



## Group rights in practice: The case of orthodox Protestants in Opheusden, the Netherlands

Thesis: Multiculturalism in comparative perspective

- Author: Dieter Eggen (3541843) - Supervisor: Gerrit-Bartus Dielissen - Second reader: Marcel Coenders -



*'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.'*  
(1 Thessalonians 5:21, King James Version)

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**ABSTRACT** Group claims made by religious groups are nowadays topic of considerable controversy in many Western liberal democracies. The fear that certain religious denominations are incompatible with Western values and liberal democracy has led to an intense debate in both the public and political sphere. At the core of this there seems to be a crisis of values where freedom of religion, defended by religious groups and crystalized in religious group rights, is in conflict with individual rights like individual equality and the freedom of speech. In the Netherlands state support for religious pluralism has since long given group rights to religious groups. Among them are the orthodox Protestants, a native Christian denomination who adhere to a strict, absolute and universal interpretation of the Bible. As such they are a highly interesting case for the study of the relation between individual and group rights. In this research a case study of the orthodox Protestant community of Opheusden, the Netherlands, was undertaken. In what ways do individual and group rights relate in the case of orthodox Protestants in Opheusden? Do group rights strengthen or undermine the individual rights of both group and out-group members? The findings of this research show a mixed image and present different ways in which groups rights can both strengthen as well as undermine individual rights. Highlighting the importance of understanding how individual and group rights relate, as well as a thorough understanding of those involved, when granting group rights to religious groups.

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# Introduction

During the summer of 2013 an outbreak of the measles occurred in the Netherlands. As some orthodox Protestants, mostly on religious grounds (Ruijs et al., 2012, p.10), refuse vaccination, the vaccination coverage in places with a high concentration of orthodox Protestants is insufficient for group immunity. Thereby giving diseases like the measles a chance to spread. In the end one girl died of the disease and the outbreak led to a debate about the desirability of mandatory vaccinations (Pierik, 2013). 2013 was also the year in which, for the first time, the orthodox Protestant Reformed Political Party<sup>1</sup> (SGP) had a woman running as its political representative<sup>2</sup>. The party had been forced to allow women representatives after court rulings of both the Supreme Court of the Netherlands (2010) and the European Court of Human Rights (2012). Then, at the end of 2013, there was the protest against the Sunday opening of a supermarket in the town of 's-Gravendeel. For some of the inhabitants this was a violation of the Biblical Sabbath. The local Protestant community voiced its dissatisfaction with a boycott of the supermarket (De Volkskrant, 2013).

I begin with these examples as they are all related to the discussions about claims making for group rights in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. A large part of this debate centers around those groups that claim group rights based on religious grounds. In the Netherlands the struggle for religious group rights has led to, among others, the subsidizing of religious education by the state, so called 'special schools' and the Sunday closing of shops. With the arrival of Muslim migrants to the Netherlands since the 1960s (Rath, Sunier & Meyer, 1997, p.1) and the subsequent increased visibility of Islam in Dutch society, the discussion about what to do with the claims for religious group rights is once again at the foreground of public debate (Loenen, 2006, p.1). This is in part because some people feel that the claims made by Muslims for 'Muslim rights' clash with Western values like gender equality and LGBT rights<sup>3</sup> and ideas about the public space. In the Netherlands, the Party for Freedom owes much of its existence to this train of thought. In the last decade numerous discussions about Muslim group rights and the Islam in the Dutch public space made the news headlines. Whether it was about the building of new Mosques (Landman & Wessels, 2005, p.1126), wearing of Burkas (Moors, 2007, p.5), Islamic education (Driessen & Merry, 2006, p.1) or ritual slaughter (Zoethout, 2013, p.652), the Islam is facing resistance in its attempt to obtain a place in Dutch society. At the core of this there seems to be a crisis of values where freedom of religion, defended by religious groups and

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<sup>1</sup> In Dutch: Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij, from here on referred to as SGP.

<sup>2</sup> Lillian Janse became eligible as candidate for the municipality council of Vlissingen in August of 2013. In March of 2014 she became the first woman as SGP councillor (De Volkskrant, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender rights.

crystalized in religious group rights, is in conflict with individual rights like individual equality and the freedom of speech (Van der Burg, 2009, p.7) (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007).

While the political and public discussion on this perceived conflict is these days mainly related to Muslim group claims there are other religious groups where tensions between individual and (religious) group rights occur. As the examples above show, orthodox Protestant groups hold values which clash with individual rights, mainly in respect to gender equality and LGBT rights. The Dutch history of pillarization<sup>4</sup> and its ‘inclusive form of government neutrality’, whereby the government tries to stay neutral by giving every resident the same support for their cultural or religious identity (Van der Burg, pp.30-31), has since long given orthodox Protestants state support and space for their religion. As this is a group indigenous to the Netherlands that has since long protected their group and identity by means of group rights<sup>5</sup>, they present a suitable context to study the relation between individual and group rights. How do individual and group rights relate in the case of orthodox Protestants? Is this relation really as tense as some believe? And what can the wider debate on this relation learn from the case of orthodox Protestants in the Netherlands?

This study investigates the workings of this relation as it happens on the ground, while also gaining insight into the perspective of those under study. For this purpose a qualitative case study of the orthodox Protestant community of Opheusden, the Netherlands, was undertaken. Opheusden is a small town in the province of Gelderland which harbors three large orthodox Protestant churches, all part of this research. Although the members of these churches technically belong to different religious denominations. Their similarity, shared values and goals, interconnectedness and geographical proximity means that for this research they were treated as part of the same orthodox Protestant community. There will be more on these different churches, their similarities, differences and interrelations in the methods section. A qualitative case study of a single orthodox Protestant community allowed for a close look into the relation between individual rights (of both in-group and out-group members) and group rights as it happens in practice.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘After the labour movement arose late 19th century, Dutch society became fragmented into four “pillars” – protestant, catholic, socialist and liberal-neutral. The whole social organisation of the Dutch state and society, ranging from political parties, employer associations, labour unions, schools and universities, health and welfare institutions, media organisation and even sports clubs, fishing and bicycle clubs, became divided along this four-partition.’ (Kickert, 2002, p.1478)

<sup>5</sup> Take the school struggle in the Netherlands of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At one side of this struggle were liberals and republicans who advocated ‘neutral’ secular state supported public education, at the other side were Protestants and Catholics who claimed equal treatment and support by the government for religious ‘special’ education. The struggle ended with a change in the constitution in 1917 which equalized public and special education. From that moment onward both forms of education received equal support by the Dutch state. (Sunier, 2004, pp.565-572)



In this introduction I have briefly outlined the topic and objective of this research. Before proceeding there are things in need of clarification. The theoretical perspective will therefore start off with a definition of both individual and group rights. I will clarify my use of the term ‘orthodox Protestant’. As this is a container concept for different Protestant groups it is quite useless without further elaboration. Also, since this research is aimed at the relation between individual and group rights within liberal democracies, I will discuss this relation from a liberal-democratic perspective.

## 1.1 Problem definition: objective and research questions

Objective: Contributing to the theoretical debate on the relation between individual and group rights in liberal democracies by means of a case study of the orthodox Protestant community of Opheusden, the Netherlands.

Central research question: *‘How do group rights relate to the individual rights of orthodox Protestant group members and out-group members in Opheusden, the Netherlands, and how is this perceived by those involved?’*

Sub-questions:

- 1) *‘How do group rights relate to individual rights within the orthodox Protestant group?’*
  - a) *‘Do group rights strengthen the individual rights of the members of the orthodox Protestant group and if so, how?’*
  - b) *‘Do group rights lead to a restriction of the individual rights of the members of the orthodox Protestant group and if so, how?’*
- 2) *‘How do group rights relate to the individual rights of out-group members?’*
- 3) *‘How is the relation between individual and group rights perceived by individual in-group and out-group members?’*

## 2. Theoretical perspective

### 2.1 Defining individual and group rights

Since the relation between individual and group rights is the primary concern of this research it is appropriate to start with a definition of both types of rights. Individual rights are those rights that enable the individual to achieve his or her own goals, as long as this does not undermine the ability of others to do the same. Or, in the words of writer and philosopher Ayn Rand: *'Thus, for every individual, a right is the moral sanction of a positive—of his freedom to act on his own judgment, for his own goals, by his own voluntary, uncoerced choice. As to his neighbors, his rights impose no obligations on them except of a negative kind: to abstain from violating his rights.'* (1964, p.93). Translating the ideal of individual rights into everyday life comes with its share of obstacles. For example: when is someone undermining the opportunities of others? And when does someone have the freedom to act on his or her own judgment? Despite the highly debatable and controversial nature of such questions, there is some consensus that certain human rights are needed to protect the individual and enable individuals to pursue their life goals. The United Nations 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' is the most prominent attempt of the global community to come to terms on what these human rights should entail. This declaration consists of thirty chapters to describe the rights of humans. Most of these chapters concern the equality of all and the right of every individual to among others: life, liberty, freedom of thought, safety and education (United Nations, 1948). For the purpose of this research this declaration is a good starting point when speaking of individual rights. For many Western liberal democracies individual rights, similar to those found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are the foundation of their constitution (Habermas, 1994, p.109).

A group right, on the other hand is a right accorded to a specific group: *'A group right is a right possessed by a group qua group rather than by its members severally. It contrasts with a right held by an individual person as an individual. An example of a commonly asserted group right is the right of a nation or a people to be self-determining.'* (Jones, 2008). These rights are sometimes given to protect the identity of the group to outside influences, for example to protect the language or culture of a specific group. Often these group rights are about exemptions from certain rules. Like group claims to wear group specific (religious) clothing when in public service, or claim the right to religious slaughter (Kymlicka, 1995, p.31). Kymlicka names three different types of group rights: self-government rights, polyethnic rights and special representation rights. The claims made by orthodox Protestant groups mostly fall in the category of polyethnic rights: those rights that enable the group to protect certain religious and cultural practices (Kymlicka, p.38). The difference between individual and group rights

can be ambiguous, as it are often individuals who use group rights. In some cases it is therefore more appropriate to speak of group-differentiated rights, those rights that individuals derive from being member of a certain group (Kymlicka, p.46).

## 2.2 Defining orthodox Protestant

So far I have spoken of the religious group under study as ‘orthodox Protestant’. This is however a container concept for different churches rooted in the Protestant branch of the Christian faith. Orthodox in this sense means that these groups adhere to the ‘true’ and ‘pure’ word of God as it was written down in the Bible. Since there is much debate about the ‘truest’ way to interpret the Bible there are a variety of churches which are all considered to be orthodox Protestant. As there is no agreement on the right interpretation of the Bible it is difficult to come to a clear definition of orthodox Protestant (Nickolson, 2013, p.2). Sociologists of religion Hijme Stoffels defined religious orthodoxy as *‘a belief system that, with reference to a holy script or divine revelation, contains an absolute and universal truth claim with regard to the final salvation and calamity of humans and the world, whereby the loyalty of its followers is considered of vital importance.’*<sup>6</sup> (as cited in: Nickolson, p.2). So despite their different interpretations of the Bible, orthodox Protestant groups follow an absolute and universal interpretation of the Bible and expect their members to be highly loyal to this interpretation. Nickolson (pp.2-3) gives four characteristics of the orthodox Protestants over which there is consensus. First of all, faith is experienced on a personal level. It is not just about accepting certain religious rules but also about experiencing the religion on a deeply personal level. Secondly, there is emphasis on missionary work and evangelization. It is the duty of a good Christian to spread the word of God, both at home and abroad. The third characteristic is that the Bible is seen as the only true and reliable word of God and is therefore the starting point for both thought and action. Finally there is a central place for the crucifixion of Jesus, the son of God, as atonement for the sins of humans.

To get a better sense of what orthodox Protestantism is about, it is useful to make the comparison to more liberal Protestant groups. For them the Bible is a human script, other than the direct word of God. Liberal Protestants are more open to both modern society as well as different perspectives on life, therefore missionary work and evangelization has no role in liberal forms of Protestantism. More in general, liberal views on Protestantism are more aimed at the individual experience of faith and are therefore more open to different ways of experiencing the faith (Nickolson, p.3).

