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Re-emerging Christianity in West European Politics: The Case of the Netherlands

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Abstract: Does Christianity re-emerge in politics even in the most secularized part of the world, Western Europe? In this article, the exemplary case of the Netherlands provides empirical evidence for two mechanisms of resurgent Christianity in party politics. In this way, the article also offers a more precise understanding under what conditions various dimensions of religion become (again) or remain politically significant. The first mechanism has been the incentive of secularization and secularism for remaining Christians to regroup in a so-called creative minority to convey an explicitly faith-based message to a broader public. Modernization has therefore not automatically meant less religion in politics. However, creative minorities remained a relatively minor affair in Dutch party politics, despite the large number of Christian migrants and their descendants. Second, Christian and culturally rightwing, secular parties have increasingly referred to a Judeo-Christian culture to mark the political identities of the European Union and its nations in response to Islam's growing visibility. The concept of Judeo-Christian culture foremost functioned as a sacred word to denote the liberal and secular order of the West, reflecting the re-emergence of Christianity as cultural phenomenon rather than faith in West European politics.

INTRODUCTION

The thesis that modernization relegates religion to the private sphere has been heavily contested in social sciences over the last decades

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(Casanova 1994). Serious doubts have been expressed about the possibility of a general theory of secularization expecting a linear relationship between modernization on the one hand, and less religion in the public sphere on the other. These doubts partly originate from the elusive, multidimensional nature of concepts such as religion. The diversity in political significance of religion across the world and Europe underlines the need for theoretical approaches sensitive to varieties of and within religions, histories and local contexts (Gorski and Altinordu 2008). The purpose of this article is to determine more precisely under what conditions which dimensions of religion keep or gain political relevance even in the most secularized part of the world, Western Europe. It examines two potential mechanisms in the exemplary case of the Netherlands: (1) Secularization, secularism, and the growing visibility of Islam incentivizing remaining Christians to regroup and remobilize into political parties to make their faith-based messages heard (again), also stimulated by the arrival of hundreds of thousands non-Western Christian migrants and their descendants; and (2) religious as well as secular parties using Christianity as a marker of European or national identities in response to secularization, secularism, and the growing visibility of Islam. This article proceeds as follows: first it discusses in further detail how Christianity may re-emerge in West European politics and why the Netherlands is the most appropriate case to explore the two mechanisms. The center part illustrates how the two mechanisms have been at play in Dutch politics. The last part discusses the implications of the empirical findings.

MECHANISMS OF RE-EMERGING CHRISTIANITY

Western Europe has been depicted as the secular exception in an increasingly religious world (Casanova 2006). Nevertheless, religion in West European politics is receiving increasing scholarly interest due to the growing presence of Islam and the European integration process (Byrnes and Katzenstein 2006). Political Christianity received its share of attention, too. The history of Christian-democratic parties is no longer a neglected research topic. Research also shows how church-state relationships across Europe, originating from a variety of Christian beliefs, shape present-day understandings of the political role of religion (Madeley and Enyedi 2003). The general impression is of a diminishing social and political significance of Christianity; church attendance

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declined, Christian-democratic parties across Europe lost electoral support, explicit references to Christianity in the European Constitutional Treaty faced stiff opposition, and so on and so forth. However, Christianity may also regain political prominence today, through which religion re-enters the public sphere against expectations of privatization of religion and further differentiation of religion and other life domains. This article puts two possible mechanisms of re-emerging Christianity in West European politics to the test, which have been mentioned in the scholarly literature on religion and politics but which are still in need for empirical corroboration. The focus will be on resurging Christianity among political parties, since they still constitute (the most) influential organizations in terms of political mobilization, articulation of demands and ideas as well as recruiting of political personnel.

The first mechanism refers to so-called creative minorities; a concept reintroduced by the Catholic Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and later Pope Benedict XVI calling upon his fellow-believers to make Europe retrieve the best part of its heritage for the good of mankind (Ratzinger 2004). The concept is derived from Arnold Toynbee's work on the rise and fall of civilizations. According to Toynbee, civilizations arise from creative minorities' response to certain challenges, to be followed later on by the masses. Secularization, secularism, and Islam may be the present-day challenges for Christians to regroup to make their faith-based message heard again also in the political society (Jenkins 2007, 70, 288). The large number of usually more religious non-Western Christian migrants and their descendants can be an extra incentive for the remaining Christians for a renewed political engagement (Jenkins 2007). In other words, secularism and secularization do not only reflect the declining political significance of Christianity, but may also evoke a tendency toward deprivatization of religion and desecularization among the remaining, presumably more religious, Christian believers (Achterberg et al. 2009). In similar vein, Christians in Western Europe created political parties when they faced the challenge of secularism in the 19th century (Kalyvas 1996). The first mechanisms tested here is therefore whether Christians regroup and remobilize into political parties in response to secularization, secularism, and Islam. Creative minorities base their political mission explicitly on Christianity, seeking also new and modern ways to convey their faith-based message to a broader public.

