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Committed Believers: Determinants of the Organizational Commitment of Dutch Evangelicals

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Abstract

This study tries to find out why certain congregations in the Netherlands have a more committed membership than other congregations and, thus, are less affected by processes of religious disaffiliation. To do this, data gathered among members of six evangelical megachurches together with data from a national probability sample are analyzed to address two questions. First, to what extent are Dutch evangelicals more committed to their religious organization, in terms of money and time spent at church, than members of mainline churches in the Netherlands? And second, which decisive factors determine these instances of organizational commitment of Dutch evangelicals? Results show that evangelicals indeed spend more money on and time at church than mainline Christians. As regards the second question, it turns out that donating money is mainly determined by income, whereas time spent with church groups is mainly determined by the degree of embeddedness in socio-religious networks.

Keywords

organizational commitment – evangelicalism – socialization – socio-religious networks – individual religiosity

1 Introduction

In many West-European countries, including the Netherlands, Christian churches are facing hard times. People increasingly stop attending religious services, and a growing number of them even denounce their church membership. Seen from an organization-sociological perspective, this means that churches are confronted with a loss of commitment among their members. Commitment, according to Rosebeth M. Kanter in her classic study of utopian communities, “[...] refers to the willingness of people to do what will help to maintain the group because it provides what they need.”¹ But for an ever increasing number of Europeans, it apparently is no longer in their interest to maintain the Christian congregation that they or their families were once committed to. As a result, most Christian churches are in decline nowadays, at least in large parts of western Europe.²

However, there are also exceptions to this downward trend. In the Netherlands, which is actually one of the fastest secularizing countries in Europe in terms of religious affiliation and church decline, several more conservative churches—like certain strict re-reformed churches as well as various Pentecostal and evangelical churches—seem immune to secularization, and some of them even experienced growth instead of decline in recent years.³ This phenomenon is not typically Dutch. Also, in the US and Canada, conservative churches are far less affected by religious disaffiliation and declining rates of church attendance.⁴ In terms of Kanter’s aforementioned understanding of ‘commitment,’ this means that these conservative churches better succeed in satisfying the needs of their members, which in turn increases their willingness to do whatever it takes to maintain their religious congregation. But exactly why are these conservative churches more successful in this respect? What motivates their members to stay committed to and help maintain their congregation? Inspired by these questions, we modestly set out to study the

1 Rosebeth M. Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 66.

2 Jan Reitsma et al, “Believing and Belonging in Europe 1981–2007: Comparisons of Longitudinal Trends and Determinants,” *European Societies* 14/4 (2012), 611–632.

3 Regarding the rate of secularization in the Netherlands, see *ibid.* For the remainder, see Jos Becker & Joep de Hart, *Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland: Verschuivingen in de binding met de kerken en de christelijke Traditie* (Den Haag: SCP, 2006), 30–31.

4 For the US, see, for instance, Robert D. Putnam & David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 100–109. For Canada, see Reginald Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2002).

spending of money on and time at church as specific instances of organizational religious commitment, among a specific religious group: the members of six evangelical megachurches in the Netherlands, the churches of which, in recent history, are characterized by sometimes spectacular growth in an otherwise very secular societal context.

Evangelical congregations are a very interesting phenomenon in this respect. Not only are these congregations firmly rooted in Christian orthodoxy, but they are also known for their strong emphasis on the Christian community, although they do not adopt a specific church order.⁵ Evangelical congregations, thus, are likely to be populated by devout and committed religious believers, which makes their membership an interesting group for studying the determinants of religious commitment. This we intend to do by addressing the following research questions: (1) *To what extent are Dutch evangelicals more committed to their religious organization, in terms of money and time spent on church, than members of mainline churches in the Netherlands?*; (2) *Which decisive factors determine these instances of the organizational commitment of Dutch evangelicals?* By studying the organizational commitment of evangelicals in comparison with the organizational commitment of mainline Christians, we, thus, aim to offer a (partial) explanation of the relative success of more conservative megachurches in Dutch society. That is not to say this study is meant as a rebuttal of the secularization thesis, at least as far as institutional religion is concerned. Just like Steve Bruce has recently demonstrated for the UK, church growth in one specific niche of Christianity, in this case evangelicalism, does not compensate for the overall decline mainline Christian churches experience.⁶ Still, Christianity has many institutional faces in the Netherlands, which makes it worthwhile to study not only decline but survival as well.

2 Theoretical Background

Crucial to the problem of commitment is the functionalist question of how to connect organizational requirements to the self-interests of people.⁷ This connection involves three basic problems of commitment: control, cohesion,

5 Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1995).

6 Steve Bruce, "Secularization and Church Growth in the United Kingdom," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6/3 (2013), 273–296.

7 John R. Hall, "Social Organization and Pathways of Commitment: Types of Communal Groups, Rational Choice Theory, and the Kanter Thesis," *American Sociological Review* 53/5

and continuance. These three problems of commitment made Kanter, in her aforementioned classic study, distinguish between three types of commitment: moral, affective, and instrumental commitment. Moral commitment relates to the problem of control and regards obedience to the authority and values of the group; affective commitment relates to cohesion and concerns the emotional ties to other members of the group; while instrumental commitment relates to the continuance of people's willingness to remain committed to the organization as such. Commitment thus is a multidimensional concept, which in the case of religious communities involves much more than, for example, mere church attendance. In this study, we adopt this multidimensional understanding of commitment and especially focus on one specific and often neglected dimension of religious commitment: instrumental commitment or the commitment of the religious believer to the religious organization.

Instrumental commitment, according to Kanter, basically has two components that tie an individual to an organization: sacrifice and investment.⁸ Sacrifice means that a person has to give up something pleasurable or valuable as the price for membership. For instance, abstinence, like not drinking alcohol or not having sex, is an often used commitment mechanism in religious communities, which makes membership costly and firmly ties a person to an organization.⁹ But individuals are also tied to an organization if they contribute to the economy of the organization. Often commitment mechanisms that are used in this respect, for instance, require financial donations from members or ask members to invest time in the organization.¹⁰ Individuals in this way gain a stake in the organization, which makes leaving costly. In this study, we focus on this latter component of investment and consider the *amount of money donated to church* per year and the *amount of hours spent per week on church groups* as instances of instrumental, i.e., organizational religious commitment.

