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Geesteswetenschappen

Attachment with the church and God

How attachment, discrepancy between personal and normative God images and conflict may influence adolescents to leave the church.



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Introduction

Disengagement from religion is common among adolescents in all kinds of religions in the Netherlands. In a longitudinal study on religiousness in the Netherlands (1966-2006) it was shown that there is a general secular trend of a decline in religiousness. The trend of the declining church affiliation was investigated on behalf of the government by De Hart (2011; 2014) who particularly looked at decline in church attendance and church membership. Since the sixties, when this longitudinal study on religiousness started, it was shown that there is a general trend of decrease in church attendance and membership. Most of this decline appears to be happening in the age group of 17 to 24 years old (De Hart, 2011; 2014). De Hart and others showed that there is a trend especially among adolescents to leave the religion they grew up with. Children in general know less about and believe less in the religion of their parents, they are also less inclined to pray and reading the bible and are less familiar with religious upbringing (De Hart, 2014). On the other hand among the religious young people it was noted that there is also a different trend; they show an increase in strictness. Compared to older church members there is an increase of church attendance in the group of church going young people, a growing number of them think that church regulations ought to be followed and there is more trust in the church and its organizational institutes. The intensity of religious activity of this group of religious young people is in contrast with the trend of decline in religious activities of young people in general.

In this thesis we try to investigate the motivations of these young people who want to stay with or disengage from their church. To investigate this we try to answer the following research question: Do attachment style and perceived discrepancy in God images play a role in the decision of adolescents to stay or leave their church? The purpose of this study is to examine whether, in young adults, attachment style influences the intention to leave the church, in combination with perceived conflict from deviating internal and external images of God. In order to answer this research question some background knowledge is needed. First some definitions that are often used when researching religious subjects are described. Following this, the three most influential common categories on religious decline will be discussed in three chapters, namely: Chapter 1: Socialization, Chapter 2: Religious/Cognitive Development and Chapter 3: Emotional Development. In this thesis only the most important theories that are covered by these three umbrella factors are addressed for discussing our hypotheses, even though there are many more theories on decline in religion.

Definitions in Religious studies

There are some remarks to be made considering the terms used in this research of the decline in religiousness: following a church, having faith and religiosity are not the same thing and religiousness and spirituality actually can be part of the same definition, but that is not always the case. Most people accept and believe (have faith) in religious constructs like heaven or a creator, but are not necessarily connected with a religious institute. The same with spirituality: the institutionalized religions dwindle, but self-found spirituality (the exploring of the true self, finding the true meaning of life for oneself e.g.) is key in the current religious developments. Although the definitions of religiousness and spirituality are not the same, there is an overlap: often the people who consider themselves spiritual also consider themselves religious and among church outsiders one in four people does not consider him/herself as an atheist or agnostic but believes in a religious construct, even though he/she is not part of a religious institute (de Hart, 2014). Likewise there is also a difference between believing and belonging. When looking in general at believing and belonging three categories can be distinguished by self-identification and church attendance: firstly, people who identify themselves as religious and attend church (like in Poland and Ireland), they believe and belong; secondly people who rarely identify themselves as religious or go to church (Sweden), they don't believe and don't belong and thirdly there are people in between, who don't go to church very often but who do identify themselves as religious, they don't belong but they do believe (the Netherlands). This illustrates that church attendance has commonalities with religiosity but they are not describing the same construct (de Hart, 2014). That people identify themselves as religious but do not follow an institute has been made apparent by the research of De Boer (2006), De Hart (2014) and several others. Even though church attendance is dwindling among adolescents, religiosity or spirituality is not; most of them still have a need for spirituality and religiosity (De Boer, 2006; Stolk, 2011). By a survey on Dutch, Christian adolescents it was shown that there are different profiles of believing, categorized by "self-description": Christian, Spiritual or Believing and "statements about believing" e.g.: "I don't follow a Church but I do believe" or "I wonder what I actually believe and why" (de Boer, 2006).

When looking at defining oneself as part of a religious institute and how religion is put into practice in the Netherlands, Christians are less apparent in this than for instance Turks or Moroccans. About 50% of the Moroccans and about 75% of the Turks think that they ought to follow the rules of their religion in daily life, whereas this is much lower among Christians (De Hart, 2014). This combined with the fact that the biggest decline in church attendance

happens in the age group of 17 to 24, leads this research to focus on Dutch adolescents who describe themselves as Christian (Catholic and Protestant) and who are connected to a church or Christian association.

The terminology of 'leaving the church' is broad and many different terms are employed for this in different studies: disengagement, apostasy, dropping out, disaffiliation etc. Apostasy is derived from 'Apostates': those who abandon faith. Apostasy indicates the loss of faith but also the rejection of a specific dictating community as a basis for self-identification. It is not uncommon that people consider themselves religious, without going to church or call themselves Christian more as an ethnicity than as part of a community (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977). As in religious studies, in this thesis the terminology of Hood, Hill & Spilka (2009) is followed using the term 'apostasy' when talking about leaving the church. However as mentioned earlier, those who discontinue church attendance do not have to lose personal faith.

Although there is a trend of growing apostasy in the general Dutch society, this thesis especially focusses on the subgroup of self-identifying Christian young people and their motivation of why they want to leave their church.

Chapter 1: Socialization

There are several approaches that explain a decline in religiousness among adolescents of which we can say they belong under a common category; one of these is socialization. Socialization is the process, which begins at infancy, and whereby one acquires attitudes, values, beliefs and habits through social interaction and learns how to deal with these (Colman, 2008). Socialization happens under influence of parents, teachers, friends/peers, communities etc. and through education, friendships and upbringing.

Apostasy or decline in religious expression during adolescence was widely researched, mostly during the seventies and eighties of the previous century (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Hunsberger & Brown, 1984). There are several theories on why religious decline happens mostly during this period in life and so far there is no consensus between these theories. The longest standing assumptions are the secularizing effect of higher education, socialization with peers, upbringing and deviance against norms (Uecker, Regnerus & Vaaler, 2007). Normative deviance is both described in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3; deviance against norms is facilitated through socialization but deviance in adolescence begins through the changing emotions that is part of the emotional development.

1.1 Socialization through the influence of education

Going to college or university is one of the most mentioned reasons why adolescents generally decrease in religiosity. The environment of the university is a breeding ground for apostasy according to Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977). In their study a linear relationship between education and apostasy was found. Due to higher education the intellectual horizon of adolescents is broadened, and at the same time they come into contact with other cultures, values, morals and ideas; which ultimately helps to shape their own values, morals and ideas. Socialization through peers, whom they meet at the university, may influence adolescents to de-convert from or re-/devalue their religion, thereby contributing to apostasy. Another contributing factor is the challenge to incorporate actively practicing a religion in their daily routine of studying, student association activities, partying etcetera, especially when the adolescents live away from home. During college most adolescents live away from home on campus. When the parents are not around to reinstate the habit of practicing the religion, most adolescents don't continue to practice their religion on a regular basis (Uecker et al., 2007). In contrast it was shown that when college students live at home, with their parents, there is much less decline in religious identification and active participation with religious institutes (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977).

Through the socialization effects of education: coming into contact with different (social) values through teachers/peer/friends, an encouraged critical attitude and less reinforcement from parents results in contributing less importance to or total devaluation of religion of upbringing. However education can also strengthen the socialization effects of upbringing and thereby increase religiousness. Examples of this are visible in (sectarian) religious communities that disapprove of public schools. These communities are often strict in their religious upbringing and closely monitor their followers. Within these communities the children are often homeschooled or go to a school that is run by the community. This way the children come in contact only with peers and teachers etc. that have the same ideas, values and beliefs that are condoned by the community. As the community values are strengthened, the outside world with other ideas, values and so on, are denigrated to ensure that the young members of the community stay and become dedicated adult members (Van Eck & Van Twist, 2015).

Through education the values and ideas can change or strengthen, but the socialization process starts with the upbringing that parents give their child which influences also education choice and friendships.

1.2 The socialization effect of upbringing

Parents want to pass on their morals, values and ideas to their children, so that they can grow up to be adults that the parents can be proud of. One of those primary values that parents pass on to their children is religion. Parents often use religion to provide their children with a stable set of moral and values (Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy & Waite, 1995).

Having children often enhances the religiosity of many young, married parents; whereas young adults who do not have children or have children but are not married are less likely to join and attend religious services (Stolzenberg et al., 1995). One of the most used arguments to explain this enhancement is that the parents seek tools with which they can provide their children with a core set of moral values and attitudes to live by. Young families experience more emotional support and social contacts with like-minded people when they are members of a church (Stolzenberg et al., 1995). The age of the child(ren) also influences the degree of religiosity of the parents. When the children are at 'school age' the religiosity of the parents tends to increase. For instance when during this time children are sent to Sunday school and the parents often tend to go with them to church (Argue, Johnson & White, 1999; Stolzenberg et al., 1995). However, parents only experience support from their community when they are not considered to be too young for parenthood. If they are considered to be too

young, by the community, then this often results in a distancing from the church and the community (Rindfuss, Swicegood & Rosenfeld, 1987).

Parents can increase religiosity through the upbringing, but it can also decrease religiosity of the children over time. Having children increases the religiosity of the parents, but only during school age, when the children grow older the religiosity of the parents stabilizes or declines (Stolzenberg et al., 1995). When parents start to pay less attention to religious upbringing this also effects the religiosity of the adolescent. De Boer (2006) showed that in households, where there was less openness and opportunity to talk about religion, children showed less interest in religion; even though they were originally brought up within a Christian tradition. The influence of parents is also visible in the longitudinal research of De Hart (2014); it was shown that children know less about their religion than their parents and likewise their parents less than their parents. Uecker et al. (2007) concluded that if parents do not teach their children about the religious tradition and do not continuously keep affirming it, then they fail to ‘teach the language’ of their religion. This results in young adults who do not or barely speak the language of the religion of their parents, which can consequently result in a devaluation of religion.

1.3 Socialization of religious ideas through peers

Peers and friends influence the ideas and values of an individual, but especially during middle/high school and university. In this period of life adolescents start to actively form their own opinions. In what way peers influence an adolescent depends on the context; the kind of peers and friends one has are influenced by the environmental factors like parents, school, extracurricular activities and clubs and the community. Peer pressure and belonging to in- or out-groups are a few of the most influential social motivators of behavior which are extensively researched in sociology and psychology. Peer pressure is fueled by the need to be accepted, to belong to the in-group. To be part of the in-group adolescents often change (down play or enhance) their (religious) attitudes, values or behavior in order to conform with the group.

An individual’s initial (religious) beliefs and behavior are a result of the socializing influence of its family. But when the individual is moving away from its family there is often a decline in religiousness because tradition is no longer reinforced. However, when close bonds of friendship are maintained with peers who are also religious then decline of religiousness is much less; these friends have a reinforcing effect on religiosity next to the socializing effect of parents (Roberts, Koch & Johnson, 2001). This effect of peers/friends

was shown in the research of Roberts et al. (2001): when there are no friends who go to the same church only 39% of the religious adolescents continues to attend to their church. When some of their friends attend the church, 76 % of religious adolescents continue to attend to church. Compared to the adolescents who reported that all of their friends attend the church with them showed the biggest effect of continued church attendance of 92%. Adolescents who came from families that were not or only moderate religious, also showed an increase in religiousness by the influence of religious peers. Peers and friends can as shown enhance religiousness, even so they can also be the incentive to decline in religiousness. However even though peers influence the socialization of religion, parents show the most stable and primary influence on religion (Regnerus, Smith & Smith, 2004).

