

14 Decline or persistence of religion?

Trends in religiosity among Christian societies around the world

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Abstract

In this chapter we try to explain why traditional forms of religion have strongly declined in some parts of the world, while in other parts religion continues to play a central role both in the public sphere and in private life. We argue that the patterns of religiosity in Christian societies today are determined by three sets of factors: (a) the religious worldviews and theological doctrines of European Protestantism have fostered the process of the disenchantment of the world more strongly than was the case in Catholicism and in Orthodoxy; (b) patterns of religiosity are influenced by the historical relationship between the church(es), the state and the people in a given country: the degree of religiosity and church attachment will be lower in societies in which religious life was shaped by a hierarchical–bureaucratic state church over long periods of history, and where non-orthodox forms of popular religion were suppressed by the official church, and will be higher in societies in which the church helped the people to preserve their cultural identity against foreign powers, and in societies in which freedom of religion was established in earlier periods of history; (c) the more that existential risks are diminished as a consequence of higher levels of socio-economic development, social equality and the existence of welfare-state provisions, the less important religion will be.

1 Introduction

The role of religion in the modern world continues to attract a high level of attention among both the social sciences and the general public. In many European countries and in some other parts of the world, churches have lost much of their former influence, and traditional forms of religious practice and belief have strongly declined in the course of the twentieth century. In large parts of the world, however, religion continues to play a central role in private life and in the public sphere; we can observe religious revivals, the emergence of charismatic and fundamentalist movements, as well as the expansion of new churches and cults (Marty and Appleby 1992; Beyer 1994;

Riis 1998; Berger 1999; Greeley 2003). Our intention in this chapter is to investigate and to explain these cross-national differences by means of the ISSP-1998 survey on religion. In order to reduce the complexity of the subject, we shall focus on Christian societies¹ and refer only to Christian forms of religious beliefs and practices.

Let us begin with some theoretical considerations. From the origins of sociology until the 1980s, sociological thinking about religion was dominated by the thesis of secularization, which postulates that religion will become less important as societies develop in terms of education and knowledge, wealth and prosperity. This thesis seemed to be very plausible when looking at the decline of church-oriented religion in Europe. In the last decades, however, an increasing number of sociologists put it into doubt in face of the religious development in other parts of the world. Some of them argue that, from a worldwide perspective, the European way of secularization might rather be an exception and not the model which other societies would follow in the course of their socio-economic development (Martin 1994; Berger 1999; Davie 1999). New theses were proposed which claim to explain the development of religion in different areas of the world more adequately.

One line of argument holds that secularization does not mean the end of religion, but a shift from universal religious institutions to religious pluralism and to more individualist, private forms of religion (Parsons 1960; Berger 1999; Luckmann 1991; Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere 1993). Another explanation is based on the market model of religion. Rodney Stark and others argue that in modern pluralist societies, where religious consumers can choose among a variety of products, competition forces the suppliers of religious goods to make their products more attractive for specific segments of the population. Thus, the level of religious activities will be even higher than in traditional, religiously homogeneous societies (Stark and Iannacone 1994; Finke and Stark 1998).

While these approaches refer to general trends of religious development in the contemporary world, Martin (1978), Inglehart and Baker (2000) and others emphasize that in highly developed modern societies, too, the importance of traditional forms of religion may differ significantly between countries and culture areas. According to Martin (1978), the development of religiosity in the course of modernization depends, among other factors, on the role which religion has played in crucial periods of the history of a specific country. If the church was involved in strong and violent social conflicts owing to its dominant political position, as was the case, for example, in France during the French Revolution, the relationship between the people and the church will be disturbed. Negative attitudes towards the church will be transmitted from one generation to the next, taking the form of a “vicious circle”, and people will be likely to distance themselves from religion in the course of modernization. In the opposite case, if religion has had a positive

role during crucial periods of the national history, e.g. if the church united the population against external enemies, as was the case in Ireland, a “beneficent circle” in the relationship between church and people will emerge, and chapter will be more likely to maintain close ties to their church up to present times (Höllinger 1996). Following these considerations, a first goal of this paper is to investigate in which ways religiosity is shaped by the type of religious institution and the characteristics of the national religious culture one belongs to.

Even if the thesis of secularization is much contested today, the fact that traditional forms of religion have declined more strongly in the highly developed European welfare states than in economically less developed countries cannot be denied. Thus, the second aim of this chapter is to examine to what extent religiosity is influenced by the social and material life conditions of the society in which one lives.

2 Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1 The impact of religious denominations and country-specific religious cultures on religiosity

Max Weber’s sociology of religion provides important theoretical considerations concerning the impact of different types of religion and religious institutions on the patterns of religiosity. According to Weber, the emergence of the Protestant ethic, which stimulated the rise of capitalism in Europe, necessarily involved the eradication of magical forms of religion. Parallel to this process of disenchantment, ritualistic and communitarian elements of religion were diminished in favor of a stronger emphasis on individual religiosity and morality. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the demystification of religion was carried further in a more radicalized way by an influential group of Protestant theologians headed by Rudolf Bultmann. The adaptation of religion to the standards of modern thinking was intended to secure its plausibility in modern society. However, as Peter Berger (1967) has argued, the more religion becomes indistinguishable from secular thinking, and the more it eradicates rituals and symbols, the more it ceases to be a religion at all, and people will turn away from it to purely secular strategies of coping with life.

