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Trends in Religious Feeling in Europe and Russia

ABSTRACT

The 1981 and 1990 European Values Surveys showed a decline for almost all religious variables, a decline even sharper among young people, except for belief in an afterlife. The younger the respondents, the less religious they were likely to be. These results confirmed the thesis of increasing secularization in Europe and the West. However, the most recent, 1999 survey shows this downward trend to be counterbalanced by two other tendencies: internal Christian renewal and increased “believing without belonging”, both phenomena that are clearly more developed among young people. The respective strengths of these three developments vary by country surveyed. The same phenomena are even more pronounced in Eastern European (former communist bloc) countries and in Russia, once again particularly among young people. The changes may be interpreted as a turning point after the break with religiosity that characterized the 1960s and 70s.

Starting in the late 1960s and up until recently in Western Europe (since the 1950s in countries that have used opinion polls), Christianity has been observed to be declining. This decline, which began with the baby-boom generation, gradually extended to all age groups. In his analysis of the first, 1981 European Values Survey (EVS), Jean Stoetzel underlined that the younger a person was, the less likely he or she was to be religious. With 38 questions pertaining to religion, the survey already had strong claims to providing a reliable map of religiosity in Europe. The second EVS, conducted in 1990, confirmed this trend with the following exceptions (Lambert, 1995): an increase in feeling that “the church is giving adequate answers to people’s spiritual needs” and, in the new generation, aged 18 to 24, stronger belief in an afterlife, heaven, and hell. I analyzed the trend in this review, bringing to light various effects related to age, position in the life cycle, and generation (Lambert, 1993), concluding that the decline was an effect of period (i.e., affecting all ages, the period being the one that began in the late 1960s) and generational renewal: each new generation was less religious than the preceding one.

The titles that sociologists examining these two sets of survey data gave to their analyses are significant: “The Unchurching of Europe?” (Ashford and Timms, 1992) and “The Secularizing Society” (Dobbelaeere and Jagodzinski, 1995; Halman and Riis, 1999), as well as my 1995 analysis, entitled “Vers une
Europe post-chrétienne?” (Towards a post-Christian Europe?). For the nine countries as a whole surveyed in 1981 and resurveyed in 1990, membership or “belonging” to Christianity dropped from 85% to 70%, and was down to 64% in the 18 to 29 age group, and all indicators except those mentioned above were heading downward. This development confirmed the secularization thesis put forward in the 1960s in the United States, where decline in the main Christian denominations was manifest. According to Peter Berger, the first and most influential theorist of the phenomenon, secularization is “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (1967, p. 107). Presenting results for the Christian world as a whole, the American sociologist David Martin (1978) showed diversity of situations by country and denomination (Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, Orthodox). For both analysts, the phenomenon observed was a more or less pronounced regression of religious feeling internal to the private sphere, whereas for others the decline was irresively linked to industrialization and urbanization (Acquaviva, 1967) and even a hypothesized gradual disappearance of religion concomitant with advancing modernization. In addition to industrialization and urbanization, the phenomenon was attributed to the processes of individualization, rationalization and functional differentiation (i.e., religion was now only one domain among others). Marcel Gauchet (1985) spoke of a social “exit” from religion, meaning that religion had lost its relevance for societal functioning, though this did not necessarily mean it had disappeared at the level of individual consciousness. In fact, the development of “believing without belonging”, particularly in Britain (Davie, 1996), combined with the increased belief in reincarnation brought to light by other surveys, a belief in turn related to the diffusion of “parallel” beliefs (astrology, telepathy, etc.), seemed to suggest that belief was slipping outside the sphere of institutionalized religion.

Other authors, however, interpreted these results as signs of a worldwide return of religiosity. Some of the previously cited analysts reversed their assessments. In response to the observed expansion of evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic movements, the emergence of NRMIs (new religious movements or “sects”), the fall of communism in the western world and the rise of religious fundamentalism worldwide, Peter Berger, for example, spoke in 2001 of “desecularization”. David Martin, who had also theorized secularization, agreed with Berger. There were clear phenomena of religious revitalization in Europe itself: diffusion of the above-mentioned Christian currents, the impact of Pope John Paul II, life in Eastern Europe after communism, the reconfiguring of identities (Davie and Hervieu-Léger, 1996), as well as conversions, pilgrimages, and Catholic World Youth Days (Hervieu-Léger, 1999). These phenomena are nonetheless more limited in Europe, where the dominant trend is still decline. Grace Davie (2002) has gone so far as to speak of a European “exception”.

The most recent European Values Survey, 1999, is a surprise in this respect, revealing changes that call into question the decline, particularly among young people, the group in which decline had been strongest.
These changes go together with others affecting anti-authoritarian and permissive attitudes, especially among young people. The question of a “turning point” has been raised, or at very least a clear inflection, in the tendency observed since the late 1960s. This article analyzes that development on the basis of the three European Values Surveys, once again emphasizing age, period, and generation phenomena. It then turns to the matter of interpreting the changes.

The field is enlarged here to include Eastern Europe and Russia, as all these countries are now included in the EVS. Only nine former European Economic Community countries were surveyed in 1981 (indicated with an asterisk in the tables): Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and West Germany. Also participating in the 1981 survey were Sweden, Austria, and Iceland. The other Western European countries joined in 1990, except Greece, which only came in 1999. In Eastern Europe, Hungary alone was able to participate in 1981; the other countries began surveying in 1990 (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, former East Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia). When necessary, EVS data have been supplemented with data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), an annual survey that in 1991 and 1998 focused on religion, though it does not cover all the countries. (1)

Lastly, concerning denomination, we can classify the different countries into three groups (Bréchon, 2002a; Lambert, 1995, 2002): Catholic countries, Protestant countries, and mixed countries. If we order the countries from highest to lowest level of religiosity for all variables considered, (2) we nearly always find the same order within each. Catholic countries are ordered as follows: Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Austria, Spain, Belgium, and France. Next come the mixed countries: Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands (Switzerland was not surveyed but has been shown to have a religious profile similar to Germany’s). Last come the Protestant countries, which are in fact Lutheran: Finland, Denmark, Norway (not formally included but comparable to Denmark), and Sweden. This ordering was used in the tables.

(1) The European Values Survey and the ISSP are the two broadest international survey programs today. Data files were provided by the Centre d’Informations des Données Socio-Politiques (CIDSP) of the Institut d’Études Politiques of Grenoble. My thanks to the Center as well as to Lucien Karpik. The 1991 survey covers six Western European countries (Ireland, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway), four Eastern European countries (former East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia), Russia, Canada, and the United States. In 1998 the following European countries were added: Portugal, France, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria.

(2) The term “religiosity” designates here the overall level of religious indicators. It is not itself an index but a convenient notion for referring to linked religious variables in the European surveys. All of these variables can be linked to Christianity, with the exception of belief in reincarnation.
Religious evolution according to the 1981, 1990, and 1999 European Values Surveys

We focus first on the nine former EEC countries included in the three surveys, to see how they evolved up to 1999. If we exclude belief in reincarnation, which cannot be considered Christian, we have 19 unvarying religion-related variables that can be compared for the three survey years. These variables bear on the following points: “belonging” (or not) to a religion; self-definition as religious (“a religious person”); prayer (“take some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation or something like that”; “get[ting] comfort and strength from religion or not”; the importance of religious faith in child-raising; church attendance; non-militant and militant participation in religious activities; confidence in the church; the feeling that “the church gives adequate answers to people’s spiritual needs”; to “the moral problems and needs of the individual”; and to “the problems of family life”; importance of God in respondent’s life; belief in God; belief in a personal God; belief in sin; in a life after death; in heaven; and in hell. Starting with the 1990 survey, five variables were added: importance of religion in respondent’s life; attachment to religious services for the events of birth; marriage; death; and acceptance of church answers to social problems. I have here followed developments in this total of 24 indicators, applying a margin of error of ±2%; i.e., fluctuations of up to and including two percentage points are taken to indicate stability. We first consider country population as a whole, then young people 18-29, though preferably 18-24 to have a reliable number of subjects for all countries.