Creative minorities concern religion in a substantive sense; Christians believing in a transcendental reality. The second mechanism of cultural defence refers to Christianity in a functional sense, which may manifest

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itself however at the same time as the previous mechanism. José Casanova argued that "large number of Europeans even in the most secular countries still identify themselves as 'Christian,' pointing to an implicit, diffused, and submerged Christian cultural identity" (Casanova 2007, 111). Regret about the loss of the role of the Christian faith in the public sphere may therefore entail a desire to re-emphasize Christian cultural traditions. Furthermore, the increasing visibility of Islam may lead to an increasing use of Christianity as a marker of national or European identities. This second mechanism of re-emerging Christianity is derived from Steve Bruce' work on secularization (Bruce 2002), although others have emphasized the potential role of religion as a discursive basis of political identities, too (Hastings 1997; Brown 2001). In this functional understanding of religion, Christianity may also be used by secular and atheistic parties and politicians to sacrifice the European or national political community in response to the growing presence of Islam. Bruce perceives the cultural use of religion as a temporary exception on the ongoing process of secularization due to modernization (Bruce 2002, 31ff). The aim of this article is not to explain whether re-emerging Christianity is just a temporary phenomenon, but only to test the mechanism of cultural defence empirically.

Even though Christianity may re-emerge in West European politics for other reasons, the two hypothesized mechanisms above cover the two basic understandings of religion (substantive and functional) and specify under which conditions and context a certain religion may gain political prominence again. They thus offer a fruitful way out from the theoretical and conceptual problems in explaining the political role of religion mentioned in the introduction.

TRACING THE MECHANISMS: CASE SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION

It may be empirically worthwhile to explore all political systems in Western Europe, but a single case study suffices from a theoretical point of view if it is crucial one (Eckstein 1975, 113–123). If the mechanisms of creative minorities and cultural defence do not explain the political resurgence of Christianity in that particular case, it is highly unlikely they do so elsewhere in Western Europe. Since the mechanisms hypothesized are relatively untested, a single case study is also the most appropriate venue to test their plausibility (George and Bennett 2005, 75). It

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allows for a more detailed scrutiny of the mechanisms hypothesized through tracing the process between the independent variables (secularization, rising secularism, and growing visibility of Islam) on the one hand and the two dependent variables (remobilizing Christians; a larger emphasis on the Christian roots of an allegedly threatened culture respectively) on the other (George and Bennett 2005, 205–232). Here, the Netherlands is the exemplary case studied because of its particular combination of incentives and opportunities for re-emerging Christianity in party politics.

The challenges of secularization, secularism, and Islam have been prominently present in Dutch politics in the last decades. The Netherlands used to be one of the frontrunners of secularization until the early 1990s, and takes a more average position in Western Europe since then (Becker and De Hart 2006, Ch. 2). Church membership decreased dramatically over the last 40 years (Table 1). The religiosity of remaining church members also declined. In 2006, the Dutch population comprised only 7% practicing Catholics and 8% practicing Protestants (Aarts and Thomassen 2008, 206). The share of voters willing to vote for an explicitly religious party dropped to a meager 11%, while only 15% preferred a combination of religion and politics today (Becker and De Hart 2006, 61). The diminishing significance of Christianity among their fellow citizens may incentivize remaining Christians to form creative minorities in politics.

The growing influence of secular(ist) parties may have a similar effect. When for the first time in almost 80 years a coalition of exclusively secular parties assumed office in 1994, it enacted legislation liberalizing ethically sensitive policies, ranging from Sunday shopping and prostitution to

Table 1. Church membership in the Netherlands 1970 and 2005 (Dekker 2006, 228)

Denomination	1970	2005	Change
Catholic	5,274,000	4,645,000	−12 %
Liberal-protestant	56,000	23,000	−59 %
Mainline-protestant	3,989,000	2,002,000	−50 %
Orthodox-protestant	295,000	442,000	+50 %
Evangelical/Pentecostal	55,000	138,000	+150 %
Christian	9,669,000	7,250,000	−25 %
Dutch population	12,976,000	16,292,000	+26 %

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same-sex marriage and euthanasia. The Netherlands was one of the first countries in Western Europe to do so. Meanwhile, exemptions from anti-discrimination law of Christian and other religious minorities at their publicly funded schools and welfare organizations became increasingly criticized, which might be a further impetus for remaining Christians to reengage with party politics.

That may also hold for the 1,648% rise in the number of Muslims in the Netherlands between 1970 (54,000) and 2006 (944,000) (Becker and De Hart 2006). Except for France, nowhere else in Western Europe the population share of Muslims is so high (5%). And nowhere else in Western Europe had so many a negative image of Islam as in the Netherlands (Everts 1998, 65). Islam's growing visibility constituted a major reason for a variety of politicians and publicists to launch a debate on the nature of the Dutch nation in the 1990s. They heralded a conservative turn in Dutch politics by their explicit defence of the national state. Nevertheless, they still adhered to liberal values such as gender equality and individual freedom, criticizing multiculturalism and Islam for allowing Muslim communities violating rights of women, homosexuals and converts. Dutch voters considered integration and immigration as important national problems since the early 1990s, and voted accordingly since the national parliamentary elections of 2002 (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). The public debate on the Dutch nation intensified because of Islam-inspired attacks in New York, Madrid, and London, the Islam-inspired assassination of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, the ongoing negotiations on European Union membership with Turkey, the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty, the rise of the anti-Islam Freedom Party of Geert Wilders, and a continuous flurry of reports on the successes and failures of integration of migrants and their descendants. The debates and also voting behavior reflected broadly shared concerns about the decline of the Dutch culture (Buruma 2006; Aarts and Van der Kolk 2006; Lechner 2008). Islam could thus become a reason to revitalize Christianity in Dutch party politics, not only to defend the Christian faith but also a national culture of (partly) Christian origin.

