

Religion Monitor 2008 | **EUROPE**

Overview of religious attitudes and practices



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Editorial

Promoting mutual understanding of cultures and religions

Liz Mohn

Globalization and its impact on private and professional contexts are giving rise to a search for values and guiding principles within society. International understanding that goes beyond political and language barriers – which numerous public figures have called for – must also remain cognizant of the world's diverse historical, cultural and religious roots. A person's religious beliefs in particular determine his or her personal philosophy and actions to a degree that should not be underestimated.

To get a better idea of the role religion and faith play in modern life, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Religion Monitor interviewed over 21,000 people from 21 countries around the globe. Representing millions of others, the survey's respondents discussed their thoughts and beliefs, their conceptions of God, their values and numerous other aspects of their innermost lives. The survey's findings are more than just statistics; they represent the many individuals who were willing to talk about their religious practices, world views and considerations of life's larger meanings. The Religion Monitor thus provides us with an intimate look at the world's religions and, as a result, allows us a better understanding of the globe's diverse cultures.

Through its survey – carried out on each continent in a standardized manner – the Religion Monitor reveals in impressive fashion the degree to which the globe's religions are in fact comparable. Clearly, despite their many centuries of divergent development and their resulting differences, the world's faiths are similar in a multitude of ways, both in terms of structure and content.

With this brochure, the Bertelsmann Stiftung would like to introduce you to select findings from its Religion Monitor. Both the Bertelsmann Stiftung and I, personally, hope that the information it offers will help adherents of all religions better understand each other and, consequently, help increase tolerance among people everywhere.



Liz Mohn
Vice-Chair of the Bertelsmann Stiftung
Executive Board and Board of Trustees

Religiosity in Europe at a glance

Key findings from the Religion Monitor

◦ The Christian West

Europe continues to be strongly shaped by the Christian faith. Three-quarters of all Europeans (74 percent) in the countries surveyed are religious, with one-quarter (25 percent) highly religious. Because the Christian denominations play such a dominant role, the relevant sample sizes were not large enough to permit the Religion Monitor to make representative estimates regarding other religions. Twenty-three percent of Europeans are nonreligious.

◦ Living their faith

Europeans attach so much importance to their faith that they make it an integral part of their lives. More than half (57 percent) attend religious services more or less regularly, and 61 percent engage in personal prayer. Sixty-eight percent agree with the proposition that a God or some sort of divine entity exists, and they believe in life after death in some form.

◦ Differences among countries

There are marked religious differences among individual European countries, which are strongly influenced by national traditions. Faith and religion are most strongly rooted in Poland and Italy, and their role is least significant in secular France.

◦ Binding Europe together

Religious faith represents an important factor that binds Europe together. It influences people's personal and social lives in all of these countries, albeit to varying degrees. Europe can draw on a shared set of values, for example in dealing with important life events and issues such as births, partnerships and deaths, as well as in contemplating the meaning of life.

◦ Unrelated aspects of life

Politics and sexuality are the areas that Europeans are least likely to view in the context of their religious faith. Many people have expressly chosen to separate their behavior and attitudes in these areas from their religion.

◦ Catholics are more religious than Protestants

One in three Catholics (33 percent) are highly religious, but only somewhat less than one in five Protestants (18 percent). In both religions there is a significant percentage of individuals who are members of a church in name only. Among members of the Catholic Church, 11 figure for Protestants is 16 percent.



◦ Religious individuals who are not members of a church

More than one-quarter of Europeans who do not belong to a church are nevertheless religious. This phenomenon is particularly common in Italy and Switzerland, where 6 and 9 percent, respectively, of non-church members are highly religious.

◦ Pantheism

Pantheist approaches to spirituality are also found within Christianity, particularly in Italy and Switzerland. Indeed, among non-church members this sense of being one with the universe is the most prevalent form of religion.

◦ Distance and discontinuity

The number of religious young adults is not significantly lower than the corresponding number of religious individuals in Europe's population as a whole; however, there are differences in the degree of these groups' religious fervor. Particularly marked differences by age groups can be observed in Austria.

◦ A high level of tolerance

Europeans are highly tolerant. Nine out of ten agree with the statement that every religion is likely to contain a kernel of truth. Only 6 percent are critical of such openness to differing views.

The Religion Monitor

The Bertelsmann Stiftung has developed an innovative, scientifically robust instrument that allows a comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis of religious attitudes in today's world.

Are we about to experience a global renaissance of religious belief? What role do religion and other spiritual developments play in modern society and in individual lives? Are certain countries forging their own paths in this regard? The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Religion Monitor hopes to provide answers to these questions and others.

With the help of religion specialists, theologians, sociologists and psychologists, the Bertelsmann Stiftung has developed the Religion Monitor, an innovative tool that makes it possible to examine the various dimensions of religious belief in greater detail than has been possible up until now. How religious are people today? How religious are the societies in which they live? How is this religiousness



Worldwide findings: Surveys for the Religion Monitor have been carried out in all countries shaded blue on the left.

Organizational chart for the Religion Monitor

	Sociology theology psychology	General intensity	Specific topics
Core dimensions	Intellect	Interest in religious topics	Religious reflexivity; religious search; meaning; theodicy; spiritual and religious books
	Ideology (belief)	Belief in God or something divine	Notion of God; world views; religious pluralism; religious fundamentalism; other religious ideas
	Public practice	Church service; congregational prayer; attending temple	Interreligious practice
	Private practice	Prayer – Meditation	Prescribed prayer; house altar
	Experience	Personal experience	Religious feelings
	Consequences	Experience of being at one; General relevance of religion to everyday life	Relevance of religion to various aspects of life (e.g. family, politics); religious commandments
Centrality	Non religious Religious Highly religious	Religious and spiritual self-perception	

| BertelsmannStiftung

expressed? Which potential forces – both constructive and destructive – are inherent in it?

The Religion Monitor is based on a conception of religion that considers transcendence the key characteristic of religious experience and belief. It encompasses all forms of religiousness – both those that include a belief in one God or in many gods and those that represent a more individualized expression of spirituality. This allows the Religion Monitor to illuminate the entire spectrum of religious faith and religious experience independently of any affiliation with a house of worship.

The Religion Monitor comprises some 100 questions designed to examine six core dimensions of religious belief:

- Interest in religious matters
- Belief in God or the divine
- Public religious practice
- Private religious practice
- Religious experiences
- Relevance of religion to everyday life

Background studies have shown that each of these six dimensions must be examined if a comprehensive and differentiated understanding is to be achieved of the role that religious belief plays, both for individuals and society as a whole. Such understanding, moreover, is not possible based on these dimensions in isolation. This makes the Religion Monitor unique relative to many other studies, which often limit themselves to only one aspect of religious ideology and to public expressions of faith.

The Religion Monitor differentiates between substantive aspects, i.e. concrete expressions of religiousness, and the issue of centrality, i.e. the significance of religion and the intensity of its presence in individual lives. The latter is of critical importance, since the greater role religious belief plays in a person's personality, the more it determines his or her behavior and experience.

In light of this, responses in all survey modules are evaluated using a point system and then collated in a "centrality index," which gives rise to the classifications "highly religious," "religious" and "non-religious."

Highly religious: This designates people for whom religious matters play a key role in their personality. Matters of faith are experienced intensively, determining their behavior and permeating their life experiences. Highly religious people use their religious convictions as a basis for participating in public discourse.

Religious: For this group, religious experiences and practices matter, but do not play a central role in their personality. Religious matters are experienced with moderate intensity and only influence a limited range of behaviors and perceptions.

