

## Religion and Conflict Attribution

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# Religion and Conflict Attribution

*An Empirical Study of the Religious Meaning System  
of Christian, Muslim and Hindu Students  
in Tamil Nadu, India*

By

Francis-Vincent Anthony  
Chris A.M. Hermans  
Carl Sterkens



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# Introduction

*Francis-Vincent Anthony, Chris A.M. Hermans and Carl Sterkens*

India woke up to the new millennium with a terrorist attack on the House of Parliament on 13 December 2001. Every year of the first decade of the 21st century was marred by violence in some part of the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the cosmopolitan city of Mumbai. While in some cases violence was clearly economically or politically motivated, others were as clearly targeting religious minorities such as the violence against Christians in Jagatsinghpur in February 2004 and the Kandhamal riots in December 2007 and August 2008.

Are religions a source of conflict and violence? Recent works by Edna Fernandes (2007), Martha Nussbaum (2007) and Angana P. Chatterji (2009) trace the tragic events to Hindu nationalism, while Triloki Madan (2010) looks at the devastating effects of Hindu, Islamic and Sikh religious fundamentalism on social cohesion in India. Peggy Froerer (2007) focuses on the emergence and impact of Hindu nationalism in rural India. Although religions, being closely bound to politics and ethnic identities, can give way to violence, they all claim to favour harmony and human wellbeing. Recently, at the closing ceremony of the 150th anniversary of Swami Vivekanand's birth, Dr Manmohan Singh, the then prime minister of India – recalling Swamiji's address to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 – underscored that true religion cannot be a source of hatred or violence, and that Hinduism with its syncretic, pluralist approach has inspired millions to view the human race as one family (*The Hindu*, 12 January 2014). A recent document of the Catholic Church's International Theological Commission (2014) questions the generally held opinion that monotheism necessarily implies violence and sheds some light on Christian monotheism and its opposition to violence. Likewise, there is no lack of Islamic authors who point out that their religion stands for peace and harmony. Asghar Ali Engineer (2012), for example, is quick to correct the misinterpretation of Islam as a code of regression and violence.

The history of religious traditions in India attests that while there have been sporadic conflicts between Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims and Christians, there has been an underlying current of religious tolerance since the time of the Buddhist emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE. However, the political process that led to the independence of India (1947) was also accompanied by the struggle of various cultural and religious groups to define Indian identity and heritage, sparking off nationalism, fundamentalism and religiously motivated conflict. This culture of religious tolerance and conflict has marked the

history of Tamil Nadu, one of the fast developing states of contemporary India with all its contradictions (Drèze & Sen 2013). Realising that religion in a complex and pluralistic society can play a dual role with regard to violence and peace, we embarked on empirical research into religion and conflict at a relatively peaceful time (2003–2004) in Tamil Nadu, after an Anti-conversion Bill was passed by the local government in 2002.

In chapter 1 we clarify the focus and scope of our comparative research into religious conflict. Our focus is not the sporadic outbreaks of religious violence but the way Christian, Muslim and Hindu students understand conflict between religious groups. More specifically we study Christian, Muslim and Hindu students' perceptions of the causes of interreligious conflicts. We also examine how these perceptions are influenced by prescriptive beliefs like religiosity and mystical experience, and descriptive beliefs such as the interpretation of religious plurality and religiocentrism. Chapter 1 outlines the cultural and religious context of our research in Tamil Nadu. We trace the history of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity in Tamil Nadu, and the role of religion in the struggle to define Indian identity and heritage. We then present the research questions of our empirical study and describe the research variables, sampling and data collection and the design of statistical analysis.

Chapter 2 deals at length with a distinctive feature of our research, namely its cross-religious comparative perspective. It discusses fundamental theoretical issues and the core empirical methodological problems associated with cross-religious comparative research. We first clarify the rules that govern scientific comparative research, then go on to examine the various goals of comparative research. In expounding the notion of religion we tackle the thorniest issue in comparative research, namely insider-outsider perspectives: in what terms and to what extent can we understand and explain the religious beliefs, practices and experiences of other persons and communities? The methodological problem is that of establishing similarities and differences. We distinguish between different levels of equivalence in measurements in quantitative comparative research. Finally we look at the normativeness of such research. The chapter is a detailed exposition of the nature of cross-religious comparative research. We hope it will show the significance of the complex approach adopted in our study and the value of the findings.

After providing an overall view of the research and clarifying the complex issues involved in cross-religious comparative research, we proceed to analyse religious identity using a meaning system approach. For our purpose we selected two prescriptive and two descriptive beliefs as predictors of our respondents' perception of the causes of religious conflict. The prescriptive beliefs concern dimensions of religiosity (chapter 3) and mystical experiences (chap-

ter 4), the descriptive beliefs concern the interpretation of religious plurality (chapter 5) and religiocentrism (chapter 6). We describe these beliefs with a view to examining their role in the attribution of interreligious conflict to specific causes among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students in Tamil Nadu. We have chosen these beliefs for their cross-religious comparability and for their potential explanatory power of conflict attribution. Moreover, we have selected scales which are validated in previous research. Each chapter is structured as follows: a brief introduction, leading to a detailed description of the theoretical framework, followed by the elements of empirical analysis, namely research questions, measuring instruments and empirical results, and concluding with a discussion of salient findings.

Chapter 3 sheds light on different dimensions of religiosity in a cross-religious comparative perspective. The seminal work by Rodney Stark and Charles Glock (1968) provides a starting point for a theoretical framework of religiosity. It comprises six dimensions deriving from a cross-classification of three cultural systems (cognitive, normative and expressive) and two social modes (institutional and personal). The empirical analysis provides a cross-religious comparative model of institutional religious practice and the impact of religious socialising agents, such as the religious and educational community and gender, on institutional religious practice.

Chapter 4 dwells on the concept of mystical experience. The theoretical framework of mystical experience by Walter Stace (1961) forms the basis of Ralph Hood's mysticism scale (1975). Our measuring instrument, based on Hood's work, yields a cross-religious comparative model of vertical mysticism with a higher reality. It also indicates the usefulness of distinguishing between vertical and horizontal mysticism in further theory building and empirical research.

Chapter 5 examines how followers of different religious traditions interpret truth in other religions. Based on a theoretical framework of so-called theologies of religion, our empirical analysis produces three comparative models of interpreting religious plurality, namely monism, commonality pluralism and differential pluralism. The model that proves to be most acceptable to the three religious groups is commonality pluralism; differential pluralism evokes an ambivalent response. The model that is contested by Muslims and Hindus is monism: whereas Muslims tend to agree with monism, Hindus disagree with it.

Chapter 6 elaborates on the concept of religiocentrism in the context of cross-religious comparative research. According to social psychology religiocentrism is inherent in religion because it establishes the identity of both individuals and groups. For some scholars mere group identification is sufficient to

lead to in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. Our empirical analysis shows that all groups of respondents to some degree display a combination of positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes. Besides some personal characteristics, socialising agents such as parents and the media are found to influence in-group attitudes.

Chapter 7 presents the theoretical framework of four types of causes of interreligious conflict: socio-economic, political, ethnic-cultural and religious causes. The explanation of the first two types, derived from so-called realistic conflict group theory, is competition for scarce resources (economic wealth and political power). The other two causes (ethnic-cultural and religious) consider group identification sufficient reason for conflictive relationships. Our empirical analysis yields a cross-religious comparative scale comprising all four categories of causes of religious conflict, which we labelled 'force-driven religious conflict'. The results also point to a second scale: strength-driven religious conflict. The findings are evaluated from the perspective of the political theory of Hanna Arendt (1970; 1998) and Paul Ricœur's normative perspective on evil (1967; 1995; 2007).

Chapter 8 centres on our main research question: how do Christian, Muslim and Hindu students' prescriptive and descriptive beliefs influence their perception of interreligious conflict? The attribution of religious conflict is understood as an outcome expectation, influenced by religion as a complex and malleable meaning system that can engender both conflict and peace. Based on the theory of cognitive dissonance, we expect descriptive and prescriptive beliefs in a religious meaning system to display cognitive consistency. Our findings show differences between religious group regarding beliefs that inspire force-driven religious conflict, while the personal characteristics inducing agreement are identical. Among Christian students institutional religious practice induces attribution of religious conflicts to force-driven causes, while differential pluralism and positive in-group attitudes reduce it. Among Muslim students institutional religious practice and commonality pluralism contribute to the attribution of religious conflicts to force-driven causes. Among Hindu students five beliefs are found to influence force-driven religious conflict: institutional religious practice and negative attitudes towards Christians induce attribution of conflict to force-driven causes, while vertical mysticism, monism and positive in-group attitudes reduce agreement with force-driven religious conflict. The findings on personal characteristics are identical for Christian, Muslim and Hindu respondents: higher educational level of the mother and studying arts or social sciences relate to greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict.



Finally chapter 9 elaborates on the importance of force-driven and strength-driven religious conflict for theory development on the correlation between religious meaning system and religious conflict. We also consider the practical consequences for the educational process of college/university students. Three issues relevant to conflict prevention through education emerge from our findings: the need to foster critical reflection on beliefs that determine agreement with force-driven conflict in the religious meaning systems of Christians, Muslims and Hindus; the need to promote integration of religious education with citizenship education; and the need to promote successful citizenship education. Finally, we also briefly consider the competences that educators require to mould the next generation to live and act cooperatively in a plural society.

This cross-religious empirical study is the fruit of an international endeavour that led to critical collaboration between the authors, colleagues and research students of Radboud University Nijmegen (Netherlands) and the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome (Italy). Special mention must be made of colleagues, particularly prof. Stanislaus Swaminathan and prof. A.J. Christopher, and students of the Social Work Department of the Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur (India), who were involved in the initial stage of pilot testing and data entry. Above all we thank the students and staff, particularly the principals, of the 16 colleges and Madras University who generously collaborated in the process of data collection. Before the publication of parts of the present research in peer-reviewed journals and edited book series, papers were read and discussed at the biannual conferences of the International Society for Empirical Research in Theology (ISERT) in Bielefeld (2004), Bangor (2006), Würzburg (2008), Rome (2010) and Nijmegen (2012), as well as the biannual conferences of the International Academy of Practical Theology (IAPT) in Berlin (2007), Amsterdam (2011) and Toronto (2013). These international platforms of experts served as a sounding board for testing and refining our research outputs. We thank our colleagues for their insights and challenges. We thank those who rendered expert assistance in the statistical analysis of the data at various stages: Ms Lieve Gommers, Mrs Berdien Biemans and Dr William van der Veld (Radboud University Nijmegen). We also thank students of the MA course in Empirical Religious Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen for their comments on the draft manuscript of this book. Finally we are indebted to Prof. Dr Raymond Webb (University of Saint Mary of the Lake, Illinois, USA) and Ms Marcelle Manley (Pretoria) for checking the manuscript minutely and introducing linguistic improvements to make it more readable.

Earlier versions of all but two chapters in this book were published previously as independent articles in journals or contributions to edited volumes.

But most chapters have been thoroughly revised and updated, and overlaps in sampling and design of analysis were obviously removed to permit publication in a single volume. Chapter 2 was recently published as ‘Comparison in religion: a methodological contribution’ in the *Journal of Empirical Theology* (JET) 27 (Hermans & Sterkens 2014). Parts of chapter 3 were published as ‘Religious practice and religious socialization: comparative research among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu’ in JET 20 (Anthony, Hermans & Sterkens 2007). An earlier version of chapter 4 was presented to an academic audience as ‘A comparative study of mystical experience among Christian, Muslim, and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu’ in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (JSSR) 49 (Anthony, Hermans & Sterkens 2010). A less detailed version of chapter 5 was published as ‘Interpreting religious pluralism: comparative research among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu’ in JET 18 (Anthony, Hermans & Sterkens 2005). An earlier draft of chapter 6 appeared as ‘A comparative study of religiocentrism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu, India’ in JET 21 (Sterkens & Anthony 2008). Parts of chapter 8 were published a few years ago in a volume edited by Leslie Francis and Hans-Georg Ziebertz: *The public significance of religion* (Leiden: Brill), but this article contained results on Christian respondents only and was statistically less sophisticated (Hermans, Anthony, Sterkens & Van der Veld 2011). We express our heartfelt thanks to the publishers and editors of the journals and books in which earlier versions of the chapters in this book appeared, and also acknowledge gratefully the comments of three anonymous reviewers and the support and assistance offered by the publishers of the present volume.

# Comparative Research into Conflict in Tamil Nadu

## Introduction

In *India 2020. A vision for the new millennium* Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, eleventh president of India (2002–2007) and hailing from Tamil Nadu, recalls the lasting impression left on him by Mahatma Gandhi's resolve to be with those affected by religio-political conflict on the historic day of Indian independence: "I was in my teens when India became independent. The headmaster of my school used to take us to hear the news on the only available radio. We used to hear of the events in Delhi, and many speeches and commentaries. I used to distribute the morning newspaper *Dinamani* to households in Rameswaram, to help my brother with his work. While going on my daily morning round I also read the news items. One report which particularly struck me appeared in the heady days following independence. It was a time of celebration and the country's leaders were gathered in Delhi, addressing themselves to the momentous tasks that faced the government. At this moment, however, far from being at the centre of power, the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, was away in Noakhali caring for the riot victims and trying to heal the wounds inflicted by communal rioting. How many persons would have such courage of conviction as did Gandhiji at a time when the nation was at his command?" (Abdul Kalam & Rajan 1998, 3–4).

This narrative in a way captures the overall rationale and context of our research: it shows how religions can motivate people to get caught up in the tragedy of violence or become an embodiment of compassion amidst violence and death. In another childhood memory in his recent book, *My journey. Transforming dreams into actions*, Dr Abdul Kalam also recalls how his father Jainulabdeen, the imam of Rameswaram mosque, would meet with his two close friends, Pakshi Lakshmana Sastry, the priest of the Ramanathaswamy temple, and father Bodal, priest of the lone church in the town. "The memory of these three learned men is still etched in my mind. I can still see them – one in his turban and imam's cloak, another in his dhoti and the third in his cassock. They met every Friday evening at around four-thirty and discussed matters of religion and the happenings of the town. Sometimes people came to visit them at that time with specific issues to be resolved, or the three men kept each other apprised of anything that could potentially threaten the peace among the people and together, they tried to work out ways of clearing [up] miscom-

munication or scotching rumours before they assumed dangerous proportions. The fundamental requirement for peace – effective communication among sections of the people – was always kept alive by these three patriarchs” (Abdul Kalam 2013, 33–34).

These narratives about the meeting of religions and the dual role they may play with regard violence and peace in a complex and pluralistic society like India stand out against the backdrop of religious socialization in the family and educational environment. Exploring the potential of religions in the lived experience of students is in fact the basic thrust of our research.

### 1.1 Focus and Scope of the Research

The violence unleashed between Hindus and Muslims at the time of the partition between India and Pakistan was one of the darkest events in the history of a people who gained their independence through *satyāgraha*<sup>1</sup> (non-violent resistance relying on the strength of truth). Not that there have been no religious conflicts in the long history of the subcontinent. Although political conflicts between Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims and Christians have marred Indian history time and again, there has been constant and conscious observance of religious tolerance at least since the time of Ashoka, the Buddhist emperor of the 3rd century BCE.

In the contemporary global scenario there are those who warn us that the 21st century could be gravely tarnished by a ‘clash of civilizations’, in which people’s cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict (Huntington 1996). Frequent outbursts of religiously motivated violence suggest that the predictions may not be totally false. Even so, conflict among followers of different religions is nothing unusual; it has in fact blemished the history of peoples all over the world. What is new is that in a globalized world religious tensions localized in one part of the globe can assume unforeseen proportions. If there are prophets who warn us of conflicts to come, there are others who desperately seek to contain violence and care for its victims. With religious violence sporadically flaring up, specialized centres for conflict management and conflict resolution have also sprung up in various parts of the world. Research to uncover the underlying causes of religious violence and

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1 For transliteration of Sanskrit and Tamil words, we have followed the contemporary trend of keeping the diacritical marks to the minimum. On the basis of the proposal by Jacobsen (2009) in *Brill’s encyclopedia of Hinduism*, for Tamil transliteration a common scheme has been used with the palatal s usually rendered as c, and the alveolars as ṅ, ṛ, ḷ.

efforts to contain it have their significance, but our research distinguishes itself from such projects for two reasons.

In the first place, our study seeks to identify the factors – present in ordinary day-to-day life – that contribute to the attribution of religious conflict to force-driven causes.<sup>2</sup> In other words, we seek to analyse the attribution of religious conflict, and not conflict or violence as such. Are there elements in the normal life of persons which explain their attribution of conflict to specific causes? Identifying these could have some strategic relevance for the education of the young.

That brings us to the other characteristic aspect of our research. Our study of religion and conflict was conducted in an educational context. That is to say, we seek to identify those elements in the life and experience of young college students that can predictably incline them to religious violence. We hope that the findings of the present research will help to evolve educational strategies that can serve as a preventive measure. Knowing the tragic consequences of religious violence, there is no gainsaying that prevention is better than cure. If education is not preventive, perhaps it lacks some essential quality (International Congress on Preventive System and Human Rights 2009).

With this general focus and scope in mind we situate our research in the multireligious context of Tamil Nadu, India. Although there have been sporadic moments of religious conflict in the past and recently during the last two decades of the 20th century, Tamil Nadu – as we shall explain below – by and large is a place where Hinduism, Christianity and Islam have coexisted peacefully, enriching the local culture and society.

## 1.2 Religious and Cultural Context of the Research

Geographical or national boundaries are one way of identifying a culture. Thus in reference to India one speaks of Indian culture. Though it is a useful category, ‘Indian culture’ is actually a mosaic of cultures, a composite culture with an underlying unity. In such a context it seems more appropriate to define culture in terms of language, for language “is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive the world” (Gadamer 2008, 29). It

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2 The concept of force-driven religious conflict will be explained in more detail in chapter 7. It implies coercive power as a means to achieve the economic, political or socio-cultural goals of religious groups. Force-driven religious conflict does not refer to the personal willingness of individuals to engage in religious conflicts. Neither does it measure the extent to which violent behaviour is acceptable to the respondent. It indicates the extent to which the respondent attributes interreligious conflicts to force-driven causes.

is through language that we grasp the time-tested experiences of people in grappling with reality. In this sense, and by virtue of being situated outside the sphere of northern Indian empires yet on the maritime trade routes to Europe and West Asia, Tamil Nadu represents a cultural unit with a history of its own (More 2004). Our option for the Tamil cultural context was motivated particularly by the longstanding presence of Christianity and Islam in a culture closely bound to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. However, we cannot disregard the wider panorama of Indian history and the struggle to define Indian identity and heritage, in which religions and cultures have played and continue to play a role. In the 2001 census, out of 1.028 billion people, a little over 827 million (80,5%) identified themselves as followers of the Hindu religion, 138 million (13,4%) as Muslims or followers of Islam, 24 million (2,3%) as Christians, 19 million (1,9%) as Sikh, 8 million (0,8%) as Buddhists and 4 million (0,4%) as Jain. In addition over 6 million reported adherence to religions and faiths – including tribal religions – other than the six main religions. In the southern state of Tamil Nadu the proportion alters to 88,1% Hindus, 6,1% Christians and 5,6% Muslims in a total population of 62.405,679 in 2001.<sup>3</sup> This is the background to our cross-religious comparative study in Tamil Nadu.

### 1.2.1 *Tamil Culture and Hindu Religion*

Tamil Nadu is the home of one of the most ancient cultures on the subcontinent, and Tamil is the longest surviving, living literary language of India. Without entering into a debate whether Dravidians or Tamils are indigenous to India or are of Mediterranean, African or Far Eastern origin, we may safely affirm that their culture is pre-Aryan and has played a key role in shaping Indian culture together with its Aryan counterpart (Oppert 1988; Slater 1987; Thani Nayagam 1970). According to Panneerselvam (2010, 1), “The name, ‘Dravidian’, a modification of ‘Tiru(v)idam’, a land of shrines, was applied to Tamilaham by immigrants for some geographical reason or other. There is a theory that the Indus people were Dravidians, because the Sumerians with whom they had such intimate relations are believed to belong to the same ethnic group as the Dravidians.”

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3 The latest national census was held in 2011 (reference date 1 March). The provisional figures of 2011 reflect a total population of India of 1.210.193.422 people, 72.138.958 people living in Tamil Nadu. The final population statistics (including figures on religion) of the 2011 census are likely to be released by the Directorate of Census Operation of the Ministry of Home Affairs later. But while other data have become available relatively fast, data on religion are not released yet as of October 2014. This gives rise to speculations about the reasons why the census 2011 remains silent on religious data. One among them, is the politically unwelcome fact that the proportion of Hindus would have declined in favour of the number of Muslims and people who consider themselves as non-religious. See <http://censusindia.gov.in>.

In India, as in other parts of the world, regional identities formed around agricultural core areas. These fertile cores to which people gravitated became centres of the growth of distinctive linguistic and political regions. In South India around the Cauvery river delta *Tamiḷaham* or Tamil Nadu developed as a distinct cultural entity over the last two thousand years. Exterior historical evidence dating back to the 4th century BCE refers to three major kingdoms of the Tamils – the *Cēras* (on the west coast), the *Chōlas* (with the Cauvery delta as their base) and the *Pāṇḍiyas* (with Madurai as their centre) – and to their trade with western Asia, Egypt, and later with the Greek and Roman empires (Ryerson 1988; Thapar 2003).

Tamil is one of the four literary Dravidian languages which comes closest to the parent proto-Dravidian language. It has the richest and most ancient literature, paralleled in India only by that of Sanskrit (Zvelebil 1992). *Tholkāppiyam* (circa 3rd century BCE) and *Caṅkam* literature (from 2nd century BCE to 3rd century CE) are the earliest extant works in Tamil and undeniably represent the golden age of Tamil literature (Subrahmanian 1981; Swaminathan 1992; Varadarajan 1972). Among these early Tamil works *Thirukkural*, composed by Thiruvalluvar (some time in the first three centuries CE), excels as a monumental work of lofty wisdom and a compendium of Tamil cultural values. It expounds the three basic purposes or meanings of life as understood in Tamil culture: *aram* (virtue, righteousness), *porul* (wealth) and *inbam* (happiness) (Panneerselvam 2010; Thapar 2003). The Bhakti movement of the *Śaivite* (Nāyanmārs) and *Vaiṣṇavite* (Ālvārs) singers from the 6th to the 10th century marks another major period in Tamil Nadu's literary and religious history (Ryerson 1988; Subrahmanian 1981; Neill 1974).

In the religious core of Tamil culture Śaivism occupies a prominent place. The history of the Tamils is almost identical with the history of Śaivism. Śaiva-Siddhāntham (originating in the 13th century) represents an apex of the philosophico-theological tradition in India (Rajasingham 1986; Dayanandan 1988; Jaswant Raj 1989). One of the finest features of ancient Tamil society was its religious tolerance and spirit of free enquiry. "*Yām perṛa inbam peruga iv vaiyakam*" (May the entire world share in the happiness that has been granted to us) aptly describes the universalistic outlook of Tamil culture (Hirudayam 1977).

Language, culture and religion have grown in an interrelated way in Tamil to give birth to what may be termed the Tamil-Śaiva culture. In it *Śiva* is worshiped as *Natarāja* (the great dancer) and Tamil is cultivated in its threefold structure: *iyal* (literature), *isai* (music) and *nāḍakam* (drama/dance). *Carnātic* music and *bharata* dance have a longstanding tradition in Tamil country (Rajasingham 1986; Perumal 1982). Temple art and architecture in their turn show



that Tamil culture has grown in harmony with the universe, nature and the body. It has flourished through the centuries in close association with the land, seasons and gods, with two core values: love and happiness (Rajasingham 1986; Arulsamy 1990). Age-old domestic and social customs testify to these. However, like other cultures, ancient Tamil culture is not without less laudable elements (Dubois 1897; Biardeau 1989).

Over the centuries Dravidian/Tamil culture and Aryan/Sanskrit culture underwent a process of mutual assimilation. In spite of the dominance of Aryans in certain areas of life as a result of the caste system, the old Tamil values and practices survived through country schools, which passed on the wisdom of the *Caṅkam* age, the hymns of the *Tēvāram*, the ethos of the *Thirukkural*, the local history and folklore. The pre-Vedic traditions, Āgamic forms of worship and popular religiosity relating to *Murukan*, the forest god of hills and mountains (Gandhidasan 1988; Clothey 2009; Venkatesan 2009), and the *Ammāns* (mother goddesses) persisted in the face of the advance of Sanskrit religion (Hirudayam 1977; Grafe 1990). In the 20th century this undaunted persistence blossomed into a Tamil renaissance: the discovery of a Tamil culture distinct from Indian culture in general. The Tamil renaissance was spearheaded by the Dravidian Association or *Tamiḷ Caṅkam* (1916), E.V. Ramasamy's *Drāvida Kaḷakam* (1944) and later by the *Drāvida Munnērra Kaḷakam* (1949) of C.N. Annadurai (Grafe 1990; Ryerson 1988).

This brings us to the period of defining Indian identity and heritage in the struggle for Indian independence and in the current situation (to be discussed below).

### 1.2.2 *Christianity in the Tamil Cultural Context*

The volume of traffic between Socotra and Muziris (near present-day Cochin in Kerala) generated by Indo-Roman trade that brought Egyptian Jews and Greeks from Alexandria and the eastern Mediterranean, must have given rise to the tradition of St Thomas coming to Malabar in about 52 CE. A Syriac manuscript from 1770 reports that Thomas first went to Mylapore in the southern part of Tamil Nadu's capital city Chennai. He then moved to the hill country of Cherakon, where he is said to have established seven churches before itinerating in Malabar for thirty years. Tradition has it that on his return to Pāṇḍiyan (Tamil) country to preach the gospel he was killed by a Brahmin and buried in Mylapore (Neill 1984). The available literary and archaeological evidence does not shed much light on the tradition that the church in South India was founded by the apostle Thomas. Instead, "historical links that date to the mid-first millennium AD seem stronger with Edessa and the Persian Church. A group of Christians led by Thomas Cana migrated to Kerala, where they were given a



grant of land by the local king. The first coming of Christianity to India is more likely linked to the establishing of the Syrian Christian Church" (Thapar 2003, 279).

At all events, there is evidence of well-established churches in parts of South India no later than the beginning of the 6th century. It is also probable that these churches were at least partly made up by foreigners, and that "a part at least of the indigenous element in the Indian Church belonged originally not to Kerala but to the Pāṇḍiyan kingdom. The continuance over many centuries of the tradition associating St Thomas with Mylapore suggests that the first Christianization of that area goes back to very early times" (Neill 1984, 33f).

However, on the arrival of the colonizers and missionaries in the early 16th century there was almost no trace of a Christian presence in Tamil Nadu. It appears that the Christians from the Coromandel coast had moved to the west coast on account of war, inundation or persecution. The Christian community was reborn with the mass conversion of the *paravās* of the pearl fishery coast in 1536–1537, but the new converts were left without a shepherd until 1542 when St Francis Xavier (1506–1552) landed among them with his relentless missionary zeal. Though mass conversions, with little preparation and no period of moral probation, continued under Xavier, he saw to it that his work was consolidated by his followers like Antony Criminali (1520–1549) and Henry Henriques (1520–1600), who were the first missionaries to master Tamil and familiarize themselves with the Tamil socio-cultural context (Neill 1984; Thekkedath 1982; Mundadan 1984).

The Madurai mission, started by Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) in 1606, is another milestone in the history of the Tamil church. Its significance lies in its approach to Tamil culture, its attention to the higher castes, and its location in the heart of Tamil country. It is said that within six months De Nobili had such a command of *Sen-Tamiḷ* (classical Tamil) that he could engage in religious discussions with the learned men who visited him. Opting for *sannyāsi* dress and presenting himself first as a *rāja ṛṣi*, and later as a Brahmin *sannyāsi*, he initiated a new method of evangelization that was contested and opposed by other missionaries of his time. Amid opposition from within and without, wars, violence and famine the early missionaries (like Roberto de Nobili, Balthasar da Costa, St John de Britto, Costanzo Giuseppe Beschi) and catechists (like Muthudaiyan, Yesu Adiyān and Savarirayan) extended the Madurai mission to other parts of Tamil Nadu: Tiruchirappalli, Salem, the kingdoms of Thanjavur and Gingee, the provinces of Satyamangalam and Dharmapuri, the territory of the Maravas and the southern parts of Tamil Nadu (Thekkedath 1982).

The impact of these missionaries on Tamil culture can be gauged by their contribution to Tamil literature. Henry Henriques, ‘father of the Tamil press’, is known for his Tamil grammar, Tamil-Portuguese dictionary, a Tamil version of *Flos Sanctorum* and catechism books. De Nobili, considered the ‘father of Tamil prose’, authored 20 works, the best being *Ñanopadēsam* (catechism) in five parts (Thekkedath 1982). Then we have the greatest innovator of Tamil literature, Giuseppe Beschi (1680–1747), whose *Tēmbāvani*, an epic on St Joseph, ranks among the most cherished classics of Tamil literature. Adaptation or the beginnings of inculturation of the Christian faith in the Tamil cultural context can be traced back to these fertile times of cultural missionary involvement (Subrahmanian 1981; Rajamanickam 1971, 1972a, 1972b).

The intense missionary activity of the 16th and 17th centuries reached a point of stagnation and decline in Tamil Nadu at the dawn of the 19th century. But the spiritual renewal in the West reinvigorated the Christian communities in India, Tamil Nadu being a special focus of their missionary concern. The revival and expansion movements promoted by the Foreign Missions Society in Paris and the Jesuit province of Toulouse during the last two centuries was followed by the arduous task of creating a Tamil Christian community with its roots in the local soil. It began with the progressive Indianization of the leadership and the formation of local church structures. The efforts of the Christian communities to strike deeper roots in their native culture coincided with the Tamil renaissance. While contributing to the Tamil renaissance, Catholics and Protestants, missionaries and native Christians also sought to root the church more deeply in Tamil culture. The translation of the Bible into Tamil, the use of Tamil as the liturgical and theological language, production of devotional literature, poetry, hymns and lyrics, experiments with Dravidian art and architecture were all efforts to integrate the local culture with Christian life and expression. At present the situation of the Tamil communities is characterized by a drive to uplift marginalized and oppressed *dalit* Christians, a preoccupation with expressing their Christian faith in harmony with their culture, and a need to identify the close affinity between the two, going beyond the linguistic and political aspects of culture to reach its religious core (Grafe 1990). This attests the Christian community’s eagerness to participate in the process of defining Indian identity and heritage.

In the attempt to restrict ‘Indianness’ to Hinduism there is a pervasive tendency to accuse the Christian tradition of having an alien origin and of being a prolongation of Western cultural colonialism. Sarkar (2007, 360) explains: “The charge persists, despite the fact that the origins of Christianity in one part of India (Kerala and Tamil Nadu) go back to the early centuries of the Common Era, preceding, incidentally, the conversion of England to Christianity and

indeed the formation of most living forms of Hindu tradition.” What is resented most is the Christian community’s condescending attitude towards Hindu culture and religion, despite ‘accommodation’ attempts by Jesuit missionaries like Roberto de Nobili in the early 17th century and ‘inculturation’ efforts by Indian Christian communities since independence and the Second Vatican Council (in the case of Catholics). Notwithstanding the cultural and linguistic contribution of missionary and native scholars through the centuries, rooting Christian faith in the Indian cultural context and transforming unjust social structures like the caste system – to which in some ways Christian communities have succumbed – remain a challenge to be confronted squarely.

### 1.2.3 *Islam in the Tamil Cultural Context*

Like Christianity, Islam seems to have reached South India at a very early stage, that is, within a generation of the prophet’s death. It is believed that a person named Cheramen Perumal, on his return from Arabia where he was converted to Islam by the prophet himself, built a mosque in his home town Cranganur near Cochin (Sherwani 1977, 141). During the next few centuries Arab settler-traders were to be found in most of the ports on the east and west coasts of South India. With the Roman trade declining, the Arab traders took over the supply of pepper and spices to the markets of Byzantium. “Unlike earlier traders linked to the Roman trade, the Arabs settled permanently in the coastal regions of the west and the south from about the eighth and ninth centuries. They were welcomed, given land for trading stations and left free to practice their religion, as had been the convention with Christians earlier in South India” (Thapar 2003, 332).

Long before the military conquests, by the 10th century Muslim merchants had reached the major cities of the Deccan and North India. This is also true of the spread of Islam in the Ganges valley and in Gujarat in the 11th century through the work of wandering *sufi*, Muslim mystics from Yemen. The appeal of *sufi* masters was the offer of direct experience of God, like that propounded by the devotional Hindu *bhakti* traditions. “Their dialogue with the *bhakti* movement was to the advantage of both, as they questioned orthodoxy in their explorations of the meaning of religion and of the human condition” (Thapar 2003, 488; cf. Torri 2004, 18of).

The Venetian traveller Marco Polo (1254–1324) notes that the ‘Saracens’ of Tamil country used to go on pilgrimages together with local Christians to a little town in the province of Maabar where the body of St Thomas the Apostle was laid to rest (Marco Polo 1997, 232ff). The name ‘Saracens’ most probably refers to Tamil-speaking Muslims of Arab-Tamil descent, who believed that St Thomas was a Muslim and a great prophet (More 2004, 7). Marco Polo

described these indigenous Tamil Muslim communities in the 13th century in a general way. Since the Arabs, Persians and later the Turks were not so much interested in the Tamil language and its literature, it was through the literature of these Saracens that Islam directly influenced Tamil culture. In his analysis of Tamil Muslim literature before 1835 (when printing was introduced in Tamil Nadu) More (2004, 58) notes: “though the literature produced by Tamil Muslim Sufis are [sic] not abundant, yet the biographies of the Sufis, written in Tamil or Arabic-Tamil, has [sic] a certain importance.” Among Tamil Muslims *sufi dargahs* are so popular that they have a life of their own independent of the mosque-based traditions.

In the struggle for Indian independence, when the social activist Erode Venkata Ramasamy (1879–1973), born of a wealthy merchant family in Tamil Nadu, parted ways with the Indian National Congress by founding the Self-Respect Movement in 1925, Tamil Muslims were welcomed as part of the Dravidian fold. Together with the Tanjore School of Islamic Thought, spearheaded by B. Dawood Shah (1885–1969), this offered an opportunity for reforming Tamil Muslim society and participate in the struggle for independence and for the configuration of Indian identity and heritage (More 2004, 141; Torri 2004, 180ff).

#### 1.2.4 *Religion and Culture in the Struggle to Define Indian Identity and Heritage*

Indian heritage is logically linked to the Indian nation. India as a sovereign country recognized by other countries has a brief history of little more than sixty years. It gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1947 and became a republic in 1950. What is the heritage of this young state? And is it at all possible for such a vast country to speak of a partial overlap or even coincidence of geopolitical and cultural entities? Aloysius (1997) aptly sums up his interpretation of the long struggle that led to the independence of India in the title of his book *Nationalism without a nation in India*. This author shows how in the struggle against the colonial British rulers local forces were vying with each other to define Indianness or Indian heritage. A small elite who formed the Indian National Congress in 1885 tried to impose the Brahminic (ascriptive and hierarchical) tradition as the basis of nationhood and its identity. The vast majority of the lower castes, outcastes, tribal population, and religious minorities like Muslims, Sikhs and Christians saw this move by the elite upper castes as a clever ploy to re-establish their traditional hegemony, so much so that the majority of the underprivileged would have preferred the continuation of colonial rule rather than succumb again to the oppressive caste system with Brahmins in command. Thus the struggle for freedom implied defining Indianness in opposition to the colonizers, and for the lower strata of society and the

minorities also in opposition to internal oppressors. In fact, the pre-independence period saw the emergence of other leaders besides Mahatma K. Gandhi: the claims of Muslims championed by S.A. Khan, Iqbal and M.A. Jinnah, and those of lower castes and tribal populations championed by J. Phule and B.R. Ambedkar. Regional leaders focusing on linguistic and ethnic differences also launched their own critique of Brahminic nationalism. The aforementioned E.V. Ramasamy (called *Periyār*, 'respected one' or 'elder' in Tamil by his followers) propounded his rationalist critique of Brahminic hegemony, taking his cue from the European Enlightenment and Buddhist rationalist tradition. Among these subaltern leaders there was "a search for a non-hierarchical religio-cultural framework either through a rediscovery of the different forms of non-Brahminical Hinduism, or by forsaking the whole of Hinduism itself or rarely, by taking to atheistic, rationalist ideologies" (Aloysius 1997, 77). As the author underscores: "The political awakening of the lower caste groups of the Indian subcontinent under the colonial rule was premised by an implicit (often also made explicit in the sayings and writings of the prominent leaders) vision of a new nation, of a new form of congruence between culture and power, and a new way of relating the self with the other" (Aloysius 1997, 83).

Paradoxically, the reforms set in motion by the British to bring traditional society into some congruence with the requirements of a modern political structure were seen by the elite group as "interfering with national religion with intentions of destroying national cultural legacy, traditions and civilization" (Aloysius 1997, 100). Such an attempt to identify Indianness with Hindu (here Brahminic) hegemony ultimately also led to the creation of Pakistan as a separate nation-state for Muslims under British India. Sikhs put up a similar struggle for an independent nation, Khalistan, even after the independence of India. The initial stage of this prolonged struggle can be traced back to the polemical work by Kahn Singh Nabha, *Hum Hindu Nahin* (We are not Hindus) in 1898, and its tragic stage in the brutal assassination of prime minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984 and the killing of thousands of innocent Sikhs in the riots that followed. In an in-depth study of the Sikh struggle Judge (2005, 72) affirms: "The trajectory of the Khalistan/militant movement followed the path of terrorism and its roots could be located in the way the Sikh identity has been politicized to control the religious affairs of the community." Politicization of religious identity leading to religiously motivated violence is undeniably the underlying thrust of Hindu nationalism, namely Hindutva ideology, which seeks to identify Indian heritage with Hindu (Brahminic) hegemony, thus branding other religious minorities like Muslims, Christians and Sikhs anti-nationals, communalists, sectarians or 'foreigners' (Panikkar 2001).

It may be opportune to recall that initially the name ‘Hindu’ denoted a geographical rather than a religious identity. Before the arrival of Muslims the local religious communities referred to themselves as *Vaiṣṇavites*, *Śaivites*, *Lingayats*, et cetera. “Communities of the subcontinent have in the past been diverse, with multiple identities, and the attempt to force them into unchanging, static entities would seem to contradict the historical evidence” (Thapar 2001, 3). Even Islam does not present itself in a monolithic manner. There are strong cultural and sectarian differences that can be traced back to their varying pre-Islamic past (cf. Thapar 2003; cf. Thapar 2014).

In his analysis of the origins and development of secularism and fundamentalism in India Cherman (2007) offers a panoramic view of these ideologies, which influence each other to a certain degree. Although the concept of secularism has its origins in the West, it has acquired a specific meaning in India because of the secular fabric that dates back to the time-honoured tolerance among theistic and atheistic currents of thought and communities. The religious tolerance that existed at the time of the two great rulers, the Buddhist Ashoka (3rd century BCE) and the Islamic Akbar (16th century), epitomises such a mind-set. As Ashoka’s numerous edicts testify, he aimed at consolidating the empire on the solid ground of social ethics: “Of the basic principles, Ashoka emphasized tolerance. This, according to him, extended to tolerance towards people and towards their beliefs and ideas” (Thapar 2003, 202). In one of his edicts Ashoka affirms: “On each occasion one should honour the sect of another, for by doing so one increases the influence of one’s own sect and benefits that of the other, while, by doing otherwise, one diminishes the influence of one’s own sect and harms the other” (Major Rock Edict XII, tr. R. Thapar, cited in Thapar 2003, 202).

The modern Western view of secularism inspired by scientific humanism that advocates the separation of state and religion found its way into India via educational and juridical systems under British rule. However, it must be noted that there was a basic difference between the Indian and the European situation: “The Indian State did not have to struggle to free itself from the power of the Church but only to locate itself in relation to citizens who belonged to different religious denominations. In this context, the Indian State, right from the [sic] medieval times inherited, despite tensions and deviations, a political practice which respected the multi-religious character of Indian society. For instance, the administrations of both Hindu and Muslim rulers had a fair share of representatives from both religions” (Panikkar 2002, 53).

During the struggle for independence, in the face of the Hindu fundamentalist slant of some factions, other nationalists like Mahatma K. Gandhi (1869–1948) and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) laboured to create a secular democratic



state in India. Gandhi, a deeply spiritual person, proposed a spiritual secularism based on *Sarva dharma samabhāva* (goodwill towards all religions). This concept did guarantee equality and tolerance for all religions. Nehru, a self-declared agnostic, advocated a nonreligious perspective based on science and socialism, guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for all. In his view secularism was to be based on the social and political equality of every person. Hence a caste-ridden, gender discriminatory society was not really secular. In relation to religion secularism implies the equality of all religions and atheistic or agnostic worldviews. All religions are to be respected and no religion is to be favoured. Secularism as enshrined in the Indian constitution (articles 15, 16, 25–28) entails the state's neutrality and impartiality towards all religions, distancing itself from all religions whilst recognizing the value of religion in society. Hence secularism in India does not imply an irreligious or anti-religious stand. On the contrary, as Sen (2005, 294–316) underscores, 'symmetric treatment' of religions can be the hallmark of a truly secular state in a religiously plural world. But such a secular stand, paradoxically, can also give rise to religious claims and clashes.

Religious conflicts are sometimes said to have their roots in modern secularism and traditional Hindu tolerance, since they facilitate conversion or crossing over to other religions. In India religious conversion may have political consequences and has actually led to social unrest in the past, so much so that some states have recently introduced laws to restrict religious conversion or have written government committee reports on the topic. Among these states are Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. Potential laws are under discussion in Jharkhand and Uttarakhand (cf. Jenkins 2008). On 5 October 2002 the Tamil Nadu governor promulgated an ordinance prohibiting forced conversion. Article 3 reads: "No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another by the use of force or by allurement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion" (Tamil Nadu Ordinance no. 9 of 2002, art. 3).<sup>4</sup> Mass conversions of Hindus to either Islam, Christianity

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4 An explanatory statement on the ordinance by order of the governor states: "Reports have been received by the Government that conversions from one religion to another are made by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means. Bringing in a legislation to prohibit such conversions will act as a deterrent against the anti-social and vested interest groups exploiting the innocent people belonging to depressed classes. It may also be useful to nip in the bud the attempts by certain religious fundamentalists and subversive forces to create communal tension under the garb of religious conversion. The Government has, therefore, decided to enact a law to prevent conversion by use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means." On the other hand government regulations like these could be seen as conservative intervention to maintain the status quo of socio-economic strata (cf. Fernandes 1999; Harriss 2002).

or Buddhism are certainly not a recent phenomenon. Mathew (1982) gives a brief historical account of conversions in medieval times and in the period prior to independence. But more recently *dalits* in particular have become increasingly vocal about systematic maltreatment at the hands of high-caste Hindus and hope to overcome discrimination through conversion. Mass conversion, then, has become a form of collective protest against oppressive hierarchical social systems. In November 2001 50,000 *dalits* renounced their low-caste status in Hinduism and became Buddhists. Also famous are the controversial conversion ceremonies organized by the *dalit* activist and politician Udit Raj on 22 October 2002 and 6 December 2002 (the latter in Chennai), in which thousands of *dalits* converted to Buddhism, Islam or Christianity.

In the view of nationalist Hindus conversion is problematic and a hindrance to integration, denounced by them as indiscriminate and perfidious proselytism. Kim (2003, 191) illustrates: “the debates associated with the Constituent Assembly, the *Niyogi Report*, the Hindu personal laws and the legislation on conversion in post-Independence India show that there was a cumulative and conscious attempt by nationalist Hindus to identify Indianness and Hindu-ness. The nationalist Hindu arguments that the assertion of Christian identity through conversion was a disturbing factor in forming a wider Indian identity assumed that Indian identity was a static and unified concept, and moreover somewhat ‘neutral’, so that all Indians could share it, regardless of their religious orientation. They argued that common identity as Indians must be based on the Hindu heritage, and in that the religious dimension was vital.”

The underlying notion is that the growth of Christian communities through denationalizing conversions can alter the bedrock of Indian heritage and undermine the future of the nation. The accusation is that Christian communities take undue advantage of the non-proselytizing nature of Hindu religion, its spirit of tolerance and the national choice of secularism. The intricate nature of these allegations needs to be considered briefly.

The Hindu right wing has become increasingly wary of conversion, seeing its call for equality as a powerful attraction for the lower castes. Small wonder that the issue of religious conversion is not only associated with social emancipation, but also easily becomes intertwined with political interests, especially among movements advocating Hindu nationalism (cf. Harris 2002). Kim (2003, 187–190) even posits that traditional Hindu tolerance is more operational in its own sphere of influence than in religions like Christianity and Islam that do not share its overall vision and perspective on life and reality. But this might apply equally to other religious appeals for tolerance. The limitation of traditional religious tolerance exposes the need for a secular state that takes equal distance from all religions. At the same time the emergence of religious



nationalism (e.g. in Hindutva ideology) attests that secularism in itself cannot guarantee neutrality towards religions. Because India is a deeply religious country where religion has great plausibility and social significance, some are convinced that secularism needs to be complemented with renewed understanding of the traditionally acclaimed virtue of religious tolerance as respect and recognition of the other along with commitment to one's own beliefs and values. Religious traditions can indeed be a power to promote social harmony, certainly when they are willing to explore the rich source material in their respective traditions that advocates tolerance and solidarity among all human beings (cf. Balasubramanian 1992; Casanova 1994; Herbert 2003, 86ff; Kim 2003, 189; Sterkens & Hadiwitanto 2009, 80f; Fernandes 1999). What is called for is not just tolerance but respect and recognition of all religious traditions. "A willingness to receive from each other presupposes mutual respect and appreciation. The cultural inter-penetration witnessed during the last two thousand years was influenced by such a perspective. Even if this inter-penetration did not lead to an ideal synthesis, a cultural transformation imbibing elements from different streams did materialize. In almost all realms of cultural production, this inter-penetration occurred. In some, transformation is visible in form, in others content is enriched and in yet others, both form and content have undergone change" (Panikkar 2002, 57).

At the same time indiscriminate fusion of religious traditions may also give rise to conflictive situations as exemplified by the spontaneous syncretism of Islamic and Hindu traditions (Roy & Rizvi 2003) among the Mehrat, Kathat and Cheeta communities of Rajasthan (reported by Jyotsna Singh on the BBC News website, 11 July 2008). Their mixed Hindu-Muslim identity, which permitted individuals to freely celebrate Hindu and Muslim festivals and worship both local gods and Allah, has been called into question by some organized Hindu groups (like Viswa Hindu Parishad) and Islamic groups (like Jamaat-e-Islami), who feel that this confusion of religious identity must be rectified by a return or 'homecoming' (*ghar wapsi*) to the Hindu fold (according to the former group) or by proper education in their Islamic tradition (according to the latter).

The struggle to build a nation, to construct Indianness, to ensure unity in diversity continues. In this sense Indian heritage does not refer merely to the diversified ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic traditions of the past but also to the project of integrating the best of these traditions through public reasoning and critique, avoiding homogenization of heritage in one form or another (cf. Sen 2005; 2006).

### 1.2.5 *Nationalism, Fundamentalism and Religiously Motivated Conflict*

The emergence of nationalism in India dates to the colonial period. Nationalist movements and revolts challenged British rule with their aspirations to independence. In the 19th century there were a number of revolts against British rule, but they were localized. This changed after the revolt of 1857, after which the number of nationalist movements grew. The first of these was the Wahhabi movement in the first half of the 19th century, begun under the influence of Shaik Muhammed ibn-Abdul Wahhad of Najd (Devasahayam 2007, 103ff). Hindu nationalism for its part began to emerge in the late 19th century, inspired by Hindu reform movements like Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883) and the philosophy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), which emphasized the need for a reformed Hinduism while at the same time strengthening the common identity of its members (Berglund 2000, 178; Kuru-vachira 2006, 7–44, 66–112).

As Smith (2003) sums up, the first coherent presentation of Hindu nationalism is found in the works of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966). Savarkar's writings are strongly anti-liberalism and aim at establishing Hinduism as a type of cultural nationalism. In his treatise *Hindutva: who is a Hindu?* (1923) he writes: "A Hindu means a person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the Seas as his Father-Land as well as his Holy Land, that is the cradle land of his religion" (Savarkar 2003, Frontispiece). His definition of *Hindutva* or 'Hinduness' further clarifies the ideology of Hindu nationalism: "*Hindutva* embraces all departments of thought and activity of the whole being of our Hindu race" (Savarkar 2003, 4). Accordingly *Hindutva* stands for a people united by a common country, blood, history, religion, culture and language. In other words, Hindus are more than a religious community: they are a nation. The ideas of Savarkar were developed further by Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906–1973), especially in his *We or our nationhood defined* (1939). Golwalkar was the second *sarsanghchālak* (supreme leader) of the Hindu nationalist cultural organisation RSS (*Rashtriya Swayamsēvak Sangh*), founded by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889–1940) in Nagpur in 1925.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1980s India has seen a resurgence of Hindu cultural nationalism with strong political support and Hindu middleclass backing, also in rural India (Froerer 2007). Essentially

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5 In the current political scenario the BJP (*Bhāratiya Janata Party*) comes close to the nationalism developed by Savarkar and Golwalkar. The political success of the BJP depends heavily on its alliance with two Hindu nationalist movements: the social organization VHP (*Vishva Hindu Parishād* or 'All Hindu Council') and the militant youth organization RSS (*Rashtriya Swayamsēvak Sangh* or 'National Corps of Volunteers') (cf. Van der Veer 1994; Nussbaum 2007; Fernandes 2007).

Hindutva stands for a religio-political formula for Hindu cultural nationalism (Kuruvachira 2005; 2006). There are various theories to explain the rise of nationalism on the Indian subcontinent. Smith (2003, 182) summarizes the causes of nationalism as follows: ethnic unity comes to realize its geographical and historical unity and wakes up to national consciousness; modernization causes the nation to emerge; economic developments (industrialization) cause the emergence of the nation-state; and colonialism created the nation.

Most authors seem to concur that the foregoing explanations do not fit the specific historical and religious situation of India. According to Van der Veer (1994, x) leading theories of nationalism tend to ignore the importance of colonialism and orientalism in the spread of nationalism. To understand nationalism in India we need an analysis of tradition (or religion) that is not prejudiced by the discourse of modernity. Most theories of nationalism are based on the distinction between modern society and traditional society. Nationalism is assumed to belong to the 'modern' side of this distinction (Van der Veer 1994, 17). Religion belongs to the 'traditional' side. The idea underlying the distinction is that religious nationalism will disappear as soon as society is truly modern. In the case of India the impact of modernity is different because of the colonial context in which it appeared. For example, Western discourse on individualism, equality and secularism combines with the influence of religion in the formation of the nation. There is also an orientalist impact on the way Indians perceive themselves. "The orientalists saw India as an ancient Hindu civilization, in which Brahmanical authority was paramount" (Van der Veer 1994, 20). They emphasized the decline of Hindu civilization under Muslim rule. This discourse was taken up by religious reformers (like Vivekananda), who called for a revitalization of ancient religion. Or, to put it differently: Hindu reform continues a discourse that has a pre-colonial tradition.

Following Van der Veer, we see an important role for nationalism in the transformation of religious identity in the colonial and post-colonial period. Van der Veer (1994, ix-x) argues that "religious identity is constructed in ritual discourse and practice; that these identities are not primordial attachments, inculcated by unchanging traditions, but specific products of changing forms of religious organization and communication; that religious nationalism articulates discourse on the religious community and discourse on the nation; and that Hindu and Muslim nationalisms develop along similar lines and that the one needs the other".

Rajamohan (2005) mentions the existence of revivalist and fundamentalist movements among Hindus and Muslims that tried to safeguard their religious practices against each other and from Christian missionaries long before the independence of India (1947). Paradoxically, the first illustrious victim of

Hindu fundamentalism was the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi himself (1948). In recent times the communal conflict and violence between Muslims and Hindus reached a pinnacle all over India with the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh on 6 December 1992. Since then there have been bomb blasts and assassinations linked to fundamentalist groups on both sides (Smith 2003). In 2002 the state of Gujarat witnessed one of the worst clashes between nationalist Hindus and Muslims, leaving over 3,000 dead.

Sarkar (2001) provides a synthesis of the campaign conducted against Christians by Hindu fundamentalists. A tragic incident of violence against Christians took place at Monoharpur in the state of Orissa during the last week of January 1999: an Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children were burnt to death in their vehicle by a mob led by Dara Singh, who was convicted in 2003. During the following years violence against Christians was perpetrated by Hindu fundamentalist groups in Goa (2006), Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Orissa (2007). Another wave of violence against Christian communities began in the Kandhamal district of Orissa with the assassination of Swami Laxmanandnda Saraswati and four of his close collaborators by tribal revolutionary Maoists on 23 August 2008. South India is generally considered fairly peaceful for Christian communities. Yet in 2010, 86 of the 152 attacks were in South India. In 2011 there were at least 175 attacks on Christian minorities in the following states: 45 in Karnataka, 25 in Orissa, 15 in Madhya Pradesh, 10 in Kerala, and six cases each in Chattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Panikkar (2001, xix) concludes: "The Christians have been foregrounded as another enemy, a new symbol, to demarcate the nation as Hindu."

Without going into detail, religiously motivated violence between Hindus and Muslims – in the analysis of Rajamohan (2005) – can be traced to the following causes: actual or perceived failure of mainstream political formation to reflect Muslim aspirations; frustration among the youth due to unemployment and lack of opportunities for higher education; poor living conditions; organization of trade and commerce on communal lines; financial incentives and indoctrination by radical religious organizations. Similarly, in the conflict between Hindu and Christian communities the cause seems to be the conversion of *dalits* and tribal persons that transforms their oppressed social status – determined by the caste system – and empowers them to stand up for their rights and have access to education and development.

At the time of our survey (2004) the situation in India was quite peaceful, particularly in Tamil Nadu. However, as described above, conflict among religious communities existed before and continues to erupt in various states, particularly in the north of the subcontinent. The absence of religious conflict and

violence does not mean that it has been completely eradicated. If the subtle factors in peaceful situations that bear the seeds of conflict are not identified and dealt with appropriately, there is no guarantee that this dormant state may not suddenly explode. According to Panikkar (2002) the educational environment can play an important role in nurturing either conflict or harmonious interpenetration. In his aptly titled book on communalism, *Before the night falls*, Panikkar underscores the urgent need to examine this field. Not surprisingly, therefore, this research focuses on students in higher education.

### 1.3 Research Problem: Religion and Conflict

#### 1.3.1 *Causes of Interreligious Conflict*

The word 'conflict' in itself does not refer to a negative situation, for conflicts can be constructive or destructive (Varshney 2003, 282). Conflicts can be a powerful source of socio-cultural innovation or turn into an escalating force of violence and annihilation. Alongside progress in knowledge, science and technology, violent conflicts have frequently marked and marred human history. There is no gainsaying that the world religions have played their constructive and destructive role in a conflict-ridden world. In this section we focus on the underlying correlation between religion and conflict, both constructive and destructive (cf. Kurtz 2007).

For the sake of clarity we use the definition of conflict by Lincoln (2003, 74): conflict refers to "[...] the situation that arises when rival interests can no longer be contained by the structures and processes ordinarily competent to do so". This definition clearly distinguishes situations of conflict and violence, while at the same time claiming that situations of conflict have the potential of becoming more overt, confrontational and violent. Rival interests between religious groups or communities can refer to material resources like territory, wealth, education, positions of power and socio-economic advantages, but also to nonmaterial resources like dignity, prestige and all forms of symbolic capital. Rival interests are considered to be the cause of conflict between religious groups: they 'fuel' religious conflicts. In our research we distinguish between four causes of religious conflict: socio-economic, political, ethnic-cultural and religious. Each cause represents an interest of religious groups, that is something valued by the group. In the case of socio-economic and political causes this interest concerns scarce material and non-material resources. In the case of ethnic-cultural and religious causes it concerns group identification (also see chapter 7).

To obviate the potential threat of outbreaks of violence we need conflict management. In religious conflict transformation we distinguish between three dimensions: conflict management, conflict resolution and post-conflict structural reform (Appleby 2000, 210). Conflict management aims at preventing the conflict from becoming violent. Conflict management typically focuses on raising awareness of the causes of conflict in order to eliminate or ameliorate them (Appleby 2000, 214). For example, religious leaders can play the role of advocates for the oppressed or criticize certain structures in society which are unjust to specific ethnic-religious groups. Or religious communities can act as safe havens for dialogue between different groups in society. Conflict resolution aims at removing the inequalities or sources of conflict between religious groups or communities as far as possible. There are various nonviolent means to remove the sources of conflict, such as mediation, negotiation and/or advocacy on behalf of one or more parties to a conflict. Finally there is the dimension of post-conflict structural reform aimed at the restoration of productive social relations and political stability (Appleby 2000, 220). In order to transform a conflict into a peaceful situation it is not enough to eliminate the cause of conflict. Besides this, we need to create a situation of cooperation, trust and stability between different groups in society.

We focus on interreligious conflicts, that is conflicts between religious groups that are to a certain degree encouraged by a religious community or inspired by a religion. Following Max Weber, we think that religion belongs to the order of communal actions (Kippenberg 2008, 23). Religious conflicts are always the acts of individual persons, as in the case of religious terrorism. But we regard these acts as embedded in a shared concept of the self and the world and grounded in a social reality.

Finally, interreligious conflicts can be an actual or a latent reality in the lives of people. To study people who are in actual conflict is very complicated, not only practically but also ethically. On the other hand, the study of latent religious conflicts may raise the objection that it need not lead to actual conflict in a socio-historical context. Taking up the latter perspective, we study the perceptions of members of religious communities regarding the causes of conflicts. What makes it scientifically and practically interesting to understand religious people's perceptions of interreligious conflicts? Latent religious conflicts refer to the meaning members of a religious community attach to certain states of affairs or actions in the socio-cultural fabric. Which state of affairs or actions potentially lead – in their perception – to conflict? What may trigger anxiety, disintegration, even violence between religious groups in society? Perceptions are subjective, that is related to the meaning system of religions (or religious communities). And that is precisely what makes a study of the ideas

that members of religious communities have about causes of religious conflicts so interesting (Kippenberg 2008, 13). It affords insight into the way religious people look at a certain state of affairs in society, and the potential hazard it poses of conflict between religious groups. Religious conflicts are not objective descriptions of situations but are influenced by people's perceptions grounded in communal ideas of religions. As stated above, at the heart of religious conflicts are rival interests between groups in society. What may be a strong interest for one group in a specific socio-cultural situation may not be so for another religious group. And this is precisely what makes the study of latent religious conflicts scientifically interesting and practically relevant.

### 1.3.2 *Predictors of Perceived Causes of Interreligious Conflict*

What influences the perception of religious conflicts of members of religious communities? We assume that perceptions are influenced by the (re)definition of the social identity of the religious persons as well as the (re)articulation of their religion's claims to authority in a situation. To put it bluntly: what is at stake in a religious conflict is their very social identity as religious persons and the value of their religion. This assumption is not shared by all scholars in the so-called 'religious violence debate'. Many scholars focus on the following characteristics of religious conflicts (cf. Sidel 2007, 7–13). In the first place, religious conflicts are acts of direct physical violence against more subtle but no less powerful forms of coercion and structural violence. Secondly, certain forms or instances of violence are attributable to specific religions while others pertain to religion in general. Thirdly, they suggest that the 'religious' character of conflicts is based on some de-contextualised pre-understanding of specific religions; that is, religion is often presented as a disembodied system of belief. Such an understanding of religious conflicts seems to ignore or exclude some important aspects relating to the identity of the religious actors involved. Not only religious institutions but also religious identities play a role in the conflict that ensues. And religious identity not only informs the (perception of) religious conflicts; the effect of a conflict (with or without acts of violence) is to create religious identities and boundaries, whether between bodies of believers, between recognized religious faiths or between an orthodox definition of faith and a 'heresy'. Fourthly, religious conflicts need to be compared with other forms of societal conflict (e.g. ethnic conflict) so as to understand their specifically religious character.

In contrast to the (dominant) position formulated above, we assume that the (re)definition of social identity and (re)articulation of claims to authority by (one's own) religion are the main sources of the perception of religious conflicts in heightened states of uncertainty and anxiety (Sidel 2007, 16ff). In brief,



we assume that a religious conflict is not just a reflection of the strength of religious identity. It is not the difference between people but the loss of difference that gives rise to violence (Girard 2007). The sociologist Tilly (2003, 77) draws the same conclusion in his survey of collective violence in modern history: "Violence generally increases and becomes more salient in situations of rising uncertainty across the boundary." In contexts of uncertainty and anxiety about religious identities and their boundaries conflicts between religious groups can erupt. In a context of uncertainty the (re)definition of the self and claims to authority are achieved through violent opposition to an antagonistic other and through recognition in the symbolic order of society. People need recognition by others in society in order to find their own identity (cf. Taylor 1994). Identity is not a fixed and stable set of characteristics of groups or individuals, but an unstable and interactive complex related to other identities in a socio-cultural context. Religious conflicts need to be understood not only as (re)actions by individuals or groups towards a perceived threat to some material or nonmaterial interest, but also implies an anticipated response by audiences involved in this conflict. Conflicts need to be viewed in a broader process of discursive and social formation, in which religion plays a prominent role. Conflict must not only be understood in terms of its destructive consequences, but also in light of its constructive effects. Religious conflicts reflect the emergence of new kinds of threats to religious identities as well as shifting circumstances in which such identities could be reconstituted and reasserted.

In our research we view religious identity through the lens of the religious meaning system. A religious meaning system operates in much the same way as any other meaning system. It is "similar to other systems in structure, malleability and functioning, yet is unique in centering on what is perceived to be the sacred, and in the comprehensive and special way in which it can serve to fulfill the quest for meaning" (Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005, 764). In a meaning system we can distinguish between two domains, each with three elements: the domain of descriptive beliefs, which include a theory of the self; a theory of the world, contingencies and expectations; and the domain of prescriptive beliefs, which include beliefs about (life) goals, actions and emotions. Or, put in question form, meaning systems provide answers to the following six questions: Who am I? What is the nature of the world? What can I expect from my relatedness to others and to the world? What should I strive for? What should I do? What should I feel? This idea of a religious meaning system comprising descriptive and prescriptive beliefs is comparable to Clifford Geertz's (1973) distinction between 'models *of* reality' and 'models *for* reality' in religion as a cultural system. Readers familiar with the theory of Geertz can keep this in mind when we refer to the religious meaning system. Religion functions as a



model of reality when it helps people to apprehend the nature of reality by providing conceptions of the world, the self, and the relations between them. In models for reality, religion determines people's actions by providing mental dispositions which establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations (Geertz 1973, 123). Yet, the concept of religious meaning system avoids some of the critique on Geertz's concept of culture as abstract and anti-psychological (Pyysiainen 2001, 44–53).

#### 1.4 Research Questions

Our cross-religious comparative study seeks to identify predictors of the ideas of college students in Tamil Nadu about causes of religious conflict. In describing these predictors we make a distinction between Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students. We selected four religious variables as predictors of causes of religious conflicts: religious practices, mystical experiences, attitudes towards religious plurality and religiocentrism. The four religious variables will be analysed in chapters 3–6. For each religious variable we formulated the following questions:

- (1) What comparative understanding of the religious variable concerned emerges among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students once group-specific differences have been ascertained?
- (2) Are there significant differences in levels of agreement with the religious variable concerned between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?
- (3) Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics of Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students relate to the religious variables?
- (4) Which personal characteristics of Christian, Muslim and Hindu students may be considered predictors of the religious variable?

We make a cross-religious comparison of the scores on religious variables insofar as the constructed scales allow. We check (by means of a Scheffé test) whether the cross-religious differences, if any, between Christians, Muslims and Hindus are significant. Do our religious groups differ in their level of agreement with the attitudes or ideas which we think are predictors of causes of religious conflicts? Next we study the association between the level of agreement with these attitudes/ideas and background characteristics of religious students. What is the social location of the ideas/attitudes of the students?

This affords insight into the influence of context on students' agreement with the causes of religious conflicts. Finally, we want to know which characteristic is decisive in explaining the level of students' agreement with the ideas/attitudes. We make separate analyses of Christian, Muslim and Hindu students to establish whether there are differences in contextual influences between the three groups.

The research questions with regard to the dependent variable (i.e. causes of latent religious conflicts) are the following:

- (1) Which comparative models of causes of latent religious conflict are discernible in the perceptions of Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?
- (2) Are there significant differences in agreement with causes of latent religious conflicts among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?
- (3) Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics and religious ideas relate to causes of latent religious conflicts among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?
- (4) To what extent can agreement with causes of religious conflicts among Christian, Hindu and Muslim students in Tamil Nadu be explained by descriptive beliefs about the relationship between self and others and prescriptive beliefs about religious actions while controlling for students' personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics?

The first three questions are descriptive and will be examined in chapter 7. The fourth question is explanatory (see chapter 8).