The Netherlands is not only a crucial case because of a particular set of incentives, but also because of the opportunities for resurgent Christianity. A number of parties of Christian origin can be used to defend Christian roots of the Dutch culture or to regroup and remobilize Christians to convey a faith-based message. In addition, the electoral system of proportional representation in a single national electoral district without

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electoral threshold provides new and small parties very easy access to parliament. It requires only some 65,000 votes (out of 12.5 million citizens eligible to vote) to obtain a seat in the Second Chamber of Parliament, the most important political arena.

Furthermore, the membership of the smaller, traditional orthodox-Calvinist churches as well as Evangelical and Pentecostal groups grew far above average between 1970 and 2005 (Table 1). Their growth can be explained by their higher birth rate, switchovers from mainline churches, and the arrival of non-Western Christian migrants. These migrants came from former colonies (Moluccas, Surinam, and the Netherlands Antilles) and from countries such as Cape Verde, Nigeria, and Syria. Non-Western Christian migrants and their descendants form a group of between 516,000 and 842,000 people (Stoffels 2008; Castillo Guerra and Steggerda 2009). Limited research available on African Christians indicates that they perceive Christianity fundamental to their social identity, activating them to preach the Gospel in the European "spiritual desert" (Ter Haar 1998). The traditional orthodox-Calvinist as well as migrant churches and groups adhere more strongly to traditional Christian beliefs and attend church more often (Arnts 2006). Together with the help of conservative Catholics, orthodox-Calvinists, charismatic and evangelical Christians, and Christian migrants who remained member of mainline churches, they may form creative minorities in politics.

Surveys indicate that churchgoing believers are much more concerned about homosexuality, euthanasia, and Sunday rest than the average voter (Couman 2009a). Whereas the Netherlands is one of the most secularized countries in terms of personal religiosity, the private as well as social significance of religion among the remaining believers seemed to have increased in recent years (Dekker 2006; Achterberg et al. 2009). Since religiosity matters for turnout and how the parties are ranked from left to right (Couman 2009b; Pellikaan 2010), Christian political activism would not be unlikely when clear political differences exist among practicing believers and the rest.

The challenges of secularization, secularism, and Islam, the political opportunity structure and the presence of a distinct group of Christian believers make the Netherlands a crucial case. If the mechanisms of creative minorities and cultural defence fostering Christianity's political significance will not be present in the Dutch case, it is unlikely they do so elsewhere in Europe. As said, the focus is here on the main organizations to express political views and mobilize citizens, political parties. Four elements should be present to speak of the mechanism of creative minorities: (1) a party conveys an explicitly Christian message; (2) it does

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so motivated by the challenges of secularization, secularism or Islam; (3) it seeks to regroup and remobilize Christians across existing confessional or political divisions; and (4) it targets a broader public rather than taking an isolationistic, defensive, or self-protective stance. If parties refer to (1) secularism or the Islam as a reason to defend (2) the Christian roots of the Dutch culture or nation, the mechanism of cultural defence is at play.

The parties examined are those of Christian origin (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*—Christian-Democratic Appeal—CDA, ChristenUnie, and Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (SGP; Political Reformed Party)) as well as parties that refer (again) to the Christian roots of the Dutch nation in their electoral manifestos or programs of principle (apart from the Christian parties, the populist-nationalistic Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), the anti-Islam Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV; Freedom Party), and the conservative-liberal Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD; People's Party for Freedom and Democracy)). A single case study allows using a variety of sources for cross-validating the findings. First, written documentation will be examined to find out whether the two mechanisms hypothesized (as fledged out in the 4 and 2 points mentioned above) are present in these parties: electoral manifestos, programs of principle, party magazines, party websites, internal electoral strategy plans, parties' electoral activities, election evaluation reports, publications of parties' research institute, as well as statements of party representatives in parliament and media (particularly the two Christian dailies *Nederlands Dagblad* and *Reformatorisch Dagblad*). Second, interviews have been conducted with party officials of the present parties of Christian origin to check whether any inclination toward regrouping and closer cooperation has been present. Third, existing studies of parties' history and ideology have been used to find further evidence for the two mechanisms hypothesized. Activities of potential creative minorities within or outside existing parties have been traced at their websites, booklets, and statements in the media, added with interviews with specialists of particularly Christian migrants and their descendants, because of the relative lack of information about them.

CREATIVE MINORITIES

The Christian-democratic CDA: No Creative Minority

Christians launched the first successful attempts to party formation in the late 19th century. Christian parties occupied more than half of the seats in

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the Second Chamber between 1918 and 1967 and participated in every coalition government between 1918 and 1994. The three larger Christian parties (two Protestant; one Catholic) merged in 1980 into the CDA. Christianity remained the guideline and source of inspiration of its political program (Ten Napel 1992). It may therefore be a potential creative minority. However, the ideological course of the CDA deviated from its confessional predecessors. When in office, the CDA agreed to legislation liberalizing abortion and euthanasia. It resisted further liberalization of ethical issues by secular parties in its opposition years (1994–2002), but the CDA did not plea for a reversal of liberalization afterward out of fear of electoral losses or exclusion from the next coalition government. Its acceptance of the ethical status quo confirmed the transformation of the large Christian parties from a faith-based confessional to a pragmatic, liberal-conservative party (Lucardie and Ten Napel 1991). It now shares many commonalities with the free-market, conservative-liberal VVD, but still contains a certain measure of diffuse moralism and a more communitarian worldview (Vollaard 2006b; Van Kersbergen 2008). Since the 1980s the CDA also welcomed emphatically agnostics, Hindus, and Muslims as party members and representatives.