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<sup>6</sup> Translated from Dutch

Nickolson (p.6) distinguishes four different orthodox Protestant groups in the Netherlands: bevindelijk Reformed, evangelicals, orthodox Christian migrants and other orthodox Reformed. The churches under study here are all considered to be bevindelijk Reformed. 'Bevindelijk' is a Dutch term which has no direct English translation. Its meaning is somewhat similar to 'experiencing', a reference to the deeply personal level on which faith is experienced. De Muynck states: *'The word "bevinding" is used to emphasize the importance of the personal experience of faith. "Bevinding" stance opposite of the rational acceptance of truths.'*<sup>7</sup> (2008, p.103). For Bernts, De Jong and Jar 'bevindelijk' is about *'the existential experience of Gods intervention in the personal life and the human reaction to that intervention.'*<sup>8</sup> (as cited in: Nickolson, p.6). In English the bevindelijk Reformed are sometimes referred to as Reformed Calvinist, pietistic Calvinist, orthodox Reformed, conservative Reformed or pietistic Reformed. However, not wanting to get stuck in a quicksand of terms I will from now on continue to use the generic term orthodox Protestant when referring to these groups. Keep in mind that I only use this in reference to 'bevindelijk' orthodox Protestant groups as defined here, not in reference to other orthodox Protestant groups like the ones mentioned above.

Hoeksta and Ipenburg further defined orthodox Protestants by looking at their core beliefs (as cited in: Oosterbeek, 2006, p.25). They came up with the following list:

- The doctrine of predestination. Who goes to Heaven and who goes to Hell has been determined by God since the beginning of time.
- Conversion to God is necessary as proof that one belongs to the chosen people.
- There is a clear distinction between those people that have and those people that have not been converted.
- The deeply felt personal relationship to God ('de bevinding') is essential.
- There is much appreciation and respect of old clergymen and pastors.
- There is nothing humans can do to guarantee their own salvation.
- As everything happens according to the will of God, there is a high sense of acquiescence.
- The Bible is from front to back the unquestionable word of God.

Orthodox Protestants tend to be fairly closed off to outsiders, they have their own institutions and organizations in which they can practice their absolute and universal interpretation of the Bible. The Dutch history of state supported cultural and religious pluralism has given them the space to create and maintain their own 'pillar' in society. They have their own state subsidized political party, the

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<sup>7</sup> Translated from Dutch

<sup>8</sup> Translated from Dutch

SGP, as well as state subsidized education, health and welfare institutions (Statham et al., 2005, p.435). Besides state support on an institutional level, they have the freedom to refrain from certain rules and practices if they conflict with their religious beliefs. For example, some orthodox Protestants object to insurances. Since accidents, disasters and other misfortunes are all by the will of God, having an insurance is by some seen as undermining this will. For those refusing insurance there is the exemption on grounds of conscience, they do not have to participate in mandatory insurances (Belastingdienst, 2014). In healthcare, medical professionals can refuse to perform certain medical procedures like abortion or euthanasia on grounds of conscience (Doppegieter & Van Meersbergen, 2005, p.5) (De Witte, Nellie, & Grete, 2007, p.16). Until very recently marriage officiants were allowed to refuse conducting gay marriages. A law passed in 2014 put an end to this right, municipalities are no longer allowed to employ marriage officiants who refuse to marry gay couples. Meaning that in time marriage officiants unwilling to marry gay couples will disappear (Opstelten, 2014). Municipalities can decide on Sunday shopping (Overheid.nl, 2015). Biblical Sabbath is an important part of the religious life of orthodox Protestants. So in municipalities where orthodox Protestants have the political influence to do so shops are closed on Sundays.

Apart from state subsidizing and certain exemptions, other state policies are considerate towards orthodox Protestant wishes. Orthodox Protestant objection to vaccination is one of the primary reasons why vaccination of preventable diseases (like the measles and polio) is voluntary in the Netherlands (Pierik, pp.2800-2801). Another example is that of elections. While in certain countries it is common for elections to be held on Sunday, in the Netherlands Biblical Sabbath is respected.

### 2.3 Individual and group rights from a liberal perspective

The somewhat subjective nature of the research topic made it necessary to start off with careful consideration of the research perspective. As this research focusses on an orthodox Protestant community in a liberal democratic society the perspective employed here is that from a liberal point of view. This last chapters of this theoretical perspective will therefore look at this relation from a liberal perspective.

The individual lies at the heart of today's Western societies. The idea that it is society's duty to create a space for the individual to prosper, is at the core of liberal democracy and the state of law (Kymlicka, p.34). According to this view every individual has the right to live his or her life to his or her own wishes, as long as this does not undermine the right of others to do the same. The ideal of the individual

is not only there to promote self-actualization, but also to prevent oppression, exploitation and domination of the individual by others (Türk, 2008, p.2). Not surprisingly liberalism, with its emphasis on individual freedom, came into being at a time when society was hierarchical ordered under God. For the Enlightenment thinkers of the 17th and 18th century, this was an unjust justification of the might of the monarchs and religious leaders of the time. By promoting individual equality and individual freedom, the place of a person in society would not be based on the place of birth but on individual characteristics and self-determination. Since the Second World War the idea, that it is society's duty to create a space where equal individuals can prosper, has been given even more importance with the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Türk, p.1).

Despite the focus of Western liberal democracies on the individual, humans are social beings who can do little in the sense of self-actualization without the presence of others around them. People will always group together in the hope of achieving more as a unity. Group membership offers benefits to group members, like access to economic resources or increased cultural capital (Bourdieu as cited in: Portes, 1998, pp.3-4). And, as we shall see in the next chapter: group membership is one of the primary ways for people to acquire a sense of place in the world and a primary source of identity. This raises an interesting question: if groups are that important to the self-actualization of the individual, what should be done with the claims of groups for special 'group' rights? Are these to be granted as they help the group and therefore its individual members? Or are group rights a dangerous stepping stone towards the exploitation and oppression of the individual by the group?

These questions are of particular interest in the light of religious groups, since there is quite a history of religious groups oppressing its members, as well as non-members (Moore, 2007). The answer to religious oppression by liberal thinkers has been to separate church and state. Take one of the founders of liberalism, John Locke, and his 'A Letter Concerning Toleration' (1689). For Locke the duty of the state was to advance civil interests, like housing, money, liberty and health. Religion, on the other hand, was operating in the field of 'men's soul', a different field to be kept separate from the government: *'I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other. If this be not done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will be always arising between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a concernment for the interest of men's souls, and, on the other side, a care of the commonwealth.'* (Locke, 1689). Despite the fact that the separation of church and state is now a well-accepted fact in Western countries, it is debatable if any country can say to have truly separated church and state. This includes even France with its strict separation of church and state or 'laïcité' as the French call it (Van de Donk et al., 2006, p.23). In a

secularist country like the Netherlands, with a less strict history of separating church and state, the government actively support religious schools, religious public broadcasting and religious political parties make up a noteworthy part of parliament.

So even more than 300 years after Locke's ideas about separating church and state, no state has been able to fully realize the ideal. Although in most Western states there is a separation of church and state on an institutional level. That is not to say that these states do not support certain religious identities. For example when it comes to public holidays or more in general the organization of the public space. This is in part because states represent, at least to some extent, the religious history in which they came into being (Modood, 2013, p.23). But there is a more fundamental point to be made. A true separation of church and state rests on the assumption that it is possible for a state to be neutral concerning things like identity and culture. For Locke the state would take care of civil interests like housing, health, safety, etcetera. The state would steer away from issues relating to men's soul, as that is the domain of religion. Modern nation-states however are actively involved in men's souls. In fact, much of the power and appeal of modern nation states is derived from a sense of national identity that the states themselves have created (Anderson, 2006). States can no longer claim to be neutral as they are actively involved in shaping and maintaining identity, culture and morality. As Kymlicka notes, the state (unintentionally) supports certain identities, like a national, subnational, an ethnic or a religious one, just by making decisions about language, internal boundaries, public holidays and state symbols (p.115). So if states are actively supportive of certain identities it is morally unfair and theoretically indefensible to deny other groups or identities the same treatment. Furthermore, truly separating church and state would ban religious arguments from politics, which is hardly compatible with modern democracy.

While there are liberal thinkers who believe in what is called 'exclusive government neutrality', whereby the government does not support any form of religion, culture or identity, take Rawls for example (Van der Burg, pp.32-33). It is the perspective of this research that such a separation is difficult to uphold. Denying religious groups any form of state support rests on the false assumption of a neutral state and is potentially undemocratic. This is not to say that the idea of separating church and state is flawed. A healthy distance between church and state, certainly at an institutional level, is vital if human and democratic rights are to be maintained for all members of society. It does however lead us to the following question: if states cannot in advance deny religious groups any form of state support what should this support look like?

### 2.3.1 What group rights can do for individual rights

So when is the state to grant group rights and when is the state to deny such rights? To answer this question from a liberal perspective it is necessary to start with how group rights can support the individual and individual rights. Liberal authors that defend multicultural policies mostly do so because of the importance of cultural and group membership to its individual members. As Kymlicka states: *'Cultural membership provides us with an intelligible context of choice, and a secure sense of identity and belonging, that we call upon in confronting questions about personal values and projects.'* (p.105). Kymlicka's words resemble Tajfel's and Turner's social identity theory assumptions (Stets & Burke, 2000, pp.224-225). According to this theory, people derive a part of their identity from the group(s) to which they belong. The group identity is internalized into the identity of the individual (Verkuyten, 2014, p.39). Take photographer Kalunzy who after discovering being Jewish said the following: *'Suddenly I had the sense of being connected to a world, a place in history, a people, that I have never experienced. To me Judaism is a culture, not just a religion and it gives me a place to belong.'* (Kessel, 2000, p.96). Since group membership defines who we are. And the identity of the group reflects on our own individual identity. People strive for a positive group identity (Stets & Burke, p.225). So if the group identity is negative, this can have negative implications for the individual members of the group. In extreme cases such as discrimination it is easy to see how this mechanism works. If a group holds a negative identity then the group members will face the consequences of this identity, for example by facing discrimination on the labor market (Nievers & Andriessen, 2010, pp.76-79). In the words of Margalit and Raz, if culture is denied: *'the options and opportunities open to its members will shrink, become less attractive, and their pursuit less likely to be successful.'* (1990, p.449). So if individuals are constantly faced with the negative identity of the group to which they belong or identify themselves with, this will inevitably influence their individual identity and their individual rights.

If people are to live in equality, no matter the group to which they belong, it is not only necessary to create a space for individual freedom and equality, but also necessary to create a space in which their group can have a positive identity. As Amy Gutmann notes: *'Full public recognition as equal citizens may require two forms of respect: (1) respect for the unique identities of each individual, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, and (2) respect for those activities, practices, and ways of viewing the world that are particularly valued by, or associated with, members of disadvantaged groups.'* (1994, p.8). For Kymlicka this means that those group rights that help to protect the identity of the group to outside influences are, at least in certain cases, justified. Kymlicka calls these rights 'external



protections' (p.37). So group rights can play a role in protecting individual rights when they help to defend the social and cultural environment which individuals value and is part of their social identity.

### 2.3.2 Countering illiberal elements in a group

Religion too can play a role in giving people a social identity and cultural markers which give them a sense of who they are and where they belong. Especially to those brought up in the social and cultural surroundings of a religious group, the identity of the group and the values and practices related to the group, will be of importance to them and their individual self-actualization. There is however a problem when translating this perspective on group rights to religious groups, especially in the case of orthodox religious groups like the ones central to this study. For orthodox religious groups, group rights are not necessarily about creating a space where individuals can willingly live according to a certain religion. Group rights are just as easily about forcing this identity (and the related values and practices) upon its members. As it is not so much about individual freedom but mostly about upholding a particular interpretation of the word of God. Kymlicka speaks in these cases of 'internal restrictions', group rights that help to defend the group from dissent by individual members (p.35). Obviously these group rights, which limit the freedom of individual group members and are therefore in conflict with a liberal view on individual rights, are to be avoided. So when granting group rights to religious groups, the state must be aware of the impact these rights will have on the individual rights of group members. But it does not end there. Even if the state is conscious about granting only those group rights that are not in conflict with individual rights the state can still contribute to maintaining an illiberal community where individual rights are violated. Okin (1999) observes that a lot of oppression of women takes place within the household and is therefore mostly invisible to outsiders. Furthermore in patriarchal communities women are often excluded from decision making, it is therefore doubtful whether they are adequately represented by the community leaders (Okin, 1999). Taylor (1994) speaks of ascribed identities and the consequences of a repressive ascribed identity. People do not just assign a certain identity to themselves but are also given an identity by others. People label each other. An incorrect label, what Taylor calls misrecognition (1994, pp.25-26), can have grave consequences for an individual's freedom and rights. Women who have been brought up with an image of inferiority in relation to men might not use their freedom of self-determination if they hold a self-image of obedience and subjection to men. In the case of orthodox Protestants it is quite possible that a gay person might have difficulty accepting his or her sexual orientation after being brought up in constant reminder that any other sexual preference than the heterosexual one, is sinful. So even if the state only grants group

rights with the aim of protecting an identity or culture which is valued by individual group members they can still (unintentionally) contribute to maintaining a illiberal culture or community in which oppression can endure.

