

CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Loek Halman

University of Tilburg and the Centre for Contextual Hermeneutics at Stellenbosch University

Abstract

It is often said that in Europe religion has lost a substantial part of its former significant impact on human life, and often evidence for the assumed religious decline is found in the low levels of church attendance. However, such figures of declining church adherence do not necessarily reveal a religious decline in the sense of religious beliefs. There may be a discrepancy between religious practices, on the one hand, and actual beliefs on the other. In this paper, the feasibility of the ideas of secularisation, not only in terms of practices, but also in terms of religious beliefs are explored empirically using the survey data from the 1990 European Values Study. Before presenting the data on religious orientations, the issue of secularisation and the current debate on the process of modernisation in the domain of religion is discussed. This is followed by an overview of the religious situation in contemporary Western and Eastern Europe. A distinction between religious beliefs and practices is drawn. Since Catholics and Protestants are often assumed to differ in many respects and thus also in their religious orientations, the article concludes with an exploration of the main differences and similarities of both religious groups.

1. Secularisation

Secularisation refers to the process in which religion gradually loses the encompassing and important role, which it had in traditional society. Some attribute the gradual decline of religion to the rationalisation and de-enchantment of the world, while others explain the decreased significance of religious institutions, religious activities, and religious modes of thinking, by reference to social differentiation and specialisation, as the main forces of modernisation (Wilson, 1982). Due to cultural and social differentiation, people in contemporary society have to participate in different universes of meaning, each governed by its own set of values. In fact, as Mattei Dogan has noted, the 'state has dispossessed the church of some of its traditional functions (such as schools, hospices, social welfare, registry of births, marriages and deaths, culture, and organisation of leisure)' (Dogan, 1995: 416). Institutional domains have become segmented in the sense that within each institutional sphere norms and values have become functional, rational and above all autonomous. Arguing along such lines, secularisation can be seen as 'the repercussion of these changes on the religious subsystem. It denotes a societal process in which an overarching and transcendent religious system is reduced to a subsystem of society alongside other subsystems, the overarching claims of which have a shrinking relevance' (Dobbelaere, 1995: 1). Religion is assumed to have become marginalized and consequently it is assumed to have lost much of its influence on people's lives.

The individual has become the main point of reference in the shaping of values, attitudes, and beliefs, and the likelihood that people feel attracted to traditional religion and the conventional beliefs preached by the church has declined. Increasingly people believe in what they themselves want to believe in, and this is not necessarily the beliefs proclaimed by the churches. In traditional societies, individual belief systems were strongly dependent on what the community believed and the churches prescribed. Social control and the religious practices

of the community played an important decisive role for the individual's belief system. Religious feelings in modern or late modern societies are less open to social control and are more rooted in the personality. As such traditional dogmatic beliefs have been replaced by a more modern, personalised way of believing, and religious decline is mainly confined to institutional decline.

This decreasing importance of religion, is seen as merely a more or less 'natural' consequence of societies that are becoming more and more rational. Weber took such a view (1921-1922, 1972) when he described modernity in terms of the transformation of traditional religious authority to rational legal authority. Inglehart (1997) argues in a similar way. An increasing sense of security has diminished the need for absolute rules as imposed by the churches, while it reduced the importance of religious views for, for example, the maintenance of the family unit. Further, people experience inconsistencies in their world views and daily experiences when confronted with the traditional religious traditions: 'the daily life experience of people today is basically different from the kind of life experience that shaped the Judaeo-Christian tradition. [...] today we live in an advanced industrial society, in which computers are far likelier than sheep to be part of one's daily experience. Consequently, not only the social norms, but also the symbols and world view of the established religions, are not as persuasive or compelling as they were in their original setting' (Inglehart, 1990: 179).

According to Inglehart, religious decline might thus be seen as a result of increasing rationality, functional differentiation and specialisation and increasing levels of security, produced by the establishment of the modern welfare state and material wealth. In modern, affluent societies, a gradual shift can be observed 'from emphasis on economic and physical security above all, toward greater emphasis on belonging, self-expression, and the quality of life' (Inglehart, 1990: 11). This value shift from a predominant materialistic orientation towards a post-materialistic one is expected to be 'accompanied by declining emphasis on traditional political, religious, moral, and social norms' (Inglehart, 1990: 66). In other words, in highly developed societies, the increase of post-materialism will be accompanied by changes in the traditional, church-influenced social values and morality. In economically less advanced countries, materialism will be the dominant orientation and religion will have remained an important determining factor for various spheres of social life, whereas in economically more developed areas the importance of religion has declined. Here a decreasing number of people are inclined to accept part and parcel of the traditional religious dogmas. 'The churches have lost much of their impact *ad intra*: as a consequence, individuals may reject the 'menu' of church beliefs, instead recomposing a religion *à la carte* - constructing their own religious patchwork' (Jagodzinski & Dobbelaere, 1995a: 115). Such privatised religious patch works are especially assumed to be on the increase outside the core of the church constituencies.

Recently a new phenomenon has entered the discourse on modernisation: the globalisation of human society. Globalisation has been defined 'as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens, 1990: 64). According to modernisation theory, Western society has experienced a gradual transformation from a traditional society towards an industrial, and more recently modern industrial society has transformed into a post-modern order. 'Globalisation theories add to this thesis that modernisation in the West has directly resulted in the spread of certain vital institutions of Western modernisation to the rest of the globe, especially the modern capitalist economy, the nation-state, and scientific rationality in the form of modern technology; and, critically, that this global spread has resulted in a new social unit which is much more than a simple expansion of Western modernity' (Beyer, 1994: 8). One of the implications of globalisation is that people are confronted with increasing numbers of opportunities and alternative options. People are assumed increasingly to encounter a great variety of cultural habits, values and norms. As a result of

globalisation people 'are faced with an extending range of imaginary and information involving models of citizenship, forms of production, styles of consumption, modes of communication, principles of world order and, in addition, ways of reacting to all of these. There is enhanced capacity for reflection as a result of the exposure to globalise social processes. A main consequence of this is that the individual has tended to develop increased expectations of personal fulfilment and satisfaction. This has produced various alternative or modified lifestyles' (Spybey, 1996: 9). However, the acceptance of such various kinds of alternatives would not occur if the processes of individualisation and secularisation had not liberated the individual from the institutional constraints. In traditional societies people were not only living in small local communities separated from other communities, they were also strongly influenced and dominated by traditional institutions, such as religion. In particular the churches played an important role in these traditional settings. Economic growth, the spread of affluence, rising levels of education, increased mobilisation, increased technological knowledge and its many applications, have reduced the previously dominating role of religion in human society (Berger, 1967; Luckmann, 1967; Inglehart, 1990; 1995; 1997). Due to increasing individualisation, people are assumed to have become increasingly free and autonomous in selecting the convictions, beliefs, and practices they want. Decisions are no longer based on what the religious institutions prescribe, but what the individual wants. In a globalised world, this freedom and autonomy of the individual implies that people can pick and choose what they want from the global religious and cultural marketplace.

Since we focus mainly on the 'traditional' indicators of religion: religious beliefs and practices, the developments described thus far lead to the presumption that traditional belief systems, taught by the churches and in earlier days presumed to be acknowledged by the majority of churched people, are gradually replaced by diversified individual belief systems and moral convictions. The available empirical data do not include other measures of religion or religiousness, such as adherence to new religious movements or new age beliefs. It is often assumed that modernisation in general and processes of secularisation and individualisation in particular do not so much reveal a religious decline as an institutional decline. For instance, it has been argued that there is 'only the loss by religion of its traditional societal and public functions, and the privatisation and marginalisation of religion within its own differentiated sphere' (Casanova, 1994: 19). People have not become less religious, but less inclined to follow the traditionally religious doctrines as prescribed and imposed by the churches. Inglehart, for example, argues that although there is a continuing decline in traditional religious beliefs, there is nevertheless a growing concern for the meaning and purpose of life (Inglehart, 1997: 80).

However, Europe will be far from homogeneous as far as religious orientations are concerned. If, as Casanova does, secularisation is seen as a modern historical process and if the idea is accepted that 'the Protestant Reformation, the rise of the modern state, the rise of modern capitalism, and the rise of modern science - set in motion the dynamics of the process by undermining the medieval system and themselves became at the same time the carriers of the process of differentiation, of which secularisation is one aspect, then it follows that one should expect different historical patterns of secularisation. As each of these carriers developed different dynamics in different places and at different times, the patterns and the outcomes of the historical process of secularisation should vary accordingly' (Casanova, 1994: 24-25).

In Europe, an important distinction is expected to exist between Catholic and Protestant cultures. Both traditions have 'shaped enduring *national* cultures that persist today' (Inglehart, 1995: 393). Even five centuries after the Reformation, there are obvious differences between Northern and Southern Europe with regard to the importance of the religious factor and often these differences are attributed to the religious traditions in the North and the South. In Europe, secularisation 'has been an uneven process. It has affected the major Protestant Churches more strongly than the Catholic

Church, and more fundamentalist brands of Protestantism least' (Therborn, 1995: 274). The explanation for this uneven process is partly found in the theological differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. The 'seeds of individualism' were manifest much earlier in Protestantism. In contrast to Catholics, Protestants are personally responsible before God in religious matters, and the church has a lesser role as mediator between the believer and God. The Catholic Church, with its extensive, dogmatic, collective creed imposes a more collective identity upon its faithful' (Jagodzinski & Dobbelaere, 1995a: 81).

