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WORC Paper 96.03.004

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**Loek Halman
Thorleif Petterson**

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**Morality and religion;
A weakened relationship?**

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Paper submitted to the *Journal of Empirical Theology*

March 1996

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Paper submitted to the *Journal of Empirical Theology*

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Morality and religion; A weakened relationship?

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Key words: modernization, individualization, value fragmentation, religion, values, morality

Abstract

The process of modernization is assumed to have induced a gradual but steady decline in religiosity and its impact on society, particularly in the personal realm. It is assumed that in pre-modern order religion and morality were closely related, whereas as a consequence of modernization in general and processes like individualization and secularization in particular, these strong ties have been diminished.

Since modernization did not proceed in an equal speed in all countries, partly because countries have different social, economic and political histories imposing different constraints, the receipt of individualization and secularization met with different obstacles. Therefore (large) cross-national differences are to be expected.

Using the survey data from the European Values Studies, fielded in 1981 and 1990, it will be investigated whether the assumption that the relationship between religion and morality has lost its self evident predictability can be confirmed or not. In other words, what is true of the idea that religion and morality concerning sexual issues and ethical behaviours have become fragmented value domains? Cross-national differences and similarities are further explored in the article.

Introduction

In comparison with former times, contemporary western society is most often characterized as secularized. It is assumed that the former strong impact of religious institutions and religious beliefs on moral values has weakened. Economic growth, the spread of affluence, rising levels of education, increased mobilization, increased technological knowledge and its many applications, have reduced the earlier dominating societal role of religion (Berger, 1967; Luckmann, 1967). The influence of religion on other domains of life such as sexuality, morality, and politics, has strongly diminished (Beyer, 1990, 1994). The process of structural differentiation 'has led not only to the eradication of religious involvement in other areas of activity - such as the work order, the status system, the political arena, the operation of law, the organization of education, and the provision of recreation - but also to the loss of the presidency which religion once exercised over practically all of man's doing' (Wilson, 1982: 41).

In the realm of morals, 'the decline of religion appears necessarily to have brought about in its train a process of uncertainty about morals, and the abandonment both of earlier moralizing attitudes and the genuine concern about the role of morality in contemporary culture' (Wilson, 1982: 87). According to MacIntyre (1981: 18), people in modern, individualized society lack shared moral principles. Since there is no longer a valid shared justification of objective moral standards, there are no such standards. Contemporary society constitutes individuals 'whose goal is to fulfil private ends, largely through relationships seen as instrumental, and whose principal characteristic is the possession of individual rights that have priority over societal needs' (Crittenden, 1992: 3). It is said that individualized people to a large extent are independent of society, and that therefore their moral sources are quite diverse (Taylor, 1989: 401). Each individual has become his own moral guide, and rigid moral standards imposed by society are less and less accepted, particularly in case such standards 'interfere with one's freedom and enjoyment of life' (Bellah et al., 1986: 77).

The moral guidance of the churches has become under heavy pressure, not the least in the realm of sexuality. In issues like divorce, homosexuality and extra marital affairs people are decreasingly relying on the judgements and prescriptions of the churches. Getting children is not any more an obligation and sexual relations are no longer confined to husband and wife, as (once and still) proclaimed by the churches, but such decisions are based on personal choices

and preferences. Moral issues are no longer judged by referring to religion (dogmatism), but instead by referring to 'what one believes about goodness, justice and compassion' (Stark & Glock, 1968: 217). People increasingly feel free, and they actually are increasingly free, to choose the convictions and practices they like. This is i.a. reflected in the multitude of their religious beliefs, their ways of cohabitation and their views on sexual relations (Beyer, 1990; 1994). Like other moral domains, the morality governing sexuality and personal relations have become differentiated from religion.

In this article, the assumed decrease in the once strong links between religion and morality in general and sexuality in particular is empirically investigated in detail, a task not too often performed. First, the religious and moral orientations as they have been distinguished in the European Values Study will be introduced. Then, the relationships between religious beliefs and moral orientations in general and sexuality in particular are elucidated, suggesting different ways to test the hypothesis on weakened relationships between religion and morality. Next the data and measurements are presented, followed by a short discussion of the results of the analyses.

