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# Belief in God among South African youth and its relation to their religious socialization and praxis

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Johannes A van der Ven, Jaco S Dreyer & Hendrik J Pieterse

Department of Practical Theology

University of South Africa

## Abstract

*This article investigates belief in God among 538 students from standard 9 who attend Anglican and Catholic schools in the Johannesburg/Pretoria region, and relates this belief to the students' religious socialization and praxis. The students' belief in God appears to correlate strongly with their religious praxis in the present and less so with their religious socialization. However, some elements within this religious socialization play a rather important role, namely the parents' religious modeling, communication, and transfer. Two elements do not appear to have any influence at all, namely the parents' church participation and the parents' religious steering of students in the past and present.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous article we concluded that the level of belief in God among South African standard 9 students of Anglican and Catholic schools is high to very high. The question we like to explore in this article is whether South Africa will continue to be a religious country in the foreseeable future as far as these students are concerned. How long will their religious character remain? We take this question as exemplary for the country as a whole in that some tendencies among the students might be of relevance for the entire South African population.

For two reasons, this question is not totally unexpected, the first being empirical in nature and the second theoretical. First, whereas the 1980 census showed that 2% of the total population said they had no religion and 3% did not answer the question about religion or objected to it, the 1991 census indicated that only 1% of the total population said they had no religion, but as many as 30% did not answer the question about religion or objected to it (Population Census 1980, 1991). The missiologist Kritzinger thinks that this 30% belong to the African traditional religions which existed long before western colonization and mission started but which were not specifically indi-

cated in this census (Kritzinger 1993:2; see also Oosthuizen 1985:21). For a while, one of the authors of this article thought that the people indicating no church affiliation were probably members of the charismatic movements (Nel, Njumbuxa & Pieterse 1994:65). As generally as these opinions are stated, they are doubtful, not only because they contradict one another, but above all because similarly high percentages of people not answering the question about religion or objecting to it can be found in the tables of religion by population group: 20% among Whites, who certainly do not participate in the African traditional religions, 30% among Coloureds, to whom the same applies, 30% among Asians, who participate in neither the African traditional religions nor the charismatic movements, and 32% among Blacks, who might engage partly at least in both of them. It is striking that 21% of the Blacks in the 1980 census did not answer the question or objected to it, whereas only 4% of the Whites, 4% of the Coloureds and 3% of the Asians did so. In other words, the differences between the 1980 census and the 1991 census cannot be explained away totally by the missing classification of the African traditional religions and/or charismatic movements, but must have to do with other factors also, of which (an incipient process of) secularization is not an implausible one.

The second reason for doubting whether South Africa will remain the same religious country it is today, has to do with what Max Weber calls the rationalization or modernization process since the beginning of this century. When we say that this rationalization is about people's increasing control of their natural, social and psychic environment by their instrumental-cognitive rationality together with the elimination of their social-moral and personal-expressive rationality, we are surely referring to a real process in the economic, political, social and cultural domain, albeit multi-faceted and multi-interpretable, and therefore difficult to comprehend and encompass. Just as Max Weber paid focused attention to the causal relation between rationalization and weakening religiosity in the western world at the beginning of the twenties, at the beginning of the twenty-first century we may consider this causal relationship a relevant hypothesis which should be studied in South Africa. Rationalization, Weber says, leads to the disenchantment of the world ('Entzauberung der Welt'). Whereas this theory can no longer be empirically verified for the North-Western European countries at least, because there is no relevant variation in either rationalization or disenchantment any more, it probably is a fruitful idea that can give broader and deeper insight into South Africa's society, because today the modernization process is evidently influencing this society in various domains in various degrees (Van der Ven 1996:44-45). So, the real question is how long South Africa will remain a deeply religious country, and in answering this question South African youth play a key role, because they are or at least are going to be the main bearers of this process (Peeters 1984). Connected with this are the issues of religious socialization and praxis, because the concept of socialization

in general and religious socialization specifically relate to the transfer of values and norms, in this case religious values and norms, passed by the older generation to the younger one, whereas the concept of religious praxis refers to the application of these values and norms in everyday, concrete situations.