In his analysis of the post-modernisation dimension Inglehart found empirical evidence for the Catholic-Protestant divide in Europe. The fact that countries are dominated by a certain religious tradition appeared more important for similarities in basic value orientations than their geographic proximity (Inglehart, 1997: 95). His 'cultural geography of the world' substantiates the idea of a Catholic cultural profile that can be distinguished from a Protestant profile. Furthermore his analysis demonstrated that the cultural profile of Catholics is a global phenomenon in the sense that all Catholic cultures are close to each other in the cultural space. Empirical evidence for the cultural differences between the two religious traditions was also presented by Peter Gundelach who observed that the denomination of a country plays a crucial role in the differential decline in 'familism' in Europe (Gundelach, 1994)

The expectation in Western Europe therefore is, that a Catholic religious pattern can be observed that is distinctive from a Protestant pattern. But to this it can be added that the religious pattern will be dependent upon, what can be called, the 'religious economy' of a country. In analogy to mainstream economic theories some have argued that religious competition results in substantially higher levels of religiosity and church affiliation. The argument goes as follows: 'Religious economies are like commercial economies in that they consist of a market of current and potential consumers, a set of firms seeking to serve that market, and religious "product lines" offered by various firms (...). Also like commercial economies, religious economies thrive when they are allowed to operate without government interference' (Yamane, 1997: 111). A pluralistic religious situation will be conducive to 'a wide range of alternative faiths well adapted to the needs of the consumers' (Iannaccone, 1992: 128). Therefore a key variable for explaining high levels of religious commitment and religiousness is the degree of competition among the suppliers of religion. In mono-religious cultures, there is no competition and thus low levels of religious activity is to be expected, whereas in religiously pluralistic cultures, people will be more active and more religious.

Further, we may expect a religious pattern in Eastern Europe that differs from the pattern in Western Europe. 'The Soviet regime of the past 40 years in Central and Eastern Europe was ideologically opposed to religion and religious activity. Religious activity was at least discouraged and, in some cases, severely repressed in each of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe under Soviet domination following World War II' (Gautier, 1997: 289). However, it must be acknowledged that former socialist regimes oppressed religion and the churches to varying degrees. In Bulgaria, for example, the Orthodox Churches accommodated with the regime, whereas the Catholic Church in Poland strongly opposed the political regime. In general Protestant churches in many Eastern and Central European countries 'established a policy of a "church within socialism" in order to ensure at least a modicum of legitimacy' (Gautier, 1997: 290).

Despite its opposition to the regime of the Polish Catholic Church, no severe actions against the church were undertaken. In Hungary, on the other hand, the church was severely subjugated and controlled by the state as was the case in Czech and Slovak regions (Pro Mundi Vita, 1984/2). Even under Soviet domination the catholic church remained in a strong position in Poland and some even claim that the Western orientation and the global organisation of the

Catholic church helped shape Polish 'national identification in terms of Western culture' (Gautier, 1997: 290). This applies to the Catholic Church in Hungary too, but not to the Protestant churches in Hungary and East Germany which accommodated with the regimes and therefore were 'identified in the eyes of the people as operating in co-operation with the Soviet state'. As a consequence these churches lost their 'credibility among religious believers, who then disaffiliated in substantial numbers' (Gautier, 1997: 290; see also Caplow, 1985: 106).

The Eastern European religious pattern therefore is assumed to be different from the religious outlook in the West, but as in the West the religious pattern will not be very homogeneous. The degree to which these patterns are indeed heterogeneous will be explored in greater detail using empirical data from the European Values Studies.

2. Religious beliefs

The question how far secularisation has proceeded in contemporary Europe touches at the question how religious or secular European society is. As Dobbelaere argues, the timing and pace of the religious decline 'differs from one country to the next and from one Church to another' (Dobbelaere, 1995: 1; see also Sigelman, 1977; Campbell & Curtis, 1994; Wuthnow, 1977). As was explained before, secularisation defined in terms of 'the declining scope of religious authority needs to be viewed on three levels' (Yamane, 1997: 115), and thus the religious situation has to be investigated at three different levels: the societal, organisational and individual level, or: macro, meso and micro (Dobbelaere, 1981; 1997). The differences and similarities in religiousness can be explored in various ways, for example by examining the integration of church/religion and society, by evaluating the organisational development of the churches and other religious bodies or by probing people's religious beliefs and practices (Gustafsson, 1994). In this chapter religiousness is measured at the individual level. We will focus first on religious beliefs in contemporary Europe.

The *EVS* data include a multitude of indicators to measure several dimensions of religiosity. A first dimension relates to religious ideology or religious doctrines. Each religion 'maintains some set of beliefs which adherents are expected to ratify' (Stark & Glock, 1968: 14), and the more of these beliefs people adhere to, the stronger believer they are said to be. Such a dimension of religious faith refers to traditional religion and does not indicate a more general religious attitude. A more general dimension does not include specific statements about the content of religiosity, nor does it refer to institutional religion or concrete rules and dogmas. Being religious in a more general way may even be applicable to people who do not belong to or feel attracted by one of the traditional religions or churches (De Moor, 1987: 22).

Apart from indices for these two 'religious' dimensions, there are items available that tap the way in which people interpret the meaning of human life, death and suffering. Generally, religion is understood as providing people with explanations and interpretations of the cosmos and human existence. Religion deals with 'ultimate concerns' (Yinger, 1977). Religion has to do with 'ultimate meaning' (Luckmann, 1967). Bellah defines religion in similar functionalist terms: religion is 'a set of symbolic forms and acts that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence' (Bellah, 1970: 21). This view on the function of religion is not confined to Western civilisation, but appears more or less a universal phenomenon. In almost all cultures, religion provides people with meanings, interpretations, and explanations for crisis situations in people's lives (Geertz, 1973). Religion formulates answers to understand and cope with the world and human life. Traditional Christian religion offered a view 'that explains the origin of and the meaning behind the cosmos and human existence within the context of a transcendent and supernatural order, and it interprets the crises in the lives of human beings, suffering and death, good and evil in the light of a higher order' (Felling, Peters & Schreuder, 1991: 14).

Now that modern Western society is assumed to have become secular, such a traditional religious Christian meaning system in which reference is made to a higher order is expected to be no longer dominant. People will be less inclined to approach the origin and meaning of the cosmos and human life from a theistic viewpoint. As Luckmann (1967) has argued, traditional Christian institutional religion is no longer the only provider of meaning in secular society. In modern society, traditional religion has to compete with other systems that also aim to supply people with meaning and explanation. The *EVS* data contain few indices to tap one of such alternative meaning systems, the immanentist worldview. It can be argued that more worldviews are competing, but *EVS* is not equipped to measure them.¹

2.1 Traditional Christian faith

In *EVS* various traditional Christian belief statements were included and respondents were asked whether or not they believed in the following: God, life after death, a soul, the devil, hell, heaven, sin, resurrection, re-incarnation. Overall in Europe, majorities of people are believers in three areas: belief in God (60%), the existence of a soul (50%) and belief in sin (48%). When it comes to issues like life after death (36%), heaven (35%), resurrection (29%), hell (19%), and devil (20%), fewer people are inclined to believe in them. Table 1 displays the observed answer patterns in each country. Remarkable is the percentage of Hungarians believing in a soul (13%). It is unclear why so few Hungarians believe in a soul whereas overall half of the European population believes in it.

Table 1 Percentages of Europeans believing in God, life after death, soul, devil, hell, heaven, sin, resurrection

	God	life after death	soul	Devil	hell	heaven	sin	Re-surrection
France	57	38	50	19	16	30	40	27
Britain	71	44	64	30	25	53	68	32
West Germany	64	38	62	15	13	31	55	31
Netherlands	61	39	63	17	14	34	43	27
Belgium	63	37	52	18	15	30	41	29
Austria	77	44	60	20	18	39	57	41
Italy	83	54	67	36	36	45	66	44
Spain	81	42	60	28	27	48	57	36
Portugal	80	31	58	24	21	49	63	31
Denmark	59	29	41	10	8	18	22	20
Norway	58	36	45	22	18	39	39	27
Sweden	38	31	51	11	7	27	27	19
Iceland	79	71	82	18	11	51	64	44
North. Ireland	95	70	86	72	68	86	89	71
Ireland	96	78	85	53	50	85	84	70
East Germany	32	15	32	7	6	21	31	14
Hungary	58	23	13	18	15	24	36	25
Poland	95	62	72	29	35	66	83	65
Bulgaria	36	15	33	8	9	13	26	13
Czech Rep.	31	18	28	11	10	20	51	15
Slovak Rep.	64	41	47	25	27	39	60	38
Romania	89	48	68	38	37	50	71	42
Latvia	18	10	28	4	3	42	18	5
Total	60	36	50	20	19	35	48	29

1. Recently an international project to explore worldviews in modern society has started (for more information see Holm & Björkqvist, 1996).

These figures reveal rather clearly that Eastern Germany, Czech Republic, and Bulgaria, are least religious in Europe as far as traditional Christian doctrines are concerned. Poles and Irish people, on the other hand, appear most religious. The Eastern German, Czech, and Bulgarian cases are corroborating the thesis about the religious market theory to explain high levels of religiousness from religious competition (Finke, 1990; Iannaccone, 1991; Stark & Iannaccone, 1994; Stark, 1997b). Mono-religious cultures are likely to display lower levels of religious belief. Eastern Germany, Czech Republic, and Bulgaria are mono-religious and thus seem to confirm such ideas. However, Poland, Ireland, and Romania are clearly refuting the thesis, for these countries are mono-religious as well, but nevertheless their populations appear to be more religious in a traditional way.

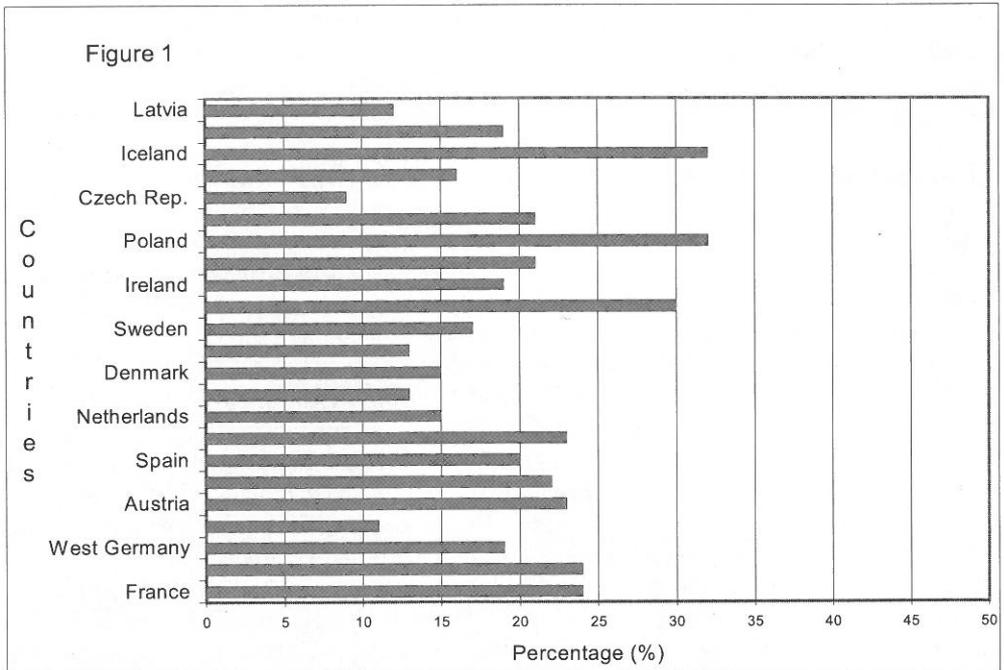
The pattern found in the Netherlands is also a contradiction of what the religious market theorists predict. The religiously pluralistic situation in the Netherlands has not resulted in firm believers. On the contrary, the highest levels of religious faith are found in mono-religious countries like Ireland and Poland. It seems as if it is not Europe which is the exception, but America.

