

**THE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS**

***RELIGION: NOT QUITE “THE OPIUM OF THE MASSES”***

by

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## Abstract

The world is becoming more religious, not less as was previously expected. However, the world's religions differ and do not have the same teachings and values. At the same time it is important for democratic societies that their citizens engage actively with politics. It is thus important and useful to understand how the followers of the world's major religions engage politically.

The role of religion in politics has often been overlooked. With some - such as Karl Marx who called it "the opium of the masses" - being contemptuous of religion, it is to be expected that religious people would be less politically engaged. This study investigates this expectation. Using a cross-sectional research design this study analyses secondary survey data from the World Values Survey to examine how the world's major religions engage politically. Two secondary questions it sets out to answer are whether belonging to a religious faith makes you more or less likely to engage in politics, and also whether some religious groups are more positively disposed to the use of violence.

The study finds that there are considerable differences in the extent that the world's major religions engage with politics. Buddhists seem to be the most interested in politics and to attach the most importance to it. All the religions seem to keep well informed, mainly by watching television.

Jews seem to vote more than the other groups in both local and national elections. When it comes to positioning themselves on the political scale, the two Asian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, tend towards the left, whereas the three Christian strands of Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity and Protestantism are clustered around the centre. Catholics tend the furthest towards the right among all the groups.

Protestants seem to be significantly more engaged in civil society organisations than any of the other groups. They also seem to participate more in the signing of petitions and boycotts than any other group. Jews seem to take more part in peaceful and lawful demonstrations and other political action than other groups.

With regards to unconventional political action, Protestants and Jews seem to participate more in unofficial strikes than other groups. All the groups recorded a very negative attitude towards violence against other people. However, Jews seem to be the most positively disposed towards it, followed by Hindus. Orthodox Christians seem to be the most negative towards violence. Some groups thus seem to be slightly more positively disposed towards violence against other people than others. The religiously unaffiliated seem to engage actively in conventional protest action, only moderately in unconventional political action and poorly in civil society organisations. Although they seem to be politically more engaged than groups like the Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Orthodox Christians, they do not appear to be more engaged than Jews or Protestants.

It thus seems that religion, as a whole, cannot be considered to be “the opium of the masses” since various religious groups have frequently been shown to be more engaged in politics than those who are religiously unaffiliated.

## Opsomming

Die wêreld is besig om godsdienstiger te word en nie minder, soos te wagte nie. Nogtans verskil wêreldgelowe en het nie eenderse leerstellings of waardes nie. Terselfdertyd is dit belangrik vir demokratiese gemeenskappe dat hul burgers aktief deelneem aan politiek. Dit is dus belangrik en nuttig om te verstaan hoe die volgelinge van die wêreld se grootste gelowe aan politiek deelneem.

Die rol van godsdiens in politiek word gereeld oor die hoof gesien. Omdat baie – soos Karl Marx wat dit die “opium van die menigtes” genoem het – godsdiens minag, is dit te wagte dat godsdienstige mense minder aan politiek sal deelneem. Hierdie studie ondersoek hierdie verwagting. Deur gebruik te maak van ‘n dwarsnit navorsingsmodel analiseer hierdie studie sekondêre data van die “World Values Survey” om te ondersoek hoe betrokke die wêreld se groot gelowe is by politiek. Twee sekondêre vrae wat die studie poog om te beantwoord is of jy meer of minder geneig is om aan politiek deel te neem omdat jy aan ‘n geloof behoort, asook of sommige godsdienstige groepe meer positief gesind is teenoor geweld.

Die studie het gevind dat daar aansienlike verskille is in die omvang van hoe die wêreld se groot gelowe met politiek omgaan. Boeddhiste blyk die meeste geïnteresseerd te wees in politiek en die meeste belang daaraan te heg. Dit wil voorkom asof al die gelowe goed ingelig bly, hoofsaaklik deur televisie te kyk.

Dit blyk dat Jode meer as die ander groepe in beide plaaslike en nasionale verkiesings stem. Op die politieke skaal neig die twee Asiatiese gelowe, Hindoeïsme en Boeddhisme na links, terwyl die drie Christelike groepe, die Katolieke, Ortodokse Christene en Protestante, rondom die middel bondel. Katolieke neig die verste na regs van al die groepe.

Dit wil voorkom asof Protestante aanmerklik meer betrokke is by burgerlike samelewingsorganisasies as enige van die ander groepe. Dit wil ook lyk asof hulle meer deelneem aan die teken van petisies en boikotte as enige ander groep. Dit skyn asof Jode meer deelneem aan vreedsame en wettige betogings en ander politieke aksies as enige ander groep.

Met betrekking tot onkonvensionele politieke aksie wil dit voorkom asof meer Protestante en Jode aan onoffisiële stakings as ander groepe deelneem. Al die groepe het 'n baie negatiewe houding teenoor geweld teen ander mense aangeteken. Nietemin blyk Jode die positiefste teenoor geweld te wees, gevolg deur die Hindoes. Ortodokse Christene blyk die negatiefste teenoor geweld te wees. Dit wil dus voorkom asof sommige groepe 'n bietjie meer positief gesind is teenoor geweld teen ander mense, as ander. Dit lyk asof die groep van ongodsdienstiges aktief deelneem aan konvensionele protesaksies, slegs matiglik aan onkonvensionele politieke aksie en swak aan burgerlike samelewingsorganisasies. Alhoewel dit voorkom asof hierdie groep meer polities aktief is as groepe soos die Boeddhiste, Hindoes, Moslems en Ortodokse Christene, lyk dit nie asof hulle meer polities aktief is as die Jode of Protestante nie.

Dit lyk asof godsdiens, as 'n geheel, nie gesien kan word as die “opium van die menigtes” nie, aangesien herhaaldelik gewys is dat verskeie godsdienstige groepe meer betrokke by politiek is, as dié wat godsdienstig onverbonde is.

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## List of Acronyms

AD – Anno Domini (indicating years numbered from the supposed birth of Jesus Christ)

AHA – American Humanist Association

BCE – Before the Common Era

CE – Common Era

DV – Dependent Variable

IHEU – The International Humanist and Ethical Union

IV – Independent Variable

SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Sciences software

USA – United States of America

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WVS – World Values Survey

## Chapter One

### Outline

#### 1.1. Background and rationale

On September 11, 2001, two passenger planes flew into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. Another passenger jet hit the Pentagon and a fourth plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. The planes were hijacked and then flown by young Muslim militants. It was one of the iconic moments of the dawning twenty-first century and the most deadly terrorist attack in history (Mansbach & Rafferty, 2008; 3). It became forever known as “9/11”. This event led to the United States of America and its allies declaring a “war on terror”, culminating in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. This led to bloody and protracted wars in these countries.

It also gave rise to a renewed interest in the role of religion in politics. Oswald Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* - or *The Decline of the West* as it is titled in English and in which he argues that we are witnessing the end of the Western world - was dusted off. Samuel Huntington’s thesis about a “clash of civilisations” as well as Benjamin Barber’s book *Jihad vs. Macworld: How globalism and tribalism are reshaping the world*, were re-examined and given new prominence. Various authors like Peter Hitchens, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins came out strongly against religion in general and Islam in particular. Opposed to the critics were those like Karin Armstrong, Rabbi Sacks and Hans Küng who argued that religion was not the problem, but carried within it the possible solutions for our problems. This gave rise to some prominent and important debates on the merits and role of religion and its influence on politics.

It is a very old debate between philosophers and the religious, which dates back to ancient times and will probably continue long after we are gone. Through the ages various philosophers like Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell and Michael Onfray have criticised religion. Karl Marx famously called religion “the opium of the masses”. On the other hand, there have been vigorous defenders of their faith like St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and more recently other leaders and thinkers of the respective faiths like Tariq Ramadan, Rabbi Schmuley Boteach, William Lane Craig, Peter Hitchens, George Galloway and Allister Macgrath, to name just a few.

Most recently the role of religion and culture has come to the fore again in Europe where it is hotly debated whether Muslim refugees from the Middle East will be able to integrate successfully in a mostly secular Western Europe with its long Christian history and traditions. It has led to a rise of the political right-wing in these countries (Shuster, 2016). It remains to be seen whether the integration of refugees will be a success. In the light of recent terrorist attacks in London and Paris, it seems that it will by no means be a smooth, problem-free project.

An alternative would be to close the borders of the European Union. This, however, seems to be an impossible task. One only needs to look at the length of the Italian coastline to realise that it would be almost impossible to stop the flow of refugees. Given this, it seems increasingly important to try and make integration work.

On top of that, the world seems to be becoming more religious, not less. Notwithstanding increased secularisation and the growth of post-modern values in the West, and contrary to the beliefs of prominent social thinkers like August Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, religion does not seem to be decreasing either in influence or importance, neither is it fading away as suggested by the secularisation thesis (Esmer & Pettersson, 2007; 485).

Despite the efforts of the Enlightenment movement, mass industrialisation, the spread of mass education, all the advances of science, and increased economic welfare and security, the religious population of the world is growing (Esmer & Pettersson, 2007; 490). This is mainly due to higher birth rates in religious communities than in predominantly secular ones (Norris and Inglehart, 2004). The world is becoming more religious, not less. Religion will thus most likely play an increasingly important role in the future.

More than 80 percent of the world's population identifies with a specific religious group (Pew Research Center, 2012). In 2010 2.2 billion people identified themselves as Christians (32 % of the world's population), making them the largest religious group. Furthermore 1.6 billion People identified themselves as Muslim (23% of the world's population); 1 billion as Hindus (15% of the world's population); 500 million as Buddhists (7% of the world's population) and 14 million as Jews (0.2% of the world's population). More than 400 million people partake in traditional or folk religions and about 58 million people belong to smaller religious groups like



Zoroastrianism, Wicca, the Baha'i faith or Jainism and Taoism. 1.1 Billion people (16% of the world's population and the third largest group) do not belong to any religion. This group includes atheists, agnostics and those who do not identify with any specific group, although some of them avow to some spiritual beliefs and also believe in a higher power.

If current demographic trends continue, the world's population is projected to be 9.3 billion people by 2050. Christianity should remain the largest religious group for the next four decades (Pew Research Center, 2015). Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world and is expected to surpass Christianity by 2070. This is partly because Muslims have the highest birth rates in the world.

All of the world's religious groups are expected to grow in absolute numbers except Buddhists, who have a low fertility rate and consist of an aging population. Although Judaism, folk religions and smaller faiths are all expected to grow in absolute size, they will most likely make up a smaller percentage of the world population by 2050. Hindus are expected to make up 14.9 % of the world's population by 2050. The religiously unaffiliated population is also expected to grow, but to become a smaller percentage of the world's population.

Much of the growth in Christianity and Islam is expected to be in developing countries in places like sub-Saharan Africa where the fertility rates are high, as opposed to the developed countries where the birth rates are lower and the population is aging. Other ways in which the population percentages can change are through people changing their religious affiliation and migration. Several factors could thus have an influence on these projections in the future. Nonetheless, the projections for 2050 are:

Table 1.1 Projection of religious growth

	% of world population 2010	% of world population 2050
Jews	0.2%	0.2%
Christians	31.4%	31.4%
Muslims	23.2%	29.7%
Hindus	15.0%	14.9%
Buddhists	7.1%	5.2%
Folk and other religions	6.7%	5.5%

Unaffiliated	16.4%	13.2%
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Source: Pew Research Center (2015)

For most people religion is much more important than politics (Esmer & Pettersson, 2007; 481). Different religions have followers across borders and connect people in a common bond across the world, making it a more global force than states (Sacks, 2015). Most scholars agree that religion has an influence on our thought processes (Fox, 2001). It is deeply embedded in our modes of thought (Dobrin, 2002; 4) and an individual's religion shapes his or her values and thus also their political outlook (Dalton, 2014; 165).

Whenever controversial issues like abortion, homosexual rights and moral issues are debated, religious values play an important role. Religion will also influence the views of religious policy makers and their constituents, which in turn might determine the scope of policy and its implementation (Fox, 2001). All of this re-emphasises the salience of culture and religion in the modern, globalised world. Despite this, the role of religion is often overlooked in international politics.

It is important for a society that its citizens are actively involved in politics, because it is by discussing political issues, reflecting on them and getting involved in the political processes that goals for society should be formulated and carried out (Dalton, 2014; 37). It is especially important for democracy, because without citizen participation it would lose its vibrancy, legitimacy and the force that is supposed to guide it.

Dalton (2014; 38-39) writes that political action generally consists of voting, campaign activity, contacting a public official, communal activity with an interest group, protesting and internet activism. Voting is considered to be the embodiment of democratic politics (Dalton, 2014; 40).

The heart of grassroots democracy is when people get together in a group to address a social or community problem (Dalton, 2014; 49). According to Dalton (2014; 119) the most active interest groups on social issues have not been labour unions or business groups, but religious organisations and parties.

Some have argued that religion will make people less likely to engage actively in politics. Michael Onfray has argued that a focus on religion can lead to people neglecting the issues of

this world. Similarly, Nietzsche and Marx have argued that it makes people more accepting of the status quo and their lot in life, hoping for salvation in the next one instead.

Others consider its influence to be more benign, attributing a positive role to religion. Rabbi Sacks points out that it is often forgotten that the three core humanist values of the Enlightenment, namely liberty, equality and fraternity, which underpin the modern concept of human rights, stem from the Hebrew Bible (Sacks, 2015). Karin Armstrong argues that religion is essentially what we make of it. It is not inherently and unchangingly violent and it is up to us to emphasise its better side and to use that to build a better global community. Similarly, Hans Küng considers the world's religions to be a source of common values which can be used as a basis for a cosmopolitan future. Either way, it seems worthwhile to explore how members of different faiths engage politically.

## **1.2. Problem statement**

Given that the world seems to be becoming more religious, that the world's religions are not the same and do not have the same teachings and that it is important for societies that its citizens engage actively with politics, it seems important and useful to understand how the followers of the world's major religions engage with politics.

The research question this thesis aims to answer is: "How do the followers of the major world religions engage politically?"

Secondary questions:

- Does belonging to a religious faith make you more or less likely to engage in conventional politics?
- Are there some religious groups that are more positively disposed towards political violence as a form of unconventional political engagement?

### **1.3. Research design and methods**

The purpose of this research study is mainly exploratory and descriptive in nature (Mouton, 2001; 152). The study will look at the way adherents of the world's main religions politically engage. It will be a quantitative study, seeking to give a broad overview of a representative sample of a large population. The aim is to see if any broad patterns in political behaviour specific to certain religious faiths can be identified.

To do this I will first look at what various scholars have written about the role of religion in politics, and then describe the development and differences between the main religions. Secondly, I will analyse how the different religious groups engage politically, using secondary data from the most recent round (2010-2014) of the World Values Survey (WVS) and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS) to analyse the data.

The WVS is conducted by a network of social scientists that study changing values and their impact on the social and political life in a wide range of countries around the globe (World Values Survey, 2016). The Survey has covered countries on all six inhabited continents (Kotzé, 2001; 135), with interviews conducted in almost a hundred countries and covering about ninety percent of the world's population. It is also the only academic study that covers both rich and poor countries in all the world's important cultural zones. It is thus the largest cross-national, time series study of human beliefs and values.

The Survey has been used by thousands of social scientists to investigate a variety of topics like democratisation, political behaviour, economic development, religion, gender equality and subjective well-being. It contains information about the religious faith of respondents as well as information about their attitudes and behaviour that are relevant and will allow me to determine if and how strongly their attitudes and behaviour are correlated with their religious faith.

Surveys are usually analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Mouton, 2001; 153). SPSS is a computer application that was specifically designed to statistically analyse survey data (Techopedia, 2016). It allows for in-depth analysis, analytical reporting, graphics and modelling (Techopedia, 2016). It is commonly used in the behavioural and social sciences to identify the relationship between two or more variables and to measure its strength (Potgieter, 2013).

The research design and methodology will be expanded upon in chapter three.

#### **1.4. Delineations and limitations**

The costs and logistics necessary to conduct a world-wide survey are beyond my means. The thesis will thus make use of data that had been collected by the WVS and not by the researcher. I therefore had no control over the collection of the data or the survey questions asked. If there had been any errors during the collection and capture of the data, there is no way to detect and to rectify it during this study, even though it might affect the findings.

Since the data has been taken at only one specific point in time, it is a cross-sectional study. I will only use the most recent data from the WVS (2010-2014) in order to make the study as relevant and up-to-date as possible. Because of limits in time and space I have decided on a cross-sectional study. It does, however, not allow me to analyse trends over time.

The WVS does not include all possible questions that could be useful in this study. Some have also questioned whether differences in language, culture and technology can really be overcome when values are compared between different countries (MacIntosh, 1998). The questions may possibly have been formulated in a way that did not make allowance for the local conditions.

I have chosen to measure Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, Protestantism, Islam and the religiously unaffiliated, since they represent the largest religious groupings according to Pew Research Center (2015). Although Confucianism has had a big impact in Asia on political and moral philosophy, it is not considered to be a religion according to Jackson and Jackson (2003; 142), but agnostic in its approach. Besides these, about six percent of the world's population practice a variety of "folk religions" (Pew Research Center, 2015). They consist, however, out of a variety of beliefs and practices specific to a tribe or smaller group of people and often lack a sacred text or creed. The WVS also did not include "folk religions" everywhere. For these reasons I have not included them.

I will take respondents' answers at face value. If someone professes in a survey that he/she is a Protestant, I will consider him/her as such although in several places, like Africa, Christianity has mixed with tribal religions to form a sort of hybrid religion (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn, 2009;

13). In addition I also recognise that not everyone who belongs to a specific faith is equally religious or equally devout. The extent to which they follow the religion's teaching and to which it will influence their actions, will differ from person to person.

Similarly, according to the Pew Research Center (2016) almost all Jews in Israel can be divided into four groups, who have very different outlooks on life and which translates into very different policy preferences, for example. However, due to the limits of the data, I have to lump them all together as Jews. This does not allow me to differentiate between the different groups and nuances within a specific religious faith, which in reality could be very broad.

According to David Martin the role and strength of religion in a modern society depend on the religious pluralism and whether it is the dominant religion in that society, the political system and also to what extent it imparts a sense of ethnic, regional or national identity (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995; 494). I thus expect that the effects will vary considerably from country to country. Local conditions might moderate or increase the influence of religion on political behaviour. This might make it very difficult to identify any consistent patterns that are unique to a specific religious faith and to draw any useful generalisations from the study. It is therefore exploratory research.

## **1.5. Definition of concepts and variables for analysis**

### **1.5.1. Religion**

Religion is difficult to define (Schmidt, 1988; 9). The root of the term religion in English comes from the Latin "religio", which means "obligation", "bond", "scruple" and "reverence" - a combination that includes references to both practice and belief (Tétreault & Denemark, 2004; 6).

Although there are a variety of definitions, at its heart, it is a belief in the supernatural (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995; 446). We find supernatural beliefs in all societies and there seems to be an innumerable variety of them. Religion thus refers to supernatural beings that have control or influence on life. Melford, E. Spiro (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995; 446) agrees that it is beliefs in supernatural beings which have the ability to either help or harm us. It can thus be

defined as the belief in a supernatural power or powers that have control or influence over life – especially a god or gods.

One can think of religions as systems of thought that combine a cosmology with a code of behaviour intended to enable human beings to live in harmony with the powers that control the universe (Tétreault & Denmark, 2004; 6). This is the definition of religion that I will use for this thesis.

The independent variables will be the different major religions as measured by the WVS. I will include those who identified themselves as Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Muslims and those who are religiously unaffiliated.

#### 1.5.2. Political engagement

Political engagement can be defined as the extent to which a person participates in politics. In the literature it is divided between conventional and unconventional political engagement. Conventional political engagement refers to actions like voting and communal activities usually associated with democratic politics (Dalton, 1988; 35). On the other hand, unconventional, or protest activities, refer to actions that directly confront the elite, instead of participating in a framework set out by them (Dalton, 1988; 59).

“Protest politics” usually refers to the calculated and public use of protest by groups and organisations to influence political decisions (Rucht, 2007). Protest action is usually caused by feelings of deprivation and frustration (Dalton, 2014; 52). This ranges from the signing of petitions, participating in lawful demonstrations, more unorthodox actions like boycotts and unofficial strikes, illegal actions like occupations, unlawful demonstrations and vandalism, through to violent actions like sabotage and bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, revolutions, guerrilla warfare and war (Dalton, 1988; 64). The signing of petitions, participating in lawful demonstrations and boycotts can nowadays be considered to be conventional political action, whereas participating in unlawful demonstrations, vandalism, violent actions like bombings and sabotage, kidnappings, assassinations and participating in revolutions, guerrilla warfare and war can be considered unconventional.

The dependent variables will be: Interest in politics and importance of politics, as well as sources of information. Putnam (1993) measured civic engagement in terms of how often people read newspapers and discuss politics. I will look at how often respondents read the daily newspaper, talk with friends or colleagues, watch the news on television and listen to the news on the radio<sup>1</sup>.

To see which conventional political action they have participated in, I will look at voting during local elections, voting during national elections and self-positioning on the political scale. This is to find out if respondents tend to prefer parties on the left, in the centre or right since ideology might inform political party support. Next come Group membership. Civic engagement informs political engagement and thus I expand political engagement to include civic engagement as in the following studies: Almond and Verba, 1963; Putnam 1993, Fukuyama 1995, 2000; Warren 2001, 2003; Mayer 2003; Stolle 2003; Van Deth 2003; Freitag et al. 2009; Scheufele et al., 2004; Griesshaber, 2014). I will look at membership of church or religious organisations, political parties, labour unions, environmental organisations, mutual-aid or self-help groups as well as charitable or humanitarian organisations.

Then I will look at who has signed petitions, taken part in boycotts, taken part in lawful demonstrations and also other political actions. Lastly, to measure unconventional political action, I will look at who has taken part in unofficial strikes and how acceptable members of different religions find violence towards other people. Political violence is one of the few indicators of unconventional political engagement. Violence is problematic for a democracy and thus also important to understand. During this wave of the WVS there was no direct question that asked respondents if they have taken part in violent political action. Although it is not ideal, I will use their attitude towards violence as a proxy for that.

## 1.6. Chapter overview

- The *second chapter* will be a literature review of the existing knowledge on religion and politics to build up expertise in the subject of how the world's religions engage politically and to see what has been done so far and what methods have been used to measure and operationalise

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that due to the growth of fake news, the media is becoming problematic.



political engagement. All of this will be used to inform the context, theories and concepts to be used in the dissertation.

- The *third chapter* will focus on the research design and methodology used. The variables used will be considered in more detail with regards to their conceptualisation and operationalisation. It will also elaborate more on the analysis of the data, including delimitations and deficiencies.
- In *chapter four* I will give a brief description of the major religions, giving an overview of their different histories, development and teachings.
- In *chapter five* the results of the SPSS analysis will be presented in the form of tables. This will include information on the nature and extent of the correlation between the variables. The quantitative findings will then be interpreted.
- The *sixth and final chapter* will discuss the conclusion as well as any interesting observations and recommendations for further study.

## Chapter Two

### Literature review

#### 2.1. Introduction

According to Davies (1989; 10) there are several approaches that can be used in the study of religion. Anthropologists describe religious practices and beliefs as they are found in living communities; sociologists emphasise its social dimension and historians describe historical events as they pertain to religion (Davies, 1989; 11). In contrast, theologians study the religion from within; it is their own beliefs and practices. There are thus two general approaches: that of the believer and that of the scholar. The different approaches are not mutually exclusive and add to the body of knowledge which helps us to understand religion better. I will take a scholarly approach from the perspective of political science.

There are many religions in the world, and they influence international and national politics, as well as the political behaviour of individuals. First I will look at the role of religion on the global level, and then at its influence on societies. Third, I will look at the influence on the individual and finally I will look more closely at political engagement.

#### 2.2. The global level

The authors of *The human search for meaning: a multi-religion introduction to the religions of mankind* (2009) take a look at the history, stories, sacred places and ethical teachings of all the major religions in the world. They contend that the different religions do not all have the same message and that there are significant differences between them. The different religions emphasise different values and opinions, which could lead to confrontation and strained relationships.

Although there are important differences, they are also all intertwined, which makes it possible to refer to one religious history of mankind. Different religions influence one another to an extraordinary extent and form clusters with other religions that share a common history and

characteristics. There are significant differences between the world's major religions, but also some similarities.

In addition, Chris Park (1994) writes in *Sacred World: an introduction to geography and religion* that religious differences help to determine the political ethos in and between countries. These differences shape people's world view and influence the way in which they conduct themselves. According to Park many types of behaviour show some influence or control by religion. For many, religious beliefs are a moral compass that guides their actions and their way of life by proscribing and limiting certain activities and endorsing others.