## 1.5 Research Variables

What attitudes and convictions are involved in our research into causes of latent religious conflicts? We start with the dependent variable and the intermediate variables. Next we describe the independent variables. The dependent and intermediate variables will not be probed in depth, as they are dealt with in separate chapters. We only give a description of the independent variables. They can have a direct or an indirect effect on the dependent variable (also see section 8.3.4). The independent variables map the personal circumstances in which people may (or may not) experience higher levels of uncertainty and anxiety (see section 1.3.2).

### 1.5.1 *Causes of Religious Conflicts*

The dependent variable in our cross-religious comparative research are causes of religious conflicts. We distinguish four causes: socio-economic, political, ethnic-cultural and religious. Each cause expresses an interest of religious groups. In the case of socio-economic and political causes this interest concerns material and non-material scarce resources. In the case of ethnic-cultural and religious causes it concerns group identification (also see chapter 7).

### 1.5.2 *Religious Meaning System*

The intermediate variables are beliefs in the religious meaning system. We selected two descriptive and two prescriptive beliefs which are predicted to influence our religious respondents' ideas on causes of religious conflicts. The two descriptive beliefs reflect religious notions about the relationship with other religious groups. The first is the interpretation of religious plurality (see chapter 5). How do religious students see the existence of other religions in society? Do they want dialogue with persons of other religions in order to be enriched by their ideas about God? Or do they regard the existence of other religions as irrelevant because absolute truth can be found only in their own religions? The second belief is called religiocentrism (see chapter 6). What is the attitude of religious students in Tamil Nadu towards members of their own religious group and towards members of other religious groups? Do they regard members of their own group positively (positive in-group attitudes)? And how negative are they towards members of other religious groups (negative out-group attitudes)? Religiocentrism is strong when a person has a highly positive in-group attitude combined with a highly negative out-group attitude. One can expect that religious persons who strongly agree with religiocentrism will have a higher level of agreement with causes of religious conflicts than those who are less religiocentric, because the former regard the religious identity of members of other religious groups as highly negative.

We distinguish between two prescriptive beliefs. The first is beliefs about religious practices that persons should engage in according to their own religion (chapter 3). We expect religious persons who are more involved with the prescribed practices of their own religion to be more committed to that religion. When their religious identity (as expressed in participation in religious practices) is strong, they will be more inclined to defend the interests of their own religious group. Hence there will be greater agreement on causes of religious conflicts. The second prescriptive belief is mystical experience of God that is highly valued in a person's life (chapter 4). Mystical experiences are considered a universal human possibility in all religions. We predict that religious persons who agree strongly with mysticism will agree less about causes

of religious conflict. This is because members of other religious groups can have the same (highly valued) experience of God as their co-religionists. In that case they will be less inclined to see their own identity as conflicting with the identity of members of other religious groups.

### 1.5.3 *Socio-cultural Characteristics*

Socio-cultural characteristics that might influence 'force-driven religious conflict' directly or indirectly are age, gender, language, urbanization and field of specialization.

Age is measured in three categories: 17–19 years; 20–22 years; and 23–26 years. We asked about age because religious opinions change over different generations and even age groups. As in many other countries, in India older people are more religious than younger ones. Even in the youthful group one could expect opinions on interreligious relations to change as a result of personal experiences.

Gender simply indicates whether the student is female or male. Past studies have consistently shown that there are differences in the religiosity of women and men. Not only do women generally tend to be more religious and more religiously committed than men, but substantive differences have been observed as well (e.g. Nelsen et al. 1985). Possible explanations for these gender differences are common in the literature. Socialization theories and structural location theories concentrate on social and contextual influences, which shape the different responses to religion among women and men. Other theories concentrate on personal or individual psychological characteristics which differentiate between women and men, like depth psychology theories, personality theories and gender orientation theories (Francis 1997). While attempts to isolate socialization effects on gender differences in religiosity have largely failed, 'gender orientation theories' or theories based on physiological differences between women and men are gaining support (cf. Stark 2002; Roth & Krol 2007). Although we do not dwell on explanatory discussions of gender differences, it obviously makes sense to control for differences between women and men. This is all the more important in a study focusing on relations between different religious traditions. When it comes to interpersonal relations there is growing evidence that women are more open to 'the other' than men (Markus & Oyserman 1989). Differences between men and women are also likely to be influenced by the surrounding cultural atmosphere: the gender status gap is exceptionally big in India. India is infamously second on the list of countries disadvantageous to women. India has shocking statistics on sex ratios with a disproportionately higher number of births of boys since the early 1980s. These figures illustrate the enormous gender status gap in India. The

increasing proportion of males is attributed to several factors, the major ones being geographical patterning of differences, religion and socioeconomic status. Preponderant male birth rates are as high as 136 boys to 100 girls in certain districts, particularly in the west of the country from Punjab to Maharashtra. The 2011 census birth sex ratio in India was 109.1 boys to 100 girls (i.e. 917 girls for 1000 boys). Surprisingly, sex ratio imbalance of births also correlates with religious background, the biggest excess of male birth being among Sikhs (129.8 boys against 100 girls) and Jains (118.0), followed by Hindus (110.9), Muslims (107.4) and Christians (103.8) in 2001 (Guilmoto 2007, 8; Hvistendahl 2011, 5ff). And once life has begun, India shows excessive female child mortality, whereas excessive male mortality is the biological norm and characterizes most developed and underdeveloped countries (Lopez & Ruzicka 1983; Kishor 1993). In the 2011 census the child sex ratio (group 0–6 years old) in India was 919 females per 1000 males (i.e. 109.4 boys against 100 girls, to permit comparison with the figures above), which is the lowest sex ratio since 1961 and a considerable fall of the number of girls compared to 2001 (sex ratio of 927 for 0–6 years old in 2001).<sup>6</sup> Tamil Nadu shows more balanced statistics with 946 females per 1000 boys in the 0–6 years old category (Gopalakrishnan 2011). Nevertheless, these hard figures are sufficient reason to make gender a variable in dealing with our Tamil Nadu research population, and to expect gender differences in regard to religious practice, mysticism, models of interpreting religious plurality and religiocentrism. When it comes to explaining agreement with force-driven conflict, there are additional reasons why we control for gender. Men show higher levels of social dominance orientation than women (Sidanius et al. 1994), and this gender difference does not vary with the size of the perceived status gap between men and women (Levin 2004). Moreover, some authors indicate that women and men tend to deal differently with ethnic and religious conflicts (cf. Butalia 2001; Skjelsbæk & Smith 2001).

Since language “is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive the world” (Gadamar 2008, 29), we asked our respondents to state their mother tongue. The questionnaire offered the following response options: Tamil; Telugu; Malayalam; Kannada; Urdu; or “any other ...”, with the possibility of filling in a language of their choice. However, we ended up by dividing our respondents into two groups: those who give Tamil as their mother tongue and those who don’t. Speaking Tamil can be considered an indicator of knowledge of and integration with the local Tamil culture. Tamil is one of the Dravidian languages belonging to the ‘Southern group’ and, like all Dravidian languages, is rich in kinship organization. Studies like those of

6 See <http://www.censusindia.gov.in>.

Ramaswamy (1997) and Krishnamurti (2003) illustrate the big impact of language use on both social organization and religious sentiments in Tamil Nadu. Hence we expected it could be relevant to the religious elements described in chapters 3–6. Whether this was proved empirically in our survey will be discussed later.

Urbanization is measured in three categories and indicates whether respondents spent at least three quarters of their life in a village, town or city. This was computed as follows. Students were asked to specify how many years of their lives were spent in villages, towns and cities. In combination with their age, we computed where they lived longest (e.g.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of their lives). The small number of students who lived for longer periods in different places with different degrees of urbanization (and did not reach  $\frac{3}{4}$  of their lives in any of these categories) were assigned a 'missing value' on this variable. We thought this socio-cultural characteristic important, since degree of urbanization is an indicator not only of modernization and economic development that influences religiosity but also of the likelihood of contact with people belonging to other religious groups. Moreover, urbanization has been associated with the consolidation of communities along religious lines (Singh Sandu 2003; Jha 2011, 18).

Field of specialization is measured in two broad categories: arts and social sciences (=1) and natural sciences (=2). From previous research (Guimond & Palmer 1996; Sterkens et al. 2010) it is known that choice of a field of study is a significant factor in the social location of types of religious identification, religious convictions (e.g. radicalism), religiocentrism and political convictions about intergroup relations. Faculties of disciplines in which religion is likely to be studied (e.g. arts and social sciences) have been found to be less religious than faculties of disciplines in which religion is not studied (e.g. natural and life sciences) (Lehman 1974). Hence we took this into account as well.

#### 1.5.4 *Socio-economic Characteristics*

A second set of student characteristics concerns their socio-economic status. For a study conducted in India, it is surely not surprising that we include the respondent's caste as an important socio-economic characteristic. Below we explain exactly what is measured by 'caste' in this research and how to interpret it. We also asked for the highest educational level attained by both parents of the respondent.

What do we mean by caste in this research? And how do we legitimately measure it? Obviously our study is too limited to reflect the complexity of the thousands of existing traditional *jātis* or even the more limited system of *varṇas* in Indian society. Besides, for a quantitative survey of this kind it would be inappropriate, if not illegal to ask about this type of caste as a background

characteristic. As early as the *Lex Loci Act* of 1845 and the *Caste Disabilities Removal Act* of 1850, restrictions with regard to occupation and other types of discrimination resulting from the traditional caste system were declared illegal (cf. Rodrigues 2006, 60–65). The classical divisions of Hindu society that can be traced back to the Ṛg-Veda (x, 90) comprise four castes (*varṇas*): *Brāhmaṇa* (priestly caste), *kṣatriya* or *rājanya* (military caste), *vaiśya* (landowners and merchants), and *śūdra* (cultivators and menials). Although its original intention was to ensure harmony in the complex social fabric, the caste system gradually degenerated into a divisive and discriminatory force. Based on the division of labour, castes later comprised groups engaged in various professions, which gradually became hereditary. In time the great variety of occupations gave rise to numerous subcastes (*jātis*), which were not strictly hierarchical. The systems of *varṇas* and *jātis* still coexist and overlap to a certain degree, but it should be noted that the connection between the *jāti* system and Hinduism is complicated, certainly not a one-to-one relationship (Dumont 1980; Quigley 2005). We do not dwell on the details of this complex phenomenon.

In the contemporary context, although the Indian constitution formally condemns the caste system as untenable, the government recognizes that social inequalities are partially attributable to the hegemony of the caste system. With a view to rectifying the socio-economic imbalance the government has introduced the strategy of 'reservations'. This policy facilitates entry of grossly underrepresented groups into the educational and professional fields. Paradoxically, among other criteria such as religion and gender, caste serves as a basic criterion for the identification of underprivileged classes (Hasan 2009). The Indian constitution (articles 341, 342) identifies 'scheduled tribes' comprising over 24% of the Indian population, and 'scheduled castes' as groups who have historically suffered oppression and denial of equal opportunity. The government proposes to reserve a certain percentage of jobs in the public sector for 'scheduled tribes' (7,5%) and 'scheduled castes' (15%). Later reservations were introduced for 'other backward castes' (Constitution article 340). The detailed division of castes and the percentage of job reservations vary from state to state. In Tamil Nadu a further distinction has been made since 1971 between 'most backward castes' and 'backward castes'. Currently Tamil Nadu reserves 69% of posts for about 87% of the population. Paradoxically, this 'positive discrimination' revives the illegal caste system in a new form. Because of its widespread use in government policies people generally know to which of these categories they belong.

In our research we followed the classification used by the Tamil Nadu government: 'scheduled tribes' (ST) are traditionally identified with *adivasi*



(original indigenes); 'scheduled castes' (SC) are identified with *dalit* (untouchables and outcasts). 'Most backward castes' (MBC) and 'backward castes' (BC) are consequently the better end of the disadvantaged groups. Those who do not belong to these categories and cannot claim reservations are said to belong to the 'forward castes' (FC). We also included the category 'other castes' (OC), since there may be respondents who do not associate themselves with these categories. The latter category was chosen by very few respondents and was eventually coded as a missing value. We also found very little difference between the general characteristics of people who classified themselves under 'scheduled tribes' and those who said they belonged to 'scheduled castes'. Consequently we recoded these two categories as a single category. We ended up with four categories on the socio-economic ladder. From low to high they are: 'scheduled tribes and scheduled castes' (ST+SC); 'most backward castes' (MBC); 'backward castes' (BC); and 'forward castes' (FC).

Father's and mother's educational level is measured in three categories: no formal education or primary education; middle or high school; and secondary school, undergraduate or higher level education.

#### 1.5.5 *Socio-religious Characteristics*

Socio-religious characteristics concern our respondents' religious socialization. Socialization can be described from two perspectives: that of the society acting upon the individual (objectively), and that of the individual responding to the society (subjectively). On the objective plane socialization is "the process by which the society transmits its culture from one generation to the next and adapts the individual to the accepted and approved ways of organized social life" (Fichter 1973, 29). The accent here is on individuals, groups and institutions that transmit systems of meaning, values, symbols, roles, et cetera. On the subjective plane socialization is "a process of learning which goes on in the individual while he is adapting to the people around him" (Fichter 1973, 30). The emphasis here is on individuals' social learning and their construction of religiosity in a process of adaptation to the environment.

Without losing sight of these twofold perspectives, we briefly examine the role of principal agents of religious socialization: family; peers; religious community; educational community; and media (Berns 2003; cf. Bajzek & Milanese 2006, 72–83; Cornwall 1989).

The family is the place of primary socialization. Parents play a key role as identification models. However, the family's role in religious socialization is determined by the significance of religion in society. In a traditional context where religion has a central place and where the family itself is well integrated with the religious structure religious socialization is to a great extent delegated



to the family. But in a secularized context where religion loses its central place in society religious socialization in the family might become ineffective. In such contexts religious socialization in families is still a (quite) necessary but certainly not sufficient condition for religiosity. The attempts (if any) made by the family are easily neutralized by other socializing agents (cf. Vermeer 2010; Sterkens & Vermeer 2012).

The peer group – which allows for more egalitarian, reciprocal interaction – has emerged as an important socializing agent among contemporary youth. It provides a place of transition from the family nucleus to today's complex, competitive society. As a spontaneous group it can play a positive role in religious socialization, yet in a cultural context of fragmentation and secularization the peer group can distance itself from institutionalized religion, preferring more individualized forms of religiosity.

The religious community becomes more important for religious socialization when family and peers hardly feature in religious socialization. Religious socialization by religious communities entails nurturing the personal commitment of the young through religious initiation and education. In minority religious communities – as is the case with Christians and Muslims in Tamil Nadu and in India as a whole – such religious socialization risks creating a ghetto mentality that cuts off the young from other religious traditions in the wider society.

Young people today spend a good deal of their time in educational institutions: schools, colleges and universities. The socialization that takes place in dealings with other students, teachers, professors, associations, et cetera allows them to transcend their emotional ties with the family. Religious socialization in formal education depends on the centrality or marginality of religion in society at large and – more specifically – on the place of religion in the curriculum. In multi-religious contexts state schools tend to accommodate the dominant religious tradition, whereas in secularized societies they may exclude religious education altogether (Fox 2008, 158, 198f, 207; Ziebertz & Riegel 2009). In such contexts religiously affiliated schools which explicitly aim at religious socialization run the risk of – unintentionally – promoting religious segregation. Especially in minority contexts religiously affiliated schools experience a double challenge: to contribute to the flourishing of their own religious tradition, and to stimulate interaction with and full participation in the surrounding society (Yusuf & Sterkens 2014).

The growing importance of the mass media in socialization is evident from the signs of crisis in other agents of socialization. In a way the mass media modify the authority of other agents of religious socialization. The contribution of the mass media to religious socialization, too, is determined by the

place of religion in society. In a secularized society the mass media tend to marginalize religious information. In a democratic and religiously plural country like India they pay particular attention to the dominant religion, allowing some room for minority religions as well. Minority religions in their turn seek to use the mass media to cater for religious socialization of their own followers and to expand their sphere of influence in society. The mass media also enable religious minority groups to be part of their worldwide communities. Hence they play an ambivalent role in religious socialization. They can moderate the role of traditional agents of religious socialization by either diminishing or strengthening them. They can also put religious socialization in a global perspective.

The theory of Schlenker (1985; 1986) on the public and private self sheds further light on how these agents of religious socialization influence the young, particularly their subjective learning or the way they construct their own identity. According to Schlenker (1986, 22) the private and public selves are complementary facets of an individual's identity. He defines identity as "a theory of self that is formed and maintained through actual or imagined interpersonal agreement about what the self is like" (Schlenker 1986, 23). "People's ideas about themselves are expressed and tested in social life through their actions. In turn, the outcomes of these 'tests' provide a basis for crystallizing, refining, or modifying identity based in part on how believable or defensible these identity images appear to be" (Schlenker 1986, 24). Individuals construct their identity through repeated interaction with the same people over a considerable length of time. Based on this interaction they construct their "desirable identity images", which "represent what people believe they *can be* and *should be* in particular contexts, and are influenced by personality factors, situational factors, and audience factors" (Schlenker 1986, 25). Speaking of audience, Schlenker distinguishes between three types. The first is the inner self, that is the internalized values, standards and knowledge which provide a basis for self-evaluation. The second type of audience consists of people with whom one interacts directly. The third type is the so-called 'reference others'. These are people whose opinions and standards are sufficiently respected to function as exemplars and evaluators across a wide variety of situations independently of direct interaction. Parents, close friends, admired mentors and the like can all function as reference others.

The instrument for measuring the impact of agents of religious socialization as 'reference others' is based on the distinction between the agents of religious socialization: *family* (mother, father, close relatives), *peer group* (close friends), *religious community* (religious leaders, religious groups or associations outside educational institutions), *educational community* (school teach-

ers and college professors who provide religious or moral education, religious groups or associations within the school and college setting), and the *mass media* (religious figures appearing on TV or radio programmes). The respondents were asked to indicate whether these agents of religious socialization had played an unfavourable or a favourable role in their understanding and practice of religion on a four-point Likert scale ranging from very unfavourable (1) to very favourable (4). A complete list of items appears in appendix B.

## 1.6 Sampling and Data Collection

For the purpose of our research we saw fit to focus on college students, since they have to play a leading role in society as a whole and in their own cultural and religious communities. In due course they should join the ranks of the elite in all spheres of society: science, the arts, public media, the economy, government, et cetera. Hence knowing how they interact with peers in other religious traditions can tell us something about the dynamics of the correlation between religion and conflict in present-day society and provide some clues to its development in the near future.

According to the current *Statistical handbook* (2011)<sup>7</sup> of the Tamil Nadu government this state has a total of 587 colleges for general higher education (arts and sciences) attended by over 700,000 students. Of these, 62 are government colleges and 9 are university constituent colleges; 133 are subsidised (aided) colleges run by Christians, Muslims and other minority communities; and 383 are self-financing.<sup>8</sup> Our research population consisted of all students attending colleges for general education in the federal state of Tamil Nadu, India. As clarified below, a selective stratified sample, taking into account gender, religious affiliation, area of residence and educational level, was drawn from 16 colleges and the University of Madras.

Given the relevance of gender difference to our theme, eight women's colleges were selected, the remaining eight being principally for men (some of which have admitted small numbers of women in recent years). The University of Madras, by contrast, has a fully fledged coeducational system.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.tn.gov.in/deptst/Education.pdf> (28 April 2014).

<sup>8</sup> At the time of the research there were 441 colleges for general higher education (arts and sciences) attended by over 459,000 students. Of these, 60 are run by the state, 134 are subsidised colleges run by Christians, Muslims and other minority communities, and 247 are self-financing.

From the perspective of the religious affiliation of educational institutions, the University of Madras and two government colleges were chosen to represent the category of secular higher educational institutions, although the great majority of students are Hindus. Since only a few (six) of the aided colleges have an explicit Islamic affiliation, we chose two of them. Muslim students are generally concentrated in Muslim colleges. Among the 32 colleges explicitly affiliated to Christian communities, eight Catholic and two Protestant colleges were chosen. This was because we can expect no more than an average of 25% of students at Catholic colleges to be Catholics, whereas Protestant students tend to be concentrated in denominational colleges. Among the aided colleges at least 42 had an explicit Hindu orientation. We chose only two Hindu colleges, since Hindu students constitute a great majority in both public and Catholic colleges. We did not include self-financing colleges in our sample, since aided colleges represent the religious thrust and government colleges the secular thrust in education more adequately. Besides, some of the aided colleges also have self-financing departments.

Since colleges are generally concentrated in urban areas and particularly in the state capital, we selected ten colleges and the University of Madras in Chennai, and three colleges in the other three major cities, Coimbatore, Tiruchy and Madurai. To complete the picture we included three colleges in semi-urban areas: Tirupattur, Cuddalore and Vellore. The locations of the colleges included in the sample are indicated in Figure 1.1.

A questionnaire was administered to students at the 16 colleges and the University of Madras between October 2003 and January 2004. Except in the case of three women's colleges (where the college administration preferred to do it), the questionnaire was administered personally by one of the researchers to groups of selected students or to the gathering of all selected students of a specific college with the help of the college authorities. About 130 questionnaires were distributed at each of the centres of higher education selected for our research. Between 40 and 50 students belonging to the three religions among graduate and postgraduate students, giving priority to the former, were selected randomly with the help of college authorities. In cases where there were fewer than 40 students to represent a particular religion students of the other two religions were chosen at random to make up a total of about 130 respondents per college. Of the 2,180 questionnaires thus distributed to college students, 2,012 were returned, of which 1,920 were found to be valid. A list of the participating colleges with exact numbers of respondents appears in appendix A.

The demographic characteristics of our (valid) respondents are as follows. Among our respondents 55.6% are women and the remaining 44.4% men. As

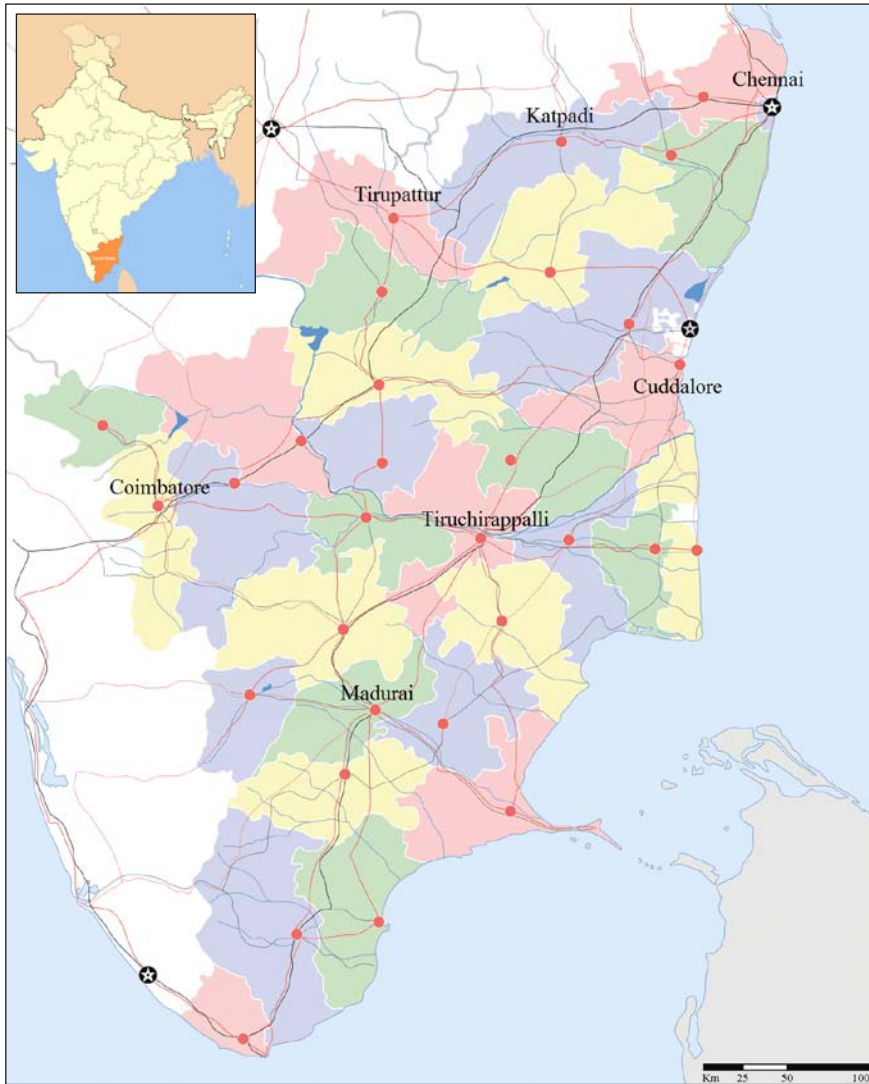


FIGURE 1.1 Map showing the location of colleges in Tamil Nadu included in the sample.

for religious affiliation, 41.1% are Hindus, 45.3% are Christians (28.1% Catholics, 12.8% Protestants and 4.4% from other Christian denominations); 13.3% are Muslims and a handful (0.4%) are Jains and Buddhists. As the study focused on Christians, Hindus and Muslims, students belonging to other religions were not included in our analysis. The percentages of students according to religious affiliation do not reflect the ratio in the Tamil Nadu college student population. The relatively higher proportions of Muslims and Christians in our

sample are necessary to permit statistically meaningful analysis and cross-religious comparison. That there are fewer Muslims than Christians in our sample results from the fact that Muslims rarely attend colleges other than their own, which are also fewer in number. The high number of Christians follows from our need to have sufficient representation of Catholics, Protestants and adherents of other Christian denominations with a view to comparing the Christian groups as part of a further study. Almost all respondents (98.4%) are in the 17 to 25 age group, which qualifies them as youths. The vast majority (86%) are undergraduates, 65.6% of these in the final or third year of their studies. Our study focused on third or final year undergraduates, since not all of them would continue with postgraduate studies. Only 13.7% of our respondents are postgraduate students and a tiny group (0.3%) is engaged in advanced studies (MPhil. and PhD).

## 1.7 Design of Analysis

In this section we first describe the design of analysis of the four research questions regarding the intermediate variables (see chapters 3–6). Next we describe the design of analysis of the research questions regarding our dependent variable (see chapters 7–8).

To answer our first research question concerning the construction of cross-religious comparative models of religious variables we follow two procedures. In the first procedure we assess the dimensionality of the measurement scale via factor analysis. In the second procedure we test whether the scale can be used to compare the ideas, experiences or attitudes of different religious groups by means of a measurement invariance test.

The assessment of comparable dimensionality involves a three step factor analysis. (a) To achieve this we first construct a category for the adherents of all three religions by conducting a factor analysis of the scale for all respondents (Christians, Hindus and Muslims) together. In including all respondents in the same analysis we assume that the models of religiously inspired conflict in these groups have the same structure. The criteria used in the factor analysis are: eigenvalue  $>1$ ; commonality  $>.20$ ; factor loadings  $>.30$ , and if items load high on two factors, the difference in factor loading should be  $>.15$ . (b) The second step is to examine the three religious groups separately. These separate analyses should show whether the overall structure of the first step holds good for each group individually. In other words, we want to find out if the models of religiously inspired conflict established in the overall analysis recur in the analyses relating to particular groups in the case of all or of only some items.



The purpose of this step is to uncover intergroup differences. (c) These differences are eliminated in the third step, where we determine the commensurable concept after checking for structural differences between the models specific to each religious group. Since we can only compare commensurable factors, we have to apply the filter of commonality: what is distinctive is filtered out. The differences (in measurement) between the groups are therefore eliminated in this final step. Only in this last step can we speak of a cross-religious comparative model (i.e. comparable dimensions for all religious groups). In the ensuing chapters we only report the results of the third step of factor analysis (for the sake of simplicity).

In the second procedure we assess the scalar invariance of the factors yielded by the factor analysis. There is a longstanding debate in cross cultural measurement on whether measures can be used in different cultural contexts (e.g. Kumata & Schram 1956). A formal test of cross cultural comparability, using structural equation modelling, has been suggested by Meredith (1993). This procedure starts with the simplest form of invariance – factorial invariance – and ends with the strictest form, scalar invariance. In this procedure one first tests whether the measurement models are the same for all groups; if so, there is factorial invariance. Next one tests for metric invariance, that is whether the factor loadings are the same across groups. If so, it becomes meaningful to compare the relationships of this factor with other factors (that also exhibit metric invariance). The last test is that of scalar invariance. This test implies that factor structure, factor loadings *and* item intercepts are equal across the groups. If that test holds good, it becomes meaningful to compare the means of the factors (or the composite scores) across the groups. The factor models were all estimated with the ML procedure available in Lisrel 8.8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). The models were evaluated by means of JRULE (Saris, Satorra & Van der Veld 2009), a computer program that uses the output of Lisrel and evaluates whether or not constrained parameters are misspecified, taking into account the power of the MI test. The analytic strategy that we use starts with the least restricted model (see Van der Veld & Saris 2011). To test for misspecifications we use the same values for delta as one would like to detect with high power tests. In the test for configural invariance we use a delta of 0.25 for cross-loadings and a delta of 0.10 for correlated errors. In the test for metric invariance we use the same deltas, plus a delta of 0.15 for equality constraints on factor loadings. In the test for scalar invariance we use the same deltas, plus a delta of 0.07 for item intercepts. For tests of the equality of factor means we also used a delta of 0.07. We should point out that it is not absolutely necessary to solve all misspecifications, because one can always expect some misspecifications resulting from chance alone. We can also accept partial scalar invariance (Byrne,

Shavelson & Muthén, 1989) in cases where there are at least two invariant indicators per group. This is unproblematic as long as the analysis is continuous in the framework of SEM. There are no rules or measures to decide what constitutes a serious deviation. However, we accept deviations as harmless for our conclusions when they are only slightly larger than the misspecifications.

The second research question aims at differences in agreement with religious variables, here religious convictions and attitudes. In our analysis we calculate the group mean and standard deviation for the three groups of students (Christians, Muslims and Hindus). We check whether cross-religious differences are significant by means of a Scheffé test or, in the case of comparison between the means of two groups, by means of a T-test (chapter 6).

The third research question is answered by means of associations ( $\rho$ ) between the personal characteristics of students (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) and religious attitudes/ideas. For nominal variables with two answer categories (here the variables gender, language and field of specialization), we present the means of each religious group on a variable in order to interpret the direction of the correlation. We mention all significant associations, but focus on those which are relevant enough to cite in theory formation, in our case associations that are moderately strong ( $.15 < r < .30$ ) or strong ( $r \geq .30$ ).

The fourth question is answered by means of a linear regression analysis (method: Enter) in which we define the aforementioned student characteristics as independent variables and the issues discussed in the separate chapters as dependent variables. In other words, we explain differences in the dependent variable in terms of the variety of some student characteristics. We discuss only those variables that yielded relevant ( $r \geq .20$ ) and significant ( $p < .000$ ) correlations with the dependent variable concerned in at least one of the religious groups. We do not demand this level of association for each group, because we expect different predictors in distinct religious groups. However, to guarantee comparison of the analyses we include the student characteristic in the regression analysis of each group of respondents (Christians, Muslims, Hindus) as soon as it proves to be relevant for one of these groups. The regression analysis results in an explained variance (coefficient of determination  $R^2$ ) in which the independent variables assume certain significant weightings, expressed by the standardized regression coefficient  $\beta$ . The standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ) expresses the relative weight of the variable concerned in the total explained variance. Since we inserted personal characteristics that yielded relevant and significant correlations with positive in-group attitudes in any of the religious groups, it is not surprising that some independent variables are neither significant nor relevant for certain religious groups. However,



to guarantee comparison we did include the same dependent variables in the regression analysis for all religious groups.

The design of analysis of the research questions regarding our dependent variable (see chapters 7–8) is largely the same as that for religious attitudes/ideas. Only the fourth question has a different analytic design. To analyse the predictors of the causes of religious conflicts we used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM technique) (cf. Kline 2005). We want to know which variables predict the level of agreement with the causes of religious conflicts. Or, to put it differently, what ideas in the minds of religious people predict their interpretation of the causes of religious conflicts? Our research is comparative. We not only want to know which predictors can be found in each group of students (Christian, Muslim and Hindu), but also want to test whether predictors are the same for all groups. Do Christians, Muslims and Hindus agree on the influence of interreligious variables on causes of religious conflicts? With the help of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) we can test whether predictors are significantly different for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students. We applied a model generating analyses of the data using the AMOS program. Structural Equation Modelling presupposes well developed theoretical expectations about the relation between the variables. Our model refers to the influence of beliefs on causes of force-driven religious conflict. The model specifies our hypotheses with regard to the direct influence of beliefs on religious conflicts. Two types of descriptive beliefs in the religious meaning system are included in the model: religiocentrism and models of interpreting religious plurality. For religiocentrism two variables are included: a positive in-group attitude (i.e. towards one's own religion) and negative out-group attitudes (i.e. towards others' religions). For the respondent's convictions about religious plurality three variables are included: monism, commonality pluralism and differential pluralism. Two prescriptive beliefs are included in the model: experience of mystical union with an ultimate reality and participation in institutional religious practices. The descriptive and prescriptive beliefs are so-called 'endogenous variables', because they belong to the core of the causal model and their value is determined by the state of other values in the system. The student's characteristics are so-called 'exogenous variables' (x-variables) because their value is determined outside the model in which it is used. The following personal characteristics are included: socio-cultural background, socio-economic background and socio-religious background. In our model these background characteristics can influence religious beliefs (cf. Durkheim 1915). In the category of socio-cultural variables we included age, gender, mother tongue, caste, urbanization and field of educational specialization. As socio-economic variables the following were included in our analysis: mother's occupation, father's

occupation, mother's education, father's education. In the category of socio-religious variables we included years attending religious schools (of one's own religion) and socializing agents in the religious domain (parents, relatives, friends, religious community, teachers/professors and media).

# Cross-religious Comparative Research

## Introduction

Comparative study of religion not merely researches various religious traditions in general, but focuses on differences and similarities between religions. In this chapter we look at some fundamental theoretical issues in cross-religious comparative research and some of the core empirical methodological problems involved. The first issue is: what makes comparison a contested issue in research into religion, specifically in disciplines like religious studies, history of religion and theology? We discuss the rules which comparative research into religion needs to observe to merit a place in the scientific study of religion (2.1). Secondly, we examine the goals of cross-religious comparative research. Why should one distinguish between different goals of comparative research? Do comparisons not all have the same goal? And if not, what are the criteria for distinguishing between the different goals (2.2)? Thirdly, we consider questions relating to the object of our comparative research: religion. What definition of religion should we use (2.3)? Fourthly, we deal with the thorniest question in comparative research: in what terms (categories, concepts, ideas) can we understand and explain the religious practices, beliefs, experiences, et cetera of other persons and communities, and to what extent is it possible to understand and explain the other (2.4)? The next issue is the selection of data. On what kind of knowledge do we want to build our research? How do we choose groups to compare? Are our findings generalizable to a given population (2.5)? Then we look at the problem of similarities and differences in comparative research. In order to compare religious traditions they should be neither totally different nor completely identical. We examine this problem from the perspective of a quantitative methodology by means of statistical surveys (2.6). Finally we look at the issue of normativeness in comparative research (2.7).

### 2.1 Comparison as a Contested Field in Research into Religion

Comparison has become a contested field in scientific research into religion over the past four decades, specifically in disciplines like religious studies and history of religion. As Patton and Ray (2000, 3) point out, this applies to the

extent that “with a few outstanding exceptions, comparative studies have virtually disappeared in graduate studies in favor of increasingly narrow ‘area studies’ research into specific religious texts and communities.” A landmark in this development is the seminal paper by Jonathan Z. Smith (1982, 19–35), *In comparison a magic dwells*. Most discussions about comparison in the study of religion are premised on this paper. It is sometimes interpreted as a critique of cross-religious comparative research as such. But this interpretation is incorrect: the critique applies to the way comparison has often been done in the tradition of the history of religion. In 2004 Smith outlined his own career as a scholar of religion from the late 1960s when he moved to Chicago and came under the influence of Mircea Éliade. We do not give a chronological account of his development, but use his and other publications which can be considered a response to this initial paper to discuss the dispute about comparison in religious studies (cf. Patton & Ray 2000; two special issues of *Method and theory in the study of religion* in 1996 (8–1) and 2004 (16–1)). The discussion will culminate in some general principles and guidelines to follow in cross-religious comparative research.

By settling on *In comparison a magic dwells* (Smith 1982) we also explicitly locate our discussion of cross-religious comparative research in the study of religion (or religious studies). The alternative would be to locate it in the social sciences. There is a long-standing tradition of cross-cultural comparative research in anthropology, psychology and sociology with specialized journals like the *Journal of cross-cultural psychology* (Sage), *Cross-cultural research* (Sage) and *Comparative sociology* (Brill) representing these traditions. Publications regularly focus on methodological issues (e.g. Harkness, Van de Vijver & Mohler 2003; Liamputtong 2010) and mostly use functional definitions of religion when studying religious themes (e.g. Roccas 2005). Many scholars working in the humanities (German: ‘*Geisteswissenschaft*’) or cultural studies would not recognize the concerns, research agenda and theory building in these socio-scientific traditions. Our own research is an empirical study of religion, hence our point of reference is the state of the art in this field.<sup>1</sup>

According to Smith (1982) comparison as practised is the result of magic rather than of a scientific method. Smith is referring to J.G. Frazer’s notion of magic. The magician’s logic is based on a confusion of a subjective (i.e. psychological) relationship with an objective (i.e. historical or material) relationship.

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1 We go beyond this state of the art, as readers will see in the rest of this chapter. Obviously empirical research into religion can also learn a lot from socio-scientific cross-cultural research. See e.g. the strict methodological rules for establishing different levels of equivalence discussed later in this chapter.

Just like a magician, the scholar of religion too often makes associations based on similarity or, more particularly, on a recollection of similarity. “*The chief explanation for the significance of comparison has been contiguity. The procedure is contagion*” (Smith 1982, 21; italics in original). The subjective idea of similarity between two things is projected onto an objective connection by invoking a theory of influence, diffusion, borrowing and the like. Most comparisons are not the result of systematic discovery, but are based on impressionistic similarity. With some exaggeration one could say that the development of scientific theory is not based on a method with strict guidelines for the researcher, but on the rich imagination of the scholar. Reacting to this critique, we should stress that comparative research needs strict methodological rules which are meticulously followed by the researcher. Valid theory can only be the result of correct application of these rules.

A second cardinal criticism regards the “tension between a concession to the centrality of historical processes over against a-historical constructs” (Smith 2000, 26). Smith’s critique is made in the framework of a discussion of four basic modes of comparison: ethnographic, encyclopaedic, morphological and evolutionary. Of the different approaches, Smith considers the morphological method in the history of the study of religion the most adequate mode of comparison. “Fundamentally, morphology allows the arrangement of individual items in a hierarchical series of increased organization and complexity. It is a logical, formal progression which ignores categories of space (habitat) and time” (Smith 2000, 23). An example of this logic is the dyad ‘original/corrupt’, in which a generative original element (the archetype) is compared with an individual manifestation of this element. For example, the pan-Babylonian school (e.g. Jeremias) considers the Babylonian religious system ‘original’ and the Canaanite system secondary or ‘corrupt’. “Here a seasonal, naturalistic interpretation has been given to the ‘Babylonian’ cosmic cycle: the god of sun and spring who, after his victory over winter, built (or rebuilt) the world and took charge of its destiny” (Smith 1982, 29). Historians of religion have followed two main trends in this morphological research mode. Either they study history thoroughly and continue its diffusionist programme stripped of its systematic and theoretical depth (e.g. the pan-Babylonian school) or they sever the pattern and its systematics from history (e.g. Éliade) (Smith 1982, 29).

What can we learn from this analysis about the principles of comparative research? We will redefine the relationship between history and patterns (or systematics) in cross-religious empirical research as a relationship between theory and data. Smith’s point is that the study of religion lacks a clear focus on the reason for comparison. This reason should be explicated and related to specific research of empirical data. The only possible reason for academic

empirical research is theory building. According to Smith this is manifestly missing in the field of history of religion. A second rule for comparative research which we can formulate against the background of this discussion is the need for a clear theoretical agenda in comparative research and a clear focus on theory building. There should be clarity not only about the 'how' (method) but also about the 'why' (theory building) of comparative research into religion.

A third criticism which Smith raises is the exclusive stress on similarity in comparison while ignoring difference. Smith (1982, 35) quotes Wittgenstein: "But isn't *the same* at least the same? We seem to have an infallible paradigm of identity in the identity of a thing with itself... Then are two things the same when they are what one thing is? And how am I to apply what the one thing shows to me to the case of two things?" In comparison we are always dealing with difference and similarity. If things are completely identical, there is no need for comparison. "Comparison requires the postulation of difference as the ground of being interesting (rather than tautological) and a methodological manipulation of difference, a playing across the 'gap' in the service of some useful end" (Smith 1982, 35). Later Smith (1987, 14) reformulates this last sentence by changing "in service of some useful end" to "to achieve some stated cognitive end". The manipulation of difference in research serves the purpose of theory building. Difference gives rise to thought, in the sense that we test whether our theory holds good in (historically, culturally, etc.) different situations. Difference should not be overlooked, but needs to be regarded as productive with a view to a theoretical agenda (cf. Smith 2004, 17). On the basis of these insights we can formulate a third rule for cross-religious comparative research: comparison needs careful manipulation of difference(s) between things (situations, beliefs, practices, feelings) while keeping other aspects constant (the same). Absolute difference is the end of comparison. That is why we define the careful manipulation of difference, so that we know in what respect a comparison is made. If our theory holds good under different conditions, we regard it as more robust (in the Popperian sense). But it is theoretically equally interesting if we need to adjust our theory in order to fit different situations.

In the 1990s the debate on comparison led Smith to reflect on its aspectual characteristic. Smith was challenged to reflect on this issue by Fitz J.P. Poole's reaction to his 1982 paper. Poole (1986, 55) pointed out that comparison does not concern phenomena *in toto* but only aspects of them. In history of religion comparison based on a holistic assumption was traditionally made in terms of essence and singularity. This holistic assumption is associated with the idea that the essence is 'given' in the data, which is presumed in the phenomenological approach to comparison (Allen 2005). But comparison deals with

aspects rather than comprehensive realities. Comparison “gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relations between his or her theoretical interest and data stipulated as exemplary” (Smith 1990, 51). Smith also stresses that comparing aspects of phenomena is the result of a theoretical focus: “We ‘re-vision’ data as *our* data in order to solve *our* theoretical problems” (Smith 1990; italics in original). The selection of aspects of comparison is based on our theoretical agenda (i.e. theory building). Smith expresses this idea differently, saying that a comparative statement is never dyadic but triadic. The logic behind comparison is never “*x* resembles *y*” but “*x* resembles *y* more than *z* in respect to...” (Smith 2004, 23). The objects of research (*x, y, z*) are compared in respect of their specific characteristics. A common criticism of comparative empirical research is the limitation of the observations to certain aspects. While observations can be more open when using qualitative in addition to quantitative methods, in the end all comparison is confined to a limited number of aspects of the research objects. Hence comparative research is done with regard to some aspects of the research objects that are considered relevant from a specific theoretical perspective. This theoretical perspective is the third element of the comparison.

A fourth element to be added to this state of the art is awareness that comparison is not an end in itself. In his essay *The “end” of comparison* Smith (2000) points out that comparison is a route to a re-description of the research object and a reformulation of the academic categories used in research. The goal of comparison in empirical research is to test our description of reality and to falsify our academic categories or, on a higher level, our theories. Comparison has different phases: before, during and after comparison.<sup>2</sup> It starts with description of a given example in a rich texture (social, historical and cultural) and second-order categories. The second phase is comparison between different exempla from the perspective of a certain category or theory. The third phase is re-description of the exempla in light of each other and (possible) rectification of the categories used in the comparison. So if comparison is not the ‘end’, what is it? The answer is: generalization. “As with comparison, generalization brings disparate phenomena together in the space of the scholar’s intellect” (Smith 2004, 31). Comparison often evokes surprise, which calls for correction of our description and our categories. Hence we want to formulate

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2 Smith speaks about four moments (Smith 2000, p 239). The first (description) includes second-order categories, which he breaks up into two different moments after the comparison. We think it is logically more correct to keep data and categories together both before and after the empirical comparative research. Hence we speak about three phases: before, during and after comparison.

a fourth rule for cross-religious comparative research: comparison aims at generalization of our second-order categories, that is the concepts we as researchers construct in terms of a theoretical frame of reference.

The final point concerns the inclusion of normative questions in cross-religious comparative research. Smith is sometimes criticized by scholars working in a postmodern paradigm for not paying enough attention to normative issues. For example, Urban (2004) cites the political dimension of comparison and the danger of abusing or privileging some interests at the expense of others. The objection to Smith is not that he neglects normative issues in comparative research. Smith repeatedly insists that the study of religion always involves an interested perspective relating to some intellectual agenda (Smith 2000, 239). On the other hand he also insists that religious research is ‘value-free’, that is scholars of religion have no fixed normative, political or ethical position in relation to their data. This could be interpreted as implying that the scholar of religion has no normative stance. According to Urban this is not what Smith is suggesting. Time and again Smith points out that religion is an imagined category, the construction of academic scholars. “Hence we must remain relentlessly self-conscious and self-critical about how we go about imagining and deploying the particular, highly charged, and volatile academic construction” (Urban 2004, 32).<sup>3</sup> This leads us to infer a final rule from this debate: comparative research into religion should include critical normative discussion of the academic categories and theories in the context of a specific society.

## 2.2 Goals of Cross-religious Comparison

What could be the goal of cross-religious comparative research? According to Smith the general goal of all comparison should be the generalization of second-order categories. Smith stresses this goal, because in the study of religion there seems to be a strong preference for one type of research (especially descriptive research) at the expense of other types (especially explanatory research) (Jensen 2004). This almost exclusive preference for descriptive comparative research is hampering theory building in the study of religion, and therefore needs to be corrected.<sup>4</sup> Although we agree with Smith about the

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3 This applies a fortiori to research on religion and violence. Chapter 8 deals specifically with normative issues and the socio-political context of our research.

4 This exclusivism is often based on a *sui generis* approach which separates ‘religious things’ (practices, experiences, feelings) from nonreligious things (Taves 2009). Based on the distinc-



importance of generalization, we distinguish between four goals of cross-religious comparative research. All four are equally valid and none should be excluded. We base our distinction of four research goals on the work of the Dutch philosopher of science Kuipers (2001; 2005; 2007), who can be characterized as a neo-classical scholar in the line of Kuhn and Lakatos. Before identifying the different goals, we will argue that it is not possible to avoid comparison in research.

As mentioned already, to many scholars J.Z. Smith's critical analyses of comparative research in his paper *In comparison a magic dwells* (Smith 1982; 2000) was reason enough to abandon cross-religious comparison altogether. But this was only one reaction. At the same time many forums and congresses were organized on the topic to try to recapture the possibilities, goals and methods of comparative research (cf. Patton & Ray 2000; Gothóni 2005). Many tried anew to legitimize comparative approaches to the study of religion. What's more, they claimed that it is impossible to avoid comparison for at least three reasons (Jensen 2004, 50–51).

The first reason relates to the way the human mind works. According to cognitive scientists the information processing in our minds relies on complex ways of categorization. Everything is stored in memory via processes which presuppose some operation of comparison. "Comparison is the basic method underlying categorization, and categorization is the pathway for cognition or information processing" (Carter 2004, 7). There is no way to avoid comparison, because it is the way our minds work. In other words, there are no categories inherent in the phenomena which we study. Categorization by comparison is implied in the way the human mind (including the scientist's mind) works.

The second reason relates to the socio-cultural process of comparison between groups and cultures. We cannot think about other groups and cultures without making distinctions between them and us. We cannot but make comparisons in our daily dealing with other individuals and groups. This is not a deliberate act: we do it intuitively.

Thirdly, comparison is an essential rationale implied in all scientific research. This was stressed by Smith when he said that comparison is never between two things but between two things "with respect to something else" (Smith 2004, 17; cf. Van der Ven 2010, 117). Every act of categorization uses a conceptual lens by means of which two things are seen as similar or dissimilar. As stated above, there are no distinctions, characteristics or aspects pertaining to phenomena as such. There are only categories relevant from a theoretical

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tiveness of 'religious things' some types of empirical comparative research are excluded (notably explanatory research).

perspective. Hence we conclude that no scientific thinking is possible without comparison.

Research is fundamentally an interested enterprise, that is it serves the agenda of a research programme. This idea was introduced into the philosophy of science by Kuhn and Lakatos, and since the 1980s it has become more or less accepted that science develops in encompassing units called research programmes (Kuipers 2007, 2). Scientific development does not proceed through the development of specific hypotheses and theories, but in more encompassing terms. Structural features of research programmes are:

- (1) a *domain* of existing or not yet existing phenomena;
- (2) the *goals* of solving some problem associated with it, be it finding its true description or its true theory, or the construction of an intended product or concept,
- (3) a *core idea*, or a set of coherent ideas couched in a certain vocabulary, about how to solve the problem, and
- (4) additional ideas, *heuristics*, suggesting how to safeguard the core idea against prima facie failures to solve the problem (Kuipers 2005, 31; 2007, 63–64).

We want to emphasize that the term ‘research programme’ does not imply a ‘strong’ rationalist concept of scientific research. A strong rationalist approach presupposes “universal, hard and fast premises, clear-cut concepts, straight and narrow theories and universal, irrefutable test results” (Van der Ven 2010, 95). The epistemological position of strong rationality implies that our scientific claims about religion can only be accepted from a position beyond the origins of our knowledge. Put differently, the principle of fallibilism demands that we need to ground a scientific theory about religion(s) not in the origins of our knowledge (context of discovery) but in the rules and norms of inquiry (context of justification). “Our claims to knowledge are legitimized not by their origins – for the origins of knowledge are diverse and fallible – but rather by the norms and rules of inquiry itself” (Bernstein 1971, 175). We cannot claim absolute knowledge; we have only fallible knowledge, that is knowledge which can stand the test of falsification. Although we want to agree with this principle of fallibilism, we think it is impossible to exclude one’s epistemic communities from scientific research into religion. “We begin our conversations by bringing our fallible views and judgments to those who traditionally make up our epistemic communities” (Van Huyssteen 1999, 265). Each judgment is made in the context of a specific community, and is based on arguments and ideas which are accepted in that community. We cannot abstract from a

*conversational context* when justifying concepts, ideas and viewpoints. 'Weak' rationalism demands that we should extend our individual evaluation to communal evaluation, and further to trans-communal evaluation (Van Huyssteen 1999, 265). This does not imply a demand to include all possible rational agents in our justification, regardless of time and place. If we were to stipulate that, it would be impossible to determine the validity of our justifications. Scientific truth is something that is established over time by the community of inquiry, including future generations and different contexts.

Following Kuipers (2001; 2005; 2007) we distinguish between four types of research programmes based on their different cognitive results, namely descriptions, explanations, products and concepts. Connected with these different results are different producers, namely scholars conducting fieldwork or (quasi-) experimental research, theorists, designers or engineers, and philosophers. Clearly this distinction is ideal-typical and most academic research is a mixture of two or more types, in which one type appears to dominate.

Descriptive programmes are the first type of research. They are meant "to describe a certain domain of phenomena, primarily in terms of individual facts (individual programmes) or primarily in terms of general observable factors (general or inductive programmes)" (Kuipers 2001, 6; 2007, 59). With regard to individual facts, one thinks of rituals of different ethno-religious groups. General observable factors refer to, for example, "the (quasi-) law that when people have made a decision there is active seeking out of information which is consistent with the action taken" (Kuipers 2007, 7; see also chapter 8 of this book). Descriptive programmes are also known as observation programmes: the research takes the form of more or less selective observations, and the resulting facts are couched in so-called observational terms. If these observations are fundamentally based on (quasi-)experiments, one speaks of experimental programmes. We like to stress (again) that observational terms are not given by the natural world but form the specific glasses through which researchers look at their research object. In the field of comparative religion the phenomenological approach (associated with scholars like Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw and Mircea Éliade) is closely connected with this type of research programme, but the approach is not restricted to phenomenology of religion. The goal of describing a certain domain of phenomena is also characteristic of ethnological, linguistic, sociological, anthropological and other scholarly approaches to religion. But in history of religion the phenomenological approach is dominant. It sees itself as a descriptive approach allowing for direct intuiting and description of phenomena as they appear to us in immediate experience (Allen 2005, 7). A phenomenological approach presumes that we "experience a real, objective, given world of religious phenomena and

meaning; the given religious world of the other, a linguistically and culturally and historically structured world of meaningful religious phenomena, a world of religious texts, contexts and interpretations not of my creation" (Allen 2005, 23).

Explanatory research programmes have a different aim. "They are directed at the explanation and further prediction of the observable individual and general facts in a certain domain of phenomena" (Kuipers 2005, 29). An explanatory programme is (quasi-)deductive, while a descriptive programme is dominated by inductive reasoning. Explanatory programmes are always built on underlying descriptive programmes. For this reason explanatory programmes are often developed along with underlying descriptive programmes. Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, for example, forms the theoretical ground of an explanatory programme linked to a programme that describes how "when people have made a decision there is active seeking out of information which is consistent with the action taken" (Kuipers 2007, 7). The theory of cognitive dissonance explains the observation as follows: "being psychologically uncomfortable, [it] gives rise to pressures to reduce the dissonance and to achieve consonance. The strength of the pressure is a function of the magnitude of the existing dissonance" (Kuipers 2007, 6). Kuipers stresses that several explanatory programmes can arise from the same descriptive programme. The observations of religious rituals, practices, beliefs and emotions can be explained by different theories. For example, secularization theory (e.g. Wilson, Bruce) and religious market theory (e.g. Finke and Stark) both profess to explain religious decline and revival. Next, one could critically evaluate to what extent these theories indeed envisage elements of religious decline and/or revival (Aarts et al. 2008; Aarts 2010; Sterkens & Vermeer 2011). This last example illustrates that some explanatory programmes are more successful at explaining certain observations but less successful at explaining others. The principal tools in explanatory programmes are so-called "theoretical terms, denoting fundamentally new concepts, which have not yet been firmly established as observation terms" (Kuipers 2005, 30). An example is the ritual form hypothesis, which posits that participants look for signs of God's activity in the form of a ritual (Lawson & McCauley 1990; McCauley & Lawson 2002). There are two decisive principles. The first is the principle of superhuman agency (PSA). The core question here is which ritual element primarily links God with the ritual. It could be a ritual actor (e.g. the priest) fulfilling an intermediary function between the participants and God, or a ritual element such as holy water or holy scripture. The second principle is that of superhuman immediacy (PSI). This refers to God's primary manifestation in the form of the ritual. Rituals are persuasive because the form of the ritual activity gives participants an experi-

ence of God's activity. The intensity of a ritual experience relates to the intensity of concomitant emotions. The ritual form hypothesis introduces new theoretical terms and principles into the study of religion, but these need to be connected with observational terms in order to research the predictions implied in this theory empirically (cf. Hermans 2009b).

Design research programmes involve the design and construction of products (Kuipers 2005, 30). The term 'product' should be taken broadly: the results of design programmes need not be products in a strict sense but may also be processes or their improvement. This type of research is often neglected in academia in favour of description, explanation and prediction. However, research in the field of organizations and policy is mainly design research (Van Aken et al. 2008) or policy research (Verschuren 2009). Since design programmes often use knowledge obtained in descriptive and explanatory programmes, the design process will only be considered *scientific* if it is not fully based on existing knowledge and techniques. That is, new theories have to be developed or new experiments have to be performed if a design programme is to be scientific (Kuipers 2005, 30). There is a long tradition of design research in education (McKenny & Reeves 2012). We have no knowledge of design research programmes in cross-religious comparative research, but that doesn't mean they don't exist or wouldn't be possible. One can imagine research into religious organizations which have developed a programme for religious revival. How do local communities in different contexts (regions, countries) process this programme? What factors are conducive to successful implementation in local religious organizations? Or one can imagine design research into products (instruments, tools, models) which help people to process their spiritual biography. This research programme could include the development and testing of a protocol of pastoral counselling of people in different contexts (e.g. hospital settings and religious institutions) and different religious groups (e.g. Christians, Muslims, Hindus). It could include research into the development and implementation of a programme format for television (or internet) structured according to core aspects of a spiritual biography. The knowledge acquired in such research should solve the question: under which conditions in terms of time, space and budget, communicative skills needed by presenters, sequence, interviewing style and theological content can the product achieve specific goals of creating understanding in the spiritual biography of other people and in their own biography?

Finally, explicative research programmes are directed to concept explication, that is the formal construction of simple, precise and useful concepts that are, moreover, similar to given informal concepts (Kuipers 2007, 62). The strategy of concept explication starts by deriving conditions of adequacy from the

intuitive concept to be explicated and, if relevant, from empirical findings, which the explicated concept will have to satisfy, and evident examples and counter-examples that the explicated concept has to include or exclude. Explication may go beyond what the explicated concept has to include or exclude and beyond the explication of intuitive concepts. It may also aim at the explication of intuitive judgments, that is intuitions, including their justification, demystification or even undermining. An example of concept explication in comparative religion is J.Z. Smith's study of the concepts of similarity and difference in comparison, and their relationship. But one can also think of critical approaches in comparative religion directed to the entanglement of religion with social and cultural power structures (Urban 2004; Sakaranaho 2005). Explicative research focused on the critical study of concepts should be strongly encouraged in comparative research because of the perennial danger of using the intuitive ideas of a specific religion as a (implicit) criterion of comparative concepts of religion in general.

### 2.3 Object of Cross-religious Comparison

What is the object of cross-religious comparative research into religion? The obvious answer is religion, or the religiosity of persons who belong to a particular religious tradition. But in the study of religion this answer is less self-evident than it seems. Scholars of religion strongly disagree about the definition of religion. This poses a major problem for all researchers of comparative religion when it comes to their research object. In this section we examine two major questions. The first is the question whether religion, and more specifically religious experience, is something unique (or *sui generis*). Put differently, should our definition set religion apart from everything else in life, both in human experience and in human culture? The second problem regards the kind of definition of religion we should opt for. This is related to the question of the distinctiveness of religion. Is this distinctiveness inherent in religion, a function of religion, or is it located in something outside religion?

Is religion unique or *sui generis*? The answer to this question splits the field of research into different camps: scientific study of religion and theology. The arguments pro and con in the different disciplines are basically the same, hence we see this as one debate. In historical perspective a *sui generis* approach to religion was dominant until four decades ago: for Mircea Éliade the essence of religion or religious experience was the sacred;<sup>5</sup> for Rudolf Otto

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5 Cf. Éliade (1958, xiii): "a religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied as something religious. To try to grasp the essence

(2004/1917) it was the numinous; and for Gerardus van der Leeuw (1963) it was divine power. For Schleiermacher (1799/2008, 46) it was the experience of something great which makes a person feel completely dependent (German: *schlechthiniges Abhängigkeitsgefühl*). This preference for a *sui generis* approach has shifted dramatically in recent times in favour of counter arguments. The two main arguments in favour of such an approach are: (1) a common core model of religious experience, and (2) the need to base our knowledge of religious experience only on data provided by religious subjects (Taves 2009, 20). The common core model refers to common features of religious experience relating to the transcendent. These common features are often connected with mysticism (see chapter 4 of this book). Arguments supporting this claim are that this type of experiences is difficult to explain in naturalistic terms (Davis 1989); strong empirical evidence of mystical experience in research (cf. Hood 2006); and reports of mystical experience that is not the subject of cultural transmission of any religion (cf. Hood et al. 2009, 375ff). The second argument stresses that religious experiences are reported by subjects and need to be treated as data for scientific research. This is the way religious subjects interpret their experiences and one cannot override their understanding. Wayne Proudfoot, a philosopher of religion, has labelled this tendency to override the understanding of the subjects themselves as descriptive reductionism. "Subjects' experiences, that which the researcher seeks to explain, must be described in a way that the subjects would recognize" (Taves 2009, 89).

What are the arguments against a *sui generis* approach? In the first place, research based on a *sui generis* approach takes for granted what needs to be 'proven'. From the outset the researcher takes it for granted that the experience is *religious* (Taves 2009, 22). There is no way to falsify this claim. By the very choice of certain subjects (notably their specific experiences, practices, feelings) the research result is already known: this is a religious experience with common core characteristics. This puts the study of religion outside the scientific community, which presupposes possible falsification of any claim in empirical research.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, a *sui generis* approach restricts comparison to similarity and overlooks difference. This has given the whole field of comparative religion a bad name (see critique by Smith in 2.1 above). Religious experience is not to be compared with anything else in personal or collective life. It

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of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other [discipline] is false."

6 We do not understand the principle of falsification in a 'strong' rationalistic way (see above). A scientific claim needs to be put to the test by epistemic communities other than our own and by researching subjects who can possibly falsify this claim.



can only be 'compared' with the same (if one could call this comparison at all!). A *sui generis* approach "sets the study of religion apart and protects it with taboos against comparing it with nonreligious things" (Schüssler-Fiorenza 2000; Taves 2009, 14). This implies that comparative research into religion does not include nonreligious experiences, because there is no ground for comparison. Religious experiences can only be compared with religious experiences. Thirdly, a *sui generis* approach obscures something that scholars of religion should study, namely the process whereby people constitute things as religious or not (Taves 2009, 21). They 'essentialize' the bond between an experience and the ascription of religious meaning to the experience. How and why subjects ascribe a specific meaning to this experience is beyond questioning. One simply assumes that this meaning is connected with this experience. Fourthly, a *sui generis* approach takes the subjects' claims about their experience (of the transcendent, sacred, divine power) to be true in a 'strong' sense (Taves 2009, 89). It seeks to base scientific knowledge of religious experiences on the truth claims of subjects. In doing so, it overlooks the difference between the way subjects describe their experiences and the way researchers describe them. One can also be true to the claims of religious subjects "in a weaker sense if we take subjects' accounts of their experience as a description of what needs to be explained, without assuming that we need to explain it in their terms" (Taves 2009, 89). A final critique of a *sui generis* approach is that religious experience is a type of experience 'before' beliefs and attitudes are linked to it. The assumption is that there is an immediate apprehension of the absolute or an immediate experience of mystical union, which is only later interpreted by the subjects in terms of certain beliefs or attitudes. Cognitively one cannot think of human experiences unconnected with the symbolic meaning system of subjects or their emotions. This critique does not have to be taken to the point that we recognize only culture-sensitive processing of experiences (Taves 2009, 93). There is also culture-insensitive (bottom up) processing of religious experiences, for example those studied by research programmes based on cognitive science of religion.

In line with the foregoing critique we reject a *sui generis* approach to cross-religious comparative research. We do not regard religion (especially religious experience) as something completely different from everything else in personal and societal life. Still, we need to define our research object (religion) as distinct from (although not incomparable with) other cultural phenomena. If we were unable to distinguish religion from other personal and societal phenomena, the study of religion could just as well be cultural studies. So how do we define and demarcate religion? There are three possible ways to identify this distinctiveness: by locating it in the substance of religion, in the function



of religion or in something beyond the religious. We outline each of these approaches and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

In a substantive definition the distinctiveness of religion is associated with some key internal features (experiences, practices, beliefs, emotions) which are considered religious by a specific epistemic community. "These features may be the necessary and sufficient qualities for designating a given phenomenon as 'religious', or they may constitute elements of a system of 'family resemblances' whereby no *single* feature is absolutely required for a phenomenon to be – more or less – religious" (Arnal 2006, 26). The feature mostly associated with substantive definitions of religion is reference to a supernatural or extramundane reality, for example supernatural agents like gods, ghosts, spirits, buddhas or ancestors (Pyysiäinen 2009). These supernatural realities are not necessarily essentialized or reified; they can also be identified as cultural postulates. Some 'things' in a culture (e.g. practices or institutions) or in individual or collective experiences (beliefs, emotions, desires, intentionality) are seen as religious if they put subjects in touch with the supernatural. This can be done in two ways: such 'things' are either manifestations of the supernatural, or subjects can relate to the supernatural via these 'things' (e.g. in prayer, contemplation, offerings). In the first case, human subjects are the patients of supernatural agents; in the second case supernatural realities are the patients of human actions (McCauley & Lawson 2002). Which features are considered religious depends on the researcher's epistemic community (embedded in a specific research programme) and the objects (religious individuals and communities) under investigation. In a comparative research programme studying different Christian traditions a substantive definition will have more specifically Christian features. In a comparative research programme studying different religions a substantive definition will have features shared by all the religions involved.