The CDA and its predecessors experienced a number of split offs of orthodox-Calvinist and Catholic origin mainly resisting their lenient position on religious or ethical issues. The CDA also faced organized opposition from within with the establishment of the Movement Christian Direction CDA (*Beweging Christelijke Koers CDA*) in 1992. The movement criticized the CDA for its stance on abortion and euthanasia and protested non-Christians representing a Christian-democratic party (Fraanje 1999). It wanted the CDA to base its message on the infallible Bible. In recent years, it also expressed concerns about an Islamic takeover of Europe and the Netherlands (Van der Land, Isselt, and de Jong 2007). The group of at maximum 500 members had its strongholds in the Orthodox-Calvinist Bible belt, but could also count on support from conservative Catholics. It did not have much of an impact, but its former chairman obtained a sufficiently high position on the CDA candidate list for the parliamentary elections of 2006 to become elected.

Although the CDA did not adapt its position to the movement' wishes, it did not distance itself from its Christian roots completely. It referred to its Christian inspiration in its electoral manifestos, and occasionally issued studies on its Christian-democratic principles (Christen Democratisch Appel 1991; Christen Democratisch Appel BSV 2009). The CDA also attempted to attract Christian migrants and their descendants. The

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former coordinator of the Dutch association of migrant churches (SKIN) obtained a high position on the candidate list for the parliamentary elections in 2006 and 2010, but did not receive many votes. The CDA's strict position on migration, its lenient position on abortion and euthanasia, a weak awareness of the Dutch history of slavery, and the presence of Muslims on the candidate lists may explain its limited attractiveness among Christian migrants. The adoption of representatives of various Christian groups indicates the CDA is remobilizing Christians, indicating the formation of a creative minority. However, the CDA sought to expand its electoral attractiveness far beyond its Christian constituency using economic and moral issues, rather than an explicitly faith-based message (Ten Hooven 2011). The party continued to defend its public presence of religion against further secularism, but its religious focus shifted gradually to the defence of the Dutch nation-state. Particularly after September 11, 2001, conservative groupings and the CDA's youth association expressed their desire to defend the Judeo-Christian culture underlying the Dutch nation-state, which reflects the mechanism of cultural defence rather than the mechanism of creative minorities (see below). To conclude, the CDA did not turn into a creative minority.

The orthodox-Calvinist SGP: A Defensive Minority

The *Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij* (Political Reformed Party) had started since the late 1910s to mobilize pietistic Calvinists with a quietist streak. They perceived themselves as strangers on a sinful earth who should keep distance from dirty politics. Nevertheless, the SGP obtained one to three seats in parliament in every election since 1922, partly thanks to the electoral system of proportional representation. It distinguished itself by its anti-Catholicism and anti-socialism, as well as its opposition against a political role of women (Fieret 1990). Among Christian parties it stood out by its adherence to the original version of Article 36 of the Belgian Confession (1561) according to which the government "should suppress and eradicate all idolatry and false religion." An aversion to public disorder, the principle of free conscience, and a resigned acceptance of non-Christian rule as God's punishment refrained them from promoting the imposition of the Christian belief by the government by all means (Fieret 1990). Particularly since the 1970s, an organizational network had been established to protect the pietistic-Calvinists from secularization (Janse 1985). Today, this closely-knitted network

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includes the SGP, churches, schools, student associations, a daily news paper, health, and welfare organizations, involving approximately 250,000 people (Stoffels 1995; 2009). They remain not only congregationally and socially relatively isolated but also geographically concentrated in the Bible Belt, a predominantly rural area ranging from the south-western to the eastern provinces of the Netherlands. Its faith-based program and supporting network make the SGP a potential operating base for the formation of a creative minority facing the challenges of secularization, secularism and Islam.

The SGP continued to convey an explicitly Christian message in recent years. It abided with its theocratic ideal to base the political system and all policies on Biblical norms. However, the SGP tried to reframe its faith-based program, when after September 11 the concepts of fundamentalism and theocracy became increasingly associated with religious violence in the Netherlands. It emphasized that the SGP would promote its Christian ideals within the constraints of the democratic state and the rule of law (Van der Staaij 2005; Van der Vlies and Van der Staaij 2008). The SGP emphatically referred to secularism and Islam as major threats to its ideal of a Christian state. It blamed the coalition government of secular parties (1994–2002) for removing Christian norms from legislation on issues such as prostitution, Sunday rest, euthanasia, and marriage. The SGP also expressed increasing concerns about secularists and feminists limiting the constitutional freedoms of education, religion, and association for Christians. It feared that legislation such as the Equal Treatment Act (1994) would no longer allow publicly funded religious schools and welfare organizations to deny personnel or pupils if their beliefs and practices do not fit the organizations' religious profile. Since the 1990s, feminist lobby groups launched several court cases to challenge the exclusion of women from the SGP. Following a largely internal debate on the biblical justification for a political role of women, the SGP eventually allowed female membership by 2006 (Post 2009). However, in 2010, the highest national court convicted the SGP for discriminating women by excluding them from its party lists, demanding the government to take preventive action. Recent legislative initiatives to instruct new citizens and school pupils about so-called Western and Dutch values such as gender equality and the non-discrimination of homosexuals further fuelled a sense of discrimination among the SGP's constituency (Coster 1998; Oomen et al. 2009). The SGP leadership blamed secularists and feminists for pursing a "secular jihad" and "equality fundamentalism" (Van der Vlies 2005). Some SGP members considered Muslims as potential

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partners to protect religious freedoms from secularism (Vollaard 2006a). Many others perceived it as impossible to cooperate with people adhering to a false religion. The SGP leadership decided to fight both secularism and Islam. It also declared that it could not accept Christianity and Islam to be treated equally (Van der Vlies and Van der Staaij 2004). Whereas it no longer opposed the building of Catholic churches, it therefore called upon local and national governments to be reticent in allowing saucer antennas, big mosques and minarets to be built (*Reformatorisch Dagblad* 2009).