1.4 Socialization effects on religion and religiousness in the Netherlands

When looking at the above mentioned researches on the influence the different parts of socialization on religion it is striking that most of this research is done in the United States of America (USA). There are many differences in the society of the USA compared with the Dutch society, not excepting religiousness. On these grounds it is questionable to state that socialization also plays a big part in religious development in Dutch society. A limited amount of research has been done that specifically looked at the religiousness of Dutch society. Already mentioned were the research by De Hart (2011; 2014), who researched religiosity in the Netherlands in general and the research by De Boer (2006), who researched the attitudes of young adults concerning religion, belief, the church and meaningfulness. Furthermore there is also the research of Vermeer, Janssen & Scheepers (2012), who specifically looked at religious transmission and parenting. They found that, on average, in the Netherlands, adolescents were raised in a moderately religious environment. Generally their parents attended church on an irregular basis, and Bible reading and prayer were usually not actively performed on a regular daily basis in most families. Despite this modest level of religious activity, according to the respondents themselves, religion was not unimportant to their parents. This research indicates that also in the Netherlands, socialization plays some role in religious development, with the reservation of the authors that, given the high standard deviations in their research, differences between Dutch, Christian families may be large Vermeer et al. (2012). The limited amount of research done, specifically on religious development in Dutch society, underlines the necessity of more research specified to the Netherlands.

As shown in this first chapter, parents are a huge influence on the socialization in the context of religion. Not only through upbringing but also through education and peer/friends. But to what degree parental influence takes hold in an adolescent is dependent on the emotional relationship between the individual and the parents (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). This stresses the importance of the role emotional development when researching the decline in religion. This will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Religious and Cognitive Development

To investigate religious growth or decline in young adults it is critical to know how and to what extent ideas about religion develop. Religious developmental theories were formulated by using several cognitive developmental theories.

2.1 Religious development

A factor that could also partially explain a decrease of faith during adolescence is the cognitive development: while children think literal, adolescents think more and more abstractly as their brain develops (Hood et al., 2009). The ability of abstract reasoning is important for the cognitive and religious development, especially during life situations because they tend to have influence on the change in beliefs and interpretations of religion (Van Saane, 2010). There are several theories on cognitive stage development that influenced the theories on religious development. The next section describes the most prominent and influential theories on cognitive and religious development.

2.1.1 The basis of cognitive (religious) development through Piaget

Piaget was the first to investigate cognitive development in children. Nowadays his work is criticized a lot, but he stood at the beginning of the theoretical evolution of cognitive development and, by inspiring others, indirectly also of religious development theories.

Piaget distinguished four stages of cognitive development that reflect different reasoning abilities: Sensorimotor stage, Preoperational stage, Concrete Operational stage and Formal Operational stage. The Sensorimotor stage describes the stage when children gain understanding of the world through sensory and motor interactions. In this stage object permanence is developed, which means that objects (or people) are considered to continue to exist even though they are not sensory perceived anymore. The Preoperational stage describes the stage wherein children are good at representing figures, language or numbers but cannot logically reason with them; they are unable to grasp more than one relationship at a time. The Concrete Operational stage describes the stage when children gain an understanding about multiple concepts and are able to reason about logical, concrete events. The Formal Operational stage describes the stage when children are able to move away from specific ideas and use complex abstract reasoning, for instance hypothetical thinking. Piaget's cognitive developmental stages have been applied by several researchers investigating the religious and/or spiritual development.

2.1.2 Development of religious denomination conception by Elkind

The conception of one's religious denomination is a natural result of mental development according to Elkind (1962), components of intelligence like conversation, search for representation, search for relation and search for comprehension are critical in religious development. He distinguished four dimensions of knowledge to religious denominational conception: a knowledge of property that is common in all members of the same denomination, knowledge that class memberships are compatible or incompatible with membership in a particular denomination, a knowledge of how membership of such a denomination is gained or lost and a knowledge of symbols/characteristics by which a member of a denomination is recognized (Elkind, 1962). These four dimensions of knowledge about a denomination have been developed into three different age related stages of conception. First there is the stage of over and under-differentiated conception of religious denomination, when a child is approximately 5-6 years old. It is under-differentiated considering the fact that there is no distinction between religious, national and racial names and characteristics. The conception of religious denomination is over-differentiated in a sense that having a religious denomination excludes having a nationality or ethnic race. At the second stage the child (during 7-9 years old) has a specific differentiation of the concept of religious denomination. There can be confusion between religious, national or racial names and characteristics, but according to the child, one could have a denomination of religion, nationality or race at the same time. The denominations are differentiated by specific characteristics like: unique practices, observances and symbols. At the last stage, in 10-12 year olds, the child is able to truly or abstractly differentiate between concepts of his/her own denomination. The child is able to recognize that all the denominations have commonalities in faith or belief and that they differ only in object(s) of worship in their belief (Elkind, 1961). These stages, in that necessary order of development in relation to age, correspond with Piaget's developmental stages; and the emerging of religious understanding in children is in agreement with the progression of Piaget's stages (Elkind, 1961; 1962; 1963).

2.1.3 The Goldman developmental theory on religious thinking

Religious thinking is no different than any other kind of thinking, therefore the development of religious thinking must go through the same cognitive developmental stages as Piaget's, according to Goldman (1964). Theology is something for adults but there is no doubt that children form series of religious concepts and develop a theological frame of reference, these concepts are constantly changing with the development of thinking about God

and the child's own activities in the world. Religious concepts are dependent on general experiences, verbal association and verbal interpretation. The concept of God is a result from elaboration, combination and interpretation of concepts such as "father", "home" etc. The concept of God is dependent on previous experiences, not just in naming but also in understanding of significant features of the previous concepts (for instance the experience of the role of father in relation to the child). However, there is, according to Goldman, a difference between religious thinking concerning the level of religious teachings, concrete thinking (about religious content) and the overall capacity of adolescents for higher, more abstract (formal operational) religious thinking.

2.1.4 Kohlberg's moral judgement development and religion

Building on Piaget's belief that the moral judgments of children derive from their cognitive development, Kohlberg attempted to identify cognitive stages that underlie the development of moral thinking (Kohlberg, Levine & Hower, 1983). Kohlberg proposed that individuals go through three broad levels of moral development, each with several sub stages. Each stage is distinguished by moral reasoning that is more complex, more comprehensive, more integrated, and more differentiated than the reasoning of the earlier stages. The pre-conventional level with sub stages 1 and 2; Sub stage 1: Punishment & Obedience orientation; morality is based on avoidance of punishment, very self-interested focused on the consequences regardless of human meaning attached to those consequences. Sub stage 2: Instrumental Relativist orientation; focus lies on instrumental needs and satisfaction that determine if something is right. The conventional level, with sub stages 3 and 4, exists of gaining approval (or avoiding disapproval) of another. Sub stage 3: Interpersonal Concordance, the person is driven by pleasure-giving behavior to others in order to gain approval. Sub stage 4: Law & Order orientation: the focus here is predominantly on social rules and order, authority and strict rules are most important. The Post-conventional level with sub stages 5 and 6, is identified by concern for morality as abstract principles; individuals can detach themselves from social groups with their principals of morality of their own if the circumstances require this. Sub stage 5: Social-contract/legalistic orientation; there is recognition of the relative nature of personal values and the importance to have rules to reach consensus. One can differentiate between legal rules and individual differences of opinion depending on the situation. Sub stage 6: Universal Ethical Principle orientation; an individual can define what is right in its own conscience, consistent with its own abstract ethical

principles, but with a sense of responsibility and consideration to others. There is a clear emphasis on universality, consistency, logic, and rationality.

The link between religious development and moral development has been frequently researched, but a causal relationship, between the two, so far has not been shown. Kohlberg emphasizes that religion has no unique cause in basic moral values, the developments are not directly and causally related. The moral development, however, can stimulate thinking and talking about religious growth. Because every religion has much to say about morality, the understanding of the way how moral development occurs is certainly relevant to the communication and understanding of moral issues at different ages.

2.2 Combining cognitive and religious developmental stage theories

Reich (1993a; 1993b) tried to combine all the different cognitive, morality and religious developmental stage theories to one unified approach. He divided the theories in hard and soft stage theories. Hard (cognitive) stages describe organized systems of action (first-order problem solving). The stages are qualitatively different from each other, and follow an unchanging sequence with a clear developmental logic: a later stage denotes greater complexity and improved problem-solving capacity. Each hard stage integrates the preceding stage and logically requires the elements of the prior stage. The theories of Piaget, Elkind, Goldman and Kohlberg are considered hard stage theories. On the other hand there are soft stages like the developmental stage theories of Oser and Fowler, that emphasize and include more elements of affective (emotional) or reflective characteristics that do not follow a unique developmental logic; a person is able to flow back and forth between the different stages (Reich, 1993a). Cognitive, hard stage, theories about religion always were considered more important in science. Nowadays the importance of cognitive theories raises more criticism. There is a call for more attention to the influence of emotional development (Boyatzis, 2005). Soft stage religious developmental theories that put more emphasis on emotional characteristics like Oser's and Fowler's theories are set out in Chapter 3.

This chapter has shown how an understanding of religion (and inherently through this forming of religiousness) develops and how this is affected by cognitive changes that occur through the development from child- to adulthood. How a person ascribes meaning to ideas and concepts, copes with conflicts is dependent on the kind of reference frame this person uses. In which way a person is able to do this, is dependent on the cognitive development. In this research we want to focus mainly on the emotional changes that influences the decision on church leaving when dealing with conflict. On the other hand, in order to deal with any

(religious) conflict, there has to be an understanding on (religious) abstract ideas and concepts. Therefore cognitive development does play a large part in apostasy, and is important to our research. However we want to argue through Chapter 3 (and our own research) that the cognitive approach is not the only developmental approach that influences such decisions on leaving or staying with one's religion; emotional development and changes are equally important to be taken into consideration.

Chapter 3: Emotional Development

During adolescence the emotional development is subject to a lot of changes. Personal opinions, values and ideas are (more specifically) formed during this time of a child's development; which are grossly influenced by the emotional development and happenings that a child experienced. It seems obvious that emotional transition periods in adolescence, such as moving away to college and shifting emotional bonds, are often significant in altering religious (and other) behaviors. Likewise emotional connections play a big part in socialization. Parenting practices, such as monitoring children's praying, taking them to church are behaviors towards a specific socialization goal (see also Chapter 1 where the parental influence on religious socialization specifically is treated). However it is found that the effectiveness of parenting practices towards religious socialization are enhanced by parenting style. Parenting style is the general emotional climate in the family, which conveys the parents' general feeling about the child. Parenting style thus serves as a general emotional context that affects the relationship between specific parenting practices and specific developmental outcomes. This also implies that the emotional climate in the family affects the effectiveness of certain parenting practices in achieving specific socialization goals; the more optimal the emotional climate, the more effective it will be and vice versa (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

Since this emotional relationship with parents may influence the course of religion so significantly, in decline or increase for adolescents; it is surprising that there has not been more interest for this, in religious research. The emotional relationship with parents, taken together with the emotional transitions and the forming of personal ideas and values for adult personality through emotional development, are arguments that emotional development plays a very important role in adolescent (religious) growth. Therefore more attention should be paid to influence of the emotional development in research about religion. Throughout the two chapters so far little attention has been paid to the personal relationship and attachment that Christian adolescents have with their church and their God. However in this thesis another explanation of why people leave the church will be investigated: the psychological construct of attachment, to see if there are predictable emotional connections between attachment and individual and normative images of God.

In this chapter at first the soft (emotional based) cognitive developmental stages will be discussed, secondly the emotional development of attachment will be explained and finally the way of how emotional development relates to religious development.

