Beyond Professional Identity
Transcendence and Paternal Function
in Pastoral Experience and Praxis

Hans Ettema

Pastoral care is a human project. Indeed, nowadays personal convictions and the ability to express one’s own religious experience are often considered to be of the utmost importance in realizing an ecclesiastic position. Additionally, the claims of occupational theory are applied to ministry and are the focus of attention, not only in practical debate but in many contributions of empirical research as well. As a consequence of standard empirical orientations and ideological views, the term “pastor” is considered as a general denomination of all those who practice as “experts in religious communication” and guide, clarify and shape the religious interpretations and experience of the life of their “clients”. However, the question that needs to be considered is whether this view of the ministry as a profession is based on a misunderstanding of the symbolic dimension of the priesthood and whether the term “pastor” is not applied in too general a sense. Misunderstanding of the symbolic dimension, and repudiating metaphorical signification, especially the importance of the paternal function, makes it hard to understand the sacramental reality of the Roman Catholic Church and to give this an adequate position in empirical research. In addition, the fundamentals of human subjectivity are likewise not properly recognized.

In the present contribution, the paternal function as a symbolic function informing the church is highlighted. The symbolic dimension of priesthood is underlined as it obtains its proper place in the acceptance of the symbolic, which is beyond personal identification and representation, opening up the space of transcendence. Against this background, a small-scale investigation is presented.

A strategy of redefinition that easily escapes attention

The term “pastor” is by and large used as a general denomination in research on those individuals who have spiritual leadership within Christian tradition, regardless of their persuasion and standing. In research on those who work in the church – priests, deacons, or pastoral workers – the research subject thus seems defined as a matter of course. In order to make the pastorate concrete within the social framework, it is almost automatically seen as a profession. This is why much of the research within the framework of practical theology and pastoral psychology is aimed at the professional skills held to be desirable in those individuals practicing the pastoral profession, but which remain, at least in part, as
yet undiscovered.

The Dutch Federation of the Pastoral Workers’ Associations (Federatie VPW Nederland, further: VPW) is of the opinion that it is a matter of course that pastoral workers within the Roman Catholic Church are called pastors, and it is therefore not surprising that the federation focuses on establishing a vocational profile for pastors. Investigating the components and preconditions for the various competencies of such a vocational profile is an area of research in which empirical researchers, behavioural scientists, and theologians can find common ground. In 1988, for instance, the VPW commissioned an investigation of this type into the “professionalization of the ecclesiastical office” (Schilderman e.a. 1993). This research revealed a substantial gap between traditional forms of religious expression and experience.

According to Zondag, Sonnberger & Van Iersel (2001), pastors are “experts in religious communication”. Religious communication is further defined as “the exchange of epiphanal experiences, insofar as these interpretations involve God”. According to the same writers, it is the pastor’s task to develop, clarify, and shape their religious interpretations. Through the pastor’s guidance, existential experience and Christian faith are brought together, and this is a process that – according to the same writers – has a cognitive and an active side. They emphatically state that neither tradition of faith nor current affairs can be considered static data. Religious professionals, they state, “review the tradition in light of the present”. This means that a large dynamic field with respect to interpretation and redefinition has been created.

The dynamics of this field is also cause for concern. The content of pastoral work has become the subject of discussion, leading to – according to Van der Ven (2000) and many others – many questions, doubts, and uncertainties, which increase pastoral ambivalence and diminish the feeling of professional identity and security. In the modern world, the pastor is subjected to a polyphony of voices within church, parish, and him/herself. In order to better understand the permanent dynamics of the self-involved re-interpretation and provide it with a context, Van der Ven came up with the concept of “reflective pastorship”, which by extension could provide a blueprint of a programme for training and educating pastors.

