Is citizenship secular?
Wagenvoorde, Reinie Alida

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12. DUTCH CITIZENS ON THE APPRECIATION OF RELIGION

This chapter is devoted to the interpretations of the combined results of the survey and the interviews regarding the appreciation of religion. What do Dutch citizens think about the role of religion in society? Are there striking differences or similarities between various religious groups? How do religiously highly committed citizens experience their religiosity in a secular society like the Netherlands? The first results of the online survey showed that the respondents valued religious diversity more than any of the other categories, and that this appreciation of religious freedom and religious diversity is widely shared. Furthermore, people agreed more with the categories that reflected positive attitudes towards the role of religion in society than with negative attitudes. In general, Dutch citizens thus seemed to evaluate several aspects of religion positively. This was true even for non-religious people, although religious people were more positive.

Due to the significant correlations between the attitudes towards religion, the religious convictions of the participants and their level of religious commitment, it was decided to include two measures of religious commitment (religious identity and orthodoxy) into the analyses to deliver a fuller interpretation of the results. We shall take a closer look at each of the four categories which combine the results of the survey and the interviews.

12.1 Religion as a Value Basis for Society

The results of the survey showed that the appreciation of religion as a value basis for society depends on the level of religious commitment and not on the religious community to which one belongs. People who are religiously highly committed regard religion more as a value basis for society than people who are less religiously committed. Therefore expected no fundamental differences between the groups in the interviews.

It will come as no surprise that the interviewees were positive about the added value of religion for society. When I asked the interviewees about the contribution of religion to the development of norms and values and about its contribution to society as a whole, they were all convinced of the positive role of religion, as Esther shows; ‘I think, yes, Christian faith has a lot to offer with regard to norms and values indeed; a bit of normalisation about how to treat each other’. The respondents saw religion — especially their personal religious tradition — as a value basis. Religion served as the framework for their personal life and they based their moral norms on their tradition. Both Muslims
and Protestants stressed the importance of their religion for social relations and its universal applicability, as Kasim here does:

You know what it is, religion actually only consists of values and norms. You have to apply that everywhere. Not only in daily life, but also in your private life and in your work life and so on. Because our faith is so unique; and in Islam, all your questions, you can — you can answer them. Honestly.

Another element that came up during the interviews was the topic of confessional education. In general, both Muslims and Protestants appreciated the opportunity to send their children to confessional schools. Muslims especially considered this element a positive aspect of Dutch culture. As the following quote from Aziz shows, the ability to have their children educated in a publicly funded confessional school made the Muslims respondents feel more welcome and more appreciated:

[I think it’s] superb, the opportunity to have Islamic or religious primary schools. There are Protestant and Catholic primary schools and there are also Islamic primary schools. If you go to those schools, they take your children — the boys, not the girls — to the Friday prayer …And it’s just an institution that is accepted by the government. As a citizen, I appreciate that enormously. And then, yeah, then I think it’s good to stay here. Then I think, I appreciate that. And then I also see that the government appreciates me as a citizen.

Arguably, he (like many of the Muslim respondents) interpreted the public funding of confessional schools as a sign of acceptance of their religious identity.

All the Protestant respondents themselves went to confessional schools and they mostly evaluated that positively. However, not all Protestants were completely convinced of the added value of confessional schools for society, because they experienced the schools as a closed system in which only the religious values and traditions of the school were taught. Two of the Protestants thought it was important that schools should educate children broadly and to raise them with such democratic values as respect and responsibility. According to them, tolerance and a broader view on society were not developed in these confessional schools.

In addition to these two negative responses about confessional schools, there was more Protestant critique about religious communities or institutions being too detached from society. These critical respondents emphasised the aspect of the common good: if a school, institution or community contributes positively to society and does not focus solely on its own group, then it is, for instance, allowed to receive public funding. The clearest example of this attitude towards confessional education and the focus on the common good can be found in this quote from Esther:
I think [public education] is also better for the country. It is better to push [religion] to the private sphere than to maintain those schools, actually. You could potentially still subsidise religious institutions, because the church, religious institutions, and those communities have an important function in society … But anyway, they [conservative religious groups] just want a certain type of education. I wonder, in what way does that differ from a public school, where you also learn to behave socially and all that? The only difference is religion … And that’s [confessional education] not good either. Yeah, then you get a certain unworldly attitude… while you live in a normal society, in the Netherlands. So, it’s good if you are really raised in that society, and that you really learn all the norms and values.