At the level of population as a whole, we find an overall drop from 1981 (or 1990) to 1999: 12 variables showed downward movement, nine were stable, and three moved back up:

- Variables that decreased strikingly over the first period: defining oneself as “a religious person”; the feeling of “get[ting] comfort and strength from religion”; belonging to a religion (down from 85% to 75%); at least once-a-month church attendance (36% to 30%); confidence in the church (a great deal or quite a lot); belief in God (74% to 68%); belief in sin (57% to 47%). However, decline in these variables clearly slowed from 1990 to 1999, and it stopped for religious belonging and the feeling that religion is a source of comfort.

- Near-stable indicators include belief in a life after death (43%) and attachment to a religious service for the events of birth, marriage, and death.

- Variables on the rise are the opinion that “the church gives adequate answers to people’s spiritual needs” (44% to 52%); belief in a “personal God” (from 30% to 38%); and belief in hell (from 22% to 25%). The increase in belief in a “personal God” pertains primarily to churchgoing Christians, whose faith is also more intense than before.

From 1981 to 1990, there was overall decline (except for church’s capacity to respond to spiritual needs, which went up sharply), while from 1990 to
1999 that decline softened, and for some variables was cancelled and even reversed. Reversal is observed for religious belonging, church’s answers to moral needs, belief in a personal God, and hell. The explanation of the decline in terms of an institutional “crisis” for the church (Davie, 2002) rather than a general “crisis” for religion does not hold up against the fact that decline also affected personal religiosity indicators while certain institutional ones remained stable or increased.

If we now consider the 18-29 age group in the same nine countries, we observe that only four variables declined, while nine remained stable and 11 were on the rise (Table II).

– The only declining variables among young people were belonging to a religion (78% to 68% for the whole period 1981 to 1999); monthly church attendance (25% to 19%); the feeling that “the church gives adequate answers to social problems” (from 22% to 19% between 1990 and 1999); and importance of God in respondent’s life (from 38% to 35%).

– Variables on the rise: importance of faith in child-raising (from 9% to 12%); attachment to religious service for the event of birth (57% to 60%), marriage (61% to 64%), death (68% to 72%); feeling that “the church gives adequate answers to moral problems and needs” (22% to 31%), to family problems (21% to 24%); belief in a personal God (24% to 31%), in a life after death (38% to 44%), in hell (16% to 23%), in heaven (30% to 35%).

Once again, the decline occurred primarily from 1981 to 1990 and was later attenuated, even reversed, as was the case for religious belonging (63% in 1990 up to 68% in 1999) and belief in God (56% up to 60%). Moreover, rising variables included institution-based religiosity indicators: belonging, attachment to religious services, church answers in spiritual, moral, and family matters.

Differences in evolution by country increased (Table I). From 1981 to 1990 (and 1990 to 1999 for certain variables), for country’s population at large there was a pattern of decline in Great Britain (20 of the 24 variables moving downward), Spain (19 variables), Ireland (16) and France (15); stability in Belgium, West Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and Switzerland (Campiche, 2001) (3); and an upward move in Italy (21 variables on the rise), Denmark (16), and Sweden (13). From 1981 to 1990, decline (measured by the number of falling variables in the country) predominated in most countries (Spain, Austria, Belgium, France, West Germany, Great Britain, Sweden), while Italy and the Netherlands were balanced, and Ireland and Denmark had more rising than falling variables.

(3) My thanks to Roland Campiche and Raphaël Boquet of the Observatoire des Religions (University of Lausanne) for making available a special analysis of these survey data by age.
TABLE I. - Religious evolution of Western European countries from 1981 (or 1990) to 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country*</th>
<th>Ireland*</th>
<th>Italy*</th>
<th>Portugal</th>
<th>Spain*</th>
<th>Austria</th>
<th>Belgium*</th>
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**Belonging and practices**

- Belong to a religious denomination
  - Catholic: 98%
  - Protestant: 2%

- At least once-a-month attendance
  - Ireland: 85%
  - Portugal: 67%
  - Spain: 51%
  - Austria: 54%
  - Belgium: 36%
  - France: 42%
  - W-Germ.: 28%
  - Netherl.: 26%
  - GB: 25%
  - Denmark: 19%
  - Sweden: 13%
  - From left to right: Catholic countries, mixed countries, Lutheran countries.

**General religiosity, churches**

- Define self as a religious person: 58%
- Prayer, meditation or contemplation: 75%
- Get comfort and strength from religion: 71%
- Confidence in Church: 70%
- Church meets spiritual needs: 55%
- Church meets moral problems, needs: 38%

**Beliefs (yes/no)**

- God: 93%
- A personal God: 68%
- Sin: 83%
- A life after death: 71%
- Hell: 46%
- Heaven: 86%
- Reincarnation: 26%

Source: European Values Survey.

Reading: 98% of Irish respondents belonged to a religion in 1981, 90% in 1999.

*9 EEC countries that participated in all three surveys, 1981, 1990, and 1999 (mean weighted by population of each country): Ireland, Italy, Spain, Belgium, France, former West Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Denmark.

Note: From left to right: Catholic countries, mixed countries, Lutheran countries.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ireland*</th>
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**Belonging and practices**

**Belong to a religious denomination**

- Catholic
  - 98 86 89 80 63 82 82 71 89 90 70 56 56 47
- Protestant
  - 2 4 - - - - - - - 5 6 1 3 2 2

**At least once-a-month attendance**

- 83 43 33 40 32 38 34 13 35 29 17 11 6

**Religious serv. imp./birth 90/99**

- 91 85 74 83 67 82 59 64 77 75 60 56 58

**Religious serv. imp./marriage 90/99**

- 91 91 70 77 70 75 57 60 75 68 62 68 61 65

**Religious serv. imp./death 90/99**

- 96 95 76 82 71 81 58 67 79 80 66 72 69 74

**General religiosity, churches**

**Define self as a religious person**

- 54 63 71 79 39 73 45 39 45 66 61 53 38 34

**Prayer, meditation or contemplation**

- 71 76 62 68 48 58 59 45 50 53 45 52 33 34

**Get comfort and strength from religion**

- 65 50 46 53 49 62 37 27 39 48 34 37 24 24

**Confidence in Church**

- 64 29 42 54 43 67 28 23 38 27 44 35 37 36

**Church meets spiritual needs**

- 45 51 31 61 41 60 28 38 57 47 29 47 42 51

**Church meets moral problems, needs**

- 33 13 23 48 36 40 22 19 31 25 24 28 29 31

**Beliefs (yes/no)**

**God**

- 92 90 75 87 68 86 76 68 66 77 70 54 44 47

**A personal God**

- 62 48 51 63 47 63 40 27 23 27 28 21 17 16

**Sin**

- 80 77 46 65 51 53 40 28 53 53 39 41 29 32

**A life after death**

- 67 58 40 64 21 32 44 35 46 53 33 41 30 42

**Hell**

- 40 39 18 39 14 21 19 15 - - 10 23 11 21 8 17 11 14 25 25 6 10 6 8 16 23

**Heaven**

- 72 73 29 49 36 41 32 28 - - 24 36 18 32 22 29 32 34 48 39 8 19 17 23 30 35

**Reincarnation**

- 27 20 23 20 18 29 25 17 28 23 12 27 19 31 18 22 21 - - 17 12 14 20 14 22 20 22

Source: European Values Surveys.
Reading: 98% of young Irish respondents belonged to a religion in 1981, 86% en 1999.

* 9 EEC countries that participated in all three surveys, 1981, 1990, and 1999 (mean weighted by population under age 17 of each country).
From 1990 to 1999, only Spain, Ireland, France, and Great Britain continued to decline; the other countries experienced relative stability (Belgium) or rose (Italy, former West Germany, Austria, Switzerland). Portugal and Finland, countries new to the survey, were also on the rise from 1990 to 1999.