3.1 Developmental stages of faith by Fowler

Fowler combines Piaget's cognitive stages and Kohlberg's moral development in his theory on developmental stages of faith (Fowler, 1981). By the way of trust child develops confidence and self-esteem; through this the child is able to be loyal to something/someone and dedicate him/herself to someone or something. In the development of faith the maturation of logics, rationality and conviction play a role; these are connected to intelligence, morality and being able to look at different perspectives. This way Fowler combined cognitive and moral development. He distinguished several stages of faith: the first stage is the Primal faith: the beginnings of emotional trust through contact, care, early play etc. Basic trust is a condition that has to be met for development of faith. The second stage is Intuitive/Protective faith: imagination is combined with perception and feelings to create faith images (God image is one of these). In this stage the images are strongly influenced by the images and tales parents carry out. The third stage is the Mythical/Literal faith: this stage is colored by logical thinking. There is a difference between reality and fantasy and the child can appreciate perspectives of others. Through this difference between fantasy and reality a child can use stories for structure and giving meaning to life. But the beliefs are quite literal and there is not yet an understanding of abstract concepts yet like religious symbols. With the start of adolescence, the fourth stage, Synthetic/Conventional faith emerges. This stage relies on abstract ideas and gives a longing for a more personal relationship with faith, based on personal reflections on the past and future. The fifth stage, Individual/reflective faith, involves critical examination of personal beliefs and values that have been formed until then. There is a change from relying on authority figures to the authority within the self. During the sixth stage, Conjunctive faith, there is an acceptance and unification of opposites and contradictions which nullifies the strain that contradicting ideas can give. Dialogical knowing develops in this stage, the individual is open to the multiple perspectives of a complex world. Lastly the seventh stage, Universalized faith is described: a relatively rare final stage that involves a oneness with the power of being or with God, as well as commitment to love, justice, and overcoming oppression and violence.

Fowler sees faith as a set of deep core beliefs, values and images of power that may vary individually. Faith involves stories and images that give guidance and direction to one's life; his stages of faith aim to describe patterned operations of knowing and valuing that underlie our consciousness (Fowler, 1981). His seven faith stages are successive, but almost no one undergoes the development through all the seven stages. Fowler claims that people

who achieve the universalizing stage of faith are in danger of premature death because of their confrontational involvement in solving serious problems in the world.

3.2 The theory of Oser: the aspect of religious judgement in religious development

Oser focusses on a specific aspect of religious development, namely religious judgment. In his research there are five stages identified of religious judgement in the relationship with an ultimate being (God). Individuals move from a stage of believing that God intervenes unexpectedly in the world and that God's power guides human beings (Stage 1), through belief in a still external and all-powerful God who punishes or rewards, depending on good or bad deeds ("Give so that you may receive") Stage 2. Individuals in Stage 3 begin to think of God as somewhat detached from their world and as wielding less influence, with people generally responsible for their own lives, since they can now distinguish between "transcendence" (God's existence outside the created world) and "immanence" (God's presence and action from within). In Stage 4 people come to realize both the necessity and the limits of autonomy, recognizing that freedom and life stem from an Ultimate Being, who is often perceived to have a "divine plan" that gives meaning to life. Finally, in Stage 5 the Ultimate Being is realized through human action via care and love; there is universal and unconditional religiosity (Oser, 1991).

These religious judgment stages develop not in a fixed rate; even though a greater insight and understanding from the person is necessary to follow through the subsequent stages, one can fluently move back and forth between these stages. The religious judgement stages influence the way a person sees God, and how much of an influence God has in a person's life. For instance in Stage 1, God is a very active player, He can intervene and change all kinds of things in a person's life; versus Stage 5 where there is more of a passive influence, the presence of God can be detected through the actions that a person undertakes, like acts of compassion or forgiveness.

3.3 Deviance and Cognitive Dissonance in decline of religiousness

Adolescence is often marked by deviant behavior against parents, most common are rebellions against churches and schools; thus reducing the incentive of (active) church membership (Stolzenberg et al., 1995). This deviant behavior against parents is based on the changing emotional labels that children give their parents, other relationships, situations and circumstances. In such deviant behavior there is often exposure to, and participation in, behavior that is not in line with the teachings of religious traditions (e.g. drinking, smoking

and sexual activity). This can lead to cognitive dissonance: the difference between what, in this example, the adolescent is doing, and what he/she thinks he/she ought to be doing in accordance with what has been learnt at home. Likewise dissonance can occur when scientific arguments are felt to be contradictory to religious convictions (Uecker et al., 2007). Such dissonance can lead to distancing from the church, downplaying of importance to religion or entire disassociation from religion.

According to Slee (1986; 1987) religious thinking uses several cognitive processes, including religious images, basic religious concepts, beliefs and interpretations of such images and concepts. The changing of beliefs, interpretations and identity development result in attitudes that become more negative toward religion, when children reach puberty and adolescence (Greer, 1981; Tamminen, 1991; Turner, 1980).

3.4 The emotional change in parental relationships influencing religiousness

Parents exercise their authority during childhood, the way they do this influences the social and emotional skills of their children. The parenting styles show little change during the growth from child to adolescent. The changes in parenting are not in style, but in the patterns of interaction with family members (Roberts, Block & Block, 1984). In mid-adolescence family interactions are rigid and marked by arguments, while at the end of adolescence family interactions have become more flexible and responsive to arguments. The change in interaction for adolescents is more about gaining influence and equality (Steinberg, 1981). To get through this change of autonomy young adolescents often retaliate against the order of the parents, they show deviant behavior in order to discover and establish their own values (see previous subsection). Autonomy here is defined as separation from parents. This definition strongly emphasizes the interpersonal distance between the adolescent and his or her parents, as perceived by the adolescent. Not only a change of behavior and values, but also the emotional support systems change the nature of interaction with adolescents and parents. During adolescence there is a shift from the primary, basic source of emotional support from parents to multiple support systems of parents, friends, colleagues etc.

In apostasy among adolescents not only pubescent deviance against parents is of influence, but also the factor of poor parental relations (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977). Several other researchers like Hunsberger (1976) and Lawton & Bures (2001) researched the parental relations and apostasy among adolescents. Hunsberger suggested that apostasy seems to be related to a lack of parental emphasis on religion, rather than a rebellion against parents or society. This is in line with findings of De Boer (2006, Chapter 5). She found that in families

that did not discuss religious issues openly, there was a bigger decline in religiousness of the children. In contrast, in families where there was room to talk about religious issues, the adolescents generally showed more interest in religion and showed a higher, more stable, church attendance rate. Hunsberger (1976) also found evidence that apostates have poorer relationships with their parents, but these poorer relationships could be either a cause or a result of apostasy. Lawson & Bures's research (2001), however, suggests that a poor relationship with parents is likely to precede disengagement from religion.

3.5 Attachment as fundamental basis for (religious) relationships

That the relationship a child develops with its parents, stands at the beginning of all kinds of different parts in psychological development toward adulthood (e.g. autonomy, confidence, social skills, coping strategies etc.).

The Attachment Theory describes how the psychological basis of building and maintaining relationships develops in infancy. Attachment is defined as a behavioral (evolutionary) construct that insures people connect with each other. Attachment starts early in life when, still as a baby, the child tends to select the caregiver who has spent the most time caring for the child as its principal attachment figure, that is, the one person whom the child prefers to use above all others as a secure base for exploration and as a safe haven when alarmed. It is possible for a child to develop more than one of such attachments with different people (Bowlby, 1973).

The development of the child's understanding of a safe haven and a secure base depends on the caregiver's perceptiveness and reactions to the child's emotions. This means that a child whose caregiver is receptive to the child's emotions and reacts adequately can be confident enough to go out and explore, knowing that the caregiver will not disappear; but when the child gets distressed during exploration it knows it can go back to the caregiver where it will be soothed. The primary caregiver's sensitivity to the child's signals of distress determines the nature of the child's cognitive-affective representations of self and others. Individual differences in such representations are believed to be underlying of the security or insecurity in attachment behaviors. When an insecure attachment is formed, it means that the primary caregiver was not always sensitive enough about the child's distress. This leads to more emotional distress when the caregiver is not present or is not able to provide security.

The type of attachment style a child develops will influence the development of its relationships and social skills with other people for the rest of its life. An attachment style can predict certain behavior in establishing relationships with others. When a person has a secure

attachment style in adolescence, behavior tends to be mostly focused on emotional and cognitive independence from the caregivers. Furthermore, people with a secure attachment are better in monitoring and regulating their own emotions and stress (Allen, Porter, McFarland, McElhaney & Marsh, 2007). A person with an insecure attachment style has more likelihood to develop a sensitivity towards rejection, compulsive care-seeking and over-dependency, because of their insecurity about their safe base if he/she is reliable (Lorenzini & Fonagy, 2013).

The attachment style has an influence on the kind of relationships a person forms, in the case of this thesis, a relationship with one's God and with the related (religious) community. The focus of this thesis lies on the attachment style, which influences the nature of the relationships a person forms with other people, in the relationship with one's God and with the related (religious) community.

3.6 Development of God representations

To have an attachment with God, there has to be a representation, an image of God in one's mind. A God representation or God Image is how God is experienced and perceived by an individual. A God representation can take many different forms: it may be a wrathful God or a loving father-figure, inspired by the Bible (Van Saane, 2010). Likewise God can be interpreted as just a word for a higher power or "something we cannot understand; God is something inside us (humans)", according to Dutch, Christian adolescents concluded from a survey (De Boer, 2006). An individual's image or representation of God changes over time, and moreover it does not have to be the same image of God that has been preached and taught by the religious institute (Schaap-Jonker, 2004).

Within every stage of development from child to adult, there is a God representation present and each developmental stage has its own religious questions and difficulties through which the individual's expectations and image of God are adjusted. The child's image of God, which is thus a significant part of its religious development, partly depends on a child's cognitive development of combining memory, fantasy, interpretations and integration of life experiences. Harms (1944) identified three stages in the development of the concept of God: Fairytale stage, Realistic stage and Individualistic stage. In the Fairytale stage children (3 to 6 years old) see God as they know him from stories, this is no difference from other characters from (fairytale) stories. In the Realistic stage (6 to 11 years old) God is viewed more as human, a concrete entity. In the Individualistic stage, during adolescence, God is viewed in a

more personal individual way; there are different concepts of God per individual, according to personal preference and needs.

3.6.1 Rizzuto's development of God images

Rizzuto is one of the first who researched and developed theories about the image of God. She used Freud's theories as a basis which she expanded and used this in her own theories about God images from a psychoanalytic perspective. According to Freud (1910): "...it has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than an exalted father..." (p. 80). From Freud's predominantly male perspective a boy uses the image of his own father to form an image of God. However not only the father is used to provide a God image, but also representations of the mother or other significant people, and according to Rizzuto (1979), the emotional part of the God image reflects subjective experiences of God that are associated with a person's internalized relational dynamics which have their origins in early interactions with parents, this can be both positive and negative. For example in Rizzuto's research, in her case study of David Miller: God is portrayed as frightening, based on the representations of his strict father (Rizzuto, 1979). On the other hand God is often visualized as strict but fair, this visualization is based on how most parents are in relation to their children.

There can be a difference between representations of God, the personalized representation (how one personally sees God) and the doctrinal representation (the representation according to the religious culture) (Schaap-Jonker, 2004; Schaap-Jonker, Eurlings-Bontekoe, Zock & Jonker, 2007; Zahl & Gibson, 2012). When there is a discrepancy between the internal, personal image of God and the external, normative image of God, this may lead to inner conflict and stress (Schaap-Jonker, 2011; Schaap-Jonker et al., 2007). An example of this is when a child is terminally ill: the normative image of God is that God is a savior to the innocents and good Christians, but this image does not match the personal image of the Christian parents who try to understand why their innocent child has to suffer so much. This difference in images leads to high conflict and stress while trying to keep having faith.

