fourth aspect of religious practices, one could surely describe processes of institutional practice, and de-institutional religious practise.

To sum up: developments in the area of world-view are complex and pluralistic. While there is no question of radical secularisation, there has been differential secularisation. Here it is important to note what aspect of secularisation is emphasised. Religion has different functions and influences in different social systems (economics, politics, social life and culture). Hence religion does not function uniformly throughout society. As for changes within religion, at micro level the image of the believer relating to one specific religious tradition with whom he/she fully agrees has made way for the freedom and autonomy of individuals to find their own religious way in life. There is a wide range of alternatives for individuals to construct and continually reconstruct their own religion (or world-view) in their own particular way, on the basis of personal experience, attitudes, feelings, and personal relationship with diverse religious traditions and institutions.

### **2.3. Multiculturalism**

Apart from modernisation and secularisation, society is currently faced with a third phenomenon which greatly influences religion. That is the process of growing multiculturalism. Multiculturalism refers to the increasing presence and influence of Western population groups in non-Western countries (and the other way around) as well as cross-border contacts between people and population groups.

### *Immigration*

Underlying the increase in the population diversity are the process of functional differentiation referred to above and economic growth. Immigration is characterised by both pull and push factors. On the one hand the cultural and/or economic attractiveness of certain regions have a pull effect. On the other hand, stagnating or declining economies compel inhabitants to seek their happiness elsewhere; in other cases political circumstances drive citizens from their areas (push factors). Both emigration and immigration are characterised by pull and push factors. Because Indonesia is such a diverse country, not only the international migration is relevant, but also the interregional emigration and immigration. Often it is the case that different (cultural or ethnic) groups do not easily mix. In some instances segregation is reinforced by an efflux of autochthonous population as a result of a high representation of immigrants. Unfortunately the segregation between different (cultural, ethnic and religious) groups is evident in society at large. Often the percentage chance of meeting with members of one's own group is significantly higher than that of meeting with members of the population as a whole, even when one belongs to a minority group.<sup>28</sup>

### *Global dependency networks*

Besides immigration, the increase in global dependency networks has given further impetus to the process of growing multiculturalism. Some authors refer to this as globalisation. For the sake of conceptual clarity we make a distinction between globalisation and internationalisation, 'mundialisation' or moral homogenisation and universalisation. All these concepts refer to the growing scale and frequency of cross-border contacts. It is a matter of increased and intensified contacts between people, population groups and cultures, as a result of which they are absorbed into global dependency networks. But the angles of approach of the four concepts – globalisation, internationalisation, mundialisation, and universalisation – differ.<sup>29</sup> (a) The term "globalisation" indicates an economic approach. It is a trend to increase the scale and internationalise the production and consumption of goods and financial transactions. Local conditions are subordinated to specialisations and investments aimed at profit maximisation.

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28 Hugo J. Graeme, Immigration Responses to Global Change in Asia. In: *Geographical Research* 44(2) [June 2006]. p. 155-172.; Cf. Abdul Sukamdi, Patrick Brownlee Haris (ed.), *Labour Migration in Indonesia: policies and practice*. Yogyakarta: Population Studies Center, Gadjah Mada University, 2000.

29 Cf. Bertrand Badie, Mondialisation: les termes du débat, In: *L'Etat du monde. Annuaire économique et géopolitique mondial*, 1994, 570-573; Herman Lombaerts, Weerbaar of weerloos? Godsdienstige tradities in de hedendaagse maatschappij, Leuven: Acco, 1996, 87-96.

At the economic level one can see, for example, the growing importance of the World Bank (e.g. with their pressure to , to name only one example), the International Monetary Fund, increased world trade and international funding, and the growing size of multinational corporations. The magnified scale of economic activities has promoted intercultural contact. The world market extends to all parts of the globe and all cultures. (b) The terms “internationalisation” and “transnationalisation” indicate a political angle of approach to cross-border contacts between people and cultures. At the global level developments and issues requiring a policy-making response are tackled in a framework of broad cooperation. The Security Council of the United Nations, for example, tries to handle pending conflicts by means of international pressure, e.g. in Aceh or Ambon. (c) Mundialisation or moral generalisation is a sociological category indicating a trend towards uniformity of values and norms. An example is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). One result is that affectively people incline to identify increasingly with humankind as a whole. Benthem van den Bergh<sup>30</sup> points out, however, that hopes of a new and universally valid world order are inflated. International recognition of human rights, for example, has not led to consistent observance of these rights. Indeed, their universal validity is sometimes refuted. In this respect moral homogenisation has made people more aware of the plurality of norms and values. Thus discussions about the universal validity of human rights have increased awareness of the particularity of some of the values which form the basis of such “rights”. In other words, when mundialisation is accompanied by discussion of, and reflection on, divergent patterns of norms and values it promotes awareness of multiculturalism.<sup>31</sup> (d) The term “universalisation” indicates an ideological approach to the study of global relations between people and cultures. Universalisation has to do with the origin and distribution of principles in diverse contexts. An example of this development is the Western interpretation of the concept of democracy which is presented as an overriding principle, inter alia for the evaluation of other political structures. Universalisation is an aspect of multiculturalism to the extent that people assess differences and similarities between cultures by applying principles to divergent spatio-temporal contexts.

