

# Religious Symbols in Public Functions: Unveiling State Neutrality

A Comparative Analysis of Dutch, English and French Justifications for  
Limiting the Freedom of Public Officials to Display Religious Symbols

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## PREFACE

The book which cannot be improved by (erasing) another word has probably not yet been written. This devilish ‘opus magnum thought’ lured me to protract this Ph.D. project eternally, but it was offered counterweight by the wisdom that ‘the best dissertation is a done dissertation’. The main text being ‘done’, no word paying due credit to those having helped me in this research could be a word too many. Their large number does not allow me to mention them all by name and makes it likely that my memory will prove deficient, which has nothing to do with the actual value someone has had.

I am greatly indebted to the two people who guided me in carrying out this research: my supervisors Titia Loenen and Ben Vermeulen. I have much appreciated the extent to which they have offered that valuable asset of these days: time. Moreover, their willingness to engage intensively in my research, to help me clarify the strangling lines of thought and yet to give me room to find my own ways to tackle certain problems has been extremely valuable. I am grateful to my reading committee, Wibren van der Burg, Paul Cliteur, Jenny Goldschmidt, Remco Nehmelman and Lucy Vickers, for spending precious summer days reading my manuscript and providing suggestions for improving the final text.

I have been fortunate to carry out the ultimately solitary undertaking of a Ph.D. in a place full of human rights experts: the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM). Thanks to my colleagues for enriching the daily life of work whether during meetings and presentations or during lunches and dinners. I am thanking the Ph.D. lot for sharing and brightening my lot. In particular, I am grateful to have shared my office – though not at the same time – with the most pleasant roommates who enlivened my working day with discussions, chats and litres of tea: Antoine Buyse, Katharine Fortin and Marthe Lot Vermeulen. Thanks to Hanneke van Denderen, Esther Heldenbergh-Bode and Marcella Kiel for helping out on practical things and more. Thanks to Saskia Bal and Maaïke Hogenkamp from our Documentation Centre for being willing to help out with research-related questions or to point out interesting publications. Thanks to Ida Lintel for helping with loose ends. My thanks go out to my colleagues of Comparative Human Rights which I have (co-)lectured with so much pleasure. In particular I would like to mention Marjolein van den Brink to whom I owe additional thanks for her spirited energy in keeping me abreast of interesting publications or activities and in commenting on my work. I am grateful for the insightful and unintentionally (too?) enjoyable meetings I have had with Kim Hermans, Merel Jonker, Reile Meyers, Marloes van Noorloos and Rianka Rijnhout.

I am indebted to many in academia and beyond for their dedicating time and efforts which enriches the solitude of academic research with encouragement, enthusiasm and partnership. In particular I would like to thank the group of experts who have commented on a preliminary draft of my conclusions: Matthijs de Blois, Antoine Buyse, Marjolein van den Brink, Jenny Goldschmidt, Sarah Haverkort-Speekenbrink, Esther Janssen, Wibo van Rossum and Channa Samkalden. I would specifically like to express my gratitude to Janneke Gerards who as a commentator has given me some pivotal suggestions to improve my conclusions.

The academic engagement has also been helpful across boundaries. My gratitude extends to Peter Edge for his generous welcome and help, in organizing a place for me to work, introducing me to other people and in clarifying my research in relation to the English context. In addition, I would like to thank Javad Gohari for kindly and humorously helping me with the more practical side of things and for acquainting me with (the coffee of) one of the finest bookstores in England. I would also like to mention Lucy Vickers for the stimulating discussions and comments on my work.

In France, I have had the privilege to be based at two reputable human rights centres: the PRISME centre in Strasbourg and the CREDOF in Paris. I would like to thank Elisabeth Lambert Abdelgawad for hosting me in the SDRE group of the PRISME centre. In particular, I would like to thank Anne Fornerod for being tirelessly helpful in getting me acquainted with the French situation both substantially and practically, even after my stay and for her indispensable comments on my work. I would also like to thank Françoise Curtit for offering me some valuable leads and helping me out with all kinds of questions. My thanks go out to Victor Canales who gave me advice in finding ways within the Council of Europe. As regards my stay in Paris, I would like to thank Eric Millard for connecting me to the CREDOF. My gratitude extends to Véronique Champeil-Desplats for receiving me, giving helpful comments and organizing a debate on my topic.