Religions shape our world views in a similar way to ideologies. In *Gods, guns & globalization: Religious radicalism & international political economy* (2004) Tétreault and Denmark write that religion and ideology are similar, and to some degree overlap. Each combines normative and positive elements to create a total system or overall hegemonic pattern designed to shape a material reality to conform to a society's beliefs about the origin of authority and the proper structure of power. Religions tend to locate that source of authority in cosmic forces whereas ideologies locate it in earthly forces such as nature, the market, socio-political regimes and the people who preside over them.

Religion is partly a philosophical orientation. It is also a system of social control and a vehicle for political mobilisation. Religious activists often have political goals. Religion is useful for challenging the state because it allows those who protest against regimes which they believe to be morally wrong to claim that they have supernatural authority for their action. Some regimes in turn claim supernatural authority in support of their right to rule. They also point out that religious activism often accompanies communal and intergroup violence, because religion plays a role in maintaining group boundaries.

Different religious world views have led to different ways of life in different parts of the world. Inglehart and Welzel identify nine different cultural regions based on the religion that has been historically dominant (World Values Survey, 2017). Apart from religion they also take territorial and cultural characteristics into account. For the 6<sup>th</sup> wave of the WVS (2010-2014) they divide the world into Protestant Europe, Catholic Europe, Orthodox, African-Islamic, English Speaking, South Asian, Latin American, Baltic and Confucian regions. These regions with similar cultures

share similar values. When placed on a twin axis chart representing scarcity or survival values vs. self-expression values on the one axis and traditional vs. secular-rational values on the other, it was found that the attitudes and values of the people correlated strongly with the religious, philosophical and political ideas that have been dominant in the country.

The Islamic societies of the Middle East put the strongest emphasis on traditional and survival values, whereas people in the Protestant countries of Northern Europe attach the strongest importance to self-expression and secular-rational values. Countries with a Protestant heritage also seem to be correlated to a democratic political system and have a preference for “emancipative values”, which emphasise equality of opportunity and freedom of choice. It also includes a preference for gender equality, freedom to choose your own lifestyle, personal autonomy and valuing the voice of the people.

These different ways of looking at the world have an important influence on global politics. Mansbach and Rafferty write in *Introduction to Global politics* (2008) that identity is a very important factor in international politics. Who we are, informs our interests and influences our behaviour - also our political behaviour. While nationalism has historically been the most important identity in global politics, its primacy is now being challenged by other identities like ethnicity, race, gender and religion.

Jackson and Jackson write in *An introduction to political science* (2003) that ethnic characteristics are often bonded to a religion. It is one of the most important factors shaping political culture and it is not limited by the boundaries of the state. According to Mansbach and Rafferty (2008) some of these identities divide people and may form the basis for a “we” as opposed to “them”. This “otherness” might lead to increased suspicion and eventually violent clashes between different groups. It has been that way since ancient times. When religion gets harnessed by political powers, it can be a powerful asset.

Scholars like Huntington and Kissinger have emphasised the ability of religion to divide different groups, whereas others like Küng and Kuschel have looked for common values that are shared by all the world’s major religions which can form the basis for a global ethic (Ramsbotham et al., 2014). This global ethic is a fundamental consensus about binding values, moral attitudes and ethical standards which can serve as a basis of trust between people on which

to build a cosmopolitan world order. In *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (2011) Ramsbotham et al. reiterate the importance of culture by arguing that it is the most important factor in resolving conflicts.

According to Hans Küng (Weltethos Institut, 2017) there can only be peace in the world when there is peace between the different religions and if the global economy is fair. He believes this is only attainable through dialogue between the world religions and with the establishment of a global economic ethic. The Global Ethic project has identified several values and moral standards which they claim are common to all of the world's cultures and peoples. It is found in the teachings of the world's major religions. These common values form the basis of a global ethic (Parliament of the World's religions; 1993).

This global ethic is based on the "golden rule" that "one should not do to others what you do not want done to yourself". From this they derive four guidelines for ethical human behaviour. First, we should respect life and commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence. Second, we should strive for a just economic order and live in solidarity with others. Third, we should live a life of honesty, truthfulness and be tolerant and last, there should be equality between men and women and they should work together in partnership. This creates a common ground to promote cooperation between diverse people.

Similar to Küng, Rabbi Sacks (2015) writes in *Not in God's name: Confronting religious violence* that the core values of the Enlightenment movement – liberty, equality and fraternity, stem from the Hebrew bible. Instead of focussing on the differences between the Abrahamic religions, he advocates that they focus on their common history, similarities and more positive messages that emphasise reconciliation and forgiveness and embrace each other as brother faiths.

Contrary to them, Henry Kissinger sees the different world views as an obstacle to the establishment of a cosmopolitan world order. In *World Order: reflections on the character of nations and the course of history* (2014), he argues that different parts of the world have different conceptions of world order, stemming from different histories and cultural traditions. There has never existed a truly cosmopolitan world order and the biggest challenge to bring this about is to find a way to shape people with different historical experiences and values into one world order.

He compares the different world views of Europe, the USA, China and the Islamic world. Each of these civilisations has a very different view of what the world order should look like. According to him the Islamic view of a peaceful world order is to forge and expand a unitary, Islamic state across the globe. The guiding principle of this system is purity, or strictly obeying the laws of Islam. The Islamic view of world order consists of the world as one empire, governed by one sovereign and one faith. In contrast, stability is the guiding principle of the Westphalian or European system that has prevailed in the world since 1647.

In turn, the Chinese see themselves above all the rest, holding sway over “all under heaven”. The Chinese idea of world order is to awe other societies with their culture and economic superiority and to draw them into relationships that can then be manipulated in a way that would lead to “harmony under heaven”.

In the USA, Puritan settlers set out in the seventeenth century to build a “city upon a hill” which was meant to inspire the whole world by means of its just principles and the power of its example. According to their world view, peace and stability would come about through the spread of democratic values.

Kissinger asserts that these different views are incompatible and that the world is not yet ready for a truly cosmopolitan order. While we are striving towards that, he contends that the best option in the meantime is the less than perfect Westphalian system of separate states that respect each other’s sovereignty by not interfering in each other’s domestic affairs and restraining each other’s ambitions by maintaining a balance of power that has held sway since 1647.

Samuel P. Huntington suggests in *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of the world order* (1996), that culture and cultural identities are determining the patterns of solidarity, disintegration and clashes in the world order since the end of the Cold War.

He divides the world into several different civilisations based on different cultures, of which different religions or philosophical traditions are an important differentiating factor. Civilisations can be distinguished by different histories, languages, traditions and cultures. However, the most important element is religion (Mansbach & Rafferty, 2008; 731).

According to Huntington there has been a revival of religions around the globe and an increase in religious consciousness. There has also been an increase in fundamentalist groupings. This underpins the differences between the various religious groups. In addition to providing identity and direction, religion distinguishes between believers and unbelievers, thus creating an in-group, which is seen as superior and an inferior out-group. His main theory is that the most important conflicts in the future will be between nations and groups belonging to different civilisations caused by irreconcilable cultural differences and world views.

This has, however, been criticised by various scholars (Fox, 2001). Bruce Russett, Michaelene Cox and John Oneal have argued that influences such as relative power, contiguity, joint democracy, interdependence and alliances explain interstate conflict much better (Mansbach & Rafferty, 2008; 736). According to them countries divided by Huntington's civilisational boundaries are not more likely than other states to become engaged in conflicts with each other.

His thesis has also been criticised for making the state central to his framework. His concept of a civilisation has also not been clearly defined, since it is based on a shared religion in some cases, while ethnicity and other factors seem to be more important unifying elements in other instances (Mansbach & Rafferty, 2008; 735).

There have also been major conflicts between countries which belong to the same civilisational group. The war between Islamic Iran and Iraq is a good example. Even within countries there is conflict between groups who belong to the same civilisation. There are also strong alliances between countries which belong to different civilisations.

Mansbach & Rafferty (2008; 735) also write that Western culture is mainly about modernisation, rather than religion and language. They argue that there is a clash between civilisations, but not so much about political values but rather about sexual liberalisation and gender equality as suggested by Inglehart and Pippa Norris.

Huntington himself has also been criticised for being a xenophobe and a nationalist who fears that increased globalisation will threaten national identity and might undermine the nation's independence (Mansbach & Rafferty, 2008; 734). Nevertheless, his theory does emphasise that identity politics are becoming increasingly important in global politics and that there is a growing resentment towards cultural and economic globalisation in non-Western countries who

see it as a form of Western hegemony being imposed on them (Mansbach & Rafferty, 2008; 735).

In line with Huntington's *Clash of civilisations*, Bruce (2007) also writes that for the most part, when two religions come into contact with each other, they attempted to impose themselves on the other (Bruce, 2007).

In contrast with Huntington, Benjamin Barber argues in *Jihad vs. Mcworld* (1995) that since the fall of Communism, democracy is threatened by two forces: One is the upsurge in religious fundamentalism and the fanatical adherents of religious, ethnical and other political groups that are against the democratic way of life. The other is what he calls "the forces of greed and global capitalism" which refers to the growing power of multinational corporations and unconstrained capitalism. According to him these two forces are pulling the world apart more than any other clashes between states or civilisations.

It thus seems that religions have both the ability to divide humans or to serve as the basis for common ground between people, depending on whether its differences or similarities are emphasised.

There is plenty of evidence to support the view that religion can divide us and lead to conflict. According to Jackson & Jackson (2003) history abounds with examples of religious wars, massacres, inquisitions and crusades. In modern times religion has played a prominent role in the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, between Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus in India and between Orthodox Christians, Catholics and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia.

Mansbach and Rafferty (2008) write that identity conflicts based around religion are notably sharp in the Middle East today. Islam seems to be torn between militants and those who are part of the mainstream and more moderate. The militants want to establish a theocratic authority over the global Islamic community, to revive the medieval Islamic Caliphate and to govern it according to Islamic law. There also seems to be a growing gap between Muslim and non-Muslim views of the world. Mansbach and Rafferty (2008) foresee that there will be an intensification of religious, ethnic and civilisational identities in the future as part of a backlash against globalisation.



Despite this negative view there are instances where people of different religions have lived together in peace and flourished. Just one example is Sicily. John Norwich writes in *Sicily: a short history from the Ancient Greeks to Cosa nostra* (2015), that when the crusades were at their height during the middle of the twelfth century, Normans, Greeks and Arabs lived and worked together in concord and harmony on the island under the enlightened rule of King Roger II. The different cultural groups were free to follow their own traditions in the cosmopolitan and tolerant atmosphere that was characterised by mutual respect. The king made good use of the different cultures by giving each tasks according to their strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the island flourished and the court at Palermo became the most brilliant of twelfth century Europe.

Different religions have developed in different parts of the world and have given rise to different ways of looking at the world. In all great world religions there are resources that can be tapped to legitimise violence and war, but also to promote peace and resolve conflicts (Ramsbotham et al. 2014). As Schmidt (1988; 385) points out, religion has both a constructive, life-enhancing side and a destructive, life-endangering side. The most important differences might not be between religions, but between the constructive and destructive sides within them.

### **2.3. The societal level**

In *Sociology: themes and perspectives*<sup>2</sup> (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995) write that two of the main approaches to religion have been the functionalist and the Marxist perspectives. From a functionalist perspective, religion is explored in terms of the needs of society. Functionalists argue that religion helps to provide a level of social solidarity, a consensus about values, harmony and integration between society's different parts.

Emile Durkheim, cited in Haralambos and Holborn (1995), thinks that religion strengthens the collective conscience by underpinning the morals and values that form the basis of a given society. By defining them as holy and divine, it gives these values and morals more power to direct human activity. It reinforces the unity of the group and fosters social solidarity. Although perhaps true for small, non-literate societies, Durkheim's view has been criticised for being less

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<sup>2</sup> *Sociology: themes and perspectives* (Fourth edition) is an edited volume and the authors that follow are all contributors to the book

relevant to modern societies with its ethnic and social diversity, specialised organisations and variety of religious beliefs, practices and institutions.

Bronislaw Malinowski, in Haralambos and Holborn (1995), agrees with Durkheim that religion strengthens social values and norms in a way that promotes social solidarity. He also sees religion as a way of dealing with situations of emotional stress like birth, puberty, marriage and most importantly death. For him death is the most upsetting of all human events and he considers it to be the most important source of religious beliefs. Religions rituals decrease fear by conferring feelings of confidence and control to participants. It also helps to strengthen the unity of the group.

Likewise, Talcott Parsons, quoted in Haralambos and Holborn (1995), argues that human behaviour is guided and controlled by the norms imparted by the social system. Religious beliefs give guidelines for human behaviour and standards against which it can be evaluated. By establishing general principles and moral beliefs, it helps to create a consensus in society that promotes stability and order. Like Malinowski, he also sees religion as a way of dealing with unforeseen and traumatic events. It acts as a mechanism to adjust to these events and to carry on with life normally. He also sees religion as a way of dealing with uncertainty – particularly in undertakings where a lot of skill and effort has been invested, but due to factors beyond our control, the outcome is uncertain. Religious rituals boost our self-confidence in such situations, by relieving some of our frustration and tension.

Additionally Parsons, cited in Haralambos and Holborn (1995), argues that religion helps to give meaning to life by answering humankind's questions about ourselves and the world we live in. It helps us "make sense" (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995; 449) of our experiences by providing answers as to why we must suffer deprivations, illness and pain, and why it is so arbitrary and disproportionate.

Evil is also present in all societies and it becomes especially disturbing when people benefit through evil actions. Religion provides some solace by stating that evil will get what it deserves in the afterlife. Religion provides us with meaning when we experience unexpected, frustrating and contradictory events that people feel should not happen. It helps us to adjust intellectually and emotionally to such events, which in turn, promotes stability and order in society.

The functional approach has been criticised for focusing on its contribution to integration, solidarity and harmony and neglecting the many cases where religion has caused disagreement and hostility between people and where it can be seen as a disruptive force. Differences of belief and questions of religious dogma and worship frequently cause division in a community that could spiral into open conflict. It also gives little thought to antagonism between different religious groups in the same society. The hostility in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants and between Hindus and Muslims in India can be seen as a direct danger to social stability. Charles Glock and Rodney Stark write that religion seems to threaten social integration as easily as it contributes to it.

In contrast to the functionalist approach, Karl Marx, cited in Haralambos and Holborn (1995), sees religion as an illusion that dulls the pain of those who are being exploited and oppressed. He argues that it consists of myths that are used to justify the subordination of the lower classes and the domination of the privileged ruling classes. He famously wrote: “religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995; 450). He contends that it stupefies its followers and does not lead them to find true fulfilment and happiness.

Religion can dull the pain of the oppressed masses in several ways. First, it promises paradise or eternal happiness in the afterlife. It thus makes earthly life more bearable by giving its followers something to look forward to. Second, some religions make a virtue of suffering and poverty. Third, it gives people the hope that a supernatural being might intervene to solve our problems. Fourth, some religious beliefs can be used to justify the social order and a person’s place in it. Some believe poverty and misfortune is a punishment for sin. This makes the situation seem unchangeable and could make people more accepting of their lot.

Marxists also view religion as a mechanism of social control and an instrument of oppression by reinforcing class relationships and maintaining the existing system of exploitation. It keeps people “in their place” (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995; 451). They assert that by making unsatisfactory lives bearable, it discourages people from attempting to change it and by giving them an illusion of hope, it prevents them from thinking of overthrowing the existing social structure.

Ruling classes are thought to adopt religious beliefs in order to justify their position in life to themselves and to others. Religion can be used to justify social inequality both to the rich and the poor in this way. Marx argues that the ruling classes often support religion to further their own interest. For example, in feudal England, the lord of the manor's power was often legitimated by pronouncements from the pulpit and in return he generously supported the church with financial endowments.

There is considerable evidence to support the Marxist view of religion's role in society. First, the caste system in India was justified by Hindu beliefs. Second, kings and queens have claimed a divine right to rule since ancient times. Egyptian Pharaohs took it one step further by claiming to be god-kings. Third, slave-owners in the southern states of America often encouraged their slaves to convert to Christianity, since they believed it would make them more gentle and easier to control. Fourth, Susan Budd wrote that English employers also promoted religion as a way of subjugating the masses and keeping their employees sober and working during the early days of the industrial revolution.

In addition, Steve Bruce notes that conservative Protestants in the United States - also called the "New Christian Right" - consistently support more right-wing candidates in the Republican Party and attack liberals in the Democratic Party (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995; 451). They have supported more military spending, an aggressive and anti-communist foreign policy, calls for less interference by the central government, less spending on welfare, and for fewer restrictions on business. In this way they have defended the interests of the rich and powerful at the expense of the lower classes in American society.

Despite Marx's negative view of religion, it is not necessarily incompatible with socialism. In Israel, for example, many kibbutzim are very religious and their members seem to experience no contradiction between religion and socialism. Furthermore, the survival of religious beliefs under the oppressive system of the USSR attests to its tenacity.

However, religion does not always legitimate the status quo. Sometimes religion can inspire change. And in some cases, that change can be revolutionary.

According to Otto Maduro (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995), the clergy can develop a revolutionary stance when the population have no other outlet for their grievances. There are

several examples where religion has encouraged change or threatened stability. In Latin America a group of radical clerics emerged in the Catholic Church who preached liberation theology against the unjust and tyrannical right-wing dictatorships. This led to Catholics supporting the Sandinistas when they overthrew the government of Nicaragua in 1979. That same year Islamic fundamentalists led by the Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah of Iran. In Northern Ireland the Catholic Church has long been associated with Irish Republicanism, as opposed to the ruling Protestant minority. Martin Luther King played an important role in promoting civil rights, reducing racial discrimination in the USA during the 1960s. In Poland the Catholic Church opposed the Communist state and supported the free trade union “Solidarity” in its efforts to change the society and in South Africa, the Archbishop Desmond Tutu was an important opponent of apartheid. So instead of only encouraging people to know their place, religion can also drive resistance and revolutionary change.

Friedrich Engels, cited in Haralambos and Holborn (1995), writes that groups turning to religion to help them cope with oppression, could turn into political movements that strive for change here on earth and not just salvation in heaven. According to Leland W. Robinson, revolutionary movements can also purposefully use religion in their attempt to change society.

He argues that three things are necessary for this: First, the classes with the potential to revolt must have a largely religious view of the world. Second, the dominant religion must have a theology that can be interpreted in such a way that it can be used by leaders to mobilise the masses. According to Robinson, Buddhism tends to make a separation between religion and society, so it is not so easy to be co-opted by political leaders. The theologies of Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity have more potential to be exploited by revolutionaries. And third, there must also be close contact between the religious clerics and the revolutionary classes.

The situation becomes even more potent when the revolutionary classes share the same religion, those in power have a different religion and there are no other organisations available through which to organise. In Latin American countries such as Chile, Guatemala and El Salvador, all other organisations like trade unions have been crushed by oppressive regimes and religion has remained the only channel of dissent.

Merideth McGuire, in Haralambos and Holborn (1995), pinpoints four factors that determine religion's potential to alter society: First, it depends on the specific beliefs of the religion. Religions that give prominence to a strong moral code are more likely to produce adherents who are critical of society and would want to change it. If it concerns itself with this world, it is more likely to produce members who would take action to affect change, than if it purely focused on spiritual and holy matters. Protestantism can thus be expected to have a stronger effect on social change than Buddhism.

Second, it is also determined by the overall culture of the society in which the religion exists. In societies like those in Latin America, where religion is central to the culture, those who wish to effect change tend to justify their actions through religion. In other, more secular societies like Britain, religion will play less of a role.

Third, the social location or role that religion plays in the social structure of society also affects its potential impact. The more importance is accorded to religion, the more potential it has to play a role in effecting change in that society.

Finally, the way religious organisations are organised internally will also determine its potential to effect change. McGuire argues that organisations with a strong, centralised source of authority have more potential to cause change in society. On the other hand, a strong central authority could hamper progress by keeping the actions of some parts of the organisation in check and limiting innovation.

Religion might thus hinder social change or it can promote it. In some places, religion has supported social change by promoting a return to more traditional values. This usually occurs when there is a reawakening of religious fundamentalist beliefs. Donald Taylor writes that fundamentalism consists of four aspects: First, a group of people perceives a challenge against a supreme authority or god that they believe in. Then they decide that this challenge is unacceptable. Next they strongly reaffirm their belief and conviction in the authority that is being challenged and finally they oppose those who challenge their views, often by political means.

Fundamentalism is seen as a reassertion of traditional and religious values against changes that have taken place. If the groups of people are successful, they often cause change in society by reversing innovations. One of the best examples of this is the Iranian revolution that took place

in 1979. Under the last Shah, Iran saw a liberalisation of traditional Islamic views towards women. When he was overthrown in the revolution that was largely inspired by Islamic fundamentalism, these advances were reversed and there was a return to more traditional values. In this case religion acted as a revolutionary force by inspiring change in the society, but also as a conservative force in that it led to a return to more traditional values.

Alternatively changes in society also lead to changes in religion. In Haralambos and Holborn (1995), Parsons, Marx, Turner, Bergman and Luckmann all claim that as society developed religion lost some of its functions. While religion can help to maintain the status quo, at other times it can also cause social change.

Max Weber, cited in Haralambos and Holborn (1995), rejects Marx's idea that the material world and particularly economic factors, shape people's beliefs. He argues that religious beliefs could also have a big influence on economic behaviour. In his seminal book *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, Weber contends that Calvinist Protestantism preceded and contributed to the development of Western capitalism. He argues that capitalism initially developed in places where this religion had a strong influence. The Protestant ethic is an ascetic ethic that developed among Calvinist Protestants in seventeenth century Europe. It urged adherents to abstain from life's pleasures and to live an austere and frugal life-style with strict self-discipline. It led to people who worked hard and focused on their careers. Because it discouraged lavish spending and encouraged saving, it led to an accumulation of wealth. Weber believes that this way of thinking is typical of capitalism, since the core ethos of it is the continual pursuit of profit. This way of life led to the accumulation, investment and reinvestment which led to the early businesses that grew to create a capitalist society.

His theory has been criticised by Marxists like Kautsky who argue that capitalism existed before Protestantism and that it led to Protestantism, being in line with Marx's materialist approach. Kautsky argues that Calvinism is the ideology that capitalists use to justify their position in society. Despite a lot of controversy over his idea, Weber's theory does show that religious ideas could conceivably cause economic change in society.

With respect to the role and strength of religion in modern societies, David Martin writes that such a role is conditioned by three factors: First, it is determined by the extent of religious

pluralism and the dominant religion. Societies where the Catholic Church dominates are usually very different from those where there are a significant number of Protestants or a greater diversity of churches and denominations. Second, the political system of the country and the relationship between the church and the state will also affect the significance of religion within that society. And last, the degree to which religion imparts a sense of ethnic, regional or national identity will also play a role.

He finds that predominantly Catholic countries tend to be less secular than Protestant ones. In these societies there are usually deep social divisions and often a strong atheistic opposition to Catholicism among the lower classes. Furthermore, Steve Bruce. in Haralambos and Holborn (1995), contends that in some places religion has become a form of “cultural defence” that is used by cultural and ethnic groups to protect their identity from perceived external threats. For example, the Protestant minority in Northern Ireland use it to preserve their separate identity in contrast to the large Catholic majority.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that all these thinkers have been influenced by their values and ideologies in defining religion and describing its role in society.

Steve Bruce writes in *Politics & Religion* (2003) that religion matters in politics because there are considerable differences between secular and religious politics and that the major religions promote and legitimate different sorts of politics. He proposes, though that the most important connections between religion and politics are often inadvertent and unintended.

He contends that religion can sometimes be seen as “the opiate of the masses” as described by Marx in that it encourages the poor to accept their fate in this life and thus discourages them from rebelling against their circumstances. Their reward will be in the next life, not this one. At other times religion can be regarded as a threat to the political and social order here on earth, because it can claim a higher authority than any other and inspire people to radicalism and rebellion.

Religion plays a very forceful role as part of ethnic and national identities and it has a very strong power to define people and to divide them. The combination of ethnicity and religion can be a powerful force. True believers often weigh up actions differently than those who make



political calculations from a secular outlook. The belief that one is doing the will of some god can lead people to perform acts of extraordinary folly or bravery.

Religious principles can be interpreted in a variety of ways, which makes it difficult to generalise about a specific religion. Even within religious groups, small differences in doctrine can have a profound impact. For example, the differing beliefs about salvation of two prominent medieval Protestants, Joseph Arminius and John Calvin, have led to two competing world views and cultures in modern Protestantism. Arminius believed that Christ died on the cross so that we all can be saved if we believe in Him and act accordingly. This promotes a democratic and active approach to life. In contrast, Calvin believed that God already knew whether we would accept Him as our saviour or not and that our destinies had been determined by God before our birth. According to this view God died on the cross only for the elect few which leads to an elitist and fatalistic approach to life.

Although the major religions can generate and legitimate a very wide range of political agendas, strategies and movements, there are still significant differences between the world religions that can be identified as typical of such a group, and that has a marked influence on their societies.

