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The Religious Factor in contemporary Europe

Exploring the levels of religious involvement and the relationships between religious involvement, the private, and the public across 23 European countries

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THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

Exploring the levels of religious involvement and the relationships between religious involvement, the private, and the public across 23 European countries

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Abstract

This paper explores the levels of religious involvement as well as the relationships between the religious involvement and values in other societal spheres in 23 European countries. In theories on modernization, the process of differentiation is regarded a core process of social change. Due to this and other modernization processes like rationalization and individualization, the traditional functions of the churches have become less important, and the impact of religion on other domains in life is assumed to have decreased. However, a distinction between public and private social spheres seems necessary for it is often argued that the declining importance of the religious involvement is particularly found in the public sphere, whereas the private sphere is assumed to remain (stronger) influenced by religion.

The paper explores the assumption that religion has a differential impact on the private and public realms. It is also investigated whether the strength of religion's impact on other domains is related to the general level of religious beliefs, e.g. whether one form of secularization (differentiation) is related to another (the declining adherence to religious beliefs). In these analyses different European regions are compared, using the data from the European Values Studies of 1990. Overall, the results do not support the assumption that lower national levels of religious involvement are related to a weaker impact of the religious involvement on other social attitudes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The major theme in contemporary theories of secularization is a religious decline. The decline is assumed to manifest itself in different ways. Most often, the religious decline is found in the decreasing levels of church attendance and religious beliefs. Yet, another dimension of the religious decline concerns religion's decreasing impact on human life. Thus, secularization is also assumed to concern the decline of the ability of the religious authority structures 'to control societal-level institutions, meso level organizations, and individual level ... behaviours' (Yamane, 1997: 15).

A very important question concerns the relationships between the different forms of religious decline, i.e whether a noticeable impact of religious involvement on social behavior is primarily found in social contexts where the general level of religious involvement is comparatively high, or whether a noticeable impact of the religious involvement is equally
probable in contexts where the religiously involved have decreased to a minority, i.e. when a religious world view is primarily found among the "really convinced". The general understanding in this matter seems to be that people abandon religious belief systems when they have lost their relevance, i.e. when their relevance to different kinds of social behavior has ceased. In this sense, it has been argued that in modern settings, cultural factors have become independent from religion, that political values have become dissociated from religion, and that social morality is no longer steered by a dominant religious orientation (Holm, 1996: 1).

Most empirical research on the religious decline is concerned with the declining number of people who adhere to religious beliefs and practices. In general such research yields evidence that indeed traditional belief systems, taught by the churches and acknowledged by a majority of churched people, have been gradually replaced by diversified individual belief systems. Not only is a decreasing number of people attending religious services frequently, the number of people adhering to the traditional religious doctrines is on the decline as well, at least when European contexts are under scrutiny.

With regard to the second component of secularization mentioned above, i.e. the impact of religion on social behavior, modernization processes like specialization and differentiation are assumed to have resulted in a functionally differentiated society in which religion is one 'subsystem alongside other subsystems, and religion's overarching claims are losing their relevance' (Dobbelaere, 1993: 24). Such a decline of the importance of the religious factor is further assumed to be related to the process of individualization, the process by which people have become free and autonomous and no longer automatically take for granted the prescriptions and rules from a traditional institution like the church.

When discussing these matters, differences between various cultural regions must not be overlooked. For instance, even five centuries after the Reformation, obvious differences between Northern and Southern Europe with regard to the importance of the religious factor seem to remain. Thus, in Europe secularization is assumed to be 'an uneven process. It has affected the major Protestant churches more strongly than the Catholic Church' (Therborn 1995: 274). The explanation for this uneven process is partly found in the theological differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. The extensive, dogmatic, collective creed of the Catholic church is assumed to impose a stronger collective identity upon its members (Jagodzinski & Dobbelaere, 1995a: 81).
Another regional difference concerns the Western European countries on the one hand, and the Central and Eastern European countries on the other. The Soviet regime of the past 40 years in Central and Eastern Europe was ideologically opposed to religion and religious activity. Religious activity was at least discouraged and, in some cases, severely repressed in each of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe under Soviet domination following World War II (Gautier, 1997: 289). Thus, the religious factor can be assumed to be less important in the former socialist societies.

However, disregarding such regional differences, another distinction seems equally important with respect to the impact of religion. In spite of counter-arguments (cf. Casanova 1994), it is often argued that the declining impact of religious beliefs is particularly found in the public sphere, whereas the decrease of the religious influence is assumed to be less evident in matters relating to the private. Thus, this paper focuses on whether religion has indeed a differential impact on the public and private social spheres and whether this impact does vary across the different European regions.

In Section Two we will briefly discuss the differential patterns of secularization in Protestant and Catholic countries in general and the differential impact of religion on different social values in particular. Four hypotheses will be formulated to be empirically investigated in the subsequent sections of the paper. In Section Three we present our data, measurements and analytical strategies, and in Section Four we present the results of our analyses. The paper concludes with a short discussions of our findings.

