Constructions of Homosexuality and Christian Religion in Contemporary Public Discourse in the Netherlands

Marco Derks

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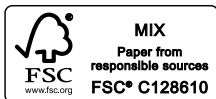

Constructies van homoseksualiteit en christelijke religie
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Marco Derks
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te Delft

Promotoren: Prof. dr. A.J.A.C.M. Korte
                Prof. dr. R.R. Ganzevoort

Voor de Oneindige. Zonder woorden.
To the Infinite. Without words.

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Acknowledgements

I have been blessed with the opportunity to do my doctoral research in a team of scholars who have become friends or whose friendship has been intensified over the last seven years. Sometime after I had completed my MPhil at the University of Manchester in early 2009, I contacted Anne-Marie Korte to ask her for guidance in exploring the possibilities for an individual PhD project. As I did not succeed in securing funding, in late 2011 she approached me with an idea for a broader research project. We then created a team and for almost a year, the five of us worked on a funding proposal for a research project about the oppositional pairing of religion and homosexuality in contemporary public discourse in the Netherlands. In the summer of 2013, funding was awarded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and in September that same year, I started working as a *promovendus* (PhD candidate) at Utrecht University. I am grateful for Anne-Marie's confidence in my capacities and for her efforts to make this finally happen. As my first supervisor and *promotor* or *Doktormutter* at Utrecht University, she has guided me through the whole process, in particular by providing conceptual comments, introducing me to new bodies of academic literature and encouraging me to show what I have got. She has also enriched and empowered me with her wisdom and expertise when I was dealing with professional or more personal challenges – and I have valued her trust in allowing me to turn the favour on several occasions. Ruard Ganzevoort (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) has been a friend for almost fifteen years. After I had graduated in Kampen, he was one of the first scholars to encourage me to proceed in academia. As my second supervisor and *promotor* or *Doktorvater*, he has helped me in particular in identifying central issues and questions, situating my research findings in a bigger picture and challenging me to think through the practical implications of my analyses. As Anne-Marie and Ruard have, to a certain extent, different disciplinary expertise and interests, academic styles and political and organisational approaches, I have learned a great deal from both of them in terms of my academic, professional and personal development.

I also want to thank the other members of our team, who participated in our project as postdoctoral research fellows. With his encyclopaedic knowledge and his historical and sociological expertise, David Bos (then Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, currently University of Amsterdam) has been one of my most feared yet valued critics. I want to thank him for his numerous suggestions, for his optimistic and hands-on mentality, and for being a great

November 2016 or at the Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion. These Annual Meetings, which I have attended since 2013, have provided wonderful opportunities to get inspiration for my research, to offer and improve some of my academic skills (e.g. presenting, responding, chairing, committee work), to build up a network, to broaden my scholarly horizon and to have some memorable erotic encounters.

Several analyses and ideas that I have developed in this thesis are partly the result of the many conversations I have had over the years with three of my closest friends: Wielie Elhorst, Marinus Schouten and Anton Untiedt. All four of us have been trained in theology and, despite some differences in style, perspective or professional positions, we have been – and remain – active in the work of (Christian) LGBTIQ emancipation. I also could not have done this work without the loving support of my parents, Herma and Winand.

A final word of gratitude goes to Sarah Bracke, Maaike de Haardt, Mark Jordan, Peter-Ben Smit and Heleen Zorgdrager, for accepting the invitation to sit on the Assessment Committee and for deciding that this thesis demonstrates my capacity for the independent pursuit of research to such an extent that I shall be admitted to defend my thesis.

The body of this thesis consists of four articles. Article 1 has been published in *Culture and Religion* (Taylor & Francis), Article 2 has been published in *Theology & Sexuality* (Taylor & Francis), Article 3 has not yet been accepted for publication and Article 4 has been published in the *International Journal of Public Theology* (Brill). I would like to thank the publishers for their permission to reissue these articles. I have not changed the content or structure of any of these articles. However, each of these three journals has different instructions with regard to language, style, referencing and punctuation. As I wanted this thesis to be consistent on these levels, I have made some minor changes. For example, I have used *British* rather than American English spelling and grammar throughout this thesis, I have placed (short) quotations between *double* instead of single inverted commas, and I have used *The Chicago Manual of Style*'s author-date style of reference.[1] At the end of this thesis, you can find the Bibliography that displays full publication details of all cited sources from public discourse as well as all cited academic literature – these two categories of references are displayed in two separate lists that follow after an explanation of the nature and limitations of this distinction. I have numbered the four articles and I have added or edited section numbers to make it easier to refer to articles – or to specific sections of articles – in the Introduction and the Conclusion of this thesis. The Introduction and Conclusion themselves have not been numbered, while sections *in* the Introduction and Conclusion have. In the Introduction and Conclusion, I will occasionally use short (edited) passages from the introductions resp. conclusions of the articles that comprise

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[1] Article 2 has been published in a special issue of *Theology & Sexuality* (which I have co-edited with Ruard Ganzevoort and Anne-Marie Korte). When I cite David Bos' contribution to that same issue, I provide the reference in the same way as any other reference.

Introduction

1. The Scope of this Study

1.1 Homosexuality and Religion

This thesis is about religion and homosexuality in the Netherlands. A number of studies on this topic already exist, including historical studies on the changing attitudes towards homosexuality among Roman Catholics and Protestants since the 1950s (e.g. Oosterhuis 1992; Bos 2010b, 2017), quantitative studies on (contemporary) attitudes towards homosexuality among different religious and/or ethnic groups (e.g. Oomen et al. 2009, 63–78; Keuzenkamp 2010b, 209–332; Huijnk 2014) and some qualitative studies on the lived experiences of LGBT Christians (e.g. Ganzevoort, Olsman and van der Laan 2010; de Wolf, van Hoof and van den Berg 2013; Schrijvers 2015). Unsurprisingly, there is also a large body of Dutch publications that relate religious texts, traditions and beliefs to same-sex desires and practices. Most of these publications (some of which are not strictly academic) have been written by Dutch clergy, theologians and/or LGBT activists for their respective Catholic, Protestant or Muslim audiences in the Netherlands (over the last two decades e.g. Vosman, Korte and de Wit 1999; Nahas 2001; Ganzevoort, Olsman and van der Laan 2010; de Bruijne 2012a).[2]

This thesis, however, focuses more specifically on contemporary *public discourses* about religion and homosexuality in the Netherlands. How do government officials, politicians, journalists or NGOs speak and write about religion and homosexuality? How do religious organisations, groups or persons express their views on homosexuality in different public arenas? Put differently, I am concerned with *discursive* constructions of religion and homosexuality, not directly with the lived experiences of religious and/or lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) persons, even though the knowledge and emotions produced by these discourses do have real consequences for and effects on the lives of, among others, religious and/or LGB persons.[3] Therefore, I have not generated research material by sending out surveys or conducting interviews; instead, I have collected my material from public discourse, my sources ranging from columns, cartoons and online comments to

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[2] In addition, many Bachelor's and Master's theses have been written on this subject, especially in the last two decades, at Utrecht University as well as at other Dutch universities, and in different academic disciplines (theology, religious studies, gender studies, anthropology, psychology, sociology).

[3] I do not use 'LGBT' or any similar (longer) acronym here, because the primary focus of this thesis is on constructions of *sexual* identity viz. homosexuality. In other instances, I might use the LGBT acronym or other terms, depending on the terms used in the sources I cite or on the argument I am making. How constructions of *sexual* identity are related to constructions of *gendered* identity (or other levels of identity) will occasionally be addressed in my analyses.

parliamentary proceedings, press releases and policy documents. In Section 3.2, I will further explain what constitutes contemporary public discourse and what types of sources I have used; here I will offer some preliminary reflections on the two central terms in the discourses I will be analysing: religion and homosexuality. I do so without a priori providing conceptual definitions of these terms, since the way they are 'conceptualised' in public discourses will be one of my analytical concerns throughout this thesis.

Where public discourses about *religion* are concerned, it is difficult to overlook how preoccupied the Dutch public is with the subject. Again and again, the question comes up about what role 'religion' or a particular 'religion' plays or should play in the public sphere (e.g. ten Hooven and de Wit 2006; Mikkers 2012; Kennedy 2013). The 'religions' that are most frequently represented or discussed in public debates in the Netherlands are Islam and Christianity. This is not surprising, as these two religions have the highest numbers of adherents: in 2015, 39% of the Dutch population was Christian, while 5% was Muslim (CBS 2016).[4] However, statistics are not very significant for the purposes of this thesis – if they were, I would add that Dutch citizens highly overestimate the number of Muslims in their country: they believe that 19% of the population is Muslim (Ipsos 2016, 4).[5]

I will occasionally place 'religion(s)' between inverted commas in order to display a critical distance between myself and the term. In most instances in which I speak of 'religion', I am referring to the use of the term *religie(s)* in Dutch public discourse. I also think it is problematic simply to present Christianity and Islam as (two) 'religions', because it risks doing injustice to the differences between Christianity and Islam. Moreover, in some cases, Catholics and Protestants in the Netherlands need to be treated as distinct social groups for religio-historical, sociocultural or theological reasons. In addition, when the term 'religion' is used in Dutch popular public discourse, it is often used by someone who self-identifies as non-religious, talking about what they perceive as religious.[6] For people who are religious themselves – whatever that might mean to them or to others – it is much more common to self-identify as, for example, *moslim* (Muslim), *katholiek* (Catholic), *christen* (Christian) or *gelovige* (believer) than as *religieus* (religious).[7]

The Dutch public is not only strongly preoccupied with religion, but also with homosexuality (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010, 963). At the same time, it is interesting to see that the average Dutch citizen believes that 36% of their fellow citizens finds homosexuality morally unacceptable, while

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[4] More precisely, 24% was Roman Catholic and 15% was Protestant. Moreover, 50% of the Dutch population had no religious affiliation, while 6% had a religious affiliation other than Catholic, Protestant or Muslim.

[5] The report shows that something similar goes for citizens of many other Western countries.

[6] Most Dutch Muslims have a Moroccan or Turkish background (CBS 2016, 2007). The first generation of Moroccan and Turkish migrants arrived in the 1960s and 1970s as so-called *gastarbeiders* ("guest workers"). Having been framed primarily in ethnic or socioeconomic terms for a couple of decades, in the 1990s the focus and framing has shifted towards their religion (Bos 2016, 211–14).

[7] The latter term is used as a term of self-identification by *religieuzen*, members of a Catholic religious order.

this is only the case among 5% of the Dutch population. Strikingly, in no other country is the average citizen so wrong about how acceptable their fellow citizens find homosexuality (Ipsos 2016, 10).

I deliberately speak of 'homosexuality' instead of 'sexual diversity' or 'queer sexuality', because queer subject positions and politics have been rather absent in the Netherlands (cf. Duyvendak 1996; Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010, 963; Hekma 2011). Therefore, I have mainly used terms such as *homo* (gay) or *homoseksualiteit* (homosexuality) when searching for relevant material. In my analysis I will, of course, look at the connotations of such terms – that is, at how homosexuality is constructed. Throughout this thesis, I will occasionally speak of 'homosexuals' as an inclusive term for 'gays and lesbians' when, in the context of the sources I am analysing, the word *homo* is used and lesbians are not explicitly excluded from that term.[8]

1.2 Homosexuality and Islam

Most research on contemporary public discourses about homosexuality and religion in the Netherlands has focused on Islam (e.g. Hekma 2002; Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010; Jivraj and de Jong 2011; Dudink 2011; El-Tayeb 2012; Bracke 2012; Butler 2013, 120–28; Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2014; Balkenhol, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2016; Wekker 2016, 108–38).[9] More precisely, these scholars have critically examined right-wing homonationalist discourses about viz. against Islam that have emerged over the last two decades. Although we see these developments across Europe and North America, they are particularly prevalent in the Netherlands (Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2014, 236; Bracke 2012, 240). I will briefly review their work before situating my own research.

In order to understand what these scholars mean by homonationalism, we need to go back to the 1990s, when scholars began to reflect on the relation between constructions of sexuality and national identity. Several feminist critics pointed to the gendered nature of Western state and state-centric nationalism. In the late 1990s, Spike Peterson argued that nationalism is also essentially heterosexist. She identified

> five overlapping and interactive ways in which women and men are
> differently situated in relation to nationalist processes: as biological
> reproducers of group members; as social reproducers of group

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[8] Three explanatory remarks need to be made about the Dutch word *homo*. First, although it "is also used as an insult in Dutch, it has nothing like the negative connotations that the term carries in English. It is much more an equivalent of 'gay'." (Keuzenkamp and Bos 2007, 51n4) Second, it can be a noun, but also a prefix, as in *homohuwelijk* (gay marriage). Third, depending on the context, the term can be used or perceived either as inclusive of lesbian women or as referring to gay men only.

[9] In different ways, most of these scholars are, or have previously been, connected to the University of Amsterdam (either its Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences or its Research Center for Gender and Sexuality). More specifically, most of them have been organisers of, speakers at, or participants in the conference on "Sexual Nationalisms: Gender, Sexuality and the Politics of Belonging in the New Europe", which took place on January 27-28, 2011 in Amsterdam. That the subject of this conference was highly sensitive and politically charged, is clear from a remark by Jasbir Puar, who, at the closing panel, called it "the most fucked-up conference I have ever been to" (Stelder 2011).

> members and cultural forms; as signifiers [of heterosexist group
> identities and differences]; as embodied agents in nationalist struggles;
> and as societal members generally. (Peterson 1999, 44)

Peterson also related heterosexism to homophobia, drawing connections between certain exclusions of women and certain exclusions of LGBT persons. In the first decade of the new millennium, Lisa Duggan noted the rise of homonormativity, a type of neoliberal sexual politics that "does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 2003, 50; cf. Bracke 2012, 244). A few years later, another American queer theorist, Jasbir Puar, would further build on the concept of homonormativity in her book *Terrorist Assemblages*, in which she speaks of

> a form of sexual exceptionalism – the emergence of national
> homosexuality, what I term 'homonationalism' – that corresponds with
> the coming out of the exceptionalism of the American empire. Further,
> this brand of homosexuality operates as a regulatory script not only of
> normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial
> and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects. (Puar 2007, 2)

Puar argues that a particular type of normative homosexuality is being reinforced by "racial and national norms". More specifically, she connects the phenomenon of homonationalism to Islamophobia, the fear of what has been constructed as America's racial and religious other in the epoch inaugurated by the attacks of 9/11.[10]

These theoretical reflections on the construction of national, sexual and racial/religious identity, offered by American scholars writing primarily about American culture, play a major role in a number of studies on discourses about homosexuality and Islam in the Netherlands. Dutch queer studies scholar Gert Hekma has written about the national outcry caused by a remark by Khalil El-Moumni. In an interview, broadcasted on national television on May 3, 2001, this Rotterdam-based imam had called homosexuality a contagious disease – a remark that was later revealed to have been taken out of context by the programme editors. Hekma shows how the debate that followed reinforced a discursive conflict between homosexuality and Islam (Hekma 2002).[11] In various co-authored articles, sociologists Paul Mepschen, Jan Willem Duyvendak, Evelien Tonkens and others have critically examined how the social location of gay politics and representations has shifted with the rise of what they call anti-multiculturalism and the culturalisation of Dutch citizenship (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010; Hurenkamp, Tonkens

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[10] In certain non-Western contexts, it is the *opposition* to homosexuality that is considered a central characteristic of national identity. This could be a reason to use the broader concept of sexual nationalism – and to consider homonationalism a particular type of sexual nationalism (cf. Sremac and Ganzevoort 2015a).
[11] More recently, historian and sociologist David Bos (2016, 231–34) has written something similar, but I will not address that article here, because it is a product of the same research project as this thesis.

and Duyvendak 2012, 127–31; Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2014; Balkenhol, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2016). Another sociologist, Sarah Bracke, has compared and contrasted the narratives about women and gays who allegedly need to be saved from the threats of Islam (Bracke 2012). Fatima El-Tayeb has traced the marginalisation of queer Muslims in Amsterdam (El-Tayeb 2012), while law scholars Suhraiya Jivray and Anisa de Jong have shown the silencing effects of Dutch gay emancipation policy on queer Muslims (Jivraj and de Jong 2011). This gay emancipation policy has also been discussed by Gloria Wekker (Wekker 2016, 108–38). Some queer theoretical reflections on homosexuality, race and the rhetoric of nationalism have been offered by, among others, Stefan Dudink (2011) and Judith Butler, who, in a discussion of blasphemy, injury and freedom of speech, offers a "Coda on Dutch Politics", in which she asks why the Dutch state decides that one minority (Muslims) must tolerate aggressive speech, while sexual minorities are being protected against hate speech (Butler 2013, 120–28).[12]

1.3 Homosexuality and Christianity

Almost all discourse analytical studies on homosexuality and religion in the Netherlands have focused on Islam – I have discussed most of these studies above. However, there is a significant amount of source material in which *Christianity* plays a discursive role, on which no substantial research has been done so far. Therefore, this thesis makes a contribution to the existing body of academic knowledge by focusing on Christianity rather than on Islam.[13]

I deliberately speak here of "source material in which Christianity plays a discursive role". On the one hand, I would be defining my research object too broadly – and, therefore, inadequately – if I would simply speak of contemporary public discourses on homosexuality and *religion*. On the other hand, if I would simply speak of contemporary public discourse on homosexuality and *Christianity*, I would be defining my research object too narrowly – or awkwardly. First, as we will see, a debate about a particular Christian person, group or organisation easily leads to generalisations about 'religion' or 'other religions'. Moreover, I am interested in the interactions between Christian and secular actors or perspectives. Finally, we are often dealing with different types of Christianity, such as Roman Catholicism (cf. Article 1), experiential Calvinism (cf. Article 2) or evangelicalism (cf. Article 3), which are represented and evaluated in different ways.

Another difference between my research and that of the scholars mentioned at the end of the previous section is that, while their focus is on

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[12] David Bos has recently criticised these studies for not paying attention to source material from before 1991. A possible explanation for this break could be that some of these authors take 1989 as a turning point (El-Tayeb 2012; Bracke 2012), but a more practical explanation seems more likely: the availability and accessibility of sources from before the 1990s (Bos 2016, 236–39). In his article, Bos has offered "a long-term analysis of the discourse on homosexuality and Islam in Dutch newspapers and radio and television programmes."

[13] In most of the aforementioned studies, references to Christianity are absent (Dudink 2011; Bracke 2012; Butler 2013) or scarce and insignificant (El-Tayeb 2012; Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2014; Balkenhol, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2016).

nativist or nationalist discourses about viz. against Islam, I discuss not only (secular) public discourses about Christianity and homosexuality, but also *Christian* public discourses about homosexuality (and secularism).

These differences can be partly explained by differences in disciplinary backgrounds. Most of these studies have been written from anthropological or sociological perspectives. This thesis, however, comes from a theological perspective while drawing on queer studies, gender studies and religious studies. This also affects the theoretical framework of this thesis, which will be sketched in the following section.

2. Theoretical Framework: Sexuality, Secularism and Christianity

To develop my own perspective, I want to place constructions of religion and homosexuality in contemporary public discourse in the Netherlands against the background of some broader developments regarding the public role of religion in the Netherlands and in Western societies more generally. These developments will be discussed through the work of two theologically sensitive philosophers of culture, both of whom have written about the transformation of religion in Western viz. Dutch culture: Charles Taylor (Section 2.1) and Gabriël van den Brink (Section 2.2). Then I will introduce the work of several scholars who are engaged in the critical study of religion, gender and sexuality. I will pay particular attention to the work of Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, among others, as this thesis has strong similarities with their book *Love the Sin* in terms of design and argument (Section 2.3).[14] This will enable me to situate my research and articulate my queer theological perspective (Section 2.4).[15]

2.1 Charles Taylor: Religion and Sexuality in a Secular Age
In *Sources of the Self* (1989), Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has offered a philosophical anthropology that elaborates on the works of major figures from Western intellectual history. He shows that the modern Western subject is a moral subject, which is not concerned merely with doing the right thing, but with being good. The foundation of this view was laid by St Augustine, who, in his synthesis of Platonic and Johannine ideas, explained that our relationship to God and to the physical world originates from an inward turn, a reflexive relationship to oneself: we understand the world through our own experiential relation to it.

Although St Augustine and a number of other thinkers from the Christian tradition play a major role in his historical narrative, Taylor does not discuss religion itself at any length in this book. He has done this in another book, *A*

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[14] Most of the academic literature I cite in this thesis has been written in English or Dutch. Only occasionally do I cite German literature, while I have no (sufficient) command of e.g. French, Spanish or Italian to cite sources in those languages. Most English and Dutch literature I cite engages primarily with English literature (and, in the case of the latter, also Dutch literature). I am aware that this could result in a predominantly Anglo-Saxon perspective.
[15] The function of the current section in the context of this thesis is similar to the function of Section 2 (with a similar title) in the context of Article 4, in which I engage with the work of two theologians (Mark Jordan and Ad de Bruijne), both of whom have written on (contemporary) Christian discourses about sexuality.

Secular Age (Taylor 2007a), which is, in John Milbank's words, "almost a full-scale political, cultural, intellectual as well as religious history of modern times, replete with extraordinarily balanced and yet acute judgments" (Milbank 2010, 54). Taylor starts by distinguishing between different types of secularism. In the first sense, secularism refers to religion's withdrawal into the private sphere, where it no longer structures other viz. public domains of life. The second meaning denotes the rejection of religious convictions and the decline in church attendance. But he also advances a third definition of secularism: our secular age is one in which we take the world's disenchantment for granted and consider Christianity nothing more than one option among many – and not the easiest option (Taylor 2007a, 1–14).

Taylor repeatedly makes clear that what he writes about secularism applies to Christian or post-Christian societies in North America and Europe, not – or at least not yet – for Muslim societies, for example (2007a, 1, 20–22). Still, he has been criticised for his lack of engagement with "the impact of colonialism and other links to the rest of the world on Europe and America" and with the work of scholars who do engage with these issues, such as Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood (Calhoun 2008, 455; cf. Asad 2003; Mahmood 2004). I consider this critique justified, because, as Nilüfer Göle rightly asserts, "the renewal of interest in secularism owes much empirically to the introduction of Islam into the picture" (Göle 2010, 246). For the purposes of this thesis, however, engaging with Taylor can still be fruitful, because I will be analysing interactions between secular and Christian perspectives in a Western country. At the same time, I will not ignore the (discursive) role of Islam in, and the repercussions of some broader global developments on, these interactions.

A few remarks need to be made to understand the importance of Taylor's third conception of the secular. In none of these three senses does Taylor take secularism to be the result of inevitable sociological processes; instead, he offers a historical and theological diagnosis of Western (post-)Christian culture (cf. Milbank 2010, 55).[16] This does not make *A Secular Age* a work of apologetics that defends Christian doctrine or battles the secular. Rather, one of the central aims of the book is actually to criticise the opposition between Christianity and secular modernity (Warner, VanAntwerpen and Calhoun 2010, 5, 20). He deconstructs the myth that human reason has been gradually emancipated from religion by criticising the dominant Enlightenment narrative and drawing upon Romanticist ideas. But what, then, does he mean by characterising our age as secular? He does seem to imply that the majority of people in North Atlantic societies live in a predominantly secular age, though some have argued that this view is at odds with, for example, the rise of different forms of religious fundamentalism (e.g. Miller 2008, 6–7). However, this critique does not sufficiently acknowledge the emphasis Taylor puts on the third meaning of secularism. Finally, it is interesting to note that he does not call our age 'postsecular' – a term that Jürgen Habermas (2008; cf. Habermas

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[16] Although Taylor speaks with a theological voice from time to time, he does not draw substantially on (contemporary) theological sources.

and Taylor 2011) has started to embrace – or 'postmodern', for that matter. In his view, calling our age 'postsecular' as if we had left secularism behind for the most part, would imply a narrow and inadequate conception of secularism in the first place (Warner, VanAntwerpen and Calhoun 2010, 21–23; Göle 2010, 243).

Taylor also reflects on how religious developments have changed modern conceptions and evaluations of sexuality.[17] Describing a cultural revolution that took place in North Atlantic societies after World War II, he characterises the secular age we live in as an "age/culture of authenticity" referring to

> the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority. (Taylor 2007a, 475)[18]

Sexual mores were at the heart of the revolution of the 1960s (2007a, 485; cf. Giddens 1995, 79). Citing the British historian of Christianity John Bossy, Taylor argues that while in the medieval understanding of the deadly sins spiritual sins were considered graver than carnal sins, this evaluation of spiritual and carnal sins radically changed during the Catholic Reformation: sexual purity had now become "the principal gateway (and its opposite the principle obstacle) to our approach to God" (2007a, 496; cf. Bossy 1985).[19] "What emerges from all this," Taylor concludes, "is what we might call 'moralism' – that is, the crucial importance given to a certain code in our spiritual lives." Although this code could take different forms – focusing, for example, on the regulation of violence viz. the stimulation of charity – there was "a surprisingly strong emphasis on the sexual". One possible explanation of the focus on sexual purity is "that sexual abstinence was a central fact of life for a celibate clergy" (2007a, 497–98). Apart from this, however, it remains a mystery to Taylor why so much emphasis was put on the sexual.

2.2 Gabriël van den Brink: From Sacred to Vital (and Social) Values

While Taylor's reflections are strongly historical and concern North Atlantic societies more generally, the second philosopher of culture I would like to discuss, Gabriël van den Brink, offers more sociological or anthropological reflections on contemporary trends in the Netherlands. He has edited – and has written the leading chapters to – a volume titled *De Lage Landen en het hogere*, on the meaning of spiritual principles in modern Dutch society. *De Lage Landen* are the Low Countries or, as the country (singular) is called nowadays,

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[17] A slightly different version of what he writes on these pages (Taylor 2007a, 495–504) has also been published as "Sex & Christianity: How Has the Moral Landscape Changed?" in an issue of *Commonweal* (Taylor 2007b).

[18] Note that he mentions "religious authority" not as the only power but as one of several powers that could impose their moral views on us.

[19] Although Taylor focuses on the Catholic tradition here, he notes similar trends in the Protestant Reformation, to which Reform Catholicism was a response (2007a, 494, 498; citing Brown 2001; see also Shaw 2007).

Nederland, the Netherlands; *het hogere* (lit. 'the higher') could best be translated as "the beyond"[20] and is a typically Dutch way of referring to a higher or transcendent reality (order, power, spirit etc.) without using a term with any religious connotations. Van den Brink defines the beyond as "the imaginary of a totality to which I feel connected and by which I feel called to selfless action" (van den Brink 2012b, 26). The beyond comes to us through images, stories, rituals and metaphors, he explains; it is a comprehensive totality that transcends the life and interests of individuals, and we have a certain connection to it (e.g. a sense of belonging, participation or trust). It inspires and appeals to us, and certain human actions are a response to this appeal (2012b, 26–28).

One of van den Brink's main purposes is to describe the changes to personal experiences of the beyond that have taken place after World War II. *Pace* those sceptics who claim that (post)modern Dutch society has abandoned its values, he shows that the proliferation of the beyond is actually particularly strong in the Netherlands compared to other European countries. What has changed, however, is the conceptualisation of the beyond.[21] He points to "a shift in which the traditional conception of the beyond, defined by church and theology, gradually makes space for another. There is a growing interest in *social* and even *vital* values, while the weight of traditional *sacred* values diminishes" (2012b, 37; emphasis added). An example of this growing interest in social values is given by another contributor to the volume, Hanneke Arts-Honselaar, who writes about spiritual life in the Netherlands of the twentieth century. She notes how, in the 1960s, it had become imperative for Dutch citizens to perform their moral and religious duties in the public arena. This explains why the Netherlands came to see itself as a leading country (*gidsland*) for issues of morality and developed into a "hot spot of moral activism" (Arts-Honselaar 2012, 131; cf. Kennedy 2005b, 34–38).

Van den Brink argues that new attitudes towards the beyond manifest themselves in the sphere of what he calls "vital values" (van den Brink 2012a, 443). Providing several examples from popular magazines and websites, he shows how the importance of values of spiritual vitality (e.g. emotional balance) and physical vitality (e.g. through healthy food, good sex and fitness) to the Dutch population (2012a, 443–44). He points in particular to an increased discussion and tolerance of homosexuality since the 1960s, which paralleled the rampant secularisation in the second half of the twentieth century (2012a, 449).[22] While van den Brink is mainly citing a study by David Bos (2010b) here, he places it in a broader context by taking it as an example of the replacement of the sacred with the values of secular vitality.

[20] This expression is also employed by Taylor in his definition of religion (2007a, 20).
[21] In 2004, in response to a request from the Scientific Council for Government Policy, van den Brink had published a study on "norms, normality and normalisation in the Netherlands" that reported an increasing emphasis on certain moral standards among the Dutch population rather than a process of moral deterioration (van den Brink 2004).
[22] Other examples he mentions are the exponential growth of the percentage of extramarital children since the 1980s and the enormous popularity of dance music (esp. house) and drugs (esp. XTC) since the late 1980s (van den Brink 2012a, 446–52).

2.3 Janet Jakobsen & Ann Pellegrini: Homosexuality and the Limits of Religious Tolerance

Neither Taylor nor van den Brink analyse contemporary public discourses about religion and (homo)sexuality. Moreover, offering critical examinations of the way sexuality and gender are being constructed and evaluated is not a major concern to them. This, however, is a growing area of research. After I have briefly sketched this field, I will discuss Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini's book *Love the Sin* in more detail.

Over the last few decades, sexuality and gender have become central concepts in the study of religion: as aspects of, or elements in, religious texts, traditions, concepts, bodies or practices, or as (implicit or explicit) demarcations of the scholar's positionality or perspective. More recently, several scholars with disciplinary backgrounds in religious studies, cultural anthropology or sociology have written more specifically about the role of sexuality and gender in the very construction of religion and secularism (e.g. Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004; Bracke 2008; Woodhead 2008; Mahmood 2013; Scott 2013; Korte 2014a). In *Religion, the Secular, and the Politics of Sexual Difference*, Linell Cady and Tracy Fessenden have collected essays that "call into question a rigid secularism that positions itself as the solution to conflicts over gender and sexuality, rather than a structural feature of the conditions that generate them." (Cady and Fessenden 2013, 7) One of the most important publications for these scholars has been a published lecture on "Sexularism" by American historian of France, Joan Scott (2009), of which a revised version is included in the said volume (Scott 2013). Scott argues that new histories of secularism need to be written to counter the myth that secularism guarantees gender equality – hence the neologism "sexularism", a fusion, or maybe a Freudian *con*fusion, of 'sexuality' and 'secularism'.[23] These histories of secularism should account for the relation between the privatisation of religion and the privatisation of the domestic sphere, connect secularisation to changing views on sex and gender, and relate economic changes of market and labour to conceptions of sexual difference and the family (2013, 30–31).[24]

A more obvious but still not unambiguous relationship is that between secularism and *religion.* As Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini note in their contribution to Cady and Fessenden's volume, "[n]ot only are religion and secularism mutually definitional – you know the meaning of one by its relation to the other – but the two terms are also historically interrelated: secularism develops in relation to the specific religious practices from which it grows" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2013, 140). Here, they build on their previous work on secularisms (2008a), while also drawing on a book that deserves special attention in this thesis: *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (2004). In this book, they analyse public debates about religious and

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[23] While for Scott, "sexularism" was first a typographical error (hitting an x on her keyboard instead of a c) before she decided to use it as an analytical term (Scott 2009, 1), the term had already been used by Ann Pellegrini as early as 2005 (Pellegrini 2005; cf. Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2013, 141n10).

[24] More recently, Scott has published a book on the topic: *Sex & Secularism* (2017).

sexual freedom in the United States. They focus on homosexuality specifically "because it is an overburdened site of moral concern and hence can be a particularly illuminating case study of sexual regulation" (2004, 9). Their book's leading question is why, "[i]n a country that proclaims religious freedom, citizens are judged (sometimes even by the highest court in the land) by the standards of a particular religious tradition" (2004, 4).

This thesis follows Jakobsen and Pellegrini's *Love the Sin* in a number of ways: its focus is on public discourses about religion and homosexuality; it aims to understand the particularities of religion and secularity as they are constructed in contemporary public discourse; and it consists of a number of case studies. However, while each chapter of *Love the Sin* "builds on the analyses and arguments of the one that precedes it" (2004, 14), the articles that make up this thesis are more independent. Moreover, while each case study in *Love the Sin* focusses on a different public arena, I often combine material from different public arenas in each article (see Section 4.2).

Like *Love the Sin*, this thesis is both analytical and constructive. Jakobsen and Pellegrini not only offer critical analyses, but also argue for the freedom to be non-religious or religious other than Christian/Protestant, without favouring a rigid public secularism (2004, 11–12). My approach, however, is primarily analytical and only tentatively constructive. While Jakobsen and Pellegrini argue for political and juridical change, my focus is rather on the existential and the theological. My choice and discussion of Charles Taylor and Gabriël van den Brink has already hinted at this focus, but I will now further explain the perspective I will use in this thesis.

2.4 A Queer Theological Perspective

To a certain extent, the questions I will ask are similar to those asked by Jakobsen and Pellegrini in *Love the Sin* (cf. Section 2.3) as well as those addressed by the scholars critically reflecting on homonationalist and anti-Islamic discourses in the Netherlands (cf. Section 1.2). With several of them, I share a queer perspective, but this is supplemented by a theological perspective. Both of these perspectives affected how I chose the case studies for each of the four articles that comprise this thesis (cf. Section 4) as well as the way I collected and analysed the material. From a queer perspective I am interested in, for example, the construction of homosexuality in the context of sexual and gender diversity (Article 1, Section 3), the malleability of sexuality (Article 3, Sections 2.3 and 3.2) or constructions of sexual identity (Article 4, Sections 3-4). From a theological perspective, I am inspired by topics such as the relation between faith and reason (Article 1, Section 2), the sacredness of marriage (Article 2, Sections 4-5) or the character of Christian identity (Article 4, Sections 4-5). When I am unpacking the discourses, drawing connections, discovering voices and silences, it is, among others, my queer Catholic positionality and my training in (queer) theology that make me look in certain directions and ask particular questions.

However, I want to emphasise that a queer perspective does not favour 'homosexuality' over 'religion' or 'heterosexuality'. After all, queer theory can

actually be very critical of the very concept of 'homosexuality'. In a similar way, a (Catholic) theological perspective does not favour 'religion' over 'homosexuality' or 'non-religion'. Even the very concept of 'religion' can be criticised from a theological perspective.[25] More generally and more importantly, theology is critical of the overvaluation of all-too-human constructions, which it calls idolatry – a concept similar to what queer theory or any other poststructuralist theory would call essentialism. My perspective is – to borrow Mark Jordan's words – "not theological in the sense of claiming institutional authority or arguing by approved methods from established formulas" (Jordan 2005, 19, cf. e.g. 2006, 329). Both theology and queer theory are theoretical and critical perspectives.

I prefer to speak of a queer theological perspective rather than of separate queer and theological perspectives, for I see strong resemblances between theology and queer theory (Derks 2013; cf. e.g. Loughlin 2007; Stuart 2014). I will elaborate on this in more detail later, especially in Section 5 of Article 4. Here I want to note that what some theologians share with queer/gender scholars is the awareness that one's social location or positionality plays – and should play – an important role in one's analyses. What they also share, therefore, is a critical engagement with the subject of their investigations. Their critical analyses are aimed at the emergence of a more just reality – however justice is defined. This is not something that can be *achieved* by critical analyses – or by any other human activity, for that matter; instead, it emerges, it is given, often through processes of *déconstruction*. As far as they are directed against what they perceive as injustice, queer and theological voices could be called prophetic.

3. Research Question and Method

The main question of this thesis is how religion – or, more specifically, Christianity and secularism – and homosexuality are mutually constructed in contemporary public discourse in the Netherlands, and what we learn from this with regard to the public role of religion. In this section, I will first explain what kind of "constructions" I am looking for (Section 3.1), define the contours of "contemporary public discourse" (Section 3.2) and describe my methodology (Section 3.3).

3.1 Constructions

A major presupposition in my research is that religion and homosexuality are socially constructed and that constructions of religion and homosexuality are interrelated. As I have already briefly alluded to in Section 1.1 regarding religion (and as I will note throughout this thesis), the terms or concepts of 'religion' and 'homosexuality' can have many meanings. This does not mean that one can become religious or homosexual by simply choosing it, because that would actually suggest that one is immune from sociocultural influences. Nor does it mean that, for example, genetic factors play no role whatsoever in

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[25] Simply think of how Karl Barth has disqualified religion as *Unglaube* (Barth 1945, 324–56).

being homosexual or religious – or, to put it in Butlerian terms, in performing homosexuality or religiosity. Taking a constructivist approach is even more fitting as my focus in this thesis is not on practices or experiences, but on public *discourses* about religion and homosexuality – and, therefore, on the politics of making meaning.

I have selected different cases or topics for each of the four articles that comprise this thesis. In each article, I have slightly modified the question in accordance with the collected and selected material. I will further explain my decisions in Section 4. Here, I want to discuss a number of dimensions to the construction of religion and homosexuality. First, we can look at the levels on which religion and homosexuality are being constructed. Are religion and homosexuality seen as predispositions, as identities, as practices or in terms of belonging to a particular group or community? In the cases I will discuss, they are always constructed in each other's proximity. This brings us to a second question: How does the construction of religion affect the construction of homosexuality and vice versa? How people understand or evaluate homosexuality can be partly the effect of what they consider essential to their religion – or essential to being non-religious. But the meaning or value of homosexuality for oneself or for others can also affect the way people value religion. Instead of speaking in terms of one affecting the other, it would be even better to speak of a correlation between the two. Third, I will also look at other concepts that play a role in the construction of religion and homosexuality, such as citizenship or national identity, as elaborated by Mepschen, Duyvendak and others (Section 1.2). A fourth question has to do with identity politics: What kind of oppositions are being created? Obviously, we will encounter oppositions between religion and homosexuality, but then the question will be on what level they are (allegedly) in opposition to one another. Yet another type of opposition can be between social groups in terms of processes of othering (cf. Baumann 2004). In a way, this is an oppositional construction of religion or homosexuality, but now in social terms – that is, constructing e.g. Christians or homosexuals as "imagined communities" (Anderson 2006). This question directs our attention to the power dynamics between different actors in public discourse. A fifth and more fundamental question is: What are the strategic and ideological assumptions and effects of these constructions and what are the interests of those who use them (cf. van den Berg et al. 2014, 117)?