Whether a religion is monotheistic or polytheistic will influence the cohesion of the community and also how rigid the social divisions are. If you only believe in one god, it is easy to divide the world into an us and a them, the godly as opposed to the ungodly, the saved and the damned, whereas you will see things differently if you believe that under the surface there is a cosmic consciousness that unites us all and that the divine can manifest in a variety of ways.

Monotheistic religions also seem to spawn more potent millennialist or millenarian movements, because they are more likely to have a view that the world was created at one point in time and will come to an end at another. Wallis (Haralambros & Holborn, 1995; 477) writes that millenarian movements are groups in which a fast approaching and radical change of the social order is prophesied which leads them to organise and prepare for this event. These groups are usually preceded by a severe crisis which brings dissatisfaction to a head and a feeling that the normal ways of trying to solve the problems are insufficient. They often emerge in societies that have experienced or are experiencing colonisation or settlement by outsiders or foreigners. They are most prevalent under deprived people such as the urban poor or oppressed peasants and those

living under the yoke of colonialism. Often they are a reaction to a disaster like famine, drought, plague or harsh economic depression. Sometimes, however, they occur without severe physical or economic deprivation.

The Marxist view of seeing religion as a response to exploitation helps to explain the existence of many such movements. Some millenarian groups turn into political movements. An example of this is the Ghost Dance Religion that developed under the Teton Sioux Indians in the USA around 1889 when they were forced into reservations, lost their traditional way of life and experienced famine and disease which led to widespread apathy and despair. This led to a belief that the world will be renewed, their white oppressors would be buried under a layer of earth and buffaloes would return in abundance. Dead Indians would be resurrected and the Teton would live forever according to their traditional way of life, free from disease, misery and death. All they had to do to fulfil the prophecy was to believe it and perform the Ghost dance. It ended in tragedy when the ghost dancers were surrounded by troops and a chance shot led to the massacre of three hundred of them. They wore “ghost shirts” which were supposed to protect them against bullets, but its failure to work ended this religion.

Bruce (2003) also writes that monotheism has a tendency to arrogance. Since adherents believe they have the true faith and that everyone else is wrong, they think themselves superior. In contrast, polytheistic religions usually find it easier to coexist with others. Among polytheists, the faith also tends to spread through accommodation and osmosis rather than conquest and suppression. This is because the diversity inherent to polytheism tends to create diffuse structures with various points of power, which hinders bigotry.

The divisive effect of monotheism can be weakened. Followers of different religions find it easier to get along peacefully when they move away from the orthodox and dogmatic core of their beliefs to either a mystical version of their faith that emphasises the oneness of everything or to some quasi-polytheism that fills the space between them and the creator with several saints.

The extent to which a religion is divisive and the consequences that flow from this will also depend on its reach. Religions like Christianity and Islam which search to convert the whole world will have a further reach than religions which do not have the ambition to convert others. Bruce contends that Islam is more likely than Christians, Hindus or Jews to support aggressive

international movements to promote their faith. Islam also has a global consistency that Christianity, for example lacks. All Muslims use Arabic and follow similar codes of behaviour and ways of worship, while Christianity is more varied.

Of the different strands of Christianity, Catholicism has the most potential to transcend national boundaries and seems to be the most inter nationalist. Being loyal to a transnational centre in Rome has allowed them to give staunch resistance to communism in the former Soviet countries. In contrast, without the same universal hierarchy of authority ordained by Catholic theology, the Orthodox and Protestant churches have tended to fragment into national churches and once so divided, to be subordinated to the state.

Bruce also distinguishes between churches and sects. The church type of Christianity thinks in terms of the entire people and supposes that religious merit can be transferred. A group of virtuous people can thus glorify God on behalf of all the people. Sects, on the other hand, believe that God's promises are only applicable to those who personally accept them and then live according to the highest standards of piety. Members of this type of Christianity need to convert personally to the religion, as opposed to being born into the community of believers. The Catholics and Orthodox Christians are churchlike in their approach, whereas the Reformed version of Protestantism is sectarian and individualistic and thus more sect-like. Lutherans are somewhere between these two approaches.

It matters whether a religion is communal as opposed to individualistic. Among the Christian strands Catholics and Orthodox will be on the communal side of a scale, moving on to Lutheran and then Anglican and finally sectarian Protestantism at the other individualistic end. Catholics and Orthodox Christians believe "that divine wisdom is concentrated in an elite and that merit can be transferred". The religious institution thus serves an entire people. These religions prefer an organic model of association. This has led to these two religious groups arguing against liberal democracy. Even once those arguments have been lost, Orthodox and Catholic cultures have been vulnerable to authoritarian regimes whereas most Protestant states have avoided both fascism and communism. However, in modern times most Christian countries have had democratic governments. Although there has been an increase in freedom and a move towards democracy in much of the developing world, the Islamic world has seen an increase in repressive regimes. Several Muslim states reject democracy and deny women the right to vote.

There are also significant differences between religions that emphasise orthodoxy or right beliefs, as opposed to those that emphasise orthopraxy or right actions. Faiths that insist on right actions tend to be more concerned about dissenters and the public status of the faith than those who emphasise right beliefs. Religions that are rule-bound are considerably more conservative than ones that do not turn divine revelations into a legal code. This is because those rules were written a long time ago.

Orthopraxy religions also tend to be less humane than orthodox religions because societies, governed by rules written centuries ago, are less pleasant than ones that can evolve and adapt to modern times. The vague prescriptions of orthodox religions can be adapted much more easily to modern times than the detailed proscriptions of orthopraxy religions. This is because the more a faith's teachings can be treated as metaphors, rather than direct instructions, the easier it is for younger generations to change its meaning to fit with modern times. The impact of orthopraxy will be qualified by universalism and power. For example, although Judaism also proscribes how adherents should live in considerable detail, much like Islam, the Jews do not want to convert the whole world and they have often been powerless to impose these rules on others. Religions thus seem to differ in the way they adjust to circumstances depending on whether they stress orthodoxy or orthopraxy. This has important political and social consequences.

There is also a clear difference in the relations between the church and the state in Muslim and Christian cultures. In Christian cultures there is a clear separation of the two, which allows for the development of secular politics and the notion of individual rights, separate from what the dominant religion proscribes.

When it comes to violence, contemporary Christianity seems to put a constraint on so-called jihadi movements which refers to fundamentalism groups who believe that the pursuit of God's will and law justifies the use of violence. By looking at the conflict in Northern Ireland, anti-homosexuality and anti-abortion campaigners in the USA, Bruce argues that for the most part, even conservative Christians who want to restore God to the centre of Western life tend to keep to social actions that are permitted in liberal democracies. They thus seem to prefer to use conventional political actions rather than unconventional ways. Most of them seem to understand the difference between the law and morality and tend to respect the democratic rights of others.

Bruce argues that most religions, taken conventionally, are not compatible with liberal democracy and that religious societies are generally not democratic or liberal. According to him faith is essentially an obstacle to liberal democracy because it divides people into those who know the ways of God and the rest. In contrast, the fundamental principle of democracy is that people are essentially of equal worth. The idea that we all share a common humanity despite superficial differences in status is what lies at the heart of democracy. Thus he argues that it is the decline of religion which has allowed the freedom of the individual to flourish.

Today the most important characteristic of the cultures of the modern industrial countries in the West is that they are secular. Bruce argues that the Protestant Reformation played an important role in this and the development of liberal democracy. Protestantism promoted democracy by first, playing an important role in the rise of capitalism and increased prosperity, second, by encouraging individualism and egalitarianism and last, by creating a context of religious diversity. These factors contributed, mostly unintentionally, to the development of liberal democracy. In combination, they weakened the influence of religion to such an extent that it allowed for the development of secular cultures and societies.

The Reformation strengthened the position of the individual against both the community and against hierarchy. This laid the foundations for egalitarianism. In addition, Protestantism demanded a mindful, diligent and active laity which gave a strong impetus to lay activism. Protestants also considered it very important that everyone should be able to read and write. All this led to striving, self-reliant and autonomous individuals.

The Protestant idea that everyone should have access to the divine revelation led to a variety of interpretations and sects. This increased religious diversity led to other believers becoming more tolerant and liberal. In turn this led to an increased number of people who have little or no religious affiliation. The pluralism created by Protestantism, undermined the conviction necessary to impose religious views on others and it led to reluctance by states to impose orthodoxy.

This seems to confirm the thesis by Max Weber that for the most part, increased prosperity will lead to increased tolerance, liberality and eventually to secularisation. The link between

prosperity and a decreased influence of religion was noted by Inglehart. As the gross domestic product increases, there tends to be a decrease in adherence to the traditional religion.

To sum up, the Protestant Reformation played an important role in the development of liberal democracy, by increasing education and inadvertently contributing to a new value being placed on individuals and increased egalitarianism. By unintentionally leading to a gradual downgrading of religion, Protestantism created the context in which the secular state flourished.

Woodberry and Shah (2004) argue that because of religious pluralism, separation of the church and state, development of democratic theory and civil society, the spread of mass education and promotion of economic development and a reduction of corruption, Protestantism by and large tends to promote democracy. Societies with high numbers of Protestants have been found to have more efficient government and tend to be less corrupt. Since Protestantism is a more egalitarian religion than the more hierarchical ones such as Catholicism and Islam, there seems to be a strong compatibility with democratic values.

#### **2.4. The individual level**

Schmidt writes in *Exploring religion* (1988) that religion is a way in which humans give meaning to their lives. Religion can meet our social, intellectual and emotional needs. Socially it can provide a network of social relationships and a place of belonging, emotionally it provides ways of expressing and dealing with our feelings and intellectually it can provide us with a world view, which is a belief system to help us understand the world and our place in it.

According to Max Weber's social action theory, human action can only be fully understood by taking into account the particular world view held by the members of society (Haralmbros & Holborn, 1995; 459). From this world view they draw their motives, purposes and meanings that direct their action. Religion is usually an important part of a person's world view.

Willems writes in the *International Encyclopedia of Political Science* (2011) that religious traditions have specific conceptions of the self and the world, as well as about how people should conduct themselves in their individual and collective lives. These ideas and morals have had an effect on the political orientations of both individuals and collectives. In *An introduction to*

*political science*, Jackson & Jackson (2003) contend that religion provides the moral principles that underlie values such as trust, honesty, compassion and justice.

Rachels writes in *The elements of moral philosophy* (fourth edition; 2003) that Socrates, the great Greek philosopher, said that morality is of utmost importance since it has to do with how we should live. From the religious believer's point of view morality is simple. For example, according to the Abrahamic religions God laid down laws that we have to obey if we are to live a good life. You have to do what God commands and avoid what He forbids.

In contrast, some philosophers consider morality to be separate from God's will and to stem from our conscience and reason. Some of the reasons they give are that, first, it is difficult to find specific moral guidance in many of the ancient religious texts, because we face different problems from those the Jews or Christians faced thousands of years ago. Second, religious scriptures are often ambiguous and give contradicting advice. Rachels argues that many people seem to make up their mind on moral issues before the time and then look to rationalise and support it through the texts of their religion. Morality is thus seen as separate from religion. Whereas religion is based on faith, morality is based on logic and reasoning.

Dobrin also points out in *Religious ethics: a source book* (2002) that there is often a difference between the official position and declarations of religious leaders and the religion as it is practiced by ordinary people.

Esmer and Pettersson write in *The Oxford handbook of political behaviour* (2007) that religion has at least some influence on political behaviour in all societies. They argue that the biggest differences are not between different faiths, but between the more devout and conservatives in all faiths and those who are more secular and liberal in outlook. How and to what extent religion influences our individual behaviour will depend to a large extent on what we believe and how religious we are.

Religious beliefs and the way they influence our actions have been criticised on many grounds. Nietzsche criticises Christianity in *The Anti-Christ* (Norman & Ridley, 2005) for falsifying, devaluing and negating reality. According to him Christianity rejects reality and is a life-denying as opposed to a life-affirming world view by rejecting success, beauty, power and affirmation of the self. He sees it as a "slave morality" and argues that Christians are not characterised by their

faith, but by how they act and that this is by not offering any resistance in their deeds, thoughts, words or hearts to people who do evil against them. Similar to Marx, Nietzsche also argues that a belief in immortality led to a devaluation of “the world”. In contrast to Christianity, Nietzsche sees Islam as a culture that embraced life.

Onfray, on the other hand, sees both these religions, as well as Judaism as life-denying cultures. Michel Onfray argues in *In defence of Atheism* (2005) that religion consists of fables constructed by humans to avoid facing the reality of death and suffering and that this focusing on an imaginary world leads to a neglect of that which is real. He writes that Christianity delights in submission, passivity, obedience and subservience to the powerful in the belief that all power stems from God. As such the social position of both the rich and the poor are ordained by God and should be accepted as such. For him, a belief in a better afterlife leads to a denial, contempt or hatred of this life. He also sees the Muslim religion as essentially militant and warlike.

In *The God delusion* (2006) one of Richard Dawkins’ main criticisms of religion is that, according to him, even moderate religion provide the climate and cultural conditions in which fundamentalism and extremism can flourish.

Similar to Dawkins, Sam Harris writes in *The end of faith: Religion, terror and the future of reason* (2004), that the problem is not just with religious fundamentalists, but also religious moderates and society at large, because of the cultural and intellectual accommodations that have been made to faith and also because it is the religious beliefs of moderates that provide the context in which fundamentalist beliefs have been allowed to flourish. Because some people will not allow their beliefs to be challenged they are beyond the means of peaceful persuasion.

He sees every belief as a source of potential action and argues that as we believe, so we will act. He contends that some ideas as inherently dangerous and more likely to lead to brutality. Similar to Nietzsche and Onfray, he asserts that what we believe happens after we die, has a big impact on what we believe and how we act during life.

In defence of religion, Karen Armstrong writes in *Fields of blood: Religion and the history of violence* (2014) that religion is not inherently and necessarily violent in essence. She argues that the same beliefs have inspired very different courses of action and that it is up to us to ensure



that the better side of religion comes to the fore to help build a sense of global community and to ease the suffering in this world.

## **2.5. Political engagement**

Almond and Verba argue in *The civic culture* (1963) that for a democracy to be successful, citizens should be informed about what is happening, influential, active and involved in politics. In short, citizens should be politically engaged. In *Political Action: Mass participation in five Western democracies* (1979). Barnes et al. define political participation as all voluntary activities by individual citizens with the intention to directly or indirectly influence political choices at various levels of the political system.

They classify political action as protest potential, conventional political participation and repression potential. Unconventional political behaviour is usually associated with protest behaviour. They note, however, that what has been considered conventional or unconventional could change depending on its legality and legitimacy. It depends on the extent to which a population approved or disapproved of the behaviour.

For them conventional political participation refers to those actions that are related to the electoral process. They ask respondents how often they read political articles in newspapers, discuss politics with friends, attend political meetings, contact officials or spend time working for a candidate in an election and how often they contribute to political efforts to resolve community problems.

They define repression potential as the propensity to “grant authorities increasingly severe instruments of control to contain correspondingly severe challenges by protesters, strikers, or other unorthodox activists” (Barnes et al., 1963; 87). This tendency implies allegiance to an authority figure. Thus, while protest is considered to be unorthodox political behaviour and conventional participation are considered to be orthodox, they consider repression potential to be “super orthodox” political behaviour. They define political violence as the use of force against objects or people for political reasons. In addition they note that all forms of direct political action could potentially spill over into violence.

They find no systematic differences in the political participation rates between Catholics and Protestants. However, they do find that strong religious feelings inhibit conventional and unconventional political activity. Religious people also have more repression potential. Those with no religious affiliation have a considerably higher potential to protest, a notably lower repression potential and also a higher rate of conventional participation.

In *The impact of values* (1995), Van Deth and Scarborough look at the impact of changing values in the advanced industrial societies of Western Europe. They write that values are widely assumed to be at the root of human behaviour. Values cannot be directly observed. They can be defined as “conceptions of what is desirable”. Values come to the fore when moral issues are discussed and play a role in forming our attitudes. These attitudes tend to form a pattern, which can be referred to as value orientations.

According to Van Deth & Scarborough those who attend church more regularly tend to be more rigid on moral issues like abortion. Protestants are consistently found to be less rigid than Catholics on such issues. This could be because the Catholic Church has an extensive and very dogmatic creed which imposes a strong collective identity on its adherents. They also seem to be less pragmatic and thus less likely to compromise with other religious or ideological groups.

All forms of institutionalised Christianity promote the idea that the state should be respected. It seems that highly religious people have more trust in political authorities than those who are not and they also tend to evaluate government outputs less critically. At the time of the study general interest in politics seemed to be rising.

In Western democracies, voting is the most frequent and regular form of political participation. Van Deth & Scarborough find that those not part of church communities or religious institutions tend to participate less in elections. They argue that the social environment provided by the church internalises the norms related to electoral participation and is conducive to voting. They have also found that Christians tend to vote for parties on the political right. Overall Van Deth & Scarborough assert that those who are more religious tend to have a greater concern for matters of sexual behaviour, but that the effect on political behaviour is ambiguous.

In addition Norris and Inglehart find in *Sacred and Secular: religion and politics worldwide* (2004), that those who attend church more regularly have less interest in politics, discuss politics

less and have lower levels of social trust. They also participate less in the more radical forms of political protest. It would thus seem that those who attend church regularly and are arguably more religious, are less interested and less likely to participate in politics.

On the other hand, Norris and Inglehart find a positive relationship between membership of religious organisations and civic activity. Belonging to a religious organisation seems to make you more likely to engage with community issues and to participate in the democratic process. However, the direction of the causal link is not clear.

Notwithstanding, Putnam finds in *Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy* (1993) that there is a negative association between Catholicism and civic engagement. In Italy organised religion is seen as an alternative to the civic community. This is said to be due to the pope who forbade Catholics from taking part in political life for more than thirty years after the unification of Italy. It is also thought to be due to the Catholic emphasis on hierarchy and the high premium put on “virtues” like obedience and acceptance of one’s fate in life. Religious Catholics in Italy seem to be more involved with and concerned with spiritual matters than with issues concerning their daily life.

According to Kotzé (2001; 137) voting is considered to be the most conventional form of participating in politics. Dalton writes in *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Sixth edition; 2014) that religion provides a common value orientation that forms a basis for voting choice for some citizens. In many countries, at least in the West, differences between those who are religious and those who are not seem to be replacing differences between religious denominations. For example, in countries that are essentially mono-denominational, such as Ireland, New Zealand and Finland, the biggest differences in voting behaviour are between those who are religious and those who are not. Chris Parks (1994) writes that religious groups, especially if they are a minority, often form their own political party. Otherwise they tend to support political parties that are most favourably inclined towards them.

Taking part in more “unconventional” forms of political behaviour like protests and other forms of direct action is more sporadic (Kotzé; 2001; 137). In countries where people do not have access to conventional forms of political participations, they have to make use of unconventional

political behaviour like protests to influence political decisions. Protest can be seen to lie on a spectrum with the weakest form being the signing of a petition to the strongest forms being taking part in illegal demonstrations and eventually reverting to violence. This has been used in several studies to measure unconventional political participation.

In a study to see whether Stellenbosch university students were responsibly engaged in politics, De Jager and Adams-Jack (2017) write that political participation can take various forms. This can be divided into conventional, unconventional, legal and illegal as well as constitutional and unconstitutional. Conventional participation has usually included voting, political campaigning, communal action and personally making contact with a political representative. Non-conventional forms of political participation have generally included legal demonstrations, participating in boycotts, taking part in illegal strikes, damaging property and resorting to violence.

According to Sabucedo and Arce (2001; 94) whether a specific action is considered conventional or unconventional derives from the status quo. Everything outside of traditional activities and what disturbs the status quo is considered as “unconventional” (Sabucedo & Arce, 2001; 94). However, in certain contexts, like in South Africa, protest action has become a normal form of political participation and can be considered to be part of conventional politics (De Jager & Adams-Jack, 2017). Dalton (2000) also notes that citizens in democracies are increasingly taking part in more direct actions to influence politics. Protest action has become broadly acceptable in some political systems and is not considered to be problematic (De Jager & Adams-Jack, 2017).

However, even if it becomes popular, violence is problematic and will remain a form of unconventional political participation. For their study they considered voting, campaigning, signing petitions, taking part in peaceful protests and legal strikes as forms of conventional political participation and taking part in illegal strikes, damaging property and resorting to intimidation and violence as unconventional forms of political participation (De Jager & Adams-Jack, 2017).

In another study Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi (2016) look at how engaged Africa’s youth are in politics by measuring their interest in politics, how often they discuss it, whether they vote,

attend campaign rallies or community meetings to raise issues, contact community or political leaders and whether they have participated in protest marches.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

There are considerable differences between the world's major religions. These differences have led to different cultures and world views around the world. Religion seems to have both the ability to divide us or to serve as a basis for common ground. On the societal level religion seems to have the ability to maintain the status quo or to inspire revolutionary change. Its influence on the individual has led to considerable controversy and criticism. Lastly I looked at political engagement. It seems that there are some differences in the way that adherents of various faiths engage politically, but that the biggest differences might be between those who are religious and those who are not. Next I will elaborate on my research design and methodology.

## Chapter Three

### Research design and methodology

#### 3.1. Introduction

Science is based on logic and observation (Babbie, 2011; 10) and the social sciences aim to measure and describe social phenomena (Kabelo, 2015). To do this the research process must be precise and logical, but also flexible, open-ended and allow for the wide sharing of information (Neuman, 2011; 14). The research process must be explained through a set methodology to allow for it to be scrutinised from the outside (Nachmias & Frankfor-Nachmias, 2008; 13). This means that the data must be analysed and presented within a clear research structure (Kelly & Maxwell, 2009; 166).

Social science is concerned with how things are and why (Babbie, 2011; 12). To a large extent it seeks to find patterns in social life. The goal of this thesis is to analyse how the adherents of the world's major religions engage politically and to see if any broad patterns in political engagement specific to certain religions can be identified. This will be done by using a cross-sectional research design and analysing secondary survey data. This chapter gives an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of the research design and the methodology that will be used, as well as an overview of the survey dataset, the sixth round of the WVS (2010 - 2014). Lastly I will conceptualise and operationalise the dependent and independent variables.

#### 3.2. Cross-sectional research design

A cross-sectional study involves the observation of a sample or a cross-section of a phenomenon or population made at one point in time (Babbie, 2011; 82). It is like taking a snapshot of one point in history and examining it. Descriptive and exploratory studies are often cross-sectional. Cross-sectional design is strongly associated with quantitative analysis because of the large number of cases on which data is collected and the ease with which they can be analysed using statistical tests (Burnham et al., 2008; 59). Data is collected over a short period and then analysed to see if there are any patterns of association between the variables. The variables are not controlled or manipulated by the researcher, which makes it difficult to prove the direction of

causality. Also on the negative side, a cross-sectional study only looks at one moment and the conclusions may be limited to that time frame (Babbie, 2011; 82). It is therefore important that the phenomena will be re-examined at a later point to build on the research that has been done and to track any changes over time.

### **3.3. Survey research**

Survey research is frequently used in the social sciences (Babbie, 2011; 242). It is mainly used for studies that have individual people as the units of analysis and can be used for exploratory, descriptive or explanatory purposes. According to Babbie (2011; 242) it is probably the best method to collect original data to describe a population that is too large to observe directly. Surveys are excellent to measure the attitudes and orientations of a large population. According to Nachmias and Frankfort-Nachmias (2008; 3) measuring attitudes are valuable for social research since it gives an idea of the “general inclination” of respondents.

Surveys should be based on representative samples of a specific population, which allows for generalisation to be made about them (Babbie, 2011; 242). A questionnaire is used to get the necessary information for the analysis (Babbie, 2011; 243). It usually contains a combination of open- or closed-ended questions, as well as background and demographical questions (Gorard, 2003; 106). Data is usually collected by interviewing the sample population or through self-administered questionnaires (Babbie, 2013; 264).

One of the strengths of surveys is that they are especially useful when you want to describe the characteristics of a large population since they make large samples feasible (Babbie, 2011; 276). This is very important for both explanatory and descriptive analyses, especially when several variables are analysed at the same time. In a certain sense, they are flexible since they allow several questions to be asked on the same topic, which allows for considerable flexibility in analysis. Other strengths of survey research are high measurement reliability if the questionnaire has been properly constructed and high validity if appropriate controls have been applied (Mouton, 2001; 153). With a well-designed and randomly drawn sample it is possible to estimate errors and because of this, a sample can provide more accurate information than a census

(Burnham et al., 2008; 101). Its accuracy will, however, depend on the type of sampling design and the care with which it was carried out (Burnham et al., 2008; 137).

