Peter Lüchau and Peter B. Andersen

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS BEHIND DISAFFILIATION FROM THE DANISH NATIONAL CHURCH

Abstract

The national churches of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have all witnessed a steady decline in membership over the past 10–20 years. While there are several studies of disaffiliation from the Lutheran national churches in Finland, Norway and Sweden there are no such studies for Denmark. Using hitherto unseen data from Danish governmental databases, this paper analyses statistics relating to individuals who disaffiliated from the Danish national church from 2002 to 2007. These disaffiliates are compared to members of the Danish national church on socio-economic variables such as age, urbanisation, education, gender and income. The disaffiliates tended to be younger, urban, well-educated, male and fairly well-off. This fits well with theories of secularization. It also shows that the socio-economic variables determining the tendency to disaffiliate from a national church are the same in Denmark as in Finland, Sweden and Norway.

Keywords: religion, membership, disaffiliation, Nordic church, secularization, Denmark

Introduction

Like its sister churches in Finland, Norway and Sweden, the Danish national church has witnessed membership decline for many years. There is a large body of studies on disaffiliation from the churches in Finland, Norway and Sweden but similar studies have unfortunately not been carried out in Denmark. Experiences from the other Nordic countries (Iceland excluded) might point not only towards the factors governing disaffiliation from the Danish national church but also towards ways of analysing them. Grounded in studies of disaffiliation in Finland, Norway and Sweden, this article will argue that the Danish situation basically resembles its Scandinavian neighbours and can be seen as the product of secularization. The analysis will use hitherto unseen data from the Danish central statistical bureau on Danes who actively terminated their membership of the Danish national church in the period from 2002 to 2007.
The need for studying disaffiliation from the Danish national church

In the past 20 to 50 years the Lutheran national churches of the Nordic countries have witnessed a decline in membership (Iceland is excluded from the analysis on account of its relatively small population). The declines have been different in both size and in the degree of their uniformity. In Denmark the decline seems to have been fairly steady from year to year (Kleinbeck 2008:87), whereas in Finland, Norway and Sweden it has been more variable (Kääräinen et al. 2005:39; Høeg 2009:41; Svenska kyrkan 2009). It should be noted that the membership of the Danish national church is officially reported as a percentage of members within the entire population. Hence development over time will tend to appear uniform unless the decline fluctuates significantly from year to year. Annual immigration to Denmark is currently too small to affect the membership of the Danish national church from year to year. Reporting the raw number of church members or the number of defectors from year to year will tend to emphasise minor fluctuations. This is how membership decline was reported for Finland, Norway and Sweden. Regardless of how they are reported, the membership rates of the Nordic national churches are still fairly high and in some instances rival those of the Catholic Church in some Southern European countries.

In Finland, Norway and Sweden there have been systematic efforts to analyse the membership of national churches. In particular, the question of disaffiliation has been analysed from different theoretical viewpoints and with different methodological approaches. Unfortunately this has not been done in Denmark. A limited study of disaffiliation from the Danish national church in Århus City Council has been carried out (Sundback 1989) as well as a later, descriptive study of membership decline (Kleinbeck 2008). A representative study at the individual level has not been carried out until now.

Studying those who disaffiliated from the Danish national church could shed some light on the factors governing the declining membership of the church. It could also establish whether the factors governing this disaffiliation are the same as in Finland, Norway and Sweden and whether there is an overall Nordic pattern of church disaffiliation.