Compared to Protestantism, both Catholicism and Orthodoxy lay a stronger emphasis on the ritualistic and mystical dimension, and incorporate magical popular religious rituals such as the veneration of saints in order to obtain divine grace (Weber 1979; Schneider 1999; Larentzakis 2000). With the architectural splendor and artistic decoration of their churches, and the wide use of music and ritualistic prayers in their liturgy, the importance of expressive and symbolic elements for the arousal of mystical feelings is particularly pronounced in the Orthodox Church. In former times, too,

Catholicism laid a strong emphasis on the ritualistic dimension, but after the opening initiated with the Second Vatican Council these elements became significantly restrained (Lorenzer 1984). Based on these considerations, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: We expect that the higher emphasis on religious rituals and symbols in Catholicism and Orthodoxy makes these churches more attractive for the masses, and thus leads to higher levels of religious participation and beliefs than is the case for the sober and discursive religiosity of Protestantism.

Religiosity is influenced also by the type of religious institution to which one belongs. Weber and Troeltsch have explained this connection in their church-sect typology: churches are monopolistic, hierarchical and bureaucratic institutions which claim to include all members of society and try to eliminate religious competition. Furthermore, they are often allied with the secular powers, there is mutual reinforcement, and frequently church officials are holding political positions and vice versa. In order to maintain their monopoly, churches make concessions to the (lower) religious and moral standards of the masses. As a result of authoritarian–bureaucratic leadership, the religious zeal of the church members and the spirit of religious innovation tend to wither. Sects, on the other hand, are newly formed groups composed of individuals willing to practice religion more intensively and to accept high standards of morality. Sects normally form relatively small local communities; this facilitates the creation of close social bonds among the members as well as mutual control concerning religious conformity (Weber 1979; Johnstone 1997). Thus, we can summarize:

Hypothesis 2: Religiousness should be stronger among members of religious denominations and groups which are close to the ideal type of sect than among members of church-type religions.

Weber and Troeltsch have derived their ideal type of church from the historical model of European state churches. In these countries, religious norms were imposed on the population from above, and dissenting forms of religion – popular “pagan” beliefs and practices as well as sectarian Christian movements – were repressed with the assistance of the state authorities (Sharot 2001). Many times this repression took cruel forms, as can be seen from the large number of witches and heretics who were persecuted and members of sects who were expelled from their home countries. Furthermore, since a considerable part of the church elite stemmed from aristocracy, and many bishops were feudal lords themselves, the church hierarchy supported the economic and political interests of the aristocracy rather than those of the common people. As a reaction, there emerged aversions and rejections against the church among the population. Numerous

reform movements denounced the grievances existing within the late-medieval Catholic church (Troeltsch 1992). In the French Revolution hostility against the church took even more radical forms. And two of the most important social movements in modern Europe – the Enlightenment and Marxism/socialism – denounced not only the churches but religion in general as a reactionary social force.

In most countries of Europe, the state church system was formally abolished in the course of the nineteenth or early twentieth century. Nevertheless, even if there has been freedom of religion for more than a hundred years, the former state churches maintain some of their previous characteristics, and as a consequence of the century-long conflicts between the church and the people, which are stored in the collective memory, the reservation against the church is maintained to a certain degree.

It is important to keep in mind that not all national churches in Europe correspond to the ideal type of state church, as described above. A very different kind of relationship between the church and the people can be found in Ireland, Poland and Cyprus. Here, the church and its representatives helped the population to preserve its cultural and national identity against foreign powers which subjected the country to its rule. As a consequence, national identity and religious identity were closely fused together, and the church became very positively anchored in the minds of the people (Martin 1978; Höllinger 1996; Finke and Stark 1998).

The ISSP-1998 survey on religion also includes three ex-colonial countries: Brazil, Chile and the Philippines. The colonial powers ruling these countries established Catholicism as a state church, corresponding to the model of the European motherlands. However, there exist significant differences between the position of the Catholic church in these countries and the European state-church systems. In the latter, the clergy were a powerful elite, capable of effectively controlling the religious behavior of the population. In the colonies, the infrastructure of the church was much looser. Owing to the lack of clergy, there was much less religious education, and religious ceremonies and rituals many times had to be conducted without the presence of a priest. Thus, there emerged a syncretistic Catholicism merged with animist and spiritualist beliefs and practices of the indigenous population. Since this form of magical popular religion meets both the spiritual and the practical needs of the people, religion continues to be considered a very positive social force (Höllinger 2007).

Summarizing the preceding considerations, we can formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: (a) In countries where one particular church has held the position of a state church over long periods of history, religiosity today will be significantly lower than in those countries where this was not the case. (b) In countries where the dominant church helped a people to preserve their cultural

identity against foreign powers, the popularity of the church and the level of religiosity will remain on a high level up to present times. (c) In countries where Christian religiosity is strongly merged with traditional magic and spiritualist religious beliefs and practices, religiosity will be higher than in countries where traditional forms of popular religion have been eradicated.

Finally, there are some countries where the religious monopoly of one specific church has been abolished already in earlier historical periods and citizens could choose among a variety of denominations. We expect that such a constellation has the following effect:

Hypothesis 4: In countries where citizens can choose among a variety of denominations, religious commitment should be higher today for two reasons: first, smaller religious denominations are closer to the ideal type of the sect and thus encourage higher religious involvement; second, the mechanism of competition in a free religious market is an incentive for single denominations continuously to revive and improve their religious supply.