Now, as we already mentioned above, several evangelical congregations in the Netherlands are far less affected by a loss of membership and declining rates of church attendance than mainline Catholic and Protestant churches.¹¹ This fact makes it reasonable to assume, we propose, that Dutch evangelicals display higher levels of organizational commitment than their mainline

(1988), 679–692; Kanter, *Commitment*, 66–69; Keith A. Roberts & David Yamane, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016), 116–122.

8 Kanter, *Commitment*, 72.

9 Ibid., 76–78.

10 Ibid., 80–81.

11 Becker & de Hart, *Godsdienstege*, 30–31.

co-religionists. In view of our first research question, we thus expect: *compared to mainline Christians, evangelicals donate more money per year to church* (hypothesis 1A) and *spend more hours per week on church groups* (hypothesis 1B).

But if it actually turns out that evangelicals indeed display higher levels of organizational commitment, what, then, are the most important determinants in this respect? In view of this question, we propose to consider three sets of possible determinants: adolescent religious socialization, current involvement in socio-religious networks, and individual religiosity. Apart from the fact that similar factors were already found to influence religious behavior, like prayer and church attendance, by Marie Cornwall, we consider these factors of importance in the sense that adolescent religious socialization and current involvement in socio-religious networks may provide social support for an individual's commitment to a religious organization, while individual religiosity may serve as an important ideological, motivating factor in this respect.¹² Below, we consider each set of determinants in more detail.

As regards adolescent religious socialization, research shows that parental religiosity has a significant and positive impact on the religiosity of their offspring.¹³ Being raised in a religious family by religious parents is almost a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for adult religious commitment; a fact which has also been established in the Netherlands.¹⁴ These insights already make it worthwhile to consider religious socialization as an important determinant for organizational religious commitment. In addition, US research also shows that the relative growth of conservative Protestants, including evangelicals, is in large part the result of demographic factors. For most of the twentieth century, conservative Protestant parents simply had more children than other parents and were more keen to keep their children in the faith.¹⁵ Consequently, conservative Protestants put more emphasis on a religious

12 Marie Cornwall, "The Determinants of Religious Behavior: A Theoretical Model and Empirical Test," *Social Forces* 68/2 (1989), 572–592.

13 See, for instance, Dean R. Hoge & Gregory H. Petrillo, "Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes among High School Youth," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17/4 (1978), 359–379; Bruce Hunsberger & L. B. Brown, "Religious Socialization, Apostasy, and the Impact of Family Background," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23/3 (1984), 239–251; Scott M. Myers, "An Interactive Model of Religiosity Inheritance: The Importance of Family Context," *American Sociological Review* 61/5 (1996), 858–866.

14 See, for instance, Paul Vermeer, Jacques Janssen, & Joep de Hart, "Religious Socialization and Church Attendance in the Netherlands Between 1983 and 2007: A Panel Study," *Social Compass* 58/3 (2011), 373–392.

15 Michael Hout, Andrew Greeley, & Melissa J. Wilde, "The Demographic Imperative in Religious Change in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 107/2 (2001), 468–500.

upbringing in the family, resulting, until recently, in much higher retention rates among, for instance, Mormons and evangelicals than among mainline Protestants and Catholics.¹⁶ Now, to what extent Dutch evangelicals also take the religious upbringing of their children more seriously is unknown. Still, on the basis on these US findings, we assume that also Dutch evangelicals put more effort in keeping their children in the faith and, thus, that their adult offspring are more committed to their religious organization due to more intense socialization experiences.

When it comes to religious socialization, religious practices turn out to be most influential. That is to say, growing up in a family context in which, for example, church attendance, prayer, and Bible-reading are regular activities has a stronger impact on the religiosity of the child than being raised by parents who are only nominal church members or who only have conversations about religion with their children.¹⁷ Thus, we expect that: *evangelicals who were raised in a religious way, who regularly attended church as youths, and/or whose parents regularly attended church when they were in their formative years donate more money per year to church* (hypothesis 2A) and *spend more hours per week on church groups than mainline Christians* (hypothesis 2B).

The second set of determinants concerns the role of current socio-religious networks. The underlying idea here is, dating back to the classic work of Emile Durkheim, that religion is eminently 'social'.¹⁸ That is, to the extent that individuals are socially tied to a religious group, they will be more willing to perform activities and adopt beliefs central to that group's identity. Establishing interpersonal bonds, thus, is crucial in becoming a committed member of a religious congregation. This not only goes for conversion to deviant sects, as John Lofland and Rodney Stark already demonstrated, but also for more conventional faiths.¹⁹ More recent studies have again confirmed the importance of social networks in this respect. However, these studies have also shown that having close ties with people within the same congregation are more important than having close ties with people sharing the same denominational

16 Putnam & Campbell, *American Grace*, 136–140.

17 Joep de Hart, "Impact of Religious Socialization in the Family," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 3/1 (1990), 59–78; Hoge & Petrillo, "Determinants"; Vermeer, Janssen, & de Hart, "Religious Socialization."

18 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]).

19 John Lofland & Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* 30/6 (1965), 862–875; Rodney Stark & William Sims Bainbridge, "Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects," *American Journal of Sociology* 85/6 (1980), 1376–1395.

background.²⁰ Thus, believers who feel emotionally attached to their fellow congregants are especially expected to display higher levels of organizational commitment.

As regards participation in congregational activities, the basic social mechanisms involved are monitoring and sanctioning.²¹ People who have close ties will be more inclined to monitor each others' behavior and to talk to others if a congregant falls short of his or her organizational duties. Or people will participate in various activities in order to maintain good relations with their fellow congregants, as a matter of positive sanctions or rewards. Against the background of these theoretical insights, we thus hypothesize that: *evangelicals whose family members, friends, and colleagues attend the same congregation and/or who consider their fellow church group members to be friends donate more money per year to church* (hypothesis 3A) and *spend more hours per week on church groups than mainline Christians* (hypothesis 3B).