The fact that some of the Protestants were rather critical about the homogeneity and self-centred nature of religious groups or institutions might be related to the fact that six of the nine Protestant respondents are nowadays members of a different church community than the ones in which they were brought up. The results with regard to this topic might have been different with a sample of Protestant respondents who stayed in one community during their lifetime. Within this sample however, the Protestants described a greater transition or development of their religious belief, whereas the Muslims focused more on the continuity of their faith. In the next sections, we can see whether this difference is also visible in the opinions in the other categories.

12.2 Privatised Religion
Concerning the domain of privatised religion, the online survey showed that Muslims and Protestants appreciated the involvement of religion in the public and political domain more than Catholics and non-religious persons. When the level of religious commitment was included in the analyses, the effect of religious denomination diminished significantly. This meant that it was the commitment level that determined the point of view, when it came to the appreciation of the public or political role of religion. Belonging to one specific religious community only explains to a small degree the differences in opinions in this category. The higher the religious commitment, the more people appreciated religion’s contribution beyond the private sphere. This is understandable, because people who are more committed to their religion will have a more positive appreciation of it, and consequently not want to restrict religion to the private sphere alone. An interesting question that was tested with the interviews, was whether religiously highly committed citizens were positive towards a public role of any religion or whether this positive attitude was limited solely to their own religion. I come back to this issue in sections 12.3 and 12.4.

Based on the survey results, it could be expected that the interviewed Muslims and Protestants would not differ much in their interpretation and appreciation of the public and political role of religion. This expectation was
confirmed. Both groups thought that religion should be allowed in the public domain. There were hardly any respondents who distinguished between the public and the political domain or between public and political debates. In the arguments, two elements were often named.

To begin with, both Protestants and Muslims maintained that everybody holds certain convictions, whether religious or not, which influence their opinions. According to many of the respondents, it is exactly these convictions that matter most, and that these convictions should therefore be made explicit in public debates. This did not mean that the respondents thought that religious beliefs should dominate every debate, but that it should be possible to explain the rationale behind certain opinions, as Esther argues here:

Religion is actually a conviction of a group about how to interpret certain things, about how you should live together. When you talk about the norms and values that are based on that religion, I think, okay, that is absolutely good to put forward in political debates. Because that is what every party does, from its own norms and values and vision, you are discussing with each other how to organise society in the best way.

The respondents agreed that it is impossible to keep convictions, whether religiously inspired or not, restricted to the private domain. A clear example is this quote from Paulien (Protestant, female, 54 years), who argued:

The opinions we have, no matter where they come from — whether they come from the Bible or anywhere else, socialism or communism or whatever — everybody has a certain basis from which his norms and values stem. You can’t just hide that behind the front door.

Secondly, many respondents pointed to the unfairness of depriving religious convictions a role in public and political debates when other, non-religious, opinions are allowed. Several respondents noticed that non-religious people also held opinions, based on irrational presuppositions and Tarik argued that these can also be labelled ‘religious’. He argues that ‘one could regard liberalism as a religion too. They also base their decisions on what they believe’. Murat (Muslim, male, 44 years) agreed with Tarik:

When someone suggests to change the constitution regarding article 23, in order to forbid confessional education, then that is also a conviction. It is his religion, so to say. We don’t call it religion, because there is no God involved. But in my opinion it is a religion, it is an ideological conviction.

Several other respondents (also Protestants) mentioned the supposed neutrality of secular convictions and of the (secular) government, which according to them, is non-existent, as this quote from Jacob shows:
So, I am religious, but everybody has his vision on humanity, his world vision, on good and evil, which is more or less latently present. Anyway, everybody has those ideas. Let’s say, indemonstrable presuppositions about how everything came to exist. So, neutrality in that sense doesn’t exist … Nowadays, people are in favour of public education, because it’s neutral, you know, because everyone thinks that it is. But I don’t believe in that. According to me, that [neutrality] doesn’t exist. You always base your choices on shared values and nothing is self-evident.

