

# Religion and Modernity

*An International Comparison*

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experienced some growth or maintained their vitality.' He sees the main exceptions, besides the decline of indigenous religions and the abrupt severance of religious ties under the rule of communism, only in the 'continuous decline of religion throughout much of Western Europe'. And Friedrich Wilhelm Graf also solves the problem that arises from the close interlocking of modernization and secularization caused by social theory by broadening his view beyond Europe. He first refers to the US, which he defines as a modern capitalist society, and whose population he also characterizes 'in a decidedly denominational sense as deeply religious' (Graf 2004: 55f.). But processes of modernization and religious revitalization went hand in hand in other non-European countries, too. 'Japan is a modern capitalist society with a lot of sometimes traditional and sometimes avant-garde new religion. In South Korea, the capitalist processes of transformation are associated with sometimes dramatically quick conversions to charismatic forms of Christianity, under whose surface a lot of ancestral religion remains. Some Latin American societies have just been led by highly religious elites to paths of modernization' (Graf 2004: 56).

If we want to determine the role of religion in the modern world and the reasons for its changes, we therefore cannot avoid exceeding the European domain and dealing with non-European societies. We have selected for our purposes the US, South Korea, and the Pentecostal movement. We have selected the US because it represents perhaps the most significant contrast to Europe; South Korea, because the processes of rapid modernization go together here with an upturn in the religion that has suffered the heaviest losses in Europe: Protestant Christianity; and the Pentecostal movement, because it is usually seen as the fastest growing religious movement. After dealing with the three selected cases, we want, in a multi-level analysis located on both the micro- and the macrosociological level, to consider more cases so as to arrive at some generalizable statements.

## 10

### Religion and Religiosity in the US

#### A Contrasting Case to Europe?

It is not unusual for analyses of the social significance of religion and the church in the US to start by highlighting the major differences to Europe (see, for example, Lehmann 2006: 134f.; Joas 2009: 317f.). Although the countries of Western Europe are very similar to the US in terms of their social, political, and economic conditions, so it is argued, they differ greatly when it comes to religion. In the US, the churches are full, whereas Western and Central Europe have seen pews emptying in recent decades. In the US, religion has a visible role to play in political life, whether it be in the inauguration of the American president, in the sessions of Congress, or in public debates. In the decades after the Second World War, the political significance of churches and religious communities in a country such as Germany has weakened steadily and has more or less faded into insignificance, quite possibly also on account of the bitter experience of political religions such as National Socialism and Communism. Anyone spending even a small amount of time in the US can immediately sense its vibrant religious diversity. A German village is built around just one church, whereas in the US a number of churches of different persuasions frequently line a single street. Switching on the television, the viewer is confronted at all times of the day and night by a huge number of religious programmes, with charismatic preachers representing a vast number of religious groups and holding their hell-fire sermons or promulgating in sonorous tones their advice on how to cope with life; in Europe, on the other hand, religious communities are allotted very few broadcasting slots. Clearly, the numerous references to the great differences in the vitality of religion and church between the US and Europe shed doubt on the validity of secularization theory (Warner 1993: 1048). The level of modernization in the US is no lower than it is in comparable Western European countries, but its lively religiosity cannot be found in similar countries of Western Europe. The claim that modernization leads to a weakening of the social significance of religion and church is palpably wrong, as the example of the US shows.



The differences in the level of religiosity between the US and Europe are indeed considerable, a fact scarcely contested in the literature. What is at issue here is not whether these differences exist, but how they are explained. Peter L. Berger, Pippa Norris, Ronald Inglehart, and others speak of a puzzle for researchers concerning the different significance of religion in the US and Europe. Berger (1999: 10), for example, writes: 'One of the most interesting puzzles in the sociology of religion is why Americans are so much more religious as well as more churchly than Europeans.' And Norris and Inglehart, who also speak of a 'puzzle of secularization in the United States and Western Europe' (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 83), write: 'It is clear that the United States is exceptionally religious for its level of development, but it remains unclear why' (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 240). It is secularization theory, with its claim that modernization and secularization are causally linked, that creates the need for explanation.

To solve the puzzle, some have developed a new variant of secularization theory. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, for example, do not consider the decisive factors influencing the level of religiosity to be industrialization, urbanization, increased prosperity, and greater education, but rather the degree of existential insecurity. In their eyes, the need for religious affirmation is increased by a lack of material security, by social inequality, and by personal and social experiences to risk. 'Feelings of vulnerability to physical, societal, and personal risks are a key factor driving religiosity' (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 4). They argue that the high level of religious vitality in the US is due to the high level of existential insecurity there. In no other highly developed society is social inequality as great as it is in the US. Social inequality, shortcomings in the welfare system, the risk of poverty, ethnic segregation, job insecurity, deficiencies in pension and health care schemes—these have all contributed, so they claim, to the high level of religiosity in the US. Norris and Inglehart are by no means representatives of classic secularization theory, then, which makes the level of economic prosperity, scientific progress, and university and school education chiefly responsible for the decline in the significance of religion in modern societies. What they probably *do* represent, however, is a neoclassical version of secularization theory, which sees the decisive explanatory factor as being the lack of existential security, which of course is determined by (among others) the level of economic development (*insecurity hypothesis*).