With regard to individual religiosity, the third set of determinants, we consider aspects concerning religious beliefs, religious orientation, and religious experience. These aspects may be of importance, we propose, due to the conservative nature of evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is an embodiment of Christian orthodoxy and may be regarded as a more distinctive and demanding form of Christianity, especially in the context of a modern, secular society.²² Also, in the Netherlands, evangelicalism exhibits the characteristics of a conservative, reactionary movement due to its position on the authority of the Bible and its more strict and different stances concerning contemporary moral issues like abortion, euthanasia, or homosexuality.²³ This distinctive nature of evangelicalism suggests, we propose, that the organizational commitment of evangelicals is also endorsed by specific religious beliefs. Thus, we expect that: *evangelicals who hold orthodox, Christian beliefs and who believe that the Bible contains the literal word of God donate more money per year to*

20 James C. Cavendish, Michael R. Welch, & David C. Leege, "Social Network Theory and Predictors of Religiosity for Black and White Catholics: Evidence of a 'Black Sacred Cosmos'?", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37/3 (1998), 397–410; Cornwall, "Determinants"; Samuel Stroope, "Social Networks and Religion: The Role of Congregational Social Embeddedness in Religious Belief and Practice," *Sociology of Religion* 73/3 (2012), 273–298.

21 Stroope, "Social Networks."

22 McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 94.

23 Pieter Boersema, "The Evangelical Movement in the Netherlands: New Wine in New Wineskins?," in: Erik Sengers (ed.), *The Dutch and Their Gods: Secularization and Transformation of Religion in the Netherlands Since 1950* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2005), 163–179, at 169.

church (hypothesis 4A) and *spend more hours per week on church groups than mainline Christians* (hypothesis 4B).

Furthermore, since there is also a positive correlation between endorsing traditional, Christian doctrines and having an intrinsic religious orientation, we also assume that the organizational commitment of evangelicals is mainly motivated by intrinsic religious concerns and not so much by extrinsic considerations.²⁴ This relates to the distinction, originally made by Gordon W. Allport, between having an intrinsic religious orientation versus an extrinsic religious orientation.²⁵ For people with an intrinsic religious orientation, religion is an end in itself and is not something that primarily serves other ends like, for example, social standing. Thus, we hypothesize that: *evangelicals with an intrinsic religious orientation donate more money per year to church* (hypothesis 4C) and *spend more hours per week on church groups than mainline Christians* (hypothesis 4D).

Religious experience also relates to the distinctiveness of evangelicalism. Evangelicals not only stress doctrinal orthodoxy, but they also emphasize the personal appropriation of faith through conversion.²⁶ What matters most, is entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit and to experience the presence of God in daily life. This is what really distinguishes evangelicals from non-evangelical Christians, according to Christian Smith; an emphasis on conversion and the subjective experience of faith, which also prevails among Dutch evangelicals.²⁷ Consequently, our final hypotheses are: *evangelicals who had a 'born again' experience and/or who experience the presence of God donate more money per year to church* (hypothesis 4E) and *spend more hours per week on church groups than mainline Christians* (hypothesis 4F).

24 Jai Ghorpade, James R. Lackritz, & Rebecca Moore, "Intrinsic Religious Orientation: The Conservative Christian Connection," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 20/3 (2010), 201–218.

25 See C. Daniel Batson & W. Larry Ventis, *The Religious Experience: A Social-psychological Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

26 McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 72–73.

27 Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). See also Boersema, "Evangelical Movement"; Miranda Klaver, "Hartstochtelijk protestantisme: Bronnen en kenmerken van de evangelische beweging in Nederland," *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 50/4 (2010), 385–400; Paul Vermeer, "Church Growth and Appealing Sermons: A Case Study of a Dutch Megachurch," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 28/1 (2015), 1–22.

3 Method

a *Sample*

Our sample consists of 920 respondents coming from two different subpopulations: evangelicals and non-evangelicals. In order to acquire a substantial number of evangelical respondents, we first conducted an extensive web search into thriving Protestant congregations in the Netherlands. As an instance of purposive sampling, we specifically looked for thriving communities of mega-church size, serving around 1000 attendees or more in an average week, whose mission statements are in line with the six fundamental convictions of evangelicalism listed by Alister McGrath: ascribing absolute authority to scripture, affirming the majesty of Jesus Christ, recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit, stressing the need for personal conversion, giving priority to evangelism, and being committed to the Christian community.²⁸ In addition, we also examined whether these congregations exhibit such specific features like no traditional church building, no traditional liturgy, services consisting mainly of singing songs of praise and a lengthy sermon, the use of pop/rock music, etc. In autumn of 2014, we had identified twelve congregations fitting our profile. Next, we contacted the leadership of these congregations and asked if they were willing to participate in our research by distributing a link to an online questionnaire among their membership and/or attendees of eighteen years or older. Eventually, six congregations participated and distributed the link among their membership and/or attendees during the period of November 2014 to January 2015. This resulted in a total of 584 evangelical respondents who filled in our online questionnaire.²⁹ However, since we used a non-probabilistic sampling method (purposive sampling), we cannot tell to what extent this sample is representative of the total population of evangelicals in the Netherlands.

²⁸ McGrath, *Evangelicalism*, 55–66.

²⁹ The following congregations participated in this study: Maranatha Ministries in Amsterdam (an evangelical congregation with Pentecostal influences serving mainly, but not exclusively, people from Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles); the Church of the Nazarene in Vlaardingen (one of the largest of the twelve Nazarene churches in the Netherlands); the Baptist church De Rank in Utrecht (a large Baptist church in the center of the Netherlands and member of the Union of Baptist Churches in the Netherlands); the Free Baptist Community in Groningen (a recently established independent Baptist church in the north of the Netherlands); the Free Evangelization in Zwolle (a very large independent evangelical congregation, though it is involved in a corporation with Willow Creek Netherlands, located in the east of the Netherlands); and the evangelical church De Pijler in Lelystad (an independent evangelical congregation with ties to Willow Creek Netherlands located in the center of the country).