Characteristic of a functionalist definition is that the content of 'religion' is arbitrary (Arnal 2006, 27). What is 'sacred' for one person is 'profane' for another: the distinction is purely formal. It is not content that defines religion, but some fixed cultural, societal, political or psychological role (cf. Arnal 2006; Platvoet 1999).<sup>7</sup> A functional approach to religion focuses on the role and ef-

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7 Cobb (1990), for instance, has a clear preference for a functional definition in comparative research into religion; at the same time he stresses the need to describe religious phenomena in the cultural context in which they need to be comprehended. "There is no such thing as religion. There are only traditions, movements, communities, people, beliefs and practices that have features that are associated by many people with what they mean by religion" (Cobb 1990, 82). Also: "I see no *a priori* reason to assume that religion has an essence or that the great

fects of religion in personal and societal aspects that cannot (in a substantive sense) be called religious. Put differently, religion is defined exclusively in terms of its practical role or function. A well-known example in the study of religion is Durkheim's distinction between sacred and profane. For Durkheim the sacred refers to "the feeling of effervescence" that accompanies occasions of communal solidarity. Religion is thus defined by its social function rather than by any distinctively religious content (cf. Arnal 2006, 25). According to this definition the flag of a country can be a religious object. On the other hand, magic is excluded from the category of religion because of its private character: it cannot fulfil the social functions which Durkheim has in mind in his definition of religion.

A third type is a reductionist definition. It is not always recognized, in that it is seen as a variant of the functional definition (Arnal 2006, 27). What we defined as functionalist can also be regarded as a non-reductive type of functionalist definition. Scholars using a 'common core model' (notably phenomenologists of religion) sometimes speak about a reductionist definition of religion if religious experience is stripped of its unique attribute of referring to a supernatural reality. This is not the same as what we call a reductionist definition of religion. A definition of religion is reductionist if religion is nothing but a social factor on a societal level or a psychological factor on a personal level (Van der Ven 2010, 97), or the result of a neurological process. Here religion is reduced to something which is not religion. For example, Marx defined religion in terms of its function of offering consolation for the afflictions of this world. Freud identified religion in terms of its role as a neurotic outlet for the social need to repress anti-social drives (Arnal 2006, 25). Some explain religion exclusively in terms of neurological brain processes.

How do we evaluate the different definitions' usefulness for cross-religious comparative research. Both substantial and functional definitions are suitable for comparative research. A reductionist approach is less suitable, because the distinctiveness of religion evaporates into something nonreligious. The weakness of a functionalist approach is that there is no clear demarcation of the object of comparative research. Its criteria of what makes phenomena religious are too broad. The research object is clear on the basis of these criteria, but it is unclear what to exclude (Arnal 2006, 28). For this reason we prefer a

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religious traditions are well understood as religions, that is, as traditions for which being religious is the central goal. I certainly see no empirical evidence in favour of this view. I see only scholarly habit and the power of language to mislead. I call for a pluralism that allows each religious tradition to define its own nature and purposes and the role of religious elements in it" (Cobb 1990, 84).

substantive definition in comparative research into religion. There is a second reason. However provisional and in need of justification by research and critical debate in ever widening epistemic communities, a substantive definition tries to capture religion by means of some features of the phenomenon that presents itself in human life as religion or the religious. This type of definition also includes (or is in the process of including) the meaning of religious 'things'.

From a cognitive perspective one can distinguish between different aspects or dimensions on which the description and explanation of the religious can be based, namely form, function, structure and meaning (Jensen 2004, 53). For example, a (religious) ritual has a certain form, like the use of offerings, the presence of special ritual agents or the ritual element which links God with the ritual (cf. McCauley & Lawson 2002). The same ritual also has a function, like establishing communication with a supernatural agent or establishing a community of believers. The structure of the ritual refers to the arrangement underlying the form (e.g. the structure of a rite of passage in Van Gennep's sense). Meanings are implied in the intentionality of the actors, that is what they have in mind when performing a ritual. Substantive definitions (can) include the (religious) meaning for the actors, which is excluded in functional and reductive definitions. We therefore opt for a substantive definition in our research, in which we consider differences in the religious meaning system to predict differences regarding religion and conflict. The religious meaning system contains descriptive beliefs about the self, the world and contingencies and expectations, as well as prescriptive beliefs about goals, actions and feelings connected with supernatural agents (Silberman 2005a; 2005b; see chapter 8 of this book). The content of this belief system tells us which beliefs, feelings and expectations in the minds of religious believers are associated with religious violence. We need to know the content of this meaning system, because the same religion can be a source of peace and human fulfilment and a source of the most extreme forms of violence (Juergensmeyer 2003). We cannot restrict ourselves to the person's religious self-categorization (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc.), because one cannot brand certain religious traditions as violent and others as nonviolent without further qualifications. Believers of the same religion can have both ideas which support violence and ideas which engender nonviolent attitudes. Hence we need a substantive definition of religion (with specific attention to the meanings in the minds of adherents of different religions) to define our object of cross-religious comparative research into religiously inspired conflicts.

That does not mean that a substantive definition is problem free. On the contrary: why should we assume that certain features are important to demarcate a 'thing' as religious? One can hardly determine what religion is without

explaining how it works and where its origin lies. Concepts or phenomena cannot be characterized as religious in their own right: they derive this qualification from an overall framework of concepts and codes, in terms of which they are interpreted as religious. Detailed description of the meaning of religious concepts is virtually impossible if it excludes their function. But it is equally difficult to pin down religion in purely functional terms, that is in a manner totally divorced from whatever concrete form that religion assumes. We need to be aware of these questions in order to open our categories to debate in wider epistemic communities than our own.

#### 2.4 Insider and Outsider Perspective

In what terms (categories, concepts, ideas) is it possible to understand and explain the religious (practices, beliefs, experiences, etc.), and to what extent can we understand and explain the religiosity of other persons, communities and traditions? This thorny question has divided comparative religious researchers up to this day. We classify the question under the insider-outsider perspective in cross-religious comparative research into religion. With due regard to the *emic/etic* debate in the study of religion, we clarify the insider and outsider perspectives. We argue that the two perspectives need to be interrelated in comparative research, and clear up some misunderstandings about this distinction.

The insider-outsider distinction refers to the epistemic community from which categories are derived and in which the research findings are formulated. Do terms used in the research come from insiders (e.g. participants in a religious practice or those with religious experiences) or from outsiders (i.e. academic scholars or non-adherents of the religious tradition concerned)? Every inquiry, both scientific and non-scientific, starts from knowledge that is familiar. What is known to the researcher? Scientific inquiry aims at new knowledge, but it can only do so based on existing knowledge. In section 2.1 we touched on this issue when we formulated the fourth rule of comparative research into religion, namely that the goal of comparison is generalization of our second-order categories or theories. According to Smith comparison often triggers surprise (i.e. new knowledge), leading to correction of our description and categories (i.e. existing knowledge). Smith (2004, 30) cites the following example: “[...] the theoretical second-order language appropriate to one domain (the known/ familiar) may translate the theoretical second-order language appropriate to another domain (the unknown/ the unfamiliar). Perhaps the strongest example of this procedure in the study of religion is Durkheim’s

translation in *Elementary Forms* of the language appropriate to 'religion' (for him, in this work, the unknown) into the language appropriate to 'society' (for him, in this work, the known)."

*Emic* and *etic* are technical terms that Pike (1967) originally derived from the suffixes of the linguistic terms 'phonemic' and 'phonetic'. Phonemic refers to any unit of significant sound in a particular language and phonetic refers to the system of cross-culturally useful notations that represent these vocal sounds. Pike (1967) used these technical terms to indicate to what extent the terminology of foreign cultures is used to describe a given tradition. In religious studies, too, this dichotomy is used to indicate to what extent the description and analysis of a tradition employs the terminology used by its actual adherents. In an emic approach a tradition is described in terms of the conceptual framework and interpretive religious codes and super-codes found in the tradition under investigation. An emic approach to religion seeks to describe religious concepts and the concomitant feelings and behaviours as closely as possible in accordance with the informant's own description (i.e. the believer or the religious tradition in question). An etic approach seeks to organize, systematize and ultimately compare the collected data in the terminology of a conceptual framework designed by the researcher or his/her research tradition. The etic tradition is detached from the religious tradition under investigation and makes use of extraneous concepts, in terms of which the data are reinterpreted or defined. It can therefore treat several cultures at one time. The *emic* approach is culture-specific and is applied to one culture at a time (Pike 1999, 28).

Insider perspective refers to the religious person, community or tradition in terms of the knowledge of that epistemic community. This is not the same as information presented by that person, community or tradition. The researcher can be seen as someone who is learning to understand the knowledge of the other. The outsider perspective takes as its knowledge base second-order categories from scientific theories and uses that knowledge to understand a religious person, phenomenon or tradition. In both cases the researcher is an outsider (i.e. belonging to the academic epistemic community), who adopts either an insider or an outsider perspective. The study of religion is not to be confused with the production of religion (or 'religion-in-the-making'), just as academic linguistics is not about the production of language (i.e. as a user of language). The researcher belongs to the academic community and adopts an insider or an outsider perspective. If one adopts an insider perspective, the knowledge one builds as a researcher is informed by and formulated in terms of the knowledge of a particular religious person, community or tradition.<sup>8</sup> We

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8 A researcher never copies the research object: "a theory, a model, a conceptual category cannot be simply the data writ large" (Smith 2004, 31). The researcher's terms (theoretical notions)

suppose as researchers that we have access to this insider knowledge. If we were completely ignorant of this knowledge base, we could not adopt an insider perspective. We would stray into unknown territory without any clue about what we are seeing. The categories we use from an outsider perspective are general, transcending the specific research object (i.e. the religions or the religious people that we are studying). As researchers we must have some knowledge (the known/familiar) on which to base our research. We are not aliens coming from an alien planet! We are always *in medias res*, that is, in the midst of understanding the research object based on what is known about it (McCutcheon 1999, 10). In a cognitive paradigm all knowledge reflects an epistemic community. The insider perspective reflects the epistemic community of our research object (i.e. the religion under investigation); an outsider perspective reflects an object-invariant position beyond a specific religious community, tradition or phenomenon. Every research object can be studied from both an insider and an outsider perspective. For example, we can research the experiences of God's presence in the Catholic ritual of the Eucharist. From an insider perspective his presence is closely connected with the bread and wine blessed by the officiant in the liturgy (e.g. the priest) and shared by all the communicants. From the insider perspective the bread and wine are the 'real' presence of Jesus Christ. Based on the knowledge of the Catholic epistemic community, the experiences of participants in a concrete ritual (such as the pope's open air Eucharist on World Youth Days) are researched. This knowledge is based on second-order rather than first-order terms. For example, the researcher uses the phrase 'holy bread/the consecrated host as the real presence of God', while the participants express themselves in sentences like: "It tastes a bit like heaven" or "When I received the bread at the communion I felt God's presence" (cf. Hermans 2009b). The same ritual can also be researched in an outsider perspective, such as the ritual form hypothesis (McCauley & Lawson 2002). This theory developed from a cognitive paradigm, that is the perspective of cognitive constraints placed on ritual participants by the form of the ritual. The epistemic community comprises academic scholars studying religion from the perspective of cognitive science of religion. The assumption is that people intuitively search for agency in the ritual, especially for a culturally postulated supernatural agent (God). Two core principles of the ritual form hypothesis are superhuman agency (PSA) and superhuman immediacy (PSI) (see above). The ritual form hypothesis classifies the Eucharist as a special agent ritual, in which the ordained priest mediates God's agency and bread

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are always second-order; not to be confused with first-order terms of the religious persons who are being studied.

and wine are considered to be a ritual element entailing the direct presence of a supernatural agent. It is the same ritual, but expressed in terms of another knowledge base. In cognitive science of religion scholars claim to have knowledge about the cognitive constraints which they apply to the field of religion in order to build new knowledge.

The next question is which perspective is preferable in comparative research into religion. Logically there are three positions, which can all be traced in the study of religion (McCutcheon 1999).<sup>9</sup> Some scholars claim that it is only possible to study our research object from an insider perspective. In the study of religion this position is pre-eminently associated with the phenomenology of religion (Allen 2005). Other scholars claim the reverse: it is impossible to study religious experience, ideas, feelings, practices, et cetera from an insider perspective, because these phenomena are opaque to the researcher. The only possible position for the researcher of religion is an outsider perspective (McCutcheon 1999, 4). The third position rejects this dichotomy, and accepts that it is possible to understand our research object (the other) from both an insider and an outsider perspective. We will call this third approach the reflective position (McCutcheon 1999, 8; Van der Ven 2010, 116). The ideological battle between these different positions can be reduced to one basic question: is the knowledge base of one specific epistemic community the only possible way of studying religion, or is every knowledge base relative, that is dependent on the epistemic community which formulates the research object in terms of what they profess to know? Following a 'weak' rationality, we reject any claim that some epistemic communities have greater knowledge of a research object (the other) than other epistemic communities. An insider perspective is no better qualified to understand the other than an outsider perspective. And an outsider perspective is no less capable of understanding the other than the insider perspective. In both cases the researcher adopts a perspective, and in doing so, adopts a specific knowledge base from which religious phenomena are studied. From a reflective position the insider and outsider positions are not mutually exclusive. In terms of a 'weak' rationality it is not only possible but also necessary to expose the knowledge of our epistemic community to evaluation by wider epistemic communities. The whole academic community is ultimately the forum where we should offer our knowledge for critical evaluation, not

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9 McCutcheon distinguishes between four positions. He defines one position as neutral to the truth claims of the research subjects (McCutcheon 1999, 6–7). McCutcheon introduces a new dimension to distinguish this position from the other positions. Logically one can only distinguish between types on the basis of the same dimension (here either insider or outsider perspective).



just here and now but to all future researchers. At the same time we should bear it in mind that researchers and research programmes have a limited capacity to evaluate their findings in ever expanding epistemic communities. This limitation is not problematic as long as we remember that the ultimate forum for evaluation of all knowledge is the community of inquiry 'without limits'.

In this process of expanding evaluation and reflection an outsider perspective has some benefits compared to an insider perspective. Following Van der Ven (2010, 112–113) we formulate three advantages in terms of the diachronic (length), synchronic (breadth) and abstraction (height) levels of academic knowledge of religion. An outsider perspective has advantages over an insider perspective in that it can include religious phenomena in different times and places. This is illustrated by the difference between an insider perspective on the Catholic Eucharist and the ritual form hypothesis as an outsider perspective. The ritual form hypothesis enables one to study rituals in different historical periods and places beyond the institution of the Eucharist in the 2nd century Christian community and the doctrine of the 'real presence' after the 12th century. This diachronic perspective can be extended beyond the Christian era and to other geographic regions (Egypt, the Far East). The same applies to a synchronic dimension of knowledge: an outsider perspective is better able to include different kinds of religious phenomena (e.g. different rituals or different religious experiences) in the knowledge base of a research programme. For example, the ritual form hypothesis enables one to study different types of rituals of different religions and not just the specific type of one religion (e.g. the Eucharist). Finally, it is easier to reach a higher level of abstraction from an outsider perspective. For example, with the help of the ritual form hypothesis one can study rituals on a higher level of abstraction, which the concept of the Eucharist does not permit. The two principles of superhuman agency (PSA) and superhuman immediacy (PSI) are formulated more abstractly than the Eucharistic idea of transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The fact that an outsider perspective has advantages in cross-religious comparative research into religion does not mean it is superior to an insider perspective. A reflective approach in comparative research presupposes mutually critical interaction between different perspectives. This also implies that an insider perspective can understand or explain a specific phenomenon which an outsider perspective cannot. For example, in a study of an open air Eucharist researchers registered that the fellowship between participants was experienced by participants as moments of God's presence. The ritual form hypothesis cannot explain these experiences, because it connects cognitive

constraints with the form of rituals. From an insider perspective (e.g. Catholic sacramental theology) the idea of a community of believers is crucial for the ritual practice of the Eucharist (Hermans 2009b). This challenges the ritual form hypothesis to broaden its knowledge base in order to be able to comprehend the experience of these participants.

The decisive distinction between the insider and outsider perspectives is thus not the source of the knowledge but the aim. In the outsider perspective categories (beliefs, practices, feelings, organizations etc.) of religious persons and communities are translated into scientific categories that permit interreligious comparison (Van der Ven 2010, 112). In the insider perspective researchers try to formulate their research findings in terms of the categories used by the religious persons or communities themselves. The aim of the study is to deepen understanding of the categories from the perspective of that religion. Bearing this distinction in mind, we will clear up some misunderstandings about the distinction between insider and outsider perspective – what it does not mean.

The first misconception connects the terms ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ with different research goals. Research from an insider perspective is defined as descriptive research, and research from an outsider perspective is identified with explanatory research (Van der Ven 2010, 108). Harris (1979), for example, argues that the goal of comparative research into religion is not to describe what insiders might mean by their beliefs or practices, but rather to find explanations of why they do what they do or think what they think. The question of the research goal is not to be confused with the question of the possibility and extent of knowing the other. It is possible to do descriptive research from the perspective of both insiders and outsiders; and one can do explanatory research from both an outsider and an insider perspective. For example, one can describe a ritual (a Catholic Eucharist or Hindu offering of fire) from the perspective of the insider (participant) but also from the perspective of the outsider (scholars using the ritual form hypothesis) as a special ritual agent.

Secondly, it is a misconception to identify the insider/outsider distinction with ‘experience-near’ and ‘experience-distant’ (Geertz 1999, 51). “Experience-near is, roughly, one that someone – a patient, a subject, in our case an informant might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied to others. An experience distant concept is one that specialists of one sort or another – an analyst, an experimenter, an ethnographer, even a priest or an ideologist – employ to forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims” (Geertz 1999, 51). The distinction between insider and outsider is not a difference in closeness to experience or about the

way individuals express themselves about this experience. How can one distinguish between words that are experience-near and experience-distant? Geertz is aware that this is a matter of degree, but at the same time gives as an example 'fear' as more experience-near than 'phobia'. But this is not necessarily the case: 'fear' can be a concept in an outsider perspective, and 'phobia' can be a word used by interviewees to describe themselves. The decisive question is this: to which knowledge base or which epistemic community does a category (term, concept, idea) belong? This can be the epistemic community (religion, religious community) that is the object of our research. But in this case, too, our knowledge is not the same as 'the data writ large' (Smith). The categories used in an insider perspective are again second-order categories (see 2.1). The labels or words may be the same as the ones used by our research subjects, but they are couched in terms of our insider knowledge as second-order categories.

A third misconception is to equate the insider perspective with belief and the outsider perspective with unbelief (Van der Ven 2010, 109). The distinction insider versus outsider perspective refers to the faith of the believers who are our research subjects. The heart of religion is belief in God (or generally, a supernatural agent). Can scientific researchers from an outsider perspective (i.e. a nonbeliever's perspective) understand the object of their faith, that is God? This question can also be formulated the other way round: can religion (from an outsider perspective) be understood if one believes in God (i.e. an insider perspective) (McIntyre 1999)? Each perspective speaks its own language, but they cannot understand each other! However, the insider versus outsider distinction is not between belief and unbelief. In principle, our academic theories are never about religious truth claims about God. Truth claims feature in our theories only indirectly if we base our research on a substantive definition of religion, that is our research subjects state that they have experiences '*coram Deo*' (before God). Our knowledge, also from an insider perspective, is about subjects who claim to experience some supernatural agent (God). Our academic knowledge is about human subjects, human practices, human experiences – period! This also implies that the researcher does not have to be an adherent of the religion under investigation. As we said before, one adopts an insider perspective. I do not need to believe in dharma, karma or moksha in order to understand from an insider perspective what Hindus mean by these concepts. If you cannot adopt an insider perspective, don't study a religious phenomenon or religion from an insider perspective.

A fourth misconception is to equate the insider perspective with normative claims and the outsider perspective with neutrality or methodological agnosticism (Van der Ven 2010, 109–110). The idea is that researchers who adopt an

insider perspective immerse themselves in their research subjects and take over the latter's normative claims. Researchers with an outsider perspective distance themselves from their research object and are therefore neutral and objective. This distinction is nonsense, because there is no research without normative claims – neither from an insider perspective nor from an outsider perspective. Every researcher needs to explicate the normative implications of the research. This is certainly true of comparative research into religion, which has often neglected its normative (and political) implications (Urban 2004). Even simple categorizations like native versus non-native religions have an enormous impact on society, as can be seen in India where Christianity is defined as non-native (i.e. foreign) by Hindu nationalists. This definition may become a ground for legitimating violence against Christians. Every researcher has a normative stance which has political implications outside the academic community. Researchers have an obligation to explicate this normative stance. This is different from impartiality and objectivity. Impartiality means that the research object should be studied independently of our own (non-)belief and our own interests. Van der Ven (2010, 110) remarks that this is a regulative idea (in a Kantian sense) as opposed to a descriptive idea. Researchers should strive to be impartial, although they must realize that they will never be completely impartial. Van der Ven (2010, 110) quotes Rawls's idea of a rational and sympathetic spectator: "His own interest does not thwart his natural sympathy for the aspiration of others and he has a perfect knowledge of these endeavors and what they mean for those who have them." If we apply this to our study of latent religious conflicts in Tamil Nadu, India, we need to be aware that all the researchers have a Christian background. We are not more sympathetic to the Christian students in our study than to Hindu or Muslim students. In fact, we are critical of all three religious groups, in the sense that we presume that all religions contain ideas which are supportive of violence alongside ideas which support a non-violent attitude towards other religious groups. We adopt a normative stance with regard to the role of women students in Tamil Nadu, because in all the different religious communities women have fewer opportunities than men. But we are impartial (or strive to be) towards the fact that a specific religion (notably Christianity) has a better track record in treating women the same way as men. Finally, some comments on objectivity. Objectivity can be used to qualify our research method in the sense that the results (description, explanation or design) depend on the research method and on nothing else. But objectivity does not apply to the whole of our research, especially not to the knowledge claims of our epistemic community. The reason is that these claims are connected with a specific epistemic community; they can never profess to be objective.

Finally, research programmes can adopt either an insider perspective or an outsider perspective, but also a mix of the two like the research reported in this book. For example, dimensions of religiosity in this study are structured from an outsider perspective (cf. chapter 3). We do so by placing them in a systematic framework using a cultural theory of religion (Ladrière 1988) in combination with the distinction between institutional and personal modes of religiosity (Drisbey 1994). From a cultural perspective we distinguish between cognitive, normative and expressive systems of religiosity. The *cognitive system* refers to the whole set of representations (i.e. concepts and notions) used to interpret and understand reality. The *normative system* is the whole set of values and norms that directs actions and according to which actions are judged. The *expressive system* consists of all the mediations that make the circulation of meanings and values possible. We further distinguish between institutional modes of religiosity which are shared by members of a community, and personal modes of religiosity which are individual expressions of the religious cognitive system, the religious normative system and the religious expressive system.

Our concept of mysticism originates from an insider perspective propounded by Stace (1961) in his seminal work on mystical experience (cf. chapter 4). His conceptualization of mysticism is based on cross-cultural comparison of what religious persons in different contexts claim to have experienced. His conceptual framework comprises three constructs: (a) a distinction between mystical consciousness and its interpretation; (b) a distinction between extroverted and introverted mysticism and their core characteristics; and (c) identification of universal common characteristics. This is an insider perspective because it takes the knowledge of persons claiming to have had a mystical experience (collectively forming an 'imaginative' epistemic community) as a frame of reference for research. The Hood scale of mysticism (Hood et al. 1996; Hood et al. 2001) is a second-order categorization (by an academic researcher) of the knowledge of this epistemic community.

Finally, our categorization of models for interpreting religious plurality stems from an insider perspective (cf. chapter 5). These are taken from conceptualizations of Christian theologians reflecting on different positions in the relationship between Christianity and other religions. Attitudes towards religious plurality are formulated in light of the problem of how to reconcile claims to universality with religious diversity (Knitter 2002). The knowledge claim of this concept is the assumption that all world religions have a universal perspective and in their particularity or uniqueness give rise to religious diversity. Although the concept derives from an insider perspective, it is formulated on a higher level of abstraction referring to different positions (or models) in

the Christian community regarding universality claims of the Christian religion and religious diversity. The different positions or models are second-order categorizations. Here our knowledge base comes from the epistemic community of Christian theologians reflecting on religious diversity.

## 2.5 Selection of Data in Comparative Research

Empirical cross-religious comparative research connects data with ideas. More specifically, data (or observations) are regarded either as evidence of ideas or as proof to the contrary (Ragin 1994; Hermans 2009a). Data are everything 'out there' in reality, but not everything is relevant to the ideas that we want to research through comparison. This question of data selection in relation to scientific ideas is the topic of this section. Which cultures, persons or phenomena does one select for comparison? Which topics and religious characteristics are the focus of our comparison? And what criteria do we apply to make these decisions? The first and paramount issue in data selection is the knowledge aim of our research. All other questions in this section relate to this major issue.

Our theoretical notions in this section derive from socio-scientific literature on survey research (Van de Vijver & Leung 1997; Harkness, Van de Vijver & Mohler 2003). This is, firstly, because the social sciences have a strong methodological tradition in cross-cultural comparative research in contrast to comparative research in religious studies or history of religion, which often lacks sound methodology (see 2.1). Secondly, we are interested in building theory about specific research populations (i.e. religious groups, local religious communities, religious institutions, etc.). A research population is a collection of individuals or subjects with at least one characteristic in common, who form the research object. Research populations can be of any size (small or large), be local or global and can span any period of time (e.g. from new to centuries-old traditions). To give some examples: a population can consist of adherents of a religious tradition, visitors at a meditation centre, devotees performing a specific religious ritual or people visiting a pilgrimage site. In the scientific study of religion we want to make claims about religious traditions as shared, cultural and collective realities. If religion is not shared, it would be impossible to speak about populations. There are strict methodological rules relating the selection of research units (sampling) to the kind of claims one can make about the research population. We think that comparative research into religion has a lot to gain from the social sciences in this respect.

### 2.5.1 *Knowledge Aims in Cross-religious Comparative Research*

Our first issue is the types of knowledge aims found in cross-religious comparative research. We distinguish between four types of knowledge aims based on two dimensions (Van de Vijver & Leung 1997, 20ff; cf. Van de Vijver 2009). The first dimension is the degree of robustness regarding the anticipated similarities and differences. If there are no prior ideas about the nature and size of cross-religious similarities and differences, the research is exploratory. But if there are firm ideas about (the reasons for) cross-religious differences, specific models regarding the relationship between religious and personal/contextual variables may be tested for accuracy in hypothesis-testing research.

The second dimension refers to the exclusion or inclusion of personal and contextual variables to understand cross-religious similarities and/or differences. Personal variables include participants' characteristics that could influence the cross-religious differences observed, like age, gender, language or educational level as well as personal beliefs, values, emotions and strivings. Contextual variables are those factors in the respondents' environment that might influence the cross-religious differences found, like degree of urbanization or level of socio-economic development. If no (or little) attention is paid to personal and contextual variables, the research is characterized as descriptive. If these variables are used as likely causes of similarities and differences, the research can be characterized as explanatory.<sup>10</sup> In the latter case the focus of the study (here the dependent variable) is placed in a structure of antecedent and consequent variables, which explain similarities and differences between religious groups. Based on these dimensions, four types of comparative research can be distinguished, each with a different knowledge aim.

1. Exploratory descriptive research simply wants to determine if there are similarities and differences between religious groups or phenomena. The researcher has no (definite) expectations about possible cross-religious similarities or differences. No theory is available to predict the nature or level of potential differences. For the most part the focus is on a specific target variable, such as a specific ritual of forgiveness, beliefs in holy books or ideas about a supernatural agent. In reflecting on the findings the researcher can only give post hoc explanations of observed differences.

2. Exploratory explanatory research tries to explore the meaning and causes of cross-religious differences with the help of personal and contextual vari-

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<sup>10</sup> Van de Vijver and Leung (1997) do not label the positions in the second dimension. The labels 'descriptive' and 'explanatory' are based on Segers (2002, 119). We do not include the third dimension (structure-oriented versus level-oriented) that Van de Vijver (2009) adds in a more recent article.



ables. Usually a large set of variables is included, because there are no specific hypotheses available for testing. But relevant variables are identified beforehand that are likely to be helpful in interpreting observed differences.

3. In descriptive hypothesis-testing clear expectations based on previous research into cross-religious similarities and differences are put to the test. This type of comparative research tests, for instance, whether findings obtained in one religious group (in a specific context), can be generalized to other religious groups in similar or different contexts. Or it validates cross-religious differences found in a specific context (e.g. between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia) when generalized to other contexts (e.g. Muslims and Christians in the Philippines). However, little attention is paid to characteristics other than the target variable. Personal and contextual factors that might help to explain cross-religious differences are not taken into account.

4. Explanatory hypothesis-testing is theory driven in the sense that one has clear expectations about cross-religious similarities and/or differences. By deliberately looking for cultural variation and the influence of antecedent variables this research aims at testing a theoretical model. Under which conditions does one find similarities or differences in a specific target variable? Contextual variables are crucial to test this external validity.

This book reports on an exploratory-explanatory study. We create cross-religious comparative measures of characteristics that might influence the perception of religious conflict among Christian, Muslim and Hindu respondents, for instance comparative measures of institutional religious practice, mysticism, attitudes towards religious plurality and religiocentrism among our respondents. We also include numerous socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious variables that might help us to interpret cross-religious similarities and differences. Obviously the inclusion of all these characteristics is not unfounded. The personal and contextual variables could influence the perception of religious conflict directly, as well as indirectly via the religious meaning system. But we do not have specific hypotheses based on previous empirical research about the reasons for or the nature and magnitude of cross-religious similarities and/or differences with regard to the perception of latent religious conflict among our Christian, Muslim and Hindu respondents in Tamil Nadu. Such hypotheses simply do not exist. Since we include personal and contextual variables to understand cross-religious similarities and differences but lack a strong hypothesis based on previous empirical research, this is an exploratory explanatory study.

### 2.5.2 *Looking for Differences or Similarities?*

A second question is how we decide what characteristics of the religious groups will be compared, and in which contexts we are going to compare different religions. Apart from the knowledge aim and the specific theoretical orientation, the answer to this question depends greatly on whether one is primarily looking for differences or for similarities between religions. (a) “If the objective is to look for differences, it may be more informative to start with cultures that are similar” (Van de Vijver & Leung 1997, 29). This is because comparable backgrounds reduce the number of alternative explanations of possible differences between religious groups. For example, the respondents in our project are similar in many respects: they are of the same age, live in the same geographical region and study at the same educational level. Cross-religious differences between Hindus in Tamil Nadu (India), Christians in Rome (Italy) and Muslims in Berlin (Germany) would be far more difficult to interpret. If respondents are dissimilar in many respects, one can only guess what the cause of cross-religious differences might be. (b) If one is primarily looking for universal patterns, it is better to choose research contexts which are as different as possible. If cross-religious similarity is observed in the context of what in many other respects (contextual, cultural, ethnic, gender) is very different, it is likely that one can generalize one’s findings with relative confidence. As Van de Vijver and Leung (1997, 30) put it, cross-religious “similarity in the context of drastic differences in other aspects of cultures is highly informative with regard to claims of universality”.

We have said that we develop scientific knowledge about populations. Populations are researched by observing members of this population. In socio-scientific methodology this is known as methodological individualism (Janssen 2010). Although we want to construct new scientific knowledge about a population, we gather data from its individual members. In the social sciences the study of a population through observation of its members is called a survey. Most scholars will think of statistical research using questionnaires when hearing the label ‘survey’. However, we need to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative surveys. The difference between the two types stems from differences in knowledge aim (Janssen 2010). In quantitative surveys the primary aim is to describe the distribution of variables in the population based on frequencies observed in a sample. In qualitative surveys the statistical representativeness of the sample, data quality and precision of estimates (confidence limits) are the main issues, because the aim is to make predictions about the distribution of variables in a population. In other words, the aim is to make claims regarding the generalization of the research findings in populations. “A survey is a qualitative survey if it does not count the frequencies of categories

(/values), but searches for the empirical diversity in the properties of members, even if these properties are expressed in numbers" (Janssen 2010). In short, a qualitative survey establishes diversity or meaningful variation (relevant dimensions and values) in a population, while a quantitative survey focuses on the distribution of a variable in a population. To observe the distribution one has to construct scales which are comparable between different populations. In the process of scale construction the variation in a population is reduced, because to make comparisons one needs to have similar categories (see 2.6: measurement equivalence). Put more concisely, there is a reduction to what is comparable. And this is in fact the strength of a qualitative survey: its aim is to cover all (major) existing varieties of a phenomenon in a population (e.g. aim of saturation). What saturation is depends on the type and degree of saturation that is judged relevant with a view to comparing religious groups. Qualitative surveys can be used for exploratory descriptive purposes as well as for exploratory explanations.

### 2.5.3 *Sampling*

The last issue in the selection of data is sampling. "The ideal sample resembles the structure and characteristics of the whole population. In other words, it is a miniature of the whole" (Häder & Gabler 2003, 118). The definition of the population to be studied has to be clear and unambiguous. The core principle of sampling is that each person who fits the definition of the population should have a non-zero chance of being included in the sample (Häder & Gabler 2003, 119). The degree of compliance with this principle determines the degree of generalizability of the results. The simplest type is random sampling, which gives every member of a population the same chance to be included in the sample. A more complex type is stratified sampling. "The main purpose of stratified sampling is the reduction of the sampling variance relative to that given by a simple random sample" (Häder & Gabler 2003, 120). One can only do this type of sampling if a population list is provided (e.g. a register of all members of a church organization or meditation centre). A third type is a multi-stage sampling procedure. This method is frequently used when no list of members of the population is available (Babbie 2008, 232–236). Although this type of sampling is highly efficient, it is more subject to sampling error than the first two methods. In a two-stage sampling procedure the researcher would first select a sample of units or clusters that represents the population of clusters (e.g. schools with a specific religious affiliation). Next, a selection is made of respondents who represent the population of each unit or cluster. As one can see, this type of sampling is subject to two sampling errors, which make generalizability less certain. This problem can be reduced in two ways: increase

in sample size and increased homogeneity of the elements being sampled (Babbie 2008, 233). These rules should be taken into account in every sampling stage (i.e. in the selection of clusters from the population of clusters and the selection of elements in each cluster). In our research we used a two-stage sampling method. In the first stage we selected centres of higher education (colleges and universities) in Tamil Nadu, India. The respondents in each centre were then randomly selected with the help of the college authorities (see section 1.6).

## 2.6 Levels of Equivalence in Cross-religious Empirical Research

Cross-religious comparative research aims at comparing the religious characteristics of persons/communities/traditions. For comparisons between Christians, Muslims and Hindus this requires the use of qualitative survey measures. But to what extent can survey measures assess similar phenomena across different religious traditions? That is the equivalence at issue in this section. Equivalence is always a question of degree, because comparison is about difference and similarity. If there is no similarity, comparison is impossible. If there is no difference, there is no need to compare. We first discuss the issue of equivalence, and then look at the way in which equivalence can be established statistically. We restrict ourselves to survey designs of cross-religious comparative research.

What levels of equivalence can be distinguished in empirical comparative research? Before answering this question, it should be noted that equivalence is a property of a specific cross-religious comparison. Equivalence is a function of characteristics of both the instrument and the religious groups involved, and is not confined to the measuring instrument as such. If there is no relation between the concepts of one group and those of (one or more) other groups, there is no basis to pronounce on similarity and difference. In that case one speaks of construct inequivalence (Van de Vijver & Leung 1997, 8; Harkness, Van de Vijver & Mohler 2003, 153). For example: how could we compare piety in Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the tradition of Voetius (the so-called *Nadere reformatie*) with the piety of Dogras in Kashmir? What construct could one use to compare piety based on a biblical understanding of strict rules of life with Dogra piety expressed in ritual dance and festivals? Here we deal with cases where comparability is possible to some degree and limit ourselves to equivalence in cross-religious empirical research.

Whether an instrument can be called equivalent, hence suitable for (application and comparison in) cross-religious research cannot be answered with a

simple yes or no. To answer this question a distinction should be made between three levels of equivalence: construct equivalence, measurement unit equivalence and scalar equivalence (Van de Vijver & Leung 1997, 7–26; Harkness, Van de Vijver & Mohler 2003).<sup>11</sup>

The first level is called *construct equivalence* (or structural equivalence). The measuring instruments in different religious groups refer to the same construct, while the stimuli to measure the concept differ. For example, the construct of a literal interpretation of the Bible or the Qu'ran may be considered the same, but the wording of this construct in a measurement instrument will differ. Another example is the measure of 'religiosity' for Muslims used by Sahin and Francis (2002; cf. Khan & Watson 2006) based on the measurement of religiosity among Christian respondents (Francis et al. 1995). While the questions differ, they refer to the same construct. Without construct equivalence intergroup comparison is not possible at all. Construct equivalence requires reflection on the nomological networks of the 'same' constructs in the religious groups that are being compared. This entails comparison of the structure of relationships of constructs in one religious group with the structure of relationships of constructs in another religious group. For example: the relationship of the concept 'Bible' with revelation, inspiration and tradition in Christianity is compared with 'Qur'an' in relation to revelation, inspiration and tradition in Islam. It implies comparison of wordings in which the same construct is measured in different religious groups.

The next level of equivalence is called *measurement unit equivalence*. It presupposes not only construct equivalence but also equivalence of the measurement unit for different groups. It occurs when the measurement unit is identical (at interval level) for different groups, but the origins of the scale are not. Origins of the scale are different when the stimuli (e.g. items) result in different scores for different groups, while these groups do not differ in respect of the measured concept. A well-known example is the measurement of temperature using Celsius and Kelvin scales. Each scale has a different origin, but the distance between points of measurement on each scale is equal. In the case of measurements in the religious domain, if measurements contain implicit or explicit references to a specific culture, the observed differences between

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11 Other authors distinguish types of equivalence – cultural, conceptual, functional, correlative and genetic equivalence – to indicate that comparability is not simply a one-dimensional property as the description of 'levels' of equivalence might suggest (e.g. Nowak 1977; Raivola 1985). Equivalence entails more than simply the degree of comparability. Nonetheless levels of equivalence need specific attention in empirical cross-religious research.

religious groups may not be the result of actual intergroup differences, but may be attributable to a misfit between the measurement and specific cultural backgrounds. Some groups may be 'advantaged' in respect of a measurement, while others are 'disadvantaged' (Van de Vijver & Leung 1997, 8). To illustrate this problem we cite the debate on Kohlberg's measurement of moral development. This instrument is criticized for being culturally biased because it is based on a specific theory of justice that is prevalent in the Western world (in this case Rawls's theory of justice with its strong preference for individual autonomy as opposed to group interests). Moreover, in its original measurements men scored systematically higher on moral development than women. This does not mean that men have 'higher' moral standards than women, but the choice of specific dilemmas that measured moral development seemed to be better adjusted to men's daily lives than to women's (Gilligan & Attanucci 1988).

A second example comes from the measurement of mysticism developed by Hood (1975; 1997; see chapter 4). This instrument is based on a conceptual framework developed by Stace (1961), which is alleged to be cross-cultural, a-historical and unbiased by religious ideology. This claim is challenged by constructivist scholars, who argue that there is no 'common core' in mysticism but that mystical experiences are (at least partly) influenced by culture. From a constructivist position scholars maintain that "persons who score high on mysticism are persons who have developed a feminine self-schema cognitive structure through which they process data in a way that emphasizes the unity of and identification with reality" (Mercer & Durham 1999, 175). If they are right, male respondents would score systematically lower on mysticism measurements than female respondents. It becomes even more complex, because gender interacts with other aspects of culture like religious upbringing and tradition. For example, one may ask whether female Muslim respondents in Tamil Nadu are disadvantaged in scoring on a mysticism measurement compared with female Hindu respondents. The only way to solve this problem in the absence of a scale origin is to administer the same measurement instrument to different religious groups and estimate the influence of cultural characteristics on group scores (Harkness, Van de Vijver & Mohler 2003, 153). For most measurements in the study of religion this work still has to be done. And even for those scales which have been tested more extensively (like the Hood mysticism scale), the results are – to say the least – ambivalent. Knowing this, we should always be critical about the comparability of the measuring instruments that we use, especially when comparing the level of agreement between different groups.

The final and highest level of equivalence is called *scalar equivalence* or *full score equivalence*. This level supposes that the measuring instrument functions at the same ratio level in each group, so that the scores can be interpreted in the same way for all groups. Only this highest level of equivalence permits full score comparability. It is often difficult to decide whether it is a matter of measurement equivalence or scalar equivalence. Most comparative research takes another route, namely by trying to disprove scalar equivalence (e.g. based on Popper's falsification principle). One tries to identify possible relevant sources of bias (e.g. stimulus familiarity or social desirability) and show that "they cannot statistically explain observed cross-cultural differences in a multiple regression or covariance analysis" (Harkness, Van de Vijver & Mohler 2003, 154).

How can cross-religious equivalence be established maximally? The basis is always sound conceptual reasoning based on knowledge of the religious groups that are being compared. This is crucial on the level of construct equivalence but is also the basis of the higher levels of equivalence. To achieve measurement unit equivalence and scalar equivalence we also need to make use of specific statistical methods. In order to establish (at least) measurement unit equivalence, we use two statistical procedures. In the first procedure we assess the dimensionality of the measurement scale via factor analysis. In the second procedure we test whether the scale can be used to compare the ideas, attitudes or experiences of different religious groups by means of measurement invariance tests. See the design of analysis for the technical details of these procedures (1.7 above).

An example is our scale construction for mystical experience (chapter 4). In the first step of our analysis five items were included in the factor 'mystical union'. In the second step, one item ("Did you ever have an experience in which you realized your oneness with all things?") yielded low commonality in the case of Christians and Muslims. In the separate factor analysis of Hindus, this item had quite a high factor loading (.51). In the third step this item had to be excluded from our analysis in order to establish a commensurable scale. What this analysis shows is that the final scale for Hindus in Tamil Nadu underrepresents the experience of mystical union with all reality (i.e. perception of oneness). This is a powerful idea in Hinduism based on an *advaitic* (non-dualistic) view of reality. Accordingly we labelled the scale for mystical union 'vertical mysticism' because it did not include union with all reality. One may feel disappointed by this result in the sense that – based on this factor analysis – one cannot compare the research groups in respect of the perception of oneness with all reality. But the whole point of comparative research is to be able to say something about difference and similarity between cultural groups. One cannot compare groups in respect of incommensurable religious ideas, attitudes



and practices. Only in this last step can we speak of cross-comparative dimensions for all groups.

## 2.7 Normativeness in Comparative Research

All research is normative. This is not problematic as long as normativeness is recognized and reflected upon. This is not something specific to comparative research but a necessity for any research. The thorny question is whether a normative perspective can be used in comparative research. There should be at least some ground for comparison, that is a possibility to establish similarity and difference between religious attitudes, ideas or practices under certain socio-cultural conditions from this normative perspective. There also has to be at least some common ground to establish similarity and difference. Our argument about weak rationality is relevant here: we cannot abstract from a conversational context to justify our normative perspective. Normative perspectives always originate in a specific epistemic tradition and need to be scrutinized and evaluated in a wider (trans-communal) context. This means that any normative perspective can be adopted in comparative research provided it is open to critical evaluation in the different forums of scientific inquiry, namely the scientific community, society and the religions which are studied. In this trans-communal evaluation it is possible to establish the validity of this normative perspective and a basis for evaluating different cultural traditions in ever widening horizons (both in terms of time and place, i.e. other traditions, later generations and societal conditions). We think that there are at least three positions which meet this condition. They can be identified as a critical-hermeneutic route, an abstract principle route and a pluralist-deliberative route (cf. Van der Ven 2010, 122ff).

The first route originates from a specific conception of what is normative in a specific religion. This need not necessarily be the religion under investigation. In a comparative study one can also take one of the religions being researched (e.g. the Christian tradition) and use its normative perspective to evaluate not only the ideas of Christian respondents but also those of Hindu and Muslim respondents. For the Christian students this is an insider perspective and for the other two groups it is an outsider perspective. Of course, there is no such thing as a single Christian perspective: there are many traditions in the Christian religion. It makes a big difference if one takes the normative perspective of the doctrinal authority of a Christian church or the normative stance of specific groups in that same church or religious tradition, such as a feminist group (cf. Gross et al. 2013). This route is characteristic of many

theological scholars engaged in comparative research (e.g. Valkenburg 2006), but it is also found among religious scholars who adopt the normative position of the religious group under investigation (e.g. immigrant Muslim women in a Western country). We call this the critical-hermeneutic route if – and only if – one is willing to adopt a critical stance towards the specific normative position. Put differently, one needs to seek a context of justification beyond the epistemic community of origin. If one is not open to trans-communal evaluation, this position becomes ideological, which is unsuited to comparative research because it does not permit distancing. This critical position is not outside or contrary to the hermeneutic process of understanding based on a specific normative perspective (Dreyer 2005, 13). Accordingly we labelled it ‘critical hermeneutic’: dialectically, it is midway between belonging and distancing, between ideology and utopia.

The second route we label the abstract principle route. It seeks to transcend all specific traditions in a normative evaluation while at the same time formulating a principle that can embrace the specific traditions. A good example is the notion of the golden rule which Van der Ven (2010, 125) uses in his comparative research into human rights. Versions of the golden rule are found in most world religions, Eastern and Western, and in many nonreligious worldviews (e.g. different forms of humanism). At the highest level of abstraction it comprises a negative and a positive form. Its negative form reads: “don’t do to others what you would not have them do to you”. Its positive form reads: “treat others as you would like to be treated yourself”. On an abstract level of formulation the golden rule is never connected with concrete behaviour, while on lower levels of abstraction it is connected with concrete instances (e.g. killing, stealing). The principle of the golden rule is to treat others symmetrically with oneself and to desist from asymmetrical treatment (Van der Ven 2010, 126). When I treat others asymmetrically, which easily happens in situations of unequal distribution of power, resources, social position and so on, there is a risk that I will inflict harm on them. To prevent unjust, harmful or violent acts towards others, I need to treat them symmetrically with myself. The golden rule is formulated in the perspective of ‘I’ and ‘you’, that is it is linked to specific conceptions of what socio-cultural groups and traditions understand to be good and bad. In the formulation of Kant’s categorical imperative two things change in the formulation: it becomes decentred and universalized (Van der Ven 2010, 126–127). It is decentred because it is no longer formulated as ‘I’ and ‘you’ (a specific other) but as ‘I’ and ‘he/she’ (any other). According to the formulation of the categorical imperative, “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.” By the same token I and the

other are treated as members of humanity as a whole. This universalizing character of the categorical imperative rules out any restriction of the golden rule to members of certain groups. Abstract principles like the golden rule and the categorical imperative open up the debate on, for example, the understanding of human rights or religious laws to ever widening horizons of normative evaluation because of their decentring and universalizing character. In other words, the second route implies a two-way critical procedure from concrete interpretations informed by specific socio-cultural and religious traditions to the understanding of this abstract principle, and from this principle to specific interpretations in historical, cultural and contextual situations.

The third route we label 'pluralist deliberative'. Where the first and second routes imply a normative criterion which is considered to be beyond rational doubt (albeit not in a 'strong' sense!), the third route implies a pluralist position vis-à-vis a normative criterion. In the case of the abstract principle route this may be less obvious than in that of the critical hermeneutic route, but this second route also has a criterion which is considered universal: it should be accepted by all in the normative evaluation of certain convictions, acts or laws. The third route goes beyond this by accepting pluralism in normative criteria of normative evaluation. It does not presume acceptance of a moral principle by all participants in a debate. The pluralist imperative implies readiness to deliberate between different, sometimes even conflicting normative perspectives on certain moral ideas or actions (Zwart 1993, 261–264). In the pluralist deliberative route, deliberation per se is the aim of normative evaluation. The result of this deliberation is an ever widening normative understanding of a specific issue. The more moral perspectives embark on the process of deliberation, the richer this reflection on a moral issue. In the long run in the human community as a whole (including the forums of the academy, society and religions) this will deepen our understanding without ever leading to a final conclusion. In our study we opt for this third route (see chapter 7). The reason is that the third route can also incorporate the normative evaluations of the first and the second route. We present our normative evaluation in chapter 7 based on the philosophical ideas of Paul Ricœur, who reflected on the thorny issue of evil throughout his scientific career. In the beginning he clearly follows a critical hermeneutic route when dealing with the symbolism of evil, specifically in the Christian tradition. He takes the second route when reflecting on absolute evil and forgiveness on the basis of the abstract principle that every human (also the perpetrator) is destined for goodness. Following this principle, he argues that one should always put good and evil on different normative planes and give precedence to the good (although evil may seem pervasive and absolute in a concrete context!). According to our reading of Ricœur, critical

hermeneutic and abstract principle reflections are grounded in a fundamental notion of the aporetic character of evil in human thinking. Neither thinking nor moral action can resolve the aporia in the experience of the suffering person. The impossible act of forgiveness, which nevertheless emerges in history, is equally resistant to our thinking. Accepting this aporia in our thinking, Ricœur pursued ever new avenues in his career to understand the moral issue of evil: via the human will, narratives of the suffering person, through the problematic aspects of memorizing and the impossibility of forgiveness. We think that this is what characterizes a pluralist deliberative route.

# Religiosity

## 3.1 Introduction

Since the initial study by Gabriel le Bras (1931; 1955) there has been a growing debate about the typologies, components and indicators of religiosity. Some theoretically identified dimensions have been operationalized and tested empirically. Among others, Glock (1954), Lenski (1961), Stark and Glock (1968), King and Hunt (1972) and Huber (2003) have featured prominently in this debate (cf. Bajzek & Milanesi 2006, 133–138). Several measurements of religious dimensions have been tested cross-culturally, mainly among Christian denominations in different contexts (cf. De Jong et al. 1976). Only a few studies have explored the nature and contents of religious dimensions among Muslims (e.g. Hassan 2007).

This chapter sheds light on the multidimensionality of religiosity in a cross-religious comparative perspective. It is not that the comparative perspective is absent from all previous studies. Stark and Glock, for instance, draw comparisons between Christian denominations and summarize the differences between Protestant churches and the Catholic Church. They identify various dimensions of religiosity that they consider basic and indicate their relevance to other religious traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. However, Stark and Glock's empirical research is limited to Christian denominations in the United States of America. Cornwall et al. (1986), too, propose a clear theoretical framework of religiosity tested on a large sample of Mormons and maintain that their model is adaptable to the study of religiosity in other denominations and groups as well. In our research we take the multi-religious context into account throughout, from the construction of the theoretical framework, through the operationalization of the religious dimensions, to the statistical procedures to establish cross-religious comparability.

In section 3.2 we explain how our theoretical framework expands on Stark and Glock's (1968) concept of religiosity, making it more comprehensive for cross-religious research. In section 3.3 we present the research questions, clarify the construction of the measuring instruments and report the results of the statistical analyses. In section 3.4 we discuss the salient findings.

### 3.2 Theoretical Framework: Multidimensional Approach to Religiosity

Examining religiosity in different religious traditions requires some theoretical lucidity about what ‘religiosity’ actually is. We begin, therefore, by clarifying its multidimensional structure. The seminal work by Stark and Glock (1968) provides a good starting point for a theoretical framework of religiosity. They write: “Beyond the differences in specific beliefs and practices, there seems to be considerable consensus among all religions on the general ways in which religiousness ought to be manifested. We propose that these general ways provide a set of core dimensions of religiousness” (Stark & Glock 1968, 14). They then proceed to identify the core dimensions: “Five such dimensions can be distinguished; in one or another of them all of the many and diverse religious prescriptions of the different religions of the world can be classified. We shall call these dimensions: *belief, practice, knowledge, experience, and consequences*” (Stark & Glock 1968, 14). Note that ‘belief’ is the revised term Stark and Glock (1968, 15) use in their later work, replacing what they originally called the ideological dimension. In addition to the primary dimensions, Stark and Glock (1968, 175) also identify some secondary dimensions, namely particularism, ethicalism and relational aspect. They tend to be a trifle arbitrary, however, in their attempt to deal with all aspects of religiosity. We therefore place the dimensions of religiosity in a systematic and comprehensive framework with a view to testing it in our empirical research. We distinguish between six dimensions, theoretically derived from a cross-classification of three cultural systems (cognitive, normative and expressive) and two social modes (institutional and personal) that are pertinent to religiosity.<sup>1</sup>

In the first place, religiosity cannot be lived in the abstract: it needs to assume a cultural form. This means we have to explore different cultural systems relevant to religiosity. According to Ladrière (1988, 32–35; 1978, 7) culture can be classified into cognitive, normative and expressive systems.<sup>2</sup> The *cognitive*

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1 Cornwall et al. (1986) make a similar – although not completely identical – inventory of six dimensions by means of cross-classification. They combine a somewhat different threefold distinction between cognitive, affective and behavioural components on the one hand, and a distinction between institutional and personal modes of religion on the other. Consequently the cognitive component refers to religious belief in traditional and particularistic orthodoxy respectively; the affective component stresses either church commitment or spiritual commitment; and the behavioural component refers to religious participation and personal religious practice. Also see Huber 2003.

2 Hassan (2007, 437) makes a similar threefold distinction with regard to Islamic religious commitment (i.e. cognitive, ethical and behavioural religiosity), but sticks to Stark and Glock’s five dimensions when structuring his measurements among 6,300 Muslims in Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Malaysia, Iran, Turkey and Kazakhstan.

*system* refers to the whole set of representations (i.e. concepts and notions) used to interpret and understand reality. Besides scientific representations – which have considerable cultural importance – the cognitive system includes mythological, ideological, philosophical and religious representations. The evaluative or *normative system* is the entire set of values and norms that direct actions and according to which actions are judged. The *expressive system* consists of all the mediations that make the circulation of meanings and values possible. In order to be communicated meanings and values, which in themselves are abstract, have to be objectified, that is presented concretely in spoken and written languages, symbols and rites, artistic and aesthetic forms, and so on. Since culture comprises cognitive, normative and expressive systems, we can describe religiosity as the way believers engage in the religious cognitive system, the religious normative system and the religious expressive system.

Secondly, we distinguish between institutional and personal modes of religiosity. Institutional modes are forms of religiosity (cognitive representations, values and behaviour) that are shared by members of a community; personal modes are individual expressions of religiosity (cf. Drisbey 1994, 141). This distinction is made in Stark and Glock's account of the practice dimension when they distinguish between rituals and devotion: "While the ritual aspect of commitment is highly formalized and typically institutional, all known religions also value personal acts of worship and contemplation which are relatively spontaneous, informal, and typically private" (Stark & Glock 1968, 15). When comparing different Christian denominations they affirm that "Catholics are more likely to exhibit institutional than private religious practice", whereas Protestants are more likely to engage in "private rather than institutional religious practice" (Stark & Glock 1968, 124). In short, generally the institutional mode of religiosity refers to formalized religion, while the personal mode comprises individual belief, moral consciousness and individualized religious behaviour. This general distinction of institutional and personal modes of religiosity has been made elsewhere too, with bipolar concepts like 'public' versus 'private' religiosity (e.g. Nonnemaker et al. 2003); 'explicit social religion' versus 'subjective religion' (Dittes 1971); and even 'religion' versus 'spirituality' (Gorsuch 2002, 8ff).

Combining the three cultural systems with the two modes of religiosity gives us six dimensions of religiosity: the religious cognitive system can be understood as institutional doctrinal knowledge and personal belief; the religious normative system as institutional ethical consequences and personal moral consciousness; and the religious expressive system as institutional formal ritual and personal popular devotion (see Table 3.1).

These six dimensions of religiosity are found in one form or another among the primary and secondary dimensions identified by Stark and Glock (1968).



TABLE 3.1 *Dimensions of religiosity*

Cultural systems	Social modes	
	Institutional mode	Personal mode
Cognitive system	<i>Doctrinal knowledge</i>	<i>Belief</i>
Normative system	<i>Ethical consequence</i>	<i>Moral consciousness</i>
Expressive system	<i>Formal Ritual</i>	<i>Popular devotion</i>

What we have termed institutional *doctrinal knowledge* is what these authors call the knowledge dimension. In their view it consists in “information about the basic tenets of their [religious persons’] faith and its rites, scriptures, and traditions” (Stark & Glock 1968, 16). Similarly, the personal *belief* in our scheme refers to the same dimension highlighted by the two authors. In their view “the belief dimension comprises expectations that the religious person will hold a certain theological outlook, that he will acknowledge the truth of the tenets of the religion” (Stark & Glock 1968, 14).

On the one hand Stark and Glock (1968) identify ethicalism as only one of the secondary dimensions of religiosity, although at the outset they affirm that “[g]oing to church, believing, and acting ethically are generally recognized as components of being religious” (Stark & Glock 1968, 11). On the other hand, reserving it as a concern for a later study, they identify implications for behaviour and action as one of the primary dimensions: “religions prescribe much of how their adherents ought to think and act in everyday life” (Stark & Glock 1968, 16). Bearing this in mind, and insofar as the normative system can be brought to bear on institutional and personal religiosity, we distinguish between institutional *ethical consequences* and personal *moral consciousness*.

With regard to the religious expressive system, following the distinction made by Stark and Glock (1968), we include institutional *formal ritual* and personal *popular devotion*. This distinction derives from the fact that religious expression tends to be more spontaneous and popular in personal practice (Bajzek & Milanesi 2006, 179–192). These distinctions and interconnections make our framework more apposite to the dimensions of religiosity identified by Stark and Glock.<sup>3</sup>

3 The only primary dimension not included in our framework is religious experience. The latter is to be distinguished from the religious cognitive, normative and expressive systems as something that precedes and/or follows these. In our research mystical experience is represented separately with the help of Hood’s Mysticism Scale (1975), to be discussed in chapter 4.

### 3.3 Empirical Research

Having clarified the theoretical framework of the dimensions of religiosity, we turn to the empirical phase of our research. First we formulate the research questions that we seek to answer. Secondly, we explain the construction of the measuring instruments based on our theoretical framework. Finally, we present the results of the data analysis.

#### 3.3.1 *Research Questions*

On the basis of our conceptual framework concerning the dimensions of religiosity, the research questions are the following:

- (1) What comparative interpretations of religiosity emerge among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students once group-specific differences have been ascertained?
- (2) Are there significant differences in the levels (dimensions) of religiosity between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?
- (3) Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to the level of religiosity among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?
- (4) Which personal characteristics may be considered predictors of religiosity among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

#### 3.3.2 *Measuring Instrument*

The instrument to measure religious practice operationalizes the six dimensions of religiosity that emerge from combining the three cultural systems (cognitive, normative and expressive) and the two social modes (institutional and personal) relevant to religiosity: doctrinal knowledge and personal belief, ethical consequences and moral consciousness, formal ritual and popular devotion. Below we give some examples of items. For a complete list of items representing these six categories of religiosity, see Appendix C: 'Questionnaire on dimensions of religiosity'.

In the religious cognitive system three items concern institutional doctrinal knowledge and two concern personal belief. Here are examples of each of the two categories: "Are you interested in learning more about the beliefs and doctrines of your religion?" (item 11); "Are you convinced that there is life after death?" (item 20).

In the religious normative system three items deal with institutional ethical consequences and two with personal moral consciousness. Here we offer an example of each of the two categories: "Are you interested in learning more about the moral values upheld by your religion?" (item 18); and "Do you seek God's forgiveness for your wrongdoings?" (item 10).

Since religious practice is particularly concrete in the religious expressive system, we include five items on institutional formal ritual and five on personal popular devotion. Here is an example of each of the two categories: “Is it important for you to participate in the religious worship conducted by a priest or leader of your religion?” (item 12); and “Is it important for you to wear a religious symbol on your body?” (item 13).

### 3.3.3 *Results of Empirical Analysis*

The procedures of scale construction and further data analysis described in chapter 1 (1.7) enabled us to find answers to the four research questions.

Research question 1: What comparative interpretations of religiosity emerge among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students once group-specific differences have been ascertained?

Since we were looking for a single measurement of religiosity covering all six dimensions, we first constructed a correlation matrix containing all items. We decided to eliminate items which showed relatively low correlations with other items, so we started our three-step factor analysis with only ten items.<sup>4</sup> In the first factor analysis for Christian, Muslim and Hindu respondents together one item (item 15) was eliminated because of low commonality. In a second step the factor analysis of nine items was conducted for the three religious groups separately. Five items (2, 5, 10, 14 and 20) had to be removed because they were not common to all three religious groups. In a third step we repeated the factor analysis on the remaining items. Table 3.2 shows the results of this third step, namely, the Principal Axis Factoring (Oblimin rotation method) of the four remaining items for all the students taken as a whole. We first present the results of this third-step factor analysis and then comment on the differences between the three groups that were filtered out in the second step.

The factor analysis for the whole sample in the third step results in a reliable measuring instrument that can be used to compare different religious traditions with regard to (certain aspects of) religiosity. Note that the four items of the comparative model of religiosity represent all three institutional dimensions: doctrinal knowledge (item 11), ethical consequences (item 18) and formal ritual (items 12 and 16). In other words, the comparative model focuses on institutional religiosity, not on personal religiosity. Because all items refer to specific behaviour relating to institutional religiosity, we label it *‘institutional religious practice’*. Hence our empirical observations reflect the tendency among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students only with regard to institutional religious practices.

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4 Items manifesting strong correlations in the correlation matrix: 2, 5, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18 and 20.

TABLE 3.2 *Factor analysis (PAF, Oblimin rotation), commonalities ( $h^2$ ), percentage of explained variance, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of comparative understanding of institutional religious practice among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students.*

		F1	$h^2$
11	Are you interested in learning more about the beliefs and doctrines of your religion?	.77	.60
16	Is it important for you to read the sacred scriptures of your religion by yourself?	.70	.50
18	Are you interested in learning more about the moral values upheld by your religion?	.69	.48
12	Is it important for you to participate in the religious worship officiated by a priest or leader of your religion?	.65	.43
	Cronbach's alpha		.80
	Number of valid cases		1911

Scale: 1=Not at all; 2=A Little; 3=Much; 4=Very much

Explained variance = 49.9%; F1 = Institutional religious practice; N = 1920

Reliability and percentage of explained variance are moderately high when checked for each of the three religious groups separately. As can be seen in Table 3.3, the comparative model of institutional religious practice seems to be most reliable for Hindus.

The foregoing model of institutional religious practice includes only comparable elements between the three religious groups. But when a factor analysis was done for each of the three religious groups separately (second-step analysis with nine items) we found that some items are not relevant to all the religious traditions involved. These items indicate incommensurable aspects of religiosity specific to one or two of the religious traditions.

In the second-step factor analysis for Christians the factor 'institutional religious practice' also included item 2 ("Do you sing and pray together with the adherents of your religion?") with quite a high loading (.56). This means that the comparative model of institutional religious practice underrepresents this formal ritual that is important for Christians. When we do a similar factor analysis for Hindus, we find that the resultant factor includes not only item 2 (factor loading .47), but also item 14 ("Are you convinced of the existence of God?", factor loading .49). Hence for Hindus the comparative model underrepresents not only the institutional formal ritual but also the personal belief dimension. When we do a similar second-step analysis for Muslims we find that besides item 14 (factor loading .61), two other items are included: item 20 ("Are you convinced that there is life after death?", factor loading .46) representing the dimension of personal belief, and item 10 ("Do you seek God's forgiveness for

TABLE 3.3 *Reliability of institutional religious practice, percentages of explained variance, and number of valid cases for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students considered separately.*

	Cronbach's alpha	% explained variance	N
Christians	.69	36.5	866
Muslims	.65	55.1	253
Hindus	.77	46.6	785

your wrongdoings?”, factor loading .51) representing the dimension of personal moral consciousness. The exclusion of these three items from our final cross-religious comparative measurement suggests that the personal mode of religiosity is underrepresented for Muslims.

The final result underlines, firstly, that the comparative measurement of religiosity is institutional in character. Secondly, the results suggest that Christians' understanding of religiosity places greater emphasis on its institutional character and that personal religiosity is rated more highly by Muslims, with Hindus falling somewhere between the other two groups. We shall discuss these findings further in the final section.

Finally, we tested for scalar invariance with Lisrel 8.8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom 2012). The initial model was rejected ( $X^2[df=15]=127.58$ ; RMSEA=0.109) because there were several misspecifications in the intercepts of the items. In order to obtain an acceptable model we had to free the intercept of item 12 for the Hindu respondents, and the intercept of item 16 for Hindus and Muslims. We accepted the final model ( $X^2[df=12]=31.39$ ; RMSEA=0.050) which only had 3 minor misspecifications left in the correlated errors, but because of their small size and the fact that they have no effect on the current estimates we did not solve these misspecifications. The final model indicates that the scale is partial scalar invariant (Byrne, Shavelson, and Muthén, 1989). Which implies that there are at least two invariant indicators per group, and they don't even have to be the same over the groups. This is unproblematic as long as the analysis is continuous within the framework of SEM. However the use of composite scores, the standard way to proceed, requires full invariance. Any deviations from full invariance results in bias in the composite. The seriousness of the bias is related to the degree of deviation from full invariance. There are no rules or measures to decide what a serious deviation is, however, in this case the deviations were only slightly larger than the misspecifications we accept as being harmless for our conclusions, i.e. the delta's we discussed earlier (see section 1.7 on the design of analysis, and section 2.6 on levels of equivalence).

TABLE 3.4 *Levels of agreement (mean and standard deviation) with regard to institutional religious practice for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students; and comparison of means between religious groups of respondents (Scheffé's test: F-value: 373.90 ; sign. <.000).*

	N	Mean	S.d.	Muslims	Hindus
Christians	866	3.16	.68		**
Muslims	253	3.29	.63		**
Hindus	785	2.26	.81	**	

Scale: 1=Not at all, 2=A Little; 3=Much; 4=Very much. Intergroup differences are significant at  $p < .000$  level (\*\*).