To explain the high level of religiosity in the US, other social scientists (Stark and Finke 2000) point not to the level of existential security, but rather to the form of the church-state relationship. They argue that the sharp separation of church and state, the state's restraint in all religious matters, and the refusal to privilege one religious community above others, as is typical of the US, means that a free religious market can develop in which all religious organizations can compete with one another on equal terms. Competition

between religious communities, so they claim, encourages providers of religion to improve their religious offerings and adapt to the wishes of their clientele; at the same time, it allows religious consumers to choose the services that most meet their needs from among the alternatives on offer. In contrast, the situation of a religious monopoly such as can be found in many countries in Europe prevents a market-induced improvement in the religious offerings and hampers the choices available to religious consumers. According to this approach, therefore, the crucial reason for the high level of vitality in the US lies in the formation of a plural religious market enabled by the strict separation of state and church (*market hypothesis*).

The approach adopted by the economic market theory has not gone unchallenged, however. Drawing on the early works of Gaustad (1962: 159), Steve Bruce (2002: 221) points out that large areas of the US are astonishingly homogeneous in religious terms. We need only think of the distribution of the Southern Baptist Convention in the south of the US, the dominance of the Mormons in Utah, or even the significance of the Lutherans in the Midwest. In the 1950s, according to Gaustad's calculations, in approximately 50 per cent of all counties in the US, at least half of the population were of a single denomination. Even if religious plurality has increased in recent decades, we may assume that, in many areas of America, one single religious community still dominates.

What we also need to bear in mind is that the link between the degree of religious plurality and the level of religiosity is a matter of contention. Finke and Stark (1988) find evidence to support the argument that competition among religious communities increases religious consumption. Others argue that this applies only if the proportion of Catholics is assessed, and then omitted from the calculation (Olson 1999). Still others even arrive at the opposite result, arguing that religious diversity correlates negatively with church ties (Land et al. 1991; Blau et al. 1992). Using a broad comparison of various studies, Chaves and Gorski come to the following conclusion: 'The empirical evidence contradicts the claim that religious pluralism is positively associated with religious participation in any general sense' (Chaves and Gorski 2001: 279). Many sociologists of religion consider a positive relationship between a situation of religious monopoly and a high level of religious commitment to be more likely (Berger 1969, 1979; Bruce 2002).

To explain the high social and political significance of religion in the US, historians and sociologists also often draw on American history, with its allegedly deeply religious associations, referring, for example, to the Founding Fathers, who are partially stylized as religious role models (West 1997; see also Noll 2002; Engeman and Zuckert 2004). Even the origins of the US, so they claim, are due in no small measure to religious motives, the wish of many religious dissidents to escape the pious paternalism of the established churches in Europe and to live in a country of individual spiritual self-determination.



Some historians claim that the revivalist movement of the eighteenth century—we are talking here of the first Great Awakening in the years between 1730 and 1760—helped to prepare for the Revolution and to shape some of its leading ideas, such as the *egalitarian rhetoric*. The Great Awakenings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is claimed, strengthened even further the religious character of social, political, and economic life in the US. If Americans still express their national identity in religious terms, and see America in terms of the ancient Israelite ideas of the Covenant or of being God's chosen nation as handed down in the days of the Founding Fathers, this is a manifestation of the vitality of their Puritan and Evangelical heritage. No other modern country is as strongly inclined as the US to ascribe to itself a divine mission in the world and to interpret its efforts to secure peace, justice, democracy, and freedom in terms of religious concepts (Banchoff 2013). The optimistic belief that the world can be improved and that America has been chosen to set about improving it and to fulfill God's mission shows the extent to which America's self-image is shaped by its history (*genealogical hypothesis*).

This historical approach has also been contradicted. According to Hans Joas (2009: 323), the special case of the US cannot be attributed to the idea that its national identity was impregnated with religion from the very outset, as the number of members of religious communities in the US did not diminish in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but rose constantly and considerably. Here, Joas is adopting a thesis formulated by Finke and Stark (1992), who argue that, if the churchification of America has actually increased in the course of its history, then the explanation for the high level of religious vitality in the US cannot lie in its Puritan heritage, but must be sought elsewhere.

Finally, literature in the social and historical sciences also repeatedly argues the thesis that the high level of religiosity in the US is due to the constant influx of immigrants from countries that were highly religious and who brought their religion with them (most recently, Höllinger 2009: 464). Processes of secularization and dechurchification, it is claimed, could never become dominant in the US because America is constantly receiving new religious impulses from outside (*immigration hypothesis*).

The immigration hypothesis has also of course drawn criticism. The objection here is that migrants frequently had a lower level of religiosity before immigration to the US than they did afterwards; and that the level of religiosity often did not increase among those emigrating to countries other than the US. It is therefore not immigrants who contribute to the high level of religiosity; rather, the specific situation in America exerts a positive influence on the religiosity of immigrants (Herberg 1955).

As we can see, the question of which factors can be used to explain the high level of religiosity in the US is highly contentious in the literature.

However, before attempting to provide our own answers to this question, we first need to clarify how great the claimed differences in the level of religiosity between the US and Europe really are, and whether they have tended to increase or decrease in recent times. Therefore, before embarking on the explanatory part, we will provide a detailed descriptive section that attempts to capture the religious differences between Europe and the US, as well as their development. Once again, we shall have recourse to the multidimensional concept of religiosity (see Chapter 2) that we have already made use of in previous chapters.