On the negative side, one has to sacrifice a lot of depth and it can give rise to criticism that one is just looking superficially at an issue (Mouton, 2001; 153). Because surveys are often designed in a way that is at least minimally appropriate for all respondents, one might miss some details that are important to many of them (Babbie, 2011; 277). This makes it appear that surveys only deal superficially with what are sometimes very complex issues. Survey research also does not fully capture the context of social life like an ethnographic study could. Surveys are also in some sense inflexible and cannot be as readily adjusted as those which involve direct observation. They also do not measure direct social action, but only collect self-reports of past action or the declared intent by respondents to perform certain actions in the future. According to Burnham et al., (2008, 137) people are usually bad at predicting their own future behaviour. This leaves surveys open to a certain artificiality.

Surveys are usually weak on validity and strong on reliability. The artificial nature of survey research means that it lacks the same validity that is present in field research, for example, but by giving all respondents a similar stimulus, and through careful wording of the questions, a lot of unreliability can be eliminated in observations.

Some common errors that can occur with survey research are sampling errors, questionnaire errors, a high refusal rate and a high rate of no responses (Mouton, 2012; 153). The interviewer can have an effect on the respondent and there are also respondent effects that can influence the results. Respondents might, for example, give what they consider socially acceptable answers which are not their true views. There could be further errors during the fieldwork and also errors during the data capture. Another error that can affect survey research is selecting an inappropriate statistical technique.

Surveys are usually analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Mouton, 2001; 153). Descriptive statistics offer a powerful and economical way to measure, analyse and present political phenomena (Burnham et al., 2008; 138). SPSS is a computer application that was specifically designed to statistically analyse survey data (Techopedia, 2016). SPSS software was first released in 1968 (Wellman, 1998). It allows for in-depth analysis, analytical reporting,



graphics and modelling (Techopedia, 2016). It is commonly used in the behavioural and social sciences to identify the relationship between two or more variables and to measure its strength (Potgieter, 2013).

Although quantitative data as used in descriptive statistics present only a limited aspect of a very complex reality, it can nevertheless summarise large amounts of information, allowing researchers to grasp a situation that might otherwise be too rich and complex in detail to take in (Burnham et al., 2008; 166).

### 3.3.1. Secondary data analysis

In Secondary Analysis the data that was collected and used by a researcher are reanalysed by another researcher (Babbie, 2011; 278). This is often done for a different purpose than the original research. It is especially applicable when surveying data. According to Babbie (2011; 280) secondary analysis enhances “the possibility of meta-analysis in which a researcher brings together a body of past research on a particular topic”. Additional advantages are that it saves time and costs (Mouton, 2012; 165).

One disadvantage of secondary analysis is that when a researcher collects data for a particular purpose, it may not necessarily be appropriate for another project (Babbie, 2011; 280). The questions may come close to measuring what you want, but not exactly. In addition, no sampling is possible since I will analyse existing data (Mouton, 2012; 165). If there were any errors during the collection and capture of the data, there is no way to detect or rectify it during this study, even though it might affect the findings. Nevertheless, if the original data had been collected by a reputable institution it can lend additional credibility to the findings of the secondary research (Babbie, 2013; 266). Secondary analysis can thus be very useful and valuable (Babbie, 2011; 280).

### 3.3.2. Descriptive analysis

Since it aims to examine a phenomenon that is often ignored (Fox; 2001) and little understood, the purpose of the study is mainly exploratory (Mouton, 2001; 152). It will also contain descriptive elements (Mouton, 2001; 152), looking at how the different religious groups engage politically.

Exploratory studies are valuable in social science research (Babbie, 2011; 68). These studies are usually done to give the researcher a better understanding of the subject, to satisfy his or her curiosity, to see how feasible it is to undertake a more extensive study and to develop methods that can be used in future studies (Babbie, 2011; 67). On the negative side, such studies rarely provide satisfactory answers to research questions, although they can hint at them and also point the way to research methods which might provide more definitive answers (Babbie, 2011; 68).

With regards to descriptive studies, many aim to describe events and situations. The researcher observes and then describes what has been observed. Since scientific observations are more deliberate and careful, they are usually more precise and accurate than casual observations. Descriptive analysis helps to avoid over-generalisations and quick conclusions based on only a few observations (Babbie, 2013; 91). Its main purpose is to delineate what is being observed so that general conclusions can be drawn from the observations (Babbie, 2013; 21). The study intends to find and explore possible correlations between the variables and to describe the values, attitudes and connections as they exist.

In this study the main rationale for describing the different variables is to analyse the way that the different religious groups engage politically. In addition the study is predominantly based on inductive reasoning, by first observing aspects of social life and then attempting to discover patterns that may lead to relatively universal principles (Babbie, 2011; 56-57). This implies that the researcher collects the data from which he or she then extrapolates to gain insights into human behaviour (Fox & Bayat, 2007; 106).

### **3.4. Description of dataset: The World Values Survey**

The World Values Survey is a worldwide study of changes in the socio-cultural and political spheres (Kotzé, 2001; 134). It was started in 1981 (World Values Survey, 2017). It is a network of social scientists that study changing values and their impact on the social and political life in a wide range of countries around the globe (World Values Survey, 2016). It is considered to be “the largest cross-national investigation of social change that has ever existed” (Kotzé, 2001; 135). Each successive wave of the WVS has covered a wider range of societies than the previous

one (World Values Survey, 2017). Its data suggests that changes in basic values have important social and political consequences.

Interviews are conducted in almost a hundred countries and cover about 90% of the world's population (World Values Survey, 2016). The WVS's data is publicly available for free and is available for each country covered, each wave and also on a longitudinal level for those who wish to analyse changes over time (World Values Survey, 2017). I will only make use of the sixth wave (2010-2014) which is the most recent data from the WVS, in order to make the study as relevant and up-to-date as possible.

The WVS contains information about the religious faith of respondents as well as information about their attitudes and behaviour that are relevant and will allow me to determine if and how strongly their attitudes and behaviour correlate with their religious faith.

However, the WVS does not include all possible questions that could be useful in this study. For example, some questions in previous waves asked respondents whether they have occupied buildings or factories, have damaged things, broken windows or have participated in street violence, whether they have taken part in personal violence and also whether they think using violence for political goals can be justified. These questions might have been a better indication of groups' propensity to engage in violent behaviour.

Similarly, according to the way that the WVS gathered its data it did not ask all Muslims whether they were Sunni or Shiite. According to Heywood (2007; 299) There are considerable differences between these groups. In some cases respondents just answered Muslim, whereas in other they indicated whether they were Sunnis or Shiite. Although there was a large sample of Sunnis, only 54 respondents indicated they were Shiite. That is not enough since a sample of three hundred respondents is good for most studies (Burnham et al., 2008; 110), so I will only look at those who indicated they are Muslim.

#### 3.4.1. Sampling methodology of the WVS

The minimum sample size for most countries is one thousand two hundred respondents. Samples have to be representative of all the people in a country older than eighteen and living in a private household, regardless of their citizenship, nationality or language (World Values Survey, 2017). Whether the sampling method is full probability or a combination of stratified and probability

sampling, the national research teams aim to include as many primary sampling units in the sample as possible. Data is collected by conducting face-to-face interviews at the respondents' place of residence. The data is thus gathered in a natural field setting (Mouton, 2012; 144-145).

Ever since 1981 the questionnaire has been improved and refined (World Values Survey, 2017). For each wave social scientists from around the world were invited to suggest questions (World Values Survey, 2017). This was then translated into the various languages and in many cases translated back into English by independent translators to ensure accuracy (World Values Survey, 2017). In most countries the questionnaire was also pre-tested to ensure its efficacy. In some cases problematic questions were omitted. Respondents' answers were recorded in either a paper questionnaire or by means of CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview). According to Steenekamp and Du Toit (2015) the samples were weighed to the full population and the margin of error was less than 2% at a 95% confidence level.

#### 3.4.2. Dataset

The following table provides an overview of the dataset used in this study. It is the sixth wave of the WVS which had been conducted between 2010 and 2014. It included 57 countries and more than eighty-five thousand respondents. According to Burnham et al. (2008; 110) a sample size of three hundred respondents is large enough for most research purposes.

Table 3.1 Number of respondents by religion

Religious denomination	Number of respondents (N)
Hindus	540
Buddhists	2 550
Jews	377
Catholics	12 888
Orthodox	8 328
Protestants	7 570
Muslims	20 890
Religiously unaffiliated	14 106

### 3.5. Conceptualisation and operationalisation

Conceptualisation is used to specify what is meant with a specific term (Babbie, 2011; 106). Operationalisation is the development of specific research procedures that will allow us to empirically observe those concepts in the real world (Babbie, 2011; 118). Since “political engagement” is an abstract concept, several indicators will be used to measure it.

#### 3.5.1. Independent variables

The independent variables are the different religious faiths as measured by the WVS. Question V144 asks: “Do you belong to a religion or religious denomination? If yes, which one?” I will include the data from those who say they are Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Muslims and those who are unaffiliated.

**Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and Muslim** will include all those who identified themselves as such.

**Catholics** will include all those who indicated that they belong to the Catholic Church, those who answered that they are Catholic but do not follow the rules, members of the Aglipayan Church and those who identified as Greek Catholic. These groups will be re-coded as “Catholic”.

**Orthodox Christians** will include respondents who indicated that they are Orthodox Christians, as well as those who belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Gregorian Church. They will be re-coded as “Orthodox Christian”.

**Protestants** will include all those who identified as Protestant as well as those who said they are Anglican, belong to the Apostolic Church, Baptist, Evangelical, Iglesia ni Cristo, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, members of the Salvation Army, the Church of Sweden, the New Apostolic Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Evangelical or Apostolic Faith Mission. They will all be re-coded as “Protestant”.

The **religiously unaffiliated** includes people who do not identify with a specific religion, agnostics and atheists. All other religious groups will be re-coded as “**Other**”.

### 3.5.2. Dependent variables

#### 3.5.2.1. Conventional Political Behaviour

Political participation can be divided into conventional, unconventional, legal and illegal, as well as constitutional and unconstitutional (Sabucedo & Arce; 2001). First I will look at my conventional political engagement indicators.

##### 3.5.2.1.1. Interest in politics

In a 2016 study by Afrobarometer to determine how politically engaged Africa's youth are, Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi measured among other factors, their interest in politics. Previously, Van Deth and Scarbrough (1995; 391) found in *The impact of values* that people in the advanced industrial societies of Western Europe were becoming increasingly more interested in politics. They also found that religious as opposed to secular value orientations were not related to an interest in politics (Van Deth & Scarbrough, 1995; 402). Conversely, Norris and Inglehart (2004) found that those who attended church more regularly had less interest in politics. The findings thus seem to be ambiguous.

Question V84 (WVS) asks: "How interested would you say you are in politics? Are you very interested, somewhat interested, not very interested or not at all interested? I will collapse the "very interested" and "somewhat interested" categories into an "interested" category.

##### 3.5.2.1.2. Importance of politics

It seems likely that people will be more involved in politics if they consider it to be important. If Marx and the other critics of religion are right that religion is "the opium of the masses" and that a belief in a hereafter makes us less concerned with the matters of this life, I would expect those who are religious to attach significantly less importance to politics than those who are religiously unaffiliated.

In the questionnaire it is asked: "For each of the following, indicate how important it is in your life. Would you say it is very important, rather important, not very important and not at all important? V7: Politics". I will collapse the "very important" and "rather important" categories into an "important" category.

### 3.5.2.1.3. Information sources

Almond and Verba contend in *The civic culture* (1963) that citizens should be informed about what is happening for a democracy to work. In most Western nations the news media usually report widely and continuously on politics because it affects everyone (Barnes et al., 1979; 58). According to Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi, (2016) a person's news consumption from various media provides an alternative indicator of their engagement with political affairs. In their study Barnes et al. (1979) asked respondents how often they read political articles in newspapers and discussed politics with friends among other questions to measure conventional political participation. In a similar way, Putnam (1993; 92) measures civic engagement in terms of how often people read newspapers and discuss politics. Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi (2016) also measure political engagement by asking respondents how often they discuss it.

The questionnaire says that “people learn what is going on in this country and the world from various sources. For each of the following sources, please indicate whether you use it to obtain information daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly or never: V217: Daily newspaper, V219: TV news, V220: Radio news and V224: Talk with friends or colleagues. I will collapse the “daily” and “weekly” categories into a “regularly” category.

### 3.5.2.1.4. Voting behaviour

Barnes et al. (1979) consider conventional political participation to be those actions that are related to the electoral process. Likewise, Kotzé (2001; 137) notes that voting is considered to be the most conventional form of political participation. Van Deth et al. (1995; 441) also write that voting is the most frequent and regular form of political participation in Western democracies. Esmer and Pettersson (2007; 484) contend that religion has at least some influence on political and voting behaviour in all societies.

The questionnaire asks: “When elections take place, do you vote always, usually or never? Please tell me separately for each of the following levels: V226: Local level and V227: National level”. I will collapse the “always” and “usually” categories into a “usually” category.

To get an idea which kind of parties, policies or candidates respondents might prefer and vote for, it could be useful to see where the groups tend to position themselves on the political spectrum. In question V95 the questionnaire asks: “In political matters, people talk about ‘the

left' or 'the right'. How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?" 1 means completely "left" and 10 means completely "right". I will look at the mean score for each of the different religions.

#### 3.5.2.1.5. Membership in civic organisations (Civic engagement)

Civil society is defined as all the non-state organisations, institutions and associations that function in the public domain (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2007; 677). These organisations are based on voluntary membership and are relatively independent of the state. Several scholars have noted the important role of voluntary organisations for society to function well (Putnam 1993, Fukuyama 2000, Warren 2001, 2003). They are thought to tie society together and to promote civic virtue, cooperation and reciprocity by enabling citizens to put aside their pure self-interest in order to promote the common good (Fukuyama 1995; Mayer 2003; Stolle 2003; Van Deth 2003; Freitag et al. 2009). Scheufele et al. (2004) argue that such organisations increase political awareness by facilitating political debate and discussion. According to Mayer (2003; 43) they also "make members aware of the power of collective action and therefore promote political involvement and mobilisation". Moreover, Griesshaber (2014) notes that in societies where there is a high civic engagement, corrupt behaviour becomes more difficult.

In addition, Almond and Verba (1963; 310) assert that if a person is a member of some voluntary organisations, even if not purely political, they tend to be more politically competent and active. Involvement in one organisation seems to increase a person's political competence and if he or she is involved in more, their competence increases further (Almond & Verba, 1963; 320). Moreover, being members of political organisations seems to have a stronger influence on their political competence than membership in other kinds of organisations (Almond & Verba, 1963; 322). The most important point is that any membership, even passive membership or membership in a non-political organisation, improves a person's political competence.

Given that political organisations have a stronger influence on members' political competence I will limit the scope of this study to membership of religious organisations and organisations with political connotations. In the questionnaire it is asked: "Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organisations. For each organisation, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organisation? V25: Church or religious organisations, V28: Labour Union, V29: Political party, V30: Environmental



organisation, V32: Humanitarian or charitable organisation, V34: Self-help group and mutual aid-group”.

Since even passive membership of an organisation seems to improve a member’s political competence I consider both active and inactive membership. I will construct a scale, combining the different variables. Those who are not a member of an organisation is coded as zero, those who are an inactive member record a score of one and those who are active members record a score of two. Since it combines the membership of six different organisations, it has a lowest possible score of zero and a highest possible score of twelve. Those who recorded a score from one to six will be considered “active” and those who recorded a score from seven to twelve will be considered to be “very active”.

#### 3.5.2.1.6. Protest action

Almond and Verba (1963) write that it is important for citizens to be actively involved in politics. With a shift in values from traditional, material well-being and deference towards emancipation, self-fulfilment and independence values in Western European countries, people no longer unquestioningly accept political authority (Van Deth & Scarbrough, 1995; 390). This has led to them not just limiting their political participation to conventional behaviour like voting, but expanding it to include protest actions and more.

Greisshaber (2014) refers to protest actions like petitions, boycotts and demonstrations as “elite-challenging actions”. He asserts that they are forces from below which challenge and confront political decision makers and that it is a way of holding them to account. Because it is a traditional orientation, religiosity is often thought to inhibit protest, but in some cases it might inspire political activism or protest actions (Van Deth & Scarbrough, 1995; 413). Norris and Inglehart (2004) find that people who attend church more regularly participate less in the more radical forms of political protest.

It is asked in the questionnaire whether respondents have done any of the following, whether they might do it or would never under any circumstances do it: “V85: Signing a petition, V86: Joining in boycotts, V87: Attending peaceful demonstrations, V88: Joining unofficial strikes and V89: Any other act of protest?” I will only consider those who have done it as opposed to those who have not.

### 3.5.3. Unconventional political behaviour

In this section I will look at my unconventional political engagement indicators. In some contexts protest action has become a normal form of political participation and can be considered to be part of conventional politics (De Jager & Adams-Jack, 2017). However, even if it becomes popular, violence is problematic and will remain a form of unconventional political participation.

#### 3.5.3.1. Joining unofficial strikes

Since the strikes are unofficial, I will consider this to be unconventional political action. In the questionnaire it is asked whether respondents have done any of the following, whether they might do it or would never under any circumstances do it: “V88: Joining unofficial strikes”. I will only consider those who have taken part in it.

#### 3.5.3.2. Attitude towards violence

According to Bruce (2003; 210) violence is a good indirect indicator of other important attitudes such as attitude towards people with different views than your own and respect for the authority of the state. He notes that other than being an important social division around which people can organise their grievances, religion often only plays a small part in violence. Barnes et al. (1979; 44) define political violence as the use of force against objects or people for political reasons. They also note that all forms of direct political action have the potential to spill over into violence (Barnes et al., 1979; 44). Although the questionnaire does not specifically ask the respondents if they have participated in violent protest actions (something that has been asked in previous waves of the WVS), it can be argued that if a person is more positively disposed towards violence they might be more likely to revert to it if the opportunity presents itself.

In the questionnaire it is asked: “Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning never justifiable and 10 meaning always justifiable. V210: Violence against other people”. I will look at the mean scores of the religious groups. If there is anything within the theology or the culture of a specific religious group that makes them more favourably disposed towards violence I would expect to be able to pick it up in the data.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

This study has adopted a cross-sectional research design to descriptively measure how the world's major religions engage politically. This will be done through secondary analysis of the sixth wave (2010-2014) of the WVS. This chapter outlined the research design and methodology as well as the different indicators that will be used to measure political engagement. The benefits of survey research are that it makes large samples feasible, is excellent to measure the attitudes and orientations of a large population, is flexible and usually has high measurement reliability. Secondary analysis improves the possibility of meta-analysis and saves time and costs.

The next chapter will look at the history and teachings of the world's major religions.

## Chapter Four

### The history, development and teachings of the different religions

#### 4.1. Introduction

We live in a world of many religions. They do not all have the same message and there are significant differences between them (Krüger et al., 2009; 11). On the other hand, no religion developed in a void and in a fascinating way they are all interweaved in such a way that we can talk of one, albeit differentiated, religious history of mankind (Krüger et al., 2009; 12).

Nobody is quite sure what the first religion was like (Krüger et al., 2009; 18). As far as we know, humanity - and thus also religion - originated on the African continent (Krüger et al., 2009; 17). This could have happened during the first process of hominisation which took place about two hundred thousand to two million years ago (Krüger et al., 2009; 17).

If, as according to Krüger *et al.* (2009; 18), we define religion as an attempt to comprehensively integrate our world, this would include an attempt to meaningfully integrate death. This means that we can consider burial to be a religious act and the oldest grave, dating back a hundred thousand years, has been found in northern Natal, South Africa.

As humanity forms one biological species and as human minds function in more or less the same way, we can assume that all religions will have some characteristics in common. All religions contain, for example, myths and rituals. Religions cluster together and those that developed together share similar attributes and influence each other (Krüger et al., 2009; 21). In a sense they form different “families” of religions.

These different religions have different ideas and emphasise different aspects that could lead to friction and strained relationships with others (Krüger et al., 2009; 13). Even within different religions there are a variety of interpretations and groupings.

This chapter will look at the development and differences between the religions examined in this study. It can take a lifetime to study just one. Thus, due to time and space limitations, only a

brief description of the history and teachings of the world's major religions will be possible. First we will look at the Asian religions.

## 4.2. Hinduism

“Hindu” is the Persian word for “Indian” (Hammer, 1982; 170) and is thus unsurprisingly the biggest religion in India (Heywood, 2007; 304). Most of its followers also live in India (Krüger et al., 2009; 63). Unlike many other religions, it has no known founder. It is rooted in the Indian civilisation that inhabited the Indus valley from 2 500 before the Common Era (BCE) until about 1700 BCE.

Between 1700 BCE and 1500 BCE the Aryans, a fair-skinned people who probably came from central Asia, moved into north-western India (Krüger *et al.*, 2009; 63). They were a warlike people who conquered northern India and brought their own customs and gods with them (Krüger et al., 2009; 64). Since the Aryans were warriors, their gods were predominantly masculine and powerful (Krüger et al., 2009; 67). Their customs and religion influenced the local religions and practices, but in no way displaced them (Hammer, 1989, 173). Hinduism therefore developed out of this fusion over a period of about five thousand years (Hammer, 1989; 170).

Hinduism has no fixed dogmas or central religious authority that directs conduct (Krüger et al., 2009; 63) and comprises a wide variety of often contradictory beliefs and practices (Hammer, 1989; 172). Most Hindus believe in some form of god, although there are many who do not. Some Hindus believe that they should be vegetarians out of a respect for life, whereas many others sacrifice animals at the temples and roast meat on the river banks during festivals. Some Hindus worship Shiva, while others pray to the god Vishnu or his avatars and incarnations Krishna or Rama. Others pray to the goddesses.

One town or village will worship in a different way from a neighbouring one. The individual Hindu might worship one god or many, or none at all. He or she might believe in one god and also pray to different manifestations of that same god. They can also think of the “ultimate” in personal or impersonal terms. However, “Hinduism” is an overarching concept that binds all

these different beliefs together in one religious “family”. The common “ethos” that binds all these different beliefs together is the belief in reincarnation and karma.

#### 4.2.1. Reincarnation

Hindus regard the soul as unchanging and eternal, thus according to the doctrine of reincarnation or “samsara”, the human soul is born several times on earth (Krüger et al., 2009; 81). They believe that even though our bodies die, our souls are reborn again. This rebirth can happen in any life-form, depending on how well you lived your previous life. To end this cycle, an individual must “identify and become one with the ultimate reality”. Hindus believe that eventually we will all become one with this “ultimate reality” or God, but that the ignorant just take longer to reach this stage.

#### 4.2.2. Karma

Karma is a law of cause and effect (Krüger et al., 2009; 81). According to it, what we think, say and do influences our future. The body into which we will be reborn depends on how we acted in a previous life. If you performed good deeds in a previous life you will be reborn in a better state and if you did bad things, you will be punished by being reborn into a worse life.

Unfortunately this belief has been used to justify the highly unequal caste system in India. Those at the bottom are said to deserve it because of past indiscretions in a previous life and those at the top are believed to deserve it. This way of thinking has made it difficult to challenge and decrease the high inequality in Indian society, and it leads to a fatalistic view of and approach towards life.

#### 4.2.3. Other beliefs

Hinduism is also pantheistic meaning that they believe that the sacred is present in all things or is all things (Krüger et al., 2009; 79, 344). At the same time, some Hindus also personalise the divine in the form of Ishvara, which is considered to be the Lord or God (Krüger et al., 2009; 79).

The original Aryan beliefs are best presented by the Vedic texts. It includes the gods Indra, his female partner Indrani or Saci; Agni, the god of fire; Varuna, Djauspitr, Vayu and Prajapati (Hammer, 1989; 186). Eventually there emerged an idea that there was one supreme God who controlled all the others (Krüger et al., 2009; 80). Others thought of this not as a dominant god, but as one reality, which was called “Brahman”. There thus developed a disagreement between different groups of Hindus about whether this “ultimate reality” or “God” was impersonal or personal (Krüger et al., 2009; 80).

For some Hindus the impersonal idea of “Brahman” became the personal and supreme god Ishvara (Krüger et al., 2009; 83). They also started to worship the two gods Vishnu and Shiva. Together with Brahman they form a trinity (Krüger et al., 2009; 83). Brahman is “the creator”, a creative force that produces worlds and ages, Vishnu is “the sustainer” who preserves the natural laws and the world, while Shiva is “the destroyer” who “dances the world to pieces”. These three gods are seen as the different manifestations of the lord of creation, Ishvara.

Vishnu also has a female partner called Lakshmi (Hammer, 1989; 186). Vishnu is said to appear to humans in the form of one of his ten avatars or incarnations. The most popular form is as Krishna, who is the hero of several myths and is seen as a great king, warrior and lover. Other manifestations of Vishnu include Matsya, a fish, Kurma, a tortoise, Varaha, a wild pig, Nara-Simha, a man-lion, Vamana, a dwarf, Parusha-Rama, Rama-Chandra, Buddha, the enlightened one and founder of Buddhism, as well as Kalki, which is yet to come.

