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The role of religion during the Bethel church asylum

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Abstract

Since the turn of the century, secularization scholars have turned their backs on the idea that the role of religion within society will ultimately diminish. Instead, scholars now believe that secularization is a European anomaly, in which The Netherlands is considered one of the most secularized countries on earth. In this thesis, I aim to study the role of religion in the Bethel church asylum, a three month long continual service that was held to both prevent the deportation of an Armenian family and to initiate dialogue with the Dutch government on 'immoral' asylum policy. By using the theory of deliberative democracy as a methodological and theoretical tool to delineate the political, public and religious spheres, I employ narrative and content analysis to analyze both the role of religion and the church as a moral community that carries out religion.

The analysis shows that the Bethel church asylum was able to reignite the public debate on asylum policy, which ultimately led to a change in asylum policy and a residence permit for the Armenian family. This reveals a cooperationist model of church and state relations, despite the lack of formal recognition of the church in the Dutch Constitution. It opposes the idea that the role of religion in the Dutch public sphere has diminished, and that the church is no longer a prominent actor. In fact, the Bethel church asylum was widely supported and received minimal criticism. Those in favor argued from a moral perspective, stating that the church is a helper of those in need and that it should point out the government's injustices. Those against argued from a legalist perspective, doubting whether the Bethel church asylum was legitimate due to the misuse of Dutch law. There is evidence that the Bethel church asylum can be considered an act of civil disobedience. Lastly, the Bethel church asylum's outcome supports the Habermasian idea that the function of the public debate is to construct the borders within which political actors and their decisions must reside to be perceived as legitimate.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Bethel Church Asylum

On an inconspicuous side-street in The Hague lies a small church. One would not notice the Bethel church's chapel from afar nor its reserved front wooden door, as both blend in with the surrounding brick houses. However, this very church made global headlines for holding a continual service that lasted night-and-day for over three months from late 2018 into early 2019. The family Tamrazyan, an Armenian family whose asylum requests had been rejected on numerous occasions by the Dutch government – judges, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) and Council of State – was residing inside the church. It all started when the family, as a last-ditch effort, had tried to apply for the children's pardon. This was a policy set in place for families without a residence permit but with children who had 'Dutchified' after years of integrating into Dutch society. Once again, they were rejected. Having been left with the choice to either go back to Armenia or to ask the church for help, the Tamrazyan family decided on the latter. Their local church in Katwijk, in turn, decided to help the family by offering them church asylum. They had been hiding in their local church for only a few months, when the IND entered the building and threatened to deport them. After this incident, the family reached out to the Protestant church of the Netherlands (PCN) for help. The PCN responded by calling in the help of the local Bethel church in The Hague. The PCN had decided, after consulting with their lawyers, that a continual service would be the best way to avoid the IND from entering a church again, as per the Dutch law that prevents governmental interference in church services.¹ Just a few days after the IND incident in Katwijk, the family slipped out into the night in their disguises and fled to the Bethel church in The Hague. And so, the continual service began.

While in the Bethel church in The Hague, the IND had made it clear to the family that they were not allowed to step outside in fear of being deported back to Armenia. For privacy, the family could retreat to their upstairs living area, a basic space that had been converted to fit the family of five. Meanwhile, churchgoers upheld the continual service downstairs by singing, reading from the bible and praising both their involvement and the Divine. The Bethel church's goal was to "create time and space for dialogue with the government" (van der Meiden, 2020, pg. 16). First, a public debate ensued on the fate of the family and hundreds of other immigrant families in The Netherlands who were awaiting their asylum decisions. Meanwhile, prominent public figure Tim Hofman produced a documentary titled 'Back to your own country' – *Terug naar je eige land* – that

¹ The law *Algemene Wet op het Binnentreden* is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework.

showed how five immigrant children suffered from a children's pardon that was not working (BNNVARA, 2018). Ultimately, a political debate followed. At the time, the leading coalition in parliament consisted of four parties: VVD, CDA, D66 and CU. VVD and CDA were against easing the children's pardon, while D66 and CU were for. Until on January 19, 2019, when CDA publicly stated that they had turned and were now for the easing of the children's pardon. A weeklong behind-the-scenes discussion among the leading coalition parties commenced, which ultimately resulted in the easing of the children's pardon. The Tamrazyan family was assured that they would be granted asylum, signifying the end of continual service on January 30th, 2019. These three months the Tamrazyan family spent in the Bethel church in The Hague is what delineates this case study, which from here on out will be referred to as the Bethel church asylum. Some of the case study's main topics include the children's pardon, the family Tamrazyan's situation, and the relationship between church and state, all of which were discussed in news stories, political debates and church news items.

1.2 The Children's Pardon

From the start, the children's pardon had struggled to be an effective policy within Dutch migration services. Concerned citizens and organizations spoke out over the years in defense of children who fit the children's pardon's requirements on paper yet were rejected by judges. The notorious *meewerkcriterium* was often the culprit, as it required families to have actively participated in their return to their country or origin. Media covered these stories, and the secretary of asylum affairs gave in to the demands of the public from time to time by issuing general pardons. Occasionally, immigrant children themselves would seek media attention to publicly air their grievances. Two cases stand out in particular: Mauro, and Lili and Howick.

Less than ten years before the Bethel church asylum, there was Mauro. An Angolese teenage boy, who had been put on a plane to Amsterdam by his mother when he was 10 years old, became the center of public and political debate on the fate of children who had integrated into Dutch society. In the public sphere, media covered the Mauro case extensively. Mauro's adoptive mother even went on a Dutch talk show to raise awareness for Mauro's situation. In the political sphere, parliamentary members Spekman and Voordewind (GroenLinks) handed in a motion to the Dutch House of Representatives that would serve as the basis for what would become known as the children's pardon, or *Het Kinderpardon*, in October of 2011. Spekman and Voordewind called on the Dutch government to craft policy that would enable Mauro and children in similar

situations to receive a residence permit.² Ultimately, this led to the birth a nation-wide children's pardon in 2012.

Six years later, the Armenian teenagers Lili and Howick caused a massive stir in the Dutch public space. In August of 2018, a judge had ruled that their asylum was rejected, a decision not considered out of the ordinary by Dutch judges. Their mother had been deported back to Armenia a year earlier. What followed was a media frenzy, as every major news outlet reported on the asylum case. Politicians, the teenagers' lawyer and friends, even Dutch princess Laurentien, all spoke out publicly. All to no avail, as the siblings' planned deportation was not cancelled. "Sometimes, you have to be tough," is what Mark Rutte, prime minister of The Netherlands, had said in defense of that decision. The night before Lili and Howick were to be deported, they ran away from their foster family and roamed the village of Wijchen for hours during the night. That is when secretary of asylum affairs, Mark Harbers, decided to use his *discretionaire bevoegdheid* (which will be referred to as discretion) to grant Lili and Howick asylum.³

The Bethel church asylum commenced only a few months after Lili and Howick went missing that evening. There was something different, however, about the Tamrazyan family's situation in comparison to Mauro, and Lili and Howick. Firstly, their time spent in the church signified the end of the children's pardon. Secondly, the family's case involved a church's public act against the state. Some Bethel church volunteers even called the continual service an act of civil disobedience against the state. Although Dutch churches had previously organized church sanctuaries, they had not previously used a continual service as a tool to prevent a rejected immigrant family from being deported. And even though the church asylum was organized by the local Bethel church community in The Hague, the PCN and the Council of Churches publicly stated their support for the initiative.

In conclusion, the Bethel Church Asylum encompasses this intersection of politics and religion with a heavy dose of immigration. The three month long continual service was unique, in the sense that no other church had used such a tool to obstruct a government from carrying out its asylum policy. It not only reignited a public debate on the children's pardon, but it also sparked a discussion on the legitimate use of such a religious act in the Dutch public sphere against the

² For more information on this discussion, see *Kamerdossier 19637*.

³ This reconstruction is comprised of the following media: NOS.nl (2018), Beslissing Harbers: 'Een gewetensvraag, die heel essentieel is voor het beleid', <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2249567-beslissing-harbers-een-gewetensvraag-die-heel-essentieel-is-voor-het-beleid>; Zeggelaar, D. van (2018), Howick en Lili: de kinderen die toch niet worden uitgezet, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2249564-howick-en-lili-de-kinderen-die-toch-niet-worden-uitgezet>; NOS.nl (2018), ard beleid of hand over het hart? De week van Lili en Howick, <https://nos.nl/video/2249550-hard-beleid-of-hand-over-het-hart-de-week-van-lili-en-howick.html>; NOS.nl (2019), Plots was er een vader in beeld bij de zaak-Lili en Howick, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2309221-plots-was-er-een-vader-in-beeld-bij-de-zaak-lili-en-howick>; and BNNVARA (2018), Van Mauro tot Lili en Howick: het Kinderpardon, <https://www.bnnvara.nl/pauw/artikelen/van-mauro-tot-lili-en-howick-het-kinderpardon>.

government, with some even calling it an act of civil disobedience. The Bethel church asylum ultimately signified the end of the children's pardon, but was it responsible for its ending or was the asylum merely one of the many voices that contributed to its abolishment?

1.3 Theoretical Relevance

From a theoretical standpoint, the Bethel church asylum is interesting because it encompasses an intersection of various theoretical debates. First and foremost, it raises questions about the role the church can play in political matters like the children's pardon. Primarily, this question prompted me to turn to scholarship on secularization and the relationship between church and state in The Netherlands. It seems reasonable to assume that twentieth-century secularization theorists would not have imagined the church to organize the Bethel church asylum so publicly in the year 2018, since it does not align with the expectations they had for the role of religion in the public sphere. Nor would they have imagined that the church might do something that would potentially jeopardize their relationship with the Dutch state. The outcome of the Bethel church asylum, thus, sheds a curious light on secularization as an explanatory theory and may very well align more with those who claim that religion's role has changed, not disappeared. Currently, there is no consensus among scholars about what role religion plays, also within The Netherlands.

Undoubtedly, previous research on church asylum is relevant to this case. As church asylum is not common in The Netherlands, I will mostly draw on scholarship from other contexts. Jorgensen (2013) and Hamelzky and Broeke (2020) have suggested that church asylum can be seen as an act of civil disobedience. This raises the question of whether the Bethel church asylum can be seen as an act of civil disobedience or simply a (political) protest. Nonetheless, the Bethel church asylum's ability to act publicly against a statist policy alludes to some sort of basic understanding among those involved that they are part of a structure in which that is allowed, namely a democracy. This brings me to the last theoretical debate: the normative theory of deliberative democracy. The Bethel church asylum's organizers publicly stated that their intention was to encourage a dialogue with politicians to come to a humane solution for the families affected by the failures of the children's pardon (van der Meiden, 2020). This call for dialogue sounds strikingly similar to one of deliberative democracy's principles that decisions made within the political sphere *should* reflect the opinions expressed in and through public deliberation. Deliberative democracy will, thus, serve its purpose in this thesis by being used as a framework for society; I will not take a position within the debate.

1.3 Research Aims & Questions

It is unclear what role religion fulfills in today's Dutch society. Current literature does not offer a clear answer to this gap, rather it shows that there is still a lively discussion on the role of religion in today's Western European societies. Europe is defined by some scholars as divergent from the still vibrantly religious other parts of the world, where The Netherlands has some of the highest rates of secularization. That is, if we were to mostly rely on data on church attendance. But is that the whole picture? If not, what consequences does it have for Dutch democracy if the church's role actually has not been relinquished to its fringes, but, instead, can be considered an important – potentially disobedient – voice within Dutch public and political spheres? How is the state to respond to a lively church?

I aim to join in on three theoretical debates: church and state relations, secularization, and civil disobedience, while drawing from the theory of deliberative democracy and other contexts in which church asylum has taken place. I do so by approaching the church as a potentially influential and disobedient actor within a Dutch deliberative framework through the Bethel Church asylum case. This leads to the following research question:

How can the role of religion be understood in the Bethel Church asylum case?

To effectively answer the main research question, four sub-questions have been formulated. These sub-questions have inspired the way in which the results of this thesis are presented in the 'Results' chapter. These are as follows:

- Sub-Question 1: What roles were ascribed to religion in five prominent newspapers during the Bethel Church case? (*public sphere*)
- Sub-Question 2: What roles were ascribed to religion in two parliamentary debates during the Bethel Church case? (*political sphere*)
- Sub-Question 3: What roles did the church ascribe to itself and to religion in the weekly bulletins during the Bethel Church case? (*religious sphere*)
- Sub-Question 4: To what extent did the roles ascribed to religion overlap or contradict one another across the political, public, and religious spheres?

2 Theoretical Framework

The relationship between state and church is the focal point of this thesis and lays the groundwork for this theoretical framework. Before ending with an overview of Dutch church and state relations (part 3), this chapter separately addresses scholarship on the state (part 1) and religion (part 2).

First, I turn my attention towards scholarship on conceptions of and protests against the state in part one (2.1 Democracy, Deliberation, and Demonstration). I start by outlining Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy. I then shortly contextualize his theory by applying it to The Netherlands, using his theory to define the various spheres of The Netherlands: its political, public and religious spheres (2.1.1 A Theory of Deliberative Democracy). Next, I present relevant facets of the theory of civil disobedience as a form of protest against the state. Although acts of civil disobedience can be performed by states themselves and against supranational bodies (Scheuerman, 2020), I confine my conception of civil disobedience to acts within and against a state (2.1.2 A Theory of Civil Disobedience). I conclude part one by providing an overview of Dutch laws relevant to this case, like the children's pardon and the *Algemene Wet op het Binnentreden*. I will also tie in some elements of deliberation into the Dutch context (2.1.3 The Netherlands).

Second, I turn my attention toward the church (2.2 Secularization and Asylum). I start by defining what the church or, in a broader sense, religion is. Since religion is one of the oldest concepts of study within sociology, having been defined in a multitude of ways, it is vital to define both her and the church before delving into the theory of secularization (2.2.1 A Theory of Secularization). Next, I present the rather limited scholarship on church asylum by first describing how it is generally understood, after which I delve into church asylum in different contexts. This will enable me to compare the results from my case to others (2.2.2 Church Asylum).

Finally, state and church are connected in part three (2.3 Dutch Church and State Relations). I first discuss the (historical) relationship between the two institutions from around the time that Protestantism first appeared in what we now refer to as The Netherlands up until the Synod of Dort in 1618 (2.3.1 The Emergence of the Dutch Republic and the Protestant Reformation). In the next section, I provide the rest of their history up until today (2.3.2 The Emergence of a Modern Nation and the Development of the Protestant Church). Then, I present some models of church and state relations, after which I discuss which best fits The Netherlands according to current scholarship (2.3.3 Models of Church and State Relations). I end the chapter with a short overview of the most relevant parts of this Theoretical Framework (2.3.4 A Disobedient and Influential Church in a Dutch Deliberative Democracy?).

2.1 Democracy, Deliberation, and Demonstration

James S. Fishkin, Director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy, stated in a 2017 issue on the prospects and limits of deliberative democracy that “[d]emocracy is under siege” (Fishkin & Mansbridge, 2017, pg. 6). Now, as director of an institution trying to further research on deliberative democracy – a still rather normative and theoretical project – it seems reasonable that he would preface the issue with such alarming wording. It does bring into question, however, to what extent democracy is under siege. What role could (public) deliberation play in ‘rescuing’ democracy? And can (civil disobedient) protesters be considered as either attackers or defenders of democracy, or something else entirely? Part one of this theoretical framework attempts to answer the questions above, while applying parts of the theories of deliberative democracy and civil disobedience into the Dutch context.

2.1.1 A Theory of Deliberative Democracy

The normative theory of deliberative democracy emanates from a critique of neoliberalism, with its steadfast emphasis on individual rights and freedoms and a more economic understanding of democracy. In an attempt to rekindle citizens’ participation in politics, deliberative democrats developed a theory that would ‘once again’ empower citizens within the political decision-making process. Instead of mere consumers of various political brands, citizens are main contributors to reflective public debates on important issues, which in turn inform political actors’ decisions to the betterment of democratic life. The theory proposes a way to “enhance democracy and criticize institutions that do not live up to the normative standard” (Chambers, 2003, pg. 308). According to deliberative democrats, political decision-makers, operating within a political sphere, can and must be held to account through citizens’ articulations of opinions within public deliberation. This is where the political order, in turn, derives its legitimacy from. Public policies are not only legitimate because they originate from political procedures, but also “because they can be contested, and sometimes revised, even after they have been enacted” (Girard, 2015, pg. 283). Deliberation is not intended to replace other democratic consent-giving structures, like voting, but rather to supplement them. Although still mostly a normative political idea, there have been significant advances within the realm of deliberative democratic theory. As Chambers (2003) put it, the theory “has moved beyond the theoretical statement stage and into the working theory stage” by, for instance, the realization of community forums and mini publics (pg. 307).

As one of the prominent scholars of communication, Habermas has evolved the field immensely since the 1970’s, garnering theories and research on “the role of public discourse in shaping political life” (Calhoun, et al., 2012, pg. 437). In response to the increasingly vexed stance

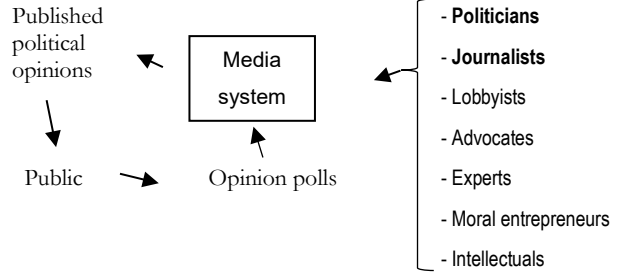
against the rationalities of post-modern thought, Habermas formulated theory dedicated to the possibility of reason and rational-critical communication in modern-day liberal institutions. He recognizes humans as communicative and deliberative. This viewpoint is particularly evident in his 1984 theory of communicative action, in which he argues that the very notion that people have and use a shared language to communicate with and understand one another, points toward some basic form of normative consensus in their shared language. People criticizing others, and in turn being able to be criticized themselves, whether it be about truth, ethics or feelings, is what he sees as the essence of a rational discourse (ibid, ibid).

Habermas traced this form of rational communication back to seventeenth-century European coffee houses, literary cafes and print media, mostly led by the bourgeois, which he referred to as the public sphere. This public sphere is a social phenomenon that can best be defined as “a network of communicating information and points of view...the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions” (Habermas, 1996, pg. 360). When these opinions concern public affairs, ranging from matters of discrimination to taxes, we can speak of a political public sphere. This means that even discussions amongst soccer supporters at a local soccer club about racism or the new tree that was planted outside of their town’s supermarket are considered here. The public political sphere thus serves as a mediator between civil society and the state. The state itself is not a part of this political public sphere, even if it is its “executor” (Habermas, 1964).

So, what does this public political sphere look like? Figure 1 provides us with a graphic overview of what Habermas refers to as arenas of political communication, in which the political public sphere is situated in the middle. The upper part of the political system consists of well-established governmental branches, like administrative agencies and parliament, each of whom can be described as a specialized deliberative arena with its own type of institutionalized deliberation and negotiation processes; together they form the state’s institutions. The second part of the political system is the political public sphere, “rooted in networks for wild flows of messages – news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes and images, and shows and movies with an informative, polemical, educational, or entertaining content” (Habermas, 2006b, pg. 415). Various types of actors are the source of these messages, the two most notable and essential types being journalists and politicians. Journalists, or media professionals, are the editors of mass media outlets, deciding what, how, and when something is worthy of being considered. They produce what Habermas considers an elite discourse that is fed by those struggling to influence and gain access to media. Politicians are at the heart of the political system as both the authors and recipients of published political opinions. Habermas distinguishes five other types of actors who emerge within the

Figure 1

Arenas of political communication (Habermas, 2006b)

Forms of communication	Arenas of political communication	
Institutionalized deliberation and negotiation	Government, administrative agencies, parliament, courts of law, etc.	Political system: (1) state institutions
Mass-media communication in various public spheres	 <p>The diagram illustrates the media system as a central box labeled 'Media system'. To its left, 'Published political opinions' has an arrow pointing to the media system, and 'Public' has an arrow pointing to 'Published political opinions'. Below 'Public', an arrow points to 'Opinion polls', which in turn has an arrow pointing to the 'Media system'. To the right of the 'Media system', a bracket groups a list of actors: - Politicians, - Journalists, - Lobbyists, - Advocates, - Experts, - Moral entrepreneurs, and - Intellectuals. Arrows from this group point towards the 'Media system'.</p>	(2) Political public sphere
Everyday talk	Organized and informal relations, social networks and movements	Civil Society

established public sphere: lobbyists, advocates, experts, moral entrepreneurs, and intellectuals⁴. Some of these actors – i.e. advocates and intellectuals, but also churches – have backgrounds in civil society. All together, these actors construct public opinions, which they publicly express within the media system either through journalists or on their own accord. Both elected government officials and voters can decide whether to react positively, negatively or indifferent toward public opinions. They can also choose to reconsider their opinion on a public matter in light of newly made available information in the political public sphere; this is known as reflexivity. This reflexivity tests whether the public sphere’s political communication is effective in filtering public opinions. If this filtering mechanism works, solely considered public opinions are able to pass through. And it is these considered public opinions that “set the frame for the range of what the public of citizens would accept as legitimate decisions in a given case” (Habermas, 2006b, pg. 418).

So, public debates serve the function of outlining the state’s playing field, as such, so that decisions made within parliament align with opinions expressed within the public sphere and subsequently civil society actors. Political actors should, therefore, be more attuned to the public’s will, while journalists should provoke public discussions to expound the public’s concerns. Then, it allows citizens to partake in comprehensive, reflective debates on political issues, contemplate various perspectives that normally fall outside of their self-interest, and “articulate sound

⁴ Lobbyists represent special interest groups, advocates represent either general interest groups or marginalized groups without a voice, experts advise the public on matters that fall within their specialized area of interest, moral entrepreneurs breed attention for neglected issues, and intellectuals spontaneously contribute to and influence public discussions through a personal reputation in academia. Source: Habermas (2006b, pg. 416).

arguments” that can ultimately inspire public policy (Perloff, 2014, pg. 14). The power generated within this process of giving and taking of public opinion and will-formation, is what Habermas refers to as communicatively generated power. This differs from the state’s ability to sanction, organize and execute, referred to as its administrative power. Administrative power must succumb to communicative power in the sense that the state’s actions must be a reasonable reflection of the public political discussion. Simply put, there must be some form of deliberative consensus among citizens about the things that the state is reasonably able to do (Heysse, 2006).

This model of deliberation and the public sphere will not serve as a source of contention in this thesis, in the sense that I do not wish to delve into the academic debate on the merits of this theory. Nor is it my aim to use any of the empirical conclusions reached in this project to either criticize or praise the practical implications of deliberative democracy in The Netherlands. I have chosen this normative theory as a methodological tool to distinguish various spheres – political, public and religious – that serve as areas of study. The political sphere in this thesis is modeled after part one of Habermas’s political system (state institutions), where the Dutch parliament is taken as a source of data. The public sphere in this thesis is the Dutch media system, modeled after the political public sphere. Lastly, the religious sphere is the least distinct of the three, not naturally residing in one of Habermas’ arenas of political communication. I have defined the religious sphere as such that it consists solely of the public utterances that the Bethel church organizers made about the continual service. So, for a brief moment in time, the organizers carved out a part of the internet to debate, discuss, and reveal their act to the public. A more detailed explanation of these spheres can be found in Chapter 3. Methodology & Methods.

I use the theory of deliberative democracy for it possesses similar characteristics to the Bethel Church’s initiators’ aims, namely the importance of producing a lively and informed public debate on the children’s pardon, as well as the seemingly influential effect it had on public policy. The theory serves as the groundwork, the model, upon which I was able to create interesting observations about the relationship between church and state. Next, I explore the theory of civil disobedience, in which I also touch upon the intersection between deliberative democracy and civil disobedience.

2.1.2 A Theory of Civil Disobedience

The first scholar to pose civil disobedience as a more theoretical, non-religious subject was Henry David Thoreau in the 1840’s. He disagreed with the United States’ war with Mexico, a stance that led him to refuse to pay taxes to the US government (Thoreau, 2002). He published an essay on

the matter, which ultimately became known under the title ‘Civil Disobedience’.⁵ Examples of other infamous figures known for having protested through acts of civil disobedience are Rosa Parks, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Junior. They respectively sat in a part of the bus where people of color were not allowed to sit, led the Indian struggle against British colonial rule right after World War II, and was the face of the US civil rights movement in the sixties. It was Martin Luther King, Jr. who popularized the term, especially in the United States. Around that time, philosophical scholars started taking civil disobedience seriously by unearthing all facets of the concept via books, scholarly articles, and anthologies (Bedau, 2002). This period has formed what we now see as the groundwork for the theory of civil disobedience.

John Rawls was one of the scholars who provided an important starting point for the theory on civil disobedience in his 1971 book *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls only reflected on acts of civil disobedience in nearly just, or democratic, states in which their citizens acknowledge and assent the legitimacy of their constitution. He defines civil disobedience as “a public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government” (Rawls, 2002, pg. 104).⁶ At times, civil disobedients will skirt around the legal limits of what is acceptable to make a statement, while simultaneously expressing respect to that very same system of laws. The law being breached does not have to be the same law that is being protested against, a logic that is referred to as indirect civil disobedience. Direct civil disobedience, therefore, entails the breaching of the law that is being protested against (Arendt, 1972). A civil disobedient objecting treason could, for instance, have trouble reaching their desired outcome of abolishing treason if (s)he was to commit treason themselves. Instead, minor offenses seem a more suitable choice, like ignoring parking laws or trespassing private property. Whichever law is breached, the act symbolizes an aggressive yet defensive signal from a minority of society to a political majority that has transgressed one or more principles of justice (Scheuerman, 2016). And as long as the civil disobedient is able to convince the majority of members of society that (s)he is sincere, willing to accept punishment, and that there is a sufficient moral basis for the act, there is a reasonable justification of the act. Important to note is that a sufficient moral basis cannot, according to the Rawlsian view, rely on one’s personal principles, a religious doctrine or the interests of one person or one group. Instead, “one invokes the commonly shared conception of justice that underlies the political order” (Rawls, 2002, pg. 106). This conception of what is just, and as important what is unjust, can be traced back to the way in which

⁵ Thoreau’s original essay, published in 1849, was republished in a book, edited by H. A. Bedau, in a collection of essays from notable civil disobedience scholars.

⁶ Similar to what is mentioned in the previous footnote, the original work published by Rawls on civil disobedience stems from an earlier year (see text). A reprinted version from 2002 has been used in this thesis.

political affairs are regulated and how the constitution is understood in a just and democratic constitutional state. This repackaging of justice into an accepted secular language differs from the way Habermas would argue, as he believes one could argue from all points of view, not just a secular one. Forcing religious citizens to translate their arguments in a secular language could be considered unjust in and of itself. Religious citizens must, therefore, “be allowed to express and justify their convictions in a religious language if they cannot find secular ‘translations’ for them” (Habermas, 2006a, pg. 10). Nonetheless, Rawls believes that civil disobedients must try to appeal to society’s common language of justice to better their chances of success. To exemplify this, he pointed to Martin Luther King, who, despite being a pastor and religiously motivated, appealed to the US constitution to make his case (Scheuerman, 2016). This is an important point for this thesis, since this is precisely where the theories of deliberative democracy and civil disobedience converge.