Religious values and moral orientations in the EVS

Our discussion on religious values and moral orientations relates to the European Value Study (EVS). This is one of the largest comparative research projects on basic value orientations ever carried out. Large scale surveys on individual values in the realms of religion and morality, work and leisure, family and marriage, society and politics, sexuality and education, were fielded in 1981 and 1990 respectively, in more than 30 countries in the Western World. The EVS-project addresses research questions as 'Do Europeans share common values?', 'Are values changing in the Western world and, if so, in what direction?', 'Do Christian values continue to permeate European life and culture?' (Barker et al., 1992: 1).

The EVS has yielded a wide variety of analyses and publications (see e.g. Harding et al., 1986; Ashford & Timms, 1992; Ester et al., 1994; Halman & Vloet, 1994; Pettersson & Riis, 1994). In the present context, it is of special interest to note that the EVS-data i.a. has revealed several basic religious orientations as well as two different moral dimensions. Among the former, personal religiosity refers to a religiosity which may be applicable to people who do not belong

to or feel attracted by one of the official churches (Halman & de Moor, 1994). This is expressed in items like belief in a personal God, being religious, emphasizing the importance of God in your life, getting comfort from religion and frequently taking moments for prayer. On the other hand, orthodoxy encloses the traditional conventional belief statements such as belief in God, hell, heaven, sin, devil, life after death etc. (Halman & Vloet, 1994). A third religious orientation can be called church adequacy. Usually it is referred to as confidence in the church (Halman & de Moor, 1994; Halman & Vloet, 1994), but we think church adequacy is a more appropriate label, since the orientation concerns whether one finds that the churches give adequate answers or not to man's social and moral problems and to his spiritual needs.

Apart from these religious views, the EVS distinguishes two moral orientations, one concerning civic behaviour (e.g. theft, cheating on taxes, buying something stolen, etc.) and one concerning sexual behaviours (prostitution, homosexuality, sex under the legal age of consent, etc.) as well as issues regarding life and death (suicide, euthanasia, killing in self-defense, etc.). The former is often labelled 'civic morality', the latter 'permissiveness'.

In this context, it is important to stress that the concept of permissiveness does not indicate a lack of morality, or that people should not have clear, even traditional moral standards. The label permissiveness rather implies that people find it acceptable that others have different standards than oneself (Halman & de Moor, 1994: 56). Characteristic of the concept of permissiveness is that people do not feel bothered by others having different value systems, 'as long as they don't infringe upon your own..... If you want to go in your house and smoke marijuana and shoot dope and get all screwed up, that's your business, but don't bring that out on the street, don't expose my children to it, just do your thing' (Bellah et al., 1986: 7). Being permissive means to accept that other people have different standards than one-self, and not necessarily that one-self follows lax standards in one's own behaviour. In this sense, permissiveness is directly related to loose social control of others.

A major result of the EVS-study is that civic morality decreased during the eighties, that permissiveness increased, and that most of the religious orientations decreased (Halman & de Moor, 1994; Ester & Halman, 1994). At the same time, it must however be stressed that this general pattern of value change is complicated by a variety of country-specific process of value change. 'All in all, the conclusion cannot be that modernization is a process by which traditional

values are uniformly replaced by individualized values in all domains of behaviour' (Ester et al., 1994: 161).

In the present context, the permissiveness moral orientation is of special interest. As mentioned, this orientation concerns views on sexual behaviours and bio-ethical issues regarding life and death. As expected, comparisons between 1981 and 1990 revealed in most countries an increase in this kind of permissiveness. However, in highly secularized Sweden and Denmark, a decrease in permissiveness was observed. Puzzled by this rather unexpected result, the causes of this change were investigated. It appeared that 'the decreasing permissiveness seems to be the net result of two opposite tendencies; i.e. a decreasing adherence to bio-ethical strictness values together with an increasing support for stricter views on sexual relations' (Pettersson, 1994a: 203). Such results suggest that formerly coherent views on sexual relations and bio-ethical matters have become increasingly differentiated. Such results imply that the permissiveness orientation might be better studied when divided in its two basic components, i.e. sexual permissiveness and bio-ethical.