A pattern that is somewhat more strongly supported by the results is the distinction between Catholic and Protestant cultures. In general Protestant countries are less religious compared with Catholic countries. The Scandinavians are far less inclined to accept the faith items than people in Southern Catholic countries or in Poland, and Ireland. Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands are in between these extremes, but these countries are more pluralistic in the sense that Catholic and Protestant churches are both part of their cultures.

In Eastern Europe, Catholic domination has not always resulted in higher levels of traditional belief. Czech Republic is a salient example in this respect. The situation in this country will be very different from what is observed in Poland where the Catholic Church remained strong despite the communist regime. The church has always played an important role as 'the primary vehicle for political and cultural resistance to "outside" (communist) domination' (Doktór, 1996: 54). In general it can be concluded that 'where the church has been linked with recent national formation, religious beliefs and practices have maintained themselves much better than in other countries' (Therborn, 1995: 274). Poland, but also Ireland, are clear examples in this respect as far as the Catholic Church is concerned and Romania as far as Orthodox Church is concerned. The case of Eastern Germany can be seen as a result of a harshly sanctioning religious clergy in this country (Gautier, 1997: 291). As a result, 'the success of communist secularisation was both striking and persistent' (Therborn, 1995: 292).

Belief in reincarnation was also part of the list of beliefs included in the questionnaire that was presented to the respondents. According to some, this belief maybe interpreted, as an indication of new religious needs (e.g. Stoetzel, 1983: 95-96). At least, it is assumed, that reincarnation is one of the few items in the European Values Study questionnaire referring to religiosity outside the official mode (Riis, 1994: 104). Statistical analyses show that belief in re-incarnation is of a different order than belief in the traditional statements. This is, of course, 'easily explicable, for it is not an explicitly Christian belief' (Harding et al., 1986: 48).

As Wilson and Dobbelaere have argued, in a context 'where there has developed a strong belief that only in this world is pleasure available, the desire to perpetuate or repeat earthly life has made conceptions of reincarnation increasingly congenial' (Wilson & Dobbelaere, 1994: 219). As a consequence it can be expected that the idea of re-incarnation was more widespread among more individualistic, more modern, most secularised people. However, belief in reincarnation is, however, not widespread, not even in most secular countries, for example East Germany, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, and Sweden. Contrary to what might have been expected, belief in reincarnation is strongest in Poland (32%), while it is 17% overall in Europe (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Percentages of respondents who believe in re-incarnation

As far as the Polish case is concerned, *Doktór* has observed that 'traditional and alternative religion seem to be equally strong' (*Doktór*, 1996: 54). The explanation for this result was not easy to find and the author suggested several interpretations. He argues that it could be the result of 'a greater inclusiveness of religious beliefs in Catholic and mono-religious countries, where, due to the absence of other religious alternatives, the religious identity is not so clearly defined and differentiated as in religiously pluralistic countries' (*Doktór*, 1996: 55). However, the mono-religious situation in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Ireland have not resulted in a similar widespread belief in re-incarnation. Also *Doktór's* suggestion that it may be attributed to the oppression of religion during the communist regime and that as a result of that 'all types of religion were mystified and gained support' (*idem*) does not seem to be corroborated by other Eastern European countries such as Eastern Germany and Czech Republic who experienced a similar oppressive regime, but where belief in reincarnation is rather limited. Belief in reincarnation in Eastern Germany is found among 11% of the respondents, and in the Czech Republic among 9%. The case of Eastern Germany not only opposes the view that a mono-religious situation is conducive to the development of a diversified belief system, but also the idea that the repression of religion by the former communist regime has resulted in an increase in alternative religious beliefs. Also the third alternative explanation forwarded by *Doktór*, seems to be challenged as well. He argues that adherence to alternative religions in Poland might be understood as 'a phenomenon fulfilling diversified individual religious needs in an otherwise monopolistic religious market' (*Doktór*, 1996: 55). Most other countries characterised by a monopolistic religious market display lower levels of belief in reincarnation and as such they demonstrate that this suggestion is not very convincing.

2.2 Non-traditional religiosity

In *EVS*, respondents were asked how important God is in daily life, if one is a religious person, if one believes in either a personal God or a spirit force, if one finds comfort and strength from religion, and if one prays or meditates outside religious ceremonies. These items are indicative of a kind of religiosity that may even be applicable to people who do not belong to or feel attracted by one of the official churches. Such items reveal a subjective religious disposition or 'diffuse religiosity' (Riis, 1994: 105), that is 'concerned with religious experiences, those feelings, perceptions, and sensations which are experienced by an actor or defined by a religious group (or a society) as involving some communication, however slight, with a divine essence, that is, with God, with ultimate reality, with transcendental authority' (Stark & Glock, 1968: 15). Table 2 reports on the empirical findings, revealing significant cross-national variations in religious patterns.

Table 2 Percentages of respondents who is religious, who believes in a 'personal God', who gets comfort from religion, who takes moments of prayer and for whom God is important in their lives (score 8-10 on 10-point scale: 1 = not important; 10 = very important)

	Religious person	Belief in personal God	Get comfort from religion	Moments of prayer	Importance of God (8-10)
France	48	20	33	45	19
Britain	54	32	44	53	26
West Germany	54	24	37	62	29
Netherlands	59	28	43	67	28
Belgium	61	29	42	53	28
Austria	69	28	47	59	41
Italy	82	66	65	74	53
Spain	63	50	53	61	38
Portugal	68	61	62	61	50
Denmark	68	19	26	43	13
Norway	45	29	30	63	23
Sweden	29	15	23	33	14
Iceland	74	51	71	46	35
Northern Ireland	71	66	75	76	63
Ireland	72	67	82	84	65
East Germany	32	13	26	46	20
Hungary	54	39	45	57	34
Poland	90	78	72	86	74
Bulgaria	32	10	27	30	16
Czech Rep.	37	11	24	32	17
Slovak Rep.	69	33	46	60	41
Romania	73	36	71	85	58
Estonia	19	6	-	-	-
Latvia	34	10	10	25	8
Lithuania	47	20	-	-	-
Total	56	33	42	53	31

As was observed with respect to the responses to the traditional Christian religious belief statements, the answer pattern within each country is more or less similar on all indicators of diffuse or personal religiosity or emotional religious disposition. An exception to this general rule is personal prayer in Iceland, which deviates more from the European mean than the other indicators deviate from the mean European pattern. In Norway a reverse situation can be observed. Here people appear less religious, but they are more likely to pray or meditate.

Although the deviations from the overall means varies from country to country, it is more or less clear that Swedes, Bulgarians, Eastern Germans, and Czech people, appear less religious on all items compared with other Europeans in general, and Polish, Irish, and Italians in particular. Somewhat unexpected is the percentage of Irish people that answered affirmatively to the question: Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are a religious person? The Irish response (72%) resembles the responses in Portugal (68%) and Austria (69%), but also the response rates in Denmark (68%), Romania (74%), Slovakia (69%), and Iceland (74%), whereas in general one might have expected that Irish people would resemble the Poles and people in Southern Europe. Relatively large numbers of Irish people report that they are not a religious person (about 27%). Denmark represents an exceptional case too, for 68% of its citizens consider themselves religious persons, which is more than twice as many as in Sweden (29%). On other measures, however, Denmark is close to the Swedish pattern.

While religiosity may be less widespread among the Swedes, Eastern Germans, French, Norwegians, Bulgarians, and Czech people, this does not imply that there are large numbers of atheists in these countries. The percentage of people reporting that they are convinced atheists is rather limited in Europe. The highest percentage is found in Eastern Germany (17%). Overall in Europe it is about 5%. Thus, despite the fact that about one in every three Europeans does not consider him/herself a religious person, about 90% of them are not convinced atheists.

However, the use of the word 'religious' may be confusing and widely misunderstood. This appears in the answers to the question on the content of people's beliefs. Respondents were asked: 'Which of the following statements comes closest to your beliefs'. The statements were:

1. There is a personal God
2. There is some sort of spirit or life force
3. I don't really know what to think
4. I don't think there is any sort of spirit, God or life force.

It is remarkable that even among those who did not consider themselves religious, over two-fifths (about 43%) claimed to believe in a 'personal God' or spirit or life force (Table 3). Apparently, they are believers, but they do not want to be seen as religious. Maybe that for many people 'religious' is associated with clergy (priests etc.) and therefore people do not want to consider themselves as religious. In Ireland this is the pattern found frequently. 74% and 84% respectively of the non-religious people in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, respectively, claim that they believe in either a personal God or a spirit force.