Previous studies of disaffiliation focusing upon attitudes toward the church

In a survey preceding the separation of church and state in Sweden respondents were asked about their sense of belonging to the church. They were asked how strong their feeling of belonging was to the Church of Sweden in general as well as to their local
Peter Lüchau and Peter B. Andersen: Socio-economic factors behind disaffiliation parish (Alwall et al. 1991:34). A later (Swedish) survey presented respondents with a number of reasons for wanting to disaffiliate from the church. These reasons were in the form of a number of statements to which respondents could agree or disagree using a Likert-type response. One of the statements was, «I feel no sense of belonging to the church» [authors’ translation] (Bromander 2005:201). Bromander’s study basically reversed the formulations of the items used by Alwall et al. Not surprisingly, both studies found that individuals with a weak sense of belonging to the church were more likely to have considered disaffiliating from the church. It would seem that in Sweden, at least, the way people see their own relationship with the church influences their willingness to disaffiliate from their church. Many factors can influence members’ attitudes to the church and hence their willingness to disaffiliate. In the first study mentioned above, respondents were also asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement that the Church of Sweden provided valuable contributions to Swedish society. This was supplemented by a statement that the church provided valuable contributions at the local level (Alwall et al. 1991:37). The second study mentioned asked a similar question but in reverse. Those who had considered disaffiliating from the church were presented with the statement that the church concentrated on the wrong activities (Bromander 2005:201). In both surveys the items measured general attitudes towards the activities of the church and whether respondents felt that the contributions of the church were good or bad. Those who felt that the church contributed nothing worthwhile to society (either locally or nationally) were more likely to have considered disaffiliating from the church. This means that the contributions of the church had an influence upon people’s attitudes toward it. If the church provided contributions appreciated by the public, such as social work, missionary work etc., then members tended to stay affiliated. If, on the other hand, church members felt that the contributions of the church were insignificant for society then they tended to disaffiliate. The religious, ethical and political views of the church may also influence people’s attitudes toward it. Since the Nordic national churches are large institutions, the opinions that individuals react to may be the churches’ official views but they may also be minority views within the churches. One example could be the question of female clergy. One of the potential reasons for disaffiliating from the Church of Sweden was male clergy opposition to female clergy (Bromander 2005:201). In a Finnish study of disaffiliation one of the reasons given by respondents was intolerance. What was meant by intolerance was, to a large extent, the resistance by some parts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland toward accepting female clergy (Niemelä 2007:204). In an early Swedish study, around one in four of those who had disaffiliated from the church claimed to have done so as a result of the debate regarding female clergy (Pettersson 1979:24). Studies have also examined the attitudes of the respondents towards the views of the church in general. Besides the question of female clergy, these encompass general and theological conservatism (Niemelä 2007:202; Pettersson 1979:24) and the personal views of the leading bishop (Bromander 2005:201). In general, a negative view of the opinions ascribed to the church makes it more probable that individuals have either disaffiliated or have considered doing so. The question of female clergy
seems to have given a particularly important impetus to disaffiliation. This may, of course, be a post hoc rationalisation on the part of the respondents. It is easy to accuse the church of discriminating against women in societies where gender equality is almost considered a common value.

It is perhaps a paradox that individual religiosity plays a fairly small role in studies of disaffiliation from a Nordic national church. The individual reasons for opting out given above all concern the attitude toward the church or its theology. They do not, however, concern the religiosity of the individual. Research on disaffiliation from mainline churches in the United States has shown that personal faith did not necessarily play a role in disaffiliating from a church. Among American Mormons some disaffiliated from the church because they lost their faith and became apostates, while others retained their faith even though they disaffiliated themselves from the church (Albrecht et al. 1988:80). Among American Catholics some former members identified religious motivations for disaffiliating from the Catholic Church, but they were a minority. Among those who disaffiliated for religious reasons, some did so because the church did not fulfill their religious needs, while others rejected the religious changes following Vatican II (Hoge 1988: 94–95). The American experience suggests that disaffiliation is a rejection of the church as an institution rather than a rejection of faith.

The element of individual religiosity may have been missing from previous Nordic research into disaffiliation simply because in the Nordic countries faith has a low priority. Survey data has shown that more individuals report membership of a Nordic national church than report regular church attendance or belief in God (see Halman et al. 2007). Hence individual religiosity cannot be an all-important factor since there are many non-believing and non-practising church members. A few studies have given lack of faith as one possible reason for disaffiliating. In a list of reasons for potentially disaffiliating from the church, one study gave the reason that the respondent did not share the faith of the church (Bromander 2005:155). A study of people who had already defected found that a number of open-ended answers could be classified to show that some individuals had disaffiliated from the church due to lack of faith (Pettersson 1979:24). A more complex range of views were found in a study of defectors in Finland. Here individuals had disaffiliated from the church either because they had no faith or because they had too strong a faith (Niemelä 2007:201). Some disaffiliated because they no longer held Christian beliefs, while others did so because they found the theology of the church too permissive. This suggests that the American research mentioned above may also be relevant for the Nordic churches. The main difference is that the proportions of religious and non-religious among the disaffiliated will be different, since there are generally lower levels of religiosity in the Nordic countries than in the United States.
Previous studies of disaffiliation focusing upon socio-economic factors

Gender is touched upon in most studies of disaffiliation from a Nordic national church. Males have consistently been found to be more likely to disaffiliate or have considered disaffiliating from the church. This has been found in Finland (Niemelä 2007:197; Sundback 1991:237), Norway (Aagedal 1995:39) and Sweden (Alwall et al. 1991:70–74; Bromander 2005:145; Pettersson 1979:30). These results relate to those who had disaffiliated from the church (Niemelä 2007; Pettersson 1979; Sundback 1991; Aagedal 1995), to non-members (Sundback 1991) and to those who had considered disaffiliating (Alwall et al. 1991; Bromander 2005).