The framework set out by Rawls has been written about, altered and updated by many scholars in the last 50 years, yet it remains a solid foundation for many who research civil disobedience, many of whom can be considered critical theorists. Scheuerman (2016) found Rawls to be rather restrictive on what can be considered an act of civil disobedience. The notion that civil disobedience must be a nonviolent conscientious act can, for instance, lead to the pacification of activists and the reduction of civil action to an unattainable ideal. Günter Frankenberg sharpened Rawls’ notion of non-violence, by stating that an act is only civil when it matches its intention and when it protects the physical and psychological integrity of the opponent (Habermas, 1986). Arendt (1972) expanded the definition of civil disobedients by referring to them as “organized minorities, bound together by common opinion...and the decision to take a stand against the government’s policies even if they have reason to assume that these policies are backed by a majority” (pg. 56). Arendt focused on the fact that an individual cannot perform a significant act of civil disobedience, as (s)he must be part of a larger group in order to attain a certain goal. While defining civil disobedients, Arendt (ibid) discerns them from conscientious objectors, as the latter group is more concerned with directly breaking a specific law to “test its constitutionality” (pg. 56). Arendt also sees civil disobedients as engaging in indirect disobedience, which she describes as laws being broken that are not the object of concern but rather a means to call attention to certain governmental policies or political grievances. Scheuerman (2019) sees this latter point as evidence that civil disobedience is “a rather legalistic type of illegality, something that sets it sharply apart from other forms of political illegality” (pg. 54). He believes there are many interpretations of civil disobedience, but that there are three overlapping concepts that unify civil disobedience scholars: nonviolence, civility, and publicity. The different interpretations of these concepts are what sets scholars apart. Nonviolence, for instance, is referred to as “one

decisive way in which we express respect for others as political (and moral) equals” by Scheuerman (2019, pg. 54). All in all, critical theorists are looking to expand the notion of civil disobedience and challenge the more liberal interpretation of Rawls.

Deliberative democratic theorists view civil disobedience in a more deliberative democratic manner, regarding it as a form of democratic participation that occurs “within the limits of democratic public deliberation...[that] bring[s] about a communicative environment” (Atilgan, 2020, pg. 170). Smith (2004) states that civil disobedience, when considered a proper mode of communicative action, has a vertical and horizontal dimension. The vertical dimension is the civil disobedient’s intention “to open up channels of communication and influence between civil society and the state,” while the horizontal dimension is the civil disobedient’s intention “to stimulate processes of communication and argumentation within civil society itself” about the specific law that is being brought into question by the civil disobedient (pg. 363). Civil disobedience should be nonviolent, but it is possible that resistance against authorities is needed to perform an act of civil disobedience. All in all, deliberative theorists regard civil disobedience as a form of political contestation, where violence is an exception and the intent to create public discussion is vital (Atilgan, 2020).

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the Bethel church organizers could be considered civil disobedients. This utterance, made by one of the volunteers that I spoke with while visiting the church, served as one of the main reasons why I decided to do research on this case, and why I included this theory in my theoretical framework. In the discussion and conclusion chapter (5), I will reflect on whether there was sufficient evidence for the Bethel church asylum volunteer’s claim that she was indeed civil disobedient. Also, in the sub-chapter on church asylum (2.2.2), I will shortly return to the concept of civil disobedience for there is some theoretical discussion on whether church asylum can be considered an act of civil disobedience.

2.1.3 The Netherlands

There are some important judicial texts to be discussed that serve as a contextualization of some of the theoretical groundwork that I covered in the previous two sections. These texts will also help clarify some of the concepts that are discussed in the next sub-chapter (2.2 Secularization and Asylum). I will discuss five items. First, Article 7 in the Dutch Constitution and the ‘2008 Media law’ lay the groundwork for an open Dutch political public sphere. Here, I will also discuss Article 6 in the Dutch Constitution, which gave people the right to religious freedom. Next, I will touch on the *Algemene Wet op het Binnentreden*, which was used by the PCN as a way to justify their continual

service and keep governmental actors out. Finally, the children's pardon will be further explained, as it was the law the PCN publicly wanted to discuss during the Bethel church asylum.

Article 7, known as the freedom of speech and censorship ban, protects the ability of Dutch individuals, the press, but also film and theatre, to say what they want in the Dutch public sphere. The relevant parts of the article state the following:

“No one shall require prior permission to publish thoughts or opinions through the press, without prejudice to the responsibility of every person under the law.

No one shall be required to submit thoughts or opinions for prior approval in order to disseminate them by means other than those mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, without prejudice to the responsibility of every person under the law.”⁷

This article prevents media from silencing voices. In The Netherlands, one does not need permission to utter, discuss or print anything in the public sphere. This does not mean, however, that one can say anything without consequences. If an utterance were to break any laws or rights, one could still be prosecuted for it. The ‘2008 Media law’ is mostly intended for public service providers, like the *Nederlandse Publieke Omroep* (NPO), but one chapter also covers a public fund for the press, the *Stimuleringsfonds*. According to the law, the goal of the fund is to maintain and promote the pluralism of the press, insofar as it is important for information and the forming of public opinion. It aims to do so by subsidizing local and national press agencies and conducting research on how well the press functions. It is not allowed to be on the board of the *Stimuleringsfonds* while fulfilling a role within a state institution or one of the possible recipients of a subsidy, like a newspaper.⁸ These two instruments are indicators that the Dutch state fosters public deliberation, at least on paper, and upholds the basic principles of a deliberative democracy. This does not have to mean that there is always room for all groups to participate equally, but it does imply that there are instruments that people participating in the public political sphere can fall back on if need be.

The same can be said of people's ability to freely believe and carry out their belief within The Netherlands. This right is granted in Article 6 of the Dutch constitution. It states that everyone has the right to:

...profess freely his religion or belief, either individually or in community with others, without prejudice to his responsibility under the law.

⁷ Source: Artikel 7: Vrijheid van meningsuiting; censuurverbod.
https://www.denederlandsegrondwet.nl/id/vkugbqvdsyww/artikel_7_vrijheid_van_meningsuiting

⁸ Source: Mediawet 2008, Hoofdstuk 8 De pers, Artikel 8.3 & 8.5.
<https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0025028/2021-04-01#Hoofdstuk8>

Rules concerning the exercise of this right other than in buildings and enclosed places may be laid down by Act of Parliament for protection of health, in the interest of traffic and to combat or prevent disorders.⁹

The first official version of this right dates back to 1798. This primal version noted that people experienced neither advantages nor disadvantages when upholding a certain belief. The most recent version of the article should ensure religious pluralism within Dutch society, as it states that the government will not chastise anyone for their beliefs. Nonetheless, the fact that freedom of religion is guaranteed on paper, does not imply absolute religious tolerance within Dutch society. An example of this is the lively discussion, publicly coined as the ‘Burqa Ban,’ which centered around the wearing of face-covering garments in public. In The Netherlands, a policy that banned face-covering garments in public came into effect in August of 2019. Questions have arisen over the legitimacy of a Burqa Ban policy, and whether it limits Muslim women’s movement in public spaces (Buerkert, Schut & Szuhai, 2021).

The last two regulations that I want to shortly discuss were vital to the Bethel Church asylum. The *Algemene Wet op het Binnentreden* granted the organizers the ability to keep law enforcement out of the church, while the *Definitieve Regeling langdurig verblijvende kinderen* – or the children’s pardon – was the policy that the organizers wanted to publicly discuss and change. The *Algemene Wet op het Binnentreden* was introduced in 1994 as a more detailed version of Article 12 in the Dutch constitution. Article 12 briefly outlines when and how people (representing the state) are granted the right to enter a home. The *Algemene Wet op het Binnentreden* not only provides more details on such an encounter, but it also encompasses an addition to Article 12: ‘*Betreden van enkele bijzondere plaatsen*’ or ‘Entering some special locations.’ Here, a point has been made to protect religious places, like churches. It states that it is not allowed to enter a space where religion is practiced, while a church service is ongoing.¹⁰ This means that without a service, it is allowed for, for instance, police to enter a church to apprehend a rejected immigrant family. The Bethel church organizers stated that their lawyers had told them this specific law could form a legal basis for the Tamrazyan’s stay in the church, but that it would entail organizing a continual service instead of simply offering the family shelter in the church.

As part of the formation of prime minister Rutte’s 2012 cabinet, the *Definitieve Regeling langdurig verblijvende kinderen*, or the children’s pardon, was created. This regulation was intended to

⁹ Source: Artikel 6: Vrijheid van godsdienst en levensovertuiging.

https://www.denederlandsegrondwet.nl/id/vkugbqvdsww/artikel_6_vrijheid_van_godsdienst_en

¹⁰ Source: Algemene wet op het binnentreden. 3. Betreden van enkele bijzondere plaatsen. Artikel 12.

https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0006763/2010-07-01#Paragraaf3_Artikel12

end the recurring discussion on ‘rooted’ Dutch children, or children who had stayed in The Netherlands for at least five years and identified more with Dutch culture than any other. Some of the children that were a focal point of this discussion had even been born in The Netherlands, never having stepped foot elsewhere, but were still required to go back to the country from which their parents came. Much to the dissatisfaction of Dutch citizens, organizations and politicians, who advocated for a regulation that was fairer. And so, Rutte’s cabinet incorporated the *Definitieve Regeling langdurig verblijvende kinderen* into their 2012 coalition agreement. It stated that only applicants under the age of 19 were eligible, that they needed to have legally lived in The Netherlands for at least five years, while staying in almost constant contact with someone from a Dutch immigration institution. Additionally, there was the *meewerkcriterium*, which would later on become an issue for many applicants. As indicated by this criterium, the applicant would not be granted permanent asylum if (s)he had not cooperated with their departure.¹¹ The Dutch state wanted the immigrant applicant to have done everything to go back to their country of origin, and only then would they be allowed to stay in The Netherlands. In January of 2019, at the end of the Bethel church asylum, the Dutch government decided to end the children’s pardon indefinitely and to reconsider thousands of pending cases in the light of one change, the wording of the *meewerkcriterium*. Instead of needing to have actively pursued departure, applicants had to show that they were open to leaving The Netherlands. They had to show that they attended departure meetings with the IND and continually notify government agencies where they were living in The Netherlands. If an applicant had done that, (s)he was eligible for permanent asylum in 2019.¹²

2.2 Secularization and Church Asylum

This sub-chapter revolves around the church and religion, whereas the previous sub-chapter was centered around the state. It is impossible to entirely detangle the two institutions from one another, as they are historically linked, but an attempt has been made nonetheless. I have done so by focusing on the theory of secularization (2.2.1) and church asylum in other contexts (2.2.2) in this sub-chapter. Church and state will reunite once again in the next sub-chapter, where I will present a short history of church and state relations in The Netherlands (2.3). And although the process of secularization and the separation of church and state are inherently linked, I have separated these two processes insofar as is possible for sake of clarity.

¹¹ Besluit van de Staatssecretaris van Veiligheid en Justitie van 30 januari 2013, nummer WBV 2013/1, houdende wijziging van de Vreemdelingencirculaire 2000. <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stcrt-2013-2573.html>

¹² Besluit van de Staatssecretaris van Justitie en Veiligheid van 8 februari 2019, nummer WBC 2019/1, houdende wijziging van de Vreemdelingencirculaire 2000. <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stcrt-2019-8116.html>; Vragen en Antwoorden Afsluitingsregeling langdurig verblijvende kinderen (Kinderpardon). <https://ind.nl/documents/qa%20afsluitingsregeling%20langdurig%20verblijvende%20kinderen.pdf>

2.2.1 A Theory of Secularization

“Secularization addresses the sociological position of religion in culture and society” (Torfs, 1996, pg. 964). Over the last fifty years, scholars have gone back and forth on secularization. For decades, sociologists held the belief that secularization was inevitable. That eventually society would become secular, that religion would slowly disappear and lose its meaning within and grip on society. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, however, prominent scholars who had once fervently defended the thesis, started retracting their support. Instead, they believed religion was not disappearing entirely but that it needed contextualization (Davie, 2006; Casanova, 2006), was being revitalized – with the introduction of other religions like Islam – in society’s public sphere (Berger, 1999), or that the way in which (the decline of) religion was measured did not suffice and needed reevaluation (Bruce, 2002). Stark (1999) even declared secularization extinct, to the extent that he wrote an article aptly titled “Secularization, R.I.P.”. The Netherlands is regarded as one of the most secularized nations (Sengers, 2005). The 2014 Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics’s (CBS) report on religion showed that more than half of the country consider themselves atheist. Recent research on the increasing presence of Islam within society shows a more pluralistic Dutch landscape in which religion continues to play a role, albeit different from the role it played in the past (Knippenberg, 2009). It is unclear what it means for The Netherlands’ Christian roots, whether Christian churches are still relevant players today, and if so, what role they play. This subchapter on secularization will give an overview of research on the concept, which will help deepen our understanding of the different ways in which the role of religion is viewed within the sociology of religion.

Before doing so, however, it is vital to have a good understanding of how religion is defined, since the concept can take on many forms, definitions and approaches. It reaches into almost all corners of society. It is not merely a subject or a discipline but rather a complex matter with the propensity to overstep typical research boundaries. To name a few areas, it is embedded in “politics, public policy, development, migration, human and civic rights, [and] democracy” (Bompani, 2014, pg. 310). In general, a large body of work within the sociology and philosophy of religion concerns itself with the question of how to define religion (Chaves, 1994, pg. 749). So, what is religion? It is a question that, even after years of study, lacks a definitive answer.

It is possible to make some distinctions, however. There are two different types of definitions of religion: substantial and functional. Substantial definitions are aimed at the content of religion, as per Comte and Weber. Weberian researchers, for instance, define religion as “bodies of beliefs and practices concerning salvation” (Chaves, 1994, pg. 750). This definition would lead

them to see secularization as “social change that renders these religious meanings less and less plausible” (ibid). They focus on believing, individuals’ experiences and meaning giving. According to Williams (2003, pg. 317), “religious ideas and beliefs can reveal aspects of the world to be unjust or immoral” and can the inspire people to get active on an issue. Functional definitions are aimed at the function of religion in (a subset of) society. Durkheim and Marx are examples of classical sociologists that use functionalist definitions of religion. Durkheim focused on social cohesion and religion’s role in creating cohesion. He claimed that there is less social cohesion among Protestants in comparison to Catholics, which is why he concluded that there are more suicides within the Protestant community (Durkheim, 1951). Durkheim made a distinction between beliefs and rites, where beliefs refer to someone’s religious beliefs and rites to religious acts. Researchers who follow Durkheim’s approach would define religion as “a set of collective representations providing moral unity to a society” (Chaves, 1994, pg. 750). A decline in religion would, according to their definition, lead to a disintegration of society. A well-known quote from Marx is that “religion is the opium of the people”, who looked at religion from a conflict approach. According to him, religion serves as a cohesive element for the underclass and as a legitimizer for rulers.

In this thesis, it is important to note is that religion and church are not one and the same. I consider the church, along the line of Durkheim, a moral community. As a moral community, a church can, for instance, instruct believers on how to create meaningful lives, or act as a vessel through which social cohesion is created. In that sense, the main research question, of how the role of religion can be understood in the Bethel Church asylum case, rests on the assumption that the church is a community of believers who carry out religion, so to speak. Thus, both the substantial and functional definitions of religion are relevant for this thesis. I look at religion’s substantial role when regarding what type of language is employed in the various spheres, and whether it is infused with religious meanings and symbols. I assume, in line with Williams (2003), that religion can be a source of inspiration for people to form opinions, voice concerns, and participate in public forums. While analyzing religion’s functional role, I try to uncover whether there is any evidence that the church was able to create some form of cohesion within Dutch society by organizing the Bethel church asylum. And if so, in which sphere(s). Now that I have shortly described the concept of religion, and how it is being used in this thesis, I turn my attention back to secularization.

The 1960s marked what Hugh McLeod (2007) called a religious crisis in the Western hemisphere. Church attendance dropped very rapidly, both in Catholic and Protestant churches, reaching its climax in 1967. During this time period, many clergy also left the church, leaving what remained

of the Europe's religious institutions in a state of frenzy. The public's altered perception on clergy-related matters were considered the reason why men stopped entering the clergy altogether. Their vocation was considered underpaid and had a low status in society. Celibacy also started being questioned during the 60's, "especially in view of the increasingly positive view of sex" in church and secondary school teachings (McLeod, 2007, pg. 190). This 'religious crisis' falls under the umbrella of secularization theory. Its umbrella is large, encompassing many definitions, levels of analyses, theoretical bases, assumptions, and so on. So, as diverse as the concept of religion is, as expansive, sometimes even contradictory, secularization theory is. A common denominator across different theories of secularization is the tense relationship between religion and modernization, which "results in a diminishing in the social significance of religion" (Pickel, 2011, pg. 5). Modernization can be understood as the process of rationalization of all areas of human life, from politics to art, architecture, and science (Weber, 1919). It leads to calculability and predictability, to the separation of workers and tasks, leading to an alienation to both the product and to one another (Sung Ho, 2021). There are varying degrees to which scholars believe modernization indefinitely leads to secularization, but there is an overall understanding that it "has secularizing effects" (Pollack, 2015, pg. 62). Instead of religion playing a central role in everyday life, it is relegated to the periphery of society. This does not necessarily imply a decline in personal belief, although some theorists claim that the two processes go hand in hand, which over generations can lead to religious indifference (Bruce, 2002). Generally, people tend to retain their belief system over the course of a lifetime, but within a context of waning religious importance, are less inclined to religiously socialize the next generation. Therefore, widespread religious beliefs can deteriorate over the course of just a couple of generations (Pickel, 2011).

For years, secularization scholars simply equated the concept to "religious decline measured in terms of individual involvement" (Dobbelaere, 2002, pg. 18). Scholars, thus, reduced the theory of secularization to a quantitative measure of church attendance. This led to an overwhelming number of studies that prophesized the idea that religion and churches were losing prominence in Western society and would continue to do so in the future (Pérez-Agote, 2014). This approach is based, however, on a one-sided view of what secularization is. Not only that, it holds the inherent assumption that religious decline is inevitable, even within the private sphere. According to Pollack (2015), there are two core claims that secularization theory makes, while all other claims already indicate a position within secularization. First, the theory "assumes that the social significance of religion in modern societies is weakening in comparison to earlier epochs" (pg. 64). This does not indicate that religion will become extinct, nor does it oppose the notion that this process is linear or without paradoxical and ambivalent periods. It simply claims that now,

in a more modern epoch, we have a different relationship with religion than people did in earlier epochs. Second, the theory assumes a “decline in the importance of religion *can* be attributed to processes of modernization” (ibid). Note the use of the word *can* instead of *is*, as other explanations of this decline exist. Nonetheless, the assumption holds that modernization most significantly affected religion’s role.

In this thesis, secularization theory and religion form two of the building blocks of our understanding of the relationship modern day Dutch people have with religion. It also feeds into our comprehension of Dutch church and state relations, the overall focus and aim of this study. Since the country is known for having low levels of religiosity, even when compared to other European countries, one could assume religion and those that both practice and preach it to have a small impact, maybe even no impact at all, on matters of public importance. I doubt the latter to be the case, however. I assume that, despite less than half of Dutch residents defining themselves as religious, and even fewer as Protestant, that this does not imply that the church is without much influence. The country’s Christian roots still have a prominent effect on the church’s ability to participate, voice concerns, and have an influence on the political public debate.

2.2.2 Church Asylum

Church asylum lacks extensive research, especially outside of the U.S. context. According to Lippert and Rehaag (2009), research in other contexts will offer scholars the “opportunity to explore vital questions in social, legal, and political theory pertaining to migration and citizenship processes, civil disobedience, and church-state relations” (pg. 4). This thesis covers some of the theoretical strands mentioned, particularly church and state relations and civil disobedience. First, I will shortly introduce the concept of church asylum, after which I will delve into current scholarship on church asylum in the U.S., Canada, the Nordics and Germany. This will serve as a point of comparison to the Bethel church asylum, which I will revert back to in Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion.

Churches who offer shelter to refugees is what is commonly referred to as church asylum or church sanctuary. While the two terms are used interchangeably in existing literature, I will use church asylum (*kerkasiel*) for two reasons. On the one hand, European scholars use the term church asylum, while American scholars employ the term church sanctuary. On the other hand, while the act of offering church sanctuary entails providing accommodation and material assistance, church asylum has the added purpose of trying to “prevent the expulsion of the unauthorized stayer from the country” (Dzananovic, 2020, pg. 21). Church asylum has its roots in the Old Testament, in the story when Moses established six cities of refuge. Throughout history it

was used as a means of offering shelter to exiles and people who were persecuted. In modern times, the state has largely taken over the role of granting asylum by formalizing it into political asylum (Stastny, 1987). Nonetheless, churches still hold onto church asylum as a tool to oppose injustices, most notably to show where the government falls short and how current laws are unfair (Mitchell, 2017). Sutton (1996) suggests that when the state's asylum policies harden, the use of church asylum can increase. Church asylum is usually a refugee's last resort to stay in a receiving country after having exhausted all other legal options. "In Europe, church asylum is the process of proving church protection for those migrants at risk of deportation" back to the country through which they entered Europe or their country of origin (Mitchell, 2017, pg. 270). Churches provide refugees with their basic needs, like food, water and a bed. The goal is to delay deportation, be granted another asylum hearing, with the hopes of ultimately getting a residence permit.

There are two types of church asylum: church asylum as exposure versus church asylum as concealment. The former involves seeking the attention of the media, the public, and governmental actors while providing church asylum to migrants. The latter entails the exact opposite, as the provision of church asylum is "purposely concealed from state authorities" (Lippert & Rehaag, 2009, pg. 4). Naturally, an important aspect of exposed church asylum is media coverage, as media play an important role in bringing church asylum cases to the forefront of the public and political debate. In the case of the Bethel church asylum, its organizers notified media, the public and governmental actors from the very beginning (van der Meiden, 2020).

Lippert and Rehaag (2009) point out that "the role of civil disobedience and the rule of law in relation to sanctuary practices" lack extensive research (pg. 5). In the last ten years, however, attempts have been made to gain more knowledge on this relationship. Scholars have focused on how Australia's churches stand up against immigration policy, on German church asylums after the 2015 influx of refugees resulting from conflicts in Syria, and on the church asylum movement in Denmark. According to Jorgensen (2013), "[c]hurch asylum is an example of civil disobedience (pg. 307). It is used in instances where political change through the traditional channels – the established legal processes and structures – is too slow or ineffective. Church asylum then becomes an alternative form of political activism that challenges the social and political consensus. Jorgensen (2013) asserts that church asylum, despite having been used to house vulnerable groups in churches for centuries, can be regarded as a political strategy that paves "the way for transformation of the social order" (pg. 309).

Offering church asylum is not legal in any European state. In most cases, the government will respect a church asylum and will not allow police to enter a church while church asylum is being provided. Not always though, as was the case in the Danish church sanctuary movement

when police removed Iraqi refugees who were receiving church asylum. By doing so, the Danish police incited public and political debates, which eventually led to some Iraqi refugees gaining legal residence (Jorgensen, 2013). In all Nordic countries, there have been public debates about whether churches are allowed to oppose state policies by acting on behalf of immigrants. Nordic political parties have also expressed their opinion on the matter, where many are in favor of a critical and active role for churches and some anti-immigration parties contest the idea that churches take on that role. Church asylum “is now established as an informal, partly legitimate possibility for refugees seeking asylum in the Nordic countries” (Loga, Pyykkönwn & Stenvaag, 2012).

In the U.S., church asylum became popularized during the 1980’s during the ‘asylum movement,’ which I will explain below. In the 1980s, immigrants from Central American countries fled to the United States as refugees after the US government had enacted the Refugee Act. Most of their applications, however, were rejected. Critics pointed out that the US was “in part responsible for the immigrants’ plight, because of the involvement and support that the U.S. offered to their governments” (Villazor, 2008, pg. 140). To help these Central American immigrants, churches started offering them assistance in the form of church asylum. As more and more churches started declaring themselves ‘sanctuaries,’ the effort started being referred to as the sanctuary movement.¹³ At its peak, the movement consisted of around 25,000 church members and more than 100 synagogues and churches. An important element of the sanctuary movement was that the U.S. government was held responsible for the incoming Central American immigrants. At the time, U.S. citizens criticized their government for assisting the governments from which the immigrants came, which was seen as adding oil to the South American political conflicts. Those involved in the sanctuary movement believed they had a moral duty to assist the immigrants, which encouraged “non-violent and church-based responses” (Villazor, 2008, pg. 140). Between 1984 and 1985, the movement’s leaders started being prosecuted by the U.S. government, but they were widely backed by the public and “forty-seven members of Congress, who argued for leniency” (Villazor, 2008, pg. 141).

In 2006, the U.S. new sanctuary movement was sparked after Elvira Arellano pursued church asylum after a judge had officialized her deportation. At the time, Arellano had an eight-year-old U.S. born son, and “decided to defy the deportation order...to protest [against] the effect of deportation on immigrant families” (Villazor, 2008, pg. 140). The new sanctuary movement that arose differed from its earlier counterpart in that it emphasized the importance of the family unit. Those involved in the new sanctuary movement believed that it is unjust to separate U.S. born children from their immigrant parents.

¹³ As noted earlier, the terminology used in the U.S. context differs from the European context.

Before holding a church asylum in the U.S., “[t]he church or its members must agree to host an immigrant family who meets a number of criteria” (Villazor, 2008, pg. 146). The family must be at risk of deportation, and at least one of the children must be a U.S. citizen. This implies that there must be some chance of success that the family will be granted political asylum if the church were to get involved. The church does tread into legal issues when organizing church asylum, according to Section 274 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. § 1324). It “proscribes harboring, concealing, or providing shelter to undocumented immigrants. A person found in violation of 8 U.S.C. § 1324 could be charged with a criminal offense, and if found guilty, the offense provides punishment by imprisonment and fine” (Villazor, 2008, pg. 146). That is why churches ensure that they can argue that, from both a moral and legal point of view, an injustice has been done to any immigrant family seeking church asylum.

There are a lot of similarities between the Canadian and the U.S. context. Just like in the U.S. context, “Canadian immigration officials are reluctant to enter churches for the purposes of enforcing immigration law” (Rehaag, 2009, pg. 43). Canadian churches also screen migrants to ensure that they have a strong case to be granted political asylum after the church has offered church asylum. This is probably why church asylum seems to be such an effective tool for refugees in Canada. Those that seem unlikely to gain political asylum will also not be considered for church asylum. This is interesting, because it places churches in a “position of mimicking the decision-making processes mandated by state law in order to determine whether those seeking sanctuary do, in principle, qualify for refugee protection” (Rehaag, 2009, pg. 52). Moreover, Canadian churches will only intervene in situations where the Canadian government might breach international law “as a result of its failure to design a refugee determination system with adequate procedural safeguards to prevent refugees from being deported to face persecution” (Rehaag, 2009, pg. 46). Proponents of church asylum in Canada, therefore, do not believe church asylum to be an illegal practice, which means the practice is certainly not considered an act of civil disobedience. When considering how Canadian media portray church asylum, it becomes apparent that “arguments about the legality of these practices play a central role” (Rehaag, 2009, pg. 43).