Among 18-29-year-olds, a pattern of decline may be observed for Spain (19 variables down), Ireland (14), and Great Britain (13); France was intermediate with a shift towards growth; the Netherlands and Switzerland neutrally balanced; all the other countries were on the rise: Italy (22 variables up), Belgium (13), Austria (10), former West Germany (19), Denmark (17), Sweden (14), and from 1990 to 1999, Portugal (18) and Finland (18). There are three cases of continued rise over the two periods 1981-1990 and 1990-1999 (Italy, Denmark, Sweden) and three cases of transition toward growth (Austria, Belgium, former West Germany). According to a 2003 survey, the rising trend concerns France as well (Lambert, 2003).

In general, then, some countries are characterized by a clear trend, either of religious decline (Ireland, Spain, Great Britain) or rise (Portugal, former West Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland) while others are in intermediate situations. If it is true that the Scandinavian countries prefigure development in Europe –this was the case for religion from 1981 to 1990 and has been the case in some other areas– there is reason to expect new cases of increase.

Why such strong variations from one country to another? (4) When asked, colleagues from other countries said they were still working to identify the reasons for the observed changes. The following interpretation may be put forward. In Ireland and Spain for the time being, the trend may be said to be due to a kind of delayed version of what happened in Quebec, i.e., late but accelerated modernization, which has shaken up what was an overprotected Catholic tradition. For Ireland, the impact of the moral scandal concerning the clergy may also be part of the explanation. This country, characterized by a high level of religiosity and a strong link between religion and national identity, presents a sharp decline as we move from seniors to young people, a decline that is surely also due to late and intense modernization.

(4) If we compare trends by country using first the 1990 and 1999 Values survey data, then the data from the 1991 and 1998 ISSP surveys (in the six countries where this is possible), we see the same dominant trend in four countries –Ireland, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Austria– but the opposite trend for Italy and former West Germany, where a receding of religiosity is observed. It should be noted that the samples of 18-29-year-olds are small and that only one question, on religious service attendance, was identical in the two survey programs, but the trends from one survey program to the other should be consistent. In fact, it seems the 1991 ISSP survey underrepresented belonging to a religion –and therefore level of religiosity that year– for Italy and Germany, thereby showing attenuated overall progression for 1991-1999. The 1999 Values Survey, meanwhile, overrepresented Italian belongers (compared with recent polls), thereby showing an exaggerated rise in religiosity.
Analysis in terms of age, generation, aging, and period

To better understand this development, it is useful to observe how religiosity has evolved by age and generation since the 1950s in countries for which we have data going back that far. For the nine countries already considered, cohort analysis (birth year group) is also highly instructive; i.e., following the evolution of the 1981 cohorts as they aged (1990, 1999) and observing the positioning of the new generations; i.e., the 18-26-year-olds of 1990, then those of 1999 (Graphs G1 and G3).

Analyzing the 1981 Values survey, Jean Stoetzel remarked: “In Europe today, the older the respondent, the higher the probability that they are religious in their opinions, beliefs, and behavior. This means, inversely, that the younger the respondent, the more likely they are to be irreligious. This last proposition must be nuanced, however: irreligiosity reaches a peak not among the youngest but at around thirty years of age.” (Stoetzel, 1983, pp. 231-232).

During the 1950s and 1960s (in countries for which data is available), most religious variables followed a J-curve from young to oldest adults: religiosity decreased until age 30, then started back up with age. This was explained by position in the life cycle. The initial fall was understood to reflect young adult’s becoming autonomous with regard to the relatively high level of religiosity in adolescence due to religious upbringing, nearly general at the time. The low point at around age 30 was attributed to adult’s preoccupation with work and family matters; the turn back up among adults over 40 corresponded to adult’s greater readiness and capacity to turn to other concerns now that the children had been raised, a capacity that further increased with retirement. Lastly, the perspective of death strengthened interest in religion: “Old age, as Cicero put it, brings us closer to death.” (Stoetzel, ibid., p. 94).
These graphs show how each cohort (birth year segmentation given on the abscissa) evolved from 1981 to 1999, corresponding to the vertical distance between point on dotted curve, 1981, and point on solid line, 1999. For example, the baby-boom generation, (1946-1954) was less likely in 1999 than in 1981 to belong to a religion (G1) whereas it was more religious by the other indicators (G2 and G3); and it came to value faithfulness and authority more (G4). The graphs illustrate the main types of shifts: 1) religiosity recedes with generational renewal (belonging, church attendance, confidence in the church) and/or with period (belonging); 2) religiosity increases with these two phenomena (attachment to a religious service); 3) effects of aging move in opposite directions on either side of the pivotal baby-boom generation indicated by the vertical line (belief in God and a life after death).
The French curves for 1981 clearly show the break associated with the baby-boom generation (1946-1954, to the left of the vertical line), a generation effect. In 1999, the intensity of that break appears significantly attenuated: members of this generation had the same levels of belonging, church attendance (G5), and confidence in the church (G7) as in 1981 but were more likely to believe in God and a life after death (G6), in direct contrast to earlier generations, who believed less in 1999 than in 1981. Belonging and church attendance declined with both generational renewal and the overall receding, a period effect. Attachment to a religious service in the event of death increased in the newest generations. The two most notable changes are the reversed direction of the curve for belief in a life after death (effect of aging reverses around the pivotal baby-boom generation, G6) and the revaluing of faithfulness and authority, especially in post-war generations (combined period and generation effects).
In 1981 two new facts could be observed: a clear break from religiosity with the baby-boom “protest” generation (1946-1954) and a generalized fall, except in the oldest group. In 1990, a break was again observed, and the general decrease was sharper (except, as mentioned, for church’s answers to spiritual needs and, among young people, belief in a life after death).

What do we observe for 1999? For the nine countries considered both in 1981 and 1999, the baby-boom generation (45-53 years of age in 1999) partially turned back toward religion as it aged, on almost all points except belonging to a religion and belief in sin. This is thus a return to the earlier aging effect. The same evolution is observed in the following cohort (1955-1963, 36-44 in 1999), who followed in the footsteps of their predecessors. Furthermore, whereas each new post-baby-boom generation has been from the outset positioned above the religiosity level of the preceding one, young people born after 1964 show a degree of stabilization (except for belonging and church attendance, still declining), and even an upturn (for attachment to religious service for the event of death and belief in a life after death). Generational renewal thus has not corresponded to decline. In pre-1946 generations, for whom decline in religiosity came later and was more moderate, from 1981 to 1999 decline dominated (excepted for the feeling that the church answers spiritual needs and belief in a personal God). The most spectacular change concerns belief in a life after death, which went up among post-1946 generations while crumbling in the others –suggesting that Cicero hadn’t gotten it right. This change seems particularly significant because belief in a life after death is generally one of the most meaningful beliefs, together with belief in God.

France is one of the countries where the upset of age and generation effects has been the most spectacular (Graphs G5 and G7) (Lambert, 2000a). The break with religiosity begun by the baby-boomers shows up clearly in the 1981 curves, especially for the curve representing belief in God, and from 1981 to 1999, the general fall in religious belonging continued. However, within the “break” generations (1946-1963) there has been a partial return toward belief in God and above all to belief in a life after death. Since aging no longer affected increase in belief in generations prior to the baby-boom, we are now in the remarkable situation of belief in a life after death being strong in direct proportion to how young the respondent is –precisely the opposite of what Stoetzel observed. This same reversal may be observed in Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden.