Age has also been consistently found to be a factor in disaffiliation or potential disaffiliation. Generally, younger members were more likely to disaffiliate from the church. This has been found in Finland (Niemelä 2007:197; Sundback 1991:242), Norway (Aagedal 1995:39) and Sweden (Alwall et al. 1991:74; Bromander 2005:145; Pettersson 1979:30). The result relates both to those who had considered disaffiliating from the church (Alwall et al. 1991; Bromander 2005) and those who had already disaffiliated (Niemelä 2007; Pettersson 1979; Sundback 1991; Aagedal 1995). The most likely age of defecting or being likely to defect differs from study to study. This probably has more to do with how the age variable was collapsed in the analyses than with the mean age of the disaffiliates. In Finland the vast majority of those who had disaffiliated from the church were between 18 and 39 years old (Niemelä 2007). In Sweden those between 35 and 44 (Bromander 2005) or between 30 and 39 (Alwall et al. 1991) were most likely to have considered disaffiliating from the church. In addition, in Sweden those who had disaffiliated from the church were likely to be under 35 years of age (Pettersson 1979:30).

Several studies have looked into urbanisation as a factor. It has been found that those living in the capital or in industrial centres were more likely to disaffiliate from the church or to have already disaffiliated. This has been found in Finland (Niemelä 2007:197; Sundback 1991:269), Norway (Aagedal 1995:39) and Sweden (Alwall et al. 1991:80; Gustafsson 1993:60; Pettersson 1979:18). Results related to both those who had already disaffiliated (Gustafsson 1993; Niemelä 2007; Sundback 1991; Aagedal 1995) and those who were most likely to disaffiliate from the church (Alwall et al. 1991; Pettersson 1979).

A few studies have commented on income as a factor in disaffiliation or potential disaffiliation. Generally individuals with higher incomes were more likely to have considered disaffiliating or to have already disaffiliated from the church. This was found in Norway (Aagedal 1995:39) and Sweden (Bromander 2005:151). In Sweden those most likely to disaffiliate were overrepresented in both the lowest and the highest income brackets as compared to the rest of the population (Bromander 2005). Looking only at those above the lowest income bracket, individuals likely to disaffiliate were progressively overrepresented the higher their income bracket. In the case of Norway it was simply concluded that those who had disaffiliated from the church generally had high incomes (Aagedal 1995:39). From these observations it would be safest to con-
clude that among those who have disaffiliated from the church or considered doing so there was an overrepresentation of individuals with high incomes when compared to the incomes of current members of a national church.

Two studies have found a relationship between disaffiliating from a church and education. In both a Norwegian and a Swedish study, those who had disaffiliated from the church were much more likely to have taken a course of higher education (Aagedal 1995:39; Pettersson 1979:33). There was not necessarily a continuous relationship between disaffiliation and education, where a higher level of education would mean a higher chance of disaffiliating from the church. Instead there seemed to be an overrepresentation of people with a higher education among those who had disaffiliated from the church. Whether this was also the case in Finland is unknown.

Lessons learned from previous studies of disaffiliation

The abovementioned studies of disaffiliation have been grouped into two different categories based on their focus. The former group of studies focused on subjective reasons for disaffiliating from a national church. Having no sense of belonging, dislike of the opinions of the church, and feeling that the church did not contribute in a positive way to society made members more likely to disaffiliate from the church. Those who disaffiliated or were likely to disaffiliate were those who were alienated from the national church. The latter group of studies focused on socio-economic factors behind disaffiliation from a national church. Being male, relatively young, having a higher education and a high income made members more likely to disaffiliate from the church. Those who disaffiliated or were likely to disaffiliate were those with a particular socio-economic profile.

The two different foci seem to generate two different conclusions. The former focus prompts the conclusion that disaffiliating from a national church is predominantly a personal choice and most likely the outcome of individual religious histories – each history was unique although they all had some communality. Theories involving social psychology or subjective belonging would need to be employed if we are to understand who disaffiliates from a Nordic national church. Employing the latter focus tends to lead to the conclusion that disaffiliating from a national church is a personal choice but predominantly influenced by socio-economic factors such as age, gender, income and education. The likelihood of an individual disaffiliating from a national church is influenced to a very high degree by the individual’s position in society. Seen from a sociological perspective, having a particular socio-economic profile makes it easier to disaffiliate from a church while having another socio-economic profile makes it more difficult. To understand who disaffiliates from a Nordic national church requires, therefore, the employment of theories involving socio-economic factors. Theories of secularization are well suited as they postulate a relationship between socio-economic changes and religiosity. They basically claim that, as societies become modern or industrial, the socio-economic conditions of the populations change and as a result the religiosity of individuals changes as well.
Unfortunately there are no studies that combine an analysis of attitudes toward the Nordic national churches with socio-economic factors, even though it would be possible with a suitably constructed survey. It is therefore difficult to decide if the two approaches are incompatible or simply indicate contrasting causes at this point. The data used in the present analysis is based on socio-economic variables and hence the attitudinal aspect must be ignored for now.