Non-religious: Religious practices, beliefs and experiences hardly feature in the lives of these individuals. Religious beliefs play practically no role in their personalities and how they experience or deal with the world around them.

The above categories allow profiles for individual respondents to be generated, along with a comparative assessment of the relative

degree of religiousness found in different societies around the globe. The assessments, in turn, make it possible to identify potential social developments stemming from these attitudes.

The survey's questionnaires have been translated into 20 languages, allowing respondents to be queried in a standardized manner in all countries. Individual questions were adjusted, moreover, to reflect faith-specific issues (allowing, for example, Hindus and Buddhists to be asked if they have an altar in their homes, and Muslims to be queried on how often they pray). For all questions a reply of "don't know/no answer" was possible, as was, in some cases, an additional "have never given it any consideration."

At the heart of the Religion Monitor is a representative survey carried out in 2007, in which 21,000 people from all continents and religious traditions were polled. The survey's random sampling takes into account sociodemogra-

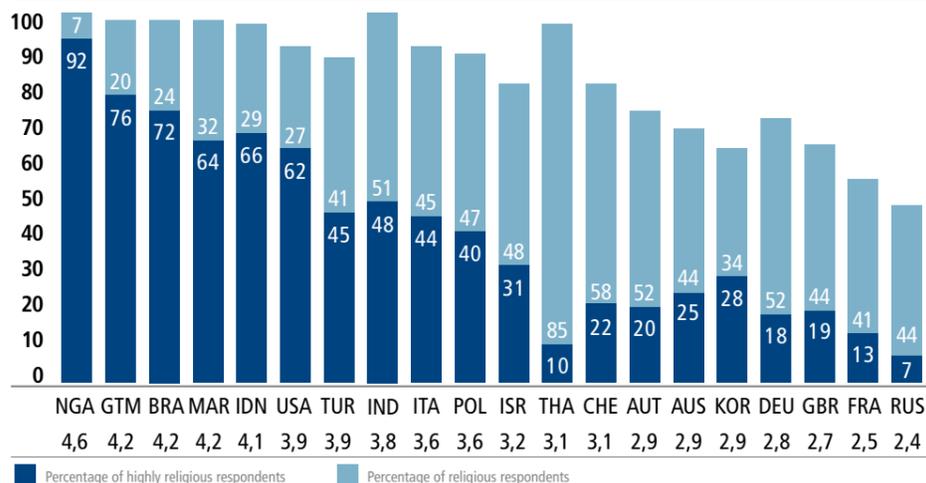


phic factors such as gender division and various age groups (from 18 years) as a percentage of the overall population. In Germany, quantitative data were supplemented with a qualitative survey (in-depth personal interviews and interviews with experts).

The countries were selected in light of the Religion Monitor's interreligious focus. The survey was carried out in the countries identified above (see graphic on previous page). Given circumstances specific to each country, interviews were carried out either by telephone or in a face-to-face setting. In Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Thailand, it was possible to conduct the survey only in certain regions.

Despite the different expressions of religiousness in individual cultures, the methodology in use makes it possible to measure and compare religious attitudes in various countries. The resulting "centrality index" (the share of highly religious and religious individuals within the general population) as it applies to 20 countries gives a first impression of the potential of such comparative observations.

Percentage of highly religious and religious respondents for 20 countries



Centrality of religion averages for each country are given along the x-axis below each acronym, on a scale from one to five
 AUS=Australia, AUT=Austria, BRA=Brazil, CHE=Switzerland, DEU=Germany, FRA=France, GBR=Great Britain, GTM=Guatemala, IDN=Indonesia, IND=India, ISR=Israel, ITA=Italy, KOR=South Korea, MAR=Morocco, NGA=Nigeria, POL=Poland, RUS=Russia, THA=Thailand, TUR=Turkey, USA=United States of America

Media response

Correcting preliminary assessments

"The survey corrects impressions made by numerous headlines and preliminary assessments. This applies in particular to the 'return of religion,' hoped for and feared by many."

Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung

Not just a private matter

"I'm amazed at these figures - and they are clearly welcome. At Bertelsmann, it's obvious that religion is not just a private matter, but a social phenomenon."

Felix Gmür, Secretary General, Swiss Conference of Bishops

Revealing

"This study reveals the truth behind many clichés surrounding the significance of faith."

Welt am Sonntag

Christianity continues to play an important role in Europe

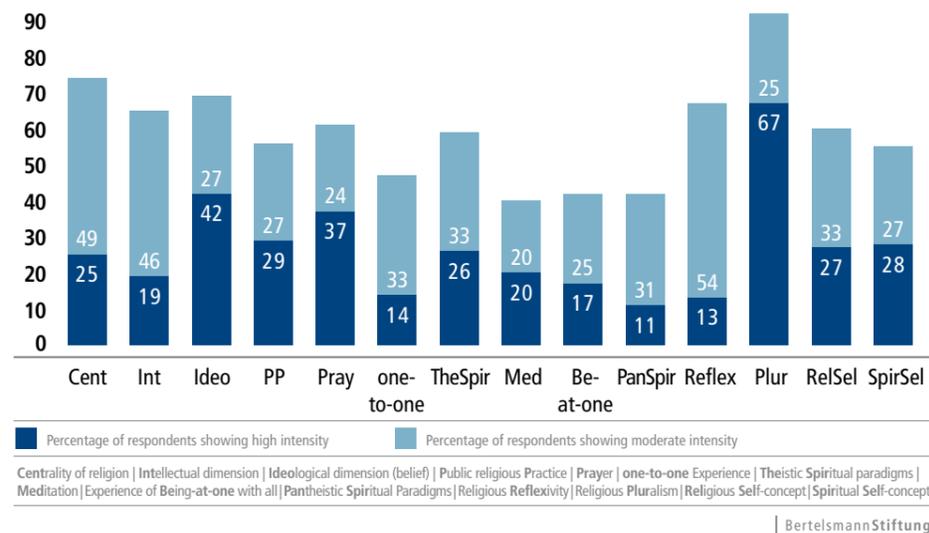
Seventy-five percent of Europeans are religious – Rates of religious affiliation are highest in Poland and Italy – France has a high percentage of nonreligious individuals



Does it still make sense to refer to Europe as the Christian West? Clearly the answer is yes. In a study conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Religion Monitor, which focused on Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, France, Great Britain and Poland, between 60 percent (Great Britain) and 97 percent (Poland) of

respondents considered themselves to be Christian. Thus Christianity continues to play an important role in Europe, although there are differences in degree from one country to another, depending on religious composition. The Religion Monitor delved further, asking respondents not only whether they belonged

Core dimensions and basic contents – individuals of moderate or high religiosity in Europe



to a religion, but also about the intensity of their religious affiliation. The study found that three-quarters (74 percent) of Europeans in the countries studied are religious, and of that number, one-fourth (25 percent) are highly religious; slightly fewer than one-fourth of Europeans (23 percent) are nonreligious.

According to the surveys conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, two-thirds (68 percent) of Europeans today believe in a God or a divine entity, as well as in some form of life after death. More than one-half (57 percent) also report that they attend church services more or less regularly. Sixty-one percent find personal prayer to be meaningful for their daily lives. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) regularly engage in intellectual contemplation of issues

relating to religion and faith. These findings clearly indicate that for a large number of people in Europe, religious affiliation is more than a mere formality; these people actually live their faith.

However, there are substantial differences among countries in the degree of people's religious consciousness. Religious affiliation is most pronounced in Poland and Italy, where there are only very few nonreligious individuals (7 percent in Italy, 5 percent in Poland). Forty percent of Poles are highly religious, and another 47 percent are somewhat religious. The results are even more pronounced in Italy, which, like Poland, is predominantly Catholic: 44 percent of Italians are highly religious and 45 percent are somewhat religious.