Belief in God is the central topic in this question, because however one describes religion and whatever the meaning of religion, the reference to a transcendent reality, objectively speaking, or to a transcendent perspective, subjectively speaking, belongs to its very core and determines its very essence, at least as far as a so-called substantial definition of religion is *concerned*<sup>1</sup>. In its objective mode, 'transcendent reality' relates to a reality that exists prior to any individual human thought and decision, albeit not necessarily absolutely independently of them. God's nature may be and actually is frequently seen as prior to any individual human action, although the very core of this nature intrinsically consists of absolute relatedness and commitment to humans altogether, this is to say in an abundantly graceful way<sup>2</sup>. But if we say that in the objective mode God is seen as prior to any individual human endeavour, we do not necessarily restrict ourselves to a metaphysical affirmation of God. The objective mode may also include a cultural-anthropological understanding of God. In other words, God can be seen as a *culturally assumed* transcendent reality. According to the cultural anthropologists Lawson and McCauley this cultural assumption of God's transcendent being determines the very core of religion, without which the term 'religion' would lose its meaning altogether (Lawson & McCauley 1993). In a theological view, as we refer to here, a metaphysical and a cultural-anthropological way of understanding God do not exclude each other, at least in so far as a cultural-anthropological approach is conceived as non-reductionistic, in other words that cultural anthropology is able to interpret belief in God without reducing this belief to cultural-anthropological factors and structures only. The subjective mode refers, as we have already said, to a transcendent perspective, which is to say that humans, while relating to and occupying themselves with all kinds of worldly affairs, can look at these processes from both a mundane and a supramundane frame of reference by alternating between these two points of view. So family life can be seen in terms of its educational aspects, but also as a divine call, professional work in terms of its rational and technical aspects, but also as a vocation or religious 'profession', civic life in terms of its social and democratic aspects, but also as a contribution to God's rainbow family of men and women, and so on. In classical terminology, one looks at one's own and others' life with the eyes of God (in the Thomist tradition, Mouroux 1968). Or, one puts one's own and the others' life in the light of God (Lumen fidei: Schillebeeckx

1964). In other words, the subjective mode refers to what the social sciences call religious saliency, that is the link humans construct between the domains of concrete life like family, professional and civic life on the one hand and religion on the other.

From the above, it is obvious that our question deals with belief in God among South African youth, the saliency of this belief and the influence of religious socialization on it. From all of this, in the first part we ask what religious socialization is, what elements constitute it, and what religious socialization the students have had in the past. In the second part we focus on the students' own religious praxis at present. In the third part we ask what relation can be observed from the data regarding the students' religious socialization in the past and their own religious praxis in the present. The reason for asking these questions is that we expect that at least some elements in the socialization process correlate with at least some elements in the religious praxis the students are developing in their adolescent years. In the fourth part we investigate the direct relation between the students' religious socialization and praxis on the one hand and their belief in God on the other. We close this article with a conclusion.

We try to answer these questions from a sample survey we conducted in 1995 among 538 students from standard 9 who attend Anglican and Catholic schools in the Johannesburg/Pretoria region<sup>3</sup>. This sample approaches the empirical universum of standard 9 students in schools affiliated to both churches in the Johannesburg/Pretoria region.

## **1. RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION**

As we said before, religious socialization refers to the transfer of religious values and norms by one generation to the next. This transfer should not be understood as either a process that automatically develops only or as a one-way process. Although some main events in this process happen without the two parties involved, namely the older generation and the young people, being aware of them or intentionally aiming at them, other events take place while the parties are conscious of them and willingly directed to them. The former, the unconscious aspects, may be seen as referring to incidental learning, the latter, the intentional aspects, as referring to intentional learning. Socialization, which is a sociological concept, can be interpreted in terms of this incidental and intentional learning, which functions as its psychological translation and concretization (Bandura 1986).

Incidental learning has two forms, namely observational and experiential learning, observational learning being a kind of practical mimesis and experiential learning a kind of learning by trial and error. Practical mimesis, as elaborated on by Bourdieu

following Plato, is imitating other people, but without being aware of it. With regard to practical mimesis we may assume that children unreflectively copy their father's and mother's religiosity, attribute the same saliency to it, participate in ecclesiastical life in the same way as their father and mother do — up to a certain age (Van der Slik 1992: 143). Experiential learning takes place when a child tries to act out other people's behaviour which he or she has observed, and evaluates its value, meaning, effectiveness and efficiency from his or her own point of view and context. In other words, while observational learning is a kind of copying of behaviour, experiential learning intrinsically transcends this mimetic endeavour, because it necessarily implies assessing, testing, examining, and evaluating this behaviour. This is one of the reasons why socialization is not a purely one-way process. Because of its inherent experiential aspect, it comments on, criticizes and corrects the older generation's thinking, feeling, evaluating, and acting.