Previous studies of disaffiliation show that there was a large overlap in the factors governing disaffiliation from a Nordic (Lutheran) national church in Finland, Norway and Sweden. It was more or less the same set of attitudes toward the churches that explained why some individuals disaffiliated or were inclined to disaffiliate in both Finland and Sweden. Equally, it was more or less the same socio-economic factors that explained why some individuals disaffiliated from the church in Finland, Norway and Sweden. The religious situation in Denmark is very similar to that in Finland, Norway and Sweden. There is a Lutheran majority church that is linked to the nation by name and by history. There are low levels of individual religiosity and high membership rates. This suggests that the factors governing disaffiliation from the national churches of Finland, Norway and Sweden could also explain disaffiliation from the Danish national church. One of the aims of the following is, therefore, to test whether the same socio-economic factors that explained disaffiliation in Finland, Norway and Sweden can also explain disaffiliation from the national church in Denmark.

Disaffiliation from a church as an indicator of secularization

Secularization means different things on different analytical levels. On the societal level secularization is a process whereby the values of church religion lose their relevance for the integration and legitimisation of society (Dobbelaere 2002:19). On the organisational level secularization entails the accommodation of the doctrines of religious organisations to the outside world (Dobbelaere 2002:21–22). Because the values of church religion lose their relevance for societal integration and legitimisation, the churches have to accommodate and change their message accordingly. On the individual level secularization is decline in church-related religiosity, particularly church attendance and church membership (Dobbelaere 2002:140). Secularization is both a change in the conditions under which churches operate and a change in individual religiosity. The changing situation in which the churches find themselves does not necessarily mean that the churches will perish. They are more likely to change in order to accommodate the new situation and try to make up for the loss of power over society. The changing religiosity of the individual means that church-related religiosity will decline and that some individuals will chose to reject religion altogether. Others will continue to be religious but they will be so outside of the churches. Hence on the individual level secularization is not necessarily the decline of individual religiosity per se but rather a change in the kind of religiosity that is prevalent.

There is some debate as to the underlying causes of secularization. According to Norris and Inglehart (2004) post-industrial societies are characterised by high levels of
material and physical security. People have enough to eat and are safe from physical harm. Hence they have less need for religion and correspondingly become less religious. According to Dobbelaere (2002) functional differentiation erodes the authority of the churches. They can no longer control the beliefs and practices of individuals, who are therefore free to believe what they like or not believe at all. Berger (1967) claims that religious pluralism undermines the plausibility of religious worldviews. As they are no longer unique, people see them as less legitimate and abandon them. Wilson (1966) suggests that science has delegitimised religious explanations of how the world functions and hence delegitimised religion as such. Regardless of which underlying cause is focused upon, one expected result will be a decline in church-related religiosity and, by extension, church affiliation.

Most of the four underlying causes of secularization mentioned above are relevant to the religious situation in the Nordic countries. All countries share a comprehensive welfare state model that aims to secure material and physical safety for all citizens. The Nordic tradition for having established national churches under (partial) government control combined with constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion means that the ability of the Nordic national churches to control the beliefs and practices of the individuals has been limited. Whether there has been religious pluralism in the Nordic countries is debatable. The Lutheran national churches have had a near-monopoly on religiosity but on the other hand other religions do exist in the Nordic countries, the Roman Catholic Church or Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example. Finally science is both well established and widespread in the Nordic countries through, among other things, the extensive use of university-educated individuals in the workforce. All this suggests that the preconditions for secularization are present in the Nordic countries and that theories of secularization could therefore explain disaffiliation from the Nordic national churches.

Previous studies of disaffiliation from a Nordic national church suggest that several socio-economic variables are important. The results of the previous studies of disaffiliation and the expectations of theories of secularization lead to five hypotheses about those who disaffiliated from the Danish national church between 2002 and 2007:

1. Males were more likely to disaffiliate than females.
2. Individuals with a university degree were more likely to disaffiliate than others.
3. Individuals with very high incomes were more likely to disaffiliate than others.
4. Individuals between 18 and 45 were more likely to disaffiliate than others.
5. Individuals living in the capital were more likely to disaffiliate than others.