12.3 Embracing Religious Diversity

The results of the survey showed that there are hardly any differences between religious and non-religious people, when it came to embracing religious diversity. This element is generally highly valued. This might be related to the fact that tolerance is highly valued as an important element for good citizenship, as the results from the previous chapter showed. If people value tolerance in general, they might also value tolerance towards religion(s). In Chapter 13, this direct relation between attitudes towards religion and interpretations of citizenship is discussed further.

As the examples dealing with privatised religion showed, the religiously highly committed respondents interpreted their religious conviction as a value basis for their opinions. They assumed that opinions of other citizens were also based on certain (unable to be proved or irrational) convictions. Several respondents argued that they thought that there was no fundamental difference between religiously inspired convictions and other convictions or world views. As the respondents did not distinguish between religious and non-religious opinions and arguments, their attitude towards the public role of religion was related to their opinions on religious freedom and religious diversity; the two sub-themes within the category embracing religious diversity. The respondents agreed to a large extent that different opinions and arguments should be allowed in the private as well as in the public domain, thereby embracing plurality in opinions and the freedom to express these opinions.

Although the respondents were positive over the role of religion in the public domain and did not seem to distinguish between different religions, it is interesting to note that more nuances had to be made with regard to their opinions on religious freedom and religious diversity. The results of the survey showed that Muslims emphasised embracing religious diversity more than the other groups. This indicated a greater appreciation of both religious freedom and religious diversity. This can possibly be explained by the fact that Islam is a relatively new religion in the Netherlands, which might increase the importance for Muslims to strive for religious tolerance and acceptance. This greater appreciation could also be related to the fact that the public and political debates of the last decades have been quite negative about Islam, portraying it as a non-Western religion or even incompatible with Western democracy. This could also account for the Muslims attaching greater value to religious freedom and diversity; in doing so, they are able to maintain their own religious identity.
When we look at the interviews, there are differences between Muslims and Protestants in the appreciation of these issues, although it needs to be stressed that this depended largely on the specific interpretation of the respondent. The respondents pointed to different elements of religious freedom and diversity and approached these elements from different perspectives.

12.3.1 Freedom of Religion

In general, Muslim respondents emphasised two different elements. They appreciated the opportunities they had to practice their belief in the Netherlands. Mohamed, for instance, said:

I go to the Friday prayer. At least, if it’s quiet at work, if it’s possible. And when I openly communicate that, I never get a negative reaction of like; ‘What’s he doing?’ So most of the time it is allowed. So far, I haven’t experienced any problems. The same with praying and fasting. So, if you are able to do all this, that’s just excellent.

During the interview process, several Muslims told me that they had a separate praying room in the office or that they were allowed to take a longer break on Friday afternoon to go to the mosque. In this respect, the Muslim respondents were especially very positive about the religious freedom that they experienced in the Netherlands. However, despite this positive evaluation of the freedom to practice their religion, the respondents also experienced constraints when it came to public and political debates over religious expressions. Examples of these constraints can be found in the debate on the proposed ban on ritual slaughtering and the debate on the conscientious objections of civil celebrants regarding gay marriage.

I chose two quotes about the debate on ritual slaughtering in which the respondents highlighted several interesting elements. The first quote shows how Mohamed related the experience of religious freedom to the emotional bond with the Netherlands:

Ritual slaughtering was, yes. Yes, that was, for example, a real big problem. If you forbid that in the Netherlands, large groups of people are going to get in trouble. … Look, the more space you get in the Netherlands, the more you will feel Dutch. But if that [space] becomes limited, then I think, you know; ‘I don’t belong here’ and things like that. Then all kinds of negative feelings arise in me.

Mohamed suggests here that people will feel Dutch if they have enough space to develop and express themselves. A ban on ritual slaughtering would be counterproductive in this respect. Although Mohamed’s previous quote revealed that he appreciated the freedom that he personally received at his work, he was worried about the public and political debates such as the debate on ritual slaughtering. He thus connected religious freedom to feeling Dutch and feeling...
welcome. It showed that he felt personally attacked when his religious freedom was limited. Mohamed experiences the proposed ban on ritual slaughtering as a restriction of his religious freedom.