In Germany, church asylum is not uncommon, as there are between thirty to sixty cases each year. A decisive turning point for German churches to start offering church asylum occurred in 1983, when “a twenty-three-year-old Turkish asylum seeker jumped out of a window of a Berlin court building, ending his life” (Mittermaier, 2009, pg. 68). A local church in Berlin who was helping him decided after this event that it would start helping other refugee families. The church housed three Palestinian families who were confronted with deportation that year, which was the first occurrence of church asylum in Germany. The prevalence of church asylum in Germany

increased tenfold after the influx of immigration into Europe in 2015. “In her address to the Berlin conference in November, 2016, Dietlind Jochims noted that the current number of church asylum requests was ten times higher than it was in 2014” (Mitchell, 2017, pg. 280). The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) generally sanctioned church asylum, as long as churches in Germany collaborated with BAMF. Just like in Canada, the number of refugees who received a legal status after receiving church asylum was high. “Over 75% of sanctuary cases ending up with positive outcomes” (Mitchell, 2017, pg. 280).

In The Netherlands, church asylum is still fairly uncommon. Since the 1970’s, just over 50 cases of church asylum have been reported (Dzananovic, 2020). Church asylum reemerged after Christian Syrian and Turkish guest workers fled to Dutch churches to avoid deportation. This led to lively public discussions on the use of church asylum (Hamelzky & Broeke, 2020). None of these cases amounted to massive change on a societal scale, their impact largely staying within the individual’s circumstances (Dzananovic, 2020). An important guideline for church asylum in The Netherlands was published by the Dutch Council of Churches. In 2004, they stated that churches are allowed to organize church asylum but only on the basis of four conditions. Firstly, the person requesting church asylum must face some existential threat or injustice. Local churches are allowed to decide whether this first condition is met on case-to-case basis. Secondly, the church asylum must be temporary and there must be a decent chance that the asylum seeker will receive a residence permit. Thirdly, the church must specify the terms of the church asylum, like its duration and the way in which it will end. Finally, the church must have enough (human) resources to sustain the church asylum until the goal has been reached (Council of Churches, 2004). To my knowledge, no other church has ever used a continual service as a tool to keep the government out. That is what makes this church asylum different from other church asylums. This is an important point for discussion, particularly as there is an inherent legal aspect to church asylum.

2.3 Dutch Church and State Relations

A process that has been ongoing for centuries is the separation of church and state, even having played a part in the birth of the modern Dutch nation-state. Inherently tied to the question of religion’s role within society, the relationship between church and state has changed and developed significantly over time. By giving an overview of this separation, focusing mainly on the Dutch context, we become more acquainted with what historically ties these two institutions together and what type of relationship still remains. This history starts in the sixteenth century, right around the time of the rise of Protestantism in the Low Provinces and the materialization of a Dutch political entity (2.3.1). I then present various church and state models, as well as which model best reflects

The Netherlands currently (2.3.3). Finally, I bring together the various strands of theory that from this Theoretical Framework (2.3.4).

2.3.1 The Emergence of the Dutch Republic and the Protestant Reformation

In an era when the Kingdom of The Netherlands was yet to be, we could speak only of a cluster of cities and villages strewn across the north western part of Europe, known as the Low Provinces. The area included parts that now would be considered The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. It was the sixteenth century, a period of religious strife and kings and queen. In the early years of that century, the Low Provinces were under Spanish rule. Charles V, a king that was an involved yet geographically distant leader, cultivated the provinces as a separate political entity that included cities running their own governments. As per Spanish rule, the provinces were Catholic. Soon, however, early traces of Protestantism started to take hold of small portions of Dutch villages. During these early years, Protestants were scattered across the provinces in small groups. There was no overarching leadership or doctrine to derive organizational instructions from. Later in the sixteenth century, synods were held every few years that produced decisions about how to proceed in various parts of Europe. There was no guarantee, however, that local practitioners would follow their instructions. Charles V forcefully fought against these early traces of Protestantism. Those who worked for the Protestant cause were deemed heretics and consequently killed during the period known as the Spanish Inquisition. Some believe that the violence associated with the Inquisition might be a reason why people stopped practicing Catholic traditions, like pilgrimages, in the north. And although, at the time, the Inquisition might have been an effective tool to deny Protestantism an institutional base, it did not prevent the northern provinces from slowly becoming Protestant strongholds.

In the 1550's, many French and Dutch Protestant refugees had fled the Southern provinces out of fear of death, settling in the more tolerant northern provinces. The executions of heretics had led to societal unrest, igniting riots and a need for the Council of State to intervene. William of Orange, a member of the Council of State at the time, called for moderation. Frustrations further built up between the Spanish rulers in the south and cities and villages in the north. Eventually, well into the 1560s, the Spanish regent ruler Margaret gave in to the locals and granted freedom of religion to Protestants in areas where they were already practicing, a decision that enraged the rulers in southern Spain. Troops were sent north to squash the unrest. This move not only forced Protestant churches to go back into hiding, but it also started the Eighty Years war. The war ended officially in 1648 when the Peace of Westphalia guaranteed Dutch independence from the Holy Roman Empire.

During this tumultuous period of time, religion and politics were fundamentally intertwined. The success of the Protestant Reformation in The Netherlands, which commenced around the same time the Eighty Years war did, was closely tied together with the success of emergence of the Republic of The Netherlands. “[R]eformed faith offered a political theology that could readily justify the decisions of pious magistrates,” who in turn fought for a type of faith void of Rome’s influence and apparent errors (Hart, 2013, pg. 70). It was a self-fulfilling cycle that threatened the existing order of Roman rule and prompted a new one that, after numerous battles over a span of around thirty years, more closely represented Dutch interests. It was not necessarily the case that the future Dutch population was all Protestant. In fact, only a small percentage of Dutch people were Protestant. It was more so the case that years of hardship from Rome had caused many to support an effort that opposed the Spanish rulers. At the end of the sixteenth century, however, the church’s position within Dutch society was ambiguous. Efforts were made by the church not to provoke Spanish rulers to the point of invasion, while local pastors tried implementing new practices and standards. State and church, while recognizing each other’s value, each were adamant about having a final say in disputed matters.

During the Protestant Reformation, networks were set up throughout Europe that formed a durable ecclesiastical structure for years to come. There was no holy man that led the faith, as is the case in Catholicism. Instead, elders and pastors worked alongside local assemblies to create a more local governmental structure of the Reformed church, which then fed into a larger, European structure. In the beginning of the 1600s, theological discussions and public debates on Reformed faith called for a national synod. Some were for a state church, while others argued that the church should be autonomous from the state. Concurrently, the state called for a system of tolerance of all faiths. Whether the state was actually tolerant, however, depended on who was in charge. The religious struggles were far from over. This eventually led to the Synod of Dort in 1618, that produced “a series of positions designed to combine doctrinal clarity and pastoral guidance” (Hart, 2013, pg. 82). The Synod of Dort’s decision was approved by the States-General and subsequently distributed among all the provincial churches for their signatures of approval. And while this solidified the position of Reformed churches as part of the political establishment, it did not end the internal discussions that lingered on matters like predestination and the pursuit of personal holiness.

2.3.2 The Emergence of a Modern Nation and the Development of the Protestant Church

As time went on, Reformed pastors would call for more reforms within the church. The voices that preached against the entanglement of church and state became louder, while large groups

remained in opposition to drastic changes. From the early beginnings of the Reformed faith, there had been various views on how best to practice and what type of relationship the church was to have with the state. For well over a century, these discussions continued without much of an instruction from the state on how to best conduct themselves. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century, when the House of Orange fell to the French Republic, that a decision was made for the established church: she was no longer. A new constitution was drafted that cut financial support from the state for Reformed churches, placing them alongside the other religious communities that resided in The Netherlands. It was the formal beginnings of the modern and liberal nation and the separation of church and state.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, more than half of the population still considered themselves Reformed Protestant. A system had been set in place to finance churches on the basis of membership, meaning that Protestant churches still received a considerable amount compared to other denominations. Still, “the French revolution and its aftermath ended the Reformed churches’ privileged legal position within the old order of the Dutch Republic” (Hart, 2013, pg. 157). When William I, a Protestant, came into power in 1815, he promoted his faith publicly and granted Protestant churches the ability to draft and carry out their own doctrine. Roman Catholics were unhappy with this favoritism in the context of the tolerance of beliefs, which eventually led to Catholics leaving The Netherlands and form what we now know as The Kingdom of Belgium. Then, in 1848, famous Dutch scholar Thorbecke wrote the constitution that laid the basis on which the modern state rests; it included a formal and more complete separation from the church (Maussen, 2012). The idea was to replace the notion of a Protestant nation with the idea of a Dutch nation. Many of the former financial ties between church and state were severed, with the exception of salaries of ministers of the church and state-sponsored education.

During the period that followed, there was a “growing self-consciousness among Protestants and Roman Catholics” (Knippenberg, 2006, pg. 322). More and more citizens started declaring themselves non-religious, a group that made up about 1.5% of the population in an 1889 Census. The Dutch liberal state was slowly taking shape, laying the groundwork for the process of *verzuiling*, or the pillarization of society into four pillars: orthodox Protestants, Roman Catholics, Socialists or Social Democrats, and Liberals (Blom, 2000). There is no one way of defining the pillars, but renowned professor of political science Lijphart (1968) described them as subcultural groups that share a common ideology. Each pillar was represented in parliament through various political parties, fighting for their own ideals and supporters. Outside of the political sphere, one was expected to marry someone from their own pillar, send their children to a school that shared

their ideology, read their pillar's newspaper, and so on. The confessional political parties were powerful during this period, always participating in the cabinet's leading coalition and, thereby, preventing any reforms to the education system (Knippenberg, 2006).

According to de Rooy (2002), nearly all of Dutch society was still religious after the Second World War. However, church attendance was falling, and people described their relationship to religion as being complex. And, according to proponents of secularization, the emergence of the modern economy as a new type of actor further weakened the church's position within the public sphere. Then, the cultural revolution happened. During the 1960s and 1970s, the dominant confessional culture patterns shifted from traditional notions of marriage and sexuality to looser conceptions. Birth control was introduced, which led to a rapid decline in birth rates. "Secularization accelerated...both in terms of belief and practice and undermined the (moral) authority of the churches" (Knippenberg, 2006, pg. 323). People broke through their own pillars as a result of higher levels of education, increased prosperity and a growing diversity of media sources. The 1980's especially were characterized by economic prosperity, further securing the role of the economy as essential to the functioning of modern society. Now, the church was not only battling the state, it was seemingly, at least according to secularists, also being pushed out by the promise of modernity. The idea of the self, her autonomous nature and compelling independence, and the emancipation from the structures that once constrained her, appealed to late twentieth century individuals. According to Halman and Draulans (2006), the Protestant theology could have contained the seeds that laid the foundation for this rise to individualism more so than Catholicism.

Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic and Protestant parties that had each represented their own pillars, merged into one party, the *Christen Democratisch Appel* (CDA). The rapid social changes eventually led to the 1983 Constitution, which officially marked the end of the constitutional ties between church and state. In this version, which is still in use today, the church is no longer mentioned. Religion is mentioned as part of a broader set of constitutional guarantees. However, it no longer enjoys a special position within the Dutch constitution. By the end of the 1980s, the Dutch population was split halfway between religious and non-religious citizens (ibid, 1992). This group of religious citizens was no longer made up of Protestants and Catholics. The influx of immigrants and their religions saw an increase in the number of Muslims in The Netherlands; they now make up about 6% of the Dutch population. The growing distrust among Dutch population about Muslims, especially after September 11th and the murders on politician Pim Fortuyn and filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, has led some to revert back to The Netherlands' Christian roots (Davie, 2006; Knippenberg, 2006). This was particularly evident in the beginning of the 2000s, when CDA gained back many voters and led parliament for three consecutive terms under then

Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende (Knippenberg, 2006). During the Bethel church asylum, it was also the very same CDA that shifted their opinion on the children's pardon, causing a turning point in the Bethel church asylum case.

The historical process of the separation of church and state, as described above, shows the rather turbulent history between Protestants and Catholics early on and church and state later on. It is evident that religion no longer enjoys the position it once had, especially from the perspective of the protestant church. However, this process does not omit the potential influence religion can have in today's society, especially since the turn of the century. The exclusion of the church in the 1983 Constitution does not imply that the church has no role in the public or political sphere. In the simplest of ways, it means that there is no official role for the church. So, what does this short history tell us about the type of church-state model The Netherlands has?

2.3.3 Models of Church and State Relations

Scholars have stated that our current understanding of church-state relations might fall short in light of new challenges, like the rising Islamic populations in Europe (Riedel, 2008). The diverging paths of church and state, which is also present in The Netherlands as I showed above, has long been seen as a sign that church and state would continue to separate further, particularly by proponents of the theory of secularization. This assumption, however, has received criticisms for its lack of understanding of the current situation of a potential revival of religion in the public sphere. The Bethel church asylum encompasses questions about the church's relationship to the state, due to its inherent public and religious nature. Therefore, I will first present a common understanding of the three models of church and state relations as described by Riedel (2008), after which I will present Vermeulen's (2010) five models of church and state relations (as cited in Dzananovic, 2020). These models are relevant for the Discussion and Conclusion chapter (5), where I compare the findings in this study to current scholarship on the relationship between church and state.

Particularly in Europe, there are three commonly known models of church-state relations. The three models – the state church model, the cooperationist model, and the secular model – range from a church that is completely immersed into the state to one that is entirely disconnected from the state. Firstly, the state church model is characterized by “the existence of one official religion as established national church or state church” (Riedel, 2008, pg. 255). In nations with a state church, there are policies and practices in place that tie state and religious institutions closely together, like the British parliament's ability to decide on the church's ecclesiastical laws. These ties “have a great significance upon the legal position of the religious community and upon

religious liberty in general” (Sandberg & Doe, 2007). Secondly, the cooperationist model, also known as the hybrid model, encompasses a state and church that cooperate with one another. While evidence of their relationship can be found in a constitution, it can also be expressed in treaties and agreements (Sandberg & Doe, 2007). Also, religion is considered a public instead of a private affair. This results in financial benefits for churches, i.e. tax exemptions and state subsidies. As opposed to the state church, however, churches in cooperationist countries have autonomy over their decisions. The state is not allowed to exert influence on the church, and could, thus, not decide on its ecclesiastical matters (Riedel, 2008). Lastly, in the secular model, church and state are completely separated, and religion is regarded a private matter. Generally, France is known for its secular model – or *laïcité* – which was introduced after the French revolution. France’s education system, for example, is devoid of religious ideas and state-financed religious schools (Riedel, 2008).

Vermeulen (2010) proposes a more detailed overview of state-church models. Instead of three models, he proposes that there are five models. His five models are the following: theocracy model, established or privileged church model, pluralist-cooperationist, separationist model, and totalitarian secularism model. Firstly, in the theocratic model, the state endorses one religion at the expense of others, while also oppressing religious minorities. Secondly, similar to the state church model that Riedel (2008) described, in the established or privileged church model the state favors one church over another. In the private sphere, religious freedom is guaranteed, but one church is favored in the public sphere. Thirdly, in the pluralist-cooperationist model, the state is neutral toward society’s religions, as well its secular groups. The state aims to treat all groups evenly, but it will intervene in religious matters if the idea of religious freedom is in jeopardy. Fourthly, in the separationist model, there is a stronger separation of church and state compared to the pluralist-cooperationist model. According to this perspective, state and church should be kept separate, as both would suffer as a result of them mixing. It presupposes a state that is preoccupied with public affairs, while religion – as well as religious arguments – is excluded from the public and political spheres and relegated to the private sphere. In short, politics and religion should not mesh, which can only be upheld if there are no traces of religion in the public or political spheres. Lastly, Vermeulen (2010) describes the totalitarian secularism model as one where atheism dictates a country’s official doctrine and there is no or little religious freedom (as cited in Džananović, 2020, pg. 103-104).

As these models are ideal types, it is unlikely that any country would neatly fit into any of the models described above. Attempts have been made, however, to identify under which model The Netherlands could fall. According to Torfs (1996), “the Dutch view their system as a system of separation, but the principle of separation has never been codified in their constitution or in

any legislation” (pg. 962). He adds some nuance by stating that there is no strict separation between church and state, and that there is evidence that church and state are cooperating. Sandberg and Doe (2007) place The Netherlands alongside France under the separationist model, because of the lack of a formalized relationship between church and state. The church is, for instance, not even mentioned in the Dutch constitution. Riedel (2008) disagrees with Torfs and Sandberg and Doe and labels The Netherlands as an example of the cooperationist model. In The Netherlands, as per Riedel (2008), this model is said to be the result of the struggle between the Protestant and the Roman Catholic churches. Most notably, churches enjoy state-financed benefits in the form of tax exemptions, and there is a long history of state-sponsoring of religious schools. Džananović (2020) does not place The Netherlands into one of Vermeulen’s (2010) five models, but she does indicate that the country best fits into one of the ‘middle’ three models, namely the established or privileged church, pluralist-cooperationist, and separationist models. When the Reformed church enjoyed her privileged position in the 18th century, The Netherlands could have been labeled an established or privileged church country. However, this is no longer the case. That leaves the pluralist-cooperationist and separationist models as options. Hamelzky and Broeke (2020) paint the Dutch context as pluralist-cooperationist, but that this relationship is strained. I will reflect back on these models in the Discussion and Conclusion chapter (5). Important to note is that these models have been criticized for being too broad (Džananović, 2020). To account for these criticisms, I will look beyond these models and reflect on how my findings can contribute to their refinement, at least in the Dutch context.

2.3.4 A Disobedient and Influential Church in a Dutch Deliberative Democracy?

In chapter 1 (Introduction), I asked the question of how the role of religion can be understood in the Bethel church asylum case. In chapter 2 (Theoretical Framework), I have offered a theoretical background to better understand this question and to look for answers. I described the normative theory of deliberative democracy and proposed how it can be applied to The Dutch context. The theory of deliberative democracy is relevant to the Bethel church asylum case for two reasons. On the one hand, it aligns with the Bethel Church’s initiators’ aims, namely the importance of producing a lively and informed public debate on the children’s pardon and facilitating dialogue with politicians. On the other hand, I assume that the Bethel church asylum and the public discussion it sparked was able to influence public policy. This latter point illustrates the function public debates *should* have on the political sphere, namely that they outline the state’s playing field, as such, so that decisions made within parliament align with opinions expressed within the public sphere (Habermas, 2006b). This assumption does not fall within the line of expectations set out

for The Netherlands by some secularization scholars (Knippenberg, 2009; Lechner, 1996), who both support the idea that The Netherlands has secularized to a very high level, and that (the presence of) institutional religion has declined. It begs the question of whether the Bethel church asylum is an aberration in the process of ongoing secularization or a sign that the church is still affluent. In other contexts, church asylum has proven to be a successful strategy to affect political change, like changing policies and asylum decisions. Jorgensen (2013) and Hamelzky and Broeke (2020) stated that church asylum can be seen as an act of civil disobedience, where Jorgensen (2013) claimed that it “forces the system to take action and thereby emphasizes the questioning of asylum policies and their consequences” (pg. 307). This can put a strain on the relationship between church and state, as the church can be seen as overstepping its boundary. For this reason, I have presented what historically ties these two institutions together in The Netherlands, and what current scholarship on models of church and state relations is.

On the basis of this Theoretical Framework, I propose that the Bethel church asylum can be seen as a successful act of civil disobedience that showed that the church still has an influence in the public and political spheres. As this goes against current expectations of the role of the church, I expect there to be a considerable number of characterizations of the church in the public, political and religious spheres. These three spheres are distinguished from one another by applying the theory of deliberative democracy. I also expect to find evidence that, at least in the religious sphere, people were inspired to participate in the Bethel church asylum because of religious reasons. Lastly, I expect the political sphere to reflect the public debate, also on the role of religion.

In conclusion, what exactly is the role of religion in The Netherlands? More specifically, how do we explain the role of religion in the Bethel church asylum case? By analyzing the roles that were ascribed to religion by the public, political and religious spheres, I aim to understand which role(s) religion fulfilled and what it says about church and state relations in modern-day The Netherlands.

3 Methodology & Methods

3.1 Research Design

This thesis is centered around the Bethel Church asylum case study, which was a continual service that was held for the Armenian Tamrazyan family by the Bethel church in The Hague. The Bethel Church is a Protestant church in The Hague that housed the family for three months from October 26, 2018 through January 31 of 2019. Before the church asylum, the family had received news that they were being deported back to Armenia. They were unhappy with this decision, since a judge had granted them a residence permit in the Netherlands on three previous occasions. The family asked their local church in Katwijk for help, and they were granted permission to stay for a little while. However, after the IND had dropped by to alert the family that they were still getting deported, the family secretly fled to the Bethel church in The Hague one night in October of 2018, which marked the beginning of the Bethel church asylum.

From the time the Tamrazyan family arrived at the Bethel Church on October 26th, 2019 until they left on January 31st, 2019, they resided in the Bethel Church and awaited the government's decision on their case. I used the time the family resided in the church, in addition to the political debate on January 30, 2019, to delineate the case study. I added the 31st of January as an extra day, since many newspapers reported on the ending of the Bethel church asylum and the ending of the children's pardon on that day. While the asylum was ongoing, I visited the church to participate in the service and talk to the family. I noticed that there was a mixed feeling of optimism and uncertainty among those who were present. On the one hand, people were thrilled to be of service and hoping that their asylum would help the family attain a residence permit. On the other hand, visitors questioned the asylum, wondering whether this format would lead to their desired outcome.

While standing in the church's kitchen, observing people around me and drinking the cup of tea they had offered, I was told by one excited Bethel church volunteer that the church asylum was an act of civil disobedience. It made me wonder whether they, as a religious group backed by a macro-level religious institution, could actually be civil disobedient in a Western 21st century country like the Netherlands. What that not something that individuals or smaller groups did? Moreover, the family they were protecting fell outside of the political system, since they did not have a residence permit in The Netherlands. To what extent could the family be disobedient toward a state that was not theirs? And what was the church's role in these matters, or in society as whole? Would people accept the church's involvement or disapprove of her meddling in political asylum affairs? And what did politicians and lawmakers have to say about this church asylum? After an afternoon of observation, I was left feeling inspired by those present at the Bethel

church asylum service; they were convinced that they were ensuring that justice would prevail. I also could not get the volunteer's statement about the church's act of civil disobedience out of my head. I needed to look for answers.

When I returned back home, I conducted a short literature review on church asylum and civil disobedience and was left feeling unsatisfied; the many questions I had leaving the Bethel church had not been answered. In fact, hardly any literature had been published on the subject. After some thought, I realized that I was mostly interested in the church's role, in the way the public perceived her act of offering church asylum to the Tamrazyan family, how politicians dealt with the church publicly disobeying the state, and how the church asylum's organization viewed their own role. Thus, I decided to analyze how the church's role in this matter was perceived by the public, and whether political actors had either denounced or celebrated the asylum. I wanted to compare these public and political perceptions to the church's own point of view and see where they either overlapped or differed.

I found narrative analysis to be an interesting and fitting approach to my questions, as it is a method that reveals something about the roles that are given to characters within a certain setting. Moreover, the relationship between church and state has never, according to my knowledge, been analyzed by using the narrative method. Despite the fact that people make sense of society through the narratives that are told and heard, written and read; they reinforce people's place in her cultural and political landscape, giving insight into society's power dynamics (Robertson, 2017). A consideration was that narrative analysis produces a large amount of material, which needs to be carefully analyzed by the researcher. Therefore, it is time-consuming method, even within the context of one case study, requiring the researcher to revisit their material multiple times (Stanley, 2008).

During the Bethel Church case, 280 news articles were published on the matter and two political debates took place on the children's pardon. I used narrative analysis to analyze the news articles, after which I used content analysis to compare the results from the public sphere to the two political debates. The results from these analyses were subsequently used to analyze the religious sphere, which consisted of weekly messages posted by the Bethel church The Hague on their website. Thus, I used the church's weekly updates to analyze how religious figures defined their role and compared these results to the public and political sphere.

This thesis was written and researched from a qualitative and social constructivist approach. This viewpoint assumes that there is no objective knowledge, but rather that knowledge and meaning are created through language. There is not one reality; people construct their own

reality everyday by how they look at the world and interpret her. A social constructivist approach is well-suited for identifying roles, as it focuses on the creation of meaning through language (Bergström & Boréus, 2017). As a social constructivist researcher, I cannot claim to be objective myself, as I too interpret the world around me and create meaning through the lens that I use. It is therefore essential to be transparent about all the assumptions that have guided this research project. I also do not claim that through this research I am able to assign a certain role to the church in a modern-day Western nation. I have solely analyzed the texts to unearth patterns in how the church's role in this specific context was perceived. Any characterizations of the church that I do not mention in this thesis can still persist, even within the groups that I used for this research.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Participant observation

I visited the Bethel Church on three separate occasions, one of which was whilst the Bethel church asylum case was ongoing. The first time was on November 11, 2018, a little over two weeks after the continual service commenced. There were around 20 people present, most of whom were volunteers who had been there since the beginning. I walked around the building, listening in on the ongoing service and getting an impression of what it was like to be inside that building. A few of the Bethel church service's organizers gave me information on what was happening by showing me the roster they had made for pastors holding services. Already then, it was filled for weeks. It was during this visit that I was told by a volunteer that the continual service was an act of civil disobedience, but that it was necessary to stand up for what was right.

I visited the Bethel church a second time at a reflective meeting hosted by the organization *Beraad Grote Steden* (BGS). BGS is an association, founded in its current form in 2007, that aims to bring (Protestant) churches together to reflect on and discuss themes that are important to churches in city-like contexts.¹⁴ It was during this meeting that the question was raised by speakers and PCN members on what this case meant for the church's role in society. Derk Stegeman, one of the organizers of the Bethel church asylum, opened the meeting by emphasizing that despite that the Armenian family was able to stay in The Netherlands, the Dutch asylum situation was far from perfect. He did not exclude the possibility of another church asylum in the future if things did not change. Other speakers were Theo Hetteema and Rein Willems, who were both heavily involved in the organization of the continual service.

¹⁴ This information was taken from the website of *Vereniging Beraad Grote Steden*, specifically the tabs on the association's history and goals. For more information: <https://beraadgrotesteden.nl/over-ons/>.

The third time I visited the Bethel Church was during another yearly meeting of the BGS on January 30, 2020. The meeting was precisely a year after the Bethel Church case had ended and was organized to present the book *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel – de non-stop viering in de Haagse Bethelkapel*. This is a non-fiction book by Jasja Nottelman and Willem van de Meiden and shows what the church asylum did with the church and its pastors, as well as what the church can learn from the church asylum.¹⁵ This book was not used as a source of data but rather as source of information.

All of my visits serve the purpose of adding a more descriptive element to this thesis and will not be a part the results chapter of this thesis. While in attendance, I was, for instance, able to gain insight on what it was like to live in the Bethel Church and get invited for the reflective ceremony a year later, at which I received the book that I eventually used for an extra insight into the religious figures' reflections. The visits also heightened my interest in the case as a topic for my thesis. They did not, however, provide me with any data on what role PCN members ascribed to the church, despite the question being raised at the BGS meeting.