2.2 The impact of anti-religious social and political ideologies

As has been mentioned above, the social, political and cultural development of Europe since the eighteenth century was strongly influenced by two scientific and political ideologies which were strongly critical of religion: the Enlightenment and Marxism. Philosophers of the Enlightenment considered religion as an obstacle for the development towards a higher stage of the human mind, guided by scientific rationality, individual autonomy and self-responsibility. The philosophical critique of religious worldviews went hand-in-hand with a practical-political critique of the absolutist alliance between church and aristocracy (Casanova 1994, 30 ff.). In a similar way, Marxism characterized religion as the "opium of the people" which induces them to support unjust life conditions and prevents them from fighting for a more egalitarian society.

The anti-religious positions of the Enlightenment and of Marxism were adopted by parts of the intellectual elite in all Europe as well as in the American, African and Asian colonies. However, the extent to which these ideas were disseminated among and accepted by larger segments of the population differs largely from country to country:

Hypothesis 5: We assume that the scientific and the Marxist/communist critique of religion encountered more fertile ground in those countries where the attachment of the people to the church and the credibility of religion had been weakened as a consequence of a state church system and of a "vicious circle" in the relationship between the church and the people. In countries where this was not the case, the Enlightenment and Marxism/communism had no substantial impact on the religious orientations of the population.

2.3 The impact of material and social life conditions on religiosity

During the course of history, one of the central functions of religion was to provide spiritual and instrumental support in the case of individual or collective suffering and risks, such as sickness, poverty, or life-threatening calamities. According to Weber's thesis of the disenchantment of the world, the belief in supranational powers and the need to venerate these powers will decrease the more human beings discover that they themselves are able to explain and control the hitherto insecure and mysterious life conditions by means of calculation and rational planning (Weber 1949). From this thesis, the following, more specific hypotheses can be derived:

Hypothesis 6: (a) The more existential risks are diminished in a given society as a consequence of higher levels of socio-economic development, the less important religion will be. (b) The security of life conditions depends also on the degree of social equality and on the existence of welfare-state provisions. Thus, we expect that in cross-national comparative perspective a higher degree of social equality will go hand-in-hand with a lower level of religiousness.

Weber's disenchantment thesis can be applied also to the analysis of the relevance of religion for specific social strata and groups within society. In many cases, persons with lower income have less secure life conditions than persons from the higher social strata; thus, we should expect that the former will tend to be more religious than the latter. As far as education is concerned, one might argue that higher-educated persons will adopt more rational worldviews and thus will view religion more critically. Also gender differences in regard to religiosity can be considered from the perspective of disenchantment thesis: as a consequence of the traditional gender division of work, men are more frequently engaged in technical, economic and political planning activities than women. Thus, men develop a stronger sense of rationality and are more convinced that they are able to "make their own fate", which makes them less susceptible to religion. Summarizing these arguments, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7: Owing to their specific life conditions and positions in society, men, higher-educated persons and persons with higher income are less in need of religion in order to cope with life than women, less educated and poorer people.

3 Empirical findings

3.1 Patterns of religiosity in cross-national comparison

A central issue for the examination of the preceding hypotheses is the classification of countries according to their religious system. A considerable part of the countries included in ISSP-1998 corresponds to one of the types

described above. In some countries we find aspects of more than one type. In order to make our analysis more comprehensive, countries were included in the category to which they come closest.²

State-church systems: Representatives of this type are the Orthodox countries Bulgaria and Russia, the Protestant countries Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain and Eastern Germany, and the Catholic countries Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia and Spain. Germany and Switzerland were divided into Protestant and Catholic territories after the religious wars of the seventeenth century, and the respective church had the privileged position of a *Landeskirche* or *cantonal church* until the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, we shall refer to these countries as bi-confessional state church systems.

Nationalist popular church systems: Ireland, Poland and Cyprus. *Syncretistic religious cultures:* Brazil, Chile and the Philippines.

Denominational systems: The only country in the ISSP sample which corresponds fully to this type is the United States of America. The Netherlands, Canada and New Zealand come close to this type, but in these countries one particular church – the Reformed Calvinist Church in the Netherlands, the Church of England in New Zealand and the Catholic Church in the francophone parts of Canada – had a more dominant position. Thus, we shall analyze these countries separately as *semi-denominational systems*.³

The following cross-national comparison is based on a scale composed of two indicators of religious practice (church attendance: once per month or more often; prayer: at least several times a week) and three indicators of religious belief (belief in God, in heaven and in religious miracles).⁴ From this scale three groups were derived: respondents were classified as “religious” if they have positive values on four or five of these indicators, as “non-religious” if they have no positive values at all (i.e. if they attend religious service and pray less frequently than indicated above, and if they believe neither in God, nor in heaven, nor in religious miracles); the rest of the sample was classified as “somewhat religious”.

Table 14.1 presents the results for the countries in comparison, ordered according to our typology of religious cultures. If the percentage of religious persons differs by less than 10 percent among all or some of the countries belonging to the same type, these countries were merged into a subgroup.