2. DIFFERENTIAL PATTERNS OF SECULARIZATION AND RELIGION’S IMPACT ON SOCIAL VALUES

Secularization theory assumes religion to have lost substantial parts of its former impact on social life. Weber attributed these losses to the rationalization and de-enchantment of the world, while others explain the decreased significance of religious institutions, religious activities, and religious moods of thinking, by reference to social differentiation and specialization, being the main forces of modernization (Wilson, 1982). Due to cultural and social differentiation, people in contemporary society have to participate in different universes of meaning, each governed by its own set of values. ‘Modernity partitions each human life into a variety of segments, each with its own norms and modes of behavior. So work is divided from leisure, private life from public life, the corporate from the personal’ (MacIntyre,
As a result of specialization and differentiation, religion is assumed to be "reduced to one social function among others and condemned to a kind of faithless belief" (Luhmann, 1990: 427). The churches have lost several of their traditional functions such as schools, hospices, social welfare, registry of births, marriages and deaths, culture, and organization of leisure (Dogan, 1995: 416). Institutional domains have become segmented in the sense that within each institutional sphere norms and values have become functional, rational and above all autonomous. Arguing along such lines, secularization can be seen as "the repercussion of these changes on the religious subsystem. It denotes a societal process in which an overarching and transcendent religious system is reduced to a subsystem of society alongside other subsystems, the overarching claims of which have a shrinking relevance" (Dobbelaere, 1995: 1). As a consequence, religion has become marginalized and lost much of its influence on people's lives.

Thus, the decreasing importance of religion is seen as a more or less "natural" consequence of societies becoming increasingly rational. Such a view took Weber when he described modernity in terms of the transformation of traditional religious authority to secular rational authority. Inglehart argues in a similar way: according to him religion has lost it's self-evidentness because of the rapid economic growth and the development and further advancement of modern welfare states. The increasing sense of security is assumed to diminish the need for absolute rules as imposed by the churches and to reduce the crucial functions of the religious views for e.g. the maintenance of the family unit. Further, people are said to experience inconsistencies between their daily experiences and the religious traditions: "the daily life experience of people today is basically different from the kind of life experience that shaped the Judaeo-Christian tradition. (.....) today we live in an advanced industrial society, in which computers are far likelier than sheep to be part of one's daily experience. Consequently, not only the social norms, but also the symbols and world view of the established religions, are not as persuasive or compelling as they were in their original setting" (Inglehart, 1990: 179).

The religious decline might thus be seen as a result of increasing levels of security, produced by the modern welfare state. The increased sense of security leads to a gradual value shift "from emphasis on economic and physical security above all, toward greater emphasis on belonging, self-expression, and the quality of life" (Inglehart, 1990: 11). The value shift from a predominant materialistic orientation towards a post-materialistic one is expected to be "accompanied by declining emphasis on traditional political, religious, moral, and social norms" (Inglehart, 1990: 66). In other words, in highly developed countries, the increase of
post-materialism will be accompanied by declining impact of traditional, church-influenced social values and morality. In such societies, a decreasing number of people is inclined to accept part and parcel of the traditional religious dogmas. 'The churches have lost much of their impact ad intra: as a consequence, individuals may reject the 'menu' of church beliefs, instead recomposing a religion à la carte - constructing their own religious patchwork' (Jagodzinski & Dobbelare, 1995a: 115). Such privatized religious patchworks are especially assumed to be on the increase outside the core of the church constituencies.

Recently a new phenomenon has entered the discourse on modernization: the globalization of human society. According to the theory of modernization, Western society has experienced a gradual transformation from a traditional society towards an industrial, and more recently modern industrial society has turned into a post-modern order. 'Globalization theories add to this thesis that modernization in the West has directly resulted in the spread of certain vital institutions of Western modernization to the rest of the globe, especially the modern capitalist economy, the nation-state, and scientific rationality in the form of modern technology; and, critically, that this global spread has resulted in a new social unit which is much more than a simple expansion of Western modernity' (Beyer, 1994: 8). One of the implications of globalization theory is that people are confronted with increasing numbers of opportunities and alternative options. People are assumed to encounter a great variety of cultural habits, values and norms. As a result of globalization people 'are faced with an extending range of imaginary and information involving models of citizenship, forms of production, styles of consumption, modes of communication, principles of world order and, in addition, ways of reacting to all of these. There is enhanced capacity for reflection as a result of the exposure to globalized social processes. A main consequence of this is that the individual has tended to develop increased expectations of personal fulfilment and satisfaction. This has produced various alternative or modified lifestyles' (Spybey, 1996: 9). In an earlier paper, we have demonstrated that structural globalization (increasing levels of international communication), is related to cultural globalization, that people's value systems and world views have become more fragmented (Halman & Pettersson, 1997).

However, the acceptance of such varieties of alternatives would not have occurred if the processes of individualization and secularization had not liberated the individual from the institutional constraints. In traditional societies people were not only living in small local communities separated from other communities, they were also strongly influenced and dominated by traditional institutions, e.g. religion. Particularly the churches played an important role in these traditional settings. Economic growth, the spread of affluence, rising
levels of education, increased mobilization, increased technological knowledge and its many applications, have reduced the previously dominating role of religion in human society (Berger, 1969; Luckmann, 1967; Inglehart, 1990; 1995; 1997). Due to individualization, people have become increasingly free and autonomous in selecting the convictions, beliefs, and practices they want. Decisions are no longer based on what the religious institutions prescribe, but what the individual wants. In this way, the processes of individualization and secularization are important predecessors or concomitants of the globalization processes.