Interestingly, they consider cows to be holy animals (Krüger et al., 2009; 95). They are not particularly driven to convert others to their faith and they have more festivals than any other religion (Krüger et al., 2009; 99).

For Hindus evil stems from mankind (Krüger et al., 2009; 81). For them evil is caused by ignorance. They believe it is because of this ignorance that issues like race, sex, class and notions of nations divide and imprison us. However, they also believe that we have the ability to forge our own future destiny, but not necessarily in this life as this was predetermined by our previous life, (for example, their caste).

#### 4.2.4. Paths to salvation

For Hindus there are three ways to break free from the endless cycle of rebirth: through knowledge, actions and devotion to God (Krüger et al., 2009; 82). They believe that knowledge can be obtained through ascetic exercise and meditation, usually under the guidance of a guru or a spiritual teacher. The actions they refer to includes performing rituals and rites, duties and partaking in religious ceremonies. They also believe that everything we do should be devoted to God.

#### 4.2.5. Hindu scriptures

Hindu scriptures can be divided into “Shruti”, which means “that what is heard” and “Smriti”, “that what is remembered” (Krüger et al., 2009; 64). The “Shruti” is the most important part of Hindu script. Initially these texts were not written down, but passed on orally. This helps to explain why most Hindu texts are in the form of dialogues. The earliest manuscript, the Rig-Veda, was only written down more than two thousand years after it was first composed.

The “Smriti” consists out of epics, chronicles and legends, codes of law and philosophy (Krüger et al., 2009; 65). The best known and most popular Hindu scripture today is the “Bhagavad Gita” (Krüger et al., 2009; 67).

#### 4.2.6. Hindu ethics

Hindu ethics emphasise that everyone must contribute to society (Krüger et al., 2009; 87). According to the law of karma, we will reap what we sowed in the future. The goal of ethical action is to achieve the highest possible happiness for the individual (Krüger et al., 2009; 88). This can be achieved by first striving for pleasure through the senses, especially sexual pleasure. Second, they should strive for useful things like friendship, knowledge, property and power. Third, Hindus should strive for righteousness and goodness. For Hindus, being good means you must be good to other people. Last, the ultimate goal of life is to strive for release from the cycle of rebirth.



### 4.3. Buddhism

Buddhism is related to Hinduism and share the belief in reincarnation and karma (Krüger et al., 2009; 107). Even though Buddhists do not believe in a personal god, it is considered to be one of the world's major religions.

#### 4.3.1. The Buddha

Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, who was born in Lumbini near the border between modern-day India and Nepal about 566 BCE (Metz, 1989; 222). His father was the rajah of Kapilavastu. At the age of twenty-nine he gave up a life of luxury, leaving his wife and child behind, to become a wandering “holy man” (Metz, 1989; 223). He is known to his followers as “the Buddha”, which means the “awakened” or “enlightened one” (Krüger et al., 2009; 107).

He thought deeply about human suffering and illness, about getting older and eventually dying (Pye, 2011). Realising the temporariness of existence, he considered the causes of suffering to stem from ignorance, desire and attachment to ephemeral things, concluding that the way to resolve this was through knowledge and detachment (Pye, 2011).

When he died in about 486 BCE, he did not appoint anyone or any institution to continue his teachings (Krüger et al., 2009; 110). Although some Hindus believe he was the ninth incarnation of the god Vishnu, his followers do not consider him to be a god, but a man who found the truth (Krüger et al., 2009; 110). Because he is thought to have discovered the deepest answer to the sufferings of life, Siddhartha is considered by his followers to be a being of priceless cosmic importance.

His last message to his followers was that nothing is permanent. This is the core of his message (Krüger et al., 2009; 110). His teachings were first passed on orally and only written down much later (Metz, 1989; 226). It consisted of “four noble truths”.

#### 4.3.2. The four noble truths

The first noble truth states that human existence consists of profound unhappiness or suffering (Krüger et al., 2009; 118). According to the second noble truth, our unhappiness comes from our

cravings or desires for various things (Krüger et al., 2009; 119). The third noble truth says that our suffering will stop when our cravings and desires stop. Buddhists have to completely let go of everything. The fourth noble truth lays out eight rules that Buddhists must follow to attain freedom. It is known as “the eightfold path”.

#### 4.3.3. The eightfold path

Unlike the rules laid down in the monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam which have to be followed in obedience to a supreme lawgiver, Buddhists believe that the eightfold path should be followed because it is wise, will be beneficial and lead to happiness (Krüger et al., 2009; 120).

The first rule is having the right view, which refers to a good understanding of the Buddha’s teachings. Secondly, the right purpose, which refers to being free of desire or cravings. Third, right speech refers to not telling lies or using coarse, malicious or frivolous talk. The fourth rule emphasises right deeds. The fifth rule stresses right livelihood, which means that certain kinds of work can keep people from attaining happiness and freedom. Sixth, right effort refers to having unswerving persistence and determination and to do whatever is necessary to achieve a goal once it is set. The seventh rule is right mindfulness, which means to be present and paying full attention to whatever one is doing at a specific moment. Lastly, right concentration means to think and reflect on something while maintaining inner tranquillity.

Buddhist philosophy can be summed up in the three concepts of non-permanence, non-substance and non-satisfactoriness (Krüger et al., 2009; 121). For them everything is changing and nothing has any substance or soul. They believe that all suffering is caused by believing in substance or permanence. Happiness can be achieved by giving in to the flow of life and letting go of any craving.

#### 4.3.4. Reincarnation

Like Hindus, Buddhists also believe that we are reborn and that our conduct in a previous life determines the circumstances of our rebirth (Drummond, 1989; 231). Yet, the Buddhist view differs from that of Hinduism in that they do not believe in an immortal soul that passes from one

life to the next (Krüger et al., 2009; 122). Instead, it has been compared to one candle being lit by another. Although nothing substantial is transmitted, there is a continuation of warmth and light.

#### 4.3.5. Karma

Also similarly to Hinduism, Buddhists believe in karma (Drummond, 1989; 231). The whole Buddhist path to salvation and its ethics derive from the idea that we are free to decide on our actions, but we cannot avoid their consequences (Krüger et al., 2009; 123).

For the Buddhist everything is interrelated and interdependent in a vast system governed by the law of cause and effect (Krüger et al., 2009; 123). This is what forms the basis of their ethic of compassion and non-violence (Krüger et al., 2009; 124).

Belief in reincarnation and karma might make Buddhism seem very similar to Hinduism, but they are two distinct religions (Metz, 1989; 226). Buddhists do not believe that we have individual souls that will one day unite with the source of all things. They also reject Hindu holy texts and the caste system that Hinduism underpins, as well as the idea of a “supreme being” or god.

#### 4.3.6. Meditation

Buddhists believe that the right mindfulness and the right concentration can be achieved by practicing meditation (Krüger et al., 2009; 124). It is also thought to help develop the four virtues of compassion, equanimity, benevolence and sympathetic joy (Krüger et al., 2009; 125).

#### 4.3.7. Nirvana

For Buddhists the ultimate goal of life is to attain the state of Nirvana (Drummond, 1989; 231). This is an enlightened state where all cravings, hatred and delusions have been removed, all bad karma has been brought to an end and all suffering has been left behind (Krüger et al., 2009; 125). It is a state of life without weakness, suffering, needs and the evils of an unenlightened existence. After attaining Nirvana, the Buddhist keeps on living. It does not refer to a loss of consciousness, an extinction of the self or some blissful existence in heaven.

#### 4.3.8. Different ways to the same truth

After Siddhartha's death, tension developed between his more conservative and liberal followers and Buddhism split into two main schools of thought (Krüger et al., 2009; 113-114).

Theravada or "the way of the elders" refers to the more conservative approach. They hold that only monks can attain liberation. Mahayana or "the larger vehicle" refers to the more liberal Buddhists who are more open, adaptable and ascribe a bigger role to the laity.

Buddhism spread into the Southeast and East Asian countries through political domination and influence (Pye, 2011). Only in China did it not seem to get much of a hold (Pye, 2011). As the religion spread, other forms of it developed (Metz, 1989; 237).

In the seventh century the religion reached Tibet, where a unique form of Buddhism developed that is called Tibetan Buddhism (Krüger et al., 2009; 115) or Lamaism (Metz, 1989; 237). It permeated Tibetan culture (Krüger et al., 2009; 115). In his fascinating book, *Seven Years in Tibet* (1953), the German adventurer, Heinrich Harrer, writes that in Buddhist Tibet, the Dalai Lama was seen as a "God-king" whose words were considered law (Harrer, 1953; 124). Harrer compares the influence of the monastic orders to that of a strict dictatorship (Harrer, 1953; 70). Tibetans do not put much value in existence on earth and do not fear death, because they believe in reincarnation (Harrer, 1953; 169). Because they believe in reincarnation and that people might come back as animals, the taking of both human and animal life is against their beliefs (Harrer, 1953; 37). Because of this respect for life, capital punishment was forbidden, even though murder was considered to be the most despicable act (Harrer, 1953; 170).

In 1950 the Chinese invaded Tibet (Krüger et al., 2009; 115). This forced the Dalai Lama, who is head of the "dGe-lugs-pa monastic school" and probably the most famous Buddhist leader in the world, to flee to India as a refugee.

Zen Buddhism developed in China and spread to Korea and Japan (Krüger et al., 2009; 134). They give a special importance to meditating in the lotus position (Metz, 1989; 238). Another

example is Tantric Buddhism which developed in the fourth century CE in northern India (Krüger et al., 2009; 133). A variety of Japanese sects also developed when Buddhist ideas were fused with Shinto (Metz, 1989; 238).

Buddhism has been seen as the least fundamentalist of all the major religions, since it emphasises non-violence, toleration and individual responsibility (Heywood, 2007; 306). However, Pye (2011) writes in the *International Encyclopaedia of Political Science* that although Buddhism is often seen as a quietist religion (“quietism” refers to a passivity and calmness of mind towards external events), it has had a significant impact on politics in Asia. In countries where the adherents of the religion are a small minority, their impact is small and they tend to adhere to the peaceful image. However, in countries where they are a majority, both monks and lay leaders have been playing a leading role in elitist and military manoeuvres as well as in revolutionary movements and electoral politics (Pye, 2011).

Buddhist political activists have played important roles in most Asian countries, but most prominently in Burma, China, India and Vietnam. Several Buddhist monks burned themselves alive as a protest against repression of the people during the wars for independence in Vietnam. So, instead of withdrawing from politics, they seem willing to engage in even extreme forms of activism.

#### **4.4. Judaism**

Judaism is a monotheistic religion that developed in the Middle East. At its heart lies the conviction that there is only one God who is righteous and influences the natural and social world. He is the creator and ruler of the world, He is masculine (Krüger et al., 2009; 145) and considered to be eternal and transcendental (Harley, 1989; 272). The Jews believe God sees everything and knows everything. Additionally they believe He revealed Himself and His law to them, because they are His chosen people and they must serve as an example to others so that they can see His presence in their history (Krüger et al., 2009; 145).

##### **4.4.1. Abram**

According to Hebrew scriptures a man called Abram was born about four thousand years ago in the city of Ur in Chaldea, which is in present-day Iraq (Krüger et al., 2009; 145). The people who

lived there worshipped a variety of gods. He moved with his father's tribe around the Syro-Arabian desert, searching for better land (Krüger et al., 2009; 145-146).

Somewhere along his journey Abram decided to bind himself in a personal commitment to only one deity. Abram called him El Shaddai or "God, the mountain one" (Krüger et al., 2009; 146). He vowed to be kind, to live righteously and to be just. In return the Jews believe that El Shaddai then promised Abram, his people and his descendants the land of Canaan (an area which is more or less where modern-day Palestine or Israel is (Harley, 1989; 272).

This covenant between God and His people is fundamental to the Jewish religion. Abram who became Abraham, his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob are considered to be the patriarchs of the Jewish nation (Krüger et al., 2009; 147). Jacob had twelve sons who are believed to be the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel which each had its own territory.

#### 4.4.2. Moses and the Ten Commandments

After a severe famine, the Jews were forced to seek refuge in Egypt where they were enslaved by the pharaoh, Ramses the second. Around the year 1250 BCE, a man called Moses is said to have received a calling to free them from slavery. After many difficulties he managed to lead them through the Red Sea to "the promised land".

On the way, Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments from God at Mount Sinai, written on two stone tablets (Krüger et al., 2009; 148). Four commandments direct how people should act towards God and the remaining six dictate how people should behave towards other people (Krüger et al., 2009; 149). These Ten Commandments form the basis of Judaism.

It says: "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself any carved images. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Honour your father and your mother. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour and you shall not covet" (Krüger et al., 2009; 171). The Ten Commandments have formed the basis for many legal codes around the world (Harley, 1989; 273).

#### 4.4.3. The most important doctrines of Judaism

According to Krüger *et al.* (2009; 162), it is more important for Jews to “do right” than to “believe right”. This entails living by God’s law as written down in the Torah (Harley, 1989; 273). The essence of their belief is contained in the Sjema, the part of the Jewish Bible that is read every morning and evening by devoted Jews (Harley, 1989; 273).

In the twelfth century a Jewish scholar called Moses Maimonides summed up Judaism’s creed in thirteen principles (Krüger *et al.*, 2009; 162). He wrote:

“I believe with perfect faith that God is the creator of all things and he alone; that he is one with a unique unity; that he is without body or any form whatsoever; that he is eternal; that to him alone is proper to pray; that all the words of the prophets are true; that Moses is the chief of the prophets; that the law given to Moses has been passed down without alteration; that this law will never be changed and no other will be given; that God knows all the thoughts and actions of men; that he rewards the obedient and punishes transgressors; that the Messiah will come and that there will be a resurrection of the dead” (quoted in Krüger *et al.*, 2009; 163).

#### 4.4.4. High status of humans

The Jewish faith bestows a high status on humans (Krüger *et al.*, 2009; 165). They consider human life sacred because they believe that humans are created in the image of God (Wilson, 1989; 302). Acts of inhumanity and exploitation are believed to be an affront to the God of righteousness (Wilson, 1989; 302).

Jews also believe that humans are free to act as they wish, but that they are responsible for their actions (Krüger *et al.*, 2009; 165). This also implies that they have duties and responsibilities towards God and the world He created.

According to Judaism they have both evil and good inclinations and the purpose of life is to strive for the good despite their evil tendencies (Krüger *et al.*, 2009; 166). Jews believe that they can repent if they did wrong, but that it is not good enough just to feel sorry and that they must make restitution for their wrongs if they are to receive God’s mercy.

They believe that they can be punished in this life or after death when there will be a great judgement after the resurrection of God. The righteous will receive their reward in paradise and the wicked will be punished in Gehenna, which consists out of hell and purgatory. They believe that even the righteous will spend some time in purgatory after death to cleanse them of their sins before they can enter heaven (Krüger et al., 2009; 167).

For Judaism what they do in their life now is more important than any doctrine or speculation on what will happen in the future or after they are dead.

#### 4.4.5. The Messiah

The Jews also believe that God will send a Messiah who will bring about a time of peace, joy and prosperity (Krüger et al., 2009; 168). Some believe this will happen when the exiled Jews have returned to the land of Israel and rebuilt the temple, which will also lead to the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement.

#### 4.4.6. Jewish holy scriptures

The Jews are known as the “People of the Book” (Krüger et al., 2009; 168). They believe that God’s will is contained in the Holy Scriptures and by studying them they get to know and understand God better as well as their duties towards Him and towards others.

The Holy Scriptures consist of the Tenach and the Talmud. The Tenach is the Hebrew Bible and consists of the Torah, or the law, Neviim – the prophecies – and Ketuvim, which includes additional writings.

The Talmud consists out of the Mishnah and the Gemara (Krüger et al., 2009; 169). The Mishnah focuses on the unwritten law and is a synthetisation of the traditions, interpretations and discussions of about a hundred and fifty of Israel’s most respected religious teachers. It sets out the prescriptions for living a holy life. The Gemara includes additional historical, moral and religious teachings (Krüger et al., 2009; 170).



#### 4.4.7. Jewish ethics

The Ten Commandments form the basis of Jewish ethics (Krüger et al., 2009 ; 171). The prophet Micah reduced this to only three: He said that God requires his followers to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with Him.

According to the revered Rabbi Akibu the greatest principle in the Torah is the command to “love thy neighbour as you love yourself”. For Jews, human conduct should be characterised by “loving kindness” and they also consider it a duty to help the poor (Krüger et al., 2009; 171-172).

#### 4.4.8. Different forms of Judaism

Most Jews belong to a synagogue (Harley, 1989; 274). There are, however considerable differences between various groups within the religion in how they practice it.

Orthodox Jews try to preserve traditional Judaism (Krüger et al., 2009; 182). They live their daily lives according to the tenets of the Ten Commandments and try to perform all its prescriptions. Ultra-orthodox Jews emphasise both the written and the oral Torah and try to live like the Jews did during the Middle Ages.

Reform Judaism started in Germany. They let go of the teachings of the Talmud and declared that they did not expect or desired a Messiah to lead them back to Palestine, since they preferred to stay in the country in which they were born. They also simplified and shortened synagogue services and let go of dietary restrictions, purity regulations and phylacteries like the prayer boxes and prayer shawls worn by more orthodox Jews.

Similarly, Conservative Jews let go of many traditions and feel that they can no longer live orthodox lives, but at the same time they do not conform to the more extreme non-traditionalism of the Reform movement (Krüger et al., 2009; 183). Reconstructionism rejects belief in the supernatural and the idea of a personal God, as well as the idea that the Jews are a chosen people. Instead, they argue that Jewish practices are useful to fulfil our human destiny.

#### 4.4.9. An optimistic focus on this life

In contrast to other religions that seek ways to escape from the pain of this world and instead look forward to pleasure in the next life or in heaven, Judaism has always concentrated on this world of flesh and blood and life in the here and now (Wilson, 1989; 302).

Notably freedom is the most valued ideal in Judaism. Many of the political principles and civil rights that are characteristic of democracy originate from the Hebrew Scriptures. For Jews, freedom is a mandate to determine his or her own destiny, as well as the destiny of the society in which they live.

It is the assurance that no matter how bad the current situation or the future may appear, progress is possible. It is the indistinguishable hope that this world can be changed for the better and that the prophetic dream of peace on earth can become a reality.

### **4.5. Christianity**

Christianity emerged from Judaism in the first century CE (Krüger et al., 2009; 189). From the start, the relationship between Christianity and Judaism was hostile (Krüger et al., 2009; 157). Besides the disciples and early followers of Jesus, themselves Jews, many of the Jews rejected the idea that Jesus, on whose teaching the Christian religion was founded, was their Messiah. When Christian theology started to be influenced by Greek philosophy, the Jewish rabbis wanted nothing more to do with it (Krüger et al., 2009; 158). When the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 CE, he made it the state religion of the Roman Empire. This increased the hostility between Christians and Jews even further.

The term “Christian” comes from the Greek translation of the word Messiah, which is “Christos” (Krüger et al., 2009; 189). It was used for the first time in 40 CE in Antioch, Syria, to refer to the followers of Christ.

#### 4.5.1. Jesus

There is considerable disagreement among scholars about the life and deeds of the historical Jesus (Krüger et al., 2009; 190). No archaeological finds that can be linked to him have been

found and there are limited references made to him in the general writings of the first century. A few ancient writings, hostile towards Jesus, make reference to him. Core amongst these are Josephus (37-101AD) in his *The Antiquities of the Jews* and Cornelius Tacitus (56-120 AD), known for his analysis and examination of historical documents, in his *Annals of Imperial Rome* of 116AD. The stories about the life of Jesus as recounted by his followers are not historical writings or biographies as we know it, but rather part of their confessions in the belief that Jesus was the saviour of the world and the Messiah, as predicted by the Jewish texts.

Jesus was most probably born in the town of Bethlehem in the province of Galilee. It has not been established exactly when this occurred, but is thought to be around 6 BCE. According to Christian belief, he was born of a virgin. When he was thirty, he was baptised by a wandering prophet called John “the Baptist” (Krüger et al., 2009; 191). As Jesus emerged from the water, it is said that the spirit of God descended on him like a dove.

From then on, Jesus became a wandering teacher (Krüger et al., 2009; 192). He preached that “The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent, and believe the Gospel” as recorded in Mark 1: 15 in the Bible. His followers forewent material security and replaced it with an intense desire for the kingdom of God to be established in its stead (France, 1989; 342).

Although some saw him as a liberator from Rome, he refused to take up arms against the Roman Empire and insisted that his deliverance was not political, but spiritual (France, 1989; 340). Despite this he was later captured by the Romans in Jerusalem after being betrayed by one of his disciples (Krüger et al., 2009; 192). He was sentenced to death for political rebellion and crucified. His career as a religious teacher lasted only three years, yet it was to have a profound effect on the history of the world.

According to the Christian belief, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion (Krüger et al., 2009; 196). He appeared to his friends and followers on several occasions and forty days later, ascended to heaven. They also believe that fifty days after Jesus was resurrected, his followers were filled with the Holy Spirit while they were gathering for the Jewish feast of Pentecost. This is said to have motivated and strengthened them to go out into the world to tell

about the salvation that they found in him (Krüger et al., 2009; 197). So from the start Christianity was a missionary religion.

The core of the Christian message is that Jesus rose from the dead and vanquished both sin and death (France, 1989; 338). However, because Jesus did not write down any of his teachings, we cannot be sure exactly what he taught (Krüger et al., 2009; 192). Today the writings of his disciples and other Christian texts are collected in the Bible.

#### 4.5.2. The Bible

The word Bible derives from the Greek word “Biblia” which means “the books” (France, 1989; 364). The Christian bible consists of the Old Testament, which is the Jewish Bible and the New Testament, which is the account of the life and teachings of Jesus and his disciples. Some texts were eventually excluded after a long sifting process up until 367 CE and became known as the Apocrypha. France (1989, 367) writes that any religion that can be recognised as Christian must be based on the Bible.

#### 4.5.3. The spread of Christianity

Christianity started as a radical Jewish sect and at the start it had a small number of adherents (Beard, 2015; 517). It spent two-hundred and fifty years or ten generations on the social and political margins (Bruce, 2003; 240). However, because of the wide extent of the Roman Empire, its good road system and its cosmopolitan mix of people, the Christian ideas were able to spread far and wide (Beard, 2015; 520). Christianity grew within the Roman world. They had a lot of early success, but also experienced fierce resistance from the Roman Empire and the Jews (Krüger et al., 2009; 198).

As the Roman Empire expanded, it incorporated the gods of those people they conquered into their pantheon (Beard, 2015; 519). Thus Christianity’s belief in a single God, rejecting all others, put them at odds with the Roman authorities. This led at times to cruel suppression by the Romans (Casque, 1988; 71).

However, in 312 CE Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity (Todd, 1988; 130). It is said to have occurred after he saw a cross in the sky with the words “In this sign you will conquer” emblazoned on it (Krüger et al., 2009; 203). Eventually Christianity became the state church of

the Roman Empire in 383 CE. Ironically, although it is the only religion that they ever tried to eradicate, the Roman Empire contributed much to Christianity's success (Beard, 2015; 520). At the same time some believe that Christianity weakened the Roman Empire from the inside and contributed to its downfall (Gibbon, 1998; Krüger et al., 2009; Todd, 1988; Nietzsche, 1895 [Norman & Ridley; 2005]).

#### 4.5.4. Development of doctrine and approaches

Over the years there have been various disputes within the religion itself about the nature of Christ and the nature of God (Krüger et al., 2009; 204). During the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, it was decided that Christ was both God and man. Towards the end of the fourth century the doctrine of the Trinity was fully developed. According to this, God was not only one substance, but consisted out of three hypostases, namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

During the fourth century many Christians decided to withdraw from society to live reclusive lives (Krüger et al., 2009; 206). Some lived in caves and deserts, on poles or in trees, or walled up. They became known as the eccentrics. Others lived together in self-supporting communities. They became known as the monastics. During the Middle Ages several monastic orders developed which played an important role in cultural life (Krüger et al., 2009; 210). During this time beautiful cathedrals were erected in the main cities and towns of Europe (Krüger et al., 2009; 210).

In contrast to those who chose to withdraw from what they saw as the “pollution” of the world, most Christians saw it as their religious duty to act as its “salt” and “the light” (Hian, 1989; 346). This motivated them to perform community service and to eventually fight for the abolition of slavery (for example William Wilberforce) and for improvement in the precarious living conditions brought on by the industrial revolution (Hian, 1989; 346).

#### 4.5.5. Branches of Christianity

There are three main branches of Christianity: Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity and Protestantism (Heywood, 2007; 301). Roman Catholics believe in the spiritual and earthly leadership of the pope, who is considered to be God's representative on earth and infallible,

according to the doctrine established in 1871. Eastern Orthodox Christianity developed in Constantinople when the Roman Empire was divided in two and there was a split with Rome in 1054. The two most prominent churches to emerge from this are the Russian Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. The distinguishing feature of Protestants is their belief that the Bible is the only source of truth and that people can have a personal and direct relationship with God, without the intermediation of a priest or preacher.