Moreover, such information on denominations is not publicly available in the country, seriously limiting possibilities to test for representativeness. Nevertheless, a comparison of the demographic profiles of the evangelicals in our sample with those who participated in the study of Hyme Stoffels—one of the very rare large-scale quantitative studies into the beliefs and values of evangelicals conducted in the Netherlands—hardly reveals any differences and even confirms the relatively high socioeconomic status of the evangelicals in our sample in terms of education and to a lesser extent of income.³⁰

In order to be able to compare these evangelical respondents to mainline Christians, we also distributed the link to our online questionnaire among a representative sample of the Dutch population. This sample was drawn in 2011 in view of the 'Religion in Dutch society 2011–2012' survey with previous waves of data collection in 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005.³¹ In January 2015, a letter of invitation to participate in our research was sent to 918 respondents who had stated in 2011–2012 that they were willing to participate in future research. This resulted in a total of 336 completed questionnaires, while thirty-nine letters were sent back to us either because the address was incorrect, or the respondent was deceased. In view of this response rate of 35.4%, we checked to what extent this new sample was still comparable to the original sample. A comparison of such general characteristics as education, marital status, and income showed that this is not entirely the case. Chi-square tests reveal that our new panel contains less of those of lower education and more of higher-educated respondents, more married respondents and less singles, as well as less respondents in the lower income category. Thus, we decided to include education, marital status, and income as control variables in our study next to gender and age.³²

30 Hyme Stoffels, *Wandelen in het licht: Waarden, geloofsovertuigingen en sociale posities van Nederlandse evangelischen* (Kampen: Kok, 1990). For another large-scale study conducted in the Netherlands, see Sipco Vellenga, *Een ondernemende beweging: De groei van de evangelische beweging in Nederland* (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1991). Instead of focusing on members or visitors of evangelical congregations, this study focuses on evangelicals active in movements like Youth for Christ, Navigators, Campus Crusade for Christ, and Youth with a Mission. Also, this study of Vellenga's confirms the higher socioeconomic status of the evangelicals in our sample especially in terms of education.

31 See Rob Eisinga et al, *Religion in Dutch Society 2011–2012: Documentation on a National Survey on Religious and Secular Attitudes and Behavior* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2012).

32 For the dataset and more detailed documentation of this survey, see Paul Vermeer, Peer Scheepers, & Joris Kregting, *Thriving Evangelical Congregations in the Netherlands 2014–2015. Documentation of a Survey among Visitors of Six Thriving Evangelical Congregations*

b *Measurements*

i Dependent Variables: Organizational Commitment

As mentioned already, we use two different indicators of organizational commitment: money donated to church per year and hours spent per week on church groups. The amount of money donated per year to one's own congregation is stated in euros and is categorized with the help of eleven categories ranging from (1) 0 euro to (11) 4501 euro or more. The hours spent on church groups per week refers to the total sum of hours the respondent claims to be active for one or more groups, like choir, Bible study group, etc.

ii Independent Variables: Religious Affiliation

Respondents of the evangelical subpopulation were labeled evangelical if they consider themselves to be a full member of an evangelical congregation without at the same time being affiliated to another non-evangelical congregation. Respondents of the non-evangelical subpopulation could state their religious identity on a list comprising eleven Christian denominations. Their answers were collapsed into five categories: Catholic, mainline Protestant, orthodox Protestant, evangelical, and none. In addition, those respondents of the non-evangelical subpopulation who claimed membership of an evangelical congregation were added to the evangelical subpopulation. However, because the evangelical respondents are part of a carefully selected convenience sample and the non-evangelical respondents of a national probability sample, we are in danger of comparing committed evangelicals with average or nominal Catholics or Protestants which could invalidate our results. In order to make more meaningful comparisons, we, therefore, combined religious affiliation with church attendance and constructed the following four groups of respondents: core evangelicals, i.e., members of an evangelical congregation who attend religious services at least once a month; mainline core members, i.e., mainline Protestants and Catholics who attend religious services at least once a month; mainline nominal members, i.e., mainline Protestants and Catholics who attend religious services less than once a month; and religious nones. Thus, we merged Catholics and mainline Protestants into the single category mainline, because dividing Catholics and mainline Protestants separately into core and nominal members would result in very small groups. For the same reason, we excluded nominal evangelicals and orthodox Protestants from further analyses as these groups are also very small.

in the Netherlands 2014–2015. DANS Data Guide 14 (The Hague: DANS, 2016). https://dans.knaw.nl/nl/actueel/nieuws/DANS_DataGuide_14.pdf (accessed 27 November 2018).

iii Independent Variables: Adolescent Religious Socialization

Religious socialization is a composite measure combining four aspects: whether the respondent was raised in a religious way; whether this upbringing was important in the family; and whether prayer and Bible-reading were regular activities in his/her home. The scale runs from (0), none of the aforementioned aspects apply to the respondent, to (4), all aspects apply to the respondent (Cronbach's alpha .87 and the corrected item-total correlation ranges from .64 to .72). The respondents' juvenile church attendance was assessed by asking if they attended church when they were twelve to fifteen years old. Response categories run from (1), almost never, to (4), about once a week. Respondents could also indicate the level of church attendance of their father and mother with the help of the same scale.

iv Independent Variables: Current Socio-religious Networks

Respondents could indicate how many of their family members, friends, and colleagues attend their place of worship on a scale ranging from (1), none, to (5), all. In addition, respondents active in church groups could also indicate if they regard their fellow church group members as friends on a scale ranging from (1), not at all, to (4), very much.

v Independent Variables: Individual Religiosity

Orthodoxy concerns belief in traditional Christian doctrines and was measured using the doctrinal orthodoxy scale of C. Daniel Batson and W. Larry Ventis.³³ Respondents could answer on a five-point scale ranging from (1), strongly disagree, to (5), strongly agree (Cronbach's alpha is .97 and the corrected item-total correlation ranges from .56 to .95). In order to assess the respondents' view on the Bible, we used an instrument originally designed by Stoffels. This instrument consists of four statements, and respondents are asked to indicate with which statement they agree most. Following the procedure used by Stoffels, we labeled respondents as having a literal understanding of the Bible if they agreed most with the statement "From cover to cover the Bible contains the infallible word of God."³⁴ The respondents' intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation was assessed with the help of a shortened version of the religious orientation scale of Gordon W. Allport and Michael J. Ross.³⁵ This instrument consists of fifteen items, seven items tapping an intrinsic religious orientation and eight items an extrinsic orientation. Respondents could answer on a five-point scale

33 Batson & Ventis, *Religious Experience*, 152–155. See also Peter C. Hill & Ralph W. Hood, *Measures of Religiosity* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1999), 153.