To counter illiberal elements in a group, it is important that the state does not only facilitate those people who value a specific (cultural or religious) group identity but just as important that the state gives room to those who do not value that identity, want to change it or leave the group and identity altogether. To achieve this the state must be very sensitive that in dealing with a group all members are represented, especially those in the margins. Besides the aspect of representation and careful consideration of what group rights might do to individual rights there are more ways to counter illiberal elements within a group. It is important that people have an exit option to leave their group (Kymlicka, pp.90-91), have the freedom to individually assess the value of social customs and if deemed necessary distance oneself from certain social customs (Mill, 1860, pp.60-61). Furthermore it is important that people have a sense of other cultures, identities and more in general, other ways of life (Kymlicka, p.81). Education is in this context important. The freedom of religious education should therefore never be used to limit the perspective on other cultures, religions or in general: other ways of life. It remains to be seen whether this will be enough to counter illiberal elements within certain groups. As Okin (2002) notes, even in the presence of a formal exit option, people might still choose to endure oppression as leaving one's own group might for some be a step too far. Either because they are raised in such a way that the exit option is unthinkable or because of the (social) consequences of such a step. Therefore only a formal exit option is insufficient. People need 'realistic rights of exit', leaving the group has to be a realistic and viable option.

In the last three chapters I have argued that denying religious groups any form of state support is from a liberal perspective indefensible. As states always support certain identities (the national one to begin with) it is theoretically indefensible towards those who value a different identity to deny them any form of state support. Also, since religion can play a role in our social identity and is therefore related to the opportunities individuals have, denying any support for their social identity is illiberal in its own right. It is the perspective of this research that if the state is to advance individual freedom and equality, the groups to which people belong and the group identities people value, cannot be ignored. However in the case of religious groups this perspective does come with its share of obstacles. As religions, certainly the more orthodox variants, are not so much about individual freedom and equality but about worshipping God, group rights for these groups bring with them the risk of maintaining or even strengthening a group or community in which individual rights are violated. The orthodox Protestants in the Netherlands have since long been given state support in the form of group rights. This makes it

interesting to see what the effects of these group rights have been for the individual rights of the orthodox Protestant group members. Has Dutch policy been able to find a balance in supporting an identity that is valued by some, while at the same time guarding the individual rights of all?

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Research Field

There were a number of preset criteria in selecting the research field. The field had to harbor a significant orthodox Protestant community as well as a noteworthy non-orthodox Protestant community. The orthodox Protestant community had to be organized to be able to make group claims and use group rights. Since the orthodox Protestants are known to be somewhat secluded and sometimes difficult to approach, places like Urk and Staphorst (which in the Netherlands are known for their orthodox Protestant religious life) were excluded as it was expected that the orthodox Protestant communities in these places were more likely to suffer from research fatigue. Finally, for practical reasons, places closer to Utrecht were given precedence over places further from Utrecht. Numerous places in the province of Zeeland have large orthodox Protestant communities but were for this reason excluded from this research. In the end Opheusden was chosen as the most appropriate site for this research.

Opheusden is a small town in the municipality of Neder-Betuwe with around 6000 residents (Gemeente Neder-Betuwe, 2015). It is located just south of the Utrechtse Heuvelrug in the province of Gelderland. Opheusden has a long history of orthodox Protestantism. It's seclusion between the Neder-Rijn and Waal rivers probably contributed to maintaining this religious identity to the present day. Apart from its religious roots, the identity of Opheusden has been shaped by the many horticulturists who use the fertile river grounds for their tree plantations. This has added up to a community with a strong workers mentality where values like soberness and conservatism are highly regarded. Opheusden harbors three orthodox Protestant churches which were all part of this research: the Reformed Congregations<sup>9</sup> (GG), the Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands<sup>10</sup> (GGiN) and the Restored Reformed Church<sup>11</sup> (HHK).

The GGiN came forth out of a schism with the GG in 1953 (although in Opheusden it was not until 1956 for the schism to take place). Despite this, the two churches are very similar, one participant stated: *'There is not so much difference between the GG and the GGiN. This is more a thing from the past where a conflict created a difference. I do not even really understand that actually.'* (F/GGiN)<sup>12</sup>. Other participants made statements along similar lines. Differences which do exist are mostly a matter

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<sup>9</sup> In Dutch: Gereformeerde Gemeente, from here on referred to as GG.

<sup>10</sup> In Dutch: Gereformeerde Gemeente in Nederland, from here on referred to as GGiN.

<sup>11</sup> In Dutch: Hersteld Hervormde Kerk, from here on referred to as HHK.

<sup>12</sup> Since the interviews took place in Dutch all participant quotes are translated. Between brackets is the participant's sex, Male (M) or Female (F) and church denomination.

of small outward expressions like dress codes. The relationship between the two churches is close and good. They share two orthodox Protestant primary schools in Opheusden and help each other out when they can. The GGiN for example temporarily used the church building of the GG when theirs was being expanded. Some regret the schism of the two churches. And although attempts were made to merge them, they so far remain as separate but closely related churches. The HHK is considered to be the lightest of the three churches. This shows in the social norms and rules. Like television ownership which can lead to excommunication within the GG and GGiN while it is considered a matter of personal choice within the HHK, although it is strongly discouraged as unbiblical. A more important difference between the HHK at one side and the GG and GGiN at the other, is the fact that non-participating church members are not written off at the HHK. They remain as so called ‘floating members’. This means that for HHK members it is possible to take a step back from the community or certain practices without being excommunicated. The GG and GGiN expect more loyalty from their members in the form of church attendance and the observance of certain social norms and rules, concerning dress codes and media usage. The HHK also has its own primary school in Opheusden. Contrary to the GG and GGiN schools, the HHK school has an open admission policy. While parents at the GG and GGiN have to sign an identity statement, students on the condition that they participate in the curriculum, are welcome at the HHK school despite their (religious) background. Notwithstanding these differences the churches are from a theological perspective very similar, as one participant said: *‘Our church the GG and the GGiN and HHK are very close to one another, differences are mostly external.’* (F/GG). The fact that these three churches exist separately is mostly a matter of historical development which today mainly serves practical purposes: *‘It is mostly a historical product that we went apart. And we cannot go together because at the GGiN there are 2500 people in the church on Sunday, at the GG 2000 and at our church 700. So it cannot go together.’* (M/HHK).

In contrast with the national trend of secularization (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2014) these are all healthy and growing church communities. In 2008, just eight years after the previous expansion, the church building of the GGiN was already in need of further expansion to accommodate all the church goers. Nowadays the church offers a place to 2850 people, making it the largest church in the Netherlands measured by capacity (Kerknieuws.nl, 2008). In 2014 the GG also started building a new church to accommodate their growing numbers (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 2013). In 2014 the GG had 1950 members (Gereformeerde Gemeente, 2014), that same year the GGiN had 3302 members (Reformatorisch Dagblad, 2014) and the HHK had 2048 member in 2011 (Kerknieuws.nl, 2011). Not all of these members are from Opheusden, the churches serve the wider area of Neder-Betuwe. Apart from the three orthodox Protestant churches there is a Moluccan Evangelical church in Opheusden.

Although they adhere to the same God their belief is not as strict as that of their orthodox Protestant neighbors. The religious nature of Opheusden does not only show in the existence of three large orthodox Protestant churches but also in local politics. After the last municipal election of March 2014 the orthodox Protestant SGP won eight out of nineteen seats in the municipal council of Neder-Betuwe. In Opheusden the percentage SGP voters was even higher at sixty percent (Gemeente Neder-Betuwe, 2014). To put this in perspective, on a national level the SGP only got around two to three percent of votes<sup>13</sup>. This makes the SGP by far the biggest political party in Neder-Betuwe, at a distance followed by the social democratic Labour Party<sup>14</sup> (PVDA) with four seats. This is not to say that non-orthodox Protestant groups are completely insignificant in Neder-Betuwe. Dodewaard (a place only two miles from Opheusden) has always been what they call a 'red stronghold', a place with a strong working class where many vote PVDA. Nevertheless, Opheusden is very much an orthodox Protestant town where life is largely dictated by religion: people organize themselves along religious lines, the Sunday is dedicated to God and people are actively working to create and maintain a place where they can live according to their orthodox Protestant faith.

### 3.2 Participant selection and research techniques

To get a broad and representative dataset, special care was given to the selection of participants. Members of all three churches were interviewed, both young and old, men and women. People at the forefront of the orthodox Protestant communities were interviewed (pastors, school principals of orthodox Protestant primary schools, a member of one of the church councils and a local councilor for the SGP) as well as members who were just church goers (although some of them were active in the societal life of the churches). Besides members of the orthodox Protestant churches three members of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands<sup>15</sup> (PKN) participated. The PKN is the second largest church in the Netherlands (after the Catholic Church in the Netherlands) formed in 2004 after the union of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Finally, a local councillor of the conservative-liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy<sup>16</sup> (VVD) and a current and former local councillor of the PVDA were interviewed. A total of twenty people were included as participants in this research.

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<sup>13</sup> In certain municipalities the SGP participated independent gaining 1,96 percent of votes. In other municipalities the SGP participated in combination with the ChristenUnie, gaining another 1,25 percent of votes (Kiesraad, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> In Dutch: Partij van de Arbeid, from here on referred to as PVDA.

<sup>15</sup> In Dutch: Protestantse Kerk Nederland, from here on referred to as PKN.

<sup>16</sup> In Dutch: Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie from here on referred to as VVD.

Fourteen were active in one of the orthodox Protestant churches. There were two PKN members who were former GGiN members. One PKN member married to a former GGiN member and there were three participants unaffiliated to one of these churches. Most of them were living in Opheusden with the exception of five participants who lived in the vicinity of Opheusden. Some of the participants were contacted through the organization they were active for, others through already established contacts and others again (mostly young adults) through Facebook. Despite initial concerns that field entry would be difficult, most people addressed were willing to do an interview. In a few cases people denied, either because they did not want to participate, they were unable to participate or because they did not respond to the interview inquiry. Data was gathered in semi-structured interviews. A topic list (see Appendix A) was used to make sure that those topics that were deemed relevant after the literature review were discussed. However, the semi-structured nature of the interviews also allowed room for the participants to bring in new or related topics during the interviews. When relevant, these topics were added to the topic list for future interviews. The interviews lasted from roughly forty minutes to little over an hour.

### 3.3 Data analysis

If the participants gave permission (which almost all did) the interviews were recorded on audio and a transcript was written out in Nvivo 10. From there the data was organized by coding, starting out with open coding, letting the data speak for itself, then slowly working towards more selective coding to acquire a dataset relevant for answering the research questions. The final code tree can be found in Appendix B.