Thus, the Swedish and Danish cases illustrate the need to distinguish moral views with regard to sexual issues from moral orientations related to bio-ethical issues. In the same way, the idea of value fragmentation leads to the assumption that both of these moralities have become increasingly independent of each other and that they can develop in different directions. Thus, instead of focusing on one moral dimension covering both sexual and bio-ethical issues (permissiveness) we will examine two different kinds of permissiveness: one concerning sexual issues, and one regarding bio-ethical issues.

The hypothesis on weakened relationships between moral and religious values might be discussed from two different perspectives. For one thing, the general increases in permissiveness and the declined relationships between religiosity and the two moral dimensions, might be explained by processes of ongoing secularization, i.e. that fewer and fewer people adhere to the (non-changing) moral teachings of the churches. Since the number of churched people decreases and the variety of unchurched peoples' moral outlooks increases, the general association between the religious factor and the moral orientations will (by statistical necessity) be reduced. However, an equally plausible explanation might refer to general processes of value differentiation, i.e. that disregarding the size of the church constituency, religious views become increasingly disassocia-

ted from moral values, also among the core church constituencies. Even to the core constituencies of the churches, the religious commitment might thus become increasingly unrelated to various 'secular' life spheres as e.g. sexual relations and bio-ethical issues. Also in such a case, the general association between church commitment and moral orientations will decrease.

Data and measurements

Secularization might be defined as a decreasing adherence to traditional Christian beliefs and practices. In empirical terms, this means decreases in self-reported *church attendance*, religious beliefs like personal *religiosity*, *orthodoxy*, and *trust in church* or perhaps better the idea that churches respond adequately to several problems people are confronted with. Secularization in this sense might have occurred within society as a whole or within certain groups only. Therefore, the analyses will be accomplished not only by comparing percentages and mean scores calculated for 1981 and 1990, respectively, for the countries as a whole, but also for various groups of specific interest, e.g. groups with different degrees of church involvement.

Value differentiation, on the other hand, will be investigated in two ways: first of all by exploring the dispersion of these orientations (internal value differentiation) and secondly by examining the interconnectedness of religious views and moral orientations (external differentiation). Value differentiation in the sense of increasing heterogeneity (internal value differentiation) will be measured by examining whether the variances of the moral orientations and religiosity increased during the last decade. These comparisons will be made for societies as a whole as well as for certain groups, differing in church involvement. Value differentiation in the sense of decreasing interconnectedness between religious beliefs and moral orientations (external differentiation) will be explored by examining the decreases in measures of associations between religiosity and both permissiveness measures. As such measures, the correlation coefficients (Pearson) between personal religiosity and both moral orientations for 1981 and 1990, respectively, will be used.

As mentioned, use will be made of the survey data from the European Value Study from 1981 and 1990 (see, e.g. Ester et al., 1994; Pettersson & Riis, 1994). In order to facilitate the analyses,

we confine ourselves in this article to four countries. The selection of countries originates in different religious traditions (Catholicism or Protestantism) and in different degrees of secularization. As a Protestant country we have selected Sweden, a highly secularized country. As its counterpart, we have chosen Spain, a significantly less secularized Catholic country. As countries mixed in their religious culture we have selected the secularized Netherlands and the notably less secularized U.S.A.

The measures of religious and moral orientations resemble to a large extent the measures developed within the EVS (Halman & Vloet, 1994). *Personal Religiosity* is measured by answers to questions about religious self-determination, subjective importance of one's belief in God, if one gets comfort and strength from religion or not, and frequency of moments of prayer. The measure of *Orthodoxy* covers traditional beliefs in God, the devil, hell, heaven, and sin. *Trust in Church*, or what we will call *Church Adequacy*, is measured by the respondents opinions about the adequateness of the churches' answers to man's moral, familial, and spiritual problems. The degree of *Church involvement* depends upon the frequency of church attendance. We distinguish between regular church attenders (at least once a month), occasional, and non-attenders. One of the moral dimensions concerns *Sexual Permissiveness*. It is indicated by the degree to which extra-marital affairs, sex under the legal age of consent, homosexuality, and prostitution are seen as justified (ten-point scales: 1 = never; 10 = always). The *Bio-ethical Permissiveness* is indicated by the degree to which euthanasia, suicide, abortion, and killing in self defence are seen as justified (ten-point scales: 1 = never; 10 = always). For the construction, reliability, and validity of measures like these, see Ester et al. (1994), and Halman & Vloet (1994).