3.2 Contemporary Public Discourse

In this thesis I confine myself to *contemporary* public discourses. To a certain extent, determining the temporal limits of this study – that is, simply defining what 'contemporary' means – is a pragmatic matter: not only does the body of possible sources grow during the process of research, but the material also becomes less 'contemporary' the further one goes back in time. Without rigorously excluding from my research any material outside this period and certainly without pretending to have exhaustively discussed all relevant material from this period in my research, I have decided to confine myself to

the first one and a half decades of the twenty-first century. Some events that have occurred in 2001 have significantly affected the conception of both religion and (homo)sexuality in the Netherlands. First of all, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States have had a major global impact on conceptualisations of Islam and the West (Morey and Yaqin 2011) and have also resulted in the homonationalist rhetorics of Europe and North America (see Section 1.2). As far as the Dutch context is concerned, however, the year 2001 was also a 'turning point' because of three events or developments that took place even before September 11: the opening-up of marriage for same-sex couples as of April 1, the commotion about imam El-Moumni's statement about homosexuality in early May (cf. Section 1.2) and "the amazing rise to political power of a right-wing queen, Pim Fortuyn" (Hekma 2011, 131, cf. 2002; Bos 2016, 134). Fortuyn, who was a strong critic of Islam (cf. Section 1.2), was assassinated in 2002 – albeit not by a Muslim and not only because of his views on Islam.[26]

As I will be analysing cases of contemporary *public* discourse, my research material does not consist of personal views or experiences expressed in surveys or interviews conducted as part of the research project; instead, public discourse consists of everything that has already been broadcasted, printed, posted or performed. Instead of selecting my source material based on strict, predetermined criteria, I have applied and modified my criteria (keywords, dates, media etc.) in the process of developing my arguments. Most sources have been collected from databases such as *LexisNexis* (newspapers and magazines), *Beeld en Geluid* (radio and television programmes) and *Officiële Bekendmakingen* (official documents of the government and Parliament). Additional material has been found by using Google's search engine or searching the websites of relevant organisations.[27]

I focus on those public expressions that have reached – or are likely to have reached – a substantial number of people. Therefore, I confine myself, for example, to national rather than local newspapers. The guiding principle has been to look for public expressions that are – or seem to be – directed towards a broader audience: I am interested in interactions between secular and Christian views or, put differently, in secular discourses about (Christian) religion and in Christian discourses in the presence of secular audiences. This means that I will only pay attention to internal church debates about homosexuality if these relate to non-religious discourses.[28] At the same time, I also examine secular contributions, which, like religious contributions, can also imply an audience of like-minded people.

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[26] In 2004, another famous critic of Islam, film director Theo van Gogh, was assassinated by a radical Muslim.

[27] All translations of quoted material are mine unless noted otherwise. On the types of sources I have used see Section 4.

[28] This is also one of the reasons why I have not included a co-authored article on debates about gender-related issues among conservative Protestants (Derks, Vos and Tromp 2014) in my thesis. Another reason is that the article not only analyses debates about homosexuality, but also debates about divorce/remarriage and women's ordination. However, I do occasionally elaborate on this article in this thesis.

3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Different types of discourse analysis have been developed since the discursive turn of the 1980s. Elaborating on the work of Teun van Dijk, sociologist of religion Titus Hjelm distinguishes between cognitive, interactionist and critical approaches within discourse analysis (Hjelm 2011, 136–42). My main methodology in this thesis is critical discourse analysis, which has been heavily influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. The central elements of a Foucauldian-inspired analysis of discourse are genealogy, attention to mechanisms of power and the aim of "subjectification" – that is, "the material/signifying practices in which subjects are made up" (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008, 91). Hjelm notes, however, that not every critical discourse analytical study is as abstract and historical as Foucault's (Hjelm 2011, 135–36). He explains that critical discourse analysis differs from the other two approaches "in that first, it focuses on power and ideology in discourse, and second, it acknowledges that there is a reality – physical and social – *outside* of discourse that is reproduced and changed discursively" (2011, 140). Both characteristics have to do with the power of words. First, critical discourse analysis looks at constructions of power, at how ideologies mystify or suppress (2011, 141).[29] Second, critical discourse analysis takes discourse as "a way of speaking that does not simply reflect or represent things 'out there', but 'constructs' or 'constitutes' them" (2011, 135; cf. Fairclough 1992, 3).

To some extent I will use elements from related types of (critical) discourse analysis that have been proposed or developed by other scholars. For example, Pan and Kosicki have developed a *framing* analysis approach to address the question of "how to convincingly link news texts to both production and consumption processes" (Pan and Kosicki 1993, 55). Although my remarks on consumption processes will be limited, I will pay attention to "devices that signify the uses of frames", such as "metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images" (1993, 56). Moreover, when it comes to newspaper articles, I pay special attention to headlines and lead paragraphs, in which "much of the work of framing is accomplished" (Stewart 2005, 149).

Warning against what he calls "methodological fetishism", Hjelm emphasises that "*every discourse-analytical study needs to be designed individually*" (Hjelm 2011, 142; emphasis in the original). How to define a discourse-analytical study depends on the genres of, and themes central to, the analysed discourse and on theoretical perspectives that one deems relevant. I have already articulated my theoretical perspectives (Section 2.4); let me now introduce the cases or topics of the articles of this thesis.

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[29] When speaking of 'ideologies', Hjelm does not refer to the ideologies that have emerged with the decline of religion (the everyday use of the term); instead, he uses the term in the critical – and broader – sense of "meaning in the service of power" (Hjelm 2011, 141; quoting Thompson 1990, 8).

4. The Composition, Coherence and Comprehensiveness of this Thesis

As this thesis consists of multiple case studies discussed in four separate articles, I want to end this Introduction by sketching the structure of this thesis. In doing so, I also want to explain my choice for the cases discussed in each of the articles and show how they complement one another in the context of this thesis.

4.1 Introducing the Four Articles

The first article concerns Dutch responses to a number of speeches and messages by Pope Benedict XVI in which he made comments about homosexuality – or, more precisely, comments that were *perceived* to be (primarily) about homosexuality. I look at how different participants in Dutch public discourse framed the pope and 'religion' in general, how they mobilised and conceptualised 'homosexuality', and what kind of secular and nationalist rhetoric they deployed. Article 2 concerns debates about civil marriage registrars with conscientious objections against conducting same-sex wedding ceremonies – pejoratively called *weigerambtenaren* (lit. 'refusing civil servants') by their opponents. It was believed that these *weigerambtenaren* were (experientially Calvinist) Christians. The article pays special attention to the symbolic role Dutch marriage registrars are expected to play in civil wedding ceremonies. In Article 3, I discuss a controversial Christian health care organisation called Different, which has repeatedly been accused of providing therapy aimed at changing sexual orientation from homoerotic into heteroerotic. I ask how Different, as a 'biblically orthodox' Christian organisation with a predominantly negative view of homosexuality, has presented itself to different types of audiences, such as the government, politicians, media and secular and Christian LGBT organisations. In addition, I pay attention to news coverage as well as responses from Different's critics.

Whereas the first three articles analyse individual debates or controversies, the fourth article has a more thematic focus and discusses phrases or rhetoric across a variety of different contexts. It looks at the construction of religion and (homo)sexuality on the level of personal identity, discussing a primarily secular "being yourself" discourse and a Christian counter-discourse on "being in Christ". In this final article, I engage more substantially with academic literature than I (can) do in the other three – and it is also more explicitly theological and constructive.[30]

4.2 Selection of Cases

To answer the main question of this thesis in the most comprehensive way, I have used the contributions of various types of participants in a variety of sources from various periods of several years; I have discussed debates about different public issues, figures or institutions; and I have dealt with different Christian and other religious traditions. Let me briefly address these points.

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[30] Cf. note 15.

First, I have paid attention to the contributions of different types of participants in public discourse. Politicians, for example, figure prominently in all articles, but especially in those that discuss the controversies around the *weigerambtenaar* (Article 2) and the health care organisation Different (Article 3). As to the media, I offer a critical analysis of news coverage, particularly in Articles 1, 2 and 3. The role of secular LGBT organisations is critically examined in all articles, but most elaborately in Article 1; one reason why I have included a discussion of the Different controversy (Article 3) is that *Christian* LGBT organisations played an important role in the debates about Different, while their contributions to debates discussed in Articles 1 and 2 were covered less often by mainstream media. Christian pastors and theologians appear in the "identity in Christ" discourse discussed in Article 4 and, to a lesser extent, in their responses to the issue of the *weigerambtenaar* in Article 2.

Second, I have made use of different types of sources. News articles, op-ed pieces, interviews and editorials in newspapers, in magazines and on news websites have been used in all four articles. I have also frequently cited governmental reports and policy documents (Articles 2, 3 and 4). To prevent a strong focus on *written* sources, I have included material from television news programmes (Articles 1, 2 and 3) and radio programmes (Article 3) as well as a comedy sketch (Article 2). Paying attention to the visual and comic aspects of public discourse in a broad sense also helps to prevent confining the discussion to rational debates and arguments alone.

Third, I have collected material from a period of about fifteen years (cf. Section 3.2). Article 1 covers the years of Pope Benedict XVI's papacy (2005-2013). Article 2 analyses the debates about the *weigerambtenaar* from the year the term became popular (2007) until the year Parliament put the phenomenon to an end (2014), while briefly discussing the period towards the opening-up of marriage for same-sex couples in 2001. Most of the sources cited in Article 3 come from the period in which one particular director was in charge of Different (2007-2014) and especially from the months that Different was at the centre of a heated debate (early 2012). Most of the material discussed in Article 4 comes from the years 2007-2016.

Fourth, central to each article are different public issues, figures or institutions. Article 1 is very much about international politics, as it analyses Dutch responses to a powerful religious institute that addresses cultural, political and juridical developments in diverse societies – and, as we will see, this also affects the international outlook of the Netherlands. Central to Article 2 is the public figure of the civil marriage registrar and the value of a public, state-sanctioned wedding ceremony in the city hall or on any other public location. The role of a Christian social welfare organisation viz. health care provider is at stake in Article 3. The subject of the final article does not seem to be a public issue at first sight: after all, the formation of sexual and religious identities is often considered a private matter. However, there is a lot of public talk about the value of the freedom to "(visibly) being yourself" and to "come out", while certain conservative Protestant Christians frequently emphasise

that Christians should place Christ rather than their sexuality at the centre of their identity. Moreover, I will use this article to argue that public issues of sexuality lend themselves to a public theology.

Fifth and finally, in each article, a different Christian tradition or denomination will play a discursive role: Article 1 is concerned with responses to a Roman Catholic discourse; the image created of the marriage registrar central to Article 2 is that of a particular kind of Calvinist from the Dutch Bible belt; the health care organisation discussed in Article 3 has a pietist Protestant background while it is also strongly influenced by American evangelicalism; and the "identity in Christ" discourse discussed in Article 4 is articulated by conservative (Calvinist) Protestants. In addition, Article 1 also deals with general conceptions of religion in the Netherlands, while Article 4 also examines some anti-Islamic rhetoric.

4.3 Towards a Conclusion
Throughout this thesis, I will be dealing with a variety of participants, sources and periods, various public issues, figures and institutions, and different religious traditions and denominations. This will provide me with a comprehensive basis for my conclusions. As I will analyse a significant number of sources from over a substantial period of time, and as the cases I have selected are representative of contemporary discourses about religion and homosexuality in the Netherlands, the four articles will provide a solid basis for my conclusions. In the Conclusion, I will show what discourses on religion and homosexuality teach us about the public role of religion in contemporary Dutch society.

ARTICLE 1

Publication Details

Abstract

This article provides a critical discourse analysis of Dutch perceptions of, and responses to, papal utterances about homosexuality – or, more precisely, utterances that were *perceived* to be (primarily) about homosexuality. It shows how Dutch participants in public discourse take the pope's views on homosexuality to be exemplary of the irrationality and *libido dominandi* of religion and imply that the pope can learn much from the Dutch, not only when it comes to homosexuality, but also regarding the Christian faith. Moreover, it discusses the different ways in which both the Dutch and the Vatican are occupied by the topic of 'homosexuality' and how the papal pronouncements are seen as a threat to what the Dutch see as their moral 'export product': 'gay marriage'.

Acknowledgements

The Pope, the Gays and the Dutch

Dutch Secular Responses to Pope Benedict XVI when Homosexuality Seems at Stake

1. Introduction

In December 2012, ten thousands liked a Facebook page, "No flowers to the pope", which called on Dutch flower breeders to stop sending flowers to decorate St Peter's Square during the Easter speech of Pope Benedict XVI, because the latter "systematically accuses homosexuals".[31] The next day, the country's main secular LGBT organisation, COC Netherlands, supported this call and sent out a press release accusing the pope of having made "a frontal attack on homosexual women and men" in his traditional Christmas Address to the Roman Curia (COC 2012i).

The mere fact of this criticism might not come as a surprise: Pope Benedict – and the Vatican in general – has often been criticised for his views on (homo)sexuality by activists, scholars and politicians from many (other) Western countries. At the same time, the Netherlands is often considered a liberal and secular country, religious opposition to homosexuality seems to be rather weak compared to other Western countries, and the influence papal proclamations on issues like these have in the Netherlands are considered limited as well. So why have Pope Benedict's pronouncements caused such stirs in Dutch public discourse?

In this article, I will look at the particularities of responses by participants in Dutch public discourse – that is, certain framings of the pope and of 'religion' in general, certain mobilisations and conceptualisations of 'homosexuality', and in particular certain deployments of secular and nationalist rhetoric. My aim is to better understand the role of religion in contemporary Dutch society and its intersection with secularism, evaluations of homosexuality, and national identity. I will provide a critical discourse analysis of Dutch perceptions of, and responses to, papal pronouncements about homosexuality – or, more precisely, papal pronouncements that are *perceived* to be (primarily) about homosexuality.[32] I have selected pronouncements by Pope Benedict XVI that can be found in two Addresses to the Roman Curia (Benedict XVI 2008,

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[31] Geen bloemen naar de Paus Facebook page, accessed April 23, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/GeenBloemenNaarDePaus.

[32] I have collected material from Dutch public discourse by searching the LexisNexis database (Dutch newspapers and magazines), using Google's and Twitter's search engines, checking particular websites that I deemed relevant (e.g. that of COC Netherlands) and looking up articles referred to in previously collected material.

2012b) and two Messages for World Peace Day (Benedict XVI 2007, 2012a), because they have received the most attention in the media and have provoked many responses from LGBT organisations, politicians, celebrities and others.[33]

My primary focus is on the reception and framing of Pope Benedict's pronouncements in Dutch public discourse. However – or rather *therefore* – I will also analyse the pope's pronouncements as such in some detail, which I will relate to earlier texts by the pope and some Vatican departments. I do this at some length because it helps us to better understand the Dutch responses. Needless to say, it is beyond the scope of this article to make any claims as to how I, as a queer Catholic theologian, think the pope or the Roman Catholic Church *should* address issues of gender and sexuality – if they should make any claims in this area at all.

Although the argument of this article is not strictly linear, three different subjects will be discussed in its three main parts: Section 2 concerns secular conceptions of religion and the implications for the possibility of rational dialogue; Section 3 shows how both certain participants in Dutch public discourse and the pope are – to use a euphemism – fascinated by the topic of "homosexuality" – albeit in different ways; and Section 4 connects this Dutch preoccupation with "homosexuality" with Dutch national identity.

2. The Regulation of Religion and the Impossibility of a Rational Dialogue

2.1 *"The Pope Places Himself outside a Rational Dialogue"*
The main topic of Pope Benedict XVI's traditional Address to the Roman Curia in December 2008 is that of creation and the Holy Spirit. In that context, he argues, among others, that, instead of limiting herself to defending the natural environment, the Church "must also protect man from self-destruction. What is needed is something like a human ecology, correctly understood."[34] He proceeds,

> If the Church speaks of the nature of the human being as man and woman, and demands that this order of creation be respected, this is not some antiquated metaphysics. What is involved here is faith in the Creator and a readiness to listen to the "language" of creation. To disregard this would be the self-destruction of man himself, and hence the destruction of God's own work.
>
> (...) Rain forests deserve indeed to be protected, but no less so does man, as a creature having an innate "message" which does not contradict our freedom, but is instead its very premise.

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[33] The pope's Message for World Peace Day 2013 was issued on December 8, 2012 – that is, two weeks before he would address the Curia.
[34] This is an echo from his predecessor's Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*: "The first and fundamental structure for 'human ecology' is the family." (John Paul II 1991, sec. 39) In his 2015 Encyclical *Laudatio Si*, Pope Francis would make a similar claim (Francis 2015, sec. 5).

He then claims that we need to "defend love against sex as a consumer good, the future against the exclusive claims of the present, and human nature against its manipulation" (Benedict XVI 2008, cf. 2007).[35]

Within a day, COC Netherlands, the country's main secular LGBT organisation, posts on its website a rather objective and well-informed summary of what Benedict has said about sexuality and gender. It notes, among others, that Benedict has "explicitly targeted gender and implicitly targeted gay marriage", and it ends by explaining that it is this "ideology" that had made the Vatican oppose a recent UN declaration against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (COC 2008a). Two days later, they issue a press release in which they criticise the pope:

> By making such pronouncements, the pope places himself outside a rational dialogue on homosexuality and religion, because what fair-minded person – whether Catholic or not – can go along with this completely excessive way of thinking about homosexuality as the 'ultimate evil', let alone agree with it? COC Netherlands cannot but ascertain that this pope is an old armchair scholar who has clearly and completely lost touch with reality. (COC 2008b)

They do not engage in a discussion with what the pope has actually claimed, not only because of the limited space or because such is not the aim of a press release by an activist organisation, but mainly because they consider any "rational dialogue" with the pope on this subject impossible – not only practically impossible and not only impossible for COC itself, but theoretically impossible for any "fair-minded person". COC is definitely not the only one that holds this view. On December 22, 2012, the anonymous administrator of the above-mentioned Facebook page posted, "I'm not against the pope. Neither am I against religion. Everyone can believe whatever s/he jolly well likes." That is, religious people can believe whatever they want, but they are definitely not "fair-minded persons". In a reader's letter to a newspaper, a father of a gay son and former member of the Roman Catholic Church writes, "Any substantial response is redundant and too much honour for him." (Hermans 2008) According to another reader, "this institute (...) do[es] not want dialogue but power" (Hendriks 2009). Four years later, again in response to the pope's annual Address to the Curia (to which I will turn below), a liberal-Jewish rabbi writes that "[t]olerance can only flourish when their beautifully presented theses [i.e. those of the pope and the chief rabbi of France, whom Benedict had cited; MD] are debunked as intolerant." (Benima 2013)
Here and in many other instances, the irrationality of the pope's view is merely stated, not explained. This is indicative of the cultural dominance of a secular mind-set. "Because secularism is based on a rationality shared by all human beings, it provides a universal discourse, whereas religions are held to be the expressions of particular cultures." (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008b, 9) Its supposed universality renders religion a – or *the* – deviation and, therefore, as

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[35] This latter claim is what Benedict believes to have been the intention of Pope Paul VI's Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) on birth regulation (and on the meaning of sexuality in general).

German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has argued in his "Notes on a Postsecular Society", religion "cannot lay claim to provide a cultural resource for the self-understanding of any truly modern mind." (Habermas 2008, 26) These responses seem to imply that there is hardly anyone in the Netherlands that would take the pope's claims seriously – anyone who would do so would run the risk of being considered not a "fair-minded person". By disqualifying the pope's view as irrational, "intolerant" and/or the product of a will to power, a possible incentive to take his view seriously and to engage in any kind of dialogue is cancelled out.

2.2 The Language of Creation and the Limits of Religion
In their press release, COC also comments that "[t]he pronouncements by the pope on the connection between homosexuality and the survival of humanity can be taken [by states] as a biblical justification of the criminalisation of homosexual acts." (COC 2008b) What interests me here is the presupposition that the pope's pronouncements will only have an impact on states (or state leaders) that ascribe a certain authority to the Bible. However, the pope had not, as some biblicist Protestants do, provided a "biblical justification" in any strict sense – that is, his claims were not based on Scripture alone. Instead, thinking from within the Catholic natural law tradition, he had spoken about "the language of creation", a language that also non-Christians to some extent can read through the lens of philosophy and science (Benedict XVI 2008).[36] According to this Catholic view on the relation between faith and reason, Benedict implies, a dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church is possible even for those who do not accept Scripture's validity.

   Benedict considers such a dialogue not only possible but also necessary. In his annual Address to the Curia in December 2012, he argues that the Roman Catholic Church needs to engage in

> dialogue with states, dialogue with society – which includes dialogue with cultures and with science – and finally dialogue with religions. (...) In her dialogue with the state and with society, the Church does not, of course, have ready answers for individual questions. Along with other forces in society, she will wrestle for the answers that best correspond to the truth of the human condition. The values that she recognizes as fundamental and non-negotiable for the human condition she must propose with all clarity. (Benedict XVI 2012b)

His assertion that the Roman Catholic Church does not have "ready answers for individual questions" contrasts with the widespread image among the Dutch public of Pope Benedict as, in the words of a columnist for a right-wing magazine, "an inviolable leader of the church who knows everything for sure" (van der List 2013).[37] Of course, one could wonder what the Church "recognizes

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[36] In his 2004 debate with Habermas, then Cardinal Ratzinger put it as follows: "The natural law has remained (especially in the Catholic Church) the key issue in dialogues with the secular society and with other communities of faith in order to appeal to the reason we share in common and to seek the basis for a consensus about the ethical principles of law in a secular, pluralistic society." (Ratzinger 2006, 69)

[37] Van der List writes, "As a personality he [Francis] is the opposite of his predecessor, the shy intellectual Benedict XVI. The common (*volkse*) Francis wants to dissipate humbleness. Not as an

as fundamental and non-negotiable" when it comes to questions of gender and sexuality, and how that might limit the possibilities for any truly open dialogue.[38] However, Benedict *discursively* emphasises that a dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and (secular) states and organisations on the other is necessary. In December 2007, in his Message for World Peace Day 2008 (to which COC also referred in their press release), Benedict had cited the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which he had called "a landmark of *juridic civilization of truly universal value*" (Benedict XVI 2007, sec. 4; emphasis in the original). This Declaration states that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State" (UDHR art. 16.3 as quoted by Benedict XVI 2007, sec. 4). By appealing to this Declaration, Benedict not only wants to show that the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on marriage is, as he would put it in December 2008, "not some antiquated metaphysics" (Benedict XVI 2008), but also that, in his view, any redefinition of marriage is at odds with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Put differently, he points to what he sees as an inconsistency in secular human rights discourse. Therefore, he presents the Roman Catholic Church – and himself as its representative – as an expert and active conversation partner on issues of human sexuality.

In December 2012, it is both the pope's Address to the Roman Curia (Benedict XVI 2012b) and his Message for World Peace Day 2013 (Benedict XVI 2012a) that cause a stir in the media. Following Dutch news agency ANP and using the headline "Pope wants to join forces with religions against gay marriage", several newspapers note,

> In some countries the Roman Catholic Church has already joined forces with Muslims, Jews and other believers against same-sex marriage legislation. Sometimes juridical, social and anthropological arguments are being used instead of religious ones. (*Algemeen Dagblad* 2012b; *De Volkskrant* 2012b; cf. *De Telegraaf* 2012b; *PowNed* 2012)[39]

While there are definitely examples of religious (including Roman Catholic) persons or groups who, for strategic reasons, seem to refrain from using religious arguments, concepts and vocabulary altogether in their campaigns against same-sex marriage in certain countries, this is not what Benedict does. In his pronouncements, he presents a Catholic view on the family that aims to integrate so-called natural knowledge. So when he states that the family is "the basic cell of society from the demographic, ethical, pedagogical, economic and political standpoints" (Benedict XVI 2012a), he means that this particular

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inviolable leader of the church who knows everything for sure, but a simple rural pastor who searches for the right way together with the beloved believers." (van der List 2013) The implication here is that that Benedict was indeed such an "inviolable leader". Although van der List's main point seems a bit critical towards Francis – he argues that the "cheered Pope Francis alienates conservatives" – this opposition in favour of Francis viz. in opposition to Benedict is made frequently in the media.

[38] For example, Gene Burns has argued that the Vatican "not only looks at the world differently than do liberal states; to some extent it rejects the legitimacy of liberal state authority entirely over sexual matters that the hierarchy insists are not open to debate." (Burns 2013, 88–89)

[39] *De Telegraaf* used the same wording but a different headline, whereas *PowNed* also used a different headline and spoke of "economic arguments" instead.

Catholic view on the family can be recognised from, or be supported by, other "standpoints". But the secularist implication of these newspapers is that religious arguments are radically different from "juridical, social and anthropological arguments".[40]

This illustrates what Habermas has argued: "From the viewpoint of secularism, the substance of faith is scientifically discredited either way. As such, discussions about religious traditions and with religious figures, who still lay claim to a significant public role, escalate into polemic." (Habermas 2008, 27) By suggesting that the pope's view of the family as "the basic cell of society" is a thoroughly *religious* view – as distinct from rational, secular knowledge – these media can easily discredit the pope's view. In short, a rational dialogue seems to be foreclosed either by suggesting that the pope uses purely 'religious' arguments (which are then believed to make no sense to non-religious persons) or by suggesting that the pope uses 'non-religious' arguments (which are considered inauthentic and a sign of a will to power when used by a religious leader).

2.3 The Pope as Pontius Pilate

The examples discussed above might give the impression that, generally speaking, the pope – and, by extrapolation, Catholicism, Christianity or even religion – is put aside in Dutch public discourse. This, however, is not entirely the case. Let me discuss a few examples of a particular type of a secular use of religion. In the press release I quoted at the beginning of this section, COC quotes its chair, Vera Bergkamp, who warns that "[s]tates will use the pope's statements to retain such criminal laws, including the death penalty." After this quote, the press release – notably not the quote of Bergkamp itself – proceeds,

> Rome will likely deny this, but that only means that the pope's Christmas address pre-empts Easter: that means that the pope will, just like Pilate, wash his hands of the consequences of his words. (COC 2008b)

Instead of evaluating the pope's remarks from a secular perspective, COC invokes Christian vocabulary from the passion narrative. Whereas, in COC's reading, the pope had presented homosexuality as "the ultimate evil", COC now compares the pope with one of the antagonists in the Gospels, Pontius

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[40] A similar example can be found in what cultural anthropologists Judith Samson, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans (Radboud University Nijmegen) write about the Vatican discourse against "gender ideology" (to which I will turn below). They claim that "[t]he new discursive strategies on countering acceptance of homosexuality by referring to gender theories can (...) be seen as a continuation of this trend within the Christian Right to attempt to beat their (discursive) opponents with their own secular means, rather than with their theological expertise" (Samson, Jansen and Notermans 2011, 295). They might be right when it comes to the most important example they focus on in their article, Gabriele Kuby, a German Roman Catholic author, a fervent critic of non-heterosexuality and a strong promotor of the Vatican's view on "gender ideology". But Samson et al. also make this claim with respect to Benedict, to whom they devote less than two pages and little critical analysis. Not only do they seem to be making a dubious distinction between secular and religious knowledge, but they also seem to overlook that in several documents and speeches Benedict XVI systematically integrates 'secular' and 'religious' knowledge.

Pilate.[41] What we see here is a secular organisation using biblical imagery to rebuke the pope, taking over the role of the Church as the true interpreter of the Bible and Christian festivals.[42] Four years later, again in a press release responding to Benedict's annual Address to the Roman Curia, COC quotes its new chair, Tanja Ineke, saying, "Instead of choosing a message of peace and love, the pope chooses a frontal attack on homosexual women and men in this Christmastide." (COC 2012i) Instead of responding from, for example, a human rights discourse, COC again chooses to use normative language from the Christian tradition. Even in a post-Christian society as the Netherlands, many are longing to hear a "message of peace and love" in Christmastide – or at least they are more sensitive to hear messages that sound like the opposite, especially when such a message comes from the pope.

It is not exceptional that, when a religious leader, group or organisation condemns non-heterosexuality, someone who either does not self-identify as religious or self-identifies as not religious responds by claiming that, after all, God is love and that religion – often Christianity is mentioned here – is primarily about love. Let me provide two more examples. In April 2005, just after Cardinal Ratzinger had become the new Pope, gay youth magazine *Expreszo* released a poster showing pink smoke coming out of the Vatican chimney. Its slogan read, "Doesn't it become time for a religion that loves all people?", which implies that there is currently no such religion and that LGBT persons are the main victims of religions. "It's not an accusation against the Vatican or the pope, but a call to the church to accept everyone," explains *Expreszo*'s editor-in-chief. "After all," he argues, "God has also created gays." (*Rotterdams Dagblad* 2005)

Shortly after Pope Francis had been elected in 2013, a secular feminist publicist wrote a column annex open letter to the new Pope. She starts,

> Now I'm not a member of this big divine fan club, but I do really love humanity and, therefore, I would like to ask you something. About neighbourly love.

She does not, so to speak, love God (cf. "this divine fan club"), but she does share with Catholics a love of humanity, which she suggests is a simple and easy thing to feel or do (cf. the understated "something"). Yet, she suggests, even that was too much for Pope Benedict:

> This went a bit wrong with your predecessor. There was, for example, this trifle in 2008 in which the Vatican opposed a UN resolution that intended to end the discrimination and persecution of homosexual men and women. (...) And then there was also the Christmas speech, in which Benedict said – almost but still not literally – that homosexuality is at odds with natural order and, moreover, a threat to the future of humanity. (...) So, my question to you is: Could you be that Pope who

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[41] In a similar fashion, television presenter Cornald Maas (who, among others, presented the national broadcasting of the Canal Parade during Amsterdam Pride in 2010-2013) called the pope "the Anti-Christ" (NOS 2012c). These and other disqualifications of the pope might be part of a longer history of Dutch (Calvinist) anti-papism (cf. e.g. van de Sande 1989).
[42] By comparing the pope with Pontius Pilate, COC puts LGBT persons de facto on par with Jesus, placing them in a redemptive position, 'in Christ'.

reaches out to gays, lesbians and transgenders, and who welcomes
them on God's lap? For I think that's what Jesus would have done. (ten
Broeke 2013)

Such claims about neighbourly love, creation and what Jesus would do are also common among (liberal) Christians, but it is striking to encounter them among non-religious participants in public discourse, who sometimes even formulate their suggestions *etsi Deus daretur*. Interestingly, if an imam has said something similar to what the pope had said, very few non-believers respond that "Allah has also created gays" or make claims as to "what Muhammad would have done". Although there are, of course, multiple examples of online comments to news items on the pope in which people argue to remove religions from the public sphere or to simply 'abolish' all religions, in the responses discussed here, we see that they want the church to play a particular role in society.[43] As Wendy Brown, Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood note, summarising what scholars such as Talal Asad and Charles Taylor have argued, "secularism does not merely organize the place of religion in nation-states and communities but also *stipulates* what religion is and ought to be" (Brown, Butler and Mahmood 2013, ix; emphasis in the original). I would like to add that this stipulation or regulation of religion is argued for from a secular perspective *on sexuality* – or, as Joan Scott has put it, from a "sexular" perspective (Scott 2013; cf. Jordan 2011b).

3. Gays, Gender and the "Manipulation of Nature"

3.1 "A Frontal Attack on Homosexual Women and Men"

Over the last decade at least, COC has frequently responded to Vatican pronouncements. In 2008, their then chair, Vera Bergkamp, spoke of "an excessive preoccupation with homosexuality" (COC 2008b) at the Vatican, and in 2012, their current chair, Tanja Ineke, spoke of an "obsession" with homosexuality (COC 2012i; cf. *Algemeen Dagblad* 2012c). Although it makes sense for an LGBT organisation to focus on passages about (homo)sexuality and gender identity in the pope's speeches, it is interesting to see a "preoccupation with homosexuality" in Dutch media reports on the Vatican. As the media act as "grids of cultural intelligibility" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004, 53), let's pay some closer attention to the coverage of the pope's two Addresses to the Curia (2008, 2012b) and his Message for World Peace Day 2013 (2012a).

The first thing that strikes me is that they often single out the passages on family, gender and sexuality. Moreover, just like COC, they too take these passages as primarily directed against homosexuals. In 2008, the pope's Address was covered by printed and online media using headlines such as "Pope: save humanity from homosexuals" (*De Volkskrant* 2008), "Pope: save humanity from homosexual behaviour" (*NRC* 2008; *Elsevier* 2008) and "Pope:

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[43] Two brief remarks to prevent possible misunderstandings. First, they are, of course, responding to the leader of the *global* Roman Catholic Church, so strictly speaking, it remains implicit what role they ascribe to the (Roman Catholic) Church in *Dutch* society. Second, I am not suggesting that their remarks are a kind of reinforcement of Christianity in a secular public sphere.

homosexual behaviour as bad as disappearance rainforest" (*Trouw* 2008). In 2012, the headlines read, "'Gays threat to human nature'" (NOS 2012a, cf. 2012b; van den Broek 2012), "Pope: gays destroy the essence of humanity" (*De Telegraaf* 2012b), "Pope: unite religions against gays" (*PowNed* 2012) and "Pope slogs at gays again" (*nu.nl* 2012b; *De Telegraaf* 2012a; *Nederlands Dagblad* 2012b). Several media have the pope arguing that "gays manipulate the role God has given to them and thereby destroy 'the essence of human life'" (*nu.nl* 2012b; *Nederlands Dagblad* 2012b; van den Broek 2012).[44]

In 2012, commercial television news programme *RTL Nieuws* has an item on the sudden rise in numbers of Dutch people de-registering from the Roman Catholic Church after the pope's Address "in which he says that gays deny their true nature". Immediately after the reporter has explained that "the pope has insulted many homosexuals with his Christmas speech", they show Pope Benedict at the point where he says (in Italian), "They deny their nature and decide that it is not something previously given to them, but that they make it for themselves." (*RTL Nieuws* 2012b; cf. *De Telegraaf* 2012a) The suggestion is that Benedict has spoken of "homosexuals" in the previous sentence and that "they" refers back to them. On that same day, one of the *RTL Nieuws* presenters (not the one who presents the news that day) writes a blog post on the *RTL Nieuws* website, explaining that she would leave the Roman Catholic Church because of "the news on the pope, who had used his Christmas speech to bash homosexuals again." (Bosman 2012) Two days earlier, another national television/radio presenter (and a so-called 'gay celebrity') had also publicly announced he would leave the Roman Catholic Church and had called others to do the same. He had commented, "I think that, after all the disclosures of the past few years, it would suit the church if she remained silent on the issue of sexuality for a few decades."[45] (*nu.nl* 2012c)

In short, the overall suggestion in the media is that Benedict had launched an explicit and intentional attack *ad homines* – or, as COC chair Tanja Ineke put it in COC's press release in December 2012, "the pope chooses a frontal attack on homosexual women and men" (COC 2012i).[46]

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[44] I have translated *homoseksuelen* as "homosexuals" and *homo's* as "gays". *Algemeen Dagblad* put "euthanasia" in their headline when covering the pope's Message for World Peace Day 2013, but mentioned "euthanasia, abortion and gay marriage" in the first line (*Algemeen Dagblad* 2012a).

[45] These "disclosures" concern the sexual abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church, which might also explain why the responses to the pope were even more fierce in 2012 than in 2008.

[46] Ruth Heß notes similar news coverage in Germany (Heß 2010, 121–22). At the end their press release, COC notes, "In recent pronouncements, the pope seems to turn not only against homosexuals, he also seems to attack transgenders." (COC 2012i) This can be taken as a correction of the focus on gays and lesbians in many media reports. However, it could also be that COC implies that Benedict has found a new, additional target, for example compared to his earlier pronouncements in 2008. In that case it should be noted that it is not Benedict who has changed, but rather COC itself. In their response in 2008 they had not explicitly mentioned transgender persons as such (COC 2008b). It was only around 2010 that they (as well as the Government; see Jivraj and de Jong 2011, 144n3) had started to explicitly include transgender (and bisexual) persons in their mission and activism using the LGBT (Dutch: *LHBT*) acronym that had been common for a much longer time in the Anglo-Saxon world. (Whether OCW followed COC or the other way around is neither clear nor relevant.) By asserting that Benedict "also seems to attack transsexuals", COC might be reinforcing the image of a hateful pope who's always on the look for new targets.

3.2 The Vatican Discourse against the Ideology of Gender

As I have explained in the introduction to this article, I am concerned with Dutch perceptions of, and responses to, papal pronouncements that are *perceived* to be (primarily) about homosexuality. In order to show that they (i.e., the media, COC Netherlands and others) 'read' the pope in a particular way, I need to analyse the relevant papal Addresses and Messages themselves in some detail. Placing them in the context of other relevant Vatican documents, I will show that the pope had made slightly different claims than was often assumed.