Clearly this is a major change from the 1970s and 1980s, when young people were becoming less and less religious, a fall that was gradually affecting the upper age groups, counterbalancing the increase in religiosity associated with aging. The shift began in the 1980s with belief in a life after death, then extended to other areas. In 1999, while the differences between young and old were maintained for religious belonging and church attendance, they were reduced for all other criteria. With the exception of afterlife belief in some countries, however, the level of religiosity among young people is still below that of their elders (Graphs G2 and G6).
Three trends operative in Western Europe: exit from religion, Christian renewal, believing without belonging

At a deeper level of analysis, three main trends or tendencies may be identified: a continuation of the move away from religion; a renewal within Christianity; and an increase in believing without belonging. The observed upward movements in religiosity are either located within Christianity or related to the third of these trends. The three tendencies are manifest in all countries, but in differing proportions, and we are not yet in a position to explain the causes of inter-country differences. The analysis that follows moves outside the limits of the nine former EEC countries surveyed in 1981, 1990, and 1999.

Continued exit from religion

At the level of the population as a whole, belonging to a religion continued to decrease in all countries except Portugal (1990-1999), though at a slower rate after 1990 (Table I). Among young people in all nine countries of the former EEC, belonging was lower in 1999 than in 1981 (Table II). But from 1990 to 1999, it remained stable in Italy, Belgium, France, and Denmark, while rising in former West Germany (perhaps also in Great Britain, where measurement is problematic). It also rose in Sweden and Portugal. The lowest levels of belonging are found in Belgium (56%), France (47%), and the Netherlands (30%). This applies also specifically to Christianity, which is actually a few percentage points lower than belonging in general due to the fact that the other religions are not much represented in the samples. Christian belonging fell below the 50% mark in the Netherlands (41%) and among young people in the Netherlands (26%), France (43%), and Belgium (44%). What is new here is that the majority of persons stating no religion have never belonged to one: a new continent has developed, of persons with no religion “of origin”.

Development of religiosity without religious belonging

First underlined by Grace Davie, who called it “believing without belonging”, this phenomenon is now manifest in all countries, and is strongest among young people (Table III). It exceeds the field of belief, which is why I have spoken of “off-piste” religiosity (Lambert, 2000a). It comes through most strongly in the least strictly “Christian” variables: “take some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation or something like that”; belief in

(5) Colleagues consulted in Italy, Portugal, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark say they do not have a satisfactory explanation because they do not know which of the many possible causes for either decline or return of religiosity go the furthest to explaining the phenomena.
“a life after death”, a belief which can encompass quite diverse ideas, such as reincarnation; belief in God as “some sort of spirit or life force”; being moved to “explore different traditional religious teachings” rather than “stick to a particular faith” (variable introduced in 1999 in some countries). Componential analysis confirms that these variables define an axis somewhat distinct from the one for Christian religiosity. Moreover, in interviews, non-belonging believers preferred to speak of “spirituality” rather than “religion”, expressing mistrust of the latter.

| TABLE III. – Religious evolution of young people (18-29-year-olds) in 9 former EEC countries* from 1981 to 1999 (European Values Surveys) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                | Catholic | Protestant | No religion |
| Religious attitudes            |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| At least once-a-month attendance | 39    | 30        | 16    | 14        | 2     | 2         |
| Religious service important /birth | 77    | 80        | 59    | 58        | 30    | 31        |
| Religious service important /marriage | 77    | 80        | 71    | 71        | 39    | 39        |
| Religious service important /death | 82    | 86        | 78    | 79        | 47    | 45        |
| Membership in a religious group, org. | 10    | 10        | 13    | 10        | 1     | 2         |
| Volunteer work in a rel. group, org. | 4.4   | 4.2       | 4.5   | 4.1       | 0.6   | 0.8       |
| Define self as a religious person | 64    | 66        | 40    | 34        | 15    | 17        |
| Get comfort and strength from religion | 45    | 46        | 25    | 28        | 6     | 10        |
| Confidence in Church (a great deal + quite a lot) | 47    | 49        | 32    | 38        | 8     | 11        |
| Church gives adequate answers to… |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| - people’s spiritual needs | 41    | 61        | 33    | 45        | 17    | 30        |
| - moral problems and needs | 29    | 39        | 18    | 29        | 9     | 18        |
| - problems of family life | 27    | 30        | 20    | 25        | 6     | 11        |
| - social problems (90/99) | 27    | 24        | 26    | 18        | 14    | 9         |
| Belief in God |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| … in a personal God | 80    | 82        | 58    | 56        | 20    | 27        |
| … in a spirit or life force | 30    | 45        | 23    | 27        | 6     | 11        |
| … in sin | 39    | 33        | 34    | 27        | 29    | 31        |
| … in a life after death | 53    | 56        | 49    | 42        | 16    | 18        |
| … in reincarnation | 46    | 55        | 36    | 41        | 19    | 27        |
| Ethics |        |           |        |           |        |           |
| Faithfulness in marriage is important | 77    | 85        | 78    | 87        | 58    | 74        |
| Marriage is not outdated | 70    | 70        | 74    | 65        | 47    | 50        |
| Greater respect for authority is good | 53    | 43        | 43    | 44        | 30    | 44        |
| Abortion can never be justified (1/scale 1-10) | 29    | 20        | 19    | 15        | 9     | 9         |
| Homosexuality can never be justified | 40    | 11        | 26    | 12        | 18    | 9         |
| Cheating on taxes can never be justified | 71    | 74        | 71    | 75        | 51    | 69        |
| Taking marijuana or hashish can never be justified | 69    | 49        | 66    | 46        | 47    | 40        |

Reading: 64% of young Catholics defined themselves as « a religious person » in 1981, 68% in 1999.
* Ireland, Italy, Spain, Belgium, France, former West Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Denmark.

For the nine countries already considered, among young people with no religion the level of self-definition as “a religious person” went from 15% in 1981 to 17% in 1999; belief in God from 20% to 27%; and belief in an after-life from 19% to 27%. God for this category of respondents is clearly more
“some sort of spirit or life force” than “a personal God”, and among ideas of the divine in the ISSP survey, the term “superior power” came out ahead of all others. Interestingly, the image of the church has actually become stronger among these believers (Table III). This autonomous kind of spirituality is spreading, especially in highly secularized countries such as France, Belgium, Great Britain, and above all in the Netherlands, where 54% of respondents stating no religion “take some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation, or something like that”. Surveys of young Dutch stating no religion show great diversity in images of God (Christian, first origin, an energy, a cosmic consciousness, particle of the divine in every person, etc.) and prayer practices (recourse to God in moments of difficulty, even without a precise addressee; a sort of self-therapy through relaxation-meditation) (Janssen and Prins, 2000). It might be thought that this is a kind of substitute religiosity among those who have abandoned religion, but it is almost as likely to characterize persons who have never belonged to a religion. And this phenomenon seems more significant than “sects” or NRM, which affect less than 1% of young people, though the ISSP Values surveys only give a slight idea of this because the questions do not effectively tap it. To do so, it would be necessary to mention earlier notions of the divine, for example, and positive or negative vibrations, near-death experiences, etc. “Mystic-esoteric”, “psycho-mystical”, post-New Age clusters are undoubtedly at the core of these beliefs (Champion and Rocchi, 2001). Lastly, non-belonging believers more readily adhere both to “parallel” beliefs (astrology, telepathy, clairvoyance, good luck charms) and beliefs shared by many Christians, especially those who practice the least often.