Intentional learning ideally and typically means that one intends to educate one's children or students in a certain direction and that one also takes the corresponding measures to achieve that goal. This does not mean that one urges, forces, or manipulates the child or the youngster all the time. Intentional learning is the same as indoctrination or manipulation, because the educational interaction with the child or the student contains various degrees of freedom. At one extreme, one might intentionally aim for the student to become truly free and able to autonomously choose values and norms for himself, and at the other, for the student to identify with one's own system of values and norm, without any exception.

Whatever direction intentional learning seeks to take the student in, it never results in a one-way process, because children or students always make a stand, albeit feeble, even if their parents and other educators do their best to impose their way of living on them. In other words, a distinction has to be made between the intention emerging from the aim and goals of education and its actual effect. The new generation never tolerates being totally molded in the older generation's format, that is the religious format.

But the generation concept itself points to the fact that socialization is a two-way process. According to Mannheim, a generation exists of a group of people who are born in more or less the same place and period, pass through the same educational experiences during their formative years, process the same experiences from more or less identical perspectives, reconstruct their common past from these identical perspectives time and again, and evaluate their future as well as their expectations for the future from there (Mannheim 1928:157-185, 309-330). So, it makes a difference

whether one was born before 1948 when the Afrikaner National Party established its formal policy of apartheid or later on, say in 1976, when the uprising in Soweto, inspired mainly by Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement, took place because students were forced to take courses which had Afrikaans as the medium of instruction (see Woods 1987). And it makes a difference, whether one was an Afrikaans or English-speaking white, black, coloured or Indian at either point in time. One's social class at either point also makes a difference, whether upper class, middle class, lower class, or the classless mass of pariahs. From this perspective, socialization can be understood as an interactive process between generations from different perspectives and spatial-temporal contexts. Put differently, it is a intergenerative process, in which the transfer of values and norms by the older generation to the younger one is complemented by the transfer of values and norms by the latter to the former. This is the very reason why open-minded parents and other educators say they always learn from their contact with youth<sup>4</sup>.

Because of the distinctions we made, namely incidental learning which is divided into observational and experiential learning on the one hand and intentional learning on the other, we investigated our population of students from these points of view. As regards observational learning we selected three indicators referring to their parents, namely their parents' religious saliency, belief in God, and church participation. As regards experiential learning we selected one indicator, namely their religious communication with their parents. And lastly, as regards intentional learning, we selected three indicators also referring to their parents, namely their parents' religious transfer, religious steering in the past and religious steering in the present.

Table 1 shows the average scores for the cultural elements of religious socialization, whereas table 2 is restricted to the structural element of the parents' church participation. Cultural' refers to the socialization of the values and norms and structural' to its institutional aspects. The scores in table 1, which indicate how frequently the various elements of religious socialization have been put into practice, offer a differentiated picture. The highest score is given to an element that falls under the heading of observational learning, namely the parents' belief in God (4.6). Four elements are in the middle, the first falling under the heading of observational learning, namely the parents' religious saliency (3.9), two under that of intentional learning, namely religious steering in the past (3.6) and religious transfer (3.4), and the last one under that of experiential learning, namely religious communication with the parents (3.2). The lowest score is given to religious steering in the present (2.7).

**Table 1: Cultural elements of religious socialization**

	Average
<b>Observational learning</b>	
parents' religious saliency	3.9
parents' belief in God	4.6
<b>Experiential learning</b>	
religious communication with parents	3.2
<b>Intentional learning</b>	
religious transfer	3.4
religious steering in the past	2.7
religious steering in the present	3.7

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The picture table 1 shows is differentiated, because it points to the fact that all cultural elements of religious socialization have been very frequently or frequently put into practice with the exception of religious steering in the present, the score for which falls under the middle of the scale (2.7). Disregarding this exception, all the other scores indicate the level of religious socialization as being relatively high. The question is whether this high level is as highly effective. We will return to this issue later on.