As a modern denominator, the word “pastor”, which was fairly recently introduced in the Netherlands when pastoor and kapelaan (priest and chaplain) started sharing this title after the Second Vatican Council, seems, as a modern signifier, self-evidently to indicate all those working for the church. However, this is not how it was used at first, but this quickly changed. Soon after the ordained parochial workers, the priests, started being called “pastors”, their number decreased and theologically educated laymen started taking over their work. Currently, the word seems to denote a general category of pastoral workers, including ordained clerics. This way of thinking, which also seems to be present in research and articles on this subject, is based on first the profession (possibly comparable to something like “spiritual caretaker”) with a general vocational
profile, and, subsequently, the specializations, such as priesthood. The VPW, which is an association under civil law, laid down the objective of developing the vocational profile of the parochial pastor in their statutes in 1988. In the capacity of trade union, the VPW is making efforts to further define the profession of parochial pastor through a process of “organised collegiality”, including priests, deacons, and pastoral workers. The vocation itself is to be developed further and to be given direction through a professional code and a vocational profile. The VPW’s newsletter of September 2001 says, “Members will determine in which direction the vocational profile must be developed.” (Kontaktblad 2001) Again, this seems logical from a functional perspective, but in fact it is not. According to the Dutch bishops, the title of pastor is reserved for the priest who practices the (sacrum) ministerium. There are no objections to using the terms pastoral work and pastoral workers. Lay religious people can also obtain a religious mission. According to the Dutch bishops, the fact that these theologically trained laymen are referred to as “pastor” in Dutch can indeed be seen as a token of appreciation for their work and of recognition of their ecclesiastical mission. However, it does not conversely imply that they are equal in the ecclesiastical sense and for that reason the title “pastor” should not to be used (Nederlandse Bisschoppenconferentie 1999, 350).

Nevertheless, it is currently not really possible to read about this subject in a manner that does not assume functional equality. When speaking of clerics, the term pastor is used. When speaking of pastors, this category automatically includes the priest. The priest becomes pastor. But what is a pastor? The professionalization that is required, comparable to other fields of social care, usurps, as it were, the definition and authentication of the parochial pastor. The results of the research done by Nijmegen University for the VPW have led the latter to conclude that a basis has been laid for thinking about professionalization, for example through expert training, of the profession as a whole, rendering the pastorate a professional position.

The first conclusion to be drawn here is that, according to the VPW, there is a growing movement, rooted in the professionalism claimed by those denoted as pastors, which wants to ensure social identity and recognition. Professionalisation has to do with requirements and criteria demanded of the pastor and standards the pastors must meet to conduct the pastorate. At a given moment, some will have earned the pastor certificate and others will not. When the priesthood concerns a subdivision of the pastorate, this will first have to be defined by analogous functional vocational requirements. As a result of the redefinition of the profession, the fait accompli of vocational qualifications, and the kind of people that fulfil these, the VPW feels entitled to claim the title of pastor. Consequently, it is striking that scientific publications pertaining to this area, including the educational programmes, follow these views so easily. The broad vocational category of pastor, socially assignable as it appears to be, offers a suitable tool for talking about behaviour, positions, attitudes, or other individual aspects. The priesthood never presented such a tool. On the basis of their own potential,
the scientific publications actually follow the strategy of the said fait accompli.

Metaphors

As often stated, the religious documents seem to offer little in the face of this promotion of “professional development”. According to Schilderman (1998), who attempted to translate the objectives of the theology of ministry into the professionalism of pastoral work on the basis of empirical research, the church uses primarily religious metaphors when speaking about the vocation. Schilderman voices the objective that it is hardly possible, or at least not systematically, scientifically, or hermeneutically, to relate those images to the conditions of the development of the pastoral profession. There is a true abyss between metaphorical church language, for instance in the Dogmatic Constitutions of the church Lumen Gentium, and the socio-scientific categories arising from the term “professionalism” (competencies as scientific knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes) deemed necessary for the functioning of the pastor.

Within our present culture, shaped as it is by science, a metaphor is a non-literal representation, which makes its value for reality considerably lower from the start; at least, this is the consensus. For most people, it is a manner of poetic or rhetorical expression, a matter of exceptional language use and not that of daily speech (Lakoff & Johnson 1979). Within the context of common sense argumentation, a description has to describe matters in such a way, that they are clearly defined in objective space. Such unequivocal clarity is also required for the model theory in social science. The social sciences, and in their wake empirical theology, have adopted this common sense approach to the interpretation of reality, as what Husserl (1913) termed die natürliche Einstellung (natural attitude) of what is taken for granted as real. Within the scientific consensus of the social sciences, the model is considered to be a objective representation of reality, and, with this, language may be an implicit obstacle and of little actual importance. This approach means that metaphors, which always represent a phenomenon through the meaning and connotation of another, are a serious complication and should logically be rejected.

However, this point of view also presents some problems. First, it is easily demonstrated, as Lakoff & Johnson (1979) have done, that even the most common speech is imbued with metaphors, which we usually take quite literally. When we say that the actual use of the term “pastor” is indefensible, we use a war metaphor. Of course, the word “pastor” is also a metaphor, a transfer. If these days we compare the spirit to a computer, this is a very real comparison to many people. We could even consider language an unseen dimension in our world of meaning, and in light of language theory, we would have to establish that language does not depict matters but merely symbolizes them. Insofar as it is possible to speak of representation by language, this is done by current presentation against a background of absence.