### 10.1. DESCRIPTION

In our descriptive section, we argue that the differences in religiosity between the US and Europe are in fact considerable, and are not only of a quantitative but also of a qualitative nature; in other words, they concern not only the level of religiosity in question, but also the form and content of belief. We also claim, however, that the religious differences are less than is commonly assumed, and that, not only in the modern countries of Western Europe but also in the ultra-modern US, there are tendencies towards dechurchification and secularization that are in many respects not so vastly different from those in Western Europe; after a phase of religious divergence, these tendencies may perhaps herald a stage of religious convergence between the two continents.

If, however, as we show in Table 10.1, a variety of indicators are used, then what becomes apparent to begin with is the great difference in religiosity and churchliness between the US and Europe. With the exception of denominational affiliation, the US has a significantly higher level than the European countries in all religious dimensions. The fact that there are major differences between the US and Europe, not in terms of denominational affiliation, but regarding individual participation in church life, as well as in all questions of belief—this simple fact can be read as a pointer to the specific character of American religiousness. This religiousness is apparently less institutionally communicated and more strongly answered for individually than in Europe, where many people still remain church members even if they scarcely take part in religious life and faith no longer means a great deal to them.

Let us now consider the characteristics of religious affiliation in the US in more depth before then examining the other religious dimensions in more detail.



## 10.1.1. Dimension of Affiliation

Both in Europe and the US, approximately three quarters of the population count themselves as belonging to a church or congregation. If we differentiate church membership according to age, then differences between Europe and the US are also not serious. In both cases, older people are much more frequently members of a church than younger people. In the US, only approximately 60 per cent of 18- to 29-year-olds are members of a church, while that figure is between 80 and 90 per cent among those over 50 (Fig. 10.1). This means, however, that what applies to European countries applies also to the US: that the proportion of church members in the overall population is very likely to fall in the future.

Even today, approximately 17 per cent of Americans say that they have no preference for any religion (see Fig. 10.3). The question of religious preference is related to the question of church membership, but is not identical to it, since it is concerned with people's identification with a religion, and not with their membership of a church. In 1957, the proportion of those who claimed to have no religious preference was 3 per cent. At the beginning of the 1990s, the proportion answering the question about their religious preference with 'no religion' was only about 6 per cent. Therefore, the proportion of so-called 'Nones' has risen mainly since the 1990s.

This is also made clear by Fig. 10.2, which is based on Michael Terwey's chart. It compares the increase in the numbers of those in the US who say that they have no religious preference with the growth in the number of those without religious affiliation in Western Germany since the 1970s/1980s. What is striking is the completely parallel course taken by the development in the proportion of those without religious ties in both societies, even if these are scarcely comparable with one another in terms of their overall religious character. In both countries, the increase in this proportion occurred mainly in the 1990s.

According to Claude Fischer and Michael Hout (2006: 193f.), the explanation for this rapid growth in the number of those without religious affiliation in the US is mainly attributable to the increased public visibility of the religious right wing since the 1980s. They argue that the growing identification of churches with conservative positions has led politically moderate people with only very loose ties to the church to give up their religious affiliation completely for political reasons. Ever since the religious right began to gain prominence in the public domain and the media with their campaigns against feminism, homosexuality, abortion, and the theory of evolution, many have felt the need to loosen their religious ties. When responding to the question about their religious preferences by saying that they have none, this is a way for them to say 'I'm not like them.' According to Fischer and Hout's interpretation, then, it is mainly the merging of closeness to the church and

Table 10.1. Belief\* and church membership in Europe and the US, 2006-8 (in %)

Country	Church membership	Weekly church attendance	Belief in God	Significance of God (8-10)	Belief in hell	Belief in heaven	Belief in reincarnation	Belief in Nirvana
US	75.3	26.3	92.0	69.2	70.8	82.5	30.8	20.2
European average (48 countries)	75.6	17.2	74.3	45.2	34.3	44.1	23.8	15.3
Ireland	85.5	39.7	85.0	46.2	48.9	77.4	25.7	16.9
Italy	80.2	32.9	84.3	55.3	51.4	57.8	26.0	18.0
Denmark	87.6	2.6	58.5	14.1	10.4	26.0	16.8	4.8
West Germany	83.6	9.9	66.8	30.9	25.1	37.1	23.4	8.2
East Germany	23.0	3.6	19.6	10.6	8.6	16.1	9.4	3.5
Estonia	31.0	3.7	43.4	19.0	34.4	36.1	33.6	11.8
Poland	94.3	51.7	94.5	65.1	59.7	67.0	19.1	9.4
Czech Republic	28.2	8.0	29.1	17.4	16.9	21.4	14.2	8.9
Russia	60.9	5.2	69.3	40.5	34.6	35.1	23.0	13.4

\*certain or probable belief.

Sources: WVS 2005-8; Religious Landscape Survey 2007; EVS 2008; ISSP 2008.