The increased ‘supply’ of alternative world views and value systems, provided not the least by the ever growing mass media, is a crucial factor in this regard. In other words, the orthodox belief systems and moral teachings, taught by the churches and in earlier days (assumedly) acknowledged by the majority of churched people, are increasingly replaced by diversified individual belief systems and socio-moral convictions. Since the cultural environment has become internationally oriented, and people feel increasingly free to choose from an enlarged pool of religious and moral options, the homogeneity in peoples’ religious-moral value systems will almost by statistical necessity decrease. An increasing number of people will demonstrate their own, private religious and moral patchwork, and a distinguished and homogenous impact of these on other social spheres becomes less likely. The increase of alternatives to select from and the freedom to decide for themselves make it unlikely that a more or less uniform religion will remain a basic source for people’s ideas and opinions in other life spheres. In fact, the lives of people have become compartmentalized according to the various subsystems of society (Dobbelaere, 1995: 3). People do not longer accept the ‘menu’ of the churches. The individual’s personal religiosity has become increasingly segregated from his motives in other spheres of life (Holm, 1997).

A first hypothesis to be empirically investigated in this paper concerns the assumption that secularization measured by the levels of church attendance and religious beliefs is counter parted with the loss of the importance of religious beliefs and actions for attitudes in other domains of life. Thus, we assume the two dimensions of secularization to be closely interrelated.

H1. The lower the national levels of religious involvement, the lesser the impact of the religious involvement on attitudes in other social domains

However, it has been argued that religion’s generally weakened impact on social life is especially noticeable in the public, economic-political realm in contrast to matters concerning
the private, familial life (Berger, 1969: 129-134; Luckmann, 1967: 85f). Due to social differentiation and increasing religious diversity, religion with its overarching claims was more or less ‘forced’ to withdraw from the public domain, whereas it remained influential for matters concerning family life and personal growth (Fenn, 1972: 31), for matters ‘relevant to interpersonal relations, for face-to-face contacts, for the intimacies of the family, courtship, friendship, and neighborliness’ (Wilson, 1976: 6). Thus, it has been noted that a ‘large and growing body of theory and research indicates that religious communities and belief systems help to shape a variety of attitudes and behaviors germane to family life: the selection of marital partners, marital quality, desired and actual family size, the timing of family formation, attitudes towards gender roles, and sexual attitudes and conduct, to name but a few areas of inquiry’ (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993: 313). Apparently, religion continues to demonstrate a noticeable impact on family life, the core of the private sphere, in contrast to matters in the public. The public domain is more separated from the churches and institutional areas like education, welfare, medicine and law ‘operate as public arenas under the general surveillance of secular government. The churches as specialized institutions have been relegated to the periphery of social life in providing certain optional rituals for baptism, marriage and death’ (Turner, 1991: 199).

Thus, in comparison to private family life, religion’s impact on public, social life is less certain. ‘Religion may continue within the private space of the body of individuals, but the public space of the body of populations is now subordinated, not to the conscience collective, the sacred canopy or the civil religion, but to secular disciplines, economic constraints and political coercion. The public realm is desacralized in Western industrial societies’ (Turner, 1991: 9). Such a conclusion might also be substantiated from the political sciences, where the contemporary state of the arts seem to suggest that the religious cleavage is of less importance for political involvement and voting behavior. Needless to say, this does of course not imply that all links between religion and politics have dissolved (see e.g. Casanova, 1994; Heath et al., 1993; Jagodzinski, 1996). There are such links, but these are assumed to be generally weaker than the links to various dimensions of the private sphere. That religion’s impact on the public sphere is weaker compared to the private, might also find support from yet another group of studies, i.e. those who concern the relation between religion and work values, another classical area of research in the social sciences of religion. In this field, ‘most research suggests that religion is largely irrelevant to the work experience’ (Davidson & Caddell, 1994: 135; cf. Lindseth & Listhaug, 1994). It has even been suggested that ‘in the absence of other institutions capable of providing a coherent, overarching values system, it also seems likely that companies will increasingly serve that role, filling needs for personal (and material)
development' (Harding & Hikspoors, 1995: 453). Thus, in the area of work, the direction of causation might be reversed from religion’s impact on work behavior (the Weber thesis) to work experience as the provider of ’religion’ (overarching meaning systems).

As already mentioned, a cleavage with respect to the impact of religion is most often assumed to exist between Catholic and Protestant contexts; a cleavage that parallels a European north-south divide. The religious decline is notably more evident in the Northern part of Europe and this difference is often attributed to the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism (see also Davie, 1992: 224). Due to i.a. the greater incentives for religious individualism among Protestants, Protestant culture is assumed to be more affected by the process of secularization than Catholic culture, both in terms of a lower level of religiosity and a weaker impact of religion on other social domains. These differences have at least partly been explained by the theological differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. The ‘seeds of individualism were manifest much earlier in Protestantism. In contrast to Catholics, Protestants are personally responsible before God in religious matters, and the church has a lesser role as mediator between the believer and God. The Catholic church, with its extensive, dogmatic, collective creed imposes a more collective identity upon its faithful’ (Jagodzinski & Dobbelaere, 1995a: 81).

Needless to say, other explanations for the differences in levels of religious involvement between Catholic and Protestant countries are also afforded. Some of these focus on economic factors. In general, countries in Northern Europe score higher on wealth and prosperity than countries in the Southern part of Europe. Since it has been assumed that ‘economic development goes hand in hand with a decline in religious sentiment’ (Wald quoted by Lipset, 1996: 62), the north-south cultural divide might also be explained by such economic differences. That the north-south differences in economic development can, on their turn, be explained from the differences in religious traditions, is a classical and disputed theory that we will not discuss in this paper.