Table 3 Percentages of the non-religious respondents that believe in a personal God, a spirit or life force, who do not know what to believe in and who do not believe in a personal God or life force, by country (number of non-religious people in brackets)

Country (N)	believe in a personal God	believe in spirit or life force	does not know what to believe	does not believe
France (362)	8.0	31.7	35.5	24.9
Great Britain (560)	11.4	43.7	26.9	18.0
West Germany (555)	3.2	39.3	28.6	29.0
East Germany (496)	0.9	10.8	20.7	67.7
Austria (218)	5.4	43.6	26.1	24.9
Italy (210)	17.7	42.4	18.8	21.1
Spain (735)	25.3	37.9	23.3	13.4
Portugal (295)	22.5	33.3	25.5	18.7
Netherlands (339)	2.4	42.0	22.5	33.1
Belgium (610)	7.5	7.7	53.7	31.0
Denmark (222)	1.4	17.1	30.0	51.6
Norway (582)	11.0	37.5	34.8	16.7
Sweden (587)	6.1	45.2	24.4	24.4
Iceland (159)	12.7	48.4	26.8	12.1
N. Ireland (83)	38.6	34.9	21.7	4.8
Ireland (266)	42.5	41.7	12.8	3.0
Hungary (376)	5.2	9.0	35.1	50.7
Poland (25)	16.0	28.0	48.0	8.0
Bulgaria (509)	2.7	25.1	18.5	53.7
Czech Rep. (999)	1.2	31.5	29.7	37.6
Slovak Rep. (183)	0.6	17.5	22.3	59.6
Romania (263)	13.9	45.9	32.4	7.7
Estonia (671)	1.4	50.5	29.3	18.8
Latvia (241)	0.9	41.9	27.3	30.0
Lithuania (353)	4.4	37.1	29.7	28.8

As far as the content of belief is concerned, secularisation and individualisation are assumed to have moved society 'from some sacred condition to successively secular conditions in which the sacred evermore recedes' (Hammond, 1985: 1). In particular those beliefs that are at the core of institutional, traditional Christian religiosity will be affected by these modernisation

processes. The traditional Christian doctrine 'identifies God as the agent who governs life. God is assumed to have a purpose for each person's life' (Wuthnow, 1976: 3-4). In Christianity, God is regarded the ultimate source of meaning and interpretation. As expected, adherence to this view is no longer dominant in the Scandinavian countries, Eastern Germany and Czech Republic, the highly secularised societies. The belief in a personal God hardly exists in these countries or in Bulgaria. However, apart from Eastern Germany, in these countries some kind of belief in an ultimate reality is found in one in every three citizens. It seems reasonable to draw the conclusion that even in a secularised world, the sacred seems to be remarkably alive (Hammond, 1985). In East Germany, almost half of the population does not believe in a God or spirit or life force. In no other country is this denial of an extra-empirical reality so widespread. This maybe attributed to the severe repression of religion by the Soviet authorities. 'Repression of religious expression,..., may have been especially harsh in East Germany, the model of Soviet society to the West' (Gautier, 1997: 292).

The impact of Soviet anti-religious rule, may also explain the results obtained in some of the other Central and Eastern European societies: Hungary and the Czech Republic. However, the observations in Slovakia and Romania do not confirm these ideas. Nihilism, the rejection of the existence of a God or life force, is not frequently found here. On the other hand it is a pattern that is more frequently found in Bulgaria (34%). So, Soviet domination is no the only source of explanation for a specific pattern of belief in Eastern and Central Europe. The cross-national differences appear too great to justify the conclusion that the countries in Eastern and Central Europe have developed a distinctive religious model as a consequence of the period of Soviet domination.

3. Religious practices

Religiousness measured in terms of beliefs is, of course, just one way of exploring an individual's religiousness. Religion is, according to one of the founding fathers of sociology 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community...'. (Durkheim, 1965: 62). Religious practices or 'acts of worship and devotion, the things people *do* to carry out their religious commitment' (Stark & Glock, 1968: 15), are other expressions of religion. This dimension can be measured in various ways, for example by church membership and actual participation in church activities. The empirical findings on church attendance suggest that the uniting force of the churches has been lost for most people and even for a large part of the church community itself. We start this section with acts of worship followed by more attitudinal measures of people's adherence to institutional religiosity.

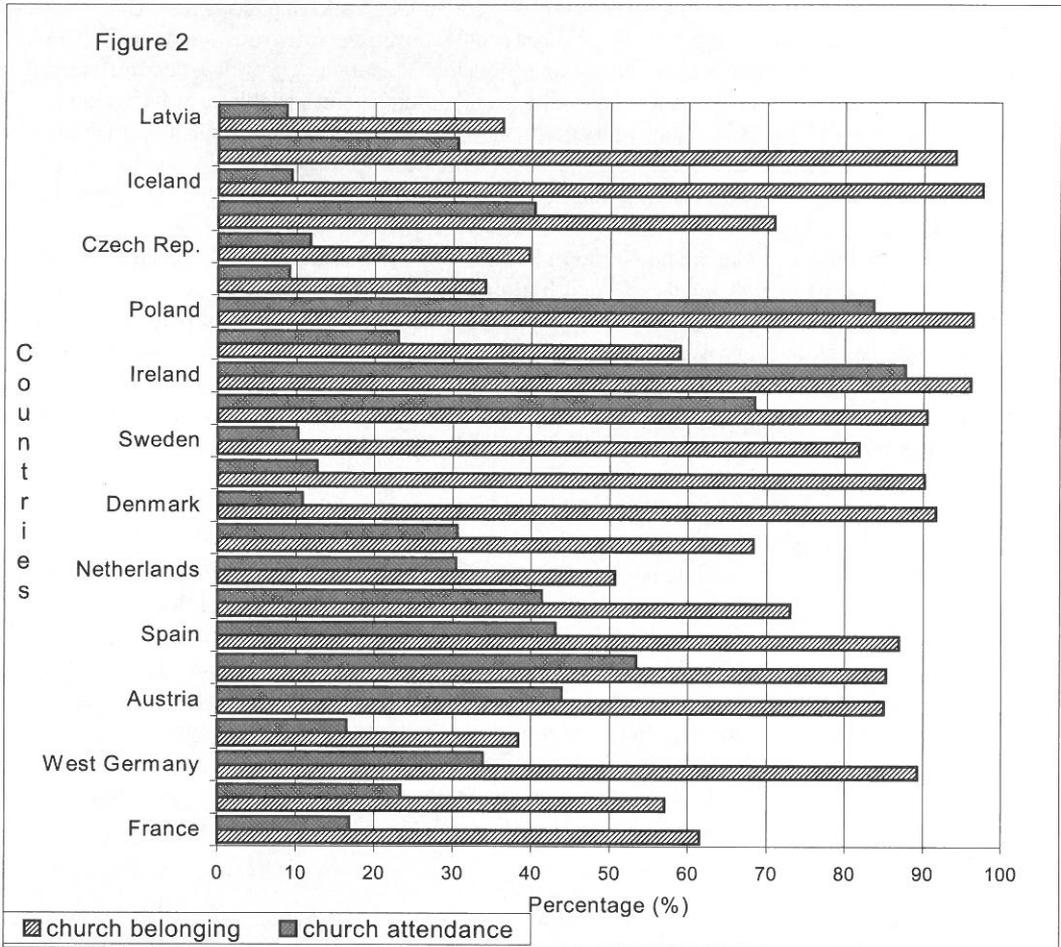
3.1 Worship

Church attendance is the most frequently used instrument to measuring religious practices. As a measure of secularisation it is immediately clear from figures on regular church attendance, that the Nordic countries in Europe are highly secularised; around 10% of the populations in these countries regularly (that is at least once a month) attend a religious service, while people in Southern European countries are much less secularised according to church attendance figures. The highest figures on church involvement is found, however, in two Catholic countries: Ireland and Poland. Here very large majorities go to church frequently (84% and 88% respectively). The Bulgarian pattern resembles the Nordic one, but it deviates from the pattern of church attendance observed in Rumania, although both are primarily Orthodox countries; Church attendance is rather low in Bulgaria (9%), whereas it is modest (about 30%) in Romania.

As a secular ideology, individualism was expected to have been conducive to decreasing levels of church going. In some countries individualisation even led to leaving the church one was born into. Until recently it was common that from their birth on, children belonged to the denomination their parents belonged to. In the Netherlands a sharp distinction existed for a long time in history between Catholics and Protestants milieus. This situation is famous as pillarization. There was a Catholic pillar that differed from a Protestant pillar. Belonging to a Catholic pillar implied that a person grew up in a Catholic family, that he/she went to a Catholic school, that he/she became member of a Catholic youth organisation, that he/she went to a Catholic University, that he/she was employed in a Catholic enterprise with a Catholic employer, that he/she belonged to a Catholic labour Union, that he/she went to a Catholic hospital, that he/she voted on Catholic political parties etc. etc. Protestants grew up and lived in Protestant milieu that was separated and segregated from Catholic milieu. Meanwhile a process of depolarisation has removed most of this typical Dutch pattern and many people in the Netherlands do not any longer want to be part of either the Catholic or Protestant church. Half of the Dutch population is unchurched, a proportion unparalleled in Western Europe, not even in the Nordic secular countries.

Figure 2 Percentages of respondents attending religious services regularly (at least once a month) and belonging to a denomination

Figures used for figure 2. First column is x-axis; second column is y-axis



In fact, church affiliation in the Nordic countries is rather high (Figure 2). Almost all people in the four Scandinavian countries consider themselves a member of the Lutheran church. This phenomenon of high levels of church membership may be understood from the connection between Church and state in these countries. In Scandinavia 'there exists an historically determined connection between church and state, and (...) citizenship implied church membership' (Gustafsson, 1994: 21). People in the Nordic countries entered into the Lutheran church by birth (Lane & Ersson, 1996: 184), and being a church member is considered almost a citizen's duty in these cultures and as such church membership can be seen as a way of expressing solidarity with society and its basic values (Hamberg, 1990: 39). However, since the level of actual participation is rather low in the Nordic countries, membership in these countries will be less meaningful religiously than in other countries.

A clear Eastern European pattern is lacking, for in some countries church affiliation appears high (Poland, Romania, Slovakia), in other countries it is rather low (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic,

Estonia, Latvia). Hungary and Lithuania display intermediate positions. This variation can hardly be explained from social repression during Soviet domination, although the low rates in Eastern Germany, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic, seem to confirm the severe impact of secular Soviet rule in the recent past. In Slovakia, Poland, and Romania, communist leadership has apparently not been very successful in paralysing the churches. Rather peculiar is the clear demarcation in participation and affiliation between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This may very well reflect differential stages of economic development and modernisation, and differences in social-historical experiences. As Inglehart suggests, the main feature of modernisation is economic growth through industrialisation (Inglehart, 1997: 70). The Czech Republic has been more advanced economically and industrially than its Slovak neighbour country, and thus secularisation will have advanced more in the Czech Republic than in Slovakia.