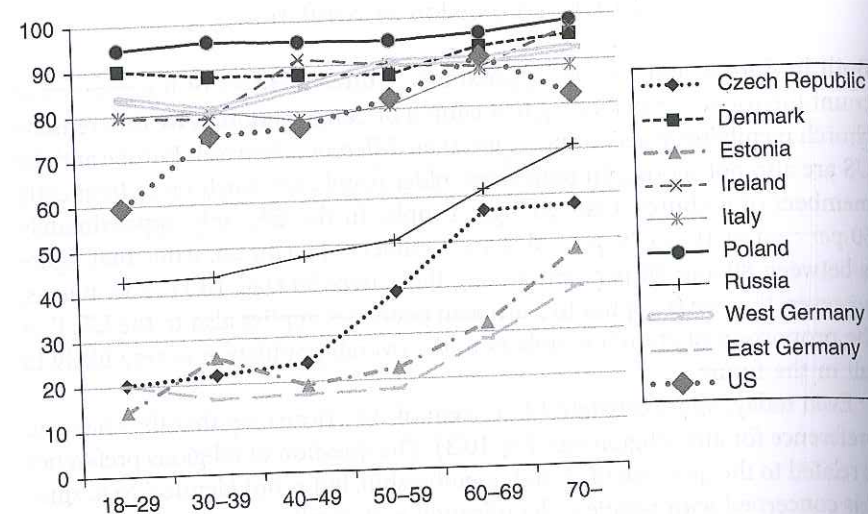


Fig. 10.1. Church membership according to age in selected countries of Europe and the US, 2008 (in %)

Sources: WVS 2005-8; EVS 2008.

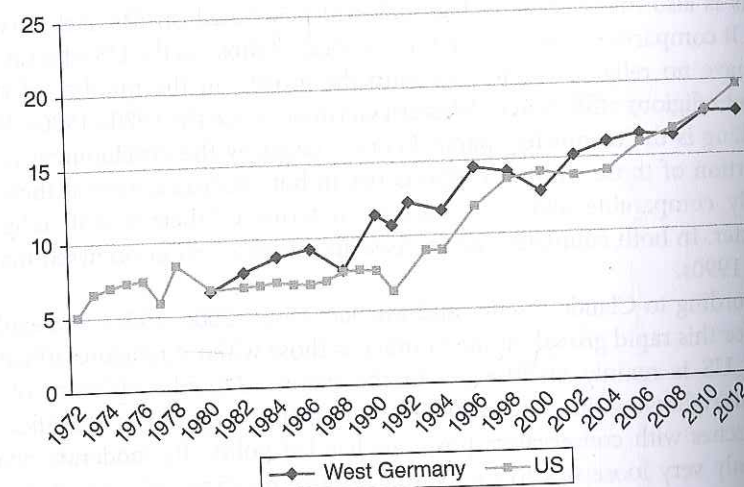


Fig. 10.2. Those without religious affiliation in the US and Western Germany (in %)

Sources: Following Terwey 2013: IV (on the basis of GSS 1972-2012 and Allbus 1980-2012, own calculations).

political conservatism that has contributed to the growth of the areligious option. In fact, it can be shown that affirmation of conservative positions among Christians close to the church has increased in recent years, while those distanced from the church tend to have moderate political positions (Chaves 2011: 99ff.). The rejection of every religious option is also encouraged of course by the fact that those with different political views tend to exaggerate the close link between Evangelical religious practice and politically conservative attitudes.

Denying all religious ties, as the so-called 'Nones' do, does not mean not going to church at all or denying the existence of God. Yet, when it comes to religious practice and belief in God, there is also a clear difference from those who identify with a religious option. Of the 'Nones', 5 per cent attend church service at least once a month, and 22 per cent say that they have no doubt that God exists (Chaves 2011: 19). Monthly church attendance in the population at large is around 37 per cent, however, and the existence of God is affirmed without any doubt by 64 per cent of Americans.

As Fig. 10.3 shows, the proportion of Protestants in relation to the overall population has dropped over the last forty years. In the 1970s, the proportion was still at over 60 per cent, but has since fallen to a little more than 50 per cent (GSS), and, according to other sources, to less than 50 per cent (American Religious Identification Survey 2008). Protestantism is still the most important religious tradition in the US, however, although it has forfeited its superior,

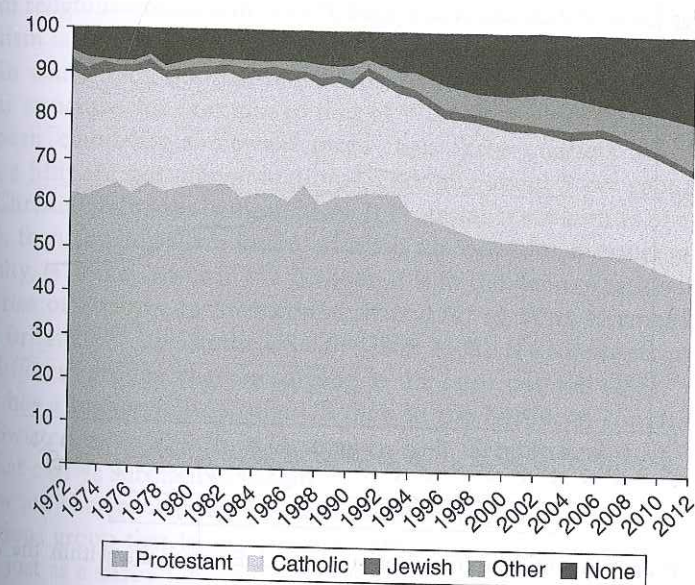


Fig. 10.3. Religious affiliation among Americans (in %)

Source: GSS 1972-2012.



culturally dominant position. It was without doubt the main religious culture in the US in the nineteenth century, the religion to which all other ideological and religious groupings had to accommodate themselves. In 1960, the proportion of Protestants in relation to the overall population was still at around 70 per cent (Greeley 1989: 25). American Protestantism has since lost this dominant position.