3.7 An attachment with God

The believers' perceived relationships with God develop from their attachment-related experiences with primary caregivers. Kaufman (1981; as described in Kirkpatrick, 2005) described God as the ideal attachment figure, God is always there in moments of crisis; while human attachment figures are fallible and therefore not perfectly trustworthy (they are after

all, human). There is much research and evidence that support the idea that religion, in particular a perceived relationship with God, serves as a safe haven in times of distress or threat. More specifically, people turn to prayer, rather than to the church, in times of emotional distress; this because God is immediately available through prayer when crisis arises, while the church (or its ministers) is not (Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi, 1975; Spilka, Hood & Gorsuch, 1985 as described in Kirkpatrick, 1992). When looking at how God is represented in the Christian faith it is hardly a surprise that God can be an attachment figure, the imagery and language used by Christians to voice their beliefs is strongly represented by attachment wording. He is called the Father who looks out for you, God or Jesus is by one's side, holding one's hand, or holding one in his arms. This enables believers (by their own accounts) to cope with stress and face the trials and tribulations of the world (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990).

The image that one has of him/herself and the internalized relational dynamics all play a crucial role in the forming the image of God (Rizzuto, 1979). These are precisely the things that are constructed through the influence of attachment style. The idea that attachment is one of the underlying core aspects of individual differences in religious beliefs and religious behaviors was suggested by Kirkpatrick (1992). Kirkpatrick's application of the Attachment Theory to religion includes the theory that even though God is invisible and believers have no concrete physical interaction history with God, their perceived relationships with the divine nevertheless sometimes meet established criteria for defining attachment relationships.

3.7.1 Compensation & Correspondence Theory in an attachment relationship with God

Kirkpatrick developed two theories in which Attachment Theory is used to describe a relationship with God: the Compensation Theory and Correspondence Theory (Kirkpatrick, 1992; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). The Compensation Theory follows that God is a compensational attachment figure when the primary attachment figure (parent) is not available or inadequate. Thus people who have not had secure relationships with their parents (or other primary caregivers) may be inclined to compensate for this absence by believing in a loving, personal and available God. Against this, Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1990) set out the mental model hypothesis: predicting that religiousness may be at partially determined by early attachment relationships; for people to model their religious beliefs on the attachment relationships they experienced early in their lives. In their study they did not find evidence for this mental model hypothesis, however there was evidence for the Compensation Theory.

When looking at the time leading to conversion most people recalled relational and severe emotional stress, these recurrent themes of lost or disrupted love relationships, family problems, and severe emotional distress represent the very sorts of circumstances in which people are likely to seek the safe haven provided by an attachment figure: in this case, God (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). However even though Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1990) did not find evidence for their mental model hypothesis; they did find that accounts of attachment to parents suggested a positive association between security of attachment and socialization-based religiosity. People who have a secure attachment style would be expected to view God, like their human relationship partners, as an available and responsive attachment figure who loves and cares for them, whereas avoidant persons would be more likely to see God as remote and inaccessible, or cold and rejecting, or simply nonexistent (Kirkpatrick, 1992). This is described in the Correspondence Theory which, in contrast with Compensation Theory, shows that the attachment with parents is corresponding to the relationship one has with one's God. In their research Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1990) found that people who classified themselves as secure were significantly more likely than those who were classified as avoidant, to view God as more loving, less controlling, and less distant/inaccessible. People with an avoidant attachment style showed significantly less religious commitment than people with a secure attachment style, and were more likely to classify themselves as agnostic than the other groups. Anxious subjects generally fell in between the secure and avoidant groups on how they view God.

3.7.2 The research of Granqvist on Attachment relationships with God

In order to explain how the two, seemingly contradictory, theories of Compensation and Corresponding could coincide next to each other, Granqvist & Hagekull (1999) suggested that secure attachment facilitates the socialization of children to parental religion, whereas insecure attachment does not. Thus, those with secure childhood attachments become religious if their parents are religious, but not if their parents are not, those with insecure childhood attachments follow the opposite pattern. Granqvist referred to this process as Socialized Correspondence. Here the Correspondence refers to the parallel between one's religious beliefs and one's parents' beliefs, rather than as before in Kirkpatrick's theory, between one's religious beliefs and security of one's own (prior experienced) attachment style.

Kirkpatrick reacted to the Socialized Correspondence by arguing that there is a difference between immediate and delayed corresponding effects on religiousness

(Kirkpatrick, 1999). The effects that are (more) immediate correspond with mental models of self/others and God in a specific time, therefore religiousness and attachment are concurrent in correspondence. In contrast as corresponding effects are delayed, it was hypothesized that religiosity of insecure people is more tied to attachment system dynamics; religiosity increases over time to compensate for earlier experienced attachment behavior (Longitudinal Compensation). But using the Concurrent Correspondence and Longitudinal hypotheses on their own fails not only to predict the religious changes of secure individuals but also to account for the theoretically relevant moderating influence of parental religiousness (Granqvist, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). On the other hand, using the Socialized Correspondence hypothesis in isolation fails to account for the links observed between attachment security and some content aspects of religiousness, such as a loving God image as opposed to, for instance, a distant God image (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992).

Granqvist (2002) therefore expanded the Correspondence Theory into the Two-level Correspondence Theory to combine Concurrent Correspondence and Longitudinal Compensation with Socialized Correspondence. The first level in Correspondence Theory is the primary mechanism of social learning of parental standards in the context of a secure relationship, and the second level of Correspondence Theory is a secondary effect, reflecting mental models correspondence between self/other and God. This secondary effect of mental model correspondence is based on repeated positive experiences of sensitive parents. This creates a mental model that a child can use when a parent/caregiver is not directly available after experiencing stress. Thus in this second level, God is as a mental model, corresponding with the attachment of parents (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001).

3.7.3 Attachment style as an influence on religiosity and apostasy

“...and it brings us evidence every day of how young people lose their religious beliefs as soon as their father’s authority breaks down” (Freud, 1910, p. 80). In this quote Freud connects for the first time religiousness and apostasy through a changing parental relationship. More recent the relation between attachment styles and religiosity and apostasy is extensively researched by Granqvist (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001; Granqvist, 2002; 2006; Granqvist, Ljungdahl & Dickie, 2007). From these studies it can be concluded that adults and adolescents with a secure attachment, and who have parents with a high religiosity, are more likely to stay with their church (correspondence hypothesis), while adolescents with insecure attachment are more likely to switch according to their needs (compensational hypothesis).

Granqvist (2002) showed in his study of 196 adolescents that religiosity of secure attached adolescents is stable or increasing slowly over time and is mostly based on the socialization of the religious standards of the primary attachment figure (in this research mostly the mother, though relationship with father also yielded, though less, significant results). Thereby religiosity of secure adolescents is corresponding to parents' religiousness and adopting parental religious standards. On the other hand insecure attached adolescents (to mother) showed significant results in decrease of religiousness, but when there was an increase of religiousness then it was marked by sudden and intense conversion and religious changes during life situations of emotional turmoil. Thus when researching adolescents and apostasy, it is expected that adolescents with a secure attachment stay in the church of their (religious active) parents while adolescents with an insecure attachment change and convert more easily from their church, according to their emotional and affective needs.

3.8 Research questions and hypotheses

Following Granqvist (2002; 2006) and Schaap-Jonker et al. (2007), it is my expectation in this thesis that when the personal image of God is too much in conflict with the normative image (the religious culture), adolescents with a secure attachment style will stay within their church because they are stable enough to overcome the differences to their internal image. For them the family, the congregation, the social foundations are more important than those differences. In contrast adolescents with an insecure attachment style use the church as a place to have contact with their (primary) attachment figure, God. These adolescents experience stress when the God images are conflicting. These differences of image are perceived as threatening, as such the adolescents will be more inclined to search for a better fitting normative image, trying to diminish their feelings of conflict and better regulate their emotions.

Results from this thesis might help explain the increase of the apostasy among Dutch Christian adolescents by employing in-depth developmental psychology. The outcome of this study may provide more information on the influence of attachment in daily life. Little is known about the specifics of attachment, and most findings and literature are based on studies with clinical cases which are (severely) lacking attachment (Allen et al., 2007). The outcome of this study might also give religious institutes more insight on what may be missing for Dutch adolescents in the institutes' way of dealing with current issues about religion and spirituality.

Based on the previous discussed literature and my own expectations the following research question was formulated:

Do attachment style and perceived discrepancy in God images play a role in the decision of adolescents to stay or leave their church?

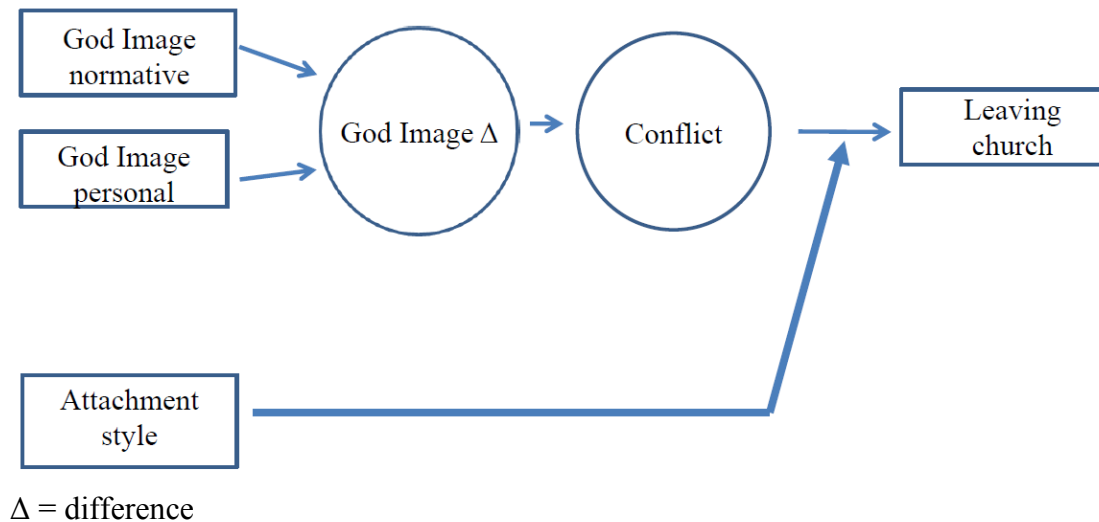
To answer this research question the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. If there is a discrepancy between the personal image of God and the normative image of God, which an individual experiences as a conflict, and one has an insecure attachment, then the individual will be more inclined to leave the church, whereas someone with a secure attachment will be less or not at all inclined to leave the church.

2. If the personal image of God is consistent with the normative image and there is no conflict, then adolescents, regardless of their attachment style will be inclined to stay with their church.

The relationships between the variables of the hypotheses are illustrated below in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Relationships between the variables of the religious group*



Method

4.1 Participants

To research our hypotheses, at first the aim was to recruit at least a 100 adolescents, between 16 and 21 years old, connected with: a church or religious student association. This age-group was selected because it shows the most decline in religiousness and church attendance. Next to that the decision-making skills of adolescents have developed enough for being able to show their intricate reasoning behind such a decision of leaving the church. However, since finding enough participants for this research is very difficult (because they rarely, if at all, go to church), it was decided to try to achieve more statistical power by including participants from the age of 16 up to 35 years old. It was expected that a larger number of participants could be recruited, which would improve the chance of finding significant results.

This study had a random sample of 156 participants, however 54 participants had to be excluded because they did not finish the questionnaires, 1 participant had not filled in the informed consent, 1 participant was older (40) than the age range (16 to 35). Therefore this study consisted of $N = 100$ eligible participants, 38 were males and 62 were females. The participants were on average $M = 23,05$ years old ($SD = 3,996$, range = 16 - 35). The majority of the sample was well educated, 74 % of the participants completed or were following at least an academic or higher vocational schooling.