The French, on the other hand, show the lowest level of attachment to faith, God and religion. In traditionally secular France, 42 percent of the population is nonreligious, while only 13 percent can be described as highly religious. Another 41 percent can be classified as somewhat religious. Austria, which has traditionally been predominantly Catholic, and Great Britain, with its Protestant state church, occupy a middle position, along with the multi-denominational countries of Germany and Switzerland.

The intensity of religious affiliation has a substantial effect on both the individual and the fabric of society. Religious matters play a central role in the lives of highly religious individuals, who tend to view their actions and experiences in a religious light. Members of this

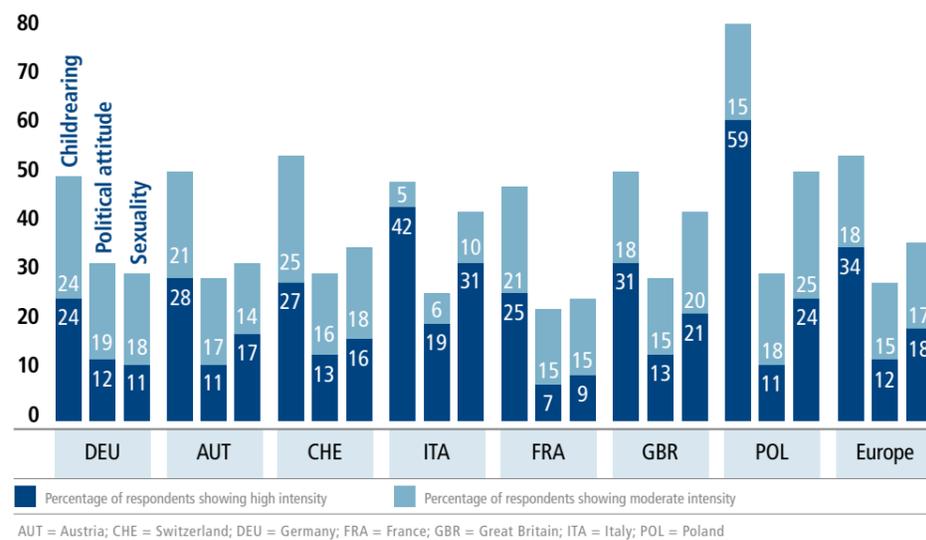
group can be expected to actively defend their religious convictions in the social arena. In the lives of those who are somewhat religious, religious attitudes and practices play a role as well, but such factors are of less significance for their personalities and less likely to shape their experiences and behavior. Members of this group only occasionally see their actions, thoughts and emotions in a religious light, and they are less willing to interject their religious views into social discussions.

A factor that binds the nations of Europe together

Not only does religiosity have a significant effect on Europe's social and cultural life, but its role in binding the nations of Europe together in the European Union should not be



Consequences – effect of religiosity on various aspects of life



underestimated. Half of all Europeans (49 percent) regard their faith and religion as very important for significant life events such as births, marriages and deaths. Only 20 percent attach virtually no importance to the role of religion in these contexts. For a large number of people (38 percent), faith provides an important orientation as they contemplate the meaning of life. Moreover, for 57 percent of Europeans religious faith offers support in times of crisis. Thirty-seven percent are strongly guided by their religion in their attitudes toward nature and the environment, and for an additional 20 percent this aspect plays at least some role. For one in three Europeans, fundamental religious principles form the basis for their childrearing decisions. An additional 18 percent take religious factors into account to some degree in rearing their children.

Politics and sexuality are a private affair

It is striking that there are significant differences among European countries in how and to what degree religion influences people's behavior. In Poland, three out of four people (74 percent) indicate that religion is the primary factor that determines how they rear their children. Fifty-nine percent report that religion plays a significant role in this sphere, and for 15 percent it has at least some influence. Results for the Swiss and the British are in the middle of the spectrum; 52 percent of Swiss respondents and 49 percent of the British are guided by their faith in their childrearing decisions. The picture is similar in Germany, where 48 percent take their religion and faith into account in questions of childrearing (24 percent to a considerable degree, 24 percent to some extent). In France, 25 percent regard

their religion as very important in rearing their children, while 21 percent consider it somewhat important.

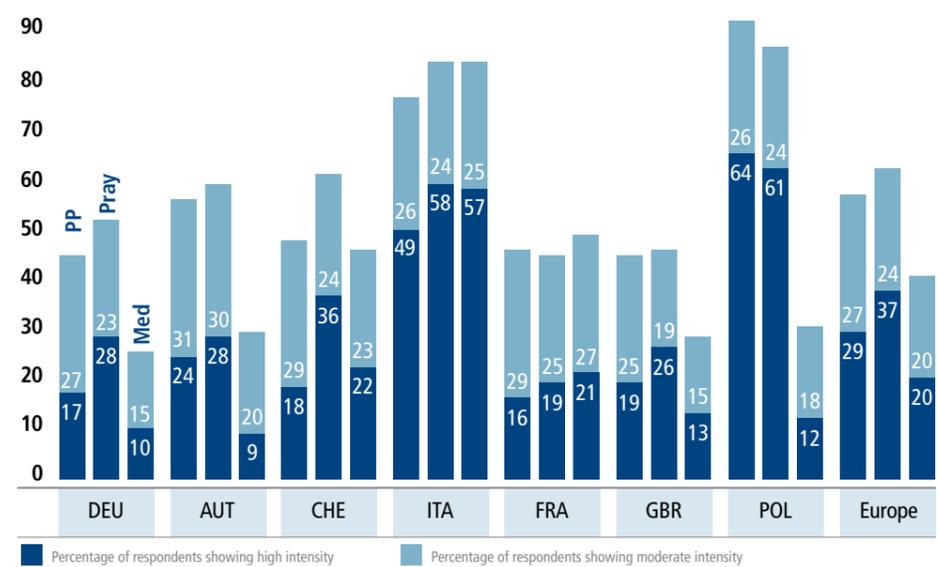
A different picture emerges for the effect of religious faith on political attitudes. Results in this area are highest for Germany, with the sum of the categories “strongly affected” and “moderately affected” amounting to 31 percent. Next highest is Switzerland (13 percent “strongly,” 16 percent “moderately”), followed by Poland (11 percent and 18 percent, respectively). While in Italy fewer people overall (25 percent) report that their political opinions are influenced by their personal religiosity, 19 percent of Italians indicate that their religious faith is very important in their consideration of political issues, which is the highest percentage among the countries surveyed. The link between political and religious attitudes is weakest in France. Overall, 58 percent of Europeans report that their political views

are not affected at all, or only slightly, by their religious convictions. Only 27 percent respond to this question in the affirmative, with the minority (12 percent) reporting that they are strongly influenced in political matters by their religious faith. Similarly, Europeans – 48 percent of them, at any rate – are reluctant to allow faith and religion to affect their sexual lives. Seventeen percent of respondents report that religion has a moderate degree of influence in questions of sexuality, while an additional 18 percent indicate that it plays a very important role in this context.

Further differences emerge when we look at religious practices. Nowhere is the number of those who attend religious services every week, or at least on a regular basis, greater than in Poland (when asked whether the public practice of their religion was a regular part of their lives, 64 percent agreed strongly, 26 percent somewhat). In Italy as well, church services



Private and public practice (of religion) in the surveyed countries



PP= Public Practice; Pray = Prayer ; Med = Meditation
 AUT = Austria; CHE = Switzerland; DEU = Germany; FRA = France; GBR = Great Britain; ITA = Italy; POL = Poland

are a regular part of life for the overwhelming majority (49 percent agreed strongly, 26 percent somewhat). At the other end of the scale are Germany (17 percent agreed strongly, 27 percent somewhat) and France (16 percent and 29 percent, respectively).