The decline in the social significance of Protestantism can be attributed mainly to the losses sustained by the so-called *mainline churches*, which include the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, moderate Lutherans, and Methodists. Fig. 10.4 shows the decline of the *mainline churches*, which still accounted for just about 30 per cent of the overall population in the 1970s, but whose proportion has since halved. On the other hand, the Evangelicals—the Southern Baptists, the Mennonites, the Pentecostals, the Non-denominational—have been able to maintain their numbers in relation to the overall population (Fig. 10.4; see also Noll 1992: 464). They have not gained in significance since the mid-1980s, as is often assumed, but they have also not shrunk. The growth in their significance occurred primarily in the 1970s (Fig. 10.4). Since then, the number of members has remained more or less constant. In recent years, the number of those converting from the *mainline churches* to the *Evangelical churches* has by no means increased, although today there are fewer Evangelicals converting to the *mainline churches* than used to be the case (Chaves 2011: 88). More and more Evangelicals are remaining in their churches and,

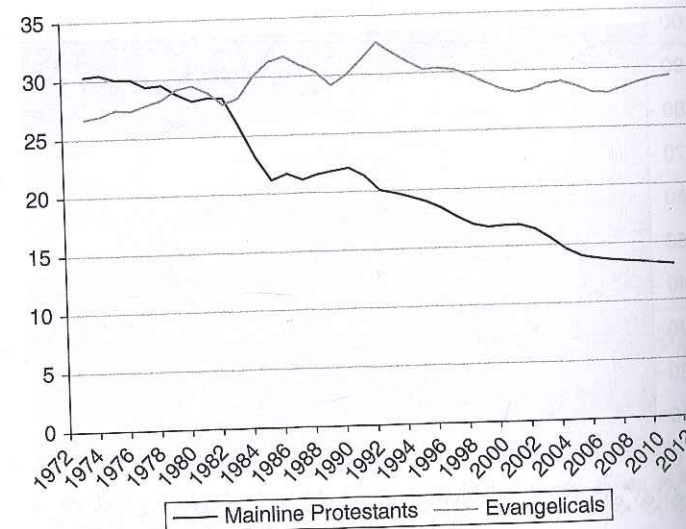


Fig. 10.4. Proportion of mainline Protestants and Evangelicals within the overall population (in %, floating average over 3 years)

Sources: Based on Chaves 2011: 86 (GSS 1972–2012, categorization of denominations according to Steensland et al. 2000, own calculations).

even if they rise socially, are no longer joining liberal churches as frequently as before. The Evangelical churches have clearly improved their reputation in society, and upward mobility is therefore accompanied less by a change to the liberal churches than was previously the case.

The Catholic Church has been remarkably stable over the last few decades (see Fig. 10.3). Approximately one American in four is Catholic, a proportion that has scarcely changed since the 1970s.

Special attention should be paid to the proportion of those who do not belong to any Christian denomination, but who belong to another religion. Their numbers have increased slightly in recent decades, but, leaving aside Judaism for a moment, to which 1.7 per cent of Americans say that they belong, they still do not even exceed 2.5 per cent to 3 per cent (see Fig. 10.3). Today, approximately 0.4 per cent of Americans belong to the Islamic faith; 0.7 per cent to the Buddhist faith; and 0.4 per cent to the Hindu faith (Pew Forum 2008: 26). This low proportion of members of non-Christian religions is surprising, since the image associated with the US is of a highly pluralistic religious landscape full of competition and dynamism (Stark and Finke 2000; Eck 2001). If we bear in mind that, in most of the highly developed Western European countries, the proportion of Muslims alone is 5 per cent and more (Pew Forum 2011: 161f.: Belgium 6 per cent, Germany 5 per cent, France 7.5 per cent, Great Britain 4.6 per cent, Netherlands 5.5 per cent, Sweden 4.9 per cent), the current image of a religious monopoly marked by lethargy and conventionality in Europe, and the very varied and vibrant religious situation in the US, begins to reveal its first cracks. Religious pluralism is mainly a phenomenon witnessed within American Protestantism. In actual fact, the distribution of denominations in the US shows a similar structure, for example, to that of West Germany and other Western European countries: somewhat more than three quarters are Christian, about a fifth are non-denominational, and only about 5 per cent belong to non-Christian religious communities. If Protestants are seen as one religious group, then the pluralism index, which is an index for measuring levels of diversity, is in fact lower in the US than it is in the denominationally mixed countries of Europe. In Switzerland, it is 0.71; in West Germany 0.70; in Great Britain 0.71; and in the US 0.67 (ISSP 2008). If Protestants are divided into different groups, then, according to the same data set (ISSP 2008), the index has a higher value in the US than in the European countries (US = 0.85, Switzerland = 0.73, West Germany = 0.68, Great Britain = 0.73), but not one that carries substantial weight.

How are changes in religious affiliations taking place in the US? After all, a religious group that is growing not only acquires members, but also loses some, just as a shrinking community has to accept losses in its membership, but can also record growth in membership. In the case of the first group, the number of acquired members is only just above that of the members leaving,



whereas it is the reverse with the second group. According to the findings of a survey conducted by the Pew Forum in 2008, 11 per cent of the overall population in the US have in the course of their lives abandoned their Protestant faith, while 8.4 per cent of the American population have joined Protestant denominations (Table 10.2). The net loss of Protestants therefore amounts to -2.6 percentage points. Particularly affected are the Baptists (-3.7 percentage points) and the Methodists (-2.1), whereas the *Non-denominational*s have performed particularly well (+3).