Apart from Poland, Ireland, and Northern Ireland, the rather high levels of church affiliation is not paralleled with high levels of church attendance. As far as an individual's religious attachment is concerned, the Eastern European pattern resembles the Nordic pattern of a low degree of active church involvement. The Polish and Irish pattern of church involvement is highly similar. Figures on church attendance appear rather similar in the Southern European countries, Austria and Slovakia, but these countries vary slightly in terms of proportions of church membership which appears high in Spain, Italy, and Austria, and relatively low in Slovakia and Portugal.

3.2 Church religious attitudes

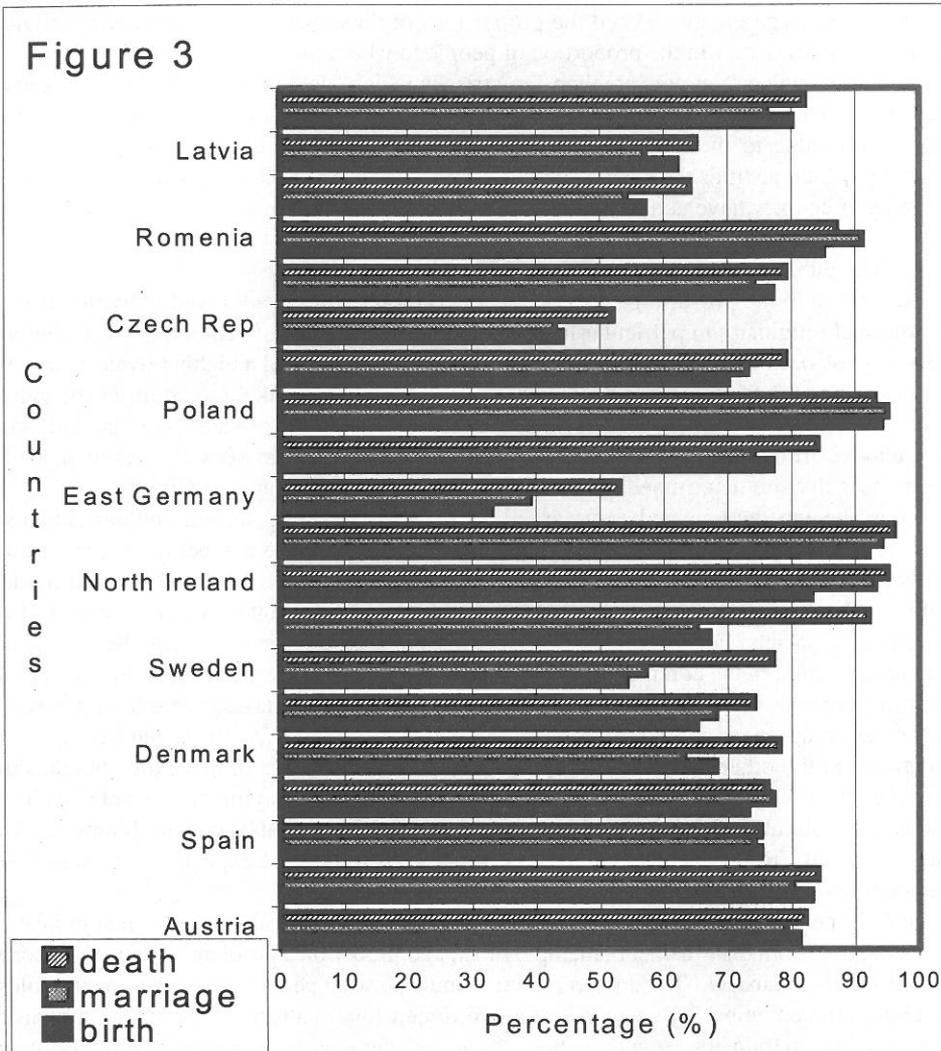
Apart from these concrete behaviours, *EVS* contains several indicators of what can be called institutional or church religious attitudes. A first set of indicators measures the degree to which people consider religious ceremonies important for marked transitions in human life, such as birth, marriage and death. Further, there are some indicators available about the role of the church in contemporary society. As was explained before, an important aspect of secularisation is the assumed decline of the role the churches play in modern secular society. The degree to which people are of the opinion that the churches should speak out on various issues is one aspect; another is the degree to which people consider the churches and their leaders important sources for answers to social, moral and familial problems and spiritual needs.

3.2.1 Rites of passage

Religion offers ceremonies to mark important passages in human life, such as, birth, marriage and death. The proportions of people considering a religious ceremony meaningful for such events² are presented in Figure 3. Although the meaningfulness of religious services varies for the separate occasions, generally speaking there is a tendency to regard such a service in the case of death as more important than in the case of birth or marriage. Even in Eastern Germany, where fewer than 40% consider a religious service necessary at birth and for a marriage, a (small) majority says that a religious service is necessary at death. Relatively large differences between death on the one hand and marriage and birth on the other, appear distinctive in the Scandinavian countries. A religious ceremony at death is more widely accepted than a religious service at birth or marriage. The Dutch and Czech patterns are highly similar, and together with Eastern Germany, the people in these countries are least convinced that a religious ceremony on the occasions of birth, marriage and death are necessary.

2. It was asked whether one thought it was important to hold a religious service for any of these events.

Figure 3 Percentages of respondents who are of the opinion that religious services are important at birth, marriage and death



Despite these cross-national variations and the fact that the acceptance depends upon the occasion, it will be clear that most Europeans regard events like birth, marriage and death sufficiently significant to merit a religious ceremony. Such widespread acceptance seems contradictory to the low levels of church involvement in terms of church attendance. However, it must be acknowledged that participation in such religious ceremonies is not necessarily an expression of religious involvement. It rather reveals that the number of alternatives to mark such important transitions in human life is limited (Dobbelaere & Voyé, 1992: 128), and that it is more or less a habit or a national custom to have religious ceremonies on such occasions without further motivation or reflection. This is clear from the large proportions of people who

do not or hardly ever go to church, but nevertheless think that religious services are important at birth, marriage and death. Even among those who have left the church most are convinced about the importance of such ceremonies. As such, religious services on these occasions have become part of a more general culture, devoid of religious meaning for a large part of the population. The latter explanation seems likely because the percentages of those who stick to the rites of passage greatly exceed the proportions of those who see themselves as religious persons. Countries vary in the proportion of people to whom these rites are likely to be devoid of religious meaning. Not only are there countries in which some of the unchurched stick to the rites, there are also countries in which a considerable proportion of even church members attach little or no value to them. This last finding applies to the Nordic countries and to West Germany, which justifies the conclusion that a large part of the 55% marginal church members in the latter country have actually broken away from their church.

3.2.2 The public role of the church(es)

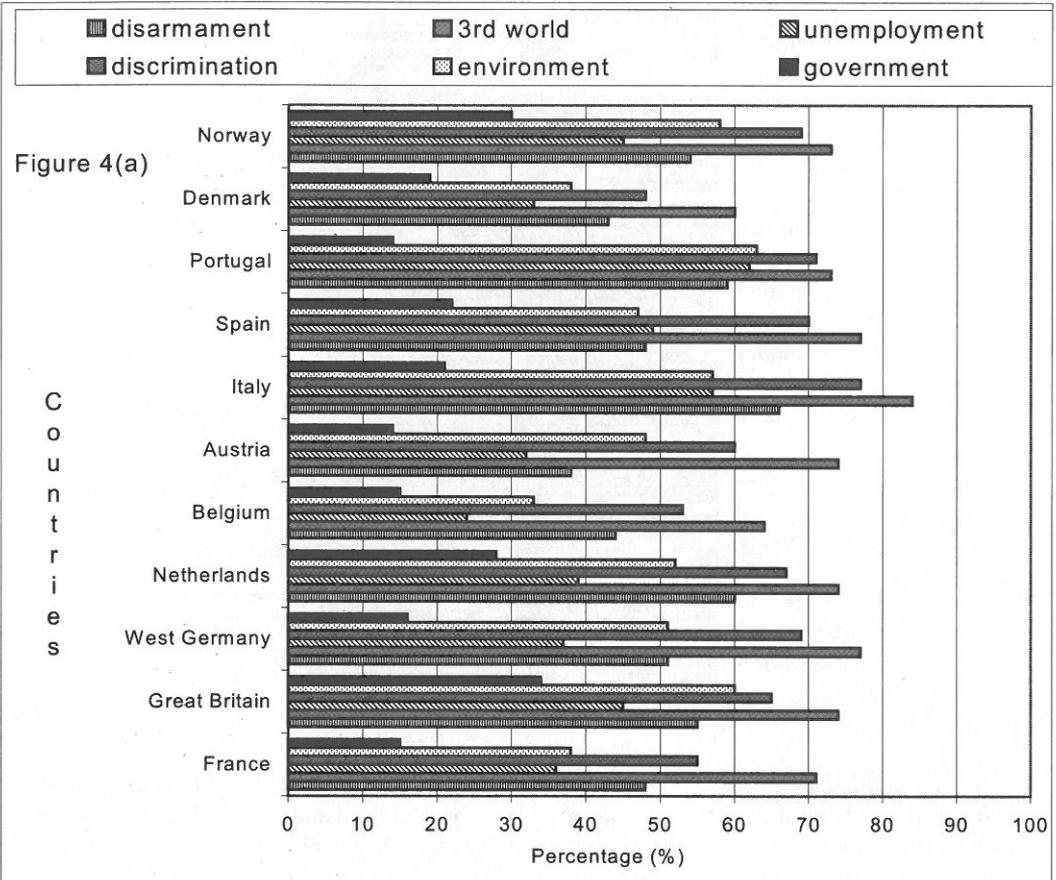
According to the prevailing ideas on modernisation, secularisation and individualisation, institutional religiosity in particular has diminished and the role of religion and the churches in society has been reduced to a specialised institution and above all a highly private affair. And as Luckmann argues, in modern society 'the individual is more likely to confront the culture and the sacred cosmos as a "buyer". Once religion is defined as a "private affair" the individual may choose from the assortment of "ultimate" meanings as he sees fit - guided by the preferences that are determined by his social biography' (Luckmann, 1967: 99).