Language is only possible on the basis of a breach and distinction with what
(secondary, after the breach) is referred to as reality. Reality can only become real through language. In other words, language has primacy over reality, or the signifier comes before the signified. This idea, the core of which has already been discussed by the philosopher of modern language theory Saussure (1915), has found its way to psychoanalyst Lacan in an anthropological sense. As little as language is the imaging representation of reality it does express that which is present in the subject to which it refers. The signifier is not determined by what is described or expressed, but the signifier dominates our world of meaning and experience (cf. Moyaert 1994). Man is subjected to language and so this applies to recognition, which implies misrecognition of his own experiencing self at the same time. In our daily lives, we may have the idea that we express the conscious and intentional notions we have about ourselves. We can call this the narrative of the Self. At the same time, we are often confronted with a good deal of speech that is not organised or controlled by ourselves. Lacan calls this the language of the Other.

Our self-image is first of all derived from another. And our own language is the derivative of the language of the Other as well. Speaking and language come from without. The language of the Other, which does not come from the Self, can also manifest itself in me when I say something that seems to be foreign to me, but equally well when convinced of expressing my own intentions. In short, the language that gives me the opportunity to express the deepest stirrings of my soul remains, at the same time, foreign to me. According to Lacan, we are born into a world of speech; speech and language, which already existed before we were born and which will continue to exist after we have passed on from this world. The world of language gives us opportunities, but simultaneously alienates us. The language we speak and from which we derive our identity is, strictly speaking, not ours. Even our own fantasies are foreign to us as they were formed in a language that is only indirectly ours, but that may even be based on the fantasies of others (Fink 1995). To recognize this status of language may bring us the insight that we should give more room to the nature and meaning of language for human experience and the structure of subjectivity.

**Priest and pastor**

The question addressed to in this study is whether or not the term “priest” can easily be included in the category of “pastor”, as is actually the custom in the Netherlands. The presupposition investigated here is that the psychoanalytical Lacanian notion of the paternal function can clarify the position a priest may assume. The relationship kept by the paternal function is a precondition for a dynamic in which the faithful can divorce themselves from a limited personal existence. Vergote (1988) clarified the special meaning of the father figure and related notions of law and debt for religious psychology. By calling God “Father” the language of the faith indicates that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority and that He is, at the same time, goodness and loving
care for all his children (Catechism of the Catholic Church §§ 238-242). Paternity plays a central role in Christ’s life and suffering, as he places himself in the position of Son in relation to his divine Father (John 17:1). The entire gospel is built on this notion. Christ, who first prays to his Father that the grail of suffering may pass him by, offers his spirit to his Father on the cross. The centurion present acknowledges that this event is truly the apparition of the Son of God. This relationship is also often echoed in Paul’s letters. The faithful are those who can call God their Father (Romans 6:1-17). Christ’s priesthood is bestowed upon him as the son conceived by the Father (Hebrews 5:5). The Roman Catholic Church speaks of the pope as the Holy Father. Finally, in the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation the priest who has the authority to say: “May our Lord Jesus Christ forgive you (…) and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ (…) I hereby grant you pardon, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” is called “father”.

Speaking about the priesthood may be considered a process of metaphorical substitution: gains in meaning through progressing substitution. In this series, the sacrifice of Melchizedek, “priest of the highest God” (Genesis 14:18-20) is always mentioned as a prefiguration, but Abraham’s sacrifice (Genesis 22) and the sacrifices in the temple also belong here. These prefigurations find their eventual meaning and significance in the sacrifice of Christ. This sacrifice, which is the revelation of Christ being the Son of the Father, is commemorated in the Eucharist, where the priest acts out of the force and the person of Christ (CCC § 1584). The priesthood renders the bishop and his co-ministers equal to Christ the Priest (CCC § 1563).