Research question 2: Are there significant differences in the levels of institutional religious practice between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

As we can see in Table 3.4, Hindus (mean 2.26) attach least importance to institutional religious practice, and differ significantly from Christians (mean 3.16) and Muslims (mean 3.29) in this respect. The biggest difference in institutional religious practices is between Hindus and Muslims, followed by that between Hindus and Christians. The difference between Christians and Muslims is not significant. It must be remembered that our measurement of institutional religious practice does not include personal religious practice. The greater institutional religious practice among Muslims and Christians may be because both are minority religions, each having a following of less than 6% of the population of Tamil Nadu. Generally adherents of minority religions tend to safeguard their religious identity by laying greater emphasis on institutional commitment. Hindus' lesser involvement may be because Hinduism does not stress institutional religious practice as much as Christians and Muslims do, suggesting that Hindus probably favour personal popular religiosity. But when we check the mean scores of the five items on personal popular devotion we again find that, except for one item (regarding astrology or consulting the horoscope), Hindus' involvement is much lower than that of Christians and Muslims. This may be because Hinduism does not stress religious practice in general, or that Hindu college students are less keen on religious practice. It may also be that adherents of majority religions are usually less fervent religious practitioners than those of minority religions. We discuss this issue further in our final section.

Research question 3: Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to the level of institutional religious practice among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?

What are the personal characteristics of people who set great store by institutional religious practice? We examine these characteristics for Christians, Muslims and Hindus separately. The descriptions help us to interpret the significant differences between Christians, Muslims and Hindus with regard to institutional religious practice. Of course, such an interpretation is not a statistical causal explanation; but we hope that correlations between institutional religious practice on the one hand and personal characteristics on the other will help us formulate further hypotheses on the differences we did find. The following types of personal characteristics are examined: socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious. The category of socio-cultural characteristics includes age, gender, language (i.e. Tamil speaking or not), urbanization and field of educational specialization. Next we consider the following socio-economic characteristics: caste, mother's occupation, father's occupation, mother's educational level and father's educational level. In the category of socio-religious variables we include the number of years respondents attended a religiously affiliated school of their own religion, and the respondent's evaluation of the (positive or negative) role played by some socializing agents in the religious domain. The socializing agents in question are: parents, relatives, friends, religious community, teachers/professors of the students concerned, and the mass media. Measuring instruments for personal characteristics are described in more detail in chapter 1 under research variables (1.5).

With regard to *socio-cultural* characteristics, gender is a significant factor among Christians (.25) and Hindus (.12). We found considerable differences between women and men, with the former attaching more importance to institutional religious practices. Next, Christians living in urbanized areas pay more attention to institutional practice than those living in the countryside, although the correlation is quite weak (.14).

In the case of *socio-economic* characteristics mother's educational level correlates with institutional religious practice among Christians (.13). The higher the mother's educational level, the greater the respondent's interest in institutional religious practice. There are no other significant factors. Socio-economic characteristics do not seem to be very relevant.

With regard to *socio-religious* variables, personal evaluations of the perceived influence of religious socializing agents reveal some interesting patterns of association with institutional religious practices. In all three religious groups the socializing agent that has the strongest association with involvement in institutional religious practices is the religious community. It seems natural that interest in institutional religious practices should be closely linked with a positive evaluation of the socializing influence of religious communities. This association is stronger among Muslims (.35) than among Christians (.28) and Hindus (.29). The mass media have a fairly moderate association with



TABLE 3.5 *Social location of institutional religious practice among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students. Correlations (eta for the nominal variables sex and language; Pearson's r for the other, ordinal variables) between institutional religious practices and some personal characteristics.*<sup>5</sup>

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Age	.09**		
Sex	.25**		.12**
Urbanization	.14**		-.08*
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Education mother	.13**		
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Parents	.10**	.21**	.20**
Relatives	.11**	.30**	.17**
Friends	.08*	.16*	.17**
Religious community	.28**	.35**	.29**
Teachers/professors	.15**	.17**	.22**
Media	.18**	.24**	.25**

Correlations are significant at  $p < .00$  level (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  level (\*).

institutional religious practices among Hindus (.25) and Muslims (.24). The same applies to the correlation with a favourable evaluation of parental influence on religious socialization. Interestingly, close relatives have a fairly strong association with institutional religious practice only in the case of Muslims (.30). It is remarkable that positive evaluation of the influence of teachers and professors on religious socialization shows the strongest correlation with institutional religious practice among Hindus (.22), especially since Christians and Muslims run educational institutions which are said to aim at the religious identity construction of their followers.

Some interesting points for discussion emerge from the foregoing results: the dominant impact of the religious community on the institutional religious practices of the young, whereas its influence seems to be doubted nowadays; the limited influence of educational institutions in the case of Christians and Muslims when these minority groups specifically organize activities and insti-

5 The following characteristics did not show significant correlations for any of the groups of respondents: language, field of specialization, caste, and educational level of the father. These variables are not mentioned in the table.

tutions to promote religious formation of the young; and the role of close relatives in the case of Muslims. We shall discuss these findings in the next section.

Research question 4: Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics may be considered predictors of religiosity among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

We answer the fourth question by means of a linear regression analysis (method: Enter, using SPSS 15), in which the personal characteristics are independent variables and institutional religious practices are dependent variables. However, we only insert personal characteristics that show a relevant ( $r \geq .20$ ) and significant ( $p < .00$ ) correlation with institutional religious practice in at least one of the religious groups. We do not require this level of association of all groups, because we expect different predictors in different religious groups. Hence, to permit comparison of the analyses, we include the personal characteristic in the regression analysis of each group of respondents (Christians, Muslims, Hindus) as soon it proves relevant for one of these groups. Through regression analysis we try to explain differences in institutional religious practice in terms of a variety of personal characteristics. The regression analysis results in an explained variance ( $R^2$ ), in which the independent variables assume certain significant weightings expressed by the standardized regression coefficient  $\beta$ .

Among Christian students (Adj.  $R^2$  .15) gender influences institutional religious practice, with women displaying significantly greater interest in institutional religious practice than men ( $\beta$  .25). Furthermore, a more highly educated mother correlates with greater involvement in institutional religious practice ( $\beta$  .10). Among the socio-religious characteristics, finally, respondents' perception of a positive influence by the religious community ( $\beta$  .24), parents ( $\beta$  .07) and mass media ( $\beta$  .07) predicts greater interest in institutional religious practices.

In the case of Muslim students the analysis yields three significant predictors, which explain about one fifth of the variance ( $R^2$  .20; Adj.  $R^2$  .18). Three socio-religious characteristics significantly predict the importance attached to institutional religious practice, namely the perceived positive role of the religious community ( $\beta$  .26), relatives ( $\beta$  .20) and parents ( $\beta$  .12) in the respondents' understanding and practice of their religion.

Regression analysis of institutional religious practice among Hindu students yields similar results ( $R^2$  .14; Adj.  $R^2$  .13). Here gender proves to have a rather limited influence on institutional religious practice ( $\beta$  .08), while socio-religious characteristics largely explain the variety of institutional religious practices. A more positive role played by the religious community ( $\beta$  .17), parents ( $\beta$  .13), media ( $\beta$  .12) and teachers ( $\beta$  .09) in the religious socialization of

TABLE 3.6 *Regression analyses for institutional religious practices with weights ( $\beta$ ) for each variable and total explained variance ( $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$ ) for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students separately.*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Sex (male 1; female 2)	.25**	-.05	.08 *
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Education mother	.10 *		
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Parents	.07 *	.12 *	.13**
Relatives	.03	.20**	.03
Religious community	.24**	.26**	.17**
Teachers/professors	.01	-.02	.09 *
Media	.07 *	.12	.12**
	$R^2$		
	.15	.20	.14
	Adj. $R^2$		
	.15	.18	.13

Standardised regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) are significant at  $p < .00$  (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  (\*) level.

respondents, at least in their own perception, leads to greater institutional religious commitment.

### 3.4 Findings and Discussion

Some interesting points for discussion have emerged from the results presented above. We take these up with reference to the research questions: the intergroup differences regarding the comparative measurement of institutional religious practice (findings related to research questions 1 and 2); and the impact of religious socializing agents, tradition and gender on institutional religious practices (related to research questions 3 and 4).

#### 3.4.1 *Significance of a Comparative Model of Institutional Religious Practice*

Firstly, we can affirm that this study has established a comparative model of religious practice for Christians, Muslims and Hindus. Contrary to our expectation, personal popular devotion is not included in the comparative measure-

ment of religious practice. More generally, our comparative model doesn't include the personal mode of religiosity at all. This means that our cross-religious comparative model of religious practice is institutional in character. On the whole college-going youths in Tamil Nadu are much involved in institutional religious practice, Muslims and Christians more so than Hindus.

It is not surprising that institutional religious practices are considered important in a multi-religious context like Tamil Nadu, since they express and confirm the individual's membership of a specific religious community. The cross-religious differences between Christians, Hindus and Muslims with regard to religiosity seem to relate to the integration of the institutional and the personal modes of religious commitment. Christians' strong agreement with all institutional aspects corroborates their agreement with our comparative measurement of institutional religious practice, in which they are much involved. For Muslims the integration of institutional and personal aspects gives a different connotation to institutional religious practice as being more associated with extended family structures. This seems to explain the inner dynamics of the growth and vigour of Islam, confirmed by the relatively high involvement of Muslims in institutional religious practices. Our comparative model of institutional religious practice is most reliable in the case of Hindus. This means that our measurement is applicable to the Hindu mind-set as well. Although Hinduism is not an institutionalized religion like Christianity, it could be argued that the overall cultural tradition serves as an institutional basis for the dominant religion in India. Still, Hindus differ significantly from Christians and Muslims, manifesting least involvement in institutional religious practices. It seems that a dominant and relatively less institutionalized religion that is integral to the local culture does not evoke high involvement in religious practice. In a way minority religions that are extraneous to the local culture – as is the case with Christianity and Islam in India – might feel a greater need to nurture their adherents' religious identity through institutional religious practice to avoid assimilation into the majority religion for the sake of their own survival and growth (Carrier 1964, 198–200).

We conclude that the configuration of institutional religious practices and the level of involvement in these are determined by the institutional character of these religions: strongly organized Christianity and Islam with clear rules and prescriptions for their adherents on the one hand, and less formally organized and less regulated Hinduism on the other. The cross-religious differences in involvement in institutional religious practices can also be attributed to the minority or majority status of the religious traditions involved. However, further research is necessary to shed more light on how involvement in institutional religious practices varies according to institutional and personal

enactment of religious traditions, and the relative size and status of the group in wider society.

### 3.4.2 *Impact of Agents of Religious Socialization and Gender*

Two findings on the personal characteristics that affect participation in institutional religious practices merit attention. We found that a positive evaluation of the influence of the religious community on religious identity has a positive effect on institutional religious practices, and among Christian students women show higher levels of institutional religious involvement than men.

The association between the socializing agent 'religious community' and institutional religious practice is perfectly understandable. Insofar as institutional aspects are stressed in religious practice, it is no wonder that socialization by the religious community has a strong impact, even in the less institutionalized Hindu community. But this impact is also understandable in light of the secularizing context of India. Secularization marginalizes religion and diminishes the impact of religious socialization agents such as the family and educational institutions. In such a context it is significant that institutional religious practices of the young are ascribed to the positive contribution of religious communities to religious socialization. This may point to a re-emergence of the religious community as the primary agent of religious socialization in an increasingly multi-religious and secularized world (Bajzek & Milanesi 2006, 77). At all events, it refutes the frequently expressed doubts about the role of religious communities in religious initiation.

The fact that the religious community is the only socialization agent that contributes significantly to institutional religious practice among Christians illustrates the dichotomous situation in which these Christians live. To a large extent they are conditioned by a non-indigenous religious culture, and by an indigenous culture in the other spheres of life. In their case no other religious socialization agent seems to have a significant impact on their involvement in institutional religious practices. In contrast to Muslims and Hindus, Christians' institutional religious practice is influenced exclusively by the religious socialization of their own community. This indicates limited inculturation of the Christian faith in local Tamil culture (Anthony 1997; 1999). It also suggests that the religious socialization of youths is highly institutionalized in the Christian community. In India, where religion is less organized and more spontaneous in its expression, a highly institutionalized religion like Christianity with few roots in the local culture might in the long run lose its relevance and thrust (Panikkar 1984). Even at a wider level, "[Christians] are slowly recognizing the necessity of a new awareness, which is tied neither to (western) civilization nor to (institutionalized) religion" (Panikkar 1993a, 152).

Among Hindus the educational community of teachers/professors has a moderate association with institutional religious practices. Given that Hinduism is the dominant religion, educational programmes naturally favour the institutional religious practices of Hindu students. However, it is strange that Christian and Muslim religiously affiliated schools and colleges do not play a significant role with regard to involvement in institutional religious practices. The educational institutions of the minority communities are intended to nurture their adherents' religious identity and religious practice, and generally they have religious programmes and facilities (e.g. times and places for worship) for this purpose. This again highlights the ambivalent situation in which religiously affiliated schools for minority groups find themselves (Anthony 1999). Possibly the cultural basis of Hinduism inspires the curriculum more than that of the minority religions.

While we find moderate associations between the role of parents and institutional religious practices among Muslims and Hindus, there is no such association among Christians. Christian parents seem to play no relevant role in involving youths in institutional religious practices. Could this be the result of the impact of secularization on Christian families, as is the case in the West?

Similarly, we do not find associations between the role of the mass media and institutional religious practices among Christians, whereas Hindus and Muslims show moderate associations. It is understandable that the mass media are most influential among Hindu students, since this dominant religion receives significantly more attention in the mass media (cf. Farmer 1996; see chapter 2 above). This difference could indicate greater estrangement of Christian life and the Christian community from the mass media culture in Tamil Nadu.

Finally we look at the impact of gender on institutional religious practices among Christians. Christian women are significantly more involved in institutional religious practices than men, whereas gender plays only a minor role or none at all in Hindus' and Muslims' institutional religious practices. How is that possible? Does it indicate a differential impact of modernity on men and women in these religions? Are only Christian men more affected by modernization than Christian women, since there are no gender differences among our Muslim and Hindu respondents? And if so, why (cf. Anthony, Hermans & Sterkens 2007, 119–120)?

# Mystical Experience

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on mystical experiences among our sample of college and university students in Tamil Nadu. With due regard to Stace's view (1961:21) that "nearly all men are in some sense or other rudimentary or unevolved mystics", we analyse mysticism as "a normal phenomenon reported by healthy and functioning persons struggling to find a meaningful framework in which to live out their experience as foundational – as at least what is real for them, if not in some sense as the ultimate 'Real'" (Hood et al. 1996:267).

First we outline the theoretical framework of mystical experience propounded by Stace (1961), which forms the basis of Hood's Mysticism Scale (4.2). Then we list the research questions and describe the construction of our measuring instrument based on Hood's Mysticism Scale (Hood 1975; Hood, Morris & Watson 1993; Hill & Hood 1999; Hood & Williamson 2000), followed by the results of our analyses. Insofar as mystical experience can be linked to personal characteristics we consider its social location, as well as socio-cultural and socio-economic attributes as socio-religious predictors of mysticism (4.3). Finally we discuss the significance of the comparative model of mystical experience (4.4).

Although the Reinert and Stifler (1993) replication of Hood's scale included some Hindu and Buddhist monks and nuns, no comparison based on religious affiliation was reported. Hood et al. (2001) did compare Christians and Muslims using the same mysticism scale. Our comparative research goes beyond these attempts by comparing Hindus with Christians and Muslims, testing for one-dimensionality and scalar invariance. Our comparative study attempts to meet a long felt need underscored by Hood et al. (2001:704). In their view, if comparison of Christianity and Islam is pertinent because both are monotheistic religions with shared historical roots, it is even more challenging to compare them with Hindus because it might yield very different findings.

## 4.2 Theoretical Framework

Hood's Mysticism Scale is based in part on Stace's conceptual framework of mysticism. In his seminal work Stace (1961) outlines a conceptualization of



mysticism that is cross-cultural, a-historical and unbiased by religious ideology. His conceptual framework is based on three constructs: (a) a distinction between mystical consciousness and its interpretation; (b) a distinction between extrovertive and introvertive mysticism and their core characteristics; and (c) identification of universal common characteristics (see Table 4.1).

(a) Stace (1961, 31) distinguishes between *mystical consciousness* and *its interpretation* on the basis of his inquiry into Christian, Islamic, Judaic, Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist mystical experience. He considers it analogous with the distinction between sensory experience and its interpretation, and concedes that we may never come across altogether uninterpreted experience. Nevertheless he (1961, 66) recognizes the directness and seemingly un-interpreted state of unity in mysticism: "The unity is perceived, or directly apprehended. That is to say, it belongs to experience and not to the interpretation, insofar as it is possible to make this distinction." Stace uses the term 'mystical consciousness' in this context, but not always consistently; sometimes he equates it with 'mystical experience', which also includes interpretation of the state of union.

In our view this state of union belongs to the realm of mystical consciousness rather than that of interpretation. Empirical research supports the claim that mystical consciousness and its interpretation can be relatively independent (cf. Hood & Williamson 2000). Mystical experience as a concept entails distinct but not separable aspects of consciousness of union and its interpretation. While mystical consciousness – in Stace's perspective – is basically similar all over the world in different periods and religious contexts, mystical experiences can vary insofar as the interpretations of this state of union may differ from one religious tradition to another.

(b) Stace's second distinction is between *extrovertive* and *introvertive mystical experience*, based on the source of the stimuli that lead to the experience of union. "The essential difference between them is that extrovertive experience looks outward through the senses, while introvertive experience looks inward into the mind. Both culminate in perception of an ultimate unity – what Plotinus called the One – with which the perceiver experiences union or even identity. But extrovertive mystics using their physical senses perceive a multiplicity of external material objects – sea, sky, houses, trees – mystically transfigured so that the One or Unity shines through them. Introvertive mystics, on the other hand, by deliberately shutting off the senses and obliterating from consciousness the entire multiplicity of sensations, images, and thoughts, seek to plunge into the depths of their own egos. There, in that darkness and silence, they claim to perceive the One and be united with it – not as a Unity seen through multiplicity (as in extrovertive experience), but as the wholly naked One devoid of any pluralism whatever" (Stace 1961, 61f).

Stace identifies two core characteristics of extrovertive and introvertive mysticism. *Extrovertive mysticism* is characterized by awareness of unity with the universe or the perception of all things as one (unifying quality), and by apprehension of the One as inner subjectivity or life in all things (inner subjective quality). In *introvertive mysticism* the experience of union refers to a 'pure' state, in the sense that the mystical consciousness has no substantive content and is even characterized by a loss of self (ego quality). Such consciousness of nothingness is accompanied by distortion of time and space (spatio-temporal quality). Stace (1961, 86–87) describes it as follows: "When the self is not engaged in apprehending objects it becomes aware of itself. [...] One may also say that the mystic gets rid of the empirical ego whereupon the pure ego, normally hidden, emerges into the light. The empirical ego is the stream of consciousness. The pure ego is the unity which holds the manifold of the stream together. This undifferentiated unity is the essence of the introvertive mystical experience."

These descriptions of the very essence of mystical experience suggest that the extrovertive type "is an incomplete kind of experience which finds its completion and fulfillment in the introvertive kind of experience. The extrovertive kind shows a partly realized tendency to unity which the introvertive kind completely realizes" (Stace 1961, 132). By pointing out the interconnection between extrovertive and introvertive consciousness Stace underscores that mystics themselves generally do not distinguish between the two types, indicating that there is also a wider set of characteristics common to both extrovertive and introvertive mystical consciousness.

(c) These *common characteristics* of mystical experience, Stace claims, are universal in all cultures, religions and ages. He identifies five psychological and phenomenological common characteristics that can be seen as universal factors directing the interpretation of mystical consciousness: noetic quality (perception of special knowledge or insight), ineffability (difficult to articulate), positive affect (experience of peace or bliss), religious quality (perception of sacredness or wonder), and paradoxicality (Stace 1961, 31–37, 131–132; cf. Hill & Hood 1999, 364).

Following Hood et al. (1996, 257–258), we may sum up the three fundamental assumptions in Stace's proposal as follows: first, despite variations in interpretation, mystical consciousness is universal and essentially identical among people; second, conceptually there is a clear distinction between introvertive and extrovertive forms of mysticism; third, although there is a set of common core characteristics, mystical experience need not always possess all of them, since there can be borderline cases.

TABLE 4.1 *Common core theory of mystical experience (Stace 1961).*

Core Characteristics	
Extrovertive consciousness	Introvertive consciousness
Unifying quality	Ego quality
Inner subjective quality	Temporal-spatial quality
Common characteristics	
Noetic quality	
Ineffability	
Positive affect	
Religious quality	
Paradoxicality	

Stace’s common core theory has been challenged by Katz (1978) and others, who favour diversity theory and “argue that no unmediated experience is possible, and that in the extreme, language is not simply used to interpret experience but in fact constitutes experience” (Katz 1978, 256). Here the category ‘consciousness’ may help to clarify that, whereas we can speak of ‘pure consciousness’ without interpretation or qualification, experience is always interpreted. The opposition between common core theory and diversity theory is compounded by Stace’s identification – at times – of consciousness with experience. As explained above, mystical experience can be seen as comprising both mystical consciousness (consciousness of union with reality/Reality) and its interpretation. While in some cases we may speak of un-interpreted pure consciousness, mystical experience always entails a greater or lesser degree of interpretation of the consciousness of union.

### 4.3 Empirical Research

#### 4.3.1 *Research Questions*

Against the background of the conceptual framework of mystical experience, our research questions are the following:

- (1) What comparative model of mystical experience emerges among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students once group-specific differences have been ascertained?
- (2) Are there significant differences in the levels of mystical experience between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?
- (3) Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to the level of mystical experiences among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?
- (4) To what extent can agreement with mystical experience among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students be ascribed to personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics?

#### 4.3.2 *Measuring Instrument*

The measuring instrument is based on Hood's Mysticism Scale. Empirically this scale has proved apposite in diverse cultural contexts and religious traditions (Hood 1975; Holm 1982; Hill & Hood 1999; Hood et al. 2001). Hood's Mysticism Scale comprises 32 items, half of which are formulated negatively to prevent response set. Originally eight common core characteristics of Stace's concept of mystical experience were operationalized in four items each, but empirical testing led to reporting on mysticism at a more general level. Hood (1975) famously reported a two-component structure, the first corresponding to experience of union, the second being religious interpretation. Caird (1988) and Reinert and Stifler (1993) proposed a three-factor mysticism scale, compatible with Stace's conceptualization: extrovertive mysticism (experience of union with the external world) with twelve items; introvertive mysticism (experience of nothingness) with eight items; and religious interpretation with twelve items (Hood, Morris & Watson 1993; Hood & Williamson 2000).

Since mystical experience is only one of many themes in our overall cross-religious study, we abridged the measuring instrument to twelve items. This was possible because Hood's scale of 32 items consists partly (16 items) of negative formulations, which to a great extent simply reverse the positive formulations. We opted for positive formulations in accordance with our answer format. Each dimension (extrovertive mysticism, introvertive mysticism and religious interpretation) is covered by four items. Our choice of items is based on the inter-item correlations in Hood's initial study (1975) and the results of our own pilot study. Since English is the educational medium (at colleges) of all respondents, it was unnecessary to translate the items. However, it should be noted that linguistic considerations can play a role in evaluating the appropriateness of an instrument in a multilingual context (Van de Vijver & Leung 1997, 38–40).

Note that in Hood's original scale (1975) – which he later abandoned in favour of the three-factor model – the items selected by us represented the eight common core characteristics of mystical experience as follows: ego quality (items 5, 6, 11), spatio-temporal quality (item 2), unifying quality (items 9, 12), inner subjective quality (item 3), noetic quality (items 1, 7), ineffability (item 8), positive affect (item 10) and religious quality (item 4).

Hood used a four-point Likert-type response format ranging from +2 ('this description is definitely true of my own experience/s') to -2 ('this description is definitely not true of my own experience/s'), with no midpoint but with the additional option, 'I cannot decide'. The original format of the item (e.g. "I have had an experience in which a new view of reality was revealed to me") seemed weighted in favour of a positive response and was rather indirect in its approach to respondents' mystical experience. In Hood's formulation the respondents had to choose between 'This description is probably (or definitely) true/not true of my own experience/s'. We opted for a more direct formulation of items and responses. For example, our item 7 reads "Did you ever have an experience in which a new view of reality was revealed to you?" The respondents could answer on a four-point Likert scale: 'Certainly no', 'Probably no', 'Probably yes', 'Certainly yes'. The complete list of twelve items appears in appendix D.

### 4.3.3 *Results of Empirical Analysis*

Research question 1: What comparative model of mystical experience emerges among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students once group-specific differences have been ascertained?

In constructing a comparative model of mystical experience we followed the analysis procedure described in chapter 1 (1.7). When free factor analysis (step one) was run on items manifesting strong correlations (6, 7, 8, 11, 12), they yielded a single factor. In the second factor analysis of the five items for the three religious groups separately, item 12 had to be removed because of low commonality in the case of Christians and Muslims. We found that item 12 ("Did you ever have an experience in which you realized your oneness with all things?") yields low commonality in the case of Christians and Muslims. In the case of Hindus, by contrast, it has quite a high factor loading (.51). In Stace's conceptual framework, item 12 represents 'unifying quality', one of the core characteristics of extrovertive consciousness. It means that the comparative model underrepresents the experience of mystical union with all reality (perception of oneness) in the case of Hindus. We shall discuss this difference in more detail in the final section.

TABLE 4.2 *Factor analysis (PAF, Oblimin rotation), communalities ( $h^2$ ), percentage of explained variance, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of comparative mystical experiences among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students.*

	F1	$h^2$
7. Did you ever have an experience in which a new view of reality was revealed to you?	.56	.32
11. Did you ever have an experience in which something greater than yourself seemed to absorb you?	.49	.24
8. Did you ever have an experience that cannot be expressed in words?	.49	.24
6. Did you ever have an experience in which your own self seemed to merge into something else?	.48	.23
Cronbach's alpha	.58	
Number of valid cases	1869	

Scale: 1=Certainly no; 2=Probably no; 3=Probably yes; 4=Certainly yes  
 Explained variance = 25.8%; F1 = Vertical mysticism; N=1920.

Table 4.2 presents results from the third step, namely Principal Axis Factoring (Oblimin rotation method) of the four remaining items for the entire group of students. The third factor analysis results in a moderately reliable measuring instrument that can be used to compare mystical experience in the three religious traditions. Note that the four items of the comparative model of mystical experience concern the core characteristic of ego quality, namely loss of self (items 6, 11), and the common characteristics of noetic quality (item 7) and ineffability (item 8). These common core characteristics can be considered central in comparative measurement of mystical experiences.

Items 6 and 11 represent the (complementary) active and passive aspects of mystical union implying loss of self: on the one hand it is an experience in which one's self seems to merge into something else (item 6), on the other it is an experience in which something greater than oneself seems to absorb the self (item 11). Although in Hood, Morris and Watson's (1993, 1177) three-factor analysis item 6 emerged as part of extrovertive mysticism, we have seen that in Hood's original scale ("form D") items 6 and 11 represented ego quality (loss of self) that is central in introvertive mysticism (Hood 1975, 31). Hence these two items in our comparative factor point to one of the core characteristics of introvertive mysticism, namely, loss of self in the experience of union with a higher reality.

The other two items (7 and 8) of our comparative model concern the common characteristics of noetic aspect and ineffability. In Stace's theoretical

framework ineffability (“an experience that cannot be expressed in words”, item 8) is one of the common characteristics, but in Hood’s empirical study it turns out to be a characteristic of introvertive mysticism. In the three-factor solution (Hood et al. 2001, 694, 702) among Iranian Muslims the characteristic of ineffability fits the interpretation and introvertive factors equally well. In the case of US Americans, however, ineffability is indicative of introvertive mysticism. The significance of ineffability seems to vary according to religio-cultural setting. Caird’s study (1988, 125) of a small sample of 115 respondents tends to confirm Stace’s view of ineffability rather than Hood’s. The study by Reinert and Stifler (1993, 387) also confirms ineffability as part of the common interpretive categories. We conclude, therefore, that the interpretive category of ineffability has a particular affinity with introvertive mysticism.

Item 7 (“an experience in which a new view of reality was revealed”) has the highest factor loading (.56). In Hood’s three-factor solution items on the noetic aspect form part of the interpretive category. This accords with Stace’s definition of the noetic aspect as a common characteristic that can qualify both introvertive and extrovertive mysticism. Two items in our comparative model (items 6 and 11) deal with the active and passive aspects of loss of self in the union with a greater reality, which is the core of introvertive mystical consciousness. The other two interpretive items (items 7 and 8) concern the noetic quality of this union (leading to perception of new insight) and its ineffable nature (experience of union being difficult to articulate). In its composition the comparative model of mystical experience thus represents a revelatory and an ineffable experience of union with a greater or higher reality. Hence we label it ‘experience of mystical union with a higher reality’ or ‘*vertical mysticism*’.

The reliability ( $\alpha$  .58) and percentage of explained variance (25,8%) of the comparative model of mystical experience are moderate for the whole group (Table 4.2.), and remain almost unaltered when each of the three religious groups is examined separately. We further tested, via confirmatory factor analysis, whether the measurement model is the same for all groups, and whether the factor loadings are the same across groups. Analysis of the data with Lisrel 8.8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom 2012) resulted in an acceptable model fit for the test of scalar invariance ( $X^2[df=18]=38.75$ ;  $RMSEA=0.043$ ;  $GFI=0.99$ ). This means that we can assume that the measurement model is equivalent for the three different religious groups (Christian, Muslims and Hindus) and allows meaningful comparison between these groups.

Research question 2: Are there significant differences in the levels of mystical experiences between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?



TABLE 4.3 *Levels of agreement (mean and standard deviation) with regard to vertical mysticism for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students; and comparison of means between religious groups of respondents (Scheffé's test: F-value: 27.81; sign. <.000).*

	N	Mean	S.d.	Muslims	Hindus
Christians	852	3.13	.61		**
Muslims	237	3.05	.63		*
Hindus	773	2.89	.67	*	

Scale: 1=Certainly no; 2=Probably no; 3=Probably yes; 4=Certainly yes. Intergroup differences are significant at  $p < .000$  (\*\*) or  $p < .005$  level (\*).

As shown in Table 4.3, the experience of vertical mysticism reported by Hindus tends slightly towards ambivalence (mean 2.89), whereas Christians and Muslims evaluate it as 'probably yes' (means 3.13 and 3.05 respectively).

Hindus are found to differ significantly from both Christians and Muslims (Scheffé's test: F-value: 27.81; sign. <.000). We would have expected them to manifest a higher level of involvement, for mysticism is a key component of Hinduism, being both its source and its centre. In Christianity and Islam it is only a minor strand (Stace 1961, 342–343). The lesser involvement indicated by the Hindus' tendency towards ambivalence suggests that vertical mysticism may not be as important for them as for Christians and Muslims. At the same time there is evidence that the comparative model underrepresents mystical union with all reality, thus inadequately reflecting Hindu experience.

Research question 3: Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to the level of mystical experience among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?

This question concerns the social location of vertical mysticism. What are the personal characteristics of people who experience mystical union with a higher reality? We describe the significant correlations for each group of students separately (Table 4.4).

Among Christian students females report a higher level of vertical mysticism (.12). In the case of Christians four socio-religious characteristics are connected with vertical mysticism: perceived positive influence of friends, the religious community, teachers/professors and the media. The strongest association is with the influence of teachers/professors on religiosity (.19).

In the case of Muslim students only socio-religious characteristics are connected with vertical mysticism: influence of relatives, the religious community,

TABLE 4.4 *Social location of vertical mysticism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students. Correlations (eta for the nominal variables sex and language; Pearson's r for the other, ordinal variables) between vertical mysticism and some personal characteristics.<sup>1</sup>*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Gender	.12**		.10**
Language			.09*
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Parents			.08*
Relatives		.23**	.10**
Friends	.12**		.08*
Religious community	.12**	.15*	.14**
Teachers/professors	.19**	.16*	.18**
Media	.14**	.20**	.13**

All correlations are significant at  $p < .00$  level (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  level (\*).

teachers/professors and the media. The strongest associations are with the positive influence of relatives (.23) and the media (.20).

Among Hindu students females report a higher level of vertical mysticism than men (eta .10) and Tamil speakers (.09). For the rest all socio-religious characteristics correlate significantly with vertical mysticism. The strongest association is with the perceived positive influence of teachers/professors on religiosity (.18).

Research question 4: To what extent can agreement with mystical experience among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students be ascribed to personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics?

The results of the regression analysis are rather disappointing (Table 4.5). Among Christian and Hindu students only the influence of the media on their religiosity is a significant predictor. The level of explained variance (.02) in both groups is too low to be theoretically relevant. No other personal characteristic predicts the level of agreement with vertical mysticism.

<sup>1</sup> The following characteristics did not show significant correlations for any of the groups of respondents: age, urbanization, field of specialization, caste, educational level of the father and educational level of the mother. These variables are not mentioned in the table.

TABLE 4.5 *Regression analyses for vertical mysticism with weights ( $\beta$ ) for each variable and total explained variance ( $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$ ) for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students separately.*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Relatives	.00	.20**	.07
Media	.14**	.16*	.11**
	$R^2$ .02	.08	.02
	Adj. $R^2$ .02	.07	.02

Standardised regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) are significant at  $p < .00$  (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  (\*) level.

In the case of Muslim students the analysis shows two predictors which explain 8% of the variance ( $R^2$  .08; Adj.  $R^2$  .07). This level of explained variance is low, but it gives a theoretically relevant profile of Muslim students' level of agreement with vertical mysticism. Two socio-religious characteristics predict a higher level of agreement, namely influence of relatives ( $\beta$  .20) and of persons in media linked to one's religion ( $\beta$  .16). Positive influence of relatives is the strongest predictor and refers to the context of primary religious socialization (i.e. the extended family). But public figures linked to their own religion is a strong predictor of vertical mysticism among Muslim students. No other characteristic (socio-cultural or socio-economic) predicts a higher level of agreement with vertical mysticism. In the case of Muslim students vertical mysticism is influenced by religious models close to them (relatives) and in the media. The more strongly Muslim students are influenced by these religious models, the more they report experiences of vertical mysticism.

#### 4.4 Findings and Discussion

Our points of discussion refer to the research questions: the comparative measurement of vertical mysticism (research questions 1 and 2); and the impact of personal characteristics on vertical mysticism (research questions 3 and 4).

##### 4.4.1 *Significance of a Comparative Model of Vertical Mysticism*

The comparative model of vertical mysticism or mystical union with a higher reality emerging from our analysis is significant for three reasons. In the first

place, it is the outcome of a procedure to establish measurement equivalence that has not been used before in conjunction with the Mysticism Scale. Secondly, as far as comparison between religious groups is concerned, the only study has been that of Hood et al. (2001), which included 188 US Americans (mostly Christians) and 185 Iranian Muslims, with separate factor analyses for each group. In our research 1,920 respondents belonging to the Christian, Islamic and Hindu traditions form a single sample and are compared substantially. Thirdly, from the perspective of Stace's common core theory, as will be seen below, the comparative model offers new insights and prospects.

In our comparative model of vertical mysticism one of the core characteristics of introvertive mysticism, namely a sense of loss of self, combines with the common characteristics of noetic quality and ineffability. It suggests that vertical mysticism has a revelatory, ineffable character. This set of common core characteristics is comparable in the experience of Christians, Muslims and Hindus. However, the model seems to represent only one type of mystical experience, namely mystical union with a higher reality or 'vertical mysticism'. In a way vertical movement in mysticism characterizes Semitic religions. It is alluded to, for example, in the classic of Christian mysticism, *The ascent of Mount Carmel* by St John of the Cross (1542–1591), and in more humanistic terms in *The ascent of Mount Ventoux* by Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), the first modern scholar and man of letters (Robinson 2003). Our research shows that Christian and Muslim students report a significantly higher level of vertical mystical experience than Hindu students. In the case of Muslim students our findings reveal that some socializing agents (relatives and the media) influence the level of vertical mysticism.

While Christians and Muslims are positive about vertical mysticism, Hindus tend towards ambivalence. Moreover, in the case of Hindus the comparative model of mystical experience underrepresents mystical union with a wider reality, one of the core characteristics of extrovertive consciousness (perception of oneness). This is significant, as in the Hindu tradition introvertive search for the ultimate ground of one's being leads to discovery of *Ātman* and extrovertive search for the ground of all reality leads to discovery of *Brahman*. The search culminates in the realization that *Ātman* is identical with *Brahman* (*Ayam Ātma Brahma*, as stated in *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, 2).

Recognizing that the ground of one's being is identical with the ground of all reality is characteristic of Hindu mystical tradition. Since this ultimate ground, *Brahman*, is consciousness (*Prajñānam Brahma*, as stated in *Aitareya Upaniṣad* III, v, 3), in Hindu tradition mystical experience is pure consciousness. In the Vedantic tradition Sankara (788–820) with his philosophy of *advaita* (non-dualism) and Ramanuja (1017–1118) with his *Viśiṣṭādvaita* (qualified

non-dualism) are leading exponents of the nature of consciousness. For Sankara and the *advaita* school consciousness is pure light shining by itself without any subject-object distinction, whereas for Ramanuja and the *bhakti* (devotional) tradition consciousness is a relationship of illumination. Notwithstanding the differences, Sankara and Ramanuja assume consciousness to be the essential nature of spirit, namely of *Brahman* and the individual soul, and on this basis they interpret the nature of the phenomenal world (Chethimattam 1996, 34 and 96; 1971, 54). In the experience of recent mystics like Ravana Maharishi (1879–1950) from Tamil Nadu and Sri Ramakrishna (1834–1886) from Bengal the difference between the two philosophical traditions is perceived as basically a matter of vantage points (Easwaran 1988, 30; Sharma 1993). In relation to the external phenomenal world *advaitic* and *Viśiṣṭādvaitic* consciousness, by underscoring the radical interdependence of all reality, tends to evoke a monistic or pantheistic mystical experience. As mentioned already, our comparative model of mystical experience was found to underrepresent this mystical union with a wider reality in the case of Hindus. It suggests the possibility of horizontal mysticism (union of self with a wider reality) as distinct from vertical mysticism (mystical union with a higher reality), which is more compatible with the Christian and Islamic traditions.

Our model includes the comparable elements of vertical mysticism, which is particularly dominant in the Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Such mysticism generally has a revelatory component and is not easy to articulate (ineffable). In the context of these religions mysticism entails union of the self with the higher reality of God, who sometimes reveals himself and his intentions in an ineffable manner. By contrast Oriental religions like Hinduism and Buddhism tend to emphasize horizontal mysticism in their introvertive and extrovertive search for the ultimate. It leads to union of self with a wider reality, an experience of the radical interdependence of all reality in a non-dualistic sense. The final phase of such mysticism is total loss of self or total realization of Self in pure consciousness.

In this conceptualization loss of self implies emergence of the ultimate reality as pure consciousness. In the Semitic religions there is a strong tendency to see this reality as beyond or above the world as we experience it. This reality is one, absolute and the ultimate ground of the self. The true self is embedded in this reality. By analogy with a distinction made in philosophy of mind (Searle 1985) we could speak of a *self-to-God* direction of fit.<sup>2</sup> The truth of the self is

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2 Searle (1985) distinguishes between a mind-to-world direction of fit and a world-to-mind direction of fit. An example of the former is beliefs. The truth of beliefs about the world is decided by their fit with the state of affairs of the world. A belief is satisfactory when it depicts

decided by the fit of the self with the nature of the absolute reality. Loss of self implies a transformation of the self according to divine reality. The self should mirror this reality, which is beyond anything in the world (including the self). Vertical mysticism is characterized by a *self-to-God* direction of fit. Horizontal mysticism, on the other hand, can be seen as characterized by a *God-to-self* direction of fit. It is characterized by the perception of all things as one, that is by the idea that the divine reality is present in all things (including the self). This implies transformation of the divine reality in order to fit the reality of all things, hence not so much a loss of self as a self that becomes one with this reality. The perception of all things as one is the result of a process of transformation in which the divine reality is realized in all things (including the self). By using the concept of direction of fit we suggest that the movement in vertical mysticism differs from that in horizontal mysticism. In vertical mysticism the divine reality transcends or is beyond the world as we experience it. hence it implies a loss of self because the truth of the self is in God. In horizontal mysticism the divine reality is immanent, that is it is present in everything we experience. Therefore the self should be transformed in conformity with this all pervading divine reality, or brought to God-realization.

The foregoing discussion elucidates that the theoretical distinction between vertical and horizontal mysticism could be fruitful for further comparative research into religious mysticism. In our opinion it might be more fruitful than the introvertive and extrovertive distinction proposed by Stace. The qualifications 'introvert' and 'extrovert' refer more to the (perceived) origin of the mystical consciousness than to the experience of the reality/Reality as such. In other words, vertical and horizontal mysticism may be better categories for interpreting mystical experience.

In addition our research may shed some light on the unresolved debate between Stace's common core theory and Katz's diversity theory. Is there a common structure of mystical experience for all religions (cf. Stace's common core theory) or do religions differ in regard to the type of mystical experience (cf. Katz's diversity theory)? With reference to vertical and horizontal mystical experience the question could be viewed as follows: if Stace is correct, both types of mysticism are present in all religions, and if Katz is right, both types may not be present in all religions, that is religions will differ with regard to specific types of mystical experience. If we consider the results of our research, we find some ground for the Katz's diversity theory. In the process of establishing

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the world adequately. A desire is an example of a world-to-mind direction of fit. The idea is that usually a desire is not yet realized in that it does not refer to a state of affairs in the world. Instead the world is transformed in such a way that it fits the desire.

measurement invariance we had to remove items which can be regarded as belonging to a horizontal model of mystical experience (i.e. oneness with all reality). The items did not seem to fit the mind-set of our Christian and Muslim students.

In the case of Christians this may be due to fear of syncretistic fusion with monistic or pantheistic tendencies. For example, in its *Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of Christian meditation* the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (1990, n. 12) warns against monistic or pantheistic syncretism in the use of Eastern methods of meditation. The problem of a pantheistic tendency may also feature in Islamic theology (Ventura 2000). Obviously further research into horizontal mysticism is needed among adherents of Oriental religions in order to arrive at a fully fledged, empirically tested common core theory or diversity theory that covers both types of mysticism: the vertical and the horizontal.

In conclusion, this brief study underscores the significance of a comparative model of mystical experience. The distinction between vertical and horizontal mysticism looks promising for further theory building. Our findings also point to the limitations of Hood's Mysticism Scale (already foreseen by him) when it comes to comparing very different religions like Semitic and Eastern religions (e.g. Hinduism). Hence we think that the major theoretical problem with regard to mysticism still has to be solved: is there a core structure of mystical experience or does it imply diversity? To answer this fundamental question more comparative research among members of different religions in different geographical contexts is needed.

#### **4.4.2 *Personal Characteristics and Vertical Mysticism***

We found only a limited number of personal characteristics that relate to vertical mysticism. As a result the prediction of 'vertical mysticism' with the help of regression analysis was disappointing. Several characteristics do not relate to vertical mysticism: socio-cultural characteristics like age, language and urbanization; and some socio-economic characteristics like caste and educational level of parents. Further research is needed to see whether agreement with mysticism changes across different personal characteristics and whether this change is the same for members of different religions.



# Interpreting Religious Plurality

## 5.1 Introduction

The Indian subcontinent has long been a melting pot of a wide variety of religious traditions. Through the ages religious tolerance has been a hallmark of this multicultural and multi-religious country. However, the resurgence of local cultural and religious consciousness under the influence of modern cultures and the concomitant process of globalization is increasingly complicating the interaction between religious traditions. This tendency in the Indian context is in keeping with an international phenomenon: the politicizing of religious issues and the mushrooming of extreme fanatical wings in various religious traditions. In some ways the global panorama in the new millennium throws the question of religious plurality, into sharp relief. In societies where religious plurality is a given fact people tend to adopt a pragmatic approach to other religions, shaped by their own religious traditions and their particular socio-cultural susceptibility. Hence we can assume that adherents of the three major religions in India have a specific way of interpreting religious plurality.

The general problem considered in this chapter is: how do Christians, Muslims and Hindus interpret religions other than their own? This is a major question that has emerged in what is known as the theology of religions during the last century. In fact, different models of interpreting religious plurality have been identified. We shall reflect on this theory building, paying special attention to pluralist models (5.2). In our opinion the theoretical conceptualization of pluralist models often remains obscure. In outlining our empirical research (5.3) we clarify the structure of our measuring instrument and present the results of the empirical study undertaken among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students in Tamil Nadu. Finally we discuss salient features of the findings and draw some conclusions about models of interpreting religious plurality (5.4).

## 5.2 Theoretical Framework: Models of Interpreting Religious Plurality

We have reached a stage in history when it seems almost unethical to think about one's religion in isolation from other religions in the world around us. In the latter half of the 20th century Christian communities woke up to this

imperative explicitly and consciously. Making sense of other religions from the perspective of the Christian faith gave rise to many theologies of religions.<sup>1</sup> Most authors in this field work with three models: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism (cf. D'Costa 1986; Wilfred 1995; Sterkens 2001; Amaladoss 2003; Phan 2004; Vermeer & Van der Ven 2004; D'Costa, Knitter & Strange 2011). There seems to be some agreement on the concepts of exclusivism and inclusivism. These two models also have a strong basis in the history of theology. Pluralism, however, is subject to growing debate: are there distinct theological models of pluralism? Does pluralism amount to relativism? Knitter (2002; cf. D'Costa, Knitter & Strange 2011) sums up various theological trends that shed some light on these questions. He perspicaciously classifies the approaches of Christian communities and theologians into four meaningful models: replacement, fulfilment, mutuality and acceptance. We give a short overview of these models, since they provide the basic framework for our research.

### 5.2.1 *Replacement*

The *replacement model* entails exclusive affirmation of one's own religion as the only true religion, hence replacement of all other religions by one's own as the final solution. This approach, which characterized church history up to the 16th century, is epitomized in the famous dictum of the early church fathers, Origen and Cyprian: "*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" (no salvation outside the church). In contemporary Christianity, according to Knitter, Protestant evangelicals and fundamentalists occupy this position. In this model Knitter distinguishes between those who hold out for total replacement and those who recognize a need for partial replacement. The latter group, while acknowledging the possibility of revelation in other religions, denies that they offer salvation. In the contemporary context we realize that similar claims can be made, explicitly or implicitly, by other world religions with a universal view of salvation, such as Islam and Hinduism. In the theological debate this model is generally known as the exclusivist model.

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1 The key theological question around which the Christian theologies of religions revolve is the uniqueness and universality of Christ. Besides this Christ-centred focus, Christian theologies of religions generally also have an ecclesiocentric, theocentric, anthropocentric or soteriocentric focus (Thomas 1985; Knitter 1986; D'Costa 1990; Bühlmann 1990; John Paul II 1991; Dupuis 1991; Kuttianimattathil 1995; International Theological Commission 1997; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2000; Serretti 2004).

### 5.2.2 *Fulfilment*

When Christians attempt to combine their affirmation of God's presence in other religions and the non-negotiable aspect of salvation through Christ alone their approach falls under the *fulfilment model*: other religious traditions will reach their fulfilment in Christianity. This perspective, which was already adopted by some of the early church fathers (Justin Martyr, Tertullian) in their dealings with the Graeco-Roman world, has revived in the mainline churches: Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Anglican, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic. According to Knitter the pioneering works of Rahner illustrate this trend, which acknowledges that God's grace is active in other religions and views them as possible channels of revelation and salvation. At the same time, since Jesus Christ is God's ultimate revelation and the final source of human salvation, those who receive grace in their own religions are unwittingly oriented to Christianity and hence can be considered 'anonymous Christians'. The documents of the Second Vatican Council (*Nostra Aetate* 2; *Ad Gentes* 9, 11, 15, 18) stopped short at this position by acknowledging the presence of 'rays of Truth' and 'seeds of the Word' in other religious traditions, which are thus seen as 'preparation for the Gospel' (*Lumen Gentium* 16).<sup>2</sup> Any further concession would jeopardize the non-negotiable uniqueness and universality of Christ. The existence of non-negotiable elements in other religions suggests that the fulfilment perspective is to be found among adherents of other religious traditions as well. In theology of religions this is generally known as the inclusivist model.

The underlying dilemma of religious pluralism is how to reconcile the universality and diversity of religions. All world religions have a universal perspective, and in their particularity or uniqueness give rise to religious diversity. In the replacement and fulfilment models outlined above the accent on the uniqueness and universality of one's own religion is so heavy that all other traditions are either totally or partially invalidated. In other words, these two models have a monistic perspective: the absolute validity of only one religion – one's own. In our research, therefore, we call them replacement monism and fulfilment monism.

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<sup>2</sup> More recently, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (2000) writes in its declaration *Dominus Iesus* (no. 8): "Therefore, the sacred books of other religions, which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers, receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain."

### 5.2.3 *Mutuality*

Setting aside the non-negotiable elements, the *mutuality model* prefers to focus on the underlying common elements of which the various religions are diversified expressions and to which they can contribute. To relate across the apparently irreconcilable differences, religions need to discover the shared elements. Knitter describes the mutuality model in terms of three complementary perspectives.

The philosophical-historical perspective highlights the historical limitations of all religions and the philosophical possibility of one divine reality underlying all religions. According to Hick (2003), who represents this trend, lack of a common source or goal would mean that religions are going in different directions. In his view the *noumenon* is always more than the phenomenon that is accessible to us. In other words, all human knowledge is historically conditioned or socially constructed. Thus different religions point to differences in the manner of experiencing, conceptualizing and living in relation to the ultimate divine reality that transcends the capacity of any one religion. In this sense religious symbols and metaphors represent particular religions rather than define the ultimate divine reality itself. To avoid falling into the trap of relativism, Hick suggests that the value of religions be gauged by the extent to which they promote self-sacrificing concern for the good of others.

The religio-mystical approach proceeds from awareness that religious experience in one's own tradition is limited, while openness is shown to religious experience in other traditions. The religio-mystical approach posits that divine reality is greater than anything that can be experienced in one single tradition, and is accessible in the mystical experiences of various religions. Panikkar's notion of 'cosmotheandric experience' (1993b) is said to exemplify this trend. According to Panikkar mystical experience is based on a necessary interrelationship among three components: the divine, the human and the material world. Although different in many ways, the three cannot exist in isolation from each other. Besides, this divine-human-material interrelatedness is dynamic; it grows and changes. One is called to live out this relationship in ever deeper, life-giving ways in order to further the unfolding of history and the continuation of creation. Insofar as the divine does not exist without the human and the material, the divine itself is as diverse as the religions. Behind the diversity of religions there is this one religious fact. The differences between religions, then, are opportunities for mutual fecundation and growth.

The ethical-practical perspective focuses on the common challenge to alleviate the needs and sufferings of the poor and the oppressed. This global responsibility gives religions an opportunity for understanding themselves and others. The ethical agenda created by human and ecological suffering is

common to all religions, as recognized by the World Parliament of Religions in 1993 and 1999. It follows that the concept of salvation/liberation which is at the heart of religions, necessarily includes a reference to the human plight and the plight of the planet. The truth and goodness of religions should be measured by their ability to promote peace, justice and unity. As experiences in Basic Human Communities confirm, involvement in a common liberation process creates an opportunity for understanding each other's religious beliefs.

These three complementary perspectives mean that the mutuality model represents a kind of pluralistic encounter among religions based on underlying – often amorphous – commonalities, which entails a risk of religious relativism. Besides, it tends to disregard the fact that common ground is often identified from the perspective of one's own religious framework. For example, we cannot deny that even the notion of justice – viewed as the responsibility of all religions – is decisively shaped by the Judaeo-Christian cultural tradition. In this sense the model promotes a veiled imperialism. In the theological debate this model is frequently referred to as the pluralistic model. Since it focuses not so much on mutuality as on commonality that allows for pluralism, we prefer to call it *commonality pluralism*.

#### 5.2.4 *Acceptance*

The commonality pluralism model is so concerned with underlying universal aspects that it tends to disregard the relevance of the particularity or uniqueness of religions. The *acceptance model*, which according to Knitter is characteristic of the postmodern era, underscores that differences between religions are real and that their particularities are opportunities for reciprocal enrichment and growth. The acceptance model postulates that while different religions can be interrelated, connected and brought into unifying relationships, 'the many' cannot be melted down to 'the one'. The cultural and religious filters are so different that we cannot measure one religion according to the measuring system of another. It is believed that by seeking to remove diversity we will end up destroying the vitality of religions. Knitter identifies three different perspectives in this model: a cultural-linguistic view of religion; pluralism of ultimate concerns; and theological comparison.

Lindbeck (2009) sees the post-liberal *cultural-linguistic* approach to religion as one of three different ways of understanding religion (the other two being the propositional-cognitive and experiential-expressive perspectives). In the cultural-linguistic perspective religion is viewed as a cultural and/or linguistic framework that shapes one's entire life and thought. In other words, religious experience is shaped by religious language. Our experience is determined by the common religious worldview into which we are born. In this perspective

there can be nothing truly common to all religions; they refer to different experiences. Religious words and experiences are ‘true’ only in the given texts or language systems of particular religions. Insofar as religions claim to offer ultimate meaning they serve as a framework for understanding everything else. But this framework cannot be fitted into another framework. What is possible is a kind of dialectical process which can lead to mutual learning and self-correction. Here there is no attempt to impose one’s own grand theory on others.

The *pluralism of ultimates* perspective is represented by S. Mark Heim (1995), who argues that differences between religions go deeper than just language. They reach into the very soul of religions, into their ultimate elements. Religions can be moving towards different destinations or salvations. In the same way differences between religions may also point to differences in the divine ultimate. Real differences between religions open up possibilities for learning something really new. DiNoia (1992) goes a step further: because religious alternatives are sometimes simply not comparable, neither option can be rated as superior to the other. According to him the teachings of a religion or worldview cultivate “a pattern of life” based on its definition of “the true aim” of life as a whole. Conversely, the pattern of life and real-life (e.g. socio-economic) circumstances help to shape the conceptualization of the aim of life. Since there is no rational basis for preferring one to the other, they can even be described as incommensurable (cf. Sterkens 2001, 73f).

From the perspective of *comparative theology*, the foundations for a theology of religions are to be found in dialogue rather than in theology itself. According to Clooney (1996; 2010) and Fredericks (1999), who represent this trend, a Christian theology of religions must be a comparative theology. Better understanding of one’s own religion might follow from a better understanding of others. It requires commitment to one’s own religion and at the same time openness to the truths found in others. Comparative theologians are open to the conflict arising from ‘double claims’ “between our commitments to the Christian tradition, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the allure of other religious traditions” (Fredericks 1999, 169).

The acceptance model with its three complementary perspectives underlines the importance of diversity, but in so doing tends to ignore the underlying common elements shared by the world religions. Given that this model focuses not so much on acceptance as on differences that need to be accepted in a pluralistic context, we prefer to call it *differential pluralism*. The model that Vermeer and Van der Ven (2004, 43–44) call dialogical pluralism comes close to this model, although its focus is more on the need for dialogue.

### 5.2.5 *Relativistic Pluralism*

Knitter (2002:162ff; 224–9) does not describe relativism as a separate model, but refers to a relativistic tendency that can arise in both the mutuality model (commonality pluralism) and the acceptance model (differential pluralism). In his view the philosophical-historical perspective, the religio-mystical perspective and the ethical-practical perspective in commonality pluralism conceal a relativistic tendency, as do the cultural linguistic view, the pluralism of ultimate concerns, and theological comparison in differential pluralism. Relativism thrives on commonalities that tend to be so vague and amorphous as to accommodate anything in its sphere without the need to discern and distinguish underlying nuances and differences. As Knitter (2002, 162) puts it with a touch of humour, “Relativists are people for whom the notion of truth is either so broad, or so diversified, or so distant, that they can never trust themselves to know whether they, or anyone, really have the truth. Relativists live in a kind of twilight world in which all cats are grey.” Still, commonality pluralism tries to avoid relativism by finding common ground in normative content, and differential pluralism does so by looking at other traditions through their own cultural glasses instead of using one’s own. But even in the attempts to avoid it, relativism resurfaces. In the first case one runs the risk of imposing one’s normative ideas which are not applicable to others, thus becoming ‘imperialistic’ (Knitter 2002:163). In the second case any form of critique from an outside perspective becomes impossible (Knitter 2002:225). However, relativism is described as not being necessarily part of pluralism. We therefore discuss it as a separate model.

What is relativism? The Oxford Dictionary (2012) defines it as “the doctrine that knowledge, truth and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute”. This is more descriptive than the meaning the term ‘relativism’ has sometimes assumed in theological debates. In these debates it is often seen as the impossibility or refusal to make any normative judgments about religious traditions whatsoever. Relativism then becomes a kind of “twilight world in which all cats are grey” (Knitter 2002, 162) or all norms are fair (Cobb 1999:66). Formulated positively, relativism is the attitude of seeing different particular beliefs or complete religious traditions as always equally valid, equally profound and equally humanitarian. Regardless of the question of whether this is a valid definition, we have operationalized ‘relativistic pluralism’ according to this latter meaning of the word.<sup>3</sup> Because it is not

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3 One could also turn the argument around to a certain degree: plurality is a necessary condition to make moral judgments. Particularly inasmuch as the evaluation of religious traditions and their truth claims form part of dealing with religious plurality, comparison of different tradi-



necessarily implied in the other forms of pluralism, and since this tendency is expected to be prevalent in the Indian Hindu context, we include it as a distinct model: *relativistic pluralism*. In the relativistic pluralism model all religions are held to be of equal value and significance, irrespective of common elements and differences that may exist among them.

Thus our theoretical framework comprises five models of interpreting religious plurality, based on a conceptual analysis of Christian theologies of religions, which we hope will prove valid for adherents of other religious traditions as well: replacement monism, fulfilment monism, commonality pluralism, differential pluralism and relativistic pluralism.

### 5.3 Empirical Research

Having clarified the theoretical framework of models of interpreting religious plurality, we now proceed to the empirical phase of our research. First we define the research questions to be investigated from the perspective of our conceptual analysis. Secondly, we describe how the measuring instrument was structured in the conceptual framework of models of religious pluralism. Finally we present the results of the data analysis.

#### 5.3.1 *Research Questions*

In keeping with the conceptual analysis of religious pluralism in the previous section, the research questions are as follows:

- (1) Which comparative models of interpreting religious plurality are found among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students once group-specific differences have been ascertained?
- (2) Are there significant differences in the levels of agreement with the comparative models of interpreting religious plurality between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?
- (3) Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to the level of agreement with the comparative models of interpreting religious plurality?

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tions in terms of a meta-theory is essential. Here comparison – that is looking for common ground or weighing advantages and disadvantages of different approaches – is seen as a vital condition for, rather than an obstacle to, normative judgment (cf. Sterkens 2009, 258; Wils 2005).

- (4) Which personal characteristics may be considered predictors of models of interpreting religious plurality among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

### 5.3.2 *Measuring Instruments*

The questionnaire distributed in our research deals with the five models of interpreting religious plurality derived from Christian theology of religions: replacement monism, fulfilment monism, commonality pluralism, differential pluralism and relativistic pluralism. Each model is represented by four indicators referring to four basic dimensions. Each dimension is formulated on a general level, that is to say, the formal status of the dimensions is the same in each religion, although the language, ideas and symbols representing the ultimate referents in these religions can be very different (Vroom 2003).<sup>4</sup> Three of the indicators represent the basic dimensions of religions and the fourth refers to the overall relationship of that religion with the others. Formally each religion is characterized by three basic dimensions: experiential, normative and transformative. The experiential dimension reflects the human being's experience of ultimate reality (God), the normative dimension refers to the truth claim of the religious tradition, and the transformative dimension relates to the adherent's becoming or self-realization. The tendencies in these three dimensions shape the overall relational dimension – the relationship of one religion with others. In the fulfilment monism model, for example, the dimensions are operationalized as follows: “*Other religions do not offer as deep a God-experience (anubhava) as my religion*” (experiential dimension); “*Compared with my religion, other religions contain only partial truths*” (normative dimension); “*Compared with other religions, my religion offers the surest way to liberation (salvation, mukti, paradise)*” (transformative dimension); “*Other religions will eventually find their fulfilment in mine*” (relational dimension). Since this is a comparative study of Christian, Muslim and Hindu students, we had to be careful to use general categories without losing sight of the nuances of specific categories in each religion. We tried to resolve this in the following ways.

In operationalizing the experiential dimension we included in brackets the term ‘*anubhava*’, meaning ‘God-experience’ or ‘experience of God’. *Anubhava* is a Sanskrit term used in most Indian languages, including Tamil. In the Hindu tradition of Sankara it refers to the integral mystical experience in which all thinking is nullified and the knowing subject becomes one with the object of

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4 Jensen distinguishes four modes of comparison: form, function, structure and meaning (Jensen 2003,124–125). The four dimensions used in each model fall in the category of function of religion in the life of individuals and communities.

knowledge (*advaita*). The term has a strong cultural resonance in all religious traditions in India, be it Christianity, Islam or Hinduism. Although the term is applicable to all three religious traditions under investigation, we do not claim that its use solves all difficulties of comparison (cf. Van der Zwan 1994, 128; Panikkar 1993, 120–133; Le Saux 1982, 161–175; Samartha 1991, 103–111).

The normative dimension (referring to the truth claim of religions) and the relational dimension were operationalized abstractly and generically. Thus the overall relationship among religions implied in the five models was formulated as follows: “*Eventually my religion will replace other religions*” (replacement monism); “*Other religions will eventually find their fulfilment in mine*” (fulfilment monism); “*The similarities among religions are a basis for building a universal religion*” (commonality pluralism); “*Differences between religions are a basis for mutual enrichment and growth*” (differential pluralism); and “*Although there are many religions, at the deepest level there are no real differences*” (relativistic pluralism).

To represent the transformative dimension we used terms specific to each religion. Although the ultimate transformation proposed by religions can be expressed by the general abstract term ‘liberation’, we included in brackets the terms for ultimate transformation in each religion so as to evoke its specific meaning in that tradition: ‘salvation’ in the case of Christianity, ‘paradise’ in the case of Islam, and ‘*mukti*’ in the case of Hinduism.

Following this scheme, each of the five models of interpreting religious plurality was operationalized in four items, to which respondents indicated their agreement on a four-point Likert scale from disagreement (1) to agreement (4). Thus our measurement instrument for models of interpreting religious plurality comprised a total of 20 items: replacement monism (items 1, 4, 6 and 19), fulfilment monism (items 3, 5, 8 and 10), commonality pluralism (items 7, 9, 12 and 14), differential pluralism (items 11, 13, 16 and 18) and relativistic pluralism (items 2, 15, 17 and 20). See appendix E for a complete list of the items.

We assumed these models of interpreting religious plurality to be logical options in each of the religions under investigation. Establishing the extent to which people actually subscribe to these ideas is the aim of our research. For example, the premise of the commonality pluralism model is that all religions refer to the same ultimate reality. In Christianity the main exponent of this model is Hick, but there are modern Hindu and Islamic scholars who seem to have much the same idea. Fredericks (1995, 74) cites Bithika Mukerji, who refers to a universal religious experience common to all religions: “Christianity in the reflection of Hinduism is yet another dimension in which God has disclosed himself to his People” (Mukerji 1990, 233). In modern Islam he quotes Mohamed Talbi (1990, 101), who, reflecting on the dialogue between Islam and

Christianity, affirms: "Thus when all is said and done, we find ourselves faced with the unfathomable mystery of God's Plan and of man's condition." From these examples one concludes that the underlying idea of the commonality pluralism model as formulated in terms of Christian theology of religions is not completely alien to recent developments in Hinduism and Islam.

### 5.3.3 *Empirical Results*

The results of the data analysis provide answers to the four research questions that define the scope of our research. We deal with them one by one, presenting the results pertaining to each.

Research question 1: Which comparative models of interpreting religious plurality are found among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students once group-specific differences have been ascertained?

For the construction of comparative models of interpreting religious plurality, we followed the analysis procedure described in more detail in chapter 1 (1.7). We present the results of the third step: the factor analysis conducted on all students after filtering out differences between the three religious groups, followed by the test for scalar invariance in which factor models are evaluated by means of JRule. Then we describe the differences between the religious groups that were filtered out after the second step. Table 5.1 shows the Principal Axis Factoring (Oblimin rotation method) of 13 of the 20 items in our questionnaire. In total seven items were removed in previous steps, either because of low commonalities (items 11 and 18) or multiple loading (items 15 and 17) in the first factor analysis for the whole sample, or because some items (12, 16 and 20) proved to be peculiar to one of the groups in the second factor analysis. The final factor analysis results in a total explained variance of 52,4% for the whole sample, and remains almost unaltered when Christians (51,5%) and Muslims (52,4%) are examined separately, while it is lower for Hindus (43,8%).