**Christian renewal**

This renewal is selective in that it excludes aspects of constraint (church attendance, being a member of a church group or militant) and guilt (belief in sin), as well as answers brought by the church to moral and social problems. It is manifest in Italy, Portugal, and Denmark; moderate in Austria, former West Germany, and Sweden; mitigated in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands; absent in Ireland, Spain, and Great Britain. Overall the same is true for young Christians (Table III). Specifically, the phenomenon is particularly strong among young people in Italy, Portugal, Denmark, and Sweden, and for belief in a life after death, and it includes answers from the church to moral problems and needs. On the other hand, it no longer affects church attendance, which is decreasing everywhere except in Italy, or militancy level (stable) –as if there were mistrust of any enduring commitment. Moreover, it more strongly affects young Catholics than young Protestants (except in former West Germany). The difference in religiosity level between these two groups, already significant, is tending to increase. The immense Catholic gatherings of World Youth Day illustrate both Christian renewal among the young, which shows up here for the first time in opinion polls, and the strong religious mobilization of Catholics compared to Protestants.
The renewal affects all categories of practicing Christians. However, there are strong differences from regular churchgoers, whose rates exceed 50% on all variables (except for once-a-month churchgoing and church’s answers to moral, family, and social questions) to, at the other extreme, non-practicing Christians, who are below the 50% mark on all variables (except for attachment to religious services and belief in God) and whose Christianity may be characterized as “à la carte”. There is a sign of change, however: “à la carte” religion is diminishing among young people, though it remains largely predominant. If we posit that the minimal core of Christianity corresponds to the four conditions of 1) going to church at least once a year (apart from christenings, weddings, and funerals), 2) believing in God, 3) believing in sin, and 4) believing in a life after death, we can say that in the nine countries considered here for the 1981-1999 comparison, this core was shared by only 31% of Christians in 1999 and 32% in 1981, i.e., near stability, whereas among young Christians it was shared by 28% in 1999 as opposed to 24% in 1981: a slight rise. The above-mentioned core of conditions is more likely to be met by Catholics than Protestants due to more frequent churchgoing. Consistent with this evolution, there is also a slight decline among young Christians in probabilistic belief (doubt, scepticism) and non-belief. Probabilism corresponds to responses such as “Yes, probably” or “No, probably not” in answer to questions on belief. It can be measured in the Values survey with regard to belief in God and in the ISSP studies for all beliefs.

These three tendencies are attested for both sexes and all education levels and social class categories, though there are nuances. The decline of religiosity is slightly sharper among highly educated women (due to a desire for emancipation?) and among manual workers and the unemployed, while Christian renewal is slightly stronger among highly educated men, senior managers and the liberal professions. Whereas this last group used to be characterized by both a high level of regular churchgoers (as is the case for farmers) and the highest level of “no religion” (particularly atheists), it is now groups with relatively low educational levels who are most likely to state “no religion”, especially the unemployed, followed by male manual workers. Social marginalization has thus become a factor in de-Christianization, just as proletarianization once was. Social success, meanwhile, would seem to be producing the opposite effect.

**Sharper rise in religiosity in Eastern Europe and Russia**

In Eastern Europe and Russia at this time (Tables IV and V), Catholic countries (Poland, Croatia, Slovakia, Lithuania, and to a lesser degree Slovenia) show a fairly high level of religiosity; mixed countries a moderate level (Latvia, Hungary) or a low one (Czech Republic); Lutheran countries (Estonia, former East Germany) a low level; and Orthodox countries contrasting levels: high in Romania, fairly high in Ukraine and Belarus (surveyed for the first time in 1999), modest in Bulgaria, and particularly low
in Russia. Do we observe the return of religiosity expected after the fall of communism? In fact, the same three trends observed in Western Europe may also be observed in former communist Europe, which suggests that these countries have been undergoing at least the same main influences as Western Europe. The recent upturn is even sharper in Eastern Europe for both Christian renewal and believing without belonging. The upward movement is clear for all ages in the Orthodox countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Russia), where belonging too is increasing, whereas in former East Germany, Slovenia, and Hungary trend varies significantly by variable. Remarkably, despite the nearly 70 years that Russians lived under communism and the other countries’ 45-year-long communist experience, the proportion of “convinced atheists” was extremely low in 1999, except in former East Germany (20%), where de-Christianization has long been underway: 8% of “convinced atheists” in Russia and the Czech Republic, 6% in Estonia and Bulgaria, still lower levels elsewhere. As in the west, the religious upturn is stronger among young people, touching even Latvia, Hungary, and the extremely secularized Czech Republic (Lužňy and Navrátilová, 2001). Former East Germany is the only exception, while Poland and Estonia have remained stable. Lastly, belief in a life after death is advancing everywhere, except once again in former East Germany, where it remains stable.

Papers delivered at the most recent Conference of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (Turin, July 2003) enable us to refine the analysis. Siniša Zrincšak (2003) identifies three main situations:

– Countries where anti-religious repression had great impact, such as Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria, and Russia (also Ukraine, but not discussed). With the exception of Estonia, these countries are experiencing an upturn in religiosity marked by the following specific traits: respondents say they go to church (on average) more today than at age 12, and are more likely to define themselves as “a religious person” than to belong to a religion whereas usually the opposite is observed. In other words, once the atheist pressure let up, there was a readjustment that has not necessarily benefited the church, especially if the church had ties to the dominant classes when communism arrived and submitted to the normalization that began to prevail in the 1960s.

– In diametric contrast, the situation of countries that firmly resisted the pressure from atheism, such as Lithuania, Poland, Croatia, and Romania – i.e., Catholic countries plus Orthodox Romania.

All are characterized by closely associated religious and national identities. Moreover, there was no break in religious socialization, and adults now go to church less frequently than at age 12. Religiosity has remained strong in proportion to church’s becoming the main framework for resistance against communism, though this is slightly less true of Romania.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Ex-East Germany</th>
<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Russia</th>
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<td>5.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get comfort and strength from religion</td>
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| **Occasionally surprising** variations from 1990 to 1999 can be explained by the lesser reliability of the 1990 survey, particularly in Romania, Russia and Bulgaria, but the tendency is identical according to 1991 and 1998 ISSP surveys.**
TABLE V. – Religious evolution of young people (18-29-year-olds) in East European countries from 1981 (or 1990) to 1999 (European Values Surveys)

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Latvia*</th>
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<th>Ex-Czechoslovakia</th>
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<td>90</td>
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Reading: 98% of young Polish respondents belonged to a religious denomination in 1990, 94% en 1999.  
Note: Countries are arranged from left to right by religion: Catholic (Poland, Lithuania, Slovenia), mixed (Latvia, Hungary, former Czechoslovakia, Estonia, East Germany), Orthodox (Romania, Russia, Bulgaria), and by decreasing order of religiosity.  
* Occasionally surprising variations from 1990 to 1999 may be explained by the lesser reliability of the 1990 survey, particularly in Romania, Russia and Bulgaria, but the tendency is identical according to 1991 and 1998 ESSP surveys.
Intermediate cases, such as Czechoslovakia (especially what has become the Czech Republic), Hungary, and Slovenia. These countries were generally more industrialized than the others at the time of the communist take-over, and therefore more westernized, secularized. Anti-religious state action strengthened secularization, at least until the late 1970s, but the people also came to find the communist grip unbearable (1956 revolt in Hungary, Prague Spring of 1968); communism’s economic failure was felt earlier, and an upturn in religiosity became manifest as early as the 1980s. To this may be added the case of former East Germany, except that, as mentioned, it had long been undergoing de-Christianization and the decline in religiosity there also characterizes young people.

This analysis points up the influence of three main factors: denomination, initial degree of modernization, and the role of religion in national identity. Some analysts also underline the influence of church’s role in relation to the different social classes. Before communism, in countries that had modernized early, a pro-socialist proletariat had developed and run up against a conservative church. In Poland, on the other hand, industrial managers were for the most part Protestant Germans whereas the workers, Catholic, received support from the clergy. With a working class strongly identified with Catholicism and not yet modernized, Poland combined numerous factors conducive to maintaining a high level of religiosity. Former East Germany, on the other hand, combined many factors conducive to religious decline: primarily Lutheran, no identification between nation and religion, early modernization and industrialization, and a church that had compromised itself with the former dominant class. In Russia, the Orthodox church was subject to backlash due to its close ties with the oppressive Tsarist regime, and the situation was similar in the other Orthodox countries. Using multivariate analysis to test the respective influences of denomination and modernization (GNP per inhabitant) on religiosity level for population at large by country, Gert Pickel (2003) showed that denomination is the strongest determining factor, Catholicism being associated with a sharply higher religiosity level. But given the strong rise in the Orthodox context, we cannot be sure the results would be similar for young people alone.