Perhaps, it is the existential metaphors embodied in priesthood that forms a core-theoretical obstacle to socio-scientific and empirical approaches. Perhaps, a certain insensitivity to the importance of the father function in priesthood causes its neglect in functionalistic approaches in formulating a vocational profile (which, in turn is a secular and social matter). With regard to the following, it is the conviction of the author that the role of (spiritual) aide and pastoral worker should remain separate from the spiritual fatherhood of the priest, which is not a role but a state of being. On Holy Thursday 2004, Pope John Paul II said: “The ordained ministry, which may never be reduced to its merely functional aspect since it belongs to the level of ‘being’, enables the priest to act in persona Christi and culminates in the moment when he consecrates the bread and wine, repeating the deeds and words of Jesus during the Last Supper.” (John-Paul II 2004, 755) According to the tradition, the Pope maintains that the church derives its lifeblood from the Eucharist and that the priest derives his right to exist from this. This identity-determining “being” is related to the Eucharist and derives its significance from it. It is remarkable that in research into the work and spirituality of pastors it is apparently difficult to focus attention on these identifying dimensions. After all, do sacramental theology and papal statements not also belong to the identity context? In the end, the answer to this question may turn out to be negative, as these elements do not fit in the
common-sense language of empirical research or the socio-scientific presuppositions on what is suitable to be researched. Does this type of research not too easily readjust the subject to be investigated to these presuppositions and the ideological view of the researcher and endanger its scientific claims? This study is aimed at centralising the symbolic world, which enables us to put our own experience into perspective. The theoretical and empirical question in this study is whether or not accepting the foreignness of the Christian identity in sacramental expressions would yield a difference in the pastoral experience.

**Metaphor and subject**

It is not only in the strictly theological sense that fatherhood possesses a transcendental and vertical dimension. In psychoanalysis, the significance of the father became obvious when his role became disputable historically. The discovery of psychoanalysis, in part through Freud’s self-analysis, is connected to this situation. The myth of fatherhood as told by Freud in *Totem und Tabu* (Freud 1955), which is intended to support his theories on the passage of man from nature to culture by the Oedipus castration complex leaves some questions unanswered. How can the murdered father obtain his idealised position on the basis of the *actual* battle between the sons and how can his rules be recognized on the basis of an anomalous situation (Vergote 1988)? Lacan (2001) agrees. According to Lacan, this Freudian myth is a *petitio principii* (begging the question) and a leap towards reality at the same time. A specific reality is actually and prehistorically presupposed in order to understand structural-theoretical issues.

Lacan poses his construction of the *paternal metaphor* (*métaphore paternelle*) as the answer to this conundrum. In this context, the notion of the paternal function (*fonction paternelle*) is to be introduced. The paternal metaphor should not be perceived as a kind of generalised imagery in relation to actual fathers because this would mean that the metaphor would be understood as a less accurate or non-literal imitation of reality. So, what to think about the metaphor?

According to Aristotle’s definition (Aristotle 1979, 1457b6), a metaphor is the “transfer of a name to a matter with this indicating something else”. Indeed, literally, the word *metaphor* means “transfer”. Aristotle’s definition concerns the actual *use* of the word, not the supposed cognitive or interpretative processes. In other words, it is about the effective relationship brought about by words; it is primarily a language process, not word meanings *per se*. In current Greek, the word *metaforikos* means, “motor bus”. Derrida (1987, 63) writes that this metaphor “drives us around town, and transports us down all roads, through intersections, and past all of the concomitant traffic lights, directional signs, and posted speeds. We are – metaphorically speaking – the content of this means of transport: passengers, included and transported by the metaphor.” In describing the metaphor, we are again confronted with the metaphorical nature of language,
and are swept up by it, more than the intentional language user intends. Again, the metaphor makes it clear that language has primacy in meaning and that this leads us. The metaphor should be taken as that which the word does to us; the effect of the sign.

The notion of condensation, as it plays an important role in the dream approach applied by Freud, was understood by Lacan to be an operation that can best be understood using the insight of the metaphor. Lacan (1998) significantly cited Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten (Freud 1960), in which Freud shows that condensation is a formation in which meaning can arise from a senseless slip of the tongue. Lacan sees condensation as a metaphor in order to assign the notion a fundamental psychological meaning at a higher level. According to Lacan, the metaphor is situated exactly at the point where meaning is formed from non-sense. The metaphor – “one word for another one” – is a substitutive operation providing new meaning.

This substitutive metaphorical operation also occurs at the level of the genesis of the subject. The future subject, which was first subjected to and fascinated by the comparative identification with the (m)other, becomes independent by accepting that it is not a complement to the (m)other; by accepting that it will not receive from the (m)other the full existence attributed to that other being from which it derives identification. On the contrary, it must accept that the mother has another meaningful other in a role which the subject itself wants to fulfil. Thus, it also loses the claim and fulfilment so near in secondary narcissism, but through acceptance of this loss it gains a separated subjectivity of its own. In this separation, the subject gains existence. This existence is granted only through the symbolic order, the separation resulting in a splitting of the subject, who receives desire. Desire exists on the basis of absence. Absence has a necessary place in the structure of subjectivity.