Contrary to expectation, four items meant to represent replacement monism and three items representing fulfilment monism cluster together under factor 1. The two models share a monistic view of religion, namely belief in the universal validity of one's own religion only. The two items (5 and 10) with the highest factor loading belong to the fulfilment model, which is a milder form of monism than the replacement model. Accordingly we label factor 1 *monism* ( $\alpha$ .90) with a certain emphasis on fulfilment.<sup>5</sup>

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5 A similar clustering of exclusivism and inclusivism was found in Vermeer and Van der Ven (2004).

Factor 2 covers four items, three of which (7, 9 and 14) are meant to represent commonality pluralism and one (item 2) relativistic pluralism. The item with the highest factor loading clearly represents the model of commonality pluralism. Item 2 can also be understood in a non-relativistic way, if we assume that respondents put the accent less on 'equally' and more on 'profound experience of God'. Hence we retain the name *commonality pluralism* ( $\alpha .79$ ) for this factor. At the same time we have to take into account that one item of the commonality model – the one referring to building a universal religion (item 12) – had to be eliminated after the second step of our analysis. This suggests that acceptance of commonality among religions does not necessarily imply universal commonality or moving towards a common religion. We shall deal with this question in our discussion.

Factor 3 contains two items (13 and 16) that represent *differential pluralism* ( $\alpha .38$ ). These two items suggest the necessity of accepting differences between religions as part of God's plan to save the world and as an opportunity for reciprocal enrichment and growth. In the final section we try to explain why the other two items (11 and 18) did not load on this factor.

Through confirmatory factor analysis we tested whether the measurement models are the same for all groups, also whether the factor loadings are the same across groups. Analysis of the data with Lisrel 8.8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom 2012) resulted in an acceptable model fit for the test of scalar invariance for monism ( $X^2[\text{df}=88]=376.78$ ;  $\text{RMSEA}=.073$ ;  $\text{GFI}=.95$ ). This means that we can assume that the measurement is equivalent for the three different religious groups (Christian, Muslims and Hindus), and allows meaningful comparison of monism between these groups. We also tested for scalar invariance for commonality pluralism and differential pluralism.<sup>6</sup> The initial model was rejected ( $X^2[\text{df}=36]=124.57$ ,  $\text{RMSEA}=.063$ ;  $\text{GFI}=.98$ ), because there were 2 misspecifications in the intercepts of the items. We improved the model by freeing the intercepts of the third item of commonality pluralism (i.e. item 2) and the second item of differential pluralism (i.e. item 16) for Hindus. The resulting model was accepted ( $X^2[\text{df}=34]=71.19$ ,  $\text{RMSEA}=.042$ ;  $\text{GFI}=.98$ ). These results indicate that the scale to measure commonality pluralism is partially invariant (Byrne, Shavelson, and Muthén, 1989). The scale to measure 'differential pluralism' is not scalar invariant for Hindus, but it is metric invariant, implying that we cannot compare the mean on this scale for Hindus with other religions, but we can compare the relationship of this scale with other metric or scalar invariant measures across religions (see also section 2.6 on levels of equivalence).

6 Because we cannot test for scalar invariance based on 2 items, we tested for scalar invariance for commonality pluralism (4 items) and differential pluralism (2 items) simultaneously.

TABLE 5.1 *Factor analysis (PAF, Oblimin rotation), commonalities ( $h^2$ ), percentage of explained variance, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of comparative models of interpreting religious plurality among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students.*

	F1	F2	F3	$h^2$
5. Compared with other religions, my religion offers the surest way to liberation (salvation, <i>mukti</i> , paradise).	.81	.01	-.01	.63
10. Other religions do not offer as deep a God-experience ( <i>anubhava</i> ) as my religion.	.77	-.01	.01	.62
3. Compared with my religion, other religions contain only partial truths.	.72	-.01	.01	.54
1. Only through my religion people can attain true liberation (salvation, <i>mukti</i> , paradise).	.69	-.12	-.01	.57
6. Other religions do not offer a true experience of God ( <i>anubhava</i> ).	.69	-.13	.01	.60
4. Eventually my religion will replace other religions.	.69	.12	.01	.40
7. Different religions reveal different aspects of the same ultimate truth.	.01	.81	.01	.58
9. Every religion contributes in a unique way to the ultimate liberation of human beings (salvation, <i>mukti</i> , paradise).	.01	.68	.01	.46
2. All religions provide an equally profound experience of God ( <i>anubhava</i> ).	-.20	.58	-.01	.56
14. Different aspects of the same divine reality are experienced in different religions.	-.01	.55	-.15	.43
13. Differences between religions are part of God's plan to save the world.	.01	.01	-.64	.41
16. Differences between religions are a basis for mutual enrichment and growth.	-.01	.01	-.62	.42
Cronbach's alpha	.90	.79	.38	
Number of valid cases	1869	1873	1894	

Scale: 1=disagree; 2= tend to disagree; 3=tend to agree; 4=agree

Explained variance = 52,4%; F1= Monism; F2 = Commonality pluralism; F3 = Differential pluralism; N=1920.

As said before, the factor analysis for the whole sample in the third step was only conducted after investigating the three religious groups separately and included only items that appeared in all three religious groups. It is worth looking at the results of factor analyses in the second step to account for the differences between the religious groups. The separate factor analysis for Christians reveals that the items for fulfilment monism have the highest factor loadings in

the monism model. An item that typically refers to fulfilment concerns the Christian monism factor: "Other religions will eventually find their fulfilment in my religion" (item 8), but is not part of the comparative monism measurement. It suggests that Christian monism has a strong fulfilment tendency. Unlike the comparative measurement, the commonality pluralism factor includes an item expressing the relativistic view that there are no real differences between religions: "Although there are many religions, at the deepest level there are no real differences" (item 20). Considering that commonality pluralism contains another item with a relativistic tendency (item 2), we conclude that Christian commonality pluralism tends towards relativism. Unlike commonality pluralism, the configuration of Christian differential pluralism is no different from the configuration of this factor for the whole sample.

The factor analysis for Muslims shows that the monism model emerges in all eight items (as in the case of Christians). However, the items representing fulfilment and replacement monism do not cluster in higher and lower factor loadings respectively. Does this imply that in affirming the exclusive validity of one's own religion absolutely no distinction is made between 'weak' and 'strong' forms of monism? The commonality pluralism and differential pluralism factors contain the same items as the comparative models.

The factor analysis for Hindus yields the same result for the monism model as that for Muslims: the items representing the replacement and fulfilment models are jumbled together. The items in differential pluralism are the same as in the comparative model. The main differences found among Hindus pertain to commonality pluralism. Firstly, the Hindu understanding of commonality pluralism includes the idea of building a universal religion (item 12: "The similarities among the religions are a basis for building up a universal religion"). Secondly, like Christians, they include the relativistic view that at the deepest level there are no real differences between religions (item 20). Inclusion of these two items suggests a strong universalistic and relativistic tendency in Hindu commonality pluralism.

In general we might say that the comparative models seem to fit Muslims best (with only item 8 in the monism factor filtered out), followed by Christians (without item 8 for monism and item 20 for commonality pluralism) and Hindus (without items 12 and 20 for commonality pluralism). This is mirrored by the percentages of explained variance for the separate factor analyses among Muslims (52,4%), Christians and Hindus (43,8%).

Research question 2: Are there significant differences in the levels of agreement with the comparative models of interpreting religious plurality between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?



TABLE 5.2 *Levels of agreement (mean and standard deviation) with regard to monism for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students; and comparison of means between religious groups of respondents (Scheffé's test: F-value: 309.42 ; sign. <.000).*

	N	Mean	S.d.	Muslims	Hindus
Christians	849	2.76	.91		**
Muslims	241	2.89	.98		**
Hindus	773	1.79	.76	**	

Scale: 1=disagree; 2=tend to disagree; 3=tend to agree; 4=agree. Intergroup differences are significant at  $p < .000$  (\*\*) or  $p < .005$  level (\*).

To answer the second research question we compare agreement with the three comparative models of interpreting religious plurality among Christians, Muslims and Hindus and use Scheffé's test to determine whether the differences are significant.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to the monism model there are great differences between the three groups. Christians are generally doubtful about monism, although their ambivalence tends towards agreement (2.76). Muslims agree with the monism model (2.89) and Hindus generally disagree with it (1.79). Hindus, who favour the monism model least, differ significantly from both Christians and Muslims. The difference between Christians and Muslims is not significant (Table 5.2).

The three groups' mean scores for commonality pluralism fall in the area of positive agreement. In a multi-religious context it seems reasonable to expect religions to share some fundamental features. Although the three groups agree with commonality pluralism, Hindu respondents (3.37) differ significantly from both Christians (3.02) and Muslims (2.93) in that they seem to be most open to the underlying commonality of religions (Table 5.3).

The three groups' mean scores for differential pluralism fall in the area of doubt. Hindus (2.70) and Christians (2.62) tend towards agreement, whereas Muslims (2.50) are ambivalent. However, there are no significant differences between the religious groups. We note that the attitude towards differential pluralism is very different from the level of agreement with commonality

7 We interpret the means as follows: scores between 1 and 2.20 are interpreted as disagreement, scores between 2.21 and 2.80 as doubt, and scores between 2.81 and 4.00 as agreement. The rationale behind this interpretation is that the middle of the scale (2.50) does not tell us whether respondents agree or disagree with a model. We used a four-point Likert scale without a middle category: (1) Disagree, (2) Tend to disagree, (3) Tend to agree, (4) Agree.

TABLE 5.3 *Levels of agreement (mean and standard deviation) with regard to commonality pluralism for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students; and comparison of means between religious groups of respondents (Scheffé's test: F-value: 49.30; sign. <.000).*

	N	Mean	S.d.	Muslims	Hindus
Christians	848	3.02	.88		**
Muslims	241	2.93	.85		**
Hindus	777	3.37	.74	**	

Scale: 1=disagree; 2=tend to disagree; 3=tend to agree; 4=agree. Intergroup differences are significant at  $p < .000$  level (\*\*).

pluralism. How do we explain this difference? Differential pluralism implies active involvement in religious differences, illustrated by, for instance, item 16: "differences [...] are a basis for mutual enrichment and growth". Active involvement is certainly more demanding than recognition of commonality in God-experience or ultimate truth. Besides, the average score in the area of doubt and the relatively high standard deviations for differential pluralism may indicate that there is dissent in the religious groups about differential pluralism (Table 5.4). When we calculate the percentages of scores representing disagreement (1–2.20), doubt (2.21–2.80) and agreement (2.81–4.00) among Christians, Muslims and Hindus, it is revealing that almost half the Christians (47.8%) and Hindus (49.7%) agree with differential pluralism, while one third of these groups disagrees with it (Christians 33.2%, Hindus 31.8%). Among Muslims equally large proportions either agree (41.4%) or disagree (40%) with differential pluralism. Opposite trends with regard to the differential pluralism model seems to be strongest among Muslims. These figures illustrate that differential pluralism is indeed disputed.

Research question 3: Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to models of interpreting religious plurality among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?

This question concerns the social location of the models of interpreting religious plurality. We discuss the models of monism, communality pluralism and diversity pluralism successively. For each model we give the significant correlations with the personal characteristics of our Christian, Muslim and Hindu respondents.

TABLE 5.4 *Levels of agreement (mean and standard deviation) with regard to differential pluralism for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students; and comparison of means between religious groups of respondents (Scheffé's test: F-value: 4.73; sign. =.009).*

	N	Mean	S.d.	Muslims	Hindus
Christians	862	2.62	.96		
Muslims	245	2.50	.96		
Hindus	780	2.70	.92		

Scale: 1=disagree; 2= tend to disagree; 3=tend to agree; 4= agree. There are no significant inter-group differences at  $p < .005$  level.

### Monism

Among Christian students there are relatively low but significant associations with three socio-cultural characteristics: language (.15), urbanization (.11) and gender (.07). Christian students whose mother tongue is Tamil (2.83) score higher on monism than students who don't speak Tamil (2.50); agreement with monism is relatively stronger in urbanized areas; and – surprisingly – Christian women (2.81) on average have a stronger monistic orientation than men (2.69), although the association is low and of limited significance ( $p < .05$ ). A positive personal evaluation of the influence of mass media (.17) and the religious community (.13) correlates positively with monism among Christians. The more positive the evaluation of the influence of the media and the religious community on religious socialization, the stronger the monistic attitudes of our Christian students.

By and large Muslims show more and stronger associations with monism than Christians. Of the socio-cultural characteristics gender has the strongest association (.35). In line with general expectations, men (3.21) are clearly more monistic than women (2.51). This observation accords with the idea that women are more open to 'the other', that is adherents of other religions, than men. Urbanization again correlates positively with monism (.18); and Muslims who are acquainted with the local language, Tamil, score higher on monism than those who do not speak Tamil (mean scores 3.09 and 2.75 respectively). As for the socio-religious characteristics, we find that students who score relatively highly on monism evaluate the contribution of religious socializing agents as positive. These positive correlations apply to friends (.18), the religious community (.18), parents (.15) and teachers/professors (.14).

While our Hindu population scored relatively poorly on monism, Hindu women (1.67) disagree even more strongly with monism than Hindu men

TABLE 5.5 *Social location of monism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students. Correlations (eta for the nominal variables sex and language; Pearson's r for the other, ordinal variables) between monism and some personal characteristics.*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Age		.14 *	.17**
Sex	.07 *	.35**	.17**
Language	.15**	.17**	.07 *
Urbanization	.11**	.18**	-.19**
Field of specialization			
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Caste			-.20**
Education mother		-.13 *	-.13**
Education father			-.18**
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Parents		.15 *	.09 *
Relatives			
Friends		.18**	.09 *
Religious community	.13**	.18**	.22**
Teachers/professors		.14 *	.13**
Media	.17**		.20**

All correlations are significant at  $p < .00$  level (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  level (\*).

(1.93). But in contrast to the findings among Christians and Muslims, urbanization (-.19) correlates negatively with monism: Hindus who live in the countryside agree more with monism than those living in cities. Socio-economic characteristics also give some indications where we find (or do not find) monistic attitudes. In lower castes (-.20) and among students whose parents are less educated (-.18 and -.13 respectively for father's and mother's education) monistic attitudes are more common. Finally, the correlations with socializing agents point in the same direction. Respondents who perceive the influence of these socializing agents as positive for their religious identity have higher scores on monism. This applies to their religious community (.22), the media (.20), teachers/professors (.13), parents (.09) and friends (.09) (Table 5.5).

TABLE 5.6 *Social location of commonality pluralism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students. Correlations (eta for the nominal variables sex and language; Pearson's r for the other, ordinal variables) between commonality pluralism and some personal characteristics.*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Age	.08 *		-.16**
Sex	.13**	.30**	.20**
Language			
Urbanization	-.17**	-.21**	
Field of Specialization			
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Caste			.19**
Education mother	-.15**	.16 *	
Education father		.14 *	
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Parents		-.15 *	.08 *
Relatives	.09 *	-.15 *	
Friends		-.17**	
Religious community			-.09 *
Teachers/professors		-.13 *	
Media	-.11**		

All correlations are significant at  $p < .00$  level (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  level (\*).

### Commonality Pluralism

For a detailed overview of correlations between commonality pluralism and personal characteristics of our Christian, Muslim and Hindu student population, see Table 5.6.

Christian students who agree more strongly with commonality pluralism have spent most of their lives in less urbanized areas like towns or villages (-.17), and their mothers have relatively low educational levels (-.15). Commonality pluralism also correlates negatively with the perception of a positive influence by media on religious socialization (-.11).

Among Muslim students women (3.20) agree significantly more strongly with commonality pluralism than men (2.69). Once again women are more open to other religions, for example in their agreement with the statement, "Religions reveal different aspects of the same ultimate truth". Like Christians,

Muslims who agree more strongly with commonality pluralism come from less urbanized areas (-.21). Higher parental educational level is an indicator of agreement with commonality pluralism. Finally, commonality pluralism is more likely to be found among students who report less positive influence by socializing agents like friends (-.17), parents, relatives (-.15) and teachers/professors (-.13).

Hindu women, too, (3.51) agree significantly more strongly with commonality pluralism than Hindu men (3.21). Although the age range in our population is limited, younger students agree more strongly with commonality pluralism (.16). Among Hindus caste is an indicator of agreement. Commonality pluralism is more likely to be found among people belonging to categories like 'forward castes' and less likely to be supported by Hindus belonging to underprivileged classes like 'scheduled tribes and scheduled castes' and 'most backward castes' (.19).

#### Differential Pluralism

For differential pluralism significant correlations with some personal characteristics are confined to Christians and Hindus, but none of these correlations is above .20. Hence it is difficult to make general observations.

Among Christians degree of urbanization once again proves to be an indicator. Greater agreement with differential pluralism is found among Christians who lived most of their lives in less urbanized areas like towns or villages (-.19). Surprisingly, male college and university students (2.78) agree more strongly with differential pluralism than their female peers (2.50), although the association is rather weak ( $\eta^2$  .14). Agreement with differential pluralism is also more likely among students whose mother (-.17) or father (-.12) has relatively little education. When the influence of socializing agencies such as mass media (-.11) and the religious community (-.09) is perceived as less positive there is greater agreement with differential pluralism.

Among Hindu students the levels of association are also low. But generally students agree that differences between religions are "part of God's plan to save the world" (item 13) and are "a basis for mutual enrichment and growth" (item 16) if they live in less urbanized areas (-.18); their parents are poorly educated (-.13); and if they perceive the influence of religious socialization by media (.14), teachers (.11) and religious community (.08) as positive. Remarkably (but understandably), these latter correlations point in the opposite direction to those among Christians.

TABLE 5.7 *Social location of differential pluralism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students. Correlations (eta for the nominal variables sex and language; Pearson's r for the other, ordinal variables) between differential pluralism and some personal characteristics.*<sup>8</sup>

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Age			.09 *
Sex	.14 **		
Urbanization	-.19 **		-.18 **
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Education mother	-.17 **		-.13 **
Education father	-.12 **		-.12 **
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Friends	.08 *		
Religious community	-.09 **		.08 *
Teachers/professors			.11 **
Media	-.11 **		.14 **

All correlations are significant at p<.00 level (\*\*) or p<.05 level (\*).

Research question 4: Which personal characteristics may be considered predictors of models of interpreting religious plurality among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

Since we include only personal characteristics that show relevant ( $r \geq .20$ ) and significant ( $p < .000$ ) correlations with our models of interpreting religious plurality, few independent variables were included in the regression analyses. While in the case of monism and commonality pluralism some personal characteristics meet this criterion in at least one of the religious groups, none of the personal characteristics showed relevant correlations for differential pluralism. Accordingly linear regression analyses were confined to monism and commonality pluralism.

For *monism* gender has the strongest predictive value, both among Muslims ( $\beta$  -.36) and Hindus ( $\beta$  -.19): men score considerably higher on monistic attitudes than women. Next, the perceived positive influence of the religious community on religious socialization contributes to more exclusivist and inclusivist

8 The following characteristics did not show significant correlations for any of the groups of respondents: language, field of specialization, caste, socialization by parents and relatives.



TABLE 5.8 *Regression analyses for monism with weights ( $\beta$ ) for each variable and total explained variance ( $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$ ) for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students separately.*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Sex (male 1; female 2)	.05	-.36**	-.19**
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Caste	.02	.09	-.08 *
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Religious community	.09 *	.14 *	.16**
Media	.13**	-.01	.17**
	$R^2$ .04	.16	.11
	Adj. $R^2$ .03	.14	.11

Standardised regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) are significant at  $p < .00$  (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  (\*) level.

attitudes ( $\beta$  .16 for Hindus and  $\beta$  .14 for Muslims). In respect of Hindus, finally, the influence of the mass media is worth mentioning: when media contribute positively to religious socialization, at least in the respondent's perception, scores on monistic attitudes are more likely to be high ( $\beta$  .17). Still, the overall explained variance is quite low: 14% (Adj.  $R^2$ ) among Muslims and 11% (Adj.  $R^2$ ) among Hindus. Among Christian students there are hardly any statistically significant influences on monism, because the total explained variance for Christian students is so low.

In the case of *commonality pluralism* we limit ourselves to the 255 Muslims in our research sample. None of the selected socio-economic and socio-religious variables contributes significantly to the prediction of commonality pluralism. Gender and urbanization, which we categorized under socio-cultural personal characteristics, jointly account for 13% of the variance in commonality pluralism (Adj.  $R^2$ ). Gender is the strongest predictor ( $\beta$  .31) and – not surprisingly – reverses the direction found in monism. Women score considerably higher on commonality pluralism than men. Urbanization ( $\beta$  -.19) is a second predictor: if Muslim respondents have lived most of their lives in less urbanized areas, they can be expected to agree more strongly with commonality pluralism. In other words: living in cities, which are modern but religiously more diverse than the countryside, leads to less agreement with items like “Different religions reveal different aspects of the same ultimate truth” (item 7).

TABLE 5.9 *Regression analyses for commonality pluralism with weights ( $\beta$ ) for each variable and total explained variance ( $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$ ) for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students separately.*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Sex (male 1; female 2)	-.10 *	.31**	.18**
Urbanization	-.15**	-.19**	.04
	$R^2$ .04	.14	.04
	Adj. $R^2$ .03	.13	.03

Standardised regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) are significant at  $p < .00$  (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  (\*) level.

## 5.4 Findings and Discussion

In this concluding section we highlight the salient features of our findings and consider some points for discussion in light of our research questions.

### 5.4.1 *Three Comparative Models of Interpreting Religious Plurality*

First, our research produced three reliable cross-religious comparative models of interpreting religious plurality: monism, commonality pluralism and differential pluralism. Although the conceptual framework was based on Christian theology (Knitter's classification), these models can be generalized to Muslims and Hindus as well. Although our comparative models sometimes underrepresent tendencies specific to particular religious traditions, they have enough substance for meaningful comparison. Similar empirical studies using concepts and models from Islamic and Hindu theology of religions could broaden the picture that we have outlined. Such a procedure would lead to a comparative theology that takes into account both emerging theoretical reflections and concrete religious experiences of people living in multi-religious contexts.<sup>9</sup>

The conflation of replacement monism and fulfilment monism into a single model suggests that, although replacement and fulfilment are theoretically

9 This type of empirical comparative theology is obviously different from the comparative theology of Clarke (1876) that entailed evaluation of religious traditions by Christian standards. But it also differs from the comparative theology of Clooney (2010) and Fredericks (1999), which is based on interreligious dialogue.

distinguishable, their underlying perspective on religious pluralism is the same: monism. Previous research in Western contexts among specific religious groups also found an empirical clustering of exclusivist and inclusivist attitudes (Sterkens 2001; Ziebertz 2007; Vermeer & Van der Ven 2004). In Tamil Nadu, too, viewed from a cross-religious comparative perspective, the usefulness of the distinction between replacement (exclusivism) and fulfilment (inclusivism) proves to be limited. Christians display a kind of 'weak' monism, characterized by a tendency towards fulfilment. Among Hindus and Muslims in our research population replacement and fulfilment tendencies blend almost indistinguishably.

Our research also sheds some light on two distinctive pluralistic approaches to religious diversity: the first focusing on underlying common ground (commonality pluralism); the second stressing the value and richness of differences between religions (differential pluralism). Hence it would be more correct to speak of specific pluralism models than of pluralism in general. What complicates the interpretation of these models is that Hindus differ from Christians and Muslims in that they manifest a universalistic and relativistic tendency in commonality pluralism. This is not a defensive stance regarding Hinduism, but entails working towards a universal faith based on common elements. Hindu universalism allows tolerance of other religions and assimilating them in the process of transforming itself. Hinduism is seemingly more intent on the search for truth than on defending the truths it represents (Mukerji 1990, 233). For this reason Hinduism does not regard internal divisions and contrasting views among its adherents as threatening its existence. We realize that a conceptual framework based on Christian theology cannot fully reflect the Hindu perspective. Further research into this model could reveal a 'weak' and a 'strong' position in commonality pluralism, with Christians and Muslims representing the former and Hindus the latter. 'Strong' commonality pluralism may reflect a more universalistic and relativistic tendency.

It is noteworthy that relativistic pluralism does not emerge as separate comparative model. Does this mean that it should not be regarded as a separate model? Before drawing this conclusion, one should realize that among specific religious groups relativism could be found separately, but also that one 'relativistic item' (item 2) ended up in our comparative commonality pluralism model.

Empirical confirmation of three different models of interpreting religious plurality in the minds of young people living in a multi-religious context is an important finding. But we must note that the universalistic tendency in commonality pluralism was absent in our comparative model, and that the measurement of differential pluralism consists of only two items.

#### 5.4.2 *Cross-religious Differences in Models of Interpreting Religious Plurality*

The model that proves most acceptable to the three religious groups is commonality pluralism. In a traditionally multi-religious setting like Tamil Nadu commonality pluralism seems a natural choice. The most contested perspective among Muslims and Hindus is monism. Still, Muslim respondents agree with monism, whereas Christians are generally ambivalent. There are also significant differences between the religious traditions. Hindus not only express significantly stronger agreement with commonality pluralism than Christians and Muslims; they also differ significantly from the other two groups in disagreeing with monistic attitudes. For all religious groups the attitude towards differential pluralism is ambivalent. Although Hindus show more agreement than Christians and Muslims, there are no significant differences between groups.

#### 5.4.3 *Social Location and Prediction of Models of Interpreting Religious Plurality*

Among Muslims and Hindus *monism* is more likely to be found among men than women. For Christians and Muslims monism is more likely to be found in urbanized areas, while among Hindus it features in less urbanized areas. Caste and parental educational levels of parents are relevant only for Hindus: greater agreement with monism when these indicators of socio-economic class are weak. Finally, monism is more likely when respondents evaluate the influence of agencies of religious socialization positively.

Among Muslims and Hindus women are more positive about *commonality pluralism* than men. Christians and Muslims support commonality pluralism mainly in less urbanized areas. Higher socio-economic levels are an indicator of greater agreement with commonality pluralism (among Muslims and Hindus). And finally, commonality pluralism is supported (especially by Muslims) when respondents evaluate the influence of agencies of religious socialization less positively.

The social location of *differential pluralism* is equivocal. Among Muslims we do not find any significant correlations at all. But the results for Christians and Hindus point in the same direction: differential pluralism is found in less urbanized areas and among pupils whose parents are less educated.

The tendency towards monism among Muslim (and to a lesser extent Hindu) men and relatively more agreement with commonality pluralism among Muslim and Hindu women merits further scrutiny. Maybe this research finding can be explained by considering the difference in female and male self-concepts. If the self-identity of women is characterized by 'integration' and that of

men by 'separateness', women should be more open to their social environment (Markus & Oyserman 1989, 101). Integrated selves are more responsive to their social environment, which in Tamil Nadu is multi-religious. This explains Muslim women's stronger agreement with commonality pluralism (i.e. other religions reveal different aspects of the same ultimate reality/truth/liberation) and lesser agreement with monism (i.e. one's own religion is the only true religion). A question that still needs clarification is why this tendency is found only among Muslim and Hindu women and not among Christian women, at least in comparison to Christian men. We consider this question in the next chapter.

# Religiocentrism

## 6.1 Introduction

On the basis of studies of ethnocentrism, this chapter seeks to provide a functional theoretical framework of religiocentrism for cross-religious comparative research. The bi-factorial structure of religiocentrism (positive in-group attitudes combined with negative out-group attitudes) poses some problems when it comes to comparing scores on religiocentrism of Christians, Muslims and Hindus, because measurement equivalence is not easy to achieve.

Previous research has shown that social identity and personal characteristics affect such factors as ethnocentrism, religiocentrism, nationalist attitudes and exclusivist reactions (Allport 1979). More recently these attitudes at an individual level were shown to differ between social categories. A new development, however, is to focus on religiocentrism from the perspective not only of individual differences but also of differences between religious traditions. The aim, in other words, is to describe and explain variations in terms of a cross-religious comparative format. This chapter shows that a cross-religious comparative measurement of religiocentrism is problematic, since in-groups and out-groups differ depending on the respondent's tradition. Nevertheless comparison is not impossible.

In section 6.2 we outline the theoretical framework of our research. We define the concept 'religiocentrism' and explain the phenomenon by describing its origins from the angle of social identity theory. Section 6.3 describes the empirical research: we define the research questions, explain the construction of the measuring instruments, and comment on the analysis procedure appropriate to our research questions. Naturally we concentrate on the results of analyses relating to the research questions. In section 6.4 we summarize the findings and discuss the results, offering some possible explanations of cross-religious differences in levels of religiocentrism.

## 6.2 Theoretical Framework: Religiocentrism and Social Identity Theory

Empirical studies show that it is difficult to demonstrate a causal connection between religiosity and ethnocentrism (the latter being defined as the combination of positive attitudes towards the ethnic in-group and negative attitudes

towards ethnic out-groups). Early in the 20th century William G. Sumner already indicated this two-dimensional structure of ethnocentrism – positive attitudes towards in-group, negative attitudes towards out-group. Ethnocentrism is “the technical name for this view in which one’s own group is the centre of everything and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (Sumner 1906, 12; Felling, Peters & Schreuder 1986; Verberk 1999). One’s own social group is considered superior; social groups with which one feels no affiliation are considered inferior.

Results from a study of social and cultural developments in the Netherlands indicate that ethnocentrism coincides with two other factors that are important in this context: authoritarianism and localism (cf. Eisinga & Scheepers 1989, 133–150 and 165–182). Three significant characteristics of ethnocentric authoritarianism are conventionalism, authoritarian submission and authoritarian aggression. Conventionalism refers to rigid adherence to conservative (i.e. traditional) values and norms. In the case of ethnocentrism it entails clinging to the exclusive, positively evaluated values and norms of the in-group and rejecting the (supposedly) negative characteristics of out-groups. Authoritarian submission may be defined as an uncritical attitude towards human and superhuman authority and unquestioning submission to it. It is associated with social identification with an in-group perceived as superior. Authoritarian aggression refers to the tendency to condemn or denounce and punish people who do not respect authority and who violate one’s own values and norms. Authoritarian aggression amounts to social contra-identification with the ‘inferior’ out-group whose members do not live up to the values and norms of the in-group. Localism, finally, is a tendency to identify with the local community (cf. Roof 1974).

In this study we measure religiocentrism, not ethnocentrism. We deal with religious notions which (at least in principle) cut across boundaries of ethnicity. Religiocentrism – by analogy with ethnocentrism – implies the combination of a positive attitude towards the religious in-group and a negative attitude towards the religious out-group. Hence a discussion of religiocentrism must meet two criteria. The first is that members of a religious community should subscribe to positive attributes ascribed to members of their religious tradition – in other words, they should favour their own group. These positive attributes may even be ascribed exclusively to the in-group, although that is not necessarily clear in the positive in-group attitudes measurements. The second criterion is that they should be negatively prejudiced against other religious traditions and assign negative attributes to the out-group. Hence we speak of religiocentrism when there is a combination of positive attributes assigned to adherents



of the respondent's own religion and negative attributes assigned to adherents of other religions.

More interesting than definitions of religiocentrism as such are the explanations of the origins of positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes. Social psychology deals with both individual and contextual explanations of religiocentrism. Such a combination of individual and contextual explanations is a matter for concern, since empirical personality psychology has failed to identify personality traits causing exclusive religious attitudes like fundamentalism – unless you define fundamentalism in terms of specific personality traits like authoritarianism (Robins & Post 1997; Hood et al. 2005). Conversely, conversion to fundamentalist and exclusivist faiths does not result in basic personality changes (Paloutzian, Richardson & Rambo 1999). Thus there are probably better grounds for an approach that connects individuals' attitudes with the ideas of their communities or of groups they relate to in terms of religious identity construction. Hence we base our theoretical approach on social identity theory.

According to social psychology religiocentrism is inherent in religion because religion establishes the identity of both individuals and groups. Simply by establishing an identity religion has a potential for religiocentrism, and for ethnocentrism insofar as religious communities are defined by ethnicity. This being said, social identity theories differ from so-called realistic group conflict theories in their interpretation of the origin of in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. Realistic conflict theory presumes conflicts are rational: hostility towards out-groups aims at obtaining the means to realize in-group goals. Intergroup conflict arises from competition for scarce material resources, power, status and differing values, and are therefore 'realistic' (Cosser 1956; Sherif 1967; Brief et al. 2005). Social identity theories, on the other hand, are generally doubtful about competitive intergroup relations as a necessary condition for intergroup conflict. Tajfel's (1981) so-called minimal group experiments ('minimal' because there was neither conflict of interest nor a history of hostility between the groups) proved that mere group identification is sufficient to lead to in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. Tajfel (1981, 2 and 21) defines a group on the basis of both internal and external criteria. Internal criteria refer to an individual's identification with the group, while external criteria refer to others' perception that individuals belong to a common group by virtue of characteristics that others do not possess. Both internal and external criteria are necessary for group identification. Social identity theory attempts to explain religiocentrism by way of psychological processes of cognitive perception underlying group identification. These processes – social categorization, social identification and social comparison – help to explain why

the development and maintenance of an individual's identity in relation to a group identity potentially leads to prejudice. In other words: social identity theory concerns the construction of (e.g. religious) individual identity through group relationships. Here we distinguish between three concepts in our approach to religiocentrism: social categorization, social identification and social comparison (cf. Coenders et al. 2004).

In *social categorization* differences between members of the same group are seen as peripheral, while similarities between group members are central. In addition similarities between members of the out-group are considered more important than similarities within one's own group. In short, members of the out-group are perceived as having shared ideas and feelings, whereas the characteristics of the in-group are more diversified and nuanced. Tajfel (1981) speaks of depersonalization or dehumanization of the out-group. Because of this tendency to generalize, education that is intended to reduce religious prejudice should avoid presenting religious traditions as fixed entities by highlighting the contingency, internal dynamics and internal plurality of other religious traditions and worldviews. Unless the diversity of notions and beliefs among members of each tradition is illustrated, education about different religious traditions could end up having the opposite of the intended effect (i.e. a decline in negative prejudice) (cf. Stenhouse 1982; Duckit 1992; Sterkens 2001).

*Social identification* has to do with the fact that individuals derive their self-image from their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel 1981, 255). Individuals always strive for a positive self-image by attempting to join groups they evaluate positively and reduce identification with group(s) they evaluate negatively, including those they actually belong to. In social identification positive stereotypes are applied to oneself, while social contra-identification consists in resisting generalized negative characteristics of groups one does not belong to or want to belong to (cf. Brown 1995).

*Social comparison* contributes to positive self-esteem by evaluating the characteristics of the in-group as 'of higher moral value' or 'better' than those of relevant out-groups. Positive stereotypes are applied to oneself and the in-group(s), negative stereotypes to members of out-group(s). Prejudice is thus an attitude in the relative positioning of two or more groups rather than a matter of specific group characteristics. Hence prejudice is primarily a matter of intergroup relations, and individuals think of themselves as belonging to this or that social group. Whether prejudice is the cause or the effect of group formation is, for the purpose of social comparison, a theoretical question. The two go hand in hand. While some conflicts result from sharply distinct group identities, distinctions between groups are also established through conflict.

In the first case the different social constructions of needs and satisfiers in the distinct groups compete and frustrate relationships. In the second case conflicts make social comparison possible and strengthen the internal cohesion of the various groups (cf. Coser 1956; Blumer 1958).

Although social identity theory proceeds from critique of realistic group conflict theories, it incorporates rather than refutes these theories. Competitive conditions and awareness of a distinctive identity are not merely 'additives' when conflicts arise. An 'additive' approach would mean that competitive conditions on the one hand and identity construction on the other are independent factors that accumulate in the course of conflict. Social identity theory recognizes extensive interdependencies between competitive conditions and identity construction. On the one hand intergroup competition for scarce resources (e.g. economic wealth or political power) presupposes minimal consciousness of the existence of groups. On the other hand competitive conditions can strengthen group identity formation through social processes of inclusion and exclusion. Hence it remains important to study the context in which identity is constructed, more specifically in terms of the kind of interests at stake and the societal conditions under which competition arises. Nevertheless, apart from 'realistic' competition for resources, identity construction in itself explains the origins of religiocentrism (cf. Eisinga & Scheepers 1989; Turner 1999).

### 6.3 Empirical Research

Having clarified the theoretical framework of the concept we want to measure, we turn to the empirical research. First we define our research questions. Secondly, we explain the construction of the measuring instruments based on our theoretical framework. Thirdly, we comment on the results of the data analysis and comment extensively on the construction of a comparative measure of religiocentrism.

#### 6.3.1 *Research Questions*

With reference to our theoretical framework of religiocentrism we formulate the research questions as follows:

- (1) What comparative understanding of religiocentrism emerges among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?
- (2) Are there significant differences in levels of religiocentrism between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

- (3) Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to the level of religiocentrism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?
- (4) Which personal characteristics may be regarded as predictors of religiocentrism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

### 6.3.2 *Measuring Instruments*

We measured religiocentrism by means of a list of positive and negative statements about Christians, Muslims and Hindus. Respondents indicated their (dis)agreement on a four-point Likert scale. The list consisted of four items comprising positive pronouncements about members of the religious in-group and two sets of five items attributing negative characteristics to members of religious out-groups (five negative attributes assigned to the first religious out-group and five to the second religious out-group). Respondents were presented with different items depending on the tradition to which they belonged, because 'religious in-group' and 'religious out-group' differ according to the respondent's religious self-definition. Since the questionnaire was anonymous and we did not know beforehand which religious tradition the respondent belonged to, all respondents actually received the same questionnaire. However, the part on religiocentrism had three different sections to be completed by Christians, Muslims and Hindus respectively. In these sections Christian students were given items assigning positive attributes to Christianity (i.e. Christians) and items assigning negative attributes to Muslims and Hindus. Muslim students were presented with positive attitudes towards Islam (i.e. Muslims) and negative attitudes towards Christians and Hindus. Hindu students were given positive statements about Hinduism (i.e. Hindus) and negative statements about Christians and Muslims.

The positive attributes assigned to the religious in-group were the same for all respondents, regardless of their religious tradition. Examples of positive in-group attitudes are: '[X] respond to God most faithfully'; and 'Thanks to their religion, most [X] are good people'. '[X]' should be replaced by 'Christians', 'Muslims' or 'Hindus', depending on the respondent's religious in-group. Note that the qualification 'positive' in the scale for positive in-group attitudes is not a normative qualification. 'Positive' does not mean that it is advisable or even desirable to agree with this kind of statement. It simply expresses the 'positive' side of the bi-factorial structure of religiocentrism, operationalized as in-group favouritism.

The negative attributes assigned to the religious out-group may differ depending on the out-group concerned *and* the respondent's religious tradition. They may (but will not necessarily) differ, because religiocentrism can be seen

as a function of religious identity construction which entails processes of social inclusion and exclusion and their mutual influence. As mentioned already, the origins of religiocentrism lie in social categorization, identification and comparisons that involve the in-group and relevant out-groups. Consequently the content of negative out-group attitudes may differ depending on the (in) group that 'constructs' the relevant attributes assigned to the out-group. After all, the prejudice does not necessarily refer to a (negative) quality of the out-group but results from the interrelationship between a specific in-group and a specific out-group. Hindus and Muslims may have different negative attitudes towards Christians; Hindus and Christians may have different negative attitudes towards Muslims; and Muslims may have prejudices against Christians that differ from Hindus' prejudices.

The negative attributes assigned to a specific religious out-group are always chosen from the perspective of a specific religious in-group, based on widespread prejudices in that in-group. As far as possible we kept the attributes the same, but in a few cases we evaluated a negative prejudice about a religious group as inappropriate from the perspective of all the religious traditions that make these judgments. A general item that we applied to all religious out-groups is: '[Y] are often the cause of religious conflict', where [Y] represents Christians, Muslims or Hindus depending on the religious out-group. Examples of items assigning negative attributes to Christians are: "Because of their religion Christians are Westernized" (from a Muslim perspective); and "Because of their religion Christians lack a sense of national belonging" (from a Hindu perspective). An example of a negative attitude towards Muslims is: "When it comes to religion Muslims are intolerant". Examples of negative attitudes towards Hindus are: "Because of their religion many Hindus remain poor" (from the perspective of Christians); and "Hindus are very caste-minded" (from the perspective of Muslims). For a complete list of items, see appendix F.

Because there are three groups of respondents (Christians, Muslims, Hindus) and attributes are assigned to three religious traditions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism), the measurement of religiocentrism comprises nine different scales. Christian respondents are questioned about their positive attitudes towards Christianity, their negative attitudes towards Islam and their negative attitudes towards Hinduism. Muslim respondents are questioned about their negative attitudes towards Christianity, their positive attitudes towards Islam and their negative attitudes towards Hinduism. Hindu respondents are questioned about their negative attitudes towards Christianity, their negative attitudes towards Islam and their positive attitudes towards Hinduism. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the measuring instruments according to the respondent's religion and the religious tradition the items refer to. The rows refer to

TABLE 6.1 *Synopsis of religiocentrism measuring instruments (positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes) according to the respondent's religion (rows) and the religious tradition the attitudes refer to (columns).*

Respondent's religion	Religious tradition the attitudes refer to		
	Christianity	Islam	Hinduism
Christians	Positive in-group [1]	Negative out-group [2]	Negative out-group [3]
Muslims	Negative out-group [2]	Positive in-group [1]	Negative out-group [3]
Hindus	Negative out-group	Negative out-group [2]	Positive in-group [1]

Measuring instruments with identical attributes for all respondents are indicated by the same number between brackets: [1], [2] or [3].

the three groups of respondents according to their religion. The columns refer to the religious traditions that the attributes are assigned to. Thus each cell refers to a specific measurement: items with attributes assigned to a particular religious group (column) from the perspective of the respondent's own religious tradition (row).

As explained in greater detail under the answer to research question 1, the distribution of measuring instruments according to the respondent's religious tradition poses a problem for cross-religious comparability.<sup>1</sup> There are two options: using a questionnaire with identical items for all respondents, or using a similar questionnaire with all items formulated more abstractly, for instance 'my religion' and 'members of other religions' to indicate in-group and out-groups respectively.<sup>2</sup> However, both alternatives have disadvantages.

1 The religiocentrism instrument discussed here is an adapted version of an earlier instrument testing the effects of an interreligious curriculum on religiocentrism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students (Sterkens 2001). While this instrument is suitable for comparison between pre- and post-tests in religious groups, it had to be adapted for comparison between religious groups.

2 An alternative method of organizing the survey (not related to the measurement itself) would also have been possible. We could have distributed different questionnaires according to the respondent's religion, using only the relevant 'positive in-group attitudes' and 'negative out-group attitudes'. Although this measurement would still differ according to the respondents' religious self-description, they would not need to choose a specific section in the questionnaire. However, professors and lecturers who participated in the study said that they did not know what the religious self-descriptions of students would be (Christian, Muslim, Hindu or other). Because the question about religious self-description was administered anonymously,

The first alternative would have presented all items to all respondents, with the same positive and negative attributes (irrespective of their religious tradition). Apart from the fact that this would make the questionnaire considerably longer, it entails loss of specificity of the (negative and positive) attributes; in that sense the measuring instruments would be less compatible with our theoretical framework for religiocentrism as an effect of a specific relation between in-group and out-group. Secondly, this alternative could affect test reliability detrimentally. The research group comprised Christian, Muslim and Hindu students; obviously each of these subgroups has a different religious in-group and different religious out-groups. Hence if all respondents were given the same questionnaire, they would also be confronted with items that assign negative attributes to their religious in-group. This we wanted to avoid, since respondents might be affronted by such items. Irritation of this kind could impair the reliability of the measuring instrument. On the basis of an empirical study Tajfel (1981, 109) states that some measure of irritation can cause extreme judgments. This also applies to respondents' possibly unfavourable reaction to negative statements about the religious out-group. Since we could not omit negative out-group statements, we tried to avoid irritation by including a number of items assigning positive attributes to the out-group. The latter also served to counteract response set. Since these items are not part of the measuring instruments, they are not mentioned in the tables.

The second alternative would have been to construct items in more abstract terms by using 'my religion' and 'members of other religions' to indicate in-group and out-groups respectively. This would imply using attributes that are reasonably applicable to all religious traditions. Here, too, negative attributes would be less specific and in that sense less compatible with our theoretical framework. This alternative would not specify which religious out-group the items refer to, which would be problematic in a research population that includes three religious groups. In such a context items could be interpreted differently depending on the respondent's association with a particular out-group. Whether the drawbacks of these alternatives outweigh the shortcomings of our measuring instrument is disputable. Obviously the choice of either of these alternatives would depend on the research questions one seeks to resolve.

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it was not possible to distribute different versions of the questionnaire according to the respondent's religious tradition.



### 6.3.3 *Empirical Results*

We now proceed to discuss the results of the empirical analysis with reference to the research questions. First we briefly explain the construction of the measuring scales for religiocentrism. Second, we compare the scores on positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes between the different groups (as far as possible). Third, we relate scores on positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes to some student characteristics. Finally we try to explain the variance in positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes by means of a regression analysis. By doing so we hope to find an explanation of and reflection on the differences between Christians', Muslims' and Hindus' levels of religiocentrism.

Research question 1: What comparative understanding of religiocentrism emerges among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

To answer the first question we checked whether religiocentrism, as a combination of positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes, occurs among members of the three religious traditions under investigation. As explained above, the negative attributes assigned to the religious out-group may differ depending on the out-group concerned and the respondent's religious tradition. Because the items are not exactly the same for each group of respondents, it is not possible to create one overall scale for the whole population (Christians, Muslims and Hindus). In particular, the items measuring negative attitudes towards Christians differ for Muslims and Hindus. We did check whether religiocentrism occurs among all religious groups by conducting a confirmative factor analysis for each scale in every religious group: 860 Christians, 772 Hindus and 254 Muslims. This confirmed the structure of positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes for all three religious traditions. Measurement of religiocentrism in a research population comprising three religious traditions thus results in nine scales: three for 'positive in-group attitudes' and six for 'negative out-group attitudes'. Each scale contains three items. The criteria of the confirmative factor analyses (Principal Axis Factoring, Oblimin rotation method) were mineigen  $>.1$ ; factor loadings  $>.30$ ; commonality ( $h^2$ ) of the items  $>.20$ . Technically this is called construct equivalence, which means that measuring instruments for different religious groups refer to the same concept, though the stimuli to measure the concept are not necessarily the same (cf. Van de Vijver & Leung 1997, 7–26; Harkness et al. 2003, 14 and 143–156). Table 6.2 reflects the reliability ( $\alpha$ ) of each scale. Since each measuring instrument contains only three items, we regard the reliability levels as acceptable.

TABLE 6.2 *Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the religiocentrism measuring instruments (positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes), and percentages of explained variance according to the respondent's religion (rows) and the religious tradition the attitudes refer to (columns).*

Respondent's religion	Religious tradition the attitudes refer to		
	Christianity	Islam	Hinduism
Christians	.70 [1]	.55 [2]	.48 [3]
Muslims	.56 [2]	.62 [1]	.60 [3]
Hindus	.57	.60 [2]	.65 [1]

Measuring instruments with identical attributes for all respondents are indicated by the same number between brackets: [1], [2] or [3]. These instruments reach scalar equivalence suitable for cross-religious comparison.

Research question 2: Are there significant differences in levels of religiocentrism between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

To answer the second question we have to discuss the equivalence (or comparability) of the measuring instruments in greater detail. Because of the bifactorial structure of religiocentrism, we discuss cross-religious comparisons of (1) positive in-group attitudes and (2) negative attitudes towards specific out-groups separately.<sup>3</sup> Only measuring instruments that use identical attri-

3 Theoretically one could also make (3) cross-religious comparisons of negative attitudes towards a generalized out-group; (4) cross-religious comparisons of negative attitudes towards (different) out-groups; and (5) a comparison of negative attitudes towards different out-groups within the same religious group. The third option would only be feasible if items were formulated using an inclusive definition of out-groups (e.g. 'members of other religions'), combined with negative attributes that are reasonably applicable to all religious traditions. The best we can do with our questionnaire is to combine 'out-group 1' and 'out-group 2' scores of one religious group of respondents, and compare them with a combined score on 'out-group 1' and 'out-group 2' of another religious group, e.g. by combining the scores on negative attitudes towards Muslims and negative attitudes towards Hindus among Christians, and comparing them with the combined scores of negative attitudes towards Christians and negative attitudes towards Hindus among Muslims. However, the items are obviously not identical. In the fourth option, for instance, we ask whether Muslims are more negative about Christians than Hindus are about Muslims. The opinions that members of specific religious traditions have about each other belong to this type. In other words, what are the mutual negative attributions? For example, are Christians more negative about Muslims than the other way around? The fifth option is comparison of negative out-group attitudes within one group of respondents. For instance, are Christians more negative about Muslims than they are about

butes for all respondents function at the same ratio level in each religious group and therefore achieve scalar equivalence.

### Positive In-group Attitudes

With regard to *positive in-group attitudes*, average scores on positive in-group attitudes of Christians, Muslims and Hindus may be listed separately. Since this measurement is on an ordinal level (without an absolute zero point in the scale), the score as such is relative and has limited meaning. It only becomes meaningful when related to the levels of positive in-group attitudes in other religious groups (a question we deal with here), or to specific personal characteristics (to be discussed under research question 3). Cross-religious comparisons of the scores on positive in-group attitudes are straightforward, because these were measured using the same attributes for all groups. Still, such a comparison assumes that the words we used for the positive attributes have the same meaning for all groups involved and are equally applicable to all. The same assumption is also made, of course, for other (known and unknown) respondent characteristics such as urbanization, institutional religious practice, vertical mysticism and so forth. In principle, then, this assumption is not different from the assumptions made for any measuring instrument in any survey. Technically it means that the measuring instrument contains no religious bias. We trust that this is the case, since we cannot think of any reason why religion should lead to different interpretations of the words we have chosen.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, this does not mean that different groups will necessarily display equal levels of positive in-group attitudes. Positive in-group attitudes do indeed differ according to religious tradition. On average Muslims (3.54) are more positive about their own religious tradition than Christians (3.23), while Christians are more positive about their own religious tradition than Hindus (2.84). Consequently Muslims are appreciably more positive about their own religious tradition than Hindus. A Scheffé test shows that these differences are significant (F-value: 99.14;  $p < .000$ ), confirmed by the T-test of the groups concerned, which reveal significant intergroup differences. We will account for these results in the discussion (Table 6.3).

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Hindus? These three types of comparison do not concern our research question here. Their theoretical possibilities and outcomes are discussed in Sterkens and Anthony (2008).

4 Our (cross-religious) comparative measurement of the related concept of *monism* showed intergroup differences similar to those we find here (see previous chapter). This supports our assumption that our measuring instrument for positive in-group attitudes contains no bias.

TABLE 6.3 *Levels of agreement (mean and standard deviation) with regard to positive in-group attitudes for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students, and comparison of means between religious groups of respondents (T-tests for significant intergroup differences in Scheffé's test).*

	N	Mean	S.d.	Muslims (t-value)	Hindus (t-value)
Christians	860	3.23	.74	20.41 (p < .000)	29.20 (p < .000)
Muslims	254	3.54	.58		63.45 (p < .000)
Hindus	772	2.84	.86		

Scale: 1(Disagree), 2 (Tend to disagree), 3 (Tend to agree), 4 (Agree)

### Negative Out-group Attitudes

With regard to *negative out-group attitudes* towards specific out-groups a more detailed and nuanced answer is required. This cross-religious comparison is possible for negative attitudes towards both Muslims and Hindus, but with our measuring instrument it is not possible for negative attitudes towards Christians. In the latter case our operationalization assigns different negative attitudes towards the out-group (here Christians) depending on the in-group making the judgment (here Muslims or Hindus). Why did we do this? For the Christian out-group we prioritized item specificity (according to religious out-group) over scalar equivalence. After all, according to our theoretical framework the attribution of negative characteristics results from a specific interaction between groups. Negative attributes do not necessarily say something about the group possessing these attributes, but only about how that group is perceived by another group. They stem from social processes of exclusion in the identity construction of members of the in-group which holds these opinions. In the Tamil Nadu context differing negative attitudes towards Christians on the part of Muslims and Hindus are a case in point. While Hindus often see Christians as intent on converting others to their religion and negative about local cultural practices, some Muslims perceive Christians as religiously intolerant. Hence we give the scores on negative attitudes towards Christians from the perspective of Muslims and Hindus respectively, with the explicit qualification that the two scores are not comparable. On the items measuring negative attitudes towards Christians Muslims scored (on average) 2.61 (s.d.79). On the items measuring negative attitudes towards Christians Hindus scored (on average) 2.37 (s.d.79) (see Table 6.4).

We can, however, compare negative attitudes towards Muslims from the perspective of Christians and Hindus, because the same attributes were used

TABLE 6.4 *Levels of agreement (mean and standard deviation) with regard to negative attitudes towards Christians among Muslim and Hindu students, negative attitudes towards Muslims among Christian and Hindu students, and negative attitudes towards Hindus among Christian and Muslim students, and T-tests (where possible) of means between religious groups of respondents.*

	N	Mean	S.d.	Muslims (t-value)	Hindus (t-value)
<i>Negative attitudes towards Christians</i>					
Muslims	243	2.61	.79	No comparison possible	
Hindus	771	2.37	.79	No comparison possible	
<i>Negative attitudes towards Muslims</i>					
Christians	848	2.51	.75	--	4.63 (p < .000)
Hindus	769	2.32	.85	--	--
<i>Negative attitudes towards Hindus</i>					
Christians	853	2.78	.72	1.65 (p < .050)	--
Muslims	247	2.69	.79	--	--

Scale: 1 (Disagree), 2 (Tend to disagree), 3 (Tend to agree), 4 (Agree)

– assuming, of course, that the words used do not have different meanings for different groups of respondents, and that the attributes are in theory equally applicable to both groups. In our research population Christians (2.51; s.d.75) are significantly more negative about Muslims than Hindus are (2.32; s.d.85). We can also compare negative attitudes towards Hindus from the perspective of Christians and Muslims: Christians (2.78; s.d.72) are more negative about Hindus than Muslims are (2.69; s.d.79). A T-test shows these differences are significant. These results will be considered in the discussion.

Research question 3: Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to religiocentrism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?

The third research question concerns the social location of religiocentrism. Where do we find religiocentrism among our respondents? And does religiocentrism among Christians, Muslims and Hindus relate to the same or to different personal characteristics? Before answering the second question we must be sure that cross-religious comparison of the association measures is legitimate. Is that really the case? The answer is yes, as long as there is no

non-uniform bias. Even when the measurements do not achieve full scalar equivalence because of uniform bias, comparison of correlations is possible. After all, uniform bias does not affect the association measures, irrespective of whether only one or both variables are biased. If there is uniform bias, the items yield different scores for different groups, but the scores show a linear transformation. An example will make this clear: the absolute frequency of church attendance (for Christians) and mosque attendance (for Muslims) cannot meaningfully be compared, because they have different meanings in these two traditions. But a comparison of the correlation between church attendance and religiocentrism among Christians on the one hand, and the correlation between mosque attendance and religiocentrism among Muslims on the other, still makes sense! If construct equivalence for the variables involved is achieved, cross-religious comparison of correlations between the variables is possible, since uniform bias does not affect the association measures (cf. Van de Vijver & Leung 1997; Harkness et al. 2003). What, then, are the personal characteristics of people who adopt religio-centric attitudes? Again we consider positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes of Christians, Muslims and Hindus separately.

#### Positive In-group Attitudes

Among Christian respondents the following *socio-cultural* characteristics correlate significantly with positive in-group attitudes (see Table 6.5). Levels of positive in-group attitudes are higher among students who speak Tamil as their mother tongue (3.33) compared with native speakers of another language (2.89). Furthermore, positive in-group attitudes are more likely to be found among Christians who have lived most of their lives in towns and villages ( $r = .16$ ). All *socio-economic* characteristics correlate negatively with positive in-group attitudes. Stronger positive in-group attitudes are found among lower castes ( $-.17$ ) and when parental educational levels are low ( $-.17$  for mother's education and  $-.14$  for father's education). As for *socio-religious* characteristics, relatively strong positive in-group attitudes are found among students who evaluate the role of socializing agencies positively. This is true of all the socializing agents, in order of importance: the media (.17), parents (.13), religious community (.09) and teachers/professors (.08).

In our Muslim research group two *socio-cultural* characteristics correlate relatively strongly with positive in-group attitudes: gender and language. Male Muslim students are significantly more positive about Islam ( $m = 3.66$ ) than their female peers ( $m = 3.40$ ), a finding that applies to the Muslim population only. Next, Muslims who speak Tamil as their mother tongue display more positive in-group attitudes ( $m = 3.65$ ) than those who speak another language ( $m$

= 3.46). With regard to *socio-economic* characteristics, we find the same significant variables as among the Christian population. Among Muslims, too, there is a negative correlation between caste and positive in-group attitudes: Muslims belonging to lower castes have more positive in-group attitudes. Next, there is a negative correlation between parents' educational level and positive in-group attitudes. Mother's educational level is the most significant: the lower her educational level, the stronger the positive in-group attitudes. With regard to *socio-religious* characteristics, relatively strong positive in-group attitudes are found among students who evaluate the role of the following socializing agents positively: parents (.27), relatives (.19), religious community (.18), teachers/professors (.16) and the media (.14).

Among Hindus we find significant correlations of positive in-group attitudes with urbanization, the Tamil language and age among the *socio-cultural* characteristics. Hindu students who have lived most of their lives in rural areas show higher levels of positive in-group attitudes (-.18). Second, as among Christian and Muslim students, speaking the Tamil language relates to higher levels of positive in-group attitudes ( $m = 2.90$ ) compared to Hindu students who speak another language as their mother tongue ( $m = 2.64$ ). On average older students (not younger ones, as among Christians) display more positive in-group attitudes than their younger peers. When it comes to *socio-economic* characteristics, Hindus belonging to lower castes have stronger positive in-group attitudes (-.19). Regarding parental educational level as a socio-economic characteristic, we find a similar correlation: lower parental educational levels (both father's and mother's) relate to stronger positive in-group attitudes (-.21 and -.17 respectively). Finally, among Hindus we find stronger positive in-group attitudes among students who evaluate the role of socializing agents positively, even if the socializing agents are somewhat different than among Christians and Muslims. We find positive correlations between positive in-group attitudes and media (.23), teachers and professors (.21), religious community (.18), parents (.13), friends (.11) and relatives (.08) (cf. Table 6.5).

#### Negative Out-group Attitudes

With regard to negative out-group attitudes, our findings showed significant and relevant correlations only for Muslim students' negative attitudes towards Christians. The first relates to gender ( $\eta^2 .38$ ). Muslim men (2.64) are considerably more negative about Christians than Muslim women (2.04).<sup>5</sup> Next, we find

5 We also find a correlation ( $\eta^2 .19$ ) between gender and negative attitudes towards Hindus: Muslim men ( $m = 2.82$ ) are considerably more negative about Hindus than Muslim women ( $m = 2.53$ ). Among Christian and Hindu respondents, too, we find higher negative out-group



TABLE 6.5 *Social location of positive in-group attitudes among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students. Correlations (Pearson's  $r$  for ordinal variables,  $\eta$  for nominal variables) between positive in-group attitudes and some personal characteristics.<sup>6</sup>*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Age	-.08*		.10**
Sex		.22**	
Language	.25**	.15**	.13**
Urbanization	-.16**		-.18**
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Caste	-.17**	-.18**	-.19**
Education mother	-.17**	-.30**	-.17**
Education father	-.14**	-.14**	-.21**
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Parents	.13**	.27**	.13**
Relatives		.19**	.07*
Friends			.11**
Religious community	.09*	.18**	.18**
Teachers/professors	.08*	.16*	.21**
Media	.17**	.14**	.23**

Correlations are significant at  $p < .00$  (\*\*) or at  $p < .05$  (\*) level.

negative attitudes towards Christians especially among Muslims whose parents have low educational levels: a negative correlation with mother's educational level ( $r$  -.22) and a negative correlation with father's educational level ( $r$  -.21). Finally, a positive evaluation of the contribution of teachers and professors ( $r$  .20) to religious socialization, and that of the religious community ( $r$  .15) relates to negative attitudes towards the Christian out-group (table not included).

attitudes among men than among women, though the significant correlations are lower in these religious groups.

- 6 The following characteristics did not show significant correlations for any of the groups of respondents: number of years spent in schools affiliated with one's own religion, education level, occupation of the father and occupation of the mother. These variables are not mentioned in the table.

Research question 4: Which personal characteristics may be considered predictors of religiocentrism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

To establish whether religiocentrism can also be explained by personal characteristics we conducted a linear regression analysis (method: enter), in which the personal characteristics are defined as independent variables, and positive in-group and negative out-group attitudes as dependent variables. We only included personal characteristics which show relevant ( $r \approx .20$ ) and significant ( $p < .000$ ) correlations in at least one religious group (See Table 6.6).

#### Positive In-group Attitudes

Because respondents with more than one missing value are excluded from the analysis, the exact number in the regression analyses varies slightly, but about 810 Christian students (out of a total of 869), 725 Hindu students (out of a total of 789), and 220 Muslim students (out of a total of 255) are included in the analysis. The total explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of the regression analyses of positive in-group attitudes varies according to the group of respondents. It is highest among Muslims ( $R^2 = .17$ ), followed by the Christian group ( $R^2 = .13$ ), and lowest for Hindu students ( $R^2 = .11$ ). We can identify the following predictors in the different religious groups, presented in order of importance.

Among Christians Tamil as mother tongue predicts higher positive in-group attitudes ( $\beta = .22$ ). When it comes to socio-religious characteristics, respondents' perceptions of the influence on religious socialization of the media ( $\beta = .15$ ) and their parents ( $\beta = .14$ ) are relatively good predictors of positive in-group attitudes. Finally, low socio-economic status is associated with stronger positive in-group attitudes. This is true of all three socio-economic characteristics: caste ( $\beta = -.11$ ), mother's educational level ( $\beta = -.08$ ) and father's educational level ( $\beta = -.08$ ).

Among Muslims a positive role of parents in religious socialization ( $\beta = .26$ ) has by far the strongest influence. Next socio-economic status, more specifically mother's educational level ( $\beta = -.20$ ) and caste ( $\beta = -.18$ ), predicts positive in-group attitudes: low socio-economic status is associated with relatively high positive in-group attitudes. Finally, gender ( $\beta = -.15$ ) can be identified as a predictor of positive in-group attitudes: men have considerably higher positive in-group attitudes than women.

Among Hindus the positive role of the media ( $\beta = .16$ ) is the strongest predictor of positive in-group attitudes. As among Christians and Muslims, low socio-economic status is associated with more positive in-group attitudes, specifically caste ( $\beta = -.14$ ) and mother's educational level ( $\beta = -.14$ ).

TABLE 6.6 *Regression analyses for positive in-group attitudes with weights ( $\beta$ ) for each variable and total explained variance ( $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$ ) for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students separately.*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Sex (male 1; female 2)	.03	-.15*	.01
Language	-.22**	-.08	-.03
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Caste	-.11**	-.18**	-.14**
Education mother	-.08*	-.20**	-.01
Education father	-.08*	.07	-.14**
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Parents	.14**	.26**	.10*
Teachers/professors	.03	-.03	.09*
Media	.15**	.08	.16**
	$R^2$ .14	.20	.12
	Adj. $R^2$ .13	.17	.11

Standardised regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) are significant at  $p < .00$  (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  (\*) level.

### Negative Out-group Attitudes

Analysis of negative out-group attitudes is only worthwhile in the case of Muslim respondents' negative attitudes towards Christians.<sup>7</sup> We did find the following significant standardized regression coefficients contributing to total explained variance ( $R^2 = .18$ ; Adj.  $R^2 = .16$ ): gender ( $\beta = -.31$ ); socialization by teachers and professors ( $\beta = .09$ ); mother's educational level ( $\beta = -.09$ ); and father's educational level ( $\beta = -.08$ ). However, only the standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of gender proved significant on  $p < .00$  level: Muslim women have considerable lower levels of negative attitudes towards Christians than Muslim men.

7 Since we did find low correlations between personal characteristics and negative out-group attitudes among Christian and Hindu respondents, regression analyses would yield too low levels of explained variance to say anything meaningful about these groups.

## 6.4 Findings and Discussion

We summarize the responses to our research questions and discuss the cross-religious differences in religiocentrism levels by examining the differential effects of student characteristics on religiocentrism.

### 6.4.1 *Findings*

#### Significance of a Comparative Model of Religiocentrism

Religiocentrism does occur among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu. To some degree all groups of respondents display a combination of positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes. Because negative out-group attitudes (prejudices) emerge in specific interaction between religious traditions, it is difficult to make cross-religious comparisons of the levels of such attitudes. At best we achieved concept equivalence in this regard, which is still good enough to allow cross-religious comparisons of the social location and origins of religiocentrism. In the case of positive in-group attitudes we constructed comparative scales with scalar equivalence.<sup>8</sup>

We also examined whether there are significant differences in the levels of religiocentrism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students. Muslims display more positive in-group attitudes than Christians, and Christians in their turn have significantly more positive in-group attitudes than Hindus. With regard to out-group attitudes, Christians are significantly more negative about Muslims than Hindus are, just as Christians are more negative about Hindus than Muslims are.