When we look at Benedict's Addresses and Messages, we discover that explicit references to "homosexuality" are actually strikingly absent.[47] Words like "homosexuals" or "gays", as used by the Dutch media quoted above, do not occur in these texts. The Pope's terminology also differs from that of (previous) Vatican documents. He does not speak of "homosexual persons" with their "intrinsically disordered acts" or their "objectively disordered" "inclinations", "tendencies" or "conditions" – the terminology of a 1986 document that Cardinal Ratzinger had signed as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF 1986; cf. Vosman 1999).[48] Neither does he speak about any possible dangers of (male) homosexual acts, which some Vatican departments seem to have done previously.[49]

Benedict does, however, speak of contemporary attempts to make opposite-sex marriage "juridically equivalent to radically different types of union" (Benedict XVI 2012b). Seven years earlier, he had been more specific when he spoke of "various forms of the erosion of marriage, such as free unions and 'trial marriage', and *even pseudo-marriages between people of the same sex*" (Benedict XVI 2005a; emphasis added). So, although he emphasises that same-sex marriages erode opposite-sex marriage on the most fundamental level, my point is that he is also concerned about other types of unions (e.g. civil partnerships) that practically 'replace' or symbolically undermine (opposite-sex) marriage.

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[47] These terms are also absent in many other texts written – or at least signed – by Pope Benedict that touch upon issues of family/marriage and sexuality/gender (e.g. Benedict XVI 2005a, 2005b, 2009).

[48] With the exception of *Considerations regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons* (CDF 2003), the Vatican seems to have stopped using the concept of "homosexual persons" altogether since the late 1980s, probably because progressive Catholics had taken this as a sign that the Congregation considered homosexuality an integral or even essential part of the personhood of gays and lesbians, and that, therefore, homosexual relations could somehow be permitted. The role of Cardinal Ratzinger is ambiguous: "The Vatican letter on the pastoral care of homosexual persons may have been signed by Joseph Ratzinger, cardinal prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, but its content and terminology bear the mark of Pope John Paul II. (...) It contributes but one more reason for puzzlement as to the cause for what appears at first glance as almost an obsession with the subject [of sexuality; MD]." (Modras 1988, 119)

[49] First, there is the claim of *Homosexualitatis Problema* that "the practice of homosexuality may seriously threaten the lives and well-being of a large number of people" (CDF 1986, sec. 9), which may have referred to, among others, the AIDS epidemic that was on its highs in the 1980s. Second, in 2005, just after the start of Benedict's papacy, the Congregation for Catholic Education had issued a document that intended to ban men with "deep-seated homosexual tendencies" from the priesthood and the seminaries. It could be that the undefined "negative consequences" of ordaining men with such tendencies refer to sexual abuse of boys by priests (CCE 2005).

His concern, however, is even more fundamental than with such types of unions per se. At least as early as 1985, Ratzinger himself had already criticised the ideas of radical feminism (cf. Case 2011, 815). His pronouncements as Pope echo a broader Vatican discourse against secular theories of gender.[50] In 2000, the Pontifical Council for the Family (PCF) had argued that "[c]laiming a similar status for marriage and de facto unions (including homosexual unions) is usually justified today on the basis of categories and terms that come from the ideology of 'gender'", according to which

> masculine and feminine genders in society are the *exclusive* product of social factors, with *no* relation to *any* truth about the sexual dimension of the person. In this way, *any* sexual attitude can be justified, *including homosexuality*, and it is society that ought to change in order to include other genders, together with male and female, in its way of shaping social life. (PCF 2000, sec. 8; emphasis added)

The word "including" before "homosexual unions" and "homosexuality" respectively in these PCF quotes is equivalent to the word "even" before "pseudo-marriages between people of the same sex" in the 2005 quote from Benedict and indicates that same-sex marriages are seen as the most extreme result of this "ideology".[51] Four years later, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – presided by Cardinal Ratzinger, but working under the authority of Pope John Paul II – issued a document which presented the Roman Catholic Church as "an expert in humanity" (CDF 2004, sec. 1) and which criticised these "ideologies" of gender in a similar fashion, warning that they "call into question the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father, and make homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent, in a new model of polymorphous sexuality" (CDF 2004, sec. 2).[52]

Benedict seems to be criticising several aspects of Western secular culture more broadly that "trivialise" (2005a) or "manipulate" (2008) nature – that is, both the natural environment and the human body. Benedict and the Vatican in general believe that these views are condensed – among others or primarily – in theories of gender. For Benedict, the human body has sexual difference as its core natural characteristic, whereas he believes (all) gender theories subordinate the body to the mind: "Licentiousness, which passes for the discovery of the body and its value, is actually a dualism that makes the body despicable, placing it, so to speak, outside the person's authentic being and dignity." (2005a) Moreover, in Benedict's view, if 'the traditional family' disappears, also the basic cell of society disappears in which one learns true peace: when "gender theory" becomes more popular and when same-sex marriage is legalised in a growing number of countries, in particular in Europe,

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[50] For more detailed analyses of this Vatican discourse see especially the work of Mary Anne Case (2011, 2016) and, on a secondary note, also Ruth Heβ (2010, 120–24), Judith Samson et al. (2011) and Gene Burns (2013).
[51] Benedict himself does not use the word 'ideology' to frame secular theories of gender (Benedict XVI 2007, 2008, 2012b).
[52] Interestingly, the document *Considerations regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons* does not use the word 'gender' at all (CDF 2003).

this causes a threat to political stability (cf. Case 2011; Samson, Jansen and Notermans 2011).

3.3 Fixed Natures

To summarise my argument in this section so far, the overall suggestion in Dutch media was that the main or only focus of Benedict's Addresses and Messages was on homosexuality, that he had explicitly spoken of homosexuals (or homosexuality) and that he had called homosexuals – either solely or primarily, and either personally or categorically – a threat to humanity. This is only partially true. In his Addresses and Messages, the pope, elaborating earlier documents from some Vatican departments – and subtly changing some of their vocabulary – criticises (certain) gender theories and takes political attempts towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage as the most telling and extreme result of these theories. Yet he does this in the context of a more substantial *Ideologiekritik*: he is concerned about broader global developments (in particular in Europe) in which he discerns different types of the manipulation of nature, a body-mind dualism, a commodification of sexuality and a misunderstanding of human freedom.

Let me make two critical analytical remarks here. First, when the pope speaks about "human nature", he refers to sexed human bodies, which he reads in an essentialist and heteronormative way. However, many people promoting the interests of LGBT persons also use a concept of nature, yet they conceptualise it differently than the pope and the Vatican. The sexual orientation of lesbian, gay and bisexual persons – just like heterosexual orientation – is taken as a 'natural', pre-social given. In transgender persons, the idea is that these persons are, so to speak, 'born in the wrong body', so the tension here is an intrapersonal one – that is, a tension between a pre-socially 'given' gender identity and a body that's at odds with this gender identity. Although I could cite many queer theorists/theologians to criticise both conceptualisations of nature, that's beyond the scope of this article. What strikes me is that the pope's implication that this secular view on sexual orientation and gender identity reveals a body-mind dualism was hardly countered – it seems that such a coherent counter-narrative is not available among LGBT advocates in the Netherlands. It could be that many consider the pope's view as merely a 'religious' view that can therefore be scientifically discredited (cf. Section 2.2). In that case, not only a dialogue with the pope is evaded, but also a dialogue with any person who holds views similar to the pope – and these are not, as one might think, only religious persons.

My second remark has to do with the pope's and/or the media's focus on homosexuals. Having discussed news reports in Section 3.1, let me now turn once again to Dutch public discourse and focus on some op-ed pieces in national dailies. In December 2012 and January 2013, a few intellectuals discussed the question whether 'the media' had fairly covered the pope's pronouncements, what the pope had or had not said and how that mattered. Several critics argued that the pope had not explicitly targeted LGBT persons

and that the media and COC had been unsympathetic readers.[53] Some of them also commented that the pope should have been more aware of the public and non-academic context of his statements (Corsius 2012; Koster O.P. 2012; Snel 2012). Historian Jan Dirk Snel noted that "[i]t is striking that so many people accuse the pope of 'anti-gay hate'. Well then, no reasonable human being will discover *a single trace* of that in his views, no matter how much you possibly disagree with him." (Snel 2012; emphasis added) Bas Heine, columnist for a major Dutch newspaper, disagreed: "What irritates me about Ratzinger's speech is not any explicit hate against gays, but rather this shrouded tone, this veiled language of Christian humanism, this cautious murmuring, this not saying what you really mean." He called the pope's words "dangerous" because of their "blackmailing apocalyptic tone (...). Gays are portrayed as enemies of humanity." (Heine 2012) Snel had a different explanation of the absence of explicit references to homosexuality: "What Heine calls 'shrouded' rather seems to be a cautious academic way of thinking. Anyone who wants to see in the pope a radical opponent of unbridled capitalism will find quite some more explicit quotes. But as soon as moral issues are concerned, Ratzinger is strikingly reticent." (Snel 2013) Professor of Christian Ethics Theo Boer caught it nicely when he tweeted – with a sense of irony, "What the pope criticises in paragraphs 5&6 is in fact the sexual morality of (almost) an entire culture."[54] Although I find Snel's wording (not "a single trace" of "anti-gay hate") too strong, I tend to agree with Snel and Boer. What is more important, however, is that, despite of the ambiguity of Benedict's pronouncements, most Dutch media took them as blunt attacks on homosexuals – and, occasionally, on LGBT persons.

4. The Netherlands: The Merchant and/or the Vicar

4.1 "No Flowers to the Pope"
We now turn to the Facebook page "Geen bloemen naar de paus" ("No flowers to the pope") that I referred to at the beginning of this article.[55] It was started by an anonymous person on December 21, 2012.[56] It soon received more than 28,000 likes and caught the attention of the televised, online and printed media (e.g. *RTL Nieuws* 2012a; Hart van Nederland 2012; Joop 2012; NOS 2012c). COC Netherlands shared it on their own Facebook page the next day and put a recommendation of the page below a press release on their website: "Please support the Facebook call 'No flowers to the pope' – for why should we send 'flowers from the Netherlands' each year to a Pope who constantly offends and condemns LGBTs?" (COC 2012i)

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[53] A columnist for a conservative Roman Catholic new website even expressed a complaint against national broadcasting organisation NOS at the Contact Point Discrimination Internet for deliberately misrepresenting the pope's words (cf. KleinJan 2012b). He was supported by, among others, 'media priest' Roderick Vonhögen on Twitter (@mediapriester, December 24, 2012).
[54] @TheoBoer, December 22, 2012.
[55] Cf. note 31.
[56] On December 25, in a Christmas greeting, the administrator wrote, "Many people wonder who is the initiator of this page. I don't find it that relevant to go public personally."

The Facebook page's main image addresses the senses of hearing and seeing among its visitors. It shows a black-and-white image of Benedict that makes him look evil. In his left hand he holds a wilted yellow sunflower. A red diagonal line across the image symbolises the No. On top of the image it says in Dutch, "Bedankt voor die bloeme!" Because of the intended spelling mistakes – one could translate it as "Zanks for ze flowers!" – almost every Dutch citizen immediately recalls how for many years the Polish Pope John Paul II as well as his successor, the German Pope Benedict XVI, had tried to pronounce "Bedankt voor de bloemen!" in their Easter greetings to the Netherlands before giving the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing from the central loggia of St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

The page's "description" is provided in ten languages, which shows that the international image of the Netherlands is considered at stake.[57] It reads as follows:

> Since 1985 Dutch flower breeders give huge amounts of free flowers to brighten up St. Peter[']s Square during the Easter speech of the Pope. A nice promotion for this important industry in The Netherlands.

> But does the Pope deserve this? Why give flowers to someone who systematically accuses homosexuals? Why would a flower breeder in a modern, tolerant nation as The Netherlands be associated with the prehistoric and insulting ideology of the Pope?

> We think there are better and more humane things in which the Dutch flower breeders could profile their industry. So: No flowers to the Pope!

The text uses similar framings as we have discussed above: the pope is presented as "someone who systematically accuses homosexuals" (cf. Section 3.1) and with his "prehistoric and insulting ideology" he places himself outside a rational dialogue (cf. Section 2.1). But let me elaborate a bit on the Netherlands as an exporter of flowers and as a "tolerant nation".

4.2 "Our Best Export Product"
In historical works that are directed at a broader audience, Dutch development cooperation has frequently been characterised through the use of two interrelated archetypes or characters that juxtapose self-interest and altruism respectively: the merchant (*koopman*) and the vicar (*dominee*) (van Dam and van Dis 2014, 1638).[58] In a different way, they can also be – and have been – applied to foreign policy more broadly: as a merchant the state protects and promotes Dutch economic interests, while as a vicar it promotes certain values and rights (that are considered Dutch or European/Western more generally) to the rest of the world (Herman 2006, 159). Taking up the latter role is, of course, more difficult towards states on which the Netherlands is economically dependent.

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[57] There are some differences in formulation and length between these ten versions, but these differences are not relevant for my argument. The English text I quote here is similar to the Dutch text, except that in the Dutch version the word "prehistoric" is missing.
[58] The images of merchant and vicar "can purportedly be traced back to the origins of the Dutch Republic in the 16th century, which came into existence after commercial and religious motives caused the inhabitants of the Low Countries to rebel against their Spanish king" (van Dam and van Dis 2014, 1638).

For example, when in 2013 the Netherlands celebrated 400 years of diplomatic relationships with Russia, the tension between these two roles was strong: on the one hand, the Netherlands had strong economic ties to Russia, whereas on the other hand, Russia had just put a ban on 'gay propaganda'.

The Facebook page's description suggests that in this case the tension between these two roles is not very strong: Dutch flower breeders are assured that they can simply profile their industry elsewhere. So, the Netherlands can rather freely take up the role of vicar. But besides flowers, there is another Dutch export product that apparently needs to be promoted. Since the late 1990s, "issues like abortion, euthanasia, the medical use of cannabis, the legalization of prostitution and same-sex marriage" have become "part of the Dutch moral export product." (Herman 2006, 865; cf. Kennedy 2005a, 15–17) This goes in particular for the latter issue. In 2001, the Netherlands was the first country to open marriage for same-sex couples. One of the driving forces behind this, former editor-in-chief of the *Gay Krant*, Henk Krol, has called same-sex marriage "our best export product" (e.g. *De Telegraaf* 2009). In 2012, when he was a candidate for the parliamentary elections, a journalist asked him to respond to the statement, "In its foreign policy, the Netherlands should be guided primarily by economic interests; the merchant goes before the vicar." He responded, "Of course, economic motives are important on foreign policy. But I'm proud that the Netherlands is more than just a merchant. Equal marriage rights – nicknamed 'gay marriage' – that is the most beautiful immaterial Dutch export product." (de Jongh 2012; cf. *De Volkskrant* 2013) The phrase "our best export product" has been taken over by, among others, COC Netherlands (e.g. COC 2011) and Boris van der Ham, former MP for the liberal democrats and current chair of the Humanistic Association Netherlands (e.g. Wit 2015). In a slightly different way, a liberal democrat in Amsterdam has called same-sex marriage "our most visible export product" (Vroege 2016) and in 2011, then Minister of Education (responsible for LGBT emancipation), Marja van Bijsterveldt, has called "defending the freedom, tolerance and equal rights" of LGBT persons "an important export product of the Netherlands" (Rijksoverheid 2011; cf. Groen 2011). By calling same-sex marriage "our best export product", they use a merchant-like term to play the vicar's card. Same-sex marriage is presented not only as a good thing, but also as a Dutch invention: if other states legalise same-sex marriage, they are considered to be *following* the Dutch example. If states would instead follow the pope's warnings, this would affect the international reputation of the Netherlands as a frontrunner in LGBT emancipation. Whereas the opening of civil marriage for same-sex couples in 2001 had been largely presented and perceived as a secular victory over religious regulations of sexuality (Derks 2017), a backdrop in the international reputation of the Netherlands in this area as the result of Vatican lobbying would be particularly painful.

5. Conclusion

The reception of, and responses to, the pronouncements by Pope Benedict XVI discussed in this article teach us a few things about the role of religion in contemporary Dutch society and how this intertwines with secularism, sexuality and nationalism. The fact that often those passages that addressed issues of marriage, sexuality and gender in the pope's Addresses and Messages were highlighted and taken to be primarily directed against gays and lesbians indicates that views on homosexuality have become a test case of the pope's – and, more generally, a religion's – credibility.

In Section 2.3 I have discussed a few examples of how certain actors in public discourse who do not self-identify as Christians still make claims about what the Christian religion is actually about. They consider Christianity primarily a matter of morality – of "norms and values", a catchphrase introduced by former Prime-Minister Jan Peter Balkenende (Christian democrats) and still frequently used across the political spectrum. This is a more subtle postsecular use of Christianity than the one we find in certain right-wing nationalist discourses that rebuke Islam by deploying a particular construction of "the Judeo-Christian tradition" of the Netherlands (cf. e.g. van den Hemel 2014). Moreover, while several secular participants in public discourse deployed a Christian vocabulary in their responses to the pope, such is very unlikely to happen in response to pronouncements by an imam.

At the same time, the pope can easily be dismissed because religious arguments are considered a priori irrational or irrelevant from a secularist perspective (Sections 2.1-2.2). More specifically, when it comes to issues of sexuality and gender, the suggestion is that there is nothing the Dutch can learn from the pope (Section 3). The focus on what the pope – or 'religions' in general – allegedly think and say about homosexuality could have the effect of overshadowing similar views among secular citizens, especially in a post-Christian country as the Netherlands.

The reception of the pope also indicates that the secularist and the Vatican worldviews are fundamentally different: both the pope and secularist people are having a hard time trying to understand each other – if only they have not stopped trying. Many media, COC and others took the pope's pronouncements as a fundamental attack on gay men and lesbian women. This can partly be explained by the fact that, in the secular Netherlands, there is a strong focus on the rights and freedoms of *individuals.* Pope Benedict's Encyclicals, Addresses and Messages are more philosophical, more abstract, more collective. Moreover, it is striking to see that many in the Netherlands focussed on what Benedict had said – or what they *thought* he had said – about homosexuality, less or not on what he had said about sexual difference, abortion and euthanasia – even though these are also considered Dutch "export products" (Herman 2006, 865; cf. Kennedy 2005a, 15–17). One possible explanation is that gays and lesbians can be more easily politically staged as dramatic characters than women (who are most directly or fundamentally affected by views and decisions concerning sexual difference and abortion).

ARTICLE 2

Publication Details

Abstract

When civil marriage in the Netherlands was opened up to same-sex couples in 2001, the Dutch government allowed civil marriage registrars with conscientious objections to opt out. This exemption became controversial in 2007, when it was reemphasised by a new government coalition that comprised two faith-based parties. Through critical discourse analysis this article discusses the construction of religion and homosexuality in public discourses on the *weigerambtenaar* (lit. 'refusing civil servant') between 2007 and 2014. It looks at the effects of the *weigerambtenaar* as a term, a character and a social problem, and shows how particular oppositions between homosexuals and Christians were created or reinforced. Moreover, it argues that, although the issue was framed in terms of certain secular *rights*, some contributions also pointed to the importance of (quasi)religious *rites* in the civil wedding ceremony. Therefore, it also shows how marriage was conceptualised in terms of religion and (homo)sexuality.

Acknowledgements

Conscientious Objectors and the Marrying Kind

Rights and Rites in Dutch Public Discourse on Marriage Registrars with Conscientious Objections against Conducting Same-Sex Weddings

1. A marriage may be entered into by two persons of the opposite sex or of the same sex.
2. The law considers a marriage only in its legal civil relationships.

Dutch Civil Code[59]

1. Introduction

In 2011, the word *weigerambtenaar* was elected the Dutch Word of the Year (Onze Taal 2011). This neologism, which literally translates as 'refusing civil servant', was a particular framing of what was commonly referred to as *gewetensbezwaarde (trouw)ambtenaar*, a 'marriage registrar with conscientious objections' (hereafter abbreviated as 'MaRCO'). These registrars' objections were directed against conducting same-sex weddings. The MaRCO has been a controversial political issue since 2000, when the Dutch parliament discussed a proposal to open up marriage to same-sex couples. This turned civil marriage into a battleground for testing and contesting religious (and sexual) freedoms.

Although the debates on the MaRCO tended to focus on marriage *rights* for same-sex couples – as well as the rights of MaRCOs (esp. their freedom of religion) – this article intends to show that many participants in the debates were also – often implicitly and subconsciously – concerned about civil marriage *rites* in which the civil marriage registrar plays a significant role. This shift of focus from rights to rites becomes visible in the argument I will make in this article. The main question is how homosexuality and religion were constructed in public discourse about the MaRCO. After I have sketched the historical and political context of the construction of the MaRCO as a 'social problem' (Section 2), I will show how the construction of the MaRCO as a particular character reinforced a particular opposition between Christians and homosexuals (Section 3). In the final two sections, I will address the main question in a different manner by looking at the role of religion and sexuality in the conceptualisation of marriage in public discourse about the MaRCO. I will show how the discourse about the MaRCO has brought to light the broadly valued ceremonial – or even quasi-religious – role of the civil marriage

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[59] Art. 1:30 Burgerlijk Wetboek.

registrar (Section 4) as well as some conflicting understandings of marriage (Section 5).

I will address these questions by providing a critical discourse analysis of selected examples from Dutch public discourse, primarily between 2007 and 2014 (see Section 2 for a substantiation of this temporal demarcation). A certain level of comprehensiveness has been pursued by using contributions of different types of participants (esp. journalists, politicians, activists, MaRCOs) in different public arenas (esp. newspapers, websites, television programmes) on primarily national (but also regional or local) level. Moreover, instead of limiting my scope to rational arguments only, I will look at verbal and visual rhetoric more broadly.

2. The MaRCO: From Possibility to Social Problem

In 2001, the Netherlands was the first country to open up civil marriage to same-sex couples. This was the result of efforts by the Second Kok Cabinet (1998-2002), which, just like the First Kok Cabinet (1994-1998), was a coalition of social democrats (PvdA), conservative liberals (VVD) and liberal democrats (D66). After the Christian democrats (CDA) had lost dramatically at the 1994 elections, the Netherlands had got its first secular coalition in eighty years. The question of same-sex marriage did not play any role in the formation of the First Kok Cabinet, which was not much interested in immaterial matters. Three MPs – one from each of the three coalition parties – started campaigning for it. But most members of government could not be bothered about the issue. Moreover, they thought – mistakenly – it would be a step too far for the Dutch population. In 1998, however, the Coalition Agreement of the Second Kok Cabinet articulated the intention to open up marriage for same-sex couples. Within two years and rather easily, the amendment was put into law (Peters 2015, 113–17).[60]

In an interview with these three MPs in September 2000, one of them explained that they all had had the feeling, "We have to do it now, now that it's possible in a coalition without CDA." (Boom 2000; cf. Dittrich 2001, 57–58) On April 1, 2016 (the 15th anniversary of same-sex marriage), the country's secular LGBT organisation, COC Netherlands, explicitly mentioned the efforts of this "second 'purple' cabinet" (COC 2016), implying that it was not just the government, but this particular secular cabinet.[61] These are just a few examples that might indicate that the opening up of marriage (just as the Termination

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[60] "While the world was flabbergasted, the Netherlands had become bored with this feat." (Hekma 2004, 51–52; as quoted by Bos 2017, 191).

[61] The First and Second Kok Cabinets are commonly nicknamed 'Purple I and II', because purple is a mixture of blue and red, the colours of the two biggest parties (liberal conservatives resp. social democrats). The following example shows that 'purple' in this context has become synonymous with 'secular'. In Autumn 2013, the coalition of social democrats and conservative liberals reached a budget agreement with the liberal democrats and two small Christian parties to get a majority in the Senate. As this was an agreement between all three parties of the former 'purple' coalition and two conservative Christian parties, it was called "Purple with the Bible" in the media (e.g. Niemantsverdriet and Stokmans 2013). This phrase indicates that 'purple' implies 'secular', especially since religion did not play any dominant role in this agreement.

of Life on Request and Assisted Suicide Act of 2002) was *presented* by some MPs of the coalition parties and *perceived* among the public as a victory of a *secular* coalition. However, academic studies on the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the Netherlands (including comparative studies on different countries) primarily focus on legal aspects (e.g. Maxwell 2000; Waaldijk 2000, 2005; cf. Cox 2005), whereas academic literature that pays attention to the role of religion and secularism in the preparation, presentation and perception of this legalisation is almost absent (except e.g. van der Burg 2005).

Whereas, for example, France has witnessed a significant religious opposition against the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2013 (even though French *laïcité* traditionally separates church and state more strictly than is the case in the Netherlands), religious opposition in the Netherlands has been limited.[62] A few factors could explain this. First, the Netherlands did not – and does not – have a significant Christian Right movement (cf. Cox 2005). Second, the increased dominance of a juridico-political discourse of anti-discrimination in the 1980s and 1990s had rendered many counterarguments unconvincing. When the new Constitution took effect in 1983, an article on equal treatment and anti-discrimination became the Constitution's first article.[63] Although this was "mainly justified on technical-systematic grounds", the article was soon perceived as expressing the most fundamental norm of Dutch society (van der Burg 2005, 261–62). This was reinforced with the introduction of the Equal Treatment Act, which, after a decade of fierce debate viz. religious opposition, became effective in 1994. In the late 1990s, many arguments – whether religious or non-religious – against opening up civil marriage had become unconvincing: neither assertions on the longstanding tradition or Christian roots of opposite-sex marriage nor warnings that opening up civil marriage might have a negative impact on Dutch international relations, could change the 'fact' that limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples was considered discriminatory (2005, 268).[64] Third, civil partnerships for both same-sex and opposite-sex couples had already become available a few years earlier, in 1998, and these entailed almost the same rights as civil marriages (cf. Waaldijk 2001, 446–47). But the most important explanation in the context of my argument is that Dutch priests and ministers as such are not civil marriage registrars.

> All Dutch legislation regarding marriage – whether different-sex or
> same-sex marriage – purports to regulate the institution of marriage
> only in its civil capacity. This is because, since the early 1800s, there
> has been a clear divide in the Netherlands between the state as keeper
> of the registry of births, marriages, and deaths – known in the
> Netherlands as the *Burgerlijke Stand* – on the one hand, and religious
> institutions as solemnizers of religious marriage, on the other hand. A

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[62] In the years before the legalisation of same-sex marriage in France, *laïcité*'s authority had been challenged by religious opponents of same-sex marriage (McCaffrey 2006, 265–66).
[63] "All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted."
[64] For a similar argument with respect to France, see McCaffrey (2006, 266–67).

> Dutch marriage, whether different-sex or same-sex, can *only* take place before an official of the *Burgerlijke Stand*, normally in the town hall.
> (Waaldijk 2005, 107)

Although the churches might have expected that after the opening up of civil marriage, they would be asked or pressed by, among others, lesbian and gay believers to solemnise same-sex marriages, the change of law did not have direct *legal* consequences to church policies.

The government was aware that there might well be some marriage registrars who had conscientious objections against conducting same-sex weddings (MaRCOs). During the discussions of the proposed amendment of law, State Secretary of Justice, Job Cohen, explained that, just like all other kinds of conscientious objections among civil servants, such cases would continue to be dealt with locally and internally, as there would always be another local registrar to officiate. In short, MaRCOs would not be forced to conduct same-sex weddings (*Wet openstelling huwelijk: memorie van antwoord* 2000).[65]

Although several political parties as well as COC Netherlands made critical comments already in 2000, it was only in early 2007 that a heavy debate emerged. On February 7, the coalition of social democrats, Christian democrats and the Christian Union had presented their Coalition Agreement, in which they explicitly stated that they would protect the position of the MaRCO (AZ 2007, 37).[66] This was nothing new compared to the position of the government that had opened up marriage.[67] In addition, it could be that the two Christian coalition parties wanted to play safe with the social democrats, who had been part of the cabinet that had introduced same-sex marriage. On February 14 (Valentine's Day), the Mayor of Amsterdam, Job Cohen, gave a speech at the *Homomonument* in Amsterdam in which he expressed his concern about this passage in the Coalition Agreement (Gasthuis 2007). It is important to note here that Cohen was a member of one of the coalition parties (social democrats); that he had been responsible for the opening up of marriage and for the 'creation' of the MaRCO *as a juridico-political possibility* (see above); and that he had conducted the country's – and the world's – first same-sex weddings on April 1, 2001 in Amsterdam.[68] Two months later, on April 1, 2007 – exactly six years after the first same-sex weddings – the social democrats joined several opposition parties in signing a covenant with COC Netherlands not to support a legal recognition of MaRCOs (*De Volkskrant* 2007b; COC 2007a). The role of the social democrats in these events make it likely that the passage in the Coalition

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[65] The Association of Dutch Municipalities expressed the same view (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Burgerzaken 2001, 30).

[66] The Christian Union (*ChristenUnie*) is a merger of two moderately conservative Protestant parties that had never been in a government. It tends to be religiously rather conservative but socially moderately progressive.

[67] The only new element was the obscure remark that, "if problems would rise in the municipal practice, initiatives will be taken to secure the legal certainty of marriage registrars with conscientious objections."

[68] In addition, on March 3, Albert Verlinde, a popular television host – and a gossip queen to many – started a petition against the MaRCO (COC 2007b).

Agreement had been brought in by either one or both of the two Christian parties. This is not surprising as blessing same-sex marriages had been a controversial issue in Dutch churches in the preceding years.[69] These statements – as well as the sudden frequent use of the word *weigerambtenaar* in the media, to which I will turn in the next section – created and fuelled heated debates that would continue until 2014, when a proposal by the liberal democrats to ban the MaRCO was accepted by both Parliament and Senate.[70] In effect, the issue of the MaRCO – one of the two "flaws (*weeffouten*)" in the 2001 amendment of law, according to COC Netherlands in a press release issued on the 15th anniversary of same-sex marriage (COC 2016) – had been on the political agenda for a longer period and had been debated more intensively than the issue of same-sex marriage itself.

There have been no reported cases of same-sex couples who could not get married in a particular municipality. Yet the political focus on the MaRCO was relatively strong, both compared to other kinds of (possible) conscientious objections among civil servants and compared to the relatively low number of MaRCOs. As to the latter, on their website COC Netherlands noted that they had sent out a questionnaire to all 443 municipalities in "early 2007" – probably shortly after the release of the Coalition Agreement in February – to assess the number of MaRCOs (COC 2007a). They probably reported 104 MaRCOs at that time (cf. Prikken 2012).[71] What they did not note is the total number of all marriage registrars in the Netherlands, which could be several thousands.[72] Now the success or failure to construct something as a "social problem" – and that's what the issue of the MaRCO was becoming – "need bear no strong relationships to the number of people affected, the extent of harm (as measured by any particular set of criteria) or to any other independent variables that purport to measure importance" (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 58).

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[69] For example, when the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederlands Hervormde Kerk*), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*) and the Lutheran Church merged into the Protestant Church of the Netherlands in 2004, a part of the right wing of the Dutch Reformed Church did not join, one of the reasons being the possibility same-sex couples would have in the new Protestant Church to have their marriages blessed (Bos 2010b, 20–21).

[70] An additional and more general explanation could be the fact that, in the intervening years, the attacks of 9/11 and the assassinations two Dutch critics of Islam in 2002 (Pim Fortuyn) and 2004 (Theo van Gogh), among others, had negatively affected public perceptions not only of Islam but also of religion(s) in general.

[71] They presented the results of their investigation on April 1, 2007, at the earlier-mentioned presentation of their covenant with several political parties. A news item on this event spoke of "one out of eight municipalities" that "employed" MaRCOs (*De Volkskrant* 2007b). I do not know for sure how many MaRCOs COC counted in early 2007, as they have updated their information since then. On January 20, 2016 they mentioned 87 MaRCOs (COC 2007a), which seems to have been the number since at least on September 15, 2012, when a columnist for a regional newspaper wrote, "An average of 87 tokens of this threatened species still exist in municipal offices. In 2007, there were 104 all-in-all." (Prikken 2012) The columnist does not tell where he got these numbers from, but it is very likely that he got them from COC, for on November 10, 2011 the national news broadcasting organisation spoke of 104 by referring to COC (NOS 2011a) and that's the number of MaRCOs in 2007 according to Prikken.

[72] Both the Association of Dutch Municipalities and the Dutch Association of Civil Affairs have informed me that they do not have a national administration of marriage registrars. But to get an idea: in 2011, a columnist spoke of 487 marriage registrars in the municipality of Amsterdam only (Fogteloo 2011). If that's correct and if the registrar/citizen-ratio in the Netherlands as a whole is the same as in Amsterdam, there were roughly 8,000-10,000 civil registrars in the country.

Numbers do not speak for themselves. For example, in 2013 an MP for the Christian Union assumed the same number as COC Netherlands did at that time, but considered it negligible (Segers 2013). In an op-ed piece, a historian called the controversy "yet another example of political symbolism". He accused several political parties of hypocrisy: whereas the green lefts and the liberal democrats had earlier ridiculed the fear of 150 burqas, they were now scared of 100 MaRCOs. On the other hand, he argued, the Christian democrats had pleaded in favour of a ban on the burqa but against the ban on the MaRCO. The author concluded, "That the conscientious objections of one hundred *weigerambtenaren* are being banned is a flagrant violation of the fundamental principles of liberalism and a solution for a non-existent problem." (Bregman 2011) But for opponents of the MaRCO, the issue was – or had become – a matter of (certain) principles. Already in early 2007, a city council member for the green lefts had argued that MaRCOs and their defenders "should not try to find clever escape routes" (quoted in Musters 2007) and in 2013, an MP for the same party explained that "back then we were still pragmatic (...), because we thought that the *weigerambtenaar* would naturally disappear" (quoted in Meijers 2013). Others went even further and argued that one should never have given room for these – supposed – conscientious objections anyway.

3. The Fictive Character of the MaRCO and the Opposition of Christians vs. Gays

The successful construction of a "social problem" relies on the use of drama, when "officially certified 'facts' are coupled with vivid, emotional rhetoric" (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 61). If the mere oppositional pairing of religion and homosexuality did not already provide enough fuel for this, the construction of a particular dramatic character did the job. The *dramatis persona* of the MaRCO was effectively constructed by the introduction and repetitive use of the neologism *weigerambtenaar*. Among the Dutch population, the cultural image of the civil servant (*ambtenaar*) in general is that of a lazy, nine-to-five, humourless bureaucrat who likes to make it hard for citizens to get a license of any kind or who, for obscure or silly reasons, simply refuses to provide a license. So in the general public's imagination, refusing (*weigeren*) is already a common feature of the character of the civil registrar – which is why some joked that the word *weigerambtenaar* is a pleonasm (Hoogland 2011; cf. Gasthuis 2007). After some news reporters had spoken of *weigerachtige ambtenaar* (*Trouw* 2003) and *weigeringsambtenaar* (van Esch 2004), the shorter version *weigerambtenaar* suddenly became a hit after it was (re)introduced in a national newspaper column in March 2007.[73] The fused noun *weigerambtenaar*, 'sticking' *weiger* to *ambtenaar*, reinforced the inherently reluctant and stubborn character of civil servants. Yet this use of a term with, literally speaking, a very

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[73] On April 21, 2007, a columnist noted that the word *weigerambtenaar* had been used 27 times in newspapers and magazines since February 14, and had already 36,000 hits on Google (Gasthuis 2007). In 2011, another columnist (Hoogland 2011) asserted that it was a journalist of *De Volkskrant* who had coined the term in 2007 – he probably meant a news item on March 3 (*De Volkskrant* 2007a) – but it had been used at least once before in 2001 by a reporter of a regional newspaper (Bosma 2001).

general meaning – it does not speak of (same-sex) marriage or religion – for a very *specific* group contributed to the idea that the MaRCO was a big and widespread problem.[74]

The general image of the *weigerambtenaar* that emerges from (written and visual) contributions to public discourse by its opponents is that of an old, grumpy, straight, male Christian from the Dutch Bible belt who feels aversion towards (male) homosexuals/homosexuality and, therefore, rejects same-sex couples on the most beautiful day of their lives.[75] One aspect of this image needs some more explanation. The Dutch Bible belt is a strip of land that stretches from the southwest to the east of the Netherlands and that covers towns like Staphorst and Urk. It has a high concentration of *reformatorischen*, conservative Calvinists with a pietistic or experiential spirituality. These Christians have their own newspaper (*Reformatorisch Dagblad*), political party (SGP), labour union (RMU) and private (primary and secondary) schools. The extent to which the MaRCO is presented or perceived as a Christian or as *this particular type* of Christian depends on how familiar the 'presenter' viz. 'perceiver' is with the characteristics of different Christian denominations in the Netherlands.

The above-sketched character of the *weigerambtenaar* emerges from phrases and images, especially in the many cartoons that circulated, but most clearly in an episode of the popular satirical television programme *Koefnoen*, broadcasted on March 10, 2007, about a disastrous civil wedding of a gay couple. It starts with a man (the marriage registrar) behind a door criticising Annemarie (either a colleague or his manager) for putting him in the corner. A little further he talks with strong disdain about a second woman, his colleague who was supposed to conduct the ceremony but who happened to be ill. As will soon become clear, the man is both misogynist and homophobic. What is striking is that there are only a few allusions to religion. The first is a "Praise be to the Lord" that he utters at some point, but the second is subtler: he has dark-brown straight-parted hair and under his gown, he wears a black three-piece suit typical for – although not limited to – middle-aged conservative pietistic Christian men. Whereas the registrar's rural accent makes him sound provincial or even backward, the grooms are from the country's 'Gay Capital', Amsterdam, and also their manners, clothing and professions make them look and sound stereotypically gay. The registrar turns out not to be a *weigerambtenaar* in the literal sense, for he eventually does not refuse (*weigeren*)

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[74] The success of the term *weigerambtenaar* becomes clear when we see media using the term *weigerbakker* in their headlines when reporting about an American baker who had refused to make a wedding cake for a lesbian couple (e.g. NOS 2014) – apparently, these media expect their readers to immediately associate the word *weiger* with (religious) discrimination against gays and lesbians. At the same time, also the more neutral – or 'politically correct' – term of 'marriage registrar with conscientious objections (*gewetensbezwaarde ambtenaar*)' does not speak of (same-sex) marriage or religion.