Results

Religious shifts

In Table 1, the shifts in religious indicators are demonstrated. Quite as expected, it can be concluded that most of the religiosity measures show a decreasing tendency. Church attendance decreased in all countries but the U.S. A general trend towards decreased orthodoxy and personal religiosity can also be observed, whereas church adequacy remained the same or even increased as in Spain. Of course, the differences in religious involvement between the countries remain,

despite these common tendencies. Still, Sweden is more secularized than Spain and the U.S. Furthermore, Table 1 also illustrates that the US remains a special case. Americans appear to remain comparatively strongly involved in religion (see e.g. Halman, 1991; Halman & de Moor, 1994; Greeley, 1985; Hout and Greeley, 1987).

Table 1. Shifts in Church attendance, Orthodoxy, Church Adequacy, and Personal Religiosity in four countries

	Spain		NL		SW		US	
Church attendance(%)	81	90	81	90	81	90	81	90
monthly	54	43	40	30	14	10	60	58
sometimes	21	28	18	27	46	41	25	24
never	25	29	42	44	40	49	15	18
Mean								
Unadjust	2.31	2.17	2.03	1.88	1.74	1.62	2.45	2.41
Adjust*	2.34	2.14	2.06	1.85	1.76	1.59	2.45	2.45
Orthodoxy	2.61	2.40	1.89	1.69	1.35	1.10	4.01	3.89
Ch adequacy	1.19	1.26	0.84	0.84	0.68	0.62	2.00	1.94
Religiosity	0.04	-.08	-.11	-.19	-.78	-.85	0.49	0.44

Bold text means t-test significant < .05

* Adjusted for personal religiosity, orthodoxy, and church adequacy.

Most interesting, the decreases in church attendance in Spain, the Netherlands, and Sweden, can not be attributed to the decreases in religious beliefs. The decreases in church attendance in these countries remain significant even after controlling for the decreases in religious beliefs. Thus, the decreased church attendance should mainly be explained by other factors than decreasing religious beliefs.

Quite as expected, Table 2 demonstrates that regular church attenders score higher on personal religiosity, orthodoxy, and church adequacy than those who infrequently or never attend religious services. From the regular attenders to the non-attenders, there is a clear, systematic decline in all measures of religious beliefs. Table 2 also demonstrates that religious beliefs, measured by personal religiosity, orthodoxy and church adequacy, have remained more or less the same or even increased slightly among the frequent church attenders. Thus, the decreases in personal

religiosity and orthodoxy are mainly accounted for by the increased number of unchurched and to a certain degree occasional attenders.

Table 2. Shifts in religious orientations in three church attendance groups in four countries

	Spain		NL		SW		US	
Church attendance	81	90	81	90	81	90	81	90
<i>monthly</i>								
religiosity	.55	.61	.56	.71	.44	.56	.73	.76
orthodoxy	3.53	3.46	3.06	3.04	3.14	3.10	4.38	4.36
ch adequacy	1.81	1.94	1.49	1.59	1.35	1.40	2.41	2.43
<i>sometimes</i>								
religiosity	-.24	-.23	-.15	-.18	-.78	-.72	.25	.20
orthodoxy	1.95	2.12	1.97	1.49	1.36	1.33	3.69	3.58
ch adequacy	.63	1.06	.72	.72	.76	.72	1.67	1.57
<i>never</i>								
religiosity	-.88	-1.03	-.80	-.84	-1.20	-1.26	-.09	-.34
orthodoxy	1.21	1.09	.83	.86	.74	.48	3.10	2.82
ch adequacy	.32	.47	.27	.39	.36	.36	.97	.85

Bold text means significant at $p < .05$

However, there are two important exceptions to the general rule of religious decline. In Spain and in the Netherlands, the conviction that the churches have adequate answers to man's social and moral problems increased even among those who never attend religious services. For Spain, this tendency may be explained by the fact that the Catholic church is no longer associated with an authoritarian (Franco) regime (Halman & de Moor, 1994: 53). In the Netherlands, the explanation is less obvious, but may depend on two related issues: the wording of the question and the decrease in church membership. The questionnaire item used to measure church adequacy was phrased as follows: 'Generally speaking, do you think that your church is giving, in your country, adequate answers to' (see Ester et al., 1994: 283). Since the number of unchurched people, i.e. those who declare not to belong to any denomination, has increased up to more than half of the Dutch population (Halman & de Moor, 1994: 44), the number of people who can rate the adequacy of the answers given by 'their church' has decreased.