The metaphor is an event of transposition or transfer, originally in the carnal realm of development, from which subjectivity originates and in which the difference between the self and the other (which was first imaginary to the level of visual comparison on the basis of identification) can be placed within a contextual framework, and symbolically can get its real place. What “I” am eludes me at the level of imagination. Being the person indicated by the shifter “I” is determined by trust in the stranger/other whom I cannot totalise nor reduce to myself. The other takes up another position, which I must accept. It is this surrendering of the totalising reduction which means that language can be put into perspective; that “I” can speak to another. This is the absolute possibility condition of language: it does not coincide with the physical world. Speaking makes the absent symbolically present. It is based on an abyss. Without this distance between what is made present and the speaker, there are no proportions and no awareness; in fact, the world as we know it does not exist. Without this distance, I cannot distinguish between my fantasies, imagination, dreams, the world, or the Other, and I will not know where or what I am. I may be able to reproduce or process language, but I will not have a position and will therefore not really
exist in language and reality. It is for this reason that Lacan provides his insights into the structure of the subject when discussing his views on psychoses.

**Paternal function and transcendence**

The primal signifier that precedes everything, including the world and time, is brought about by Lacan’s paternal function, or paternal metaphor. There is a third term in the mother-child unity interaction (the two first terms, mother and child, being an indissoluble duality), which Lacan calls Name-of-the-Father. It is “No” and “Name” at the same time: “No” because the caesura action prevents the child from remaining caught in the duality with the mother; “Name” because the child receives one: its own name, the only one and the right one.

In language, a name rigidly establishes the identity of the child and protects it from the dangers of a dyadic situation. The father, who gives the child its name, keeps the child at a certain distance from the mother. Or rather, the father protects the child against potential danger: the mother’s desire. Who is who here? The caesura in the mother-child relationship (which, after all, is no relationship) arising from the father’s existence is based on something other than the actual father’s characteristics. The actual father as a stereotype “head of the family” is becoming increasingly rare these days. The father is no longer someone physically in charge and enforcing his random decisions. Nowadays, it is about the one with the actual authority. According to Fink (1995), it is about the person the mother can appeal to. It is someone who has a place in the mother’s speech, who represents an authority above her. Authority is granted. It is an essential fact that all speech to which a subject can relate always points to a final authority or law. The law lays down the rules. The idea of truth also always invokes both universality and something at its base. By the same token, Christ, questioned by Pilate about his kingship, reminds the latter of the origin of his authority and power (John 19:11). Along with the existence of the symbolic order, reality has come about. Cancelling out the real, the symbolic creates “reality”. Symbolisation falls always short of the real; it is that which cannot be captured and which is unimaginable. Language, it has been claimed by Lacan, protects the child against the potentially dangerous situation in which the difference between what the mother wants and what the child wants is unclear. Separating the child from “the desire of the mother” (“of” being both a subjective and objective genitive) implements a signifier representing the mother’s desire. This phantasm-controlling desire does not obtain meaning and place until the onset of language in the child’s development. Personal entry into generalising language is possible only after meaningful substitution in the fatherly metaphor. The desire emanating from the mother that cannot in the first instance be put into perspective is substituted. This is symbolised by the Name-of-the-Father. The unattainable object of desire is the phallus. This object exists as the signifier for lack. The absent object, resulting from the substitution and the alienating function of language, allows the desire emanating from the mother to be
given its place and to be distinguished from that of the child itself. This signifier of the Other’s desire called into existence by Name-of-the-Father (and which both recognizes the father and lets the child become subject) is the primal cause of desire. Human desire, which, strictly speaking, does not have an object, is thus stimulated.