Similarly, personal prayer is part of everyday life for a majority of people in Poland (61 percent agreed strongly, 24 percent somewhat) and Italy (58 percent and 24 percent, respectively). The situation is quite different in Great Britain (26 percent and 19 percent) and, once more, in France (19 percent and 25 percent).

A striking finding emerged when respondents were asked how often they had felt that God was speaking to them, or even intervening in their lives. Sixty-three percent of Italians reported having this experience (27 percent agreed strongly, 36 percent somewhat). Among Poles, however, who are equally religious and equally Catholic, this was true of only 49 percent (9 percent agreed strongly, 40 percent somewhat).

Next, we looked at the state of religiosity across the the Christian denominations that

have dominated the European map ever since the Reformation. For this purpose the Religion Monitor has combined into one category all of the Protestant denominations represented in Europe, from the Anglican Church in England to the Lutheran-Protestant denomination in Germany, to the Zwinglian-Calvinist tradition, found for example in Switzerland.

Catholics are more religious than Protestants

In the surveyed countries, Catholicism is clearly more deeply rooted than the Protestant religions. To be sure, the results differ only slightly when we look at religiosity in general: Among Catholics, 85 percent can be classified as more or less religious, as compared with 81 percent of Protestants. Those who are members of a church in name only, but lack religious faith, make up 11 percent of Catholics and 16 percent of Protestants. There is a striking difference, however, in the intensity of religious faith among Catholics relative to Protestants. Thirty-three percent of Catholics can be classified as highly religious, while this is true of only 18 percent of Protestants – only roughly one-half as many. Those who are merely “some-

what religious” make up 64 percent of Protestants and 52 percent of Catholics.

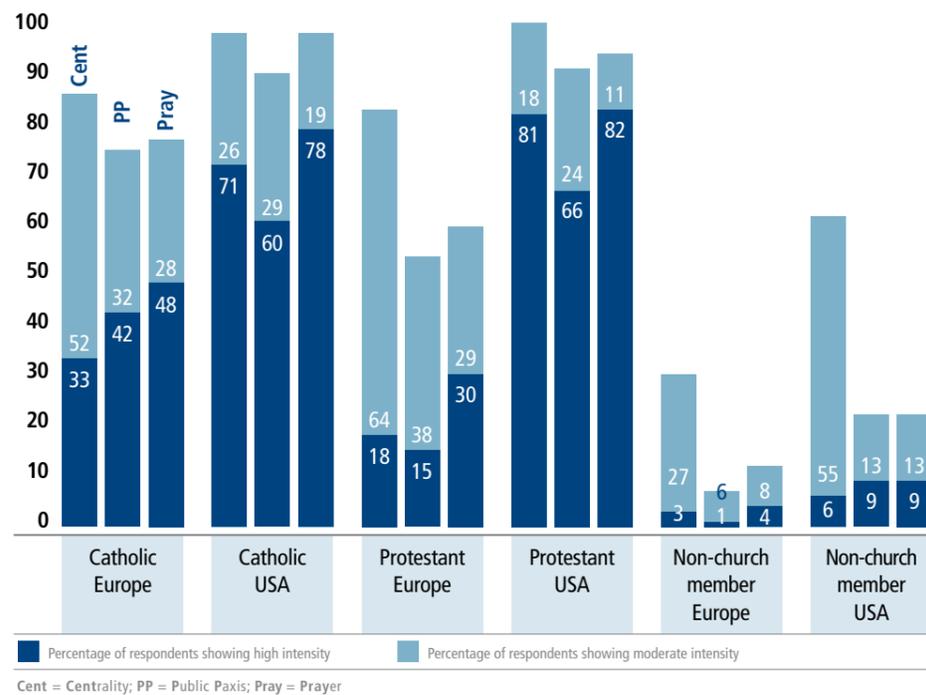
These results are in striking contrast to the corresponding findings for a country like the United States, where Protestants tend to have significantly closer ties to their church than do Catholics. This difference is evident in the degree to which people of different religions show their faith publicly by attending church services. In Europe, 42 percent of Catholics report that they attend mass frequently; 32 percent do so occasionally. Among Protestants, only 15 percent attend church regularly, 38 percent occasionally. In the United States, however, 66 percent of Protestants attend church regularly and 24 percent irregularly, while

60 percent of Catholics go to mass regularly and 29 percent attend on an occasional basis.

Seventy-six percent of Catholic Europeans pray regularly (48 percent) or occasionally (28 percent), but only 59 percent of Protestant Christians do so (30 percent agree strongly, 29 percent somewhat). A surprising finding: Despite the fact that belief in a God and the expectation of life after death are central to Christian faith, these convictions are shared by only two out of every three Protestant Christians (68 percent – 36 percent agree strongly, 32 percent somewhat). One in four Protestants can relate only slightly or not at all to this kind of belief. Among Catholics, 53 percent firmly believe in a God and in the resurrection, while 27 percent have some degree of belief, but



Centrality, public and private practice (prayer) of Catholics, Protestants and non-church members in Europe and the USA



doubts as well. Fifteen percent have little or no faith in these religious tenets.

While there is a significant difference between Catholic and Protestant Christians in the intensity with which their faith affects their personal, day-to-day lives, there is little difference as to which areas of their lives are influenced by religion.

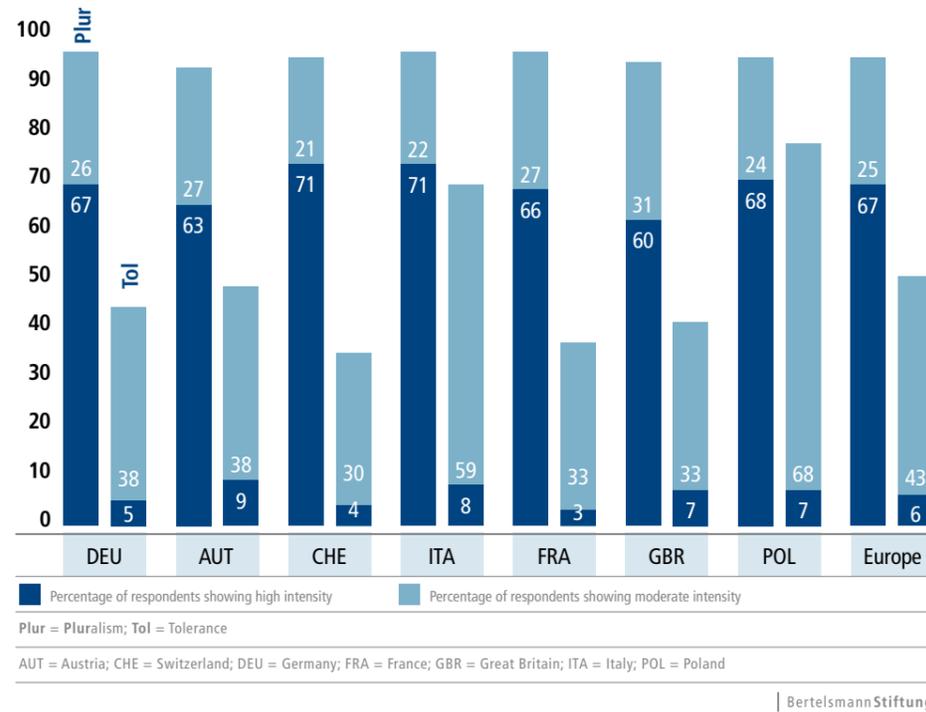
Religious individuals who do not belong to a church