In short, the SGP conveyed a clearly faith-based message, also in response to the challenges of secularism and Islam. However, that does not make it a creative minority. It did not seek other groups of Christians to spread Christian ideals among the broader public. It took a rather defensive stance, instead. It did not join the merger process of two other orthodox-Calvinist parties in the 1990s (see below). Disagreements on political role of women, the freedom of religion and social-economic issues rather widened the gap among the orthodox-Calvinist parties (Vollaard 2010). Instead of regrouping and remobilizing Christians to address a larger audience with a Christian-inspired program, the SGP and the accompanying network of pietistic-Calvinist organizations focused on how to ward off the dangers of modernization, secularization, and secularism. To conclude, the SGP has remained a defensive minority rather than a creative one.

The ChristianUnion: A Creative Minority

The ChristianUnion is a merger of two orthodox-Calvinist parties, the *Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond* (Reformed Political Alliance — GPV) and the *Reformatorische Politieke Federatie* (Reformed Political Federation — RPF). The GPV used to be a defensive and isolationistic party. It originated from a church conflict in the 1940s. Its founders declined political cooperation with people who had not made the right choice of church membership (Klei 2011). Party membership therefore remained largely limited to the Free Reformed Churches, one of the manifold orthodox-Calvinist congregations in the Netherlands. That also held for a tight network of organizations of schools, a daily newspaper, student associations, health, and welfare organizations to which the GPV belonged (Stoffels 1995). The GPV obtained every election since 1963 one or more seats in parliament. The second party, the RPF,

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emerged in the 1970s from orthodox-Calvinists' discontent about the progressive course and the lenient ethical stance of the larger Protestant parties and their cooperation with the Catholic party (Van Mulligen 2010). When the GPV stuck to its exclusivist membership policy, the discontent orthodox-Calvinists decided to establish the RPF, but perceived it only as a temporary vehicle to mobilize Christians politically to fight secularization. The RPF obtained one or more seats in parliament since 1981. It maintained close ties with the anti-abortion lobby and the Evangelical Broadcasting Company (*Evangelische Omroep*), which helped to foster mutual recognition among remaining Christians, including GPV's members and the growing number of Evangelicals who used to shun politics as a sinful, earthly practice. Concerned about the RPF's electoral competition, ongoing secularization, and the decline of the CDA, the GPV decided in the 1980s to cooperate more closely with fellow orthodox-Protestants (Klei 2011). After two decades of deliberation, the GPV eventually abandoned denominational purity and merged with the RPF into the ChristianUnion in the early 21st century.

The creation of the ChristianUnion exemplified the formation of a creative minority. The RPF sought to regroup and remobilize Christians across denominational divisions to fight secularization and secularism. RPF as well as GPV clearly based their program of principles and manifestos on the Christian faith (albeit in a Protestant understanding). So did the ChristianUnion. Secularization and secularism remained important incentives for the party to seek active political engagement. It wanted to fight the "Enlightenment fundamentalism" of parties that wished to abandon religion from the public sphere. Nevertheless, the ChristianUnion fairly pragmatically acknowledged the limited possibilities in a secularized country for its specific Christian desires regarding abortion and euthanasia, seeking to play a constructive role in politics instead (Segers 2009). Initially, Islam did not function as a rallying flag, as its party leader André Rouvoet explained: "… as a Christian, [I] see with pain in my heart the rise of Islam in my country and in Europe … The biggest problem we face in our days is not 'Islamisation,' but secularisation! … [W]e accept and tolerate the presence of a growing number of Muslims in our society and we defend their fundamental rights … We do so as a consequence of Christian political thinking: not by concession, but by confession! … [T]he separation of Church and State follows from a Christian understanding of tolerance … while the separation of faith and politics is an impossibility and nothing more than an attempt of secular humanism to ban God and religion from the public domain. We cannot allow that to happen!" (Rouvoet 2006). Nevertheless,

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part of the ChristianUnion's constituency seemed to ask for a more strident position on Islam. In response, the party's think tank and the 2011 campaign for the First Chamber have been more critical of Islam's influence in the Netherlands (see below).

The orthodox-Calvinist churches (excluding the pietistic ones) and Evangelical and charismatic congregations comprise about 840,000 people (Stoffels 2009). The ChristianUnion tried to expand its electoral appeal both within and outside this group, specifically targeting younger generations, women, Christian migrants, Evangelicals and also conservative Catholics. It launched internal working groups for these groups, paid extra attention to them in party publications and electoral campaigns, and listed candidates from the various target groups. The ChristianUnion managed to attract a significant amount of support from Evangelicals, despite disagreements on the party's Calvinist origins as well as the role of homosexuals within the party. However, it barely succeeded to attract Catholic votes or members. Catholics' low level of religiosity and the cultural differences with an orthodox-Protestant party from the north (whereas most Catholics live in the south) may explain the little Catholic involvement.

