

Pillarisation in the netherlands essay



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Throughout the 19th and early 20th century, Holland was a melting pot made up of different religions and social groups who lived their lives separate from each other, only associating with those people who were in their own, familiar group.

This was called “verzuiling”, pillarisation. The foundation of pillarisation can be traced to a collection of different events throughout the history of Holland, but one event in particular set everything in motion: the “Doleantie” in 1886. Dr. Abraham Kuyper was a Protestant preacher who felt that King Willem III was too progressive in his ideas for reshaping the Protestant church.

Kuyper led a small group of people away to establish a new church, the Reformed Church. This act was at first greeted with scepticism, as there did not seem to be a substantial difference between Kuypers church and that of Willem III's. Kuyper however, had a distinct vision of what was necessary to keep the Christian religion alive and worthy: a ‘zuil’, and this vision became slowly more apparent. A “zuil”, or pillar, incorporated schools, newspapers, and political parties which revolved around the church.

Basically all aspects of life needed to have Christian roots so that the masses would not be distracted from what was true and pure: the Dutch Reformed Church. Kuyper was a realist. He was aware of the fact that not all of Holland could be changed according to his beliefs. All he could do was lead those who already stood behind him in the right direction.

So he created Protestant churches, schools, gatherings, and media, with the idea of ‘sovereignty in one's own circle’. The success of his idea was proved

by the fact that not much later the Catholic Church followed his example and pillarisation was born. For many decades pillarisation proved to be a good, and for many people the only way of living. It was safe, familiar and easy to associate only with those who had the same norms and values. Your children were not indulging in activities considered sinful by your own church, and there was reassurance in the fact that they were always in the vicinity of church elders. In spite of this, the pillars did not hold.

After the 2nd World War, Holland became industrialized, and cities grew larger. Many moved to the cities, and often found themselves far from the trusted environment that their pillar-society had created. Catholics now lived next to socialists, liberals next to Protestants, and through this forced acknowledgement of each other, a tolerance grew. What also contributed to the great change Holland was undergoing, was the increased financial support offered by the government. The Wall Street Crash of Black Thursday had awakened a realisation in the government of the problems resulting from large groups of people with no income. After the war the government became a Welfare state.

As a result of this, higher education was now also a viable option for the less privileged. With education, young people became more vocal, expressing their disgust about society. The 50's and 60's were a time of total rebellion. These and other changes ensured that when the 70's arrived there was hardly anything left of the Pillarised society. Then arose the problem which had for a long time been neglected and passed off as unimportant: the increase in immigrants from Indonesia, Surinam, Turkey, Morocco, and now the Far East. Because of its reputation as a Welfare State, Holland has

become an attractive venue for many foreigners. Once again Holland is a melting pot, this time without pillars.

The question is, though, whether the current state of pillar-free life is a good thing. Going back to the 1960's, we see that it was perfectly normal to know the religious background of one's neighbours. Nowadays, however, religion has been designated a private matter, of no concern to our neighbours and friends. On the one hand this can be viewed as good; it is fairly difficult to discriminate a person based on their religious beliefs if one doesn't know what these beliefs are.

On the other hand the semi-pillarised society we live in now, with its mosques standing next to catholic and protestant churches, brings its own problems. Religions all come with a set of rules, ' don't eat pork', ' don't drink alcohol', ' only eat red meat on those days', and most people are easily offended when they think others are insulting their religion. That is where the problem lies. Social standards combined with these rules are inflicted on us, and our own insecurity and vulnerability make for an impossible situation. Think about dinner parties: is it there even a remote chance people will not view it as rude, when you ask them beforehand what religious group they belong to? Should we simply not ask, and instead hope against hope that our guests will be allowed to eat everything placed before them? Of course many will say we could simply ask what our guests don't eat, rather than what religion they belong to, but food is not the only aspect that can cause friction between different religious beliefs; what about clothing, manners, marriage? You can't very well go up to your neighbour and ask whether you're allowed to shake his wife's hand.

Of course, if pillarisation does make its way back to society, we'll once again be faced with the problems concerning discrimination and intolerance. Then again, if you don't know the religion of your neighbours, are you truly tolerant of them?