Net losses among Catholics are substantially higher, however. When asked, 31.4 per cent of Americans say that they were brought up as Catholics. Currently, however, only 23.9 per cent of the American population belongs to the Catholic Church. About one tenth of all Americans have left the Catholic Church (Table 10.2), which is approximately 32 per cent of all Catholics. The number of US citizens that have turned to the Catholic Church is 2.6 per cent, representing a net loss of 7.5 percentage points.<sup>1</sup> No other religious community in the US has had such heavy losses as the Catholic Church.

Why, then, has membership of the Catholic Church remained largely constant over a period of almost four decades? Apart from fertility and

Table 10.2. Childhood versus current affiliation of US adults (in %)

	Childhood Religion	Entering Group	Leaving Group	Current Religion	Net change
Protestant	53.9	+8.4	-11.0	=51.3	-2.6
Catholic	31.4	+2.6	-10.1	=23.9	-7.5
Mormon	1.8	+0.4	-0.5	=1.7	-0.1
Jehovah's Witness	0.6	+0.5	-0.4	=0.7	0.1
Orthodox	0.6	+<0.3	-<0.3	=0.6	0
Other Christian	<0.3	+0.3	-0.3	=0.3	0
Jewish	1.9	+0.3	-0.5	=1.7	-0.2
Muslim	0.3	+<0.3	-<0.3	=0.4	0.1
Buddhist	0.4	+0.5	-<0.3	=0.7	0.3
Hindu	0.4	+<0.3	-<0.3	=0.4	0
Other world religions	<0.3	+<0.3	-<0.3	=<0.3	0
Other faiths	0.3	+1.1	-<0.3	=1.2	0.9
Unaffiliated	7.3	+12.7	-3.9	=16.1	8.8
Don't Know/Refused	0.7			0.8	0.1
Total	100			100	

Source: Pew Forum 2008: 24, 26.

<sup>1</sup> As in Europe, the Catholic Church is therefore gaining far fewer members through transfers than the Protestant churches.

Table 10.3. Retention rates—proportion of those remaining in the same faith that they were brought up in, and of those changing their religious affiliation (in %)

Raised...	Non-converts	Converted to another group	Converted to no religion	Total
Protestant	80	7	13	100
Catholic	68	18	14	100
Mormon	70	15	14	100
Jehovah's Witness	37	30	33	100
Orthodox	73	21	7	100
Jewish	76	9	14	100
Buddhist	50	22	28	100
Hindu	84	8	8	100
Unaffiliated	46	54	N/A	100

Source: Pew Forum 2008: 30f.

mortality rates, there is another factor that we should point to here: immigration. The many people who left the Catholic Church over the years have been largely replaced by the high number of Catholic immigrants (Pew Forum 2008: 23). Forty-six per cent of all immigrants are Catholic; only 24 per cent are Protestant, and 9 per cent are members of non-Christian religions (Pew Forum 2008: 47).

The group that has grown most in recent years is those without religious ties. The number of Americans who did not belong to any religion in childhood is 7.3 per cent, more than half of whom—3.9 per cent of all Americans—have since joined a religious community. Fewer than half have remained without religious affiliation. The considerable growth shown by this group can be attributed mainly to the fact that 12.7 per cent of all Americans brought up in a religion have given up their religion and have joined the group of those without religious affiliation. The net gain in those without religious ties amounts to almost 9 percentage points.

What is striking when we look at the retention rates of the different denominations is the relatively low staying power of those without religious ties. Only 46 per cent of those who had no religious upbringing describe themselves today as having no religion (Table 10.3). The retention rate of Catholics is substantially higher at 68 per cent, even if it is also not very high. On the other hand, Hindus, Jews, and also Protestants, are able to retain about 80 per cent of those who belong to their religion.<sup>2</sup> In the process, the Catholic Church is losing far more members to the Protestant denominations than vice versa. Even so, 8 per cent of Catholics were brought up Protestant (Pew Forum

<sup>2</sup> This contradicts the European pattern, however. In Europe, the Catholic Church is better able to keep its members than the Protestant churches—a clear indication of the quite different position of Protestantism in the US as compared to Europe.



2008: 29); and 9 per cent of Protestants grew up Catholic. But, since the group of Protestants is more than double that of Catholics, the number of Catholics migrating to the Protestants is significantly higher than the number of migrations in the reverse direction. The Jehovah's Witnesses have been much less able to retain their members than the Catholic Church (Table 10.3), and fluctuations among the Unitarians and members of New Age groups are also high.