According to this psychoanalytical outcome, which has far-reaching consequences for a fundamental anthropology, the father is the one who represents the Law, which makes it possible to obtain a life world of one’s own. The paternal function or paternal metaphor frees the developing subject from the fascination of the self-image with the mother and vice versa. It imposes and guarantees the law and the right to live one’s own life. The father did not invent this position himself, but is father as far as he submits himself to the Law. The position can be called transcendent precisely because it enables the subject to transcend the fascinations and phantasms of his own experience by the incarceration of self-fascinations and the recognition of the Other of the other. The actual, concrete father can only be father insofar as he embodies this representation.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, in which Jesus’ life can be seen as a metaphorizing breach that fulfils the meaning of the texts quoted from the Old Testament since then, sacrifice has a central function. Abraham’s sacrifice is a primal image of faith, and Abraham is called the father of the faithful. As Kierkegaard so vigorously pointed out in Fear and Trembling (Kierkegaard 1963), Abraham is put to the test. Subjected to the fear of the Other’s desire, he conceived a child with a barren woman on the basis of a mere promise. He tries to reduce his fear of what the Almighty other might demand of him by sacrificing his only child. When he intends to sacrifice his only son, the child of promise, Yahweh is the intimidating rival, a jealous God, the relationship with whom Abraham merely sees as one of exchange in the imaginary sense. On the mountain where the sacrifice is to take place, the Lord’s angel stops his arm. This thwart means “no” to the law of desire. The pleasure that the other might have derived from this is not evident (perversion: installation in the pleasure of the Other); that which the Other asks cannot be understood by equating (neurotic projection) it to one’s own desire (Julien 1990). In this gaping emptiness between the two identifying possibilities to know God’s wish, the ram represents that which he neglected, according to Lacan. The ram is sacrificed, the almighty primal father is killed, and his overwhelming voice is muted. Abraham transforms the silenced voice into the subject around which his desire revolves. After Abraham was prepared to give everything and was held back by the awareness that the Lord provides, he received after this precarious passage the name, which made him the father of all faithful (Vergote 1978). The sacrifice is the original metaphor, the vessel, of the faith. The sacrifice means the advent of the subject of faith. An elaborate treatise on the sacrifice in which the central position of this active metaphor becomes clear is found in the letter to the Hebrews in which the author tries to explain to them the meaning of the Jewish tradition and its continuation and fulfilment in the sacrifice and high priesthood of
Self-conception, identity, self-searching, or searching beyond the self?

From what does the profession of pastor derive its legitimacy? What ensures its identity? In discussing the present vocational identity, Van der Ven (2000) distinguishes between a therapeutic model (expressive, person-centred, subjective, and aiming at inter-subjective authenticity) and an administrative church-oriented model of pastoral training. He argues that these two domains are the successors to the pre-sixties’ kerygmatic and ecclesiastical model. The therapeutic model influenced the clinical pastoral movement, which was in essence aiming at immanent human good and possibilities of human growth and the genuine individual (personal) experience of God’s mercy. This model dovetails with the current individualisation of religion. The opposite is the administrative model, in which the pastor can, for instance, be seen as a parochial manager. The administrative model appears to correspond primarily with models of modern rationality, which, in turn, rely heavily on the modern myth of progress and the necessary convergence of values (Gray 2003). Van der Ven (2000) has tried to prove that competencies, skills, and tasks cannot be derived from scientific premises, either for the pastor or for other modern vocations such as physician and teacher. Science could play a primarily reconstructive role here, which means it would be better to conduct an inductive procedure in performing empirical research into tasks. Van der Ven has subsequently worked out the concept of reflective pastorship, as a case of practical self-responsibility and self-control based on rationality.

The striking element here is that reflection and cognition take up such central positions in the determination of the specifics of this professional. In addition, Van der Ven’s explanation of Peirce’s philosophy, which he applied in his own work, is one-sidedly cognitivist and ignores entirely the semiotic philosophy. He subsequently appeals to Geertz’ theory on religion. Religion is conceived as a system of beliefs. Transcendence is also the object of beliefs. In this area, the pastor is operating within the context of the church (Van der Ven, 2000, 78ff).

As stated at the beginning of this paper, language is never entirely transparent. This is without a doubt also the case with religious discourse, which can exist thanks to a breach with the safe, familiar and own world. Within this context, room is reserved for the foreign, the unspeakable, and the transcendent. The sacramental rites in the Roman Catholic Church are procedures that bring about a more far-reaching reality than that is open to thinking alone. The church attributes a ritual position to priests, with profound demands being made of the individuals involved. Priesthood is a way of life, an existence. The sacred position is not just a position; it touches on the holder’s being, an individual who acts “in the person of Christ”. This position of the priesthood is not determined by pastoral functions, but by the sacrament, which does not represent its reality
but executes it (Ettema 2000). In a way, the sacrament of priesthood is an impenetrable sign providing integrity and position to the person holding this office. It is outside of and works beyond the extant of the individual. The priest fulfills a symbolic function and takes up a position within ritual speech. The idea that the competences of priests, such as the ability to forgive sins and administer sacraments could be reduced to a form of psychological power is the result of an illusory belief in the intrinsic autonomy of the individual (Moyaert 1994, 46). As the psychoanalytical insights into the paternal function teach us, symbolic authority is extrinsic in relation to the intellectual and moral powers of the individual involved. Sharing in the bishop’s vicarious duties, the priest does not derive his authority from himself. It is this position he can take up and from which he speaks that determines the priest’s identity.

