Summary

According to the secularization theory, Western societies have witnessed a gradual but steady decline in religiosity and its impact on society, both in the public and the private realms. It is assumed that previously religion and morality were closely connected. The processes of individualization and secularization have induced a weakening of these strong ties. Since individualization and secularization did not proceed uniformly in all Western countries, partly caused by differences in social, economic and political histories and circumstances, imposing different constraints, the receipt of individualization and secularization met with different obstacles. Therefore (large) cross-national differences in the degree of religious involvement and religion's impact on other social values are to be expected.

Using the survey data from the European Values Studies, fielded in 1981 and 1990, hypotheses on increasing internal and external value differentiation or value fragmentation are investigated. Internal value differentiation refers to the degree of heterogeneity within a given value dimension; external value differentiation refers to the relationships between different value dimensions. In other words, the article asks what is true of the idea that religion and morality concerning sexual issues and ethical behaviours have become differentiated, fragmented value domains? Cross-national differences between Catholic, Protestant and religiously mixed countries are further explored in the article.

1. Introduction

Contemporary Western society is most often characterized as modern, if not as post-modern. Processes like industrialization, rationalization, economic growth, urbanization, specialization, and differentiation, have transformed traditional society from a predominant agrarian, rural, stratified, undifferentiated and metaphysical order into the affluent, modern, and fragmented society. These processes of structural changes were accompanied by process of cultural changes, not the least secularization and individualization (Ester, Halman and de Moor, 1994, 3).

In traditional, pre modern society, people's basic values were primarily based in, and legitimized by tradition and (institutional Christian) religion. In mod-


THE MORAL GUIDANCE OF THE CHURCHES HAS BECOME UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE, NOT THE LEAST IN THE REALM OF SEXUALITY. IN ISSUES LIKE DIVORCE, HOMOSEXUALITY AND EXTRA MARITAL AFFAIRS PEOPLE ARE DECREASINGLY RELYING ON THE JUDGEMENTS AND PRESCRIPTIONS OF THE CHURCHES. GETTING CHILDREN IS NOT ANY MORE AN OBLIGATION AND SEXUAL RELATIONS ARE NO LONGER CONFINED TO HUSBAND AND WIFE, AS (ONE AND