#### Social Location and Prediction of Religiocentrism

In a third research question we asked which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to religiocentrism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students. On the whole the correlations between student characteristics and religiocentrism are remarkably similar for the three religious traditions in our research, but there are some differences as well. In the discussion we reflect on cross-religious similarities and differences in the social location of religiocentrism and how these could contribute to the interpretation of levels of religiocentrism.

Our last research question was: which personal characteristics can be regarded as predictors of religiocentrism among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students? For positive in-group attitudes we identified certain predictors: the Tamil language for Christian respondents; caste (as a socio-economic category) for all religious groups; mother's education for Muslims; and father's educa-

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<sup>8</sup> We do not repeat the discussion of levels of equivalence here. See section 2.6 in chapter 2.

tion for Hindus. Finally, the influence of socializing agents such as parents (for all religious groups) and the media (for Christians and Hindus) is a good predictor of positive in-group attitudes. For negative out-group attitudes it proves far more difficult to find predictors with statistical certainty.

#### 6.4.2 *Discussion*

The discussion gives a further interpretation of differences in religiocentrism among Christians, Muslims and Hindus in Tamil Nadu in terms of the possible differential effects of personal characteristics on these groups. With regard to respondents' *socio-cultural characteristics*, we have seen that male students display higher levels of religiocentrism than their female peers. This is true of all religious groups, but statistically the correlation is most significant for Muslim respondents. Markus and Oyserman (1989, 101ff) maintain that women's identity is characterized by greater 'connectedness' than men's, which is marked by 'separateness'. Gender differences are also evident when men and women communicate about religious experiences and religious conversion.

While most men use adventurous metaphors and focus on themselves as the central character, women use less dramatic metaphors and tend to focus on someone else when describing their experiences (Knight et al. 2005; cf. Nanda 2000). These general observations might well explain why women are more open to a religiously plural environment and consequently display lower levels of religiocentrism. But we can also give an explanation relating more specifically to the Indian context. Women in Tamil Nadu readily exceed the confines of their own religious tradition when seeking solutions to health problems (for themselves and their children), as well as for other material and spiritual needs. For the latter they also have recourse to the sacred figures, rituals and sacred places of other religions. Furthermore, in a highly patriarchal society like India, the cultural and religious self-definition of women depends largely on that of men in the family, more particularly on the husband's identity. Women quite commonly change their religion in order to marry a man belonging to another religious tradition. This is far more usual than the other way round. Indian women, in other words, cross the boundaries of religious traditions more easily than men. This might explain why women in general are less religio-centric.

In addition the Tamil language as mother tongue relates significantly to religiocentrism. Christians, Muslims and Hindus who speak Tamil as their mother tongue show higher levels of positive in-group attitudes, and in the case of Christians it is also associated with higher levels of negative out-group attitudes. Speaking the Tamil language as mother tongue is also a significant predictor of positive in-group attitudes among Christians. Why? Tamils are

typically attached to their language. Consistent resistance to the Sanskritization process and defence of their Dravidic language identity over at least two millennia have made them a distinct group. This is manifested in their resistance (sometimes violent) to the national language Hindi, which derives from Sanskrit. Perhaps this 'linguistic pride' has an effect on positive in-group attitudes. For Christians and Muslims speaking their own language could give them a sense that their religious tradition is fully part of the local culture. Moreover, speaking the Tamil language is an indication of 'localism' or the tendency to identify with the local community. Localism in turn has a direct influence on ethnocentrism, as has been proven empirically in several surveys (cf. Roof 1974; Gijssberts et al. 2004; above). For Hindus the analysis yields a much weaker correlation with positive in-group attitudes and no proof of influence. This might have to do with the ambiguous feelings that are involved in the relationship between the Tamil language on the one hand and Hindu identity (especially positive in-group attitudes) on the other. Hinduism is dominated by the Sanskrit textual traditions of the Vedas and Upanisads, as well as the Dharmasastras, the big Sanskrit epics and the Puranas (cf. Flood 2005, 68–198). Tamil Hindu literature, on the other hand, is enormously diverse, perhaps easier to define in terms of what it excludes than on the basis of a central 'Hindu' doctrine. It contains, among other things, the Tamil Vaisnava and Saiva Saints' texts. Nevertheless recognition of this Tamil literature is under permanent pressure from stricter Hindu schools, who aspire to a clear canonization of texts. Perhaps this distinctive position of Tamil Hindu literature explains why, among Hindus in particular, speaking Tamil as a mother tongue has no influence on positive in-group attitudes (cf. Cutler 2005).

When it comes to *socio-economic characteristics*, we found caste to be relevant to religiocentrism. Belonging to a lower caste is associated with higher positive in-group attitudes and, less strongly, with negative out-group attitudes. In other words: lower castes display higher levels of religiocentrism. At first glance this negative correlation between caste and religiocentrism, and the significant negative influence of caste on positive in-group attitudes in the regression analysis, might seem surprising. Would one not rather expect people belonging to higher castes to be more positive about their religious tradition? And why are both correlation and influence not significantly stronger among Hindus than among Christians and Muslims? The results prove that the caste system, operationalized according to the legal definitions of the Tamil Nadu government, is deeply imbedded in Indian culture, irrespective of religion. It is a socio-economic characteristic rather than a religious standard. This is remarkable, since a widespread prejudice against Hindus is that they are very 'caste-minded'.

Another finding among all groups of respondents is a negative correlation between parental educational levels (both mother's and father's) and positive in-group attitudes: low parental educational level goes hand in hand with high positive in-group attitudes. Among Muslims there is also a negative correlation between parents' educational level and negative attitudes towards Christians. All these negative correlations are meaningful in the regression analyses as well. Among Muslims mother's educational level is the strongest predictor of religiocentrism (both positive in-group and negative out-group attitudes), while for Hindus father's education is the strongest predictor of positive in-group attitudes. Mother's educational level in particular can be seen as an indicator of the economic position of Muslim respondents. Low participation of women in higher education is a problem in India. The literacy rate in 2001 was 64% but, even though the gap is narrowing, there is still a significant difference between female (54%) and male (75%) literacy. Only 1% of women attend a university or college, as opposed to 3% of men (Departments of School Education, Literacy and Higher Education 2007). Although education is free, parents have to pay for textbooks, uniforms and transport. The mother's level of education is a strong indicator of the family's economic status.

Among all students a higher educational level for the mother is a relatively strong predictor of lower levels of religiocentrism. In other words: higher socio-economic status is associated with lower levels of religiocentrism. The influence of socio-economic status is evident in both educational level and caste. How does one account for this? Students from upper economic classes are more exposed to cultural and religious pluralism: they might travel more and have greater access to both the written and electronic media. Since these opportunities can promote understanding of other groups, students of well educated parents may have lower levels of religiocentrism. Empirical research has also shown that even under similar conditions at college, socio-economic status still has an impact. High-status students interact more frequently than their low-status peers.

This can lead to differences in learning outcomes, including attitudes. High status students (who talk more) learn more, even when status differences are irrelevant to the task (Cohen & Lotan 1995). And a student who learns more in interaction with others might be better able to differentiate between opinions and feelings about other religious traditions. This might reduce religiocentrism.

With regard to *socio-religious characteristics*, we find that the perceived positive influence of some socializing religious agents generates positive in-group attitudes. In other words, the more positively one evaluates a socializing agent's effect on one's understanding and practice of religion, the more likely one is to



have positive in-group attitudes. This is especially true of parents and the media, and applies to all the religious groups involved. The religious community plays a significant role among Muslims and Hindus; religious socialization by the media is most influential among Christians and Hindus. There is no clear-cut causal effect of socializing agents on negative out-group attitudes, though here too, among Christians and Muslims, we find a positive correlation between religious community, teachers and professors and the media on the one hand and certain negative out-group attitudes on the other. Socializing agents seem capable of strengthening students' religious identity. The influence of socializing agents – especially parents – leads to positive in-group attitudes.

Finally we reflect on these findings from a socio-psychological perspective against the background of the situation in Tamil Nadu. Social psychology suggests that higher levels of religiocentrism (like ethnocentrism) can relate to a group's minority position rather than to its cultural or religious convictions. In an empirical study of anti-racist education Stenhouse et al. (1982) found that among students belonging to a minority group negative out-group attitudes *increased* under the influence of interventions designed to reduce prejudice. In other words: for the minority group, the effect of the intervention was the opposite of its intention. Among members of the majority group the intervention did lead to the intended decline in ethnocentrism. Stenhouse comments that this unwanted effect on the minority group could be attributed to confrontation with the prejudice of the majority, which also surfaced in the lessons. From this perspective it is not strange that members of a minority group show higher levels of religiocentrism than members of majority groups. In our research population Muslims (and in the second place Christians) show significantly higher positive in-group attitudes than Hindus. Christians are also more negative about Muslims than Hindus are. This means that different levels of religiocentrism do not necessarily relate to religious convictions (even if these are not excluded), but can also relate to a minority position. Another study that is pertinent in this context is that of Finchilescu (1988), who examined the effects of participation in integrated as opposed to segregated training programmes on the attitudes of black and white trainee nurses in South African hospitals. After integrated training the white group rated the blacks relatively more favourably. By contrast, blacks showed more in-group favouritism as well as greater awareness of race as an important factor in the way they were treated. According to Finchilescu and a comment by Duckit (1992) intergroup contact increased black trainees' awareness and resentment of discrimination

against them and consequently, among the 'minority group',<sup>9</sup> it led to greater ethnocentrism.

Nevertheless, it may well be possible that cross-religious differences in religiocentrism relate to specific *religious convictions* and more specifically to the religious truth claims of Christians, Muslims and Hindus. Perhaps Christians and Muslims in our research population make stronger religious truth claims than Hindus. As explained in chapter 5, we did indeed find that Christians and Muslims in our research population express significantly greater agreement with monism (compared to Hindus) (cf. Anthony et al. 2005). Agreement with monism implies the absolute validity of one's own religion. Such truth claims, in either an exclusive or an inclusive variant, can foster intolerance, because they contradict the conditions for recognizing other traditions. Genuine recognition necessarily entails willingness and skills to understand other traditions in terms of their own premises, and a decrease of religiocentrism. According to this theory religion potentially fosters religiocentrism inasmuch as exclusive or inclusive truth claims contribute to intolerance between religious groups.

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9 'Minority' in this context does not refer primarily to numeric minority (even though this was the case in the group of nurses) but to their lower social status as generally perceived by others.

# Causes of Interreligious Conflict

## 7.1 Introduction

What are causes of conflict between religious groups? This chapter focuses on believers' perceptions of the causes of interreligious conflict. What do Christian, Muslim and Hindu students perceive as possible causes of religious conflict? What situations potentially contribute to religious conflict, according to these students? Perceptions of causes of conflict are not objective descriptions of facts. They are interpretations based on the (re)definition of the respondents' religious identity, on the (re)affirmation of the authority of their religious tradition, and most likely also reflect their circumstances in terms of level of anxiety and uncertainty (Sidel 2007, 1–17).

Often God as the ultimate reality and final authority is advanced as the motive for religious involvement in (destructive) conflict. The violent face of religion is evident in its politicization in nationalism, its radicalization as fundamentalism, and its instrumental use by terrorism. No religion is free from such ambiguous features, given the close link between religion and the economic, political and social domains. In India the three major religions have been, and in some cases continue to be, sources of violent conflict. Christianity's close link with those who colonized and dominated the Indian subcontinent in the latter half of the second millennium and the existence of contemporary Christian fundamentalist groups demonstrate the conflictive features of Christianity. Similarly, the spread of Islam through invasion and conquest since the 8th century CE and the present instrumentalization of Islam by terrorist groups in India reveal the conflictive side of Islam. And Hinduism, which in all its varied forms has inspired the vast majority of Indians over three millennia, was not totally free from violence. For example, the attacks by Saiva sects on the flourishing Jain and Buddhist communities in South India since the 7th century ended with their disappearance from Tamil Nadu. Some Hindu fundamentalist groups are also responsible for sporadic violence on the Indian subcontinent today.

To gain empirical insight into the causes of religious conflict we proceed as follows. In section 7.2 we identify four types of causes of conflict between religious groups: economic, political, ethnic-cultural and religious causes. Section 7.3 presents the empirical research, starting with the research questions, fol-

lowed by the measuring instruments and our findings. In section 7.4 we summarize our findings and evaluate them from a normative perspective.

## 7.2 Theoretical Framework: Realistic Conflict Group Theory Versus Social Identity Theory

We distinguish between four types of causes that may lead to interreligious conflict. The first two are based on the conviction that conflict arises from competition for scarce resources like economic wealth or political power. The third and fourth types do not see such competition as a necessary condition, but consider group identification sufficient to cause conflictive relationships.

In so-called realistic conflict group theory hostility towards other groups is aimed at securing the means to attain the goals of one's own group. Rival interests of religious groups are considered the main reason for conflict. These interests can be material (e.g. land, water, money, labour) or non-material (e.g. power, status, values), but are clearly identifiable. Because intergroup conflict arises from competition for scarce material resources, power, status and differing values, they are regarded as rational and realistic (Coser 1956; Sherif 1967; Austin & Worgel 1979; Brief et al. 2005). The competition can be actual or perceived, and may be limited to specific social strata in different religious groups. Actual competition, for instance, relates to disparities in average living standards, unemployment rates, discriminatory or affirmative action regarding appointments to public office, and population growth caused by migration. Dwindling resources coupled with sustained levels of competition (e.g. in economic crises) or increasing competition for stable available resources (e.g. because of migration) will trigger conflict if competition is interpreted on the lines of the groups involved (Coenders & Scheepers 1998). But 'realistic' competition can also be a matter of perception, as when job opportunities and perceived living standards of one's family are considered to be lower than those of others, or when one thinks one has less access to education. Perceived competition is a major determinant of intergroup attitudes and behaviour (Esses 2002 et al.). In this study we distinguish between two types of 'realistic' causes of religious conflict: socio-economic and political.

Social identity theory, on the other hand, claims that competitive relations are not a necessary condition for intergroup conflict. Tajfel's (1981) minimal group experiments ('minimal' because there were neither conflicting interests nor a history of hostility between the groups) proved that group identification in itself is sufficient to lead to in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. In social identity theory intergroup attitudes are explained in terms of the

psychological processes of cognitive perception underlying group identification. Discourses on difference are always part of group identification. More specifically, social categorization, patterns of identification and contra-identification, and social comparison are socio-psychological processes underlying group formation that potentially provoke exclusionary reactions (cf. Sterkens 2007). In the previous chapter we explained these notions of social categorization, (contra-)identification and social comparison in some detail (cf. 6.2.).

Sidel (2007, *ibid*) confirms that the (re)definition of religious identity and the (re-)articulation of claims to religious authority can be seen as causes of religious conflict, especially in heightened states of uncertainty and anxiety. The latter qualification makes it clear that social identity theory must not be misunderstood as an unconditional theory that explains conflict independently of contextual factors. Although social identity theory stems from a critique of realistic group conflict theories, it does not dissociate itself from such approaches. Intergroup competition for actual and/or perceived scarce resources remains important. Competitive conditions intensify group identification and may affect intergroup relations (Jetten et al. 2001; Turner & Reynolds 2003), in addition to factors like group size, power and status differences between groups, as well as specific histories of conflict. While group identification may entail conflictive relationships, conflict may also restore the religious identity of groups when it is threatened and may reclaim the authority of their own religion. It is the intertwining of identity construction and group interests that sparks interreligious conflict, not (just) economic or political competition that develops arbitrarily on religious lines. Nevertheless the identity concern is usually manifested in the public domains of economic, political or socio-cultural life. In India, for instance, the link between national identity and Hinduism may be perceived as a threat to the identity of minority groups (Muslims and Christians). But some Hindus may see a loosening the link between national identity and religion as a threat to the definition of being Hindu. To summarize, in interreligious conflict both actual and perceived competition for material and non-material resources relates to group identification in different ways.

What types of causes of interreligious conflict do believers identify? In this research, we distinguish between four types: socio-economic, political, ethnic-cultural and religious causes. The first two types are based on realistic conflict group theory, the latter two on social identity theory. However, they overlap. In all four types of conflict violent actions are the means to (re)define religious identity and (re)claim the authority of one's own religion. At the same time these violent actions are justified by the ends. According to Hannah Arendt such means-end thinking typifies violent conflict: "The very substance of

violent action is ruled by the means-end category, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it justifies and which are needed to reach it" (Arendt 1970, 4).

### 7.2.1 *Socio-economic Causes of Interreligious Conflict*

Firstly, conflict between religious groups can have socio-economic dimensions. When one group (especially a minority group) is economically successful this is likely to lead to intolerance on the part of other, less successful groups (often majority groups). When groups are defined on religious lines economic tensions between them can easily turn into interreligious conflict. Economically disadvantaged groups can also be oppressed on the basis of religious convictions. The much contested role of the Hindu caste system is a clear example. On the other hand, religions can motivate their followers to engage in actions to change socio-economic conditions, such as access to jobs or equal wages for all irrespective of religious background. We refer to Weber's classical sociological studies (1930; 1958), which explore the influence of religion on secular economic behaviour. While people's social and economic situation is perpetuated by diverse cultural factors, in his studies religion plays a significant role in the dialectics between the spiritual and the material world. Even in modern urbanized areas in India there are systematic differences in the socio-economic status of members of different religions or even denominations (cf. Milner 1994; Nolan & Lenski 2006).

### 7.2.2 *Political Causes of Interreligious Conflict*

Secondly, there can be political causes of conflict between religious groups. In the Indian context Tambiah (1996) points out that conflict often relates to the failure to homogenize and centralize nation-state building projects that pay too little attention to minorities and cultural and/or religious differences between groups. Although Tambiah downplays religious factors by focusing on ethno-nationalist conflict, he explicitly recognizes that religion can play an important role by mixing political and religious ideas. Underpinning nationalism with religious convictions is a case in point, for instance the relation between Indian nationalism and Hinduism. Hinduism is generally seen as a weak candidate for religious conflict, because it lacks both a strong historical sense of itself as a legally organized religion and the traditional religious resources for a fundamentalist movement like a scriptural canon and a theodicy of God acting in history. However, Appleby (2000, 110) suggests that, possibly for the same reasons, "Hinduism lends itself powerfully to the cause of nationalist movements constructed around the fluid categories of 'religion' and 'ethnicity'".

Hindu groups reconstruct religion around nationalist themes to challenge the secular order of the Indian state that threatens the higher castes in traditional India, for example by means of the somewhat vague religio-political idea of *Hindutva* (cf. Jaffrelot 1996, 80–148). A party like the BJP (*Bharatiya Janata Party* or Indian People's Party) cites ancient Hindu culture and values as a source of inspiration. Another typically Indian phenomenon is changes in the political picture as a result of religious conversions. In 1981 a group known as *dalits*, the most oppressed caste in the traditional system, converted to Buddhism, which led to some agitation among Hindu nationalists because of its potential political consequences (cf. Smith 2003; Nussbaum 2007). Appadurai (2006) in particular makes a strong case that decreasing group membership (here among the majority group) can create 'an anxiety of incompleteness' about the sovereignty of the majority in the national polity. 'Anxiety of incompleteness' refers to the idea that minorities "remind these majorities of the small gap which lies between their condition as majority and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted national ethnos" (Appadurai 2006, 8). This sense of incompleteness can tip over into ethno-nationalism and even ethnocide, which means that minority groups are denied the right to develop and transmit their own language, whether collectively or individually. Violence can erupt in conditions where anxiety of incompleteness is accompanied by feelings of uncertainty about their status as a result of social transformations caused by globalization, or when the majority's access to resources is threatened (Appadurai 2006, 84). In concrete terms: if majority group members (e.g. Hindus) have no access to higher education, uncertainty about their future socio-economic status fuels their anxiety of incompleteness. The relation between politics and access to scarce resources (in terms of education, housing, health care, etc.) supports our decision to include political causes of interreligious conflict in the theoretical framework of realistic group conflict (cf. chapter 1, section 1.2.4).

### 7.2.3 *Ethnic-cultural Causes of Interreligious Conflict*

Thirdly, conflict between religious groups can have ethnic and cultural dimensions, for instance in the form of an association between religion on the one hand and ethnic or national identity on the other. Religion can trigger conflict by entering into a pact with the ethnic-cultural context. In that case religion functions as a vehicle of ethnic identity construction or a support for nationalism. It reinforces the superior attitude and dominance of certain groups in society (cf. Bruce 2003). Relating national pride (nationalism) to a religious majority can lead to feelings of superiority among this majority, while religious minority groups are seen as inferior. Linking ethnic or national identity to a



particular religion, in other words, is conducive to religious conflict (cf. Jaffrelot 1996). But the reverse is also possible: religion can expressly rebel against a dominant cultural context. Extremist groups in various religions are characterized by a rebellious attitude towards the modern liberal state (Juergensmeyer 2003, 225). The liberal (or secular) state refrains to some extent from giving specific moral direction or guidance to its citizens. In the eyes of certain religious movements this creates a moral vacuum or even moral decadence. People blame the leaders of the mainstream of their religion for compromising with liberal values and secular institutions. They believe that this alienates them from their (religious) identity (Darmaputera 1997).

#### 7.2.4 *Religious Causes of Conflict Between Religious Groups*

Finally, some scholars locate religious violence in the dialectical experience of the sacred that represents both an overpowering presence (*tremendum*) and fascination (*fascinans*). Because religion is a response to this ambiguous sacred, it contains the potential to heal and to destroy, to love and to hate. A detailed analysis of the phenomenology of the sacred or a theory of religion helps us to understand why there are seeds of violence at the core of religion (Girard 2007; Otto 2004; Wils 2004). Religion motivates people to fight for justice in the name of God. Vanquishing the other is interpreted religiously as a victory over evil. Gaining power can be read as a religious obligation, whereupon preserving that power becomes proof of religious truth. Likewise, the enmity of others can be understood as an offence to the sacred. By using religious codes and metaphors a power struggle can become a 'just war' or even a holy war in the semantics of a cosmic, never ending battle between good and evil. This battle can be deadly serious when it leads to self-sacrifice as an extreme and ultimate expression of religious identity (cf. Juergensmeyer 2003; Steffen 2007).

### 7.3 Empirical research

On the basis of our theoretical framework we questioned Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu about their ideas on potential causes of interreligious conflict. In this section we first formulate the research questions, then describe the structure of our newly constructed measuring instrument, and finally present the results of the data analysis.

#### 7.3.1 *Research questions*

Our research questions are the following:

- (1) Which comparative models of causes of interreligious conflict are found among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students once group-specific differences have been ascertained?
- (2) Are there significant differences in levels of agreement with causes of interreligious conflict among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?
- (3) Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to the level of agreement with causes of interreligious conflict among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?

### 7.3.2 *Measuring Instrument*

To answer these research questions we developed a measuring instrument for causes of interreligious conflict. The questionnaire distributed to our respondents deals with four types of causes: socio-economic, political, ethnic-cultural and religious causes of intergroup conflict. We define conflict as “the situation that arises when rival interests can no longer be contained by the structures and processes ordinarily competent to do so” (Lincoln 2003, 74). All items have the same format: “*x causes y*”, where *y* refers to the conflict between religious groups and *x* is the reason or causal ground. To indicate causation we used verbs like ‘encourage’ and ‘favour’. The socio-economic cause is operationalized in items such as: “The open or silent approval of violence as a means of social change by some religions encourages religious conflict” (item 4). An example of items representing the political cause is: “Intervention by political leaders in religious matters encourages conflict among religions” (item 3). The ethnic-cultural cause is represented by items such as: “Linking ethnic or national identity to a particular religion favours religious conflict” (item 11). Specific religious causes are operationalized in similar terms: “Religiously motivated militant or radical groups encourage religious conflict” (item 10). The respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the statements in the items on a four-point Likert scale ranging from ‘not at all’ (1) to ‘strongly’ (4). The complete list of items appears in appendix G.

### 7.3.3 *Empirical Results*

The results of the data analysis provide answers to the three research questions formulated above. We deal with them one by one, presenting the results pertaining to each analysis.

Research question 1: Which comparative models of causes of interreligious conflict emerge among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students once group-specific differences have been ascertained?

TABLE 7.1 *Factor analysis (PAF, Oblimin rotation), commonalities ( $h^2$ ), percentage of explained variance, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of comparative models of causes of interreligious conflict among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students.*

	Theory	F1	F2	$h^2$
10. Religiously motivated militant or radical groups encourage religious conflict.	R	.66		.40
4. The overt or tacit approval of violence as a means for social change by some religions encourages religious conflict.	SE	.65		.43
12. The superiority feeling of some religions encourages religious conflict.	R	.60		.36
3. The intervention of political leaders in religious matters encourages conflict among religions.	P	.58		.42
11. Linking ethnic or national identity to a particular religion is conducive to religious conflict.	EC	.58		.31
5. The belief in the necessity of bloody sacrifices upheld by some religions inspires religious conflict.	R	.56		.32
6. The interference of foreign religious leaders in internal political matters encourages conflict among religions.	P	.52		.27
9. Religious conversion that changes the political equation within a democracy increases conflict among religions.	P	.48		.26
1. Affirming one's religion where there are many religions encourages religious conflict.	R		.75	.56
2. The human rights awareness promoted by some religions favours religious conflict.	SE		.40	.17
	Cronbach's alpha	.81	.33	
	Number of valid cases	1811	1887	

Scale: In your opinion, to what extent do the following actually favour or encourage conflict among religions? 1=not at all; 2= a little; 3=much; 4=very much.

Explained variance = 35%; F1= Force-driven religious conflict; F2 = Strength-driven religious conflict.

SE = socio-economic causes; P = political causes; EC= ethnic-cultural causes; R= religious causes.

To answer this question we used a three-step factor analysis (cf. chapter 1, section 1.7). Table 7.1 presents the results of the factor analysis for all students after filtering out differences between the religious groups.

The structure of these factors does not accord with our theoretical distinctions between the causes of interreligious conflict based on the literature.

Factor 1 consists of eight items representing all categories of causes (socio-economic, political, ethnic-cultural and religious). How should we label this factor? Three items relate to religious causes, three to political causes, one to socio-economic and one to ethnic-cultural causes. The item with the highest factor loading concerns religious extremism: "Religiously motivated militant or radical groups encourage religious conflict" (item 10). Item 5 (necessity of bloody sacrifices) also refers to religious extremism. The item with the second highest factor loading (item 4) concerns violence as a means of social change. All items on factor 1 relate to the use of coercive force in interreligious conflict. Item 11 ("Linking ethnic or national identity to a particular religion") and item 12 ("The sense of superiority of some religions") refer to the coercive force of ethnic and religious belonging respectively. Coercive power includes both positive and negative sanctions imposed by power holders on subordinates. It is exercised by an actor who has the capacity to reward or punish others (cf. Etzioni 1961; Baldwin 1971; Molm 1994). This actor can be an individual or a group of individuals like political or religious leaders, but can also refer to ethnic or religious communities that exert social pressure. Force or coercive power implies the imposition of one's will on others, as opposed to free consent or mutual agreement. In the questionnaire items the origin of force lies in religion (i.e. religious extremism), in socio-economic and ethnic causes, or in the overlap of religion and political power. We therefore label the first factor *'force-driven religious conflict'* inasmuch as conflict implies coercive power as a means of achieving the economic, political or socio-cultural goals of religious groups. To avoid misunderstanding, force-driven religious conflict does not measure the respondent's personal willingness to engage in religious conflict. Neither does it measure the extent to which violent behaviour is acceptable to the respondent. It measures to what extent the respondents attribute interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. The reliability of this factor is high ( $\alpha .81$ ).

Factor 2 consists of two items only. Item 1 falls in the category of religious causes, but refers to affirmation of one's religion and not to religious extremism. Item 2 is in the category of socio-economic causes, but refers to human rights awareness in a religious tradition and not to the pursuit of wealth or power. Affirmation and awareness strengthen people in their religious identity and their search for rights. They clearly lack the dimension of coercion that is present in the first factor. Hence we label the second factor *'strength-driven religious conflict'*. Strength is owned and operated by an individual person or – we should add – a single group through a positive self-image associated with the convictions and principles the person espouses. Strength refers to the capacity to act and to speak on the basis of one's religious identity. Yet in a plural context this 'strength' can be seen as a source of conflict as well. That is exactly

what this second factor measures in two items. In the second factor the a correlation between the two items is  $r = .38$ . This implies that the reliability of the second scale – strength-driven religious conflict – is relatively low ( $\alpha .38$ ). Note that factor 1 (force-driven religious conflict) and factor 2 (strength-driven religious conflict) also correlate strongly ( $r .51$ ). We elaborate on the labels of both factors in section 7.4.1.

The same two-factor solution emerges when separate factor analyses are conducted for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in the second step. However, for Muslims items 2 and 9 show low communality (both  $h^2 = .16$ ). For Hindu students, too, item 2 is slightly problematic ( $h^2 = .11$ ). For purposes of comparison we decided to retain items 2 and 9 in the third step of the analysis described above, but on account of the low psychometric quality of the second scale (strength-driven religious conflict) we excluded it from subsequent analyses.

Next we evaluated the model of force-driven causes of religious conflict for scalar equivalence. Our estimate was based on the ML procedure available on Lisrel 8.8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom 1996). Models were evaluated by means of JRMU (Saris, Satorra & Van der Veld 2009), a computer program that uses the output of Lisrel and evaluates whether or not constrained parameters are misspecified, taking into account the power of the ML test. Results show that the scale to measure power-driven religious conflict is scalar invariant ( $X^2=178.41$ ,  $df=85$ ,  $RMSEA=0.043$ ) for Christians, Muslims and Hindus. In addition we tested whether factor variances were equal across the groups, which they were ( $X^2=185.63$ ,  $df=89$ ,  $RMSEA=0.043$ ).

Research question 2: Are there significant differences in levels of agreement with force-driven religious conflict between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

On average, students tend to agree strongly (2.70) with the idea of force-driven religious conflict, with slight, statistically insignificant differences between Muslim, Christian and Hindu students (see Table 7.2). They seem to share an awareness of the use of force to realize group interests as a potential cause of interreligious conflict.

Research question 3: Which personal (socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious) characteristics relate to the causes of interreligious conflict among Christian, Muslim and Hindu college students?

We explain the social location of force-driven religious conflict for each religious group separately. What are the personal characteristics of students who attribute interreligious conflict to force-driven causes? We mention all signifi-

TABLE 7.2 *Levels of agreement (mean and standard deviation) with regard to force-driven religious conflict for Christian, Muslim and Hindu students; and comparison of means between religious groups of respondents (Scheffé's test: F-value: 1.60; sign. = .201).*

	N	Mean	S.d.	Muslims	Hindus
Christians	865	2.72	.68		
Muslims	252	2.64	.67		
Hindus	783	2.69	.73		

Scale: 1=Not at all, 2=A Little; 3=Much; 4=Very much. There are no significant intergroup differences at  $p < .005$  level.

cant associations, but focus on those which are significant enough to contribute to theory formation, namely moderately strong ( $.15 < r < .30$ ) or strong ( $> .30$ ) associations. We describe the significant correlations for each group of students separately (Table 7.3).

Christian students who lived in urbanized areas (.22) and whose mother (.22) and father (.16) obtained higher educational qualifications agree more strongly with force-driven religious conflict. There are also weak associations: female students (mean score 2.77 versus 2.65 for men), non-Tamil speaking students (2.89 versus 2.67 for Tamil speakers), those who study the arts or social sciences (2.81 versus 2.68 for natural sciences) and belong to lower castes tend to agree more strongly with the causes of force-driven conflict between religious groups.

What are the personal characteristics of Muslim students who attribute interreligious conflict to force-driven causes? We find a strong association between force-driven conflict and the mother's educational level (.30). Next there are four moderately strong associations. Female Muslim students (mean 2.83 versus 2.48 for men), students living in urbanized areas (.16), those who study the arts or social sciences (mean score 2.90 versus 2.56 for natural sciences) and whose father attained a higher level of education (.27) show relatively more agreement with force-driven conflict.

On average Hindu students who agree more strongly with force-driven religious conflict have parents with higher educational levels ( $r$  .27 for mother's and .24 for father's educational level), have lived most of their lives in urbanized areas (.18), and study the arts and social sciences (mean score 2.88 versus 2.61 for natural sciences), are found among the lower castes (-.15) and have teachers who have less positive influence on their religious socialization (-.15).

TABLE 7.3 *Social location of force-driven religious conflict among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students. Correlations (eta for the nominal variables sex, language and field of specialization; Pearson's r for the other, ordinal variables) between force-driven religious conflict and personal characteristics.<sup>1</sup>*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>			
Sex	.09**	.27**	.09**
Language	.13**		
Urbanization	.22**	.16 *	.18**
Field of specialization	.09**	.21**	.16**
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Caste	-.12**		-.15**
Education mother	.22**	.30**	.27**
Education father	.16**	.27**	.24**
<i>Socio-religious characteristics</i>			
Teachers/professors			-.15**
Media			-.12**

Correlations are significant at  $p < .00$  level (\*\*) or  $p < .05$  level (\*).

The mass media, too, have less positive influence on their religious socialization (-.12). Finally, among Hindus women (mean 2.75) agree more strongly with force-driven religious conflict than men (2.61).

## 7.4 Findings and Discussion

### 7.4.1 Findings

We were able to construct a comparative scale of causes of interreligious conflict representing all categories (socio-economic, political, ethnic-cultural and religious causes). The scale has a good reliability coefficient and passed the test of scalar invariance. We labelled this scale 'force-driven religious conflict'. We also managed to construct a second scale, which we labelled 'strength-driven

<sup>1</sup> The following characteristics did not show significant correlations for any of the groups of respondents: age, perceived socialization by parents, relatives, friends and religious community.



religious conflict'. Because of its low reliability we omitted it in further analyses, but we explain our theoretical understanding of both scales in the next section.

There are no significant differences between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students' agreement with force-driven causes of interreligious conflict. All three groups tend to agree strongly with these causes. This means that our student respondents perceive force-driven issues as sources of conflict between religious groups in India. Obviously not all students show the same level of agreement with force-driven causes of interreligious conflict. The level correlates with their socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious personal characteristics.

Socio-cultural characteristics generally produce the same picture for all religious groups: students who lived in urbanized areas and students in faculties of arts and social sciences agree more strongly with force-driven conflict. While in urban areas religious diversity is more clearly visible and relationships are more anonymous, they are not necessarily characterized by more interreligious conflict than rural areas. That students in the arts and social sciences are more inclined to attribute interreligious conflict to force-driven issues could be explained by the fact that they are better informed about societal questions than students of the natural sciences. Among Muslims gender also has a moderately strong association with force-driven religious conflict, female students tending to agree strongly and male students to agree less with force-driven religious conflict. Christian and Hindu female students show stronger agreement than men, but here the association between gender and force-driven conflict is weak.

Why is this association relatively strong among Muslim students? Can we attribute it to gender differences among Muslims in India? While India in general is not particularly female-friendly, Muslim women experience even more social restrictions than Hindu and Christian women. Although the southern state of Tamil Nadu is less gender restrictive than northern conservative states (e.g. Uttar Pradesh), there are differences between the religious groups all over the country (cf. Dyson & Moore 1983). Census data do not offer much religiously related socio-economic information, but some data indicate differences between Christian, Muslim and Hindu women in this regard. Female educational levels differ according to religion. Figures of illiteracy in rural India are almost identical for Muslim (76%) and Hindu (75%) women, as opposed to 43% for Christian women. But in urban India the cross-religious differences are more significant, 60% of Muslim women being illiterate as opposed to 42% of Hindu and 23% of Christian women. It would be unfair, however, to depict Islam as female-unfriendly on the strength of (il)literacy figures. Overall cross-religious

differences are much bigger than differences between the sexes. Male illiteracy in urban India is also highest among Muslims (42%), followed by Hindus (25%) and Christians (19%) (Minority Rights Group International 1999, 24ff). Nevertheless "Muslim women in urban India are much worse off than their rural counterparts, not only in terms of their overall educational status as citizens of India, but also in terms of their relatively poor educational status when compared to Hindu or Christian women" (Minority Rights Group International 1999, 26). Clearer cross-religious differences based on gender are manifested in work participation rates. The National Sample Survey Organisation (1997), for instance, reports a major gap between the work participation rates of Muslim women on the one hand and Hindu and Christian women on the other, Muslim women having the lowest participation rate in all categories of paid work. The difference between women's and men's work participation is also biggest among Muslims compared to Hindus and Christians. Earlier studies have shown higher levels of women's seclusion among Muslims compared to non-Muslims (Morgan et al. 2002). Ghuman et al. (2006), for instance, measured women's autonomy by asking couples (women and men separately) whether a wife has to ask permission to go anywhere outside the house or compound, to the local health clinic or to the local market. However odd this question may seem, the findings show cross-religious differences in women's autonomy in the perceptions of both women and men, Muslim women being perceived as least autonomous. There were also cross-religious differences with regard to disagreement between women's and men's perceptions of the wife's autonomy. In general men tend to attribute more power to the wife than she does to herself, because husbands may wish to present themselves in a favourable light (Meyer & Lewis 1976) and/or wives may be socialized to be more passive and understate their own power (Olson & Rabunsky 1972). But the differences between women's and men's perceptions of the wife's autonomy are biggest among Muslims (Ghuman et al. 2006, 25). All this proves that gender issues are far more important in India than in Western contexts. Further research into the mediation and moderation of religion in gender differences is essential.

Among all religious groups socio-economic characteristics have strong associations with force-driven religious conflict. More specifically, mother's and father's education correlates positively with attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes, while caste (among Christians and Hindus) has a weak negative association with force-driven interreligious conflict. These associations seem to reveal opposing mechanisms in the relationship between socio-economic status and the attribution of force-driven causes to interreligious conflict. On the one hand respondents whose parents' educational level is relatively high agree more strongly with force-driven causes of interreligious

conflict. Are students from more educated families better informed about the socio-economic, political and ethnic-cultural background to conflict between religious groups? On the other hand, respondents from relatively higher castes (i.e. upper socio-economic strata) agree less with force-driven causes of inter-religious conflict. It seems that those who have more to lose perceive more force-driven sources of interreligious conflict. These opposing relationships of socio-economic characteristics with force-driven religious conflict accord with inconclusive research findings regarding the effects of socio-economic status on prejudice, discrimination and hostility towards others (Brondolo et al. 2009; Carter et al. 2011; Floyd & Gramann, 1995; Portes 1984; Stephan & Stephan 2000). Educational level is often a strong determinant of less prejudice toward out-groups (Hello et al. 2002), but the degree to which the out-group is perceived as a threat, whether as a 'real' threat in respect of material resources or a 'symbolic' threat in respect of intangible resources such as values or culture, is associated with greater prejudice (cf. Hello et al. 2002).

Socio-religious characteristics are negatively associated with the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven conflict among Hindu students only. Hindu students agree more strongly with force-driven religious conflict if their teachers/professors and the media have a less positive influence on their religiosity. Teachers/professors and the media are secondary (i.e. societal) socializing agents. Agents of primary socialization (parents, relatives and friends) apparently do not make a difference. Why do only secondary socializing agents relate to force-driven religious conflict? And why only for Hindu students? As the majority group in India, Hindu students generally are the majority in educational institutions, also in Protestant or Catholic schools – a large part of our sample – where the majority of professors are Christian. If these professors have less positive influence on Hindus' understanding and practice of their own religion, interreligious conflict is more likely to be recognized and attributed to force-driven causes. And if the influence of the prominent mass media on one's own religiosity is considered less positive, it might make one feel threatened by other religious traditions, thus leading to agreement with force-driven causes of interreligious conflict. Both mechanisms could point the way to explain our finding, but further research is necessary to confirm this interpretation.

#### 7.4.2 *Discussion*

In this section we discuss two issues. First, we explain theoretically the two kinds of attribution of interreligious conflict that we have established empirically, namely force-driven and strength-driven religious conflict. We do so with reference to Hannah Arendt's philosophical analysis of power in the political

domain. Second, we evaluate the possible use of violence which can lead to suffering and evil inflicted on others. Comparative research should not stop with a description of findings, but also needs to evaluate these findings from a normative perspective (cf. section 2.7). We introduce two normative perspectives in this section. The first is Hannah Arendt's theory of action, which reflects on the plurality of actors in the public domain and on human freedom. The second is Paul Ricœur's philosophical thought on the problem of evil in relation to human action and suffering. Evil can be regarded as the dark, incomprehensible side of violence in both its active and its passive form. Different forms of violence in society should never be evaluated in a simplistic scheme of good (people) versus bad (people). Normative evaluation of good and bad is often more complex and incomprehensible when viewed from the perspective of evil. We think Arendt and Ricœur offer fruitful normative perspectives on conflict, (potential) violence and evil.

#### Towards a Theory of Force-Driven and Strength-Driven Interreligious Conflict

In this chapter we have distinguished empirically between what we labelled force-driven religious conflict and strength-driven religious conflict. What theoretical background underpins these labels? We think Hannah Arendt provides a basis, specifically in her political theory and action theory developed in *The human condition* (Arendt 1958/1998) and her reflections on the relation between politics and power in *On violence* (Arendt 1970). We analyse the distinction between power, force and strength. Before we do so, we locate power in the framework of political freedom, which is the focus of Arendt's political theory. Arendt evaluates the political realm according to the normative criterion of preserving agents' freedom of action and speech, especially in relation to the plurality of people in the public domain (cf. Dossa 1989; Keenan 1994).

At the heart of Arendt's political theory is the idea that personhood is constituted by the power to act and to speak. If one robs people of this power, they lose their personhood. And the power to act and to speak can be taken away. It only exists potentially and is not necessarily or always present. Only in actualizing the potential to act do people gain personhood. The idea of persons living together *eo ipso* implies concerted action. According to Arendt (1998, 198) the political realm (or *polis*) is "the organization of people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between living together for this purpose". This 'space of appearance' – as Arendt calls it – is realized when different people come together and can act and speak in complete freedom. It is a space where actions may establish preliminary relationships and where words can reveal intentions and disclose developing realities. In the space of

appearance different people meet each other in freedom. There “I appear to others as others appear to me” (Arendt 1998, 198). Hence the space of appearance is marked by plurality and freedom. Plurality means that people with different opinions, feelings, longings, dreams, et cetera are able to act together and speak to each other. Although we are different, there is a basic equality that makes it possible to live together. In plurality equality and distinctness are combined in such a way that it becomes possible to live together. “We are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (Arendt 1998, 7f.; cf. Habermas 1977, 7). Freedom means that people have the opportunity to take the initiative and start something new. The fact that humankind is capable of action and speech means that the unexpected can be expected. Free people are able to do the unanticipated and to realize what is improbable (Arendt 1998, 177f.; cf. Habermas 1977, 8).

The space of appearance antedates and is presumed in all formal constitutions of the public domain. Whatever form of government or legal structure is chosen to organize the public domain, it is only legitimate if that space is recognized. In other words: the space of appearance in which people gather can be seen as the first manifestation of political freedom; but it is extremely fragile, hardly more than a potentiality. The potential still has to be realized. What brings the public space of appearance to life? Arendt (1998, 200) answers this question as follows: “Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence.” Power is generated when people come together and act in concert (Arendt 1970, 52). It is not a property of individuals but belongs to a group of people and remains in existence only as long as the group keeps together (Arendt 1970, 44). Power entails a plurality of actors joining together in freedom for some common political purpose. It is generated by people when they act together. But here, too, the problem of continuity arises. What guarantee do we have that it will still be actualized in the future? What gives duration to the power of concerted action based on freedom that was there in the beginning? The human force that can create this continuity is mutual promise. Mutual promise keeps power alive when the space of appearance is threatened. Promising is an act that remembers itself at the very moment when the promise is made. “By holding actors together into the indefinite future, promising transforms freedom from the simple possibility of new beginnings into ‘worldly’ *political* freedom” (Keenan 1994, 305). Put differently, a mutual promise or contract can serve as a foundation for the political realm while remaining true to the logic of freedom. The promise is a speech-act way of remembering itself; it institutionalizes the power of acting in concert by promising itself (Keenan 1994, 307). Yet it retains the

logic of freedom which manifests itself in a twofold unpredictability in the act of promising: firstly "man's inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom; and [secondly] the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality" (Arendt 1998, 244).

Can the institutionalization of promise provide the foundation for the political realm that power could not provide? The twofold unpredictability indicates that it cannot. In her later publications Arendt tries to 'solve' this problem by introducing the category of authority. Scholars strongly agree that Arendt tries to combine the logic of freedom with the authority of foundation (Habermas 1977; Keenan 1994). There is a potential for conflict and violence in the interpretation of political foundations. "This tear within the heart of the political realm lies in the act of decision itself, divided as it is between the freedom of reconstituting the political realm by redefining the promise and the violence of imposing that definition in ways that all do not accept and that exclude other possible communities and other possible futures" (Keenan 1994, 318). In the face of a plurality of opinions political action tends to forget the freedom that makes it possible. Arendt rightly reminds us that political institutions are not born out of conflict but should be based on recognition. The legitimacy of power can only rest on the freedom of people acting together. But this idea of political power needs to be distinguished from the exercise of power or rule (Habermas 1977, 17). The latter implies "that men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to command and the others forced to obey" (Arendt 1998, 222).

Now that we have formulated the notion of power in Arendt's political theory we can distinguish it from force and strength. Force is characterized by violent action (Arendt 1998, 203). It exercises coercion in a social sphere and involves manifest or latent violence. Violence creates a situation in which people lose their capacity to act and speak in freedom. But while violence can destroy power, it can never be a substitute for it. Force always manifests itself in combination with powerlessness, as in tyrannical government where one person has the monopoly of violence. Force contradicts the essential human conditions of plurality (acting and speaking together) and freedom (initiative), which are essential components of any legitimate political organization. But force is not confined to the political domain. It can also take the form of economic force when the haves pressurize the have-nots. Or it can have an ethnic-cultural dimension when high status groups dominate low status groups. One also thinks of religious groups who force their ideas on others and thereby render members of other religious groups powerless. Unlike power, force leads to



a win-lose situation (Arendt 1970). While power can be divided without diminishing it, force leads to an increase of the potentiality to act for some and a decrease of that potentiality for others. That is why force and conflict go together, just as power and peaceful coexistence belong together. Among religious extremist groups the use of violence is obvious. But other developments may also disrupt the balanced space of appearance between different individuals or groups. Changes in the relative size of groups (in terms of minority and majority), for instance, can influence the fragile power balance. Or linking national identity with religious belonging (as in *Hindutva*) can lead to a diminished potentiality to act and speak among minority groups.

Strength shares with force the idea of the capacity to act and speak. Strength is “nature’s gift to the individual which cannot be shared with others, [and] can cope with violence more successfully than with power – either heroically, by consenting to fight and die, or stoically, by accepting suffering and challenging all affliction through self-sufficiency and withdrawal from the world” (Arendt 1998, 203). Strength is possessed by an individual person or – we would add – a single group via a positive self-image associated with the convictions and principles the person or group stands for. It does not need a social sphere or a space of appearance in which different people act and speak. The strength of individuals’ convictions or their charismatic personalities make them strong leaders who are able to persuade others. Strength, too, is not a substitute for power but, unlike force, it does not imply powerlessness. With strength the person’s integrity and the possibility to act remain intact. When a person (or group) affirms her (its) religious identity in a plural context, it is an expression of strength. It does not create a ground for living together, but the strength of the person or group resists the idea of powerlessness. This happens, for instance, when a religious group demonstrates against laws or regulations which limit its freedom of expression or hamper its culture in some way. Suppose that individuals participate in demonstrations even if they run the risk of arrest or harassment. In that case demonstrating clearly expresses strength, although it does not create a ground for living together.

How does this analytical distinction of Arendt’s help us to label the two kinds of attribution of interreligious conflict that we have identified empirically? The causes in the items of the first scale all imply the use of some kind of force against members of other religious groups. They hint at actions that take away other people’s power to act or speak. In force-driven religious conflict items refer directly or indirectly to violence, either socio-economically motivated (item 4: overt or tacit approval of violence as a means of social change), politically motivated (item 3: intervention by political leaders in religious matters encourages conflict), related to ethnic-cultural issues (item 11: linking eth-



nic or national identity to a particular religion is conducive to religious conflict) or in regard to religious issues (item 10: religiously motivated militant or radical groups encourage conflict). In all cases increasing the power of one group coincides with making other groups (more) powerless. The second scale consists of two items which do not result in disempowering the other, but neither do they aim at establishing a space of appearance in which people act in concert. The two items in strength-driven religious conflict focus on strengthening one's religion, both in terms of human rights awareness and the affirmation of one's own religion in a multi-religious context. The actions formulated in these two items are not direct sources of conflict. On the other hand, it is possible to perceive religious identification as contributing to conflict. When awareness of human rights is promoted in a context where these rights are violated by others it can lead to (further) conflict. This also applies when one's own religion is affirmed in a plural context where a majority religion feels threatened by the presence of other religious communities. These items – respectively on awareness and affirmation – are expressions of strength. Individuals or particular groups show their willingness to act and speak even if it may have negative consequences for them. The connection between awareness and affirmation on the one hand and potential conflict on the other justifies this interpretation.

However, we stress the limitations of our research (in terms of metric qualities) in the case of strength-driven religious conflict. Further research is necessary to test whether this concept holds good, along with the concept of force-driven conflict. We also recommend future research to determine whether force-driven religious conflict and strength-driven religious conflict can be distinguished from the power to act in concert. Nonetheless our findings show that Arendt's conceptual distinctions can be fruitful in empirical research into interreligious conflict. They clearly indicate that creating a space of acting and speaking together in a context of plurality is a crucial problem in the *polis*.

#### Evaluation of Force-Driven Religious Conflict

The second issue is normative evaluation of force-driven conflict. We base this evaluative perspective on the philosophy of Paul Ricœur, a representative of what we labelled the pluralist-deliberative route (see section 2.7). Ricœur pursued ever new avenues to fathom the moral issue of evil: via the human will, via narratives of the suffering person, and finally through his reflections on the difficulty of memory and the impossibility of forgiveness. Each of these angles on the moral issue of evil opens up another perspective from which to evaluate force-driven conflict. We structure Ricœur's moral deliberations into three phases.

(1) The problem of evil first appears in Ricœur's work in the context of a hermeneutics of the symbolism of evil. To understand this first phase of his thinking about evil one has to connect it with his reflection on the phenomenology of the will. Human free will intrinsically creates the possibility of evil. Human beings not only cause evil as an unintended effect, but are capable of intentionally willing what is wrong. Evil falls under the heading of free will (Gisel 2007; Boey 2008, 30f). The intention to do wrong is connected with a disproportion in free will between infinite desire and finite reality. If the will does not accept the finitude of the realization of human desire (e.g. the desire for power, possessions and recognition), the will can take the form of something evil. Evil is the manifestation of absolute free will, such as absolute power or possession of everything which disregards others' equal right to power and recognition.

Because of free will humans are susceptible to wrongdoing. But the potential to do evil is not yet the reality of evil itself. Why do human beings shift from innocence to guilt, from the possibility of evil to its actualization and avowal? Why do they do evil? The answer to this question does not lie in a description of human volition (Gisel 2007; Kearney 2006, 198). Evil is connected with the enigma of sudden appearance: it need not be enacted, but it suddenly appears. This enigmatic character of evil precludes a straightforward rational analysis of human volition. To understand the shift from possibility to actuality we must turn to the symbolism of evil. Through a hermeneutics of signs we gain access to evil. Even then evil remains an enigma. It can never be fully explained because signs, symbols and myths should not be taken literally. Signs only indicate reality. Myths never become rational knowledge. And symbols enable us to think of what cannot be accessed otherwise (Ricœur 1967, 15). Literal interpretation of religious myths or reification of religious symbols actually corrupts religion. When this happens (e.g. in fundamentalism) the fragile interpretation of symbols is wrongfully turned into absolute knowledge. "When any individual, sect, or denomination presents itself as possessing the exclusive or definitive understanding of good and evil, when 'evil' is used as a blanket term of condemnation to advance a dubious political agenda, then there is a *corruption* of religion" (Bernstein 2007, 119).

What insight does Ricœur's (1967) hermeneutic detour via the symbolism of evil afford into the shift from the possibility of evil to its actualization? And what is the possible role of religion in the regeneration of free will (Ricœur 1995)? With regard to the shift from possibility to actualization of evil, we note two ideas. The first is a distinction in the origin of evil, namely a deterministic and an anthropological account (Kearney 2006, 198ff; cf. Ricœur 1967, 156ff). In a deterministic account evil emanates from external forces (e.g. the symbolism

of defilement). In an anthropological account evil originates in the self (e.g. the guilty self recognizes its own 'servile will'). Moral responsibility is only possible when the blame is not projected onto circumstances, others or even the Other. Moral consciousness is a "bad choice that binds itself" (Ricœur 1967, 156) and only emerges when we acknowledge wrong as our own fault. The second idea is the disruption of the borderline between perpetrator and victim. On the one hand there is evil which makes another person suffer. On the other hand people feel they are victims of the wickedness and violence of others. A hermeneutic interpretation of the symbolism of evil disrupts this clear-cut borderline between perpetrator and victim, and thereby turns evil into a confused experience. Myth makes us aware that there is a strange passivity in doing evil. From the side of the perpetrator people might feel themselves victims even though they are guilty (e.g. through the past history of evil in which they are implicated). From the side of the victim there might be a strange awareness of receiving punishment that is deserved. This awareness can find its source in the idea that all suffering is deserved, for example because of some personal or collective fault (Ricœur 2007, 38). This reflection makes us realize that the boundaries between perpetrator and victim in force-driven conflict are not always clear. They are messy, blurred and confused. In complex intergroup conflict we need to be suspicious of simplistic pictures that present one group (or individual group member) as purely a perpetrator and another as an unadulterated victim.

What is the possible role of religion in the regeneration of free will? How can we ensure that our free will is directed to the good? This assurance cannot come from free will itself. If it does not originate from our free will, it eludes our autonomy. But this leaves us with a paradox, because we need to be sure that the capacity of free will to act out of duty remains intact. The actuality of doing evil reveals a paradox at the heart of our human freedom: both lost and to be recovered. "This uncommon situation opens, moreover, a place for religion that is distinct from that of morality – religion, according to Kant, possessing no theme other than the *regeneration* of freedom, that is, restoring to freedom the control over it of the good principle" (Ricœur 1992, 216; cf. Sterkens 2001, 227–231; Dupont 2010, 168).

The recovery of freedom demands some help from outside (beyond our autonomy), which at the same time should not destroy our autonomy but restore it. On the one hand, without a gift no change of heart would be possible. On the other hand the bestowal of a gift cannot take away the responsibility of the will. "What remains is that the will turns toward this good coming from elsewhere than its disposition toward good that has not abolished its tendency toward evil" (Ricœur 1995, 86). In philosophical thought this paradox of our

attempt to do good and the externality of a gift has the structure of hope. It consists in the idea that reception of the gift also entails a command to mobilize our capacity to do good. We hope that what we receive is in fact a change of heart. On the other hand, resorting to radical confession of evil in the depths of the will also means opening oneself to receive the gift. Hoping for the gift that will restore our capacity to do good restores our capacity to do good. In the depths of our free will we cannot distinguish between our own effort and the alterity of the gift (Ricœur 1995, 87). In the face of doing evil we hope to be restored to doing good and at the same time we hope that this will be given to us. “Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God – living God, absent God – or empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end” (Ricœur 1992, 355).

(2) In a second phase Ricœur looks at the problem of evil from a different angle: that of the experience of suffering and the lamentation of the suffering person. His focus shifts from the problem of origin (‘why?’) to the enigma of suffering (‘why me?’). The lamentation of the sufferer, who cries out that the violence inflicted upon him is undeserved and unjust, resists any attempt at understanding. By focusing on the lamentation of the sufferer Ricœur addresses the problem of the effects of evil instead of representations of its origin. It is a shift from speculative thought about the aporia of evil to the experiential fact of this aporia. His major publication in this period is a lecture given in Lausanne in 1985 (Ricœur 2007). In this lecture Ricœur traces the path that speculative thought has taken in Western thinking about the aporia of evil. He understands this Western trajectory as one of refinement: how can speculative thought reflect the experience of evil in action and suffering? We will not follow the entire trajectory, as it is beyond the scope of this book. The core of Ricœur’s argument is that we have to try to understand evil, but in the process we should preserve the aporia. We need a reflective moral view of evil, but should not ignore the protest against unjust suffering.

A strictly moral view of evil tends to disregard the aporia attested in experiences of suffering. Speculative thinking on evil as in theodicy arguments (e.g. Leibniz, Hegel) included all forms of evil under the heading of metaphysical evil, in which the tragic and the logical coincide: something has to die for something greater to be born (Ricœur 2007, 54). Although these speculative thoughts display great philosophical refinement, they should be criticized insofar as they neglect the aporia of evil and the victims of history who have

been marginalized. We need to think about human suffering as evil in order to understand that some questions and answers about evil are 'wrong'. In a sense one could say that our thinking acts like a filter of what not to think. Ricœur concludes that the aporia in human understanding of evil deserves the final word. What is more, it is as a result of our thinking that we come to see evil as aporetic. Ultimately evil cannot to be conquered by thinking. "It is this aporia that action and spirituality are called to give, not a solution, but a *response* aimed at making the aporia productive; in other words, at continuing the work of thought in the key of acting and feeling" (Ricœur 2007, 65–66).

What response makes the aporia productive? The response of action is its focus on what needs to be done to combat evil. "Every action, whether ethical or political, which diminishes the quantity of violence exercised by some against others diminishes the level of suffering in the world" (Ricœur 2007, 66). Yet we must be aware that a practical response will not resolve all problems of evil. It will not solve the problem of innocent victims of violence, nor will it solve suffering not caused by unjust action of someone towards others (e.g. natural catastrophes or illness). In other words, the practical answer does not answer the question: 'Why me?' Although we must act when faced with experiences of suffering, practical answers do not silence the question 'Why me?' Ricœur then cites the human capacity for feeling as a third response to the enigma of suffering. Here Ricœur (2007, 68) speaks about a spiritual transformation in the work of mourning: a transformation which starts with acceptance of ignorance ('I don't know why'), accepts the impatience of the sufferer ('How long, oh Lord?'), separates reasons for belief in God from explanations of the origin of suffering, ending in complete renunciation of the desires which engender the lamentation: the desire to be rewarded for one's virtuousness, and to be spared suffering in order to break out of the cycle of retribution in which the lament remains captive (Ricœur 2007, 71–72). What is needed emotionally is a loosening of all bonds that make us experience the loss of a beloved object as the loss of ourselves (Ricœur 2007, 78). We can detach ourselves emotionally from all desires connected with the question 'Why me?' In this way we reach peace of mind, which is the effect of wisdom.

Ricœur's reflections on evil from the perspective of the sufferer offer some guidelines for a moral evaluation of causes of interreligious conflict. Firstly, we need to be aware of the different ideas which religions proffer on evil and human suffering. Some ideas are more helpful to understand evil and also leave the aporia of evil open. Secondly, whatever attributions we make with regard to conflict, they will never resolve the aporia in our understanding of conflict. It is difficult to fully understand conflict, let alone violent conflict. There is always a temptation to reductionism in empirical research, including empirical

research into the causes of interreligious conflict. We cannot claim to have explained the intentions of believers towards acts of violence. From a normative point of view we have to be aware that in the experience of the sufferer the aporia of evil has the final word. No explanation will answer the question 'Why me?' Thirdly, thinking needs to find a response in action to diminish the suffering inflicted by conflict. An academic study of causes of interreligious conflict cannot restrict itself to description or explanation. Our understanding of conflict should lead to reflection on actions which can diminish suffering (see chapter 9). Finally, we should not to forget that neither thinking nor action can resolve the aporia of evil. This research focuses on Tamil Nadu students' ideas on interreligious conflict. But one can also imagine research into the experience of victims of violence. There is always an ethical responsibility for the research subjects. On the basis of Ricœur's analysis, the core of this ethical responsibility is to help victims to deal emotionally with the aporia of suffering or to help them with the unanswerable question: 'Why me?'

(3) In a third phase Ricœur (1995, 289–292) shifts his focus to the emancipatory function of narration in memorizing historic events of evil. Two issues are relevant to our research: remembrance of suffering and forgiveness of the perpetrators.

Firstly, why should we remember the victims of violence in history? Remembering is a moral duty in the sense of a debt owed to victims. Remembering the specific horror of violence prevents people from being victimized twice. Our memory of past incidences of evil should respect the uniqueness of the events. The power to singularize in narration prevents our comprehension of a specific event from becoming inhuman in the sense that it could even make the event necessary, for instance if the conflict is attributed exclusively to economic, political or cultural causes (Ricœur 1995, 290). Memory of suffering is not neutral: it identifies victims as victims and perpetrators as perpetrators. From a moral point of view, victims and perpetrators of violence are not on a par. The perpetrators are guilty, while the victims are suffering because of violence inflicted on them. Although narration is an act of imagination, we should never forget the reality of what happened in history. Our memory of suffering is not just fiction, although it comes to us in the shape of imagination. A narration is a work of fiction which can help us see and feel the past as if we were present in the event itself (Kearney 2006, 207). At the same time this distinction between narrative imagination and historical facts should prevent us from seeing a narrative account of past events as a literal description: all remembrance is a battlefield of interpretations. Finally, our memory of suffering should also express the impatience of hope experienced by the victims. Re-

membering should not deter the victim from hoping for a better future (Ricœur 1995, 291; Boey 2008, 45).

The second issue is that of forgiveness or memory that can heal. Genuine forgiveness involves not simply forgetting past events but of viewing them differently in a way that emancipates them from the deterministic clutch of violent obsession and revenge (Kearney 2006, 210). Forgiveness breaks the cycle of violence by giving a future to the past. This does not mean that the harm can be undone: the perpetrator of violence will always be the person who made others suffer. At the same time the call for forgiveness is experienced as impossible. How could one sever the harm from the perpetrator? It is not only the results of evil which are an aporia; the act of forgiving, too, is hidden in the abyss of our understanding. We cannot expect victims of violence to forgive the perpetrator. But it happens: this impossible act of forgiveness can happen. By what power can it happen other than the primordial affirmation that every human being (including the perpetrator) is destined for goodness? The person who repents and the person who forgives disconnect the criminal from his or her crime on the strength of the belief that the good in humankind is more ultimate and unconditional than all the evil we can imagine (Boey 2008, 92). According to Ricœur this is also what religions are called to awaken in their followers in situations of violence.

What is useful in these reflections for our consideration of the causes of interreligious conflict from an ethical perspective? The first benefit is singularization of events. We should not write about interreligious conflict as if it does (or did) not happen in a real place to real people. Conflict refers to historical events which need to be remembered. Our studies should give the sufferers a voice, otherwise they are victimized twice. One way to do this is to put research into causes of interreligious conflict in a historical framework. Secondly, our analyses and reflections should attest the belief that all parties (victim and perpetrator) are destined for the good. Good has the final word, not evil. We should also criticize the convictions of any religion that contradict this moral axiom, such as that some people or some groups represent absolute evil (Bernstein 2005).



# Predictors of Force-driven Religious Conflict

## 8.1 Introduction

How do Christian, Muslim and Hindu students' beliefs influence their perception of causes of interreligious conflict? Which beliefs contribute to the perception of coercive force as a means of achieving the economic, political or socio-cultural goals of religious groups? Which beliefs make them attribute interreligious conflicts to force-driven causes? Are there differences in predictors of force-driven religious conflict between Christians, Muslims and Hindus in Tamil Nadu? These are the questions explored in this chapter.

It is structured as follows. First we present a meaning system approach to religion as a theoretical perspective on the relation between religion and conflict. If we suppose that conflicts involve a (re)definition of religious identity and a (renewed) claim to religious authority, we need to map the 'mind-set' of religious people. We regard religious identity as a set of descriptive and prescriptive beliefs shared by members of a religious community (8.2). That still begs the question why some members of religious traditions hold beliefs that support conflict, while others do not. Although religious traditions undoubtedly contain beliefs that may support conflict, this does not imply that all believers concur that religious identification induces conflict, let alone that they legitimize violent activism or even support it. What psychological mechanism explains why some believers attribute interreligious conflict to coercive force used to achieve economic, political or socio-cultural goals, while according to others religion advocates peaceful coexistence? We think that the theory of cognitive dissonance affords insight into the differential influence of religious meaning systems on the perceived relation between religion and conflict at an individual level (8.3). Secondly, we describe our empirical research into the relation between religion and force-driven religious conflict. After formulating the research questions we present the measuring instruments and the research findings (8.4). The chapter ends with a summary and discussion (8.5).

## 8.2 A meaning system approach to the relation between religion and conflict

How can religion be both a source of peace and human fulfilment, and a source of conflict? In this section we outline an approach to religion which clarifies how both these opposing claims can be true. First we explain why we choose a meaning system approach to study the relation between religion and conflict (8.2.1). Next we describe the meaning system approach to religion. This allows us to see religion as a complex, malleable system that is a powerful element in the construction of human identity, both personal and collective (8.2.2). Finally we argue that the same religious meaning system can lead to different stances on changes or transformations in the world in different economic, social and cultural contexts (8.2.3).