Lastly, the various authors cited point out that communism was able at first to modernize quickly, especially in the least industrialized countries, where it brought education, utilities (water, electricity, transportation), basic comforts, urbanization. From 1950 to 1970, Eastern European economic growth was two and half times stronger than Western (Zrincšák, 2003). Moreover, communism was gaining ground the world over. In countries with ongoing reliable survey data (Croatia, Slovenia, Poland, Hungary), religiosity was lowest around 1970, and particularly low among the young, the highly educated, industrial workers, and city-dwellers. Significantly, in the first group of countries, the generation that reached adulthood in that context showed the lowest rates of retrospective age-12 church attendance; it was also the first generation raised without religious socialization—more or less the first post-war generation. But in the 1970s and 1980s, when the heavy
industrialization and basic modernization phase was over, communism gradually “ran out of steam” and was vastly overtaken by the west, concomitantly losing its ideological and political credibility. The fact is that in these four countries, all of which kept statistical series, religiosity began rising slightly among young people as early as the late 1970s (Zrincšák, 2003). Ultimately, the “return of religiosity” expected after the collapse of communism has proven slighter than predicted, perhaps due to the mistrust provoked by church claims to former property or church attempts to influence people’s thinking and consciences –indeed, this has led churches to keep a lower profile (Lužny and Navràtilová, 2001). Now, however, a decided increase in religiosity may be seen, particularly among the young. The causes are likely to be linked to disillusion with post-communism and the same motivations for the similar change in the west.

Trend reversal in other areas

If we consider the past thirty or forty years, it can be said that Europe is at a turning point for religiosity: the pattern of decline has now been counterbalanced by a degree of Christian renewal and the development of autonomous spirituality, especially in the new generation. These new tendencies have become manifest mainly since the 1990s and are more accentuated in post-communist countries. Before an attempt to explain them, they must be resituated in the framework of the general evolution of values, since there have also been upsets in trends in other areas (Galland, 2000; Schweisguth, 2002) and all these changes may well be interconnected.

Until very recently, Étienne Schweisguth points out, “comparable to the slow but inexorable shifting of a tectonic plate, traditional values were receding with generational renewal. The new generations, with their new ways of seeing life and the world, gradually replaced the old ones, whose vision was still marked by religious dogmas and respect for instituted authorities”; religious attitudes themselves were likewise marked (2002, p. 162). From 1990 to 1999, however, there was an increase in proportions of respondents deeming “greater respect for authority” desirable (G4), trusting the police and the army, thinking it necessary to “maintain order in the nation” (as opposed to “protect freedom of speech”), deeming faithfulness and having children important for a successful marriage (G4), and, in response to a public ethics question, disapproving of bribery and cheating on taxes. In the case of faithfulness, the trend reversal appeared first in 1990 among post-war generations, particularly the newest (18-26), and it was among these post-war generations that the phenomenon was strongest in 1999. Revaluing is sharpest in France and Denmark, where faithfulness was the most strongly disqualified in 1981 (see Graph G8 for France), to the point where generational renewal is now having the opposite effect from before. With regard to respect for authority and order, this change has only been observable since 1990 and is advancing less with each new generation (Graphs G4 and G8). Étienne
Schweisguth (2000, p. 209) also notes that in France the opinion that schooling should first and foremost “transmit discipline and a sense of the value of effort” rather than “awaken the mind and teach critical thinking” has been gaining ground since 1997 (surveys by the Centre d’Études de la Vie Politique Française [CEVIPOF]).

What accounts for this reversal? There is no definitive explanation. It might be thought of as a “return swing of the pendulum” after the previous “break from” period of protest and permissiveness, as Étienne Schweisguth and I have suggested, and as is suggested by the observation that for each value area, reversal is stronger in countries that went the furthest in the opposition direction. “It is perhaps relevant here to think of awareness of the effects of increased divorce on children, of fear of AIDS, and of rising aspirations to authenticity,” suggests Étienne Schweisguth (2002, p. 165), later evoking the increase in various types of violence, incivility, and delinquency.

Still, as is often the case, the metaphor is misleading. The change is not affecting all these areas, and it is not a mere return to “traditional” values but a redefining of them. Liberalism in matters of lifestyle continues to progress, as is shown by the decrease in unfavorable opinions of homosexuality, abortion, divorce, euthanasia, and suicide, although the attitude toward soft drugs seems indecisive. Why these differences? Galland and Schweisguth make a useful distinction here between liberalization in attitudes toward private-life matters and permissiveness: “The progress of [the former], understood as leaving each person free to choose how he or she wants to lead his or her life, should not be confused with permissiveness, understood as a general weakening of all social norms” (Galland, 2000, p. 208). What the surveys show is a desire for both more freedom in private-life matters and more rules in collective life; “in sum”, writes Galland, “relational norms in private life, institutional ones in public life” (ibid, p. 213). “The return to favor of faithfulness in the couple may be understood in terms of the idea that mutual trust is what holds relationships together now that their solidity is no longer ensured by intangible principles. The fall in permissiveness among the younger generations … [is not] a mere ‘return’ to traditional values temporarily repudiated by generations who were more inclined to protest. Instead it expresses a new way of regulating social relations, based first and foremost on preserving and maintaining the closest relationships” (ibid, p. 214).

We do not find the same phenomenon of trend reversal in the area of social protest and politics (Bréchon, 2002b). In contrast to the preceding ones, the attitude of protest did not reach the population at large and fell off even before 1981. This may explain the fact that there are no reversal phenomena between 1981-1990 and 1999. We should, however, mention that non-voting has been gaining ground since 1981 in the population at large and even more among young people, and that politicization decreased among young people from 1990 to 1999. Pierre Bréchon understands this as a switch from voting as a duty to voting by desire (i.e., a person turns out if he or she deems the issue on the ballot worth turning out for) – and the same is true of church attendance. Meanwhile, the propensity for protest action (petitions, boycotts,
strikes, sit-down strikes) has increased, particularly among young people, a phenomenon that Pierre Bréchon interprets as a preference for direct targeted action, outside classic politics. There was no observable change in left-right political positioning from 1981 to 1999 for the nine countries studied, and while trends vary by country, this is essentially in keeping with the principle of alternation of power, rather than to be interpreted in terms of tendencies linked to the preceding phenomena, except for strength of the far right within the right.

What relation is there between these changes and the observed changes in religiosity? Both Olivier Galland and Étienne Schweisguth suggest a relation between the ebb of permissiveness and the upturn in religiosity, but without analyzing possible links between them. In the case of France, where permissiveness began to recede in the 1980s, the remarkable fact is that this process began among persons stating no religion and attained regular churchgoers, though they followed late and at a distance. At the level of Europe as a whole, the story is approximately the same: it is for people with no religion that the shift has been the sharpest (Table III), though this varies by country. Consequently, and contrary to what might have been expected before study, the receding of permissiveness is not due to the increase in religiosity but is instead an autonomous development. Nonetheless, the attitude difference between persons stating no religion and practicing believers is considerably reduced by this point; the receding of permissiveness may facilitate the upturn in religiosity, and the upturn is likely to facilitate the receding of permissiveness. These changes may reflect the overall attempt to find norms, touchstones, identities, which may even lead to a certain revaluing of institutions, as is the case particularly among young people with regard to the police, the army, and religious institutions (answers brought to moral, family, and spiritual needs). This in turn goes against the current understanding that institutions are in decline.