Whatever the explanation, the impact of religion is generally assumed to be stronger in the Catholic countries compared with Protestant countries, where the religious involvement is considerably lower, the level of confidence in the churches weaker, etc. (Ester et al., 1994). Furthermore, it has been argued that the differences in labor market policies, family policies, and social insurance policies between Catholic and Protestant countries can be attributed to the differences in religious traditions (Castles, 1994). Thus, the divide between Protestantism and Catholicism is assumed to have had far-reaching socio-political implications (Therborn,
In his analysis of the post-modernization dimension Inglehart found empirical evidence for the Catholic-Protestant divide in Europe. The fact that people belong to a certain religious tradition appeared more important for similarities in basic value orientations than their geographic proximity (Inglehart, 1997: 95). His 'cultural geography of the world' substantiates the assumption of a Catholic cultural profile that can be distinguished from a Protestant. Furthermore his analysis suggests that the cultural profile of Catholics is a global phenomenon and that all Catholic cultures are close to each other in the cultural space, irrespective of their geographical belonging. That the denomination of a country plays a crucial role in the differential European decline in 'familism' (Gundelach, 1994), is yet another evidence of the importance of the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism.

In other words, there appears to be a cultural economic syndrome of Protestantism: 'The wealthier countries and those with highly developed tertiary sectors are most likely to be long-established democracies, and the publics of these nations tend to show relatively high rates of political discussion, have less Materialist value priorities, and tend to be Protestant in religion' (Inglehart, 1990: 57). If, following Casanova, secularization is seen as a modern historical process and if it is accepted that 'the Protestant Reformation, the rise of the modern state, the rise of modern capitalism, and the rise of modern science - set in motion the dynamics of the process by undermining the medieval system and themselves became at the same time the carriers of the process of differentiation, of which secularization is one aspect, then it follows that one should expect different historical patterns of secularization. As each of these carriers developed different dynamics in different places and at different times, the patterns and the outcomes of the historical process of secularization should vary accordingly' (Casanova, 1994: 24-25). Thus, the modernization, secularization, individualization processes have taken a specific form in the Northern Protestant parts of Europe, whereas in Southern European Catholic countries the same kinds of processes have developed in a different way.

To summarize then, the levels of secularization and the impact of religion are assumed to be of different magnitude across two sorts of divisions, one regional and one societal. The regional division concerns the differences between Northern and Southern Europe, a division that coincides with the division between Protestantism and Catholicism or different levels of secularization. The Protestant countries are assumed to be most secular, while the Catholic countries are assumed to be less secularized. Thus, in Catholic Europe, the impact of religion on both the private and the public sector, is assumed to be stronger than in Protestant Europe,
and the levels of religious involvement are assumed to be higher.

The societal division concerns the difference between the private and public sectors. It has been argued that the impact of religion is generally stronger on values in the private domain as compared to the public. In ‘the modern context religion influences more the private than the public realm’ (Tamney & Johnson, 1985: 361). As the public sectors of economy and politics developed their own rationalities and value hierarchies, traditional religion became increasingly dysfunctional when applied to these spheres. And hence, religion’s impact remained stronger in the private sector than in the public. A scheme for the analysis of the differential impact of religion across the societal and regional divisions is shown in Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Protestant</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public sphere</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sphere</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
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**Figure 1. A comparative scheme for the analysis of the differential impact of the religious factor across regions and the public and private sectors**

In Figure 1, the cells (a through d) indicate the ‘impact of religion’. As mentioned above, the impact is expected to be stronger in the Catholic than in the Protestant (a < b; c < d), and stronger on the private sphere than on the public sphere (a < c; b < d). Thus, the following hypotheses can be formulated.

**H2.**  *The impact of religiosity on both the public and private spheres will be stronger in Catholic Europe compared to Protestant Europe.*

**H3.**  *Both in the Catholic as well as in the Protestant Europe, the impact of religion will be stronger on the private sphere than on the public sphere.*

As we have indicated in the introduction, important differences in religious patterns are expected between Central and Eastern European countries and countries in Western Europe. In the socialist regimes, religion and the churches were oppressed in varying degrees. E.g. in Bulgaria the Orthodox churches accommodated with the regime, whereas the Catholic church in Poland strongly opposed the political regime. In general, the Protestant churches in many Eastern and Central European countries ‘established a policy of a “church within socialism” in
order to ensure at least a modicum of legitimacy' (Gautier, 1997: 290).

Despite its opposition to the regime of the Polish Catholic church, no severe actions against the church were undertaken. In Hungary, on the other hand, the church was severely subjugated and controlled by the state (Pro Mundi Vita, 1984/2). Even under Soviet domination the Catholic church remained in a strong position in Poland and some even claim that the Western orientation and the global organization of the Catholic church helped shape Polish 'national identification in terms of Western culture' (Gautier, 1997: 290). The same applies to the Catholic church in Hungary, but not to the Protestant churches in Hungary and East Germany which accommodated with the regimes and therefore were identified in the eyes of the people as operating in cooperation with the Soviet state. As a consequence these churches lost their 'credibility among religious believers, who then disaffiliated in substantial numbers' (Gautier, 1997: 290; see also Caplow, 1985: 106).