According to our expectations, the level of religiosity is much lower in most European countries which are or were formerly dominated by a state church than in countries with a nationalist popular church (Ireland, Poland and Cyprus), in former colonial countries characterized by a strong religious syncretism (Brazil, Chile, Philippines), and in the denominational system of the United States. The lowest levels of religiosity can be found in the North-West European Protestant states, and – contrary to our assumptions – in the two East European Orthodox countries Bulgaria and Russia. In terms of our scale, only around 10 percent of the population of these countries can

Table 14.1. Indicators of religiosity, by type of religious culture

Type of religious system country	Church-attendance: at least once a month (%)	Prayer: several times a week (%)	Belief in . . .			Degree of religiosity		
			God (%)	Heaven (%)	Religious miracles (%)	Religious (%)	Somewhat religious (%)	Non-religious (%)
<i>State-church systems</i>								
<i>Orthodox</i>								
Bulgaria, Russia	9	16	49	23	26	11	49	40
<i>Protestant</i>								
Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Eastern Germany	9	14	38	26	27	12	48	41
Great Britain	21	21	59	44	32	20	54	26
<i>Bi-confessional (Catholic/Protestant)</i>								
Switzerland, Western Germany	24	29	53	41	53	26	53	21
<i>Catholic</i>								
France, Czech Republic, Slovenia	19	19	45	28	38	18	42	40
Austria, Hungary, Spain	30	32	66	40	43	29	53	18
Slovakia	45	36	67	51	46	42	34	24
Italy, Portugal	45	46	84	66	71	56	39	5
<i>Semi-denominational systems</i>								
Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand	24	28	59	50	41	27	47	26
<i>Denominational system</i>								
USA	47	58	79	77	69	57	33	9
<i>Nationalist popular churches</i>								
Ireland, Poland	56	43	85	71	58	60	36	4
Cyprus	21	28	90	73	85	58	38	4
<i>Syncretistic popular religion</i>								
Chile	43	55	95	81	79	61	37	2
Brazil, Philippines	70	80	95	89	79	82	37	0

be considered religious. The Catholic countries of Europe have rather heterogeneous patterns of religiosity. The decisive factor explaining the differences between these countries seems to be that religiousness today is lower in those countries which are close to the Central and North-West European regions where the Protestant Reformation had its origin. In most of these countries, considerable parts of the population had embraced Protestantism; however, after the cruel religious wars of the seventeenth century, they were forcibly reconverted to Catholicism by the state authorities. In the following period of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the church reinforced its efforts to impose the official standards of religious conduct upon the masses by means of religious education and disciplining. Thereby traditional forms of popular religion were repressed in a similar way to that in the Protestant countries.

In the South European countries which were not affected or were less affected by the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, popular religion remained much more alive. This seems to be the case particularly in Italy and Portugal (as can be seen in Table 14.1, *believe in religious miracles* is much higher here than in the rest of Europe). The situation is somewhat different in Spain. Even if this country was outside the Reformation/Counter-Reformation area, the Catholic church exerted the role of a repressive state church from the era of the Inquisition up to the time of the Franco regime. This probably explains the dramatic decline of church attachment since the transition to democracy and the cultural liberalization of the country in the 1980s.

In contrast with our hypothesis, the patterns of religiosity in the three semi-denominational countries Canada, the Netherlands and New Zealand are much closer to the pole of the highly secularized North-West European societies than to the United States. There are three possible interpretations for this finding: first, it may be the case that the mechanism of religious competition leads to a continuous religious revival only under the condition of a fully free religious market; second, the high level of religiosity among US Americans might be co-determined by other aspects of the religious culture of this country. Differently from the European colonists in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the Puritan settlers in the United States were inspired by a vocation to found a new society which should be ruled by religious principles in a similar way to that of the ancient Jews when they moved from Egypt to the Holy Land (Münch 1986). Moreover, the religious culture of the United States is not only shaped by Protestant denominationalism. There is also a strong segment of Catholics, most of which stems from Ireland, Italy and Poland. Presumably, many of these Catholics have maintained the high standards of piety characteristic of their country of origin. The same applies to the millions of Latin Americans who have migrated to the United States during the last decades. In addition, the black population contributes to the religious vitality, as can be seen from the strong impact of African spirituality on Pentecostalism and on other charismatic

religious movements in the United States. A third explanation for the higher religiosity in the United States compared to other non-European Anglo-Saxon countries is that the latter have developed welfare-state institutions more similar to Europe than to the United States.

In ISSP-1998, respondents were also asked how often their parents attended religious service at the time when they (i.e. respondents) were a child. We have analyzed the answers to these questions given by respondents over 60 years old in order to get an estimate of the frequency of church attendance in the period from around 1930 to 1950. Thereby we obtain empirical evidence for the change of church-related religiosity from this period until the end of the twentieth century (see Table 14.2). Compared to Catholic countries, both the European Protestant countries and the two Orthodox state church countries, Bulgaria and Russia, had rather low rates of church attendance already in the first half of the twentieth century. Interpreting these results, one has to keep in mind that Protestant and Orthodox churches traditionally put less emphasis on weekly church attendance than the Catholic church. During the last fifty years, church attendance has diminished strongly also in most Catholic countries of Europe.