In sum, however, the results evidenced a general decrease in church involvement, orthodoxy, and personal religiosity, whereas church adequacy remained mainly unaltered. The decreases in church attendance could not be attributed to decreases in religious beliefs.

Shifts in moral permissiveness

As mentioned in the introduction, people's moral judgements are viewed by many sociologists as increasingly uncertain and/or based on circumstantial personal considerations. Translated into empirical terms, such a development would imply that decreasing numbers of people would be able to present definite answers to moral questions. Thus, the number of 'don't knows' would increase. Such a tendency, however, can not be confirmed from Table 3. The results point in the opposite direction: the populations in the countries investigated here have become more, not less, certain about their moral views. In all four countries, the number of people not able to answer the moral questions decreased. These results apparently contradict the hypotheses advanced by Wilson, MacIntyre and others. People are not increasingly uncertain about moral issues, but increasingly able to state their personal moral views. Such results do not indicate a moral decline, but rather a shift in moral outlook.

Table 3. Shifts in two moral orientations in four countries and three church attendance groups

	Spain		NI		SW		US	
	81	90	81	90	81	90	81	90
<i>ethics</i>								
unadj	3.51	3.85	4.59	5.44	4.28	4.68	3.90	4.17
adjust	3.61	3.76	4.53	5.50	4.31	4.65	3.91	4.16
<i>sex</i>								
unadjust	2.47	2.75	4.44	5.22	2.65	2.48	2.32	2.34
adjust	2.56	2.67	4.50	5.17	2.66	2.47	2.33	2.33
Church attendance								
<i>monthly</i>								
ethics	2.88	3.03	3.46	4.09	3.21	3.49	3.54	3.74
sex	1.94	1.97	3.46	3.90	2.31	2.01	1.96	1.97
<i>sometimes</i>								
ethics	3.78	4.04	4.80	5.62	4.29	4.42	4.19	4.45
sex	2.64	2.83	4.61	5.68	2.57	2.41	2.73	2.62
<i>never</i>								
ethics	4.90	5.03	5.55	6.23	4.69	5.19	4.71	5.18
sex	3.86	3.85	5.25	5.74	2.77	2.61	3.04	3.21

Bold text means significant at $p < .05$

The shifts in moral values are demonstrated by the changes in the mean scores for each of the two permissiveness scales. The general trend is that sexual as well as bio-ethical permissiveness increased during the eighties. The exceptions are the United States where the shifts in moral views are rather limited, and, as mentioned earlier, Sweden where sexual permissiveness decreased, probably due to heavy mass media campaigns against AIDS (see Pettersson, 1994a). The adjusted means scores show that the increased bio-ethical and sexual permissiveness can not be attributed to the decreases in personal religiosity. Thus, suggestions that a declining religiosity would be followed by an increased moral permissiveness (Wilson, 1982: 87), are not confirmed by the EVS- data.

Internal value differentiation

Whether or not people have become more heterogeneous in their religious and moral preferences appears from Table 4, where the variances on bio-ethical and sexual permissiveness measures and the personal religiosity measure are presented. In the case of bio-ethical permissiveness, the variances have generally remained unaltered. Only the Spanish became more heterogeneous in their views on such issues. As for sexual permissiveness, the Swedes, the Dutch, and the Americans, became more homogenous, not less. By contrast, on personal religiosity people seem to have become more heterogenous. The Swedes are the sole exception to this general tendency.