**Some empirical indications**

What does a recent investigation about personal experience say about the symbolic dimension? Qualitative Dutch research (Zuidberg 1997) among thirty pastoral workers, including an estimated fifteen priests (no figures were given), showed that a significant segment of the interviewees felt that the language in which the “religious experience can be put into words” was becoming increasingly more of a private language and that recognizing the liturgical language of the church was difficult. There was a huge difference between the official liturgy and personal prayer. Only five out of thirty pastoral workers named God as an identity-determining factor in the core elements of the pastorate. This matches the background of the modern climate.

Religious aspects have been individualized in modern culture. The increasing focus on the subject since the Renaissance is without a doubt a product of the Christian tradition, but has made religion a private matter through the connection between rationality and awareness, on the one hand, and the autonomy of the subject, on the other. It is now an area of personal experience and vision on life. Individual responsibility, so closely connected with secularised civil religion, has given personal choices more importance than tradition’s claim. This has caused institutions to end up in crises, and religion is expressed much more in the personally felt conviction than in belonging to a tradition and church. Many people are neither practising church members nor atheists. Contemporary practitioners of faith and churchgoers stress individual responsibility more than obedience. Last but not least, the modern demand for individuation does not tolerate normativity well. The individual makes up his own rules for his own life. Against this background, an ethics of “authenticity” have been developing since the eighteenth century that has been spreading to large groups of the population in the last thirty years. The ethics of authenticity proposes that everyone has his or her own way of being human and that the meaning of life consists of manifesting oneself, like an artist creates a work of art. Many authors, especially Lasch (1979), have noticed this “narcissistic” nature of authen-
ticity and criticized its egocentric aspects.

Modern pastors will be part of this culture and are sensitive to it through their own calling and for pastoral reasons. However, this does not mean that they should identify with it. Zuidberg’s research presents an image of pastors engaged in the search for integrity, and trying “to get home”. According to them, the church community should be stimulating integrity and personal growth. Self-knowledge and awareness also form a recurrent theme, possibly due to the profound accent provided by the ideological points of departure about “reflective spiritual leadership” (just mentioned by Van der Ven) at the background of Zuidberg’s research. All these results emphasise self-experience, identity, and self-searching; the book De God van de pastor (The God of the Pastor) seems to give this quest an imaginary home seeking, self-directed, and non-symbolic orientation.

Based on our theory explained above and in view of the outcome of Zuidberg’s research, we performed a small-scale investigation entitled “Pastorship, position, and transcendence” in which the paternal function played a central role. Although this function cannot be translated directly into observable variables, it is thought that indications can be found for its functioning provided that the pastor involved can speak and act within the pastorate, always retaining complete responsibility in the capacity of office bearer. The complete appreciation of the symbolic order of religious life is part and parcel of this phenomenon. We have presented four (three, actually) versions of creed in the liturgy, including The Apostles’ Creed in Latin, the Apostles’ Creed in Dutch, an abstracted and wider creed, and a variant in which the self takes up a central position. Below, a partial investigation into a small group of ordained pastors (6 priests, 1 deacon) is described.

With an inquiry into the psychological aspects in dealing with “tradition and prayer” as a point of departure, the first part of this research consisted of sending forms to participants containing introductions and texts to which they could respond in the form of short essays. The questions concerned personal views on prayer in relation to tradition, and the various creeds. To get an indication of the relevant personal orientation, a self-inventory pertaining to “self-experience” was added. Actually, this inventory measures different aspects of narcissistic attachment or identification. The first scale measures the oblivious (and overt) narcissism of the person who is more “sender” than “receiver” in his or her relationship with others. In previous research (Ettema & Zondag 2002), this scale was called “centrifugal narcissism”. A second scale indicates a more sensitive, inhibited other-oriented and dependent (often called “covert”) dimension of narcissism: “centripetal narcissism”. The Dutch Narcissism scale (Nederlandse Narcisme Schaal, NNS) further measures a protective mode of relationship, that of “isolation”. It is significant that what is being dealt with here are actually forms of fascination. Standards were drawn up for these scales so that individual cases could be related to scores from the reference group. For psychometric reasons, five (discernable) levels were used: very high (VH), high (H), mean
HANS ETTEMA

(M), low (L), very low (VL).