34 Stoffels, *Wandelen*, 151.

35 See Hill & Hood, *Measures*, 144–154.

running from (1), strongly disagree, to (5), strongly agree (for the intrinsic orientation Cronbach's alpha is .90 and the corrected item-total correlation ranges from .48 to .86; for the extrinsic orientation Cronbach's alpha is .80 and the corrected item-total correlation ranges from .27 to .57). Next to this, respondents could also indicate if they have ever had a born-again experience on a scale from (1), definitely not, to (4), I am certain of it.³⁶ Finally, we asked if respondents ever experienced the presence of God with the help of a four-point scale ranging from (1), never, to (4), often.

vi Control Variables

Age is 2014 minus the respondent's year of birth. Education concerns the highest education completed and was collapsed into three categories: (1) lower education (highest education is lower vocational school); (2) middle education (from lower secondary school to secondary vocational school); and (3) higher education (from O levels to PhD or doctorate). Marital status relates to: (1) married; (2) unmarried/single; (3) living together; (4) widow/widower; and (5) divorced. Income regards the gross family income and was collapsed into the categories: (1) lower income (2,000 Euro or less); (2) middle income (between 2,000 and 2,500 Euro); and (3) higher income (2,500 Euro or more).

The descriptive statistics of all variables are presented in Table 1.

4 Results

a Levels of Organizational Commitment

To begin with, we have a look at the different levels of organizational commitment among core evangelicals, mainline core members, mainline nominal members, as well as non-church members or nones. This concerns our first research question and a test of hypotheses 1A and 1B. As the results in Table 2 show, evangelicals are indeed more committed to their religious organization than mainline core and nominal members. When it comes to donating money, core evangelicals donate far more money to church per year than mainline core and mainline nominal members, while religious nones understandably do not donate money to church at all. Additional one-way ANOVA (Scheffe test) shows that evangelicals differ significantly from mainline core and mainline nominal members in this regard, while there is no significant difference between mainline core and nominal members ($F(2, 561) = 29.243, p. \leq .001$); the nones

³⁶ We borrowed this question from Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 198.

TABLE 1 *Descriptive Statistics*

Variables	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
<i>Congregational commitment</i>				
Money donated to church per year	1.00	11.00	3.18	2.33
Hours spent per week on church groups	0.00	52	2.51	4.79
<i>Religious affiliation</i>				
Core evangelical	0.00	1.00	0.51	
Core mainline	0.00	1.00	0.04	
Nominal mainline	0.00	1.00	0.06	
Religious none	0.00	1.00	0.23	
<i>Adolescent religious socialization</i>				
Religious socialization respondent	0.00	4.00	1.92	1.66
Juvenile church attendance respondent	1.00	4.00	2.90	1.35
Father's church attendance respondent 12–15 years	1.00	4.00	3.07	1.33
Mother's church attendance respondent 12–15 years	1.00	4.00	3.16	1.27
<i>Current socio-religious networks</i>				
Family members attend same congregation	1.00	5.00	1.39	0.74
Friends attend same congregation	1.00	5.00	1.90	1.01
Colleagues attend same congregation	1.00	5.00	1.25	0.60
Church group members as friends	1.00	4.00	2.18	1.16
<i>Individual religiosity</i>				
Orthodoxy	1.00	5.00	3.90	1.20
Bible literal word of God	0.00	1.00	21.7	
Intrinsic religiosity	1.00	5.00	3.45	0.98
Extrinsic religiosity	1.00	5.00	2.60	0.70
Born-again experience	1.00	4.00	2.43	1.35
Experience of God	1.00	4.00	2.35	1.03
<i>Controls</i>				
Gender (female)	0.00	1.00	0.54	
Age	18	94	49.60	13.75

Variables	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Education				
Lower	0.00	1.00	0.07	
Middle	0.00	1.00	0.36	
Higher	0.00	1.00	0.54	
Marital status				
Married	0.00	1.00	0.73	
Unmarried/single	0.00	1.00	0.13	
Living together	0.00	1.00	0.04	
Widow/widower	0.00	1.00	0.03	
Divorced	0.00	1.00	0.05	
Family income				
Lower income	0.00	1.00	0.19	
Middle income	0.00	1.00	0.12	
Higher income	0.00	1.00	0.40	

were of course omitted from the post hoc analysis. Evangelicals are also far more committed to their congregation in terms of the hours spent per week on church groups. One-way ANOVA (Scheffe test) again shows that evangelicals spend significantly more hours per week on church groups than mainline core and mainline nominal members. Mainline core and nominal members do not differ significantly in this respect, and they even do not differ significantly from the non-church members ($F(3, 706) = 35.982, p. \leq .001$). Thus, core evangelicals consistently display higher levels of organizational commitment than mainline core and nominal members, which is clear support for hypotheses 1A and 1B.³⁷

However, one interesting aspect of Table 2 should not be left unmentioned. As the standard deviations for money donated to church per year (2.44) and hours spent per week on church groups (5.64) indicate, the levels of organizational commitment vary strongly among evangelicals. This indicates that the evangelical megachurches participating in our study are not necessarily strong communities immune to free-rider problems.³⁸

37 In an additional analysis, we checked for possible differences between core and nominal Catholics and mainline Protestants and found no statistically significant differences, which justifies our decision to merge Catholics and mainline Protestants into the single category mainline.

38 Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," *American Journal of Sociology* 99/5 (1994), 1180–1211, at 1184–1185.

TABLE 2 *Means of Hours Spent per Week on Church Groups and of Money Donated to Church per Year for Core Evangelicals, Mainline Core Members, Mainline Nominal Members, and Religious Nones (SD in parentheses)*

	Core evan- gelicals	Core main- liners	Nominal mainliners	Religious nones	Eta
Money donated per year	3.77 (2.44)	2.22 (0.72)	1.56 (0.57)	---	.31***
Hours spent per week	3.82 (5.64)	1.26 (1.95)	0.12 (0.63)	0.02 (0.22)	.37***

* $p < .050$; ** $p < .010$; *** $p < .001$.

b *Multivariate Analyses*

But which factors determine the religious commitment of evangelicals? In view of this question, which concerns hypotheses 2A to 4F, we conducted a stepwise linear regression analysis for each instance of organizational commitment. This enables us to ascertain the relative weights of the aforementioned three sets of determinants and, thus, to identify the most decisive factors for the organizational commitment of the core evangelicals. To do this, each regression analysis estimates five models. In the first model, we only estimate the effect of religious affiliation. Similar to the results presented in Table 2, this model shows to what extent mainline core members, mainline nominal members, and religious nones display lower levels of religious commitment than core evangelicals (the reference category). The next three models again estimate the effect of religious affiliation, but within each model a different set of determinants is added to the equation. If these determinants have a significant effect on the instance of organizational commitment in question and at the same time reduce the effect of religious affiliation, it is possible to conclude that these determinants explain the organizational commitment of evangelicals.³⁹ In the fifth and final model, then, all three sets of determinants together with the control variables are entered into the equation to really find the most decisive determinants of each instance of organizational commitment.