The various changes may be linked another way if we posit that the upturn in religiosity is itself not a mere return to the past and therefore not a “return of the religious”. In fact, religious behaviors have profoundly changed (Babès, 1996). In Catholicism, Vatican II (1962-1965) contributed to this effect. The European surveys tell us nothing of this, but it suffices to recall that the aspects of constraint, sense of sinful guilt, and fear of hell have yielded to freedom, earthly accomplishments, and a less alarming or awe-inspiring afterlife, to the extent that belief in such a life has been maintained or is on the rise. Sin has been redefined as what hinders full development of love and relation to self, others, and God. “À la carte” religion, probabilistic belief, and pragmatism dominate. Among young Catholics, “the individual conscience has replaced external authority in matters of social and personal ethics”, observes John Fulton on the basis of a European biographical survey (2000, p. 169). In the United States, the baby-boomers have been the artisans of a “remaking of religion” (Roof, 1999). For their part, the various churches have integrated the demand for personal autonomy, even when maintaining their norms, as in the case of the Catholic hierarchy. Here again, the
individualization process is continuing in a way that allows individualization to fit together with collective, institutional forms that will in turn preserve it, as is illustrated by young Christians’ predilection for situations of unconstrained participation and vast gatherings in which they can cultivate their own forms of sociability (World Youth Days) (Hervieu-Léger, 1999). In other words, for the church as for the family, the return to the institution is not a mere return, because it involves neither the same relation to the institution nor the same institution. In this respect, we have perhaps underestimated the possibilities for redefining how individualization and institutionalization work together.

Towards an overall explanation for the changes underway

We have no stronger explanation for the increase in religiosity than for the receding of permissiveness. After being the first to bring to light the religious upturn, I consulted colleagues of other countries working on the “religion” section of the European surveys, who all expressed the same surprise. Some in Western Europe suggest a possible “return swing of the pendulum”, while specialists of the post-communist countries hypothesize a reaction to the anomic and lack of touchstone values and prospects that afflict many of these countries. Earlier I proposed an analytic model based on the observation that in the matter of religiosity, modernity may bring about four effects: decline, renewal (adaptation), conservative reaction and innovation, as a function of socio-economic contexts, countries, classes, and individuals, with the understanding of course that secular symbolic systems (ideologies, human rights and others) have increased in importance and that religion is no longer the symbolic foundation of society but has become an optional area in accordance with the relative autonomization of the main spheres of activity (political, economic, artistic, etc.) (Lambert, 2000b). I sought to apply this model to the change under way to examine what, exactly, in the way that modernity was developing could explain the changes in effects of decline, renewal, traditionalist reaction, and innovation. What follows is a summary of my findings.

Modernity can be characterized in many ways, but the following constitutive factors (at least) come to the fore: the primacy of reason, scientific and technological development, the craving for freedom, the masses’ entrance onto the stage of history (nationalism, democracy, socialism, etc.), economic development, functional differentiation, and globalization. If, consistent with the purposes of this article, we keep strictly to the empirical data, what can be said of the effect of each of these factors?

– We begin with the craving for freedom; in other words, the process of individualization, which is, moreover, understood to be the major axis on which values have evolved according to the European survey. Theoretically, individual freedom of choice can work to the benefit of each of the four effects. We have seen that in the framework of emancipation from traditional values and norms, it operated more in favor of religious decline, whereas it
seems now more neutral among young people and even to be heading in the
direction of increased interest in such values and norms, especially among
young people. The first chrononological effect of mass secondary education
followed by mass university education, a key factor in individualization, was
corrosive, to judge from the negative correlation between education and reli-
giosity levels observed until 1990 (age controlled for), probably because of
the development during this time of the spirit of autonomy and critique.
Within Catholicism, access to secondary and higher education precipitated the
decline in sacerdotal vocations and youth movements. But in also perhaps
favoring adoption of a more personal faith, if not one autonomous from insti-
tuted religion, this tendency may now be understood to be working to balance
the preceding one among the young, since in 1999 the negative correlation
between levels of education and religiosity was either cancelled or became
positive.

– Socio-politically, the overall context is not at all as unfavorable to reli-
gion now as it was thirty years ago. During the late 1960s and early 1970s,
young people were leftist, and the overall context was characterized by the
expansion of revolution (in the former colonies, China, Latin America).
Moreover, the left/right split corresponded to two vastly different models of
society, even in the context of social-democracy, where it extended to reli-
gious institutions, which were hostile to socialism and even more so to
communism. When leftism ran out of steam, the great disillusion period
began (revelation in 1994 of the breadth and depth of the Gulag system, etc.),
followed ultimately by the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union
(1989). Christianity contributed to the fall of communism; in Poland it even
did so through the action of the working class (Solidarność). Moreover, since
leftist political parties gave up the idea of eliminating capitalism, left and
right came to represent two different versions of the same social model, while
churches came around to accepting voting for socialist parties –a preference
that now characterizes a minority of churchgoers. With this change, the
left/right split ceased to be the main source of the split in religious attitudes.
That source is now age, under the effects of the previously described break.
The resulting situation is either neutral or favorable to Christianity, now liber-
ated from its main rival and enemy, communism; also disencumbered of the
Spanish and Portuguese dictatorships, which hurt the image of the Catholic
Church; and in general tending to disengage from the political scene.

– We know that the primacy granted to reason has historically provoked
religious decline (the end of the “revelation” monopoly) as well as renewal
(religious rationalization), the latter in accordance with the idea that because
God endowed humans with reason, reason cannot stand in contradiction to
enlightened faith, a renewal capable of having strong social effects (Weber,
The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism). Having no adequate survey
questionnaire, we can say nothing of the present context in this regard, except
to recall that the primacy of reason has been challenged by critiques origi-
nating in philosophy and psychoanalysis as well as by a tendency to re-grant
rights to feelings.
What can be said of the effects of economic growth? As explained, in the 1960s, industrialization and urbanization appeared the main factors of religious decline, with religious service attendance low in proportion to the advancement of these processes (Acquaviva, 1967). The main reason, however, was socio-political (see above): proletarianization was the primary cause of this decline, after the break from parish communities of origin. What is the situation today? When I analyzed the effect of town size on level of religiosity using 1990 survey data and controlling for age and occupation (rural residents are older, farmers more religious), I found only three instances of influence worth noting—the metropolises of Paris, Amsterdam, and London—probably because the political-religious split was already being left behind. Sociologists have studied correlations between GNP per inhabitant and religiosity level by country for 1990 and 1999, also taking into account such features as education level (Dobbelaere and Jagodzinski, 1995; Billet et al., 2003). The correlation between GNP/head and church attendance is negative but low, and it decreases further if denomination is controlled for, since Protestant (especially Lutheran) countries are both the most developed and the least religious. In fact, while the least modernized countries are all Catholic and figure among the most religious, some of the most modernized countries show a fairly high level of religiosity (Austria, Luxembourg, Switzerland, not to mention the United States). The same study of Europe and Russia, conducted using the United Nations Human Development Indicator, produced the same conclusion, except that with all else kept equal, a communist past is associated with weaker religiosity (Pickel, 2003). But these analyses are not of young people, whose religiosity, as we have seen, is rising in such countries as Denmark, Sweden, former West Germany, Belgium, Austria, and most post-communist countries, a fact which could well modify the result for them.

However this may be, we can conclude that economic and human development in the last decades has tended to weaken religious feeling. The explanation generally given for this development is that it is consistent with a rationalization process assumed to be contrary to religious feeling (in the aforementioned studies, GNP/head is taken as an indicator of this process), a process whose nature is to focus attention on earthly preoccupations, to the detriment of concern for salvation in another world. If this were the case, however, the link between economic progress and religious decline would be much stronger. Why is this not the case? Perhaps because the very fact of functional differentiation invoked by these authors has meant that the supposed economic rationalization has no firm grip on religiosity: economic development is not massive or new as it was up till the 1970s, and Christianity has been reinterpreted in a direction consistent with the value placed on fulfilling personal development in this world. This phenomenon already struck Alexis de Tocqueville almost two centuries ago ([1835] 1899 for English version): “Not only do the Americans follow their religion from interest, but they often place in this world the interest that makes them follow it. In the Middle Ages the clergy spoke of nothing but a future state; they hardly cared to prove that a sincere Christian may be a happy man here below. But the Ameri-
can preachers are constantly referring to the earth […] and it is often difficult to ascertain from their discourses whether the principal object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the other world or prosperity in this.”