From our very small and restricted sample, the following aspects come to our attention. The subjects differ widely in age, between 73 and 33, and, as such, represent different eras and experiences in the development of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands, especially after Vatican II. Our group can be divided into three subgroups and classified by age (born between 1925-1940; 1941-1955; and 1956-1970). Table 1 gives an overview of our findings:

Table 1. Age, forms of narcissism, and appraisal of ecclesiastic tradition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Born between</th>
<th>NNS Centripetal</th>
<th>NNS Centrifugal</th>
<th>NNS Isolation</th>
<th>Narcissism and attitude</th>
<th>Creed</th>
<th>Value of office (priesthood)</th>
<th>Prayer: personal or liturgical?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1925 - 1940</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Average profile (A)</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>No difference Trad. and metaphorical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941 - 1955</td>
<td>VH</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>High profile (B)</td>
<td>Self-involved Trad./self-involved</td>
<td>Accepted Relative</td>
<td>Personal Self-control Trad./ Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956 - 1970</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Average till low profile (C)</td>
<td>Trad.</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>Intimate Trad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although our group is extremely small and such results have little value for generalisation, some remarks are possible. Concerning the relevant aspects of narcissism, we can notice that high scores, especially on our two main dimensions, are found in the 1941-1955 (B) group. The actual persons of this group are, according to other findings by the interviews in the same project, “enthusiastic”, have a “narcissistic coloured total openness”, speak about leadership in a relativistic voice, also concerning their own position, are critical of ecclesiastical leaders (and the whole idea of leadership in the church), and are “democratic”. The scores on narcissism indicate a high level of fascination with the
BEYOND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

self-image, as they receive it from others as much as they impose it on their church members. Those in group A were characterised as “frank and open”, “concerned but at distance”, are still consciously opting for their office of priesthood, and are “independent”. The two interviewees from group C were described as more timid, uninhibited, sometimes having difficulty in being concrete in talking about their views. Their narcissistic profile is mean to low, with noticeable scores (one low, the other high) on isolation.

Earlier research (Peters and Bernts 1999) shows that the older generation (ordained prior to 1980) has a relatively weaker image of the church. This is parallel in the current investigation for the intermediary group. However, none of the respondents claimed to have interpretations of belief that were independent of tradition. The research shows that at different levels of narcissistic bonding to (centrifugal) self-investments and/or to the externally supported (centripetal) image, subjects appear to have considerably more difficulty in keeping their faith and interpretations in line with tradition. The more free and independent belief attitudes were found among those individuals who scored average on the orientation to others and also average to low on the own bonding to the self-image.

The scores from the NNS are no more than an indication of possible narcissistic bonding. The research group was small and the subjects were very different in many respects. The function of the holy office goes further than that which personal psychology can effect and may enable a person to transcend personal fulfilment. The research group also included individuals who may have been very committed, social, and open in their spiritual leadership, but who knew they were bound by their task and their calling. The mission of priesthood was clearly felt to lie at the basis of many of the statements.

Conclusion

The meaning of the ordained ministry goes beyond what can be described in a collection of help and care functions and is more than a sum of competencies. The person in his entirety is involved in the priesthood. Ordination by, or, in the case of pastoral workers, their mission, bestows upon the person a position that does not emanate from will or choice. Ordination serves to create a distance between personal baggage and church position. The person to be ordained receives his new identity through the action of the sacrament. When the priest puts on his liturgical robe to celebrate the Eucharist, he demonstrates that he is not going to be acting in his own person but in the person of Christ. His “I”, or his personal self, is to make way for an Other. These words, which are used by cardinal Ratzinger (2000), remain impracticable and inaccessible in a socio-scientific context but may be fitting and more understandable in a psychoanalytic framework. The capital in Other, in this case, is not only a traditionally established ornament but the designation of the invisible God who is no part of our reality, the Transcendent One, who, in our history, only appears in the Eu-
charistic realis presentia of Christ (Van den Bossche 2001). Van den Bossche writes that the pastor’s co-operator, the pastoral worker, cannot do what is impossible in terms of the sacrament. Rome cannot let him or her conduct a service, because, after that, there will be no “Rome” anymore. Van den Bossche is not referring to the capital of Italy here nor to the papal offices, but to the figure of the hierarchy that is an expression of the transcendence that makes possible the father position, to which the person ordained also has to submit.

It is clear that ordained ministry in northern Europe is in crisis. However, perhaps, this crisis is easier to bear and understand if we incorporate the sacramental dimension before we exclaim a new kind of profession on pragmatic grounds, a profession that is only founded on personal convictions.

References

Kontaktblad. Kwartaalblad van de federatie vpw nederland. 2001: (3).