4.2 Procedure

Respondents were recruited in different ways. The participants were contacted in the period of the end of May through June 2015, through youth organizations of churches, religious student associations, email and social media through snowball sampling. The churches and student associations were contacted through email and personal contact with the researcher, to invite them to participate in this research. Here they received information about the study and could indicate if they wanted to cooperate in this study. The churches and student associations were free in their manner of bringing the questionnaire under the attention of eligible participants. If churches or student association did not react to the invitation a reminder was sent after a week, when they did participate contact was made after 2-3 weeks to assess how recruiting participants was going. At the end of the research the churches and student associations, who were interested, could receive a summary of the research and the results. The summary was given in order to give the religious institutes suggestions on how they could keep their (or attract new) young members.

During the assessment, respondents were selected on the inclusion criteria as described under the heading 'Participants'. When a respondent met the inclusion criteria he or she was invited to read and sign the informed consent form. After which, the respondents received the questionnaires and were asked to complete them as accurately as possible. The respondent could choose to complete the questionnaires online or on paper. It takes about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires. After finishing the questionnaires the respondent was thanked for volunteering in this study and could enter a lottery for a VVV coupon of €25 as a reward. Subsequently all the data was collected and entered into a database of SPSS.

4.3 Measurements

4.3.1 Attachment style

To investigate the hypotheses several measurements were used, the first of which is the ECR-R, Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000). To measure attachment-related anxiety, a subscale of the ECR-R will be used. This subscale is devised to measure the insecure attachment style, the other subscale that measures ambivalent attachment style has not been used. The subscale consists of 18 items, in a rated seven point Likert scale rating from 1= strongly disagree till 7= strongly agree. To obtain a score on attachment anxiety, the average was calculated, the reliability for this anxious attachment subscale was $\alpha = .94$. The lower one scores on the insecure attachment style, the more secure one's attachment style is.

4.3.2 Internal & external image of God

To investigate the internal and external image of God, the "Vragenlijst Godsbeeld" (VGB) (Schaap Jonker & Eurlings-Bontekoe, 2009 as described in Schaap-Jonker, Eurlings-Bontekoe & Luyten, 2012) was used. This measurement has a five point Likert scale rating from 1= totally not applicable to 5= totally applicable, with two dimensions: experience in the relationship with God and perception of God. For the internal image of God the VGB was filled in, according to the participant's own image of God ("when I myself am thinking of God, I experience..."). For the external image the same questionnaire was filled in with regard to what the participant perceived as normative ("I should experience..."). The internal and external image scores were also subtracted from each other in order to measure the discrepancy between internal and external subscale images of God. The dimension of experience in the relationship with God consists of 17 items which translate into three subscales: POS, positive feelings, with a reliability of $\alpha = .92$ for the internal positive image

and $\alpha = .94$ for the external positive image. ANG, anxiety, with a reliability of $\alpha = .77$ for internal and $\alpha = .75$ external. Third subscale is BOO, “boosheid” (anger), with a reliability of $\alpha = .83$ for the internal anger image and $\alpha = .73$ external. The other dimension, perception of God, consists of 16 items which translate to three subscales: OSH “ondersteunend handelen” (acting supportive), with a reliability of $\alpha = .97$ for internal image and $\alpha = .95$ for the external image. HSH, “heersend/straffend handelen” (acting ruling/punishing), with a reliability of $\alpha = .83$ internal and $\alpha = .82$ external. Last subscale is PAS, passive, with a reliability of $\alpha = .82$ for internal image and $\alpha = .76$ for external passive image.

4.3.3 Conflict score

To investigate how much the conflict of having discrepancies between internal and the external image of God was experienced, a conflict scale based on conflict scale (Rahim, 1983), adjusted to fit the topic of religion, was used. This scale is an 18 item Likert scale, ranging from 1= very much disagree to 5= very much agree, with some items also the option not applicable was available. An average score of ‘experiencing conflict’ was calculated, in this calculation the option “not applicable” was scored a 0. Examples of the questions are: “I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with *the church*”, “I usually accommodate the wishes of my *congregation*”, “I try to play down the differences to reach a compromise *between what I believe and what I should believe*”, “I experience conflict between *what I belief for myself and what I should belief according to my church.*”

However when the reliability was checked it was too low, $\alpha = .42$, this we ascribed to the fact that the scale had to be translated and the questions were adjusted to fit the topic of religion. Therefore we did a factor analysis with a varimax rotation to investigate if there were some common factors in the conflict scale that could be used. With this four underlying factors have been discovered with a high enough reliability: Factor 1 “Conflict inschikken” (concede to conflict) $\alpha = .78$, Factor 2 “Conflict discrepancy” $\alpha = .77$, Factor 3 “Conflict actief met voorganger bespreken” (actively talk about conflict with the minister) $\alpha = .75$ and Factor 4 “Conflict vasthouden eigen waarden” (holding on to own values when in conflict) $\alpha = .71$.

4.3.4 Intention to leave score

To investigate the intention of leaving the church a questionnaire was used that is based on several ‘intention to leave work’ questionnaires adjusted to fit the topic of religion (De Kruijf, 2014; Estryng-Behar, van der Heijden, Fry & Hasselhorn, 2010; Lee, 2004). This

questionnaire consisted out of 16 items, the first five items were about the satisfaction of the church, with a five point Likert scale ranging from 1= very unsatisfied to 5= very satisfied. An example of an item: "How much are you satisfied with...how the church carries out the faith with regard to the content." The higher the score on satisfaction, the lower the intention to leave; therefore these items were reverse scored. The next ten items measured intentions, thoughts about leaving the church with a five point Likert scale. The answers ranged from 1= very much disagree to 5= very much agree. An example of an item: "It is very likely that I will go to another church somewhere in the upcoming six months". The following items are scored in reverse order: item 6: "This community means a lot to me", item 8: "I feel emotionally attached to this church", and item 10: "I do not often think about leaving the church". Lastly an open question was asked about how often in the last year one had thought about leaving their current church. The answers given at the open question have been converted to a range score: 0 - 5 times = 1; 6 - 10 times = 2; 11 - 15 times = 3; 16 - 20 = 4 ; > 20 times = 5. Through this an average score of 'intention to leave' is calculated, $\alpha = .91$; the higher the average score, the higher the intention to leave the church.

Although it would be better to use participants who actually have left the church, we choose to measure whether participants may have the intention to leave the church. That is, we assume that people who have already left the church will be difficult to find since most contact with the prior religious institutions will be lost. Therefore intention of leaving the church will be investigated to heighten the possibility of finding enough eligible respondents. This kind of measurement is frequently used to accurately predict the behavior (that which is linked to the intention) in the field social and organizational psychology (Estryn-Behar et al., 2010; Lee, 2004).

4.3.5 Background

Lastly a demographical questionnaire was made in order to be able to look at, and if need be, control for the background of the respondents, in the statistical analyses. In this questionnaire items about age, sex, education, church experiences and opinions were asked. This questionnaire was not based on previous literature but devised by the researcher herself.

To interpret the answers of the questionnaires and the relationships between the variables the statistical measure program SPSS 22.0 will be used

4.4 Design

This study has a within-group design. Our dependent variable is the intention to leave the church. We want to investigate the extent to which the intention to leave the church can be predicted by the discrepancy between internal and external image of God (consistent or inconsistent), the amount of conflict that is perceived and attachment style. In the two hypotheses “Image of God”, with two conditions (image of God consistent; image of God inconsistent), “Attachment style”, with two conditions (secure attachment; insecure attachment) and “Conflict”, with two conditions (conflict; no conflict), serving as independent variables and intention to leave the church as a dependent variable.

4.5 Data analysis

The first hypothesis: If there is a discrepancy between the personal image of God and the normative image of God, that one experiences as conflict, and one has an insecure attachment then an individual will be more inclined to leave the church, whereas someone with a secure attachment will be less (or not at all) inclined to leave the church. In order to investigate this first hypothesis, some sub-questions need to be answered:

1. Does Image Difference Δ lead to Conflict?

To answer this question first the amount of image discrepancy has to be calculated, this by making an Image Difference variable (Δ) which will be made by subtracting Internal- and External Image of God scores. Then how much conflict is experienced by the adolescent is calculated by the average of the responses on the conflict scale (= Conflict score). It is expected that there is a positive correlation between Image Difference (Δ) and Conflict score.

2. Adolescents with an insecure attachment leave the church.

To answer this question a regression analysis will be done. It is expected that there is a positive correlation between ECR-R scores and leaving the church.

3. Conflict and insecure attachment style lead to leaving the church.

Attachment with the church and God

To answer this question an interaction variable will be made with which a multiple regression analysis will be done. It is expected that there is a positive relationship between the Conflict score and insecure attachment (ECR-R scores) with leaving the church.

To test the first hypothesis an Anova will be done. To see, when the participants are categorized by attachment style, if Image Difference (Δ), Conflict score and leaving church, have a positive relation.

The second hypothesis: If the personal image of God is consistent with the normative image, there is no discrepancy, then adolescents regardless of their attachment style will be inclined to stay with their church. To test the second hypothesis also an Anova is used. It is expected that there will be a negative correlation between Conflict score and Church leaving, when categorized by Attachment style.

Results

5.1 Results

The correlations and descriptive statistics of the variables insecure attachment (ECR-R), God image Discrepancy (pos, positive; ang, anxiety; boo, anger; osh, acting supportive; hsh, acting ruling/punishing and pas, passive), Conflict (conflict factor 1, concede to conflict; conflict factor 2, discrepancy; conflict factor 3, actively talk about conflict with the minister and conflict factor 4, holding on to own values when in conflict) and Intention to leave the church are shown in Table 1., and correlations are also shown in Figure 2.

In spite of our expectation attachment style did not correlate with intention to leave, however, as shown in Table 1, attachment style does significantly correlate with a discrepancy in the passive God image ($p = .041$).

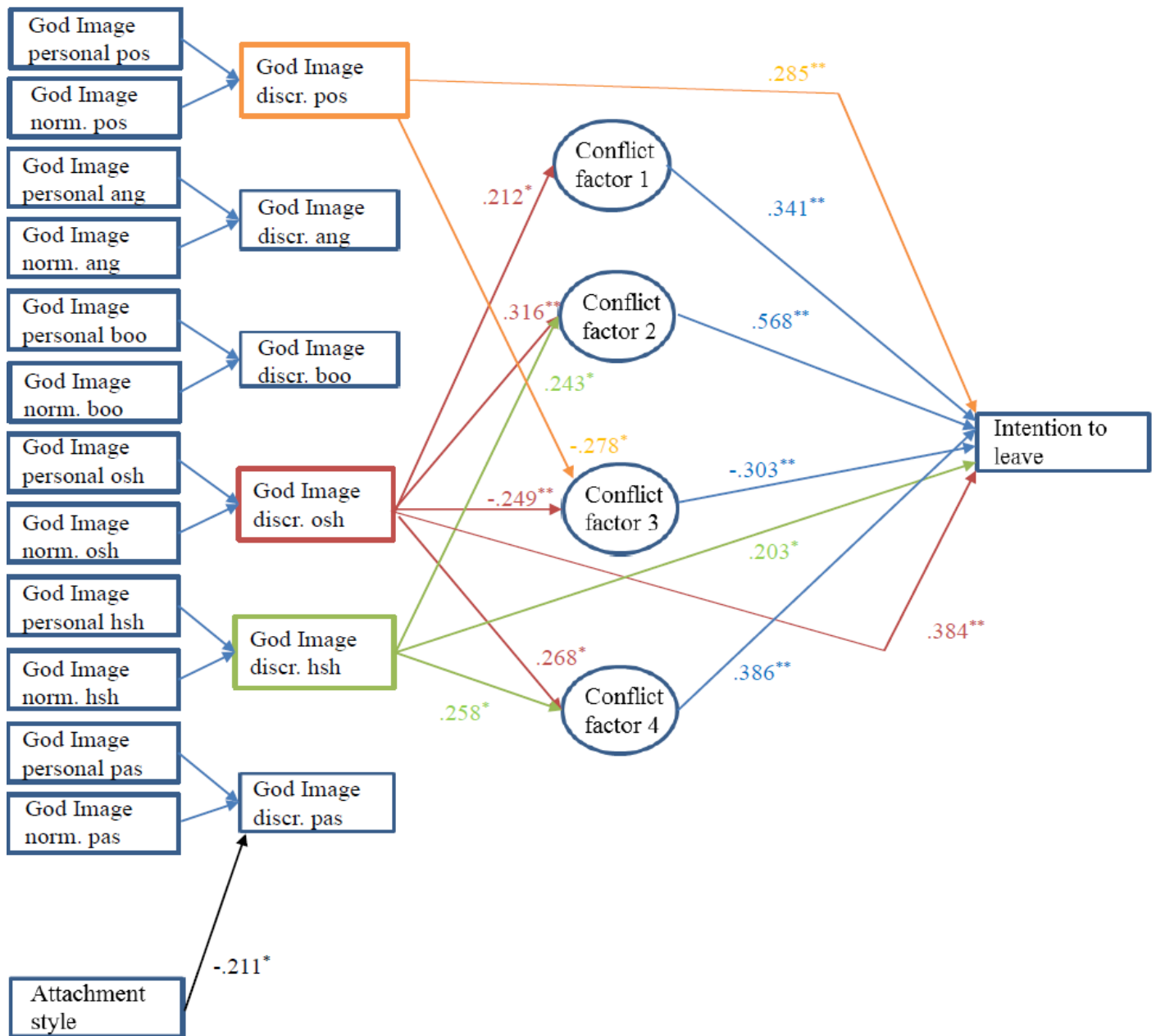
In line with our expectations some God images (positive God image ($p = .008$), acting supportive God image ($p = .000$), acting ruling/punishing God image ($p = .048$)), and all the conflict factors (factor 1 concede ($p = .001$), factor 2 discrepancy ($p = .000$), factor 3 active with minister ($p = .003$) and factor 4 own values ($p = .000$)) each correlate significantly with intention to leave (Table 1. and Figure 2.).