Two factors have contributed notably to globalisation, internationalisation, mundialisation and universalisation. First, the emergence of modern communication media has given rise to a flood of information which is accessible world-wide. As a result knowledge of previously “alien”

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30 Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, *Wereldwijde vervlechtingen en de wereld van staten*, Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1995, 99-101.

31 Paul Ricœur, *La critique et la conviction: entretien avec Francois Azouvi et Marc de Launay*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995, 273-283.

traditions has grown. Secondly, increased mobility has enabled many people to have contact with foreign cultures.

### *Significance for religion*

Immigration and the emergence of global dependency networks have great significance for religion. Under the influence of immigration and global networks the Indonesian society is characterised by even greater plurality than before. Overall the superindividual order of meaning, despite its pluriformity, deviates considerably from the frames of reference of “new” inhabitants and the “new” cultures that people encounter. The order of meaning in terms of which meaning is constituted is no longer a uniform, collective one. In a multicultural society individuals lump together elements of diverse orders of meaning in order to devise their own process of constituting meaning. In this situation religion and world-view are processes that may be described as pluralistic.<sup>32</sup> We shall examine the pluralisation of religion and world-view in a separate section.

## **3. Religious plurality**

We have defined religion and world-view as the totality of processes of constituting meaning on the basis of a superindividual order of meaning, encompassed and legitimised by symbolic universes. The latter are regarded as all-encompassing frameworks that derive from the processes of constituting meaning. In this sense they are a product of these processes, but at the same time they provide the framework in which processes of constituting meaning can occur. Through such processes order and meaning are created in the common history of humankind and in individual lives. According to Berger and Luckmann one finds this ordering and constitution of the meaning of life on the basis of symbolic universes in every form of world-view (see above). These authors maintain that there is no distinction between different world-views in a functional sense. Substantively collective history and individual life stories are integrated in the processes of constituting meaning on the basis of different interpretations of reality, crystallising in diverse images, texts and institutions. In this constitution of meaning there are differences between various religious and philosophical traditions (3.1), but there is also plurality within each particular religious or philosophical tradition (3.2).

### **3.1. Plurality between religions and world-views**

Substantive differences between religious and philosophical traditions

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32 Cf. Peter Beyer, *Religion and globalization*, London: Sage Publications, 1994.



are important because they vividly illustrate the distinctive character of each tradition. Religious and immanent world-views fulfil the same function but differ manifestly in their manner of fulfilling it. We shall explain these differences with reference to the distinction between radical externalism, moderate externalism, moderate internalism and radical internalism.<sup>33</sup>

#### **A. Radical externalism**

Radical externalism is a theory which posits that the meaning of life is not in human hands but that life and the world derive their meaning entirely from a relationship with a reality that transcends ours. The meaning of life originates outside us. Meaning is based exclusively on, and depends on, a transcendental reality that determines it. Human activities and all our attempts to make life meaningful are, strictly speaking, pointless because the meaning of life is predetermined. Human action does not generate meaning. Criticism from opponents of radical externalism relates mainly to the lack of human freedom inherent in this theory. The critics maintain that it turns human beings into something like slaves who can merely accommodate themselves to a meaning imposed on them by an external agency; or they are condemned to a lifelong search for the meaning of life whose existence is guaranteed by an external reality but whose whereabouts is an eternal mystery. Opponents of radical externalism who consider themselves religious maintain that the radical externalist view is a caricature of religion which needs to be explicated further. Nonreligious opponents of radical externalism repudiate the existence of any external or transcendental agency as the ultimate source of the meaning of life. They do not accept that "meaning" can depend on, and be determined by, a transcendental authority external to human beings and their subjectivity. Consequently they end up rejecting the existence of any objective meaning.