3.2.2 Literature review

After visiting the Bethel Church, I turned to existing literature on church asylum cases and the concept of civil disobedience, as one of the case's volunteers mentioned the concept as being applicable to the Bethel Church case. My search was meant to give me some insight to explain what was going on, and whether previously analyzed church asylum cases contained similar elements to the Bethel Church case. The results of this search can be found in Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework.

After noting that there was (a revival of) an internal discussion happening within the PCN as a result of the Bethel church asylum on whether the church was allowed to hold the service, I decided to turn to existing literature on the role of the church. What ensued was a storm of articles on the role of the church in various parts of the world, but no coherent answer to my question, especially in the Netherlands. This brought a main research question into focus, namely what kind of role the church has in today's society in The Netherlands from the perspective of the public, political and religious spheres.

I decided to conduct a limited literature review after determining my main research question and my methodology. This limited review would structure this thesis and give me an idea of the history of the church in the Netherlands. The review focused on the phrase ‘“Role of Religion”

¹⁵ This information is based on an e-mail that I received on Tuesday December 10, 2019 from the BGS. It was an invitation to their January 30, 2020 meeting, which included an attachment that briefly explained what the book was about.

OR “Role of the Church” AND “The Netherlands” ’ in order to narrow the search to pertain only to the context of the Netherlands. I wanted to prevent me from being influenced by existing literature on the role of the church in The Netherlands in order to let the data speak for itself, a common approach used in inductive research. Therefore, it was vital that I first finish conducting the narrative analysis on the news articles before returning to scientific literature on the role of the church in a modern Western society.

3.2.3 News articles

Nexis Lexis Uni was used to gain access to major Dutch newspaper articles. It is an American online database that contains various documents that would otherwise be inaccessible. Besides newspaper articles, the database includes legal, business and regulatory documents (LexisNexis, 2020). The newspaper articles were accessed on August 12, 2019. A total of 333 newspaper articles were found, using the following steps.

The correct syntax is essential to finding the right articles. After a number of combinations, the phrase ‘Kinderpardon OR Bethelkerk OR Kerkasiel’ was used. Even though the focus of this research is on the role of the church, omitting the term *Kinderpardon* would have resulted in too few results and the exclusion of a central element of the Bethel church asylum. The same reason holds for the decision to choose OR instead of AND. The media sources were further delineated by using the beginning and ending dates of the Bethel Church case, which ranged from October 26, 2018 to January 31, 2019. Only Dutch national newspapers were considered, two of which were religious (see Table 1). This resulted in a total of 333 sources, a number that was further reduced to 280 after sifting through each article to judge its usefulness. The articles that were omitted at this stage were mostly crossword puzzles, television announcements and news pertaining to other Bethel churches.

Table 1

Overview of media articles

Newspaper (N=5)	Religious (N = 2)	Number of articles (N = 256)
De Volkskrant	No	45
Trouw	No	71
NRC Handelsblad	No	47
Reformatorsch Dagblad	Yes	35
Nederlands Dagblad	Yes	58

3.2.4 Two political debates on *Het Kinderpardon*

To analyze the political talk on the Bethel church case, I used two political debates. The first debate occurred on November 7, 2018 and was on immigrant and asylum policy in general. It served as

the opportunity for political parties to hand in motions on immigration and asylum policy, most of which were on the children's pardon. Even though its format was not formally a political debate, a debate-like conversation nonetheless ensued. The second debate occurred on January 30, 2019 and was on the children's pardon. The cabinet's political leaders from the leading coalition were not present. They had discussed the children's pardon behind closed doors in the week prior to the debate. Their absence was questioned by opposition leaders, who stated that they did not want to hold the debate for show. The format of the debate was consequently more of a round of questions asked by opposition leaders to the minister in charge of asylum affairs, Madeleine van Toorenburg (CDA).

I gained access to these two political debates on August 6, 2019 through the website tweedekamer.nl by using the search term "Kinderpardon" and narrowing down the period to the Bethel church asylum case – October 26, 2018 through January 31, 2019. This resulted in 60 parliamentary papers from eight different categories.¹⁶ I omitted any documents that did not represent a debate, which left me with the two debates mentioned above.

3.2.5 Weekly Bethel church messages

Over the course of the Bethel continual service, fourteen messages, or one every week, were published on the local Bethel church of The Hague website.¹⁷ Each message consisted of a short introductory piece on the children's pardon and the Bethel church asylum, as well as an update on what had happened that week in the media, within the church and in politics from the perspective of the Bethel church organization. Sometimes, stories or poems were included from visitors or Hayarpi, the only one of the Tamrazyans who was consistently in the media. Every message also contained multiple pictures.

What is important to note about these weekly messages is that they show the perspective of those who were heavily involved with the Bethel church asylum, and who, assumedly, wanted the church asylum to succeed and be impactful. By no means do I want to give the impression that their perspective is the only point of view within the organization of the church, or even within the smaller circle of the Bethel church The Hague. To gain insight into other perspectives within the religious sphere, would require me to conduct interviews with people who disagreed with the Bethel church asylum, or at least were not in favor of it. That is not something I focused on within the scope of this thesis.

¹⁶ The categories were: *Besluitenlijsten*, *Brieven regering*, *Commissieverslagen*, *Kamervragen*, *Moties*, *Overige kamerstukken*, *Plenaire verslagen*, *Stemmingsuitslagen*.

¹⁷ See: <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielnieuwsoverzicht>

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Narrative and content analysis

“Narrative has been one of the major themes in humanistic and social scientific thought since the mid-twentieth century” (Johnstone, 2001, pp. 635). Originally a method that was only employed by linguistic scholars, it has since spread to other disciplines as a primary way to analyze talk. It is nearly impossible to provide one definition of narrative or narrative analysis, as scholars from different disciplines use the concept differently. Narrative and story are often used interchangeably, while some researchers see story as being a part of narrative (Riessman, 2008). According to Robertson (2017), everyday life is immersed with narratives, those heard on the morning radio on the way to work, the news articles on political developments or the lack thereof, even the content shared privately on social media platforms. They all share the element of narrative, regardless of context, speaker or audience. Or in the words of Riessman (2008, pg. 4), “narrative is everywhere, but not everything is narrative.” A researcher could use interviews, (ancient) literary works, scientific theories, songs, artwork, news articles, biographies, political debates, and so on. It is through the narratives that are told and heard, written and read, that people make sense of society. They reinforce people’s place in her cultural and political landscape, giving insight into society’s power dynamics (Robertson, 2017).

Narratives are not reality, in the sense that they exist or are in the real or physical world. Narratives represent a version of reality; they are a construction – or what Riessman (2008) would see as a mirror – of reality. They serve as essential tools to mediate between the construct of one’s identity and the real world, making it possible to infer, arrange and understand meaning (Carr, 1997). When a narrative portrays a character as being evil for instance, this most certainly does not mean that said character *is* evil. Not at all. It means that a story told in a particular context during a specified time, by a certain (group of) character(s) to a certain audience, ascribes an evil role to a character. Sometimes stories from different narrators paint the character in the same negative manner, while others shed a more nuanced or even a positive light on the character’s role. It is by grouping the stories that are told, comparing and contrasting them, that different realities are constructed – and different roles are ascribed – that show how characters are perceived by wider audiences. Their perception says something about the role a character has within their version of society, and how much room they think there is to change that role within society (Robertson, 2017).

Chatman (1978) describes narrative as being made up of two elements: a ‘what’ and a ‘why’, respectively the story and discourse of a narrative. By focusing on the ‘what’ of narrative is what Riessman (2008) refers to as thematic analysis, or the content of a story. When a researcher focuses

on the 'why' of a narrative, or what Riessman (ibid) refers to as structural analysis, focus is put on the meaning that is conveyed by a story. The third and final type or narrative analysis, according to Riessman (ibid), is performative analysis. When conducting research in a performative manner, a researcher combines elements of thematic and structural analysis, while embedding the stories in the relationship between narrator and audience. It includes the added elements of when, why, by whom and for whom the story is told (Torbenfeldt Bengtsson and Andersen, 2020). This is what Chatman (1978) refers to as discourse or seeing 'behind' the story. According to him, the discourse revolves around questions pertaining to the narrator and her audience, the way she tells the story and how the audience makes sense of the story. What meaning do people attribute to the characters? What words do they use to make sense of them? And what does this story mean in the grander context in which it is told? Important to note is that the meaning of discourse within narrative analysis is different from discourse analysis, which is a more abstract type of analysis that is based on discourse theory (Bergström, Ekström & Boréus, 2017). Discourse analysis is beyond the scope of this research project, as I only applied narrative and content analysis in this thesis. I am, therefore, unable to deduce any empirically funded conclusions about the discourse as a whole.

Within narrative analysis, every narrative has a beginning, a middle and an end. There is a certain logic to the chain of events that make up a story, which make up its content (Torbenfeldt Bengtsson and Andersen, 2020). These linked events are, according to Riessman (2008), the one element that scholars can agree on when defining the concept of narrative. Without a linkage of events, a text is a mere summary of something and narrative nothing more than a fuzzy concept. These events are further embedded in a setting, like a school, a village, or a church. There are characters who color the story, some of whom are portrayed as heroes, others as villains, friends or foes. Whether characters are considered heroes or villains depends on the story's plot. "As a rule, the plot is the focal point that one event is linked logically to and causally explains another one" (Torbenfeldt Bengtsson and Andersen, 2020, pp. 266). An example to illustrate this are the following two sentences: *The ice caps are melting, because we are living beyond our means. Scientists have tried to point this out for years, but political leaders refuse to take action.* Here, two events are linked to one another, forming the plot. Scientists are described as heroes, while political leaders are posited as villains.

One of the most used analytical narrative structures is Labov's (1972) distinction of five elements of narrative: abstract (1), orientation (2), complicating action (3), resolution (4), and coda (5). An abstract summarizes the story, the orientation refers to the story's characters, its setting and the time period in which the story is set, the complicating action disharmonizes the story by taking it from a certain equilibrium to chaos or disorder, the resolution then is the solution or

action taken to solve or reharmonize the story, while the coda finally returns the narrator back to the present. In this thesis, Labov's (1972) five elements of narrative were used to decide whether a news article was a narrative or simply a summation of events, facts or something else entirely. In news articles, abstracts and codas were not important signifiers to determine whether an article was considered a narrative. Codas and abstracts are more suitable for picking out stories in, for instance, interviews or longer texts, and can be considered a narrator's 'entrance' or 'exit' talk (Robertson, 2017).

After determining whether texts were narratives, I organized my news articles on the basis of a categorical-content approach, which is a type of content analysis. However, it includes aspects of narrative that a 'typical' content analysis would not include, like actors' appearances. In this approach, I first defined relevant categories of study, which I deduced both inductively and deductively, from the news articles themselves and from my theoretical framework (Robertson, 2017). This means that I looked out for characterizations of the church (asylum), uses of religious language, utterances on the relationship between church and state, and statements on public deliberation and backdoor politics. I then used all three common approaches of narrative analysis – thematic, structural, and performative – in that order to conduct the analysis of the Bethel church asylum case's public sphere. The way thematic analysis was applied in this thesis was by assigning characters into five groups: religion, vulnerable groups, the state, public or other figures, and non-descript (or a group of characters that could not be assigned to any of the other four groups). However, the focus of the analysis lay heavily on the structural analysis, since I was mostly interested in the different ways in which the role of religion and the church were interpreted. Structural analysis focuses heavily on meaning giving and characters (Torbenfeldt Bengtsson and Andersen, 2020), which made this analysis the bulk of my narrative analysis.

In the political and religious spheres, I omitted the narrative aspect of my categorical-content approach. The analysis in the public sphere formed the bulk of the research and provided me with the categories that I then used for the political and religious spheres. Moreover, in the political sphere, it became evident that religion and the church hardly played a role. In the religious sphere, the opposite was the case, as it centered around the Bethel church asylum. So, there was little ambiguity about the role that religion and the church played in the political and religious spheres as opposed to the public sphere. Lastly, I have formatted the political and religious spheres in a temporal form, while the public sphere is formatted in a categorical format.

3.3.3 Research questions broken down

The distinction between the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of narrative analysis were used to inspire the sub-questions, making use of both the story and discourse elements of narrative analysis. I considered all 280 media sources as potential narratives told by the newspapers. There were many different narrators who wrote news articles. Newspapers included pieces from their staff as well as written pieces sent in by their readers. I have accounted for these differences in the analysis. The two political debates and the online weekly messages posted by the Bethel Church in The Hague were not used for narrative analysis. The requirements for these texts were, for that reason, not as strict.

In an effort to answer SQ1, I went through all media sources in a first round and did three things.¹⁸ Firstly, I determined whether a news article contained the elements of a narrative, according to Labov’s (1972) distinction. Since the formatting was already structured as a news ‘story’, I omitted Labov’s (ibid) first and last requirements – abstract and coda – of narrative. In most of the news articles, these two elements were present, particularly the abstract. Since I considered each news article as one story, the abstract and coda elements were not needed. Labov’s (ibid) other three elements of narrative – orientation, complicating action, and resolution – were used to determine whether a news story was a narrative.

Secondly, I used five different colors to separate the different characters in the narratives (see Figure 2). Each color represented a group of characters that could be grouped based on a common denominator. I developed these five common denominators after having gone through the news articles in the first round. These five denominators helped me place the characters into groups that aided my research. It was able to give me an idea of the prominence of an actor in a

Figure 2

Example of analyzed text

Dominees uit tal van kerken in Nederland preken sinds vrijdagmiddag continu in de protestantse **Bethelkerk** in Den Haag. Ze willen hiermee de uitzetting van de 21-jarige Armeense **Hayarpi Tamrazyan** en haar familie voorkomen. Die familie is vrijdag verhuisd uit de vrijgemaakte gereformeerde kerk in Katwijk naar Den Haag, waar **Hayarpi** haar vader, moeder, 15-jarige broer en 19-jarige zus al een maand verbleven.

Volgens Esther van Dijken, woordvoerder van de familie, had het Armeense gezin van de Dienst Terugkeer en Vertrek gehoord dat ze zouden worden uitgezet, of ze nu in een kerk verbleven of niet. Om dit te voorkomen, besloot een alliantie van kerken estafettediensten te gaan houden.

De Algemene wet op het binnentreden schrijft voor dat de politie en andere overheidsinstanties de kerk niet binnenkomen als er een dienst gaande is. 'Tenzij er sprake is van een heterdaadsituatie en de net betrapte persoon de kerk in vlucht. In het algemeen geldt dat je geen misbruik mag maken van dit recht. Zo is het mijns inziens niet de bedoeling louter en alleen diensten te houden om justitie dwars te zitten en zo een inval te voorkomen', aldus de in religie en recht gespecialiseerde advocaat Teunis van Kooten.

Note. This is an excerpt from the first article that was published on the Bethel Church case on October 27, 2018 by *De Volkskrant* titled “Dominees preken continu om Armeense Hayarpi hier te houden”.

¹⁸ SQ1: What roles were ascribed to religion in the public sphere during the Bethel Church case?

story, but it also helped me in a later stage to quickly find descriptions of the church. This only occurred if it was, for instance, unclear who a narrator was referring to in a text. The latter group also referred to groups that were large and abstract like ‘Dutch society’, that appeared only in a few articles and I considered to be nothing more than an extra in the story. An overview of all the characters who fell under each denominator can be found in Table 2. I wanted to ensure that I stayed as close to the data as I could. That means that some groups or characters are repeated or mentioned in a slightly different manner.

Thirdly, I attributed a role to the church in one of three ways: none (1), small (2), or prominent (3). If there was no mention of any characters that fall under the denominator of religion, I defined that article as a ‘no role’ article. I did the same if a ‘religion’ character was mentioned, but only briefly as an extra or without any dialogue or ramifications to the storyline and plot. In these articles, there was no red in the story or only a few words were. If a ‘religion’ character was a part of the story’s main plot but lacked any influence on the plot, I considered the article as a ‘small role’ article. In most cases, these articles contained a few ‘red’ sentences that were outnumbered by the overwhelming presence of other colors. An example of a story in which a ‘religion’ character had a ‘small role’, was one in which one or multiple governmental character(s), like Mark Harbers, were the focal point of the story, while the Bethel church continual service would be mentioned briefly as being impacted by a decision made by Harbers. Here, the story was focused on Harbers’ decision-making process, which happened to have an impact on various characters, one of which was the church. An article was deemed a ‘prominent role’ when the story revolved around a (or multiple) ‘religion’ character(s) and where most of the story’s lines were red. In many of these articles, the opening paragraph would be dedicated to a ‘religion’ character. These characters would be given multiple lines of dialogue, and, many times, the story’s plot would revolve around the Bethel church asylum case. This three-tier process gave me an idea of the extent to which a role was given to ‘religion’ characters, like the church, by the five major news outlets.

In the second major round of analysis, I went through all media sources again and did two things. Firstly, I made an overview of all the characters that were mentioned in each narrative. Next, I made an overview of the different ways in which ‘religion’ characters were characterized. In other words, I made a data matrix which showed the actions these characters were taking, according to the narrator, and, if present, what meaning was attached to that action. The attached meaning could either be overt or covert. The meaning, or the narrator’s interpretation of the actions, I then deemed either positive, negative, both or neither. Certain use of language informed this categorization, where articles that contained only or mostly positive interpretations were labeled

Table 2

Overview of (groups of) characters in narratives

Denominator	Color	Characters	
		Individuals	Groups
Religion	Red	Derk Stegeman, René de Reuver, Theo Hetteema, Hilly Merx, Gerard de Korte	Bethel church in The Hague (or the organization of the church asylum), Church in Katwijk, Protestant community in The Hague, Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PCN), Church World Service (CWS), New Asylum Coalition (NSC), the church (in general), Christians, church goers and volunteers, Dutch (and international) pastors, religious organizations that donate
Vulnerable groups	Green	Hayarpi Tamrazyan, Lili & Howick, Nemr	Tamrazyan family, the deported Armenian Grigoryan family, CP children (and their parents), immigrant children (and their families), asylum seekers, minorities
The state	Orange	Klaas Dijkhoff, Mark Rutte, Mark Harbers, Diederik Samson, Halbe Zijlstra, Rob Jetten, Madeleine van Toorenburg, Gert-Jan Segers	Police, Dienst Terugkeer & Vertrek (DT&V), Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), the government, the leading coalition (VVD, D66, CU, CDA), European Union (EU), Groenlinks, USA, political parties (in general), politicians (in general), GroenLinks, PVV, FvD, Trump, rightwing parties, the opposition,
Public/other figures	Purple	Tim Hofman, Canadian writer Stephen Marche, ‘the judge’, Cardi B, Arjen Lubach, Martin Luther King, Florine Kuethe (press advisor to the Tamrazyan family)	BN’ers, CNN, scientists (in general), (international) media, advisors to politicians, political experts, charities, airlines, (asylum) lawyers, Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland (VN),
Non-descript text	Black		Dutch society, The Netherlands, CDA constituency, Armenia,

Note. CP children refers to children who officially requested to be considered for the children’s pardon. BN’ers is a term is used to described *Bekende Nederlanders* or famous Dutch people.

accordingly, as were the negative interpretations. When the article showed a more nuanced interpretation, I labeled it as both. When an article lacked any interpretation, it was labeled as ‘neither’. I then compiled all of these categories into the data matrix, which was made in Microsoft Excel and contained six separate tabs. One tab served as an overview for all news articles and gave me numerical data on prominence of role, while the other five tabs were each dedicated to a newspaper. This overview gave me an overall impression of the amount of space that was given to the ‘religion’ character by every newspaper, while the narrator’s meaning or interpretations of the character showed what roles were assigned to her.¹⁹ Using this overview, I compared the five newspapers to one another, which provided me with overall themes on the role of ‘religion’ in the public sphere. The results of these rounds of analysis can be found in ‘Chapter 4.1 Public sphere’.

¹⁹ I was able to embed the descriptions of the ‘religion’ character into the story of each narrative. If, for instance, one article portrayed the church as a hero, but another character was described in the same way while being mentioned more often than the church, this influenced the weight of the church’s role. In that scenario, the church was not the main character, but rather another character on the hero’s side of the story.

As mentioned before, the extensive process outlined above was not used as such for the political and religious spheres. Instead, the overall themes from the public sphere served as a point of departure for the subsequent analyses. While going through the data in the political sphere, in an attempt to answer SQ2, it became clear early on that there was little data on ‘religion.’²⁰ In two parliamentary debates on the children’s pardon, the church was mentioned only four times. This prevented me from doing an extensive analysis of the role of religion in the political sphere, besides the fact that the apparent lack of religion in the political sphere is a result itself. This means that the political sphere is the shortest results subchapter. The religious sphere produced more results and was conducted in a manner similar to that of the political sphere.²¹ I first went through all the data, labelling the different roles the church ascribed to themselves as well as how the Bethel church used religious language.²² I then compared the three spheres, which can be found in the last subchapter in 4.4 (Comparisons and Conclusions between all Spheres). I then used my theoretical framework to reflect on the role of religion in a democracy, as well as the relationship between church and state, in order to answer my main RQ.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I attempt to embed my conclusions about the role of religion in the theoretical debates of the relationship between church and state, secularization, and civil disobedience. Lastly, I refer to previously conducted research on church asylum, and I use my findings to reflect on the theory of deliberative democracy.

3.4 Validity of Research

3.4.1 Role of researcher

As a born and raised atheist, white, educated female, I am aware of the role I play in this research project. First and foremost, I was concerned about my lack of knowledge on religion, fearing it might prohibit me from recognizing religious talk or typical ‘church words’. After multiple rounds of analysis, however, I found my knowledge of ‘church words’ significantly increased. I do not want to imply that this means that I did not miss anything, but I believe that I was able to recognize important religious references, like mercy and charity.

The other side of the story is the fact that I have less of a preconceived notion of the church. I am not ambivalent towards the church, rather I am particularly interested in her influence in today’s society. That might make me less biased towards certain ascribed roles. All in all, I

²⁰ SQ2: What roles were ascribed to religion in the political sphere during the Bethel Church case? (*political sphere*)

²¹ SQ3: What roles did the church ascribe to itself in its weekly bulletin during the Bethel Church case? (*religious sphere*)

²² SQ4: To what extent did the roles ascribed to religion overlap or contradict one another across the political, public, and religious spheres?

believe that my limited experience within the institution of church, as well as religion, has given me the needed distance to make a more objective observation of how people make sense of the role of the church. I had no framework on which to rely before starting my analysis, and thus was not led by certain words or descriptions.

As with any qualitative method, there is no guarantee that a researcher will not influence the results. Narrative analysis, compared to other qualitative methods, requires more interpretation from the researcher and allows more room for contextualized constructs that might otherwise not be considered. This could be considered a weakness or simply another way of looking at creation of meaning. By analyzing a large number of news articles, I tried to minimize any of my own opinions. Also, the inductive manner in which I went to work, led me to ‘listen’ to the data instead of trying to fit theoretical frameworks onto my data.

3.4.2 Types of data

The data used to represent the three spheres – the political, public and religious – differ in form but have been chosen to be of a similar format. Two political debates were used to symbolize the political sphere, while media articles were used to embody the public domain and online weekly updates by the PCN to signify the religious sphere. In a political debate, there is room for politicians to hand in a motion, and there is also space for discussion, for debate, for rebuttal. That is usually not the case in media, where it is often the newspaper telling their version of a story on a specific topic in the form of an editorial piece. Nonetheless, the collection of news articles did provide me with traces of a public debate, especially when various news sources responded to one another. The data from the religious sphere differs from the public sphere, since it only encompasses the viewpoint of the Bethel church instead of being a collection of different opinions. The data from the religious sphere differs from the political sphere in the same sense that the public sphere differs from the political sphere. There is no trace of a discussion with the religious sphere, merely the Bethel church portraying their version of reality. The way in which different types of data are constructed could have influenced the level of detailed analysis I was able to conduct.

That leads me to my second point. The political and religious spheres produced a lot less data than the public sphere did, particularly the political sphere. The lack of religious utterances and references to the church in the political sphere is the reason why there was a lot less data, which is a result in and of itself, but I was hard pressed to find a more suitable data source to represent the political sphere.

Lastly, when selecting data, one naturally leaves out something. In the case of this research, I made a selection of five Dutch national newspapers, thereby excluding local and international newspapers, as well as some of the other Dutch national newspapers. This selection of Dutch national newspapers could have an impact on the way in which I perceive the Dutch political public sphere. International (and local) media also chimed in on the story, which could have an effect on the way in which the church's act was viewed domestically. That is not, however, what this thesis focusses on. International media are mentioned on occasion, but only in the context of what domestic media have mentioned about it. Local media was not mentioned.

4 Results

In this chapter, I present and subsequently discuss the results that were produced by the thematic narrative and content analyses. The chapter is divided into four sub-chapters. I commence by presenting the results of the public sphere, a narrative analysis of 280 news articles that were published during and on the Bethel church asylum case (4.1 Public Sphere). Next, I turn my attention toward the content analysis of the political sphere (4.2 Political Sphere), after which I present the content analysis of the religious sphere (4.3 Religious Sphere). I conclude with a comparative subchapter in which all three spheres are compared with each other and general conclusions about the analyses are drawn (4.4 Comparison & Conclusion).

4.1 Public Sphere

A total of 280 news articles were published on the Bethel church asylum case over a span of three months, starting on October 26, 2018 and ending on January 31, 2019 by five national Dutch newspapers. Three of those newspapers – *De Volkskrant*, *NRC*, and *Trouw* – are considered non-religious in this study, while two of those newspapers – *Nederlands Dagblad* and *Reformatorisch Dagblad* – are considered religious in this study. Not all topics discussed within these articles were directly about the Bethel Church asylum; many articles delved into the children's pardon, those affected by the policy, and the political landscape surrounding the children's pardon. Some articles did mention or even characterize religion as a concept without referring to the Bethel church asylum specifically.

Out of the 280 newspaper articles published during the Bethel Church asylum, 208 articles contained Labov's (1972) three central elements of the structure of a narrative: an orientation, complicating action, and resolution. The other 72 articles contained at least one of the central elements of the structure of a narrative but not all three. The narrators of these 72 articles would usually write no more than 150 words, always including an orientation and either a complicating action or a resolution. They were formatted more as updates to convey the most amount of information with the least number of words. Some of these articles were the result of interviews between the reporter and the interviewee and were structured as such, but they missed the required narrative elements. Lastly, a small number of articles were a collection of readers' responses. They, too, lacked Lavov's (ibid) three central elements.

This first part of this chapter is primarily structured on the basis of the four general themes that emerged from the five national newspapers. These themes represent the meaning that was given by narrators to the church's actions in the public sphere. Some of these themes were inspired by my theoretical framework, like the relationship between church and state, while other themes

materialized through the various stages of analysis. The themes are as follows: the church's support and building community (4.1.1), the church's obligation to help those in need (4.1.2), the church's resistance to the state (4.1.3), and the church's influence on the CDA and the CP (4.1.4). The last theme became relevant after the CDA changed its stance on the children's pardon in the last week of the Bethel church asylum. This resulted in many newspaper articles on why the CDA had turned, which is why this last theme is mostly focused on the last week of the Bethel church asylum. After presenting the general themes, I will discuss some of the unexpected results that do not fit within the four general themes but are important to note nonetheless (4.1.5). Next, I compare the five newspapers individually, after which I analyze the differences between the religious and non-religious newspapers (4.1.6). Finally, I present the conclusions from the narrative analysis of the public sphere (4.1.7). The themes are presented in a purely qualitative manner (4.1.1 – 4.1.5), while the comparisons between newspapers are presented both quantitatively and qualitatively (4.1.6).