The figures presented here mean that the image of a less dynamic religious landscape needs to be corrected once again. The slow change in membership proportions conceals considerable migrations from one religious community to another. Even if membership of a religious community seems to be stable over several decades, as it is with the Catholic Church, it may conceal considerable migrations, with dynamic movements to and from one religion and the next—28 per cent of Americans have already changed their religion once (Pew Forum 2008: 22). If we include changes from one denomination to another within Protestantism, as well as within the various forms of non-religiousness (atheism, agnosticism), then in fact 44 per cent of Americans today belong to a different religious community than the one in which they grew up (Pew Forum 2008: 22). Twenty-eight per cent of Protestants have changed their denominational affiliation within the Protestant spectrum alone, with 15 per cent of Protestants transferring to an Evangelical church, 10 per cent to a *mainline church*, and 3 per cent to one of the historical *black Protestant churches*.<sup>3</sup> Taking account of changes within Protestantism, and from Protestantism to another religious community or to having no denominational affiliation, we can say that 48 per cent of all Protestants in the US are today no longer members of the denomination in which they grew up, while 52 per cent have remained true to the denomination of their childhood. According to detailed ISSP data (2008), only 5.6 per cent of the population in West Germany have changed from one religious community to another, while in the US that figure is 35.1 per cent. When someone leaves a church in Germany, then usually it is to give up all denominational ties. Changing from one religious community to another is fairly rare.

The impression of a lively religious landscape is confirmed if we look at how Americans behave with respect to marriage. Twenty-seven per cent of married people live in denominationally mixed marriages (Pew Forum 2008: 34). If we add to that figure those marriages between people who belong to different Protestant denominations, then the proportion of religiously mixed couples increases to 37 per cent. According to calculations by Mark Chaves (2011: 25),

<sup>3</sup> In the younger age groups, the proportion of those who go beyond the boundaries of religious traditions when they change religion is far above the proportion of those who change within a religious tradition. Among the older age groups, the proportion of intratraditional change is higher than among the younger age groups (Pew Forum 2008: 32).

approximately a quarter of all those born after 1970 crossed religious boundaries when they married.<sup>4</sup> For those born before 1920, the proportion is only around 10 per cent. The religious landscape in the US is without doubt becoming more pluralistic. This is also shown by the fact that the proportion of those who state that their closest friends are members of the same religion fell from 59 to 54 per cent in the period between 1988 and 1998 (Chaves 2011: 25).

Even so, the process of religious pluralization also comes up against clearly recognizable boundaries. The majority in a person's closest circle of friends still comprise those who belong to the same religious community. And, if we consider the religious heterogeneity of marriages entered into, it is also not a majority, but a minority, who live in religiously mixed marriages. Of all the religious traditions, it is the Hindus and Mormons who have the highest level of religious homogeneity within families. The majority of Catholics (78 per cent) also marry a member of their own religious community. If we consider that a further 14 per cent of Catholics are married to a Protestant, then the attitude of Catholics to marriage is open to the outside world to only a very limited extent. Only 3 per cent of Catholics are married to a member of a non-Christian religion, and 5 per cent to someone who is not religiously tied. The situation is similar among Protestants, with more than 90 per cent having a Christian partner. Eighty-one per cent of all married Protestants are married to other Protestants, and a further 10 per cent to Catholics (Table 10.4). At the

Table 10.4. Religiously mixed marriages (in %)

Among married...	Spouse is...		Religion of spouse (if different)			
	Same religion	Different religion	Protestant	Catholic	All other/DK/REF	Unaffiliated
Protestants	81	19	—	10	3	6
Catholics	78	22	14	—	3	5
Mormons	83	17	5	5	2	5
Jehovah's Witnesses	65	35	9	6	5	15
Orthodox	65	35	12	16	4	3
Jews	69	31	7	12	3	8
Buddhists	45	55	15	7	6	27
Hindus	90	10	1	2	3	3
Unaffiliated	41	59	28	22	9	—

Source: Pew Forum 2008: 34f.

<sup>4</sup> The demarcation lines used here as a basis tally with the categories used in Fig. 10.3: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, no religion, other religion. They can therefore be distinguished from the categories that underlie the investigations conducted by the Pew Forum.



same time, endogamy among members of *Evangelical churches* and the *historically black churches* is higher than among members of the *mainline churches*. Whereas 26 per cent of members of *mainline churches* are married to non-Protestants, members of both the other churches account for 15 per cent and 12 per cent of those married to non-Protestants respectively (Pew Forum 2008: 35). The impression that here a Christian majority essentially does its own recruiting when it comes to its reproductive behaviour, and that the gates are relatively closed to the outside world, can scarcely be dismissed.

The demarcation line between the separate groups becomes even sharper when we consider the ethnic composition of the congregations. The overwhelming majority of congregations in America are ethnically homogeneous: they are of either white or black or Asian or Hispanic origin. Among the congregations that are more than 90 per cent white, though, there has been an increase in the proportion of those with at least a few Afro-Americans or Latin Americans or Asians among them (Chaves 2011: 28). There are therefore today fewer congregations that are 100 per cent white than used to be the case. Racial diversity within the *black churches* has not increased, however, and they are as little multi-ethnic as before. Racial integration is therefore a one-way street.

What is more, the extent of religious plurality in the US is unevenly distributed in regional terms. Many areas are characterized by a large degree of religious homogeneity. In two thirds of all American counties, more than half of all those with religious ties belong to a single denomination (Fig. 10.5).<sup>5</sup> Here, the religious landscape is dominated by one religious group. In one fifth of the more than 3,000 counties, the proportion of all those belonging to a religion who count themselves as members of a single denomination comes to at least 75 per cent.