Table 4. Shifts in correlation coefficients between moral permissiveness (bio-ethical and sexual) and religiosity in four countries and three church attendance groups (all correlations are negative)

	Spain		NI		SW		US	
	81	90	81	90	81	90	81	90
ethics	.40	.46	.39	.41	.27	.20	.27	.26
sex	.41	.38	.35	.39	.10	.11	.28	.32
<i>Church attendance</i>								
<i>monthly</i>								
ethics	.18	.25	.20	.26	.21	.10	.10	.13
sex	.30	.16	.19	.31	.16	.01	.16	.23
<i>sometimes</i>								
ethics	.12	.18	.18	.23	.07	.04	.21	.13
sex	.22	.09	.17	.22	.07	.07	.19	.20
<i>never</i>								
ethics	.25	.32	.15	.21	.30	.10	.28	.11
sex	.18	.21	.11	.20	.00	.04	.22	.16

Bold text means Fischer's Z significant at $p < .05$

Furthermore, it can be concluded from Table 4 that in all countries regular church attenders have become more, not less, homogeneous in their personal religiosity. As such, this category contradicts the general trend towards increased religious heterogeneity in the societies as a whole. A similar tendency is found among those who never attend religious services. Like the regular church attenders, the non-attenders have become more similar in their opinions on sexual issues and also, although less clear, in ethical issues.

To summarize, then, the analyses on internal value differentiation have not demonstrated an undisputed tendency towards increased heterogeneity in religious and moral values. For personal religiosity, a general trend towards increased heterogeneity was accomplished by an opposite trend among the regular church attenders. For sexual permissiveness, the general trend was not towards increased heterogeneity, but towards decreased, whereas the bio-ethical permissiveness generally remained unaltered.

External value differentiation

The assumption of an ongoing external value fragmentation or value differentiation refers to weakening associations between value domains, i.e. to diminishing correlations between personal religiosity and both moral permissiveness dimensions. With a few exceptions, the observed changes in correlations are not significant. This is demonstrated by Table 5. So, measured in this way, the EVS-data from 1981 and 1990 do not corroborate the hypotheses of increasing external value fragmentation.

Table 5. Analysis of variance of moral permissiveness (bio-ethical and sexual) and religiosity in four countries and three church attendance groups

	Spain		NI		SW		US	
	81	90	81	90	81	90	81	90
ethics	1.96	2.04	2.30	2.26	2.08	2.12	1.88	1.89
sex	1.98	1.93	2.34	2.23	1.50	1.38	1.72	1.57
religiosity	.95	1.02	.96	.99	.97	.94	.71	.77
<i>Church attendance</i>								
<i>monthly</i>								
ethics	1.48	1.59	1.86	2.08	2.26	1.90	1.74	1.71
sex	1.41	1.41	2.02	2.15	1.59	1.23	1.49	1.34
religiosity	.61	.56	.56	.39	.77	.59	.41	.37
<i>sometimes</i>								
ethics	1.77	1.80	1.95	2.03	1.95	2.01	1.89	1.95
sex	1.78	1.74	2.03	1.87	1.43	1.36	1.74	1.59
religiosity	.87	.92	.86	.85	.87	.90	.82	.85
<i>never</i>								
ethics	2.28	2.24	2.36	2.10	2.05	2.13	2.11	1.96
sex	2.50	2.20	2.41	2.16	1.53	1.41	2.08	1.79
religiosity	.87	.85	.85	.87	.77	.67	.98	.97

Bold text means Levene's test for equality of variances significant at $p < .05$

In Spain, different tendencies in external value differentiation are found among the churched and unchurched. The interconnectedness between personal religiosity and sexual permissiveness decreased among the regular and occasional church attenders, whereas it hardly changed at all among those who never attend church. For the U.S. and Sweden, decreased associations between personal religiosity and bio-ethical issues are observed among those who never attend church. Disregarding these exceptions, the main conclusion from Table 5 should read that personal religiosity and moral permissiveness did not differentiate during the eighties, at least not in the way we have measured differentiation here, namely as external value differentiation.

Discussion

In this article, the assumed decrease in relationships between religious and moral orientations has been empirically investigated. As expected, the survey data from the European Values Study indicated that religiosity was on the wane during the eighties. The assumption that in modern society an increasing number of people feel lost in their moral convictions could, however, not be corroborated by the same data. During the eighties, people did not become more uncertain about their moral convictions. On the contrary, the shifts do not seem to indicate a moral decline, but rather a shift in moral outlook. The general trend was that sexual as well as bio-ethical permissiveness increased during the eighties.

