CHAPTER 3

Religiosity

3.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Hassan (2007, 437) makes a similar threefold distinction with regard to Islamic religious commitment (i.e. cognitive, ethical and behavioural religiosity), but sticks to Stark and Glock’s five dimensions when structuring his measurements among 6,300 Muslims in Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Malaysia, Iran, Turkey and Kazakhstan.
system refers to the whole set of representations (i.e. concepts and notions) used to interpret and understand reality. Besides scientific representations – which have considerable cultural importance – the cognitive system includes mythological, ideological, philosophical and religious representations. The evaluative or normative system is the entire set of values and norms that direct actions and according to which actions are judged. The expressive system consists of all the mediations that make the circulation of meanings and values possible. In order to be communicated meanings and values, which in themselves are abstract, have to be objectified, that is presented concretely in spoken and written languages, symbols and rites, artistic and aesthetic forms, and so on. Since culture comprises cognitive, normative and expressive systems, we can describe religiosity as the way believers engage in the religious cognitive system, the religious normative system and the religious expressive system.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.3.1 Research Questions

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

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

3.3.2 Measuring Instrument

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

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

In the religious normative system three items deal with institutional ethical consequences and two with personal moral consciousness. Here we offer an example of each of the two categories: “Are you interested in learning more about the moral values upheld by your religion?” (item 18); and “Do you seek God’s forgiveness for your wrongdoings?” (item 10).
Since religious practice is particularly concrete in the religious expressive system, we include five items on institutional formal ritual and five on personal popular devotion. Here is an example of each of the two categories: “Is it important for you to participate in the religious worship conducted by a priest or leader of your religion?” (item 12); and “Is it important for you to wear a religious symbol on your body?” (item 13).

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

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

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

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

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4 Items manifesting strong correlations in the correlation matrix: 2, 5, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18 and 20.
Reliability and percentage of explained variance are moderately high when checked for each of the three religious groups separately. As can be seen in Table 3.3, the comparative model of institutional religious practice seems to be most reliable for Hindus.

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

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

### Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor 1 (F1)</th>
<th>Communalities (h²)</th>
<th>Percentage of Explained Variance</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Number of Valid Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Are you interested in learning more about the beliefs and doctrines of your religion?</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td>Christian, Muslim and Hindu students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Is it important for you to read the sacred scriptures of your religion by yourself?</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td>Christian, Muslim and Hindu students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Are you interested in learning more about the moral values upheld by your religion?</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td>Christian, Muslim and Hindu students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Is it important for you to participate in the religious worship officiated by a priest or leader of your religion?</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td>Christian, Muslim and Hindu students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of valid cases</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>% explained variance</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research question 2: Are there significant differences in the levels of institutional religious practice between Christian, Muslim and Hindu students?

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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.d.</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1=Not at all, 2=A Little; 3=Much; 4=Very much. Intergroup differences are significant at p<.000 level (**).
What are the personal characteristics of people who set great store by institutional religious practice? We examine these characteristics for Christians, Muslims and Hindus separately. The descriptions help us to interpret the significant differences between Christians, Muslims and Hindus with regard to institutional religious practice. Of course, such an interpretation is not a statistical causal explanation; but we hope that correlations between institutional religious practice on the one hand and personal characteristics on the other will help us formulate further hypotheses on the differences we did find. The following types of personal characteristics are examined: socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-religious. The category of socio-cultural characteristics includes age, gender, language (i.e. Tamil speaking or not), urbanization and field of educational specialization. Next we consider the following socio-economic characteristics: caste, mother’s occupation, father’s occupation, mother’s educational level and father’s educational level. In the category of socio-religious variables we include the number of years respondents attended a religiously affiliated school of their own religion, and the respondent’s evaluation of the (positive or negative) role played by some socializing agents in the religious domain. The socializing agents in question are: parents, relatives, friends, religious community, teachers/professors of the students concerned, and the mass media. Measuring instruments for personal characteristics are described in more detail in chapter 1 under research variables (1.5).

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

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

With regard to socio-religious variables, personal evaluations of the perceived influence of religious socializing agents reveal some interesting patterns of association with institutional religious practices. In all three religious groups the socializing agent that has the strongest association with involvement in institutional religious practices is the religious community. It seems natural that interest in institutional religious practices should be closely linked with a positive evaluation of the socializing influence of religious communities. This association is stronger among Muslims (.35) than among Christians (.28) and Hindus (.29). The mass media have a fairly moderate association with
institutional religious practices among Hindus (.25) and Muslims (.24). The same applies to the correlation with a favourable evaluation of parental influence on religious socialization. Interestingly, close relatives have a fairly strong association with institutional religious practice only in the case of Muslims (.30). It is remarkable that positive evaluation of the influence of teachers and professors on religious socialization shows the strongest correlation with institutional religious practice among Hindus (.22), especially since Christians and Muslims run educational institutions which are said to aim at the religious identity construction of their followers.

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

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5 The following characteristics did not show significant correlations for any of the groups of respondents: language, field of specialization, caste, and educational level of the father. These variables are not mentioned in the table.
tutions to promote religious formation of the young; and the role of close relatives in the case of Muslims. We shall discuss these findings in the next section.

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

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

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

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

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

3.4 Findings and Discussion

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

3.4.1 Significance of a Comparative Model of Institutional Religious Practice

Firstly, we can affirm that this study has established a comparative model of religious practice for Christians, Muslims and Hindus. Contrary to our expectation, personal popular devotion is not included in the comparative measure-
ment of religious practice. More generally, our comparative model doesn’t include the personal mode of religiosity at all. This means that our cross-religious comparative model of religious practice is institutional in character. On the whole college-going youths in Tamil Nadu are much involved in institutional religious practice, Muslims and Christians more so than Hindus.

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

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

3.4.2 Impact of Agents of Religious Socialization and Gender

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

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

The fact that the religious community is the only socialization agent that contributes significantly to institutional religious practice among Christians illustrates the dichotomous situation in which these Christians live. To a large extent they are conditioned by a non-indigenous religious culture, and by an indigenous culture in the other spheres of life. In their case no other religious socialization agent seems to have a significant impact on their involvement in institutional religious practices. In contrast to Muslims and Hindus, Christians’ institutional religious practice is influenced exclusively by the religious socialization of their own community. This indicates limited inculturation of the Christian faith in local Tamil culture (Anthony 1997; 1999). It also suggests that the religious socialization of youths is highly institutionalized in the Christian community. In India, where religion is less organized and more spontaneous in its expression, a highly institutionalized religion like Christianity with few roots in the local culture might in the long run lose its relevance and thrust (Panikkar 1984). Even at a wider level, “[Christians] are slowly recognizing the necessity of a new awareness, which is tied neither to (western) civilization nor to (institutionalized) religion” (Panikkar 1993a, 152).
Among Hindus the educational community of teachers/professors has a moderate association with institutional religious practices. Given that Hinduism is the dominant religion, educational programmes naturally favour the institutional religious practices of Hindu students. However, it is strange that Christian and Muslim religiously affiliated schools and colleges do not play a significant role with regard to involvement in institutional religious practices. The educational institutions of the minority communities are intended to nurture their adherents’ religious identity and religious practice, and generally they have religious programmes and facilities (e.g. times and places for worship) for this purpose. This again highlights the ambivalent situation in which religiously affiliated schools for minority groups find themselves (Anthony 1999). Possibly the cultural basis of Hinduism inspires the curriculum more than that of the minority religions.

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

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

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