Table 3 shows the results of the linear regression analysis for the amount of money donated to church per year. Model 1 confirms the results of Table 2, that is, compared to mainline core and mainline nominal members, evangelicals

39 James A. Davis, *The Logic of Causal Order: Series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985), 40.

TABLE 3 Stepwise Linear Regression Analysis for Money Donated to Church per Year (β)

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Religious affiliation (ref = Core evangelical)					
Core mainline	-.18***	-.18***	-.16**	-.09	-.10
Nominal mainline	-.24***	-.23***	-.18**	-.13*	-.09
Religious socialization respondent		.02			.03
Juvenile church attendance respondent		.02			.06
Father's church attendance resp. 12-15 years		-.03			-.14
Mother's church attendance resp. 12-15 years		.04			.04
Family members attend same congregation			.03		.04
Friends attend same congregation			.05		.06
Colleagues attend same congregation			.11*		.10*
Church group members as friends			.04		.01
Orthodoxy				.18*	.16**
Bible literal word of God				-.13**	-.07
Intrinsic religiosity				-.06	-.06
Extrinsic religiosity				-.11*	-.12*
Born-again experience				.09	.05
Experience of God				-.00	.01
Gender (1 = female)					-.16***
Age					.06
Education (ref = higher)					
Lower					.07

TABLE 3 *Stepwise Linear Regression Analysis for Money Donated to Church per Year (β) (Cont.)*

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Middle					-.01
Marital status (ref = married)					
Unmarried/single					-.04
Living together					-.01
Widow/widower					-.01
Divorced					.00
Family income (ref = lower)					
Middle income					.08
Higher income					.36***
R ² adj.	.08	.07	.09	.10	.26
N	432	432	432	432	432

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

donate significantly more money to church. Needless to say, that the nones were omitted from the regression analysis as they did not donate money to church (cf. Table 2). In Model 2, factors concerning religious socialization are added to the equation, and this has no effect. The differences between evangelicals and mainline core and mainline nominal members hardly change. Thus, we have to reject hypothesis 2A—being raised in a religious way does not explain the financial contributions evangelicals make to their congregation. Model 3 adds factors relating to socio-religious networks to the equation, which has a modest effect. It slightly reduces the differences between evangelicals and mainline core and mainline nominal members. This is partial support for hypothesis 3A, as it shows that evangelicals donate more money to church because they have colleagues who attend the same congregation. Adding factors relating to individual religiosity again has a modest effect as Model 4 shows. The strongest effect relates to orthodoxy. This effect is in line with hypothesis 4A, as it shows that evangelicals indeed donate more money because they are more orthodox. However, the negative effect of having a literal understanding of the Bible is not in line with hypothesis 4A, because this shows that evangelicals who

take the Bible literally donate less money to their own congregation! Having an intrinsic religious orientation has no effect, which is not in accordance with hypothesis 4C. But the negative effect of having an extrinsic orientation can, in a reversed way, be seen as partial support for hypothesis 4C. Finally, religious experiences do not affect making financial contributions to one's own congregation, which is a clear rejection of hypothesis 4E. Still, these different factors relating to the role of socio-religious networks and individual religiosity are not the most decisive determinants of this specific instance of the organizational commitment of evangelicals. More important in this respect are especially income and gender (cf. Model 5). Adding these control variables to the equation makes the differences between evangelicals and mainline core and nominal members statistically insignificant and more than triples the adjusted explained variance to twenty-six percent. Thus, it is especially male evangelicals with a higher income who hold orthodox, Christian beliefs and who do not have an extrinsic religious orientation that donate money to their own congregation.

The results for the regression for the number of hours spent per week on church groups are displayed in Table 4. Model 1 again is in line with the results of Table 2. Evangelicals spend significantly more hours per week on church groups compared to mainline core and nominal members and religious nones. However, adding factors relating to religious socialization to the equation, as is done in Model 2, does not have any significant effect. Thus, we also have to reject hypothesis 2B. That is to say, evangelicals do not spend more time on church groups due to more intense socialization experiences. In contrast, the role of current socio-religious networks now appears to be very important (cf. Model 3). Adding these factors to the equation reduces the differences between evangelicals and all other groups to insignificance, while the adjusted explained variance increases from twelve to twenty-eight percent. This is strong partial support for hypothesis 3B. That is, it is especially evangelicals whose colleagues attend the same congregation or those who consider their church group members to be friends that spend more hours per week on church groups. However, factors concerning individual religiosity are now only of minor importance (cf. Model 4). Although the differences between evangelicals and the other groups are again reduced to insignificance when the factor of having had a born-again experience is added to the equation, which is partial support for hypothesis 4F, the increase in explained variance is modest with only two percent points. Furthermore, the effect of this latter factor even disappears when all other variables, including the control variables, are added to the equation (cf. Model 5). Although, in this full model the

TABLE 4 *Stepwise Linear Regression Analysis for Hours Spent per Week on Church Groups (β)*

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Religious affiliation (ref = Core evangelical)					
Core mainline	-.12**	-.12**	-.03	-.04	.01
Nominal mainline	-.17***	-.17***	-.01	-.08	.04
Religious none	-.32***	-.32***	-.03	-.16	.04
Religious socialization respondent					
Juvenile church attendance respondent		-.03			-.00
Father's church attendance resp. 12–15 years		.08			.08
Mother's church attendance resp. 12–15 years		-.03			-.09
Family members attend same congregation					
Friends attend same congregation			-.08		-.07
Colleagues attend same congregation			.07		.06
Church group members as friends			.36***		.36***
			.28***		.26***
Orthodoxy					
Bible literal word of God				-.09	-.03
Intrinsic religiosity				-.04	-.06
Extrinsic religiosity				.04	-.00
Born-again experience				-.09	-.10*
Experience of God				.22**	.12
				.11	.10
Gender (1 = female)					
Age					-.09*
Education (ref = higher)					
Lower					.03
Middle					.01
					-.06