This is related to the second quote that I chose. Rahmi argued that ritual slaughtering belonged to religious freedom, which he interpreted as a personal right. He therefore argued that non-religious people were not allowed to put limits to that freedom:

Look, ritual slaughtering is very important to certain people. And non-religious people shouldn’t [forbid that] for religious people, by using very general [arguments] about animal [rights]. So there should be freedom. So, there should be … as a religious person I shouldn’t bother others with my religious arguments, like you have to do it this way, you have to do that from over there. But I should not be… I should have some freedom, especially in my personal, individual life, to practice my religion … You require religious people to behave non-religiously, also in individual matters. I would say, I call that world view — non-religious [conviction] is also a world view — you try to impose your own world view on others, under the guise of arguing that religion is not allowed to have any influence and that’s not good either. So, religious arguments don’t have to play a role in the public discussion … but that shouldn’t deprive a person from his religious freedom.

Rahmi relates the issue of ritual slaughtering to the distinction between the public and private domain. Rahmi was one of the very few respondents who thought religious arguments not particularly useful in public debates and that these debates should mainly focus on general interests. Apparently, Rahmi saw religion mainly as a personal and private matter, which should be distinguished from public matters. Therefore, in this quote he stated that religious arguments were not useful in the public domain and likewise, general arguments and public debates should not be concerned with religious issues. He felt that the opponents of ritual slaughtering tried to force religious people also to behave in a non-religious way in the private sphere. There are two implications for this line of thought. Firstly, it seems to me that Rahmi would find it less problematic if religious expressions were excluded from the public domain. Secondly, he interpreted ritual slaughtering as an element of religious freedom in the private sphere.

What we have seen in the arguments on religious freedom is that there is some ambivalence in the interpretation and appreciation of religious freedom within the Muslims respondents. On the one hand, they personally experienced freedom of religion; they can pray at work and there are Islamic schools. This kind of religious freedom was appreciated greatly by them. On the other hand, public debates, as the quotes on ritual slaughtering showed, threatened that experience of religious freedom.

I propose that religious freedom is less of an issue for Protestants. They sometimes mentioned the conscientious objections against gay marriage and
many of them experienced negative attitudes towards religion in public debates in media, but they did not relate that to their religious freedom as we saw in the examples of Mohamed and Rahmi above. Apparently, freedom of religion is more important for Muslims than for Protestants.

12.3.2 Religious Diversity

To continue with the sub-theme of religious diversity, the interviews confirmed the results of the survey: Muslims seemed to appreciate religious diversity more than Protestants. Muslim respondents almost unanimously valued the plurality of religious communities in the Netherlands. Several of the respondents even made an explicit distinction between religious convictions and atheism or agnosticism. This demonstrated an appreciation for other religions, which did not seem to include non-religious people, as Meral (Muslim, female, 36 years) made clear; ‘I also appreciate it [religious diversity]. Sometimes, I see — across the street here — a church. Every Sunday, I see people going there to pray. You know, they are also religious. That's better than nothing’.

The Protestants seemed to be more ambiguous towards the idea of religious diversity. Some of them saw it as enrichment and alluded to the positive contributions of religious communities to society, whereas others were more negative about diversity. They pointed to the fact that problems still exist within multicultural society and that it is difficult to live together with different cultures and religions. Julian provides clear example of this Protestant ambiguity. When I asked him whether he thought religious diversity was enriching for society, he gave two lines of reasoning that led to two different answers to the question. At first, he argued as a religious person who is convinced of his own point of view. He thought that it would be beneficial if all people would live according to his conviction. After that, he mentioned that this question could be answered from a different perspective, where the evaluation of a certain world view as enriching depended on the extent to which that world view contributed to a virtuous life or better society. From that perspective, he appreciated (other) religious views more than secular views:

From our religious perspective, it is your deepest wish, actually, that everybody would acknowledge the Bible as the word of God. Every other conviction is fundamentally inadequate, according to us ... I think, fundamentally — at the deepest level — it hurts me that so many people are on the wrong track. So, that’s why I think it is difficult to call that enrichment. To put it bluntly, to me it makes no difference what the other opinions are. Look, in a more mundane way, say, one could formulate some criteria and one could say, ‘I investigate to what extent a religion contributes to a virtuous life. You know, that people behave normally and

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76 I will discuss these negative attitudes towards religion in Section 12.5, where I discuss the experienced threats towards religion.
act responsibly’. Depending on that, I appreciate certain attitudes more than others. If you measure [enrichment] like that, people from certain religions can command more respect than a secular Dutch person, who thinks solely about himself, takes holidays three times a year and who knows what else … I would never call that ‘enrichment’, but I can show respect if someone contributes to a good society from his own conviction.