The first hypothesis is not related to theories of secularization as such. It is simply an observation that is consistent across the Nordic countries. The second hypothesis relates to the idea that the progress in science makes religion implausible (Wilson 1966:47). Science is spread to the general public through education. The kind of education that most comprehensively involves science is that taken at universities. Hence it can be expected that more will disaffiliate from the church among those with a higher education. The third hypothesis is tied to Norris’ and Inglehart’s (2004) view of secu-
larization as related to existential security. The higher the income of the individual, the less need they have for religion (Norris and Inglehart 2004:108). Hence individuals with very high incomes should be more likely to disaffiliate from the church. Hypothesis four is related to the way secularization affects society at different rates (Gundelach and Riis 1992:11). Religious changes most often occur in generational shifts. Individuals’ religiosity is shaped in their formative years and follows them through life (Norris and Inglehart 2004:28). Older and more religious generations are being replaced by younger and less religious generations. Therefore those who are younger would be more likely to disaffiliate from the church. Hypothesis five is also related to how secularization affects society at different rates in different places. Societal changes occur first in the most advanced areas and only later in less advanced areas. Large cities are generally centres of innovation and development, where information and ideas spread more easily. Therefore secularization will occur in the capital before it occurs in other parts of the country. Hence individuals living in the capital should be more likely to disaffiliate from the church.

Data

The data used in the following analysis comes from official Danish state databases. The central statistics bureau of Denmark, Statistics Denmark, compiles all the information the public sector gathers on Danish residents. Since Denmark is a comprehensive, universal welfare state the public sector gathers a wide variety of information on all individuals residing in Denmark. It is therefore possible, in principle, to do individual level analysis on the entire population of Denmark. Contacts between Danish residents and state or municipal institutions are often registered. This means that databases contain individual level information on education, place of residence, marital status, number of children, employment, age, gender, health record, criminal record, country of birth, income etc. After being collected at various state and municipal institutions, the information is compiled by Statistics Denmark. Since the beginning of the 1980s the information compiled is updated on an annual basis.

The Danish national church is financed primarily through a church tax paid by all members of the church (Dübeck 2005:72). Church tax is collected by the tax authorities alongside ordinary income tax and therefore Statistics Denmark gathers information on whether individuals residing in Denmark are members of the Danish national church. Otherwise this would not have been possible since all registration of religious conviction is illegal in Denmark (Dübeck 2005:55).

The data set consists of two groups. The first group contains all individuals residing in Denmark who terminated their membership of the Danish national church between 2003 and 2007. This includes all Danish residents who were members of the national church in 2002 but disaffiliated from the church somewhere between 2003 and 2007. It is assumed that nothing drastic that could affect reasons for disaffiliating has happened on the societal level in the five-year period and therefore the group is treated as one. The group is not a sample of those who disaffiliated but the entire population of
individuals who disaffiliated from the Danish national church between 2003 and 2007. The group of disaffiliates consists of 48,499 individuals. The second group is a control group consisting of approximately 10 per cent of the entire Danish population that were selected using simple random sampling and resulted in a sample of 545,163 individuals.

Disaffiliation from the Danish national church from 2003 to 2007

Out of a population of 5,447,084 individuals, a total of 48,499 individuals changed status from members of the Danish national church to non-members between 2002 and 2007. This means that fewer than 10,000 Danes disaffiliated from the national church annually from 2003 to 2007, although there was a slight fluctuation from year to year (see Table 1). The percentage of Danes that were members of the Danish national church declined annually by around 0.34 percentage points from 2002 to 2007. This amounts to a little more than 18,500 individuals each year. The number of individuals disaffiliating from the national church was rather small and so was the total annual membership decline. Why the number was so relatively low is impossible to analyse comprehensively based on the current data. It would require data on attitudes towards the church and international comparisons.

### Table 1: Disaffiliates 2003–2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Disaffiliates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>10557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>9757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>8050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>11470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48499</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Denmark

The Danish national church lost members for three reasons: deaths of members, non-baptism and hence non-affiliation of new-born babies and disaffiliation of existing members. Immigration was also a factor, but immigration to Denmark has been severely restricted in recent years and, even if immigrants are not taken into account, the church still experienced an overall decline in membership (Kleinbeck 2008). The total membership decline (around 18,500 individuals a year) suggests that not more than half the decline is due to disaffiliation from the church (fewer than 10,000 individuals a year).

Of the 48,499 who disaffiliated from the church 4,160 were either below the age of 18 or first or second generation immigrants. Since individuals under the age of 18 cannot disaffiliate from the church on their own (their parents have to terminate their membership for them), they are omitted from the analysis. Since immigrants come from many different religious traditions, they are also omitted from the analysis. To include them, however interesting that might prove, would involve many factors not...
touched upon in the discussions of previous studies of disaffiliation and secularization. Hence for the purposes of analytical comparison it is better to leave them out. This leaves 44,339 adult ethnic Danes who disaffiliated from the church between 2003 and 2007. Of those 42,072 disaffiliated from the church and stayed disaffiliated. A total of 2,267 individuals had complicated membership histories: 582 disaffiliated from the church only to return as members later in the period, 494 disaffiliated from the church, returned as members, only to disaffiliate from the church a second time, and for 1,191 data on membership of the national church was missing for at least one year between 2002 and 2007. Finally 1,123 individuals had disaffiliated from the church but were no longer alive in 2007. To simplify the analysis only those 42,072 adult ethnic Danes who disaffiliated from the church and stayed disaffiliated will be included in the analysis.