## 4. Results

During the interviews it immediately became clear that the orthodox Protestant community of Opheusden is very loyal to its religion. It was not uncommon for participants to speak with a hand placed on the Bible. This is a community highly conscious of its relationship to God, actively incorporating this in every aspect of their lives. At the same time they are aware of their marginal position in a country where by far most people do not share their views. This means that the confession of their faith is like walking a tightrope. On one hand, it is about trying to hang on to their religion, on the other hand, it is about trying to remain relevant to and not alienate themselves from wider society. The interviews reflected this dilemma. Some of the participants were first of all concerned with hanging on to their religious beliefs and practices while others were more susceptible to the times in which we live. At the end of the day, though, they remain an orthodox religious community who first of all answer to God. The way group rights relate to individual rights within this community is therefore best understood within the context of their religious beliefs. This implies having some understanding of their faith, which in turn means having some understanding of their history. This results section will therefore start with a brief description of the history of the orthodox Protestant faith. It should be noted that the history of these churches was not of primary concern during the field work (although occasionally certain aspects of this were mentioned and discussed). So chapter 4.1 can be seen as an extension of chapter 2.2, rather than outcomes of the fieldwork. However, since it will be easier to understand how group rights relate to individual rights in the context of their religious beliefs and these beliefs come forth out of their history, a brief introduction into this was added to the results section.

### 4.1 A (brief) history of the orthodox Protestant faith in the Netherlands

The history of the Protestant faith is both long and complex and has today resulted in a wide range of Protestant churches in the Netherlands. These groups have a common origin in the Reformation, but (theological) disputes have over time resulted in numerous churches spanning from liberal Protestant to orthodox Protestant. A full description of this history, the theological debates and the forming of all of these churches is beyond the scope of this study. However some understanding of their history, the foundation of their religion and religious beliefs, is essential for a proper understanding of how these groups live and think today.



The Protestant religion has its roots in the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Early Protestant thinkers like Calvin and Luther felt that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed away from the Christian faith and therefore needed to reform. The 31<sup>st</sup> October of 1517 is often associated with the start of the reformation. The day that Martin Luther nailed his ‘Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences’ on the door of the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, present day Germany. The Ninety-Five Theses contain Luther’s criticism of Roman Catholic practices of the time, for example concerning the lucrative business in ‘tickets to heaven’ or indulgences (Amelink, 2001, pp.18-19). Ultimately the Catholic Church responded with a counter reformation, proposing certain reforms while at the same time critically responding to the views of Luther, Calvin and similar thinkers. The struggle between Protestants and Roman Catholics that followed led to one of the most gruesome conflicts in European history. The Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) killed an estimated eight million people (Norman, 1996, p.568). In the case of some German states this meant an estimated twenty-five to forty percent decline in population (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014).

The Reformation was a movement aimed at restoring the Catholic Church to the roots of what was perceived to be the Christian faith. This element of staying close to the Bible remains very important to the orthodox Protestant groups today. Besides that, the Reformation brought forth three religious scriptures, the ‘Three Forms of Unity’, that to this day remain the basis for how orthodox Protestants interpret the Bible and in general, what it for them means to be Christian. The first of these Three Forms of Unity is the ‘Belgic Confession’, drafted in 1561 by Walloon pastor Guido de Brès. At the time the Belgic Confession had the purpose of publically defending the Reformed beliefs to the Catholic leaders of Tournai, present day Belgium, whom had persecuted the local Reformed population for decades (Strauss, 1993, p.502). Since then, the Belgic Confession grew out to be one of the main scriptures explaining the common beliefs of Dutch orthodox Protestants. The second of the Three Forms of Unity is the ‘Heidelberg Catechism’ (1563). The Heidelberg Catechism was commissioned by Prince Elector Frederick III of the Electoral Palatinate. The Electoral Palatinate was a territory of the Holy Roman Empire in present day Germany. Frederick III wanted to use the Catechism to educate his people in the Reformed doctrine (Platform voor de studie van de Heidelbergse Catechismus, 2015). The Catechism consists of 129 questions and answers grouped in 52 Sundays, one for each week of the year (Amelink, p.20). As such they are still used in many orthodox Protestant churches. The last of the Three Forms of Unity is the ‘Canons of Dort’. The Canons of Dort were the end result of one of the first of many struggles between Protestants. At stake was, among others, the topic of predestination. According to the Belgic Confession God has for eternity determined the faith of humans. The so called ‘Remonstrants’ held a more liberal view. People, by the confession of their faith, did have some form

of self-determination in their salvation. In the end the views of the Belgic Confession defended by the contra-Remonstrants were victorious (Post, 2009, p.4). At the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), a series of meetings of church leaders, the criticism of the Remonstrants was countered with the Canons of Dort (Amelink, pp.19-20). The Synods of Dort also decided on a new Bible translation. The resulting ‘Statenvertaling’ was the first official Dutch translation of the Bible and is still in use among many orthodox Protestants. The Three Forms of Unity and the Statenvertaling remain highly important to the orthodox Protestant churches today. They are the main source for the confession of their faith and the way they live their lives. As such, they were from time to time mentioned in the interviews.

## 4.2 The Bible as the absolute truth

Since the orthodox Protestants adhere to a strict and absolute interpretation of the Bible, the way they relate to individual rights is in certain cases the direct result of this interpretation. Like in the case of the role of men and women in life and society: *‘But in the first place I feel that the position of women and that is a very dangerous statement, is subordinate to the position of men. And by that I do not mean that the woman is the slave of the man or the drudge of the man. But I always maintain the creation order. God has created Adam and from Adam he created Eve. And so he determined the order in the creation. And that comes back in the Bible, yes that order constantly returns in the Bible.’* (M/HHK). More to the point this means that God has given man and woman specific characteristics for their role in life and society: *‘...man and woman are equivalent but that does not mean that they should have the same position. I believe that God has given characteristics to a woman that she can use very well within the family. I believe that the first place of the woman is within the family because she has been given the characteristics to do so, more than I see in men. (...) If I look around in my family and I see my wife at work, we have a big family, then I take my hat off. I could never do what she is doing within the family. Because in my view she has been given the characteristics to do so. And I think it works the same the other way around. So everyone has their own place and again without wanting to take something away from someone, not at all. It is the place where you fit best. The creation order has indeed been beautifully created.’* (M/GGiN). So the place of women is within the household, taking care of the upbringing of the children. Men’s role is that of wage-earner and supervisor. The orthodox Protestants like to say that men and women are *‘equivalent but not equal’*. The orthodox Protestant women agreed that God has given men and women their distinct place in life and society, although their enthusiasm on this varied: *‘Well, being a woman you sometimes feel like: “why can I not or should I not be a member of government? I could do that just as well as a man.” But according*

to the Bible there is a specific place for women and you do want to stick to that.' (F/GGiN). Others see their role as women as one of great pride and importance: *'We, from a biblical point of view, see the upbringing of children, if you may have them, as a really important task. Actually the most important task if you may be a mother. (...) I find it honorable, I am proud of it.'* (F/HHK). Moreover, the women find that the image some outsiders hold off them, as helpless and subordinate to men, does them no justice. One of the participants said the following in relation to the court rulings that women should be allowed as political representatives for the SGP: *'I would have preferred if this would have come from within the party, rather than being imposed on by the government under the guise of women discrimination. I do not think anyone at the SGP complained like: "I am being suppressed, help!" I mean as a woman you can do something about that yourself.'* (F/GG). Since the role of women is first of all within the household, they are excluded from leadership positions, they are not allowed in the church councils. So instead of direct influence through positions of power within the community, the influence of women runs mostly through their husband: *'You can talk about it [certain topics or discussions] with your husband. So if all is well, man and woman talk extensively.'* (M/GGiN). Despite the opaque ways women can exert their influence, the orthodox Protestants feel that women have enough ways to express their opinion and have their voices heard within the community. Nevertheless, from a liberal perspective, the position of women within the orthodox Protestant community is controversial. And it is doubtful whether women, especially those unwilling to fit the strict orthodox Protestant gender roles, are adequately represented.

The position of women illustrates how in certain cases the orthodox Protestant dealing with individual rights is the direct consequence of their strict and absolute interpretation of the Bible. This means that when the Bible leaves room for different interpretations there is also room for different opinions. In the case of the position of women participants also referred to the Bible in support of their view that women should be allowed in leadership positions: *'I personally would not have any difficulties with that, The Bible also knows women who hold leadership positions.'* (M/HHK). So there is room within the orthodox Protestant faith to come to a more liberal dealing with women rights. On the other hand, when the Bible is more unambiguous and definite on a subject there is no such room: *'Let me be clear: the more definite Gods word. To name one example, the whole issue of homosexuality, the Bible is unequivocal about that. It is forbidden. And when it is about other subjects, I mentioned homosexuality but also when it is about cohabitation than we have a clear view on that because the lord commands that man and woman are to be married. Well those are things where we say: "God's word is so clear, our opinion is set."'* (M/GGiN). So the orthodox Protestant position on homosexuality is fixed and from their perspective unchangeable. They recognize that certain people have homosexual feelings but

they cannot, on grounds of God's word, accept that people put these feelings to practice: *'To us there is a clear distinction, which is based on the Christian vision, whether someone has a homosexual orientation but fights it. Because he knows that he, based on God's word, is not allowed to.'* (M/GGiN). When the topic of homosexuality came to discussion, the participants were asked what this position in practice means for their dealing with homosexuals. The general response was that homosexuals would always be treated with respect and they would be helped with their sexual orientation. This help consists of guiding homosexuals in dealing with and suppressing, their feelings. Other orthodox Protestant participants somewhat downplayed the topic, stating that homosexuals within the community would out of their own volition want to suppress their sexual orientation since it also clashes with their religious beliefs. Despite the orthodox Protestant claim that homosexuals will always be treated with respect, some of the non-orthodox Protestant participants painted a different picture: *'No that really is a taboo, homosexuality. If you hear them about that, they will not all say it like this. But if you hear them talking about it on the construction site, they simply are "untermenschen", so to speak. They understand that you cannot say it like that in public discourse but informally you often hear that.'* (M/PKN former GGiN). Another non-orthodox Protestant participant said: *'To me it seems horrible when you are gay within the orthodox Protestant community. Because you are not recognized, people see that as a disease which can be cured by I do not know what. So that makes those people concerned unhappy, which is awful.'* (M/unaffiliated). Whether homosexuals are treated with respect or not, in the end they are within the orthodox Protestant community, not allowed to live in accordance to their sexual orientation. This can potentially be a grave violation of their individual rights.

As stated in the theoretical discussion, the realistic rights of exit is an important condition to counter illiberal elements within a group or community. If this condition is met, those unwilling to live to orthodox Protestant views can always choose to leave the church and the community. Therefore restrictions within the community do not necessarily have to contradict with individual rights as one can always leave for a place without those restrictions. In the interviews religious disaffiliation, its motives and consequences, were frequently discussed. Although according to the orthodox Protestants religious disaffiliation is uncommon, when people do leave the church the most common response was that they would always be treated respectfully and that it is important to keep communicating: *'I believe that you should always continue to communicate with everyone. So it is not a separation. That you do not want to have anything to do with them anymore.'* (M/GGiN). When one of participants was asked if anything would change in the relationship if one of her children was to leave the church the response was as follows: *'Nothing, they can stay at home, they can come home but they must obey to the rules. I would not accept loud pop music or what not, no. As far as that is concerned and that is what I tell*

*the kids: you can always come home. We will be there for you day and night. But you must obey the rules that we have here.*' (F/HHK). Contrary to these statements others acknowledge that religious disaffiliation can have serious negative social consequences. This is in part a natural result of people choosing different paths: *'The contact stays. But of course you lose an important binding factor, you do notice that. (...) If you hang around with someone who starts doing things that you cannot do because of your faith then people go their separate ways. So often and that does not have to be on purpose, because the lifestyle changes, people drift apart.'* (M/GGiN). At the same time, leaving the church can also have negative social consequences because it is not accepted by the social environment and seen as apostasy. One of the participants who had left the GGiN said: *'... you really are disowned if you say the faith goodbye. They try to keep you, then they first think you are crazy, but at a certain point you really are different.'* (M/PKN former GGiN). Another participant, member of one of the three orthodox Protestant churches, remarked that religious disaffiliation is often associated with other arguments between relatives: *'Often you see that it coincides with an argument and well then the contact is already lost. So they first get in an argument with their parents, then they throw their youth aside, then the faith and after that, there is no more contact.'* (M/GGiN). The social consequences of religious disaffiliation, whether or not it is accepted by family and friends, seems to differ from case to case. For some, seeing friends or family leave the church is unacceptable. This is understandable if you believe that God is the only way to salvation and true happiness. Seeing someone close to you wander off this path is undeniably difficult. Especially when other arguments are involved, church disaffiliation can lead to the breakaway of social contacts. Others are more resigned. They will not agree but they will try to make the best of it. Praying that at some point those close to them will return to the faith. Still, leaving the church can be quite a step: *'Yes they do not make that step because it is also safe to be part of such a community. It is not only negative but also the idea that people take care of you. But on the other hand, if you see things differently and you say: "I do not believe in this anymore, I do not want this anymore", then you have a problem. Then all of a sudden you lose the natural warmth of the orthodox Protestant nest. You have to be strong and committed to make such a choice.'* (M/unaffiliated).