4.1.1 The church's support and building community

Newspapers reported an overwhelming amount of support for the Bethel church asylum. This was made evident by repeated comments on the high coverage by national and international media, as well as how political actors and the public showed support. Important to note is that this subchapter does not focus on the discussion on the legality of the Bethel church asylum, covered in chapter 4.1.3, which includes statements of opposition to the way in which the Bethel church asylum was organized. What will become apparent in that chapter (4.1.3) is that no actor in the public sphere condemned the church for helping the Tamrazyan family. However, critics took issue with the use of a continual service for political means, and they questioned whether the Bethel church asylum was legal. In this subchapter on the church's support and building community, I will show that the church was generally supported by the public, despite questions being raised about the legality of the Bethel church asylum. After presenting my findings on the church's support, I will show how some newspapers described the church as building a community.

Four newspapers described the church as being widely supported by (inter)national media; only the RD did not. On December 24, 2018, the NRC had published an extensive narrative on the Bethel church asylum, in which Derk Stegeman – one of the organizers – had stated that the church was “surprised by the overwhelming [media] attention” and that they even wanted to limit the presence of media to uphold the sanctity of the worship service.²³ De Volkskrant published a

²³ Stegeman, D. in Boon, F. (December 24, 2018). Het kerkasiel geeft Haagse protestanten ‘nieuw vuur’, *NRC Handelsblad*, *In het nieuws*, pg. 4.

narrative on January 17, 2019 titled “Church service as global news,” in which narrator Charlotte Huisman listed all the prominent international newspapers, like CNN, NYT, and Der Spiegel, that were reporting on the Bethel church asylum.²⁴ Trouw even reported that a group of Mennonites from the USA had visited the Bethel church asylum after hearing about it in one of the many articles by foreign newspapers.²⁵ Because the media attention was so high, the organizers even hired a professional publicity coordinator.²⁶

Over the course of the Bethel church asylum, there was a growing number of people who visited the church asylum to show support. This group consisted of believers and non-believers. According to Trouw narrator Ilona de Lange, many people from the Bethel church’s neighborhood would come by in the beginning of the Bethel church asylum.²⁷ To show that people from outside and inside the church supported the Bethel church asylum, newspapers would mention how many people had attended the service up to that point. ND writer Rikko Voorberg, for instance, stated that the church asylum, which at the point had been going on for about two weeks, had already seen “300 pastors... Respect and faith shimmer through the space, supported by pastors from the full breadth of ecclesiastical Netherlands.”²⁸

Not only were members of the Dutch public described as supporting the Bethel church asylum, but internationally people were also said to widely support the church asylum. Also, the PCN publicly supported the service early on and the *Raad van Kerken*, or Council of Churches, called on the cabinet on the 5th of December 2018 to reconsider how they implemented the children’s pardon. Prominent members of the CDA, like Ruth Peetom and Rutger Ploum, came by at various points during the Bethel church asylum. Madeleine van Toorenborg, who was the one that presented and defended the CDA’s political shift in the parliamentary debate in late January 2019, also visited the chapel. ND gave van Toorenborg a platform in November of 2018, when the newspaper published a narrative, written by her, on the dilemmas of the children’s pardon. was part of a biweekly political column in ND that is written by a politician from a major Dutch Christian political party (CDA, CU or SGP). In it, she defended the CDA’s stance on the children’s pardon. Her narrative was one of conflict, one in which she told readers how difficult it is to craft policy that does not exclude individuals – something that happens no matter what her party decides to do. Churches were mentioned once, as a group of actors who takes care of people in need. Van Toorenborg describes them as “meaningful, because a rejection on an asylum request

²⁴ Huisman, C. (January 17, 2019). Kerkdienst als wereldnieuws, *De Volkskrant*, *Ten eerste*, pg. 15.

²⁵ Fijter, N. de (January 21, 2019). Mennonieten uit Ohio gaan voor in Haagse Bethelkerk, *Trouw, Vandaag*, pg. 5.

²⁶ Huisman, C. (January 17, 2019). Kerkdienst als wereldnieuws, *De Volkskrant*, *Ten eerste*, pg. 15.

²⁷ Lange, I. de (October 30, 2018). Een preek van Martin Luther King voorlezen telt ook, *Trouw, Vandaag*, pg. 4.

²⁸ Voorberg, Rikko (November 10, 2018). Vieren dat het lukt en huilen dat het moet, *Nederlands Dagblad*, pg. 7.

should not mean that all doors are closed.”²⁹ This, in combination with her visit to the Bethel church asylum, indicates that van Toorenborg is not against the role churches can play in asylum matters.

ND included Groenlinks member Bram van Oijk in one of their narratives on the political debate on the children’s pardon. The majority of the article’s narrative revolved around the political debate and was not focused on the Bethel church asylum. Toward the end of the narrative, however, Van Oijk stated that "In our society it pays to oppose injustice. I am happy with such a democracy.”³⁰ Here, he was referring to the Bethel church’s continual service. Van Oijk was the only politician that appeared in the article’s narrative who had spoken about the Bethel church asylum. The significance of Van Oijk’s contribution lay in the fact that he is not tied to a religious party, but that he still commended the Bethel church asylum for its public stance. This will be an interesting point for the discussion.

In Trouw and ND, the church was described as creating a community of people and thereby creating some form of social cohesion. Trouw writer Ilona de Lange spent a night in the Bethel church and described what happened while she was there. When interpreting her visit, she focused on the way in which the church asylum was able to create a community of people. She quoted Theo Hetteema, as he described how unique that development was. “Usually there is a community that undertakes an activity, now a community was created by those who are participating [in the church asylum]. That is unique.”³¹ The inclusion of this statement as a conclusion to her story gives the reader the idea that the church can create cohesion among the people, even in this unintentional manner. NRC writer Floor Boon described something similar to de Lange. She wrote that the Bethel church asylum created a community that feels connected in their protest against the government, while not wanting to be too politically outspoken. It was unclear whether Boon believed this community to be composed solely of churchgoers or whether it was made up of non-religious people as well.

In conclusion, the church was portrayed as an actor that was supported by the media and had visitors from different backgrounds. Not only believers attended the church service, but non-believers also came by, although this latter group was underrepresented in comparison to the believers. Prominent members of the CDA were described as supportive of the church asylum, as well as Groenlinks member Bram van Oijk. No other politicians were mentioned as having visited

²⁹ Toorenborg, Madeleine van (November 6, 2018). Dilemma’s van het kinderpardon, *Nederlands Dagblad, Opinie*, pg. 13.

³⁰ Oijk, Bram van in: Mouissie, Sjoerd (January 31, 2019). Harbers kan goed uit de voeten met asielakkoord, *Nederlands Dagblad*, pg. 3.

³¹ Source: Hetteema, T. in Lange, I. de (November 15, 2018). Ook ‘s nachts draagt de predikant een toga. *Trouw, deVerdieping*.

the Bethel church. Lastly, only two newspapers characterized the church as an actor that built community through the Bethel church asylum. Neither characterization implied that the church was able to create cohesion on a societal level. Instead, both narrators spoke of a smaller group of people that were involved with the Bethel church asylum.

4.1.2 The church's obligation to help those in need

Various newspapers portrayed the church as feeling responsible for standing up for what is just and protecting members of society who are in need of help, despite the potentially negative consequences for their relationship with the state. Some newspapers included claims that the church was forced to help in this situation, because they had to stand up for what is right. Often, the church was described as drawing from biblical texts to defend its actions, with some claiming that biblical texts trump the church's obligation to submit to the government's wishes. The Bethel church asylum's organizers were usually quoted in these instances and would function as leading characters representing the church.

Mostly the *Reformatie Dagblad* (RD) emphasized the church's role as one who stands up to injustice, but *NRC Handelsblad*, simply *NRC* from here on out, and *Nederlands Dagblad* (ND) did as well. In a December 22, 2018 article, for instance, Derk Stegeman – one of the church asylum's organizers – stated that the church would continue granting the family Tamrazyan church asylum after Mark Harbers had publicly announced that he would not be using his discretion to help the family.

Stegeman realizes that things are not looking good for the Armenian family. "Still, we have hope. That is different from optimism," he emphasizes. "We keep hope because we firmly believe it is right to do so. As a church we feel responsible to keep fighting for what is humane and just."³²

NRC portrayed a similar image of the church while quoting Bethel church prominent De Reuver, who had said that the church sometimes simply needs to do something when in an unjust situation. The ND published an opinion piece by Koert van Bekkum, which voiced something similar but spoke specifically on what is wrong with Dutch asylum policy.

"Church asylum' in our society is no more than a 'time-out'; a signal that others will hopefully do something with. The crucial question is therefore a very simple one: does the church have

³² Eijdsden, Auke van (December 22, 2018). Marathondienst in Haagse kerk gaat gewoon door, *Nederlands Dagblad*, pg. 1.

reason to send that signal now that the Tamrazyan family is knocking on her door in their distress? Knowing the history of the family, the Reformed Church in Katwijk answered this question with a resounding 'yes'. Subsequently, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands adopted this, after which this church shelter grew into a broader 'signal' that something is not right about the way in which we deal with Dutch-rooted, rejected children. Here, not only legally and politically, but on a deep moral level something is very wrong.”³³

Van Bekkum claims that, by organizing the Bethel church asylum, the church is indicating that the Dutch asylum policy is malfunctioning and that there something wrong on a much deeper, moral level with the way we treat the children affected by the children’s pardon. The church steps in as a character that raises awareness for an important issue while helping a family in need. This latter description is carried on through in other newspapers, where the church is mostly associated with helping immigrants. *De Volkskrant* described the church as the Tamrazyan family’s protector, while the ND incorporated a statement made by the PCN in which they said that “no one can ask us to close our eyes to the suffering caused to these children.”³⁴ The church was described as being forced to stand up for what is right, especially by the ND. An ND article quoted René de Reuver – one of the organizers of the Bethel church asylum – as having organized the continual service due to a lack of other options. The organizers had “not sought the situation, but ha[d] been forced to do so,” he had said during a meeting of the ecumenical council of the Protestant Church.³⁵

It was mainly the religious newspapers that included biblical references in their narratives, although *Trouw* also focused on this aspect. References ranged from specific mentions of bible passages to more general ideas of how a church should behave according to scripture. The church was, in organizing the Bethel church asylum, described as putting charity into practice, and bringing biblical texts to life, and obeying the commandment to love and care for loved ones. She was described as a respectful and loving church that, despite possibly overstepping a church-state boundary, helps people in need, especially children. RD had included an opinion piece by a pastor who believed that the church, protestants in particular, value the rule of law. But that when it comes down to it, the rules of the Holy Kingdom prevail. *Trouw* voiced something similar when it published a narrative by Gera van Dorp, who stated that, in the national anthem, God is above the king and that “[t]he church still relies on this higher authority.”³⁶ A more detailed version of

³³ Bekkum, Koert van (December 12, 2018). Voor een 24 uurskerkdienst, *Nederlands Dagblad, Opinie*, pg. 12-13.

³⁴ PCN in: Kuijper, Eline (October 27, 2018). Kerk Den Haag neemt opvang over van Katwijkse gemeente, *Nederlands Dagblad, Geloof*, pg. 7.

³⁵ Meijer, Hilbert (November 16, 2018). Protestantse Kerk bezint zich op migratie, *Nederlands Dagblad, Geloof*, pg. 7.

³⁶ Source: Dorp, G. van (November 7, 2018). Kerkasiel mag, kijk maar naar het volkslied. *Trouw, deVerdieping*.

this idea was included in a narrative published in the beginning of the Bethel church asylum. John van Tilborg, director of the Christian aid organization Inlia, stated that:

“Jesus himself says that ‘[e]verything you did for one of the most insignificant of my brothers or sisters, you did it for me.’ Those are Jesus' own words. That makes it a heavy commandment... [I]t is up to the church to hold the government to account. Having to respect the government does not relieve you of the responsibility of looking after someone who is in the ditch.”³⁷

Here, van Tilborg is referring to the difference between Romans 13 and Matthew 25. Romans 13 stipulates that Christians must recognize the authority of the government. But John van Tilborg believes the commandment in Matthew 25 can sometimes supersede Romans 13. The church, thus, does not blindly follow the government. Derk Stegeman, in defending the legitimacy of the church asylum, stated that "Ultimately it is not the state, but the church that determines whether there is a religious practice."³⁸

All in all, the newspapers painted a church that felt a high sense of responsibility for taking care of those who are not being cared for. The church is willing to overstep the church-state boundary, if it is necessary to do so. Some even propose the idea that scripture trumps the rule of law if a situation in which someone desperately needs help presents itself.

4.1.3 The church's resistance to the state

In organizing the Bethel church asylum, one could argue that the church inherently challenged the state. This theme in particular was brought forth in many different narratives. Narrators described the church in different ways, as some portrayed her as breaching the law while others presented a church that only skirted the law. In some narratives, civil disobedience was brought forth as a characterization, but underwhelmingly so. The church's role vis à vis the state could be categorized as either a hinderance or an enhancement of the state. All in all, there was a wide variety of opinions and characterizations included on the church-state relationship during the public debate on the Bethel church asylum. As shown in the previous subchapter on the church's support and community building (4.1.1), newspapers generally portrayed a church (asylum) that was widely supported by (inter)national newspapers, the public, and political actors. None of the concerns on the Bethel church asylum's legality were discussed in detail in that chapter, because it was not

³⁷ Mulligen, Remco van & Kuijper, Eline (October 27, 2018). Barmhartig gaat vóór gehoorzaam, *Nederlands Dagblad, Geloof*, pg. 6-7.

³⁸ Meijer, Hilbert (January 17, 2019). Kerk heeft geen 'plan B' voor kerkasiel, *Nederlands Dagblad, Geloof*, pg. 6.

evident that these concerns had an impact on how the Bethel church asylum was perceived in general. As will become evident in the results of the other spheres, the discussions on the Bethel church asylum's legality did not penetrate into the political and religious sphere. I will come back to this point when comparing the three spheres in Chapter 4.4 Comparison & Conclusion.

A recurring description of the church's use of the law *Wet of het binnentreden* was that the church wrongly used the law. De Volkskrant went as far as stating that church was abusing a loophole in the law, while Trouw included a milder description by Jos Wiene, mayor of Haarlem, who "reproached the church for improperly using the law that safeguards political involvement in church services."³⁹ ND included a similar description by lawyer Teunis van Kooten, who was critical of the service. He understood that the law the church was using to legally justify the continual service was not meant for this purpose. He believed that the church should not have abused this special position and that it should have looked for other ways to help the Tamrazyan family.⁴⁰ RD also included lawyer Teunis van Kooten in one of their narratives, in which he expressed similar doubts while placing the focus on the freedom of religion instead of the law *Wet of het binnentreden*. He believed that the church was challenging the government by holding this continual service. According to him, "The laws pertaining to freedom of religion are not intended to allow church asylum." He thinks it is commendable that the church wants to show support to a troubled family, but that:

...from a legal point of view, it is very questionable whether the church may use such a means for this... There is hardly any jurisprudence on such matters. The big question is how heavily the judge weighs religious freedom in this specific case. The judge will probably also look at the intention of the law: it is not meant for the offering of church asylum.⁴¹

In that very same narrative, de Reuver opposes van Kooten. Initially, de Reuver agrees with van Kooten that the church is operating on the outskirts of what is legally allowed and that it is dealing with conflicting interests: obedience to the state (Romans 13) and helping people in need (the Gospel). However, he states that "church asylum is a last resort."⁴² According to de Reuver, the church would be in a 'crisis of conscience' if she did nothing to help the Armenian family. Van Kooten en de Reuver offer two different arguments; van Kooten argues from a legal position and

³⁹ Source: Houten, Maaïke van (January 30, 2019). Kerkasiel splijt niet, maar bindt. *Touw, deVerdieping*.

⁴⁰ Kooten, Teunis van in: Kuijper, Eline (November 3, 2018). De kerkdienst als drukmiddel, *Nederlands Dagblad, Geloof*, pg. 7.

⁴¹ Kooten, Teunis van in: Visscher, Johannes (October 30, 2018). Botsende belangen bij kerkasiel voor gezin, *Reformatorisch Dagblad, Voorpagina*, pg. 1.

⁴² Reuver, René de in: Visscher, Johannes (October 30, 2018). Botsende belangen bij kerkasiel voor gezin, *Reformatorisch Dagblad, Voorpagina*, pg. 1.

de Reuver from a moral position. This difference in argumentation is apparent when comparing the utterances made by religious actors versus non-religious actors in the public sphere, where mostly the religious actors fall back on matters of morality, justice and scripture. In turn, non-religious actors, at least most of them, only concern themselves with the legality of the Bethel church asylum.

The mayor of Haarlem refutes van Kooten's point of view in a January 17, 2019 narrative published by ND. He does think the church asylum broke the law, stating that the church would only be allowed to do this "in life-or-death situations, which is not the case for the Tamrazyan family."⁴³ While Trouw and NRC do not add to this debate on the various laws specifically, they do both include the concept of civil disobedience into their narratives. Floor Boon, narrator for NRC, describes the Bethel church asylum as an act of civil disobedience almost casually without further delving into her reasoning or any examples to support her characterization of the church. In introducing the church in her narrative, she states the following:

... In The Hague's Valkenboskwartier, the Protestant Church in The Hague shows its compassionate face, in the form of civil disobedience - or strong political protest... Because of the *Wet of het binnentreden*, the police is not allowed to disrupt the worship service. That is why the Bethel church The Hague decided to organize a continual service.⁴⁴

Here, Boon seems to equate the church's use of a continual service to prevent the police from entering the church to civil disobedience. ND's reader Jochem Pleijsier had written an opinion piece, claiming to speak from the point of view of Christians in The Netherlands. According to him, the church selectively uses acts of civil disobedience to protest. The Bethel church asylum is, according to him, an example of when the church uses this form of protest to object legislation.

Church asylum, like that of the Armenian family, involves a arbitrary use of civil disobedience. We want to value the rule of law. So, we usually submit to legislation or court decisions that are not biblical. For instance, the arrival of an abortion clinic, the exclusion of civil servants who have biblical objections or the closure of many sheltered workshops and nursing homes. I don't understand the arbitrariness in civil disobedience. And certainly not the choice of sacred worship as a means of taking action in the case of the Armenian family.⁴⁵

⁴³ Meijer, Hilbert (January 17, 2019). Kerk heeft geen 'plan B' voor kerkasiel, *Nederlands Dagblad, Geloof*, pg. 6.

⁴⁴ Boon, Floor (December 24, 2018). Het kerkasiel geeft Haagse protestanten 'nieuw vuur', *NRC Handelsblad, In het nieuws*, pg. 4.

⁴⁵ Pleijsier, Jochem (November 16, 2018). Selectief gebruik van burgerlijke ongehoorzaamheid, *Nederlands Dagblad, Opinie*, pg. 12.

Pleijser questioned why the church did not use acts of civil disobedience to object to societal issues that also do not align with the church's moral stance, like the arrival of abortion clinics. So, why was the church silent then and loud now? He then highlighted his suspicion on the decision to use a worship service for this purpose. Pleijser does not further explain his characterization of the Bethel church's asylum as an act of civil disobedience, but he does take issue with this particular use of the worship service. He also begins his statement by pointing out that Christians want to value and usually submit to the rule of law, indicating that they are not respecting the rule of law in this situation. Narrators Boon and Pleijser both mention civil disobedience without explaining how they understand the term. However, while Boon seems to imply that the use of a continual service is what makes the Bethel church asylum civil disobedient, Pleijser seems to suggest that not respecting the rule of law while objecting legislation is what he sees as civil disobedience.

Philosopher Mathijs van de Sande disagrees with both Pleijser and Boon. According to him, The Netherlands resided in Rosa Parks' bus at the time.⁴⁶ Van de Sande thought that politicians tend to view protest as a nuisance, as something that should be criminalized. Dutch society should acknowledge the fact that much of the political progress stems from people who protested and broke the law, just like Rosa Parks. Van de Sande did not, however, see the church as an actor that was breaking the law. According to him, the Bethel church asylum was not an act of civil disobedience. The organizers were merely using the Dutch law *Algemene wet op het binnentreden* in a smart way. De Reuver stayed rather aloof in that he did not want to call the Bethel church service an act of civil disobedience, but, according to him, "sometimes the rules don't suffice."⁴⁷ No other narratives mentioned the concept of civil disobedience. It is a rather limited number of narratives that included civil disobedience, with two out of four claiming that the Bethel church asylum is an act of civil disobedience while two oppose that. The crux seems to revolve around whether or not the church broke the law by holding a continual service, thereby knowingly preventing the police from being able to enter the church building. No actor doubted the church's moral justification for organizing the Bethel church asylum. This will be a point for the discussion.

Arnold Huijgen, a ND reader and theologian, would have agreed with Pleijser that the continual service was being misused. Huijgen argued that the church was in the wrong along a different, harder line than Pleijser, though. As a Christian, he believed that something should have been done for the family and that the government should have handled the situation differently. The fervent stance of the PCN was, however, inappropriate with regards to the relationship

⁴⁶ Source: Marijnissen, Hans (21 November 2018). Nederland zit in de bus van Rosa Parks. *Trouw, deVerdieping*.

⁴⁷ De Reuver, René in: Soest, Aaldert van (October 31, 2018). Wet moet wijken voor innerlijke bewogenheid, *Nederlands Dagblad*, pg. 2.

between church and state. Huijgen, who initially considered preaching at the continual service, decided not to.

“The decisive factor for me [not to preach at the continual service] is the improper way in which worship is used. The church is making clever use of the constitutional and democratically pure attitude of the government, who will simply not disrupt the worship service. Worship is, however, used improperly and politically, to pressure and persuade the government to make other decisions. In my opinion, that does not fit with the sanctity of worship, not with the nature of prayer. How can you keep the hymn credible for a political cause? Imagine if the government were to use such smarts to thwart churches.”⁴⁸

Here, the church was being portrayed as a cunning character who was abusing the rules set in place to respect her position in society. And despite Huijgen’s conviction that the Tamrazyan family should stay, and that the government made mistakes, he could not agree with the political use of the continual service. The credible use of a worship service would require a direct threat to the church, according to Huijgen, which he thought was not the case. At the end, he considered what would happen if the government misused her special position to obstruct the church. He insinuated that this would not be accepted.⁴⁹ Protestant Theologist Marcel Barnard presented the role of the church in a similar fashion, namely that the church was to grant church asylum but not to use a continual service as an instrument to prevent the government from doing its job.

Toward the beginning of the continual service, on November 3 2018, Hans Goslinga published an article that questioned the Bethel church asylum. Baring the title “Church asylum battles the rule of law,”⁵⁰ the article describes the organizers of the Bethel church asylum as activists who – with the support of the PCN – were placing need above the law. Goslinga writes:

The activists in the church in The Hague are not trying to sideline the democratic rule of law. The format in which they have organized their church asylum is even legal (the police is not allowed to enter the church when there is a service), but they are definitely obstructing, in whichever way you look at it, the legal process...[Church asylum] undermines the trust in the democratic rule of law, it stirs up emotions, which increases the risk of the arbitrariness.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Huijgen, Arnold (December 12, 2018). Tegen een 24 uurskerkdienst, *Nederlands Dagblad, Opinie*, pg. 12-13.

⁴⁹ This line of reasoning by Huijgen was also quoted in RD, but in a more compact version with less interpretation provided by the narrator.

⁵⁰ This is a translation. The original title is *Kerkasiel strijdt met de rechtstaat*.

⁵¹ Source: Goslinga, Hans (November 2, 2018). Kerkasiel strijdt met de rechtstaat. *Touw, deVerdieping*.

What I infer from Goslinga's statement is that he argues from a legal perspective. That, according to him, the law is simply the law. He does not delve into the morality of deporting children who have been in The Netherlands for many years and have 'Dutchified'. He believes that by looking at an individual case after such public pressure, the use of discretion becomes arbitrary.⁵² Goslinga placed the organizers of the Bethel church asylum on "thin ice," since they decided that this family's needs were more important than obeying the law. However, in closing, the author wondered whether the Dutch government provoked this protest by her parsimonious use of the 2012 children's pardon. Thus, not only the Bethel church asylum is questioned, but the government is as well. This article was the only *Trouw* article that shed uncertainty on the Bethel church asylum, and it evoked a response from three other narrators during the church asylum. Two of whom were *Trouw* writers, one of whom was an *NRC Handelsblad* writer. All three responses disputed Goslinga's claims.

The first of these responses came from Peter-Ben Smit, theologian and Catholic dean of the diocese in Haarlem. As opposed to Goslinga, Smit believed the church did not undermine the state. Rather, that she helped the state function better:

The church asylum helps the rule of law function properly. The churches, by protesting, are saving people's trust in the rule of law...They reveal that justice is not a machine. They point out that not every application of the law is moral and just. Because at the end of the day, it is made and carried out by humans. Because religion can be an important voice against a failing state. [Churches] show the Dutch state what her responsibility is: to ensure the just and moral application of the law. They are giving the state an opportunity to do an even better job by reviewing a decision that she has made. Churches will call this conversion, progressive insight is the political term...[Churches] prevent the state from undermining itself as a reliable constitutional state through a morally untenable application of the law. Churches are not undermining trust in the rule of law, they are saving it.⁵³

Smit characterized the church as a hero who was showing the state how she can better carry out her role. Smit showed here that he believes churches to be vital actors in society, who can stand up to the state when she is failing to carry out the rule of law. Additionally, the church is helping the state not to undermine itself by pointing out injustice. Smit does focus primarily on the moral

⁵² This is what is referred to as *discretionaire bevoegdheid* in Dutch and was a focal point of discussion during the era of the children's pardon.

⁵³ Source: Smit, P-B (November 15, 2018). Met het kerkasiel redt de kerk de rechtstaat juist. *Trouw, deVerdieping*.

obligation of both the church and the state, which could indicate that Smit believes churches fulfill the role of society's moral watchmen.

The two other narrators who responded, De Reuver and van de Sande, pose similar ideas. In an NRC response, de Reuver thinks that the church is actually strengthening the democratic state by exposing the faults in existing law. And that, when the church is given the opportunity to fix problems, trust in the rule of law will actually be increased instead of weakened. In a *Trouw* article, van de Sande disagreed with Goslinga on the first two points, firstly claiming that protest is a vital part of a democracy. Secondly, he believed emotions do play a role, but that even from a rational point of view, people can still argue that the family should stay in The Netherlands after having lived there for so long. That, even when one is not and never has been confronted with deportation, (s)he would find it immoral to deport 'Dutchified' children. Van de Sande did not comment on Goslinga's last point on the increased arbitrariness.