[75] According to the results from a survey by the evangelical broadcasting organisation EO among MaRCOs who are in the records of the Reformed labour union RMU, the average (Reformed!) MaRCO is a *man*, is *older than 50* and has worked as an *extraordinary* marriage registrar in a relatively *small* municipality for *more than 10 years* (*De Vijfde Dag* 2011). The difference between ordinary and extraordinary marriage registrars will be discussed in Section 4.

to conduct the ceremony. However, he does take the opportunity to express his aversion towards the marrying couple. In his speech, which seems to imitate the traditional conservative pietistic fire-and-brimstone sermon, he narrates to the couple and their two (female) witnesses how the two men had first met:

> While living within a stone's throw, you lived separate lives – and after all, why not...? You have become acquainted at a self-defence course. How do such things go? I imagine one day the training ended up in fist fucking... and then you got into conversation with one another.
> (*Koefnoen* 2007)

This is, of course, a parody. But such a replacement of conscience with disgust as the 'origin' of the MaRCO's conscientious objections can also be found in online comments (e.g. some comments to Brussen 2011) and in op-ed pieces in the media. For example, Rev. Tom Mikkers (Remonstrant minister) argued that the MaRCO "brings out his conscience to disguise his aversion against homosexuality" (Mikkers 2011). Others called the MaRCO a "homophobe" (Prikken 2012), "an anti-gay Calvinist" (Arnhold 2011), someone "for whom same-sex love is an abomination" and who sees homosexuality as "a choice instead of a nature" (Drayer 2011) or someone who "does not like gays" but is "stubborn" enough to become a marriage registrar anyway (van der Veer 2014). The fear of the opponents of the MaRCO was that the latter would reject gay couples in their face. That this would happen was very unlikely if not virtually impossible, but the mere thought of it was scary enough – the fear of a possible rejection by a marriage registrar was almost like the fear of one's partner suddenly saying No *á la moment suprême.*

   A different type of response to the MaRCO was the argument that marriage registrars should, as many put it, 'simply execute the law'. This was argued by, among others, a Mayor who had just fired an MaRCO (Veldhuizen 2007), former chair of COC Netherlands, Vera Bergkamp[76] (de Pous 2012), MP Ineke van Gent (*Pauw & Witteman* 2011), the previous two with editor-in-chief of the *Gay Krant*, Henk Krol, in a co-authored op-ed piece (van Gent, Krol and Bergkamp 2011) and 6 out of 10 respondents to a poll on the website of national tabloid *De Telegraaf* (van Zwieten 2011). Some defenders of the MaRCO responded by drawing a comparison with how the government had always left room for those who had conscientious objections to serve in the military – the green lefts in particular had been solidly behind such conscientious objectors (de Groot 2011). Vera Bergkamp, however, speaks of "discrimination" and makes a comparison with South-African Apartheid: "Someone with a dark skin had access to public transport, but not every bus driver wanted to take him on the bus. That's not equality." (de Pous 2012; cf. van Beem 2012) This illustrates how secularism considers religion a matter of private conscience (cf. e.g. Scott 2013, 27), but we also see here what German scholar of religion Astrid Reuter has

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[76] At the time of the interview referred to, Bergkamp had just stepped back as chair of COC Netherlands and had started campaigning for the next parliamentary elections – in 2012, she would become an MP for the liberal democrats.

called "a shift of political culture towards human rights culture – that is, to a process of 'justicialization' (*Vergerechtlichung*)" (Reuter 2009, 3). The rhetorical effect of arguing that this is a matter of "discrimination" against a certain group – an interpretative frame that, as I have explained in the previous section, has generally become more dominant in Dutch public discourse since the 1980s – is the construction of an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006) of homosexuals, in which homosexuality is primarily constructed as a natural identity.

One columnist for a national newspaper responded that Bergkamp's comparison with South-African Apartheid did not hold. After all, a bus driver is not a civil servant. Moreover – and more importantly – a white bus driver who refused to drive a black person was actually acting *in accordance with* the law – or at least not against it (de Jong 2012). The 'simply executing the law' rhetoric of Bergkamp and others was ironically at odds with at least two examples of conscientious objections or acts of civil disobedience from the history of LGBT emancipation. First, in 1995, under the headline "Pink attack on purple coalition", a national newspaper had reported about marriage registrars of two Dutch municipalities who threatened to conduct same-sex weddings or even to conduct no weddings at all, if the national government would not speed up the process of opening up civil marriage to same-sex couples (van Osselen 1995; cf. Bos 2017, 191).[77] Second, in the early 1980s, several gay men – or "faggots (*flikkers*)", as they called themselves – expressed conscientious objections against serving in the military, because, as one of them put it, in the army "male supremacy and display of male power is even more institutionalised than in society in general" (Mario 1981b, cf. 1981a; Roosendaal 1983).

As I am concerned in this article with the construction of religion and homosexuality, let me become a little more analytical and explain what kinds of oppositions I discern in this discourse. Generally speaking, I see the effectuation of a *discursive* opposition between *Christian* MaRCOs and *homosexual* couples. First, many critics of the MaRCO seem to assume that all gays and lesbians are on their side, whereas many MaRCOs and their defenders seem to assume that all 'true' viz. 'biblically orthodox' Christians will never conduct same-sex weddings. Moreover, there are two assumptions that are shared by defenders and opponents alike: first, the assumption that all marrying couples are 'homosexual'; and second, the assumption that all MaRCOs are Christian.

The first assumption was implied and/or reinforced by the fact that especially LGBT organisations[78] had campaigned for the opening up of marriage, by the general use of terms such as *homohuwelijk*[79] ('gay marriage') and *homopaar* ('gay couple') in and outside of public debates about the MaRCO,

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[77] On the meaning of 'purple' see note 61.
[78] It was primarily the *Gay Krant* which had campaigned for it – COC Netherlands only started to support same-sex marriage in the second half of the 1990s (Bos 2017, 190–91).
[79] COC Netherlands and (some) other LGBT activists, however, avoided this term and spoke of 'huwelijk tussen paren van gelijk geslacht' ('same-sex marriage') and similar terms instead.

and by the above-discussed framing of the MaRCO as a homophobic person. However, people who want to enter into a marriage with a person of the same sex can do so for various reasons – not only for sexual or romantic reasons. Moreover, they might not self-identify as gay or lesbian, but as bisexual, heterosexual, genderqueer or whatever. Juridically speaking, such motivations and self-identifications are irrelevant.

But the second overall assumption or implication of contributions to the discourse was that MaRCOs could only be found among *Christian* marriage registrars (e.g. Fogteloo 2011; van der Veer 2011; Hobbel 2012; Kas 2013). One could object that the few MaRCOs that actually defended themselves in public were indeed all (Protestant) Christians. However, this could be partly the very *effect* of the focus on *Christian* marriage registrars. Moreover, although in 2000 the State Secretary of Justice had also spoken of the possibility of non-religiously motivated objections (*Wet openstelling huwelijk: memorie van antwoord* 2000) and although the 2007 Coalition Agreement had not explicitly spoken of *religiously* motivated objections (AZ 2007, 37), it seems that the only reason many opponents of the MaRCO could *imagine* for MaRCOs to have such conscientious objections is these registrars' religion. Apparently, for the opponents of the MaRCO, non-religious marriage registrars would *by definition* never have any such objections.[80] Let me discuss another example here in some more detail. In a current affairs television programme, an MP for the socialist party (SP) addressed the director of the conservative pietistic labour union RMU (which had recently started to look after the interests of MaRCOs) as follows:

> It is highly painful if a marriage registrar, who speaks on behalf of the city office, says, "This couple's wedding I want to conduct but not that couple's." But these people want to celebrate and then the city office informs them that this person does not want to do this. Imagine that the city office would say, "We do not want to conduct the weddings of Christians", how would you feel about that? (*De Vijfde Dag* 2011)

The example he provides as a counterargument and his use of a rhetorical question creates 'Christians' as the other, especially as it is hard to imagine what kind of conscientious objections – and, consequently, what kind of worldview – a marriage registrar could have against conducting the wedding of a Christian couple. On the other hand, the fact that a conservative pietistic labour union defended MaRCOs reinforced the idea that MaRCOs could only, or primarily, be found among conservative pietistic Christians. In a similar fashion, in an interview for a newspaper, an MaRCO had implied that all MaRCOs voted for the conservative pietistic political party SGP (Bosman 2011). So, the idea that all MaRCOs were Christian – or, more precisely, pietistic Calvinists – was widespread among both opponents and defenders of the MaRCO.

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[80] Interestingly, marriage registrars with a religious affiliation other than Christian are absent from – or at least unrecognizable as such in – public discourse (both as participants and as subject of debate).

An opposition between homosexuals as a social group versus Christians as a social group was effectuated or reinforced by several assumptions: the assumption that everyone who marries a person of the same sex is homosexual; the assumption (esp. among opponents of the MaRCO) that all gays and lesbians oppose MaRCOs; the assumption that all MaRCOs are Christians (or conservative Calvinists in particular); and the assumption (esp. among MaRCOs and their defenders) that 'biblically orthodox' Christian marriage registrars by definition would not conduct same-sex weddings. As the promotion of the rights of LGBT persons is often seen as characteristic of a secular mindset and the rejection of homosexual relations or acts as characteristic of 'orthodox' Christianity, one could also say that a discursive opposition between secularism and 'orthodox' Christianity was being constructed. Yet this opposition was blurred in a particular way in a debate that emerged in 2011. Before I will discuss that debate in more detail in Section 5, I will first provide some background information about the role of civil marriage registrars.

4. The Marriage Registrar as a Secular Priest

The only thing the Dutch Civil Code dictates with respect to civil weddings is that the couple should declare before the marriage registrar that they take each other as spouses, after which the registrar draws up an act.[81] However, for almost a century at least, civil marriage registrars have been doing more than the law requires them to do. Let me give an example from a 1939 collection of speeches delivered by a marriage registrar at civil weddings. In the preface, he explains that if a marriage registrar

> wants to elevate civil weddings from a rigidly formal mood and wants to comply necessary lightness and crucial enthusiasm in the way he addresses the bridal couple, he constantly needs to elaborate on his views on the same theme in different ways. (Pfeiffer 1951, 13)

So in one of the speeches we find him reflecting on the true nature of nuptial love, proclaiming that marriage "requires the broader and more encompassing love, which does not ask but gives" (1951, 54). It could as well have been a line from a sermon – and, more specifically, a Protestant sermon resembling Anders Nygren's antithesis between *eros* and *agape* (Nygren 1953).

Back then, all marriage registrars were municipal employees. But during the second half of the twentieth century, secularisation viz. the decline of church attendance and membership led to stronger expectations towards civil weddings viz. marriage registrars. As this required more time from marriage registrars, in 1993 the government decided to allow municipalities to appoint unemployed "extraordinary marriage registrars (*buitengewone ambtenaren van de burgerlijke stand*)" as of January 1, 1995 (e.g. Gemeente Middelharnis 2008; Dorp and Oosthoek 2010, 10).[82] In many municipalities, couples can choose the

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[81] Art. 1:67 Burgerlijk Wetboek.
[82] I use these sources (a document from the municipality of Middelharnis resp. a book on marriage registrars) because parliamentary documents before January 1, 1995 are not available on the Government's website overheid.nl.

marriage registrar they like. As in principle any Dutch citizen can be sworn into the office of extraordinary marriage registrar – even just for one day – couples can also ask a friend or relative to do the job. For many extraordinary marriage registrars, the main motivation to become marriage registrar is to contribute in making this the most beautiful day of the couple's life (e.g. Cordia 2010; Bosman 2011; Kamerman 2011). Usually, the registrar visits the couple for an intake conversation to get to know the couple and to discuss how they would like the wedding to be orchestrated. At the wedding ceremony, registrars give a personal speech in which, for example, they retell to the wedding guests how the couple had first met (like the registrar in the *Koefnoen* sketch discussed in the previous section does) or they preach about the value of love (see the registrar quoted at the beginning of the current section). The couple's favourite music can be played, rings can be exchanged, and finally, after the perfectly-dressed couple's Yeses, the registrar declares that the couple is now married and can kiss one another. Often the legal formalities do not precede, but are surrounded – and, in the most extreme case, overshadowed – by such personal and quasi-ritual elements. Many Dutch citizens – both opponents and defenders of the MaRCO, and both religious and non-religious persons – value this tradition. When I confine myself to examples from public discourse about the MaRCO, I find a conservative liberal Mayor (in *De Vijfde Dag* 2011), several MaRCOs (Cordia 2008, 2010; *Leeuwarder Courant* 2011; Bosman 2011; van Outeren 2011), a spokesperson of the Christian Union (quoted in Kamerman 2011), an MP for the conservative reformed party SGP (van der Staaij 2009), an MP for the green lefts (quoted in *Reformatorisch Dagblad* 2011a) and two conservative Christian opinion makers (van den Berg and van Mulligen 2011) all emphasizing the value – or even the right – of couples to choose a marriage registrar they feel a connection with, whether in terms of their religion, their sexual orientation and/or any other aspect of their lives.

So, the civil wedding ceremony is not only a matter of rights, but also of rites. Moreover, in civil wedding ceremonies and in the way people talk about them, we can hear some secular echoes of Christian wedding liturgies. As such, this should not come as a surprise, for the Christian roots of Western marriage laws have been well documented, especially by John Witte in his book *From Sacrament to Contract* (Witte Jr. 1997). But when we look beyond the law, we find a few interesting things. Witte has argued that the Modern "doctrine of individualism [has] rendered anachronistic the traditional notion that marriage was somehow a spiritual estate or a social calling that demanded the involvement of priests, parents, and peers in its formation and maintenance" (1997, 197). However, as we have seen above, the marriage registrar in the Netherlands seems to have taken over the role of the priest (or minister) in the formation of marriage (and even parents or peers can take up this role). Not only do they often give a speech that sounds like a sermon, but also in the way they perform – or are said to perform – the legal formality of taking the bridal couple's vows we see the Christian origin of the ritual. Let me give a personal example. On February 9, 2017, my brother got married to his girlfriend in the

historic city hall of Delft. After the ceremony, in which she had read two poems about love and happiness, the marriage registrar gave them a stencilled print of her speech as a kind of souvenir. On the cover page it read that, on that day, she had *voltrokken* ("contracted") their marriage. But the Civil Code states that "[t]he marriage shall be contracted in public in the town hall *before* the Registrar of Civil Status"[83], leaving the subject of the act unmentioned. In debates about the MaRCO as well as in other contexts I have come across many others (including marriage registrars) implying that the registrar is the one who performs the act that constitutes a marriage. Ironically, this is also at odds with the Medieval Catholic view that considered not the priest but the spouses themselves the "ministers of the sacrament" (cf. Witte Jr. 1997, 26). So, many registrars claim – or are attributed to – a more significant role than the Civil Code does – maybe because this is what they believe a priest or minister does in a wedding service. Moreover, whereas a priest or minister acts on behalf of his or her church, it is not particularly clear on behalf of what or whom marriage registrars act. As they are formally holding office (*ambt*), many of them wear a black gown, just like judges and professors – and, more importantly, like certain Protestant ministers. But how does the registrar relate to the state and its citizens, and what does s/he represent?

It is exactly because of this tradition that the world-view and personality of a marriage registrar really do matter to many of those who want to get married. This intensified the arguments of both defenders and opponents of the MaRCO. MaRCOs and some of their defenders feared that, when MaRCOs would be either banned or forced to conduct same-sex weddings, Christian couples would be unable to find a marriage registrar of their religious affinity. As one MaRCO put it, "soon it will have become impossible for an SGP-couple to have their marriage conducted by someone of their own kind. That's discrimination." (Bosman 2011; cf. Cordia 2010; *NRC* 2011) This MaRCO is implying two things here: first, that the possibility of a religiously fashioned civil wedding is a right – a right that SGP-voting Calvinists in particular are making use of; and second, that a marriage registrar who *does not* have conscientious objections against conducting same-sex weddings would by definition be unfit to officiate at the wedding of a pietistic Reformed couple. Among opponents of the MaRCO, the awareness that a marriage registrar might have conscientious objections against conducting same-sex weddings, created the fear that same-sex couples would run the risk of being rejected in their face by a (Christian) MaRCO. As one columnist put it, the MaRCO is someone who "refuses out of hand" to conduct your marriage, who "turns his back on you (...). You cannot hurt someone any deeper." (N.N. 2012)[84] Therefore, many opponents demanded *neutrality* – that is, that Christian registrars keep their 'religion' private. At the same time, the ceremonial practice at civil weddings that seems to be generally valued (also among opponents of the MaRCO), demands de facto a *plurality* among registrars in

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[83] Art. 1:63 Burgerlijk Wetboek (emphasis added).
[84] The author of this column is not given in database LexisNexis.

terms of views and styles. Moreover, the emphasis on the registrars' performances beyond the juridical formalities seems at odds with the 'simply executing the law' rhetoric of many opponents of the MaRCO.

This practice never created any serious problems – after all, there is a freedom of choice from a plurality of marriage registrars – until it became apparent that some registrars (might) have 'homophobic' (religious) views. As I have argued in the previous section, it seems that not the religiosity of some registrars was the problem, but the perceived homophobia of MaRCOs. Moreover, it is remarkable that the conscientious objections of Christian marriage registrars were apparently only directed at conducting same-sex weddings – hardly any MaRCO or its defenders articulated objections against conducting, for example, weddings of divorced persons, even though many Christians who are against same-sex marriage are also against divorce (Derks 2011; cf. Derks, Vos and Tromp 2014). These two observations seem to point to a commonly shared implicit conviction that the only possible mismatch between a marriage registrar and a couple is that between a MaRCO (who is perceived as *Christian*) and a same-sex couple (both of whom are perceived as *gay*).

5. Affirmation or Rejection on the Most Beautiful Day of 'Our' Lives

In the second half of 2011, after the issue of the MaRCO had been figuring in public discourse for four years, several Christian theologians and other scholars wrote op-ed pieces in national newspapers and magazines, in which they argued – in different ways – that the above-mentioned ceremonial role of marriage registrars was at least part of the 'problem' of the MaRCO (e.g. Snel 2011; Derks 2011; Mikkers 2011; Ganzevoort 2011; ten Berge 2011). But it was expected that soon a majority of Parliament would support a proposal to, as it was often phrased, put the phenomenon of the *weigerambtenaar* to an end. In an interview for a Christian newspaper, Arie Slob, MP for the Christian Union (which had argued for the protection of the MaRCO for over a decade), now suggested to solve the problem by making civil weddings a short and simple de-ritualised formality (Beverdam 2011).[85]

The conservative pietistic daily *Reformatorisch Dagblad* (2011a) quoted several MPs, who were all critical of Slob's proposal.[86] Ineke van Gent (green lefts), who had called the proposal worthy of consideration two days earlier (NOS 2011b), now responded, "If you say, 'In principle marriage is an administrative act at the city hall', you erode people's freedom of choice."

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[85] Interestingly, two days later in another newspaper, a spokesperson of the Christian Union provided an explanation that actually ran contrary to Slob's proposal: "Imagine a couple from Urk [a town in the Bible Belt; cf. Section 3] that prefers the marriage registrar they know from their parish. If that registrar has deep conscientious objections against conducting the marriage of a gay couple, then he will just stop doing his work. Then those other couples loose the possibility of getting married before that registrar." (*NRC* 2011) The spokesperson implies that Slob wanted to protect both the MaRCO and the tradition of 'ceremonial' civil weddings, whereas Slob had now proposed to 'de-ritualise' civil weddings.
[86] Cf. the explanation on experiential Calvinism in Section 3.

Alexander Pechtold (liberal democrats) questioned Slob's motivation: "Of course the soberer version remains an option, but it should not become the standard." Instead of explaining *why* it should not, he proceeds, "Certainly not if it is framed by the desire to protect the position of the *weigerambtenaar*. This is really a proposal of the type: 'If we do not get a party, then you do not get a party either.'" I would like to leave open for dispute whether this does justice to Slob's motivation, but look at how two young politicians active for SGP and Christian Union respectively had made a suggestion similar to Slob's in an op-ed piece a few months earlier: if the "valuable tradition" of having the freedom to choose your preferred marriage registrar will be put to an end, they argued, "it might be the most fair to reduce civil weddings to a bureaucratic act right away." (van den Berg and van Mulligen 2011) Madeleine van Toorenburg (Christian democrats) was primarily worried about the consequences: if a civil wedding without a ceremony would become the standard, she commented to *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, "couples will later have to motivate why they want both a legal and a ceremonial wedding at the city hall. The next step will be city councils setting extra fees." Apparently, she considered a ceremonial wedding the state's responsibility. But she also explained that, "according to CDA, marriage by its very nature is more than just an administrative act, regardless of where it takes place." In a similar fashion, Kees van der Staaij (SGP) warned that marriage should not be stripped of its symbolic meaning (*Reformatorisch Dagblad* 2011a).[87] That the latter two MPs (resp. Catholic and pietistic Reformed) made explicit remarks about the character of the institution of marriage should not come as a surprise, because both Catholic subsidiary theologies and Protestant covenantal theologies have articulated reasons for why the state should be invested in marriage (Browning 2003, 26).

Slob's proposal was also received critically outside the political arena, as we see in a background article in one of the country's more sophisticated national newspapers *NRC*. The reporter clearly has no sympathy for Slob's proposal when she writes about it in terms of "getting his way". Ironically, she primarily gives the floor to several young, *opposite-sex* couples, all of whom criticise Slob's proposal. About a thirty-something opposite-sex couple the reporter notes, "Because she and her boyfriend are not religious, the very ceremony surrounding civil marriage is important." The reporter does not question this logic, which almost suggests that the state should compensate for what non-religious couples miss out on. Another person remarks that "we should cherish traditions like marriage, including civil marriage", which – one would not expect otherwise – is also the view of the owner of a wedding fashion boutique: "That day is all about the show, the romance, the emotion. It is the day you will remember for the rest of your life. For one day you are the centre of attention. That's what we all want." Marriage registrar Josine den Burger too believes 'we all' are of the marrying kind: "What do little girls dream of? They dream of wearing that beautiful dress while walking in with their father holding their arm. They really do not dream of putting a signature at a counter." Therefore,

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[87] He spoke of a *verzakelijking* ('formalisation', 'reification') of marriage.

she gets "*extremely* het" about Slob's proposal. According to the reporter, den Burger

> sees herself not only as a marriage registrar, but also a little bit as an entertainer. Being a professional singer herself, she knows how to play to an audience. "That's also what people want at such a moment." (...) Without a ceremony civil weddings would become stark and unpleasant, thinks Josine den Burger. "Of course, you can do something extra yourself. But the civil wedding is the essence. That is compulsory." (Kamerman 2011)

Again, the reporter fails to ask what den Burger considers "compulsory": a civil wedding as such or a civil wedding with a ceremony? Although all these interviewees do not say much about what they believe marriage to be about – the focus is more on weddings than on marriage – it turns out that the general view on marriage has not become merely contractual. Marriage seems to have become a simulated symbol, a symbol without a (transcendental) reference that participates in the uncritical repetition of traditional Christian wedding ceremonies. As the article pays no attention to same-sex couples, one could even get the impression that the MaRCO caused a threat to anyone who wants to get married – that is, if we are all of the marrying kind, as den Burger suggests, a threat to everyone.

6. Conclusion

Although there had been public discussions about MaRCOs since the opening up of marriage for same-sex couples in 2001, a heated debate erupted in early 2007. This had to do with party politics with key roles for political parties of previous secular coalitions on the one hand and Christian parties on the other. The introduction and repetitive use of the neologism *weigerambtenaar* enabled or catalysed the construction of the MaRCO as a fictional character, whose homophobia either resulted from or was concealed by his Christian 'religion'. This character was perceived as causing a serious threat to gay and lesbian couples and their weddings. After same-sex couples had received access to the institution of civil marriage in 2001, MaRCOs now were in danger of being excluded from conducting civil weddings – a fear that became reality in 2014. As all same-sex bridal couples were perceived as gay or lesbian and as all MaRCOs were perceived as Christian (whether or not of a particular Calvinist type), an identity politics struggle emerged over who was the threatened minority: 'orthodox' Christians or gays and lesbians? A discursive opposition between these two groups was also created or reinforced by, on the one hand, the implication that 'true' Christians are against same-sex marriage viz. in favour of MaRCOs, and on the other hand, the implication that 'true' gays and lesbians are simply in favour of same-sex marriage viz. against MaRCOs.

Whereas many opponents of the MaRCO emphasised that marriage registrars should 'simply execute the law', I have shown that for a long time, marriage registrars have been expected to do more than what the Dutch Civil Code instructs. The decline in numbers of people attending or being a member

of a church seems to have been mirrored by an increase in numbers of extraordinary marriage registrars. Marriage registrars often act – or are expected to act – as secular priests, who preach about love and pretend to be the one who contracts the sacred bond of marriage. This brings us back to an old dispute over who defines marriage – an issue that remained implicit for the most part. In debates about the MaRCO, homosexuality was primarily defined in terms of an identity – and, therefore, same-sex marriage was considered synonymous with 'gay marriage' – that is, a marriage between two *gay* or *lesbian* persons – whereas marriage was primarily spoken of in terms of an individual right – that is, not as a relationship or an institution. But in response to a proposal to de-ritualise civil weddings, both opponents and defenders of the MaRCO and both religious and non-religious persons turned out to highly value the state's facilitation of *ceremonial* civil weddings. This blurred the discursive opposition of Christians (often associated with MaRCOs) vs. secularists (often associated with LGBT persons). Moreover, it indicated that marriage is still (also) seen as a symbolic institution. But what does marriage symbolise – and, consequently, why is a *ceremonial* civil wedding considered so important? Important for many religious and non-religious couples. Important for opposite-sex and for same-sex couples – or should we say *gay* couples?

One can only guess. But let us end with a tentative suggestion. In 2013, under the headline "Steam-roller Gay Marriage", *Reformatorisch Dagblad* reported on the rapid legalisation of same-sex marriage in, until then, nineteen countries. They had asked an expert to comment on this: Bas de Gaay Fortman, Professor Emeritus of Political Economics and Human Rights at Utrecht University and a former MP and Senator of a radical political party in the 1970s and 1980s. In his comments, de Gaay Fortman also makes a more personal remark by explaining that, back then, he and likeminded politicians considered marriage a unique institution for opposite-sex couples and that they did not consider this view at odds with the principle of equal rights. But over the years he had changed his mind. The interviewer paraphrases, "Decisive for him was the 'growing awareness' of what people with this nature (*geaardheid*) have suffered in the past and that they need marriage as a 'recognition'." (van Vlastuin 2013) Marriage registrar Josine den Burger, quoted in the previous section, seems to say something similar. In this view, marriage is not a particular type of *relationship between* two persons, but, when it is a same-sex marriage viz. a marriage between two *homosexual* persons of the same sex, a compensation for their suffering and a recognition and affirmation of their sexual identity. Maybe marriage has become the ultimate means to give homosexual persons the feeling that they can truly 'be who they are'.

ARTICLE 3

Publication Details

Abstract

For four decades, the Dutch Evangelical health care organisation Different has repeatedly sparked public outrage because of its negative views on homosexuality and in particular its alleged use of reparative therapy. Through a critical discourse analysis of public communications by and on the organisation, this article discusses how Different conceptualises and evaluates homosexuality, and presents itself as a Christian organisation in a predominantly secular society. The article shows how Different uses pseudoscientific theories to explain the development of homosexual desires, biblical arguments to condemn homosexuality and queer insights on the malleability of sexuality to claim space for their view that a certain 'change' of homosexual feelings is possible. Moreover, it suggests that Different advertises its controversial views to trigger such critical responses from secular groups or persons that it can then take as 'proof' that Christians – rather than LGBT persons – are the true discriminated minority.

Acknowledgements

Reparative Therapy and Christian Identity Politics in the Netherlands

A Critical Analysis of a Controversial Organisation

1. Introduction

In early 2012, great public outrage arose in Dutch media about the Evangelical heath care organisation Different, which was accused of offering therapy to cure (Christian) gays and lesbians. Although reparative therapy, which uses various psychotherapeutic methods to change sexual orientation from homoerotic into heteroerotic (Beckstead 2002, 88), is not as prevalent in the Netherlands as it is in, for example, the United States, such allegations against Different, which had been providing pastoral care or therapy for "persons with homosexual feelings" for four decades, were not new. But this time, criticisms were even stronger after national daily *Trouw* had revealed that Different had recently become an official health care organisation, which enabled clients to have the costs of their therapy reimbursed by their health care insurance company viz. with public money. After five months of criticism from LGBT organisations, politicians, journalists and others, the Minister of Health withdrew Different's recognition as a professional health care organisation.

The views of and public responses to Different have been discussed by a few scholars, but only briefly and mainly in Dutch publications for a broader audience without detailed source analysis (Koolhaas and Maris 1992, 85–102; Bos 2010a, 15–16, 2010b, 23–27, 2010c; Ganzevoort, Olsman and van der Laan 2010, 50–52; Ganzevoort 2012). In this article I not only provide a more detailed and substantial analysis of how Different has advertised its services and views, but also do I pay attention to more recent sources, in particular from the aforementioned controversy in 2012. Inspired by similar studies on public discourses about reparative therapy in the United States (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004, 75–101; Stewart 2005; Jordan 2011a, 150–67), I will focus more explicitly on Different's framing strategies and the power dynamics involved.

Through a critical discourse analysis (cf. e.g. Hjelm 2011) of selected examples from public discourse, I will discuss how Different, as a 'biblically orthodox' Christian health care organisation with a predominantly negative evaluation of homosexuality, presented itself towards different types of audiences.[88] More specifically, I look at its conceptualisation and evaluation of

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[88] Although I had already collected some material in early 2012 viz. before I had started my doctoral research, I have collected most sources systematically in 2014-2017 from LexisNexis (database of newspapers and magazines), Beeld en Geluid (archive of radio and television

homosexuality in relation to the Christian tradition, science and secular views in Dutch society, and at how it presents itself as a Christian organisation and evaluates its discursive position – and that of 'biblically orthodox' Christians in general – in a predominantly secular society.

I will first introduce the organisation and discuss its conceptualisation and evaluation of homosexuality, using sources in which its primary audience consists of (conservative) Christians, with Dutch secular culture functioning as a discursive other (Section 2). Then I will discuss the public controversy in early 2012, not from a medical, state-political or juridical perspective, but focusing primarily on Different's self-positioning in a predominantly secular context and towards different audiences (Section 3). The reason I pay special attention to the 2012 controversy is that, as I will explain below, Different now had to defend itself against the Health Care Inspectorate and, consequently – and more than ever – against the (predominantly secular) 'general public'.

2. Different: A "Controversial Branch"

2.1 "Social Service and a Prophetic Voice"
The health care organisation Different resides under umbrella organisation *Tot Heil des Volks* ('For the Salvation of the People'; henceforth: THDV). Founded in 1855, THDV was embedded in the *Réveil*, a European pietistic and anti-Enlightenment revival movement that took a more social move in the second half of the nineteenth century (cf. Harinck 2005). It presents itself as "a Christian umbrella organisation with a mission that we summarise as: evangelisation, social service and a prophetic voice – that is, reading the times from the perspective of the Word of God."[89] It has social welfare projects for homeless people, (drug and sex) addicts, sex workers and "persons with homosexual feelings", whereas it used to lift up its "prophetic voice" in particular on its opinion website *Habakuk* (until 2015).[90]

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programmes) and websites of relevant organisations. On several occasions, THDV (the umbrella organisation under which Different resides) has or might have changed some information on its website, for example after the Inspectorate had summoned Different to make certain changes (January 2012), after Different had lost its qualification as an official health care organisation (June 2012) or after Gert Hutten had become THDV's new director (January 2015) (cf. note 90); therefore, I cannot always verify when a particular text was published on, altered or removed from their website. In December 2018 viz. almost a year after I had finished collecting my material and writing this article, I discovered that the entire THDV website had changed significantly: THDV's mission statement discussed in Section 2.1 as well as the stories of clients and the background articles discussed in Section 2.3 have all been removed. In order not to distract the reader from my argument, I have decided to continue to use a present tense when citing these sources.

[89] http://www.totheildesvolks.nl (last accessed August 7, 2017). It is likely that they used this formulation in 2012, as they used it on May 2, 2014 (when I first copied their mission statement from their website) – apart from a minor stylistic alteration – and on August 7, 2017 (when I checked it again). See, however, my remark in note 88. All translations of quoted material are mine.

[90] Habakkuk is the smallest prophet of the Minor Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. The use of this name might indicate that they self-identify as a minority with a small – yet prophetic – voice. In Autumn 2015, months after Hutten had become THDV's new director (cf. note 88), the website was taken down and several old-stagers left THDV because they found that Hutten did not adequately articulate a "prophetic voice" (Bol 2015).

In 1975, THDV started *Evangelische Hulp aan Homofielen* ('Evangelical Help for Homophiles'; henceforth: EHAH), which would change its name into "Different" in 2004.[91] The foundation of EHAH was primarily a response to certain developments in the Netherlands. In the early 1960s, mainline Protestants and Catholics had started to articulate more positive evaluations of homosexuality, while conservative Protestants would start addressing the issue in the early 1970s (Bos 2010b, 15–19, 22–24; Oosterhuis 1992, 135–78). New insights from psychiatry played a key role in re-evaluations of homosexuality. As Koolhaas and Maris (1992, 86) comment, "[i]t is striking that in a time in which church condemnation of homosexuality is waning, the psychiatrist is taking over the role of the minister or vicar." On the one hand, progressive views were articulated and embraced by mainstream psychiatrists. In the second edition of his *Homosexualiteit en homoërotiek*, Protestant psychiatrist F.J. Tolsma (1963) had changed his views articulated in the first edition from 1948: he no longer considered homosexuality the result of being seduced into it but as an almost unchangeable "psychological predisposition" (Oosterhuis 1992, 169). In 1969, Wijnand Sengers, "the first [Dutch] psychiatrist to introduce social factors as causes for intra-psychic conflicts" among homosexual persons (van Naerssen 1987, 150), had published his doctoral dissertation on "homosexuality as a complaint" (Sengers 1969), which convinced Dutch psychiatrists to stop seeing homosexuality as a disease (Hekma 2006, 135–36). In 1973, the influential American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality per se from its nomenclature, although the majority of American psychoanalysts would continue to consider homosexuality a disorder (Stewart 2005, 152; Drescher 1998, 39n2). On the other hand, in 1967, Dutch Roman Catholic psychoanalyst Gerard van den Aardweg characterised homosexuality as a kind of "neurosis and compulsive self-pity" (van den Aardweg 1967) and his views would gain some influence internationally among certain conservative Roman Catholics and evangelicals, including EHAH staff. In 1969, a Dutch book telling the story of "a cured homosexual" was published ([van der Sluis] and Bos 1969). The author, Johan van der Sluis, whose name was only mentioned in the fourth edition of 1974 (Bos 2010b, 24), would found EHAH in 1975 and remain active at THDV for decades. EHAH would soon connect with the American ex-gay network organisation Exodus International (founded in 1976) and co-found sister-organisation Exodus Europe (Dubois and de Jong 2005, 247–48).

While Different's counselling seems to fall under the "social service" element in THDV's mission statement, THDV has also frequently raised its "prophetic voice" against homosexuality. As we will see, THDV has done this under the flag of Different (in lectures and teaching material, but possibly in therapy sessions as well), but also through op-ed pieces in Christian media outlets, especially THDV's own opinion website *Habakuk* and magazine *De*

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[91] In their own words, they changed the name mainly for pragmatic reasons (Dubois and de Jong 2005, 250).

Oogst.[92] A key role was played by Henk van Rhee (1952-2015), THDV's director between 2007 and 2014, who represented Different towards the press. Having previously worked as editor at evangelical broadcasting company EO, as PR director of the Ministry of Justice and as office director and election campaign leader of political party Christian Union (cf. de Boer 2015), he was a man of public standing among conservative Protestants and he knew the ropes of public profiling.

2.2 "How We Think"

Already in 1980, THDV's director had called EHAH "the most controversial branch of THDV" (Dubois and de Jong 2005, 190) and EHAH founder Johan van der Sluis is reported to have used the same expression a decade later (Koolhaas and Maris 1992, 87). It needs no explanation that this is due to their conviction that "being cured from homophilia is possible", as they claimed in a brochure in 1990 (quoted in Koolhaas and Maris 1992, 88). In a brief historical discussion of EHAH/Different, church historian and sociologist David Bos (2010b, 27) asserts that, "[w]hereas EHAH used to speak frankly of 'healing' and later of 'liberation', currently Different (...) speak[s] merely of 'change and wholeness in Jesus Christ', which could lead to a 'decreasing or paling' of homosexual feelings." As my focus is on more recent sources, let me take the following quote from van Rhee (taken from an 'interview' in 2010 on a Christian website) as a starting point:

> When we are asked how we think about homosexual relations, we explain that we think God disapproves of such relations. (...) Some clients get married to a woman after their treatment. Others choose a celibate life or suppress their feelings. We don't promise people with homosexual feelings that they will get rid of these feelings through their treatment. We teach them how to cope with those feelings. (van Rhee as quoted in Bokelman 2010)

This quote is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it remains implicit *who* asks how they think about homosexual relations: the Christian communities in which they lecture? The clients they counsel? Second, who are the "we" that are asked how they think? Many THDV representatives indeed let hardly any opportunity pass to express their disapproval of homosexuality. But van Rhee is one of the major prophets condemning homosexuality: at least 52 of the 462 columns (11%) he has published on THDV website *Habakuk* over the course of eight years (2008-2014) are (partly) about homosexuality, which he always evaluates negatively.[93] Even in an interview for a Christian newspaper one day after the publication of the aforementioned *Trouw* article in 2012, he would repeat that if clients are open to a homosexual relationship, they are free to do

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[92] THDV also intended to articulate its "prophetic voice" on sexuality through the Jan de Liefde Institute, "a Christian information centre on sexuality", launched in January 2012. They wanted "to expose the social problem of the sexualisation of our society and the poverty that comes with it, and to point people's attention to the liberating message of God's grace" (Duifhuizen 2012). Because of the public controversy around Different in early 2012, THDV decided to (temporarily) cancel this plan shortly after its launch (THDV 2012, 6).