In this quote we again see the preference for other religious world views over secular ones. Furthermore, it is remarkable to see that almost all Protestants referred immediately to Islam when I asked them about religious diversity. Apparently, many of them interpreted the question on diversity as a question about their opinions on Islam as a ‘new’ religion in the Netherlands. However, these interpretations could be divided in two groups. Some of them regarded Islam as a religion like other religions and pointed to positive aspects, whereas others were quite critical towards it and addressed such themes as Shari’ah, inequality and intolerance to characterise and problematise the position of Islam in the Netherlands.

Although the respondents were thus quite divided in their appreciation of religious diversity, all respondents — both Protestants and Muslims — agreed on the importance of knowledge of different religions. They suggested that knowledge of different world views could increase understanding of and respect for differences, as this quote from Sebastiaan (Protestant, male, 27 years) exemplifies; ‘Yes I think it is important [that people know about different religions]. Yes, that way, you can prevent negative images … I just believe that knowledge can, at least partly, negate these stereotypes’. Some respondents added that this knowledge should be part of general education in the Netherlands. Paulien argued that courses on different religions should be taught by people from the different religious groups themselves. She remarked that, ‘it should be honest education. Every group should be able to give its own education … I think it’s good to know about each other. Then you can discuss things and talk to each other’. To conclude, the theme of embracing religious diversity evoked many different reactions from the respondents. By elaborating on the two sub-themes — freedom of religion and religious diversity — it has become clear that the Muslim respondents are more positive about both elements than the Protestants, which is in line with the results from the survey.

12.4 Negative Attitude Towards Religion

The last theme of the survey was negative attitude towards religion. In the survey, this category consisted of items that problematised the role of religion with regard to modern citizenship and emphasised the negative effects of religion. The results showed that non-religious people agreed more with these items than religious people. This is not very surprising; it is reasonable to expect that non-religious people value religion less than religious people do and that non-religious people therefore focus more on potentially negative aspects or effects of religion. Although initial analyses also revealed a difference
between Catholics and Muslims, the follow-up analyses made clear that this effect was largely due to differences in religious commitment. Both the level of orthodoxy and the extent to which religion defined one’s identity had moderate effects on the negative opinions about religion, whereas the effect of the religious community remained only weak. Therefore, it can be concluded on the basis of the survey that the less religiously committed a person is, the more he or she emphasises problematic effects of religion.

The survey thus showed no differences between Protestants and Muslims regarding this theme; they did not agree to the negative opinions on religion. The interviews, however, revealed more nuances concerning this theme. In general, both Muslims and Protestants were very positive about religion. This positive attitude is mainly based on the idea that religion contributes to morality and social cohesion. Many respondents pointed to the value of religious communities in social activities and in helping other people. In general, they disagreed with the negative attitude towards religion.

However, there were some respondents who were quite critical about certain elements of religion. One of the examples of this more critical attitude can be found in this quote from Lucas, who criticised conservative tendencies within religious traditions:

I think that one of the roles of religion that I, that I don’t like, is that religion has the tendency to preserve values. I think about, in a way, sexual morals, eh yes. Or the position of women. In that regard, religion, churches and Christian organisations are a few decades behind. And eh, [laughs] they will get there eventually, with a bit of a delay, you might say.

Again, critical stances towards religion were mainly found in Protestant respondents who had made a transition from one religious community to another. It could be that the transition influenced their appreciation of religion to a certain extent.