#### **B. Moderate externalism**

Moderate externalism rejects the notion that the meaning of life is based exclusively on an external or transcendental agency outside our reality. Humans are not slaves who simply have to obey and live according to a superimposed meaning. Neither are they condemned to search for a meaning of life that is said to lie hidden somewhere. To moderate externalists constitution of meaning is not purely subjective, but neither does it occur independently of human beings. In their view there are certain precondi-

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33 Cf. Marcel Sarot, Sisyphus revisited: reflections on the analogy between linguistic meaning and the meaning of life, In: *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 1996, 219-231.

tions outside humanity which codetermine and direct the constitution of meaning. This implies that, although human beings create meaning, they do not do so entirely *ex nihilo*. The conditions for meaning presuppose a transcendental authority who confers meaning. The five major world religions, for instance, regard reality and human history as phenomena which contain some elements of meaning in themselves, but relate these to God, the divine or an absolute. The origin, existence and ultimate destiny of the world and its history emanate from an external, transcendental agency. Thus the various world religions conceive of the world as the creation of a transcendental power or agency and the Judaeo-Christian tradition sees human history as “salvation history”. History is not regarded as a random chain of events but as having a definite purpose or destiny which lies with God. Here the distinctive character of religion is clearly apparent. Religions differ from immanent world-views in that they relate humans to the transcendent. People with a religious world-view experience the power and inspiration of God in the meaning that he imparts to life and the world. Within and between the various religions we find different interpretations of how the transcendent empowers and inspires the constitution of meaning.

### C. Moderate internalism

Moderate internalism puts more emphasis on the human contribution to the constitution of meaning, in that it considers meaning to be constituted in relation to empirical reality and history. Meaning is constituted under conditions that are pre-existent in the world. No transcendent authority is involved in the process. Moderate internalism is nonreligious because the conditions under which people attribute meaning to reality are not transcendental but fully mundane. Culture, for instance, codetermines the “meaning” attributed to reality. The world and human history are regarded as the context in which meaning is constituted, and meaning is attributed to life within that world and that history. The cardinal question is not so much why we exist – a question which, some would argue, can be answered only by assuming an external agency which underlies our existence – but what is the point of that existence, a question which can be answered by regarding the world as a factual reality in which human beings exist as subjects.<sup>34</sup> According to this approach reality is meaningful because it is a human reality which people can experience. It is not arbitrary nor is it a mere semblance: reality is what it is to people, and people are what they are in this world for people.<sup>35</sup> Because this approach sees the

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34 Corliss Lamont, *The philosophy of humanism*, London: Vision, 1962, 141-146.

35 Jacob Philip van Praag, *Grondslagen van humanisme: inleiding tot een humanistische levens- en denkwereld*, Meppel: Boom, 1978, 95-103.

meaning of reality as based on the factual existence of the world as a human reality, it may be considered an immanent world-view. It is operative to a greater or lesser extent in the various humanist trends. Here some authors distinguish between religious and atheistic humanism, pragmatic and Marxist humanism, primitive and radical humanism, and naturalist and materialist humanism.<sup>36</sup>

#### **D. Radical internalism**

The difference between radical and moderate internalism relates not so much to the question of whether or not humans attribute meaning to life or the manner in which they do so, as to how they interpret reality and the (possible) conditions within it. Both radical and moderate internalism subscribe to the view that life acquires meaning via human action and human constitution of meaning. But they differ when it comes to the ontological foundation of reality and the conditions under which, and on the basis of which, meaning is constituted. Moderate internalism does not regard reality as intrinsically meaningless. Inherent in reality are certain conditions by means of which and under which meaning can be constituted. Radical internalism, on the other hand, maintains that life is intrinsically meaningless and that there are no conditions inherent in it that permit constitution of meaning. Radical internalists proceed from the premise that the meaning of life can be found only by human beings themselves. In their view the deeper meaning of life depends wholly on human subjects and has no objective grounds in reality. Klemke<sup>37</sup> puts it succinctly: "Objective meaning leaves me cold. It is not mine. I am glad that existence is meaningless, it makes human beings all the greater and more glorious, it gives me the freedom to construe my own meaning" (our translation). Meaning is created only through human action in a reality that, in itself, is meaningless. Radical externalism does not recognise any form of "objective meaning" deriving from either an external, transcendental agency or from reality itself. Neither a transcendental authority nor reality as we know it provides meaning. The only meaning that exists is what people construe for themselves. Constitution of meaning is wholly subjective.