– As we know, the development of science engendered both disbelief (the Galileo and Darwin affairs, and scientism, among others), renewal (demythologizing of the Bible, refinement of faith), a fundamentalist reaction (Darwinism provoked religious “fundamentalism” in the United States, where creationism has certainly not laid down its arms), and innovation (parascience, Scientology, etc.). Once again, we lack data, except for the idea of the Bible, and for France. According to 1991 and 1998 ISSP surveys, the fundamentalist understanding of the Bible (agreement with the statement “The Bible is the very word of God; it should be taken literally”) has very few subscribers in the countries surveyed and was declining in 1998 (approximately 10% affirmative responses), except in Russia (Lambert, 2000c). In France, the 1994 CSA-Le Monde-La Vie survey (Michelat, Potel, and Sutter, 2003), redone in 2003 (Lambert), presented respondents with the following statement: “The more progress is made in scientific knowledge, the harder it is to believe in God.” In 1994, 49% of respondents agreed (“strongly agree” or “agree”) as opposed to 47% disagreement—a clear sign of a persistent problem. And in the 2003 survey, the rate of agreement receded from 49% to 47%—and from 63% to 49% among 18 to 24-year-olds, a fact which goes some way to explaining the upturn of religiosity among the young. We do not know the situation for other countries.

– The impact of functional differentiation (relative autonomizing of each activity sphere) on religiosity level is in itself extremely difficult to assess because even in countries that have maintained a state religion, such as Lutheran countries and Greece, or an “established” one, such as England and Scotland, the role of this religion is in reality limited to its specific domain and is therefore very nearly the same as in the other countries. What’s more, those countries have the lowest religiosity levels in Europe: the comfort of a privileged situation for the religion and its links with the ruling classes have had “counter-productive” effects. The Greek exception here is due to the fact that Orthodox identity symbolized the national cause against the Ottomans (homology with the case of Poland). In fact, for the status of religions and Christian denominations in Europe, the tendency in the last twenty years has been a reduction of the extremes: the most secularized countries, such as France, are tending to grant more recognition to religion (denominational schooling under state contract, school curricula content, ethics committees, etc.), while at the other extreme, official religions, in countries that have one, are less marked denominationally (in Sweden, newborns are no longer automatically registered as Lutheran, which was the case before if parents made no declaration to the contrary). These changes only follow, and indeed reflect, the evolution of “mentalities”.

But has religion’s autonomization from social life in the broadest sense of the term actually entered into both mentalities and practices? Is the upturn in religiosity going together with a desecularization trend? The 1991 and 1998
ISSP surveys, with their battery of items on the role religious authorities and norms are either expected to play or not (prayer in public schools, prohibition of books and films that attack religion, influence on political authorities or parliaments, divine laws as the foundation for ideas of good and evil, opposition to non-believers holding public office) allow us to provide answers to these questions (Lambert, 2000c). My analysis of the 1991 data showed a clear pattern of refusal to accept religion’s “grip”, rejection of a fundamentalist conception of Christianity, except in Poland and Ireland. It was hardly surprising to observe that in the countries surveyed, Europeans opposed to any influence of religion on social life were less religious than those in favor of such influence. More remarkable is that practicing Christians were themselves reluctant to accept it, especially any influence on political life, with the exception once again of Ireland and Poland. The 1998 data in fact show the beginning of an upturn in favorable attitudes toward religious influence, extremely moderate in Western Europe, stronger in post-communist countries, especially Orthodox ones, whereas the Irish and Polish are now calling for the opposite, surely in keeping with their desire to attain individual autonomy.

– Lastly, globalization –enlarging the horizon to encompass the entire planet– is likely in itself to induce relativizing of religions, awaken interest in other traditions, provoke reactions for protecting certitudes, and elicit both moves to syncretize and invention (NRM). According to the 1981 European Value Survey, 25% (17% of 18-29-year-olds) thought that there was only one true religion; 53% (56% of 18-29) said that there were interesting insights in all the great religions; and 14% (19% of 18-29) said that no religion had any truth to offer. Mentalities have evolved fairly quickly in this case, since in France the proportion of persons agreeing that there is only one true religion fell from nearly 50% in 1952 (IFOP-Réalités) to 15% in 1981 and 6% in 1998. The dominant attitude is clearly one of positive relativism, as confirmed by the 1998 survey. However, two other questions in the 1998 ISSP survey nuance this observation significantly. The statements “Looking around the world, religions bring more conflict than peace” and “People with very strong beliefs are often too intolerant of others” both received majority agreement, and the proportions were even higher among young people. The specter of religious wars and conflicts hovers here, revived by the rise of fundamentalism, particularly in Islam. In Great Britain, the beginning of a move to reassert Christian identity in response to Islam may be observed (Voas and Bruce, 2004), a phenomenon which could extend to other European countries with strong Muslim minorities. We are not yet in a position to identify the dominant effect of globalization on religiosity.

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It is said that we have passed from triumphant modernity to disenchanted, relativized modernity, unsure of itself, devoid of collective hope (collapse of the “great narratives”), threatened by economic insecurity, ecological dangers, and the spread of nuclear weapons; modernity that, under these conditions, is
making a return —selectively— to traditions and the contributions of great civilizations (other approaches to medicine, other forms of wisdom and religion, etc.). Though this overview is schematic, there is some truth to it. Should the increase in belief in a life after death be seen in relation to this relatively gloomy situation, a situation to which young people are particularly sensitive, at least when it comes to socio-economic integration? Perhaps, but there is no proof that they are related, once again because there is no relevant data. The explanation is more likely to be exacerbation of the individualization process, the extreme valuing of self-realization being in itself an attitude that makes death more difficult to accept. It is worth noting that belief in reincarnation allows one to get back into the game of life —in better shape the next time around, the hope is— and that “near-death” experiences diffuse an image of death haloed round with luminous felicity —enough to make one want to believe— while instituted religions too have sweetened the last end. Can the influence of videos and videogames also be invoked —games highly valued by teenagers, games that thrust them into heavens or cast them into hells depending on whether you win or lose? In any case, the current situation can be described as a kind of about-face that undermines the yet dominant idea that the tendency in the contemporary world is to conceal death. This is confirmed by papers given at a recent international conference. 

To return to the initial debate, in view of the facts presented here, can we speak of desecularization in Europe? It is important to distinguish between the individual (or micro), organization-association (meso), and society-at-large (macro) levels (Dobbelaere, 2002). Desecularization is relevant for the first of these, especially among young people, with the exception of some countries (Spain, Ireland, former East Germany) and keeping in mind that belonging is still receding in the west (except in Portugal) whereas it is gaining in the east (except in Poland and Slovenia). Moreover, secularist attitudes are stronger than religious ones, though they are receding slightly. At the intermediate level, we observe no tendency to turn back to religious belonging, except within Islam. At the level of society at large, there is convergence toward a sort of pluralist secularization, open to religious expression on condition that democracy and human rights are respected. For post-communist countries this situation nonetheless represents radical desecularization. We can conclude that Europe is becoming slightly less exceptional (see Grace Davie, 2002) with regard to the religious situation in the rest of the Christian world (particularly the United States), especially given that the 1991 and 1998 ISSP surveys provide signs that secularization is flagging. For Christianity, the new situation presents both “advantages” (fall of communism, relativization of progress and science) and “disadvantages” (relativization of Christianity itself, competition from other spiritual paths, the development of a “no religion” continent). What is clear is that we are moving away from purely linear development. This seems to confirm Peter

Beyer’s thesis that globalization brings with it religious diversification (Beyer, 1994). To better understand what is occurring, we need new interview surveys with questions adapted to the new realities.

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