### 8.2.1 *Reasons for Choosing a Meaning System Approach*

Why do we choose a meaning system approach to analyse the relation between religion and conflict? What does this approach offer for such an analysis?

Firstly, the concept of meaning system refers to human beings' belief system, which contains descriptive beliefs about the self, the world and its contingencies and expectations, as well as prescriptive beliefs about goals, actions and feelings (cf. below). A meaning system approach helps us to open up the believer's cognitive structure. Beliefs are seen as convictions with a cognitive aspect, an affective aspect and an action tendency. If one were to restrict religious research to indicators of religious belonging (e.g. religious self-definition or membership) or religious behaviour (e.g. church attendance, prayer, devotional practices or reading holy scriptures), it would reduce religion to a black box which is not understandable in itself. Religion could still play a role in human life, but it would be unclear how it influences other types of convictions and behaviour. The black-box model's lack of explanatory power becomes evident when the same religion seems to influence believers' lives in opposite directions. This applies pre-eminently to the relation between religion and conflict. One and the same religious tradition is able to promote both violent behaviour and peaceful activism. One may not even spot the relation between religion and conflict, because its contrary influences on conflict lead to a lack of correlation in large populations. A meaning system approach is able to differentiate between simplistic statements concerning the relation between religion and conflict. Obviously religious traditions 'in essence' are neither violent nor non-violent. It would be naive to characterize Hinduism as essentially non-violent or Islam as violent (cf. Van der Veer 1994; Fox 2000; Silberman 2005a; 2005b).

Secondly, a meaning system approach facilitates understanding of the dynamic, process-oriented function of religion in people's lives. The cognitive-motivational approach is an established paradigm in the study of human identity (cf. Emmons 1999; 2005; Singer 2004). Understanding of how a religious meaning system functions can benefit by empirical research and theory building about meaning systems in general. Religious meaning systems differ from each other in their unique motivational power, centredness and comprehensiveness. They are unique in their power to direct the ideas, emotions and actions of human persons and groups. Centredness refers to the ability of religion to centre everything in life on what is considered sacred (God). Finally, comprehensiveness refers to the fact that religion is relatively easily accessible to give significance to a wide variety of experiences and an extensive range of issues. It can give meaning to the deepest, most complex and persistent questions in human life, such as questions of life and death, suffering and happiness, evil and good (cf. Silberman 2005a; Hood et al. 2009, 15ff).

Thirdly, a meaning system approach helps us to construct a typology of the relation between religion and conflict. It enables us to classify structurally or functionally equivalent beliefs in different religions for comparative purposes. Equivalence can be established at the level of specific beliefs or attitudes, but also at the level of meaning systems as a whole. The concept of meaning systems makes it possible to construct a typology of religious groups based on their descriptive and prescriptive beliefs about violent or peaceful activism (Van de Vijver 2003; Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005, 767).

Fourthly, a meaning system approach helps to illuminate the complexity of religion (here the existence of contradictory beliefs) and its malleability (here the capacity to change over time). The complexity and malleability of religious traditions mirror their adaptability to the environment. Adaptation happens via two complementary processes: assimilation and accommodation. There is religious assimilation insofar as the environment is interpreted in terms of the schemes and structures of the religious tradition. In assimilation the environment is actively or passively included in the existing belief system. There is accommodation insofar as the religious meaning system changes in keeping with the context. In accommodation the mental structures of the belief system change to be consistent with the reality in which they appear. In the complex relation between religion and conflict something similar happens. On the one hand the religious meaning system contains descriptive and prescriptive beliefs about social reality. In what kind of world do we live? To what extent and by which means do we want to change this world? On the other hand the religious meaning system is influenced by economic, political and cultural circumstances. Which religious convictions should be stressed in the world we

are living in? How do religious communities deal with the complexity and malleability of their tradition? The following questions are important in this regard: (1) Which changes in the world are desired from a religious perspective? And how can and should religion change in the perspective of its societal context? (2) In what realm should the desired change occur – the economic, political, cultural or religious realm? (3) What are the goals of the desired change? Does it entail adjustment of an existing situation or complete transformation? (4) Which means are effective to accomplish the necessary change? And which means are morally and religiously legitimate with a view to the desired change? A meaning system approach can help us to understand the complex interaction between religion and its environment in terms of transformation of both the religious tradition and the context (cf. Silberman 2005b; Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005, 766ff).

### 8.2.2 *Religious Identity: A Meaning System Approach*

What do we mean by the religious identity of a person? What does it mean to label somebody Christian, Muslim or Hindu? The concept of identity derives from personality psychology, more specifically its cognitive paradigm that focuses on cognitive-affective processes in identity formation (Singer 2004). Identity refers to people's sense of unity in different situations and throughout their entire lifespan. Individuals filter their experiences through their personal beliefs and theories about themselves, about others, about the world and the relation between self, others and the world. "These beliefs or theories form idiosyncratic meaning systems that allow individuals to give meaning to the world around them and to their experiences, as well as to set goals, plan activities, and order their behavior" (Silberman 2005b, 644). Meaning systems contain descriptive and prescriptive beliefs (Epstein 1990; 1997; Silberman 2005b).

The descriptive beliefs together form a theory of reality. The word 'theory' is misleading insofar as it suggests that people consciously set out to develop theories of reality. The construction of descriptive beliefs rather "happens, automatically and pre-consciously, because it is in the nature of the human mind to make connections between events and ultimately to construct a model of the world" (Epstein 1997, 20). The major descriptive beliefs concern the person's nature (a self-theory, e.g. "I am a believer"); the nature of the world (a world theory, e.g. "God created the world"); and the relation between self and world (e.g. "With God's help I can change the world"). A personal theory of reality is hierarchically organized in a set of schemas. The most basic schemas are referred to as postulates or basic beliefs. "The four basic postulates include the degree to which the world is regarded as benign versus malevolent; the degree to which it is regarded as meaningful (including predictable, control-

lable, and just); the degree to which others are regarded favourably rather than as a source of threat; and the degree to which the self is regarded as worthy” (Epstein 1990, 165). These postulates are higher-order principles that structure a person’s meaning system. If any of them is invalidated, it has a profoundly destabilizing effect on the person’s identity. Religious beliefs have a unique quality of grounding the postulates in a transcendent reality. For example, the fact that God created the world gives it a predictable and controllable character.

Prescriptive beliefs are broad generalizations to obtain what one desires and to avoid what one fears. Meaning systems not only contain beliefs about the nature of self and world, but also beliefs about contingencies and expectations regarding the self, the world and the relation between them. Contingencies are about things such as human fate (e.g. “people should be rewarded for good behaviour”) and expectations concern things like changing the world through good behaviour (e.g. “good actions can turn the world into a just society”). Prescriptive beliefs orient people to their future existence. What should I do in order to survive? Which emotions are helpful in a certain situation? What (life) goals should I pursue? Goals, actions and emotions are associated with costs and benefits. People adapt their behaviour to their judgment of the costs and benefits. One either gains or loses through specific actions or certain expressions of emotion. Usually people want the benefits to be greater than the costs. Prescriptive beliefs orient people to goals, actions and emotions that are likely to have an outcome in which benefits outweigh costs.<sup>1</sup> But there are no benefits without costs, and no costs without benefits. Hence there always has to be some trade-off between costs and benefits in specific circumstances (Higgins 2000, 29).

The sociocultural context shapes the meaning that people derive from experiences and how they interpret a situation. Religious persons have different theories of reality, because they are influenced by different social, historical and cultural settings in which they live and by which they are formed. At the same time there are some common principles underlying the construction of meaning systems which explain why they work the way they do. These

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1 This cost-benefit approach is different from the classic conflict approach, in which costs and benefits are distributed between different variables (e.g. the id and the superego in a Freudian framework). But it is also different from the limited capacity perspective developed in the 1970s when the cognitive paradigm began to influence psychology (Higgins 2000). The idea was that cognitive failures must underlie failures in human processing and reasoning. The cost-benefit approach does not focus on cognitive failures (as if the mind is not doing what it is supposed to do), but on adaptive mind processes aimed at survival.

principles are the same for all meaning systems. According to Epstein (1985; 1990; 1997) meaning systems develop in response to four basic motives. Each motive implies some benefit. The first motive is to optimize one's pleasure-pain balance; the second is to assimilate the data of reality into a stable, coherent and reasonably veridical model of the world; the third is about continuity of relatedness with other persons; and the fourth motive is to enhance self-esteem, including autonomy and agency.

A religious meaning system works in much the same way as any other meaning system. It is "similar to other systems in structure, malleability and functioning, yet is unique in centring on what is perceived to be the sacred, and in the comprehensive and special way in which it can serve to fulfil the quest for meaning" (Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005, 764). We clarify the uniqueness of religious meaning systems by giving illustrations of descriptive and prescriptive beliefs in religion. Descriptive beliefs include a theory of the self, a theory of the world, and contingencies and expectations about the relation between the self and the world. Prescriptive beliefs refer to (life) goals, actions and emotions. In other words, religious meaning systems give answers to the following six questions: Who am I? What is the nature of the world? What can I expect from my relatedness to others and to the world? What should I strive for? What should I do? What should I feel?

1. In a religious theory of the self, the self is seen as related to the sacred (Pargament 2007), to an ultimate reality (Tillich 1953) or to a superhuman power with abilities human beings do not have (McCauley & Lawson 2002). A religious theory of the self includes beliefs about the nature of humankind, such as being sinful or inclined to do good, being focused on one's own pleasures or oriented to the happiness of others. Because of the connection with the sacred, an ultimate reality or superhuman power, religious theories of the self are extremely powerful in orienting people. For religious believers the self finds its fulfilment in God. To find one's true self one needs to be close to God. Losing the (perceived) close relationship with God would plunge believers into despair and anxiety.

2. The core question in a religious theory of the world relates to human flourishing or the way to achieve true happiness (Taylor 2007). When the world is seen as evil, true happiness is unattainable in earthly life. When the world is seen as holy, true happiness is possible provided people live according to rules of life that find their moral ground beyond this world, that is in God. Between these two extremes of evil and holiness mixed positions are possible. One could, for instance, be convinced that evil powers do exist in the world, but that they are subject to God's power. Or one could believe that evil resides in human nature but not in the nature of the world, which is created by God; et

cetera. When it comes to violent religious activism the concept of evil versus the goodness of the world is a central issue.

3. Religious meaning systems include beliefs concerning the relation between the self and the world. Contingencies and outcome expectations describe the relations between self-theory and world-theory (Epstein 1997, 20). Contingencies may prescribe different rules for treating in-group and out-group members, or they may teach the circumstances in which one should treat other groups with either compassion or hostility (Silberman 2005b, 646). Outcome expectations concern self-efficacy expectations about world change, the ability of individuals to change themselves and the world around them, and expectations about the means to effect this change. Outcome expectations, then, relate to the perceived legitimacy of violent behaviour to reach goals in the interest of one's own religious group. Some research shows opposition between the wish to change the world and the aspiration to change one's religious tradition. Believers who oppose any change in their tradition are more likely to favour changing the world (and vice versa). "In terms of means to achieve the world change, the more traditionally religious participants endorsed more strongly the mechanism of religious practices and evaluate religious practices as being more instrumental for bringing about world change" (Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005, 768). Religion as a meaning system also includes a sense of self-efficacy by suggesting to believers that they have the power to change both themselves and the world for the better. This power to change the world may be supported to a certain degree by a superhuman power (God), thus giving the expectation of the religious actor incomparably greater efficacy than in other meaning systems (Silberman 2003). In this perspective no power in the world can prevent the transformation that God wants to happen.

4. Religious meaning systems influence forms of self-regulation and may encourage or discourage people to strive for specific life goals (Higgins & Silberman 1998). Robert Emmons, a personality psychologist studying spiritual goals, refers to goals as strivings which motivate persons to act towards an identifiable end-point that is highly valued (Emmons 1999, 26). Some life goals can never be fully realized despite enormous efforts. Emmons defines these goals as ultimate concerns, because they surpass human powers of realization (Emmons 2005, 736), for example peace, justice, benevolence, forgiveness. The longing for peace or forgiveness never goes away however hard people work to achieve them. "The concept of ultimate concern enables a bridge to be built from issues of ultimacy in the abstract to everyday concerns and goals where issues of ultimacy meet the road" (Emmons 1999, 6). The uniqueness of the religious meaning system is to orient people's lives to goals of ultimate



concern. In doing so it creates a strong sense of centredness, orienting a person's life to what matters most.

5. On the level of actions religion offers "a set of practices for establishing relationship to a supernatural or transcendent reality, for the sake of obtaining human good or avoiding harm" (Ward 2004, 3). Religious systems stipulate which actions are appropriate and inappropriate. Some actions are seen as prototypically religious or spiritual, such as prayer, meditation and participation in rituals. All actions primarily seek to strengthen the believer's relationship with God. Actions to achieve the human good can include acts of compassion and charity, as well as acts of violence (Silberman 2005). Actions may acquire unique power from a religious meaning system via a variety of processes such as sanctification. By sanctifying an action it is imbued with supreme perceived efficiency and efficacy. The capacity of sanctified actions to contribute to what is considered morally good is put beyond human doubt. Institutionalization plays an important role in establishing religious practices. There is no religion without institutionalization, because religious practices are not natural but institutionally created acts (Hermans 2003). A necessary condition for the creation of institutional acts are the intentions of the participants in religious practices. Certain acts, such as bowing one's head in a particular direction, 'count as' acts of prayer or devotion before God (*coram Deo*). 'Count as' means the act has the status of linking the believer with a superhuman power. Religious practices are social phenomena. The intentionality which defines something as religious is shared with others. It is possible to perform a religious act privately, but the performance presupposes a religious community which shares the same intentionality. This implies that community members cannot create religious practices on their own authority. The legitimization of a practice as a religious practice depends on the authority of a tradition, which ultimately goes back to the will of God. For example, people are baptized because John the Baptist and Jesus' disciples have taught Christians to do so. Some baptismal gestures and symbols are associated with God's salvific acts such as the journey of the people of Israel through the Red Sea and the creation of heaven and earth. Religious acts are controlled to a greater or lesser extent by religious regimes. A religious regime refers to a system of power relations, which are in some degree formalized and legitimized by theological specialists (Bax 1985).

6. Emotions are influenced by religious meaning systems in different ways (Silberman 2003, 647). In the first place, religions offer people practices to experience a unique, emotionally powerful closeness to God. For example, in rituals the participants look for the act or instrument which conveys the presence of what is seen as God (McCauley & Lawson 2002). When this close

relation with an ultimate reality is experienced, it is accompanied by intense emotions, which can be positive (e.g. joy, warmth, pleasure), ambivalent (e.g. being overwhelmed or anxious because of the greatness of God), or negative (e.g. guilt or fear when one does not live up to expectations). Secondly, religious meaning systems may also directly prescribe or prohibit certain (levels of) emotions. For example, participants in a Hindu ritual burning of a deceased person are forbidden to cry, whereas Catholic funeral goers in Latin America express their emotions freely. Thirdly, the beliefs, goals and actions which are part of a religious meaning system influence emotions positively or negatively (Silberman 2005b, 647). For example, people's God concept is important when they have to cope with a stressful event like the loss of a loved one (Pargament 1997).

### 8.2.3 *Religious Meaning Systems and Religious Conflict: A Dual Relation*

How can a meaning system approach to religion help us to map the dual relation between religions and religious conflicts? Religious meaning systems contain different ideas that may have different, even contradictory effects. While some beliefs in a religious tradition may promote violence, other beliefs in the same religion promote peaceful activism. We give illustrations of this dual relation, following the foregoing structure of a meaning system (8.2.2).

1. Religious beliefs about the nature of the self can focus on human characteristics which encourage either violent or peaceful activism. A human characteristic that facilitates peaceful activism is selflessness (i.e. willingness to serve the needs of others and transcend egoism and self-centredness) through a process of self-effacement before God (Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005, 772). God sets people free from self-centredness and in doing so opens the self to the needs of others. But religion can also focus on beliefs that facilitate violent activism, such as glorification of extreme forms of 'self-sacrifice'. Willingness to give one's life for a cause can be seen as the ultimate demonstration of one's faith in God. To define the self as merely an instrument that should be sacrificed to serve a greater cause can lead to self-effacing violent activism like suicide bombing or unrestrained participation in 'holy' wars.

2. Religious beliefs about the nature of the world can promote both violent and peaceful actions. The conception of the world as good or evil is a key issue in violent activism. Religions provide powerful stories about the future of the world. This future can be an end state in which God corrects all human evil doings in a final drama (including punishment or destruction of individuals who disobeyed the will of God) versus images of a peaceful world recreated in the likeness of the original paradise (i.e. a situation in which everything is good and people live in accordance with God's will) (Silberman, Higgins & Dweck

2005). The idea of participating in the final drama of the battle against evil can incite people to violent activism. According to Allport (1966) religions include three beliefs about the relation between self and others that can lead to bigotry: firstly, belief in the absolute and exclusive truth of one's own religion; secondly, the doctrine of election (i.e. the superiority of one's own religious group by virtue of its chosen and privileged status, combined with an evaluation of other groups as 'inferior'); and thirdly the concept of theocracy (i.e. the belief that a monarch rules by divine right and that the church or highest religious authority is a legitimate guide for civil government). Intolerance of others' opinions, identities or lifestyles may encourage violent activism: religious groups who believe that there is no truth and no moral or spiritual value in other religious traditions will see any opposition to their own stand as harmful to others. On the other hand there are beliefs that encourage peaceful religious activism: firstly, the belief that there is truth in different religions; second, the idea that all human beings are brothers and sisters, being children of the same divine creator; and thirdly the belief that humankind has been given the competence to rule society by reason and collective deliberation (i.e. human reason can discover the rules of living together in a just society in accordance with God's will).

3. Religious beliefs regarding contingencies and outcome expectations can both promote violent activism and discourage people from acting violently. A violent act is always morally wrong. All world religions teach that killing is immoral. But all forms of violence, even killing, can be redefined as serving socially worthy or moral purposes. "Religious violence and killing are often redefined through theological reinterpretation as holy wars, as sacred events, or as being fought for God and his honour. These battles are not viewed as violence within the religious meaning system of those who participate in it. On the contrary, they are viewed as religious battles for justice aimed at making a more peaceful and just world" (Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005). The outcome is not wrong in a moral sense because it is the will of God.

4. Religions can even promote life goals by way of violent or peaceful activism. The problem with violent activism is that it contradicts the moral standards of religions with regard to respect for human life, the property of other people, freedom of opinion, et cetera. How, then, do we legitimize actions that are in themselves morally wrong? The power of religions to morally justify any goal or action is the power of sanctification (Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005, 776). The process of religious sanctification is uniquely powerful. If a superhuman power (however conceived) requires a person or group to act violently, this act is beyond any doubt. It is even beyond the moral doubt that it could be wrong because it inflicts physical and emotional harm on fellow human

beings. So the process of sanctification offers a justification for acts that are in themselves morally wrong. The actors have to dissociate themselves from the immoral quality of their actions. Moral dissociation can involve moral justification, euphemistic labelling and dehumanization (Bandura 2004). Moral justification refers to cognitive redefinition of destructive conduct as serving a socially worthy or moral purpose. Consequently the violence is personally and socially acceptable. Euphemistic labelling refers to the psychological process whereby people act more cruelly when violent actions are given a sanctified label than when they are called aggression. So extremely violent actions are reinterpreted theologically as 'holy wars' or acts in honour of God. Dehumanization refers to the process of stripping individuals or religious groups of their human (i.e. moral) qualities by defining them as subhuman or even satanic or evil. Other people are labelled 'children of Satan', which even obliges a true believer to fight against them.

5. Religions promote actions to strengthen people's relationship with transcendent reality (God). Prescribed religious actions can provoke conflict in different ways (Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005, 75). Some actions might be inherently conflictive, as in the case of religious calls for 'holy wars'. The self-sacrifice of the faithful believer is the ultimate proof of commitment to God and obedience to the religious cause. Other actions can be indirectly conflictive because they threaten the identity of other religious groups. For example, the obligation to evangelize or proselytize has a potential for conflict because other groups may feel their existence is threatened. Although evangelism and proselytism are directed to individuals, religious groups might feel that their way of life is threatened with annihilation. Some religious groups (e.g. Islam) threaten their own members with violence if they change their religious affiliation. An important factor in religious practices is institutionalization (see above). Inherent in this process is control by religious regimes. Religious elites and theological specialists play an important role in controlling religious practices. As long as practices stay within the limits of an orthodox interpretation, changes are permitted. The function of religious regimes is to keep practices within those limits. In other words, religious regimes are a major factor opposing religious transformation. Strong religious regimes (amounting to close monitoring of orthodoxy) are an institutional indication that there is little room for intra-religious transformation. The attitude of religious regimes towards extra-religious transformation is the reverse: by and large they oppose social transformation peacefully, unless it seriously threatens the religious institution itself (Silberman 2005b). If the threat is considered urgent enough, religious institutions provide organizational resources to mobilize believers for violent activism. When that happens highly institutionalized religions with

powerful religious regimes can contribute greatly to external transformation (i.e. in social realms other than religion). In religions there are also beliefs which counteract institutionalization. One is the belief that the core of religion is the individual's religious experience. This is aptly described in William James's definition of religion as "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (James 1982/1902). Based on this belief, religious persons will be more inclined to seek experiences with the divine and assign institutionalization a secondary role. When religious people show a preference for religious experiences in their meaning system they are less inclined to promote violent activism, for there is no organizational resource to mobilize believers for violent activism. Summarizing the argument regarding prescriptive beliefs about religious practices, we see a dual relation between religion and violence. A meaning system approach to religion accommodates this dual relation by taking into account the movement towards institutionalization and a focus on personal religious experience within the same religion.

6. Emotions can be connected with violent activism in religion. One of the most powerful negative emotions is anger at the desecration of an object, space or action that is perceived to be sacred (Silberman, Higgins & Dweck 2005). According to Lazarus anger stems from a demeaning offence against me and mine. "Anger depends heavily on the goal of preserving or enhancing self- or social self-esteem" (Lazarus 1999, 217). The two key appraisal-based meanings at the heart of anger are harm to the self and the assignation of blame. The perception of desecration can evoke intense negative feelings because of the uniqueness and importance of the sacred object or space. It may facilitate violent actions against those who are believed to be the desecrators. The infamous demolition of the disputed Babri mosque at Ayodhya by Hindu fundamentalist groups in December 1992 and its enduring effects on Muslim-Hindu relations in India is an example.

#### 8.2.4 *Consonance and Dissonance in the Religious Meaning System*

Why do some members of a religious tradition hold beliefs that support conflict and violence while others hold beliefs that support solidarity and peace? The fact that a religious conviction is part of a religious tradition says nothing about its prevalence among adherents. Religious socializing agents like religious institutions and schools – even when they have partly differing agendas – try to transmit all religious convictions to new generations. People gradually acquire beliefs when they read holy texts, participate in rituals, listen to preaching, pray, sing or meditate. Religious traditions provide descriptions of their

perceived reality and prescriptions about how to live. But most members do not subscribe to *all* beliefs of their religious tradition; and not all individual members hold the *same* beliefs. Why do some members endorse some beliefs while other members endorse other beliefs? We can rephrase the question in terms of the meaning system of an individual person. By means of what psychological process do people (re)arrange the descriptive and prescriptive beliefs in their personal religious meaning system? As said before, religious meaning systems are complex (i.e. they contain contradictory beliefs) and malleable (i.e. they are able to develop and change over time). The complexity and malleability of religious meaning systems allow individual believers to react differently to their environment. In assimilation the environment is interpreted in their religious schemes and structures. In accommodation the meaning system changes to be in line with the context. People want to have beliefs that are consonant with their behaviour, and vice versa. When they pray they have beliefs regarding the outcome of prayer, which motivate them to pray. If they are violent, they will have beliefs that legitimize their actions. The psychological mechanism for arranging people's beliefs in relation to each other and in relation to their behaviour is called cognitive dissonance reduction. The theory of cognitive dissonance maintains that people are driven by a search for consonance between different beliefs, between their beliefs and their behaviour, and between expectations and reality. Cognitive dissonance theory was formulated more than 50 years ago by Leon Festinger (1957) but has developed further since then (Cooper 2007). In current reformulations management and protection of the self (or identity) play an important role in reducing dissonance. This makes it a very useful theory to understand the psychological dynamics of attributing causes of religious conflict. Earlier we explained the concept of conflict in connection with a (re)definition of self-identity (7.2). In this section we first summarize the main ideas of the theory of cognitive dissonance, which are helpful to understand the psychological mechanism underlying the (re)arrangement of beliefs within a meaning system. Next, we connect this psychological mechanism with religious conflict as a specific outcome of behaviour in a situation of heightened anxiety and uncertainty (cf. Sidel 2007).

Festinger formulated his theory after studying a small doomsday cult which believed that the earth would be destroyed by a great flood on 21 December 1955. All people would perish except those who believed in the prophecies emanating from the planet Clarion. Festinger and his students expected that the members of the cult would face great cognitive inconsistency on the morning after 21 December if the world as we know it still existed. How did the members of the group restore the internal consistency of their meaning sys-

tem? How did their attitudes change in a way that was consistent with their experiences after 21 December 1955? The theory of cognitive dissonance is based on the premise that people do not tolerate inconsistency very well. How do we understand this? (Festinger et al. 1956; Festinger 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills 1999; Cooper 2007.)

1. In his theory of cognitive dissonance Festinger managed to relate cognitions that until then had been treated independently. Pairs of cognitions can be declared relevant or irrelevant to one another. Once cognitions are considered relevant to one another, they can be either dissonant or consonant. They are consonant if one follows from the other, and dissonant if the opposite follows from each of them.

2. Next, the theory of cognitive dissonance maintains that dissonant cognitions are psychologically uncomfortable. Following his mentor Kurt Lewin's early work on tension systems, Festinger argued that people are motivated to reduce dissonance. Our behaviour is driven by forces which motivate us to act in one way rather than another. The force that Festinger identified was arousal. The theory of cognitive dissonance is based on the premise that dissonant cognitions create an unpleasant state of arousal (i.e. a mental tension state). The drive (or desire) to reduce this tension state is the mechanism that underlies attitudinal change. Put differently, people change their attitudes in order to reduce dissonance. Attitudinal change is motivated by the need to reduce the tension between opposite cognitions. For example, the members of the doomsday cult needed to reduce the tension between the prophecy that the world would be destroyed at a specific moment and the stark fact that it still existed afterwards.

3. The theory of cognitive dissonance posits that the magnitude of dissonance can be expressed in a formula. The greater the dissonance, the greater the arousal. And if there is more arousal, there is a greater need to reduce the tension between opposite cognitions. The formula can be expressed as follows (Cooper 2007, 9):

$$\text{DISSONANCE MAGNITUDE} = \frac{\text{SUM (all discrepant cognitions x importance)}}{\text{SUM (all consonant cognitions x importance)}}$$

"The total magnitude of the tension state of cognitive dissonance is proportional to the discrepant cognitions a person has (the elements above the line in the formula) and inversely proportional to the number of cognitions which are consonant (below the line) each weighted by its importance" (Cooper 2007, 9). For the doomsday cultists named the Seekers the fact that the world still existed after 21 December 1955 was a discrepant cognition. It caused great dis-



sonance because of its importance for them. The firmness of their belief in the end of the world is illustrated by the fact that some of them had sold their houses and quitted their jobs. Festinger and his colleagues observed that in the days after 21 December the Seekers developed a cognition consonant with their prophecies and sacrifices. This idea was that *because* of their sacrifices the extra-terrestrials from the planet Clarion decided not to destroy the world. To magnify the importance of this cognition the Seekers publicized it in press releases and interviews. The formula also makes clear how arousal can be decreased by changing attitudes in one of the following ways: (a) changing the importance of discrepant cognitions (numerator, above the line); (b) bolstering consonant cognitions (denominator, below the line); and (c) seeking new cognitions that support discrepant behaviour.

4. According to Festinger dissonance is the result of a tension state arising from a logical (in)consistency between cognitions and behaviour. Currently scholars still accept this motive for attitudinal change, but have expanded it with at least three considerations relating to the (in)consistency between cognitions and actions. Not all scholars agree with these considerations, but we mention them as topics of the debate on dissonance arousal (cf. Cooper 2007, 182).

(a) Dissonance arousal is generated by behaviour, more precisely aversive behaviour. But in order for dissonance to occur individuals have to be responsible for their actions and realize that the consequences are irrevocable. If people are able to absolve themselves of responsibility for an aversive consequence, the motivation to change attitudes disappears. There is no drive to change when responsibility is denied. Responsibility denial is when “they believe they had no choice but to behave as they did and/or the consequence was unforeseeable when they made that choice” (Cooper 2007, 76).

(b) The second consideration concerns the orientation to behaviour, more precisely to aversive behaviour as the cause of dissonance arousal. Dissonance is driven by the perception of unwanted consequences and has little to do with inconsistent cognitions (Cooper 2007, 80). For Festinger it looked as if people were ‘hard-wired’ to be aroused by inconsistency. However, this does not explain *why* people are upset by inconsistency. Harmon-Jones (1999) has pointed out that an action orientation combined with the need to survive can explain why we try to get rid of inconsistency. It is not just inconsistency as such, but the effect of inconsistency on our need to adopt an unequivocal stance towards action in the social and physical environment. It is adaptively better to act in a world without ambivalence and conflict. Inconsistent cognitions interfere with our action tendencies and thus create negative emotions. These negative emotions are a sign that we are maladapted to our environment.

(c) Finally, the role of the self, more specifically the role of self-esteem, needs to be included in the theory of dissonance. The heart of dissonance is not inconsistency as such, but the motivation to maintain a positive self-image of moral adequacy. The so-called self-affirmation theory states: "We want to see ourselves as good, capable, and able to predict outcomes and control outcomes in areas that matter. Awareness of information that threatens this image motivates us to restore it to a state of integrity" (Aronson et al. 1999, 128). The objective of attitudinal change is to restore a sense of global self-worth. Whether the self-affirmation is strong or weak depends on the magnitude of the threat to the self-image.

5. For our research the role of the self in dissonance arousal and attitudinal change is of utmost importance. Self-esteem can play different roles in dissonance arousal. Stone and Cooper (2001) propose three ways of reducing cognitive dissonance in their Self-Standard Model (SSM).

(a) The first way is presented by the classic theory of cognitive dissonance and implies no role for self-identity. Once dissonance is aroused, people turn directly to the task of reducing it. They change their attitudes by changing the importance of discrepant cognitions, by strengthening consonant cognitions or seeking new supportive cognitions. No thoughts concerning the self are involved. The only objective is to justify aversive behaviour.

(b) The second way implies that in the throes of dissonance, positive self-attributes are made accessible to a person. Positive self-attributes are a set of high expectations that functions as a personal standard of judgment in the context of discrepant behaviour. For example, people remind themselves that they are decent humans with high moral standards. How can this affect dissonance? Dissonance is the result of discrepancy between behaviour and personal standards of self-esteem. It does not occur when behaviour is evaluated according to generally shared and distant normative criteria of what is good or bad, foolish or sensible (Stone & Cooper 2001, 231). Dissonance occurs because the consequences of behaviour are considered unwanted or objectionable by everyone in society or a specific community, most of all by the person responsible for the behaviour. According to self-affirmation theory the standards need to be personal, even idiographic. On the other hand, positive attributes are resources to restore self-esteem. If the cognitions used to reduce discomfort are positive, self-descriptive and related to the discrepant behaviour, dissonance is reduced. For example, I consider myself to be a person who makes good intuitive judgments in interpersonal conflict situations. Based on this positive attribute, I cannot have chosen the wrong behaviour in this situation (although others may say so!). This positive self-descriptive cognition reduces the experience of discomfort, hence dissonance (cf. Cooper 2007, 110).

(c) The third way implies a situation in which positive self-attributes are made accessible to a person but are not considered relevant to the behaviour.

In a meaning system approach people will hold beliefs that are consonant with each other. Based on the theory of cognitive dissonance, we can expect descriptive and prescriptive beliefs in a religious meaning system to display cognitive consistency. In Festinger's original theory (1957) the realm of consonance/dissonance was restricted to comparison of the consistency or inconsistency of cognitions, but in later theories the self and motivated reasoning also played a role in cognitive dissonance (Cooper 2007). Maintaining cognitive consistency is a way to protect a positive self-image. A person will try to minimize dissonance between different beliefs in the meaning system. Or, put differently, a person will hold beliefs that give rise to maximum consonance.

Earlier we defined the context of religious conflicts as a heightened state of uncertainty and anxiety. According to Sidel (2007) people in this situation seek to (re)articulate the authority claims of their religion and to (re)define their identity, because authority claims and strong identity definitions offer solid ground to withstand uncertainty and anxiety. When people feel threatened and uncertain they need a firm basis in order to survive. This is precisely what religion offers: it has exceptional power to contribute to personal or collective identity and it claims great authority. If something is decreed by God, there can be no doubt about its righteousness and accuracy. Religious conflicts are also considered to be connected with societal transformation. Force-driven religious conflict is seen as violent activism to bring about world change or transformation. For example, if the political equation changes because of conversion of Hindus to Islam or Christianity, this situation needs to be transformed by means of conflict. Societal transformation refers to an urgent drive to change a given imperfect state into a desired state. It includes continuity and discontinuity between the imperfect state and the improved situation. Cognitive consistency is important for people to maintain a stable meaning system. "As threat to the stability of their conceptual system mounts, people experience increasing anxiety and a tendency for their conceptual system to become disorganized. When disorganization is imminent, the anxiety becomes overwhelming, and people will do whatever they can to reduce its intensity and prevent disorganization" (Epstein 1990, 172).

### 8.3 Empirical Research

#### 8.3.1 *Research Question*

The following research question was formulated in light of the foregoing theoretical perspective: to what extent can agreement with force-driven religious conflict by Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu be explained by descriptive beliefs about the relation between self and others and prescriptive beliefs about religious action, while controlling for the socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious background of the students?

In a meaning system approach the attribution of religious conflict is understood as an outcome expectation. Outcome expectations are beliefs involving self-efficacy expectations about world change, the ability of individuals and groups to change the world around them and expectations about the means to effect this change. The outcome expectation in our research is formulated as “x encourages y”, in which ‘y’ is defined as interreligious conflict and ‘x’ refers to either socio-economic, political, ethnic-cultural or religious force-driven causes (cf. 7.2). If a religious group overtly or tacitly approves violence as a means of socio-economic change, this can encourage interreligious conflict. Changes in the political equation in Indian society can lead to conflict between religious groups. Linking ethnic or national identity to a particular religion is conducive to religious conflict. And superiority feelings of specific groups can foment religious conflict. We speak about force-driven religious conflict because of the use of coercive force as a means of effecting societal change. Adherents of other religious traditions, individually or collectively, are forced to accept an unwanted change or the rejection of desired change (‘x’). The focus of our research is on *force-driven religious conflict*, which can be seen as a belief about outcome expectations. Force-driven religious conflict will be consonant with other beliefs in the meaning system, both prescriptive beliefs (i.e. beliefs about contingencies and expectations about the self, the world and the relation between them) and descriptive beliefs (i.e. beliefs about the nature of the self and the world). We included several prescriptive beliefs and descriptive beliefs which we expected to affect the extent to which people attribute interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. The prescriptive beliefs are institutional religious practice and vertical mysticism; the descriptive beliefs concern the models of interpreting religious plurality and religiocentrism.

The first type of prescriptive belief included in our research is involvement in *institutional religious practice* (cf. chapter 3). The reason for including it is the authority claimed by religious institutions. Religious institutions tend to control believers’ practices as a means of opposing change in their tradition. Strong motivation to learn more about the beliefs and doctrines of one’s

religious tradition; evaluating reading sacred scriptures as important; keen interest in the moral values of one's religion; and considering participation in religious worship important are all seen as indicators of the respondent's willingness to comply with the authority of religious institutions. Force-driven religious conflict implies societal transformation. A demand for external change coincides with internal opposition to change. The reason behind both processes is the same, namely insistence on the authority of my religion. We therefore expect students who agree with institutional religious practice to agree with force-driven religious conflict (*hypothesis 1*).

A second prescriptive belief which can influence agreement with force-driven religious conflict is *vertical mysticism* (cf. chapter 4). Religions can favour personal mystical experiences of union with a higher reality. Mystical experiences are not institutionally controlled. They can happen to believers of all religious traditions, independently of religious institutions or theologically trained authorities. Nevertheless vertical mysticism relates positively to perceived positive influence of friends, the religious community, teachers/professors and the media on personal religiosity. In other words: revelatory and ineffable experiences of union with a greater reality correlate with a perceived positive influence of most agents of religious socialization. Mysticism also relates positively to intrinsic religiosity (Hood & Morris 1990; Campbell et al. 2010) and religious or spiritual practice (Hood et al. 2009, 362ff). Overall, then, it seems likely that vertical mysticism relates negatively to the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. People who have had vertical mystic experiences are unlikely to see coercive power as a means of achieving economic, political or socio-cultural goals as the core of interreligious conflict. Hence students who agree with vertical mysticism will agree less with force-driven religious conflict (*hypothesis 2*).

The first type of descriptive belief concerns the question of truth in a context of religious plurality. We distinguish between three models of interpreting religious plurality: monism, commonality pluralism and differential pluralism (cf. chapter 5). *Monism* refers to belief in the absolute validity of one's own religion. People who think that other religions do not contain any truth are likely to denigrate the ideas and convictions of other traditions. We consider it likely that agreement with monism induces a belief that coercive force, including perceived radicalism of other religious groups, is at the root of interreligious conflict. *Commonality pluralism* stresses underlying – sometimes amorphous – universal aspects shared by all religions in pluralistic encounter. *Differential pluralism* sees differences between religions as avenues for growth and development. We expect believers who agree with either form of pluralism to show less agreement with force-driven religious conflict because of their open

attitude towards other religious traditions. In short: students who agree with monism will agree more with force-driven religious conflict (*hypothesis 3*); students who agree with commonality pluralism will agree less with force-driven religious conflict (*hypothesis 4*); and students who agree with differential pluralism will agree less with force-driven religious conflict (*hypothesis 5*).

The second type of descriptive belief concerns the relation between self and other in religiocentrism. Religiocentrism includes a combination of positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes (cf. chapter 6). *Positive in-group attitudes* mean that positive characteristics like faithfulness, goodness or the ability to speak meaningfully about God are associated with one's own religious group. *Negative out-group attitudes* strip other believers of their moral qualities and put them in a bad light (e.g. by declaring them intolerant or sanctimonious). What is the relation between religiocentrism and (the attribution of) interreligious conflict? At first sight it seems likely that religiocentrism relates positively to conflictive relations between religious groups. Inasmuch as in-group superiority and out-group inferiority are part of religiocentrism, they offer motives to treat others a-morally. Consequently respondents who display relatively high levels of religiocentrism are likely to attribute interreligious conflicts to force-driven causes. Those who consider their own tradition superior to other traditions when comparing group characteristics will not hesitate to use coercive force to achieve the goals of the religious in-group. In that case it is not difficult to regard coercive force as an important factor in interreligious conflict. But positive in-group attitudes do not necessarily imply feelings of superiority. Group characteristics have to be compared to speak of 'superiority', and comparison is only one aspect of social identity construction, along with categorization and identification (cf. 6.2). It might well be that positive in-group attitudes are indicators of religious belonging and commitment to one's own religious tradition, without implying superiority or exclusive truth claims. This means that the relation between positive in-group attitudes and force-driven religious conflict depends on other mediators and moderators. Only when one's own group is seen as superior to other groups, and only when positive in-group attitudes are combined with or even take the form of absolute truth claims will positive in-group attitudes contribute to the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. But insofar as positive in-group attitudes are merely an indicator of religious commitment to one's own group they will reduce agreement with force-driven religious conflict. How difficult is it for the religiously committed to see religiosity as intertwined with or even responsible for conflict? It remains to be seen what we find in our Tamil Nadu student population. However, some previous research in Asian contexts helps us to form tentative expectations. Camacho (2014) does not find any influence

of positive in-group attitudes on support of violence in the Philippines, although Subagya (2015) established a very small correlation in Indonesia. Hadiwitanto (2015), on the other hand, establishes a clear (positive!) correlation between positive in-group attitudes among both Christians and Muslims in Indonesia and forms of generalized trust in others. In other words: in the latter case it is likely that religious commitment manifested as positive in-group attitudes contributes to out-group trust.

Expectations regarding the potential influence of negative out-group attitudes on force-driven conflict are more straightforward. Negative out-group attitudes intrinsically entail negative evaluation of other groups, so one would reasonably expect them to induce agreement with force-driven religious conflict. The complexity of the potential effects of religiocentrism is mirrored in its classic bi-factorial structure: positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes clearly correlate, but not strongly enough to warrant combining them in a single, empirically validated concept. Summarizing the relation between religiocentrism and religious conflict we can formulate two expectations. Since our measurement of positive in-group attitudes does not entail attitudes of superiority but rather points to religious commitment to one's own group, we expect students who agree with positive in-group attitudes to agree less with force-driven religious conflict (*hypothesis 6*). On the other hand, students who agree with negative out-group attitudes will agree more strongly with force-driven religious conflict (*hypothesis 7*).

### 8.3.2 *Measuring Instruments*

The measuring instruments were described in some detail in chapters 3 to 7. Here we merely mention them briefly.

The measurement of *force-driven religious conflict* comprises items that measure the extent to which respondents agree that coercive power is at the root of interreligious conflict. The coercive force can be part of religious radicalism, or be used to achieve the economic, political or socio-cultural goals of religious groups (cf. chapter 7). *Institutional religious practice* has doctrinal, ethical and ritual dimensions. Doctrinal learning practices are measured by asking whether respondents are interested in learning more about the beliefs and doctrines of their own religion. The ethical dimension refers to strengthening the moral values upheld by the religion, and the ritual dimension refers to participation in ritual activities performed by theologically trained leaders of the relevant religious tradition (cf. chapter 3). *Vertical mysticism* measures union with a higher reality. It combines the idea of a loss of self with the noetic quality (i.e. need for special knowledge or insight) and ineffability (i.e. difficulty of articulating the meaning) of a mystical experience (cf. chapter 4).



With regard to models of interpreting religious plurality, we used three measurements: *monism*; *commonality pluralism*; and *differential pluralism* (cf. chapter 5). Religio-centrism is the combination of positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes. *Positive in-group attitudes* are measured in the same way for all religious groups. Measurement of *negative out-group attitudes* differs for each group. Negative out-group attitudes are seen as group-specific, reflecting a religious group's specific negative stereotypes of another group (cf. chapter 6).

### 8.3.3 *Conceptual Model and Design of Data Analysis*

To analyse the predictors of the force-driven religious conflict we used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM technique). SEM requires not only explicit theoretical expectations about the relation between the variables, but also a sparse model (cf. 1.7 in chapter 1 for a more detailed description).

(a) In the first place we are interested in the influence of prescriptive and descriptive beliefs on the attribution of force-driven causes of interreligious conflict. We tested for the influence of these beliefs insofar as they correlated significantly with force-driven religious conflict in at least one of the religious groups (Christian, Muslim or Hindu).

(b) We also tested for the direct influence of personal characteristics on force-driven religious conflict and their indirect influence via prescriptive and descriptive beliefs. To limit the model we only did so if the personal characteristic showed a minimum association of .20 with force-driven religious conflict (for direct influence) or the relevant belief (for indirect influence) in at least one religious group. We did not require this level of association of all three groups, since there can be different predictors in each religious group. Based on this criterion we removed the following variables from our model: age, mother tongue, caste, mother's occupation, father's occupation, and years attending schools affiliated with one's own religion. Using the same criterion we also had to remove all socio-religious characteristics associated with socializing agents in the religious domain. Because respondents with more than one missing value were excluded from the analysis, there were 805 Christian students (out of a total of 869 Christian respondents), 724 Hindu students (out of 789 respondents), and 217 Muslims students (out of 255 respondents).

The resultant model is presented in Table 8.1. Agreement with force-driven religious conflict is the dependent variable. All descriptive and prescriptive beliefs may influence the level of agreement with force-driven religious conflict. These potential influences are depicted by an arrow from the beliefs box to the dependent variable. There are also five student characteristics included in the model: gender, urbanization, field of specialization, and mother's and father's educational level. In this model the student characteristics can influence

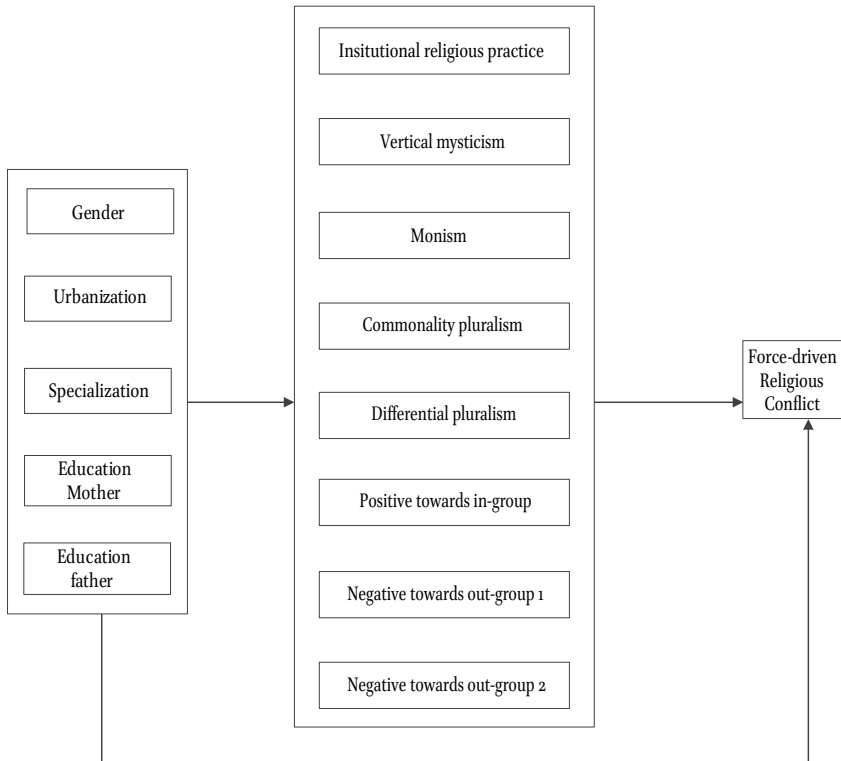


FIGURE 8.1 *Structural model to analyse the influence of beliefs and students' characteristics on agreement with force-driven religious conflict.*

agreement with force-driven religious conflict directly as well as indirectly by way of beliefs. Actually there should be an arrow from each student characteristic to each belief, and from each student characteristic to force-driven religious conflict. But for the sake of simplicity we replaced this labyrinth of lines with a single arrow from the box of student characteristics to beliefs and one arrow from student characteristics to force-driven religious conflict.

### 8.3.4 *Empirical Results*

We first present the results for Christian students, next for Muslim students and finally for Hindu students.

Which beliefs of Christian students predict their agreement with force-driven religious conflict, while controlling for their socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious background? The results of our SEM analysis are presented in Figure 8.2. The model is not rejected, that is it can be accepted as an explanation of the level of agreement with force-driven religious conflict among Christian students.

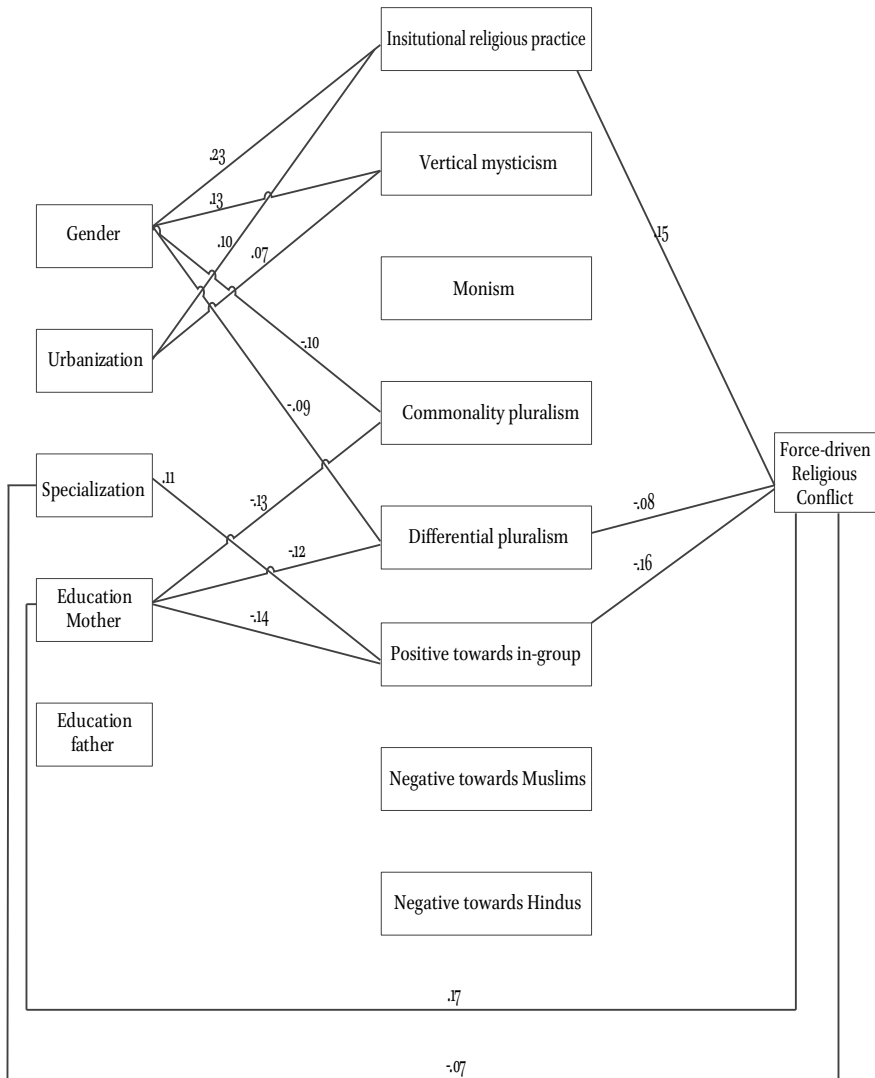


FIGURE 8.2 Structural model of the influence of beliefs and personal characteristics on force-driven religious conflict among Christian students (beta coefficients).<sup>2</sup>

We start our description of the results with the intermediate variables, and then describe the influence of the independent variables.

<sup>2</sup> The model is not rejected:  $\chi^2 = 2.38$ ; d.f. = 3;  $p = .50$ ; rmsea = .00. The unexplained variance or error-variance of force-driven conflict is .89. The explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of the model is .11.

Christian students agree more with force-driven religious conflict if they are closely involved in institutional religious practices ( $\beta .15$ ) and show less agreement with differential pluralism ( $\beta -.08$ ). These findings confirm the expectations in hypotheses 1 and 5 respectively. Furthermore, low agreement with positive in-group attitudes predicts greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict ( $\beta -.16$ ), a finding we did propose as a possible result in hypothesis 6. We will discuss these findings in the next section.

Two personal characteristics directly influence agreement with force-driven religious conflict: higher level of education of the mother ( $\beta .17$  – the highest beta coefficient in our model) and studying the arts or social sciences ( $\beta -.07$ ). The latter means that students of the arts and social sciences show more agreement with force-driven religious conflict than science students. Seemingly it is easier for students of disciplines in which religion is likely to be studied (arts and social sciences) to recognize the force-driven causes of interreligious conflict than for students of disciplines in which religion is not studied (natural and life sciences).

Other personal characteristics have an indirect influence on force-driven religious conflict via beliefs (gender, urbanization and again field of specialization and mother's educational level). Female students ( $\beta .23$ ) and those who have been living in urbanized areas ( $\beta .10$ ) participate more in institutional religious practice than men and those who have lived in the countryside, but Christian men ( $\beta -.09$ ) agree more with differential pluralism than women. A relatively low educational level of the mother ( $\beta -.12$ ) is associated with greater agreement with differential pluralism. Among Christian students positive in-group attitudes are prevalent among science students ( $\beta .11$ ) and those whose mother's educational level is relatively low ( $\beta -.14$ ). Of all personal characteristics, mother's educational level shows the strongest link with force-driven religious conflict, both directly and indirectly. Gender, urbanization and field of specialization are also relevant to agreement with force-driven religious conflict. We will reflect on these empirical results under findings and discussion (8.4).

Which beliefs of Muslim students predict force-driven religious conflict while controlling for socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious personal characteristics (cf. Table 8.3)? Muslim students agree more with force-driven religious conflict if they show relatively high levels of participation in institutional religious practices ( $\beta .13$ ) and agree with commonality pluralism ( $\beta .18$ ). The first result confirms our expectation (hypothesis 1), but the second result contradicts our expectation in hypothesis 4. We will reflect on this anomaly in the discussion (8.4).

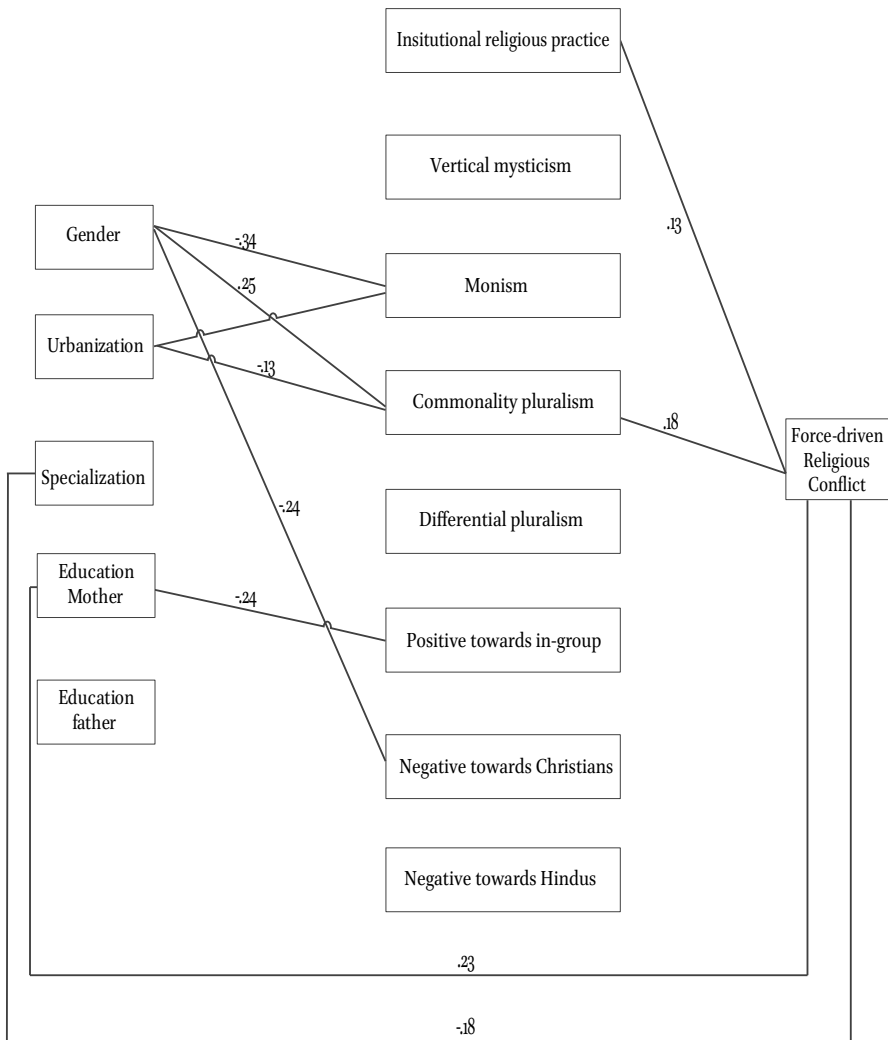


FIGURE 8.3 *Structural model of the influence of beliefs and personal characteristics on force-driven religious conflict among Muslim students (beta coefficients).*<sup>3</sup>

Two personal characteristics directly predict agreement with force-driven religious conflict among Muslim students: a higher level of education of the mother ( $\beta .23$ ) and studying the arts or social sciences ( $\beta -.18$ ). These are identical with the results for our Christian students.

3 The model is not rejected:  $\chi^2 = 4.91$ ; d.f. = 3;  $p = .18$ ; rmsea = .05. The unexplained variance or error-variance of force-driven conflict is .83. The explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of the model is .17.

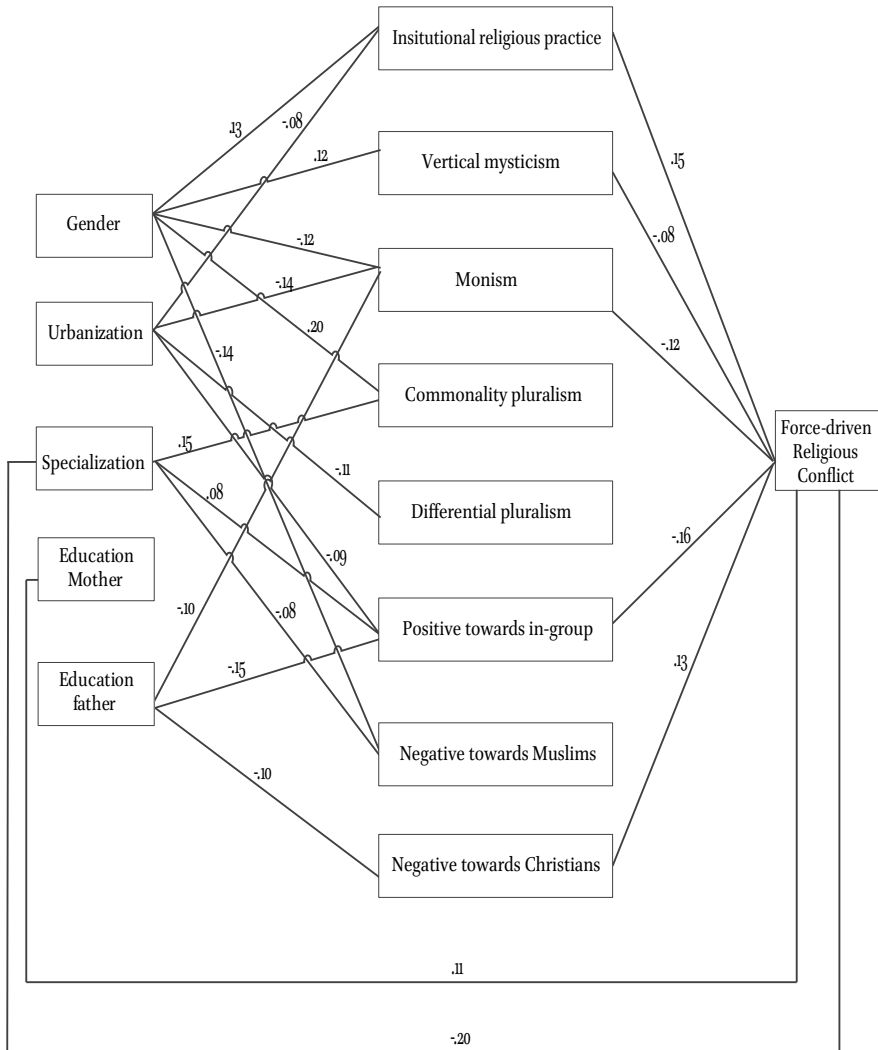


FIGURE 8.4 Structural model of the influence of beliefs and personal characteristics on force-driven religious conflict among Hindu students (beta coefficients).<sup>4</sup>

Two personal characteristics indirectly influence force-driven religious conflict through commonality pluralism: gender and urbanization. Muslim female students agree more with commonality pluralism than men ( $\beta$  .25) and students who used to live in less urbanized areas agree more with commonality pluralism as well ( $\beta$  -.13).

4 The model is not rejected:  $\chi^2 = 2.73$ ; d.f. = 3;  $p = .44$ ; rmsea = .00. The unexplained variance or error-variance of force-driven conflict is .85. The explained variance ( $R^2$ ) of the model is .15.

Finally: which beliefs predict force-driven religious conflict among Hindu students while controlling for socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious personal characteristics (cf. Table 8.4)? Two prescriptive beliefs are linked with force-driven conflict: greater involvement in institutional religious practices ( $\beta$  .15) and less vertical mysticism ( $\beta$  -.08). These findings confirm our first and second hypotheses. Three descriptive beliefs predict agreement with force-driven conflict: lower levels of agreement with monism ( $\beta$  -.12), contradicting our hypothesis 3; lower levels of positive in-group attitudes ( $\beta$  -.16); and higher levels of negative (out-group) attitudes towards Christians ( $\beta$  .13). This means that religiocentrism both reduces and induces attribution of interreligious conflicts to force-driven causes. Positive in-group attitudes reduce agreement with force-driven religious conflict, while negative out-group attitudes – at least negative attitudes towards Christians among Hindus – induce agreement with force-driven religious conflict. We will discuss these remarkable results in section 8.4.

Two personal characteristics directly predict greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict among our Hindu respondents: a relatively high educational level of the mother ( $\beta$  .11) and studying arts or social sciences ( $\beta$  -.20). These are identical with the results found among Christian and Muslim respondents.

All personal characteristics are indirectly linked with force-driven religious conflict. Female Hindu students are more involved in institutional religious practices than men ( $\beta$  .13), as are students who have lived in rural areas ( $\beta$  -.08). Women have more mystical experiences than men ( $\beta$  .12). Hindu men ( $\beta$  -.12), Hindus who lived in less urbanized areas ( $\beta$  -.14) and whose fathers have relatively low educational levels ( $\beta$  -.10) show greater agreement with monism. Agreement with positive in-group attitudes is linked with living in less urbanized areas ( $\beta$  -.09), lower levels of father's education ( $\beta$  -.15) and studying natural sciences ( $\beta$  .08). Agreement with negative out-group attitudes towards Christians is linked with a lower educational level of the father ( $\beta$  -.10). Note that the indirect effect of father's educational level on force-driven religious conflict goes in the same direction as the direct effect of mother's educational level. Generally higher parental educational levels relates to greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict.

## 8.4 Findings and Discussion

To what extent can the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes be explained by descriptive and prescriptive beliefs among Christian,



Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu, while controlling for students' socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious characteristics? In this section we first summarize the direct predictors of force-driven religious conflict for each religious group and then explicitly refer to the hypotheses formulated earlier concerning each belief in our research model (8.4.1). In the discussion we reflect on some remarkable findings from the perspective of our theoretical framework, namely the religious meaning system approach and the theory of cognitive dissonance. More specifically, we discuss the positive influence of monism and commonality pluralism on agreement with force-driven religious conflict, the differential influence of religiocentrism, and the direct influence of mother's educational level on agreement with force-driven religious conflict (8.4.2).

#### 8.4.1 *Findings*

We can summarize our research findings for each of the religious groups as follows (cf. Table 8.1).

Among Christian students institutional religious practice increases attribution of interreligious conflicts to force-driven causes, while differential pluralism and positive in-group attitudes reduce it. As far as personal characteristics are concerned, a more highly educated mother and studying arts or social sciences (as opposed to natural sciences) predict greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict.

Among Muslim students institutional religious practice and commonality pluralism contribute to the attribution of interreligious conflicts to force-driven causes. Secondly, a more highly educated mother and studying arts or social sciences predict greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict.

Among Hindu students five beliefs are found to influence attitudes towards force-driven religious conflict. Institutional religious practice increases attribution of interreligious conflicts to force-driven causes. Vertical mysticism, monism and positive in-group attitudes reduce agreement with force-driven interreligious conflict, whereas negative attitudes towards Christians contribute to it. The findings concerning the personal characteristics are identical with those among Christian and Muslim respondents: higher educational level of the mother and studying art or social sciences increase agreement with force-driven conflict.

What do these research findings imply for the hypotheses formulated for each belief (cf. 8.3.1)? Did the hypotheses pass the test of falsification? And are the beliefs included in our model generally able to predict agreement with force-driven religious conflict?

TABLE 8.1 *Direct predictors of force-driven religious conflict among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students with reference to hypotheses.*

	Christians	Muslims	Hindus
<i>Prescriptive beliefs</i>			
H 1: Institutional religious practice	+	+	+
H 2: Vertical mysticism			-
<i>Descriptive beliefs</i>			
H 3: Monism			_*
H 4: Commonality pluralism		+*	
H 5: Differential pluralism	-		
H 6: Positive in-group attitudes	-		-
H 7: Negative out-group attitudes			+
<i>Personal characteristics</i>			
Educational level mother	+	+	+
Art & social sciences	+	+	+

Legenda: '+' indicates a positive effect; '-' indicates a negative effect; '\*' indicates a finding that contradicts the earlier formulated hypothesis.

The first hypothesis concerns the prescriptive belief about institutional religious practice. Our hypothesis is corroborated by the results from all three religious groups: interreligious conflicts are (more widely) attributed to force-driven causes when students display higher levels of institutional religious practice.