The ChristianUnion also received only limited support from Christian migrants and their descendants, partly because of their low political participation (Mabayoje 2009). The first generation prioritizes settling in a new country and do also often lack the right to vote in national elections (ChristenUnie 2005). Turnout of Christian migrants and their descendants is low in both national and local elections. They rather focus on their own church community and social care in their local neighborhood or ethnic group (Koning 2011). Some Christian migrants also keep a certain distrust of politics, because of negative experiences in their home country or their (Evangelical) conviction politics is sinful. Christian migrants and their descendants are often not aware of the ChristianUnion or consider it too small (ChristenUnie 2005). Furthermore, many Christian migrants and their descendants belong to the Catholic Church, which may prevent them from voting for a protestant party. Cultural differences between the predominantly white and restrained orthodox-Calvinists at the countryside and often colored and expressive Christian migrants in big cities may be a further hurdle. When Christian migrants and their descendants did vote in local or national elections, they often support leftwing, secular parties (ChristenUnie 2005; Michon and Tillie 2003, 132). The latter parties started much earlier to attract the migrant vote, immediately following the decision in 1985 to allow long-term legal residents without Dutch nationality to vote in municipal elections.

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The ChristianUnion targeted also pietistic-Calvinists, the SGP's constituency. Although the ChristianUnion (and its predecessors) occasionally called for closer cooperation among fellow Christian parties in times of ongoing secularization, it feared to lose electoral attractiveness if it associated itself too closely with a theocratic, rightwing party that excluded women from its candidate lists (Vollaard 2010, 185). The ChristianUnion did also seek to remobilize and regroup Christians abroad. It established the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) in 2002 together with Christian parties from Hungary, Germany, and the United Kingdom (www.ecpm.info/en). In 2010, the ECPM received recognition as an official political foundation within the European Union, but as of now only the Christian Union and SGP are represented there (participating in the European Conservatives and Reformists Group and Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group respectively).

The ChristianUnion's attempts to regroup and remobilize Christians both within and outside the Netherlands have been accompanied with efforts to reach a broader public. It launched a permanent campaign in 2003 to draw attention to its faith-based program, seeking cooperation with local churches and Christian associations (Voerman 2010, 95, 110). It faced, however, difficulties to keep support from its orthodox-Calvinist and Evangelical constituencies while strengthening its appeal among other voters and parties. Its pragmatic approach to its principles allowed the ChristianUnion to join a coalition government after it won six out of 150 seats in the Second Chamber in 2006. Initially, the ChristianUnion's constituency felt relief that an explicitly Christian party could still do so despite ongoing secularism and secularization. However, criticism grew when the party focused on governing and attracting non-traditional voters too much (Schipper et al. 2011). These difficulties illustrate the limited possibilities for re-emerging Christianity in a secularized country. A permanent majority of secular parties prevents the ChristianUnion to make a difference on issues what is perceived by its traditional constituency as essential (abortion and euthanasia), while the large majority of secular voters are not attracted by an explicitly Christian message. In addition, individualization does also continue among Christians, which may undermine to participate actively in Christian organisations, including the ChristianUnion (Dekker 2006). In other words, the case of the ChristianUnion clearly illustrates how secularization and secularism incentives remaining Christians to regroup and remobilize in party politics. However, it may also eventually fall apart in future also because of the same processes of secularization and secularism.

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CULTURAL DEFENCE

Creative minorities turned out to be a limited resource of resurgent Christianity in the Netherlands. Only the tiny ChristianUnion and the SGP desire a return to traditional Christian morality. Nevertheless, Christianity may gain relevance in a different guise. In the Netherlands, 55% feels akin to Christianity, while 48% perceive religion as somewhat to very important for Dutch and European identity (Bernts and de Hart 2007, 68ff, 86). Holidays, Sunday rest, church towers, and the text "God be with us" on the Euro-coin's edge still remind one of the dominance of Christianity in Dutch history. Islam's growing visibility may be the incentive to re-emphasize the Christian roots of the Dutch nation-state or the European Union. This section explores whether and how political parties have referred to Christianity as a discursive marker of political identity, testing how Christianity may re-emerge through the mechanism of cultural defence.

A Christian understanding of the Dutch nation is not new. After its independence, the Netherlands was depicted as a Protestant nation liberated from the Catholic-Habsburgian house of slavery, seeking religious freedom for its cities, provinces, and citizens. Fearing the country would fall apart due to growing religious and social divisions in the late 19th century, the conservative-liberal establishment adopted a more secular understanding of the Dutch nation as a beacon of freedom. The Protestant parties and churches remained attached to the Protestant nation. The national hymn was often sung at their party meetings and in church services. In the 1960s, Dutch nationalism largely lost its Christian connotation and was replaced by a progressive discourse in which institutionalized religion and explicit nationalism was perceived as outdated if not reprehensible (Kennedy 1995). Also the conservative-liberal party VVD removed a reference to Christianity from its Program of principles in 1980. Positive references to the Christian past, culture, heritage, or tradition of the Netherlands were therefore largely confined to the Christian parties in the 1980s. The small orthodox-Calvinist parties stuck to a rather exclusivist Protestant interpretation, while the CDA adopted a pluralistic, multicultural, open-minded, tolerant, and inclusive understanding of the Dutch nation.