The figures in Table 14.2 indicate that the anti-religious politics of communism in Eastern Europe have accelerated the decline of religiosity: church attendance in the 1930–50 period was considerably lower in Russia than in Bulgaria, which became communist only after the Second World War. With the exception of Poland, the decline of church attendance from the first half to the end of the twentieth century was somewhat stronger in the ex-communist Catholic countries of Eastern Europe than in the West European Catholic countries. However, among countries belonging to the same type of religious culture, the development of religiosity in this period is rather similar in both parts of Europe. In the United States, as well as in Brazil, Chile and the Philippines, the rate of church attendance in the 1930–50 period was at the same level or even somewhat lower than in the Catholic countries of Europe. However, differently from the latter, in the former countries there was practically no decline of church attendance during the last fifty years; in Brazil and in the Philippines we even find a slight increase.

The ISSP results concerning the denominational structure and the level of religiosity among members of different types of churches provide further evidence of the development of religion in the countries in comparison (see Tables 14.3a and 14.3b). In view of the country-specific patterns of religiosity presented in Table 14.1, the categorization of countries was slightly modified: semi-denominational countries are merged into one group with bi-confessional countries; Italy and Portugal are not any more classified as state-church systems, but together with Ireland and Poland as popular religious Catholic cultures.

In all countries which are or formerly were dominated by state churches, including the three semi-denominational countries Canada, the Netherlands

Table 14.2. Change of church attendance¹ from the first half to the end of the twentieth century, by geographical, cultural and political macro-regions

	1930-1950 %	1998 %	change %		1930-1950 %	1998 %	change %
<i>Western Europe/Capitalist</i>				<i>Eastern-Europe/ex-communist</i>			
<i>Protestant/semi-Protestant</i>				<i>Protestant/semi-Protestant</i>			
Denmark, Sweden, Norway, GB	21	13	-8	Eastern-Germany	17	8	-9
Netherlands	61	24	-37				
Western-Germany, Switzerland	49	24	-25				
<i>Catholic</i>				<i>Catholic</i>			
France	41	16	-25	Czech Republic	49	15	-34
Austria, Spain	62	35	-27	Hungary, Slovenia	65	25	-40
Italy, Portugal	65	46	-19	Slovakia	75	45	-30
Ireland	98	75	-23	Poland	81	70	-9
<i>Orthodox</i>				<i>Orthodox</i>			
Cyprus	66	21	-45	Bulgaria	35	n.a.	
				Russia	15	9	-6
<i>North America and Australia</i>				<i>South America and South-East Asia</i>			
Canada, New Zealand	43	25	-18	Chile	50	43	-7
USA	53	47	-6	Brazil, Philippines	67	70	+3

Note:

¹ Church attendance: once a month or more often.

Table 14.3a. Religious denomination, by type of religious culture

Countries according to Type of religious culture ¹	Denomination of respondents				Total N =	
	Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant church	Christian denomination		No religion
(1) Orthodox state church	% 69			4	28	2511
(2) Protestant state church	%	2	63	4	30	5510
(3) Bi-confessional and semi-denominational	% 0	31	25	10	34	5638
(4) Catholic state church	% 0	68		6	25	8930
(5) Popular Catholicism	% 0	91		2	7	4229
(6) Denominational	%	29		56	15	1181
(7) Syncretist popular religious	%	78		17	5	4541
Total	% 5	48	16	8	22	32540

Table 14.3b. Level of religiosity, by denomination and type of religious culture
(% of respondents classified as "religious" according to the scale of religiosity)

Countries according to Type of religious culture ¹	Denomination of respondents					
	Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant church	Christian denomination	No religion	Total
(1) Orthodox state-church	% 18			24	0	12
(2) Protestant state-church	%	33	13	68	2	12
(3) Bi-confessional and semi-denominational	%	38	25	67	4	26
(4) Catholic state-church	%	37		28	1	28
(5) Popular Catholicism	%	63		42	3	58
(6) Denominational	%	62		69	10	58
(7) Syncretist popular religious	%	77		85	35	76
Total	% 18	53	17	69	3	36

Note:

- 1 (1) Bulgaria, Russia; (2) Denmark, Eastern Germany, Great Britain, Norway, Sweden;
 (3) Canada, Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, Western Germany;
 (4) Austria, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain;
 (5) Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal; (6) USA; (7) Brazil, Chile, Philippines.

and New Zealand, a massive turn away from religion has taken place during the last decades: 25–35 percent of the respondents of these countries indicate not to belong to any religion (see Table 14.3a). In contrast, in those countries where Catholicism maintains the traits of a popular religion up to present times, church membership has remained on a high level. In Latin America and in the Philippines the de-establishment of Catholic monopoly has opened the way for the expansion of new Protestant, Pentecostal and other Christian denominations. The restructuring of the religious field, in turn, has stimulated an intensification of Catholic pastoral work (Höllinger 2007).

The results presented in Table 14.3b confirm our hypothesis that the level of religiosity is significantly higher among members of smaller denominations than among members of state churches. This table also shows that both in popular religious Catholic countries and in the syncretistic religious cultures of Latin America and the Philippines members of the dominant Catholic church are equally religious, as are members of small denominations. These findings imply that the patterns of individual religiosity are more determined by the characteristics of the respective national religious culture than by the institutional and social dynamics of church and sect. This supposition is supported also by our findings concerning the religiosity of respondents indicating to have no religion. In the highly religious countries of Latin America and the Philippines one-third of those who do not belong to a (specific) religious denomination are classified as religious according to our scale; in the highly secularized countries of Europe this is the case only for a small minority.