I have twice had the honour to participate in the International Summer School on Religion and Public Life which with its mix of reflection, candour and depth offers a unique programme. My gratitude extends especially to Adam Seligman, Rahel Wasserfall and David Montgomery for generously allowing me to take part in this exceptional experience. Thanks for enriching my Dutch bicycle which I hope to ride more often in the future.

One of the things I greatly enjoyed in carrying out research as a ‘linguaphile’ and as a lawyer is to work with words and with language. Unfortunately, what you love is not necessarily something what you are flawless at, and so I am grateful to all those who have been willing to help me in getting my dissertation not only done, but also in rendering it comprehensible, whether by helping me out with language-related questions or by correcting entire pieces of work. My thanks go to two of our native speakers at SIM, Katharine Fortin and Brianne McGonigle Leyh, for being available for language-related questions. Audrey Déléris and Jayshree Mangubhai have proven

that physical distance has not precluded them from delivering outstanding work at a distance. I am grateful to them for enabling me to get it just right. I am obliged to the Wiarda Institute which showed itself to be so professional in being able to work together with the whimsical flows of a Ph.D. project. In particular I would like to mention Klaartje Hoeberechts, Titia Kloos and Peter Morris. Thanks also to Alison Morley for going through my texts with so much scrutiny as well as delicacy; your suggestions have again taught me some more about writing 'true' English. But even in my native language I still have enough to learn. Thanks to José Verouden for offering invaluable suggestions for my Dutch summary. Needless to say that all errors, whether in the English, French or Dutch text are entirely mine.

If my 'seconds' would still have to fulfil the ancient task of physical protection I am not sure whether they would have been very thrilled to fulfil that task but still even then I would at least have felt confident in having these two wonderful and experienced persons by my side. Judith Raven and Marthe Lot Vermeulen, I feel privileged to have already walked so many paths of life together with you and I can only hope to continue to do so after I have followed in both your footsteps. I thank you for bringing warmth, humour and wisdom to my life over tea, coffee or wine. Separating work/private life is less applicable today than it once was and even less so for a PhD research. Accordingly, I am also grateful to all those who played a valuable role in my private life. My gratitude extends to my parents for having equipped me with tools which can serve me throughout my life. I thank my friends, family and in-laws for being involved in my life and for caring. I would like to mention my brother and sisters in particular for being that which seems so self-evident but really is not. I would also like to thank Shiko Boxman and Suze de Wit for making the juggle of various tasks so much easier. Additionally, I would like to thank the latter for sparing me to use more than a thousand words (although twenty-eight words is still a lot). Suze, if only I had the same visual power you possess in that little pencil of yours to draw my gratitude for having you around in my life. Thank you for using that extraordinary gift of yours for the benefit of my book and for adding beauty to my life. Finally, I suspect that my life, whether private or professional, would just not have looked quite the same if I had not shared an important part of it with Caspar. Perhaps surprisingly, but I feel enormously rich and privileged by your persistence in urging me not to settle and to look outside the box, whether it is by you letting me write on a window or by imagining the unimaginable. May such exercises continue to fill our lives and that of Illion.