[93] Another 27 columns (6%) address issues of marriage, sexuality and gender (without making mention of homosexuality).

so, but "we don't agree with that choice" (Bakker 2012). Third, although from a semantic perspective the second and third sentence merely describe the decisions clients make, the context suggests that this is what Different *hopes* clients will choose: "after their treatment" suggests that Different's therapy can enable clients – male clients, that is – to "get married to a woman", but the option of clients entering a homosexual relation is notoriously – although not surprisingly – missing. Moreover, by first mentioning the option of a heterosexual marriage and then celibate life, van Rhee seems to prioritise the first, which requires at least some sexual reorientation.

2.3 Testimonies

On its website, Different advertises "psycho-pastoral counselling for Christians who are struggling with homosexual feelings. We also support family and friends, and give lectures and courses."[94] The website's intended audience is (evangelical or 'biblically orthodox') Christians. It provides stories of five former clients (Chris, Carlos, David, Anja and Marijke). These have been written either in first-person style or in third-person style with quotes. In the end, however, Different is the author: all stories function like testimonies about the positive impact of Different's therapy and, therefore, I will read them "as rhetorical performance rather than personal data" (Jordan 2011a, 151; cf. Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004, 81–82). In addition, the website also contains nine articles written by Reitze Siebesma, a "teacher" at Different, who gives lectures and workshops on homosexuality and the Christian faith, after years of struggling with homosexual feelings (Siebesma 2015d) and taking therapy at Different himself (Streefkerk 2012).[95] What does Different, through these stories and articles, communicate about the origins and reality of homosexuality, the possibilities for a certain 'change' and the role Different can play with respect to this 'change'?

The general image the reader gets from these stories is that homosexual feelings are a result or symptom of the inability to positively identify with people (esp. parents and friends) of the same sex. Marijke seems to believe she was not "born this way" but had "become this way". The other four stories are more explicit about the development of same-sex desires. Anja had "developed (...) lesbian feelings" in her childhood and disqualifies them as "lopsided growth (*scheefgroei*)", a term also used by the aforementioned psychoanalyst van den Aardweg (1987; cf. Ganzevoort, Olsman and van der Laan 2010, 102) and van der Sluis (*Dit is de dag* 2012). In a similar way, Chris considers his homosexual desires part of the "brokenness" of creation: they are actually a "desire for masculinity" and they "don't make you happy but rather increase the despair." Both David and Carlos locate the origins of their homosexual desires in experiences of being bullied or abused by male peers or adults. These

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[94] https://www.totheildesvolks.nl/different/home (accessed August 18, 2017). In early 2012, the text was slightly different, as I will explain in Section 3.
[95] Cf. note 88. It is not clear when these stories and articles have originally been published, but likely at least before 2012. In December 2018, these stories and articles were all dated on September 30, 2015 and October 1, 2015 respectively, but these dates have probably been automatically generated when Different reorganised its website in Autumn 2015.

explanations are echoes of Psychodynamic Therapy, which considers homosexuality a result of "faulty family dynamics" (Schroeder and Shidlo 2002, 150), and in particular the views of American Christian counsellor, Leanne Payne, whose books *The Healing of the Homosexual* and *Crisis in Masculinity* have been translated into Dutch (Payne 1990, 2009) and whose books and views have been supported and advertised by THDV (Ganzevoort, Olsman and van der Laan 2010, 35–41; COC 2012e; cf. Howard 2005, 190).

By including two stories of women, Different does not seem to have the strong focus on male homosexuality that is typical for sexual reorientation theories (cf. Beckstead 2002, 88). On the other hand, there are some instances – like the quote from van Rhee above – that do suggest a focus on male homosexuality. Occasional discussions of lesbian sexuality by van Rhee (2012i) and Siebesma (2015b) seem reactionary. As I will show below, the 'evil' of *male* homosexuality is depicted more vividly in these stories.

In one of his articles, Siebesma explains that homosexual feelings are often "deeply rooted", that there are no "techniques to get rid of these feelings" and that one needs to "acknowledge" one's homosexual feelings instead of "denying, ignoring or suppressing" them; at the same time one needs to learn not to "give in to wrong tendencies" (Siebesma 2015a, 2015c). The former clients report that in the course of the therapy their same-sex desires have "decreased". After all, homosexual desires – however "deeply rooted" they are – are not considered a central part of one's identity. That is why Different does not speak of, for example, "Christian gays and lesbians", but of "Christians who are struggling with homosexual feelings" – a common term in the ex-gay movement (cf. Gerber 2008, 22, 27).

Siebesma explains that these desires can become an occasion for spiritual growth (Siebesma 2015c, cf. 2015e). Chris tells that in the therapy sessions, he had learned "not to follow blindly" after his desires, but to bring them to God and to focus on deeper feelings of "friendship and intimacy." "The most important thing I have learned at Different," Marijke testifies, "is praying together. God's presence heals. No therapy (...) can match up to that." That final comment seems to echo Different's former – or maybe not (fully) abandoned – *pastoral* approach rather than the professional *therapeutic* regime Different had said to have implemented in 2011 (see Section 3). While the reference to God's healing presence might trigger the critical reader, the idea that Different 'cures' people of their homosexuality is explicitly warded off by Chris as well as by Marijke, who first hesitated when a friend suggested her to go to Different, because, as the narrator explains, she had recently converted to Christianity and "had not completely got rid of the image of 'dirty Christians who want to cure gays'." However, Different has never clearly and explicitly distanced itself from its earlier views on the origins and 'curability' of homosexuality.

Whether referring to desires, acts or lifestyles, homosexuality is always depicted negatively. Clients are encouraged to stay away from queer-positive theologies, which are stereotypically presented and rejected through a remark

by Marijke: "My girlfriend started to read books about gay theology. These theologians say that, above all, God does not want us to be lonely – how we solve that problem of loneliness doesn't matter. I fully disagreed." This perfectly fits the view of THDV, which, in 2002, had published *Een antwoord op de homotheologie* ("a response to gay theology"), a translation of a book by Joe Dallas (2002), an American ex-gay and pastoral counsellor – but *not* a theologian himself. Marijke's girlfriend functions already as the main barrier towards healing, but her seductiveness is even stronger because of the "gay theology" she seems to embrace. Marijke, however, is not led into temptation: she "fully disagreed." She relates how God commanded her to "sacrifice" her girlfriend by leaving her, just like God had commanded Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son. The textual ambiguity of Genesis 22 (in which God eventually prevents Abraham from killing his son) is sacrificed for the sake of moral clarity.

Even more dangerous is the male 'gay scene'. When Chris was once "openly confronted with homosexuality" in Amsterdam, he felt "empty" and "afraid" of "an extravagant life", a phrase that can even signify merely having a gay relationship. Carlos discursively connects homosexuality with addiction: he tells he was brought into contact with Different by a man who "had a history in the gay scene and had been a drug addict for years", but who, "with God's help, (...) had broken loose from his addiction and previous lifestyle." Similar stereotypes of the 'gay scene' can be found in utterances by van Rhee (quoted by Streefkerk 2012) and former THDV organisation *Onderweg* (quoted by Ganzevoort, Olsman and van der Laan 2010, 50–51), and are also reported in a study on Mormon clients of reparative therapy in the United States (Beckstead 2002, 94–95).

3. Different Coming Out: The 2012 Controversy

3.1 "Sober End to Media Hype"

We have seen how Different evaluates homosexuality and advertises its services towards a (conservative) Christian audience. Now I will turn to a (mainly chronological) discussion of a public controversy in early 2012, in which Different had to defend itself against the government, politicians, LGBT organisations and others. Before I proceed, it is important to explain that, in 2011, Different had changed into an official health care organisation and had become a member of the Dutch Association of Mental Health and Addiction Care (IGZ 2012a, 2).[96] Its clients could now have their costs (partially) reimbursed by their insurance company, while Different needed to meet the standards installed by the Health Care Inspectorate (e.g., working with psychiatric diagnoses). Different, which now offered "psycho-social counselling" instead of "psycho-pastoral counselling", might have hoped to get societal recognition as a *professional* organisation and to attract more clients. It

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[96] Near the end of that same year, the Minister of Health made significant cuts in the basic package of health care, only allowing the reimbursement of costs for treatments of medical or psychiatric diseases listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (VWS 2011).

did report a rise in number of clients in 2011, but considered this the result of having finally lost its "stigma" (*Nederlands Dagblad* 2011). Yet it would not take long before they felt 'stigmatised' again.

On January 17, 2012, under the headline "Insurance companies and medics against Christian gay therapy", national daily *Trouw* revealed the insurance companies' reimbursement of Different's alleged reparative therapy (van Beek 2012a). In order to discern the challenges Different now faced, it is important to discuss in some detail the responses of the Minister of Health (Edith Schippers), the Inspectorate, several MPs and the media. Within hours after the *Trouw* article's publication, the Minister called it "bizarre" that such therapy existed and promised to make reimbursement no longer possible (*nu.nl* 2012a). An MP for the same party as the Minister (liberal conservatives) used the same expression, while MPs of other non-confessional parties disqualified Different's therapy as "quackery" (green lefts), "objectionable gay therapy" (right-wing nationalists) and "useless and stigmatising anti-gay therapy" (liberal democrats). MPs of two conservative Christian parties (including Christian Union; see Section 2.1), however, immediately defended Different by responding that their colleagues were threatening the freedom of Christian gays and lesbians to choose their health care provider. Another Christian MP tweeted, "The Minister makes herself ridiculous and unreliable by immediately disqualifying Different without waiting for the Inspectorate's investigation." (COC 2012b)

The next day, van Rhee published a column on *Habakuk*, calling *Trouw*'s suggestions "absurd" and accusing "an MP majority and Minister Schippers" of a "smear campaign" (van Rhee 2012a). In a THDV press release, he left out these strong terms, but still criticised the *Trouw* article for giving "an incorrect and incomplete image" of Different's work, and he rejected the suggestion that Different offered "a therapy aimed at 'suppressing one's feelings'" (2012b). Two years earlier, however, he had frankly noted that some of Different's clients "suppress their feelings" (see Section 2.2). The press release proceeded with a technical passage about diagnoses, treatment plans and satisfaction surveys. It ended with the remark that they were looking forward to the Inspectorate's investigation and that they were confident that it would correct the negative social perception of Different.

On January 19, the Inspectorate paid a site visit to Different. Its report – which was finalised on the same day, but only made publicly available on February 1 – concluded, "The Health Care Inspectorate *has not found indications* that Different aims at treating or curing homosexuality." (IGZ 2012a, 5; emphasis added) On February 1, the Minister responded in writing to questions from two MPs by saying that the Inspectorate's investigation "*has in no way shown* that they offer" reparative therapy (VWS 2012b, 2; emphasis added). Same wording, but stronger. One day earlier, however, responding in writing to questions from two other MPs, she had used the negation differently, stating that the Inspectorate "has shown *that they do not offer*" reparative therapy (VWS 2012a, 2; emphasis added). While a confusing picture emerged from the

Minister's communiqués, the Inspectorate made things worse. When it published the report on its website, it used the same formulation as it had used in its report, but the headline read, "Different does not 'cure' homosexuality", and the lead used a similar wording (IGZ 2012b). Several media – who might or might not have read the full report – took over the easiest and less nuanced reading, using headlines such as "Schippers: no 'Christian gay therapy' at Different" (*De Volkskrant* 2012a), "No 'gay therapy' at Different" (Grotenhuis 2012; *Spits* 2012), "Inspectorate clears Different of curing gays" (*Nederlands Dagblad* 2012a) or even "Inspectorate searches for 'gay therapy' but finds absolutely nothing" (*De Pers* 2012). None of them nuanced this in their main texts. As "much of the work of framing is accomplished in the headline and lead paragraph of the story" (Stewart 2005, 149; cf. Pan and Kosicki 1993, 59–60), we see how easy it had become for Different to ignore the critical passages in the Inspectorate's report concerning the lack of "a sound diagnosis" in several personal health care records, the psychiatrist's professional inadequacy in a number of cases and the need of "fair public information from Different about its health care offer and the (long-term) results" (IGZ 2012a, 4–5).

The premature criticisms of the Minister and several MPs, and the simplified representation of the Inspectorate's report by the Inspectorate itself, the Minister and several media enabled van Rhee to qualify the Inspectorate's report as marking a "sober end to media hype" (van Rhee 2012d) and to accuse "many media, politicians and professional and interest organisations" of stigmatising Different (2012c, cf. 2012a, 2012g). "*Everyone* is *constantly* talking about discrimination against gays," another THDV staff member was quoted saying in a Christian newspaper – using hyperboles that are typical of victim personality disorder – "but," he proceeded, "*in the end* we are also discriminated against." (Vermeulen 2012; emphasis added; cf. van der Sluis in *Dit is de dag* 2012)

3.2 Queerish Orientations
Curiously, in its first report, the Inspectorate had summoned Different to speak of a homosexual "nature (*geaardheid*)" instead of a homosexual "orientation (*oriëntatie*)" (IGZ 2012a, 2). The latter term, however, is common among LGBT activists and, ironically, also among government agencies like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ 2010) and the Ministry responsible for LGBT emancipation (OCW 2011). Different indeed used the term. In a radio interview shortly after the publication of the *Trouw* article, van der Sluis explained that Different had "left behind" the language of "healing" and spoke instead of "a change of orientation. It is an orientation, not a nature (*geaardheid*)." (*Dit is de dag* 2012) Only months later, when Different had lost its professional status and no longer resided under the Inspectorate's authority, van Rhee felt free to express his criticisms. In a column 012, he complained that the website of the Amsterdam Pride used the word "orientation": "Wasn't that the term the politically correct had prohibited to be used as a demarcation of one's sexual preference?" (van Rhee 2012i) He then discussed some media reports on research among lesbian

women, pointing to the fluidity of female sexuality. He sarcastically concluded that he could suddenly make better sense of what the apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:26 about women who "exchange" natural for unnatural intercourse. A year later, he made similar comments on a newspaper article reflecting on a Dutch television programme in which a gay presenter had explored the boundaries of his sexuality by having sex with a female "sex coach". The newspaper article had suggested that the hypothalamic differences between straight and gay persons might be the result rather than the cause of homosexual activity. For van Rhee, this was a reason to hope for "a slightly less rigid attitude," "no longer only space for politically correct research" and "a bit more relaxation in discussions about homosexuality", even though he did not have any illusions of a "return to something like the order of creation" (van Rhee 2013).

Van Rhee's comments are typical of Different's strategy in general: they often do not clearly articulate their own view – except towards a likeminded audience – but instead accuse their opponents of inconsistencies, bias or overemotional reactions. By contrast, they present themselves as "relaxed", "down-to-earth", nuanced and rational. Moreover, Different – and THDV more broadly (cf. note 92) – presents itself as an expert in the area of (homo)sexuality. However, it does so not by developing a coherent view, but by referring to 'science' and by pretending to 'know better' than its opponents. While Different might have continued to use pseudoscientific theories in its therapeutic and educational activities, it has started to use scientific studies and queer theories on the malleability and performativity of sexuality because, as Lynne Gerber (2008, 9; cf. Erzen 2006) has argued regarding the American ex-gay movement, they "need to depict gender and sexual orientation as malleable and subject to training, while at the same time rendering heterosexuality essential and inevitable."

3.3 *"The Broad Gay Movement"*

Right after the publication of the *Trouw* article, both the country's main secular LGBT organisation, COC Netherlands and the umbrella organisation of the Dutch Christian LGBT movement, LKP, called the Minister to end the reimbursement of the costs of "inadequate and harmful 'gay therapies'" (LKP 2012a; COC 2012a). It was more difficult for van Rhee to respond to criticisms from LGBT organisations, as they conveyed more knowledge and expertise than the Minister and several MPs, whose initial responses he had been able to ward off as "premature". For example, when COC provided a detailed analysis of several books from the American ex-gay movement recommended on Different's website (COC 2012e), van Rhee responded, "They point a finger at anyone who differs from the belief (*geloof*) in COC dogmas and they imply that this thought or that publication can only but prove that Different is unable to provide professional mental health care." (van Rhee 2012e) Instead of providing a substantial criticism, he contrasted Different as a *professional* organisation with COC as a *confessional* organisation.

Both COC and several Christian LGBT organisations, who would be speaking side by side and play a key role in the media in the months that followed, explained that they regularly met former clients of Different who had bad experiences (*Trouw* 2012). In the two weeks following the Inspectorate's first report, several former clients shared their experiences in newspapers and on radio and television.[97] One former client told how his therapist had checked whether he agreed with the view that the Bible condemns homosexuality (Kamerman 2012). Two others had felt irritated about their therapist telling his personal story about his "change" (Streefkerk 2012), while in another case, the therapist had explicitly affirmed the client's desire to get rid of his homosexuality (*EenVandaag* 2012). Several male clients told about their therapists' strong focus on their alleged lack of masculinity: Mark had been advised to do more "men's stuff" (Streefkerk 2012), Marinus' therapist had told him that what he desired in other men was the masculinity he lacked in himself (*Radio 1 Journaal* 2012), while Anton's therapist had told him his sexuality originated from a bad relationship with his father, and had used a theory (by the aforementioned Payne; cf. Section 2.3) about cannibalism (van Beek 2012b). Joran had ended the therapy when he got depressed from the conversations: "In the end they completely break down your feeling. I was in love with a boy, but the therapists overanalysed it completely." (van Beek 2012c) Also others explain how the therapy had made things worse for them. The former client whose desire to get rid of his homosexuality had been affirmed by the therapist, tells that the sessions had turned out to be unsuccessful in that respect and that, because of these bad experiences, it took him even longer to accept his sexuality (*EenVandaag* 2012). Anton's suicidal thoughts disappeared after he had broken off the therapy (van Beek 2012b), while Marinus calls the therapy "a waste of time" and "to a certain extent (...) harmful". He explains that "[a]fter the conversations at Different it took me five years of counselling from two psychologists to get rid of the feeling of shame." (*Radio 1 Journaal* 2012)

Also a few positive experiences were reported, mostly by Christian media. Hans, who appeared in two television programmes by evangelical broadcasting company EO (see Section 2.1), called it "complete nonsense" that Different aimed at curing people of their homosexuality. He considered this misconception the result of "an enormous aversion against God, against Christianity, against the Christian faith" (*Dit is de dag* 2012). His aim, however, was not to defend Different but to refute the idea that all Christians wanted to cure gays. He referred to several friends who had claimed that their experiences at EHAH/Different had been harmful (*Door de wereld* 2012). A conservative Protestant daily reported the story of Evert, who would have "got jumpy" if Different had aimed at "changing gays through therapy". It is striking to see that this newspaper, notorious for its negative editorials on news about

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[97] On January 17, both NOS News (which opened with an item about Different) and a talk show had invited 'ex-ex-gay' Raphael Creemers, a former recipient and provider of reparative therapy, but not at Different (*Journaal* 2012; *Pauw & Witteman* 2012).

homosexuality, displays the story of a gay man who believes that there is nothing wrong with "a gay relationship in love and faithfulness" and whose Different therapist is quoted saying, "Yes, you're gonna meet a nice guy, what's wrong with a relationship?" (2012a). Apparently, it was more important for this newspaper to provide a story that supported their previous invalidations of the allegations against Different (cf. *Reformatorisch Dagblad* 2012b; Bakker 2012). Two weeks later, the Dutch edition of *Metro* published the stories of two clients who had positive experiences. One client had never had "the slightest impression" that Different wanted to turn him straight (van der Voort 2012). By emphasising that these clients had been in therapy at Different in *recent* years, the daily suggested that things had changed to the good at Different.

All these stories – of negative, ambivalent or positive experiences – show several striking similarities to the stories on Different's own website. The main difference is that during or after the therapy several of these ex-clients had started to disagree with the views of their therapist and, more importantly, they explain how Different's therapy had worsened their psychological problems. Different, however, did not apologise. In the same television programme in which Hans had shared his experiences and views, van Rhee commented, "What is actually wry, also for current clients, is that the examples that have been brought up to show what goes wrong [at Different] all date back to longer ago. And if things have gone wrong, that is very inconvenient." When the presenter asked him whether he agreed that things had gone wrong in the past, he responded that things go wrong at any professional health care organisation and that, in the specific case of Different, some clients change their view on homosexuality during the therapy so that the therapy no longer "matches" their views (*Door de wereld* 2012). By speaking of "examples that have been brought up", he denied the former clients' agency and transferred their agency to unmentioned powers, whereas calling their negative experiences "very inconvenient" sounds like an understatement when uttered by a man who had spoken of "rabble rousing" and "smear campaigns" against Different. This seems to be exemplary of how van Rhee and other THDV representatives deal with the occurrence of minority stress – psychosocial stress derived from the status LGBT persons as a stigmatised minority (Meyer 1995, 38) – among Christian LGB persons. Although a significantly higher number of religious queer youth has suicidal thoughts compared to non-religious queer youth, let alone compared to their straight peers (van Bergen and van Lisdonk 2010; cf. Kuyper and Fokkema 2011), van Rhee usually ignores (van Rhee 2010a; cf. Bos 2010c) or downplays such data (van Rhee 2012a).

When the Minister had initially concluded that there were no signs that Different offered reparative therapy, COC and LKP pointed to the complaints of former clients in the media and to the generally negative view on homosexuality THDV systematically propagated. Moreover, they called former clients to contact the Inspectorate (LKP 2012b, 2012c; COC 2012c, 2012d, 2012f). As van Rhee had taken the Inspectorate's first report as an acquittal from the

criticism of the media and LGBT organisations, he now criticised "the broad gay movement" because they

> deny orthodox Christians with a homosexual orientation the freedom to choose their own lifestyle and matching type of care. In a number of cases, this comes close to 'double discrimination' – that is, of homosexuals in general and by the gay community itself." (van Rhee 2012d, cf. 2010b; Streefkerk 2012)

By speaking of "the broad gay movement", he probably meant COC and *Christian* LGBT organisations. In his opinion, they had disclosed a lack of solidarity with "orthodox Christians with a homosexual orientation", who now faced "double discrimination" – that is, by "the gay community itself", but also "in general".[98] Although he seems to be pointing to minority stress among Christian LGB persons, it needs to be noted that, in THDV vocabulary, "orthodox Christians with a homosexual orientation" means Christians *without* a homosexual 'lifestyle'. Moreover, he does not specify that second group of oppressors, which could consist of straight people, but also of fellow believers. After all, his aim seems to be to rebuke the powerful "gay movement" that, in his view, was victimising Different and those that Different claimed to be protecting.

3.4 Undercover

In March 2012, television programme *Undercover in Nederland* broadcasted an item in which an undercover reporter went to search for help to get rid of his homosexuality. We see how a Dutch translator and promoter of the work of Leanne Payne (cf. Section 2.3) redirects the undercover reporter to Different. When the latter calls for an intake, the receptionist says, "This morning I read an item in *Metro* saying that you are born this way and have no choice. That's not necessarily how we think of it." During the intake conversation, the therapist confirms that one can get rid of one's homosexuality, but adds that one needs to acknowledge one's homosexual feelings. "God has created you as a man. A woman fits you. (…) If things are different, you can try to find out what has happened. That can be something traumatic, like sexual abuse, but also other experiences are possible." He explains having "those feelings" himself, but also knowing "how to grow out of it, so to speak. I used to think like, 'That's never going to happen.' I had never had feelings for a woman. I have made a long journey. Now I have been married for fourteen years." When, after his intake, the undercover makes another phone call and asks for Different's view on the possibility of being cured of one's homosexuality, the receptionist responds, "We don't want to speak of 'curing', just because that sounds very incorrect to a lot of people. We 'help' people, let's put it that way. (…) It isn't our identity, is it?" (*Undercover in Nederland* 2012). The belief that homosexuality is not one's "identity" – also expressed by van der Sluis two months earlier (*Dit is de dag* 2012) – is common in the American ex-gay

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[98] He had also made this accusation when he had just become THDV director (*Nederlands Dagblad* 2007).

movement (Gerber 2008, 22) and also among certain conservative Protestants in the Netherlands (Derks 2018a).

Probably after he had seen a preview and three days ahead of the programme's broadcasting, van Rhee published a column on *Habakuk.* "In a cheap way," he wrote, *Undercover in Nederland* repeats the negative image of Different that has been proven to be untrue, and continues the "media hype". This is "rabble-rousing", he sneered. "As a decent care institution, we have, therefore, refused to respond in front of the camera. After all, what could one sensibly say about a fake situation?"[99] (van Rhee 2012f) The reporter was obviously faking his desire to be cured, but the therapist was not faking anything. A few days later, van Rhee admitted that the therapist had acted "pastorally" but not very "professionally". He commented, however, that the recordings had been made before Different had changed into a professional health care organisation (COC 2012g).

3.5 The Return to "Pastoral Care"

In June 2012, the Minister sent a letter to Parliament, reporting the outcome of a second, more substantial investigation by the Inspectorate.[100] She concluded that, in many cases, there had been "no [adequate] psychiatric diagnose, no psychiatric treatment and, therefore, no insurance-covered health care." (VWS 2012c, 2). Van Rhee responded that Christians with "a psychological problem that might be related to [their] homosexual orientation" were the real victims, for now they could "no longer get reimbursed health care" (van Rhee 2012h). He also explicitly framed the critique of politicians, activists and media as an attack on Christians as such: "[I]t's apparently very irritating that Christians believe in a God who, according to the Bible, has ascribed other purposes to sexuality and relationships than what people find fun and enticing." (2012j)

After the Minister had banned the reimbursement of Different's therapy, the aforementioned Christian LGBT alliance commented that, although they were happy about the Minister's final decision, they were unhappy about the Minister's suggestion to Different to instead offer "pastoral care" to conservative Christian LGB persons, because such a trajectory misses "good diagnosis and treatment regulations" (LKP 2012d; cf. COC 2012h). In an item based on the alliance's press release, *Trouw* noted that van Rhee

> cannot take away the fear of the Christian gay organisations. He only sees a future [for Different] in terms of pastoral care. "We cannot afford to pay for a psychiatrist from our own budget." Yet he does not want to return to the time that Different was called EHAH. "We should no longer get above ourselves in treating psychiatric problems." (KleinJan 2012a)

By the latter statement, he acknowledged that Different lacked the expertise to provide professional therapy for psychiatric problems. The change from

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[99] He made similar remarks in a radio news item (*Lunch!* 2012).
[100] The report itself is publicly not available. According to Els Veenis (personal communication, August, 23 2016), who at that time was senior policy advisor at the Directorate of Emancipation of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the report is probably confidential, because it cites personal health care records.

"psycho-social counselling" back to "pastoral care" might have been – again – merely a change in vocabulary. But apparently Different would not change what it believed was unchangeable: its religious conviction that a homosexual 'lifestyle' is sinful, that homosexual desires develop in one's childhood and that these desires should and can change.

4. Conclusion

This article has shown that, although Different does no longer speak of the "healing" of homosexuality, its concepts and strategies strongly resonate with those of (contemporary) promotors of reparative therapy. Despite some changes in its vocabulary, Different consistently and indefatigably promotes a pseudoscientific viz. psychopathological view of homosexuality, conceptualising homosexuality as symptomatic of an underdeveloped gender identity, as the result of childhood traumas and as peripheral to one's 'true' viz. heterosexual identity. As such, they use concepts that are Freudian rather than biblical, which is – ironically – typical of the Christian ex-gay movement (cf. Jordan 2011a, 163). Moreover, their appraisal of studies on the flexibility, malleability or performativity of sexuality and their critique on the idea of a "homosexual identity" can be rendered "queerish" – that is, using queer ideas for a heteronormative agenda (Gerber 2008, 22–24; cf. Derks 2018a). By often using intransitive verbs like "decreasing" or "paling" rather than transitive verbs like "suppressing", Different emphasises that the decreasing of homosexual feelings is not the aim but a possible – and positive – effect of its therapy.

This article has also shown how for Different – and for THDV in general – the freedom to have a 'biblically orthodox' Christian view *on homosexuality* is a major – if not the main – test case of religious freedom in the Netherlands and, consequently, a marker of their Christian identity (cf. van den Berg et al. 2014, 116; Cobb 2006; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004). Warning against the dangers of "the broad gay movement", the male gay scene and queer-positive theologies, Different rarely lets an opportunity pass to condemn 'the homosexual lifestyle'. Although Different is only one of THDV's social welfare projects, it has always been THDV's "most controversial branch". Moreover, THDV has actively expressed its "prophetic voice" in particular against the phenomenon of homosexuality and it has regularly presented itself as an expert in the area of sexuality. In that respect, their strategy is similar to the Vatican campaign against what it calls "gender ideology" – the difference is that this Vatican discourse is more explicitly theological – even if it is bad theology (cf. Derks 2018b).

The premature criticisms of the Minister and several national politicians, only hours after the publication of a newspaper article about the use of public money to fund Different's (allegedly 'reparative') therapy, could be seen as a kind of secular – or "sexular" (Scott 2013) – anxiety or panic, especially as the acceptance of homosexuality has become a major hallmark of Dutch secular culture (Hurenkamp, Tonkens and Duyvendak 2012, 130–31; van den Berg et al.

2014, 117; Derks 2018b, 52–53). From Different's perspective, the 2012 controversy was just another example of limiting the freedom of (biblically orthodox) Christians – and of Christians "with homosexual feelings" in particular – *and* a proof of the dominance of "the broad gay movement", under the rubric of which van Rhee also located *Christian* LGBT organisations so as to maintain the discursive opposition of homosexuality and Christianity. Unlike the American conversion therapy movement, which has "moved beyond rhetoric to significant political action" (Drescher 1998, 16; cf. Jordan 2011a, 166), Different simply claims space for itself – and for biblically orthodox Christians in general – as they claim that their discursive and legal space is decreasing. But as Bos (2012) has rightly suggested, it might well be that Different *wants* to be suspected, because it 'proves' the enmity of the secular other towards Different and towards Christians in general.

As several media initially reported that the Inspectorate had not found any proof that Different aimed at curing gays and lesbians of their homosexuality, it was easy for van Rhee to disqualify the criticisms as "politically correct" but substantially flawed. By frequently debunking "political correctness" (cf. Sections 3.2 and 3.4), they participated in broader – that is, also non-religious – right-wing populist tendencies in the Netherlands that turn against 'the establishment'. As LGBT emancipation has become increasingly associated with the establishment over the last two decades – and as religious groups have become a cultural minority – the power dynamics might easily change, because being a minority can always be turned into a site of privilege.

ARTICLE 4

Publication Details

Abstract

This article discusses two major ways in which sexual and religious identities are conceptualised in Dutch public discourses about homosexuality. In a secular discourse that stresses that LGBT persons should be able to 'be themselves', certain religious identities are often ignored, subordinated or attacked, while the self that needs to be realised is primarily rendered a sexual self. A conservative Protestant (counter-)discourse on 'being in Christ' subordinates (homo)sexual identity to Christian identity – or even rejects it. To move beyond such (Late) Modernist oppositional constructions of religion and homosexuality in terms of (religious/sexual) 'identity', this article explores the (queer) Catholic concept of sacramental characters – as an anti-identity – and suggests that it has the potential to break some of the deadlocks in public discourses about homosexuality and sexual diversity.

Acknowledgements

Sexual and Religious Regimes of the Self in Dutch Discourses about Homosexuality

A Queer Theological Analysis and Alternative

1. Introduction

The return of religion into the public sphere in the West is, among others or maybe even primarily, a discursive return. New or reshaped religious voices and phrases are being heard. There are also new and old-yet-bolder discourses *about* religion. These discourses can be about 'religion' or about particular religions; they can be (re)affirming or critical. As several scholars have shown, in secular discourses about religion and in religious discourses in the presence of secular audiences, issues of sexuality and gender regularly pop-up (e.g. Bracke 2008; Scott 2013; van den Brandt 2014; Derks, Vos and Tromp 2014). When it comes, for example, to the rights and freedoms of sexual minorities, conservative religious opposition often functions as a marker of their religious identity, while the promotion of these rights and freedoms is regularly presented as the hallmark of secular Modernity (e.g. Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004; Woodhead 2007; Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010; Bracke 2011). Such and other oppositional pairings of religion and homosexuality figure prominently in many national contexts (cf. e.g. van den Berg et al. 2014, 116; Sremac and Ganzevoort 2015b; van Klinken and Chitando 2016).

This article zooms in on public discourses about religion and homosexuality in the Netherlands. Despite this country's national image as a liberal, secular and gay-friendly country – or maybe also because of the country's desire to be seen as such – there have been numerous examples of oppositional pairings of religion and homosexuality in contemporary public discourse. The focus of this article is at a particular level on which the relation between religion and sexuality is being constructed – that is, the level of personal identity. Some consider sexuality central to who a person 'really' is and consequently subordinate religiosity to it; others prioritise religion over sexuality. This happens in numerous ways through different (explicit and implicit) conceptualisations of religion and sexuality.

"Clearly matters of race, gender and sexual equality are highly significant areas of engagement for public theology", notes Esther McIntosh in her contribution to Brill's *Companion to Public Theology* (McIntosh 2017, 301).

"However," she proceeds, "there are few theologians seriously engaged with issues of race, gender and sexual equality who refer to themselves as 'public theologians' or to their work as 'public theology'." She and other feminist theologians point at a number of deficiencies in major types of public theology, such as the gendered roots and exclusionary effects of the public/private binary, the emphasis on (often implicitly male) rationality and the treatment of feminist, black and queer theologies as 'one-issue' theologies (cf. e.g. Walton 2009; Graham 2011; Korte 2014b). McIntosh argues that public theology needs to "listen" to marginalised voices and to "speak out" against discrimination and inequality. But, in her view, public theology needs to do this because many (public) theologies have done or still do the opposite, not because of their theological resources or repertoire. Put differently, McIntosh seems to be more concerned with making (public) theologies and churches more open and inclusive than with making theological contributions to the public issues of race, gender and sexuality.

The current article is an attempt at a public theology to the extent that it addresses issues of public concern (religion and sexuality) from a theological perspective. The aims of this article are primarily analytical and tentatively constructive. First it provides a critical analysis of the construction of (homo)sexuality and religion in Dutch public discourses about homosexual identity. Then it explores queer theological proposals to think erotic selves differently – in other words, religiously.

In am seeking to make most use of a (Foucauldian) critical discourse analysis approach. It assumes an understanding of discourse as "a way of speaking that does not simply reflect or represent things 'out there', but 'constructs' or 'constitutes' them." (Hjelm 2011, 135; cf. Fairclough 1992, 3) My interest is in discursive constructions of religion and homosexuality, not – at least not directly – in the lived experiences of religious and/or lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) persons. That is not to say that the knowledge produced by these discourses does not have real consequences for and effects on the lives of religious and/or LGB persons.[101] My focus is on Dutch public discourses. The material I analyse is most often derived from the so-called fourth and fifth estates of the public domain – that is, newspapers, magazines and websites – and from policy documents.

Titus Hjelm has explained how "every discourse-analytical study needs to be designed individually", depending, among others, on the genres of, and themes central to, the analysed discourse and on theoretical perspectives that one deems relevant (Hjelm 2011, 142). My analysis will be informed by (Christian) theological and queer theoretical perspectives. It should be emphasised, nevertheless, that a theological perspective does not necessarily favour religion over homosexuality or non-religion; nor does a queer

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[101] I do not use 'LGBT' or any similar (longer) acronym here, because the focus of this article is on constructions of sexual identity. In other instances, I might use the LGBT acronym or other terms, depending on the terms used in the sources I cite or on the argument I am making. How constructions of sexual identity are related to constructions of gendered identity (or other levels of identity) will occasionally be addressed in my analysis.

perspective favour homosexuality over religion or heterosexuality. Theology and queer theory are both theoretical and critical perspectives.

2. Sexuality, Secularism and Christianity

Two scholars of religion who have written extensively about Christian discourses to do with sexuality will be my main guides and conversation partners along the way. The first is Ad de Bruijne, a Neo-Calvinist theologian and a Professor of Christian Ethics at the Theological University Kampen, the Netherlands. Having written his doctoral dissertation on Anglican theologian Oliver O'Donovan's theory of Christendom (de Bruijne 2006), his main research *foci* have been political theology and sexual ethics. My particular concern is with a recent essay in Dutch, in which de Bruijne provides a theological cultural analysis of contemporary public debates about sexuality in the Netherlands (2016). Inspired by George Grant, Charles Taylor and, in particular, O'Donovan (cf. de Bruijne 2006, 50–54), he argues that Modernity is both a departure from and a continuation of Christianity. He suggests that the battle between what he calls "orthodox Christians"[102] and "Late Modernist propagators of sexual emancipation" could be changed from a culture battle into a fruitful dialogue. That could be done by acknowledging that, on the one hand, orthodox Christians share much of Late Modernist views on sexuality, while on the other hand, Late Modernist propagators of sexual emancipation are in several respects influenced by their Christian heritage. Although his essay is primarily analytical and although he also makes critical remarks on how orthodox Christians – among which he would count himself – often talk about sexuality, de Bruijne aspires to a revaluation of some (Premodern) Christian views on sexuality and relationality.