Two kinds of value fragmentation were distinguished. What was called internal differentiation indicates a process of increasing variation in moral outlooks, a process not seldom assumed by sociological theory. However, this kind of value differentiation could not be demonstrated. A similar conclusion can be drawn with regard to a second kind of value differentiation, i.e. external value differentiation. This kind of differentiation refers to the idea that religious and moral orientations have become less related to one another. However, the empirical analyses did not yield strong evidence for this assumption.

Finally, the analyses made clear that the value changes were not limited to certain groups in society, e.g. those who never attend a religious service. Rather, the trends occurred among the churched and unchurched alike. Nor did the results reveal different kinds of value changes in Catholic and Protestant countries. Of course, Catholic countries in general are less secularized

than Protestant countries, but the value shifts appear not to be specific for either of these denominations.

It should be emphasized that in many respects, the findings of this article are tentative. Although the choice of countries investigated here was principled, it can nevertheless be argued that analyses of additional countries might yield different results. In this regard, it should be especially noted that in each country, each of the four groups with different relations to the church, contain comparatively few subjects. Thus, these results are highly uncertain.

Both sexual and bio-ethical permissiveness increased between 1981 and 1990. Sweden was the only exception to this tendency. In an earlier study, this was tentatively explained as a combined effect of high levels of permissiveness at the beginning of the period under study and extensive mass media campaigns on AIDS (Pettersson, 1994a)². Being comparatively permissive in sexual relations ('the Swedish sin') and confronted with massive AIDS related mass media campaigns advocating stricter views in sexual matters, the Swedes had every reason to change their attitudes towards sexual relations. Against this background, it is interesting to note that a renewed survey in 1993 showed a distinct return among the Swedes, especially the younger generations, to the more permissive views of 1980 (Pettersson, 1994b). At a point in time when the AIDS campaigns had disappeared, the views of the Swedes turned back to more 'normal' permissive views.

The Swedish exception is of principal interest, since it demonstrates that national processes of value change must be understood in relation to e.g. specific national events, the contests of the mass media, and the central features of the public discourse. In order to properly understand the processes of value change at the aggregated level, all relevant processes and happenings on the social and cultural arena must be given due consideration. All hypotheses on identical processes of value change in different countries must by necessity contain strong assumptions of 'all other things equal'.

A similar argument can be raised regarding the different processes of value change among the different national groups with similar relations to the churches. In some countries, the group of frequent church attenders changed in the expected direction; in others not. Of course, such differences must be understood in relation to the national 'ethos' of the church teachings during

the eighties as well as the process of church abandonment. For instance, that regular church attenders in the Netherlands developed more permissive attitudes towards sexual behaviours while the American did not, is i.a. likely an effect of the American (evangelical) churches teaching stricter doctrines in this regard than the Dutch.

Disregarding such differences, it can generally be concluded that in many cases, the frequent church attenders seemed to follow the same general direction of value change occurring in the various countries. In this sense, the religious sector appears to be affected by the same cultural changes as the non-religious sectors. From such findings, it can be argued that the churches do not seem to lead the cultural changes, but rather to follow them. Only occasionally do the views of the core members develop differently than the views of the general public. In this regard, the findings are rather similar both in secularized Sweden and less secularized Spain.

At the same time, it is important to note that regular church attenders showed to be less permissive than those who never go to church. Considering the general trends towards increasing permissiveness, it could also be argued that the churches appear to follow the general processes of increasing permissiveness reluctantly! They seem to serve as unsuccessful 'breakers' in the back of the train of cultural change rather than as strong engines in the front, pulling the train!

Notes

1. This article is a revised version of the paper *Religion and sexuality fragmenting values? A Preliminary Research Report* presented at the ISSR/SISR Conference: The Regulation by Religion of Nature and the Body, Quebec, Canada, 26-30 June, 1995.
2. It should be noted that the values for Sweden in Table 1 concerning sexual permissiveness are affected by an incorrect translation of the item on 'sex under the legal age of consent'. In the Swedish questionnaire, this item was translated as 'sex with minors', something which explains the comparatively non-permissive results for the Swedes.

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