Next we look at the cultural elements of religious socialization, where we also investigated the structural elements, namely church participation of our students' father and mother. Table 2 gives the relevant information. Three different categories are included in this table, namely the non-churched, the marginal and the modal members of any Christian church. The latter are those who consider themselves members of a church and who also participate in liturgical services at least once a month. The marginal members also see themselves as members of a church, but do not go to church on a regular basis; they may go now and then in a year and/or on liturgical feasts. The non-churched do not consider themselves to be church members and seldom or never go to church.

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**Table 2: Parents' church participation**

	Fathers (n= 538)	Mothers (n= 538)
non-churched	20%	13%
marginal member	49%	43%
modal member	31%	44%

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This table shows that only 31% of the students' fathers and 44% of their mothers are modal members, whereas 49% and 20% of their fathers and 43% and 13% of their mothers are marginal members and non-members respectively, which is remarkable because of the relatively high scores under their parents' belief in God (table 1). Given this, it is interesting to know that the correlations between the parents' belief in God and their church participation are not as high as might be expected, particularly if one takes South Africa's intense religiosity and (apparently intense) church engagement into account (for the fathers  $r = .43$ , for the mothers  $r = .37$ ). This means that belief in God and church participation do not totally coincide. In other words, belief in God takes place both inside and outside the church<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the percentage of non-churched fathers (20%) and mothers (13%) supports the opinion we voiced in the first part, namely that South Africa's population is secularizing. It also supports our view that the relatively high number of people (between 20% and 30%) who did not answer the question about religion in the 1991 census might not belong to the missing categories of African traditional religions or charismatic churches, but are in fact part of the more or less global secularization process taking place in South Africa.

## **2. RELIGIOUS PRAXIS**

Now the student's religious praxis has to be conceptualized and operationalized. We understand this praxis as a practical indication of the saliency the students contribute to religious values, especially belief in God. This is to say, we distinguish between religious saliency itself and religious praxis as a practical expression of this saliency.

As we said, religious saliency has to do with the meaning religion has in the various domains in one's own life and the degree to which one looks at these domains from a religious perspective. So we asked the students to indicate to what extent religion is important to them when making choices within five different domains: the personal domain of the self, that is one's perception of oneself, the interpersonal domain, which includes attitudes towards others, choosing friends and a (future) marriage partner, the professional domain, that is study and career, the political domain, which refers to the question of possessing land, which is a contentious issue politically, and supporting political parties, and lastly the domain of time, especially the planning of one's time and being without time, that is relaxing.

**Table 3: Religious saliency**

		Average
<b>personal domain</b>	perception of the self	3.5
<b>interpersonal domain</b>	attitudes towards others	3.4
	choosing friends	2.6
	choosing a marriage partner	3.5
<b>professional domain</b>	study	2.7
	career	2.5
<b>political domain</b>	possessing land	2.3
	political parties	2.4
<b>domain of time</b>	planning of one's time	2.3
	choosing to be without time, that is relax	2.5

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It is interesting to see that for these students religion has a positive meaning in the personal (3.5) and interpersonal domain (3.4, 3.5) only, with the exception of choosing friends (2.6). In the professional and political domain and the domain of time religion is not important. This may disappoint those people who expected these students to be politically engaged, inspired by a religious conviction, in the greatest transitional period during their formative years — from the apartheid era towards 'a new South Africa', as it has been called since the first democratic elections in 1994, one year before the data were collected for this research project. While the students do not feel they owe any political support because of their religiosity, it is as if this religiosity exists on a politically isolated or even alienated island (for religious individualization and privatization, see Wolfaardt 1991:7).

After having described the different domains of religious saliency, we conducted a factor analysis, that resulted in one factor only, which we simply called 'religious saliency'. The average score of the students on this new scale was 2.8, which is understandable given what table 2 in the previous article has already shown us.

The students' religious praxis, which we see as being based on and as an practical indication of this religious saliency, as we mentioned before, is divided into two different aspects, a cultural and a structural aspect. The cultural aspect of religious praxis can be divided into praying before meals, before sleeping and in specific situations on the one hand and bible reading on the other. The average score in table 4 for praying indicates that this cultural aspect is frequently practised (3.4), whereas this does not apply to bible reading (2.4).