My second guide and interlocutor is Mark Jordan. He is an internationally acclaimed American scholar of Christian theology, European philosophy and the study of sexuality and gender. Maybe even more so than for de Bruijne, Jordan understands the responsibility of a theologian not to be so much a defender of official church teachings or a supporter of what he calls "Christian chatter about sex" (Jordan 2011b, 51). In the introduction to *Blessing Same-Sex Unions* he writes that the book – and, I think, much of his work more generally – is "not theological in the sense of claiming institutional authority or arguing by approved methods from established formulas". Jordan views himself as commenting on Christian traditions "as an attentive listener, not a fervent advocate" (2005, 19, cf. e.g. 2006, 329).

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[102] The term 'orthodox' can be used in diverse ways. De Bruijne does not refer to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, but to "those within different confessional traditions (Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox) who intend to remain faithful to *traditional views on sexuality*, for example because of the authority of the Bible or the teaching of the Church" (de Bruijne 2016, 273; emphasis added). Interestingly, not only does he seem to imply that there is a diachronically and synchronically coherent body of "traditional views on sexuality", he also takes these views as a central demarcation of orthodoxy (possibly even to the extent of collapsing orthodoxy into orthopraxy), thereby changing its original doctrinal meaning of "assent to the faith of the church" (Hastings 2000, 504) or "commitment to creedal Christianity and the exemplarity of its patristic matrix" (Milbank, Ward and Pickstock 1999, 2).

My interest lies in Jordan's chapter on "The Return of Religion during the Reign of Sexuality" in an anthology dedicated to *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion.* By taking some passages from Nietzsche, Foucault and Bataille as "mnemonic devices", he suggests that in Western Europe and Northern America the disappearance of the regime of religion has created a vacuum to be filled by the regime of sexuality. In the United States – the primary context from and for which he writes – it is the Christian religion that has left and now returns. It is not Christianity *per se*, but rather the Christianity of Christendom, Christianity as an established religion (Jordan 2011b, 39–40). Jordan recounts a story of the return of an old king, the Christian God, who returns to find his throne occupied by a new king, King Sex. "The death of God not only made a void into which sex could enter, it fixed the conditions for sex to take power as sexuality – to become King Sex, as Foucault says." (2011b, 40) This genealogical narrative helps him to explain how Christian sex-talk, which he has discussed in more detail in several other publications (e.g. 2002, 2005, 2011a), has been shaped by this regime of sexuality. His reflections on sexual identities and sacramental characters (2011b, 52–54, 2011a, 210–14, 2006, 2002, 15–17, 170–72) will figure in the final, more constructive part of this article.

Both de Bruijne and Jordan provide genealogies to make sense of certain contemporary Western discourses about sexuality. The differences between their genealogies are related to differences between their respective confessional, intellectual and geographical backgrounds and audiences. For the purpose of this article, the value of Jordan's essay is its focus on "the relations between Christian speech to *modern regimes of sexuality*" (Jordan 2011b, 41; emphasis added). One of my aims is to discern how such regimes – as well as remnants of the regime of Christianity – operate in Dutch public discourses about homosexuality. The concept of a discursive regime refers to "the effects of power peculiar to the play of statements" (Foucault 1980, 113). By speaking of discursive regimes, I not only mean that understandings of religion and homosexuality are produced through particular discourses; I am also suggesting that these discourses could be governed by the powers of religion and sexuality.

Let me anticipate some of my analyses by clarifying here that the notion of a religious regime does not refer to the way many secularists think of religion – that is, as an institution of power that imposes its will on believers or citizens. Instead, it means that it is impossible to think outside of religion, that being non-religious is impossible or non-imaginable, that one can only think, talk and act from within a religious viz. Christian frame of reference. Similarly, when we talk of a sexual regime, this does not refer to the way many (Christian or other) conservatives think of sexual freedom – that is, that it implies boundless freedom and immorality. Instead, it means that one cannot but view sexuality other than as a core aspect of a person's identity that needs to be discovered, developed, cultivated and profiled.

As the Netherlands – unlike e.g. the United States – has a predominantly secular cultural framework and lacks a strong Christian Right, de Bruijne's

essay is especially helpful as he pays attention to contemporary secular discourses. Partly following de Bruijne's distinction between "Late Modernist propagators of sexual emancipation" and "orthodox Christians", I will characterise the 'being yourself' discourse discussed in Section 3 as primarily secular; the comparison is with the 'being in Christ' discourse discussed in Section 4 being primarily orthodox/conservative Protestant.[103] De Bruijne explains that these categories are "ideal types" similar to Charles Taylor's ideal-typical distinction between "orthodoxy" and "atheism", both of which, strictly speaking, do not exist in reality (de Bruijne 2016, 273; cf. Taylor 2007a, 539–93). In the same way, the distinction I am making is not strict either: I will try to discern the regime of sexuality – and remnants of the regime of religion – in *both* discourses.

3. Being Yourself

An expression that is often used by the Dutch government, politicians and LGBT activists as a catch phrase to describe one of the aims of LGBT emancipation is *jezelf zijn* ('being yourself'). In his 1998 gay travel guide, gay activist Henk Krol listed dozens of places around the globe where gay men could "nicely be themselves" (Kools 1998). Contemporary travel guides for gay men also use this expression.[104] When Vera Bergkamp became chair of the country's main LGBT organisation, COC Netherlands, she used the motto *zichtbaar jezelf kunnen zijn* ("being able to visibly be yourself") in order to emphasise the need to make lesbian women and transgender persons especially more visible (COC 2010); she has frequently used this expression in promoting the interests of LGBT persons ever since. In 2012, she resigned as chair of COC and became an MP for the liberal democrats, who consider "individual autonomy and the ability to visibly be yourself" as their basic principles (D66 2015a). This addition of "visibly" implies that what or who you "are" is visible or can be – and even needs to be – made visible. While it protests against forced closeting, it prescribes a particular type of social presentation of LGBT persons.

When COC asked political parties to share their views on, and goals for, LGBT emancipation in the running up to the 2017 parliamentary elections, the green left party, the labour party and the Christian democrats also used this expression.[105] My focus here is on the liberal democrats. Their youth organisation has once further defined this freedom to "be yourself" as being one "without dogmas and prejudices".[106] Although the word dogma does not necessarily carry its original Christian connotation, its genealogy is significant

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[103] The terms 'orthodox' and 'conservative' can be used in diverse ways (cf. note 102) and are not synonymous. The group of Protestants I focus on use especially the first term as a self-identification to emphasise their (intended) obedience to the primary authority of the Bible. By focusing on orthodox *Protestants*, I focus on a more specific viz. smaller group of Christians than de Bruijne does – or at least claims to do.

[104] See e.g. www.gayaway.nl ("Being yourself, also on a holiday!").

[105] http://www.gayvote.nl/tweede-kamer-2017/partijen-en-kandidaten.

[106] @JongeDemocraten on Twitter, September 30, 2016.

here, nevertheless. The liberal democrats are a secular party that regularly targets Christian views and the alleged privileges of Christian institutions, among others in the area of sexual and gender diversity (cf. de Bruijne 2016, 271–72; Sanders 2017). One example of such is a video clip titled "Being able to be yourself anywhere around the world". It was created in the build-up for the Amsterdam Gay Pride 2015. Here they refer to one of their major recent political achievements in the area of LGBT emancipation: with other parties the liberal democrats had successfully campaigned against so-called *weigerambtenaren*, (allegedly Christian) marriage registrars with conscientious objections against conducting same-sex wedding ceremonies (D66 2015b). In debates about this marriage registrar, a reader of a national daily expressed objections against this proposed ban by complaining that, whereas gays can "be themselves", this marriage registrar apparently cannot (Boender 2012; cf. Derks 2017).

Besides LGBT activists and politicians, the government has also used this phrase. In 2007, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (responsible for LGBT emancipation) issued a policy document, *Just Being Gay*, which stated, "Homosexuals should be able to come out if they want to. (...) It is impossible to be emancipated if you cannot be yourself in public." (OCW 2007, 18) In their discussion of this policy, Suhraiya Jivraj and Anisa de Jong have argued that,

> [a]lthough the policy target groups are ostensibly worded in generic terms (as 'orthodox religious and belief communities'; 'ethnic minorities and schools') it is apparent that Muslims, especially Muslim youth, are one – if not the – core target group where social acceptance of homosexuality is thought to be in need of improvement. (Jivraj and de Jong 2011, 147; cf. Wekker 2016, 120–26)

They take this as an example of "a third wave of homo-emancipation" that is invested with a (predominantly right-wing) homonationalist anti-Islamic discourse. This discourse has emerged in the Netherlands over the last few decades, especially since the attacks of 9/11 and the 2004 assassination of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by Mohammed B. (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010; Buijs, Hekma and Duyvendak 2011; Butler 2013, 120–28; Wekker 2016, 108–38; cf. Puar 2007).

One more recent example of the government's use of this 'being yourself' rhetoric in can be found in a policy to do with immigration adopted in 2013. At that time, the country's government was a coalition of convenience between the liberal conservatives and the labour party. It announced that immigrants – a term that has become almost synonymous with Muslims – needed to sign a so-called "participation agreement" in order to subscribe to Dutch values. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Social Welfare and Employment, Lodewijk Asscher (labour party), explained, "Cultural integration stagnates. We even discern a backdrop in the way homosexual[s][107], Jews and women are being looked at. We have to make clearer what makes this country so great: the

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[107] Asscher's (or the reporter's) erroneous use of "*homoseksualiteit* (homosexuality)" instead of "*homoseksuelen* (homosexuals)" is, I think, an insignificant error of wording.

freedom to be yourself." (Asscher as quoted in Herderscheê and Stam 2013) Despite widespread anti-Muslim sentiments, Muslims are not mentioned here, implying that they are not another group that cannot 'be themselves'. They are reckoned to be the main threat to the freedom of the three groups mentioned. In a column for a sophisticated national daily, novelist Christiaan Weijts cynically commented on Asscher's argument that, apparently, the law does not suffice. "After all, everybody can be themselves, but what if my self happens to consist of not allowing others to be themselves? And there are actually quite a few weirdoes with such a self." By "weirdoes" this columnist means religious people, such as the "few insane" who still have not left the Roman Catholic Church and thereby still "silently subscribe to the Vatican's opposition against homosexuality". The columnist argues that by prioritising the principle of equality, Asscher indirectly abandons the freedom of religion (which the columnist applauds), but also the freedom of opinion (which the columnist obviously finds problematic). He concludes that Asscher should simply ban the freedom of religion: "Everyone can choose: either you exchange the Bible, the Qur'an or the Torah for the Constitution or you go and be yourself somewhere else." (Weijts 2013) He does not seem to realise that such a decision would negatively affect one of the three groups that Asscher had mentioned as being threatened by migrants: Jews.

The primary purpose of these political pleas is to promote a social climate in which LGBT persons – and in some cases also other groups – experience no external barriers to express their sexual identity if they so wish. But this freedom to 'be yourself' is more than just a negative liberty – it is a self-determining freedom in which one breaks hold of all external impositions and decides for oneself alone (cf. Taylor 1991, 27). As Ganzevoort, Olsman and van der Laan (2010, 55) have already briefly alluded to, this 'being yourself' discourse is part of what Taylor has called the "culture" or "ethics of authenticity":

> Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfilment or self-realization in which it is usually couched. (Taylor 1991, 29)

This expressive individualism had its roots in eighteenth-century Romanticism. It started to shape Western societies at large – and youth culture in particular – in the post-war consumer culture of the 1960s (Taylor 2007a, 473–77).

The phrase 'being yourself' can be applied to anyone. However, it is often used in particular for LGBT persons, whose freedom to be themselves is considered to be in need of protection and promotion. Several events (e.g. GL Amsterdam-West 2016) and projects (e.g. Art.1 MN 2014) to improve the social inclusion of LGBT persons even use the phrase in their main title without an explicit reference to LGBT persons – by making this explicit they would have been stating the obvious. This practice indicates that LGBT persons are

believed to face more challenges to 'be themselves' than other social groups; it also signifies that LGBT persons who do feel free to 'come out' are the epitome of 'being yourself'. The frequent use of this phrase among LGBT activists, ministers, politicians and the like renders sexuality a core aspect of one's identity: the self that needs to be realised is primarily a sexual self.[108] This centrality of sexuality to human identity is typical of Late Modernity (Taylor 2007a, 502; de Bruijne 2012d, 67, 2016, 277) or, as Jordan (2011b) would say, "the Reign of Sexuality".

This ideal of 'being yourself' – and the culture of authenticity in general – is not without its internal tensions. Whereas 'being yourself' emphasises individuality, it effectively creates some kind of uniformity, because it entails a dominant cultural script that prescribes particular ways of being yourself (Taylor 1991; Mellink 2014). That expectation is clearly revealed in the following point of tension. A strong majority of Dutch citizens agree that "gays and lesbians should be free to live their lives the way they want" (e.g. Keuzenkamp 2010a, 34; Keuzenkamp and Kuyper 2013, 10). A considerable number of them also want gays and lesbians to act 'normally', which often means acting gender-confirming (e.g. Buijs, Hekma and Duyvendak 2011, 636–37; Mellink 2014, 17). Empirical research among Dutch adolescents shows that, while they highly value authenticity, many of them consider bisexual women and effeminate gay men "fake", inauthentic (Felten, van Hoof and Schuyf 2010).

While LGBT activists, the government and many politicians promote sexual and gender 'diversity', they find it difficult to render some (primarily religious) queer persons authentic. Persons with homosexual desires who do not 'come out' to family and friends – because they themselves are not aware of their homosexual desires, do not accept these desires or fear others will not accept them – are considered 'gay'/'lesbian' yet 'closeted' or 'in denial'; religious persons with homosexual desires who do not 'practice their homosexuality' are believed to be completely subservient to their 'religion'; and persons who have had one or more same-sex sexual/romantic relations but are now married to a person of the opposite sex 'were and are and ever shall be' gay or lesbian. This is how some queer (and often religious) persons are perceived and evaluated from a secular perspective – that is, under "the regime of sexuality", under which "everyone should have a sexual identity at the end of a proper sexual development" (Jordan 2011b, 51). These constructions do not necessarily correspond to how some religious persons with homosexual desires themselves experience, evaluate and negotiate their sexuality and religiosity. In a secular imagination, these persons' 'religion' is either an external force or at best an internal force which is still a non-essential, a 'chosen' aspect of one's self. In any case, this force is considered at odds with the true, sexual identities of these persons, who are then contrasted with the evenly rhetorical construction of the out and proud, sexually active homosexual. As Gloria Wekker has asserted with regards to the report *Just Being Gay*, "homosexuality is presented as a homogeneous, natural way of being, while a multiplicity of

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[108] When it applies also to transgender persons, it is primarily a sexual *and gendered* self.

forms of homosexuality present in society is obfuscated, as well as the status of the dominant form as one specific, albeit powerful social construction." (Wekker 2016, 121; cf. Jivraj and de Jong 2011, 153) She cites Stefan Dudink, who has argued that the homosexual has become the modern subject par excellence (Wekker 2016, 122; cf. Dudink 2011). While the 'being yourself' discourse often constructs sexuality primarily as an identity, as an unambiguous and innate sexual orientation (instead of as a way of relating or a practice), it often renders religion as an institution or a set of beliefs. As such, the only thing a religion can and should do is not-condemn homosexuality. Religion ought to have 'no problem with' homosexuality, considering it 'not an issue'. From such a secular perspective, religions should not shape erotic characters – and in the end, they simply cannot do so. One's sexuality or sexual orientation is considered to exist prior to, and independent of, one's religion (as well as independent of one's gender, race and class). In this way the discourse privileges certain sexualities, religiosities and races at the expense of others (cf. Ganzevoort, Olsman and van der Laan 2010, 62).

This discourse of 'being yourself', while as primarily secular, is not confined to non-Christians The Christian democrats have employed this rhetoric; some Protestant communities have connected it to Christian ideas about a homosexual person's calling in this world (Ganzevoort, Olsman and van der Laan 2010, 54–56).[109] Aspects of this discourse do indeed resonate with certain Christian – and, in particular, Protestant – views. De Bruijne claims that the Late Modernist desacralised view on sexuality is, in fact, the result of the Christian doctrine of creation: "Sexuality has become nothing more and nothing less than a part of created reality which, under God's authority, can exist according to its own nature." (de Bruijne 2016, 277) De Bruijne further claims that the centrality of sexuality to the ideal of individual self-realisation reveals a distinctive conceptualisation of individuality and relationality that is typical for the West with its Christian roots: individuality is strongly emphasised in the Bible while the concept of relationality has been developed from the doctrine of the Trinity (2016, 277–78).

4. Being in Christ

The ideal of 'being yourself' pretends to be universal: everyone, every LGBT person should be able to 'be who they are'. One response to this claim is an orthodox Protestant discourse that has focussed on 'identity in Christ'. A reader of a Christian newspaper who is concerned about the "growing acceptance of unmarried cohabitation and of faithfulness [*sic*] between homosexuals", asserts that "our identity lies primarily in Christ, not in your sexual feelings and experiences" (Polman 2014). Another example is Thony, a 21-year-old guy who had turned from "an extravagant gay" into "a follower of

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[109] Based on ethnographic research among orthodox Protestant and Sunni Muslim youth in the Netherlands, Daan Beekers has shown that both groups combine an authenticity discourse with a heteronomous discourse of submission to God when they explain how they practice their faith in a secular society (Beekers 2015, 137–80, cf. 2016).

Jesus". He explains in a newspaper interview that "God is so much greater than sexual feelings. A relation with Him is of much higher value than one with a human person. So my identity does not lie in me being gay (*mijn homo-zijn*) but in Christ." (Kardijk 2016) These are echoes of a discourse that has its roots primarily in American evangelicalism. It has been articulated by several conservative Protestant ministers, theologians and other religious professionals in the Netherlands. The national Reformed daily and its related publishing house have promoted the work of American minister Kevin DeYoung and that of Rosaria Butterfield, a former lesbian activist and professor of English, who has converted to Christianity and has married a (male) Presbyterian minister. The daily quotes DeYoung, who asserts that "[h]omosexual and heterosexual sins are incompatible with being in Christ" (Stolk 2016). It publishes the recommendation of a conservative minister in favour of Butterfield's book because it emphasises that "Christians with homosexual feelings should not speak of a [sexual] nature (*geaardheid*) or orientation (*gerichtheid*). A Christian who has been brought to life with Christ has his or her identity in Christ. Then you do not say: 'I am gay', but: 'I am in Christ'." (van Kooten 2016)[110]

This view of the rejection of a homosexual identity or the subordination of such to religious identity, is also articulated in several contributions to a volume on homosexuality and Christianity, edited by de Bruijne. Most contributions are theological and the volume's aim is to provide academic reflections to stimulate further opinion and policy-making in (primarily orthodox Protestant) churches (cf. de Bruijne 2012c). Peter van de Kamp, a pastoral theologian, argues that "an important question regarding identity" is, "What does someone prioritise? His sexual preference (*voorkeur*) or his Christian conviction [*sic*] or something else?"[111] (van de Kamp 2012, 83–84) Telling here is the – typically Protestant – reduction of Christian identity to Christian conviction; more important is what he writes about sexual identity. Elaborating on the work of the American psychologist Mark Yarhouse, who distinguishes between "same-sex attraction, a homosexual orientation and a gay identity", van de Kamp defines a homosexual identity in terms of '*primarily profiling as gay (...)* through clothing, behaviour and language" (2012, 84; emphasis added; cf. Yarhouse 2010, 37–55). He then suggests to replace this "gay script" with an "identity in Christ script" (van de Kamp 2012, 85), which enables a gay person "to shape and make visible this Christian identity in his homosexual orientation (*geaardheid*)" (2012, 88–89). Ironically, this phrase seems almost the opposite of what van de Kamp is trying to argue, for his wording suggests that one's sexual orientation exists prior to one's identity in

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[110] Dutch translations of DeYoung's *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* and Butterfield's *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into the Christian Faith* had been published by De Banier, a publishing house that, just like *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, is owned by Erdee Media Groep. The book mentioned here is the sequel to the latter, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ.*
[111] At the very beginning of his contribution, van de Kamp (2012, 83) explains that he uses the word "homo" for both gays and lesbians, and he uses male pronouns throughout his chapter.

Christ and that the latter is manageable and malleable. Does this Christian identity also become visible "through clothing, behaviour and language"?

Wolter Rose, who teaches Hebrew at the same institution as de Bruijne and van de Kamp, provides a more in-depth discussion.[112] Supporting the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual identity by providing definitions of these two concepts from a report of the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (APA 2009, 30), he argues, "Choosing a gay script means organising all aspects of who you are around your homosexual orientation (*geaardheid*). You are *primarily* gay." (Rose 2012, 118; emphasis added) Living according to the 'being in Christ' script does not mean your homosexual orientation is not important anymore – it remains "an essential part of who you are" (2012, 120). But both van de Kamp and Rose seem to be reading too much into what the APA calls "sexual orientation identity". Its definition of sexual orientation identity does not imply putting one's sexual orientation at the centre of one's life at the expense of one's religious identity.[113]

The subordination of (homo)sexual to Christian identity does not necessarily imply a rejection of homosexual practice. And yet such is predominantly the case in the orthodox Protestant discourse discussed here. Moreover, the defenders of this view do not necessarily promote or believe in 'gay healing' or reparative therapy – some of them do – but the pleas to replace 'homosexual' with 'Christian' as the primary identification and the critique on the adoption of a gay or lesbian identity are also strategies among contemporary American ex-gay ministries (cf. Gerber 2008, 18–19). It is not always easy to grasp what these orthodox Protestants have in mind when speaking of – and criticising – people claiming a 'gay identity'. They may think that gays and lesbians attach a particular political significance to their homosexual identity or do not keep their sexual orientation private. These Protestants are mainly concerned about how (Christian) gays and lesbians practice their sexuality. As some of the examples discussed above (e.g. Thony and van de Kamp) seem to indicate, they find that many gays and lesbians put their sexuality at the centre of their lives, making their sexuality more significant and more important in their personal lives than they should. If this is what many gays and lesbians do, it could be that this is for a major part the effect of how, for centuries, churches have taught them to speak and think about the meaning of sexual desires. As Jordan asserts, "[t]here has been no end to Christian discourses on sex. Indeed, they have mutated and multiplied, partly in announced opposition to the regime of sexuality, partly in appropriation or imitation of it." (Jordan 2011b, 47, cf. 2011a, xii; see also Taylor

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[112] He explains that he is gay and lives a celibate life (Rose 2012, 120).

[113] "*Sexual orientation identity* refers to recognition and internalization of sexual orientation and reflects self-awareness, self-recognition, self-labeling, group membership and affiliation, culture, and self-stigma. Sexual orientation identity is *a key element* in determining relational and interpersonal decisions, as it creates a foundation for the formation of community, social support, role models, friendship, and partnering." (APA 2009, 84, cf. 30; first emphasis in the original, second emphasis added)

2007a, 503) The way these Dutch Protestants reject primarily identifying as 'gay' and challenge the privileging of marriage over singleness within the church could be rendered "queerish" in the sense that this resonates with some insights from queer theory (Gerber 2008, 22–24). At the same time, this Protestant discourse is not queer in that its trivialisation of sexuality is effectively a trivialisation of non-heterosexual sexuality. They often emphasise that what they argue with regards to gays and lesbians also goes for straight people (e.g. van de Kamp 2012, 84, 87–89; cf. DeYoung in Stolk 2016). However, by suggesting that saying 'I am straight' is of the same political and psychological significance as saying 'I am gay', they reveal how little they are aware of the operations of heteronormativity. Whereas the queer critique of identity politics aims at doing justice to a multiplicity of sexual and gendered desires and practices, this Protestant discourse aims at limiting sexuality to either heterosexual marriage or celibacy (cf. Gerber 2008, 25) – that is, to their understanding of what marriage and celibacy are about.[114]

Just as the 'being yourself' discourse is a way of stating the obvious to an imagined secular audience, so is the 'being in Christ' discourse to a Christian audience. Although the theological concept of 'being in Christ' has some radical potential, many of these Protestants often confuse it with and reduce it to the sociological concept of 'being a Christian'. This naming could result in a Christian identity politics, especially as attitudes towards homosexuality have become an identity marker for conservative Christians in the predominantly secular context of the Netherlands (cf. Derks 2012, 109; Derks, Vos and Tromp 2014, 47–48). Ironically, these theologians seem to be providing more reflection on what a gay identity might or should be than what 'identity in Christ' entails. Van de Kamp calls identity in Christ "a central and decisive aspect of the *imitation* of Christ" (van de Kamp 2012, 85; emphasis added); Rose replaces Yarhouse's – and van de Kamp's – "Christ script" with a "together with Christ script" (Rose 2012, 117; cf. Romans 8:17) and speaks of *love* of or *friendship* with Christ (2012, 119). The language they are using seems to be primarily one of imitation of Christ, but how one's sexuality – let alone Christ's sexuality – is implicated in this imitation remains obscure. Yet an imitation of Christ – that is, a decontextualised imitation without critical difference – could only lead to a renunciation of any sexual activity. Their silence or inconsistency might well be a symptom of a broader negativity towards sex.

More explicit is the univocal hierarchical opposition that is being created between interhuman (sexual) relations and Divine-human relations. That is so in particular in a quotation taken from Thony, but also in van de Kamp's cerebral and gnostic distinction between a "gay script" and a "Christ script" (cf. Derks 2012, 111). Such opposition is the result of the replacement of the regime of religion with the regime of sexuality (Jordan 2011b, 46) – and of the reduction of *eros* to sexuality in Western culture (Ward 2002, esp. 76, 190-192; cf. de Bruijne 2016, 279).

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[114] Ironically, celibacy is a way of life originally abandoned by Luther and other leaders of the Reformation (Shaw 2007, 218–22; cf. Derks, Vos and Tromp 2014, 48, 51–52).

De Bruijne "principally considers a homosexual identity as a second identity" – and he shows some awareness of the field of cultural studies by also mentioning family ties, nationality, race and gender which, in his view, should also be seen as second identities. For him, a gay person makes his homosexual identity absolute "when a No against homosexual intercourse is automatically seen as if a gay person cannot be himself" (de Bruijne 2012d, 65). At the same time, he (self-)critically comments that there needs to be some positive "calling" in someone's homosexual identity and that those making a distinction between primary and secondary identities need to have some account of this positive calling (2012d, 65, cf. 2012b, 144). He claims that homosexuality is a unique phenomenon that shows traces both of the Christian tradition and of the post-Christian departure from that tradition (2012d, 65–66, 2012b, 143). But the problem, de Bruijne remarks, is that "we" – he probably means Dutch orthodox Protestant Christians or theologians – still know too little about contemporary homosexual – and heterosexual – identities (2012d, 66–67; cf. Derks, Tromp and Vos 2010a, 14; de Bruijne 2010, 156; Derks, Tromp and Vos 2010b, 144).

Instead of elaborating in more detail the particularities of different sexualities, the very concept of sexuality itself and the implications for Christian ethics, my suggestion is to work towards a better *theological* understanding of the meaning of 'identity in Christ'. This will bring further not only this Protestant discourse, but also other religious and secular discourses about religious and homosexual identity. My approach is more radically theological than that of McIntosh, who warns that public theology risks the "pitfall of apologetics – whereby, in the aim to defend itself and its public relevance, theology retrenches down the path of tradition and adopts a position of 'radical orthodoxy'" (McIntosh 2017, 307–8). The next section will be a first step towards making a theological contribution to the public issues of sexuality and sexual diversity. "Who we truly are is hidden in Him," de Bruijne (2012d, 65) comments. But what is this identity? How does one receive, know and perform it? To address these questions, I will turn once more to Mark Jordan as well as to one of his former students (Andy Buechel). However, as I like to play safe when it comes to sexuality, I will also elaborate on the views of two theologically talented bishops (Rowan Williams and Elizabeth Stuart) and – through the work of all these four scholars – of a doctor of the church (Thomas Aquinas).

5. Sacramental Characters

In her essay "Sacramental Flesh", queer theologian Elizabeth Stuart argues that sexual and gender identities are always "constructed in the context of power and are part of a matrix of dominance and exclusion" (Stuart 2007, 68). The 'being yourself' rhetoric regularly excludes particular non-Western and non-secular sexualities; the Protestant 'being in Christ' discourse shows little awareness of such power dynamics, effectively reinforcing heteronormativity – or at best questioning such only partially. While what Stuart argues would

also go for the sociological notion of religious or Christian identity, this might not be the case when we think through the theological notion of 'identity in Christ'. Elaborating Rowan Williams' discussion of the sacraments, Stuart claims that through the sacramental rite of baptism a person receives a new identity in Christ: it is "an identity over which we have no control whatsoever. It is sheer gift." (2007, 66; cf. Williams 2000, 189, 210–11) The baptised person no longer lives, but Christ lives in her or him, acting through them, making their flesh sacramental.

Both Stuart and Williams are inspired by Thomas Aquinas, whose discussion of the effects of the sacraments has been more fully elaborated by Jordan in his essay "Sacramental Characters". In his thinking the primordial sacrament of baptism "inaugurates a series of inhabitations or vicarious performances that reach backwards, sideways, and forwards through an ingathered history" (Jordan 2006, 328). Put differently, the effect of baptism – and, consequently, confirmation and holy orders – is a sacramental character. It possesses "a power to transfigure one's person, with all its desires, by inhabiting exemplary characters from past and future" (2011b, 53), through which a human being is incorporated "into the divine incitements to a share in divine life" (2006, 329).

Christians, Stuart proceeds, are "called to live out their culturally negotiated identities in such a way as to expose their non-ultimacy, to take them up into the process of redemption, to let their flesh become sacramental. They do this by parodying their culturally negotiated identities." (Stuart 2007, 69; cf. Jordan 2011b, 53) In his discussion of Stuart's essay, Andy Buechel explains that "[p]arody is not primarily about sending up or mocking normative discourses, but rather about performing our socially-scripted roles so as to expose their constructedness, their inadequacy." (Buechel 2015, 69) He argues that ecclesial personhood is not an identity among many others; it is an "anti-identity", which "problematizes and exposes all other ones, but does not grant anything solid in their place" (2015, 66).[115] As such, sacramental characters undermine certain Modernist theories of identity (2015, 69; cf. Williams 2000, 189; Jordan 2006, 324; Stuart 2007, 69). Jordan observes that they resist "the regime of identities proposed by sexuality as its starting point" (Jordan 2011b, 53), which "closes a syntax around sex much more tightly than Christianity ever could" (2011b, 47). While an identity "has no share in the history of the species beyond being its product, and no share in a future except repetition" (2006, 335), sacramental characters have "a complex temporality that cannot be captured by an identity" (2011b, 52). So there is not a single identifiable Christian 'identity', but a multiplicity of sacramental characters, which are cited across time, repeating the performance of their predecessors with a critical difference – and anticipating the performance of future ones (Jordan 2011b, 52; Stuart 2007, 69). The inhabitation of exemplary characters from past and future "is always incomplete; the performances, refracted and

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[115] The term "anti-identity" was suggested to Buechel by Jordan – probably in personal contact or correspondence (cf. Buechel 2015, 66n17).

anticipatory" (Jordan 2011b, 53, 2006, 327). They are sacramental by acknowledging "the ancient reserves underneath Christian speech about sex", because "Jesus' silence about sex is (...) a judgement on the adequacy of speech about constitutive desire" (2011b, 53).

One problem Buechel has with Stuart's account is that she "seems to want to make this identity [or character] into something so stable and secure – apparently in history – that we can rely on it to undo and subvert gender and sexuality." (Buechel 2015, 73) Yet there is no reason to believe that baptised persons are less prone to give in to dominant constructions of identity (2015, 65). Moreover, her account could fuel some kind of Christian identity politics in which the baptised consider themselves superior to non-baptised persons. Stuart is not unaware of these complications as she remarks that, although there is a "radical difference between the selfhood of baptized and non-baptized", this difference "in itself does not determine God's relationship to the non-baptized because God is not bound by her sacraments." (Stuart 2007, 68) But the problem is that Stuart "is not being clear about whether she is speaking ontologically or pedagogically" (Buechel 2015, 75) – or, more precisely, that she does not satisfactorily work out the claims that seem ontological. Williams makes an important remark in this respect by explaining that the possible exclusiveness of the distinction between baptised and non-baptised is "unsettled [by] the constant possibility of transition and the essential independence of this transition from any human corporate policy." (Williams 2000, 212) That is exactly why it is better not to speak of a Christian identity, but of sacramental characters. Paraphrasing Aquinas – and countering a conservative Roman Catholic reading of Aquinas' theology of the sacraments – Jordan asserts,

> Sacramental character is a principle or source of action rather than an inert product of some finished gesture. Character is a conferred role, not a written figure, no mark or stain. (...) Sacramental character enables liturgical participation, but also supposes it; the sacramental character is received by participating in the liturgy. (Jordan 2006, 327)

So the character is not bestowed mechanically outside of the liturgy; it is bestowed symbolically in the liturgy.[116] Liturgies "offer that curious queer mimicry known as camp, but they also and inevitably trouble tidy schemes for regulating loves." (Jordan 2011a, 212–13) Jordan further claims that Christianity remains "a repository of archaic, transgressive characters of desire and gender" (2011a, 213). Celibates and priests are examples of such characters within the Catholic tradition (2011a, 213; cf. Stuart 2007, 2009; Derks 2013; Buechel 2015, 70). Yet official liturgies often fail, "because of ineptness or distraction or lack of preparation. Sometimes it succeeds in unwanted ways." (Jordan 2011a, 212; cf. Buechel 2015, 74) Using a broader theological definition of liturgy instead of a strictly canonical one (cf. Jordan 2006, 329), Jordan recalls a broad range of characters from outside of official church liturgies, such as the

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[116] "For Thomas as for Rahner, sacramental causality is not some mechanical chain, but a symbolically mediated divine presence." (Jordan 2006, 327n9)

Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (an American activist group of gay-men-dressed-up-as-nuns from the 1980s), whom he renders "post-Christian ritual specialists for gay spaces" (2011a, 183). Such characters from queer or camp culture he wants to claim for queer Christianity (2011a, 213, cf. 2011b, 53).

Relating this discussion of sacramental characters more explicitly to what I have discussed in the previous two sections, I would suggest that because of their liturgical embeddedness and the incompleteness of their power, sacramental characters might move us beyond the opposition of interiority versus exteriority that the secular 'being yourself' discourse and the Protestant 'being in Christ' discourse create: the first constructs an immutable homosexual identity inside oneself, the latter constructs an immutable identity 'in Christ' that is disconnected from the body's desires. Sacramental characters also deconstruct the naturalistic or metaphysical *stasis* implied in both Modernist conceptualisations of identity. My proposal to speak of, recognise or perform sacramental characters, is characteristically theological and primarily Catholic. However, this does not mean that I am performing here the character of a master of ceremonies who facilitates a glorious return of Christendom. This proposal actually seems to resonate with the work of the late Saba Mahmood. In her book *Politics of Piety*, she has retrieved the Aristotelian concept of *habitus*, which had been adopted by both early Christians and Muslims, "an acquired excellence at either a moral or a practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person." (Mahmood 2004, 136) By doing so, (moral) performance becomes the possible source of convictions rather than being a product of it.

6. Conclusion

In this article I have shown how a primarily secular Dutch discourse of 'being yourself' often implicates an innate, unambiguous homosexual identity that needs to be found and expressed. It is a Modernist Western concept that is typical of what Jordan calls the regime of sexuality, and that turns out to effectively exclude certain – especially, but not only, non-secular or non-Western – sexualities. Its emphasis on individuality and romantic self-realisation creates or reinforces a tension between erotic or romantic relations and other types of relationality (such as family and religious ties). This homosexual 'identity' is a secular construct, among others because religion is considered its major threat: while the God of Christendom is still looming in the back – not dead yet or maybe making a come-back – the threat of the God of Islam, of the radically religious and racial other, is to be taken more seriously. From a secular perspective, any religious regulation of someone's homosexual identity should be prevented, yet, ironically, this identity is also assumed to be essentially immune to any religious influence, because it is perceived as something innate.

The Protestant 'being in Christ' discourse – including its more elaborate theological articulations – is partly a response to the 'being yourself' discourse.

And yet it remains intentionally and effectively an internal ecclesial discourse. Locating identity outside of oneself, 'in Christ', this perspective on personhood has the radical potential to undermine the identity politics of the regime of sexuality. However, partly because of their lack of serious engagement with some elements of the (Premodern) Christian tradition, many of these Protestants tend to conflate the theological notion of 'identity in Christ' with the sociological notion of Christian identity. By doing so they deliberately or unintendedly fuel a Christian identity politics in which the rejection of homosexuality functions as a religious identity marker in opposition to secular propagations of sexual freedom and diversity. Their lack of serious engagement with insights from critical theory – and queer theory/theology in particular – effectively leads them to reinforce some kind of heteronormativity and possibly to downplaying the personal, political and theological value of sexuality. The individualistic tendencies in both the 'being yourself' discourse and the 'being in Christ' discourse are symptomatic of the regime of sexuality with its static and narrow identities.