A few other characterizations were made of the church as enhancing the state. Rikko Voorberg – spokesman for an interdenominational coalition – stated in the beginning of the Bethel church asylum that churches did not want to stall government policy. Instead, they “will keep asking the government to speak to us to come to a solution that works for all parties.”⁵⁴ Only two days after Voorberg was quoted saying that the church will keep opening up a dialogue, pastor Dijkstra proclaimed in *Trouw* that the church is not walking all over the government, but that she is, in fact, serving her. “I think [the government] falls short in her aid to foreigners,” pastor Dijkstra says. “The church is showing her how it can be done.” Lastly, Bram van Oijk, a Groenlinks politician, was quoted in an ND narrative that was published after the CDA had publicly changed its position on the children's pardon. The majority of the narrative revolved around the political debate and was not focused on the Bethel church asylum. Toward the end of the narrative, however, Van Oijk stated that “In our society it pays to oppose injustice. I am happy with such a democracy.”⁵⁵ Here, he was referring to the Bethel church asylum. Van Oijk was the only politician that appeared in the article's narrative who had spoken about the church. The significance of Van Oijk's contribution lay in the fact that he is not tied to a religious party, but that he still commended the Bethel church asylum for its public stance. By including these types of quotes, newspapers posit the church as meaningful and able to fill in the gaps the government leaves behind, not as an actor that operates on the fringes of society. The three newspapers that portrayed the church's act as an enhancement of the state were mostly religious newspapers and *Trouw*.

⁵⁴ Voorberg, Rikko in: Bakker, Michiel (October 27, 2018). IND bezocht Armeens gezin in kerk Katwijk, *Reformatorisch Dagblad, Regio*, pg. 11.

⁵⁵ Oijk, Bram van in: Mouissie, Sjoerd (January 31, 2019). Harbers kan goed uit de voeten met asielakkoord, *Nederlands Dagblad*, pg. 3.

Thus, in regard to the church's resistance to the state, it seems that none of the actors take issue with the church's reason for organizing the Bethel church asylum, namely to help an immigrant family. The way in which the church went about it, however, was criticized. Some denounced the use of a continual service for political means. Such acts can, for instance, undermine the rule of law and take away the holy element of a worship service. Others, in turn, defended the Bethel church asylum by pointing out that this form of protest can actually enhance the state. They claim that it is important to point out where the government falls short, as it will ultimately strengthen the rule of law instead of weakening it. According to this perspective, the church is allowed to play that role of calling out the government for its shortcomings, even if it potentially threatens the relationship between church and state. A limited number of narratives included a description of the church's act as civil disobedient. Among these narratives, there was no clear answer to the question of whether the Bethel church asylum could be considered an act of civil disobedience. Some felt that the use of a continual service was the way in which the church broke the law, while others said this was simply the church making smart use of existing legislature to legalize the Bethel church asylum.

4.1.4 The church's influence on the CDA and the CP

During the Bethel church asylum, every newspaper – besides the RD – described the church as having influenced the CDA. The extent to which the church exerted influence differed per newspaper, but at the very least the church was characterized as sparking some sort of reaction within the CDA. However, no newspaper explicitly stated that they believed the church was responsible for the outcome of the children's pardon. Lastly, some newspapers portrayed the church as (re)igniting the public debate on the children's pardon by organizing the Bethel church asylum.

The relationship between the church and the CDA became a well-covered theme in the last week of the Bethel church asylum, as newspapers were trying to find out why the CDA had changed its stance on the children's pardon. Often, the church was characterized as having had an influence on CDA's constituency, because many CDA voters supported the Bethel church asylum. Newspapers wrote that, as the Bethel church asylum continued onward, many of its constituents started criticizing the national delegation of the CDA. One of the more concrete attempts to reconstruct what happened, was done by NRC writer Floor Boon. On January 30, 2019, she described it as follows:

The mailbox of the House of Representatives is filled of questions about the children's pardon. The supporters want to know: why is a more relaxed stance not possible? MPs entering the country are also always confronted with the subject. Why are you being so harsh, they hear. Can't you show some humanity?⁵⁶

In that narrative, Boon tells the story of how the CDA's turn, although it might have come as a surprise to many, had been brewing behind the scenes for a little while. She proposed that the turn emanated from a growing resistance among local party members and constituents, who felt inclined to rekindle the discussion on the children's pardon after the day of the Christian Democracy on November 24, 2018. Pieter Jan Dijkman, director of CDA's Scientific Institute, was one of the speakers that day. During his speech, he recounted the story of Catharina of Siena:

She asks God why He created people with a deficiency. One lacks bread, the other love. Another is missing a leg. Dijkman: „The story goes that Catharina van Siena then had a vision, in which God told her that He had done that deliberately. That then people are forced to love and care for each other. To be responsible for one another. That, exactly that, is Christian democracy. Knowing that you are imperfect, and then wanting to accept and help one another."⁵⁷

Afterward, CDA voters set up communication channels and came up with the idea to hand in a resolution on the children's pardon during the party's next convection, taking place on February 9, 2019. According to Boon, these voters felt supported by the PCN publicly rallying behind the Bethel church asylum, since many CDA members were involved with and sympathetic toward the Bethel church asylum. René de Reuver was then described as having initiated talks right before Christmas with Sybrand Buma, who was parliamentary leader of the CDA at the time, and Van Toorenburg, which on the one hand shows that the organizers of the church asylum were in a powerful enough position to speak with CDA's national delegates, and on the other hand that the party's top members were open to speaking with them. It also paints de Reuver as a political actor. According to Boon, this talk did not convince the CDA to turn, as they were bound by the coalition agreement. Less than a month later, however, CDA's national leadership suddenly announced that they had turned. Boon never explicitly stated that the church was responsible for the CDA's political shift, but the church was put forward multiple times by Boon as part of her reconstruction.

⁵⁶ Source: Boon, F. (January 30, 2019). Opeens mocht het weer over het pardon gaan; Kinderpardon. *NRC Handelsblad, In bet nieuws*, pg. 6.

⁵⁷ Source: Boon, F. (January 30, 2019). Opeens mocht het weer over het pardon gaan; Kinderpardon. *NRC Handelsblad, In bet nieuws*, pg. 6.

This implicitly indicates that the Bethel church asylum had an influential in the CDA's political shift.

A week earlier, Boon had published a narrative that not only revealed the relationship between the church and the CDA, but also how the Bethel church asylum could influence whether people voted for the CDA or the CU.

Insiders say that this issue in particular plays a role for the CDA. The ChristenUnie has supported this church asylum from the start. The ecclesiastical and somewhat more left-wing supporters of the CDA can therefore more easily get the idea that it is better to turn to the ChristenUnie for a humane asylum policy. That party immediately called the plan of CDA and D66 "good news". Its own supporters will be happy if the pardon relaxes."⁵⁸

The prospect of losing voters could, therefore, also be seen as a reason why the CDA changed its stance on the children's pardon. Again, the Bethel church asylum is credited with having indirectly influenced the CDA. This latter narrative was published on NRC's frontpage. Other newspapers also attempted to explain what had happened to the CDA. De Volkskrant's writer Raoul du Pré, for instance, did not explicitly mention the Bethel church asylum but rather churches in general as having impacted the CDA's turn.

The churches, the concerned departments, the prominent CDA'ers: they got their own faction and then a majority in the House of Representatives moving."⁵⁹

Here, churches were mentioned as having been partially responsible for CDA's political shift. It is not clear, however, who the narrator refers to as he mentions churches. While the relationship between the CDA and the church was not specifically mentioned in the RD, one RD narrator did criticize the Christian parties. He accused them of obsessing over their identity while forgetting what matters most, leaving him wondering whether "[p]erhaps Christian politicians are breaking their holy agreement."⁶⁰ This indicates that RD narrator de Jonge has this understanding that parliamentary members of one of the three Christian parties are supposed to uphold Christian beliefs through their holy agreement, and that they were breaking that agreement by not acting on behalf of the Tamrazyan family. A number of CDA politicians did, however, visit the Bethel

⁵⁸ Source: Boon, F. (January 21, 2019). Crisis dreigt door draai van het CDA. *NRC Handelsblad, Voorpagina*, pg. 1.

⁵⁹ Source: Pré, R. Du (January 31, 2019). Pardon met vragen. *De Volkskrant, Opinie en Debate*, pg. 21.

⁶⁰ Jonge, P. L. de (November 3, 2018). Door Haagse estafettedienst spreekt de kerk met recht, *Reformatorisch Dagblad, Forum*, pg. 16.

church asylum, most notably Madeleine van Toorenborg, who was the CDA prominent that would later take the stand in the parliamentary debate to explain the CDA's turn.

In the last week of the Bethel church asylum, ND published four narratives that described the role of the church in the CDA's shift as big, impactful, and a breakthrough. Not only some of the prominent organizers of the Bethel church asylum, like René de Reuver and Rein Willems, were quoted saying these things, ND-writer Gerard Beverdam also credited the church with an impactful role on the shift within the CDA. In his opinion piece, he stated that "It is indeed the situation of Hayarpi that seems to have served as a breakthrough in the CDA."⁶¹ Visits from Ruth Peetom and Rutger Ploum (then former and future CDA leaders) to the Bethel church asylum were mentioned as having been meaningful. Nonetheless, Beverdam stated that the CDA never claimed publicly that their political shift was caused by the Bethel church asylum. Instead, it was a result of a combination of factors: concerns from constituents, the European Court of Justice decision that stipulated that people were not to be deported while still awaiting appeals, and the report from 38 professors on the lasting harmful effects of deportation on asylum children.⁶² This is how van Toorenborg defended the CDA's shift during the parliamentary debate.

Lastly, in *Trouw*, the relationship between the church and the CDA was not put in the forefront as such. Only once did a *Trouw* writer focus on this relationship. Rein Willems, one of the Bethel church asylum's organizers, was largely credited for his involvement in the CDA's political shift by *Trouw* writers Brandsma and Zuidervaart. He was described as a "spider in the web of churches in The Hague"⁶³ and deemed important for his close contact with prominent members of the national fraction of the CDA. Generally, *Trouw*'s focus lay more on how the Bethel church asylum influenced the public discussion on the children's pardon. For example, *Trouw* writer Nico de Fijter wrote the following:

[This] church asylum has lit the fire under the children's pardon debate. And it showed that a wider interpretation of the children's pardon is widely supported among churches...Because the church asylum for the Tamrazyan family kept going and going, there was no chance for the attention to this issue to falter. Media, also international media, are continually interested in the story. So, the attention remained high...The initiators of the church asylum also kept finding new ways to keep their message relevant.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Beverdam, Gerard (January 26, 2019). Hayarpi als breekijzer in het CDA, *Nederlands Dagblad, Opinie*, pg. 15.

⁶² Beverdam, Gerard & Sloot, Eduard (January 26, 2019). CDA-prominenten voerden druk op over kinderpardon, *Nederlands Dagblad*, pg. 1.

⁶³ Source: Brandsma, J. & Zuidervaart, B. (January 22, 2019). Prominenten: Gebrek aan compassie CDA-fractie. *Touw, deVerdieping*.

⁶⁴ Source: Fijter, N. de (January 20, 2019). De kerkactie hield druk op het CDA. *Touw, deVerdieping*.

The title of de Fijter's narrative is "The church asylum kept pressuring the CDA," which shows that the narrator regarded the Bethel church asylum as influencing the public debate on the children's pardon, which subsequently influenced the CDA. ND mentioned the church's influence on the public debate as well on two separate occasions. ND writer Gerald Bruins doubted whether the Bethel church asylum's influence on the media could backfire instead of helping the Tamrazyan family. Bruins thought it was unlikely that Mark Harbers would cave to media pressure, especially after conceding to Lili and Howick. "The church shelter," Bruins stated, "can no longer be seen as silent diplomacy." The overall tone of his narrative was one of skepticism toward the church asylum's organization.⁶⁵ Hilbert Meijer also stated that the Bethel church asylum ensured that the debate on the children's pardon continued onward, but she did not question it like Bruins did.⁶⁶ No other newspaper explicitly mentioned the Bethel church asylum's impact on the public debate.

None of the newspapers ever stated that the church was responsible for the outcome of the children's pardon, but most did imply that the church was able to start a movement within the CDA. And it was this movement within the CDA that, according to these results, ultimately led to a change in the CDA's stance on the children's pardon. As it was a breach of the coalition agreement, the leading coalition came together and, behind closed doors, came to a new agreement on the children's pardon. This new agreement was then presented and defended during a special parliamentary debate on the children's pardon. Thus, according to these results from the public sphere, the Bethel church asylum was able to influence the CDA, whether through the public debate or on CDA members directly, which then resulted in a change in public policy.

4.1.5 A Dutch Christian past and individual religion

Some important characterizations of the church that do not fit within the previous four themes will be shortly presented here. These findings only stem from the RD, the ND, and Trouw. They touch on topics that will be important for the discussion later on, like The Netherlands' Christian past and the role religion can play for individuals.

In 4.1.3, where I presented the church's challenge to the state, I had included the opinion piece of pastor Arnold Huijgen. He had explained why he decided against involving himself in the Bethel church asylum. Matthijs Haak, a preacher in Dordrecht, had his opinion piece published in ND just two days after Huijgen's piece. He tried showing that the church asylum was not merely about the government and church's rights and obligations, but that it went deeper than that. Just

⁶⁵ Bruins, Gerald (November 17, 2018). Exit-strategy church asylum Bethel chapel?, *Nederlands Dagblad, Nederland*, pg. 4.

⁶⁶ Meijer, Hilbert (January 17, 2019). Kerk heeft geen 'plan B' voor kerkasiel, *Nederlands Dagblad, Geloof*, pg. 6.

like Huijgen, Haak performed a thought experiment, but instead of reflecting on the government's potential for thwarting the church, Haak posed the question of what would happen if an Islamic mosque had housed an Islamic family. By doing so, the author wanted to show that Christian churches enjoy a special position within Dutch society due to The Netherlands' Christian past, despite existing laws that are meant to prevent such differences in societal standings.

“Believers in our country have the same rights. After all, we are a free, multi-religious society... But some believers apparently have slightly more rights than other believers. A church can do what a mosque cannot do. In inciting situations - such as in the church shelter - we apparently easily revert back to the old, familiar Dutch order. In that order the church was an important social player. A player who mattered. That order is still somewhere in our collective memory. Nonetheless, The Netherlands really is post-Christian and multi-religious... [The church] cannot act - as is perhaps unconsciously happening in the church shelter now - as if she has an edge over others. Because that way the church, unconsciously, confirms the image that many Dutch people have: the church belongs to our (Christian) past. That idea is certainly not good for the credibility of the church. If only because our (Christian) past is dying out at a rapid pace.”⁶⁷

Haak points out something interesting, namely that The Netherlands enjoys a familiar Christian past, which favors Christian churches over mosques. Also, it is interesting to note that Haak claimed that the church's attitude harmed the image of the church, as the church tries to draw power and influence from her former societal standing, with the emphasis on former. This act of offering church asylum in the form of a continual service does not fit within a pluralistic post-Christian society, according to Haak. The two accounts of Haak and Huijgen provide us with an interesting notion. Overall, there seemed to be a lack of criticism toward the church asylum, or rather, the criticism was overshadowed by positive and encouraging messages. It is reasonable to assume that if the government or a mosque did what the church did, that the public response would be much different, more critical.

There were some churches, however, that did not want to get involved. The church in Katwijk, where the Tamrazyan family had been staying before moving to the Bethel church, had not wanted to organize the continual service. Also, the Catholic church had decided early on in the Bethel church asylum to stay neutral in the matter. In a Trouw narrative, Maaïke van Houten stated the following:

⁶⁷ Haak, Matthijs (December 14, 2018). Wat nu als moskee asiel biedt?, *Nederlands Dagblad, Opinie*, pg. 12-13.

The reformed church in Katwijk and the 25 churches that had helped her [to provide shelter to the Tamrayan family] thought [a continual service] was too political of a tool, with which they would have gone against the government... [so] the family moved to the Bethel church...René de Reuver asked the Catholic Bishop De Korte to be a part of the church asylum, but the Catholic Church did not want to interfere with the relationship between church, state and judiciary power.⁶⁸

The Catholic church specifically was hardly mentioned in the public sphere. Their clear statement in the beginning of the Bethel church asylum might be the reason why. This does show, however, that despite there being a lot of support for the church's act, many religious actors also did not want to get involved with the Bethel church service. This does show the diversity of the Dutch religious landscape, even within the Christian churches. *Trouw* was the only newspaper to comment on this.

Unexpectedly, only the religious newspapers focused on the role that religion can play in the lives of individuals. RD reported on an Armenian mother who, after hearing that a political compromise had been made on the children's pardon, could not yet be content with the news. She wanted to see her family's verdict in black and white. In her story, it was not the church but her religion that played an important role in her life and her ability to cope with her situation. In another narrative, author Clasina van der Heuvel wrote a personal account of Hayarpi's experiences as a girl who writes poetry during her stay at the Bethel church. Hayarpi described the big and positive role religion has played in her life and stated that churches have done a lot for her family; she did not elaborate on this latter point. Lastly, author Peter-Ben Smit, evidently a Christian, said that religious services should be a more central element in people's daily lives as was the case in the Bethel church asylum. He believes that the church asylum was achieving much more than a political goal and some pr; it was showing people what god's kingdom looks like.⁶⁹

In conclusion, these findings reflect mostly the topics that were deemed important in the religious newspapers as opposed to newspapers in general. I showed that some narrators pointed toward a Dutch Christian past as a way of explaining the lack of criticism for the church's act. I also included some religious actors that did not want to get involved with the Bethel church asylum, because they did not want to interfere with the relationship between church and state. Lastly, I included some of the ways in which religion can have an impact on an individual level. I cannot state that this means that non-religious newspapers are not concerned with these matters,

⁶⁸ Haak, Matthijs (December 14, 2018). Wat nu als moskee asiel biedt?, *Nederlands Dagblad, Opinie*, pg. 12-13.

⁶⁹ Smit, Peter-Ben (November 20, 2018). Een altijddurende dienst, dát is pas echt liturgie, *Nederlands Dagblad, Opinie*, pg. 12.

as there were only a few narratives that included these descriptions. It is, however, noteworthy that only religious newspapers, as well as *Trouw*, focused on this.

4.1.6 Comparisons between newspapers

During the Bethel Church case, the newspaper that published the largest number of articles on the Bethel church asylum was *Trouw*, which published 75 articles (27,73% of the total); RD produced the smallest number with 41 articles (13,67% of the total). See Table 3 for a full overview of quantitative descriptives of the newspaper articles. In absolute numbers, *Trouw* and RD also respectively produced the largest (N=57) and smallest (N=27) number of articles containing Labov's narrative structure. On average, about 80% of all articles contained a narrative. Interesting to note is that non-religious newspapers published articles with the needed elements of narrative in the 80th percentile, ranging between 80,3% (*Trouw*) and 85,1% (NRC). Religious newspapers scored somewhat lower, as 77,1% of ND's articles and 77,6% of RD's articles were formatted as narratives. Although it is just a small difference, these findings do imply that religious newspapers

Table 4

Quantitative descriptives of newspaper articles

	Newspapers									
	Non-religious						Religious			
	<i>Volkskrant</i>		<i>Trouw</i>		NRC		<i>Reform. Dagblad</i>		<i>Nederl. Dagblad</i>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
General characteristics										
Number of articles*	45	17,58	71	27,73	47	18,36	35	13,67	58	22,66
Article contains story**	37	82,22	57	80,28	40	85,11	27	77,14	45	77,59
Article contains no story	8	17,78	14	19,72	7	14,89	8	22,86	13	22,41
Role given to church										
Prominent***	4	10,81	18	31,58	6	15,00	8	29,63	24	53,33
Small	6	16,22	8	14,04	3	07,50	3	11,11	6	13,33
None	27	72,97	31	54,39	31	77,50	16	59,26	15	33,33
Meaning given to church's act										
Positive****	3	30,00	18	69,23	5	55,56	3	27,27	19	63,33
Negative	1	10,00	1	03,85	0	00,00	0	00,00	4	13,33
Both	2	20,00	3	11,54	1	11,11	3	27,27	2	06,67
None	4	40,00	4	15,38	3	33,33	5	45,45	5	16,67

Note. Some of the newspapers mentioned in this table are abbreviated for lack of space. Their full names are: De Volkskrant, *Trouw*, NRC Handelsblad, Reformatorisch Dagblad and Nederlands Dagblad.

* The percentages reflect the number of articles published by a specific newspaper divided by the total number of articles published by all newspapers.

** The percentages reflect the number of articles that contain a/no story divided by the number of articles published by that specific newspaper. The elements of story used reflect Labov's (1972) structure of narrative.

*** The percentages reflect the type of role given to the church divided by the total number of roles given to the church by that specific newspaper. The church had a prominent role in the story when it was (one of) the main character(s).

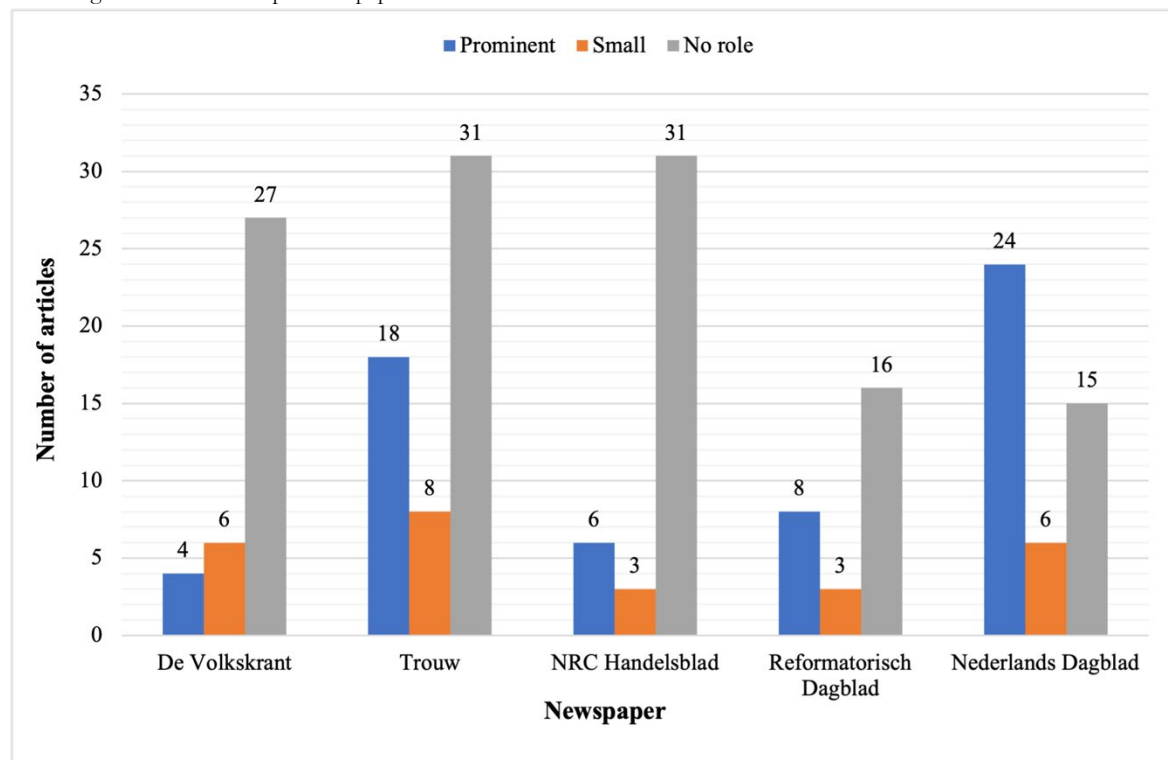
**** The percentages reflect the type of meaning given to the church's act divided by the total number of articles published by that newspaper in which the church has been given a small or prominent role. When adding up all the meanings per newspaper, the total adds up to the same amount when one adds the prominent and small roles. A positive meaning was given to the church's act when the narrator commended the church, only mentioned positive consequences of the act or when the act was not problematized.

tend to slightly prefer using other structures to relay information to their readers. Out of the articles that contained the structure of a narrative (N=208), the church was given a role about 40% of the time. ND gave the church a role in almost two-thirds of their articles, the most out of any newspaper. NRC, closely followed by Volkskrant, gave the church the least amount of attention, as only 21% of their articles included the church as a character. A similar ratio can be distinguished when only taking into account the number of times the church was given a prominent role in the narrative. ND did so in almost 55% of their articles, and while NRC gave the church a prominent role significantly less often (14,0%), De Volkskrant only did it in 10,8% of their articles. Interestingly, Trouw gave the church a role more often than RD, respectively 45,6% and 40,7% of the time. This could be explained by the fact that Trouw, now a left-leaning newspaper for Dutch intellectuals, was founded by a group of protestants during World War II (Prenger, 2018). In absolute terms, the non-religious newspapers published about the same number of narratives without a role for the church, ranging between 27 (De Volkskrant) and 33 (NRC); see Figure 3. The two religious newspapers each published significantly less narratives in which the church did not have a role, but this could be explained by the fact that religious newspapers published less articles overall.

The meaning given to the church’s act refers to the way in which newspapers interpreted the Bethel church asylum (see Figure 4). Interestingly, there were few newspapers that reported

Figure 3

Role assigned to the church per newspaper



negatively on the church's act. Only six out of the 208 narratives published were sole negative interpretations of the role of the church. Moreover, NRC and RD published no narrative that solely interpreted the church's act negatively. Every newspaper did publish at least one narrative discussing both the positive and negative aspects of the Bethel church asylum. Almost a third (30,2%) of narratives characterized the church without attaching any meaning to the Bethel church asylum. RD did so the most, as almost half (45,4%) of their articles that characterized the church lacked an interpretation. They were closely followed by De Volkskrant (40%). Two newspapers interpreted the church's act overwhelmingly positive, namely Trouw and ND, each having published almost 20 articles that solely commended the church's role. This could be explained by Trouw's Protestant heritage and ND's readers being mostly Protestant (Prenger, 2018).