**Table 4: Cultural aspect of religious parxis**

	Average
praying	3.4
bible reading	2.4

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The structural aspect can be divided into church participation during the year and engaging in three important rites of passage (baptism, marriage, funeral). Table 5 gives the scores.

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**Table 5: Structural aspect of religious praxis**

Church participation	(n = 538)	Rites of passage	(n = 538)
non-churched	15%	no rites	9%
marginal member	25%	one or two rites	24%
modal member	59%	three rites	67%

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This table shows that the percentage of non-churched students (15%) is a bit lower than that of the non-churched fathers (20%) and a bit higher than that of the non-churched mothers (13%). Again, we consider this an indication of the very real secularization process in South Africa, which is supported by the fact that 33% of the students reject engaging in all three traditional rites of passage (baptism, marriage, funeral) altogether. Further, it is striking that the students are more intensely involved in the church than both their father and mother: 59% of them are modal members as against 31% of their fathers and 44% of their mothers. Does this mean that regular church going is more an educational phenomenon than an expression of adult religiosity and religious saliency? Does this mean that Sunday worship has a catechetical rather than a ritual character, even in the case of those liturgically oriented denominations, namely the Catholic and the Anglican church?

### **3. RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION AND RELIGIOUS PRAXIS**

Now we ask what the relation is between the students' religious socialization and their own religious praxis. As we said, we expect that at least some elements in their religious socialization influence at least some elements in their religious praxis today. In

table 6, religious socialization is put on the vertical axis and religious praxis on the horizontal one. We restrict ourselves to correlation coefficients that are significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) and relevant ( $r \geq .30$ ) only.

Something very interesting emerges from this table. Although it is meaningful to distinguish between the cultural and structural aspects in the relation between religious socialization and praxis, this distinction should not lead us to facile ideas and conclusions that are not based in reality. This table shows that the cultural elements within religious socialization (observational, experiential and intentional learning) correlate only with the cultural elements of the students' religious praxis today (religious saliency, praying, bible reading) and not with the structural elements of this praxis (church participation, rites of passage), the only exception being the correlation between religious transfer and rites of passage ( $r .30$ ). However, the structural elements of the students' socialization (fathers' and mothers' church participation) correlate not only with the structural elements of the students' religious praxis (students' church participation  $r .51$ ,  $r .66$ , rites of passage  $r .32$ ), but also with an important cultural element of this praxis, namely praying ( $r .30$ ,  $r .41$ ).

**Table 6: Religious socialization and religious praxis**

	saliency	praying	bible reading	church partic.	passage rites
<b>Observational learning</b>					
parents' religious saliency	.43	.49	.30	—	—
parents's belief in God	.31	.30	—	—	—
<b>Experiential learning</b>					
religious communication	.45	.52	.38	—	—
<b>Intentional learning</b>					
religious transfer	.43	.39	—	—	.30
past religious steering	.36	.35	—	—	—
present religious steering	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Parents' church participation</b>					
Fathers' church participation	—	.30	—	.51	—
Mothers' church participation	—	.41	—	.66	.32

In terms of causal relationships, cultural elements in religious socialization influence cultural elements in religious praxis, but structural elements in religious socialization influence both cultural and structural elements in religious praxis.

#### **4. RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION AND PRAXIS AND BELIEF IN GOD**

This is the last step in our research, namely the relation between the students' religious socialization and praxis on the one hand and their belief in God on the other. In part 3 we distinguished two groups of images of God, each of which contains several approaches to believing in God, namely anthropomorphic images (theism, individual and cosmic pantheism, social-ontological pantheism) and non-anthropomorphic images (ontological theism, micro/macro pantheism, transcendent pantheism). These images are put on the horizontal axis of table 7, whereas the elements of religious socialization and praxis are put on the vertical axis. Again we restrict ourselves to those correlation coefficients that are significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) and relevant ( $r \geq .30$ ).

We would like to mention the most interesting aspects in this table. First, observational learning that involves practical mimesis, referring to the parents' religious saliency and belief in God, appears to be of the utmost importance in relation to both forms of pantheism, anthropomorphic pantheism (individual, cosmic, social-ontological) and non-anthropomorphic pantheism (micro/macro).