On account of the inadequacies of both discourses, I have discussed a queer Catholic view on sacramental characters, as articulated by Buechel, Jordan, Stuart and Williams. They argue that through the sacramental rite of baptism a person receives the sheer gift of this character. It is a role that one plays in liturgical life through critical repetition of characters from past, present and future, performing one's culturally negotiated identities of sexuality and gender in such a way as to expose their non-ultimacy. The notion of sacramental characters tackles the illusion of autonomy and self-determination that underpins much of the 'being yourself' logic; it also prevents Christian discourses about sexuality from giving in to the regime of sexuality. Thinking in terms of sacramental characters deconstructs Christian identity politics as well as the very idea of a distinct Christian lifestyle, because there exists a plurality of characters that are continuously in transition.[117]

The Netherlands has a predominantly secular cultural frame of reference. Both de Bruijne's essay (2016) and the current article show how the country is still struggling to come to terms with its Christian origins – and its departure from these origins – especially in matters of sexuality. It may seem odd, then, to present a Catholic theological view on sacramental characters in a context that is secular in some respects and still Calvinist in other respects. But this notion of sacramental characters could lend itself to a public theology, a theology that 'comes out', turning out to be quite different from what many expect her to be. It is a theology that becomes queer by quarrying in the Catholic tradition without abandoning its critical and self-critical calling. Speaking in terms of sacramental characters seems to have the potential to break some of the deadlocks we encounter in public discourses about homosexuality and sexual diversity. It shifts the focus from identities towards characters and from rights towards rites (cf. Derks 2017). It will require the work of queer theologians and other experts on queer religion to show how

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[117] De Bruijne seems to promote this idea of a distinct Christian lifestyle (2012c, 10).

queer sacramental characters have always already been shaped and performed, on stages and screens, in books and on boats, in churches and clubs. Maybe one day Dutch people will know better how to make sense of a queer guy dancing the night away in Club Church in Amsterdam, wearing nothing but briefs and a rosary, while, from a pedestal above the bar, St Bernadette watches over him and over all the others on the dance floor.

Conclusion

1. Discursive Issues: Words and Actors

1.1 The Power of Words

Throughout this thesis, we have encountered a number of expressions frequently used in public discourses about homosexuality and religion.[118] The first is the characterisation of same-sex marriage as the Netherlands' 'best export product'. The expression itself has been used by several ministers, politicians and LGBT activists, while I argued that this idea also played a role in a Facebook page that called on Dutch flower breeders not to send flowers to the Vatican to brighten up St Peter's Square for Easter, because Pope Benedict XVI had recently criticised developments across the globe that he considered threats to 'traditional' marriage. Earlier documents from the Vatican had explicitly identified same-sex marriage as a – if not *the* – major threat. In 2000, however, the Netherlands had been the first country in the world to open up marriage for same-sex couples. As I argued, the Facebook page denied one Dutch export product (flowers) to the Vatican because the pope had threatened another Dutch export product (same-sex marriage) (Article 1, Section 4). A second frequently used expression, 'being yourself', refers to an ideal that LGBT[119] persons should face no external barriers to express their sexual and gender identity if they so wish (Article 4, Section 3). A third expression to mention here is *weigerambtenaar*, a pejorative name for what was

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[118] In the Introduction, I explained that I would confine myself to discourses on 'homosexuality' instead of 'sexual diversity' or 'queer sexuality', because queer subject positions and politics have been rather absent in the Netherlands (Introduction, Section 1.1). To support this claim, I cited a number of publications from 2011 or earlier (cf. Duyvendak 1996; Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010, 963; Hekma 2011). In the articles that comprise this thesis, this strong focus on homosexuality in secular and Christian discourses has been largely confirmed: although 'homosexuality' and related terms were absent from Pope Benedict's speeches and addresses in most news coverage and responses (especially in 2008/2009) – he targeted modern constructions of 'gender' – his comments were taken as an attack on homosexual persons (Article 1, Section 3); certain discourses on 'being yourself' tend to focus on gays and lesbians instead of sexual and gender minorities more generally – and to foster particular (e.g. Western, secular, white, middle-class) forms of homosexuality (Article 4, Section 3). However, over the last decade, things seem to have changed – and only some of these changes have been registered in this thesis. For example, while the LGBT acronym had been a common term in the English-speaking world for quite some time, it was only after 2010 that the Dutch equivalent (*LHBT*) started to become mainstream in Dutch public discourse, when the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (responsible for emancipation), the Netherlands Institute for Social Research and COC Netherlands started using this acronym. Even more recently, this Ministry, this Institute and COC Netherlands have expanded the acronym by including intersex persons. Moreover, I have the impression that queer subject positions and queer intersectional politics have been emerging over the last couple of years: for example, in and around the political party BIJ1, queer Muslim platform Maruf and the We Reclaim Our Pride collective. However, these developments have hardly become visible in the discourses discussed in this thesis, mainly because these are rather recent developments.
[119] On my use of this and similar acronyms, see notes 3 (Introduction) and 101 (Article 4).

commonly referred to in more neutral terms as *gewetensbezwaarde (trouw)ambtenaar*, a 'marriage registrar with conscientious objections' (hereafter abbreviated again as 'MaRCO'). Such a registrar objected to conducting same-sex wedding ceremonies (Article 2).[120]

The first expression was probably coined by Henk Krol, the editor-in-chief of a gay magazine who had campaigned for the opening up of marriage for same-sex couples and who would later become an MP for a party promoting the interests of elderly people. The second expression also owes its popularity to Henk Krol, as well as Vera Bergkamp, who frequently used it as chair of the country's main LGBT organisation, COC Netherlands, and who continued to use it after she became an MP for the liberal democrats. The term *weigerambtenaar* was coined by a journalist. Once these expressions had entered public discourse, each term was quickly taken up by (other) LGBT activists, journalists, politicians and even Ministers.[121] *Weigerambtenaar* was even elected the Dutch Word of the Year in 2011. The discursive 'success' of these terms – as well as the entrance of the aforementioned two former prominent LGBT activists into national politics – fits a broader image of the success of the political LGBT movement in the Netherlands.

But how are these terms discursively related to religion? The word *weigerambtenaar* in itself does not contain any explicit reference to religion – or to homosexuality, for that matter. However, it has come to evoke the image of *homosexuals* being discriminated against by *Christians* (Article 2, Section 3).[122] While 'being yourself' has general appeal in what Charles Taylor has called an "age of authenticity" (cf. Introduction, Section 2.1), in the Netherlands the expression seems to be particularly linked to LGBT people. Moreover, in that context, 'religion' is frequently considered a major – of not the main – threat to the freedom of LGBT persons to 'be themselves'. There are, however, also examples of Christians using this phrase. Moreover, Dutch theologian Ad de Bruijne has suggested that this ideal of authenticity and the related view on sexuality are partly the fruit of the Christian tradition (Article 4, Section 3). Even less obvious is the way same-sex marriage as the country's 'best export product' is connected to religion. The double role of the Netherlands in international affairs has often been characterised through the use of two interrelated archetypes – the merchant (*koopman*) and the vicar (*dominee*) – that represent the contrasting values of self-interest and altruism respectively.

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[120] Another term that would fit in this list is '*hostiegate* (host gate)'. In 2010, in a small town in the Catholic south of the Netherlands, a young man had been crowned that year's Prince Carnival, the central figure in the three-day Carnival festival starting on the sixth Sunday before Easter and ending before Ash Wednesday. National public outcry emerged after the local Roman Catholic pastor had allegedly 'denied' the Prince holy communion at the traditional Carnival Mass, because the man was living in a homosexual relationship. However, this controversy has not been discussed in this thesis – I have alluded to it in another publication (Derks 2013, 255–56) – and the expression has not been as successful as the three expressions mentioned above.

[121] In the case of *weigerambtenaar*, the term became popular not when it was first used in a regional newspaper in 2001, but when it was used again in a national newspaper in 2007 (see note 73 in Article 2).

[122] On my use of 'homosexuals' as an inclusive term for 'gays and lesbians', see Introduction, Section 1.1 (final paragraph).

When people call same-sex marriage 'our best export product', they emphasise Dutch moral superiority while still using a merchant-like term. Although the Netherlands is presented as a leader in issues of morality, the country is a vicar who has left their religion behind, as same-sex marriage has been largely presented and perceived as a secular victory over religious regulations of sexuality (Article 1, Section 2; cf. Article 2, Section 2).[123]

The discursive function of these three expressions is predominantly *secular*. Expressions originating from Christian communities, however, have not had similar success. Let us turn to two examples. Partly in response to the 'being yourself' discourse, a particular discourse of 'identity in Christ' has emerged among conservative Protestants (Article 4, Section 4). The relative popularity – notwithstanding occasional criticism – of this phrase within these circles is due to the inclusion of the name of Christ and, more generally, to its air of theological validity. It was rarely heard beyond the boundaries of conservative Protestantism, however. A second expression is 'gender ideology', a derogative term coined by the Vatican to combat any (secular) constructionist view on sex and gender (Article 1, Section 3.2). As several studies have shown, this discourse against 'gender ideology' has become very influential in many countries that are predominantly Catholic (e.g. Fassin 2016; Pecheny, Jones and Ariza 2016; Careaga-Pérez 2017; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). The image that emerges from the material discussed in Article 1 is that this Vatican discourse was not particularly successful in the (Calvinist) Netherlands. However, the focus of that article is on the period of Pope Benedict XVI's papacy (2005-2013), while this anti-gender discourse has spread significantly only since the 2010s (Paternotte and Kuhar 2017, 3). In more recent years, I have indeed noticed some echoes of this discourse in the Netherlands, not only among conservative Roman Catholics (most of whom believe that Pope Francis should do more to battle 'gender ideology'), but also among conservative Protestants and even in certain non-religious circles.[124]

1.2 The Absence of Religious Institutions
The voices of religious institutions are remarkably absent from the public discourses discussed in this thesis. Apart from occasional contributions from clergy speaking in a personal capacity, official representatives of Christian churches in the Netherlands did not respond to the cited pronouncements by Pope Benedict XVI; they did not take a public position in the debates about the MaRCO, nor did they comment when evangelical health care organisation Different was accused of providing reparative therapy. Instead, the majority of the responses to the pope have come from *secular* persons or organisations (e.g. politicians, LGBT activists, journalists) and from some celebrities who publicly announced that they would leave the Roman Catholic Church (Article 1). The

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[123] The country's international outlook was threatened, among others, by the presence of MaRCO's (cf. Article 2).

[124] A term that has not been discussed in this thesis, but which has some popularity among certain conservative or biblically orthodox Christians, is '*christenfobie* (Christianophobia)', analogous to the term '*homofobie* (homophobia)' – and to '*islamofobie* (Islamophobia)', for that matter.

persons who represented 'Christianity' in the public sphere were those who were the objects of criticism and decided to publicly defend their positions: a few Christian MaRCOs (Article 2) as well as Henk van Rhee and a handful of other representatives of Different (Article 3).[125] In addition, there were some Christians in other professional positions who contributed to the debates, such as Christian politicians (Articles 2 and 3), Christian journalists (Article 3, Section 3.3; Article 4, Section 4) and the leader of a Christian labour union that had decided to look after the interests of MaRCOs (Article 2, Section 3).[126] In short, (lay) Christians managing or representing Christian organisations or holding (other) public positions have taken over the public role of church representatives. These Christians derive their authority from their professional position as well as from their personal belief or relationship with God (esp. if they are Protestant), while for the most part they act independently of church authorities.

However, perhaps the absence of churches in these debates is unsurprising: although church authorities can influence their members, legally they have no say about what, say, (Christian) civil marriage registrars or (Christian) health care providers should do. Is the absence of religious institutions the result of my choice of certain debates in which churches turn out to be absent – or maybe even the result of a deliberate choice of debates in which churches do not play a role? I do not think so. The most substantial and heated debates about homosexuality and Christian religion are indeed the ones discussed in the first three articles included in this thesis.[127] I am aware, though, that the claim I am making here about the public role of religion in contemporary Dutch society is based on only a few examples of public discourses about religion and homosexuality. Therefore, I am trying not to draw too strong conclusions.

One major reason why religious institutions are absent from most public discourses about homosexuality is that views, practices and experiences within church communities often go unnoticed by the so-called general public. The doings of a Christian civil servant, however, or those of a Christian health care provider are more visible or, so to speak, more 'public'.[128] Not only do they

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[125] Henk van Rhee was the Director of Tot Heil des Volks (THDV), the umbrella organisation under which Different resides, and as such the spokesperson of Different.

[126] Unfortunately, I have not been able to include substantial critical reflections on the role of Christian journalists or media in this thesis, although there are several examples of Christian newspapers or broadcasting companies covering news about the MaRCO and Different in distinctive (and sometimes partial) ways. Another category that could be included in this list are Christian schools, but schools have not been discussed in this thesis at all. However, there have been many debates on two issues related to religious schools: First, do schools, who legally have the freedom to select teachers that fit the school's profile, have the right to fire – or refuse to employ – teachers living in a homosexual relationship? Second, should the government stipulate what schools teach their students about sexuality? Although these are issues that affect all schools, the focus in media and politics has been on religious schools.

[127] Other heated debates about homosexuality and Christianity were those concerning Christian schools (see note 126). Churches or church representatives played little to no role in those debates either.

[128] An example of a practice within a church community that did *not* go unnoticed was the alleged 'refusal' of a local priest to give holy communion to an 'openly gay' Prince Carnival (see note 120). However, this became a public controversy only because the priest's decision affected a public figure (Prince Carnival). In the weeks that followed, the parish church of Uden as well as

operate in a more 'public' arena, they also need to adhere to particular laws and professional regulations that do not apply to churches or clergy. Moreover, many of them get paid or funded by the government – that is, with public money.

In the cases discussed in the first three articles, we observe a series of conflicts prompted by secular attempts to push religion out of the public sphere. Secular critics targeted the presence or power of (allegedly) anti-gay Christians in the Dutch public sphere, as if to say "no 'homophobic' pope amidst 'our' flowers" (cf. Article 1, Section 4), "no 'homophobic' marriage registrars at 'our' city halls" (cf. Article 2), "no 'homophobic' therapy reimbursed with 'our' tax money" (cf. Article 3, Section 3.1). Therefore, it makes sense that these attempts were directed at Christian organisations or Christians holding public offices rather than focusing on churches or church authorities.

2. Secularism, Christianity and Islam

2.1 Secular Panic

In the first three articles, we saw several examples of heated (secular) responses to news about religion and homosexuality. Two of Pope Benedict XVI's addresses to the Roman Curia and his messages for World Peace Day 2008 and 2013 were each covered by many media outlets, provoking responses from LGBT organisations, politicians, celebrities and others. Although the media could have covered several other elements addressed by the pope in those speeches, the focus in almost every news item was on what the pope had – allegedly – said about gays and lesbians (Article 1 Section 3.1). In 2007, the hitherto almost invisible and undebated phenomenon of the MaRCO that had de facto existed since the opening up of marriage for same-sex couples in 2001 transformed into a political controversy when the coalition agreement of the labour party and two *Christian* parties included the promise that, if necessary, MaRCOs would receive legal protection. In the public imagination, all MaRCOs were *Christians.* It took another seven years before a majority was reached in Parliament to 'ban' the MaRCO (Article 2). In 2012, a news article revealed that clients of the Christian health care organisation Different could get the costs of their treatment reimbursed through their health care insurance viz. with public money, while for decades Different had repeatedly been accused of offering reparative therapy to Christian "persons with homosexual feelings". Within hours of the article's publication – that is, before the Health Care Inspectorate had even started an investigation – several MPs condemned Different's therapy, while the Minister of Public Health herself promised to make reimbursements no longer possible (Article 3, Section 3.1).

The intensity of these responses was partly due to the fact that many believed that what the pope said, what Different had been doing or what

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the Cathedral of 's-Hertogenbosch turned into public stages of protest, with several politicians and LGBT activists acting on their (nominal) membership of the Roman Catholic Church (cf. Derks 2013).

MaRCOs were refusing to do, had harmed or would harm (some) gays and lesbians. I neither confirm nor deny that these perceptions were correct, though I have questioned them: the pope addressed many issues (e.g. the environment, truth, the family), while he never explicitly spoke of 'homosexuality' (Article 1, Section 3.2); the actual number of MaRCOs seems to have been rather limited and did not prevent same-sex couples from marrying at any municipality (Article 2, Section 2); and the Minister and MPs responded rashly without having substantial evidence about the nature and effects of the health care provided by Different (Article 3, Section 3.1). However, in each case, it was *believed* that the happiness, health and wellbeing of gays and lesbians were at stake, and this could explain why many were so upset.

But this is not the only explanation. What also contributed significantly to the fervour of the responses was the involvement of a *religious* person (the pope), group of persons (MaRCOs) or organisation (Different).[129] What we see here can be called secular panic.[130] Although 'secular panic' is not (yet) a fully developed concept, it has been used by several scholars to highlight and explain certain dynamics in public controversies. For example, Nachman Ben-Yehuda, a sociologist who has published extensively on social deviance and moral panic, has shown how "[s]ecular press coverage of *Haredi* (...) tends to create a secular panic, and instill fear and feelings of disgust (...)" (Ben-Yehuda 2011, 50). In a similar way, press coverage about the MaRCO instilled the fear that he would reject same-sex couples on the most beautiful day of their lives.[131] Moreover, many opponents of the MaRCO claimed that these marriage registrars' conscientious objections were a cover for what was actually an aversion to homosexuality (Article 3, Section 3). A second example is taken from a book on state transformation in Turkey, written by the sociologist Yıldız Atasoy. She uses the phrase "*headscarf madness*" to define "an expression of the secular 'panic' associated with a perceived Islamic threat". The effect of this "madness" or "panic" is twofold: on the one hand, it "plays a leading role in the binding power of the Kemalist state over society", while on the other hand, it "generates considerable Islamic distrust against the state." (Atasoy 2010, 176;

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[129] Of course, there were even more factors that played a role in each of these cases. The same Minister who seemed to allow the use of health care insurance for covering the costs of reparative therapy had just made significant cuts in the basic package of health care insurance (Article 3, Section 3.1). The controversy about the MaRCO was in part due to the fact that this passage in the coalition agreement was highlighted and criticised by a symbolic person (the Major of the country's capital, who had conducted the world's first same-sex wedding ceremonies in 2001) at a symbolic site (the *Homomonument* in Amsterdam) on a symbolic day (Valentine's Day) (Article 2, Section 2).

[130] These could also be considered examples of what Dutch Remonstrant minister Tom Mikkers, in a book written for a broader audience, has called "*religiestress* (religion stress)". Whereas 'secular' in 'secular panic' characterises the one who 'panics', 'religion' in 'religion stress' says something about the *cause* of the stress. Therefore, it has a broader meaning: it characterises not only a phenomenon among *secular* people, but also similar phenomena among different types of *religious* people. Mikkers argues that *religiestress* "develops when the pressure of religious or ideological views and behaviour on people becomes too strong. People and their relations get under pressure, resulting in a high risk of tensions, conflicts, avoidance and violence." (Mikkers 2012, 10)

[131] I use a male pronoun here mainly for reasons of grammatical clarity, but also because in popular imagination (most) MaRCOs were men.

emphasis in the original) In the cases I have discussed in this thesis, I do not see clear examples of such a binding power of the Dutch state over society: the issue of the MaRCO was settled when – after years of lobbying by LGBT activists and MPs – a majority was reached in Parliament; the issue of Different was settled by the decision of a Minister viz. the state – a result of pressure from politicians and LGBT activists, among others, but also based on an investigation of the Health Care Inspectorate.

Although the aforementioned cases of secular panic do not seem to have sown distrust against the state, they were taken by some biblically orthodox Christians as 'proof' of widespread hostility towards Christians. This panic enabled them to shift the attention away from the discrimination of LGBT persons to the discrimination of Christians (cf. Section 3.3). This, in turn, generated some sympathy for (biblically orthodox) Christians in some (religious and non-religious) right-wing circles as well as distrust in what (biblically orthodox) Christians and others consider 'the political establishment'. Before I further elaborate on these findings (Section 2.5), I want to reflect on the discursive battle between secular advocates and Christian critics of sexual diversity (Section 2.2), the different attitudes of Christians and Muslims towards secular society (Section 2.3) and certain secular appropriations of Christianity (Section 2.4).

2.2 The Battle between Secular Advocates and Christian Critics of Sexual and Gender Diversity

Certain secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity are caught up in a battle with certain Christian critics about evaluations of homosexuality – and of sexuality and gender more generally.[132] It is important to note that the distinction I am making between these two 'groups' is an *ideal-typical* distinction, which I borrow from Ad de Bruijne (2016; cf. Article 4, Section 2) – and, indirectly, from Charles Taylor (2007a, 539–93; cf. Introduction, Section 2.1). Therefore, my claim does not apply to *all* secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity. Nor do I want to suggest that these advocates agree on all issues in this area. In a similar way, my claim does not apply to *all* Christian critics – let alone all Christians. Nor do I want to suggest that all these Christian critics are unable or unwilling to value any kind of sexual or gender diversity. At the same time, this does not mean that we are dealing with obscure, marginal groups; instead, secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity can be found throughout society, while the Christian critics discussed in this thesis have varying professional positions and varying confessional or denominational backgrounds – although most of them can be found among 'conservative' or 'biblically orthodox' Protestants.[133]

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[132] As I will show below in Section 3.2, their battle is also about the evaluation of certain basic rights.
[133] We have to be cautious, however, in using terms like 'orthodox' or 'conservative' (cf. note 103). Moreover, as I have noted in this Conclusion, Section 1.1, similar views can be observed among certain conservative Roman Catholics in the Netherlands, who have only recently become more vocal on so-called family values.

The strong secular preoccupation with religion when it comes to evaluations of homosexuality has already been discussed in the previous section (2.1), while the most outspoken examples of Christian critics discussed in this thesis are Henk van Rhee and other representatives of Different, who have frequently and fervently criticised secular views on homosexuality, while also accusing their secular opponents of discrimination against Christians (Article 3; cf. this Conclusion, Section 3.3). Debates on homosexuality reveal that secular advocates and Christian critics of sexual and gender diversity are each other's favourite enemies. On the one hand, they fundamentally disagree about how to evaluate homosexuality: secular discourses emphasise that LGBT persons should be free to express their sexuality, whereas conservative Christian discourses consider opposite-sex marriages the only legitimate context for expressing one's sexuality. More specifically, while certain secular discourses place (homo)sexuality viz. (homo)sexual orientation at the core of someone's identity (Article 4, Section 3; cf. Article 2, Section 6), certain conservative Christian discourses tend to trivialise sexuality – or, actually, *non-heterosexual* sexuality (Article 4, Section 4; cf. Article 3).

On the other hand, they do have a few things in common. They share a strong preoccupation with sexuality – and with homosexuality in particular (Article 1, Section 3.1; Article 2, Section 2; Article 3, Section 2.2; Article 4, Sections 3 and 4). More specifically, they both consider it important to *talk* about (homo)sexuality: to talk about one's sexuality by 'coming out' as, for example, gay or lesbian; to write books and reports on (homo)sexuality; to organise dialogue and debate on the subject. In this respect, secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity participate in a much longer Christian history of sex-talk, inaugurated by St Augustine's erotic confessions (Jordan 2011b, cf. 2002, 2005, 2011a; Burrus, Jordan and MacKendrick 2010). Another similarity between secular and Christian discourses is that both tend to yield identity politics. Most secular – and some Christian – media, politicians and activists perceived Pope Benedict XVI's utterances about the importance of (opposite-sex) marriage and the (nuclear) family or the conscientious objections of certain marriage registrars as ad hominem rejections of gays and lesbians (Article 1, Section 3.1; Article 2, Section 3). From their perspective, gays and lesbians were discriminated against because of 'who they are'. As I have shown in the final article of this thesis, the discourse about 'being yourself' as a gay or lesbian person renders sexuality a core aspect of someone's identity that needs to be discovered, developed, cultivated and profiled (Article 4, Section 3). The counter-discourse on 'being in Christ' that has emerged among certain conservative Protestants replaces this gay identity with an identity in Christ. More precisely, they call on gays and lesbians to replace a possible homosexual relationship with a personal – yet almost entirely disembodied – relationship with Christ (Article 4, Section 4). Both this primarily secular 'being yourself' discourse and the 'being in Christ' discourse are centred around static and narrow (sexual resp. religious) identities (Article 4, Section 6).

2.3 The Different Attitudes of Christians and Muslims towards Secular Society
As I have shown in the Introduction (Section 1.2) as well as in Article 4 (Section 3), not only (certain) Christians, but also Muslims are frequently depicted as hostile towards LGBT persons.[134] How, then, do discourses about Christians compare to discourses about Muslims when it comes to their (alleged) respective views on homosexuality? Before answering this question, let me repeat something I already pointed out in the Introduction of this thesis: while studies on Dutch public discourses about homosexuality and Islam focus on (nationalist) discourses about Islam, they do so without attending to Muslim discourses themselves. This thesis, by contrast, discusses not only (secular) public discourses about Christianity and homosexuality, but also *Christian* public discourses about homosexuality and secularism (Introduction, Section 1.3). In the previous section (2.2), I have shown that certain Christian persons or groups play an active role in such discourses and that they are fighting a cultural battle with certain secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity. When I compare my findings with those of Paul Mepschen, Jan Willem Duyvendak and other scholars mentioned in the Introduction (Section 1.2), there does not seem to be a similar battle between Muslims and secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity.

One possible explanation is that Christians – at least those from mainstream or traditional churches – hold more powerful public positions than Muslims, the majority of whom are first, second or third generation immigrants.[135] For example, we have seen Christian politicians or political parties playing key roles in several debates (Articles 2 and 3). Moreover, we have encountered Different, a Christian health care organisation that has been active for four decades and is part of an umbrella organisation that was founded in 1855 (Article 3). Although Different's position was and remains rather marginal, they do have connections to (small) Christian organisations such as political parties and media. Finally, there are strong indications that a significant number of civil marriage registrars have Christian backgrounds (Article 2). So, while in public debates about homosexuality we find Christians in various professional positions who express their views or interests as Christians – or the views or interests of the Christian communities they are part of – we do not see Muslims in similar professional positions expressing themselves in similar ways.

Anthropologist Daan Beekers's ethnographic research among young Sunni Muslim and Calvinist Christian youth in the Netherlands might help us even further in trying to understand these differences. Besides revealing the similarities between these two groups, Beekers also highlights a few differences that are important for my argument. He shows that sexual issues

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[134] It seems that advocates of sexual and gender diversity on the left side of the political spectrum tend to be more sympathetic towards Muslims/Islam and more critical towards Christians/Christianity, while the opposite seems to be the case with right-wing advocates of sexual and gender diversity.

[135] Cf. note 6. The social position of Christian immigrants from non-Western countries (many of whom are active in Pentecostal migrant churches) might be similar to that of Muslims.

(e.g. homosexuality, pornography, masturbation) are being discussed more often and more openly among Christian youth, whose moral views are less strict than those of their Muslim peers. In that sense, Beekers comments, Christian youth show more similarities with (secular) mainstream youth. It is striking to find, then, that Christians put more emphasis on sexual values and that they criticise the 'sexualisation' of Dutch society more explicitly. One possible explanation for this difference, Beekers argues, is that Muslims are often already seen as the ethnic or religious other of Dutch (secular) society. Therefore, they have less reason to actively express or construct a distinct Muslim identity. These Christians, on the other hand, who realise they are not that different from their secular peers, ask themselves whether their Christian identity makes a difference in the way they live their lives. Therefore, they might feel the need to distinguish themselves from their secular fellow citizens (Beekers 2016, 200–201, cf. 2015, 137–80). In addition, while biblically orthodox Christians live, for a large part, 'secularised' sexual lives, they distinguish themselves by taking a counter-cultural stance when it comes to homosexuality or other types of non-heterosexual sexuality (Derks 2012, 109; Derks, Vos and Tromp 2014, 49).

It is important to be aware of the different attitudes of Christians and Muslims towards secular society as well as different secular attitudes towards Christians and Muslims respectively. In an essay on the cultural battle between biblically orthodox Christians and what he calls "late modern propagators of sexual emancipation", de Bruijne points to the "incapacity" of (Dutch) secular culture to cope with "new religiously inspired and sometimes repressive approaches of sexuality, for example in the response of some Muslims to expressions of homosexuality or female nudity" (de Bruijne 2016, 281; cf. Article 4, Section 2). He suggests that this incapacity is the result of the imagined viz. uncompleted liberation from a religious past, and that it could be overcome if secular advocates of sexual diversity would engage in a constructive dialogue with orthodox Christians. I agree, albeit with a slightly different understanding of orthodoxy.[136] That is one reason for why I will end this Conclusion with some suggestions for such a constructive dialogue (Section 5).

2.4 Secular Appropriations of Christianity

Throughout this thesis I have focused on interactions between Christian and secular actors in Dutch public discourses on homosexuality (cf. Introduction, Section 1.3). As I explained above, the distinction between Christian critics and secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity is an *ideal-typical* distinction (Section 2.2). One of the things to keep in mind while making this distinction is that there are different factors involved in rendering a perspective, conviction, discourse or practice secular or Christian – or Muslim, for that matter. What is presented or perceived as secular at first sight is never simply just that. In this

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[136] See note 102 (Article 4).

section, therefore, I want to reflect on the secular appropriation of Christianity in public discourses on homosexuality in the Netherlands.

One example of secular appropriation of the Christian tradition can be found in the debates about the MaRCO. I have explained that in the Netherlands, civil wedding ceremonies are strictly separated from – and need to precede – any religious wedding liturgy. With secularisation, the number of couples that want to have their marriage blessed in a church service has decreased. However, the ceremonial aspects of the civil wedding are highly valued – maybe even increasingly so among the growing part of Dutch citizens who self-identify as non-religious. When we look at the sermon-like speeches of many marriage registrars or at the way they perform the legal formality of taking the bridal couple's vows, we recognise the Christian origin of the ritual and notice that marriage registrars have taken over the role of the minister or priest in sanctioning the marriage. When a Christian MP suggested that removing the ceremonial aspects of civil weddings might prevent a 'ban' on the MaRCO, the many critical responses revealed how important these ceremonial aspects were, especially for non-religious couples (Article 2, Sections 4-5).

Another example concerns a more explicit secular appropriation of the Christian tradition. Several secular organisations or persons who did not self-identify as Christian nevertheless used Christian images, stories, teachings or principles to rebuke Pope Benedict XVI. By doing so, they implied that they knew better than the pope or the church what Christianity is all about (Article 1, Section 2.3). Although I have not discussed similar examples in the other three articles, this is a rhetorical device one occasionally encounters in public debates about homosexuality and Christianity in the Netherlands. These are examples of "secularism not merely organiz[ing] the place of religion in nation-states and communities but also *stipulat[ing]* what religion is and ought to be" (Brown, Butler and Mahmood 2013, ix; emphasis in the original). From this secular perspective, religion is or ought to be about loving your neighbours, particularly those neighbours secularism claims to love most and believes are despised the most by religions: LGBT persons. The implication is that they have a positive view on sexual diversity precisely because they are not religious themselves. In that sense, their view on religion can be qualified as "sexular", a neologism used by Joan Scott (2009) and Ann Pellegrini (2005) to emphasise the centrality of sex and sexuality in the self-construction of secularism (cf. Introduction, Section 2.3).

At the same time, when secular organisations or persons positively appropriate elements from the Christian tradition to articulate their views in opposition to religious persons or groups, we are compelled to ask what kind of secularism we are dealing with. There are different forms of secularism active in our world, interacting with different (minority and majority) religions in a variety of national or cultural contexts (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008a, 2013; cf. Introduction, Section 2.3). For example, writing about the boundaries between the religious and the secular in American public life, Janet Jakobsen

and Ann Pellegrini speak of "Christian secularism". They argue that "Christianity gets to have it both ways: Christian practices and claims can 'float', sometimes being overtly marked as religious, at other times passing as secular" (2013, 141). I think this is an interesting observation, one possibly relevant to the Dutch context. However, I want to highlight two differences between their research and mine. First, while Jakobsen and Pellegrini write about *legal* discourses (esp. court decisions) in which Christian principles are deployed in the name of secularism, I have used different types of source material from public discourse, not – or only occasionally – juridical texts and their reception in the media. Second, as I will further explain below, while Christianity is the cultural majority in the United States, the situation in the Netherlands is more complicated. Without arguing the exact opposite, I shift the emphasis by suggesting that in the Netherlands it is *secularism* that gets to have it both ways: secular rhetoric can 'float', sometimes being overtly marked as secular, at other times passing as religious.

When Dutch secularism 'passes as religious', it passes as *Christian* – or, more specifically, as (liberal) Protestant. In discourses about religion and homosexuality, secularism does so in at least two ways. The first way is the (aforementioned) positive appropriation of images, stories, teachings or principles from the Christian tradition to criticise the way LGBT people are treated by the church (or by a particular Christian denomination, community or organisation). This type of appropriation is more common among people on the political left.[137] The second way is the often rather vague appeal to 'the Judeo-Christian tradition' in arguments to 'protect our values' – especially the values of tolerance and acceptance of LGBT people – against the alleged 'homophobia' and growing power of Islam in Dutch society (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010; Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2014; cf. van den Hemel 2014; Introduction, Section 1.2). This is obviously a more right-wing re-appropriation of the Christian tradition. Taking into account this second type, it also becomes clear that, while secular rhetoric can 'pass' as Christian, it cannot 'pass' as Muslim – I have not come across any similar secular use of Islam when it comes to evaluations of homosexuality.

This flexibility, this ability to 'float', is a privilege; and it is a secular rather than a Christian privilege. It is secularism, with its aura of neutrality and universality, that is the most powerful and privileged position.[138] In this respect, the Dutch context is exceptional or at least different from that of other European or Western countries, as has been shown by Menno Hurenkamp, Evelien Tonkens and Jan Willem Duyvendak. In their analysis of discussions about homosexuality and religion in three European countries, they conclude that, "[w]hile in France and the UK, Islam is often compared to Christianity, in the Netherlands the alternative to Islam is almost always secularism" (Hurenkamp, Tonkens and Duyvendak 2012, 131).

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[137] Cf. note 134.
[138] This discursive mobility is probably only or primarily granted to – and by – white, 'autochthonous' Dutch citizens.

I do not want to make a strong either/or distinction between secularism and Christianity here, however. After all, Dutch secularism has developed in an (originally) Christian – and, more specifically, Calvinist – country. Moreover, it is related to Christianity not only through deliberate and explicit negation (cf. Sections 2.1 and 2.2), but also through explicit and implicit re-appropriation (see the examples given at the beginning of this section). Such re-appropriations are (post)secular disseminations of the ethics of the country's hegemonic tradition – that is, that of (liberal) Protestantism (cf. Brown, Butler and Mahmood 2013, ix; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2000, 15).

2.5 Secular Blind Spot
One of the negative effects of the strong focus on 'religion' as the main or even only obstacle to the positive evaluation of sexual freedom and diversity is that, in some cases, it reinforces certain religious oppositions against homosexuality (cf. Section 2.1). Some Christian persons or groups will oppose homosexuality even more fervently and obstinately in order to show that they will not let others dictate their thoughts or actions (cf. Section 2.3). It hardly needs to be stated that this effect puts queer Christians in an even more difficult position than many of them are already in. Moreover, the image of religion as inherently hostile towards homosexuality prevents one from discovering liberating or empowering elements in religious texts, traditions, practices or communities (cf. Section 5).

But there is yet another risk: the threat to the freedom and well-being of LGBT persons could come from another, unexpected direction. At the end of the first article in this thesis, I argued that the focus on what the pope or 'religions' in general allegedly think and say about homosexuality could have the effect of overshadowing similar views amongst non-religious citizens, especially in a post-Christian country as the Netherlands (Article 1, Section 5). I offered a specific example at the end of the third article when pointing to how Different had frequently debunked what they called 'political correctness'. By this they meant the views of secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity. However, such anti-establishment criticism can also be found among (other) right-wing populists who pride themselves in being politically incorrect. One can think here of the more recent rise of protests against 'gender ideology' (cf. Section 1.1). As LGBT emancipation has become more and more associated with the establishment over the last two decades (cf. Section 1.1) and as Christians have – to some extent – become a cultural minority (cf. Section 2.4), the power dynamics might easily change, because, as I will work out below, being a minority can always be turned into a site of privilege (cf. Section 3.3).

3. Fights about Rights

3.1 Justicialisation
In debates about homosexuality and religion, there seems to be a strong emphasis on finding *juridical* solutions for what is considered as a social problem. One could address the problem in question by engaging in rational

debate and dialogue or deploying humour and irony. One could also have confidence that standing regulations, procedures or policies could provide good – or maybe even better – solutions in a more dynamic and organic way. One could even take the opportunity to reflect more fundamentally on the way this social problem is being constructed and whose interests are being served. In the cases discussed in this thesis, we do indeed find such responses. However, when LGBT persons claim or are assumed to be negatively affected by the words or actions of a religious person or organisation, we also frequently hear calls for new legislation, legal protection or juridical sanctions. On the other hand, conservative Christians highlight their rights or call for legal protection when they anticipate new legislation or juridical sanctions that would limit their freedom to act in accordance with their religious views on (homo)sexuality.