Just as there are nominal Christians who are not truly religious, some people are religious although they are not members of a church. The Religion Monitor provides revealing insights into this group as well. Sixty-eight percent of non-church members are in fact nonreligious, while twenty-seven percent, or slightly more than one quarter of this quite large group, can be classified as religious. Indeed, according to the guidelines of the Religion Monitor a small number – 3 percent – can even be considered highly religious. Nine percent of non-church members are firmly convinced that a God or some other divine entity

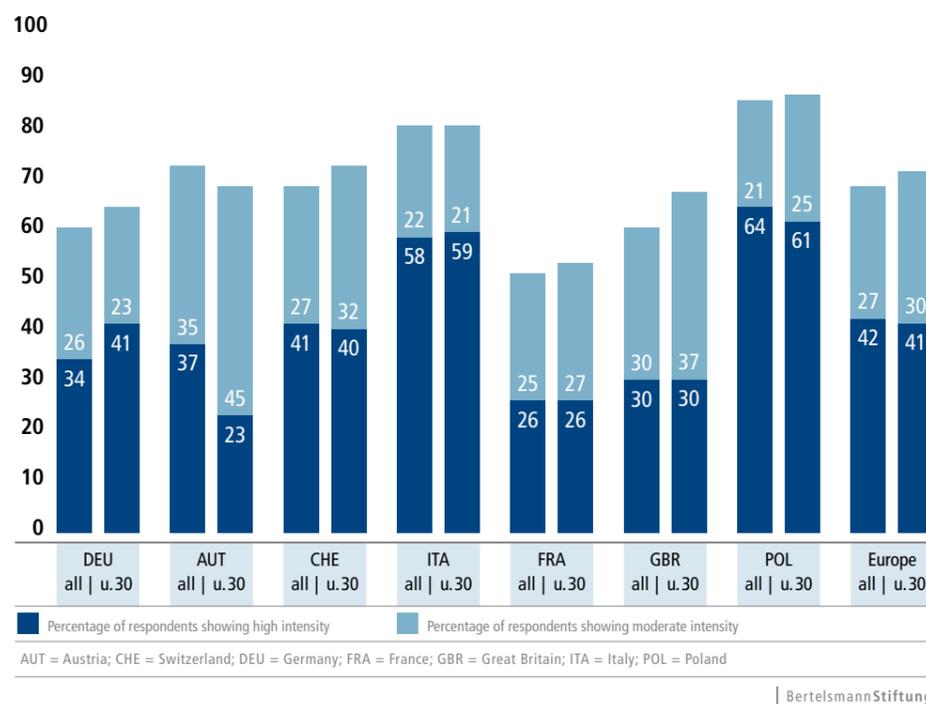
must exist, and another 20 percent are at least open to the idea of a God. Church attendance and prayer are not the primary religious practices of this group, but 26 percent engage in meditation (12 percent agree strongly, 14 percent somewhat).

Two countries stand out in this context: Highly religious people who are not members of a community of faith make up 9 percent of the population in Switzerland and 7 percent in Italy. Fifty-three percent of Italians who do not belong to a church report that they meditate often, while 18 percent do occasionally. The corresponding percentages for Switzerland are 19 and 21. These results are in keeping with the fact that pantheistic approaches to spirituality – for example a sense of being at one with the universe – are particularly widespread in both of these countries. Eighteen percent of nondenominational Italians and 12 percent of the corresponding Swiss group are very familiar with this sort of feeling, and another 42 percent of Italians and 34 percent of Swiss citizens have experienced it at least occasionally.

Religious pluralism and religious tolerance



Belief in God or something divine (ideology) among the overall population as compared with individuals under the age of 30



Indeed, Italians are particularly likely to engage in meditation as a form of religious practice. Eighty-three percent of all Italians report that they have meditated at some point, and for 57 percent of them the experience was unusually intense. These numbers are substantially higher than the corresponding figures for France (25 percent strongly agree, 32 percent somewhat). In a Europe that is becoming increasingly pluralistic in the sphere of religion, pantheistic beliefs are more than a mere fringe phenomenon: Eleven percent of all Europeans hold such beliefs strongly, while 31 percent are at least open to them. Forty-six percent – less than one half – are skeptical or reject these views entirely.

Pluralistic convictions

Just as there is religious pluralism in Europe, Europeans are very willing to show religious tolerance. Ninety-two percent of Europeans agree that every religion is likely to contain a kernel of truth and that it is important to be open to all religions (67 percent strongly, 25 percent somewhat). Particularly tolerant

are the Italians (71 percent agree strongly, 22 percent somewhat) and the Swiss (71 percent and 21 percent, respectively). Only 6 percent of all Europeans reject such views.

Another question is how and to what extent religious convictions are passed on. The data collected by the Religion Monitor make it possible for analysts to differentiate their findings by age groups. According to their findings, 72 percent of young adults (between the ages of 18 and 29) in Europe are religious (18 percent highly religious, 54 percent somewhat), while 26 percent are nonreligious. Among young adults, therefore, the nonreligious make up a group that is 4 percent smaller than the corresponding percentage in the population as a whole, and the highly religious group is smaller as well (by 8 percent), while the “somewhat religious” group of young adults is significantly larger (by 5 percent) than in the general population. Hence we find not that religious faith is disappearing, but only that its intensity is gradually declining. Whether and how this situation will change as people grow older will only be evident after these Religion

Monitor surveys have been repeated several times and have produced evidence on emerging trends.

Young adults believe differently

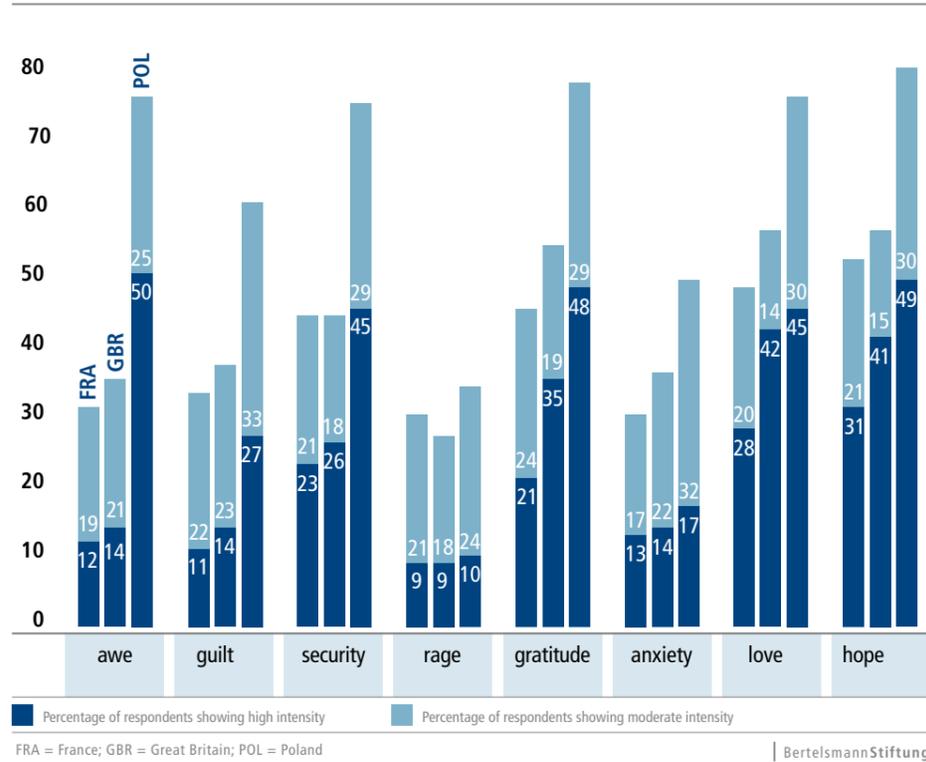
Young adults are no less likely than the population as a whole to believe in God or a divine entity, or in life after death. Among individuals between the ages of 18 to 29, 41 percent are strongly and 30 percent somewhat convinced of these articles of faith; among the general population the corresponding percentages are 42 and 27, respectively. On the other hand, 26 percent of young Europeans see little or no merit in these ideas; the corresponding figure for the population as a whole is 26 per-

cent as well. Nor was the Religion Monitor able to confirm the notion that young people do not practice their religion publicly, although it did find that they are less likely to engage in prayer, and that this is not offset by involvement in meditation.