Table 1. *Correlations and descriptive statistics*

	Correlations												M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
1 ECR-R		-.044	.071	-.016	.146	-.021	-.080	-.211*	-.192	.065	.062	-.039	2.456	1.177
2 Intention			.285**	.044	-.026	.384**	.203*	-.071	.341**	.568**	-.303**	.386**	2.288	.761
3 VGB_disc_pos				.025	-.187	.806**	.431**	-.115	.066	.153	-.278*	.062	5.148	7.258
4 VGB_disc_ang					.129	.250*	.401**	-.035	.047	.050	-.060	.081	-2.130	3.935
5 VGB_disc_booo						-.205*	-.171	.126	-.038	-.167	.006	-.058	-.850	2.076
6 VGB_disc_osh							.578*	-.044	.212*	.316**	-.249*	.268*	5.175	8.579
7 VGB_disc_hsh								-.158	.007	.243*	-.100	.258*	1.748	3.704
8 VGB_disc_pas									.056	.123	.023	.042	-.637	1.745
9 Conflict_factor_1										.250*	-.337**	.268**	3.638	.746
10 Conflict_factor_2											-.148	.362**	2.546	1.114
11 Conflict_factor_3												-.127	1.253	1.069
12 Conflict_factor_4													3.531	.858

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Figure 2. Correlations



norm. = normative

pos = postief (positive)

ang = angstig (anxious)

boo = boosheid (anger)

osh = ondersteunend handelend (acting supportive)

hsh = heersend/straffend handelend (acting ruling/punishing)

pas = passief (passive)

discr. = discrepancy

Conflict factor 1 = Conceding to differences

Conflict factor 2 = Discrepancy in ideas about faith

Conflict factor 3 = Actively trying to diminish differences about faith with help of a minister

Conflict factor 4 = Holding onto one's own ideas/values about faith

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

In order to test the hypotheses, first some assumptions had to be tested through sub questions.

5.1.1 Does God image Difference Δ lead to Conflict

In line with our assumption there are several differences in God images that correlate with Conflict. A difference in an active supportive God image (God image discr osh) correlates significantly with the conflict factors 1, concede ($p = .045$); 2, discrepancy ($p = .002$) and 4 holding own values ($p = .011$). In addition the difference in active supportive God image has a significant negative correlation ($p = .017$) with factor 3, active with minister. Difference in an active ruling/punishing God image (God image discr hsh) correlates significantly ($p = .019$) with conflict factor 2, discrepancy in ideas about faith and conflict factor 4 ($p = .013$), holding onto own values. Furthermore a difference in positive God image (God image discr pos) correlates significantly and negatively ($p = .011$) with conflict factor 3, actively talk about conflict with minister.

5.1.2 Adolescents with an insecure attachment leave the church

We expected to find a significant correlation between insecure attachment (ECR-R) and intention to leave; however in contrast to our expectation, no significant correlation was found between these variables.

5.1.3 Conflict and insecure attachment style lead to leaving the church

No significant relationship was found between insecure attachment (ECR-R) and leaving the church (Intention). Consequently also no significant correlations were shown between insecure attachment (ECR-R) together with the four conflict factors and Intention.

The expectation that conflict leads to leaving the church seems to be valid. The four conflict factors (factor 1: conceding, factor 2: discrepancy, factor 3: active with minister and factor 4: holding own values) each correlate significantly with Intention, as described in subsection 5.1 'results'.

5.2 Hypotheses

The assumption in sub question 2 (Adolescents with an insecure attachment leave the church) was not proven, therefore we cannot accept hypothesis 1 or hypothesis 2. Although no significant relation between insecure attachment of adolescents with intention to leave the church could be shown, there were significant relations between some image differences and all conflict factors on intention to leave the church.

To focus further on conflict we did a regression through enter method to see how much each conflict factor contributes to Intention in the first hypothesis (Image Difference (Δ), Conflict score and Intention leaving church, categorized by Attachment have a positive relation). In line with our expectation a significant positive relation was found with a correlation of ($R = .688$) and ($R^2 = .446$) variance accounted for, with ($F(.629, 71) = 4.392, p = .000$). With further examination however only the variable Conflict factor 2 (feeling a discrepancy) was significant in relation to Intention ($p = .001$) which pulled the whole relation between Image Difference (Δ), Conflict score and Intention into significance. The finding that conflict factor 2 contributes most to the intention to leave the church is in line with the found correlations as shown in Table 1.: the correlation between conflict factor 2 (feeling discrepancy between own and church ideas/values on faith) and intention to leave the church is the highest ($R = .568$).

We have already seen that the correlations between Conflict and Church leaving are positive (except for conflict factor 3, which is to be expected: actively diminishing conflict with help minister) and attachment style had no correlation with intention of leaving the church (Figure 2.). Therefore we reject Hypothesis 2 entirely.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine if anxious attachment in young adults contributed to the intention to leave the church, in combination with conflict feeling they might have from differences in their personal God image and the image of God that they should have according to their church. This was investigated through the following hypotheses:

1. If there is a discrepancy between the personal image of God and the normative image of God, that an individual experiences as conflict, and one has an insecure attachment, then the individual will be more inclined to leave the church, whereas someone with a secure attachment will be less or not at all inclined to leave the church.
2. If the personal image of God is consistent with the normative image and there is no conflict, then adolescents, regardless of their attachment style, will be inclined to stay with their church.

Results have shown that we cannot accept either one of the hypotheses, because attachment style (ECR-R) does not correlate significantly with any of the discrepant God images or Conflict factors and there has no significant direct relationship been found with Intention to leave. However some significant relations were shown between attachment and some of the internal and external God images. These findings can explain some of the influence of attachment style on God images and through God images on perceived conflict. God images and Conflict factors influence the intention to leave the church, therefore attachment style, indirectly, may have a certain influence on leaving the church.

6.1 Perceived Conflict leading to the Intention of leaving the church

The Conflict questionnaire did not correlate with any item, because the measure turned out to be weak due to translation and changing the questions to relate them to the subject of religion. However the questionnaire did have some underlying factors that interact with intention to leave. Four factors have been identified: factor 1 conceding to differences with church or community, factor 2 perceiving discrepancy between person's own values and church, factor 3 actively dealing with conflicts of faith with help of the minister and factor 4 holding onto one's own ideas. Factor 1, 2 and 4 significantly correlated positively with intention to leave. This implies that the more one concedes to the norm values, when having a conflict with community or church, the more one experiences discrepancy between ones

values/ideas about faith and the values evangelized by the church. Also the more one holds onto one's own ideas about faith, the more one shows the intention to leave the church. The conflict factor 3, actively dealing with faith issues with the minister, however was significant with a negative correlation; meaning the more one seeks help of the minister to solve issues of faith, the less one has the intention to leave.

When investigating how much the conflict factors contributed to the intention to leave the church, it was found by applying a regression analysis that only factor 2 (perceiving discrepancy between person's own values and church) contributed significantly to the intention to leave. Factor 2 (perceived discrepancy) consists out of two items of the Conflict scale: item 1: "I often notice that my ideas about my faith deviate from the ideas of the church" and item 2: "I experience feelings of conflict about what I personally believe and what I should believe according to my church." This indicates that the more a person experiences a conflict because of a discrepancy in ideas about faith with the church, the higher the intention becomes to leave that church.

6.2 Discrepancies in God image and perceived conflict

In line with our expectations, some of the discrepant God images correlated significantly with the conflict factors. The discrepant image of an acting supportive God (God image discr. osh) influences all the conflict factors and the discrepant image of an acting ruling/punishing God (God image discr. hsh) influences the conflict factors 2 and 4. The bigger the discrepancy between the personal perceived active supportive God image and the active supportive God image that one should believe (God image discr. osh), the more a conflict is experienced in several factors; factor 1 (conceding to differences with church or community), factor 2 (discrepancies in ideas about the faith) and factor 4 (holding onto one's own ideas/values). Conflict factor 3 is actively dealing with the conflict of the differences in ideas about the faith together with the minister, this correlates negatively with the discrepancy in active, supportive God image. This suggests that the less the difference in the God image of an active supportive God between a person and the minister, the more the person will actively deal with perceived conflicts about faith with their minister.

6.3 The influence of Attachment style

Attachment style did not influence the intention to leave the church in a manner that was expected, but we found an indication that suggests attachment style has an indirect influence on the intention to leave the church.

Anxious attachment style correlated significantly and positively on several of the God images: Internal, anxious God image; Internal, passive God image and External, passive God image. The more anxious a person's attachment style is, the more anxious the personal God image is, also perceiving it as passive (in a personal view and from the person's view how the God image should be that is enforced by the church). Anxious attachment style also correlated significantly, but negatively with some other variables, which is in line with the content of those variables: Internal, positive God image; External, positive God image; External, acting supportive God image and External, acting ruling/punishing God image. This means the more one has an anxious attachment style, the less the God image is viewed as positive both personal and as it should be perceived according to the norm of the church and the less the image of God is perceived as acting in both support and ruling/punishing by the church. Attachment style influences some internal (personal) and external (normative) God images (Table 2.) and therefore, indirectly, also the discrepancies between these two, although no significant correlations between attachment and the several discrepant God images were found.