### 4.3 The sinful human nature

The absolute and strict interpretation of the Bible also exerts its influence on the way orthodox Protestants relate to individual rights in a more indirect way. This is mainly due to the orthodox Protestant view on human nature, which is as to be expected derived from the Bible, more specifically

the story of Adam and Eve: *'He [God] has, as we can read in the Bible, created Adam and Eve. And from Adam and Eve came the entire human race. God is our Creator, he has given us a place on this earth. (...) God asks us to cultivate and preserve this earth. To deal with it in accordance to his will and to his honor. So that he as the Creator gets the honor of being the Creator. In the first chapters of the Bible, we can also read that all did not go well. Adam and Eve became disobedient to their Creator. Still the lord gave them a place on this earth, even though they had showed that they did not love God above themselves. The assignment that he had given, which is described as you are not allowed to eat from that fruit tree in paradise. A test command as we call it, to show if they really love God above all else or if this fruit at one point becomes more desirable than to love God. That by eating this fruit, they show that they love themselves and not God. The Bible describes that they have eaten from this forbidden fruit and by doing so humans became, as we call it, a fallen human. Fallen from God, becoming an enemy of God.'* (M/GGiN). The doctrine of original sin makes every human broken, all the participants who were asked for their view on human nature described it in terms like sinful, dark, broken or evil. The only way this fallen human can achieve happiness is by restoring its relationship to God, which in turn means devoting one's life to the Bible: *'The Bible is our source. It is in essence the book, the norm to which we live our lives.'* (M/GGiN). Human individuals are subordinate to this, as one participant said: *'You need to look at it this way: in everything we do in our daily lives, you have to be able to bring the lord with you. That defines our entire life. And if you go to a place where humans are at the center, where it is only about the pleasure of humans. We believe the lord needs to be at the center. God must be at the center.'* (M/GGiN). So a liberal perspective on individual rights, whereby humans are best capable of determining their own fate, is incompatible with orthodox Protestant views: *'Then you emphasize the free will of humans and the autonomy thought of what I want is good. But we say "no", you should never lay the norm within yourself. Instead you should put the norm in something which is solid, which is the word of God. Let that lead.'* (M/GGiN). This perspective helps to explain certain community rules, concerning for example their reluctant usage of modern media, which are there to protect the sinful human being from unholy temptations: *'We as Christian hear, see and experience a lot of dirtiness and filth and that is not just around us. If I look into my own heart then I know that I am also inclined to a lot of evil, because evil also lives in my heart. If God did not hold on to me, I am no better than someone who does not serve God. So it is the love of God that holds me, that stops me from all sorts of excesses and sins. If I look at a picture of people in a soccer stadium who trash things or spend the whole Sunday on the internet then I know that I would do the same if God did not hold on to me, because evil is within us. It is not something from the outside, it comes from within. We radiate that, we do that. And then it is the love from God, when I feel that, I want to fight all the sin, all the anger. I do not want that sin and anger anymore. I*

*do not have to look at other people, I do not need to put on a television if I want to see filth. I must look into my own heart.*’ (F/HHK).

The sinful human nature creates a barrier for change or critique, as it is always the sinful individual that is to initiate this. So when one of the former GGiN participants wanted to discuss the usage of open internet, the response from the GGiN was simple: open internet was not open to discussion. People need to protect themselves from sinful behavior as much as possible, therefore the internet needs to be filtered. In other cases of disagreement, the response of the church was simply that the synod (the church leadership) had decided, so no questions were to be asked. While a liberal view on individual rights is grounded in the believe that people themselves can decide on what is best for them and that it is therefore necessary to create the space for people to do so. Orthodox Protestant views on human nature do not share this trust in human autonomy and self-determination. If anything people need to be protected against their sinful nature and therefore rules are needed to limit their freedom. This aspect plays an important role in some of the social norms and life rules which to many outsiders are characteristic of the orthodox Protestant churches. In the Netherlands these churches are sometimes, a bit disdainful, referred to as the ‘black stocking churches’: a reference to the strict dress codes of these churches. But these rules and social norms also concern media usage, particular social activities like going to large scale festivals or parties and other what they call ‘*worldly affairs*’, where humans and human pleasure is central.

This is not to say that people within the community necessarily experience a limitation of their freedom. When the social norms and life rules were discussed with the orthodox Protestant participants, none of them expressed a limitation of their freedom as a result of these rules and norms. In fact, most cared little for them: *‘I try not to care too much for that. It is not the most important thing of the community: what you can and cannot do.’* (F/GGiN). Another participant stated: *‘...for me it is not about all these external rules. Let me put it this way, if these external rules are experienced as a burden then you are doing it wrong. It must be an, as the Bible states, act of love. You must want it.’* (M/GGiN). To the orthodox Protestants, who first of all want to live their life in accordance with the Bible, these rules are of minor importance. The general feeling towards those within the church that do disagree with the strict social rules, is that they can easily switch from church: *‘There certainly are differences [of opinion within the church]. In Opheusden alone you have a Moluccan church, you have the Reformed Congregations, you have the Restored Reformed Church. So people who disagree with something and cannot do enough with that, in their opinion cannot do enough, can easily change church.’* (F/HHK). Despite the fact that the rules and norms are of little importance to the orthodox Protestant participants, some did mention that they are one of the primary reasons why people leave

the church: *'Often you see that people who follow this path [of leaving the church] do so because they find it to be oppressive, difficult and constraining. They want to live more freely, they want to spread their wings as we call it. They want to live in accordance to what the world has to offer. They do want to watch television, they want to watch everything the internet has to offer.'* (M/GGiN). For those participants that had left the GGiN, the strict rules and traditions of the church also played a role in their departure: *'You notice that you are so busy with all the rules and traditions that they in the end keep you away from the faith. That you are not engaged anymore with what really matters.'* (M/PKN former GGiN).

#### 4.4 The universal interpretation of the Bible

The orthodox Protestant's strict and absolute Bible interpretation has its direct and indirect implications for the way they relate to the individual rights of group members. But how do orthodox Protestant views relate to the individual rights of out-group members? How do they relate to those who do not share their religious views? To start with, it is important to realize that as far as the orthodox Protestants are concerned their religious views also apply to those who do not hold them: *'Look there are many people who are unchristian, I think you are one of them. They have certain ideas about Christianity that we are struggling for ourselves. You have to let go of that thought. We have an idea, a faith which comes forth out of God's word. And from that word we say "people, there is an afterlife, there is a God who created Heaven and Hell, there is a God that we have to obey." That not only applies to me but also to you and all other Dutchmen, it applies to all who inhabit this world.'* (M/GGiN). From this universal view of their faith comes their duty as Christians to spread the word of God: *'We believe that there comes a time when this world will perish in fire. You see this already, all of us are messing up and wasting this earth. The Bible says: "I will return". Then heaven will open and God will return to judge this earth. And that will be the end of time, a definite end. If I should run into you at that moment you would say: "Madam you never warned me and now here I am". I am accountable for that. So we as Christians have the duty to warn others.'* (F/HHK). Since they interpret the Bible as the absolute and universal truth and it is the duty of a good Christian to spread this truth, it is from the orthodox Protestant perspective difficult to allow others to live their lives to unbiblical norms. When in one of the interviews it was suggested that allowing Sunday shopping would not necessarily have to undermine their ability to respect Biblical Sabbath the response was as follows: *'That may sound very friendly [allowing some people to shop on Sunday and others to maintain Biblical Sabbath]. Like we give everyone the space, but there lays the dilemma. Because God has not*



*only told us that we should respect Biblical Sabbath, but to the entire humankind. And then I can say: “you go do your groceries, do your thing”. But then I give you a false sense of friendship and space. And that is why we find that so bad. That is why we always vote against the Sunday opening of shops. Because this not only applies to us but to all of us. God wants his day to be honored, that it is a resting day on which we are working on God’s word, the Bible. It is explained in the church, so we should make use of that. And if my neighbor does not do that, this should sadden me. Then I should not say: “do your thing”, it should sadden me. I should say: “you are walking the wrong path”.’ (F/HHK). In another interview one of the participants recognized that the universal interpretation of the Bible creates a somewhat difficult situation for the rights of other groups, like the right of Muslims to Islamic education: ‘At one side you want freedom of education. At the other side you have to, on biblical grounds, deny others their religious education. I find that very difficult. And then I respect those men in politics. Because I am not sure how to feel about that. I want freedom of education but that implies that Muslims also have the freedom of religious education. At one side I am inclined to say: “then others should have that” but at the same time I have to reject that on biblical grounds. So that is quite a split you find yourself in. I find that very difficult.’ (F/GG).*

Although the universal interpretation of their faith combined with their duty to spread this faith may sound threatening to the individual rights of out-group members, all of those interviewed highlighted the importance of showing respect for those who hold different views. People should never by force be brought to the orthodox Protestant faith. In multiple interviews the participants made the comparison with extremist Muslims to show the pacifistic and respectful nature of their faith: ‘We will never force something upon someone. I am currently reading a book about Afghanistan, a true Muslim country. There you see the difference with the Christian faith, Islam is far more militant in imposing their faith on others. Christ taught us that we should only testify of him by our own words and actions.’ (M/HHK). Faith only has true meaning if it comes from within: ‘We should not use force, because then it might only take on outward appearance. We must do it by heart, it must be in full accordance with our heart. It must come from within. If the shops are closed on Sunday and my neighbor says: “I respect biblical Sabbath for you” then it has absolutely no meaning to us.’ (F/HHK). When the topic was pressed a bit further and the participants were asked whether the government should give room for people to live in unbiblical ways, the responses differed. For some, government policy should always advance and reflect Biblical norms. One of the more hardline participants referred to the high days of Dutch Protestantism when only Protestants were allowed as government officials. Most however showed more realism towards the times in which we live: ‘I am realistic enough to not want a theocracy. I think that it is very important that we give each other liberties. But that works both ways,

*we will give liberties to secular people who do not believe God.*’ (M/GGiN). This example shows the difference between the religion in theory and the religion in practice in a time and society where by far most people do not hold orthodox Protestant views. Some want to hold on to the roots of their faith and refer to the highly illiberal article 36 of the Belgic Confession which states that it is the duty of the government to *‘eliminate all idolatry, false religions and to eliminate the empire of the antichrist’* (Online-bijbel.nl, 2015). Others are more realistic, they might on a personal level disagree, but they accept that different people value different things. They are first off all concerned with their own freedom to refrain from certain practices if they conflict with their religious views: *‘I am not in favor of gay marriages. I am not in favor because I do not believe that is the right way to handle that. But I would not be the person to say “you absolutely should not be allowed to do that”, no. But I would not, when it comes to the topic of marriage officiants, marry gay couples.’* (M/GGiN).

So while the core of orthodox Protestant beliefs are difficult to reconcile with the individual rights of out-group members, those who worship a different religion or none at all, there is a large awareness of their marginal position. They certainly do not wish to overplay their hand, giving more room to others than their religion would theoretically allow. Although only a few non-orthodox Protestants were interviewed, none of them felt that their individual rights, or the individual rights of other out-group members, were violated as a result of the large presence and influence of orthodox Protestants in Opheusden and the surrounding region: *‘I have discussions with them but I never feel like they want to convert me or anything. If you respect their beliefs, their way of thinking, without being judgmental, then the opposite also applies. There is a large degree of reciprocity.’* (M/unaffiliated). As long as you are conscious of the religious nature of Opheusden it was described as a pleasant place to live: *‘My general practitioner is orthodox Protestant, so you do not have to go there for an abortion or euthanasia. I know this, but he is a fantastic general practitioner. Well, those are things that you have to accept if you live here. But if you do, it is a fine living environment. It is a beautiful region, people are mostly friendly, crime is low, you name it.’* (M/unaffiliated). The participants who were active for the PVDA and the VVD in the municipal council of Neder-Betuwe named the SGP as reliable partners. As long as proposals are not in direct conflict with the orthodox Protestant religious beliefs, there is room for cooperation and agreements. In general they described the area of Neder-Betuwe as a pleasant and safe living environment, partly crediting this to the strong work ethic and the social engagement among the orthodox Protestant population.