According to the European Values Study (EVS), in 2008 only around 2 per cent of the Danish population were members of a religious organisation other than the Danish national church. This was the lowest percentage since the EVS started in 1981. Membership rates of the independent religious organisations have declined simultaneously with the membership rate of the Danish national church. It can, therefore, be safely assumed that only an insignificant fraction of those who disaffiliated from the Danish national church did so to join another religious organisation.

To make comparisons more valid the control group will be reduced to better match the group of disaffiliates. To do this, individuals under the age of 18, immigrants and individuals who were not members of the national church are removed from the analysis. This leaves a control group of 349,773 individuals who were all members of the Danish national church in 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaffiliates</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Includes only adult ethnic Danes
Source: Statistics Denmark

**Gender**

Males were much more likely than females to disaffiliate from the Danish national church. Among adult ethnic Danes who were members of the Danish national church, about 48 per cent were male and 52 per cent were female in 2007 (Table 2). Among those who disaffiliated from the church between 2003 and 2007, about 64 per cent were male and 36 per cent were female. This corresponds well with the general picture regarding the difference in religiosity among males and females. Females are generally more likely to hold religious beliefs and more likely to attend church regularly (Andersen and Riis 2002).

The gender differences persisted after controlling for other variables. The relationship between disaffiliation from the church and gender was controlled for municipality,
socio-economic status, marital status, education, income and age. With very few exceptions there were more males among the disaffiliates when controlling for the above variables. With regard to socio-economic status, among the self-employed (who had employees themselves) and among assisting spouses there were no gender differences between the disaffiliates and church members. Both groups had skewed gender balances. Among the self-employed more than 70 per cent were male. Among the assisting spouses more than 90 per cent were female. If we take age as a parameter, gender differences virtually disappeared for those over the age of 80. Above the age of 80 more than 60 per cent of the church members were female. It would appear that the gender differences disappeared because there was a large majority of one gender in all the examples above. It is trivial that there can be little gender difference when one gender dominates. Hence it is safe to conclude that males were more likely than females to have disaffiliated from the church, even when controlling for other variables.

Table 3: Education (in pct.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Short</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Long</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaffiliates</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Includes only adult ethnic Danes
Source: Statistics Denmark

Education

Education seemed to be an important factor in choosing to disaffiliate from the church. Among members of the Danish national church, around 5 per cent held a master’s degree or a PhD in 2007. Among those who disaffiliated from the church it was around 14 per cent (Table 3). Furthermore, a larger proportion of the disaffiliates than members had taken medium courses of further education. This includes people who were trained as teachers, nurses, journalists, secretaries etc. The differences with regard to short-term educational courses or youth training (such as upper secondary or vocational training) were very small. The disaffiliates were less likely than church members not to have gone on to further education. In general there was a much larger proportion of individuals with a degree among those who had disaffiliated from the church. There was also a correspondingly lower proportion of individuals with only a compulsory school education. This suggests that there was something about having taken a course in higher education that encouraged people to disaffiliate from the church. Whether it was because their worldview became more scientific or because there was a certain culturally determined ethical standpoint shared by the more highly educated is impossible to conclude from the current data.

The relationship between disaffiliation from the church and education was controlled for municipality, socio-economic status, marital status, gender, income and age. The difference in education between disaffiliates and church members held after the
control. Among those aged 85 and above, educational differences disappeared. This is not surprising, since more than 60 per cent in this age bracket had nothing beyond compulsory school education. Hence individuals who had disaffiliated from the church were more likely to hold a master’s degree or a PhD than members of the church, even when controlling for other variables.

### Table 4: Income (in pct.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>300</th>
<th>300–500</th>
<th>500+</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaffiliates</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Income is measured in DKK x 1000 a year  
Note: Includes only adult ethnic Danes  
Source: Statistics Denmark

Income

For technical reasons the data on income is from 2006, whereas all the other data is from 2007. As expected, those who had disaffiliated from the Danish national church were more likely to have very high incomes than members. Among adult ethnic Danish church members, around 33 per cent earned more than 300,000 DKK (approximately € 39,550) a year before taxes in 2006. This corresponded roughly to the starting salary of an academic civil servant in the public sector. Among those who disaffiliated from the church, around 48 per cent earned more than 300,000 DKK a year (Table 4). A closer look at the income scales revealed that the major difference between church members and disaffiliates appeared in the highest income bracket. Among church members around 7 per cent earned more than 500,000 DKK (approximately € 65,900) a year in 2006. Among those who had disaffiliated, it was twice as many, around 14 per cent. Individuals who earned more than 500,000 DKK a year include academic civil servants with full seniority, heads of companies, very high ranking employees in the private sector etc.