### **3.2. Pluralism within religions and world-views**

Plurality is found not only between different world-views and religious traditions, but also within each tradition. Because people who adhere to a particular religious tradition or world-view "construe" their own

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36 Corliss Lamont, *The philosophy of humanism*, London: Vision, 1962; Thomas Steven Molnar, *Theists and atheists: a typology of non-belief*, New York: Mouton, 1980.

37 Elmer Daniel Klemke, *Living without appeal*, Den Haag: Mouton, 1974, 99.

meaning individually, one finds a diversity of notions among members of each tradition. These “individual constructions of meaning” are not designed according to a preconceived scheme and then implemented systematically. They grow in the course of everyday activities and experience. Lévi Strauss<sup>38</sup> makes a distinction between *l’ingenieur* and *le bricoleur*. The former thinks, designs, develops and implements. The latter, so to speak, patches life together somehow and assembles the bits and pieces as he or she goes along. At the microlevel of individuals religion is the product of such a *bricolage*. It is a reconstruction that individuals make by doing and experiencing. One can distinguish between several types of reconstructions of this kind.<sup>39</sup>

The first type consists of elements of traditional Christianity but without breaking away from the traditional framework. Examples would be the religious structure of members of the charismatic Protestant movement who have specific conceptions of God, Jesus and the Spirit, or the Taizé movement in France.

The second type of reconstruction consists of elements of traditional Christianity which are transformed so as to accord with modernisation. One example is the abstraction of the God concept into a nonpersonal God. Traditional faith in God makes way for a more abstract concept of transcendence. This is not the same as abandoning faith in God, nor does it necessarily imply reduced religious practice. Thus one finds that people who see God as an impersonal force of love, located within human beings but at the same time enveloping them, still pray and also seek contact with critical prophetic movements.

The third type of reconstruction consists of elements of both traditional Christianity and other religious traditions. In themselves such reconstructions are not new: throughout its history Christianity has accepted combinations with elements of surrounding cultures and world-views. When the Christian conceptual heritage interacts with a surrounding culture and accommodates it we speak of contextualisation. Inculturation is when Christianity infiltrates the surrounding culture. When both Christianity and the surrounding culture are transformed and eventually merge it may be regarded as syncretism.<sup>40</sup> Given our increasingly global culture today, with its wealth of philosophical traditions and trends, any number of reconstructions are possible within this category.

Finally there is an extensive and growing fourth type of reconstruction. One finds that an increasing number of people believe that the phe-

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38 Claude Gustave Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, Paris: Plon, 1962.

39 Cf. Jacques Janssen, *Jeugdcultuur: een actuele geschiedenis*, Utrecht: De Tijdstroom, 1994, 33-37.

40 Cf. Robert Schreiter, *Constructing local theologies*, New York: Orbis Books, 1984, 175.

nomenon of religion merits respect inasmuch as it benefits some people, but they themselves no longer attach any value to it. There is no antagonism towards religion based on their personal relation with religion, but tolerance based on the role it plays for others. These people would reject the view that religion does not have much to offer society any more, and would refute the statement that religion is an old-fashioned phenomenon, but are not involved themselves.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

In view of the developments that we have noted one could say that the superindividual order of meaning is no longer unequivocal, homogeneous and uniform. More than ever before, it is pluralistic, sometimes even contradictory and subject to constant change. The legitimation of the superindividual order of meaning is likewise characterised by a high degree of plurality. This plurality has to do with the typological distinction between religions and immanent world-views. Religions and world-views not only differ greatly from one another, but also display internal plurality. That is why we could in the present Indonesian context define religion (as a specific form of world-view) from a social constructionist perspective, as follows:

*Religion is a consistent, cognitive, communicative construction of meaning based on a continually changing superindividual order of meaning and the constantly self-adjusting social legitimation of that order. The processes of constituting meaning in their turn influence changes in the superindividual order of meaning and its legitimation. On the basis of these processes and the feelings implicit in them individuals and communities direct and assess their attitudes and behaviour.*

\*) **Carl Sterkens**

*Doktor teologi pastoral dari Radboud University Nijmegen – Netherlands; dosen pastoral di departemen teologi praktis-pastoral di universitas yang sama.*

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