The second hypothesis concerns the negative relation between vertical mysticism as a prescriptive belief and force-driven religious conflict. This hypothesis is corroborated by our findings. More specifically, Hindu students who report less experience of mystical union with an ultimate reality agree more strongly with force-driven religious conflict.

In a third hypothesis we argued that greater agreement with monism would be associated with greater attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. This hypothesis was falsified. Hindu students who disagree relatively strongly with the belief that there is absolute truth in their tradition are more inclined to attribute religious conflict to force-driven causes. We will come back to this surprising result in the discussion. Although our hypothesis is falsified, this result justifies including monism as a relevant belief in the religious meaning system when it comes to religious conflict.

Our fourth hypothesis concerning commonality pluralism is also falsified. Contrary to what we expected, we found that Muslim students who agree with commonality pluralism show greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict.

The fifth hypothesis regarding differential pluralism is corroborated in our group of Christian respondents. Christian students who disagree with differential pluralism agree more strongly with force-driven religious conflict.

Our sixth hypothesis expected positive in-group attitudes to correlate negatively with force-driven religious conflict, in that relatively more positive in-group attitudes reduce the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes and less positive in-group attitudes increase it. This hypothesis is corroborated among our Christian and Hindu research groups. Seemingly believers who are less involved with their religious in-group agree more with force-driven religious conflict.

The seventh hypothesis concerns negative out-group attitudes. We proposed that negative out-group attitudes would increase the likelihood of attributing interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. This hypothesis, too, is confirmed for Hindu students with regard to their negative out-group attitudes towards Christians, but not with regard to their negative attitudes towards Muslims, neither for Christian and Muslim respondents' negative out-group attitudes.

#### 8.4.2 *Discussion*

We highlight some of our remarkable findings, starting with the negative influence of the descriptive beliefs of monism and commonality pluralism on force-driven religious conflict, followed by the differential effect of religiocentrism on the attribution of interreligious conflicts, and ending with the direct influence of the mother's educational level on greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict.

##### Monism

A first anomalous result – at least in terms of our hypotheses – is that the more Hindu students agree with the idea that their religion holds absolute truth, the less they agree with force-driven religious conflict. How do we explain that disagreement with religious monism predicts greater attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes?

The explanation could lie in the attitudinal difference with regard to truth claims between the monotheistic religions (Christianity and Islam) on the one hand, and 'polytheistic' Hinduism on the other. Christianity and Islam are 'religions of the book', which connect religious truth to some degree with what

they consider to be a unique revelation in the Bible or Qur'an. This is very different from the major Hindu movements. By and large Hinduism has always been good at integrating new ideas and practices, including those of other religious traditions. The major movements in Hinduism all accept different ways to liberation (*moksha*), and worship of different gods. This distinction between Hinduism and the religions of the book is reflected in the level of agreement with monism. On the whole monism finds little support even among Christian and Islamic students in Tamil Nadu, but it is rejected even more emphatically by Hindu students. As noted already, this difference between Christians and Muslims on the one hand and Hindus on the other is both relevant and statistically significant (cf. 5.3.3).

What about the negative relation between monism and force-driven religious conflict against this background? Why would Hindu students be more inclined to attribute interreligious conflict to force-driven causes when they reject absolute truth claims, while we do not find this (negative) correlation among Christians and Muslims? The key to this question can be the Hindu conception of absolute truth, which differs from that of Christianity and Islam. According to Weber (1996) monotheistic religions formulate the concept of absolute truth in relation to their claim to universalism, which is primarily a claim to dogmatic truth. In Hinduism the idea of absolute truth is formulated in relation to the claim to a fixed set of rituals associated with a societal order (particularly the caste system). This connects the truth question in Hinduism with social order, influenced by the belief found in the Hindu myth of the great sacrifice of *Purusha* and the metaphysical doctrines of dharma, karma (doctrine of ethical compensation) and samsara (belief in transmigration of souls) (Shrirama 2007; Omvedt 2003). Rejection of absolute truth by Hindu students might imply a critical stance towards societal order and dismissing monism would entail approval of the use of coercive force to change society. The belief that societal change is possible – associated with rejection of monism – increases the likelihood that conflicts in society are indeed attributed to force-driven economic, political or socio-cultural causes. We are not sure if the rejection of absolute truth claims has an impact on the attribution of specific conflicts between religious groups. Neither do we know whether interreligious conflicts are interpreted against the background of social conflict generally. But our interpretation is supported by socio-cultural and socio-economic personal characteristics, which correlate negatively with monism but positively with force-driven religious conflict. Hindu men (compared to women) and respondents whose fathers and mothers have lower educational levels agree more with monism (cf. Table 5.5), but less with force-driven religious conflict (cf. Table 7.3). Compared with men, women's position is more restricted by the

order of society, and parental educational level is an important indicator of less opportunity to break free from the social order. To summarize our argument: for Hindu students disagreement with monism implies rejection of the order of society, entailing a likelihood that conflict is interpreted as a means of breaking free from that order.

#### Commonality Pluralism

A second unexpected finding is the (positive) effect of commonality pluralism on force-driven religious conflict among Muslim students only. How can agreement with commonality pluralism predict agreement with the attribution of conflict to force-driven causes?

An explanation may be found in Islamic theology and the minority position of Muslims in India. Commonality pluralism accepts that different aspects of the same ultimate truth are revealed in different religions. Similarities between religions are building blocks to construct a universal religion, and all religions offer an equally profound experience of divine reality. Commonality pluralism puts Islam on the same level of truth as other religions, as opposed to the dominant idea in Islamic theology that the word of God revealed to Mohammad in the Qur'an is the fulfilment of all other revelations. In the regime of truth of Islamic theology stressing sameness between religions is a source of conflict with other religious groups (Arkoun 2002, 306). This may represent the particular experience of Tamil Muslims, who have had deep roots in Tamil country ever since the fourteenth century. The characterization of Tamil Muslims of the early period as 'half Hindu' by Amir Khusru, the court poet of Alauddin Khilji, seems to persist to this day. "Many Tamil Muslims complain even today that the Urdu-speaking Muslims of north Indian origin do not consider them as being on par and dismiss them very much in the manner of Amir Khusru" (More 2004, 11). Commonality seems to undermine the Muslim identity of Tamil Muslims in the Islamic world. This was also evident in Tamil Muslims' participation in the Self-Respect Movement founded by Ramasamy in 1925. Although it offered scope for intimate relations between non-Brahmin Hindus and Tamil Muslims, it created a problem of identity demarcation among the latter. "When these frontiers, which safeguarded the identity of the Tamil Muslims, were undermined by certain postures of the non-Brahmin Hindus, especially towards and after independence, the Tamil Muslims naturally reacted to assert their separate identity and to remind the non-Muslims of the frontiers that existed between them and the others" (More 2004, 197).

### Religiocentrism: Positive In-group Attitudes

How can we interpret the remarkable and divergent effects of religiocentrism on attitudes towards force-driven religious conflict? First we describe the possible mechanisms that explain how positive in-group attitudes reduce agreement with force-driven religious conflict. Then we discuss how negative out-group attitudes among Hindus can induce force-driven religious conflict.

How do we explain the negative relation between *positive in-group attitudes* and force-driven religious conflict? We found that Christian and Hindu students with low levels of positive in-group attitudes are more inclined to attribute interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. Conversely, stronger positive in-group attitudes reduce acceptance of force-driven religious conflict. Two different mechanisms may explain this negative correlation: self-esteem and religious involvement.

(a) With regard to self-esteem, we can say the following. In line with social identity theory, we described positive attitudes towards the in-group as intrinsically part of people's identity construction. People strive for a positive self-concept and may achieve it by asserting their distinctness from others. They construct a positive self-image by identifying with positive in-group characteristics and contra-identifying with negative characteristics of both in-group and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner 1979; cf. 6.2). For some scholars in-group bias in general and positive in-group attitudes in particular relate directly to self-esteem. This relation works in two directions: successful intergroup discrimination elevates self-esteem and threatened self-esteem promotes intergroup discrimination. In this interpretation relatively low levels of positive in-group attitudes are seen as an indicator of threatened or eroded self-esteem (Epstein 1990; Hogg & Abrams 1990; cf. Rubin & Hewstone 1998 for a detailed discussion of this contested self-esteem hypothesis). Threatened or eroded self-esteem leads to conflict, especially when there is competition for scarce material or immaterial resources. Conversely, conflict is a means to boost low self-esteem. According to Sidel (2007) self-identity is redefined in contexts of heightened states of anxiety. Through conflict people force others to take them into account or try to command respect. If low self-esteem relates to conflictive relations with others, it follows that people with low levels of positive in-group attitudes are readily inclined to attribute interreligious conflicts to coercive force in intergroup relations. Insofar as low self-esteem is accompanied by feelings of shame the out-group might be blamed for the low self-esteem, adding to out-group derogation. People are ashamed to belong to a group which has fewer positive characteristics than they had hoped for. According to Tangney and Dearing (2004, 60) "feelings of shame engender low self-esteem and, in turn, low self-esteem results in a vulnerability to feelings of shame". Shame can

produce other-directed anger, because aggression tries to externalize the shame by blaming others. Violent actions serve to neutralize the feelings of shame. One can also formulate this from the perspective of symbolic interactionism. A core idea in symbolic interactionism is that self-awareness implies constant monitoring of the self from the point of view of others. We 'live in the minds of others', but this intersubjective bond with others is virtually indiscernible in modern society. It is manifested, however, in powerful social emotions that result from this awareness of 'living in the minds of others', namely pride and shame (Scheff 2005). Shame, and its weaker form embarrassment, are the result of unfulfilled expectations in interaction (Gardner & Gronfein 2005, 176). The ideal self that I have in mind is not confirmed by my interaction with others. Violence deals with the shame that is the result of disconfirmation of my ideal self.

(b) However, we should stress that relating positive in-group attitudes to self-esteem, let alone identifying them, is heavily contested. A direct relation between positive in-group attitudes and self-esteem is regularly depicted as conflicting with the tenets of social identity theory, because it fails to distinguish between social and personal identity. After all, self-esteem refers to the overall evaluation of an individual person's worth. It is a personal judgment of one's personal worth based on self-perceived competence and the emotions attached to it (Zeigler-Hill 2013). In short, the self-esteem hypothesis too hastily leaps from social to personal identity issues, thus overlooking the 'social' strategies to maintain a positive self-concept like social mobility and social creativity (Long & Spears 1997; Turner & Oakes 1997; Rubin & Hewstone 1998; Turner & Reynolds 2003). Religious involvement might therefore be a more straightforward explanation of the negative relation between positive in-group attitudes and force-driven religious conflict. Maybe it is simply that positive in-group attitudes are an indicator of religious involvement with and commitment to one's own religious tradition, without including negative evaluation of others. Religiously involved and committed members of a religious tradition might find it difficult to recognize the close connection between religiosity and conflict.

#### Religiocentrism: Negative Out-group Attitudes

We also found some support for our seventh hypothesis: *negative out-group attitudes* induce attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. But we found this only among Hindu students, and then only in the case of negative attitudes towards Christians (not with regard to their negative attitudes towards Muslims). Why just Christians and not also Muslims? A possible explanation may lie in the differential amount of contact between our Hindu



student respondents and members of the two minority groups. Our sample comprises a relative large proportion of Hindu students in Christian colleges, so one can reasonably expect them to have more contact with Christians than with Muslims, which makes their attitudes towards Christians more relevant in their daily life. Furthermore, ethnic competition theory explains why people are more negative towards others with whom they have more contact. The core idea in this theory is that actual or perceived “competition between ethnic groups, at an individual as well as a contextual level, may reinforce the mechanisms of social (contra)identification, the eventual outcome of which is referred to as ethnic exclusionism” (Scheepers et al. 2002, 18). Higher education can be seen as a competitive environment where some succeed and others fail and where students compete with each other to get the best starting position in the job market. Students working in a competitive context might find it easier to attribute interreligious conflict to economic, political, socio-cultural and religious rivalry. This is certainly the case when Hindu students have to do with Christian fellow students, who – in a Christian higher educational context – probably have relatively high status. Further clarification is provided by intergroup contact theory. According to this theory more contact only leads to less out-group derogation under optimal conditions such as contact on an equal footing; common goals pursued by all parties involved; intergroup cooperation; and institutional support of cooperation from authorities, laws, norms, customs, et cetera. These are the classic conditions set by Allport (1954, 281) for intergroup contact to reduce out-group negativity. It is questionable whether these conditions are met in the case of our Hindu students. If not, it implies that experiences may also hinder the development of solidarity with out-group members, especially when strong in-group identification leads to exclusionary behaviour (cf. Pettigrew & Tropp 2006; Hooghe et al. 2009).

#### Mother's Educational Level

Finally we found a direct influence of the mother's educational level on attitudes towards force-driven religious conflict among all religious groups. For Christian and Muslim students the mother's educational level is actually the strongest predictor of agreement with force-driven religious conflict. In India the mother's educational level is generally considered a good indicator of the family's socio-economic position. Low participation of women in higher education is problematic in India. The literacy rate in 2001 was 64%, but even though the gap is narrowing, there is still a significant difference between female (54%) and male (75%) literacy. Only 1% of women attend university or college, versus 3% of men (Departments of School Education, Literacy and Higher Education 2007). Taking the mother's educational level as a socio-

economic characteristic, high socio-economic status induces agreement with force-driven religious conflict. Mother's educational level also indirectly strengthens agreement with force-driven religious conflict through positive in-group attitudes. For Christian students a more highly educated mother correlates with lower positive in-group attitudes,<sup>5</sup> which in its turn leads to greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict.

In short, respondents from the upper socio-economic strata show significantly more agreement with force-driven religious conflict. Among the potential causes of interreligious conflict identified in our measurement are economic and political causes: economic causes like overt or tacit approval of violence as a means of social change, and political causes like political leaders' intervention in religious matters. In other words, wealth or power are perceived as reasons for conflict between religious groups among the upper socio-economic strata. Apparently they readily visualize a relation between competition for material or immaterial resources on the one hand and interreligious conflict on the other.

This finding leads to a completely different topic: the role of beliefs in what is generally called the relation between the spiritual and material world. Which beliefs in the religious meaning system influence, mediate or moderate the possession of (material and non-material) resources? Which beliefs about possession may reduce religious conflict? And which of these beliefs exacerbate religious conflict? Which beliefs lead to solidarity and which beliefs fuel discord? Reflections on justice in terms of mercy, righteousness or salvation (found in all religious traditions), the concept of compassion in Christianity (Lk 6:20–21), *zakat* in Islam (Qur'an 30:39) and charity in Hinduism (Bhagavad Gita 10:05) are examples of beliefs about possession that can reduce religious conflict. But needless to say, religious beliefs about possession may also stimulate religious conflicts, for example when society, including the distribution of wealth and opportunities, is seen as God-given and therefore unchangeable.

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5 For all religious groups higher parental educational levels of the parents correlate with more positive in-group attitudes: for Christian and Muslim students via the mother's education, for Hindu respondents via the father's.

# Conclusion: Prospects for Theory and Practice

## 9.1 Introduction

What possible causes of interreligious conflict are discerned by Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu? To which of these causes are conflicts attributed? Which beliefs in the religious meaning system contribute, positively or negatively, to the perception that conflict between religious groups is force-driven? Is the influence of these beliefs comparable between different religious groups? In this chapter we recapitulate the answers to these questions based on our empirical research among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu. We also reflect on the contribution of our findings to further theorizing on religion and conflict.

First we elaborate on the concept of force-driven religious conflict (9.2.1) and then on the religious meaning system (9.2.2). In both sections we summarize the main findings, reflect on their contribution to theory on religion and conflict, and make recommendations for further research. Finally we reflect on the practical relevance of the theoretical insights we have gained. Since this study focuses on college and university students, we restrict ourselves to the practical implications of our research for educational practice (9.3).

## 9.2 Theory on Religion and Conflict

### 9.2.1 *Attribution of interreligious conflict*

What do we know about the perception of causes of conflict between religious groups? First, we make a theoretical distinction between the attribution of interreligious conflict to realistic causes (i.e. socio-economic and political circumstances) and identity-driven causes (i.e. ethno-cultural and religious conditions). Next we make an empirical distinction between force-driven conflict and strength-driven conflict as two cross-religious comparative explanations of interreligious conflict. Finally we stress that religious identity becomes a more pressing concern in contexts with relatively high levels of anxiety and uncertainty. For each topic we first summarize the insights gained from our research and then propose some further steps to develop a theory on religious conflict.

### Realistic and Identity-Driven Causes of Interreligious Conflict

Theoretically we distinguish between four potential causes of conflict between religious groups: socio-economic; political; ethno-cultural; and religious causes (cf. 7.2 above). Socio-economic causes include access to jobs, equal wages, housing and clean water. Political causes include (equal) rights to vote or be elected and religious leaders' undue influence or lack of desired influence on politics. Ethno-cultural causes include the connection between ethno-religious identification on the one hand and national identity on the other, which lowers the status of some ethno-religious groups while raising the status of others. Religious causes may refer to specific religious convictions underlying the understanding of the sacred that lead to intolerance or even enmity towards others. Socio-economic and political causes are based on the conviction that conflict arises from competition for scarce (material and non-material) resources and disagreement about the distribution of these resources. Rival interests between religious groups are considered the main reason for conflict in so-called realistic conflict group theory. Ethno-cultural and religious causes do not consider competition for scarce resources to be a necessary condition. These last two in our series of potential causes of conflict regard group identification as sufficient to lead to conflictive relationships (social identity theory). Although these four causes can be distinguished, at least theoretically, they overlap as well. In all four potential causes of interreligious conflict violent actions are a means to (re)defining religious identity and (re)claiming the authority of one's own religion. To a certain degree conflicts between religious groups serve as means to reach ends relating to the religious identity of the individuals and groups involved. At the same time the conflicts are justified by the end, being religious identity. According to Hannah Arendt (1970; 1998) this means-end thinking entails a risk of violence, because it disregards the freedom of members of other religious groups to consent to this end. In other words, the aim is not living and acting in concert, but to secure the ends of specific group interests by every means.

The theoretical distinction of four causes of interreligious conflict was not confirmed by our empirical research. But does this make it irrelevant, considering the (re)definition of the religious identity of groups? We do not think so. Maybe identity issues 'spread' to each potential cause of conflict in contexts of uncertainty and anxiety. Differences between religious groups in India are complex and pervasive when it comes to wealth, power, ethnicity, language, et cetera. In contexts where cross-religious differences are deep and pervasive all potential causes seem to be perceived as relevant to interreligious conflict, while it could well be that in other contexts – for example in countries where the economic gap between (groups of) individuals is relatively small – the

different causes are not perceived as equally relevant or applicable. There are also historical instances of conflict engraved in the memory of religious communities that influence the attribution of interreligious conflict in a certain direction. Memories of conflict – either personal memories of violence or collective memories of persecution – are likely to influence the attribution of conflict (Bar-Tal 2003). Migration is another key factor in the perception of conflict because of concomitant competition and group threat (Verberk et al. 2002). To determine whether the distinction between different causes of religious conflict holds water further research should compare different religious groups in different contexts, taking into account additional relevant variables (cf. Sterkens et al. 2010). Because conflict can have its origins in a combination of realistic and identity-related issues – proven by ample empirical research in the tradition of social identity theory – there is no reason to ignore the fourfold distinction between economic, political, cultural and religious causes of conflict. It is unlikely that these potential causes will always cluster together for each group of respondents and in every imaginable research context.

#### Force-driven and Strength-driven Religious Conflict

While factor analyses did not confirm four cross-religious comparative causes among our Christian, Muslim and Hindu student respondents, we did find two cross-religious comparative types of interreligious conflict. Following Arendt's political theory, we labelled them force-driven religious conflict and strength-driven religious conflict. 'Force' and 'strength' deal in different ways with the power that is generated when individuals act and speak together in freedom (cf. 7.4 above). *Force* is characterized by a capacity for violent action, which imposes coercion in a social sphere and involves a certain level of violence. Force exercised by one group implies absence of the power to act and speak in another group. While power can be shared without diminishing it, force cannot be shared. When force is exercised an increase in some person or group's potential to act decreases the potential to act of others (Arendt 1998, 203). *Strength* is characterized by increased possibility to act and speak inspired by one's convictions, but it leaves the integrity of all individuals and groups in society intact. Actions are characterized by strength if an individual finds ways of coping with violence "either heroically, by consenting to fight and die, or stoically, by accepting suffering and challenging all affliction through self-sufficiency and withdrawal from the world" (Arendt 1998, 203). We have dealt with force-driven conflict in some detail only because of the psychometric weakness of our strength-driven conflict scale. Nevertheless we think this distinction is worth developing further in the context of interreligious conflict in view of the need for a space to speak and act in concert in a plural context. How

could everybody be given the freedom to act and speak with due respect for their differences? This is a crucial normative question in the political realm.

We are not sure whether the measurements of force-driven religious conflict and strength-driven religious conflict will be useful for other (ethno-)religious groups in other contexts. The logic behind this distinction is the need to speak and act in concert in a plural society. Is the distinction between force-driven and strength-driven in the attribution of interreligious conflict also applicable in other contexts? And is that distinction a useful theoretical perspective to construct other measurements of religion and conflict, for instance measuring the approval, legitimacy or support of conflict among respondents? We need to assess the robustness of this distinction by testing our measurement in other contexts, among other ethno-religious groups and on other, related topics.

### 9.2.2 *Religious Meaning System*

What do we know about the influence of religious meaning systems on force-driven religious conflict? We first describe some building blocks for a theory of religion and conflict. We briefly summarize the previous chapter, in which we explained why we chose a meaning system approach and what it entails, how this approach can help us to map the dual relation between religion and interreligious conflict, and how dissonance reduction plays a role in the (re)arrangement of beliefs in someone's personal religious meaning system. Then we outline some further steps for theorizing in the study of interreligious conflict from a meaning system approach.

If religious identity plays a crucial role in understanding interreligious conflict, we need to map the religious mind-sets of believers in regard to conflict. Which beliefs influence the interpretation of the stark fact that there are conflicts between religious groups? More specifically: how do beliefs influence the attribution of interreligious conflict? We have opted for a meaning system approach to identify different religious beliefs for several reasons. Firstly, we assume that all human beings have a meaning system with comparable functions and structures. A meaning system is not a *sui generis* concept restricted to religious people. Secondly, a meaning system encompasses all (religious) beliefs which can play a role in the interpretation and understanding of reality. Many authors who study religion and conflict focus on specific religious convictions such as holy war (*jihad*), absolute truth, divine (final) judgment, fundamentalism, millennialism or beliefs about an afterlife (cf. Kimball 2008; Lincoln 2003). Although such concepts can be highly pertinent, a limited selection of specific beliefs with extreme costs and benefits is also problematic. To understand the true meaning of specific behaviour (in this study: the attribution of religious

conflict) one needs (a) to map a model – as complete but as sparse as possible – which orients action; (b) to map alternative models; and (c) to argue why one model is chosen and others rejected (Kippenberg 2008, 13). Only by studying beliefs in competition with other beliefs can one explain the relevance of specific beliefs to certain behaviour.

A religious meaning system is similar to other meaning systems in structure, malleability and functioning, but it is unique in centring on transcendence and in its comprehensive fulfilment of the quest for meaning. We have stressed that beliefs in people's personal meaning system are (partially) shared with others belonging to the same religious tradition. Nevertheless individual believers differ in their agreement with prescriptive and descriptive beliefs which have their roots in religious traditions. Prescriptive beliefs refer to (life) goals, actions and emotions. Descriptive beliefs include a theory of the self, a theory of the world, and contingencies and expectations about the relation between the self and the world. Although we were able to include only a limited number of beliefs in our research, we hope we have demonstrated the strength of a meaning system approach by including beliefs that potentially induce and reduce the attribution of conflict to force-driven causes. Our model includes descriptive beliefs concerning the relationship between self and others (here religiocentrism as a combination of positive in-group attitudes and negative out-group attitudes), as well as the question of religious truth in a religiously plural situation (here monism, commonality pluralism and differential pluralism). The prescriptive beliefs in our model are involvement in institutional religious practice and vertical mysticism. We had good reasons to make this selection for our research population of Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in the relatively peaceful Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and account for it in the various chapters of this book.

A religious meaning system may have a dual relation with religious conflict. Some beliefs favour conflict, while others promote peaceful coexistence. What is at stake in conflicts between religious groups that makes people willing to act? A compelling explanation can never be confined to a reference to the religious convictions themselves, because beliefs – however provocative they may be – merely describe people's mind-set. One can interpret beliefs, portray their commonalities and differences, or analyse patterns of the relationship between religiosity and conflict, but all this remains confined to the level of ideas. An explanation becomes more persuasive when it is grounded in embodied persons and actual groups in specific contexts. Many authors draw attention to the relationship between religious identification and contextual factors when studying conflict (e.g. Appadurai 2006; Sen 2006), but we found the most apt formulation in a book by Sidel (2007, 1–17): the purpose of religious conflict lies



in (re)definition of religious identity and (re)affirmation of religious authority that reflect individual and collective circumstances in terms of the level of anxiety and uncertainty.

Finally, we not only need to map differences between religious meaning systems, but also to explain the mechanism whereby individuals in religious communities hold different beliefs. In a meaning system approach people hold beliefs that are consonant with one another. The descriptive and prescriptive beliefs in a religious meaning system are cognitively consistent with religious persons' preferred actions. People filter their experiences through the beliefs in their personal meaning system which shape their theory of reality. Following the theory of cognitive dissonance, we explained that believers are likely to interpret (i.e. attribute) religious conflict in a manner consonant with their religious meaning system. Initially cognitive dissonance theory was restricted to comparing cognitions with one another and examining their logical consistency (Festinger 1957), but motivated reasoning and the self also play a role in cognitive dissonance (Cooper 2007). Maintaining cognitive consistency is a way to protect a public self-image. Believers will try to minimize the dissonance between different religious convictions in their religious meaning system. Or, to put it differently, a person will hold beliefs that give rise to maximum consonance.

What would be further steps for theory development on the relation between religious meaning systems and interreligious conflict? We offer the following recommendations for future research.

First, we recommend including other potentially relevant beliefs in future research on religion and conflict. A religious meaning system approach offers an overall framework for the selection of beliefs. We refer here specifically to our distinction between two types of beliefs. First, in descriptive beliefs expectations about (the directives of) human action that effect change in reality can be a factor. Much of the literature on religion and conflict focuses on these issues, for example studies of beliefs like holy war or solidarity. Other descriptive beliefs might be relevant depending on the religious groups involved and their specific context. We also included prescriptive beliefs which orient people to their future survival. What kind of (life) goals should I pursue? What should I do in order to survive? And which emotions are helpful in a certain situation? Connected to goals, actions and emotions are costs and benefits. For example, the life goal of sacrificing one's life as a religious duty can be interpreted against the background of the benefit of eternal reward from God.

One of the surprising findings in our research was the direct influence of socio-economic background (here the mother's educational level) on the

attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. According to our theory, personal (both individual and contextual) characteristics should relate to religious identity as well. Personal characteristics are not mere facts but are interpreted in terms of beliefs in the religious meaning system. And the other way round: to a certain extent personal characteristics determine the beliefs in the personal meaning system of the individual believer. Socio-economic position can therefore have a direct and an indirect influence on the attribution of interreligious conflict. In the case of personal characteristics' direct influence on force-driven conflict, they are nevertheless interpreted in religious terms. In the case of indirect influence they are mediated by the religious meaning system. We need to theorize on the question of which beliefs in the religious meaning system influence the interpretation of one's socio-economic position and which concern the (non-)possession of material resources. The religious meaning system can have a dual relation with conflict, so we need to study religious beliefs about possessions that either decrease or encourage conflict. Religious ideas about possessions which can decrease religious conflict are the idea of justice (found in all religions) and the idea of giving to the poor (e.g. *compassion* in Christianity and *zakat* in Islam). Religious ideas about possessions which can contribute to interreligious conflict are, for example, ideas about an unchangeable order in society (including the positions of rich and poor) as pre-given by God.

### 9.3 Practice: The Contribution of Education

How can our research on the attribution of interreligious conflict among Tamil Nadu students contribute to peaceful relations between religious groups or decrease the likelihood of conflict? Our reflections in this section go beyond our direct findings. We cannot simply say: if one invests in  $x$  (e.g. education in interreligious dialogue), the effect will be  $y$  (e.g. no outbreaks of violence). Such a claim would need the proof of empirical research with quasi-experimental designs. But our findings invite thought on topics that may contribute to the prevention of interreligious conflict. We restrict ourselves to educational practices, not only because our research population comprises students, but also because educational institutions teach the next generation to live and act in concert in a plural society (cf. Arendt 1970).

What can education contribute to this goal? We are not suggesting that education is doing nothing in this area at present. After all, we have found that Christian, Muslim and Hindu students studying arts or the social sciences report relatively greater agreement with force-driven religious conflict. Students

of the arts and social sciences may well be a population with different characteristics from students of physical and life sciences. But our finding suggests that education also influences the interpretation of interreligious conflict. Seemingly it is easier for students of disciplines in which religion is likely to be studied to recognize the force-driven causes of interreligious conflict than for students of disciplines in which religion is not studied. Students indeed learn to understand the complexity of social problems, including the historical background to conflicts which are vivid in personal and collective memories. They can learn to reflect critically on human behaviour; to interpret the meaning of actions; to understand the implications of cultural diversity; and to look for common ground amidst cultural plurality. All these educational goals are more likely to be found in the curricula of the arts and social sciences than in the physical and life sciences.

We examine three issues relevant to the contribution of education to conflict prevention: critical reflection on beliefs in the religious meaning systems of Christians, Muslims and Hindus that affect (the level of) agreement with force-driven conflict (9.3.1.); the integration of religious education with citizenship education (9.3.2); and the characteristics of successful citizenship education (9.3.3.). In conclusion we pay some attention to the role of the educators. What knowledge, attitudes and skills do educators need to teach the next generation to live and act in concert in a plural society (9.3.4)?

### 9.3.1 *Foster Critical Thinking*

What can education contribute to diminishing interreligious conflicts in society? We think that the major task of higher education is to foster critical thinking about interreligious conflict. Higher education should not only stimulate critical reflection on the attribution of interreligious conflict to certain causes, but should also explore the relation between religious beliefs and conflict attribution. We look into both aspects.

First, why should students learn to reflect critically on the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes, either realistic or identity-driven? To answer this question one needs to distinguish between evaluation of the accuracy of the attribution to certain causes and normative evaluation of the fact that interreligious conflicts indeed have their origin in these causes. In a descriptive sense it might be correct to say that force-driven causes lead to interreligious conflict. For example, it is probably true that religiously motivated militant or radical groups and overt or tacit approval of violence as a means of social change by some religions encourage interreligious conflict (see Table 7.1 for all items measuring force-driven religious conflict). Although we think there is ample evidence of these causes of interreligious conflict in general,

one should critically evaluate whether the attributed causes apply in specific contexts. What evidence do we have that the attributions we make are indeed true? Is there any information available that confirms our attributions? Or can we find data that contradict our spontaneous explanations of interreligious conflict? In the first place, attributions should be checked against facts. Once we have concluded that a specific conflict between religious groups is rightly attributed to the causes we had in mind, we still have to make a normative evaluation of force-driven religious conflict. Students should be challenged to be critical about the use of coercive power as a means of achieving the economic, political or socio-cultural goals of religious groups. The use of coercive force as a reaction to a threat to group interests should not just be taken for granted and accepted *eo ipse* as a justified type of action. Although it is an incontrovertible fact that people use coercive force to realize group interests and although group threat motivates them to support conflict, we need not accept these causes from a normative point of view. In short: students need (to learn) to evaluate the attribution of interreligious conflict against the background of all available information that either confirms or refutes the accuracy of this attribution; and students need (to learn) to evaluate force-driven conflict according to the normative criterion of human dignity, which entails that different people live together as free individuals with the power to act and speak in concert. More specifically, but not exhaustively, students need to learn to reflect critically on the following issues: (1) human beings are susceptible to wrongdoing because of free will; (2) moral responsibility is only possible when it is not blamed on circumstances, others or even the Other; (3) the line between perpetrator and victim is not always clear-cut, but is often fuzzy and blurred; (4) religions may corrupt free will by wrongfully turning religious ideas into absolute knowledge, but can also play a vital role in the regeneration of free will; (5) the experience of suffering ('why me?') opens up understanding of the aporia of evil which defies any description or explanation; (6) moral responsibility emerges in the cry for help of the suffering other, independent of group belonging; (7) individual people and societies as a whole share a moral duty to all victims of interreligious conflict; (8) the memory of suffering needs to identify victims as victims and perpetrators as perpetrators; (9) forgiveness of radical evil is an impossible act hidden in the abyss of our understanding, but nevertheless happens; and (10) forgiveness restores the dignity of the perpetrator as a person who can take responsibility by acting and speaking.

Second, fostering critical thinking includes stimulating reflection on the relation between religious beliefs and conflict attribution. In this research we found relations between prescriptive and descriptive beliefs on the one hand and agreement with force-driven religious conflict on the other. This means

our religious beliefs have a demonstrable effect on how we interpret interreligious conflict. We explained earlier that religions have a dual relation with conflict: some beliefs support conflict, while others promote peaceful coexistence. There is a similar dual relation between beliefs and the attribution of conflict: some beliefs induce the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes, while others confine it to socio-economic, political, ethno-cultural or purely religious causes. To give two examples: we found that more institutional religious practice correlates with more attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes among all groups of respondents (Christian, Muslim and Hindu); but greater agreement with positive in-group attitudes is associated with less agreement with force-driven religious conflict among Christian and Hindu respondents. The attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes is likely to be in line with one's own religious meaning system. People are inclined to look for explanations of conflict between religious groups (i.e. through attribution) that accord with the beliefs in their personal religious meaning system. The psychological grounds for this relation can be found in the theory of cognitive dissonance. This theory maintains that people are driven by a search for consonance between different beliefs, between their beliefs and their behaviour, and between expectations and reality. Dissonant cognitions are uncomfortable in that they arouse negative emotions caused by a state of mental tension as a result of logical inconsistency. People will interpret the very existence of conflicts between religious groups differently depending on their personal religious meaning system. Harmonizing interreligious conflicts with the religious meaning system can work in two ways. On the one hand conflicts between religious groups can be interpreted in such a way that they accord with one's own religious schemes and structures (i.e. assimilation), or the content or importance of beliefs in the religious meaning system can change to be in line with acceptance of certain causes of conflict (i.e. accommodation). Both processes imply that conflict attribution can be understood as a means of (re)defining religious identity or even as a means of (re)claiming the authority of one's own religion. Fostering critical thinking, then, includes stimulating reflection on the relation between beliefs and conflict attribution. Education should make students aware of the potential relation between one's own beliefs and the attribution of religious conflict to certain causes. Critical reflection on this relation will enable students to adopt a more detached, less biased position towards conflictive events around them. The critical reflection is not aimed at changing religious beliefs (as if certain convictions are intrinsically objectionable), but at increased awareness of the fact that the attribution of interreligious conflict is shaped by

belief, often implicitly and unconsciously. Critical reflection should enable students to loosen the direct link between beliefs and conflict attribution.

In our empirical research we found that some (prescriptive or descriptive) beliefs induce agreement with force-driven religious conflict, while others reduce this agreement. Because there are only a few cross-religiously comparable beliefs with similar effects on conflict attribution among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students, we discuss each religious group separately. For each religious group we distinguish between beliefs that induce agreement with force-driven conflicts and beliefs that reduce such agreement (also see Table 8.5 in the previous chapter).

Which significant relations between beliefs and conflict attribution do Christian students need to reflect upon?

Firstly, they need to reflect critically on the positive relationship between institutional religious practice and the attribution of interreligious conflicts to force-driven causes. We have considered the measurement of institutional religious practice (i.e. motivation to learn more about the beliefs and doctrines of one's religious tradition; rating the study of sacred scriptures as important; keen interest in the moral values of one's religion; and considering participation in religious worship important) as an indicator of respondents' willingness to comply with the authority of their religious institutions. Institutions strive for self-preservation and make every effort to prove and maintain their relevance. They also have a considerable impact on the formation of individual religious identity. Greater institutional involvement with one's own religious tradition seemingly leads to more attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. Christian students need to be aware of this and reflect critically on the (potential) roles of religious institutions and religious authorities in the interpretation of conflict. This applies, for instance, when respondents with relatively high institutional religious involvement attribute conflict between religious groups mainly to nonreligious reasons (e.g. approval of violence as a means of effecting social change, intervention by political leaders or linking ethnic or national identity to a particular religion), or when individuals with close institutional involvement attribute conflict – implicitly – to problems with groups they do not identify with (e.g. militant or radical groups, or superiority feeling of some religions).

Secondly, we found that agreement with differential pluralism relates to less agreement with force-driven religious conflicts. Apparently the belief that differences between religions are a source of mutual enrichment and growth leads to less agreement with force-driven religious conflict. Evaluating religious plurality as something positive, even as 'part of God's plan to save the

world', leads to less recognition of force-driven causes in interreligious conflicts. Reflection on this finding may lead to a more critical attitude towards personal attributions of interreligious conflict to specific causes.

Thirdly, we found that positive in-group attitudes reduce attribution to force-driven causes. Insofar as positive in-group attitudes are a sign of commitment to one's own religious group – by associating positive characteristics like faithfulness, goodness and the ability to speak meaningfully about God with the religious in-group – it is seemingly more difficult to see religion as intertwined with or even responsible for conflict.

Finally, Christian students should reflect on the positive relation between socio-economic status (specifically the mother's education level) and attribution of conflict to force-driven causes. Students belonging to upper socio-economic strata are more inclined to attribute conflicts between religious groups to force-driven causes. Students could learn to reflect on the relevance of socio-economic status to daily life. What does the Christian tradition say about (renouncing) possessions, justice and compassion? And how do these ideas appeal to the privileged? Besides, one should also be aware that many personal characteristics indirectly influence attribution via the belief system: gender, urbanization, field of specialization and, again, mother's educational level. All this makes it clear that the attribution of conflict not merely mirrors facts, but is deeply rooted in the beliefs and circumstances of the attributor.

Muslim respondents should be stimulated to reflect critically on the following relations found between beliefs and conflict attribution.

Firstly, Muslims need to be critical of the connection between institutional religious practice and the attribution of conflict to force-driven causes. This relation works in the same way for Muslim students as for Christians. Muslim students should learn to be alert to the role of religious institutions and religious authorities in the attribution of causes of religious conflict, and sometimes even for their role in justifying it.

Secondly, Muslims need to reflect critically on the role of commonality pluralism in conflict attribution. Commonality pluralism entails the belief that religions reveal different aspects of the same ultimate reality and contribute uniquely to (common) ultimate liberation. Why do these convictions bolster agreement with the attribution of conflict to force-driven causes? Muslims who agree with pluralistic views are relatively more inclined to attribute interreligious conflict to religious aspects they do not identify with (e.g. militant or radical groups or superiority feelings of some religions are responsible for conflict) or to reasons that are not religiously inspired as such like ethnic tensions, nationalism or political intervention. This example shows that the interpreta-



tion of interreligious conflict (i.e. through attribution) is consonant with the religious meaning system.

Finally, Muslim students should be aware of the positive relation between higher socio-economic status and attribution of conflict to force-driven causes. Questions of how socio-economic background influences someone's interpretation of conflict (direct influence) and critical evaluation of how religious meaning systems are influenced by personal background (resulting in indirect influence on force-driven conflict) could foster a critical attitude towards their own attributions and those of others.

Hindu students should be stimulated to reflect critically on the following relations between religious beliefs and the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes.

First of all, like Christian and Muslim students, Hindu students should be critical about the role of institutional religious involvement that results in greater agreement with force-driven conflict.

Secondly, we found that vertical mysticism reduces agreement with force-driven conflict. Mystical experiences offer a possibility to merge with an ultimate reality beyond the control and authority of religious institutions. Higher levels of mysticism among Hindu students reduce attribution of conflict to force-driven causes. Students need to relate this finding to the proven reverse influence of institutional religious practice.

Thirdly, there is a negative relation between monism and the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. In the 'polytheistic' Hindu traditions absolute truth is formulated in terms of a fixed set of rules regulating the societal order. Greater agreement with truth claims regarding the societal order (if we allow this over-simplified interpretation of monism among Hindus for the sake of discussion) reduces attribution of conflict to force-driven causes.

Fourthly, critical reflection should focus on the relation between negative attitudes towards Christians and force-driven religious conflict. Are they aware of their negative out-group attitudes and how these affect the interpretation of conflict? How can prejudice be reduced?

Fifthly, Hindu students need to reflect critically on the negative relation between positive in-group attitudes and the attribution of conflict to force-driven cause. Hindu students who view their own religion positively are less likely to associate religion with conflict by attributing interreligious conflicts to force-driven causes.

Finally, socio-economic status influences agreement with force-driven conflict. Hindu students need to reflect critically on this relationship based on the ideas of their own religion.

### 9.3.2 *A Concept of Citizenship*

Teaching future generations “to live and act in concert” (Arendt 1970, 52) in a plural society is part of what is called citizenship education. Citizenship education needs to include reflection on religious meaning systems, because they influence the way we look at conflicts between cultural and religious groups. The aim of citizenship education is not knowledge of or commitment to religion as such, but to live and act in concert. Its aim is good citizenship in a society free from violence and force-driven conflict. But what is good citizenship? There are many different – sometimes opposing – concepts of citizenship, such as the liberal-individualist, communitarian and republican theories. What follows is not a balanced reflection on different theories, but rather an idea of citizenship that reflects (not echoes!) the political theory of Hannah Arendt. Our major inspiration is a book by Van Gunsteren (1998), who developed a theory of citizenship which he labelled ‘neo-republican’. It has three core elements: focus on the public realm; organizing plurality; and orientation to action.

First, a neo-republican theory situates citizenship in the public realm. It is a matter of public institutions and public ethics. We find the same idea in republican theories of citizenship, but Van Gunsteren does not demand total allegiance to the republic. The problem of such an allegiance is that it ultimately denies other loyalties which people could have, such as loyalty to their religious community. “[Neo-republican citizenship] does not require that people always put loyalty to the republic above those other loyalties. But it does require that in situations where people need to deal with their differences, they do so as citizens – that is, in such a way that access to political equality remains a real option for all persons involved” (Van Gunsteren 1998, 26).

Secondly, citizenship should focus on the transformation of a ‘community of fate’ in which different people live together into a republic that can be willed by all. Because we live together with others whom we have not chosen and who are different in all kinds of ways (ethnic, religious, socio-economic, cultural), it is actually a duty to develop competences to organize plurality. For Arendt (1998, 7) plurality is “the condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life”, and freedom is the *raison d’être* of politics (Arendt 1993, 146). We simply *have* to deal with differences because we cannot avoid living with others in the public realm. Citizenship demands not only tolerance and respect for others, but also the cultivation of competences

to deal with differences. Citizenship needs to create a position of political equality for all, from which everybody can raise their own voice and declare their choice (cf. Van Gunsteren 1998, 26–27).

Thirdly, citizenship should be actively realized by citizens. “While many theories focus on the conditions and limits of citizenship, neo-republicanism concentrates on the actual situated exercise of citizenship” (Van Gunsteren 1998, 27). While perfect citizenship may be unattainable, it is important that people progress civically through concrete efforts to deal with plurality. This appeal to action relates to Arendt’s notions of ‘space of appearance’ and ‘time of natality’. From the moment of birth people are prompted to act. Hence the human capacity to act and speak freely has ontological roots. For Arendt (1998, 198) the political realm is “the organization of people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between living together for this purpose”. This ‘space of appearance’ emerges wherever people are together in their manner of speech and action. Whereas Arendt uses ‘space’ with reference to the manifestation of freedom as potentiality, she uses ‘time’ to refer to its realization.

The aforementioned three principles of neo-republican citizenship are in line with Arendt’s political theory and action theory which we used in the theoretical development of our concept of force-driven conflict (cf. 7.4.2). But there is also a major difference between Van Gunsteren and Arendt, namely their different views on the role and importance of political institutions. Arendt reminds us that political institutions do not live by conflict or violence but by recognition. The legitimacy of power exercised by political institutions can only stem from the freedom of people acting together. This creation of political power needs to be distinguished from the deployment of power or ‘rule’ (Habermas 1977, 17). Van Gunsteren stresses the necessity of political institutions in democracies to exercise power. Because citizenship is not a natural human attribute, the “voice of the citizen needs an order of institutions, a hierarchy, both to sound and have effect” (Van Gunsteren 1998, 29). Legitimized power vests persons with rightful authority to make binding decisions. Without authority to rule it becomes problematic to live and act together. Political institutions also normalize the struggle for political power by admitting opposition, legalizing labour struggles, et cetera. Struggle for political power which is not strictly regulated would inevitably lead to structural violence, because political parties would try to implement their ideas in the policies of the state. Here van Gunsteren concurs with Habermas’s plea for unrestricted communication, including possibilities to criticize the decisions of authorities. Citizens need to be part of the political debate on the fairness of rules and should be able to argue with political authorities.

### 9.3.3 *Aspects of Civic Education*

What does civic education based on this concept of citizenship imply? We do not offer a full-blown theory of civic education but restrict ourselves to those elements which are at the heart of the foregoing concept of citizenship.

The first thing to stress is that education is itself an institutional setting, that is a form of acting together with other persons (van Gunsteren 1998, 48). Students are part of learning environments in which they are thought to exercise their freedom to act together. Citizenship needs practices to express and learn what it means to be a human person with the power to speak and to act. Colleges and universities are spaces of living together in which students can develop competences to speak and act with – sometimes very different – others. What does it mean to act in concert? How do we learn to recognize the freedom of others? How do we learn to communicate with others who have very different ideas? And how do we involve people in actions that realize citizenship? Educational institutions provide various possibilities to involve students in practices. In the first place, students can be part of policy-making bodies (educational programme committees, selection committees, representative advisory bodies, etc.). Secondly, the educational process presents many situations in which students need to learn to act together: all kinds of group work; class discussions; internships; assigning responsibilities for the organization of a symposium; et cetera. The accent here is not so much on the scientific content of education as on the political dimension of the learning environment as an instance of acting and speaking in concert. Finally, one can also think of all kinds of extra-curricular activities in which students can be involved, such as the organization of study tours, involvement in ‘open days’ when visitors from outside inform themselves about what is happening in universities, or participation in societally relevant discussions. Educational institutions are not only where students study to graduate in a specific field; they are also places in which they practise citizenship.

Secondly, it is important that we see acting in concert not as an addendum to the academic learning process but as something that can be realized through appropriate activities. Academic learning is often individualistic, but we can also use grouping and pairing of students in order to achieve educational goals. ‘Acting in concert’ in educational institutions should imply forms of ‘learning in concert’, such as collaborative learning (Barkley, Cross & Howell Major 2004) or reciprocal learning (Brown & Campione 1996; Palinscar 1998). Merely organizing students in groups and pairs is not enough to realize collaborative learning, which has the following characteristics. There must be some interdependence, in the sense that group members cannot attain their own learning objective without input from other members. Each student has a specific,

clearly defined contribution to the learning task. Learning should be interactive, implying constant exchange of information between students. Students should possess certain skills to be able to collaborate, such as listening, conflict resolution, soliciting help and helping others. And the learning process should be evaluated in terms of the achievement of learning goals as well as the process of learning in concert (cf. Hermans 2003, 312).

Thirdly, with regard to the content of civic education we should not only introduce students to relevant political institutions, but also initiate them in political theory that deals with the normative reasons why we favour a certain way of living together. In our study we used the political theory of Hannah Arendt, which is grounded in her theory of human action (cf. chapter 7). At the heart of citizenship is the normative idea of the dignity of the human person to act and speak in freedom. Political institutions may not be free from the exercise of force, but their legitimacy rests on the power of individuals to act in concert.

Fourthly, in keeping with what we said above, we cannot separate moral education from civic education. Living together in plurality implies norms and values. It is important to pay attention to human rights and their relation to religion (Van der Ven 2010; Anthony 2013). We cannot ignore the fact that plural societies contain different value systems. The meaning systems of religious communities incorporate prescriptions (norms, values, rules) of what people should do and shouldn't do. Students need to learn to understand the value systems of different (religious) groups in society, and to see how different religious meaning systems can contribute to peaceful coexistence and just institutions. In civic education students should learn to consider in how far society can be grounded in religious rules and/or human rights. There are (groups of) people that advocate the primacy of religious rules and strive for the establishment of a state religion or even a religious state. What problems does this pose for plural societies? Civic education not only reflects on moral content, but is also critical of different types of moral education such as moral socialization, value transmission, value clarification, value communication, moral development and character development (Van der Ven 1998). Here we want to stress the importance of virtue education in civic education. Virtues can be defined as good characteristics which motivate persons to act in a certain way, for instance tolerance, respect and justice (Willems et al. 2010). Virtues are learnt in practice by acting virtuously. By acting virtuously one grows in virtuousness. This relation between acting and virtuousness is important in view of the purpose of civic education: to speak and act in concert. Not all forms of moral education stress this close relation between norms, values and rules on the one hand and acting on the other. But following Arendt's political theory, we would

like to stress the importance of acting and speaking in civic education. Human dignity (personhood) emerges in the power to act and to speak together.

Fifthly, civic education should include the inculcation of argumentative communication skills to deal with differences. We agree with Van Gunsteren (1998, 28) that it is not necessary to overcome differences by reaching consensus, but we have to be able to organize differences in such a way that everyone has a respected place. Habermas offers insight into the kind of argumentative skills that are needed to deal with differences. He distinguishes three levels of presuppositions of argumentation: the logical level of products, the dialectical level of procedures, and the rhetorical level of processes. First, argumentation is designed to produce intrinsically cogent arguments with which we can justify or repudiate claims of validity. Examples of logical rules are: "No speaker may contradict himself [... and...] Every speaker who applies predicate *F* to object *A* must be prepared to apply *F* to all other objects resembling *A* in all relevant aspects" (Habermas 1990, 87). Second, procedurally arguments are processes of reaching understanding that are ordered in such a way that proponents and opponents can test validity claims that have become problematic. For example: "(2.1) Every speaker may assert only what he really believes. (2.2) A person who disputes a proposition or norm not under discussion must provide a reason for wanting to do so" (Habermas 1990, 88). Finally, at a process level argumentative speech is a process of communication motivated by a joint search for arguments for acting together. In argumentative speech we see the structures of a speech situation exempt from repression and inequality in a particular way: it presents itself as a form of communication that adequately approximates the ideal speech situation. The following rules of discourse regulate process in argumentative communication: "(3.1) Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse. (3.2) a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever. b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse. c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires, and needs. (3.3) No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (3. 1) and (3.2)" (Habermas 1990, 89).

In the sixth place, we stress the importance of intercultural (including inter-religious) communication in civic education. Misunderstandings are more likely in plural contexts because of lack of shared knowledge and/or shared patterns of communication. This lack of common ground in intercultural communication leads to culturalism (Leeman & Reid 2006) or essentialism (Nasir & Hand 2006). In this study we were able to show that religious groups differ in the effects of beliefs on the level of agreement with force-driven religious conflicts. To understand differences four aspects of intercultural competence can

be identified: displaying open-mindedness in listening to otherness; expressing otherness in classroom interaction; suspending an evaluative judgment of otherness on the basis of one's own categories (beliefs, values, norms, gender roles, practices); and reflecting on the otherness of other students in order to build common ground (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel 2001).

Finally, civic education should be critical regarding the endemic problems of interpersonal and intergroup differences in gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity and cultural background. Education is never neutral because of social inequalities in power, status and money. We need to be critically aware of this to avoid reproducing social inequalities in education. In this study socio-economic background proved to be an important (direct) indicator of agreement with force-driven conflict. If students come from an affluent family, they are more likely to agree with the attribution of conflict to force-driven causes like competition for scarce resources and political power. At the same time, civic education cannot be given the responsibility of solving problems of citizenship and inequality. Civic education should offer critical access to the manifestation of citizenship in the public domain, but the major responsibility to solve problems of inequality belongs where they manifest themselves: in the public domain (cf. Van Gunsteren 1998, 82).

#### 9.3.4 *Role of Educators*

We end this chapter with some remarks on the educators. Maybe the biggest and most complex issue in civic education is: who educates the educators? Educators play a crucial role in civic education. Among other things, they need to organize activities in which students learn to act and speak in concert; to shape the classroom and/or educational institution into a collaborative community of practice; to set a moral example and help their students to develop moral virtues; to engage in argumentative discourse with students; to engage in intercultural communication and help students to develop intercultural competences; to engage in dialogue on differences and commonalities between religious groups; and to display critical awareness of all forms of social inequality. It would be wrong to presuppose that educators already 'know' how to play this role. Thus there is a discrepancy between educators' self-judgment of their role as moral examples and the judgment of pupils (Willems 2013). In our study we included negative out-group attitudes as a predictor of agreement with force-driven conflict. Among Hindu students negative out-group attitudes towards Christians induce the attribution of interreligious conflict to force-driven causes. It might be that Hindu students had negative encounters with Christian fellow-students or with teachers in Christian colleges or universities. Whatever the case may be, civic education is not just a matter of trans-



ferring information or learning skills to students. Educators need to create a learning environment in which students put into practice what is needed for citizenship (see 9.3.3). This implies that educators should epitomize the qualities of good citizenship. Civic education involves the educator as a person, and this makes it all the more important to train them.

How can we train educators effectively? We need to offer training programmes which are adapted to their specific needs and allow in-depth discussion and reflection. Without professing to be exhaustive, we stress the following elements.

To make a qualitative difference to the role of educators in civic education one needs programmes that involve them personally on the level of their identity as educators engaged in concrete educational practice. They need to learn to monitor their complex, multi-layered role in civic education. This includes reflection on their role as moral examples, a role which they sometimes misjudge (Willems 2013).

Several studies suggest that educators allow little scope for expression of differences in learning situations. They prefer to stress cultural harmony and offer little help to students to determine their own position in different perspectives (Leeman & Ledoux 2005, 588). In classroom communication educators look for the correct answer as defined in handbooks, and thus afford little scope for diverse views (Schihalejev 2009). But dealing with difference is extremely important to teach the next generation to live in concert in a plural society. Civic education training programmes should pay special attention to openness to difference.

Finally, research into intercultural communication in teacher training has highlighted the positive role of storytelling in understanding otherness. Storytelling creates a situation in which participants feel respected, enter into a collaborative process of meaning-making, learn to listen actively and learn to realize the contextual aspects of identity construction (Li, Conle & Elbaz-Luwish 2009).

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Colleges participating in the research: location, religious affiliation, sex, and respondents participation

Name of the College	Location	Religious affiliation	Sex	Number respondents	Percent
1. Presidency College	Chennai	Government	Men	103	5.4
2. Queen Mary College	Chennai	Government	Women	39	2.0
3. University of Madras	Chennai	Government	Co-ed.	73	3.8
4. Vivekananda College	Chennai	Hindu	Men	125	6.5
5. Ethiraj College	Chennai	Hindu	Women	75	3.9
6. New College	Chennai	Muslim	Men	137	7.1
7. SIET College	Chennai	Muslim	Women	118	6.1
8. Madras Christian College	Chennai	Protestant	Men	129	6.7
9. Women's Christian College	Chennai	Protestant	Women	129	6.7
10. Loyola College	Chennai	Catholic	Men	119	6.2
11. Stella Maris College	Chennai	Catholic	Women	140	7.3
12. Bishop Ambrose College	Coimbatore (city)	Catholic	Men	95	4.9
13. Fatima College	Madurai (city)	Catholic	Women	115	6.0
14. Holy Cross College	Tiruchirappalli (city)	Catholic	Women	122	6.4
15. St. Joseph's College	Cuddalore (Town)	Catholic	Men	124	6.5
16. Auxilium College	Katpadi (Town)	Catholic	Women	139	7.2
17. Sacred Heart College	Tirupattur (Town)	Catholic	Men	138	7.2
Total				1920	100.0

### Appendix B: Questionnaire on agents of religious socialization

What role have the following persons played in your understanding and practice of your religion? Your answer can be one of the five: (1) very unfavorable; (2) a little unfavorable, (3) a little favorable, (4) very favorable, or (missing) No contact with such persons or groups.

#### *Influence of family*

1. Your mother
2. Your father
3. Your close relatives

#### *Peer group influence*

4. Your close friends

#### *Influence of the religious community*

5. Religious leaders of your religion (outside the school and the college setting)
6. Religious groups or associations of your religion (outside the school and the college setting)

#### *Influence of the educational community*

7. Religious groups or associations inside the school and the college setting
8. Teachers who offer religious or moral education in the school
9. Professors who provide religious or moral education in the college

#### *Influence of the mass-media*

10. Those who appear in the TV or radio programs linked to your religion

### Appendix C: Questionnaire on dimensions of religiosity

- A. In this section (items 1-10), you are invited to indicate how often you practice the following. Your answer can be one of the four: (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Occasionally, (4) Frequently.
- B. In this section (items 11-20), please indicate what importance, conviction or interest you attach to the following. Your answer can be one of the four: (1) Not at all, (2) A Little, (3) Much, (4) Very Much.

#### *Institutional doctrinal knowledge*

11. Are you interested in learning more about the beliefs and doctrines of your religion?
1. Do you reflect upon questions related to your religious beliefs?
5. Do you explain your religious beliefs to those who are not of your religion?

*Personal belief outlook*

14. Are you convinced of the existence of God?
20. Are you convinced that there is life after death?

*Institutional ethical consequence*

18. Are you interested in learning more about the moral values upheld by your religion?
8. Do you help the poor and the needy in some way?
19. Is it important for you to help the sick and the suffering in some way?

*Personal moral consciousness*

10. Do you seek God's forgiveness for your wrongdoing?
7. Do you examine your actions to see if they are morally right or wrong?

*Institutional formal ritual*

12. Is it important for you to participate in the religious worship officiated by a priest or leader of your religion?
2. Do you sing and pray together with the followers of your religion?
15. Is it important for you to pray at a particular time of the day or of the week?
16. Is it important for you to read the sacred scriptures of your religion by yourself?
6. Do you make pilgrimage to the holy shrines of your religion?

*Personal popular devotion*

9. Do you perform devotional practices in your family environment?
13. Is it important for you to wear a religious symbol on your body?
3. Do you make thanksgiving offerings to God or to saints for the favors received?
4. Do you pray or meditate by yourself?
17. Is it important for you to consult astrology or horoscope?

#### **Appendix D: Questionnaire Mysticism**

In this part, you are invited to indicate whether you have had the following types of experiences. Your answer can be one of four: (1) certainly no, (2) probably no, (3) probably yes, or (4) certainly yes.

*Extrovertive mysticism*

- 3 (8). Did you ever have an experience in which everything seemed to be alive?  
 6 (24). Did you ever have an experience in which your own self seemed to merge into something greater?  
 9 (19). Did you ever have an experience in which you felt that everything in the world was part of the same whole?  
 12 (12). Did you ever have an experience in which you realized your oneness with all things?

*Introversive mysticism*

- 2 (11). Did you ever have an experience in which you lost the sense of time and space?  
 5 (4). Did you ever have an experience in which everything seemed to disappear from your mind until you were conscious only of a void (emptiness)?  
 8 (32). Did you ever have an experience that cannot be expressed in words?  
 11 (3). Did you ever have an experience in which something greater than yourself seemed to absorb you?

*Religious interpretation*

- 1 (25). Did you ever have an experience that left you with a feeling of wonder?  
 4 (20). Did you ever have an experience that you knew to be sacred?  
 7 (13). Did you ever have an experience in which a new view of reality was revealed to you?  
 10 (5). Did you ever experience a sense of profound joy?

Note: Numbers in brackets refer to the corresponding items in Hood's Mysticism Scale (in the so-called "form D" of 1975; see also Hill & Hood 1999, 363ff).

### Appendix E: Questionnaire Models of interpreting religious plurality

Please express your agreement or disagreement with statements that represent different ways of understanding your religion and the other religions. Your answer can be one of four: (1) Disagree, (2) Tend to Disagree, (3) Tend to Agree, (4) Agree.

*Replacement monism*

19. The truth about God, human beings and the universe is found only in my religion.  
 6. Other religions do not offer a true experience of God (*anubhava*).

1. Only through my religion people can attain true liberation (salvation, *mukti*, paradise).
4. Eventually my religion will replace other religions.

*Fulfilment monism*

3. Compared with my religion, the other religions contain only partial truths.
10. Other religions do not offer as deep a God-experience (*anubhava*) as my religion.
5. Compared with other religions, my religion offers the surest way to liberation (salvation, *mukti*, paradise).
8. Other religions will eventually find their fulfilment in mine.

*Commonality pluralism*

7. Different religions reveal different aspects of the same ultimate truth
14. Different aspects of the same divine reality are experienced in different religions.
9. Every religion contributes in a unique way to the ultimate liberation of human beings (salvation, *mukti*, paradise).
12. The similarities among religions are a basis for building up a universal religion.

*Differential pluralism*

11. Differences between religions are an opportunity for discovering the truths ignored by my own religion.
18. Differences in God-experience (*anubhava*) made possible by various religions challenge the idea that God is one
13. Differences between religions are part of God's plan to save the world.
16. Differences between religions are a basis for mutual enrichment and growth.

*Relativistic pluralism*

15. All religions are equally valid ways to ultimate truth.
2. All religions provide an equally profound experience of God (*anubhava*).
17. All religions are equally valid paths to liberation (salvation, *mukti*, paradise).
20. Although there are many religions, at the deepest level there are no real differences.

## Appendix F: Questionnaire Religiocentrism

Section to be answered only by Christians (Catholics, Protestants, and those of other Christian denominations). Some statements concerning your religious group and

other religious groups (Hindus and Muslims) are given below. Do you agree or disagree with them? Your answer can be one of the following: (1) Disagree, (2) Tend to Disagree, (3) Tend to Agree, (4) Agree.

*Christian respondents*

*Christian in-group positive*

1. Christians respond to God the most faithfully.
8. Thanks to their religion, most Christians are good people.
14. Christians are best able to talk meaningfully about God.

*Muslim out-group negative*

5. Muslims are often the cause of religious conflict.
7. Muslims may talk about doing good deeds, but they do not practise them.
9. When it comes to religion, Muslims are intolerant.

*Hindu out-group negative*

4. Hindus talk about high spiritual ideals, but they do not practise them.
6. Hindus believe in fanciful myths.
11. Hindus are often the cause of religious conflict.

*Muslim respondents*

*Muslim in-group positive*

The items of this scale are similar to the scale 'Christian in-group positive'. Obviously, "Christians" should be replaced by "Muslims".

*Christian out-group negative*

7. Christians talk about doing good deeds, but they do not practise them.
9. When it comes to religion, Christians are intolerant.
13. Christians are often the cause of religious conflict.

*Hindu out-group negative*

4. Hindus talk about high spiritual ideals, but they do not practise them.
6. Hindus believe in fanciful myths.
11. Hindus are often the cause of religious conflict.

*Hindu respondents*

*Hindu in-group positive*

The items of this scale are similar to the scale 'Christian in-group positive'. Obviously, "Christians" should be replaced by "Hindus".



*Christian out-group negative*

4. Christians talk about doing good deeds, but they do not practise them.
6. Christians are too much worried about converting others to their religion.
18. Christians practice many foreign rites and disregard local cultural practices.

*Muslim out-group negative*

5. Muslims are often the cause of religious conflict.
7. Muslims may talk about doing good deeds, but they do not practise them.
9. When it comes to religion, Muslims are intolerant.

**Appendix G: Questionnaire: Causes of religious conflict**

According to some people the following are the causes of religious conflict. In your opinion, to what extent do the following actually favour or encourage conflict among religions? Your answer can be one of the four: (1) Not at all, (2) A Little, (3) Much, (4) Very Much.

*Socio-economic causes of conflicts between religious groups*

2. The human rights awareness promoted by some religions favours religious conflict.
4. The overt or tacit approval of violence as a means of social change by some religions encourages religious conflict
14. Foreign economic support for the expansion of some religions or sects increases religious conflict.

*Political causes of conflicts between religious groups*

3. Intervention by political leaders in religious matters encourages conflict among religions.
6. The interference of foreign religious leaders in internal political matters of the country encourages conflict among religions.
9. Religious conversion that changes the political equation within a democracy increases conflict among religions.

*Ethnic-cultural causes of conflicts between religious groups*

11. Linking ethnic or national identity to a particular religion is conducive to religious conflict.
13. The impact of modern culture on religions increases religious conflict.
15. The eagerness to preserve the native cultural heritage favours religious conflict.

*Religious causes of conflicts between religious groups*

1. Affirming one's religion, where there are many religions, encourages religious conflict.
5. The belief in the necessity of bloody sacrifices upheld by some religions inspires religious conflict.
7. Emphasising religious motives for the fight against injustice and oppression increases conflict among religions.
8. The fight against evil, demanded by some religions, inspires religious conflict.
10. Religiously motivated militant or radical groups encourage religious conflict.
12. The superiority feeling of some religions encourages religious conflict.

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