Although the Eastern European religious pattern differs from the Western, the Eastern European pattern should not be regarded as homogenous. For instance, the Catholic-Protestant divide may exist in Eastern European societies as well. In Poland, the Catholic church remained a powerful institution even under the socialist regimes. Nevertheless, in general we expect most of these societies to demonstrate comparatively lower levels of religious involvement and a comparatively weaker impact of religion on other domains. Thus, a fourth hypothesis refers to the expectation the religious pattern of Central and Eastern European countries will be different from the religious pattern in Western European societies.

H4. In Eastern European countries the religious involvement will be lower and thus the impact of religion on other domains weaker compared to the Western European countries.

3. DATA, MEASUREMENTS AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

Data

Our empirical analyses are based on the survey data from the 1990 European Values Study. This project, launched at the end of the seventies, aimed at investigating fundamental value patterns in Western Europe. A large scale survey was conducted in all countries of the EC in 1981, as well as in Spain (at that time not yet a member of the EC). The research project
aroused interest in many other countries, where colleagues and research institutions joined the project and used the same questionnaire.

In order to explore value changes a second wave of surveys was fielded in 1990 in again all EC countries (minus Greece) as well as in Hungary, the Scandinavian countries, South Africa, Japan, the United States, Canada. In Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Baltic States, and the former German Democratic Republic the survey was conducted for the first time by associated research teams (see also Inglehart, 1997).

The *EVS* questionnaire was developed to measure basic value orientations in important domains of life such as religion and morality, socio-economic life, politics, work, leisure time, family, marriage, and sexuality (for details and information on the questionnaire items, see Halman & Vloet, 1994). Our empirical analyses are based on the data from the *EVS* surveys in the European countries gathered in 1990. The sample sizes in these countries were (see also Halman & De Moor, 1994: 28; Halman & Vloet, 1994: 7): France 1002, Great Britain 1484, West Germany 2101, Austria 1494, Italy 2018, Spain 2637, Portugal 1185, Netherlands 1017, Belgium 2792, Denmark 1030, Norway 1239, Sweden 1047, Northern Ireland 304, Ireland 1000, Poland 1024, East Germany 1336, Bulgaria 1034, Hungary 998, Czech Republic 2109, Slovak Republic 1136, Romania 1103, Estonia 1008, Latvia 909, Lithuania, 1000.

**Measurements**

As indicators of individual religious involvement, we have included one measure of traditional institutional religiosity (church attendance) and one of religious beliefs (importance of God). The latter does not necessarily refer to traditional, Christian, institutional religiosity. *Church attendance* is measured by the question: ‘Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?’ The answer possibilities ranged between 1 (= More than once a week) and 8 (= Never, practically never). *Importance of God* is measured by the question: ‘And how important is God in your life? As answer categories, a 10-point scale was used (1 = not important at all; 10 = very important).

As a value measure relevant for the private sphere, we have selected four variables referring to family life and the relationships between (nuclear) family members. These items tap what might be labeled as ‘Non-traditional family values’, e.g. whether or not children need both father and mother to grow up happily, whether or not one approves of a woman who wants to have a child without having a stable relationship with a man, whether parent-child relations
are to be based on strict hierarchical relations and obligations or not. By applying factor analysis to these four items a score has been calculated indicative for the (non-) preference of a traditional family view.

As measures relevant for the public domain, a number of orientations are available by the EVS-data. For this exploratory study, we have selected items concerning *institutional trust*. As institutions primarily related to the public domain, we have chosen the education system, the legal system, and the police.\textsuperscript{2} Confidence in such institutions appear (strongly) related. By means of factor analysis we have constructed a measure indicating the level of confidence in these three public institutions.

*Analytic strategy*

A first step in our empirical investigations is to assess the levels of religious involvement in each of the 23 countries. To this end, we will combine two kinds of analyses. First, we will rankorder the countries according to the levels of church attendance and the importance of God. Next, we will apply regression analyses, regressing church attendance and importance of God, respectively, on age, gender, level of education, together with a set of 23-1 country dummy variables where Northern Ireland is the reference category. The obtained unstandardized regression coefficient for the country dummy variables will be used as measures of the national impact on the level church attendance and importance of God, respectively. The lower the regression coefficient, the lesser the impact (cf. Dobbelaere & Jagodzinski, 1995: 210-212). Thus, by these two kinds of analyses, we will obtain 4 rankorders of the levels of religious involvement in the 23 countries: two rankorders from the national means of church attendance and the importance of God, respectively, and two from the regression analyses of the country dummies.

As a next step, we will explore the impact of religion on the private (family values) and public (trust in institutions) sectors. For each country, 'traditional family values' and 'trust in public institutions' will be regressed on importance of God, church attendance, age, education, and gender. The unstandardized regression coefficients of the variables 'importance of God' and 'church attendance' can then be used as measures if the impact of each of the indicators of religious involvement on the private and public spheres.

In order to investigate the relationships between the two forms of religious decline (the national levels of religious involvement, and the national degrees of the impact of the
religious involvement on family values and institutional trust), the rankordering of the countries with regard to 1) the levels of religious involvement, and 2) the impact of the religious factors on the private and public factors will then be compared, both vis-a-vis each other as well as vis-a-vis structural socio-economic dimensions as e.g. GDP per capita.