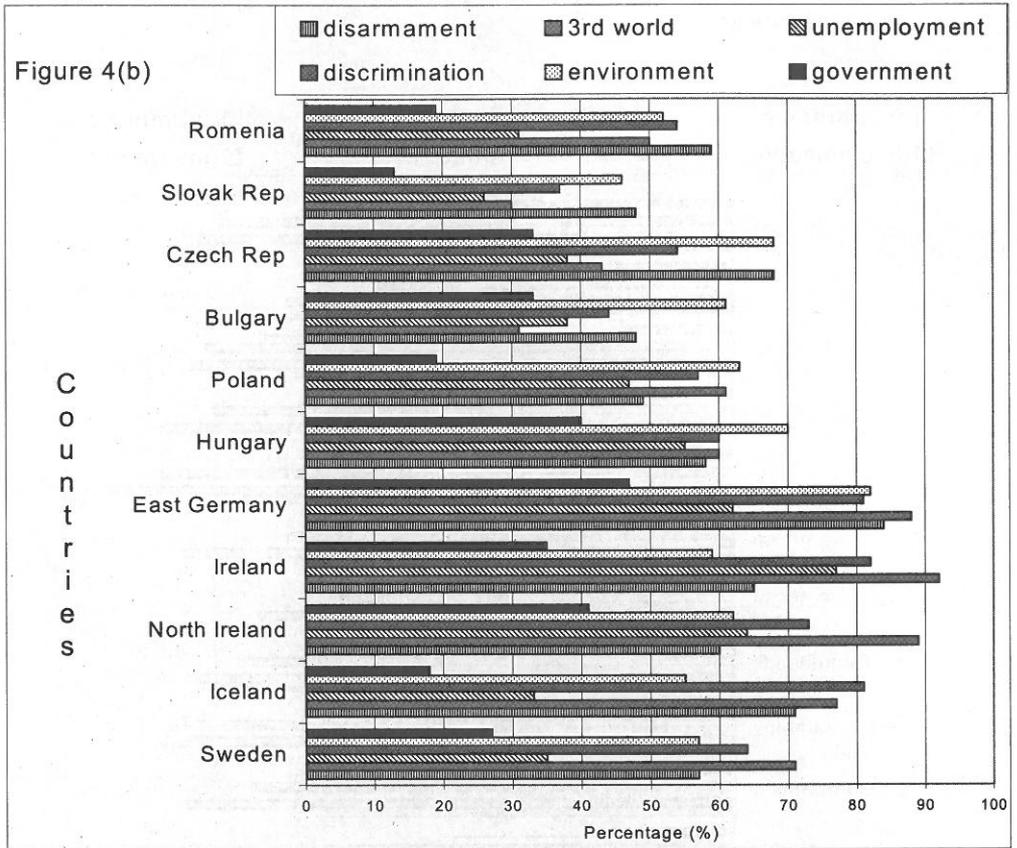
Thus, the expectation can be forwarded that the more modern, secular and individualised countries will display lower levels of church oriented attitudes. The number of people attracted by the doctrines and prescriptions of the traditional churches will be low in such modern cultures. However, country specific features will have a significant impact on the role of the churches in a society. For example, in Eastern Europe 'religion happened to be the only source of counter-culture in the communist era which had an effect on every social stratum. (...) Since that time there has been no other agency of comparable size undertaking the role of preserving and transmitting national culture and basic values' (Tomka, 1995: 20). In the Scandinavian countries, on the other hand, the impact of the churches is rather limited; the churches, for example, do not get involved in political debate. 'It is not legitimate to enter political discussions, about the policy of the government or about vital social problems such as unemployment' (Riis, 1992: 3). As such, a clear distinction can be expected to exist between the countries in Eastern Europe and the Nordic countries.

In *EVS*, people were asked if it was proper for churches to speak out on a great number of issues ranging from disarmament, unemployment and third world problems to abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia.³ The answers seem to indicate what people consider to be the role of the church in contemporary society, and a two dimensional pattern appears. One dimension concerns the public or social issues, such as disarmament, third world problems, unemployment, racial discrimination, ecology and environmental issues, and government policy; the other dimension combines the private issues: abortion, extramarital affairs, euthanasia, and homosexuality.

3. The items were: disarmament; abortion; third world problems; extramarital affairs; unemployment; racial discrimination; euthanasia; homosexuality; ecology and environmental issues; government policy.

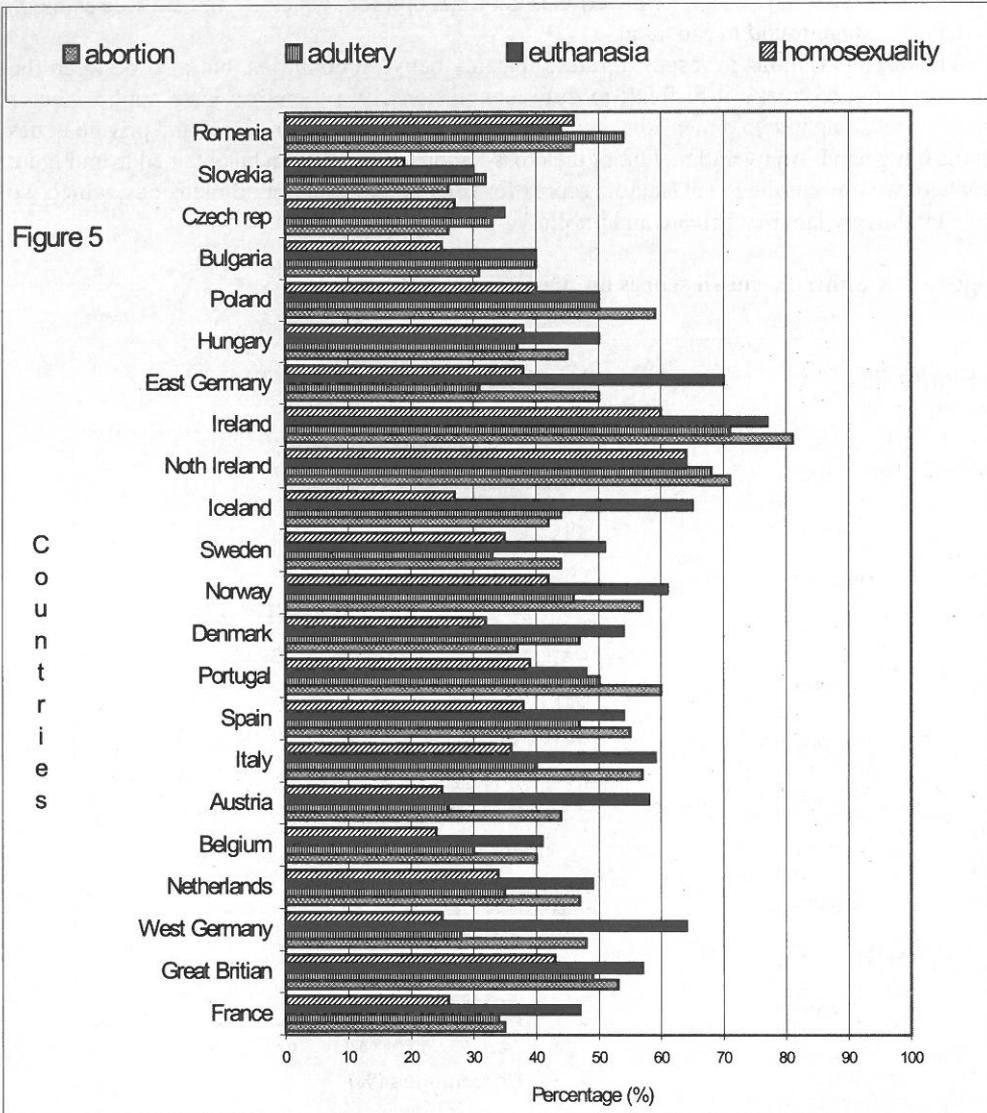
Figure 4 Percentages of respondents sharing the opinion that churches should speak out on disarmament, third world problems, unemployment, discrimination, environmental issues, and governmental policy





Most accepted, and in most countries even highly accepted, is that churches speak out on third world problems and discrimination (see Figure 4). Belgium and Denmark display lower levels of acceptance, but even in these countries a majority considers it appropriate for churches to speak out on these issues. Contrary to what might have been expected, Polish people are not the most likely to consider that it is proper for churches to speak out on such public issues. The same applies in the case of the Polish response to private issues, which does not rank highest compared with other countries. In all countries investigated here, only small minorities think it is proper for churches to speak out on government policy. This is even the case in Eastern European countries, despite the fact that, as Tomka has argued, the church was seen as playing an oppositional role in these countries. Our data reveal that this is only the case in Eastern Germany, for only in this country do more than half of the respondents say it is proper for churches to speak out on government policy. In other countries, including those in Eastern Europe, the proportions are much lower. The suggestion offered by Riis for the Nordic countries is supported, although the percentages found in these countries are not the lowest observed in Europe. France, Belgium, Austria, Portugal, and Slovakia display the lowest proportions of people who think that it is proper for churches to speak out on government policy.