## 4.5 The orthodox Protestant pillar

So what role do group rights play in all of this? On a local level religious group rights are aimed at enforcing Biblical Sabbath: *'The population here is just highly religious. You will notice this in certain outward expressions, the way people dress and the decisions they make. Biblical Sabbath is very important here. You will also notice this in local policy. There are fairs but only for two days and never on a Sunday. In those kind of things. You also see this is in the police regulations. We have a football club here in Opheusden with football fields. Well, those are completely closed on Sundays, nothing happens there. If there ever is a party there are clear rules. The party is allowed but the music has to stop at 11.30PM.'* (M/GGiN). Second of all, religious group rights are used to create and maintain the orthodox Protestant pillar. Opheusden, the wider area of Neder-Betuwe and surrounding places like Rhenen, Veenendaal and Wageningen offer extensive state supported facilities for orthodox Protestants. These include an orthodox Protestant retirement home, a healthcare center for mentally deficient youngsters, orthodox Protestant home care organizations, multiple orthodox Protestant primary schools and an orthodox Protestant secondary school.

Since orthodox Protestants want to uphold their interpretation of the Bible and they feel that they are sometimes misunderstood in wider society, they value their own institutions in which they can practice their religion: *'Among secular people there is often little understanding, you cannot blame them since they do not know our way of thinking. But because of that, there is the need for our own institution that do understand us.'* (M/HHK). At the same time, the orthodox Protestant pillar functions as a barrier to unbiblical outside influences. This helps to protect group members from unbiblical temptations but also creates a place where children and adolescents can be educated and socialized in the orthodox Protestant way of life: *'They are frightened to become part of the bigger whole and lose their own identity. And especially in the younger phase they are concerned for the identity. Because often you are still searching yourself, so well if you indulge to much in worldly affairs then the chance is relatively big...[that you lose the orthodox Protestant identity]'*(M/HHK). Although most of the participants valued the orthodox Protestant pillar, there were also participants who felt that Christians need to be more among non-Christians: *'It has its ups and downs [the pillar]. The upside is that people do not look at you strangely, people find it normal that you are Christian. But it also has its downside. I think Christians have the calling to live among non-Christians. I do not think God gave us the mission to all live together.'* (M/HHK).

Group rights enable orthodox Protestants to create and maintain their own pillar in society, this has a number of different positive as well as negative effects on individual rights. For the orthodox

Protestants, who want to use their individual freedom and individual rights to practice their religion, the pillar provides them the place to do so. In several interviews the participants expressed the feeling of being misunderstood by wider society, facing negative stereotypes and images some outsiders' hold of orthodox Protestants: *'Well in this society I feel that it is getting worse [the space to practice their religion]. Look, here you live in a pretty protected environment and you do not notice it that much. But if you look at it nationwide. Take for example internet discussions about certain topics, whenever it is about religion, the way people react and pick on religion.'* (F/GG). Another participant stated: *'I often notice that people who are not Christian have a very negative image of those who are. That they say: "they will double cross you as soon as they have the chance, they will deceive you". The outside world has a pretty negative image of Christians.'* (M/HHK). Some feel that there is little room for and acceptance of orthodox Protestant beliefs in wider society: *'People always speak of freedom of speech. I do not feel like there is freedom of speech. You can say what the majority thinks and if you say something else, then this is not accepted.'* (F/GG). About marriage officiants unwilling to marry gay couples a participant said: *'If I take for example marriage officiants who refuse to marry gay couples, that really upsets me. I do not think it ever happened that this caused a problem. That a marriage officiant refused to marry a gay couple. This has not once caused a problem in the Netherlands and still the majority feels that something needs to be done. I call it the intolerance of the tolerant. Why? Who is bothered by that? I find that very upsetting.'* (M/GGiN).

By having their own pillar the orthodox Protestants have a place where they can express themselves and their religion without facing negative stereotypes or having the feeling that their opinion is disapproved of. It gives them the space to be orthodox Protestant and it reinforces the community. The community, the safety of being part of a larger entity and the support people get from others within the community, was by multiple participants mentioned as something they highly value: *'People know each other and often they help each other. If something is wrong, financial problems or something, there is a collection in the church. So if people are in trouble, there is a collection and then everyone can give money. And there are certain social groups in which some people are lonely, so there is a group of women who go out and visit these people.'* (F/GGiN). Another participant said: *'A lot a friends of mine are religious. This is a binding factor, I met them because of the faith. And this community is just really friendly. If you need something, they are always there for you. We are always there for each other.'* (M/GGiN). In this sense group rights support individual rights. At the same time group rights strengthen a community where illiberal elements are present. Furthermore, the pillar creates a barrier between orthodox Protestants and outsiders. These are certainly not unworldly people. However, as people tend to remain close to the institutions the pillar offers, this does to a certain extent limit their

contact with people of different beliefs and their view on other ways of life: *'There are those who find it very important [the pillar], that you go to a Christian school to hear what is biblical. I do not really agree with that. I went to a Christian primary school here in Opheusden and to a Christian secondary school. But after that I went on to study on a non-Christian school. And to be honest, I am glad I did. It does broaden your horizon. To me that is important because otherwise you just stay in your own world, which is safe but you remain there. I do not think that is the right way, I think you need to see a little bit of everything.'* (F/GGiN). The division between orthodox Protestant and non-orthodox Protestant also means that for those who wish to leave the faith, the step to make is larger than if orthodox Protestants were more merged in wider society and more engaged in institutions also in use by non-orthodox Protestants. As youngsters grow up in the safe environment of the orthodox Protestant pillar, they go to orthodox Protestant primary and secondary schools, church, confirmation classes and make friends at orthodox Protestant youth organizations, the exit option is more difficult than if youngsters were more active in and a part of, non-orthodox Protestant circles. Consequently, the pillar has its effect on the realistic rights of exit.

Some of the participants mentioned that because of all the orthodox Protestant facilities in Opheusden and the wider area, the region draws in other orthodox Protestants from across the country: *'Point is that the orthodox Protestant community here has quite a lot of facilities. There is an orthodox Protestant elderly home, a healthcare center for mentally deficient youngsters. There is a large secondary school with among others HAVO and VWO [the two highest grades in the Dutch secondary school system]. That is in Kesteren [a place about three miles from Opheusden], the Van Lodenstein College. There is also a school in Amersfoort which used to be the main location but I think the school in Kesteren is bigger by now. So these facilities make this an attractive area for those kind of people from around the country. (...) From the Bible belt, the Veluwe and Zeeland people move here because the churches here are just a bit stricter than over there. And it is a community where people know each other, so for those people that is very attractive.'* (M/unaffiliated). According to the same participant this also results in the opposite effect whereby non-orthodox Protestants leave the region: *'Some people find that pretty frightening or oppressive or name it. Because also on a political level, the influence of the SGP is growing. Let's put it like this, I am personally not affected by this, I'm pretty good with the orthodox Protestants. (...) But people who do not have that, well they are more inclined to say: "we are going to look somewhere else."'* (M/unaffiliated). The consequence of this is that it is getting more difficult to provide for non-orthodox Protestant facilities, like public schools: *'Public education is a difficult point. Because the orthodox Protestant community is so large here the public schools are relatively small in comparison to the orthodox Protestant schools. (...) And sometimes they [the*

orthodox Protestant schools] *are better because they have enough students, enough financial means to do certain things. In the end schools get financed based on their number of students. And a lot of cost are fixed costs. So one way or the other this can lead to a loss of quality of education*' (M/unaffiliated). As public primary schools have difficulties offering the same quality of education as the larger orthodox Protestant schools, non-orthodox Protestant parents also choose to place their children on an orthodox Protestant school, further adding to the decline of public education: *'My kids went to the public primary school, well those schools are struggling. There are more and more orthodox Protestant children while at the same time the public school gets a bad reputation. Well, then you see people who normally do not go to church, or who used to go to the church, placing their children on the Restored Reformed school, which is the lightest of the orthodox Protestant schools. I see that with my own daughter, she lives in Ochten [a small town about 4 miles from Opheusden] and put her children on an orthodox Protestant school. It is a fine school but I still find that terrible.'* (M/unaffiliated) There were other participants who did not recognize the image of orthodox Protestants moving from other parts of the country to Opheusden and the wider area of Neder-Betuwe. Neither did they recognize the image of the region becoming more and more defined by orthodox Protestants. And although this study is unable to answer the question whether or not this process is actually happening, the fact that all three orthodox Protestant churches in Opheusden are growing might be an indication that this process is underway. Besides that, the orthodox Protestant SGP has shown a steady increase of influence since the forming of the municipality of Neder-Betuwe in 2003, gaining 29% of votes at the municipally elections of 2006, 33.5% in 2010 and 37.1% at the last elections of 2014 (Kiesraad, 2014).

#### 4.6 Being orthodox Protestant in 2014

In this final chapter of the result section we will look at how the participants feel about being orthodox Protestant in a mostly non-orthodox Protestant society. Do they feel that they have enough room for their religion? And to start with, what is the effect of present-day society, with its social media and increased intercultural and interreligious contact, on the orthodox Protestant community and their faith?

Multiple participants mentioned the generational differences among orthodox Protestants. While higher education for women used to be a taboo, these days it is common for orthodox Protestant women to attend higher education: *'My daughter just finished her education at a University of Applied Sciences, my other daughter is almost done. That used to be different, it wasn't accepted, it was a*

*taboo.*' (M/GGiN). With the arrival of the internet, the orthodox Protestants are no longer able to keep all modern media at a distance. While television is banned in two of the three churches. The importance of internet in today's society, for business, education and other purposes, means that they cannot do the same with the internet. The churches try to limit access to unbiblical content by recommending or prescribing an internet filter. But as is often the case with the internet, this only to some extent achieves its purpose. As some of the participants acknowledged, youngsters often find ways around these filters, not to mention work or educational settings where no filter is used. The effect, of both internet and more youth heading to the city for higher education, is that there is more knowledge among the younger generation of the outside world. Consequently it becomes harder for the community to avoid outside influences: *'The world is not standing still. You can live under a rock for a long time but in the end you attend school and you go to work. Among the youth some go to higher education. They go to the city where they meet other young people for whom different values matter. You used to be able to hide behind the dikes.'* (M/unaffiliated). Another participant made the comparison between herself and her mother: *'Look at my mom, she is always here in Opheusden. She does not work. Then you really are between Christian people and you see little else of the world. And I think that if people go to the city to study, they come in contact with people who think differently. So then you start to look at things more nuanced.'* (F/GGiN). To a certain extent this leads to different views on certain topics among the younger generation. When one of the participants was asked whether there are generational differences she responded: *'I think so, yes. Young people these days see and do so much on the internet. I think they are more of this world than the older generations.'* (F/GGiN). She later added an example to this: *'There are women here who do not vote because they believe that a women should not vote. Well I definitely do not agree on that.'* (F/GGiN). This is not to say that the younger generation is less religious than older generations. When religious doctrines were discussed, like the importance of the creation narrative, the story of Adam and Eve and the fall of Man, views were similar among young and old. The younger participants, just like the older ones, described the faith as an important part of their life: *'I am glad I was raised as a Christian. That there is a God is for me an added value. It is nice to know that there is someone who knows all, who sees all. If I am ever facing difficulties, I can always go to him. I sometimes think about people who have no faith. That if you find something difficult and you do not dare to talk about it, there is no one to go to. We pray and tell what is bothering us, or what would help us. I think that is a big added value to life'* (F/GGiN). Generational differences do however lead to more discussions on and at times a different approach to certain topics. Especially when it concerns topics where orthodox Protestant views are radically different from those common in mainstream society. It seems that the increased contact and familiarity with different views means that certain social issues can no longer be ignored. Such as homosexuality: *'It used to be like:*

*homosexuality is forbidden and if you are you are banished. And there are examples of those who committed suicide. We really try to get rid of that. That you can speak openly about it.* ' (F/GGiN). Or concerning women in politics: *'In the past you did not think about that, women did not attend higher education. Which is difficult now because there are lots of women who would do very well in politics. So that is just really difficult.'* (F/GGiN).