I have highlighted and critically discussed this tendency in Article 2. Many opponents of the MaRCO argued that MaRCOs had to 'simply execute the law' by conducting same-sex wedding ceremonies. Strictly speaking, this rhetoric does not allow for *any* type of conscientious objectors among *any* type of civil servants (Article 2, Section 3). Some defenders of the MaRCO, however, claimed or implied that marrying couples had the 'right' to choose a marriage registrar they felt a connection with. Even if they expressed their views in general terms, they were primarily serving the interests of *('biblically orthodox') Christian* opposite-sex couples and marriage registrars (Article 2, Section 4). We can also see this tendency in the cases discussed in the other articles.[139] For example, there were several politicians and LGBT activists who called for legal actions against the pope or the Vatican to limit their freedom of speech (cf. Article 1).[140] Several conservative Christians emphasised that everyone (including 'Christians with homosexual feelings') had the right to choose their preferred qualified therapist (including a therapist at Different) without losing the right to have the costs of their therapy reimbursed by their insurance company (cf. Article 3).[141]

This emphasis on rights, on finding juridical solutions for social problems, is part of a broader development in Western culture. German scholar of religion, Astrid Reuter, argues that since the late nineteenth century social and private life has become increasingly structured by law – a tendency she calls

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[139] Although I have come across examples of this tendency in the material collected for each of the other three articles, I have, for varying reasons, not discussed this tendency in those articles. Therefore, I cite some additional sources in notes 140 and 141 (as I will do again in note 142).
[140] In 2008, the *Gay Krant* wanted question the Vatican's right to speak at the UN (*Trouw* 2009). A Dutch liberal democrat member of the European Parliament said: "The European Committee should distance itself from these statements. Maybe the pope should even be dragged to court." (Kerknieuws 2009). According to the editor-in-chief of the *Gay Krant* as well as a former liberal democrat MP, "the Vatican, as the only religion with the right to speak at the UN, befits more humility." (*De Pers* 2009) In 2012, COC Netherlands urged the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs to call the papal nuncio to account, while expressing their wish to have the Vatican losing its special status at the UN and the OSCE (COC 2012i).
[141] Henk van Rhee called it "shocking (...) that the broad gay movement seems to deny orthodox Christians with a homosexual orientation the freedom to choose their own lifestyle and matching type of counselling." (van Rhee 2012d) An MP for the Christian Union tweeted about Different's therapy: "People are free to choose for this. Let's keep it that way." (quoted in COC 2012b)

"juridification (*Verrechtlichung*)" (Reuter 2009, 3). But she proceeds by describing a second development:

> [I]n the course of the twentieth century with its catastrophes and human tragedies, the process of increasing 'juridification' went hand in hand with an increasing sense of justice, which led to a shift of political culture towards human rights culture, i.e. to a process of 'justicialization' (*Vergerechtlichung*). In other words: Moral claims are being converted, on the national as well as on the international level, into legal claims, or more specifically human rights claims. (Reuter 2009, 3–4)

A rise of juridico-political discourse of anti-discrimination in the Netherlands has indeed been registered since the 1980s. Soon after the country's new Constitution took effect in 1983, the Constitution's first article, dealing with equal treatment and anti-discrimination, was perceived by the population as expressing the most fundamental norm of Dutch society. This perception became even stronger with the introduction of the Equal Treatment Act of 1994 (Article 2, Section 2; cf. van der Burg 2005, 261–62). Moreover, in the 1980s, Western LGBT movements started to adopt the discourse of human rights, which became central to national and international debates about gender and sexuality in the early 1990s (Kollman and Waites 2009, 2–4).

Writing about religious freedom and church-state relationships in general, Reuter argues that in more recent decades, "[c]ourts of law are increasingly becoming forums for (...) religious boundary conflicts and, in light of the great public attention they attract through media coverage, are becoming stages for new public religious mise-en-scène and mobilisation." She speaks here of a process of "judicialization (*Vergerichtlichung*)" (Reuter 2009, 7). This term generally refers to "the fact that in many modern societies, courts rather than legislative or executive branches decide major political issues" (Richardson 2015, 4). In contemporary public debates about homosexuality and religion in the Netherlands, however, this process of judicialisation does not seem to be that strong. There have been a few court cases, such as the case against a Christian politician who had compared gays with thieves (1996-2001), or, more recently, the *Renkema vs. Dr. K. Schilderschool* case against a Christian primary school that had fired a teacher because of his homosexual relationship (2011).[142] However, these are not really examples of religious mobilisation, nor have we come across such examples in the cases discussed in this thesis.[143]

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[142] In an interview for a national magazine in 1996, MP Leen van Dijke had argued that being a 'practising homosexual' was as bad as being a thief; he was convicted by a lower court in 1998, but acquitted by a higher court in 1999 and finally acquitted by the Supreme Court in 2001 (Spijker 2003, 159–60). On November 2, 2011, the cantonal judge decided that the school had unlawfully fired Duran Renkema because of his homosexual relationship; he was supported by COC Netherlands, who used his case in their campaign against a passage in the Equal Treatment Act (*Reformatorisch Dagblad* 2011b; COC 2013).

[143] Moreover, based on the findings of my research, I think that not the courts of law (judiciary) but Parliament and Senate (legislature) function as the major stages.

3.2 Basic Rights

There are three basic rights that play a major role in public debates about religion and homosexuality: equal treatment or non-discrimination (art. 1 Constitution), freedom of religion (art. 6 Constitution) and freedom of opinion (art. 7 Constitution).[144] From a juridical perspective, each article of the Constitution is of the same value, so the challenge is how to balance two or more basic rights in individual cases. However, we have already seen how article 1 of the Constitution has become increasingly important (Section 3.1; cf. Article 2, Section 2). More specifically, there is currently a lobby to add sexual orientation to the list of grounds for equal treatment or non-discrimination in article 1 of the Constitution (cf. note 144), because sexual orientation is considered a central component of 'who you are' (cf. Article 4, Section 3).

But there is more to be said about the articles at stake in debates about religion and homosexuality. In the heat of a debate, one article is often abandoned for the sake of another – or for the sake of the other *two*. A good example can be found in a column discussed in Article 4. The columnist commented on the government's plan for a "participation contract", by which immigrants would accept "Dutch values". Although it remained largely equivocal about what these "Dutch values" are, a Minister had singled out the "freedom to be yourself" (as gay, Jew or woman). In the columnist's view, the Minister's undue preference for equality effectively meant a devaluation of the freedom of religion and the freedom of opinion. It compromised the freedom of religion, because a religious person is not free to treat gays and lesbians unequally – and rightly so, noted the columnist. However, the columnist also believed that the freedom of opinion would be at risk if immigrants were forced to accept undefined "Dutch values" – a consequence of the participation contract the columnist freely criticised. Therefore, he suggested abandoning the freedom of religion while upholding equal treatment and the freedom of opinion (Article 4, Section 3).

Out of the three basic rights at stake in debates about religion and homosexuality, the freedom of religion is indeed more easily and more frequently renounced than the other two. This can also be noticed in what Hurenkamp, Tonkens and Duyvendak described as the culturalisation of Dutch citizenship: it is "built around three core issues: (1) freedom from religion, or

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[144] I am referring here to three basic rights as they have been articulated in the Dutch Constitution: "All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted." (art. 1 Constitution) "Everyone shall have the right to profess freely his religion or belief, either individually or in community with others, without prejudice to his responsibility under the law." (art. 6, cl. 1 Constitution) "No one shall require prior permission to publish thoughts or opinions through the press, without prejudice to the responsibility of every person under the law. (…) There shall be no prior supervision of the content of a radio or television broadcast. No one shall be required to submit thoughts or opinions for prior approval in order to disseminate them by means other than those mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, without prejudice to the responsibility of every person under the law. (…)" (art. 7, cls. 1-3 Constitution). These translations have been taken from https://www.denederlandsegrondwet.nl/id/vkjaj9crtkv7/hoofdstuk_1_grondrechten (accessed September 24, 2018).

secularization; (2) freedom of the body, or sexual liberation; (3) freedom of speech, the right to publicly express whatever one thinks privately" (Hurenkamp, Tonkens and Duyvendak 2012, 131). While the third issue concerns the freedom of opinion (art. 7 Constitution) and the second issue can be connected to the equal treatment of women and sexual minorities (cf. art. 1 Constitution), the first issue is not about the freedom *of* religion (art. 6 Constitution) but rather about the freedom *from* religion. On the right side of the political spectrum, it seems to be more common to emphasise the freedom of opinion. This freedom is sometimes even interpreted as a 'right to offend' – for example, to offend people because of their religion or their sexuality. Instead of emphasising the responsibility of, for example, the government or schools in fighting discrimination against (certain) minorities, they emphasise that (certain) minorities need to become more resilient to inconvenient jokes or opinions. It is, however, frequently forgotten that the freedom of speech is a *minoritarian* right – that is, it exists to protect the freedom of *minority* groups.

3.3 Minority Rights

Over the last two decades, the general public has become (even more) familiar with the image of LGBT persons as a discriminated minority. The frequency and types of discrimination faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons has been documented in studies by, among others, the Netherlands Institute of Social Research (e.g. Keuzenkamp and Bos 2007; Keuzenkamp and Kuyper 2013; Keuzenkamp 2010b), while such data are disseminated by LGBT organisations and other NGOs as well as through traditional and social media. Moreover, numerous stories of LGBT persons have been related in interviews for magazines and newspapers or in documentaries on national television. 'Religion(s)' is/are frequently portrayed as a major – if not the main – threat to the well-being of LGBT persons.[145]

However, being a minority is not only a matter of numbers, but also of how one is evaluated as a particular minority. One needs to be *recognised as* a minority by others, preferably by people who are not part of this minority group. So, ironically, you need to be powerful – or to have powerful allies – to be recognised as a victimised minority. As we have seen, LGBT organisations and other advocates of sexual and gender diversity have become very successful on a discursive level (cf. Section 1.1). Moreover, COC Netherlands and other LGBT organisations have also achieved a number of politico-juridical successes over the last two decades. When many people in different positions of power (the government, Parliament, NGOs etc.) are promoting – or at least *claiming* to be promoting – the interests of all LGBT persons, this in itself makes it more difficult to present LGBT persons *themselves* as a discriminated minority.

When conservative Christians feel they are wrongly accused of discriminating against LGBT persons, they often use a reversal argument,

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[145] Let me be clear that I am not implying here that this portrayal is purely fictional. Religious communities, organisations or traditions themselves are at least partly responsible for it.

accusing their 'tolerant' opponents of intolerance and claiming that they as Christians are the real discriminated minority (Article 2, Section 6; Article 3, Sections 3.1 and 3.3).[146] Moreover, instead of calling on the universality of Christian doctrine, instead of trying to convince their opponents of the value of their Christian views, they instead emphasise their minority position and their need for (legal) protection. This is a common strategy among conservative Christians in Europe and North America (cf. McIvor 2018). Moreover, they sometimes deliberately articulate a view that they know their secular opponents will perceive as politically incorrect (Article 3, Section 4; cf. this Conclusion, Section 2.5).

4. Homosexuality and Dutch/Secular/Christian Identity

Having a positive attitude towards homosexuality or sexual diversity has become a Dutch identity marker: the freedom – either actually experienced or strongly promoted – to 'be yourself' as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person is frequently mentioned as a central characteristic of the alleged tolerance and open-mindedness of Dutch society (Sections 1.1, 2.2 and 3.2; cf. Article 4, Section 3), while same-sex marriage is presented by many as a major Dutch export product (Section 1.1; cf. Article 1, Section 4). Dutch tolerance of homosexuality has become the impetus for the Dutch once again to promote their country internationally as a leading country (*gidsland*) in matters of morality (cf. Introduction, Section 2.2). In right-wing nationalist discourses, this characteristic of Dutch culture is frequently ascribed to the 'Judeo-Christian' roots of the Netherlands, while it is contrasted with the Muslim culture of certain immigrant groups (Section 2.4; cf. Introduction, Section 1.2). In debates about Christianity and homosexuality, however, Dutch national identity is primarily framed in secular terms (Sections 1.1 and 2.4).

As Dutch cultural sociologist Gabriël van den Brink has argued, secularisation has not led to moral deterioration; instead, there is a strong – and maybe even increasing – emphasis on certain moral standards among the Dutch population (Introduction, Section 2.2). Through particular vocabularies/mantras and actions/rituals, a certain moral attitude of tolerance, acceptance or affirmation is performed towards gays and lesbians – or towards sexual minorities more generally (cf. Sections 1.1 and 2.4). On the other hand, gays and lesbians themselves are also expected to behave in a particular way. Through the very act of '(visibly) being themselves' or 'coming out', they are doing society a favour: people in their social environment – who might initially even feel uncomfortable with homosexuality – are given an opportunity to show that they are good viz. tolerant and open-minded people after all.

By taking a strict stance on homosexuality, certain 'traditional' or biblically orthodox Christians demonstrate to their fellow believers – particularly those

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[146] To admit that (conservative) Christians are a minority is not to accede to "the self-representations of Christian conservatives that Christians are the most oppressed of 'minorities,' because the least recognized as oppressed" (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2000, 15).

who have not (yet) drifted away from allegedly traditional or biblical standards – that they have not abandoned their moral principles (cf. Hauerwas 2001; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004, 10). They can do so even more effectively by contrasting their view with the views of certain 'liberal' Christian or secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity. More specifically, one of the functions of attacking homosexuality is to divert attention away from other practices or arrangements that conflict with long-maintained sexual and gender related moralities, such as the increased equality of women and men, a less restrictive attitude towards divorce and the lowering of social stigmas around out-of-wedlock birth (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004, 9; Derks, Vos and Tromp 2014, 49). There are three reasons for them to express their views in *public* debates viz. towards (primarily) *secular* audiences. First, they want to safeguard the contested space in Dutch society for 'traditional' or biblically orthodox Christians to think, live and act according to what they believe the Bible or the Christian tradition teaches about marriage, sexuality and gender (cf. Section 3.3). Second, taking a public stance also serves to increase their credibility towards their ingroup. They can already gain more credibility by simply expressing a 'restrictive' view on homosexuality, but the effect is stronger if they contrast their view with that of a rhetorically constructed dominant secular enemy. The effect is strongest when an actual clash with this enemy takes place in public debates, because 'traditional' or biblically orthodox Christians could take such a clash as a 'proof' of the enmity of secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity (cf. Section 2.1). At the same time – and this is the third reason – they are increasingly confronted with homosexuality and other types of non-heterosexual sexualities and relationalities even within their own communities. Framing these sexualities and relationalities as secular serves to protect a (straight) Christian identity.

5. Queer Theological Suggestions for More Constructive Dialogues

Many Christian critics and secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity do not expect to learn much from one another. Instead, they often identify inconsistencies in their opponents' arguments. Although such a rhetorical strategy could be a valid part of a rational dialogue, the tone is often cynical rather than empathetic: both seem to be more interested in proving themselves right than in convincing the other, let alone trying to come to a shared understanding of the common good. However, I think that synergies between queer and Christian practices and (intellectual) traditions could be discovered and fostered in order to move beyond contemporary oppositional constructions of 'religion' and 'homosexuality' (cf. Sections 2.2-2.3; Article 4).[147] While my approach in this thesis has been primarily analytical (cf. Introduction, Section 2.3; Article 4, Section 1), I will end this Conclusion by giving three instances in which a more constructive dialogue might be possible.

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[147] On the critical nature of queer theological reflection see Introduction, Section 2.4.

The first possibility was put forward by Pope Benedict XVI in his Address to the Roman Curia in December 2008, when he drew a comparison between the need to protect the rain forests and the need to protect sexed human nature. He then called to "defend love against sex as a consumer good, the future against the exclusive claims of the present, and human nature against its manipulation" (cf. Article 1, Section 2.1). Instead of demonising the pope, calling for legal actions or chanting mantras of 'love is love' or 'born this way', I consider it more productive to take such a claim as an occasion for queer theological reflection on the three objectives mentioned by the pope. First, to what extent are modern, Western constructions of sexuality linked to capitalist consumerism and heteronormativity? Second, how are such accounts of futurity connected to heteronormative reproduction? And third, what if we explore the possible relation between the manipulation of the natural environment and a male *libido dominandi*?

A second example I take from Article 2. One of the reasons why the *weigerambtenaar* was considered a social problem, I argued, was because civil marriage registrars are generally expected to do more than just perform the formalities prescribed by the Dutch Civil Code. These ceremonial aspects of civil wedding ceremonies are uncritical repetitions of Christian rituals. Moreover, they are highly valued among secular and Christian people alike, apparently irrespective of sexual orientation. Has same-sex marriage become, as I tentatively suggested at the end of the article, the ultimate means to give homosexual persons the feeling that they can truly 'be who they are'? What, after all, is the state's understanding of marriage – if it has any – and why is the state's recognition of this particular relationship so important for citizens of different religious and sexual orientations? What has happened to the causes of COC Netherlands and especially the radical faggot movement (*flikkerbeweging*) that used to be rather critical of the very institution of marriage – and of turning it into an object of desire for gay men, lesbian women and other queers?

Article 4 included a more substantial constructive proposal. I argued that both 'being yourself' discourses and 'being in Christ' discourses tend to treat the anthropological features of religion and sexuality as separate 'identities', that these are rather individualistic discourses and that they leave little room for sexual and religious fluidity, diversity and ambiguity. Taking an explicitly queer Catholic perspective, I then proposed to think instead in terms of sacramental characters. Bestowed through the sacramental rite of baptism, a sacramental character is a radical gift, an 'anti-identity' that unsettles all human constructed identities. Suggesting that queer sacramental characters have always already been shaped and performed – in camp places such as churches and clubs – I ended the article by describing the fictional character of a queer guy dancing in a night club while wearing nothing but briefs and a rosary. This is not an empty figure of speech deployed for the mere reason of providing the kind of happy ending many readers tend to expect. If the character is scandalous, it is a *skandalon* like the crucified body of Christ (cf. 1

Cor. 1,23; Gal. 5,11), in which sacramental characters participate. By creating this character, I am doing theology in its celebratory or poetic mode. That character is an instantiation, a radicalisation, even an incarnation of what I have been arguing throughout that article. Like many other (fictional and non-fictional) queer sacramental characters it deconstructs the various oppositions between 'religion' and 'homosexuality' discussed in this thesis. It integrates queer devotions and desires in its body, a body that speaks without words.

Bibliography

Throughout this thesis, references are given in the body of the text using *The Chicago Manual of Style*'s social sciences style of reference.[148] That means that full details of each publication are provided in this Bibliography.[149] However, to place newspaper articles, television programmes and policy documents alongside academic articles or monographs in one list would be counterproductive, because the function of a bibliography is not only to provide full details of individual publications, but also to give an overall impression of the types of academic sources the author has engaged with. Therefore, a certain distinction needs to be made between academic, professional and popular sources, with the middle category possibly merging into either of the other two categories.

There are three levels on which this distinction can be made: the function of the source in this thesis (object of analysis or analytical tool), the qualifications or position of the source's author (scholar or not) or the qualifications of the medium of publication (an academic, professional or popular journal or publisher, or a newspaper, magazine, website etc.). Although I could explain what function each source plays in this thesis, it needs to be noted that some publications by Dutch scholars (also) function as *objects* of analysis (esp. in Article 4, Section 4), while occasionally an op-ed newspaper article that analyses or comments on a public debate is used *analytically* in the development of my argument (esp. in Articles 1 and 2). If I would make a distinction based on the qualifications of the author or the medium, it would still be up to me to decide for each publication whether I consider the author or medium 'scholarly'.

Although there is no way to visualise these ambiguities, a certain distinction has to be made, and I have decided to distinguish between 'Sources from Public Discourse' and 'Academic Literature' based on the function that

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[148] Some sources from public discourse have only been mentioned in footnotes (e.g. tweets, web pages that lack a title, websites as a whole).

[149] When citing a source authored by an institution, I have often abbreviated the institution's name. Abbreviations used for sources provided in Section 1.1 of this Bibliography: CCE for the Congregation for Catholic Education, CDF for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and PCF for the Pontifical Council for the Family. Abbreviations used for sources provided in Section 1.2: Art.1 MN for Art.1 Midden-Nederland (anti-discrimination organisation), AZ for Ministerie van Algemene Zaken (Ministry of General Affairs), BZ for Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), COC for COC Netherlands (the country's main LGBT organisation), IGZ for Inspectie voor de Gezondheidszorg (Health Care Inspectorate), OCW for Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science), THDV for Tot Heil des Volks (evangelical social welfare organisation) and VWS for Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport). Abbreviations used for sources provided in Section 2: APA for American Psychological Association and CBS for Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (Statistics Netherlands).

each source has in this thesis. Dutch academic publications that are object of analysis, however, are still listed in the second category. The Vatican sources cited in Article 1 will be placed in a separate subsection, mainly because these are not sources from *Dutch* public discourse.

As references displayed according to *The Chicago Manual of Style*'s social sciences style of reference consist of the name of the author and the year of publication (and a page number, if applicable), these details in themselves convey little about the character of the cited source. However, I have tried to express myself in this thesis in such a way that it is clear to the reader what the function of a reference is in the context of the argument I am making. If the reader has any doubt, they can check this bibliography to see not only the details of the publication but also the category in which I have placed it.

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Summary

This thesis is about constructions of homosexuality and religion in contemporary public discourse in the Netherlands; the focus on homosexuality – instead of, say, sexual and gender diversity – mirrors a broader tendency in Dutch public discourse. While this thesis elaborates on the work of scholars who have written about homonationalist, anti-Islamic discourses in the Netherlands, it also contributes to the existing body of knowledge by focusing on the significant amount of unexplored source material from contemporary Dutch public discourses about homosexuality in which Christianity plays a discursive role. More specifically, it analyses secular discourses about (Christian) religion and Christian discourses in the presence of secular audiences.

The Introduction offers an overview of the theoretical framework, focusing on the work of two theologically sensitive philosophers of culture (Charles Taylor and Gabriël van den Brink). In addition, it discusses the work of scholars that engage in the critical study of religion, gender and sexuality (in particular Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini). This literature review culminates in the articulation of the author's queer theological perspective. The Introduction then discusses a number of dimensions in the construction of religion and homosexuality (such as whether religion and homosexuality are seen as predispositions, as identities, as practices or in terms of belonging to a particular group or community). It also sets this study's temporal limits, defines the types of source material and describes the method of collecting these sources. Moreover, it explains the research methodology of critical discourse analysis, with its focus on power and ideology. The final part of the Introduction explains how the cases for each of the four articles this thesis consists of have been selected and how this enables a comprehensive discussion of the central topic of this thesis.

Article 1 analyses Dutch perceptions of, and responses to, a number of speeches and messages by Pope Benedict XVI about homosexuality – or, more precisely, speeches and messages that were *perceived* to be about homosexuality. It makes three interrelated arguments. First, it shows how several contributors to the debates took the pope's views on homosexuality to be exemplary of the irrationality and *libido dominandi* of religion and how they implied that the pope could learn something from the Dutch about how to love one's homosexual neighbour. Second, it contextualises Dutch media coverage, with its strong focus on homosexuality, by showing how the pope's comments can be read as part of a Vatican discourse against 'gender ideology'. Third, it shows how the Dutch viewed the papal pronouncements as a threat to what

some consider to be the Netherlands' major moral 'export product': same-sex marriage.

Article 2 concerns debates about civil marriage registrars with conscientious objections against conducting same-sex wedding ceremonies – pejoratively called *weigerambtenaren* (lit. 'refusing civil servants') by their opponents. After discussing the separation of church and state in the authorisation of marriage, the history of the legalisation of same-sex marriage and the issue of freedom of conscience among civil servants in the Netherlands, the article shows how and why a heated debate on the *weigerambtenaar* suddenly erupted in 2007 (and continued for seven years). It looks at the effects of the *weigerambtenaar* as a term, a rhetorical character and a social problem, and shows how it created or reinforced particular oppositions between homosexual persons and Christians. Moreover, it argues that, although the issue was often framed in terms of certain *rights*, it also turned out to be a matter of *rites*, as a quasi-religious performance is often expected from the marriage registrar at the civil wedding ceremony. The article closes with a discussion of the secular meaning of marriage – and 'gay marriage' in particular.

Article 3 analyses public discourses by and on the Dutch Evangelical health care organisation Different, which has repeatedly sparked public outrage because of its negative views on homosexuality and its alleged use of reparative therapy. After a brief sketch of the organisation's history, the article discusses stories and information provided on Different's website and a public controversy around Different in early 2012. Although Different denies that they (still) aim to 'cure' their clients of their homosexual desires, they do imply that these desires are the result of childhood traumas or faulty family dynamics, thereby suggesting – by citing secular research on the construction and malleability of sexuality – that homosexual feelings can 'change'. Moreover, whether referring to desires, acts or lifestyles, homosexuality is always depicted negatively, while living in a homosexual relation is never presented as a serious option for (prospective) clients viz. 'Christians with homosexual feelings'. Critically analysing the debates provoked by a newspaper article on Different in early 2012, the article suggests that Different advertises its controversial views to trigger critical responses from secular advocates of sexual diversity so that it can take these as 'proof' that Christians – rather than LGBT persons – are the true discriminated minority.

Whereas the first three articles analyse particular debates or controversies, Article 4 focuses on how sexual and religious identities are more broadly conceptualised in Dutch public discourses about homosexuality. First, it discusses a predominantly secular discourse that stresses that LGBT persons should be able to 'be themselves'. This discourse often implicitly ignores, subordinates or attacks certain (often religiously fashioned) sexualities, while the 'self' that needs to be realised is primarily rendered a sexual self. Then the article turns to a conservative Protestant (counter-)discourse on 'being in Christ', which subordinates (homo)sexual identity to Christian identity – or

even rejects homosexual identities. Although the theological concept of 'being in Christ' could help to move beyond identity politics, many of these Protestants confuse viz. replace it with the sociological concept of 'being a Christian'. In an effort to move beyond such (Late) Modernist oppositions between religion and homosexuality cast in terms of religious/sexual 'identity', the article then explores the (queer) Catholic concept of sacramental character: bestowed through the sacramental rite of baptism, it is a radical gift and an anti-identity that unsettles all human constructed identities. This idea has the potential to break some of the deadlocks in public discourses about homosexuality and sexual diversity.

The Conclusion further reflects on the four articles. It outlines the rhetorical success of secular discourses in favour of homosexuality or sexual diversity, while pointing to the relative absence of religious institutions in public discourse. It then introduces the concept of secular panic to make sense of the ways in which secular media, politicians, activists and others often respond to news about religion and homosexuality. Discussing the differences and similarities between secular advocates and Christian critics of sexual and gender diversity, it suggests that these are each other's favourite enemies. Moreover, it explains the differences between the outcomes of this research and those of research on homonationalist, anti-Islamic discourses by pointing to the different social locations of Muslims and (biblically orthodox) Christians in the Netherlands. The ideal-typical distinction between secular advocates and Christian critics of sexual and gender diversity is further put into perspective by discussing several secular re-appropriations of the Christian tradition, showing the discursive flexibility of secularism as well as the intrinsic relation between this type of secularism and liberal Protestantism. This part of the Conclusion ends with some remarks on the negative effects of the strong focus on 'religion' as the alleged main or even only obstacle towards the positive evaluation of sexual freedom and diversity. The Conclusion proceeds by highlighting the strong emphasis in debates about religion and homosexuality on finding *juridical* solutions for what is perceived as a social problem. Debates on homosexuality regularly become occasions to evaluate three basic rights: equal treatment, the freedom of opinion and the freedom of religion. While the first two rights are evaluated positively (albeit differently) by different secular groups across the political spectrum, many secular advocates of sexual and gender diversity are critical of the freedom of religion, which affects different religious minorities. This leads to a final observation regarding a tension between being a marginalised minority and being recognised as such (which requires being powerful or having powerful allies), a tension faced by LGBT persons because of the success of the LGBT movement and because (conservative) Christians are emphasising their marginalisation. The Conclusion ends by summarising how attitudes towards homosexuality have become an identity marker for certain secular Dutch citizens and certain biblically orthodox Christians and by making some queer theological

suggestions for a more constructive discussion of issues addressed in this thesis.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift gaat over constructies van homoseksualiteit en religie in hedendaags publiek discours in Nederland. De focus op homoseksualiteit in plaats van bijvoorbeeld seksuele en genderdiversiteit in bredere zin hangt samen met een bredere tendens in het Nederlandse publieke discours. Dit proefschrift bouwt voort op wetenschappelijke publicaties over homonationalistische anti-islamdiscoursen in Nederland, maar levert een academische bijdrage met een analyse van het vele nog amper bestudeerde bronnenmateriaal van publieke discoursen over homoseksualiteit waarin christendom een discursieve rol speelt. Preciezer geformuleerd: het analyseert seculiere discoursen over (christelijke) religie en christelijke discoursen ten overstaan van een seculier publiek.

De introductie schetst een theoretisch kader aan de hand van het werk van twee cultuurfilosofen met een theologische affiniteit (Charles Taylor en Gabriël van den Brink) en het werk van wetenschappers op het terrein van de kritische studie van religie, gender en seksualiteit (in het bijzonder Janet Jakobsen en Ann Pellegrini). Deze bespreking van academische literatuur culmineert in de schets van het queertheologische perspectief van de auteur. De introductie bespreekt vervolgens verschillende dimensies van de constructie van religie en homoseksualiteit (zoals de vraag of religie en homoseksualiteit worden beschouwd als predisposities, identiteiten, praktijken of in termen van het behoren tot een bepaalde groep of gemeenschap). Ook wordt toegelicht hoe de tijdsafbakening is vastgesteld, welke typen van bronnen gebruikt zijn en hoe deze bronnen zijn verzameld. Vervolgens wordt de methode van de kritische discoursanalyse besproken, met haar focus op macht en ideologie. Ten slotte legt de introductie uit hoe de casussen voor de vier artikelen waaruit dit proefschrift bestaat gekozen zijn en hoe de keuze voor deze casussen een volledige en gebalanceerde behandeling van het centrale onderwerp van dit proefschrift mogelijk maakt.

Artikel 1 analyseert Nederlandse percepties van en reacties op een aantal toespraken en boodschappen van Paus Benedictus XVI over homoseksualiteit – of preciezer gezegd: toespraken en boodschappen die (primair) over homoseksualiteit zouden gaan. Het artikel ontwikkelt drie argumenten. In de eerste plaats laat het zien hoe in diverse bijdragen aan de debatten de visie van de paus op homoseksualiteit gezien werd als een voorbeeld van de irrationaliteit en *libido dominandi* van religie, en hoe geïmpliceerd werd dat de paus iets van Nederlanders kon leren wat betreft het liefhebben van je homoseksuele naaste. In de tweede plaats plaatst het artikel de verslaglegging door de Nederlandse media, met haar sterke focus op homoseksualiteit, in perspectief door te laten zien hoe de pauselijke uitspraken kunnen worden

beschouwd als onderdeel van een Vaticaans discours tegen 'genderideologie'. In de derde plaats laat het artikel zien hoe deze pauselijke uitspraken werden gezien als een aanval op wat Nederlanders zijn gaan beschouwen als hun belangrijkste morele 'expertproduct', namelijk het 'homohuwelijk'.

Artikel 2 analyseert debatten over gewetensbezwaarde trouwambtenaren of, zoals ze door veel critici met mogelijk enige minachting genoemd werden, weigerambtenaren. Na een bespreking van de scheiding van kerk en staat wat betreft de voltrekking van het huwelijk, de geschiedenis van de openstelling van het huwelijk voor paren van hetzelfde geslacht en de praktijk van gewetensvrijheid onder ambtenaren in Nederland, laat het artikel zien hoe en waarom een hevig debat over de weigerambtenaar plotseling uitbrak in 2007 (en zeven jaar voortduurde). Het analyseert de effecten van de weigerambtenaar als term, retorisch karakter en sociaal probleem, en laat zien hoe hiermee specifieke tegenstellingen tussen homoseksuelen en christenen gecreëerd of bevestigd werden. Daarnaast wordt betoogd dat, hoewel het onderwerp vaak werd voorgesteld als een kwestie van rechten, het ook een kwestie van riten bleek te zijn. Tijdens de burgerlijke trouwceremonie wordt van ambtenaren van de burgerlijke stand namelijk vaak een quasireligieuze performance verwacht. Het artikel besluit met een discussie van vragen over de seculiere betekenis van het huwelijk en van het 'homohuwelijk' in het bijzonder.

Artikel 3 analyseert publieke discoursen rond de Nederlandse evangelische hulpverleningsorganisatie Different, die regelmatig onderwerp van publieke controverse geweest is vanwege haar negatieve visie op homoseksualiteit en haar vermeende gebruik van conversietherapie. Na een korte schets van de geschiedenis van deze organisatie bespreekt het artikel de ervaringsverhalen en achtergrondartikelen op de website van Different en de publieke controverse rond Different in het voorjaar van 2012. Hoewel Different ontkent (nog steeds) therapie te bieden die gericht is op de 'genezing' van homoseksualiteit, impliceert ze dat homoseksuele gevoelens voortkomen uit trauma's uit de kindertijd of uit ongezonde familierelaties. Onder verwijzing naar seculiere wetenschappelijke studies over de constructie of flexibiliteit van seksualiteit suggereert ze dat homoseksuele gevoelens kunnen 'veranderen'. Of ze nu spreken over verlangens, handelingen of levensstijlen, homoseksualiteit wordt altijd negatief gewaardeerd en leven in een homoseksuele relatie wordt nooit voorgesteld als een serieuze optie voor (toekomstige) cliënten c.q. 'christenen met homoseksuele gevoelens'. Op basis van een kritische analyse van de debatten die volgden op de publicatie van een krantenartikel over Different in het voorjaar van 2012 wordt gesuggereerd dat Different haar controversiële visie uitdraagt om kritische reacties van seculiere verdedigers van seksuele diversiteit uit te lokken, zodat het die reacties kan duiden als een 'bewijs' dat niet LHBT-personen maar christenen de werkelijk gediscrimineerde minderheid zijn.

Terwijl de eerste drie artikelen specifieke debatten of controverses analyseren, richt artikel 4 zich op de vraag hoe seksuele en religieuze

identiteiten worden geconceptualiseerd in Nederlandse publieke discoursen over homoseksualiteit. Eerst bespreekt het een primair seculier discours dat benadrukt dat LHBT-personen vrij moeten zijn om 'zichzelf te zijn'. Op een doorgaans impliciete wijze ontkent, degradeert of bekritiseert dit discours bepaalde (veelal religieus vormgegeven) seksualiteiten. Het zelf dat gerealiseerd moet worden is primair een seksueel zelf. Vervolgens richt het artikel zich op een conservatief-protestants (anti)discours over 'in Christus zijn', waarin (homo)seksuele identiteit ondergeschikt gemaakt wordt aan christelijke identiteit (of waarin homoseksuele identiteiten zelfs afgewezen worden). Hoewel het theologische concept van 'in Christus zijn' zou kunnen helpen om identiteitspolitiek te overstijgen, verwarren veel van deze protestanten het met c.q. vervangen ze het door het sociologische concept van 'christen zijn'. In een poging zulke (laat-)Moderne tegenstellingen tussen religie en homoseksualiteit in termen van religieuze en seksuele 'identiteit' te overstijgen, verkent het artikel het (queer) katholieke concept van sacramentele karakters: het is een radicale gave die men ontvangt door de sacramentele rite van de doop en daardoor is het een anti-identiteit die alle menselijk geconstrueerde identiteiten ondergraaft. Dit idee zou in staat kunnen zijn bepaalde impasses in publieke discoursen over homoseksualiteit en seksuele diversiteit te doorbreken.

De conclusie biedt nadere reflectie op de uitkomsten van de vier artikelen. Eerst wordt het retorische succes van seculiere pleidooien voor homoseksualiteit of seksuele diversiteit getoond en wordt gewezen op de relatieve afwezigheid van religieuze instituties in het publieke discours. In het tweede deel wordt het concept van seculiere paniek gebruikt om de manier te duiden waarop seculiere media, politici, activisten en anderen vaak reageren op nieuws over religie en homoseksualiteit. Ook worden de verschillen en overeenkomsten tussen seculiere verdedigers en christelijke critici van seksuele en genderdiversiteit besproken. Beide groepen blijken elkaars favoriete vijanden. Deze dynamiek alsmede de verschillen in sociale positie tussen Moslims en (orthodoxe) christenen in Nederland vormen een verklaring voor de verschillen tussen de uitkomsten van dit onderzoek en die van studies over homonationalistische anti-islamdiscoursen. Het ideaaltypische onderscheid tussen seculiere verdedigers en christelijke critici van seksuele en genderdiversiteit wordt verder gerelativeerd door diverse voorbeelden te bespreken van een seculier beroep op de christelijke traditie of gebruik van elementen daaruit. Dit wijst op de discursieve flexibiliteit van secularisme en op de intrinsieke relatie tussen dit type secularisme en liberaal protestantisme. Dit onderdeel van de conclusie eindigt met enkele opmerkingen over de negatieve effecten van een sterke focus op 'religie' als de vermeende belangrijkste of zelfs enige obstakel op de weg naar een positieve waardering van seksuele vrijheid en diversiteit. In het derde deel van de conclusie wordt een sterke nadruk gesignaleerd op het vinden van *juridische* oplossingen voor wat wordt ervaren of voorgesteld als een sociaal probleem. Debatten over homoseksualiteit vormen regelmatig een aanleiding om drie grondrechten te

evalueren: gelijke behandeling, de vrijheid van meningsuiting en de vrijheid van godsdienst. Hoewel de eerste twee grondrechten positief – zij het verschillend – gewaardeerd worden door verschillende seculiere groepen van links tot rechts op het politieke spectrum, zijn veel seculiere verdedigers van seksuele en genderdiversiteit kritisch over de vrijheid van godsdienst, wat gevolgen heeft voor verschillende religieuze minderheden. Dit leidt tot een laatste observatie over de spanning tussen het hebben van een gemarginaliseerde minderheidspositie en het als zodanig erkend worden (waarvoor men immers macht of machtige medestanders nodig heeft). Met deze spanning hebben LHBT-personen te maken vanwege het succes van de LHBT-beweging en omdat (conservatieve) christenen benadrukken dat juist zij benadeeld worden. Na een korte samenvatting van hoe houdingen ten aanzien van homoseksualiteit identiteitsmarkeringen geworden zijn voor bepaalde seculiere Nederlanders en bepaalde orthodoxe christenen, sluit de conclusie af met enkele queertheologische suggesties voor een constructievere doordenking van de onderwerpen die in dit proefschrift aan de orde zijn gesteld.

Biography

Marco Derks was born on September 24, 1980 in Delft, the Netherlands. He holds a *doctorandus* (Master) degree in theology from the Theological University Kampen (2006) and an MPhil in theology from the University of Manchester (2009). From September 2013 until February 2017, he worked as a *promovendus* (PhD candidate) in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University. During these years, he was also representative member (2014-2016) and chair (2015-2016) of the University's PhD Network Prout and columnist for the University's news website DUB (2015-2016). He previously worked as, among others, secondary school teacher in Philosophy and Religious Education and project manager in Christian LGBT emancipation. He is currently the Executive Secretary of the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER), a freelance editor, translator, secretary and conference chair, and a student at the Old Catholic Seminary at Utrecht University.

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