The relationship between disaffiliating from the church and income was controlled for municipality, socio-economic status, marital status, gender, education and age. Individuals who had disaffiliated from the church were more likely to have very high incomes than members of the church, even when controlling for the above variables. There were, however, a few exceptions. With regard to socio-economic status the income differences between church members and disaffiliates disappeared for some groups. Among the self-employed, there were no income differences between church members and disaffiliates. The self-employed generally had very high incomes as more than half earned more than 500,000 DKK a year. The income differences also disappeared for assisting spouses and people receiving benefits due to unemployment, sick leave or student grants. All four groups had very low incomes, since they were state benefits. The income differences between disaffiliates and church members hence disappeared because the groups had very similar incomes. The income differences
between those who had disaffiliated from the church and church members also disappeared for those with a bachelor or master’s degree. Those with a bachelor degree in Denmark are for the most part students still studying towards their master’s degree and their incomes are therefore very similar. Why there were no income differences among those with a master’s degree is difficult to explain. Even stranger is the fact that among those with a PhD or post.doc., there were fewer with a high income among disaffiliates than among church members. Regarding age, the income differences between disaffiliates and church members disappeared for those aged 80 and above. Since they primarily lived off pensioners’ benefits, their incomes were very similar. The income differences between those who had disaffiliated from the church and the church members also disappeared for those between 20 and 24 and those between 60 and 64. There are no obvious explanations for this.

It could be argued that the burden of paying church tax is the underlying reason for the impact of income. Since church tax is paid as a percentage of gross income, it will increase in proportion to income. Those who disaffiliated from the Danish national church were also those who paid the highest sum in church tax. It is doubtful, however, whether church tax was a factor. Those who disaffiliated from the church were more likely to live in the capital (see below), where the church tax rate was lowest. In general, members of the church were more likely to live in municipalities with high church tax rates, whereas disaffiliates were more likely to live in municipalities with lower church tax rates. The disaffiliates were more likely to have very high incomes even when controlling for percentage paid in church tax.

Table 5: Age Distribution (in pct.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18–29</th>
<th>30–39</th>
<th>40–49</th>
<th>50–59</th>
<th>60–69</th>
<th>70+</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaffiliates</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Includes only adult ethnic Danes
Source: Statistics Denmark

### Age distribution

Disaffiliates were generally younger than members of the Danish national church. The mean age of church members (excluding individuals under 18, of course) was 49 in 2007, while the mean age of disaffiliates was 42. The mean age at which the disaffiliates terminated their church membership was around 40. There was no obvious linear pattern in the age difference between disaffiliates and church members. Among members of the church, around 47 per cent were aged 50 and above. Among disaffiliates it was around 25 per cent. The largest difference between the two groups was among those between 30 and 39 years old and not in the youngest age bracket (Table 5). Around 18 per cent of church members were between 30 and 39 years old. Among disaffiliates it was around 30 per cent. Just as in the other Nordic countries, those who disaffiliated from the church were not the youngest but those in their thirties and for-
Even though individuals could disaffiliate from the church of their own accord from the age of 18, most waited a few years. Individuals with university degrees were more likely to disaffiliate from the church. It takes around five to six years to get a university degree and most people start when they are around 19 or 20 years old. This means that the idea of disaffiliating from the church appears to germinate when the potential disaffiliates are in their late twenties. The idea then takes a few years to come to fruition, and then people disaffiliate from the church when they are in their thirties and forties. If they have not disaffiliated from the church before turning 50, they most likely will not disaffiliate at all. Another way of interpreting the age distribution of the disaffiliates is to look at their birth cohort. Those who disaffiliated were for the most part between 30 and 49 years old. This means that they were born between 1958 and 1977. Those who were older and underrepresented among the disaffiliates were born before 1958. If the tendency to disaffiliate from the church was a generational phenomenon, then this suggests a schism between the pre-war and post-war generations. Those born in the post-World War II years were more likely to disaffiliate from the church than the pre-war generations.

The relationship between disaffiliation from the church and age was controlled for municipality, socio-economic status, marital status, gender, education and income. The age differences between disaffiliates and church members held even when controlling for the above variables. The few exceptions regarded socio-economic status, education and income. The age difference between disaffiliates and church members disappeared for those who were self-employed and had at least five employees and for those on sick leave, early retirement, or unemployment benefits. The income spans within the last groups were rather small, however, which may explain the lack of differences between disaffiliates and church members for these socio-economic groups. The age differences also disappeared for those with an upper secondary education or a bachelor degree. Both are educational levels that are supposed to be stepping stones to further education. Hence those who held them were students who, as a group, tended to have a very restricted age distribution. As the age span was limited, there can be only minor age differences between those who disaffiliated from the church and those who were church members. Finally there were no age differences between disaffiliates and church members for those with very low incomes (below 50,000 DKK or € 6,588 a year). This group consisted mainly of students and hence had a very limited age distribution.