3.2 The impact of individual and macro-social life conditions

In Table 14.4 we examine by means of multiple regression analyses to what extent religiosity differs by age cohorts, gender, education and income, and whether the corresponding patterns of results are similar for all countries in comparison.

In most countries, younger people are less attached to religion than the elder. However, in the three Third World countries and in the two ex-communist Orthodox Eastern European countries Bulgaria and the USSR we find practically no age differences. Age differences are also smaller in ex-communist Eastern European Catholic countries than in Western European Catholic countries. In the ex-communist countries this result seems to refer to the religious revival among parts of the younger generation after the fall of the Iron Curtain. On the other hand, in the Third World countries no substantial secularization has taken place yet and religiosity continues to be very high among all age cohorts. Also in the denominational system of the United States age differences are relatively small.

The results in Table 14.4 correspond to our expectations concerning the relationship between gender and religiosity: women are significantly more religious than men in all countries in comparison. Our hypothesis, that richer and higher-educated people should be more religious, is not clearly confirmed. Poorer people are somewhat more religious than the more affluent; however, differences are generally rather small and in some countries almost nonexistent. Variations in regard to education are even smaller and inconsistent across countries. In Catholic and Orthodox countries, lower-educated persons tend to be somewhat more religious than the higher-educated, whereas in Protestant countries there is no or even an opposite relationship. This result indicates that the elimination of magical and ritualistic elements in favor of a more intellectualized, discursive form

Table 14.4. Religiosity by gender, education, income and age, for different types of countries (beta-values of multiple regressions¹)

	Age (young/old)	Gender (male/female)	Education (low/high)	Income ² (low/high)	R ²
<i>Ex-communist countries</i>					
Catholic	.12**	.15**	-.08**	-.07**	.05
Orthodox	.02	.24**	-.12**	-.03	.08
Protestant	.16**	.14**	.02	.00	.04
<i>Capitalist countries</i>					
Catholic	.20**	.19**	-.05**	-.09**	.10
Orthodox	.21**	.12**	-.03	-.09*	.08
Protestant or semi-denominational	.12**	.13**	.00	-.09**	.04
Denominational	.08*	.17**	.03	-.05	.04
Syncretistic	.02	.17**	-.06**	-.02	.03

Notes:

1 Dependent variable: scale of religiosity (1 = not religious, 5 = religious);

2 Income = standardized household-income per capita.

of religion makes Protestantism more attractive to higher-educated people, while the more symbolic and ritualistic forms of Catholic and Orthodox religiosity correspond more to the religious needs of the lower social classes. While individual life circumstances of people living within a given society seem to have relatively little impact on religiosity, our cross-national comparison shows a notable negative correlation ($r = -.36$) between the degree of social and economic development of a country (measured in terms of the Human Development Index) and the level of religiosity of its population (see Figure 14.1). Figure 14.2 reveals an even stronger connection between level of social inequality and level of religiosity ($r = .67$): the higher the inequality, the more religious people are. Brazil, which is one of the most inequalitarian societies in the contemporary world, has also the most religious population among the twenty-seven compared countries.

How do these results fit with our hypothesis concerning the disenchantment of the world? One answer could be that the individual need for and readiness to resort to religion depends much more on the quality and security of life conditions in the entire social environment in which one lives than on one's individual life circumstances. Most European countries have a high level of prosperity, a relatively egalitarian income distribution and a highly developed welfare state. This combination of factors has led to a relatively harmonious social climate and to a reduction of existential life risks for all members of society. In the two Latin American countries and in the Philippines, in contrast, a substantial part of the population continues to live in precarious material and social conditions. Under the impact of the rapid process of urbanization, the extreme forms of social inequality existing in these countries have evoked an increase in social tensions, anomia and