Table 2. *Correlations Attachment and God Images*

	(Anxious) Attachment (ECR-R)
God image internal positief (pos)	-.218*
God image internal angstig (ang)	.293**
God image internal boosheid (boo)	.145
God image internal ondersteunend handelen (osh)	-.123
God image internal heersend/straffend handelen (hsh)	-.031
God image internal passief (pas)	.332**
God image external positief (pos)	-.232*
God image external angstig (ang)	.099
God image external boosheid (boo)	.199
God image external ondersteunend handelen (osh)	-.273*
God image external heersend/straffend handelen (hsh)	-.211*
God image external passief (pas)	.250*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

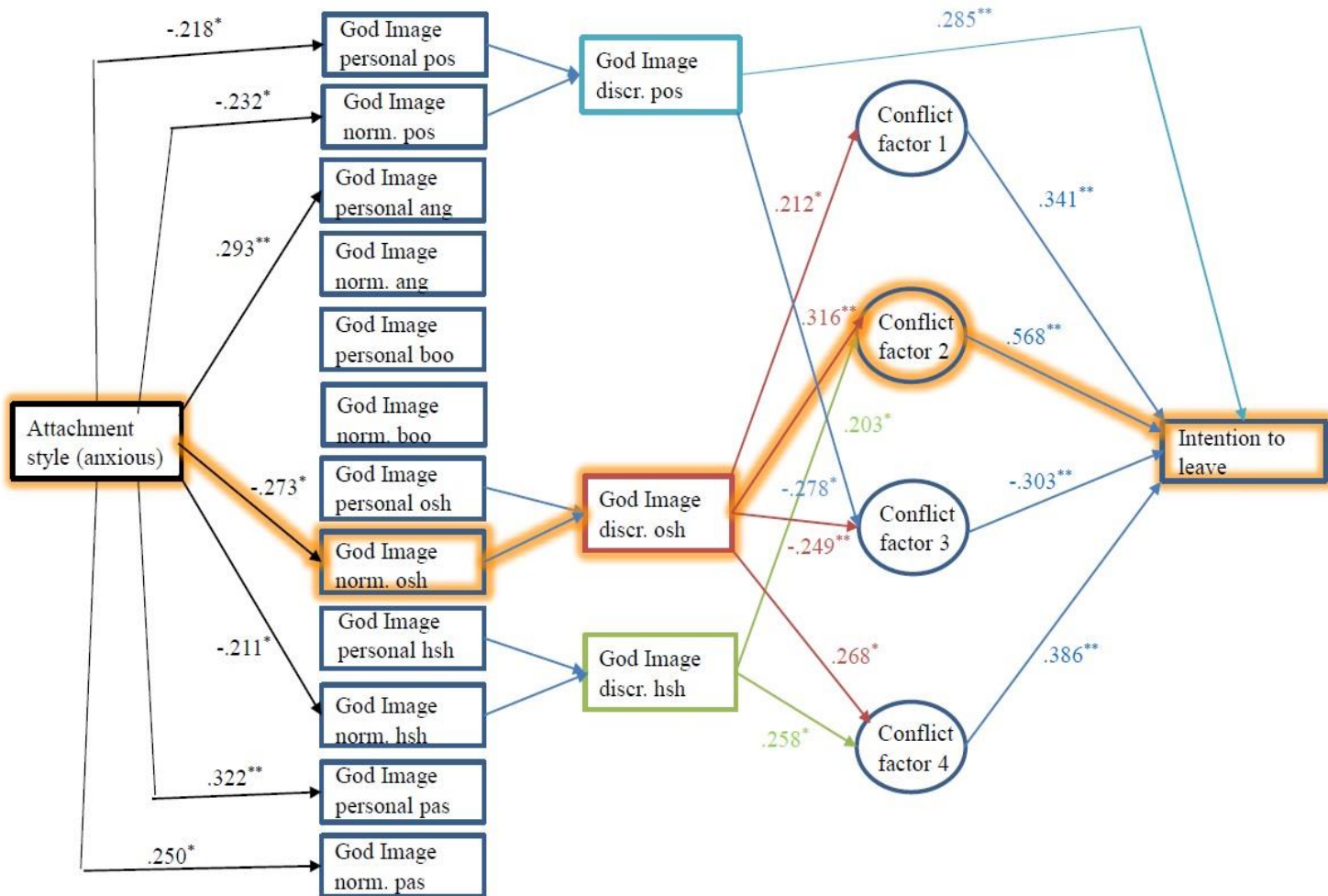
6.4 The emotional and psychological base of Attachment in Psychology of Religion research

The results of this research indicate that, although no significant direct relation between attachment style and the intention to leave a church was found, Attachment does influence several of the components, which have a relation to the intention of leaving the church (Figure 3.). In former research on attachment and apostasy by Granqvist (1998; 2002), Granqvist & Hagekull (1999) and Kirkpatrick (2005), results indicated in those studies that attachment mostly has influence on the social structures of family related to staying or leaving the church. Schaap-Jonker focused her research mostly on God images and the way faith is experienced through those images. The research described in this thesis combines both and has found some indications that attachment style influences people in the way they form the image of God and how this indirectly influences the way that people form and experience their faith; and how they deal with conflicts concerning their faith.

The indications found in this research were only marginal, and attachment style only influenced some images of God in this research; therefore this thesis is only an indication, a stepping stone, for further research in combining the more emotional components of psychology instead of the hallmarked cognitive psychological theories with experiences and

dealings of religion. These are preeminently subjects of research that fit perfectly in the field of Psychology of Religion.

Figure 3. Influence of attachment indirect on conflict and intention to leave



norm. = normative

pos = postief (positive)
 ang = angstig (anxious)
 boo = boosheid (anger)
 osh = ondersteunend handelend (acting supportive)
 hsh = heersend/straffend handelend (acting ruling/punishing)
 pas = passief (passive)

discr. = discrepancy

Conflict factor 1 = Conceding to differences

Conflict factor 2 = Discrepancy in ideas about faith

Conflict factor 3 = Actively trying to diminish differences about faith with help of a minister

Conflict factor 4 = Holding onto one's own ideas/values about faith

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Discussion

When looking at this research and the diverse theoretical background on which this was based, there are some theories and critical components that have to be mentioned as an addition or difference to this research. At first some theories and literature within the covering categories of socialization and of cognitive and emotional development are discussed, and secondly the research itself will be critically assessed.

7.1 Additional or contrary theories within the category of socialization

7.1.1 Weak religious socialization and apostasy

Religious socialization is an enhancing element for religiousness. However when religious socialization by parents is weak then the children (adolescents) are often less religious. If parents do not actively affirm and transmit the traditions of their religion, for instance because they distanced themselves from religion because of some of the above mentioned reasons, then they fail to teach their children ropes of being part of a religion. This results in young adults who are not comfortable with religious traditions, symbols and doctrines. This in turn will subsequently lead to an increase of the chance that they ascribe less importance to the religion of their church and will even disaffiliate them from religion in general (Uecker et al., 2007). That weak religious socialization leads to a decline of religiousness is in line with the research of Granqvist. In his two-level Correspondence Theory the first level of the Correspondence Theory is the primary mechanism of social learning of parental standards. Because of the secure attachment with parents, through religious socialization, adolescents are more secure in their religious attachment with God (or church) and are less likely to disengage religious membership; but only if the parents are also religious (Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001). In contrast when parents are not practicing religion anymore (or to a lesser degree), and religious socialization is weak, then the children show more tendency to become apostates. This effect of socialization has to be taken into consideration in this research. Weak religious socialization may deepen and add to the effect of the changing relationships with attachment figures as a cause of increasing apostasy.

7.1.2 Decreasing religiousness through cognitive dissonance

One of the reasons that there is religious decline during adolescence is the fact that adolescents engage in deviant behavior. This deviant behavior in combination with intellectual development through education might lead to different ideas about life and faith in

general. This change of ideas can cause cognitive dissonance with the values and ideas that they have been brought up with. Trying to minimize the effects of cognitive dissonance can cause: downplaying of importance, distancing from, or complete dissociation from religion altogether (Stolzenberg et al., 1995). The changed thinking process might make the contradictions between religious and other social life harder to deal with, leading to the trend of decreasing religiousness. Cognitive dissonance because of changing ideas and values is exactly the issue that is described by the variable Conflict factor 2: the difference between the ideas and values of the person and how the person sees them to be from the church point of view.

There is, however, an alternative theory which explains why conflict and dissonance do not have to lead to diminished religiousness and that is the use of complementary reasoning to deal with contradictions and issues of religiousness (Reich, 1991). Complementary reasoning entails rational explanations for specific perceived contradictions. An example: combining evolution theory and the belief in creation by God can result into the belief that God created the possibility for evolution and let it run its course. Complementarity reasoning is crucial for the religious development of an individual and is dependent on the developmental stage of that person. The use of complementary reasoning can lessen these contradictions that cause cognitive dissonance, thereby making it easier to cope with the perceived difference. Subsequently this may lead to acceptance, which will make it more acceptable for the person to stay with its church and congregation.

7.1.3 The secularization effects of education

As mentioned in Chapter 1, adolescents come more in contact with other ideas, secular world-views and critical thinking, through higher education. This causes a declining trend in religiosity and church attendance next to leaving the home that reinforces tradition and exposure to student life (partying, alcohol and drugs). The study of Uecker et al. (2007) showed however, that adolescents who did not go to college showed the highest rate of diminished religiosity, whereas adolescents who had at least a bachelor's degree were less likely to reduce their church attendance. The findings of this thesis, that respondents who were higher educated were less inclined to leave their church, is in line with this study.

Church attendance and religious activities do diminish by the influence of student life factors, nonetheless most college going adolescents maintain their level of personal religiosity throughout adolescence. Most of them keep their religious belief systems during their education. This is in line with the findings in the studies of De Boer (2006) and De Hart

(2014), who both showed that church attendance dwindles, but the need for religiousness and spirituality does not. It can be speculated that religiousness currently is less influenced by education than previously thought in the seventies and eighties of the previous century. Compared to that period, the purpose of going to college has changed from ‘developing a meaningful philosophy of life’, as the most listed of the important goals of studying, into creating a better off financial position in the future (Uecker et al., 2007). In addition, students nowadays are less concerned about morals or beliefs and more about economic and financial success. They tend to argue less about religious issues and enroll themselves less in classes that do argue about such issues. In contrast, students who do enroll in such classes (e.g. social sciences or humanities), are more likely to show a decrease in their religiosity (Kimball, Mitchell, Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2006; Uecker et al., 2007).

The evidence for the erosion of the religious beliefs of individuals and of the decline in religious participation among college and university students is however not conclusive (Roberts et al., 2001). In America most colleges and universities changed from secular institutes to institutes that provide a great range of religious (church) organizations to accommodate (and encourage) tolerance and respect towards religion and religious development of students (Uecker et al., 2007). Most universities in the Netherlands however, are still mostly secular. Apart from the educational program, there are abundant opportunities in the private sector for students to keep in touch with religion during their colleges years. This is apparent by the number of available religious student associations. For instance the Leiden University has eight different religious student associations for several religious denominations, the university of Delft has four, of Utrecht has seven and of Wageningen at least has two. Even though enjoying higher education broadens the intellectual horizon it rarely creates skepticism about religion. Faith has become more a part of one’s private identity, not a part of something that is often talked about with peers or teachers. Also students do not perceive a competition between higher education and their personal faith (Uecker et al., 2007). He even suggest that students would not recognize faith-challenging material as something that would cause a conflict because many young people do not consider religion as something that is worth arguing about.

7.2 Additional theories within the category of socialization and emotional development

7.2.1 Social and emotional influences of parental relationships on religiosity

On average religious Dutch adolescents are raised in moderately religious families. Church is mostly attended on an irregular basis and bible reading or saying prayers is not a

daily activity in most families. Despite these modest levels of religious activity, religion is not viewed as unimportant to parents (Vermeer et al., 2012). They found however, that there is a negative relationship between adolescent church attendance and the degree of religious autonomy granted by parents, meaning, that the more frequently parents attend church, the less religious autonomy they grant their children. On the other hand, religious autonomy is positively associated with responsiveness and psychological autonomy of the adolescent. These associations show that families who are characterized by warmer and more loving relationships (secure attachment between parents and child), are also the families where children are allowed to choose their own religious beliefs. In contrast religious autonomy is negatively associated with adolescent church attendance, meaning that in these secure attached family relationships, where children can choose their own (religious) path, lower levels of church attendance are shown. However when parents are in agreement with the adolescent concerning religion, then church attendance of the adolescent is enhanced (Vermeer et al., 2012). This is again in line with Granqvist' theory that adolescents are more likely to stay with their church as long as they are securely attached and their parents are religious (Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001). The results from Vermeer et al. (2012) point at the big influence that family structure has, both emotionally and socially, on the maintenance or decline of religiosity of adolescents. Thereby showing that emotional development as well as socialization are of influence on the development of the values and ideas of adolescents, which forms the basis of their adult religious lives.