Secondly, experiential learning, which is essentially communicative learning, as well as religious transfer follow this memesis, while again relating to pantheism, both anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic.

Thirdly, the most important relation comes from modern students' own religious praxis, especially that which we called its cultural elements (religious saliency, praying, bible reading). Again this praxis correlates only with both forms of pantheism, anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic. It is interesting to note that the students' religious praxis which expresses their direct relationship to God in praying, correlates with some of their non-anthropomorphic images of God they have, namely non-anthropomorphic ontological-theistic images ( $r .31$ ) and micro/macro-pantheistic images ( $r .41$ ).

Fourthly, special attention must be focused on the almost total absence of any influence from religious steering both in the past and in the present. Although one exception may be mentioned (present religious steering and social-ontological pantheism  $r .32$ ), one could say that all the energy put into insisting that a child or adolescent attend church is wasted.

**Table 7: Religious socialization and praxis and the belief in God**

	anthropomorph God images				non-anthropomorph God images		
	theis- me	ind. pan- enth.	cos. pan- enth.	soc/ont. pan- enth.	ont. theis- me	mi/ma pan- enth.	trasc pan- theism
<b>Observational learning</b>							
parents' religious saliency	—	.45	.32	.45	—	.36	—
parents's belief in God	—	.38	.31	.40	—	.30	—
<b>Experiential learning</b>							
religious communication	—	.42	—	.37	—	.35	—
<b>Intentional learning</b>							
religious transfer	—	.33	—	.41	—	—	—
past religious steering	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
present religious steering	—	—	—	.32	—	—	—
<b>Parents' church participation</b>							
Fathers' church participation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mothers' church participation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Students' praxis</b>							
saliency	—	.46	.38	.52	.34	.46	—
praying	—	.47	.35	.47	.31	.41	—
bible reading	—	.34	.30	.38	.31	.37	—
church participation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
rites of passage	—	—	.31	.34	—	—	—

Fifthly, something similar applies to the influence of both parents' and the students' church participation. Although table 6 shows that the parents' church participation correlates with an important element of the students' religious praxis, namely praying, in table 7 we see that neither the parents' church participation nor the students' church participation have any relevant correlation with the students' belief in God at all.

Belief in God is not really dependent on engaging in church life, as this is expressed in the regular services on Sunday or the weekend. The same applies to the students' attitudes towards the rites of passage, albeit less stringently because of the occasional correlation with two forms of anthropomorphic pantheism (r. 31, r. 34).

Lastly, what strikes us most is the lack of any correlation between all elements of religious socialization and praxis on the one hand and both anthropomorphic theism and non-anthropomorphic pantheism on the other. As we have seen, the students clearly appreciate both groups of images of God, as table 2 shows (average: 3.5 and 3.6), but there is no influence whatsoever from the way the parents or the students behave religiously. In other words, no matter how religious the parents may be, how salient religion may be for them, how intensely they believe in God, how frequently they discuss religious themes with their children, how concerned they may be about transferring religious values, how frequently they go to church themselves and send their children to church, none of this influences the extent to which their children show theistic or pantheistic attitudes, either positively nor negatively. Even the students' religious praxis itself does not influence them into the direction of these attitudes, again neither positively nor negatively. So the question is: where do these theistic and pantheistic attitudes come from, what is their origin? The only thing we can do here is to develop some hypotheses by which this rather astonishing phenomenon might be clarified. The first hypothesis deals with anthropomorphic theism that refers to absolutely transcendent images of God. Here we introduce the concept of the church, especially the doctrine of the church. While measuring the church's influence in an indirect way by asking questions regarding church participation, the direct impact the doctrine of the church has on the students' attitudes, while hearing sermons or learning from their religious textbooks, was not taken into account in our survey. The kerugmatic function the church performs in liturgical and catechetical settings might influence the students' images of God and their positive evaluation of them.