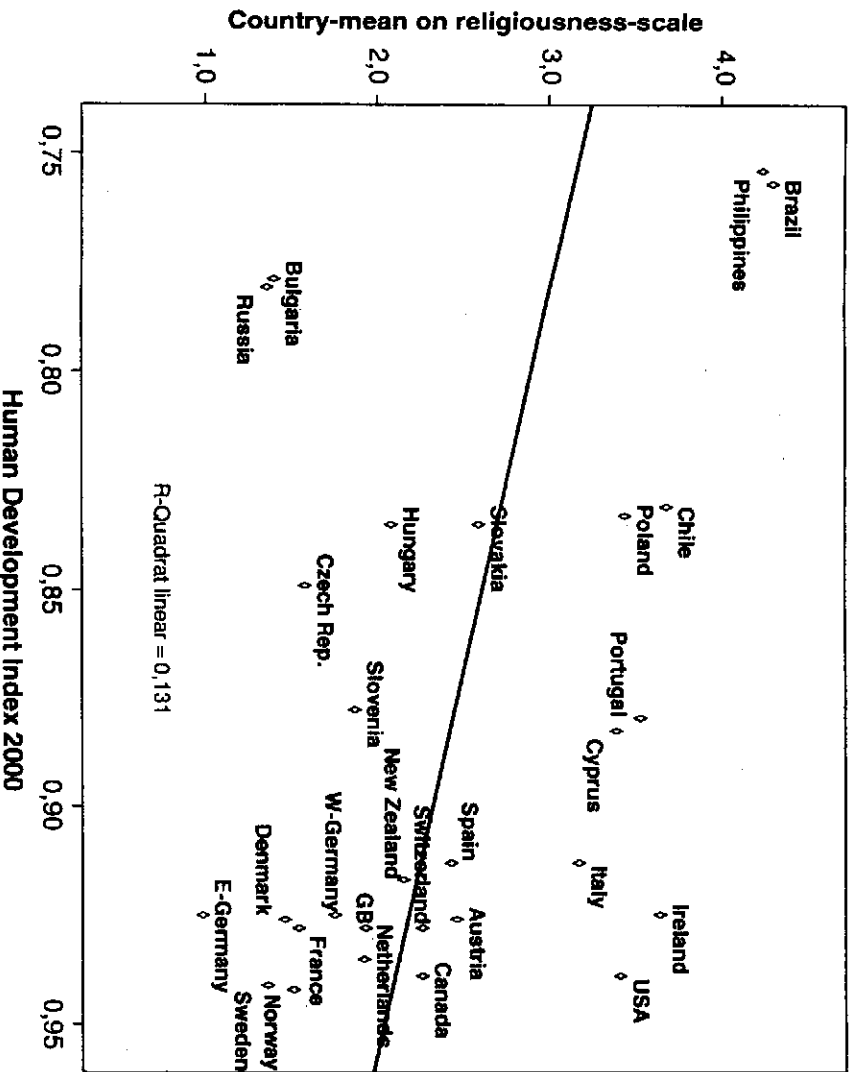


Figure 14.1. Human Development Index and level of religiousness

Source for HDI 2000: Human Development Report 2002.

crime rates, which affect not only the poor but also the more affluent strata. Also, in the United States, the relatively high level of social inequality and the lack of welfare-state provisions might be one reason why religiosity continues to be so important in spite of the high level of economic development.

The empirical association between the improvement of material and social life conditions and the decline of religiosity can be explained in a different way if one reverses the direction of causality. According to Max Weber, the disenchanting worldview of Protestantism and its individualistic ethic (*Gesinnungsethik*) were central factors for the emergence of the spirit of capitalism in early-modern Europe. According to Charles Taylor (1989), Protestantism was favorable also for the reduction of social inequality: the Protestant concept of the “priesthood of all believers” and the valorization of work and of the “common life” nurtured the idea of the self-responsibility of the individual for his/her salvation. As a consequence of the strengthening of the self-responsibility and self-esteem of the common people, the idea of equality of all believers in regard to God was gradually transmitted to the social and political sphere. In the course of enlightenment, the new ideas of equality among all humans and of the responsibility of the state for

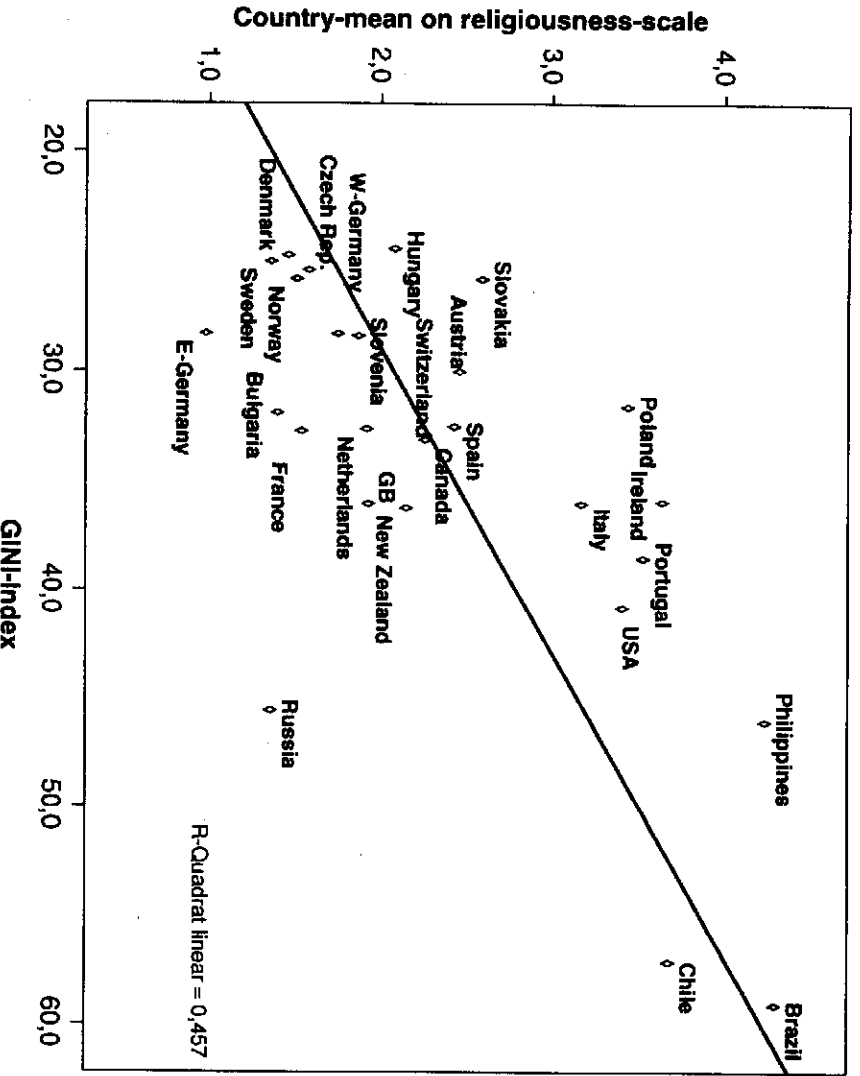


Figure 14.2. Gini-Index and level of religiousness

Source for Gini-Index: Human Development Report 2004. Depending on the country, the Gini-Index values refer to the period between 1996 and 2001.

collective welfare were dispersed also in the Catholic countries of Central Europe.