The results for Austria are particularly striking. While 20 percent of the overall population of Austria is highly religious and 52 percent is somewhat religious, the corresponding figures for young adults are only 5 percent and 53 percent. Thirty-nine percent of young people are nonreligious, as compared with only 25 percent of the population as a whole.



Sentiments about God or the divine in France, Great Britain and Poland



The importance of religion in day-to-day life and the expectations that are associated with it suggest that there is continuity from one generation to the next, at least in terms of existential questions. Young adults, as well as the population as a whole, find it important to be able to rely on their faith in dealing with the most important events in their lives. Similarly – and with nearly identical percentages – young adults see religion as a source of insight into the meaning of life and support in times of crisis. With respect to sexuality as well, they find faith and religion to be just about as important, or unimportant, as does the population as a whole. When it comes to social behavior, however, it appears that the influence of faith and religion is declining among young people. In questions of childrearing, relationships, work and career, leisure time and caring for the nature world, the relevant percentages for young adults are significantly lower than those for the general population.

Conclusion

Europe continues to be shaped by Christianity. Immigration from all over the world and globalization have not changed that fact, even though Europe is becoming more diverse in terms of both religion and culture. The Poles and the Italians are the most religious of the countries surveyed, while the French are the least religious. Furthermore, among both Catholics and Protestants there is a substantial percentage of individuals who are Christian in name only. One in four or five Europeans is nonreligious; however, one-fifth of non-church members practice religion in some form. When we look at the numbers, young adults are not, in general, significantly less religious than Europe's population as a whole. It is clear from these results: Europe is by no means a continent that is devoid of religion.

Varieties of Religious Commitment in Great Britain

by Prof. Dr. David Voas

The United Kingdom is a composite state, made up of Great Britain (which includes England, Wales and Scotland) and Northern Ireland (not included in this survey). The constituent nations are religiously distinctive. England is predominantly Anglican (the Church of England is officially established, with the Queen as Supreme Governor); Scotland is mainly Presbyterian, and while in Wales the leading tradition is congregational Protestantism. The Catholic Church is the second largest denomination in both England and Scotland. As a result of immigration since the Second World War – especially from the Indian subcontinent – about 6 percent of the British population identifies with non-Christian religions.

Two thirds of people in Britain described themselves as belonging to a religion such as Christianity or Islam. The same proportion said that religion had been part of their upbringing. The overlap was far from complete, however: about 30 percent either had a religious upbringing but did not now identify with a religion or vice versa. Whether people understood these questions (about current identity and religious upbringing) in comparable ways is far from certain: there are many different kinds of belonging.

Religious practice

The survey gives us two main pieces of information about religious practice: attendance at services and private prayer. The distribution of both forms of observance is rather bimodal, with people tending to be involved fairly regularly or not at all. In Britain 36 percent claim to pray weekly or more often, while 39 percent say that they never pray. The polarization is somewhat less pronounced for attendance at religious services; here the contrast between monthly (or more frequent) participation and never attending is 24 vs. 43 percent.

The author

Prof. David Voas is a professor of population studies at the Institute for Social Change at the University of Manchester. His research focuses primarily on the sociology of religion and demography. Many of his publications deal with religiosity in Great Britain.



Belief

In contrast to countries where the overwhelming majority of people express strong belief in God and an afterlife, religious belief in Britain is interestingly diverse. The British are distributed fairly uniformly over the range, though one might again observe a degree of polarization. Half the population answers either “very much so” or “not at all” when asked if they believe in God and in an afterlife. Perhaps, though, what is interesting is not that 50 percent of people are confident about what they believe but that the other 50 percent are not.

Unsurprisingly, agreement or disagreement with the statement that “life has significance because there is something after death” is closely associated with belief in an afterlife. Among people in Britain who do not at all believe in an afterlife, only 7 percent respectively accept that view. By contrast, three quarters of those who believe strongly see life as significant in consequence.

Heterodoxy

The survey included a battery of items on the image of God. The statements correspond to very different theological positions, and one might imagine that people who believe in a personal God, for example, would not favor formulations typical of the New Age (“energy flowing through everything”), pantheism or paganism (“nature”), or liberal theism (“the greatest possible value”, “a higher power”). In fact all of these statements (except the one describing God as a figment of the imagination) receive similar levels of agreement.

Alternative spirituality is perhaps the most widely discussed form of popular heterodoxy. Many people (religious and otherwise) are happy to describe themselves as spiritual; in Britain the population is evenly distributed between four levels of spiri-

tual self-identification (not at all, not very, moderately, and quite/very).

In general, people in Britain are somewhat more likely to describe themselves as spiritual than religious. Although half choose the same level (from “not at all” to “very”) for both attributes, it is more popular to have one’s spirituality exceed one’s religiosity than vice versa.

Salience

If the first question that we tend to ask is how religious people are, the next and arguably more interesting question is how important religion is to them. People have attitudes and beliefs about many things, but few such opinions make much difference in their lives. Although it seems likely that religion will be personally salient to people who are highly religious and vice versa, in principle it is possible that someone who is afflicted by doubt and does not belong to a church or go to services may nevertheless see religion as central to his or her existence.

The first point to note is that declared importance varies enormously across the sample. The degree of polarization is much higher than for other domains of interest. While there is a good deal of variation in what people describe as “very important” to them, only a negligible number assert that spouses, children, education, free time or even work are “not at all important.” By contrast a great many people say that about religiousness.

Religion in Britain seems connected with families. It is important for rites of passage and the socialization of the young. It helps people to deal with misfortune. It has less effect in the social sphere (work, politics) and also in what we see as our personal domain (free time, sexuality).

Views about religion

An intellectual concern for religion itself is another aspect of salience, particularly in modern conditions. In the past it was possible to take religion for granted and to be religiously committed in an unselfconscious way. Such an attitude has become much more difficult when everyone is aware of alternative worldviews and behaviors, both religious and non-religious. Religious identity, belief and practice are increasingly matters of choice, even for people who were raised in a religion. To make such choices requires first interest in and then knowledge of the options.

Respondents claimed to have some concern for religion; two thirds said that they thought about religious issues at least occasionally, though only about a third reported doing so often. Whether they were referring to religion in their own lives or in the news is difficult to say. Slightly more than half claimed to be at least occasionally sometimes critical towards religious teachings they would in principle agree with. There was very general agreement that it is important to consider religious issues from different perspectives.

Nevertheless, most respondents had very little interest in learning or reading more about religion, and the majority had never or only rarely rethought their own views.