7.2.2 Normative Culture and Privatization in decline of religiousness

Intuitively it seems obvious that transition periods in adolescence, (such as moving away to college, changing ideas and emotional connections) are often of significant influence on altering religious (and other) behaviors. De Hart (2014) suggests that the shift from a communal to a more private practice of religion might be an explanation for the decline in church attendance. This we can consider as an alternative explanation for the changing attachment figures (emotional) and family structure (social) based explanation. As shown earlier, even though church attendance is in decline, adolescents still consider themselves as religious and are searching for spirituality (De Boer, 2006; De Hart, 2014). Religion is, however, practiced more frequent in the environment of the home than in the environment of an institute. An explanation for this could be that the normative (conservative) image of the church, connects less with young people especially. That the connection between the church and young people is apparently weakening, in the Netherlands, has been made obvious in the

book “Alle aandacht!” (Schaap-Jonker & Van Wijnen, 2011), in which they have tried to provide churches with solutions on how to connect better with young people. In addition this was also the general message in the research, described in this thesis: 49% of the young people indicated that they wanted more activities, and 71% of the participants wanted other changes in the church, of those other changes 33% wanted to change mostly the sermons or the whole mass in an open and modern way so that they would more easily connect to the subjects that are dealt with in the institutes.

However it can be speculated that the emptying of the churches is mostly dependent on the representation of the normative image of the church by the local normative figures. The way that a minister, bishop or pastor, at the head of a local church, dictates the practice of religion, influences the strictness/conservativeness of the congregation. While Christianity in general is becoming more popular, this can be influenced by the normative image of a denomination for example the normative image of the pope for the denomination of the Roman Catholic Church. During the reign of the previous pope (Benedict XVI) Christianity was losing its popularity among younger members. The current pope (Francis), however has more modern, controversial ideas about the content of Christianity and communicates and act in a way that is open, more connecting and easier to understand for young people (Nye, 2013). Therefore Pope Francis (or any other minister) could be an inspiration to young people to maintain the Christian ideals and identity, which may connect better with the view on religion in someone’s personal atmosphere then with those of the religious institutes. This speculation would be in line with the above mentioned findings of De Hart (2014) and De Boer (2006), of a more personalized, private religion in general instead of an leading institute. This is also in line with the findings of this research, that showed that ‘the feeling of discrepancy on religious ideas and values’ is the conflict factor with the most influence on intention of leaving the church. When there is no conflict between religious ideas and values of an institute and more freedom and openness to personalized/private faith by the institutes, then there may also be less intention to leave.

7.3 Overall decline in religiousness but growing conservative churches

Even though there is a general decline of religiousness among young adults, De Hart (2014) has shown that there is also a religious development in the opposite direction: young adults who show an increase in religious strictness and more conservative churches that grow in popularity. The ongoing or even increasing religious activity of this group of religious

young people differs from the decline in religious activities of young people in general and is in contrast with the assumptions of this research.

There are several theories which try to explain how these conservative churches manage to stay popular. Some of their key-issues are that they demand adherence to a distinctive faith, morality, and lifestyle and that non-believers, those of the outgroup, are condemned through deviance and should be shunned; the outside world is evil and therefore has to be renounced. These practices are perceived as problematic by outsiders, not only because they deviate from 'normal' behavior, but also because they appear counterproductive when pleasures have to be sacrificed and opportunities (financial, educational e.g.) are given up. A social stigma is often the result (Kelley, 1978).

Considering this, then why would strict churches be growing? One of the reasons is the cost-based definition, it is more costly to leave a strict church with all its benefits than to stay and conform. Furthermore within these strict communities people marry relatively young and have many children; more than the average (religious) family. This in itself explains partly why membership count is growing more rapidly than with other religious denominations. In addition, with more children, the costs to leave (losing benefits like status, childcare and social support) will be even higher (Iannaccone, 1994).

Another reason is that conservative churches attract and retain an active, committed membership by strict demands of loyalty, an unquestioned belief and a distinctive lifestyle (Kelley, 1986). Strictness of faith increases commitment and active participation and will enable a congregation to offer more benefits to current and new members. Strict churches often proclaim an exclusive truth, which is a closed, but very comprehensive simple doctrine that is eternal, no matter the circumstances (Iannaccone, 1994). The simple doctrine, as a stable support in a modern world that is increasingly complicated and confusing, provides a possible good explanation why strict churches are gaining in popularity.

7.4 Limitations and strengths of this research

Several limitations have to be taken into account concerning this study. Most respondents were recruited by contacts of e-mail and Facebook. As a result, most of the respondents were above 20 years old, and highly educated (bachelor degree or more), which reduces the generalizability of the results for the complete Christian population. Also, originally, the aim was to include at least 100 adolescents from 16 to 21 years old. The respondent age-range, however had to be expanded to the age of 35, in order to get enough participants. Therefore the present is not based on adolescents alone anymore, but also on

(young) adults, which interferes with the reliability of the presented results for the age group of adolescents. Even so, the age range of 16 to 35 year olds was difficult for most congregations, either they had younger members or only older ones. The lack of members in this specific range of age made it difficult to get some clear results on the intentions of leaving the church by adolescents and young adults. The lack of members in this age group for a lot of congregations however, present some real-life proof (even though not verifiable through data) that this age group is leaving or has already left the church. On a positive note, the majority of our sample was younger than 25 years old (66%). Therefore it was decided to perform an additional sub analysis and compare the age groups of 16-24 years old with the group of 25-35, but only for the strongest shown correlations, to see if age would make a difference in the strength of our results. No significant difference was found between these groups, which may suggest that the presented results of this study may be valid for adolescents.

A second limitation was the short investigation period. Due to the short amount of time to inform church communities prior to the collection of the data, most churches could or would not participate, even though they were highly interested in the objective of this study. Most churches felt that there was not enough time to inform their congregation due to only monthly board meetings for permission and the monthly appearing of the church bulletins. With more time beforehand, even more participants might have participated in this research, giving the sample a more equal spread. Nonetheless the number of participants was eventually sufficient enough to yield significant results.

Another limitation was some of the measurements that were used. The VGB is an adequate measure, being originally in Dutch, verified questionnaire with a high reliability, also in test-retest. The ECR-R was also verified, but originally written in English. The questionnaire has been tested on the Dutch population with a good reliability, but a Dutch version was not available. For this study the questionnaire was translated by the investigator, possibly losing some of the reliability. When looking at the existing research (Granqvist, 1998; 2002; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999; 2001; Kirkpatrick, 1998) on attachment and religion, other measures or an adaptation of those measures were used than in this study, for determining attachment style; the Bartholomew's four category self-classification measure (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) or attachment paragraphs of Hazan & Shaver (1986). It might be interesting to see if using those other measures for attachment would yield different results in our research (even though ECR-R had a high reliability even after translation). Other questionnaires like the Conflict scale and the Intention to leave scale were based on existing questionnaires, and in case of the Intention to leave scale this was constructed out of

several existing questionnaires, which also have been modified to the subject of religion. It was a disadvantage that undermined the reliability of the Conflict scale severely in particular. However the other scales that have been adapted and/or translated all had a high reliability when we verified and tested them in this study.

The wide variety and use of definitions in religious research was already mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, but it has to be mentioned here again; not only religious definitions but also the psychological definitions because they form a restriction to this research. On the crossroad of Psychology and Religious Studies, definitions of psychology studies are frequently used in the research of religious studies and vice versa, without the professional knowledge about these definitions, therefore clouding the definitions and the literature written about them. An example of this is the research of De Hart (2014), he talks about diminishing religiousness among adolescents (age 17 to 24 years old), but from a psychological point of view adolescence is when children are between 13 and 18 years old. But also in psychology the term adolescence is used loosely, in some literature adolescence starts as early as 11, while in other adolescence expands to 21 years old. This makes it difficult to assess the validity of the existing literature on religion and adolescence, if the term 'adolescence' is not defined exactly. Next to this difficulty there is also the problem that an adolescent of 13 years old is dealing with very different things than an adolescent of 18+, both emotionally as socially (examples: deviant behavior against parents to investigate one's own values, or leaving home going to college). Therefore, when researching adolescents, there has to be a clear definition of which age within adolescence the study is looking at. It would strengthen the research, when looking at adolescence, if the respondents would be separated in different age groups, within the adolescence period, and check if the results are different between the age groups to be sure that the found results are applicable to the group of adolescence as a whole.

Besides limitations this study also showed some strengths. First of all the topic is highly relevant and is addressing a development that is currently happening in the Dutch society. Also a strength is the way that this research applies some older theories about the decline in church attendance among adolescents, and combines this with the more recent approach that the emotional and personal connection, one has with the church and God, influences the decision concerning leaving the church when experiencing conflict. The outcome of this study, also, has provided more insight on the influence of attachment in daily life. Although there is little known about the specifics of attachment, we can conclude that attachment style influences decision making, even though it is a subconscious influence.

Lastly the results of this study may provide religious institutes more insight on what may be missing for Dutch adolescents in the institutes' way of dealing with current religion and spirituality. There are differences in the way that adolescents and young adults want to practice their religion and the way the church is carrying out the doctrines of religion. According to the open question on what they want to change in their church the general answer was: that they want a more open attitude towards the world, outsiders and new members; and to subjects that they can relate to in the lectures. These answers are also in line with the findings of this research; especially the found discrepancy in the experience of a supportive God image. There is less support experienced from the church than what the people themselves feel, and this is one of the major elements that induce the several feelings of conflict, which then inherently lead to more intention to leave the church. The given suggestions for change by the members themselves gives the church an opportunity to change some aspects of their present ways in order to keep, and maybe attract more, adolescents and young adults to their church.

7.5 Recommendations for future research

For future research there are several recommendations. The first recommendation is to inform churches a longer period prior to the research and extend the period of data collection. This might have made the congregations more compliant towards participation in the research and had also given them more time to organize the congregation for participation. Secondly, it is recommended to expand the age range from 35 to an even higher age, in order to research the influence of attachment style on God images and conflict and be able to form a more general theory. This would also solve the problem that the congregations do not have members in a certain age range. But, when expanding the age range, one should be cautious about the fact that older church members are often with the congregation for a long(er) period of time and therefore might have less intention to leave and might experience less conflict. On the other hand, as mentioned before, different ages deal with different conflicts; therefore in an attempt to formulate a theory a distinction should be made between the different age groups in order to check if the theory is applicable to all ages the same way or if different age groups have different effects. When gaining more participants it would be wise to have a small reward for everyone or multiple bigger rewards that they can gain through participation. In this current research one VVV coupon of €25 was raffled between all the participants. The bigger the number of participants the less an incentive the reward is going to give because of the shrinking possibility to win the reward.

At the end of this thesis the recommendations that we want to stress the most are: firstly that there should be more research on religiosity in the Netherlands, most of the existing theories on religious development or decline are based on the society in the USA. It is highly questionable if we can compare these societies on religion and to what extent these theories are applicable to our own society. Secondly emotional aspects have a greater impact on dealing with conflict and religious matters than research in religion is initially letting on. Specifically through this research we have found indications that attachment plays some indirect role in dealing with conflict and intentions of leaving the church, through the God images that a person forms. Therefore our last recommendation is to investigate more in depth how attachment is related to God images, coping with (religious) conflict and apostasy. An investigation that might bring Social and Religious Sciences closer together in an joined research in the field of Psychology of Religion.

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