Two important historical movements were the cause of the different branches of Christianity that exist today (Sadgrove, 1989; 354). The first was the so-called “Great Rupture” between the East and the West (Sadgrove, 1989; 354). Although the official split is usually dated 1054, disagreement between the two churches started a long time before. The second was the sixteenth century Reformation which gave rise to Protestantism.

By the year 800 CE, Europe was divided into a western part with Rome as its capital, and an eastern part with Constantinople as its capital (Krüger et al., 2009; 209). Over time there developed a rift about the Holy Spirit between Christianity in the east and the west. While the Western Church held that the Holy Spirit came from the Father and the Son, the Eastern Church disagreed.

#### 4.5.6. Orthodox Christianity

The Eastern Churches reject the authority of the pope (Sadgrove, 1989; 354). Instead they contend that a group of bishops should have authority over the church in the place of the pope, who is considered to be the leader of the Catholic or Western Church (Krüger et al., 2009; 210). Every national church also has a patriarch who is considered to be “first among equals” (Sadgrove, 1989; 354). The clergy of the Eastern Church are also not required to remain celibate like the Catholic clergy. In addition they put a lot of value on traditions (Krüger et al., 2009; 210).

The Eastern Church also emphasises the incarnation of Christ and places importance in icons. These icons are images of Christ, his mother Mary or other saints. Whereas the images of Christ and Mary in the Catholic Church are very realistic, they are portrayed differently and in a more

mystical way in the Orthodox Church. These icons are seen as “windows” between earth and heaven (Sadgrove, 1989; 373).

The Orthodox Church also puts far more emphasis on rituals (Buchanan, 1989; 369) and worship as the expression of faith than the Western Church and is also less concerned with the correctness of doctrine (Krüger et al., 2009; 210). Because of this emphasis on worship they have a very beautiful form of liturgy.

#### 4.5.7. The Catholic Church

The biggest Christian grouping is the Catholic Church (Sadgrove, 1989; 354). The term “catholic” means “common” or “universal” and was used in the second century to refer to Christianity as a large community (Gallatin, 1988; 237).

Catholics recognise the primacy and the authority of the pope (Sadgrove, 1989; 354). He is believed by Catholics to be the representative of God on earth. When he speaks with full authority (*ex cathedra*) on matters of faith or morality, he is believed to be infallible and his directives are considered to be binding for all Catholics. At the core of Roman Catholicism is the Mass along with six other sacraments.

The Catholic Church has developed a system of seven sacraments which are supposed to accompany a Christian through every stage of his or her life (Krüger et al., 2009; 211). Baptism consists out of the pouring of water onto a person in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It symbolises a new beginning, that the person’s sin is washed away and that they are now part of the community of believers.

Confirmation is when religious adulthood is bestowed on someone. Penance is when a person confesses their sins to a priest, who then grants them absolution and pardons them from eternal damnation. Marriage is supposed to bind two people in a permanent monogamous relationship. The Catholic Church does not allow divorce. Ordination is when a priest is consecrated to the ministry, which allows him to perform the sacraments.

The last anointment consists of rubbing the body with holy oil to prepare the person's soul for death and the afterlife. And lastly mass is a ritual that recalls the Last Supper which took place on the evening before Jesus was crucified. It is also known as the Eucharist or thanksgiving.

Until the sixteenth century the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox churches were the only two important groupings within Christianity (Krüger et al., 2009; 215). Then the Protestant Reformation happened.

#### 4.5.8. Protestantism

Several factors contributed to and allowed for the Protestant Reformation. First, the power of the pope was in decline (Krüger et al., 2009; 215). Second, capitalism and the modern idea of nationalism started to emerge and third, the invention of the printing press made it possible for ideas and information to be distributed quicker and further than before. In addition, the excesses and corruption of the Catholic Church and the onerous burden on people to pay indulgences for their salvation made the conditions ripe for reformation.

On 31 October 1517 Martin Luther, a German monk, nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. In it he protested against what he saw as the corruption of the Catholic Church and the teaching of salvation through works as opposed to faith in the work of Christ on the cross.

##### 4.5.8.1. Protestant beliefs

Luther argued that God was merciful out of his own free choice and through the sending of Jesus Christ and his death for atonement of the sins of mankind. All that people have to do is to accept this gift of salvation. They did not need priests or the pope to intervene on their behalf with God in order to save them from punishment for their sins. Works or rituals done by the individual or by the church could not earn this salvation. Protestants believe that people can be saved by their faith in Jesus Christ if they individually and personally acquire and lay claim to the Word of God as their saving grace (Woodberry & Shah, 2004).



Luther also argued that scripture had priority and authority over the church and the pope (Krüger et al., 2009; 216). Since Protestants believe that the individual has free access to God through Jesus, without need of the structures, sacraments and priests put in place by the medieval church (Sadgrove, 1989; 374) this basically cut out the Catholic Church and the pope as middlemen between believers and God. Not surprisingly, Luther was condemned and excommunicated from the Catholic Church (Krüger et al., 2009; 216).

Luther later translated the Bible into German to make it more accessible to the common people (Krüger et al., 2009; 216). Until then the Bible had been in Latin putting it out of reach and comprehension of the layman. Of the seven sacraments Luther recognised only baptism and Mass (Krüger et al., 2009; 217). He also drew a sharp distinction between the public and private spheres of life. For him, the Gospel applied to the private sphere of life, whereas the law should be obeyed in the public and political sphere.

The Reformation eventually led to a three-way split in Western Christianity between Catholicism and the Lutheran and Calvinist strands of Protestantism (Bruce, 2003; 218). The Lutheran church grew throughout Germany and expanded into the Scandinavian countries. In 1536 a French Protestant scholar, John Calvin, fled to Switzerland where he founded the stern form of Protestantism known as Calvinism, which is thought by Max Weber to have contributed greatly to the rise of capitalism (Krüger et al., 2009; 218).

A distinguishing feature of Protestantism is an increased value of the individual, based on the belief that each individual matters to God (Sadgrove, 1989; 374). Moreover, Woodberry and Shah (2004) write that Protestants have been instrumental in the formation of civil society. Protestantism seems to promote an ethic in which people are encouraged to get together on a voluntary basis to perform various social tasks, instead of waiting for the church or the state to provide for the community (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2007; 688).

On the other hand, Bruce (2007) writes that those pious Protestants have warned that ordinary people should not get too involved with the material world, because it might contaminate those who are “righteous”. This kind of world view would seem to discourage those who are very

pious and “righteous” from getting involved in the “dirty business” of politics. Some Protestants have even taken the view that a bad society is a better environment for religion, because it can create more fertile ground with people who are in dire situations which might make them more receptive to the religious message (Bruce, 2007).

#### 4.5.8.2. A multiplication of churches

Over time the Protestant Reformation led to a multiplication of churches as they split off from other Protestant churches (Krüger et al., 2009; 220). In the Netherlands it gave rise to the Dutch Reformed Church (Krüger et al., 2009; 219). In Scotland there developed the Calvinistic Church of Scotland which was governed by a group of elected elders. It became known as Presbyterianism.

In England, the Anglican Church combined the Protestant emphasis on scripture with Catholic forms of liturgy. All of these movements came to acceptance and agreement with the state. Some, however, had a stronger tendency to break with the state (Krüger et al., 2009; 220).

The Anabaptists put more emphasis on experiencing what the Gospels speak about than adhering formally to rules and following the letter of the script (Krüger et al., 2009; 221). They also believe that believers should be baptised as adults since as babies they would not understand what it is all about. Most of them have refused to have anything to do with the state or to partake in war.

The Congregationalists believed that each religious community, no matter how small, should be completely self-governing without influence from an outside church body (Krüger et al., 2009; 222). Their ideas spread among the Puritans who set sail for the New World.

The Quakers believe that true Christianity does not mean conforming to a dogma or church rules, but rather listening to and following the inner light which they believe is in the heart of every person. They do not have any formal clergy and they are famous for their silent meetings where everyone sits quietly until one of them feels moved by the spirit of God to speak from their heart or their own experience. Because they believe all humans are equal before God, they rejected

slavery and war and have played an important role in humanizing European society over the last three hundred years.

The Methodists stress the need to convert, to lead a holy life and personal religious experience. The Pentecostal Church emphasises the role of the Holy Spirit and during their services members often speak in tongues and prophesise (Sadgrove, 1989; 355). The Salvation Army was founded in the nineteenth century to bring the gospel and welfare services to the urban poor (Sadgrove, 1989; 355).

#### 4.5.9. The Counter Reformation

In response to the challenge by Protestantism, the Catholic Church also underwent some reform (Krüger et al., 2009; 223). It gave rise to the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits (Krüger et al., 2009; 224). They were ardent missionaries who spread to all the continents and played a very important role in the revival of Catholicism. They were highly disciplined and gave absolute obedience to their superiors.

During the Council of Trent in 1545, there were important resolutions passed that defined Catholicism for centuries. It was asserted that the Catholic tradition was as important as the Bible, that only the Catholic church could interpret it, that there were seven sacraments as opposed to the two recognised by Protestants and also that good works were as important as faith if you want to be saved.

During the nineteenth century there was another council that became known as Vatican I. Here it was asserted that the pope was infallible when he spoke officially in his role as “pastor and doctor of all Christianity”, known as *ex cathedra*.

Another great council was held in the twentieth century and became known as Vatican II. It put the Catholic Church on a new course. It changed its policy to one of critical and constructive engagement with the modern world instead of resisting and rejecting it. It was also decided that the Jews were not to be held collectively responsible for the death of Jesus, nearly two thousand years after he had been crucified. During this council the validity of religious liberty was

recognised, as well as the separation of church and state, democracy, and vernacular Bible reading to the laity.

#### 4.5.10. Christian practices

Despite all their differences, there are certain practices that most Christians share (Krüger et al., 2009; 228). All Christians accept the sacraments of baptism and communion. Most Christians celebrate Christmas, Good Friday; which is meant to commemorate the death of Christ, Easter, Ascension Day; which celebrates Jesus' ascension to heaven, and Pentecost, which celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christians also believe that God want all humans to be "whole" in every facet of their lives: as individuals, in their families, as members of their communities, as well as members of the wider national and international community (Sadgrove, 1989; 375).

Over time the Christian churches have developed different styles of governance and worship. The Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church are governed by bishops and have a complex and elaborate liturgy. In contrast Protestants have a less elaborate liturgy and emphasise the Bible and preaching.

Although Christianity originated in Palestine and spread throughout Europe via the Roman Empire, it has declined in the West and today, most of its adherents live in Latin America, Asia and Africa (Heywood, 2007; 300-301). There is, however, another monotheistic religion that originated in the Middle East: Islam.

## **4.6. Islam**

This new religion started in the seventh century in what is Saudi Arabia today (Krüger et al., 2009; 233). It drew strongly from the ideas of Judaism and Christianity (Rosenberg, 1988; 224).

According to Anderson (1989; 334) encounters between Christianity and Islam have almost always been unhappy. However, the relation between the Jews and Muslims were friendlier than that between Judaism and Christianity at the start (Krüger et al., 2009; 158).

The word “Islam” means to surrender or to submit (Krüger et al., 2009; 233). A Muslim is someone who surrenders or submits to the will of Allah. A person can become a Muslim by declaring that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger.

#### 4.6.1. Muhammad

Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570 CE. When he was around forty years old he increasingly withdrew into the hills around Mecca for contemplation and meditation (Krüger et al., 2009; 234). In about 610 CE he is said to have been visited by the archangel Gabriel who revealed the holy scripture of the Quran to him over a period of more than twenty years (Krüger et al., 2009; 235). This revelation began when he was forty years old and continued until about eighty days before his death (Krüger et al., 2009; 242).

Muhammad believed that the God that was already known to the Jews and the Christians chose him to be His final messenger on earth (Krüger et al., 2009; 235). Similar to Judaism and Christianity, he taught that there was a coming judgement where everyone will be judged by Allah, the Creator, according to how they lived (Rosenberg, 1988; 224). He also taught that every Muslim had five duties of which more will be mentioned shortly.

Initially his teachings were not well received in Mecca because it was a polytheistic society and he consequently moved to Medina. Here he mixed with Jews who influenced his ideas. Eight years after leaving Mecca he returned as a conqueror. When he died two years later, the whole of Arabia was already conquered by Islam. After his death it spread quickly through the Middle East (Krüger et al., 2009; 236). Muhammad’s teachings were written down in the Quran.

#### 4.6.2. The Quran and Islamic teachings

Muslims believe that the Quran is God’s final revelation to mankind (Krüger et al., 2009; 242). They believe that it is a copy of the original known as “The Mother of the Book” which is in heaven. They also believe that it has existed for all time (Wilson, 1989; 315). According to Islamic tradition it was initially written down on palm leaves, camel bones and rocks. They also believe that the original Arabic version of the Quran is so perfect that it loses at least half its meaning when it is translated into another language (Krüger et al., 2009; 243).

The Quran also refers to several prophets that are mentioned in the Christian and Jewish scriptures (Krüger et al., 2009; 247). These include Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Enoch, Solomon, Ezekiel, Elisha, Elijah, Job, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Muslims believe that their teachings are also valuable, but because they were written down a long time after their deaths, the compilers made some mistakes and that is why the revelation of the Quran was necessary to correct this. In addition to the Quran there is the Hadith, which is a collection of the sayings of Muhammad that do not appear in the Quran but was recorded by his followers and scribes (Krüger et al., 2009; 244).

The Shariah is considered to be a divine law which draws from the precepts of the Quran and the example of Muhammad's life (Krüger et al., 2009; 258). Islam has never just been a religion, but a comprehensive prescriptive code or way of life that incorporates every sphere of human behaviour, including moral prescriptions for the political, economic and social sphere for both individuals and entire nations (Haywood, 2007; 294). It regulates every part of a Muslim's life. Shariah law divides every action into one of five categories: compulsory acts, recommended acts, permissible acts towards which the law is indifferent, reprehensible acts, which are discouraged, but not punished, and forbidden acts (Krüger et al., 2009; 259). Problematically, it is irreconcilable with international conventions like the United Nations' universal declaration of human rights (Anderson, 1989; 334). It prescribes the death sentence for any Muslim who becomes an apostate, stoning for forbidden sexual acts, the amputation of a hand for theft and also corporal punishment for other lesser misdemeanours (Anderson, 1989; 334).

Like the other monotheistic religions, Muslims also believe in a final day when the world will come to an end and everyone will be judged and rewarded or punished according to whether they were predominantly good or evil (Krüger et al., 2009; 249). They also believe that the worst parts of hell will be for those who reject Allah. Muslims believe that everything in the universe happens according to the will and knowledge of Allah (Krüger et al., 2009; 250). Despite this, they still believe that every person has a free will to choose either good or bad. However, they argue that Allah already knows what we will do.

Jihaad is an important concept in our understanding of Islam. It has two interpretations: It can refer to an inner struggle of an individual Muslim to live a good life and on the community level to combat oppression, corruption, injustice and evil (Krüger et al., 2009; 262). On the other hand it can also refer to a holy war, which means taking up arms in a “just war” against evil to keep corruption from overwhelming the earth. War is thus justified when it opposes evil and sustains the good. However, it can also be interpreted as a call to Muslims to bring the non-Islamic world under the rule of Islam (Anderson, 1989; 334).

#### 4.6.3. The Five Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars form the basis of Islam (Krüger et al., 2009; 254). The first pillar is the declaration of faith. Every Muslim must declare that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his prophet. The second pillar is ritual prayer five times a day: at dawn, just after noon, late afternoon, just after the sun has set and also after dark (Krüger et al., 2009; 254-255). The third pillar is fasting during the month of Ramadan (Krüger et al., 2009; 256). During this time Muslims do not eat between sunrise and sunset (Krüger et al., 2009; 255). They are also expected to abstain from liquor, smoking and sex and to refrain from bad or frivolous thoughts, remarks or actions (Krüger et al., 2009; 256). The fourth pillar is the duty to give alms to the poor (Krüger et al., 2009; 257). The Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca is the fifth pillar. Once in their life, every Muslim is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca if at all possible.

#### 4.6.4. The Islamic community or ummah

Muslims are never allowed to be only individuals, but see themselves as part of the larger community of believers (Krüger et al., 2009; 261). Every individual is seen as an “abd” of God (Kerr, 1989; 317). This means both a worshipper and a servant at the same time. For Muslims there is no distinction between worshipping God and the rest of a person’s life. It is seen as one whole. The mosque is the centre of the Muslim community and it is here where they meet for prayer, weddings, receptions and other meetings.

#### 4.6.5. Forms of Islam

Islam is divided into Sunni and Shia Islam (Krüger et al., 2009; 250). The Sunni is the largest group and represents about 87% of all Muslims. Shia Islam makes up about 13% and is

predominantly found in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Lebanon and areas of Iraq.

The ethos of Sunni Islam is said to be very different from Shia Islam. The main disagreement between the two forms of Islam concerns authority. The Sunni Muslims allow for the consensus of the community to decide on matters that are not dealt with directly in the Hadith or the Quran.

In contrast, Shia Islam asserts that the final authority in these matters should reside in divinely appointed Imams. The Shia tradition also has an underlying veneration of suffering. There developed a variety of sects in Shia Islam, for example the Sufis, a group of Islamic mystics who explore the inner and esoteric dimension of the faith (Krüger et al., 2009; 252).

The way that the great monotheistic religions have been shown to develop out of each other over time shows that no religion exists in an historical vacuum. Next we will look at the religiously unaffiliated.

#### **4.7. The religiously unaffiliated**

For the purposes of this research this category includes agnostics, atheists, secular humanists, freethinkers, rationalists and sceptics who do not belong to any religious faith (Pew Research Center, 2012). They might have some spiritual beliefs, but do not belong to a specific religion.

The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU, 2017) defines humanism as “a democratic and ethical life stance that affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. Humanism stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. Humanism is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality”.

Humanism has existed since ancient times and was nurtured by the ideas and philosophies of Pythagoras and Socrates in the West and Confucius and Buddha in the East (Schmidt, 1988; 473). These ideas survived the fall of the Roman Empire and during medieval times there was a fusion of Greek and Christian thought which, during the Renaissance, led to a form of Christian



humanism. Christian humanists focused their study on God's creation and thus also the world of man.

Secular humanism is an alternative world view to that provided by the traditional religions. It begins with an explicit rejection of the belief in God. There are a variety of humanisms, including Marxism, atheistic existentialism and a liberal humanist movement within Anglo-American philosophy. Despite significant differences, they all share a world view that is human-centred, atheistic and focussed on this world.

#### 4.7.1. Human Centred

At the heart of humanism there is an affirmation of human values and a positive hope in the future and potential of mankind (Schmidt, 1988; 475). Humans and the natural world are considered and celebrated as that which ultimately concerns us most. Humanism aspires to the complete fulfilment of human potential and personality in the here and now. For humanists all institutions and practices must be judged on whether they nurture or repress us, free or enslave us and whether they enhance or endanger the fulfilment of human life collectively and individually.

#### 4.7.2. Atheism

"Atheism" comes from the Greek words "a" which means "no", and "theos" which means "god" (Krüger et al., 2009; 291). It probably began at the dawn of Western civilisation in Ancient Greece when Milesian philosophers rejected mythological explanations for the way the world works in favour of naturalistic explanations (Baggini, 2003; 74). The Milesian philosophers argued that nature was all that there is and that it was not necessary to believe in gods to be able to understand the world. It is from this tradition of naturalism that atheism grew (Krüger et al., 2009; 292). It was not confined to the West. In the sixth century BCE there also developed an atheist movement among Hindus.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, criticism of religion increased and towards the end of the eighteenth century a few individuals declared themselves to be atheists (Krüger et al., 2009; 292). This period was known as the Enlightenment.

### 4.7.3. The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment movement directly challenged the teachings of the church (Esmer & Pettersson, 2007; 482). During the eighteenth century some philosophers rejected metaphysics, theological solutions and the authority of tradition (Lagarde & Michard, 1970; 9). These philosophers had complete confidence in the ability of human reason to find solutions to our problems and an optimistic belief in human progress.

Based on the Cartesian principle, they rejected all authority other than reason (Lagarde & Michard, 1970; 12). This gave them an effective weapon against religious dogma (Lagarde & Michard, 1970; 15). They stood up to affirm what they saw as the moral autonomy of free men as opposed to those submissive to religious authorities and they began to examine all aspects of life in the light of reason (Lagarde & Michard, 1970; 13).

Voyages of discovery opened up new worlds and allowed these thinkers to learn about new cultures, including their religions. This influenced them to develop the idea of universal relativity. They compared different customs and this led them to criticise some aspects of European culture, including some aspects of Christianity (Lagarde & Michard, 1970; 14). Instead they saw wisdom in paganism. They also admired the tolerance of some foreign rulers and the wisdom of the Chinese. From this they concluded that morality does not necessarily stem from the Christian religion.

It also led to a critical analysis of sacred texts. Freethinkers pointed out several contradictions. Since, according to them, the Bible was found to be incoherent, composed at different times, modified, and changed, they asked how it can be considered to be the word of God, directly inspired by Him and passed on to us in its original form? Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle likened religious tales to fables and argued that they were the result of the ignorance of the first men who had no better explanations for the natural phenomena that they observed around them (Lagarde & Michard, 1970; 23). They doubted that miracles ever occurred or can occur. In addition they criticised the ambitions of the pope. They also severely judged the intolerance of Catholicism towards other Christians, heretics and refugees, as well as the actions of Protestants like Luther and Calvin.

These philosophers also argue that free inquiry is necessary for scientific progress (Lagarde & Michard, 1970; 17). Against belief in miracles, scholastic errors and blind respect for authority, they propose a critical spirit, positive science and experimentation based on logic and reason (Lagarde & Michard, 1970; 24).

At times this creed took on a religious fervour. During the French Revolution there was a brief attempt to replace Christianity with a “Cult of reason” (Spencer, 2014; 134). This was, however, short-lived and after the instigators were guillotined, it was replaced by “The cult of the supreme being”, which was a compromise between the religious and secularly inclined. When Napoleon took over he reinstated normal relations with the Vatican (Detzler, 1988; 502).

During the nineteenth century criticism of religion grew further with the writings of Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud. However, attempts during the twentieth century to construct purely atheist societies in places like Russia, China, Albania and North Korea have mostly failed and led to large-scale misery and violence (Spencer, 2014; xx).

#### 4.7.4. Atheist beliefs

Atheism can be defined as the belief that there are no gods or God. Atheists have been known under a variety of names like Brights, Cartesians, communists, determinists, Epicureans, existentialists, fatalists, freethinkers, humanists, infidels, libertines, naturalists, sceptics, secularists and unbelievers to name only a few (Spencer, 2014; xviii). These people have rejected God for a variety of reasons. However, they all assert that belief in supernatural beings is unwarranted by a rational analysis of human experience and the test of scientific evidence (Schmidt, 1988; 473). They believe that the world exists by itself and that there is no need or grounds to believe in a creator.

According to this world view humans are part of a natural evolutionary process and not the result of a creative act (Schmidt, 1988; 474). This also means that there is no ultimate human destiny. We are free, but also responsible for ourselves and the type of societies that we live in. Since no deity will save us, we have to save ourselves. We are thus alone in the world, without the consolation that comes with a belief in eternal values, reward in heaven and a cosmic plan to save us. It is a world that can be considered by existentialists like Sartre to be indifferent and

meaningless. Albert Camus took a more positive view and argued in *The myth of Sisyphus* ([1942] 2000) that we could create our own meaning.

Atheistic existentialists have examined human existence through alienation, forlornness and despair (Schmidt, 1988; 474). Life is seen to have no rational or universal meaning except that which is authentic for the individual (Thiselton, 1989; 376). This philosophy has been criticised for being pessimistic and to lend itself to a kind of individualism where everyone is free to do as they please.

However, despite the critique that atheism is a nihilistic and a negative world view, others, like the Anglo-American humanists are more cheerful and just get on with living their lives as if there is no god and attempt to make the best of it (Schmidt, 1988; 474). Many humanists have been able to create lives of significance and meaning like Bertrand Russell who is well known for his dedication to justice and peace (Schmidt, 1988; 477)

Some humanists are hostile to religion. They argue that belief in a god is neither reasonable nor scientific and that religious institutions are intellectually dishonest and an impediment to the fulfilment of human potential (Schmidt, 1988; 474). According to them religion promotes fear, dependence and irrationality as opposed to courage, independence and rationality.

Agnostics believe that we cannot know for sure whether there is a god or gods given the available evidence, so they reserve judgement on the issue until clear evidence is found (Schmidt, 1988; 459).