Tolerance

Tolerance for different religions is another feature of contemporary religious pluralism, though tensions have also risen with concerns over immigration and extremism. A very large majority of respondents in Britain claimed to believe that one should have an open mind to all religions, though social desirability is likely to affect these answers strongly. It is not acceptable to be seen as close-minded.

There was less agreement that every religion has a core of truth, and still less with the statement that “I rely on teachings from several different religious traditions.” Nonetheless, a quarter of Britons did make this claim, which on the face of it seems rather implausible. One imagines that they had in mind an overlap in the ethical teachings of different religions, which thus justified a reliance on several of them jointly.

What is more interesting is how few people agree that “I am convinced that in questions of religion, my own religion is right while other religions tend to be wrong.” In Britain half of all those who say that they are at least slightly religious totally disagree with this statement. Tolerance is such a powerful feature of modern morality that people are more willing to accept religious relativism than to assert that their own religion is right.

To the extent that anything is certain, it is that the religious environment is changing in the modern world. The interpretations offered here are not definitive and some will be debated. All evidence about what is happening is precious, and the Religion Monitor contributes more material to the framework of our understanding.

Tradition or charisma – Religiosity in Poland

by Dr. Beata Zarzycka

Religiosity manifests itself in Poland in a very specific way: On the one hand, 95 percent of adult Poles consider themselves to be religious, specifically Roman Catholic. One-third pray on a regular basis, at least once a day, and more than half (53 percent) engage systematically in religious practices. Comparative analyses of the degree of religiosity in various countries show Poland ranking third, behind the United States and Ireland. Polish Catholicism can be classified as traditional popular Catholicism. On the other hand, more than half of Poles (68 percent) are convinced that the devil does not exist, and nearly 15 percent question the teachings of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body and eternal life. Most Polish Catholics (61 percent) reject the Church's views on sexual morality as well as certain principles of Catholic social teachings. Two-thirds of the respondents reported that religion plays no role in their leisure and professional lives. Eighty-nine percent describe their political views as unaffected by their religion. Only 26 percent of these Catholics are willing to make sacrifices for their faith.

In a traditionally Catholic country, it may seem surprising that such a large proportion of the population doubts the official teachings of the Church, and that so many people largely ignore – or at least qualify to a substantial degree – what those teachings require of each individual believer.

The significance of the various aspects of religiosity

The Polish respondents identified as the most important aspects of religiosity a belief in the existence of God, personal prayer, public practice of their religion, a belief in eternal life and living in accordance with religious commandments. They attached very little importance to the following: meditation, a belief in astrology and a belief in the power of evil spirits.

Seventy-eight percent believe that God exists. Nearly 70 percent of all respondents and 91 percent of those classified as highly religious attach great importance to personal prayer. Attending church services is of central importance to 63 percent of the

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respondents, and the percentage increases with age. Overall, the results reveal a certain selectivity of belief, no doubt because certain religious principles are not widely accepted.

Religious pluralism

Poland achieves high marks in the category of religious pluralism. Polish Catholics are tolerant of other religious traditions; however, this does not mean that they integrate them into their own religiosity. Eighty-three percent of all Catholics believe that every religion contains a kernel of truth. However, only 28 percent of Catholics actively draw upon other religious traditions.

A willingness to respect ethical norms appears not to be linked to religiosity. A high level of respect for ethical norms results in the polarization of responses to the question of whether foreigners in Poland should conform to the rules of Polish society. More than half (54 percent) responded in the affirmative, 26 percent in the negative. Catholics in Poland are less and less likely to affirm the claim of the Catholic Church to be the sole authority in matters of faith. They no longer identify absolutely and without reservation with their religion. Other religious traditions are accepted, but they exert no appreciable moral or spiritual influence. Moral issues produce a relatively high level of polarization among Polish Catholics.

Aspects of religiosity in people's lives

A large share of the respondents (29 percent) do not think about general religious subjects "at all." A similarly large number (31 percent) reflect on such issues "regularly." Among young people, a relatively large proportion (39 percent) think about religious topics at least "occasionally."

Contemplation and reading about religious topics were fairly uncommon experiences for most of the respondents, and they were not likely to have felt a sense of God's

presence. Half responded that they had “never” or only “rarely” had a feeling that God was trying to speak to them. Even in the highly religious group such feelings occurred only “occasionally” (41 percent); they were found among women (18 percent) more frequently than among men (7 percent). A large number of Catholics (41 percent) had not experienced God intervening in their lives; this had occurred only sporadically, i.e. “occasionally,” for 31 percent of respondents, more frequently among women (26 percent) than men (13 percent). Fewer than half (43 percent) of highly religious individuals had experienced divine intervention in their lives.

Thirty-four percent of the respondents “never” read religious or spiritual books; an equal percentage do so only “very rarely.” A mere 10 percent of respondents read religious materials often. Even among the highly religious this group amounts to only 18 percent. There is very little interest in reading religious materials among younger and middle-aged respondents; among the oldest individuals as well, however, who are generally more likely to read, only 20 percent prefer religious and spiritual texts.

It does not appear to be particularly characteristic of Polish Catholics to undertake a critical analysis of the religious teachings with which they generally agree. Roughly half of the respondents (47 percent) report that they do not critically analyze religious teachings “at all,” or only “rarely.” Thirty-one percent “occasionally” experience disagreements. This distribution remains stable among all age groups.

The influence of religiosity on various aspects of life

The respondents’ religiosity had the greatest influence on family life and relationships: childrearing, events such as births, marriages, deaths, friendships and other relationships. Surprisingly, political views and sexual morality are highly resistant to religious influence. Other aspects of life (crises, illness, leisure time, nature, work, the meaning of life) are not, as a rule, particularly affected by religiosity. Among the highly religious such links are stronger.

Sixty percent of all Polish Catholics, particularly women (68 percent), agree that religion affects their childrearing practices. It is particularly among older people that social relationships are formed on a religious foundation. The younger the respondent, the less influence religion has on the development of partnerships. The oldest group, in particular, sees religion as an important aspect of marriage. Fifty-eight percent report that they adhere to religious norms within their marriages.

A majority of Polish Catholics reject the sexual morality of the Church as well as several of its principles of social ethics. Seventy-five percent of the respondents refuse to adapt their sexual behavior to the strictures of the Church. Only one-third of the highly religious group report basing their attitudes toward sexuality on religious principles.

Eighty-nine percent of Polish Catholics indicate that their political views are not based on their religion; differences by age are not evident. Even among the highly religious, only 18 percent see a connection between religiosity and political attitudes.

These findings would seem to indicate that a change is taking place in the religiosity of Poland’s postwar generations. Religion is becoming a more subjective and private affair, and it is adjusting to a greater extent to individual and social needs, particularly in the sphere of sexual morality and people’s worldviews. In these contexts, the influence of religious institutions is continuing to decline. At the same time we are seeing an increase in the significance of individual preferences and choices, which more and more frequently are not based on Christian ethics.



Conclusion

Sociologically speaking, Poland continues to be a religious – and Catholic – country, since a majority of Polish society regards itself as Catholic and Catholicism is clearly central to Polish history and culture.

From a psychological perspective, however, the findings outlined above raise a number of questions. The picture of religiosity in Poland drawn by the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Religion Monitor seems contradictory. There is no doubt that religion has a fixed place in Polish culture and represents one of the essential aspects of that culture. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is a disconnection between objective tenets of faith and their interpretation by the faithful, as well as between beliefs and behaviors.

While Polish society has not been as deeply affected by secularization as many Western European countries have, there are clear signs that it is undergoing a process of individualization, also in the sphere of religious faith. Individuals are increasingly likely to develop their own private and selective systems of belief, in which certain aspects of church doctrine are disregarded or reinterpreted. Sometimes these systems also embrace religious ideas that are new or unfamiliar.