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Marital status (ref = married)					
Unmarried/single					-.01
Living together					-.00
Widow/widower					-.05
Divorced					-.02
Family income (ref = lower)					
Middle income					-.02
Higher income					-.05
R ² adj.	.12	.11	.28	.14	.29
N	554	554	554	554	554

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

factor of having an extrinsic religious orientation now reaches significance as a negative determinant, which in a reversed way may again be seen as partial support for hypothesis 4D. Nevertheless, as Model 5 shows, being involved in socio-religious networks is the most important determinant for this instance of the organizational commitment of evangelicals, followed by the rejection of an extrinsic religious orientation and by being male. Or, put differently, it is especially male evangelicals who have colleagues who attend the same congregation, who consider their fellow church group members to be friends, and who do not have an extrinsic religious orientation that spend more hours per week on church groups.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

The Dutch religious landscape is characterized by inter- and intra-religious plurality. Various religions are manifest in Dutch society and there is also variance within Christianity itself, which is still the largest religion in the Netherlands. Diversity prevails.⁴⁰ But not only is there a wide array of different religions, churches, and independent congregations present in the Netherlands, there is

40 Hans Schmeets & Carly van Mensvoort, *Religieuze betrokkenheid van bevolkingsgroepen 2010–2014* (Den Haag: CBS, 2015).

also a growing diversity in terms of viability. While certain churches face a loss of membership, other churches and independent congregations, though they are exceptions, thrive like never before and some even reach megachurch size. This situation motivated us to have a closer look at the relative success of several evangelical megachurches and to address the following interrelated research questions, not previously addressed in the Netherlands: (1) To what extent are Dutch evangelicals more committed to their religious organization, in terms of money and time spent on church, than members of mainline churches in the Netherlands?; and (2) Which decisive factors determine these instances of the organizational commitment of Dutch evangelicals? In view of these interrelated questions, we followed Kanter's multidimensional understanding of religious commitment and focused on instrumental or, as we call it, organizational commitment. Instrumental commitment, according to Kanter, is all about the sacrifices and investments people make to an organization and so we considered the amount of money and time people spend to maintain their congregation as indicators of their organizational religious commitment.⁴¹ Now, as the results regarding our first question show, the core evangelicals that participated in our study indeed display higher levels of organizational religious commitment. That is to say, they significantly donate more money to church and also spend more hours per week on church groups than the mainline core and nominal members in our sample. In terms of Kanter's understanding of commitment, this shows that these core evangelicals are, thus, more willing to do what is necessary to help maintain their religious community.⁴² But what explains the willingness of evangelicals in this respect? In view of this question, we studied the effects of three different sets of determinants concerning adolescent religious socialization experiences, an individual's current involvement in socio-religious networks, and individual religiosity.

When it comes to the effect of various aspects of adolescent religious socialization—the first set of determinants—our study yielded a remarkable result. As it turns out, adolescent religious socialization does not affect the organizational religious commitment of the evangelicals that participated in our study, since it has no effect whatsoever on the amount of money these evangelicals donated to their congregation nor on the number of hours they spend on church groups. This is a remarkable finding, given the fact that the relationship between growing up in a religious family and adult religious

41 Kanter, *Commitment*, 76–82.

42 *Ibid.*, 66.

commitment is ascertained in many previous studies, also in the Netherlands.⁴³ In addition, the relative success of conservative religious groups, like evangelicals, is often attributed to the greater emphasis within these groups on religious socialization.⁴⁴ Why religious socialization hardly affects the adult religious commitment of these evangelicals is, thus, striking yet interpretable. Possibly this has to do with the fact that a lot of our evangelical respondents are switchers and converts. As we showed elsewhere, about fifty percent of them switched to an evangelical megachurch from another Protestant church, while almost twenty-five percent had no religious background prior to their conversion to evangelicalism.⁴⁵ Non-religious converts, of course, probably did not enjoy a religious upbringing at all, which could explain why their current involvement in a religious organization is not affected by previous religious socialization experiences. Protestant converts probably were raised in a religious way, but maybe their religious upbringing was far from intense, resulting in weak ties with their former non-evangelical congregation and, subsequently, in their religious switching. If this interpretation is correct, our results would be in line with US research that shows that powerful religious socialization experiences during adolescence decrease the likelihood of religious switching.⁴⁶ The fact that the majority of the evangelicals participating in our study are switchers could, thus, very well explain why adolescent religious socialization experiences hardly affect their current commitment to their religious organization.

The second set of determinants, concerning our respondents' current involvement in socio-religious networks, turned out to be moderately important with regard to the amount of money donated to church and very important with regard to the number of hours spent on church groups. Especially this latter finding is in line with the earlier findings of Samuel Stroope that intra-congregation social ties have a positive effect on an individual's

43 See, for instance, de Hart, "Impact"; Vermeer, Janssen, & de Hart, "Religious Socialization."

44 Reginald W. Bibby & Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, "The Circulation of the Saints: A Study of People Who Join Conservative Churches," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 12/3 (1973), 273–283.

45 Paul Vermeer & Peer Scheepers, "Bloeiende evangelische kerken in Nederland: Een circulation of the saints?," *Religie en Samenleving* 12/1 (2017), 22–51.