4. RESULTS

In Table 1, the countries are ranked with regard to the levels of church attendance and the importance of God. It is obvious that the four measures we use, rank the countries in a very similar way. Thus, the Spearman rankorder correlation coefficients range between .92 and .99. The rankorders of church-attendance and the country’s regression coefficients for church attendance are almost identical \( r_s = .99; p < .001 \). A similar result is obtained for the rankorders between the importance of God and the country’s regression coefficient for the importance of God, respectively \( r_s = .97, p < .001 \). The rankorder correlation between the national means for church attendance and importance of God is somewhat lower but still highly significant \( r_s = .97; p < .001 \). The rankorders of the two measures of the national impact on church attendance and the importance of God, respectively, are also significantly similar \( r_s = .92; p < .001 \). Since the four different rankings of the countries with regard to the levels of religious involvement yield such similar results, we have calculated a mean rankorder for the 23 countries. The mean rankorders are presented in Table 1.
Table 1. Personal religiosity, church attendance and the impact of national context

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>imp God</th>
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<th>imp God</th>
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<th>church attendance</th>
<th></th>
<th>church attendance</th>
<th></th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Rep</td>
<td>-4.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-2.83</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-2.84</td>
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<td>6.31</td>
<td>22</td>
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</table>

In order to find regional patterns with regard to the national levels of religious involvement, we have performed cluster analyses of the four measures of the levels of religious
involvement. The results are presented in Table 2. The Czech Republic appears most secular together with Bulgaria, Sweden, East Germany, Denmark, France, and Norway. A second cluster of countries consist of somewhat less secular societies: Great Britain, Latvia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary, Iceland, and West Germany. A third cluster contains Spain, The Slovak Republic, Portugal, Austria, whereas Romania, Italy, and Northern Ireland appear in a 4th cluster. Finally, the countries with the highest degrees of religious involvement are Ireland and Poland. Table 2 presents the mean scores on church attendance and the importance of God for these five groups of countries.

Table 2. Mean scores for four clusters of countries on church attendance and importance of God and degree of secularization based on church attendance and importance of God

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Church Attendance</th>
<th>Importance of God</th>
<th>Secularization (Church)</th>
<th>Secularization (Imp God)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>-3.73</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>-1.92</td>
<td>-2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(GB, La, NL, Be, Hu, Ic, WG)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.01</td>
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<td>-1.44</td>
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<td>(Sp, Sl, Por, Au)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>7.47</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Ro, It, NI)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>8.18</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious (Ir, Pl)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

The cluster analyses yield some interesting results. For instance, although the Czech and the Slovak Republics were still united at the time when the 1990 EVS data were collected, they appear very different with regard to the levels of religious involvement. The Czech Republic appears as the most secular country, while the Slovak belongs to the more religious parts of Europe. Furthermore, Italy appears more religious than Spain and Portugal, two countries that are less modernized compared to Italy when economic parameters are investigated. Particularly Portugal is less developed economically. Thus, this country is expected to display lower levels of secularization than the likewise Catholic Spain and Italy. However, the
opposite appears to be the case.

Further, the cluster analysis has not demonstrated a clear East-West pattern. Poland is among the most religious countries in Europe, while the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Eastern Germany display similar high levels of secularization as obtained for Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Romania resembles the Italian religious pattern, while Hungary and Latvia are close to Great Britain, Netherlands and Belgium. Thus, the countries from Eastern Europe have not showed to be homogenous and different with regard to the levels of religious involvement.

As seen from Table 2, a certain division between Catholic and Protestant countries seems to exist, with indeed lower levels of religious involvement in the Protestant Nordic countries, and higher levels in the Southern and/or Catholic. However, Iceland is mainly Protestant, but in terms of the level of religious involvement, it evidently demonstrates higher levels than the other Nordic countries. France belongs to the cluster of most secular countries, nevertheless about 60% of it’s population is Catholic. A similar remark can be made with respect to Belgium. This is clearly a Catholic country, but it belongs to the cluster of more secularized countries. So, although the Catholic-Protestant divide can be traced by the results of the cluster analysis, there are obvious exceptions to the general assumption that the religious involvement is lower in the Protestant countries as compared to the Catholic. In this regard, it should also be mentioned that a cluster analysis of only the Western European countries do not demonstrate the expected Catholic-Protestant divide. In a similar sense, it should be noticed that neither the orthodox countries are homogenous in terms of church attendance or the importance of people’s beliefs in God. The Bulgarian orthodox culture appears comparative secularized, while the Romanian orthodox culture appears to score comparatively high on religious involvement.

Thus, as a concluding remark, it should be emphasized that the cluster analyses do not yield a clear-cut and easily interpretable regionalization with regard to the degree of religious involvement among the 23 European countries. The patterns that emerge, do only partly relate to the differences between the main Christian traditions. Therefore, besides the differences between the theological traditions, the national levels of religious involvement must depend on other factors as well. The degree of economic development should be one of these. As expected, the mean ranking of the levels of religious involvement is fairly similar to the national levels of economic development (GDP per capita) ($r_s -.38; p < .05$; one-sided test; a low rank on religious involvement means a low level of religious involvement). The corresponding rankorder correlation including only the Western European countries is -.77; p
The corresponding coefficient for the Easter European countries is -.60; \( p < .06 \). Thus, among the 23 countries, there is a significant relationship between the national levels of economic development and religious involvement, respectively. However, from the magnitude of the rankorder correlations, it can be concluded that the degree of economic development is far from the only factor determining the national levels of religious involvement. With regard to the national levels of economic development, it should also be noted that there is a significant relationship between GDP per capita and the percentage of postmaterialists among the 23 countries \( (r = .60; \ p < .01) \). However, contrary to the expectations, there is no significant rankorder relationship between the national levels of postmaterialism and religious involvement, neither among the 23 countries as a group nor among the Western and non-Western subgroups of countries, respectively.