Amsterdam, 19 September 2012

The information contained in this book reflects, as far as possible, the state of affairs on 1 June 2012.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	v
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 Religious symbols ... once more	1
1.2 The main research question	2
1.2.1 Two pillars	3
1.2.2 The Dutch debate	5
1.2.3 Three functions	6
1.2.4 Symbols manifesting religion or belief	8
1.3 Purpose of the study	10
1.3.1 Threefold objective	10
1.3.2 Limitations and reservations	11
1.4 Set-up of the study	12
1.4.1 'Argumentative' approach	12
1.4.2 Sources and methods	13
1.4.3 Outline	15
1.5 Conclusion	17
<b>CHAPTER 2 THE DUTCH CONTEXT</b>	
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 Religion in the Netherlands	20
2.2.1 Religious freedom	20
2.2.2 The position of religion in the public sphere	23
2.2.3 State neutrality	25
2.3 Public officials' freedom to display religious symbols	28
2.3.1 Judges' freedom to display religious symbols	31
2.3.2 Police officers' freedom to display religious symbols	34
2.3.3 State schoolteachers' freedom to display religious symbols	35
2.4 The initial indications of a challenge	36
2.4.1 Increasing debate on religion	36
2.4.2 The particularity of the central issue	38
2.4.3 The decision scheme of the Equal Treatment Commission	42

2.4.4	The deputy court clerk	43
2.4.5	The non-uniformed police officers	45
2.4.6	The state school intern	48
2.5	Conclusion	50

### **CHAPTER 3 THE DUTCH DEBATE**

3.1	Introduction	53
3.2	The debate on the judiciary	54
3.2.1	Direct or indirect discrimination	54
3.2.2	Judicial impartiality and independence	55
3.2.3	Role of the Regulation	60
3.2.4	Court clerk in relation to the judge	61
3.2.5	Separation of church and state	62
3.3	The debate on the police	63
3.3.1	Direct or indirect discrimination	63
3.3.2	Lifestyle neutrality and uniformity	64
3.3.3	Uniformed and non-uniformed service	66
3.3.4	Contact with the public	67
3.3.5	Separation of church and state	67
3.4	The debate on public education	68
3.4.1	Direct or indirect discrimination	68
3.4.2	Denominational neutrality	69
3.4.3	Teachers and their exemplary role	70
3.4.4	Parents' and pupils' rights	70
3.4.5	Separation of church and state	71
3.5	The relevant points of contention	71
3.5.1	Relation between the state and the public official	72
3.5.2	Rights and freedoms of others	73
3.5.3	State and society	74
3.5.4	Overview	75
3.6	Conclusion	77

### **CHAPTER 4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

4.1	Introduction	79
4.2	Exploring state neutrality	81
4.2.1	Definition	81
4.2.2	Rationale	84
4.2.3	Implementation	87

4.2.4	Secularism	91
4.2.5	Separation of church and state	93
4.3	Exploring religious freedom	96
4.3.1	Definition	96
4.3.2	Rationale	99
4.3.3	Implementation	101
4.4	Building a model	101
4.4.1	Basic concepts	102
4.4.2	Dynamics	106
4.4.3	Implications	107
4.5	Applying the model to the points of contention	108
4.5.1	Neutrality of the state towards the public official	109
4.5.2	Neutrality of the public official towards the citizen	110
4.5.3	Neutrality of the state towards the citizen	111
4.5.4	Factors to evaluate the points of contention	113
4.6	Conclusion	115

## **CHAPTER 5     EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

5.1	Introduction	117
5.2	The application of Article 9	119
5.2.1	Everyone	120
5.2.2	Religion or belief	121
5.2.3	Manifestation of religion or belief	122
5.2.4	Limitation clause	122
5.2.5	Margin of appreciation	123
5.3	State neutrality	125
5.3.1	General principle	125
5.3.2	Civil servants' neutrality	127
5.3.3	Judicial impartiality	130
5.3.4	Educational neutrality	132
5.3.4.1	Educational staff's neutrality	132
5.3.4.2	Students' neutrality	136
5.3.4.3	Neutrality of the educational curriculum and environment	141
5.4	Other values	146
5.4.1	Loyalty	146
5.4.2	Authority	149
5.5	Voluntary obligations	150
5.5.1	Contractual arrangements	150
5.5.2	Particular regime	152

5.6	Application of the conceptual model	154
5.6.1	Dynamics of neutrality	155
5.6.2	Neutrality of the state towards the public official	155
5.6.3	Neutrality of the public official towards the citizen	157
5.6.4	Neutrality of the state towards the citizen	159
5.7	Conclusion	160