46 C. Kirk Hadaway & Penny L. Marler, "All in the Family: Religious Mobility in America," *Review of Religious Research* 35/2 (1993), 97–116, at 111; Darren E. Sherkat & John Wilson, "Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in Religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching and Apostasy," *Social Forces* 73/3 (1995), 993–1026, at 996–997.

participation in a whole range of church activities.⁴⁷ However, our findings also show that not all socio-religious networks are of importance in this respect. Having colleagues who attend the same congregation turns out to be the most important factor, while having family members and friends attending the same congregation does not affect religious commitment at all. At first glance, this may seem a surprising result. However, this result could also reflect the interplay between the commitment mechanisms of renunciation and communion. Renunciation, according to Kanter, involves the “[...] discouragement of relationships both outside the group and with internal sub-units, in order to provide maximum strength to the entire system.”⁴⁸ Thus, having family members or friends in the same congregation could go at the cost of one’s dedication to the congregation as such. In contrast, establishing relationships within the same congregation with people to whom one is less emotionally attached, like colleagues, could very well increase one’s commitment to the congregation as such. As with colleagues one does not share family or friendship bonds, but only one’s involvement in the same congregation. In addition, colleagues usually have a similar socio-economic background, which is an important communion mechanism, according to Kanter.⁴⁹ Seen from this perspective, then, it is not surprising that, in view of one’s commitment to a religious congregation, it is more important to have distant acquaintances among one’s fellow congregants than to have family members and friends.

Aspects of individual religiosity, our third set of determinants, have an only moderate effect on both the amount of money donated to church and the number of hours spent on church groups. That is to say, next to being evangelical, having an extrinsic religious orientation is a negative moderate determinant for donating money to church and for participating in church groups, while orthodoxy only has an additional effect on making financial donations. More distinctive characteristics of evangelicalism, like an emphasis on the experiential dimensions of faith or biblical literalism, do also affect the organizational commitment of evangelicals (Model 4), but these effects eventually disappear when we control for other factors in the full model (Model 5). It is difficult to interpret these findings. On the one hand, the effect of orthodoxy and the negative effects of having an extrinsic religious orientation are

47 Stroope, “Social Networks.”

48 Kanter, *Commitment*, 82.

49 *Ibid.*, 93–94.

in line with Pieter R. Boersema's portrayal of evangelical congregations as conservative and reactionary bulwarks of faith.⁵⁰ On the other hand, this image is again nuanced by the fact that the effects of other more distinctive religious characteristics disappear in the full model and that biblical literalism in Model 4 even appears to be a negative determinant for donating money to church.

In sum, the organizational commitment of the evangelicals who participated in our study is best explained in terms of a combination of specific background characteristics, social embeddedness and individual religiosity. The most committed evangelicals are male and have a higher income, especially when it comes to the amount of money they donate to their congregation. Their involvement in socio-religious networks is also of importance. This factor has a strong impact on the amount of time these evangelicals spend on church groups and is also of modest importance in view of the financial donations they make. Factors related to individual religiosity have a modest effect on both instances of organizational commitment, while adolescent religious socialization experiences do not affect the organizational commitment of evangelicals at all. Our study, thus, offers some interesting explanations, we believe, for the organizational religious commitment of a specific group of Christians in the context of secular Dutch society. Still, we must be careful in making too strong inferences in this respect, since our study also has its limitations. As to conclude this paper, we briefly discuss four limitations and also offer some ideas for further research.

The first limitation concerns the dependent variable of this study. Commitment, and also religious commitment, is a multidimensional concept and, in this study, we only focused on one dimension, i.e., instrumental commitment or the commitment to the religious organization. Therefore, the above conclusions only apply to this latter dimension of commitment, and we do not claim that social embeddedness or individual religiosity also have an impact on the moral and affective commitment of evangelicals—the other two dimensions of commitment distinguished by Kanter.⁵¹ Other factors could very well be of importance here next to, or perhaps even instead of, the factors we studied. For example, Rafael Walthert recently demonstrated how the specific ritual form of the celebrations in an evangelical congregation results in a kind of collective effervescence, which, in turn, stimulates a sense of community among

50 Boersema, "Evangelical Movement."

51 Kanter, *Commitment*, 66–69.

the participants and strengthens affective bonds (affective commitment).⁵² Future research thus should focus on more dimensions of commitment and more possible factors need to be studied before we really come to an understanding of why (some) evangelical congregations are more successful in resisting secularization.

Secondly, although the factors we identified are important in binding evangelicals to their congregation, we do not know if these factors also prevent evangelicals from disaffiliating later in life and thus really contribute to the persistence of evangelical congregations in a secular environment like the Netherlands. To actually study this, we should be able to compare committed evangelicals with lapsed evangelicals, but lists of former or lapsed evangelicals are not available. Little is known about the retention rates of evangelical congregations, which makes predictions about the long-term effectiveness of the factors we studied rather difficult. Or put differently, it could also be the case that the relative success of evangelical congregations in the Netherlands is more due to their ability to attract new members—and the evangelical megachurches that participated in our study indeed are rather successful in this respect—than to their ability to retain members.⁵³ In order to deal with this limitation, future research could perhaps compare the membership of evangelical megachurches with the membership of waning evangelical congregations, although it may be very difficult to find waning evangelical congregations that are willing to participate in this kind of research.

Thirdly, this study only focused on the individual characteristics of church members. However, when it comes to the question as to why some religious congregations are better able to resist secularization than other congregations, institutional factors are also of importance. For example, it is often stated that a non-traditional worship style is an important factor for the success of evangelical megachurches.⁵⁴ This claim can only be properly tested if one compares evangelical congregations with congregations from other denominational traditions. Hence, in addition to a focus on individual characteristics, future research should also take institutional factors into account

52 Rafael Walthert, "Emotion, Ritual, and the Individual: The Production of Community in Evangelicalism," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6/1 (2013), 90–119.

53 Regarding the evangelical megachurches' ability to attract new members, see Vermeer & Scheepers, "Bloeiende."

54 See, for instance, Scott Thumma & Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2007), 150–155.

by comparing congregations of different denominational traditions to one another.

Finally, we should also refrain from making too strong inferences, because we cannot tell to what extent our subsample of evangelicals is representative of the total population of evangelicals in the Netherlands. As we already mentioned in the method section, we used a non-probabilistic sampling method (purposive sampling) and, subsequently, made a comparison of the demographic profiles of the evangelicals in our sample and those that participated in the earlier study of Stoffels.⁵⁵ Although this comparison hardly revealed any differences, it would be better if we could compare our subsample of evangelicals with far more recent data on the attitudes, beliefs, and values of this specific group of Dutch Christians. Unfortunately, such data is not available, which shows that evangelicals are still quantitatively understudied in the Netherlands. In this respect, our study is also an attempt to fill this gap.

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55 Stoffels, *Wandelen*.

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