Since the 1990s, references to the Christian roots of the Netherlands and Europe gradually increased also by some secular parties. VVD party leader Frits Bolkestein (1994) emphasized the need of moral underpinnings of the Dutch liberal legal and economic order. In his eyes,

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Christian and humanistic traditions would offer the moral guidelines and unity for a political community facing a growing influx of migrants. Bolkestein also dismissed cultural relativism because it denied the superiority of Western values. He yet failed to re-introduce a reference to Christian and humanistic values in the VVD's party program. In the public debate on liberalism and morality, others reflected upon the cultural loss of the demise of Christianity (Cuperus 1996). A rightwing publicist, Pim Fortuyn, argued the "orphaned" Dutch society required restoration of its Judeo-Christian and humanistic culture against the threats of multiculturalism, European integration, and Islamisation (Fortuyn 1995; 1997). Fortuyn urged the CDA to defend the Christian cultural heritage "in a modern way" (Fortuyn 1995). Reformulating its ideology in its years of opposition, the CDA argued that the Dutch society, state, and nation should "re-connect" with its cultural roots also for moral reasons. In its view, the Dutch politico-legal order required a moral foundation in "common values" (Vollaard 2006b). In 2000, the CDA party leader stated that migrants should adapt to the dominant culture underpinning the legal order, and that the Judeo-Christian and humanistic culture should be propagated against cultural relativism. He did not receive full support from within and outside his party (Zwart and Van Kessel 2005).

In response to the sudden and successful rise of Fortuyn's populist and nationalist party LPF in the national parliamentary elections of 2002, the CDA and conservative-liberal VVD distanced themselves from multiculturalism (Van Kersbergen 2008). In response to Fortuyn's criticism on Islam and European integration, all parties sought to redefine their ideal Dutch citizen and nation. Parties more or less agreed that the Dutch language, knowledge of Dutch history, and the constitutional rights were essential for (new) Dutch citizens to fully take part in their nation. Definitions of Dutch citizenship and nation also went beyond this rather procedural, civic understanding. Leftwing parties preferred foremost a multicultural, but secular and progressive nation. As will be illustrated below, culturally rightwing and Christian parties started referring more to the Judeo-Christian culture or tradition.

A combined reference to Judaism and Christianity barely appeared before 2000 in Dutch politics or society. If so, it mostly described the theological commonalities of the two religions, partly to condemn anti-Semitism (Snel 2011). Orthodox-Calvinists in parliament used the word in debates on abortion and euthanasia in the 1980s and 1990s to describe the specific ethics of both religions. Particularly since 2000, the concept of Judeo-Christian tradition or culture was increasingly used in parliament

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and society in describing the cultural origins of the West. The preamble of the European Constitution, Turkey's accession to the European Union, and a minister suggesting that a Judeo-Christian-Islamic culture may emerge in the Netherlands were the main reasons for public debates on the concept. Parliamentary documents included 143 times the word "Judeo-Christian" between 2000 and 2011, whereas the word had been only used 33 times between 1814 and 2000.[1] In party publications, it became the concept indicating the (im)possibilities of integrating Muslims and Islam in Dutch and Western culture.

The LPF argued in its manifesto that large groups in Dutch society had not taken part in the "century-long judeo-christian-humanistic developments in Europe" (Lijst Pim Fortuyn 2002, 5). Leading a short-lived coalition of CDA, LPF, and VVD (2002–2003), the Christian-Democratic Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende launched for a nation-wide debate on the "values and norms" of the Dutch society. Later on, he also wished a reference to the Judeo-Christian culture in the preamble of the European Constitutional Treaty. His party also perceived the European community of values being based on a Judeo-Christian heritage (Christen Democratisch Appel 2004a, 3; Christen Democratisch Appel 2009, 5). Furthermore, the CDA argued that the common core values underpinning the Dutch constitutional order had a Judeo-Christian and humanistic origin (such as equality, human dignity, gender equality, justice, and freedom), with which migrants should familiarize themselves through citizenship programs and education (Christen Democratisch Appel 2004b).

The CDA remained somewhat hesitant about the relationship between Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition. According to official party publications, Islam could also be connected to the aforementioned core values (Christen Democratisch Appel 2005). Prominent party members detested an exclusive and repressive understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition (Terpstra 2009). Nevertheless, doubts existed within the party whether Islam sufficiently experienced pluralism, rule of law, and democracy, while freedom would have featured prominently in the history of Christianity and the Netherlands (Mathies et al. 2005, 131). The Christian-Democratic Youth Association (CDJA) argued that the CDA should much more emphatically propagate the Judeo-Christian origins of the Western civilization, and should not hesitate to denote problematic differences with Islam such as the separation of church and state and respect of religious diversity (Van der Molen and Meijering 2008). The youth wing's call did not want the CDA to return to traditional

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Christian morality, but wished to defend the Christian cultural heritage with more pride. It used the concept of Judeo-Christian tradition to distinguish the Western civilization and Dutch culture from the alleged non-liberal nature of Islam. In its more recent party manifestos, the CDA more emphatically stated that the Western culture should be dominant (Christen Democratisch Appel 2009, 5; 2010, 13–14), although it also argued the Judeo-Christian culture offers Islam the necessary freedom to express itself publicly.