#### 4.7.5. A focus on this world

Schmidt (1988; 476) writes that Humanism focuses on this world, rather than the next. Marxists argue that it is the other-worldliness of theism that blinds people to their conditions in this life and which leads them to give up justice in this world for a heavenly existence in the next (Schmidt, 1988; 477). Like Marxists other humanists are concerned with this world, but have often been very critical of the way Marxists have been willing to suppress human freedom and sacrifice people in an attempt to create a utopia. Some humanists are also critical of the determinism and collectivism of Marxism.

In its stead, Anglo-American humanists strive to establish a world community that is based on democratic principles, a deep respect for human life, racial and sexual equality, libertarianism, a more equal distribution of food, medical care, education and wealth and the resolution of conflict through reasoning, rather than violence.

#### 4.7.6. A Humanist manifesto

Around 1927 Charles Francis Potter, a former Baptist and Unitarian minister, found the Humanist Society of New York. He meant for it to be a religious organisation.

In 1930 he published a book called *Humanism: a new religion* in which traditional Christian beliefs were openly rejected and in which the main tenets of humanism were set out incorporating elements of naturalism, materialism, rationalism and socialism. In 1933 the Humanist Society of New York published a manifesto which sets out their humanist ideas. These two documents became the cornerstones of modern humanism.

In 1941 the American Humanist Association (AHA) was founded. They emphasised the non theistic and secular nature of humanism. In 1952 the International Humanist and Ethical Union was founded in Amsterdam as the global representative body of humanist movements (IHEU, 2017). Since then a second humanist manifesto was published by AHA in 1973 and more recently a third one in 2003, as well as similar documents by other organisations (American Humanist Organization, 2017).

In a document entitled *Humanist Manifesto III: Humanism and its aspirations* the AHA asserts that we attain knowledge by observing, experimenting and through rational analysis. Humans are the result of unguided evolutionary change and thus an integral part of nature. We derive our ethical values from human needs and interests as tested by experience. Individuals can live a fulfilling life by participating in the service of humane ideals. We are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. By working for the benefit of society we can maximise our individual happiness.

Similarly, in *A Secular Humanist Declaration* published in 1980 by the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (now the Council of Secular Humanism) it states that secular humanism is based on the following principles: first, they are committed to free inquiry. Second, they believe in the separation of church and state. Third, they uphold the ideal of freedom and oppose all forms of totalitarianism. Fourth, they believe in ethics based on critical intelligence. Fifth, they believe that a moral education should be cultivated in children and young adults. Sixth, they are sceptical of religious claims. Seventh, they are committed to reason and the use of rational methods of inquiry, logic and evidence to develop knowledge and to test claims of truth. Eighth, they believe that science, despite its imperfections, is the best way to understand the world and they appreciate the benefits of science and technology. Ninth, they support the theory of evolution and tenth, they value education as essential to creating free, humane and democratic societies (Council for Secular Humanism, 2017).

#### 4.7.7. Humanist ethics

Some philosophers argue that morality should be based on reason and is separate from religion (Rachels, 2003; 62). Atheists often argue that it is easy to decide what is moral if you believe in equality and consider the welfare of other people to be on the same level as your own because of our shared humanity (Krüger et al., 2009; 294). According to Edwords (2017), humanist ethics are grounded in human needs and concerns as opposed to the alleged needs of deities or transcendental entities or powers. They argue that the basic motivations that determine our values stem from our biology and early experiences. Our needs, interests and desires stem from our need to survive as a species.

They measure the value of a choice on how it affects human lives, including that of an individual, their family, society and all the people of the earth. Since we have to practice our ethics in a living context, not an ideal one, most humanists take a non-absolutist approach to ethics. By diligently gathering information, careful consideration of the immediate and future consequences, weighing the alternatives and thinking hard, they believe they can come to better moral decisions than by relying on absolutistic moral systems that attempts to enforce rigid morals on a less than ideal world.

According to the *Humanist Manifesto III* (American Humanist Association, 2017) humanists acknowledge the inherent worth in every individual and are committed to treating everyone with dignity. They generally take a liberal stance on social policies, valuing liberty and individual autonomy and supporting religious freedom, the freedom of speech, freedom of association, the right to marriage and divorce, birth control, abortion and euthanasia.

Contemporary humanism can be seen as both a way of life and a way of seeing the world, much like some traditional religions (Schmidt, 188; 477). According to Schmidt (1988; 479), the worlds of humanists and religionists are the same. However, for the humanist there is nothing more to life than life itself, whereas religionists see something more in life that makes everything different.

This chapter has provided an overview of the major world religions and their core tenets. In the next chapter I will explore how the adherents of these different groups and teachings engage politically.

## Chapter Five

### Results: Presentation and discussion

#### 5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will present the World Values Survey data and briefly discuss it. As discussed in the methodology chapter, secondary data analysis is used to answer the research question of ‘how do the world’s major religions engage in politics’. The two secondary questions will also be answered in this chapter; so as to determine whether belonging to a religious faith makes you more or less likely to engage in politics, and whether some religious groups are more positively disposed towards political violence.

#### 5.2. Conventional Political Engagement

##### 5.2.1. Interest in politics

Table 5.1 Interest in politics according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
% Interested	39.9%	51.4%	44.1%	42.1%	38.2%	50.4%	47.3%	46.2%
N = x	540	2550	377	12888	8328	7570	20890	14106

The Pearson’s chi-square test looks at whether the two categorical variables being tested are independent. It does not test the direction or strength of the relationship. It assumes that there is no relationship between the two variables. This is known as the null hypothesis. If the chi-square is 0, we can accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no relationship between the variables. The larger the chi-square, the less the chance is that the results are due to chance. The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (405.043) so we can reject the null hypothesis.

The smaller the p-value, the more likely it is that the findings are valid and have not occurred by chance. The p-value is .000. That means that it is statistically extremely significant. There is less



than a 1% chance that the relationship occurred by chance. However, a statistically significant result is not always a practically significant result

The Cramer's V, used to measure the effect size, is .077. We can conclude that when it comes to an interest in politics (DV), there is a difference in the world population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, small/weak.

51.4% of Buddhists report that they are interested in politics, followed by 50.4% of Protestants and 47.3% of Muslims. Only 39.9% of Hindus report that they are interested in politics. The Orthodox Christians seem to be the least interested in politics, with only 38.2%.

If religion really does make people more passive by diverting their attention from this life to the next, I would have expected to find those who are religiously unaffiliated to show considerable more interest in politics than those who belong to a religion that emphasises belief in an after-life. This does not seem to be the case.

### 5.2.2. Importance of politics

Table 5.2 Importance of politics according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
% Important	42.9%	56.8%	39.5%	39.9%	31.1%	48.3%	44.8%	41.6%

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (837.460), so we can reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is statistically extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .112. We can thus conclude that when it comes to importance of politics in life (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, small/weak to moderate.

56.8% of Buddhists report that they consider politics to be important in life, followed by 48.3% of Protestants and 44.8% of Muslims. Only 39.5% of Jews report that they believe politics is important in life. 31.1% of Orthodox Christians is again the lowest percentage among the groups.

41.6% of the religiously unaffiliated consider politics to be important in life. This is again a smaller percentage than of various faiths. This would seem to support the above finding that

believing in religious ideas does not necessarily mean that one is less interested in politics or think it less important.

### 5.2.3. Sources of information

Table 5.3 Sources of information

Sources of information (% regularly)	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Muslim	Religiously unaffiliated
Daily Newspaper	80.6%	77.3%	62.4%	54.9%	51.8%	56.7%	39.9%	59.2%
Talking with friends or colleagues	78.0%	72.4%	67.7%	73.8%	81.7%	84.2%	77.7%	75.2%
Television news	93.1%	94.3%	90.5%	88.5%	93.9%	82.3%	88.1%	89.5%
Radio news	76.5%	51.4%	57.6%	71.1%	57.1%	75.2%	54.5%	58.4%

#### 5.2.3.1. Daily newspaper

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (3207.983), so we can reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is statistically extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .128. We can conclude that when it comes to using daily newspapers as a source of information (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV); this association is, however weak to moderate.

80.6% of Hindus report that they read the newspaper regularly as a source of information. They are followed by 77.3% of Buddhists and 62.4% of Jews. Only 51.1% of Orthodox Christians say that they read the newspaper regularly. The lowest percentage is recorded by the Muslims with 39.9%.

#### 5.2.3.2. Talking with friends or colleagues

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (666.990), so we can reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is statistically extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .058. We can conclude that when it comes to talking with friends or colleagues as an information source (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV); this association is, however, weak.

84.2% of Protestants report that they get the news by regularly talking with friends or colleagues. They are followed by 81.7% of Orthodox Christians and 78.0% of Hindus. 72.4% of Buddhists report that they regularly discuss news with their friends or colleagues. The group with the lowest percentage is the Jews with 67.7 %.

#### 5.2.3.3. Television news

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (767.562), so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .063. We can conclude that when it comes to using television news as a source of information (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, weak/small.

The vast majority of respondents watch the news regularly on television as a source of information. 94.3% of Buddhists report that they watch television news regularly. They are followed by 93.9% of Orthodox Christians and 93.1% of Hindus. 88.1% of Muslims report that they regularly watch the news on television. The percentage of respondents is the lowest among Protestants with 82.3%.

#### 5.2.3.4. Radio news

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (2148.369), so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .105. We can conclude that when it comes to listening to the radio as a source of information (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, weak to moderate.

76.5% of Hindus report that they listen regularly to the news on the radio. They are followed by 75.2% of Protestants and 71.1% of Catholics. Only 54.5% of Muslims report that they listen regularly to the news on the radio. The percentage of respondents is the lowest among Buddhists with 51.4%.

Most respondents seem to prefer watching the news on television. This may suggest that it is the most important source of information to the majority of citizens. It should be kept in mind by political actors who wish to disseminate their message to as wide an audience as possible.

#### 5.2.4. Voting behaviour

##### 5.2.4.1. Voting in local elections

Table 5.4 Voting in the local elections according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
% Usually	85.7%	87.1%	92.3%	88.2%	88.6%	83.5%	72.9%	79.3%

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (1684.829), so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .163. We can conclude that when it comes to voting in local elections (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, weak to moderate.

92.3% of Jews report that they usually vote in local elections. They are followed by 88.6% of Orthodox Christians and 88.2% of Catholics. 79.3% of the religiously unaffiliated report that they usually vote during the local elections. The percentage of respondents is the lowest among Muslims with 72.9%.

## 5.2.4.2. Voting in national elections

Table 5.5 Voting in the national elections according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
% Usually	88.5%	84.8%	95.3%	89.4%	88.5%	87.3%	75.1%	76.5%

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (1798.953), so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .166. We can conclude that when it comes to voting in national elections (DV), there is a difference in the population based in religion (IV). This association is, however, weak to moderate.

95.3% of Jews report that they usually vote in national elections. They are followed by 89.4% of Catholics and 88.5% of Hindus and Orthodox Christians. 76.5% of the religiously unaffiliated report that they usually vote during the national elections. The percentage of respondents is the lowest among Muslims with 75.1%.

Overall, more respondents seem vote during national than during local elections. A higher percentage of several religious groups said they usually vote as compared to those who are unaffiliated.

## 5.2.4.3. Self-positioning on the political scale

Table 5.6 Mean scores on the political scale according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
Mean	3.03	2.31	4.98	5.40	5.21	5.11	4.43	3.46
Std. Deviation	5.319	4.877	2.527	2.934	2.590	3.092	4.186	4.046

Religion does impact where respondents position themselves on the political scale as the p-value is .000. The ETA-squared is .049, which means that only 4.9% of variance in where respondents

position themselves on the political scale can be explained by religion. The ETA is .222, which is a large effect.

On a scale from one to ten, with one meaning “left” and ten meaning “right”, the mean score for Buddhists is 2.31. They are followed by Hindus with 3.03 and the religiously unaffiliated, with a mean score of 3.46. Orthodox Christians have a mean score of 5.21. The religious group with the highest mean score is the Catholics with 5.40.

It seems that the two Asian religions, Buddhists and Hindus, tend towards the left of the political spectrum. Buddhist recorded the mean score the furthest to the left. This might suggest that these religious groups prefer to vote for political parties on the left. In contrast, Catholics tended the furthest to the right, followed by the Orthodox Christians and then Protestants. The three Christian groups recorded mean scores around the centre of the political scale. This might suggest that members of these groups would prefer to vote for political parties who are more in the centre to centre-right on the political scale. The other groups fall somewhere in between.

#### 5.2.5. Membership of Civic organisations (Civic engagement)

Table 5.7 Civic engagement according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
% Very engaged	6.7%	2.8%	7.8%	5.3%	1.3%	6.3%	2.3%	1.3%
% Engaged	52.1%	41.2%	60.2%	59.8%	31.3%	80.3%	24.7%	30.8%
Total engaged	58.8%	44.0%	68.0%	65.1%	32.6%	86.6%	27.0%	32.1%

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (11996.350), so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer’s V, used to measure the effect size, is .298. We can conclude that when it comes to civic engagement (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, moderate.

Protestants record a considerably higher percentage (86.6%) than everybody else. They are followed by the Jews with 68.0% and the Catholics with 65.1%. Among those who are very engaged, the Jews recorded the highest percentage (7.8%), followed by Hindus (6.7%) and then Protestants (6.3%). Only 32.1% of those who are religiously unaffiliated, report that they are members of a civic organisation. The group that recorded the lowest percentage is the Muslims with 27.0%.

## 5.2.6. Conventional protest action

### 5.2.6.1. Signed a petition

Table 5.8 Signing of petitions according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
Have done	11.7%	18.6%	25.2%	22.4%	8.8%	31.0%	6.9%	27.5%

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (9954.590), so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .193. We can conclude that when it comes to signing a petition (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, weak to moderate.

31.0% of Protestants report that they have signed a petition. They are followed by 27.5% of those who are religiously unaffiliated and 25.2% of Jews. Only 8.8% of Orthodox Christians report that they have signed a petition. Muslims record the lowest percentage of 6.9%.

## 5.2.6.2. Joining in boycotts

Table 5.9 Participation in boycotts according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
Have done	4.0%	2.3%	7.3%	5.3%	1.9%	7.7%	3.7%	7.3%

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (5533.322), so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .145. We can conclude that when it comes to joining boycotts (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, weak to moderate.

7.7% of Protestants report that they have joined in a boycott. They are followed by 7.3% of those who are religiously unaffiliated and 7.3%. Only 2.3% of Buddhists report that they have taken part in a boycott. Orthodox Christians record the lowest percentage of 1.9%.

## 5.2.6.3. Attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations

Table 5.10 Participation in lawful/peaceful demonstrations according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
Have done	7.2%	4.5%	13.9%	11.9%	9.3%	11.3%	12.1%	12.5%

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (5321.470) so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .141. We can conclude that when it comes to attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, weak to moderate.

13.9% of Jews report that they have attended lawful or peaceful demonstrations. They are followed by 12.5% of those who are religiously unaffiliated and 12.1% of Muslims. Only 7.2%



of Hindus report that they have taken part in lawful or peaceful demonstrations. Buddhists record the lowest percentage with 4.5%.

#### 5.2.6.4. Other political action

Table 5.11 Participation in other political action according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
Have done	0.5%	1.6%	5.3%	3.9%	3.3%	5.0%	3.8%	4.7%

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (9333.277), so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .190. We can conclude that when it comes to other political action (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, weak to moderate.

5.3% of Jews report that they have taken part in other political action. They are followed by 5.0% of Protestants and 4.7% of those who are religiously unaffiliated. Only 1.6% of Buddhists report that they have taken part in other political action. The group that record the lowest percentage is the Hindus with 0.5%.

### 5.3. Unconventional political engagement

#### 5.3.1. Joining unofficial strikes

Table 5.12 Participation in unofficial strikes according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
Have done	5.0%	3.0%	9.4%	8.4%	4.0%	9.5%	7.2%	8.3%

The Chi-square statistic is greater than 0 (4988.443), so we reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is .000; which is extremely significant. The Cramer's V is .137. We can conclude that

when it comes to joining unofficial strikes (DV), there is a difference in the population based on religion (IV). This association is, however, weak to moderate.

9.5% of Protestants report that they have joined in unofficial strikes. They are followed by 9.4% of Jews and 8.4% of Catholics. Only 4.0% of Orthodox Christians report that they have joined in unofficial strikes. The group that record the lowest percentage is the Buddhists with 3.0%.

### 5.3.2. Attitude towards violence against other people

Table 5.13 Attitude towards violence against other people according to religion

	Hindu	Buddhist	Jew	Catholic	Orthodox	Protestant	Islam	Religiously unaffiliated
Mean	2.01	1.94	2.18	1.88	1.52	1.90	1.82	1.82
Std. Deviation	1.957	1.974	2.062	1.838	1.322	1.742	1.747	1.827

Religious denomination does impact attitudes towards violence against other people as the p-value is .000. However, the ETA squared is .005 which means that only 0.5% of variance in attitude towards violence against other people can be explained by religion.

On a scale from one to ten, with one meaning “never justifiable” and ten meaning “always justifiable”, the mean score for Jews is 2.18. They are followed by Hindus with a mean score of 2.01 and Buddhists with a mean score of 1.94. Protestants record a mean score of 1.90, Catholics a mean score of 1.88, while Muslims and those who are religiously unaffiliated both record a mean score of 1.82. Orthodox Christians record the lowest mean score of 1.52.

All the different groups are very negatively disposed towards violence against other people. There are, however, small differences that might indicate that a certain group is more positively disposed towards the use of violence than others. This could mean that they are more likely to revert to it under certain conditions.

## 5.4. Discussion

In this section, I will lay out the findings for each of the different groups.

### 5.4.1. Hindus

Only 39.9% of Hindus indicate that they are interested in politics. This is the second lowest percentage among the groups. 42.9% indicate that they consider it to be important.

80.6% of Hindus indicate that they regularly read the newspaper to get their news, which is the highest percentage. 78.0% of Hindus say they regularly talk to their friends and colleagues about the news and 93.1% indicate that they regularly watch the news on television, which is also among the higher percentages. In addition, 76.5% indicate that they regularly listen to the news on the radio, the highest percentage. Hindus thus seem to be generally very well informed. They seem to prefer watching the television to get their news. A higher percentage of Hindus than any other religious group seem to listen to the radio as a source of information and many of them regularly talk to their friends about news.

When it comes to voting behaviour, 85.7% of Hindus indicate that they usually vote in the local elections and 88.5% during national elections. In positioning themselves on the political scale, Hindus record a mean score of 3.03, which is the second furthest to the left. It could indicate that they prefer to vote for parties and candidates leaning towards the left.

58.8% of Hindus report to be civically engaged, which is moderate compared to the other groups. However, 6.7% of them seem to be civically very engaged, which is the second highest percentage.

As regards protest actions, Hindus have scored among the lower to moderate percentages. 11.7% of Hindus say they have signed a petition and only 4.0% have taken part in boycotts. This is moderate compared to the other groups. Only 7.2% of Hindus say they have taken part in lawful demonstrations, the second lowest percentage. 0.5% of Hindus report that they have taken part in other political actions, which is the lowest. Hindus thus seem to take less part in conventional protest actions than most other groups.

With regards to unconventional political action, only 5.0% of Hindus indicate that they have taken part in unofficial strikes, which is among the lower percentages. When it comes to attitude

towards violence, Hindus record a mean score of 2.01, which is the second highest. They thus seem to be more positively disposed towards violence than most other groups. Perhaps they are less likely than most groups to participate in unconventional political action, but when they do they might be more prone to revert to violence than most.

#### 5.4.2. Buddhists

51.4% of Buddhists report that they are interested in politics and 56.8% of Buddhists report that they think politics is important, which are the highest percentages among the groups. Buddhists thus seem to be more interested in politics and to attach more importance to it than other groups.

77.3% of Buddhists regularly read the daily newspaper, which is the second highest percentage. 72.4% of Buddhists report that they get their news by regularly talking to friends or colleagues. 94.3% regularly watch the news on television, which is the highest percentage among all the groups. However, only 51.4% of Buddhists report that they regularly listen to the news on the radio, which is the lowest percentage. So Buddhists, as can be expected from people who have an exceptional interest in politics and who deem it to be important, seem on the whole to be very well informed, getting most of their news from the television and daily newspapers. For some reason they do not seem to listen to the news on the radio as much as the other groups.

When it comes to voting, 87.1% of Buddhists report that they usually vote in local elections and 84.8% during the national elections. Surprisingly, a slightly higher percentage of Buddhists seem to vote during local elections than in the national elections. Of all the religious groups they record the lowest mean score (2.31) on the political scale, which means that they lean the furthest to the left. They might thus prefer to vote for parties or candidates on the left of the political spectrum.

44.0% of Buddhists indicate that they are civically engaged, which is moderate compared to the other groups. Only 2.8% report to be very engaged.

Buddhists are frequently among the lower percentages when it comes to protest actions. Although 18.6% report that they have signed a petition, which is moderate compared to the other groups, only 2.3% have taken part in boycotts, the second lowest percentage and only 4.5% have

taken part in lawful and peaceful demonstrations, which is the lowest percentage. In addition only 1.6% of Buddhists say they have taken part in other political action, the second lowest percentage. Despite their high interest in politics and the exceptional importance that they attach to it, this does not seem to translate into more active engagement in politics than the other groups.

With regards to unconventional political action, they recorded the lowest percentage (3.0%) of those who have taken part in unofficial strikes. They thus seem the most unlikely of all the groups to engage in unconventional political action. However, when it comes to attitudes towards violence, they have the third highest mean score (1.94), which places them in the middle of the group.

#### 5.4.3. Jews

44.1% of Jews report that they are interested in politics, which is moderate compared to the other groups. 39.5% indicate that they think politics is important, which is the second lowest percentage.

62.4% of Jews report that they regularly read the newspaper, which is moderate, compared to the other groups. Only 67.7% of Jews say they regularly talk with their friends about the news. This is a significantly lower percentage than the other groups. However, 90.5% report that they regularly watch the news on television. 57.6% of Jews indicate that they regularly listen to the news on the radio, which is moderate. Jews thus seem to prefer getting their news by watching the television and they seem to discuss it less with their friends and colleagues than other groups.

92.3% of Jews report that they usually vote in the local elections and 95.3% in the national elections, which are the highest percentages. Jews thus seem to make a point out of voting. On the political scale they record a mean score of 4.98. This suggests that on the whole, Jews tend towards the centre of the political scale. They tend more to the right than Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and the religiously unaffiliated. This could suggest that they would prefer to vote for parties and candidates in the centre of the political scale.

68.0% of Jews indicate that they are civically engaged, which is the second highest percentage. In addition, 7.8% of them report to be very engaged, which is the highest percentage among the groups. Jews thus seem to be very involved in civil society organisations.

With regards to protest action, the Jews also frequently feature among the highest percentages. 25.2% of Jews say they have signed a petition, the third highest percentage. In addition, 7.3% of them say they have taken part in boycotts, the second highest percentage. They also record the highest percentage of those who have taken part in lawful demonstrations (13.9%) and other political acts (5.3%). The Jews thus seem to participate more in conventional political action than most of the other groups.

With regards to unconventional political action, Jews record the second highest percentage among those who have taken part in unofficial strikes (9.4%). As for the use of violence against other people, Jews recorded the highest mean score (2.18). This is still very low, but it might suggest that they are more positively disposed to the use of violence than other groups. Since they have the second highest percentage of those who have taken part in unofficial strikes and also the highest mean score with regards to the use of violence against other people, it could suggest that they are more likely to participate in unconventional political behaviour than most other groups and perhaps are most likely to revert to violence to achieve their aims.

#### 5.4.4. Catholics

42.1% of Catholics say they are interested in politics and 39.9% consider politics to be important, which is a moderate score.

54.9% reply that they regularly read the newspaper, 73.8% say they regularly talk about the news with friends and colleagues and 88.5% say they regularly watch the news on television. These are all moderate percentages compared to the other groups. 71.1% of Catholics reply that they regularly listen to the news on the radio, which is among the higher percentages. Most Catholics thus seem to prefer getting their news from the television and the radio, rather than by reading the newspaper.

When it comes to voting 88.2% of Catholics say they usually vote during local elections and 89.4% during the national elections. Catholics thus seem to come out in large numbers to vote. The percentage of those who usually vote during national elections is slightly larger than for the local elections. On the political scale the Catholics record a mean score of 5.40. This is in the centre and slightly to the right. This might indicate that they prefer to vote for parties of the centre to centre-right. The three Christian groups record the highest mean scores and are all

positioned around the centre. Of all of the different groups, Catholics have the highest mean score and thus seem to lean the furthest to the right.

65.1% of Catholics report that they are civically engaged. This is moderate compared to the other groups. Of those, 5.3% seem to be very engaged in civil society organisations. They thus seem to be actively engaged in civil society.

As for protest action, Catholics are frequently among the middle percentages. 22.4% of Catholics say they have signed a petition, 5.3% report that they have participated in boycotts and 11.9% have taken part in lawful demonstrations. 3.9% of Catholics answer that they have taken part in other political action.