The second hypothesis deals with non-anthropomorphic pantheism that refers to transcendent immanence, as we explained earlier. Here we would like to introduce the concept of 'cultural decor'. The cultural decor relates to that untranslatable German word *Zeitgeist* that transcends all the different socialization and praxis elements we have mentioned. It can be understood as a kind of cultural climate that permeates almost everybody's thinking, feeling, evaluating, and acting, almost totally independently from the individual's freedom, choice and decision. Cultural processes are sometimes like meteorological phenomena: they are difficult to forecast, and when they do take place, they determine almost everything in life (Van der Slik 1992:141). Thus it is with transcendent pantheism, we suggest — it is in the air, everybody can feel it but nobody can fully explain it<sup>6</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

We started this article by asking whether South Africa would continue to be a religious country and we referred to the hypothesis that the 30% of the population who did not answer the question about their religion in the 1991 census or objected to it, must belong to the African traditional religions or the charismatic movement, which categories were missing in the census. What we found in our survey is that 20% of the students' fathers and 13% of their mothers — parents who send their children to private, church-bound schools, namely Anglican and Catholic schools, in the Johannesburg/Pretoria region — are non-churched, at least in the students' opinion, and that 15% of these students themselves are non-churched. This is an interesting outcome, especially because we are dealing here with people who have not sent their children to a public school, in which religion, at least the Christian religion, plays no central role formally, but to a school that is run by the Anglican or Catholic church. This may be seen as an indication of secularization.

Another interesting fact that was discovered while analyzing the students' responses has to do with the relevance of belonging to a Christian church or denomination in relation to the belief in God. Whereas the parents' church participation influences not only the structural dimension of the students' religious praxis, that is their own church participation, but also the cultural dimension of their religious praxis, that is their praying, it appears to have no influence on the students' belief in God at all. Moreover and more strikingly, the students' church participation appears itself to have no influence on their belief in God, whatever image of God holds a central position in this belief, whether iconic or aniconic, anthropomorph or non-anthropomorph. This phenomenon radically relativizes the religious meaning of the previous point, which is to say that being or not being a church member does not exhaust the question of believing or non-believing in God.

Lastly, the most important elements in religious socialization are to be found in the realm of observational learning, that is the parents's religious saliency and belief in God, and in the realm of experiential learning, that is religious communication with the parents, and intentional learning, that is religious transfer. Any form of religious steering, be it in the past or in the present, appears to be almost without influence on the students' belief in God. We cannot say religious steering is countereffective, because then our analysis should have produced negative correlation coefficients between this steering and the students' images of God, which it did not. But because it produced no significant correlation coefficients at all, with only one exception, it has to be taken to be ineffective. Parents would do better to use the time they spend on religious socialization for other things, like religious memesis, transfer and communication.

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The opposite of a substantial definition, a so-called functional definition, relates to everything in the world that functions as religion, that is *functions as* an ultimate concern, a highest value, be it family life, making money, pleasure, autonomy, solidarity, or the Springboks' or the Bafana Bafana's victory. The distinction between the substantial and functional definition of religion that can be found in for example Luckmanns 'The Invisible Religion' (1967), parallels Tillich's distinction between the material and formal definition in his Systematic Theology, Volume I (1966).
- <sup>2</sup> Further on we will see that this combination of God's priority and relatedness with regard to humans determines the very core of so-called pantheism in process theology.
- <sup>3</sup> This sample shows the following demographic characteristics: 49% are boys, 51% girls; 67% of them have English and 33% one of the ten other official languages as their home language; the highest education level of 26% of their fathers and 34% of their mothers falls in the category standard 1 through 10, that of 48% of their fathers and 54% of their mother in the category one form of continuous education after standard 10 or another, whereas 27% of their fathers and 12% of their mothers have a master's or doctoral degree; 34% support the ANC, 25% the Democratic Party, 29% the National Party, whereas 12% support other parties; 31% of them are Catholic, 26% Anglican, 8% Methodist, 23% belong to another Christian community, 8% to another religion, whereas 4% say they do not belong to any religion.
- <sup>4</sup> Here I indirectly criticize the more or less one-way conception of socialization by Berger and Luckmann (see Van der Ven 1997, chapter 3).
- <sup>5</sup> This does not mean that belief in God can exist totally outside and without the church. Perhaps in the short term, let us say during some periods in one's individual life time, it can, but in the long term, for example in long-lasting intergenerational periods of more than twenty or thirty years, it probably cannot.
- <sup>6</sup> For the statistical techniques used to isolate this cultural decor by separating it as so-called period effects from age and generation effects, see Peters (1993).
- <sup>7</sup> This outcome is interesting in view of the fact that more than 10% of the people watching religious TV programs are religiously non-committed (see: Dreyer 1989).

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