Generally, newspapers overlap in regard to the most recurring characters. Many characters were mentioned during the Bethel Church case, some of whom were frequently recurring and others who appeared only once (see Table 4). Overall, the children who had applied to be considered for the children's pardon, referred to as CP children, appeared most frequently. In three newspapers – Volkskrant, NRC, and Nederlands Dagblad – CP children can be considered the main characters as the most frequently recurring character. The four political parties that were part of the cabinet during the Bethel church case – VVD, CDA, D66, and CU – were prominent characters in all newspapers. In three newspapers – Trouw, RD and ND – the church was one of

Figure 4
Meaning given to the church per newspaper

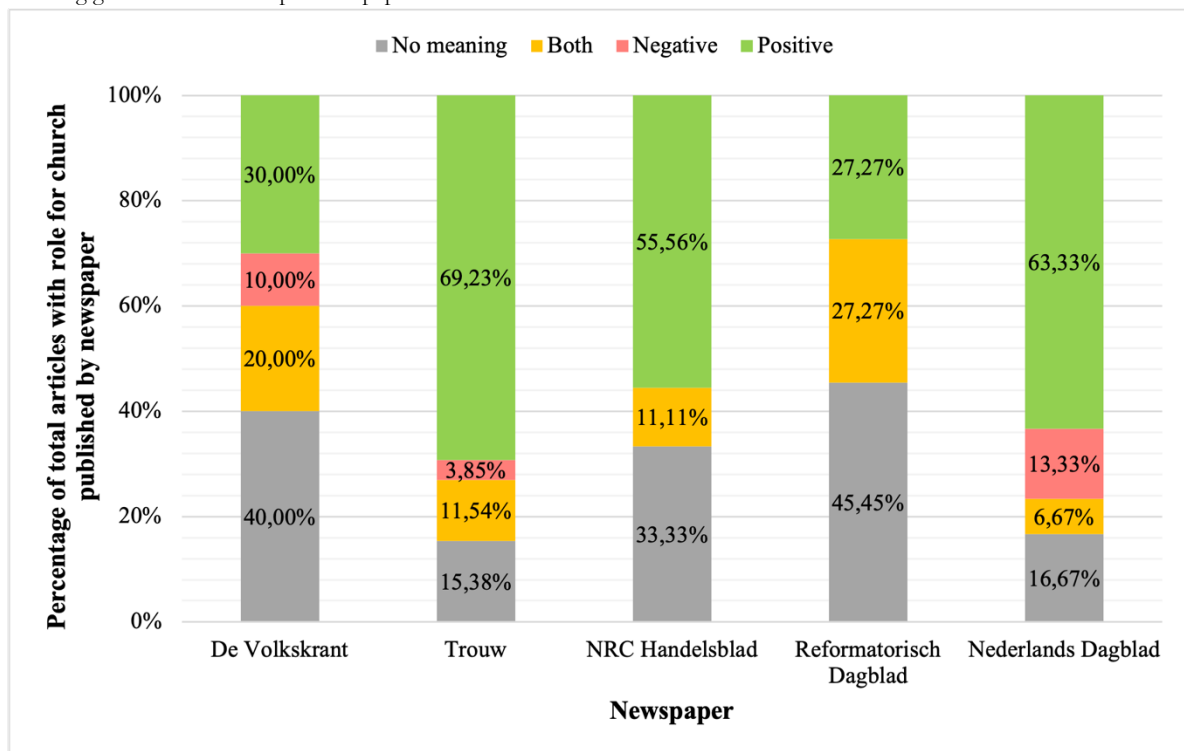


Table 4

Most frequently recurring characters in narratives (in percentages)

<i>Volkskrant</i> (N= 37)		<i>Trouw</i> (N= 57)		<i>NRC</i> (N= 40)		<i>Ref. Dag.</i> (N= 27)		<i>Ned. Dag.</i> (N= 45)	
	%		%		%		%		%
CP Children	65	Mark Harbers	47	CP Children	65	CDA	67	CP Children	56
CDA	65	CP Children	46	CDA	53	CU	59	Mark Harbers	53
Mark Harbers	59	Tamrazyan family	39	CU	53	CP Children	59	Tamrazyan family	49
CU	57	Cabinet	37	Tim Hofman	43	VVD	52	Church	47
D66	51	CDA	35	Lili & Howick	43	Cabinet	52	Government	42
VVD	51	IND	33	D66	38	Mark Harbers	48	CU	38
Lili & Howick	43	VVD	33	Cabinet	35	D66	44	VVD	33
Cabinet	43	Church	32	VVD	33	IND	37	Cabinet	31
IND	41	CU	28	Klaas Dijkhoff	30	Tamrazyan family	33	CDA	29
Klaas Dijkhoff	38	Lili & Howick	25	Mark Harbers*	30	Church**	33	Asylum seekers	29

Note. The church has been bolded to emphasize its standing.

* Klaas Dijkhoff, Mark Harbers, and IND all appeared in 30% of NRC's narratives. The IND is not listed above due to the table showing only 10 characters. There is no reason why IND was left out as opposed to Klaas Dijkhoff or Mark Harbers other than the fact that the data on characters was shown in this order.

** The Tamrazyan family, the church, and the judge all appeared in 33% of Reformatoisch Dagblad's narratives. The judge is not listed above due to the table showing only 10 characters. There is no reason why the judge was left out as opposed to the Tamrazyan family or the church other than the fact that the data on characters was shown in this order.

the top ten most recurring characters. In *Trouw* and *RD*, the church appeared in about a third of the narratives, while the church appeared in almost half of *ND*'s narratives. This again indicates that although *Trouw* can be considered a non-religious newspaper, it still seems to hold onto its religious beginnings. In *De Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad*, the church appeared respectively in 21,6% and 12,5% of its narratives. When we simply look at the number of occurrences of the church in narratives, it would appear as though specifically *NRC Handelsblad* did not consider the role of the church in their coverage. However, when including the meaning given to the church in these narratives (See Figure 4), it becomes apparent that *NRC Handelsblad* interpreted the church's role more often than even the *RD*.

The only individual that was a top ten recurring character in every newspaper was Mark Harbers, the then minister of asylum affairs and the one with the power to use his discretion for immigrant families. Almost always, the Tamrazyan family was characterized as characters living in the Bethel Church. These instances were not recorded as characterizations of the church, nor were they interpreted as the church being given a role in that narrative, as the Bethel church was simply used as a contextual element.

As is evident, there is some overlap can be found between the five newspapers, but the results from this public sphere also showed that there were many different opinions about the Bethel church asylum case. In this next part, I shortly delve into how individual newspapers interpreted the church, after which I will group newspapers by their label ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ to show differences between these two main groups. The results will be shown both through visuals, like charts and tables, and text.

Overall, *De Volkskrant*’s coverage of the church during the Bethel Church asylum was rather limited, with the church appearing only in about 25% of the narratives and having a prominent role in 10% of them. The way in which the newspaper attached meaning to the church and the Bethel Church asylum was consistently indirect, quoting key figures rather than writing anything that would indicate their stance on the matter. Perhaps the newspaper wanted to refrain from stating their position to uphold neutrality.

The quotations they included, however, did reveal some characterizations of the church. In a positive sense, the church was described as a helper of those in need, and that the asylum was the way in which the institution put charity into practice. Some narratives revealed a steady base of support for the act. One narrator even attributed the CDA’s political shift to the church alongside CDA-constitutions, implying that it had created movement within CDA voters. In a negative sense, the church asylum was described as showing an oversimplified version of asylum affairs and as abusing a loophole in the law.

Trouw portrayed mostly a positive image of the church’s role in the Bethel church case. Both in explicit and implicit terms, the newspaper provided her readers with almost exclusively positive interpretations of the (organizers of the) Bethel church asylum by focusing on the ways in which the church either reignited or added something new to the public debate on the children’s pardon. Some writers focused on the newspaper’s role in creating community among its volunteers. Interestingly, the newspaper’s editorial board explicitly stated their position within the debate on whether the church was in the right by organizing the church asylum by publishing an opinion piece on October 31, 2018, just a few days after the continual service had commenced.

The church, when confronted with people in need, obeys the commandment to love. That is what one can expect from a church. In that light, it makes sense that the church’s national leadership supports the act in The Hague. The PCN has touched a sensitive spot in the government’s asylum procedures, as these procedures can drag on for years. That problem has

not been solved by the children's pardon. And something needs to happen. That is not up to the church, but it is up to the government. She should feel addressed by the continual service.⁷⁰

In the months that followed that editorial opinion piece, the newspaper hardly strayed far from their initial support. Only one writer, Hans Goslinga, wrote very negatively about the church. However, in doing so, he also questioned whether the government had brought this protest unto themselves. Those who responded to Goslinga's commentary opposed him.

Trouw's narrators conveyed many different interpretations of the church asylum, the most out of any newspaper. It is possible to group some of the interpretations together, like the church as a protector or savior (of people in need, of the law, of the state), as an actor that stands up in the face of injustice or immorality and creates community, but also as a defiant actor, one that improperly uses the law and, as Goslinga stated, one that even undermines trust in the rule of law. Important to note was the Catholic Church's unwillingness to partake in the church asylum, claiming that it did not want to interfere with the relationship between church, state, and judicial power. Perhaps the difference between the PCN's support and the Catholic church's abstinence reflects the historical position of these two churches in The Netherlands.

NRC Handelsblad, despite producing one of the fewest number of narratives out of the newspapers, generated a number of interpretations of the church, as well as the church asylum. There was a clear focus within their storytelling on the relationship between church and state, which was mostly centered around the relationship between the church asylum and CDA constituents. None of the interpretations of the church were negative; in actuality, they were, especially for a newspaper like NRC Handelsblad, overwhelmingly positive. NRC writers attributed the political shift within the CDA to the church asylum, pointing to the strong ties to CDA constituents as a vital reason why. The church was characterized as an informed, deliberative, peaceful actor. And, lastly, the church asylum was described by writer Floor Boon as an act of civil disobedience, a statement that generally garnered little support in the public sphere.

There are a few interesting things to note on RD's coverage of the Bethel church asylum. I expected the newspaper to be heavily invested in the story, to offer its opinion on the matter and write extensive pieces on how the story was being played out. Instead, RD published fewer articles than any other newspaper. This might be because RD publishes less in general compared to the other four newspapers, but it does beg the question of why the newspaper abstained from stating their position on the matter. Perhaps they did not want to meddle in the relationship between church

⁷⁰ Source: Trouw senior staff (October 31, 2018). Kerkasiel dwingt politiek tot actie. *Trouw, deVerdieping*.

and state, as the Catholic bishop had stated in defense of the Catholic Church's lack of involvement in the matter.

In many narratives, instead of providing the reader with clear interpretations, RD posed questions about the church's legitimate use of church asylum without either offering an answer or presenting different takes on the matter. One perspective showed a church that respects and is obedient toward the government, while challenging her when she fails to help those in need. So, while churches value the rule of law, biblical rules prevail. The other perspective showed a church that was wrong to use the church asylum as a political instrument to challenge the government, even though it is questionable whether the freedom of religion allows for it.

Lastly, ND produced quite an extensive number of narratives on the Bethel church asylum. Overall, the church was frequently given a prominent role in the storylines, mostly being portrayed in a positive light. When grouping some of the church's characterizations, it becomes apparent that the church was described as an impactful actor that had a legitimate reason to stand up to the government and to oppose injustice. In the end, voicing concerns did pay off for the church, as it was reportedly able to have an impact on the CDA's political shift. It was insinuated that this could indicate that the church enjoys a special position within Dutch society. That, when the church feels the need is high, it is able to stand up to the government without being reprimanded either by the government or the public in general.

However, there were ND writers who criticized the church. Some believed the church was misusing the law and the tolerant stance of the government. Only in the case of a life and death situation should the church be able to hold church asylum, which was not the case here. ND reader and preacher Matthijs Haak also believed the church was using its former prominent social stance as a tool to have influence, but that it needed to realize that it no longer occupied that space. Lastly, ND reader Jochem Pleijsier wrote that the church was arbitrarily using civil disobedience by organizing this church asylum. This was opposed by René de Reuver, who stated that the church asylum was not an act of civil disobedience.

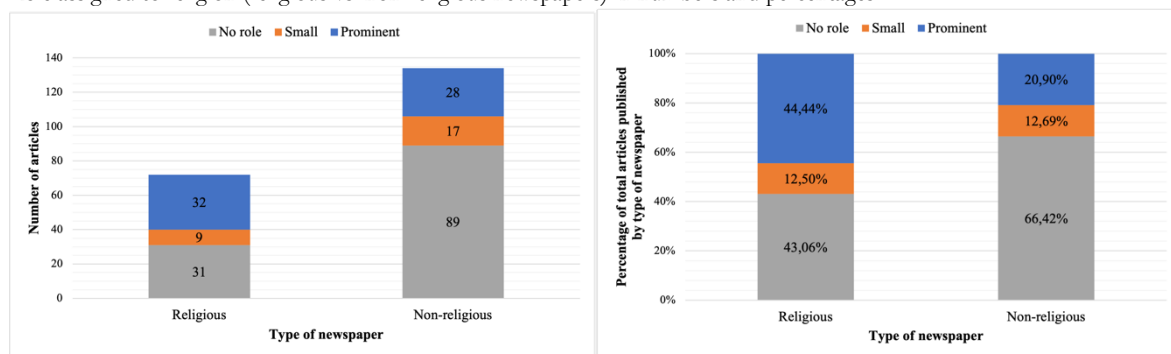
When differentiating religious from non-religious newspapers, some interesting trends become apparent. The two religious newspapers – RD and ND – gave the church a role in 41 narratives, while the three non-religious newspapers – De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad and Trouw – gave the church a role in 45 narratives (see Figure 5). When looking at the same finding in percentages, it becomes apparent that the church had a role in more than half (56,94%) of the narratives that religious newspapers published versus only about one third (33,59%) of the narratives that non-religious newspapers published. From this, it is safe to assume that religious newspapers gave the

church a bigger role than non-religious newspapers did, which is in line with expectations.

As mentioned earlier, Trouw and ND reported most positively on the church while RD and De Volkskrant reported the least positive – note, not negatively – on the church. NRC Handelsblad fell in between these two extremes. I would have expected RD to reside on the other end of the spectrum, but perhaps the newspaper found the church to be overstepping its boundary. RD’s readers belong overwhelmingly to the reformed church in The Netherlands (Erdee Mediagroep), while ND tries to serve a more diverse public (Nederlands Dagblad). Therefore, I would have expected the RD to be more explicit in their support for the Bethel church asylum and ND to be more nuanced. Trouw has Protestant roots, so its overt support for the Bethel church asylum can be explained by their history. This shows that perhaps Trouw can only be labeled a non-religious newspaper to a certain degree, and that its Protestant roots still impact the way they report on religious matters.

Figure 5

Role assigned to religion (religious vs. non-religious newspapers) in numbers and percentages



4.1.7 Conclusions on the public sphere

The Bethel church asylum was widely supported. This message was mentioned in many articles. The media’s attention, especially internationally, was usually enunciated, but narrators also focused on the number of people who visited the Bethel church asylum, including some prominent (CDA) politicians. Only two narrators included the church as an actor that built community in their narratives. In those narratives, the church was described as having created a community amongst those who were participating in the Bethel church asylum. There was no evidence that religion was able to elicit a larger move towards societal cohesion. The Church’s traditional role of helping those in need was once again confirmed during this case. Many newspapers portrayed the church as being responsible for caring for the needy, in this case for immigrants.

There was criticism toward the Bethel church asylum, but these criticisms were vastly overshadowed by positive remarks on the church asylum. Generally, narrators argued from one of two perspective. They either focused on the legal aspect of the Bethel church asylum, arguing that

it was debatable whether the church asylum was legal. Or they focused on the moral aspect of the Bethel church asylum, claiming that the children's pardon was unjust and that the church was actually helping the government function better by pointing that out. Also, it is unclear from these findings whether this act was considered civil disobedient or not. There was little discussion on the matter, and those that discussed it were not in agreement. They were all unsure whether it was lawful to use a continual service to keep the police out.

Trouw and ND reported most positively on the church, while De Volkskrant and RD reported most negatively on the church. NRC found itself in between these two extremes. Although Trouw can be considered a non-religious newspaper, it did produce similar results to ND. RD was surprisingly quiet on the Bethel church asylum, producing the lowest number of narratives and the least number of interpretations of the church's role. An explanation could be that the RD did not want to delve into the relationship between church and state. This indicates that the presupposed distinction between religious and non-religious newspapers was not as helpful as I assumed, and that Trouw has sustained its Protestant roots.

What is important to note is that these five newspapers were not the only sources of information during the Bethel church asylum. Although these newspapers fulfill an important role in the Dutch public sphere, there are other newspapers, both internationally renowned newspapers from other countries and more local newspapers. We also cannot ignore the influence of new media, or social media, on today's public discussions, as well as the more traditional sources like tv and radio.

4.2 Political Sphere

The analysis of the political sphere deviates from the analysis done in the public sphere. Instead of doing a narrative analysis of the various narratives being told in the political sphere and extracting characterizations of the church from those narratives, I have performed a content analysis. I accounted for characterizations of the church, as well as how the CDA's political shift was explained to members of parliament. This chapter will be considerably shorter than the public sphere, since there is considerably less data on religion within the political sphere. That is a result in and of itself and will be a point for the Discussion and Conclusion (5).

4.2.1 Parliamentary Debate #1 (December 13, 2018)

The first parliamentary debate, that took place on the 13th of December, was not specifically aimed at the children's pardon. Rather, it was named "Aliens and Asylum policy" as it covered topics

outside of the children's pardon as well. It was the first parliamentary debate in which a politician commented on the Bethel church asylum.

The goal of the debate was to hand in motions, a lot of which pertained to the children's pardon. There were motions on expanding capacity within the IND, on easing the children's pardon, and on whether the secretary of state could use his discretion to help Nemr – the child that appeared in Hofman's documentary – and the Tamrazyan family stay. The focus of the debate after the handing in of motions was on the children affected by the children's pardon, as well as on the reason why asylum procedures were taking so long, for which the committee Van Zwol had been set up.

Religion was not mentioned once during this debate, while the church was mentioned twice. The church was first mentioned by Farid Azarkan (DENK), who handed in a motion to ask the secretary of state to use his discretion to let the Tamrazyan family stay. Azarkan (DENK) did not focus on the act of the church, but rather mentioned it as the place where the family was staying that the moment. Kathalijne Buitenweg (Groenlinks) mentioned the Bethel church shortly thereafter, while stating her support for certain motions. She said the following:

Nearby, the Bethel Church protects people by holding a 24-hour service. It shows the bankruptcy of policies aimed at evicting as many people as possible; a policy that does not sufficiently take the interests of children who have grown up in the Netherlands into account. The secretary of state puts the problem unilaterally with the parents of the children who continue to litigate. That has been pushed off too easily. For example, in the case of the Armenian Hayarpi and her family, three times the judge ruled that they were allowed to stay and three times the state appealed. So, you can also say that the State continues to litigate for too long and that the children suffer as a result. As far as GroenLinks is concerned, the time has come for all parties to jointly offer these 400 children a real solution.⁷¹

Although Buitenweg's (Groenlinks) argument focusses more on the Tamrazyan family's situation, she does imply that the church asylum is at least partially responsible for showing that deportation policies are bankrupt. She also suggests that now is the time to do something about the 400 children that are victim to the current children's pardon, hereby using the church asylum as a signal.

⁷¹ Buitenweg, Kathalijne (December 13, 2018). Vreemdelingen en asielbeleid. https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat_en_vergadering/plenaire_vergaderingen/details/activiteit?id=2019A00181

The rest of the debate is less relevant, as the debate went on to cover other topics that fall under the umbrella of immigration. At one point, however, Sietse Fritsma (PVV) handed in a motion in which he states that backdoor conversations should be avoided. He:

...declares that the uncontrollable backroom politics, in which MPs lobby the secretary of state about individual cases for the granting of residence permits, is highly undesirable and must end.⁷²

Unbeknownst to him at the time, this is exactly the way in which the leading coalition would decide on the fate of the children's pardon just a month later. Behind closed doors, unknown to the public, the leading coalition would sideline the opposition and leave the public to wonder what exactly prompted the CDA to shift politically and for the leading coalition to change the policy.

4.2.2 Parliamentary Debate #2 (January 30, 2019)

The second parliamentary took place on January 30, 2019 and was dedicated to the 'easing' of the children's pardon, which in reality meant that it was being abolished. The debate followed a week of internal and private conversations among the four parties in the leading coalition: VVD, D66, CDA and CU. Party leaders of the leading coalition's parties were not present during the debate, to the frustration of most of the opposition. The debate started with a call to include the missing party leaders, which was supported by almost all parties. However, after a short break, the debate continued without them.

The Bethel church asylum was mentioned twice. Once by Jasper van Dijk (SP) and once by Bram van Oijk (GroenLinks). In his opening statement, Van Dijk (SP) said the following:

Respect for the people of the Bethel Church. Respect for Tim Hofman, all his people and his petition. Hopefully there will now be a real residence for Nemr and Hayarpi and all those other children.⁷³

Although van Dijk did not attribute any meaning to the Bethel church asylum, the acknowledgement of the existence of the church asylum is noteworthy already. Implicitly, van Dijk (SP) paints the Bethel church and Tim Hofman as actors who did something noteworthy and

⁷² Fritsma, Sietse (December 13, 2018). Vreemdelingen en asielbeleid. https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat_en_vergadering/plenaire_vergaderingen/details/activiteit?id=2019A00181

⁷³ Van Dijk, Jasper (January 30, 2019). Versoepeling van het kinderpardon. https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat_en_vergadering/plenaire_vergaderingen/details/activiteit?id=2019A00181

impactful. Van Oijk's (GroenLinks) statement about the Bethel church was similar to van Dijk's (SP), albeit a little longer:

I am also happy for all those people who have cared about the fate of these children over the years: the people in the Bethel chapel, the pastors, the 600, 700 pastors who were constantly ready to go there to preach, all those activists and TV presenters collecting autographs, and so on. So, it pays off, it apparently helps to resist if you see injustice in society. I am glad that we have a democracy in which such voices from society permeate parliament.⁷⁴

Here, van Oijk (GroenLinks) portrays a church that, together with other activists, successfully resisted when it was faced with injustice. He also recognizes that the voice of the church, among the voices of others, was heard in parliament. Van Oijk (GroenLinks) confirms the impact that opinions formed within the public sphere can have on governmental bodies, like parliament, by stating that the church's voice permeated parliament. This was the only utterance in the debate that stated anything of the sort, as other politicians did not stray from discussing the policy itself. It is worth noting that no one refuted van Oijk's (GroenLinks) statement about the church resisting injustice.

A little further on in the debate, it was Madeleine van Toorenburg's (CDA) turn to explain the political shift CDA had undergone. She mentioned five reasons why CDA had done so: the European Court of Justice's decision on the Gnandi case (1)⁷⁵, a scientific report that concluded that the deportation of 'rooted' children was irresponsible (2), the IND's lack of capacity and waiting times of over a year (3), nuisances that can hardly be dealt with while children are still being locked away (4), and that only 6% of underage asylum seekers had left the country after having exhausted all legal remedies (5). She did not mention the Bethel church asylum. She did not mention the change in CDA's constituency, that was, according to messages from the public sphere, demanding answers as to why the party's national chapter upheld its position on the children's pardon. Van Toorenburg (CDA) used law, science, and clinks in the system to defend her party's shift. Even more so, only Azarkan (DENK) questioned van Toorenburg's (CDA) explanation as to why the CDA has shifted politically. He explained that the five reasons Van Toorenburg (CDA) mentioned had been the case just a few months prior to that debate, and that

⁷⁴ Van Oijk, Bram (January 30, 2019). Versoepeling van het kinderpardon.

https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat_en_vergadering/plenaire_vergaderingen/details/activiteit?id=2019A00181

⁷⁵ On the outcome of the Gnandi case, Progin-Theuerkauf (2019) wrote that "the Court of Justice has clarified under which conditions a negative asylum decision may be combined with a return decision and which effects the combination of the two has in the light of the right to an effective remedy" (pg. 359).

he did not understand why the CDA chose to shift now. She responded by reiterating the points she had mentioned before but with a little extra context given to them:

Very short. I said: jurisprudence of the European Court. We now see that two judges have attached consequences to this. We have recently encountered this. I also know that the secretary of state has appealed against this. It is therefore currently a point of discussion in case law. That's one. Then we have the damage report. There are people in the public balcony who have put a lot of effort into this. That's a fairly recent piece. It was important for us to take that into account. I then indicated that we see that the IND is struggling with major shortages, as a result of which means that it all takes much longer and that families even wait for a year. I have indicated that we see that nuisances are hardly dealt with. That would have its revenge, because in the end you see that very vulnerable children get stuck and the nuisances don't. We then had stakeholders around the table who indicated to us the points that we might be able to do something about it. D66 and the CDA have discussed this. We have invited people from the field to discuss this further. And then, just around Christmas, the reality check came that 94% of the people who were ultimately not allowed to stay, ultimately did not leave. That total package, these six reasons, was the moment for us to say: let's see how we can make sure it works..⁷⁶

No other politician questioned the CDA's political shift after this statement. As is evident, van Toorenburg (CDA) did not mention either the CDA's constituents or the church in her explanation. She did mention some things that were also mentioned in the public sphere, namely the damage report, which outlined the negative effects children experienced from being deported. From the media articles that I analyzed, the IND's internal struggles were mentioned sparsely in the public sphere but they did not take center stage. This could be due to the fact that my search terms focused on the children's pardon, not on the IND. The other reasons she mentioned cannot be traced back to the public debate. Furthermore, van Toorenburg (CDA) admitted that her party had conversations with stakeholders that were able to show a way out of the situation. She did not indicate who these stakeholders were, but by saying this, she admits that stakeholders were able to influence the CDA's stance on the children's pardon behind closed doors. Whether van Toorenburg (CDA) is referring to the church here or not, it does show that the way in which her party decided on the children's pardon can be traced back to the public debate.

⁷⁶ Van Toorenburg, Madeleine (January 30, 2019). Versoepeling van het kinderpardon. https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat_en_vergadering/plenaire_vergaderingen/details/activiteit?id=2019A00181

Henk Krol (50PLUS) did not overtly question the CDA's turn, but he did point out that the decisions that were being made were occurring in backrooms, and that the new policy was unclear. He was upset that the opposition had not been involved in any of the talks on the children's pardon, and that this was not a way in which the leading coalition could create support from the remaining parliamentary parties.

Lastly, some politicians also used religious arguments in their statements. These arguments did not bear any relationship to the Bethel church, but it is interesting to note that some find religious arguments useful in the political sphere. Words like *barmhartigheid* and *naastenliefde*, meaning charity and to love one another, were used by three politicians. Attje van Kuiken (PvdA) wondered whether asylum seekers would still have the right to charity if the secretary of state could no longer use his discretion to reassess individual cases. Roelof Bisschop (SGP) argued along the same lines by stating that, in transferring the use of discretion from the secretary for state to the head of the IND, charity was being sacrificed in the long term. Accordingly, Azarkan (DENK), a Muslim-inspired political party, said the following:

Children who are rooted here and who have been in uncertainty for years due to the actions of the Dutch state deserve to stay here and must be able to count on solidarity, mercy and charity.⁷⁷

Interestingly, none of the Christian parties used religious argumentation during the debate. Instead, they focused on practicalities by discussing what was changing or why things were changing. Van Toorenburg's (CDA) explanation of why the CDA had changed their position on the children's pardon is an example of that. Overall, the use of religious concepts like charity and love one another in the political sphere shows that politicians still find them indicative of how the Dutch state should care for the people, citizens and non-citizens.

4.2.3 Comparison and Conclusions of the Political Sphere

Following the public debate in the media, I expected there to be more discussion on the influence that the Bethel church asylum had on CDA. The issue seemed to have been pushed aside during the political debates. Azarkan (DENK) was the only politician that questioned Van Toorenburg's (CDA) explanation on how the party had shifted politically. Parties seemed more interested in what was changing, not why things were changing. That could be because of the upcoming senate

⁷⁷ Azarkan, F. (January 30, 2019). Versoepeling van het kinderpardon. https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat_en_vergadering/plenaire_vergaderingen/details/activiteit?id=2019A00181

elections, and parties' unwillingness to potentially lose face. Regardless, if not overtly, I would have expected a politician to point out that CDA's constituents might have pressured the party into changing their course, and that many of their constituents are religious. Perhaps politicians did not want to state anything about the issue in the presence of Christian parties. Furthermore, they might not have wanted to delve into sensitive topics, or it could be the case that they did not find a parliamentary debate on the children's pardon the place to question the separation of church and state. It must be noted, however, that the big elephant in the room was not addressed. An unintentional effect of the state essentially ignoring the Bethel church asylum, could be that the church now has room, both legally and socially, to organize another continual service. This gives the church an extra tool to protest against the state in the public sphere in the future. It would be safe to assume that such a tool must only be used in 'extreme' situations, and that society would only accept the church meddling in topics that it is traditionally known for, like refugees.