Figure 5 Percentages of respondents sharing the opinion that churches should speak out on abortion, extramarital affairs, euthanasia, and homosexuality

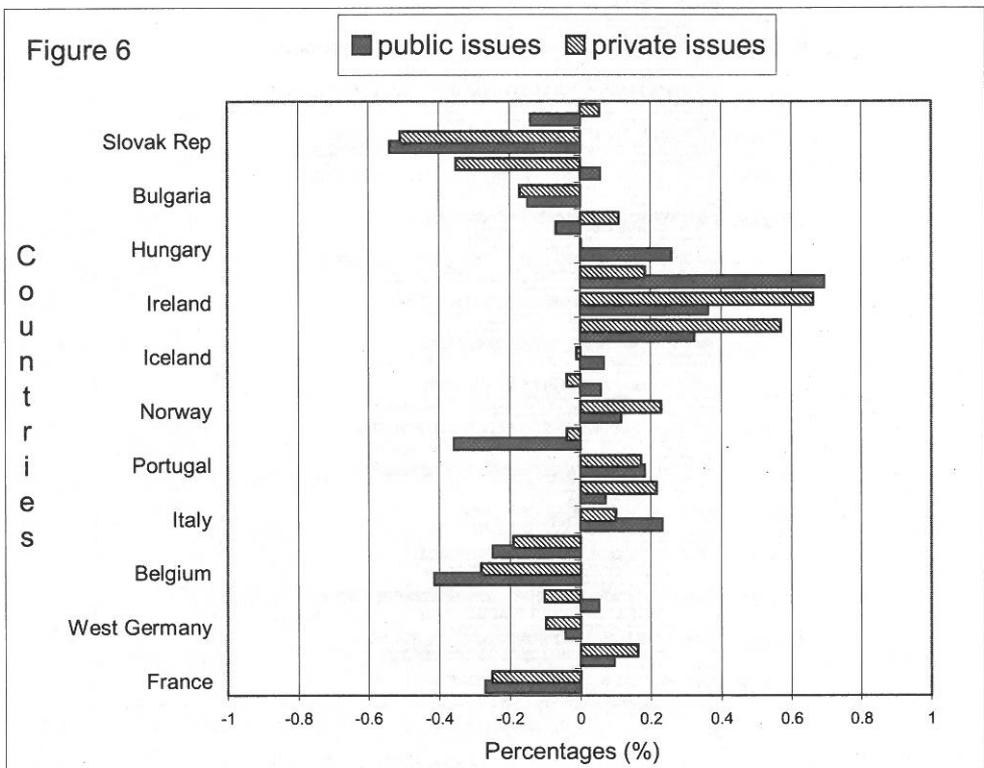


Variations between countries also exist with regard to the sexual-ethical issues, such as abortion, extramarital affairs, euthanasia and homosexuality (Figure 5). The Irish are most of all of the opinion that churches should speak out on such issues, particularly with respect to abortion and euthanasia (around 80%). Here a significant difference between Irish and Polish societies appears. Although large majorities in Poland feel that churches should speak out on such issues, these proportions are lower than in Ireland. Lowest acceptance of churches to speak out on such issues is found in France and Slovakia. In Slovakia about 19% of the

respondents consider it appropriate for the churches to speak out on homosexuality. In France, Belgium, and Iceland it is around 25% of the respondents that shares this opinion. Further, it is remarkable that such a large majority in East Germany find it proper for churches to speak out on euthanasia. 70% of the East Germans is of this opinion, which is almost twice as much as the percentage found in Slovakia.

The large variations in response rates, not only between countries, but also between the issues mentioned, make it difficult to draw conclusions. We therefore have applied factor analysis, resulting in two dimensions: public or social issues on the one hand and private issues on the other hand. An overall picture of the cross-national varieties can be obtained from Figure 6, where we present the mean (factor) scores for each country on both dimensions, which we have tentatively labelled private and public.⁴

Figure 6 Countries' mean scores on private and public issues



People in both Irish countries, more than people in other countries, are of the opinion that churches should speak out on these issues, be it private or public. People in East Germany are of the opinion that it is proper for the churches to speak out on public issues, but in case of private issues they are more reluctant to consider this appropriate. The people in Slovakia are

4. The 'private' dimensions contain the items: abortion, extramarital affairs, euthanasia, and homosexuality. The mean inter-item correlation between these items is .53; $\alpha = .82$. The 'public' dimension refers to the other items, disarmament, third world problems, unemployment, racial discrimination, ecology and environmental issues, governmental policy. The mean inter-item correlation between these items is .45; $\alpha = .83$.

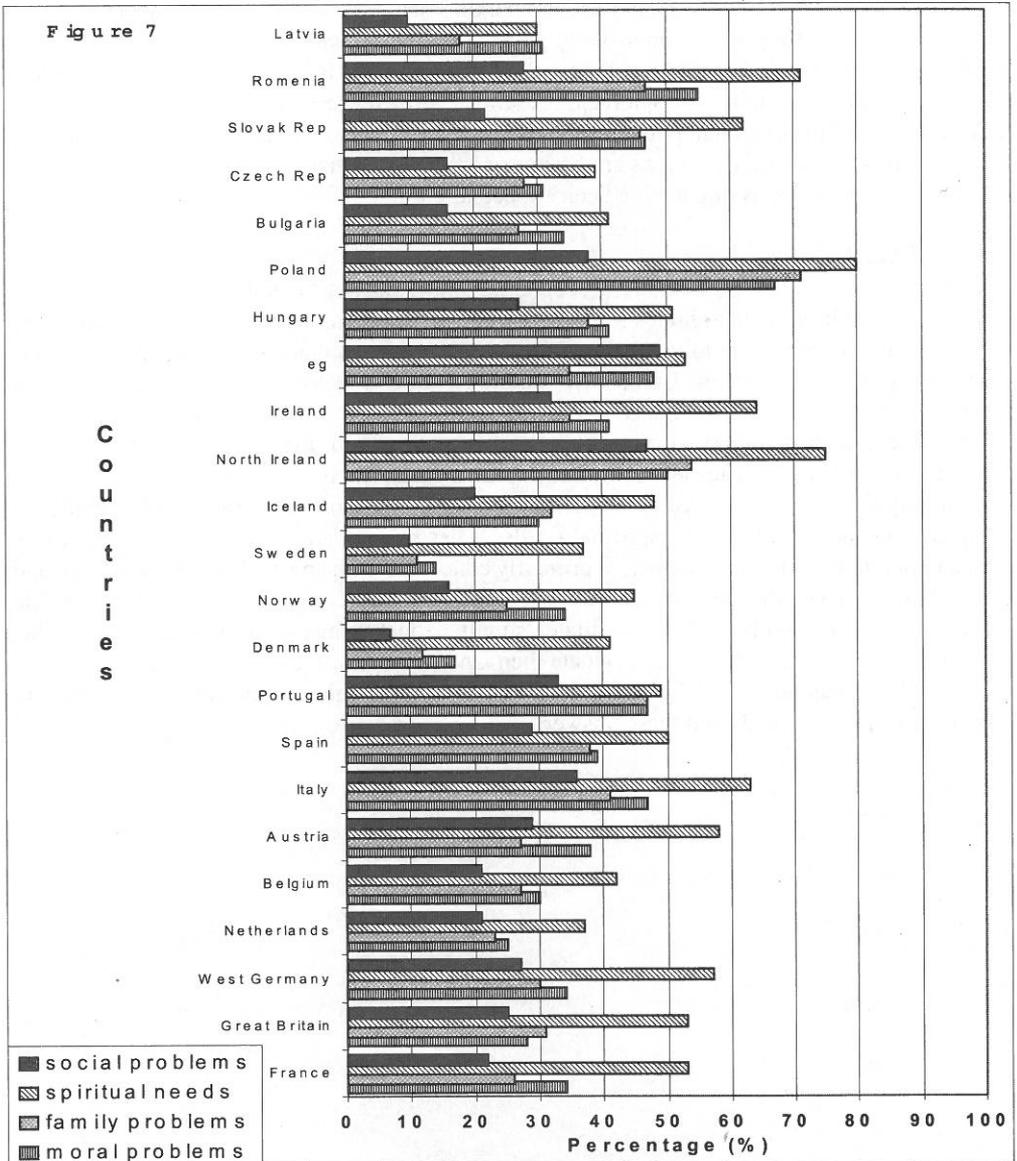
least likely to accept the role of the church in either public or private affairs. The Czechs are almost as reluctant as Slovak people to accept churches to speak out on private issues, but they do not resemble the Slovak people in not accepting the churches to speak out on public issues. Irish people accept most of all that the church expresses its views on both public and private issues, and in this they are the opposite of people in Slovakia and, to a lesser extent, Belgium. Although the results in Figure 6 are fascinating, a clear pattern is lacking. For instance, people in Norway, Great Britain, and Spain appear similar in their views as far as the acceptance of the authority of the church in public and private issues is concerned. Sweden, Iceland, and the Netherlands are similar as well, as are France and Austria. Polish people resemble the people in Romania, and not, as might have been expected, the Irish.

4.2.3 Church adequacy

The suggestion that more modern, secular and individualised countries will display lower levels of church-oriented attitudes leads also to the expectation that the idea that the churches provide adequate answers to various problems will be less accepted in the Nordic countries, whereas people in Southern Europe will be more eager to accept this role played by the churches. In Figure 7 it can be seen that in all countries, even the more modern ones, people regard the church as important in meeting the spiritual needs of the individual. The churches are regarded in all countries less adequate to provide answers to social problems.

It may not be a big surprise that even among people in more modern societies, churches appear popular for solving the spiritual needs. It has been argued that religion, particularly under conditions of high modernity, is primarily concerned with spiritual issues, the sacred and something beyond the perceptible (Beyer, 1994: 5). Religion and the churches provide 'categories and symbols that facilitate simultaneously man's comprehension of his circumstances and his capacity to evaluate them and to cope with them emotionally' (Wilson, 1982: 10). Apparently, most Europeans share this opinion. The churches provide answers to cope with spiritual needs and these answers are considered adequate.

Figure 7 Percentages of respondents agreeing that the church gives adequate answers to moral problems, family problems, spiritual needs, and social problems



Less adequate are the answers the churches give to other problems. In case of family problems and moral problems, more people in Eastern Europe than in the West of Europe regard the churches replies as adequate. Tomka has observed that public opinion 'in Hungary is firmly behind the strengthening of the societal, cultural, and political role of the churches' (Tomka, 1995: 20), and it may be that similar views exist among other Eastern Europeans as well. The expectation that church-oriented attitudes are less widespread in more modern societies seems confirmed; least accepted is the role of the church in Denmark and Sweden.

Only small minorities in these Nordic countries share the opinion that the churches are giving adequate answers to the problems mentioned.