Furthermore, the results of the survey showed that religiously highly committed people were more positive about the role of religion in society. Earlier I asked whether this positive appreciation of religion was largely directed towards one’s own religious community, and whether these religiously highly committed citizens were positive towards all religious contributions to society. In the interviews it became clear that the respondents were generally more positive about their own religious tradition than about other traditions. This was especially evident with the Protestant group. It was striking to see that they often used the same rhetoric. By referring to the principle of loving God above all else and your neighbours as you would yourself, they explained that Christianity or Protestantism could have only beneficial consequences for society. Several respondents made a comparison to Islam, to show that Christianity contributed more positively to society than Islam, as this excerpt from Julian shows:
You have to make a distinction between what a religion implies on paper, say — and how it is practically implemented. Look, I don’t want to be chauvinistic, but studies on the charitable character of Dutch people, and also on voluntary service, all point consistently in one direction. That is that churchgoers are most concerned about their fellow people. And, unfortunately, that doesn’t equally apply to Muslims. Look, Muslims have their zakat, right, their yearly ‘tax’. But that is mainly directed towards Muslims. Muslims for Muslims, so to say. That is not about a universal love towards the people around you.

This quote seem to imply that to Julian, contributions of religious groups to society are less valuable if they do not concern other groups than the own group.

In sum, the results of this chapter have shown that the attitudes towards religion as measured in the survey are largely determined by the level of religious commitment. Religiously highly committed citizens emphasised more positive aspects of religion and showed less agreement to a restriction of religion to the private sphere than less religiously committed or non-religious citizens. I found very few differences between Protestants and Muslims in the topics. In the interviews, however, some important differences were discovered. While Muslims showed positive attitudes towards all the topics, Protestants were sceptical about certain elements.

12.5 Perceptions of Religion — Threats and Opportunities

In Part One, I explored the increasingly negative attitude towards religion in Dutch integration policies. Religious groups (especially orthodox or traditional) have increasingly received negative portrayals in the media (Ganzevoort 2012). It is therefore also important to investigate how Dutch citizens experience this negative attitude and whether they experience threats to their religious identity. Running contrary to this negative framework, we have the positive construction of opportunity. This is the idea that religion can contribute to citizenship, as religion is associated with all kinds of pro-social behaviour and moral values (Bernts, Dekker, and De Hart 2007). Do religiously highly committed citizens also see opportunities for their religion to contribute positively to society? In this last section of this chapter, I look at the threats and opportunities that these groups perceive concerning their religious conviction.

It is noteworthy to see that many respondents make a clear distinction between their personal belief on an individual level and (their) religion in general. With regard to possible threats, they clearly experienced more threats on a societal level than on an individual level. Both Muslims and Protestants rarely experienced negative or threatening attitudes towards them as religious citizens. They did see negative attitudes towards religion in the media and in social and political debates, but on a personal level they felt that their religious identity was accepted and even appreciated, even by non-religious people. Both Muslims and Protestants related that other citizens were often surprised and
interested to hear that they were religious. Hasan clearly differentiated between the negative attitudes in the media and his personal experiences:

> What I see from the media and from society is that there’s just a lot of debate over Islam and that… What I have experienced myself is that even if politics is fairly strongly against Islam, still some of the members [of parliament]… in the work force and also other people are more relaxed when it comes to Islam. They say; ‘If you want to pray, go ahead’… So I’ve noticed that society is a bit more relaxed than it seems.

Although several respondents noted the negative attitudes in media and politics, some Protestant respondents described positive changes in the social and political realm with regard to the attitude towards religion, as Lucas does:

> I am inclined to regard this militant secularism as a kind of… a kind of after-effect of a generation that is saying goodbye to the church. That if they are retired in about five to ten years, then we’re done with [this militant secularism] … Where I used to hear, ‘Oh? Are you religious?’; people nowadays say, ‘Oh, how interesting!’

Protestants in this line of thinking believe that the negative stance of the past decades has slowly been replaced by a more open approach towards religion. Esther also alluded to this shift in social attitude towards religion, remarking that, ‘for a long time, [the attitude towards religion] was very negative, but somehow you see signs of change, that it is acceptable again … Indeed, there’s a new interesting twist, I think, in people’s attitude towards the Christian.’