Our first hypothesis assumed that the more secular a society is in terms of church attendance and the importance attached to God, the lesser the impact of religious beliefs and church attendance on family values and institutional trust. As mentioned, this hypothesis is empirically tested by means of regression analyses. In table 3, the relevant unstandardized regression coefficients are displayed. The higher the regression coefficients, the stronger the relationship between on the one hand church attendance and the importance attributed to God, respectively, and on the other family values and institutional trust. Contrary to our hypothesis, our analyses reveal no systematic relationships whatsoever between the magnitude of the unstandardized regression coefficients and the national levels of religious involvement, neither among the 23 countries as a group nor among any of the subgroups of countries (Western vs non-Western; Catholic vs Protestant).
Table 3. The impact of personal religiosity (importance of God) and church attendance on private and public values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Imp God</th>
<th>Church attendance</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Imp God</th>
<th>Church attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>0.0275</td>
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<td>0.0031</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>SW</td>
<td>0.0109</td>
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</tr>
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<td>IR</td>
<td>0.0849***</td>
<td>IT</td>
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Note: unstandardized regression coefficients; * P < .05; ** P < .01; *** P < .001
A cluster analyses of the regression coefficients enables us to make some divisions among the
countries. The attitude towards the family is least influenced by the importance of God in
Hungary, East Germany, Austria, France, Portugal and Slovakia, and most influenced in the
Netherlands, Iceland, Northern Ireland and Ireland. Church attendance appears to be least
important for the attitude towards the family in Bulgaria and Latvia, and most important in
West Germany. Although Poland and Romania have demonstrated high levels of religious
involvement, the impact of the importance of God on attitudes towards the family is hardly
noticeable. In Ireland there is an effect of personal religiosity, but institutional religiosity
appears to have no effect at all in this country. In this respect Ireland, one of the countries with
the highest levels of religious involvement, resembles the Czech Republic, the country with the
lowest levels. In East Germany, Sweden and Denmark the religious involvement is low, yet
church attendance in these countries appears to affect the family orientation. The effect is
almost as strong in these countries as in Portugal and Austria, two societies with considerably
higher levels of religious involvement. Thus, although the countries differ concerning the
impact of the religious involvement, we can not find any clear regionalization of the countries
with regard to the magnitude of this impact.

Our third hypothesis stated that the impact of religious involvement on the private sphere
should be stronger than religion’s impact on the public. In general, this hypothesis seems to be
in accordance with the results. Disregarding whether the relationships are significant or not,
and only considering the numeric values of the regression coefficients in Table 3, the
regression coefficients for the relationship between the importance of God and family values
are in as many as 20 of the all 23 instances higher than the corresponding coefficients
for the relationship between the importance of God and institutional trust. The corresponding
relation for church attendance is 19 out of 23 instances. Such results in favor of our hypothesis
would hardly occur by chance. Furthermore, considering only the regression coefficients
which are statistically significant, the importance of God is significantly related to family
values in 19 of the 23 countries, whereas it is only significantly related to institutional trust in
4 countries. The four countries where the relationship with family values is not significant
seem to belong to the countries with the lowest levels of religious involvement; three of the
four countries where the relationship with institutional trust is significant seem to belong to
countries with the highest levels of religious involvement.

As for the church attendance, it is significantly related to family attitudes in 15 countries and
to institutional trust in 11. Thus, the differential impact of religion on the private and public
spheres, respectively, is less evident with regard to institutionalized religion, i.e. church
attendance as compared to religious beliefs. There is a slight tendency that the eight countries where there is no significant relationship between church attendance and family values belong to the countries where the religious involvement is lowest, although Ireland is an obvious exception in this case. However, in summary it can be concluded that by and large the impact of religious involvement seems to be stronger on values pertaining to the private sphere than on values pertaining to the public.

5. DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have investigated two dimensions of secularization, i.e. 1) the levels of religious involvement (the importance of God and church attendance, respectively) and 2) the impact of religious involvement on values pertaining to the private and public spheres, respectively. We assumed that the impact of religious involvement should be stronger on values related to the private sector as compared to values pertaining to the public. We furthermore assumed that the relationship between the two forms of secularization should be positive, i.e. that the impact of religious involvement on both spheres should be stronger, the higher the national levels of religious involvement. Since the religious involvement was assumed to be higher in Catholic contexts as compared to Protestant, the religious impact was expected to be stronger in such contexts as compared to Protestant. Furthermore, as a result of the secular policies of Eastern European regimes, the impact of religious orientations and behaviors on attitudes in both the private and public spheres was assumed to be weaker in these countries than in Western.