Since religious orthodoxy has been an intensely debated topic in the Netherlands in recent years, the orthodox Protestants also find themselves under increased scrutiny. The discussions about women and gay rights in the Islam has drawn attention to the orthodox Protestants. Participants were asked how they feel about this and whether they have the feeling that their religious freedom is being threatened. As stated in the last chapter, there is a feeling among the orthodox Protestants of being misunderstood. Often making comments that people judge the orthodox Protestants without knowing too much about them. Still, most of them feel that there is enough room for the confession of their faith: *'Well sometimes I tell my colleagues that we can be really happy with the room we have to give this kind of subsidized education. We only have to look around us at other countries to see that the kind of Christian education as we give it, is almost nowhere possible, to do that subsidized. So in that sense we have, we get, a lot of space.'* (M/GGiN). Especially on a local level they are satisfied with the space they have to live in accordance with their faith: *'We are really thankful that here in the village we can express our faith as the lord commands. It is just really peaceful here. The shops are closed on Sunday, we can go to church.'* (F/HHK).

There are however concerns towards the future. The increased public discussions on religious orthodoxy have not gone unnoticed and they are worried for the consequences this in term may have: *'We are increasingly faced with: "you can be religious, that is up to you, within the walls of your home you can believe whatever you want". But as soon you are outside, you should keep your mouth shut. And we are, you should know that, quite anxious about that, we are afraid of that.'* (M/GGiN). More to the point they are concerned with whether they will be able to continue to refrain from practices which contradict with their religious beliefs: *'I do wonder what the future will bring, what about doctors? If you, on grounds of conscience, refuse to perform euthanasia is there no more room for that? Are you not allowed to be a doctor? Or abortion if you work at a hospital? 'Then I am like: if there is no more room for marriage officiants to refuse marrying gay couples, than what about doctors or people who work in nursing or people who work in a store. Will they be forced to work on Sundays? Will you no longer be hired if you refuse that? Where is this heading?'* (F/GG). Some participants felt that it has already come to the point where their religious freedom is being limited: *'You see that the freedom of education is under increased pressure. That the government forces things on us. Yes, that*



*we are forced to do certain things which we, based on our religious views, cannot do.'* (M/HHK). Another participant gave the example of a marriage officiant who was refused a job as a result of his religious views. Most however feel that so far it has not come to the point where their freedom of religion is at stake. Whether the same can be said in a number of years is something some of the participants doubt: *'But I think we are, or maybe we will be limited in this [religious freedom]. It will be worse and maybe this is because of the struggles of Muslims. Often Christians are lumped together with Muslims because some have the idea that you are inferior [as women]. The role of women is always portrayed negatively while I do not experience it like that. But of course if you never immerse yourself in something you will often take over prevailing norms. I think if people would invest a bit more, the image would be different.'* (F/GG).

## 5. Discussion

The objective of this research was to investigate the relation between individual and group rights by means of a qualitative case study of the orthodox Protestant community of Opheusden. Dutch state support for cultural pluralism and religious minorities have given the orthodox Protestants group rights by which they have been able to create and maintain their own pillar in Dutch society. In a place like Opheusden and the municipality of Neder-Betuwe this is clearly visible in all the orthodox Protestant state supported facilities and the strict enforcing of the Biblical Sabbath by local authorities. As a result group rights have contributed to create a place where orthodox Protestants can have a positive social identity, as well as a place where they can live in accordance with a faith which all the orthodox-Protestant participants described as an important part of their life. This reinforces the orthodox Protestant community, a community where individual members find support, where part of their social life takes place and where they find other opportunities. Exemptions from certain rules, for those working in healthcare or those who refuse insurances, means that they can participate in society without engaging in practices that conflict with their religious beliefs. In the theoretical perspective the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were mentioned as a good starting place when speaking of individual rights. For those who want to live their life according to the orthodox Protestant faith, group rights strengthen human rights like the freedom of religion, opinion and expression, assembly and association, culture and education<sup>17</sup>.

At the same time the orthodox Protestant strict, absolute and universal Bible interpretation means that their perspective on and dealing with individual rights often stands in stark contrast with a liberal dealing of individual rights. While none of the orthodox Protestants who participated in this research felt that their individual rights were restricted as a result and this is likely the case for most of the orthodox Protestant group members, it can be a problem for the individual rights of those brought up in the orthodox Protestant community that are less willing to conform to the community's rules, norms and practices. Especially where LGBT and women rights are concerned, orthodox Protestant views are

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<sup>17</sup> Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Article 20.1: Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Article 22: Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality. Article 26.3: Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. (United Nations, 1948).

highly illiberal. For a gay person it is either leaving the church or suppressing his or her feelings, which does their individual rights no justice. To some extent this also applies to those women unwilling to fit the strict genders roles. The prevailing view among orthodox Protestants that women should not participate in politics (or other supervisory functions) is in direct conflict with article 21.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>18</sup>. While there are no group rights that help to defend the group from dissent by individual members, the so called group rights aimed at ‘internal restrictions’ (Kymlicka, p.35). Nor can it be said that group members are forced to do or abstain from practices by the group, as they can, in theory at least, always leave the group. Group rights do strengthen a community in which these illiberal elements exist.

The theoretical perspective spoke of a number of conditions which, if met, can help to counter illiberal elements in a group, thereby helping to protect the individual rights of all group members. To start with is the realistic rights of exit. The participants painted a somewhat diverging image on the consequences of and dealing with religious disaffiliation. Some spoke lightly of this: people who felt out of place in one of the orthodox Protestant churches can easily go elsewhere. People should always be treated respectfully, no matter the choices they make. Others, among them two participants who themselves had left one of the orthodox Protestant churches, spoke more problematic of religious disaffiliation, pointing to the social consequences of such a step. Based on this research it seems that the consequences of group exit are diverse: in some cases religious disaffiliation has little impact on social relations, while in other cases it leads to a complete break away of social contacts. In case of the latter, group exit is obviously a step with severe consequences, losing contact with close relatives as well as the community of your youth.

In order to have realistic rights of exit, it is not only necessary that the consequences of group exit are bearable but also that group exit is seen as a conceivable option by the group members. This is related to another important condition to counter illiberal elements in a community. It is important that group members have a sense of other cultures, identities and more in general other ways of life. As stated in the results section, the people interviewed are certainly not unworldly people. Especially among the youth there is, as a result of internet usage, social media, studying and going abroad, plenty of perspective on those with a different identity, culture and diverging religious views. At the same time, most participants acknowledged and agreed with the need among orthodox Protestants for their own institutions and their own pillar in Dutch society. Obviously, staying within your own community and corresponding institutions, limits your view on and changes of contact with, out-group members. As

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<sup>18</sup> Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. (United Nations, 1948).

group rights facilitate the existence of this pillar, they are related to the sense group members have of other ways of life. Furthermore, as people grow up in the protected environment of the orthodox Protestant pillar, there is an increased risk that people take on a repressive ascribed identity. If you grow up in constant reminder that being orthodox Protestant is the only way to salvation and true happiness, being non-orthodox Protestant or living in a way disapproved of by orthodox Protestant views, might not be a conceivable alternative. Lastly, the pillar creates somewhat of a barrier between the social environments of orthodox Protestants and non-orthodox Protestants. Meaning the step to leave the group is larger than if these social environments are more intertwined, further diminishing realistic rights of exit.

The theoretical perspective also spoke of the importance of adequate representation. It is considered important that all group members are represented in the decision making process. Again there lies a gap between liberal and orthodox Protestant views on adequate representation. This is quite clearly the case when it comes to the position of women who from the very beginning are cut off from leadership positions. And since the Bible is seen as the absolute truth, a truth that as one participant said has been unchanged for centuries, it is not always easy to voice dissenting opinions. As clergymen are educated in understanding and interpreting the Bible, their voice bears more weight than that of ordinary group members. So for those members who view things in a different way, who disagree with certain interpretations of the Bible or with the rules and norms of the community, it can be difficult to voice this opinion. Like the former GGiN members who wanted to discuss open internet but were faced with a definite no by the church leadership, simply because the synod had decided. As in earlier cases this is something which to most orthodox Protestants is of little concern. None of the orthodox Protestant participants in this research felt that they are limited in expressing their opinion. But for those group members in the margins adequate representation is problematic when the absolute and indisputable truth of the Bible leaves so little room for dissenting views.

Finally, Mill pointed out the importance of group members having the freedom to individually assess the value of social customs, as well as the freedom to distance oneself from social customs (Mill, pp.60-61). In the two churches where not abiding to social customs can lead to excommunication this condition of classical liberal theory is clearly not met. But here as well the orthodox Protestants countered this argument by stating that those who disagree with certain social customs can always leave the church. Showing once more the importance of the realistic rights of exit to defend the individual rights of all group members. Especially since the orthodox Protestant themselves often appeal to the exit option in response to perceived illiberal elements within the community it can be

expected of them that this is a realistic exit option that also includes those who wish to leave the faith entirely.

The research also investigated the way groups rights relate to the individual rights of out-group members. While group rights can theoretically relate negatively to individual rights of out-group members, as they strengthen the orthodox Protestant community and orthodox Protestant views at their core leave little room for non-orthodox Protestant views, this is mostly a theoretical issue. Most of the orthodox Protestant participants showed a clear awareness of their marginal position in Dutch society and were first of all concerned with preserving their own group rights. The participants active for non-religious parties in the municipality council of Neder-Betuwe described the orthodox Protestant SGP as reliable partners willing to make concessions towards the non-orthodox Protestant population. Furthermore, although only a few participated, none of the out-group members felt that the individual rights of out-group members were being threatened by the large presence and influence of orthodox Protestants in Opheusden.

So group rights can both strengthen as well as restrict individual rights. There is unfortunately no single way to do it all right. This does not make the discussion on how government policy is to respond to group claims any easier. Before concluding this research with some evaluative comments I would therefore like to comment upon one of the more often heard arguments against group rights and multicultural policies. One of the major criticisms on multiculturalism is that it solidifies cultural or religious groups (Modood, p.82). In the case of orthodox Protestants, who with state support have created their own pillar in Dutch society, this is clearly so. To the point that there are indications, although more research into this is necessary, that it leads to a segregated community of orthodox Protestants in the region of Neder-Betuwe. Especially since intercultural and interreligious contact is one of the primary ways to reduce prejudice and foster mutual understanding between groups, this argument against multicultural policy is justified (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). At the same time, group rights are the result of a long history of orthodox Protestants trying to shape their life and society, using the democratic constitutional state to do so. Dutch state support for religious minorities has prevented them from alienating from the state and as a result democratic and constitutional values have mostly integrated with orthodox Protestant values (Van der Burg, pp.33-34). Orthodox Protestants use individual rights, like the freedom of religion and education, to make group claims. So in a way this is an example of liberal democracy at work, even if those involved are not liberal at all. As such it is, from a liberal perspective, theoretically indefensible to deny them any form of group rights. Even so, the relation between religious group rights and individual rights is a tense one. It can well be argued that there are limits to the group rights granted. The government's responsibility towards individual

rights does not only concern those of orthodox Protestants but those of others just as well. So in the end claims for religious group rights will have to be judged case by case. While this might sound disappointing, it is the most just given the complexity of the subject at hand. It is the only way to find a balance in respecting individual rights like the freedom of religion, the freedom of education, the equality of all and LGBT rights, when they can so easily conflict with one another. Translated into concrete issues, finding this balance will remain difficult and at times controversial. Take the case of marriage officiants unwilling to marry gay couples. It is understandable that government policy put an end to this, even if it was more of a symbolic issue since gay marriage, as a state granted entitlement, was never really at stake. At the same time though, medical professionals can still on grounds of conscience refuse to perform certain medical procedures that are part of their job descriptions. Why in certain cases there is room for exemptions on grounds of conscience, while in others there is not. Or more in general, how different individual rights compare to one another, will probably remain a controversial topic of discussion. The best advice that can be given to those in the political and judicial arena who ultimately have to weigh these conflicting claims to one another, is to be sensitive of the two sided nature of the relation between individual and group rights. Likewise, they need to have a thorough understanding of those who are affected by certain political or legal decisions. In the current public and political debate, in which identity, culture and religion are often too simplistically understood and defined, there is still a lot to be gained. Orthodox Protestants on the other hand might want to question whether or not withdrawing within their own institutions and pillar is such a good idea if they so often feel misunderstood by wider society.