The secular Freedom Party (PVV) of Geert Wilders took a different stance. Wilders split from the VVD in late 2004 following a conflict on the Turkish entry to the European Union. His PVV wanted to defend the superior Western civilization and the Dutch nation, if necessary by limiting the freedom of Islamic Dutch citizens. Wilders perceived Islam and the Judeo-Christian-humanistic culture of the West incompatible. Wilders therefore wanted to replace the first article of the Constitution (on non-discrimination) with an article stating that the Judeo-Christian and humanistic culture is the dominant one in the Netherlands (PVV 2006). The PVV associated the Judeo-Christian-humanistic culture with liberal terms such as tolerance, no use of violence, democracy, freedom of expression, and the separation of church and state. The concept functioned as a marker of the political identity of the Netherlands and the West, to which Islam did not and could never adapt to. Among other things, the PVV therefore demanded that Christian holidays should not be changed for Islamic ones, that oath-taking in the police and armed forces can only take place on the Bible, and that the Europe's Judeo-Christian-humanistic culture of Europe should be protected by sending Muslims to non-Western countries. Facing competition from both PVV and CDA, the conservative-liberal VVD adopted a reference to the Judeo-Christian tradition as one of the roots of the Dutch society in its Program of Principles in 2008 (VVD 2008). Party leader Mark Rutte argued that migrants should learn about the Judeo-Christian tradition, humanism, and Enlightenment (Rutte 2008). Rutte's reference reflected how the concept of Judeo-Christian tradition shifted from a theological to a historical-cultural concept, denoting a liberal and secular political order. This shift also occurred among the two orthodox-Calvinist parties.

Similarly to the PVV, the SGP desired a reference to the Judeo-Christian values in the Constitution, because it also feared Islamization of the Dutch nation-state. It also wanted to strengthen the European Union's Christian identity as guarantee against the threat of a "foreign" Islamic culture. In its interpretation of the Protestant, Christian or

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Judeo-Christian roots of the Dutch nation, the SGP increasingly referred to tolerance, freedom, democracy, and the separation of church and state (SGP 2005; Nijsink and Rozendaal 2009). Although it remained anti-secularist, the SGP thus embraced a more liberal understanding of Christianity due to the challenge of Islam. The ChristianUnion initially took a less antithetical stance toward Islam, despite its predecessors' fondness of Dutch identity and culture. The ChristianUnion emphasized that the freedom of religion should also offer Muslims space to express their religion. Christianity should not be used to exclude Islamic fellow citizens in the way PVV and VVD did (*Nederlands Dagblad* 2009). Its senator even pondered a moral pact between Christians and reformed Islam to criticize the emptiness of Western materialism (Schuurman 2007). However, the ChristianUnion denied Turkey European Union membership because of cultural and religious differences. In addition, it increasingly denoted the problematic relationship between Islam and the separation of church ands state, equality, and freedom of religion in recent years (de Jong 2009). It therefore proposed to include an anti-sharia provision in the Constitution to protect democracy and the rule of law in the Netherlands (Rouvoet and Kuiper 2011). In other words, Islam did not fit the originally (Judeo)-Christian political and legal order of the Netherlands. The cultural defense against the alleged threat of Islamization thus resulted in a re-emergence of Christianity in Dutch politics, not only among Christian but also culturally rightwing, secular parties. The often used concept of Judeo-Christian tradition, however, referred to a rather secular, liberal order. And it remains a contested issue whether Christianity (let alone Judaism) has been the main sources of secularism and liberalism.

CONCLUSION

The exemplary case of the Netherlands provided empirical evidence for two mechanisms of resurgent Christianity. First, particularly secularization and secularism incentivized remaining Christians to regroup and remobilize in a so-called creative minority to convey an explicitly faith-based message to a broader public. Modernization does therefore not automatically mean less (organized) religion in politics. Creative minorities remained a minor affair in politics, however, despite the large number of non-Western Christian migrants and their descendants. Secularization limited the opportunities of Christian party politics to appeal far beyond

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its Christian constituency. Furthermore, political parties may lose their appeal also among Christians as the organisation to express their ideals in politics and society due to secularism. If so, Christian parties established to fight secularization and secularism, not only in the Netherlands but also in Scandinavia (Karvonen 1993) or elsewhere, would be rather a hiccup than a fundamental change in a process of ongoing secularization.

The Dutch case also illustrated how Christianity re-emerges in politics through the cultural defence mechanism, not only among Christian but also secular parties. Elsewhere, the challenge of Islam also incentivized secular parties to start propagating the (Judeo)-Christian heritage of Europe and its nations (Betz and Meret 2009). The invention of the Judeo-Christian tradition is based on a rather biased picture of Jewish and Christian beliefs and practices in the past. Be that as it may, the growing references to the Judeo-Christian tradition has already resulted in a weakening of anti-clericalism and anti-Semitism among secular, extreme-right parties such as Lega Nord, SVP, Vlaams Belang and FPÖ (Zúquete 2008). It does not mean that these parties have left their secular(ist) heritage fully behind (Dolezal, Helbling, and Hutter 2010, 185). The reference to the Judeo-Christian culture is rather used as a sacred code word to denote a secular, liberal order distinct from Islam, reflecting the culturalization of Christian religion in Europe (Foret and Riva 2010, 793). The confusion arising from using religious wordings for a secular and liberal order illustrates once more how important a more in-depth understanding of religion's role in politics is. A confusing mix of Christian and secular cultures rather than a Christian faith has gained political significance in recent years.

The two mechanisms hypothesized have now passed their first plausibility test in the exemplary case of the Netherlands. They do exist. The logical step forward now is comparative research to examine parties as well as other political organisations (pressure groups; social movements) in the Netherlands, Western Europe and elsewhere to map and explain also the variety among political systems in the extent as to which Christianity has re-emerged in politics through the two mechanisms of creative minorities and cultural defence respectively. The two mechanisms offer thus the theoretical basis for a more precise understanding under what conditions various dimensions of religion may gain political relevance, also in post-secular circumstances.

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NOTE

1. Based on count of times (varieties of) the word "joods-christelijk" appeared in parliamentary documentations available on www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl (1814–1995) and www.opmaat.nl (1995–present).

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