Table 6: Urbanisation (in pct.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Copenhagen</th>
<th>Sealand &amp; Funen</th>
<th>Jutland</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaffiliates</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Includes only adult ethnic Danes
Source: Statistics Denmark
Urbanisation

Geographically, Denmark can be divided into three regions: the capital (with surrounding suburbs), the rest of Sealand (Sjælland) and the smaller islands including Funen (Fyn), and finally the large peninsula of Jutland (Jylland). The largest city in Denmark is the capital, Copenhagen, housing around one million individuals or one fifth of the entire population. The other major cities, such as Århus, Odense, and Aalborg are rather small in comparison to Copenhagen. The capital was home to around 19 per cent of the adult ethnic Danish church members in 2007, compared to around 30 per cent of those who had disaffiliated from the church (Table 6). On the islands the proportion was about the same. Fewer among the disaffiliates resided in Jutland than among the church members. Looking at the individual municipalities revealed that the disaffiliates were more likely to reside in the municipality of Copenhagen. In the suburbs surrounding Copenhagen the proportions of disaffiliates and church members were the same. This suggests that disaffiliating from the church was a big city phenomenon and that the city had to have at least half a million residents. The most likely explanation is that it was a question of population density. In the cities where population density is high, social relations can be described as being of the Gesellschaft type. Here social relations are based on personal self-interest and therefore family bonds, which are important for the transmission of religion, tend to weaken. In rural areas where the population density is lower, social relations can be described as being of the Gemeinschaft type. Here social relations are based on face-to-face contact and more tied to family and tradition. Hence religion is reinforced through family and tradition in the Gemeinschaft type setting, while it is weakened in the Gesellschaft type setting. It is easier for individuals to disaffiliate from the church in a Gesellschaft type setting because it has very few social consequences. In the Gemeinschaft type setting disaffiliating from the church is more likely to have severe social consequences and is therefore more difficult. The individual is more likely to be subjected to peer pressure to remain a member of the church.

The relationship between disaffiliating from the church and urbanisation was controlled for socio-economic status, marital status, gender, education, age and income. The disaffiliates were more likely to reside in the capital than the church members, even when controlling for the above variables. The only three exceptions were self-employed individuals with at least five employees, assisting spouses, and those aged 90 and above. There were very few disaffiliates in any of these three groups which may explain why there was no relationship between disaffiliating from the church and region for these subgroups.

Conclusion

Comparing those who disaffiliated from the Danish national church between 2003 and 2007 with its members during this period reveals two important findings.

First it can be concluded that the data conform well to the expectations of theories of secularization. All five hypotheses were more or less confirmed. Those who disaffili-
iated from the national church were more likely to be male than female. They were more likely to hold a master’s degree or a PhD. They were more likely than church members to have very high incomes. They were generally younger than the church members and were predominantly between 30 to 49 years of age. This suggests that the post-World War II generations were more likely to disaffiliate from the church than the pre-war generations. Finally those who disaffiliated from the church were more likely to reside in the capital. The five hypotheses held even when controlling for a number of standard background variables, which in fact only served to strengthen the conclusion.

Secondly, it can be concluded that those who disaffiliated from the Danish national church were very similar to those who disaffiliated from a national church in Finland, Norway and Sweden. When analysing socio-economic variables, the disaffiliates had very similar profiles in all four countries. The situation in Denmark had not previously been analysed in a way that could confirm this. Whether this also means that those who disaffiliated in Denmark had the same attitudes toward the national church as those who disaffiliated in Finland, Norway and Sweden is impossible to say on the basis of the current data. All that can be concluded is that the socio-economic variables conducive for disaffiliating from a Lutheran national church are the same in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

The current study has produced new insight into the declining membership of the Danish national church, but further studies would be beneficial. First and foremost it would be helpful to conduct studies focusing on the attitudes towards the Danish national church among disaffiliates and church members. These could reveal whether attitudes toward the national church constitute a factor in disaffiliation in Denmark, as has been seen in Finland, Norway and Sweden. Secondly, a comparison of disaffiliation in the Nordic countries and disaffiliation from main-line churches in the other European countries would be beneficial. This might give insight into why relatively few choose to disaffiliate from the Nordic Lutheran churches, even though levels of church attendance and beliefs are considerably lower here than in continental Europe.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Danish Council for Independent Research: Social Sciences for the grant that made the research for this article possible. The authors would also like to thank Peter Gundelach, Hans Raun Iversen and Carin Laudrup, University of Copenhagen, for support and inspiration during the project. Finally the authors would like to thank the editors and the anonymous reviewer at the Nordic Journal of Religion and Society for insightful comments and criticisms.
References