## **CHAPTER 6     FRANCE**

6.1	Introduction	163
6.2	Religion in France	164
6.2.1	Religious freedom	164
6.2.2	State–citizen relation	169
6.2.3	The position of religion in the public sphere	172
6.2.4	State neutrality	175
6.3	Public officials’ freedom to display religious symbols	179
6.3.1	Judicial officers’ freedom to display religious symbols	182
6.3.2	Police officers’ freedom to display religious symbols	184
6.3.3	State school teachers’ freedom to display religious symbols	186
6.4	Debate in France	188
6.4.1	State neutrality in public service	188
6.4.2	Conspicuous religious symbols at state schools	192
6.4.3	Face veils in public	198
6.5	Application of the conceptual model	200
6.5.1	Dynamics of neutrality	200
6.5.2	Neutrality of the state towards the public official	201
6.5.3	Neutrality of the public official towards the citizen	203
6.5.4	Neutrality of the state towards the citizen	204
6.6	Conclusion	205

## **CHAPTER 7     ENGLAND**

7.1	Introduction	209
7.2	Religion in England	210
7.2.1	Religious freedom	210
7.2.2	State–citizen relation	215
7.2.3	The position of religion in the public sphere	217
7.2.4	State neutrality	219
7.3	Public officials’ freedom to display religious symbols	220
7.3.1	Judicial officers’ freedom to display religious symbols	221

7.3.2	Police officers' freedom to display religious symbols	228
7.3.3	State school teachers' freedom to display religious symbols	230
7.4	Debate in England	233
7.4.1	Public officials and religious manifestations	234
7.4.2	Employees and religious manifestations	237
7.4.3	Pupils and religious symbols	240
7.5	Application of the conceptual model	245
7.5.1	Dynamics of neutrality	245
7.5.2	Neutrality of the state towards the public official	246
7.5.3	Neutrality of the public official towards the citizen	247
7.5.4	Neutrality of the state towards the citizen	249
7.6	Conclusion	251

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

8.1	Introduction	255
8.2	The multiple layers of Dutch debate	257
8.2.1	Pluralism, pragmatism and change	257
8.2.2	Several points of contention	258
8.2.3	Concluding remarks	260
8.3	The triangular model	261
8.3.1	All roads lead to neutrality	261
8.3.2	Three obligations and three actors	262
8.3.3	Correspondence with points of contention	263
8.3.4	Concluding remarks	265
8.4	Minimum ECHR standards	265
8.4.1	Neutrality as a pluralist and a secular principle	266
8.4.2	State towards the public official: rights can be limited or waived	267
8.4.3	Public official towards the citizen: a religious symbol can jeopardize rights	267
8.4.4	State towards citizens: a neutral and impartial organizer	268
8.4.5	Concluding remarks	268
8.5	Divergent approaches in France and England	270
8.5.1	Neutrality in two opposite interpretations	270
8.5.2	State towards the public official: absorption or individuality	270
8.5.3	Public official towards the citizen: appearance or conduct	272
8.5.4	State towards citizens: authority or representation	273
8.5.5	Concluding remarks	274
8.6	Questioning limitations in the Dutch context	274
8.6.1	An implicit concept of state neutrality	276
8.6.2	Public visibility and accommodation of religion	277

Table of Contents

8.6.3	A differentiated conception of the state	277
8.6.4	State towards the public official: substantive neutrality	279
8.6.4.1	Drawbacks of a formal dress policy for Dutch public officials	279
8.6.4.2	Putting personification into perspective	282
8.6.5	Public official towards the citizen: ‘keeping up appearances’	283
8.6.5.1	Presumed bias is not equal to bias	284
8.6.5.2	Symbolic proselytism is not equal to proselytism	289
8.6.6	State towards the citizen: recognizable state	290
8.6.7	Concluding remarks	292
8.7	Concluding observations	293
	Samenvatting	297
	Résumé	307
	Bibliography	317
	Table of Cases	331
	Curriculum Vitae	335