I want to conclude with some evaluative comments on the strengths and weaknesses of this study, the extent to which the results are generalizable and with some recommendations for further research. Although the participants were not randomly selected, special care was given to the selection process to make sure that the participants accurately represented the population. Based on the similarity of results among the orthodox Protestant participants, not only to one another but also in comparison to earlier research, they are likely to be a representative sample of the orthodox Protestant population. The same level of representativeness was not matched with the other participants. This was partially due to practical limitations of this research. As it was first of all aimed at orthodox Protestants, this research never set out to do a more extensive study of non-orthodox Protestants. So perhaps with more non-orthodox Protestant participants the results on what it is like to live as a non-orthodox Protestant in such orthodox Protestant dominated environment would be different or reveal different sentiments. One of the non-orthodox Protestant participants spoke of people who left the region because of the orthodox Protestant dominance. It would be interesting to hear their motives and experiences. Related

to this are the reported observations that the region draws in orthodox Protestants from the rest of the country, resulting in a region that is more and more defined by orthodox Protestantism. Is this process really underway and if so what are the reasons for this? Is it perhaps possible that the current societal resistance and attention to religious orthodoxy drives orthodox Protestants together? It would also be interesting to hear from more former orthodox Protestants. Attempts were made to speak with more former members but these unfortunately failed. As for the generalizability to other orthodox Protestant groups, since there can be a fair amount of confidence in the representativeness of the orthodox Protestant sample, it is likely that the results of this research will also apply to similar orthodox Protestant groups across the Netherlands. As far as other orthodox religious groups are concerned generalizability remains to be seen. In particular when taken into consideration those orthodox religious migrant groups that do not share the same history in the Netherlands. As said earlier in this discussion, religious groups are too often lumped together with expectance of similar views and principles among different groups. So it is best to judge different orthodox religious groups case by case before making any comments on the generalizability of the results found in this study.

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## Appendix A: Topic lists

The topic lists were used as a guideline for the interviews. The interviews started with introductory questions and from there took their own course depending on participant response. The topic list was further used when relevant or when the interview lost its momentum. Some of the topics were later added to the topic lists after being brought up by a participant and then used in following interviews. The former members were interviewed with a combination of the two topic lists.

### Appendix A.1: Topic list group members

#### Introduction

- In which organization (school, church, political party, etcetera) are you active? Can you tell something about this organization?
- What is your role within this organization?
- To which church do you belong? How did you become a member of this church? Can you tell something about this church? How would you characterize it?

#### Religion in Opheusden

- Could you describe the orthodox Protestant community of Opheusden?
- How does the religious character of Opheusden show? And how does it translate to daily life here in Opheusden?
- How does the religious character of Opheusden translate to local politics and policy? Are there special regulations and rules which are aimed at the orthodox Protestant population?
- How are the intergroup relations between the different churches in Opheusden? What are the similarities and differences between these churches? How much contact do you have with members of other churches?
- How are the intergroup relations between religious and non-religious groups in Opheusden? How much contact do you have with non-religious people?
- Does the large presence of orthodox Protestants here in Opheusden lead to an influx of more orthodox Protestants from around the country? And if so, why?

### The religious community

- Do you find 'bevindelijk reformed' a good term for the religious denomination? And if so, what exactly is meant with 'bevindelijk'?
- What does the religious community look like? How would you characterize it? How is it organized?
- What does it mean to be a member of this community? And what is expected of you as a member?
- What does being part of this community mean to you on a personal level?
- How do you look upon the orthodox Protestant pillar? Why does it exist?
- Are there generational differences within the church/community? If there are, can you give examples?

### Being religious

- What does being religious mean to you on a personal level?
- Do you find that the faith enhances your individual opportunities in life? And if so, can you give examples?
- Do you feel threatened in your religious freedom? Do you feel that as a result of the current zeitgeist your religious freedom is being threatened? And if so, how does this show? Can you give examples? What would you like to see different?
- How do you look upon human nature? Why?

### Religion and society

- What role do you see for religion in society? Why?
- What role do you see for religion in the public space? Politics? Culture? Why?
- How important do you find the separation between church and state? Why?
- How much room should the government give for a life apart from the Bible? Why?
- Does the government give enough room for your religion? Can you elaborate?

### Relation to other and non-religious groups

- Do you find it the task of a good Christian to convert others to the religion? If so, how and why?
- How do you feel that Christians should deal with, or threat someone, who does not choose for the Christian faith? Why?
- How do you view and relate to other and non-religious groups?

- Do you find it important that Christians interact with non-Christians? Can you elaborate?
- Do you find it important that you or your children learn about other cultures, religions or ways of life? Can you elaborate?

#### Decision making within the churches/community and religious disaffiliation

- How are certain interpretations of the Bible, or certain social rules, decided on?
- When you disagree with something within the church/community what ways are there to express this?
- Do you find yourself limited by the social rules and norms? What is your perspective on this?
- How does the church/community deal with those members who are critical of certain aspects of the church/community?
- Do people often leave the faith? And if they do, why?
- How are those that leave the faith viewed and treated by you, the church and/or the community?
- Can you describe how the process of religious disaffiliation works? And to what consequences it leads?
- How would you react if one of your children or other close relatives would leave the faith? Why?

#### Specific issues

- Would you mind if one of your children would marry someone from a different or no faith? And if so, why?
- What is the church position on media usage? Why? How do you view this?
- Would you mind if Muslims would build a mosque in Opheusden? And if so, why?
- Would you mind a rock or metal music festival being organized in Opheusden? And if so, why?
- Would you mind if shops were open on Sunday in Opheusden? And if so, why?
- How do you view the role of men and women in life and society? Should women be allowed in politics or other executive positions? How do you view men and women who do not fall within classic gender roles?
- How do you view people who are gay? Why? How does the religious community deal with people who are?
- How do you feel about the societal discussions on the orthodox Protestant position on for example abortion, euthanasia, women rights or gay rights?

## Appendix A.2: Topic list out-group members

### Introduction

- What is your role within the PVDA/VVD?
- How long have you lived here in Opheusden? How did you end up here?

### Opheusden

- How would you describe Opheusden as a place and community?
- How does the religious character of Opheusden show? And how does it translate to daily life here in Opheusden?
- How are the intergroup relations between religious and non-religious groups in Opheusden? How much contact do you have with religious people?
- What is local public and special education like in Opheusden? What is your view on this?

### Living in Opheusden as non-orthodox Protestant

- What is it like to live here as a non-orthodox Protestant person?
- Are you faced with evangelization by the local churches? And if so, how? How do you feel about this?
- Is there in your view enough room for non-orthodox Protestant groups here in Opheusden? Or are other or non-religious groups limited in their way of life? Is there enough room to live 'unbiblical'?
- Do non-orthodox Protestant leave Opheusden because of the large presence of orthodox Protestants? And if so, why?

### The orthodox Protestant churches and community

- What is your view on the different orthodox Protestant churches here in Opheusden? How do you view the orthodox Protestant community and their way of life?
- What is your view on the large presence of orthodox Protestants here in Opheusden? How do you view their pillar?
- How is your view on internal practices/the internal state of affairs within the orthodox Protestant churches/community? Are they closed off or open concerning their internal practices/state of affairs? Can you give examples?
- Are there in your view problems with individual rights within the orthodox Protestant churches/community?



- Does the large presence of orthodox Protestants here in Opheusden lead to an influx of more orthodox Protestants from around the country? And if so, why?
- Are there any changes in religious life/the religious community in Opheusden since you started living here? If so, can you give examples/elaborate?
- Are there in your view generational differences among the orthodox Protestants? If so, can you give examples/elaborate?
- What is your view on people who want to leave one of the orthodox Protestant churches? Do you often hear about church disaffiliation? And if you do, can you give examples?

#### Local politics

- Can you tell me something about the local political situation?
- How does the religious character of Opheusden translate to local politics and policy? Are there special regulations and rules which are aimed at the orthodox Protestant population?
- How is cooperation with the local SGP?
- Are local 'unbiblical' initiatives blocked by the SGP? If so, could you give examples?
- Is there much cooperation between the local municipality and the local churches? Are the churches used to carry out local policy?

#### Specific issues

- Do you have any perspective on orthodox Protestant dealing with homosexuals? And if you do, how do you view this? Can you elaborate?
- Is it be possible to organize a rock or metal music festival here in Opheusden? If not, why?
- Do you have any perspective on the position of women within the orthodox Protestant churches/community? And if you do, how do you view this? Can you elaborate?
- How do you view biblical Sabbath? Is it possible to organize something on a Sunday? If not, why?

# Appendix B: Code tree

## ❖ **Contact and interrelations**

- *Between churches*
  - ◆ Contact with Moluccan church
  - ◆ Contact between orthodox Protestant churches
  - ◆ Differences between orthodox Protestant churches
  - ◆ Schism GG & GGiN
  - ◆ Schism PKN & HHK
- *Evangelization*
- *Islam*
  - ◆ Mosque in Opheusden
  - ◆ Muslims in Opheusden
- *People of different beliefs*
  - ◆ Contact with people of different beliefs
  - ◆ Views on people of different beliefs
  - ◆ Views people of different beliefs hold of orthodox Protestants

## ❖ **Decision making and criticism**

- *Criticism*
  - ◆ Criticism from outside the church
  - ◆ Criticism/difference of opinion inside the church
  - ◆ Religious disaffiliation
    - Religious disaffiliation – (social) consequences
    - Religious disaffiliation – motivation
    - Religious disaffiliation – process
- *Interpretation of the Bible*
- *Social rules*
  - ◆ Non-practicing church members

## ❖ **Ideology**

- *Basic principles of the faith*
  - ◆ The Bible
  - ◆ God
  - ◆ Human nature
- *Faith on a personal level*
- *Generational differences*
- *Specific subjects*
  - ◆ Abortion
  - ◆ Biblical Sabbath
  - ◆ Blasphemy
  - ◆ Cohabitation
  - ◆ Euthanasia
  - ◆ Evolution
  - ◆ Homosexuality
  - ◆ Interreligious marriage
  - ◆ Marriage officiants
  - ◆ Modern media
  - ◆ Position of men/women
  - ◆ Top sports
  - ◆ Unmarried parenthood
  - ◆ Vaccination

❖ **Opheusden**

- *Appeal of Opheusden to other orthodox Protestants*
- *History of Opheusden*
- *Living in Opheusden as non-orthodox Protestant*
- *Nature of the population*
- *The religious character of Opheusden*

❖ **Orthodox Protestant churches/community**

- *(Orthodox Protestant) churches*
  - ◆ HHK
    - Women association Tabitha
    - Youth association Nathanael
  - ◆ GG
  - ◆ GGiN
    - Societal life
    - Church council
    - Church library
  - ◆ PKN
    - Bible week
    - Alpha cursus
- *History of the orthodox Protestant faith*
- *Religious practices*
  - ◆ Baptism
  - ◆ Bible study
  - ◆ Catechism
  - ◆ Confession of faith
  - ◆ Confession of guilt
  - ◆ Psalms
  - ◆ Youth work

❖ **Politics and society**

- *Local politics*
  - ◆ Cooperation between municipality and churches
  - ◆ How the religious character of Opheusden translates to local politics
    - Political balance
    - Municipality council
  - ◆ Municipality of Neder-Betuwe
- *Religious freedom/room for the confession of faith*
  - ◆ The current zeitgeist
- *SGP*
  - ◆ If the SGP would have a national majority
  - ◆ Political views
  - ◆ Who the SGP represents
- *The orthodox Protestant pillar*
- *The role of religion in society*
  - ◆ Voluntary work/social commitment
  - ◆ Why religion is important for society
- *The role of the government*
  - ◆ How much room the government should give to other and non-religious groups
  - ◆ Separation of church and state