Accordingly, the most important task facing the Catholic Church in Poland is not to maintain the faith, but to shape the religiosity and religious worldview of Polish Catholics. Catholicism needs to be a more effective presence in Poland’s pluralistic society if it hopes to stem the tide of secularization.

www.religionsmonitor.com

Internet portal for identifying individual levels of religiousness

Religion is a highly personal matter. At www.religionsmonitor.com, users can generate a profile of their individual level of religious belief.

“How religious am I?” “To what extent do religious attitudes influence my daily life?” These questions are of concern not only to members of traditional religious communities, but also to many who do not adhere to conventional religious beliefs. The Religion Monitor provides all interested parties with support as they look for answers.

More than just an academic tool for specialists, the Religion Monitor offers Internet users around the world the chance to examine their own level of religiousness – regardless of whether they are religious in a traditional sense or whether their attitudes are informed by more individual experiences.

The online questionnaire is taken from the survey carried out globally on behalf of the Religion Monitor. Once they have responded to the questions, users can generate their own “religiousness profile” and compare it to the findings for their country of residence. In addition, group access offers the opportunity to show which aspects of religiosity are accentuated in a specific group, for example a school class.

Within months of going online, tens of thousands of people in almost 100 countries have made use of this opportunity. In order to make the survey accessible to even more people, the existing German and English questionnaires will soon be supplemented by Spanish, Turkish and Arabic versions.



Comments on www.religionsmonitor.com

Outstanding service

“The online survey is an outstanding service! My students filled it out during religion class. Suddenly even those youngsters were willing to discuss their feelings and religious experiences who had previously been hesitant to discuss their attitudes and who had labeled themselves atheists.”

Religion teacher

Astounding results

“The Religion Monitor generated astounding results at one of the family get-togethers our parish regularly organizes. One evening we were discussing the extent to which children should be given a religious education. By answering the survey’s questions it became clear that our attitudes were not as similar as we had originally thought.”

Church assistant

Multifaceted nature of religiousness

“Initially my personal profile surprised me, since I was classified as ‘highly religious,’ even though I don’t belong to a church. Your questionnaire makes clear, however, that religiousness is much more than just the teachings of the major religions. A personal quest to discover life’s meaning is much more multifaceted – and is often not taken seriously. Thank you for appreciating this phenomenon as well.”

Survey respondent

The Bertelsmann Stiftung

Dedicated to promoting responsibility in an open society – the Bertelsmann Stiftung works with independent experts to develop approaches for ensuring society’s ongoing viability. For more than 30 years it has been committed to increasing social participation and efficiency.

Our mission

Founded by Reinhard Mohn in 1977, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is a private operating foundation. It is politically nonpartisan and works independently of corporate influences. Our projects derive from our founder’s original vision: to stimulate social change that leads to increased social participation and efficiency.

Our core beliefs

Together, we are the society we live in. As a result, we all bear responsibility for society’s future. As a foundation, we at the Bertelsmann Stiftung consider ourselves a key societal player. If we are to work together to shape the future, we must be resolute, courageous and open to new ideas. Our core values are freedom, solidarity, competition and goodwill, and only when all four come together does society become truly humane. To ensure this is the case and to inspire us in our endeavors, we search for best practices worldwide and, in exchange, offer up our own ideas within an international dialogue.

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At the Bertelsmann Stiftung, we are committed to:

- Ensuring that individuals take responsibility for shaping society
- Ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to develop his or her skills and talents
- Dismantling the impediments that prevent individuals and society as a whole from realizing their full potential

We believe these are the prerequisites for promoting social participation and integration in a globalized world. Together with political, business and civil society actors, we develop effective, viable solutions designed to achieve these goals. In working for change, we focus on both individuals and society as a whole, as well as on political and economic systems.

Our core issues

On both the German and international level, we address the issues of social development, education, health, employment, culture, social participation and integration.



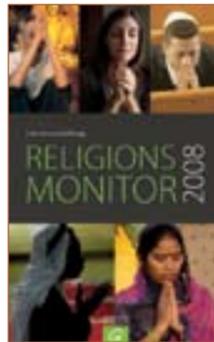
In doing so, we identify future challenges early on and develop long-term strategies. In today’s globalized world, cross-cultural and interreligious encounters are gaining in importance. The Religion Monitor and other projects within the Cultural Orientations Program are therefore key elements in our ongoing work.

How we work

Together with independent experts, our 300 employees design innovative projects addressing issues of key social importance. In carrying out our projects, we focus on transparency and quality. We thus offer concrete, future-ready solutions for political, business and social contexts. In serving as a catalyst for change, we rely on cross-border competition as a way of identifying the globe’s best ideas and approaches.

This commitment is illustrated by just a few of our projects: Demographic Change Campaign, Work/Life Balance, Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Early Childhood Education, Initiative for Employment, Alliance for Healthy Schools and Education, Center of Excellence for Communities and Regions, Corporate Social Responsibility, Agenda: Modern Governance and the Neue Stimmen International Singing Competition.

Publications



Religionsmonitor 2008

Bertelsmann Stiftung (Ed.), Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1st edition 2008,
288 pages, paperback, ISBN 978-3-579-06465-9
EUR 14,95 [D] / EUR 15,40 [A] / SFr 27,50

Written for a general audience, this volume details findings from Religion Monitor surveys carried out in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Authors include Bishop Wolfgang Huber, Walter Cardinal Kasper, Paul Zulehner and others.

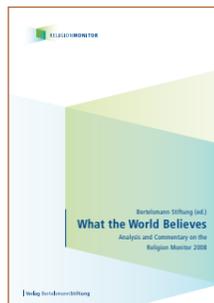


Was glaubt die Welt?

Analysen und Kommentare zum Religionsmonitor 2008

Bertelsmann Stiftung (Ed.), Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, 1st edition 2008,
approx. 700 pages, hardcover, ISBN 978-3-89204-949-4
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This specialized publication in German language discusses the Religion Monitor's findings from an international perspective. Detailed analysis is provided by experts such as José Casanova, Hans Joas, Volkhard Krech and David Voas.



What the World Believes:

Analysis and Commentary on the Religion Monitor 2008

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This specialized publication discusses the Religion Monitor's findings from an international perspective. Detailed analysis is provided by experts such as José Casanova, Hans Joas, Volkhard Krech and David Voas.

Data from the Religion Monitor are evaluated on an ongoing basis. Findings for individual countries are available for download at the website www.religionsmonitor.de. In addition, interested parties can participate in the online survey at www.religionsmonitor.com. Visitors to both websites can subscribe to a free online newsletter that provides regular updates detailing current developments.

Contact

Our experts would be glad to answer any questions you might have about the Religion Monitor. We also appreciate suggestions and feedback.

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Religion Monitor 2008 | **EUROPA**

The Christian faith continues to play a very important role in Europe. Three-quarters of all Europeans in the countries surveyed by the Religion Monitor are religious; one-quarter can even be classified as highly religious. Religiosity is a significant factor binding Europe together. Europe can draw on a shared set of values, for example in dealing with significant life events such as births, relationships and deaths, as well as in contemplating the meaning of life. These are only a few of the conclusions reached by the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Religion Monitor.

The Religion Monitor is analyzing the question of religiosity among different groups in more depth than ever before. Psychologists, religious scholars, sociologists and theologians are engaged in comparing the world religions and the religiosity of a representative group of more than 21,000 individuals from every continental and every religious culture.

www.religionsmonitor.com