The results yield some evidence for the idea that the churches nowadays are seen most of all in connection with spiritual needs and not so much with issues concerning family life and social problems. Even moral problems are not self-evidently seen as the concern of the churches. This result seems to support the idea that 'the religious sphere came fully into its own, specialising in "its own religious" function and either dropping or losing many other "nonreligious" functions it had accumulated and could no longer meet efficiently' (Casanova, 1994: 21).

Some patterns appear strange, all the same. The Irish case for instance is unclear for despite the fact that the Irish appear the most religious and most traditional in their beliefs, only about two-fifths of its population is of the opinion that the church gives adequate answers to social and family problems. Even among the Irish who frequently attend religious services, the pattern is the same. Such percentages are among the lowest in all countries investigated here, and they are even below the figures found in Eastern Europe where the role of the churches has been rather modest. As we will see later on, the Irish have become less reliant on the churches during the eighties.

5. Catholic and Protestant cultures: distinctive or similar?

The religious profiles of the European countries presented thus far yield often large differences, but also remarkable and sometimes unexpected similarities. However, a clear and understandable pattern does not appear from these data, and the question to be answered is how to explain the differences and similarities.

Differential patterns are, however, to be expected, because it has been argued that there are longstanding ideological differences between Catholic and Protestant cultures, not only in religious beliefs, but also in terms of mentality and social and political attitudes. Such differences between both religious traditions are still 'alive and well' (Greeley, 1989: 500). An important feature of the Catholic tradition is the directness towards the community and shared responsibility, whereas Protestant traditions proclaim more individualistic stances. It has been argued that as a result Protestants are more rational, more individualistic and more autonomous than Catholics (Peters & Schreuder, 1987). Consequently, Protestants are assumed to be more sensitive to various 'modernising' influences than Catholics (Weber, 1979; Durkheim, 1966; Tracy, 1981).

The results of our analyses thus far, do not provide much evidence for a Catholic-Protestant divide in Europe. Although, Ireland and Poland appear most religious in many respects, and the Nordic Protestant countries least religious, the pattern is not as clear as such observations might suggest. For instance, East German Protestantism seems to have resulted in a religious pattern that is quite distinctive from the Nordic pattern. Much more than people in the Scandinavian countries, East Germans are of the opinion that churches should speak out on public issues. The Catholic countries in Southern Europe appear less religious than Poland and Ireland, and dominant Catholic countries like France and Belgium often appear as secular as Denmark and Sweden. Further, it is remarkable that both Orthodox countries, Romania and Bulgaria, display such different patterns of religiosity. Romania is often close to the most religious countries, while Orthodox Bulgaria belongs to the most secular parts of Europe.

A clear pattern of Catholic countries on the one hand, and Protestant countries on the other, does not appear from these data. Does this mean that the Catholic and Protestant factors are no longer important in present-day European society and that other cultural factors are more important to explain cross-national varieties in religious attitudes?

One of these factors may be the degree of competition, an idea that has been forwarded by American researchers to explain the high levels of religiosity in the US despite the fact that this country is most modern. As was explained by the proponents of the religious market theory, the more pluralistic a country is religiously, the greater the religious vitality will be (Finke, 1990; Iannaccone, 1991; Stark & Iannaccone, 1994). European countries vary to the extent that they are mono- or pluriform religiously. The degree of pluralism is measured by Herfindahl's index. This index measures 'the probability that two people, selected at random from those claiming a religious affiliation, share the same religion' (Iannaccone, 1991: 166). Since a higher score on this index indicates less pluralism, a negative association can be expected between this index and the religious measures (see also Verweij, Ester & Nauta, 1997).

Another factor that will have an impact on people's religious attitudes is religious upbringing. If one has been raised and socialised in a devout family, it is more likely that one is more religious than someone who has not been raised in a devout family. In 1990 the *EVS* questionnaire included a question on this. In Ireland, Poland, Spain, and Italy almost all respondents indicated that they were brought up religiously at home, whereas at the other extreme, religious upbringing is rare in Estonia (15%), and in Sweden it was limited to 30% of the respondents.

Table 4 Percentages of Catholics, percentages of respondents brought up religiously and Herfindahl index in 25 European countries

	% Catholics	% brought up religiously	Herfindahl index
France	57.7	71.1	.879
Great Britain	16.1	59.1	.553
West Germany	45.0	62.5	.499
East Germany	5.6	47.8	.707
Austria	78.3	81.1	.808
Italy	84.0	93.9	.961
Spain	86.0	92.5	.973
Portugal	70.6	79.2	.950
Netherlands	35.0	71.4	.534
Belgium	65.8	84.1	.916
Denmark	0.9	42.5	.950
Norway	2.3	45.0	.913
Sweden	0.6	30.1	.886
Iceland	0.7	75.1	.932
N. Ireland	30.7	83.9	.467
Ireland	93.3	94.1	.939
Hungary	42.9	69.0	.588
Poland	94.0	96.5	.948
Bulgaria	0.1	37.5	.575
Czechia	34.7	45.8	.772
Slovakia	59.5	79.7	.696
Romania	4.4	77.0	.834
Estonia	1.0	15.4	.444
Latvia	15.4	28.7	.335
Lithuania	58.1	65.8	.833

In several multiple regression analyses we have defined as the dependent variable various religious measures. As independent or predictor variables we included the proportion of Catholics in a country, the Herfindahl index, and the proportion of people in a country that was brought up religiously. The results indicate the strength of the impact of each of these independent 'country-characteristics'. In Table 5 we have displayed the pairwise (Pearson) correlation between the religious indicators and Herfindahl's index, proportion of Catholics, and proportions of respondents brought up religiously.

Table 5 Pairwise correlations between percentage Catholics in a country, a country's Herfindahl index, percentage of people who were brought up religiously on the one hand and religiousness measures on the other

	index	% Catholics	% brought up religiously
religiosity	.220	.617**	.832***
traditional faith	.303	.429**	.767***
transcendental view	.013	.537**	.506**
immanentist view	.148	-.280	.020
church adequacy	.197	.413*	.686***
church attendance	-.184	.286	.069
private issues	-.076	-.107	-.286
public issues	-.139	-.073	-.021

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

Both religious upbringing and numbers of Catholics appear to have significant impact on religiosity, traditional faith, transcendent world-view, church adequacy, and rites of passage. The impact of the degree to which people in a country have been brought up religiously is slightly stronger than the impact of the number of Catholics in a country. The low correlations between the various religious indicators and Herfindahl's index do not support the suggestion that pluralistic religious countries are more religious than mono-religious countries. The opposite seems more true: the correlations, although statistically not significant, are not negative, as expected, but positive.

Since religious upbringing is more common in Catholic countries than in Protestant countries,⁵ we have calculated the partial correlations between the religious indicators and religious upbringing, controlling for the proportions of Catholics. Most associations increased as a result of the introduction of this control variable. In particular, the correlation between church attendance and religious upbringing increased. Controlling for the percentage of Catholics, the correlation is .63 ($p = .000$).

The impact of religious upbringing is thus significant, but also the percentage of Catholics is a major attribute of country differences and similarities in religiosity. Nevertheless, we cannot find a clear Catholic-Protestant divide in Europe.

⁵ Pearson correlation between religious upbringing and proportion of Catholics is .79 ($p = .000$).

6. Conclusions

The main purpose of this paper was to present an overview of contemporary religiousness in European societies, and to explore the recent shifts in religious patterns. The dominant theme in societal's subdomain of religion is secularisation. The concept of secularisation denotes a process of cultural change in which religion is of decreasing importance in human society. According to the common understanding of this process, secularisation is reflected in decreasing levels of behavioural practices and religious beliefs, but also in the shift from traditional religious authority to secular rational authority, and more recently to individual autonomy. Secularisation is, however, just one of the many processes of societal change, but in general it is considered one of the most significant and far reaching processes that have transformed human society.

We have explored how far this process of secularisation has proceeded in Europe. Is Europe indeed as secular as has frequently been assumed? And what are the main religious profiles that can be discerned?

At the onset it was considered highly unlikely that a homogeneous European religious pattern would appear. Europe comprises a mixture of countries that despite common roots, differ markedly in their social-historical experiences, political and social structures, and cultural settings. For example, an important distinction in this respect was assumed to exist between Catholics and Protestants. Although there are some marked differences between Catholic and Protestant people in their religious orientations. We have not been able to discover clear and distinctive Catholic and Protestant religious profiles in Europe, and as such our analyses seem to contradict the findings of Ron Inglehart who reported a coherent Catholic group of countries with highly similar value profiles (Inglehart, 1997: 95).

Another demarcation line was assumed to exist between Eastern and Western Europe. The secular doctrines of the Communist regimes and the Soviet authorities strongly repressed religious activism in Eastern European countries. However, they did not succeed to the same extent in all countries, creating large variations in religious and secular patterns. Eastern Germany, in many respects the model country of Soviet society to the West (Gautier, 1997: 292), is indeed highly secular, but Poland remained highly religious in all respects.

More important than the Catholic-Protestant divide were the different levels of religious upbringing. But this does not bring us much further in the understanding of cross-national variations for the question then becomes why religious upbringing is more important in one country and less in another? Such results confirm the conclusions from previous empirical studies, that nation-specific historical interpretations are indispensable for the understanding and explanation of variations of religious orientations. Europe remains the 'melting pot' that it has always been.

Although adherence to traditional beliefs is not strong in Europe, large majorities of the populations in Europe still believe in a personal God or some sort of spirit or life force. The percentage of people who do not believe in a personal God or life force, are modest and atheism is not widespread at all among Europeans. So, people have not turned into disbelievers. The question to be answered in the near future is, what comes instead of or next to this theistic and transcendental belief systems? Or to put it in more popular terms: what alternative meaning systems are arising? The EVS data contain only the traditional measures of religiousness. Therefore, new forms of religiousness that may have developed alongside, or instead of traditional, institutional, Christian religion cannot be explored. Although there are some indications that people remain religious in the sense of being interested in spirituality or issues concerning life and death, it appears that such interests have not yet developed in such a way that one can speak of a new religious wave. 'Ideas about "a new religious wave" need to be seen in perspective' (Becker, de Hart & Mens, 1997: 184). It is to be expected that religious and spiritual needs will remain in the near future, but the solutions for such needs are to a lesser extent found within traditional religious institutions.