When asked about the opportunities for religion to foster good citizenship or to give a positive contribution to society, many respondents immediately referred to activities within their own community or religious tradition. This seemed to be a general trend in the interviews. When I asked the respondents about religion in general, they usually narrowed their answers down to their own religious community or tradition. This might be explained by the fact that they are more closely connected to their own community and are better informed about what happens there than in other communities. In this sense, reference to one’s own community is purely practical. Another explanation might be that they think solely of their own religion when talking about the positive aspects of religion. Many respondents are more positive about their own religion than other religions. It is therefore conceivable that they do not even think about the positive contributions of other religious groups. The only two exceptions to this trend were Lucas and Hasan. Lucas referred to the lack of acknowledgement of all the positive activities in mosques. He pointed out that many social activities are organised within Islamic communities; they provide informal care and language courses in the mosques and therefore contribute positively to Dutch society. Hasan mentioned church activities that he saw as possible inspiration for mosques to increase social cohesion in local communities.
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Answers to questions about the positive contributions of religion for society show many similarities. Almost all respondents — both Muslims and Protestants — referred in one way or another to the social aspect of citizenship they saw as a fundamental element of their belief. They often referred to their religion as a source for morality and mentioned that their religion asks them to look after fellow citizens and to take care of the world. In that respect, they were convinced of the positive contributions of religion and religious communities to society. One clear example of the way in which a respondent saw the responsibility for religious, or specifically Christian, citizens, is this quote from Jacob:

To act responsibly in life, not only in your church life, but in your whole life, that is actually a very Calvinistic notion, you know, it comes from Calvin … that Jesus rules over all domains of life. Abraham Kuyper\(^77\) says; ‘There is no domain in life of which Jesus doesn’t say “mine”’.\(^78\) Jesus wants us to act in and take responsibility over all domains of life, the whole range of life, from art to education, to church, to society.

Besides the similarities in the focus on the social dimension of citizenship as the domain on which religion can offer something positive to society, there are also some differences between the Muslim respondents and the Protestant respondents. First, several Protestants emphasised the fact that contributing to society is something that religious people should do, and that religion is always the motivation for all action, whether explicit or implicit. According to Ruben, for instance, Christians can inspire other citizens by doing the right things, without explicitly saying that they are Christian. This line of reasoning is not found in any of the interviews with the Muslims.

Secondly, in many of the interviews with Muslims, I was told about the activities that are organised by the religious communities and in the mosques. These activities extend beyond religious content. In fact, many activities for young Muslims are organised in order to help them to feel at home in Dutch society and to help them with their individual development and education. Although not all respondents referred to these activities when asked about the contributions of their religion to Dutch society, these activities show how Muslim communities play a participatory role in Dutch society.

During my fieldwork, I witnessed such an example of mosque activity, where the Islamic community tried to encourage good citizenship for its members. Before one of the interviews with a Muslim respondent, I was invited to attend a public lecture of the imam. This lecture was part of a lecture series

\(^77\) Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) was a Dutch theologian and founder of the first modern political party in the Netherlands, the Anti-Revolutionaire Partij (ARP) and of the Free University.

\(^78\) The original quotation says: ‘There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: “Mine”’ (Kuyper, 1880, 488).
for young Muslims about the fundamentals of Islamic faith. The aim of this series was to explain the backgrounds and content of Islam to young people, in order to foster their social efficacy. The imam explained that, because these young Muslims lived in a secular, non-Islamic country, they were often confronted with questions about their belief. According to him, they were often unable to respond properly to these questions and they were struggling with the compatibility of their Islamic faith with Dutch society. By explaining the backgrounds and fundamentals of their religion, the imam tried to make them more aware and more assertive. This would also help them to integrate better into Dutch society. It seems to me that these kinds of activities, where there is a focus on the social status and defensibility of the members of the religious community, are more common in mosques than in churches. Churches, on the other hand, seem to focus their activities more on religious content.

Thirdly, there were a few Protestants and Muslims who pointed to the importance of inter-religious activities and dialogue as a way to contribute to society. Kasim related this very concept in the following quote, saying: ‘So, if we are really able to do something together with different religions, if we can contribute to society, we can achieve a lot, I guess’. Respondents who referred to inter-religious cooperation as a possible way for religion to contribute to society, underlined the importance of knowledge of and respect for others. Furthermore, some Protestants pointed out that there are many small Protestant communities that focus primarily on their own members. They argued, however, that more could be achieved if religious communities cooperated with each other and focused more on society, whether that be on a local, regional or national level.