In Latin America and in the Philippines, on the other hand, the belief that one's fate in life and in afterlife depends on the benevolence of supranational powers continues to be widespread. Thus, people there are more willing to accept their life conditions as God-given. Against such a negative view of religion one can argue, however, that participation in religious rituals belongs to those social practices which most contribute to the integration of individuals into their communities and to providing deep-going emotional support (Collins 2005). This might explain why Latin Americans, according to cross-national comparative studies, are among the happiest in the world, in spite of the pervasive social inequality and problems of their societies (Haller and Hadler 2006).

4 Summary

In this chapter we have investigated the patterns of religiosity in twenty-seven Christian societies around the world, and tried to explain why

church-related forms of religion have lost much of their former importance in some parts of the Christian world, but not so in other parts.

Summarizing our findings, we can conclude that the degree of religiosity of an individual is shaped to a much higher extent by the social and cultural characteristics of the society in which one lives than by personal life-circumstances and religious dispositions. The percentage of respondents who believe in central Christian teachings and practice religion regularly ranges from little more than 10 percent in the North-West European Protestant and East European Orthodox countries up to more than 80 percent in Christian Third World societies.

The most important factor for explaining these enormous cross-national variations seems to be the types of religious culture which have emerged in different parts of the Christian world in the course of history. In all European countries where religious life was regulated by hierarchic and bureaucratic state churches over long periods of history, religiosity today has decreased to a rather low level. In those countries, however, where the church helped to preserve the cultural and national identity of the people during periods of foreign domination, the majority of the population continues to be strongly attached to the Christian religion. The same is true for the syncretistic religious cultures of ex-colonial countries with a predominant non-Western population and for the denominational system of the United States, where many churches have long been existing and competing with each other.

Our assumption that religiosity will be higher among members of Catholic and Orthodox churches which put more emphasis on the communal and ritualistic elements of religion than among members of Protestant state churches which have undergone a shift towards individualistic, anti-ritualistic and rationalistic forms of religion since the time of the Reformation is only partially supported by our data. Orthodox Christians in Russia and Bulgaria are no more religious than Protestants in North-West Europe. In (predominantly) Catholic societies the level of religiosity varies strongly depending on the national and cultural context. In the Central European Catholic countries, where magical forms of popular religion were eradicated by the Catholic Counter-Reformation in a similar way as was the case in Protestantism, religiosity today approaches the low level of the neighboring Protestant countries. In those Catholic countries where popular and official religion remained more closely linked together, the level of religious belief and church attachment continues to be significantly higher. This is the case not only for the syncretistic cultures of the Third World, but also for the Nationalist Catholic societies of Ireland and Poland, as well as in the Southern European countries of Italy and Portugal.

In the second part of our chapter we have examined to what extent religiosity is influenced by individual life circumstances and by the quality and security of life conditions of the society in which one lives. Contrary to our expectations, the social position of individuals within society has only a

small impact on religiousness. In most countries, poorer and less educated persons are slightly more religious than richer and higher-educated persons; in other countries we found no association at all or even a reversed relationship. Even if individual life conditions seem to have little impact on religiosity, there exists such a relationship on the macro-level of societies: our data show a notable negative correlation between the Human Development Index and the level of religiousness of the population of the countries in comparison. An even stronger association emerges between the degree of social inequality and higher levels of religiousness. Following Max Weber's sociological thinking on religion, we argue that these associations should not be considered as one-sided, but as mutually reinforcing each other. Given the fact that the level of prosperity and social equality today is highest precisely in those countries where the Protestant Reformation had its origin, it seems plausible to assume that the Protestant disenchantment of religious worldviews, its ethic of self-responsibility and its emphasis on religious equality were significant conditions for the economic and social transformation of Central and North-Western Europe. Higher levels of socio-economic development in combination with a relatively egalitarian distribution of income and an efficient welfare state in turn have led to a reduction of existential risks for all members of society; thus, people in such countries are less in need of religion in order to cope with life. These developments might also have contributed to the fact that the welfare state has a high prestige in these countries and even assumed church-like qualities in some regards (see also Kersbergen and Manow 2008).

Notes

- 1 By focusing on these countries, we include the majority of countries covered by this ISSP module.
- 2 The classification is based on information about the historic development of religion in the single countries, taken from Mol (1972), Martin (1978), Höllinger (1996) and other sources, as well as on the empirical data of ISSP-1998 concerning the denominational structure of the countries in comparison.
- 3 ISSP-1998 includes another semi-denominational country: Australia. Since some of the indicators of religiousness were omitted from the Australian ISSP questionnaire, this country had to be excluded from our analysis.
- 4 Cronbachs alpha of this scale is .81 for the overall sample of countries.

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