Using the survey data from the 1990 European Values Studies we have performed several multi-variate analyses to test our hypotheses. Overall, the results did not support our assumptions. That religious involvement shows a differential impact on values in the private and public sectors, respectively, seems to be the only hypothesis which was in accordance with the data. However, in most countries the differential impact of religion on the private and public sectors appeared modest and the positive results in this regard should not be exaggerated. For the other hypotheses, any clear patterns were not revealed by our analyses. The impact of religious involvement on family values and institutional trust did not vary systematically across countries with different levels of religious involvement, and we found no clear-cut Catholic-Protestant divide with respect to the dimensions we have analyzed. Likewise, we did not find any obvious East-West divide, neither with regard to the levels of religious involvement, nor in terms of the impact of religion on public and private issues.
With regard to these hypotheses, there were too many exceptions to our hypotheses.

Obviously, one reason for our negative findings may be that our theoretical perspectives were inaccurate. Hypothesis 2 assumed that the two dimensions of secularization, i.e. the levels of religious involvement, and the impact of the religious involvement, respectively, were positively related. With regard this hypothesis, it should be noted that a former study has found the impact of religion on other domains (e.g. moral beliefs) to be unrelated to the secularization process (Jagodzinski & Dobbelaere, 1995b: 230). Surely, this finding is contrary to our hypothesis. Thus, that individual church attendance is declining, did not imply a decreasing impact of church attendance on e.g. individual moral values. However, in our understanding, and in spite of the empirical findings of the former study, such a hypothesis seems less plausible. We would rather assume that people’s moral values depend on several factors, of which their religious involvement is one. When the religious factor “disappears” (declines), the greater the degree by which their moral values will be influenced by the remaining factors. And hence, the lower the national levels of religious involvement, the lower the impact of religious involvement on the moral values.

However, our understanding of the hypothesis disregards the possibility that to the decreasing flock of the religiously involved, their religious involvement may become of increasing importance to their moral values. To those who remain religiously involved, their religious involvement may to increasing degrees become the sole determinant of their moral beliefs. If this should be the case, then declining national levels of religious involvement would not necessarily be accompanied by a decreasing impact of the religious involvement on other social domains.

That the national levels of religious involvement seems unrelated to the impact of religious involvement on other kinds of social values, can also be explained by the fact (?) that we have used irrelevant or over-simplified statistical analyses. For instance, to compare long-term democratic Western European countries with totalitarian Eastern European countries with regard to attitudes towards the police and the legal system, may be less appropriate. In this manner, our hypothesis can be said to contain a very strong ceteris paribus clause, so strong that the hypothesis can not be investigated tested in the way we have done. In other words, our measure of institutional trust may not be comparable across the different groups of countries.

We found some evidence in favor of the hypothesis that the religious involvement is differently related to family values and institutional trust, i.e. to what we assumed to be
indicators of the private and public sectors. However, our distinction between the private and public sectors can be questioned. It has been argued that people's decisions in both the public and the private domain are private, individual decisions, and that in this sense the social structure can not be divided into two different parts, one private and one public (Dobbelaeere 1985: 381). We agree that most kinds of social behavior are becoming increasingly privatized (i.e. that the individual has increasing freedom of choice in all social domains). However, we maintain that in some sectors, the freedom of individual choices is greater than in others. In our view, the sectors where the freedom of individual choices is greatest, are the private sectors. And we maintain that with regard to the forms of family life, the freedom of choice is greater than for instance with regard to the individual's relations to e.g. the police or the legal system. In this sense, we assume that family values and institutional trust can be used as indicators of two sectors with differing degrees of individual freedom of choice, i.e. as indicators of the private and public sectors.

Although we found some evidence that the impact of the religious involvement is stronger in the private sector, it should be emphasized that by and large the impact of the religious involvement was weak. Although the countries did differ in the degree to which religious involvement had an effect, the magnitude of this effect was limited. Furthermore, the differences between the countries in this regard could hardly be attributed to the fact that they were part of a specific cultural and/or political system. Although the degree of economic development showed to be of some importance, it did so only with respect to the levels of religious involvement. Thus, the differences we have found between the countries with regard to the two dimensions of secularization should also be explained by other factors than the ones we have investigated. To find these factors, one might i.a. explore more in detail the different institutional settings and/or historical antecedents in the various countries. The former option would open for some kind of a general, nomothetic understanding of the differences between the countries, the latter for some kind of a detailed and ideographic understanding. Of course, a third option might be to conclude that the national differences with respect to the two kinds of secularization which we have investigated, are so small and trivial they should be regarded as of little interest for further research! Should one choose this option, the overarching conclusion would be that the countries we have investigated are astonishing similar with respect to both the levels of religious involvement and the impact of the religious involvement on attitudes in the private and public sectors.
Notes

1. The four items concern whether or not children need both father and mother to grow up happily (yes, no), whether or not one approves of a woman who wants to have a child without having a stable relation to the father (approve, disapprove, neither). Both items are tapping views on family patterns, that is the completed family. Two additional items tap the relationships between parents and their children. The first item is ‘Which of these two statements do you tend to agree with? A. Regardless of what the qualities and faults of one’s parents are, one must always love and respect them; B. One does not have the duty to respect and love parents who have not earned it by their behavior and attitudes’, and the second ‘Which of the following statements best describes your views about parents’ responsibilities to their children? 1. Parents’ duty is to do their best for their children even at the expense of their own well-being; 2. Parents have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their children.

2. A long list of institutions was presented to the respondent who was asked to indicate how much confidence he/she has in each of them. The answer possibilities were: ‘a great deal’, ‘quite a lot’, ‘not very much’, ‘none at all’. In this paper we focus on the responses to the three public institutions: police, education and the legal system.
References