Interestingly, politicians that are members of Christian parties used no religious argumentation, while members from DENK, Groenlinks, and PvdA did. This could be a sign that Christian parties intentionally avoid using religious language to evade being accused of injecting religion into the political debate. Regarding the use of backdoor politics, Fritsma (PVV) and Krol (50PLUS) pointed out that it is undesirable. In the first parliamentary debate, Fritsma's (PVV) cautioned against the idea that political parties can influence the secretary of state to use his discretion, while Krol (50PLUS) used similar reasoning in the second parliamentary debate to criticize the manner in which the leading coalition came to its decision on the children's pardon. Both politicians hinted at the common understanding that there must be a sense of political openness in order for decisions to be legitimate.

Overall, one can assume that the church does influence the political sphere, but that she does so covertly. She most likely exerts influence behind closed doors, through constituents and key relationships between religious figures and politicians. It was not made evident in the parliamentary debates that these relationships exist, while they were mentioned multiple times in the public sphere's narratives.

4.3 Religious Sphere

The analysis of the religious sphere deviates from the analysis done on the public sphere. This subchapter is structured temporally – meaning that I will start in week one and end in week 14 – and covers two main areas of focus. First, I focus on the roles the church ascribed to itself. Then, I look at the church's use of language and how it changed as the Bethel church asylum unfolded.

Important to note is that these weekly messages were published by the Bethel church in The Hague, not the PCN.

4.3.1 Church's roles

In week one, the church stated that it respects the law but that it is there for children who are victimized by the asylum's long procedures. It poses the question of whether children should be blamed for their circumstances, and that no one can ask the church to turn away from suffering children. They also portray themselves as open and hospitable, especially for vulnerable people, and that they are there for the Tamrazyan family.

“We do what we always do: a church service, but continuously – just as the need to be carried is continuous. We do this to encourage this family, to show that we are there as a church, that there is a God who will not let anyone fall. We pray, sing, are silent, light candles, discuss the faith questions behind this situation.”⁷⁸

Right away, the church attempted to take the political aspect out of the church asylum. They portrayed it as something that the church always does, but that this time it is simply longer. Also, the use of religious language here is a clear distinction from the use of language in the public sphere. Specifically, the sentence that states that “there is a God who will not let anyone fall” is in stark contrast to religious utterances in the public sphere. Only the *Nederlands Dagblad* (ND) mentioned God in their publications. No other newspaper did that. In these weekly messages, it is one of the first things that church posted. Moreover, the last sentence of the quote paints a different picture of what those who attended church services were doing. No newspaper reported that church goers were discussing which question of faith lingered behind the situation. Instead, they focused more on what was happening inside of the Bethel church.

In their first weekly message, the church also posited itself as wanting to engage in a dialogue with politicians to find a humane solution together. This role of the church as an actor who engages in dialogue was carried through the weekly messages. They related this to church asylum as well, stating that “church asylum does not take place in secret, but rather in public to improve dialogue.”⁷⁹ What is interesting about this role and this latter quote specifically, is that later on in the weekly messages, it became evident that the church was conversing with prominent political figures in private, and that they were unwilling to divulge both who these prominent political figures were and what they spoke about.

⁷⁸ Protestantse Kerk Den Haag (2018), Week 1, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek1/>

⁷⁹ Protestantse Kerk Den Haag (2018), Week 1, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek1/>

In the second week, the church included a narrative by Liesbeth Timmers, a pastor who had led a part of the continual service. From her perspective, the church asylum had already caused some sort of movement within society and politics. She did not elaborate on what type of movement, but she might have been referring to the number of media articles that were being published at the time. She also pointed out that the church asylum was bringing all different types of people together, connecting conservative to progressive believers as well as attracting non-believers. This perspective was shared by the church organizers, who called the church asylum “unprecedented ecumenical solidarity.”⁸⁰ This description of the church asylum as a gathering of different types of people was echoed throughout the weekly messages.

In the following weeks, the church repeatedly mentioned the conversations that were taking place between the church and certain prominent politicians. Throughout the church asylum, the church never revealed who they spoke to. Instead, the organizers of the church asylum remained vague, stating that they were “doing everything, also behind the scenes, to come to a solution.”⁸¹ The church asylum was also, according to the church, strengthening and revitalizing people’s faith, partially by contextualizing bible passages that may have seen distant to them in the past.

Bible texts, often written in situations of poverty, threat and flight, become concrete in the celebrations and churchgoers take them home...We experience 450 hours of praise, complaint, prayer, and music as a continuous stream, in which you can linger for a while and then get out of again. There is also a certain sobriety, it is sometimes messy, but we experience it as holy mess. We are particularly impressed by the combination of serenity, improvisation and togetherness – it transcends ourselves and inspires us in an unprecedented way.⁸²

This indicates that, by organizing the church asylum, the church was tapping into something that it may not have been in contact with for a while. The features of the continual service offered pastors room for improvisation, like readings of texts that would not be read in a typical Sunday service, and contextualization of the bible’s stories.

The role the church was ascribing to itself here, was more of a religious nature than anything else. This characterization was carried through into the following weeks. In week five, for instance, the church included a piece by Barend van der Meulen. He is a member of the board

⁸⁰ Protestantse Kerk Den Haag (2018), Week 2, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek2>

⁸¹ Meiden, W. van der (2018) Week 3, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek3>

⁸² Meiden, W. van der (2018), Week 3, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek3>

of STEK, the organization that carries out the ecumenical tasks of the local Bethel church in The Hague. He stated that:

The church asylum is essentially not a political protest. The Protestant Church in The Hague writes on its website 'We strive to be visibly present as an ecclesiastical community: that people see something of our faith, our inspiration and our work towards justice.' And then the Tamrazyan family came their way. Then you can start the political discussion. Or literally give space to His promise that He is and will be, especially in situations that seem hopeless... I have regularly taken part in political protests, on the street or at conference tables, but this is different. Those who have exhausted their legal remedies, children who have to leave the country: in newspapers, on TV, in the *Binnenhof*, they become political problems. In Bethel, house of God, in worship they remain people of God.⁸³

Here, Van der Meulen is bending the idea of what the service is, from a political protest to something the church naturally carries out to fulfill God's promise. Essentially, he argues that a church asylum, by its very nature, is essentially not a political protest but rather an expression of what God instructs churches to do in these types of situations. In the public, the Tamrazyan family are a political problem, while in the church, they are people of God. He, thus, makes a clear distinction between what is public and what happens inside of the church. This implies that he has some understanding of the distinction between the physical space that a church occupies and the traditions that are carried out within that space, and the conversations that are taking place outside of that space, even if those conversations are about the church (activities). Thus, there is recognition that the church is not part of the public sphere.

This distinction as the church being a separate space, can be found in week seven. Then, the church included a piece by Chris van Wieren, in which he tried to capture the core of the church. He does so by positing it as something opposite to politics.

Politicians frame [the church asylum] as 'a hopeless situation', a maze in which there is no way out, we should turn around. But what happens here is not like a maze, the way is not lost. Visitors see something special, 'so this is what the church is for?!' It is like a labyrinth, here you experience something of what being a church is at the core.⁸⁴

⁸³ Meulen, B. van der (2018), Week 5, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek5>

⁸⁴ Wieren, C. van (2018), Week 7, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek7>

He tries to show, that although some saying that the church is lost and the church asylum – especially the Tamrazyan family’s situation – hopeless, that a church asylum is exactly what a church is for. That helping a family in need is what makes a church a church.

In week eight, secretary of state Harbers publicly announces that he will not be using his discretion for the Tamrazyan family. From that point on, the church seems to change its tactics. Their use of language changes from open to more assertive, and they mention multiple times that, although there seems to be little political movement, they will not stop the church asylum.

In that same week, the church acknowledged that it was obstructing justice, but that it was doing so to leave room to enter into a dialogue with the government. In week ten, the church started using more aggressive language by attacking the state for her failures as well as pointing out the shortcomings of the contested *meewerkcriterium*. They reemphasize the need for the church asylum, and that they “find it unacceptable that this family should be deported. And we need time to discuss this issue further with politicians, as well as the absurd way in which this *meewerkcriterium* works out.”⁸⁵ In week eleven, the church employed an ever more aggressive and public stance toward the government.

Besides continuing to practice silent diplomacy, we will, more than before, become more public. We will vent our anger about the Kafkaesque procedures and policy-based child abuse and share more information about the situation of the family, the procedure in the Netherlands and why returning to Armenia is not an option.

We are also focused on the CDA and ChristenUnie conferences on February 9th. The CDA in particular currently holds the key to a better children's pardon. The church asylum in Bethel and the children's pardon can no longer be ignored by the top of the CDA... We want to increase the pressure on the CDA and also on the ChristenUnie.⁸⁶

This indicates that the church wanted to show its position in a more political light, especially when they stated that they wanted to increase the pressure on the CDA and the ChristenUnie. This portrayal deviated from the previously continuous depoliticization of the church’s position. Interestingly, in the week that followed, they included a piece by a church goer that went back on that aggressive approach by once again taking the political aspect out of their service. Harm van Dane asked whether the church was “campaigning under the disguise of a church service? No, you don't do campaigns in the privacy of a small church hall, you do campaigns in public. What

⁸⁵ Protestantse Kerk Den Haag (2019), Week 10, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek10>

⁸⁶ Protestantse Kerk Den Haag (2019), Week 11, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek11>

do we do then? We create. We create livable space and time in the chaos of life.”⁸⁷ Van Dane does emphasize the creation of space, which was a theme throughout the Bethel church asylum.

This emphasis on space was, subsequently, the wording the church used in the week after (week 13) in which the CDA publicly announced that they had shifted politically. They stated that: “[t]his service has created a breathing space for a dialogue with politicians.”⁸⁸ Hereby, acknowledging that the church had an influence on the political landscape. In week 14, the last week of the church asylum, the church reemphasized their influence by stating that: “[t]he Church asylum in Bethel has had a major impact on political developments.”⁸⁹ They also recognized the effect the church asylum had on the church itself, and that it would be a point of discussion for what it meant for the position of the church.

4.3.4 Conclusions of the Religious Sphere

There were some overall trends in the religious sphere that are worth noting. First of all, the church kept it local. They always spoke as the Protestant Church in The Hague; only once did they mention the PCN. The church did mention a number of (religious) organizations and prominent figures that contributed to the service, but the perspective remained local.

In the religious sphere, the church repeatedly defined its role as the actor that created space for the family to take a breather and for the government, namely secretary of state Harbers, to reconsider the decisions surrounding the families affected by the children’s pardon. In week one, the church stated that it wanted to organize the church asylum to improve the dialogue with the government. In the last week the Bethel church asylum (week 14), the church stated that the church asylum had a major impact on the political developments. Unfortunately, this statement was not substantiated. No arguments were brought forth to support their statement, but it does tell us that the church felt like it had been an important actor that influenced the outcome of the children’s pardon. Also, by mentioning a few times that there were pastors and visitors from all different denominations (even non-believers), the church was portraying itself, or at the very least the church asylum, as a cohesive actor or act. This is not the same as the functional role religion can have, as per Durkheim. There is no evidence that in this case, religion was able to create more cohesion on a societal level.

The political aspect of the church asylum was continually pushed aside by various narrators. They either explicitly stated that the church asylum was, in fact, not a political act, or they shifted the attention away from the political by pointing out that a church service is inherently

⁸⁷ Dane, H. (2019), Week 12, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek12>

⁸⁸ Protestantse Kerk Den Haag (2019), Week 13, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek13>

⁸⁹ Protestantse Kerk Den Haag (2019), Week 14, <https://www.protestantsekerkdenhaag.nl/kerkasielweek14>

religious, not political. Moreover, not once did narrators in the religious sphere describe the church asylum as an act of civil disobedience. The term did not even appear in the religious sphere, even though some narrators in the public sphere did question the church's use of the *Algemene Wet op het Binnentreden* to legitimize the church asylum. One can only assume that the church's approach of depoliticizing the church asylum was a way to avoid any discussion on church state relations.

When using a substantial definition of religion, we uphold the assumption that religion can inspire people to formulate opinions, partake in the public debate. There were a few examples of these in the religious sphere. In week one, the story of the Samaritan that helps a stranger was mentioned as one that inspired the church asylum. This idea was echoed throughout the church asylum, as people kept stating that as a church, they could not stop helping the family and that they would not settle for anything less than a humane and just solution. Also, the church stated in week ten that in accordance with their faith, it was unacceptable that the family was being deported.

There were some other notable patterns. Almost every week, the scholarly article that was published by Erik Scherder et al. was mentioned. Toward the end of the service, the internal issues of the IND were also mentioned as a problem but only once (week 11). These were two of the five reasons the CDA put forth when they explained why they shifted politically in the parliamentary debate.

Every week, the Bethel Church mentioned how much (international) support and attention the continual service was receiving. Many times, the church mentioned that behind-the-scenes conversations were taking place with politicians. They never mentioned with whom these conversations were taking place, nor did they specify what was being discussed. When the CDA turned, they did proclaim their surprise. This implies that they were not aware, at the time, of CDA's plans to turn.

Regarding the use of language, it is evident that there is more religion infused in the religious sphere as opposed to the public sphere, while still including more secular language. On the one hand, the church told the story of the Samaritan, it includes stories of services, of the role of God as protector. It also emphasized repeatedly that the church service was a religious act, not political. On the other hand, the church drew on concepts like justice, and it referred almost weekly to the scientific article by Scherder et al. It also stated that it wanted a humane, humanitarian solution for the families, and it referred to the rights of a child.

Lastly, the language employed by the church started in an open and inviting manner. Their goal was to start a dialogue and, by doing so, to come to a humane solution for the family (week one). Their language became more pressing toward the end of the Bethel church, especially after Harbers publicly stated that he had decided not to use his discretion for the family (week eight).

4.4 Comparisons and Conclusions between all Spheres

The church was hardly mentioned in the political sphere, while it was given a considerable role in the public sphere. In the religious newspapers as well as in *Trouw*, the church was a prominent character. In the other two (non-religious) newspapers, the church appeared in about 25% of the narratives. One apparent overlap between all spheres is the talk that centered around immigrants. In the public sphere, the children affected by the children's pardon took a central role in all of the newspapers' stories. While they played a smaller role in the political debates, since politicians were more focused on the practicalities of implementing new laws, they were present, nonetheless. In the religious sphere, the church frequently referred to the Tamrazyan family and the other children that fell under the children's pardon. All spheres also included a reference to a scientific article by Scherder et al. on the negative effects of deportation on children. It was used as a reason, again in all spheres, why the children's pardon was not working and why it needed to change.

In the political sphere, the political parties seemed more interested in what was changing instead of why things were changing. There was a clear focus on aspects of implementation instead of why the CDA had shifted their stance on the children's pardon. Surprisingly, Azarkan (DENK) was the only politician that questioned the CDA's shift. In the public sphere, many newspapers attributed the CDA's shift to the Bethel church asylum, either as a direct influence or through the CDA's constituents. In the religious sphere, the Bethel church both reported on what was happening inside the church, but it also referred to public discussions and its contact with politicians. Simultaneously, the Bethel church would reiterate frequently why it was holding the church asylum and why things needed to change.

The relationship between church and state was only mentioned in the public sphere. In the public sphere, this relationship was discussed either implicitly or explicitly when narrators shared their perspective on the legitimacy of the Bethel church asylum and while writing about the CDA's constituency. The relationship between church and state was not mentioned once in the political sphere. In the religious sphere, the relationship between church and state was not mentioned specifically, but the Bethel church did continually address Dutch politicians publicly and behind closed doors. In the religious sphere, the Bethel church first entirely depoliticized its role, while later on presenting itself more politically as the Bethel church asylum was nearing its end. The church was sometimes described as a political actor in the public sphere, but this was one of many different characterizations. The most prominent one being the church as a helper of those in need. There is little support for the idea that the Bethel church asylum was considered an act of civil disobedience.

Lastly, the use of religious language was most prevalent in the religious sphere, least present in the political sphere, and sparsely present in the public sphere. This falls in line with what was expected. In the public sphere, newspapers included moral language more so than purely religious language, for instance, to justify the offering of church asylum. This reasoning was met with the opposing legal perspective, which casted doubts on the legitimate use of the *Algemene Wet op het Binnentreden* as a means of justifying the church asylum.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ This law stipulates that it is not allowed to enter a space where religion is practiced, while a service is ongoing.

5 Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Previous research on the role of religion portrayed The Netherlands as a highly secularized country in which religion's role had diminished (Knippenberg, 2009; Lechner, 1996; Sengers, 2005). The country is situated within a European context with ongoing secularization, deviating from a world in which religion is rising (Habermas, 2006a, Davie, 2006). This thesis paints another picture, in which the church as a moral community carrying out religion is able to affect change within the public, political and religious spheres. In the public sphere, the church was described as having reignited the public debate on the children's pardon, while reaching the CDA's politicians through backdoor politics. Many CDA members were also described as supporting the Bethel church asylum, which led them to steamroll their national representatives into political reform. This relationship between religion and the CDA reflects the historical Christian heritage of the party (Knippenberg, 2006), which is a reminder of the former pillarized political system (Blom, 2000; Lijphart, 1968). The findings in the political sphere do not portray the church as having been influential on decisions made in parliament. Neither religion nor the church played a noteworthy role during the parliamentary debates. This could be a reflection of politicians' discomfort of problematizing the church's public act in the presence of Christian parties, or perhaps they simply did not want to lose face so close to a senate election. Nonetheless, the state's lack of public acknowledgement of the church could have the unintentional effect that the church now has room, both legally and socially, to organize another continual service. This gives the church an extra tool to protest against the state in the public sphere in the future. In the religious sphere, the church described her role as prominent and influential, even claiming that the Bethel church asylum was responsible for the outcome of the children's pardon. In the public sphere, the church was described similarly but other actors were also recognized as having been important contributors.

The model of church and state relations that best fits Dutch society according to the findings in this study is the cooperationist model, as proposed by Riedel (2008). The findings certainly do not support The Netherlands as having a separationist model, as it presupposes the exclusion of religion from the public and political spheres. The fact that the state did not intervene when the church so publicly organized the exposed church asylum, thereby allowing religion to enter the public sphere, means that we cannot speak of a strict separation of church and state in The Netherlands (Sandberg & Doe, 2007; Torfs, 1996). Moreover, when recognizing the Bethel church's ability to employ backdoor politics to reach the CDA, it begs the question of how successful a mosque would be if it was to attempt the same feat as the Bethel church. As was posed by a pastor in the public sphere, it could very well be the case that Christian churches enjoy a

special position within Dutch society due to The Netherlands' Christian past, despite existing laws that are meant to prevent such differences in societal standings. If that is the case, can we speak of a completely neutral state? If not, a cooperationist relationship is a more appropriate label instead of a pluralist-cooperationist one, which assumes that the state does not favor any religion over the other (Vermeulen, 2010). A future comparative study between the position of Christian churches versus Islamic mosques could reveal the differences in their standings in The Netherlands.

In both the public and religious spheres, there was evidence that people drew inspiration from religion to participate in the Bethel church act. This reflects Williams' (2003) perspective on how "religious ideas and beliefs can reveal aspects of the world to be unjust or immoral" and can inspire people to participate in the public sphere (pg. 317). The Bethel church organizers emphasized how immoral the children's pardon was, and that it would not accept the policy because of it. Furthermore, they saw the Bethel church asylum as a way to contextualize the bible's stories. In the religious sphere, the organizers depoliticized the Bethel church asylum by claiming that it was simply a religious service, not a political act, and that their reason for organizing the Bethel church asylum was essentially not a political protest but rather an expression of what God instructs churches to do in these types of situations. In the public sphere, however, newspapers portrayed the Bethel church organizers more as political actors. They would include quotes from the organizers as they referred to how Matthew 25 can sometimes supersede Romans 13, implying that the church does not blindly follow the government. This difference in the church's characterizations is an addition to church asylum literature, which generally focuses on defining the concept, its legal aspects, and whether it is a successful form of protest. Authors have noted that churches will organize church asylums for moral reasons (Villazor, 2008; Mittermaier, 2009), as was evident in this thesis, but the Bethel church's emphasis on scripture and depoliticization of the church asylum contributes to current understanding of the ways in which churches defend the use of church asylum, particularly in the Dutch context.

It is unclear whether this continual service was considered an act of civil disobedience, but there was little support in favor of calling it that. That does not necessarily align with Jorgensen (2013), who defined church asylums as acts of civil disobedience. At the very least, the Bethel church asylum can be considered a political practice. In the religious sphere, the church did not describe its act as civil disobedient. In fact, it repeatedly shared pieces that tried to portray the act as non-political. It does bring an interesting question to the debate. Does an actor need to break a law to be civil disobedient, or does the obstruction of the rule of law suffice? Hindering the government from doing its job and using a law for other purposes could fall under a more

contemporary understanding of civil disobedience, even if the church did not technically break the law. In that sense, it is an expansion of Arendt's (1972) indirect civil disobedience, which she describes as laws being broken that are not the object of concern but rather a means to call attention to certain governmental policies or political grievances. Most notably, from a deliberative democratic standpoint, civil disobedience occurs "within the limits of democratic public deliberation...[that] bring[s] about a communicative environment" (Atilgan, 2020, pg. 170). The igniting of a public and political debate is evidence of such a communicative environment.

According to Habermas (2006b), the debate in the public sphere sets "the frame for the range of what the public of citizens would accept as legitimate decisions in a given case" (pg. 418). In the Bethel church asylum case, the public debate mostly portrayed approval of the church's act and a definite disapproval of the children's pardon, even in secular newspapers. Some narrators questioned the asylum's legitimacy, either by pointing out that a continual service should not be used for political means or by stating that a church should not be political in the first place. The majority of opinions expressed in the public sphere, however, painted the church in a positive light. Thus, from a deliberative democratic standpoint, one could argue that this prevented the state from publicly condoning the church asylum. If, for instance, there had been more pushback in the public sphere regarding the church's act, politicians would have had more room to criticize the church. The public sphere portrayed an influential church who had a relationship with the CDA. In the political sphere, this relationship was not discussed at all, nor was the relationship between church and state. In the religious sphere, the church explicitly stated that it targeted the CDA, but that it did so behind closed doors. Therefore, the deliberative ideals of open communication were not upheld. It was not clear why the CDA turned or exactly how much influence the was able to exert in private.

The church's traditional role of caring for those in need was once again reiterated in this study. There were only a few findings that supported the idea that the church was able to create community, which indicates that the church's role of creating social cohesion was not apparent during the Bethel church asylum. In general, however, the church asylum received a lot of support from different parts of society. Those who commented on the legality of the Bethel church asylum either argued from a legal or a moral perspective. The former group focused on the church's use of a continual service and the *Algemene Wet op het binnentreden* to evade police intervention. The latter group focused more on the way in which the church was helping the government solve immoral policy but organizing the church asylum, positing the church as a sort of moral watchman of society that points out the government's injustices.

An important note is that, for years the public debate on the children's pardon had persisted with bursts of media attention on, what was referred to by some media sources as, mediagenic children. It would be impossible to determine whether the Bethel church asylum would have been able to achieve the same results, had there not been any such media attention prior to the Bethel church asylum. It is, however, plausible that the presence of doubt in many Dutch citizens on the moral basis of the children's pardon gave room for a religious institution like the church to step out from its shadows and defy the state in such a manner.

I encountered some limitations during this thesis, some of which could lead to future research. First of all, I initially wanted to organized focus groups with Bethel church asylum volunteers to gain insight on how they viewed the church. I was unable to get enough volunteers together, which meant I had to resort to their weekly bulletins as a source for the religious sphere. In a future study, it would be interesting to interview Bethel church asylum volunteers to get an insight into how they view role of religion. Additionally, I had wanted to interview the editorial boards of the five newspapers that I analyzed, as well as the key politicians like Madeleine van Toorenburg. Due to time constraints and difficulties with initiating contact, I decided to forego those interviews. Future research could focus on how newspapers report on religious matters and which decisions they make on how to address the relationship between church and state in the public sphere. Furthermore, not a lot of sociological research has been done on church asylum, as most authors have looked at it from a legal perspective. Therefore, it was difficult to find articles that focused on the relationship between church asylum and the relationship between church and state, as well as how civil disobedience and church asylum relate. In the future, more research could be done on these two relationships. I advise legal scholars that do research on church asylum to delve further into the use of a continual service as a legal tool, as this type of service has, to my knowledge, never been used before to keep out the government. Lastly, I used the theory of deliberative democracy in a new way by applying the theory to The Netherlands in a case study on church asylum. This was challenging, as there were no examples of how to do so. I do believe the theory to hold a lot of potential for future research, also in empirical studies, which is why I suggest more political theorists try innovative ways of using deliberative democracy in their research. Also, more research needs to be done on the place of church asylum in the deliberative democracy model.

5.2 Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to gain a better understanding of the role of religion in The Netherlands during the Bethel church asylum case. To do so, I used the theory of deliberative democracy to separate the public, political and religious spheres from one another, which enabled me to perform a narrative and a content analysis on the role of religion in these three spheres. In my analysis, I considered both substantive and functional definitions of religion, as well as the church as a moral community carrying out religion. I aimed to join in on three theoretical debates: church and state relations, secularization, and civil disobedience, while drawing from church asylum literature from other contexts. On the basis of my theoretical framework, I approached the church as a potentially influential and disobedient actor within a Dutch deliberative framework.

I have reaffirmed the traditional role of the church as a helper of those in need. I have shown that the public discussion on church asylum was approached from two perspectives. Those in favor argued from a moral perspective, indicating that the church was helping the government and the rule of law function better by pointing out injustices. Those against argued from a legal perspective by focusing on how the church was misusing the law to justify the church asylum. In the religious sphere, religious actors continually depoliticized the Bethel church asylum by defining the church service as inherently religious, not political. Accordingly, they rejected the idea of the church asylum as an act of civil disobedience. In the public sphere, the debate on civil disobedience was sparse but it showed that the Bethel church asylum could be considered an act of civil disobedience when approached from a more contemporary interpretation.

This thesis paints religion and the church as a moral community carrying out religion as able to reignite public debate and force a change in asylum policy. The model of church and state relations that best aligns with this description is the cooperationist model, with the addition that the Protestant church still has ties to the Christian political parties. This enables the church to use backdoor politics, besides the public debate, to influence the political sphere. This confirms the Habermasian idea that the function of the public debate is to construct the borders within which political actors and their decisions must reside to be perceived as legitimate. However, the use of backdoor politics brings into question how much pressure is exerted outside of the public sphere, and what that means for organizations, notably mosques, who do not have historical ties to political parties. It also further complicates the question of whether the church, in challenging the state through a church asylum while covertly conversing with Christian political parties, actually saved the democratic rule of law, as some writers posed, or undermined her.

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