With regards to unconventional political action they record the third highest percentage of those who have taken part in unofficial strikes (8.4%). Measuring their attitude towards violence, they record a mean score of 1.88, which is the third lowest. So although Catholics might be more likely than most groups to participate in unconventional political action, they seem more negatively disposed towards violence than most of the groups and might thus be more reluctant to use it.

#### 5.4.5. Orthodox Christians

Only 38.2% of Orthodox Christians say they are interested in politics and only 31.1% consider politics to be important, which are the lowest percentages among the groups. Orthodox Christians thus seem to be less interested in politics and to consider it less important than other groups.

51.8% of Orthodox Christians report that they regularly read the newspaper, which is among the lower percentages. However, 81.7% of Orthodox Christians report that they regularly talk with their friends and colleagues about the news and 93.9% report that they regularly watch the news on television, which are the second highest percentages. 57.1% say that they regularly listen to the news on the radio, which is moderate compared to the other groups. Although Orthodox Christians do not seem to be very interested in politics and do not consider it to be very important, they seem to be well informed. They seem to prefer getting their news from the

television and they also seem to discuss it more with their friends and colleagues than most groups.

When it comes to voting, 88.6% report that they usually vote in the local elections, the second highest percentage among the groups. 88.5% indicate that they usually vote during the national elections, which is slightly less than for the local elections and a moderate percentage compared to the other groups. Orthodox Christians record a mean score of 5.21 on the political scale. This is in the centre and slightly to the right and also the second highest of all the groups. They might thus, on the whole, have a preference for political parties and candidates situated in the centre to the centre-right.

32.6% of Orthodox Christians report to be engaged in civic organisations, which is among the lower percentages. Of those, 1.3% can be considered to be very engaged. This is, along with those who are religiously non-affiliated, the lowest among the groups. Orthodox Christians thus seem to be less involved in civil society organisations than most other groups.

With regards to protest action, Orthodox Christians also frequently feature among the lower percentages. 8.8% report that they have signed a petition, the second lowest and only 1.9% answered that they have taken part in boycotts, which is considerably lower than the other groups. 9.3% say they have taken part in lawful demonstrations and 3.3% have taken part in other political action.

As for unconventional political action, only 4.0% report that they have taken part in unofficial strikes, which is the second lowest percentage. They also record the lowest mean score with regards to attitude towards violence (1.52). It could indicate that they are less likely than most other groups to engage in unconventional political action and that on the whole, they are the most negatively disposed towards the use of violence against other people and might be less likely to revert to it than all the other groups.

#### 5.4.6. Protestants

50.4% of Protestants report that they are interested in politics and 48.3% consider it to be important, the second highest percentage among the groups. Protestants thus seem to be more interested and to attach more importance to politics than most other groups.



56.7% of Protestants indicate that they regularly read the newspaper. 84.2% report that they regularly discuss news with friends, which is the highest percentage among all the groups. However, 82.3% of Protestants indicate that they regularly watch the news on television, the lowest percentage. Conversely, 75.2% indicated that they regularly listen to the news on the radio, which is the second highest percentage. Protestants thus seem to watch the news on television less than other groups and to listen for news on the radio more than most. They also seem to discuss news with their friends and colleagues more than other groups.

83.5% of Protestant report that they usually vote in the local elections and 87.3% in national elections. Protestants thus seem to come out in large numbers to vote. On the political scale they record a mean score of 5.11, which might indicate that they prefer parties and candidates that lean towards the centre.

Protestants seem to be significantly more civically engaged than any other group. 86.6% of Protestants report to be engaged in civil society organisations. This is a much larger percentage than any other group. Of those, 6.3% can be considered to be very engaged, the third highest percentage. Protestants thus seem to be very involved in civil society organisations.

When it comes to protest action, Protestants are also among the highest percentages. They register the highest percentages for those who have signed a petition (31.0%) and taken part in a boycott (7.7%). 11.3% say they have taken part in lawful demonstrations and Protestants also record the second highest percentage for those who have taken part in other political action (5.0%). Protestants thus seem to be very actively engaged in conventional political action.

As for unconventional political action, they record the highest percentage among those who have attended unofficial strikes (9.5%). With regards to attitude towards violence against other people, they record a mean score of 1.90, which is moderate compared to the other groups. So although they seem to be more willing than other groups to engage in unconventional political activity, they do not seem to be moderately disposed towards using violence against other people.

#### 5.4.7. Muslims

47.3% of Muslims indicate that they are interested in politics and 44.8% indicate they consider politics to be important, which are the third highest percentages. Compared to other groups

Muslims seem to be relatively interested in politics and a relatively large percentage of them seem to consider it to be important.

With regards to information sources, 39.9% of Muslims indicate that they regularly read the newspaper, which is the lowest percentage among the groups. 77.7% said they regularly discuss the news with friends and colleagues. Most Muslims (88.1%) indicate that they regularly watch the news on television. In addition, 54.5% say they regularly listen to the news on the radio, the second lowest percentage. Most Muslims thus seem to prefer to get their news by watching the television and they seem to read the newspaper less than other groups.

As regards voting, 72.9% of Muslims say they usually vote in local elections and 75.1% during national elections, the lowest percentages among the groups. On the political scale they record a mean score of 4.43, which is slightly left of centre and it might indicate that on the whole they prefer parties and candidates in the centre to the centre-left of the scale.

Only 27.0% of Muslims report to be civically engaged, which is by far the lowest percentage among the groups. Among those who are civically engaged, 2.3 percent can be considered to be very engaged. Muslims thus seem to be less involved in civil society organisations than members of the other groups.

With regards to protest action, only 6.9% of Muslims report that they have signed a petition, the lowest percentage among the groups. In addition, 3.7% say they have taken part in boycotts, which is also among the lower percentages. However, 12.1% indicate they have taken part in lawful demonstrations, which is among the higher percentages. 3.8% report that they have taken part in other political action, which is moderate compared to the other groups.

As regards unconventional political action, 7.2% indicate that they have participated in unofficial strikes, which is moderate compared to the other groups. Muslims also record the second lowest mean score (1.82), along with the religiously unaffiliated, when it comes to their attitude towards violence against other people. This could indicate that Muslims are not particularly positively disposed towards violence and are not more likely than most other groups to participate in unconventional political action or to revert to violence.

#### 5.4.8. Religiously unaffiliated

46.2% of those who are religiously unaffiliated indicate that they are interested in politics and 41.6% say they consider politics to be important, which are moderate percentages.

With regards to sources of information, 59.2% indicate that they regularly read the newspaper, 75.2% say they regularly discuss the news with their friends or colleagues, 89.5% indicate they regularly watch the news on television and 58.4% indicate that they regularly listen to the news on the radio. The largest percentage of this group seems to get informed by watching the news on television.

79.3% indicate that they usually vote in the local elections and 76.5% during national elections, which are the second lowest percentages. A slightly lower percentage have answered that they usually vote during national elections rather than during local elections. They record a mean score of 3.46 on the political scale. This might indicate that on the whole they prefer parties and candidates that lean to the left-centre.

Only 32.1% report to be civically engaged, which is the second lowest percentage among the groups. Of those, only 1.3% can be considered to be very active. They thus seem to be poorly engaged in civil society organisations compared to most of the other groups.

However, when it comes to protest action, those who are religiously unaffiliated are consistently among the higher percentages. They record the second highest percentages of those who have signed a petition (27.5%), those who have taken part in a boycott (7.3%) and those who have taken part in lawful demonstrations (12.5%). They also record the third highest percentage of those who have taken part in other political activities (4.7%). They thus seem to engage more than most groups in conventional protest action.

With regards to unconventional political action they are also among the moderate percentages of those who have taken part in unofficial strikes (8.3%). They record the second lowest mean score along with Muslims (1.82) when it comes to their attitude towards violence against other people. Although they thus seem moderately willing to take part in unconventional political action, they might be more reluctant than most to revert to violence to achieve their aims.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

The religiously unaffiliated are clearly not more politically engaged than the adherents of several religious groups. It would thus seem that religion, on the whole, is not the “opium of the masses”, but that in varying degrees followers of the world’s religions are politically active and engaged.

In the final chapter I will relate some of these findings to the literature, further analyse the findings to more fully answer the research questions and make some suggestions for future research.

## Chapter Six

### The conclusion

#### 6.1. Introduction

This final chapter will include some of the main observations made from the data analysis as they pertain to the main objective of this study, which is to determine how the world's major religions engage politically. First I will summarise the findings, then I will write down conclusions and how they answer the research questions and finally I will make some recommendations for further studies.

#### 6.2. Research findings

In answering the three research questions as presented in chapter one, the broad findings were as follows: *First*, there are considerable differences in the extent to which the world's major religions engage politically. They will be discussed more thoroughly and linked to the literature in the next section. *Second*, religion as a whole cannot be considered to be “the opium of the masses”. Belief in an afterlife does not seem to necessarily mean that a person will engage less in politics or, similarly, does a belief in only this world not necessarily make a person more likely to engage in politics. *Third*, there are some religious groups who seem to be slightly more positive towards violence than others. However, it needs to be qualified by stating that all the groups recorded a very negative attitude towards violence against other people and it is not clear whether the slight differences in mean scores translate into a significant propensity for violent political behaviour.

##### 6.2.1. How do the world's religions engage politically?

The short answer is: very differently. While keeping in mind that the research has been exploratory, a tentative analysis is provided towards understanding the differences between the political engagements of the different world religions. To do this links and references have been made to the literature on religion and politics as presented in the literature review.

**Hindus** have recorded a relatively low interest in politics. However, they seem to keep well informed. They read the daily newspaper and listen to the news on the radio more than other groups. On the political scale they seem to tend towards the left, which might suggest that they prefer leftist parties and candidates. Hindus seem to be moderately engaged in civil society organisations and to take less part in conventional and unconventional political action than most other groups. This low level of engagement is perhaps due to a belief in karma and a fatalistic approach to life (Krüger et al., 2009; 81). They also appear to be more positively disposed towards violence against other people than most other groups. Perhaps this stems from their ancient past as a warrior culture, mentioned by Krüger et al. (2009; 67). It might indicate that they are more likely to revert to it under certain conditions.

**Buddhists** have recorded the highest interest in politics and seem to attach the most importance to politics of all the groups. As can be expected of people who are so interested in politics and deem it to be exceptionally important, they seem to keep very well informed. They appear to watch the news on television more than any other group, although they listen to the radio least. On the political scale Buddhists tend the furthest to the left of all the groups, which might mean that they prefer political parties and candidates on the left. However, their high interest in politics and the high importance that they seem to attach to it do not appear to translate into more active engagement. Buddhists seem to be moderately engaged in civic organisations and to participate poorly in conventional and unconventional political actions. They have recorded the lowest level of participation in unconventional political behaviour. However, when it comes to their attitude towards violence against other people, they recorded the third highest mean score, which could mean that they are more likely to revert to violence than most other groups. This seems to belie their pacifistic image, since I would have expected them to be among those who most strongly reject the use of violence against other people.

**Jews** seem to be moderately interested in politics and to attach a low importance to it. Nevertheless, they appear to be well informed, although they seem to discuss the news less with friends and colleagues than other groups. The apparent moderate interest and low importance that they seem to attach to politics do not appear to prevent Jews from being very actively engaged in it. Jews vote more than the other groups in both the local and national elections. On the political scale Jews seem to tend towards the centre, which could mean that they prefer

centrist parties, candidates and thus moderate politics. They also appear to be very engaged in civil society organisations. In addition, they seem to participate more than most groups in conventional and unconventional political action. They also seem to be the most positively disposed towards violence against other people. This might suggest that Jews are more likely than most other groups to engage in unconventional politics and are perhaps more likely to revert to violence to achieve their aims. This active engagement with politics is perhaps because of their faith which has been described in the literature as a religion that is more concerned with this life in the here and now than with speculation on what will happen in the future or after we are dead (Krüger et al., 2009; 167). The relatively positive attitude towards violence might be because many Jews live in Israel under constant threat from Palestinian and Muslim hostility, which might force them to take a pragmatic approach to it.

**Catholics** seem to be moderately interested in politics and to attach moderate importance to it. However, they seem to keep well informed and come out in large numbers to vote during both local and national elections. On the political scale they tend towards the centre and slightly to the right. They also seem to tend the furthest to the right of all the groups. This might suggest that they would prefer parties and candidates around the centre and slightly to the right, and thus parties supportive of more traditional values. They appear to be moderately engaged in civic organisations and also to participate moderately in conventional political action. Possible explanations for this might be that they are communally orientated and have historically tended to support authoritarian regimes (Bruce 2003). However, they seem to participate more than most groups in unconventional political activity, but they are more negatively disposed towards violence than most of the groups and might thus be more reluctant to use it.

**Orthodox Christians** seem to be the least interested in politics and to attach the least importance to it. However, they appear to keep well informed. They also seem to discuss the news with friends and colleagues more than most other groups. They appear to come out in large numbers to vote and on the political scale they seem to tend towards the centre and slightly to the right. They might thus prefer such parties and candidates that are supportive of traditional values. However, they seem to be poorly engaged in civil society organisations and to be unlikely to participate in both conventional and unconventional political behaviour. Orthodox Christians also appear to be the most negatively disposed towards violence against other people. They

might thus be more reluctant to use it than any of the other groups. The low level of interest and importance attached to politics and the low levels of political participation among Orthodox Christians are, perhaps, not due to their faith. Since the relation between religion and most of the indicators is weak to moderate, it can perhaps be better explained by the fact that most adherents of this faith live in countries that were formerly part of the USSR (Sadgrove, 1989; 354). It could be that a strong democratic culture has not yet developed there, which might explain their lack of participation. Most likely it is due to a combination of factors. Their negative attitude towards violence is perhaps due to the long exposure to brutal repression by the former Communist regimes.

**Protestants** seem to be very interested in politics and to attach a lot of importance to it. They appear to keep well informed. Despite watching less television than the other groups they seem to discuss the news with friends and colleagues more. They also listen to the radio more than most. Protestants appear to come out in large numbers to vote. On the political scale they seem to tend towards the centre and might thus prefer centrist parties and candidates, and adopt a more moderate stance. They seem significantly more engaged in civil society organisations than any other group. In addition, they appear to be highly engaged in both conventional and unconventional political activities. Protestants seem to participate more in unconventional political action than any other group. However, they appear to be moderately disposed towards violence against other people. So, although they seem more likely than all the other groups to take part in unconventional political action, they might be only moderately inclined to revert to violence. The high levels of civic engagement and participation in both conventional and unconventional political action seem to confirm the assertion by Bruce (2003; 249) that Protestantism demands an active, mindful and diligent laity which gives an impetus to lay activism. It also seems to support the claim by Meredith McGuire (Haralambros & Holborn, 1995; 463) that Protestantism can be expected to have a strong effect on social change because it concerns itself with this world and not just spiritual and holy matters like Buddhism. In addition, the relatively moderate and negative attitudes towards violence by the three Christian groups support the assertion by Bruce that Christianity constraints movements which want to use violence to pursue their goals.



**Muslims** seem to be very interested in politics and to attach a lot of importance to it. They appear to keep well informed. However, they read the daily newspaper less than any of the other groups. Muslims vote less than all the other groups in both local and national elections. On the political scale they seem to tend towards the centre and slightly to the left, which might mean that they prefer to vote for parties and candidates around the centre to the centre-left. Muslims appear to be less engaged in civil society organisations than all the other groups. With regards to conventional political action, they participate poorly in the signing of petitions and boycotts. However, they seem to participate strongly in legal demonstrations and moderately in other political action. Muslims also appear to participate moderately in unconventional political action. They seem to be more negatively disposed towards the use of violence against other people than most. This seems to suggest that they are not particularly more violent than other groups. The low levels of voting, civic engagement and participation are not necessarily due to their faith. A large percentage of Muslims live in undemocratic countries under authoritarian governments (Bruce, 2003) and it might be that they do not get enough opportunities to engage fully with politics.

**The religiously unaffiliated** have reported a moderate interest in politics and seem to attach moderate importance to it. However, they appear to keep well informed. The religiously unaffiliated seem to come out in large numbers to vote in both the local and national elections. On the political scale they tend towards the left-centre. This could mean that they prefer to vote for parties and candidates that are left-centrists. They appear to be poorly engaged in civil society organisations. Conversely, they seem to be very active when it comes to conventional political action. They appear to be moderately engaged in unconventional political action and more negative towards violence than most groups. Their poor engagement in civil society organisations might mean that they miss out on the political acumen that is to be gained by being part of such organisations (Almond and Verba; 1963; 310). Perhaps their negative attitude towards violence against other people stems from their putting humans at the centre of their concerns (Schmidt, 1988; 475) and their striving to build a more humane society (IHEU, 2017).

There are thus clear differences in the political engagement of the world's major religions.

### 6.2.2. Does belonging to a religious faith make you more or less likely to engage with conventional politics: Is religion the opium of the masses?

Religion, on the whole, does not appear to be the opium of the masses as suggested by Marx. If it was, I would expect those who are religiously unaffiliated to be considerably more engaged in politics than those who belong to a religion. This does not appear to be the case.

Jews and Protestants seem to be considerably more engaged than any other groups and are frequently more engaged than the religiously unaffiliated. Both these groups believe in an afterlife. It thus seems that belief in an afterlife does not necessarily mean that a person will neglect this life or participate less in politics than those who believe that this life is all that we have and that we thus have to make the most of it.

In defence of Marx, it is a bad idea to quote an author out of context. Marx wrote his famous phrase in the introduction to his work *A contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right* in 1843 (Cline, 2017). There is no way of knowing how the mass public engaged with politics at that time other than from anecdotal evidence and descriptions by other writers and thinkers of that period. However, they will not give as wide a view as can be obtained through survey research. Unfortunately we have no survey data comparable to the WVS to look at political engagement at that time.

Religion might have had a stronger influence on human behaviour back then. In contrast, religion seems to have only a weak to moderate influence on the indicators used in this study. On the other hand, the core teachings of the world's major religions have remained relatively constant. What adherents of a specific religion believe would still be very similar to 1843.

In addition, the idea that religion is “the opium of the masses” is a critique that has also been used by modern critics of religion to attack it during debates. It thus seems appropriate to use modern survey data to examine this. Having done so, it seems that religion, as a whole, does not act as “the opium of the masses” at this point in time.

If there are any religions that might be considered to be “the opium of the masses” I would suggest Hinduism and Buddhism. Both these Asian religions have recorded relatively low levels of engagement. Perhaps it has something to do with the belief in Karma and the idea that our conditions in this life are somehow deserved because of what we did in a previous life. This

belief has supported the caste system in India for a long time (Haralambros & Holborn, 1995; 451).

In addition, the Buddhist belief that human life is full of suffering that has to be endured by letting go of all cravings and desires (Krüger et al., 2009; 119) could be seen as very fatalistic and might cause believers to be more accepting of their lot and to engage less with politics and life conditions in general. If you cannot change your allotted life, then what is the point of engaging in politics? However, other social or political factors might account for their low level of engagement.

What about the relatively low levels of political engagement found among Orthodox Christians and Muslims? I would suggest that it can be better explained by the fact that most Orthodox Christians live in countries that had been part of the former USSR where there is not yet a strong democratic culture; also that many Muslims live under authoritarian regimes (Bruce; 2003) which means that they might not get as many opportunities to engage with politics as those who live in more democratic countries. The indicators used in this study mainly measure democratic political actions. People who live under authoritarian regimes might have to resort to other means to effect change.

The Christian beliefs shared by Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox Christians are fundamentally the same. Perhaps the differences in engagement is best explained by Bruce (2003) who states that because Catholics and Orthodox Christians are more communal than the individualistic Protestants, these religions prefer an organic model of association which has led to them opposing democracy at times and left them vulnerable to authoritarianism. However, if this had an influence on the levels of political engagement, I would have expected to find similar low levels among the Catholics, which is not the case.

The differences in political engagement between Catholics and Orthodox Christians can perhaps be explained by the theory of Bruce (2003) that while Catholics are loyal to a transnational centre in Rome the Orthodox churches have fragmented into national churches and once so divided, tend to be subordinated to the state. The state might thus use the Orthodox churches as a means to maintain the status quo.

Christianity, however, cannot be regarded as “the opium of the masses”, since the Catholics and in particular the Protestants seem to be very engaged in politics. It is only the Orthodox Christians who have recorded very low levels of engagement. This does not support the claims by Nietzsche and Onfray that Christianity “delights in submission, passivity and obedience”.

Although the religiously unaffiliated seem to participate actively in political actions they appear to be poorly engaged in civic organisations. This might put them at a disadvantage. It takes away the possible political acumen that they could gain by being part of a group (Scheufele et al., 2004; Mayer, 2003). Although they seem to be politically more engaged than groups like the Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Orthodox Christians, they certainly do not appear to be more engaged than Jews or Protestants. So it seems that one cannot generalise about religion as a whole and that it is not “the opium of the masses” as proclaimed by Marx.

### 6.2.3. Are there some religious groups that are more positively disposed towards political violence?

The answer is yes, slightly. However, it is not clear whether the slight differences might lead to significantly more violent behaviour. On the whole, all the groups seem to be very negatively disposed towards violence

On a global level, this might suggest that a clash between civilisations is avoidable. In many places different religions have been able to live and work together in an attempt to achieve justice, prosperity and peace without ever forgetting that their different concepts of truth are irreconcilable (Beaver et al., 1989; 359). Perhaps Benjamin (1995) is right that it is rather unrestrained capitalism and religious fundamentalism that are tearing the world apart, and not something inherent in religion as a whole.

The fact that all the groups have recorded a relatively negative attitude towards violence also inspires hope and support to the ideas of Hans Kung and the researchers at the Global Ethic Institute who are trying to get people to commit to a culture of non-violence and respect for life.

Muslims have the second lowest mean score of all the groups, which might suggest that Islam is not inherently violent. Perhaps they have been unfairly criticised by the likes of Harris and Onfray who consider Islam to be a war-like religion. The dramatic images of the 9/11 attacks and the way that Muslims have been portrayed in the media, as well as the political instability of the

Middle East, might better explain why they are so strongly associated with violent politics in the popular mind. Perhaps bigger geo-political and structural problems explain the violent behaviour of some Muslims better than their beliefs. It is possible that the violence is mainly perpetrated by Muslim fundamentalists and militants rather than caused by the beliefs of the religion as a whole. It could also be that Muslims are so negative towards violence because they have had to endure so much of it during the seemingly endless conflicts that afflict the Middle East. On the other hand, the Jews, who seem to be the most positively disposed towards violence, might have this attitude because many of them live in Israel, where they are threatened by the Arab nations on a daily basis. This could be seen as a pragmatic approach to this problem.

Although it might be that religion provides the context that makes fundamentalist groups possible, as suggested by Dawkins and Harris, it would also seem that it creates a context that is very negative towards violence.

It is not clear how significant the differences in attitude towards violence are and whether a small difference on the scale leads to significantly more violent behaviour in practice. On the other hand, this was only one indicator and there might be better tools to investigate this in a more thorough way. In addition to that, I also have some other suggestions for further research.

### **6.3. Suggestions for further research**

This was a cross-sectional study that looked at one specific moment in time. It might be useful to do a longitudinal study to see if the adherents of the different religions engage with politics in a similar way over time. It might be interesting, for instance to see whether Orthodox Christians become more engaged as and if the Eastern European countries develop a stronger culture of democratic politics.

Orthodox Christians seem to be considerably less engaged with politics than other Christians, as well as adherents of most other faiths. To test whether it is because they live in countries that had been part of the former USSR, the political engagement of Orthodox Christians in Western countries can be compared with those who live in former Eastern-bloc countries.

On the political scale the two Asian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism have tended considerably towards the left, whereas the three Christian groups have all been clustered around the centre. It would be interesting to see if the followers of the different religions actually prefer and vote for parties, candidates and policies that correspond to this.

It might also be worthwhile to do a more in-depth study on the attitude towards violence against other people by the different religions and how this translates into action. Since only one indicator has been used in this study, it would be more thorough to do a focused study using better tools to look at this important issue.

More research could also be conducted into the propensity of the different groups to engage in conventional as opposed to unconventional political behaviour. The variable used in this study only asks respondents whether they have participated in unofficial strikes. The willingness to participate does not automatically mean that respondents would be willing to engage in more extreme forms of unconventional behaviour like occupying or breaking into buildings, using violence against other people or participating in sabotage, terrorism or a revolution. Further questions thus have to be asked to gauge the extent to which people are willing to go to further their political goals. Better tools have to be used to examine this important aspect of political behaviour.

Doing a study where the strength of a respondent's faith is also calculated, might also be useful. In other words, checking whether there are any differences between those that actively engage in their religions and religious practises, and those who merely self-identify with these religious categories.

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

This exploratory research has served to highlight that simple explanations for religious affiliation and political engagement will not suffice and that being religious does not equate to being politically disengaged. It also points to the rich potential for further research and analysis of the religion and politics.

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