Using the data acquired so far, we have a picture of religious plurality in the US that is mixed. On the one hand, the level of religious diversity is surprisingly low (pace Eck 2001). If we group the Protestant denominations together as one religious tradition, it is scarcely above the level of many Western European countries. As the analysis of religious ties in the different counties has shown, the US is characterized at the local level by considerable religious homogeneity. After all, the circle of close friends and family often has a low level of religious heterogeneity. Although religious diversity in the regions and in the circle of friends and family is growing, it does not cover the majority of territorial and familial forms of cohabitation in America. The US still remains

<sup>5</sup> Unlike representative surveys such as the GSS, which inquire into self-identification with religious groupings, the 'Religious Congregations and Membership Study' conducted by the US Religion Census of 2010 covers the ties that people have to a specific congregation. See [http://www.rcms2010.org/images/2010\\_US\\_Religion\\_Census\\_Introduction.pdf](http://www.rcms2010.org/images/2010_US_Religion_Census_Introduction.pdf).

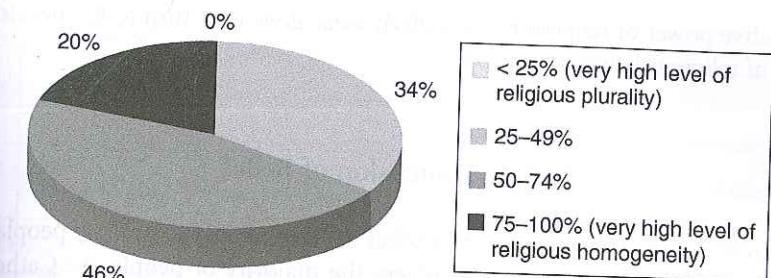


Fig. 10.5. Distribution of counties according to the proportion of the largest denomination among members of a denomination (in %)

Note: the pie chart shows how high the proportion of counties is in which at least 75%, at least 50%, at least 25%, or less than 25% of those members of a denomination living in the counties belong to the largest denomination in each case.

Source: Religious Congregations and Membership Study. See Hadaway et al. 2012.

a mostly Christian country, one whose Christian population essentially reproduces itself.

On the other hand, the proportion of migrations from one denomination to another within Protestantism, as well as across the boundaries of Protestantism and of Catholicism, is well above the level of European countries. Those brought up in one denomination do not remain within it for a lifetime, but may well decide in favour of a different denomination.<sup>6</sup> Unlike in the countries of Western Europe, being a member of a religious community in the US is clearly often not a matter of convention (an attribute ascribed), but an object of personal decision (an attribute acquired). Far fewer moved from belonging to a denomination to having no denomination (12.7 per cent) than those who moved between different denominations (about 30 per cent). Even if the outward flow towards those without a denomination has increased, the attractiveness of religious communities remains considerable. Their great appeal is also manifested in the relatively low rate of retention shown by the group of those without religious affiliation. There is apparently a powerful aura that emanates from the denominational majority culture in the US, an aura that those without religious ties can scarcely escape, even if their numbers are still rising. Many Americans attach to their religious affiliation an individual significance that most Western Europeans no longer possess. In Western Europe, the proportion of those who give up their affiliation to a church completely is well above the number of those who migrate from one religious community to another. We gain the impression that affiliation to a church in the US still represents a norm to be followed, whereas in many parts of Western Europe it has lost this character. The

<sup>6</sup> We need to carry out another investigation to establish the conditions favouring a shift from one religion to another in the US, something that we cannot do here.



normative power of religion is particularly clear if we now turn to the development of religious beliefs in the US.

### 10.1.2. Dimension of Belief

In scarcely any European country is belief in God shared by so many people as it is in the US. Even in countries where the majority of people are Catholic such as Italy or Ireland, belief in God is not as high as it is in the US. Only a few Eastern European countries such as Poland, Romania, or Croatia achieve similarly high values (see Tables III.1 and III.3). Asked whether they believe in God or a higher power, 92 per cent of Americans answered in the affirmative in 2008 (see Table 10.1). In point of fact, this proportion has remained more or less stable over recent decades (Fig. 10.6). If we consider a longer period of time, however, then belief in God among Americans has actually undergone some change. In 1968, 98 per cent of Americans (Fig. 10.6), and, in the 1950s, 99 per cent of Americans said that they believed in God (Smith 2009: 3). However small the differences and however high the number of those who believe in God still remains, the signs of religious change in America point, despite all the continuities, to a decline in religiosity.

This becomes even more striking if we differentiate those who affirm a belief in God according to age. Of those over 60, more than 80 per cent attach great importance to God (Fig. 10.7). Among the 18- to 29-year-olds, that figure is not even 60 per cent. We may assume that, all in all, the importance of belief in God among the American population will continue to decline in the coming years, even if perhaps only slowly.

Despite these tendencies, we must assess belief in God in the US as being exceptionally high. It is as natural in the US as pride in one's own nation or the belief in human rights. Anyone denying belief in God in America transgresses the boundaries of common sense.<sup>7</sup>

This does not mean, though, that people consider their own religion to be the only true one. On the contrary, there is a considerable openness to religions of every kind. More than three fifths of Americans subscribe to the statement that every religion possesses a grain of truth (Religion Monitor 2007), and even four fifths to the statement that there is something true in every religion (Religion Monitor 2012; see also Putnam and Campbell 2010: 541, 549). About 80 per cent of Americans think that people should be open to

<sup>7</sup> Penny Edgell et al. (2006) have found that Americans regard atheists as the group that has a lower likelihood of agreeing with their values than any other large social group, including homosexuals and Muslims. Three fifths of Americans see atheism as a threat in the world—more than in any other European country (Pickel 2013: 31), where the proportion of those who see atheism in this way is nowhere greater than one third.

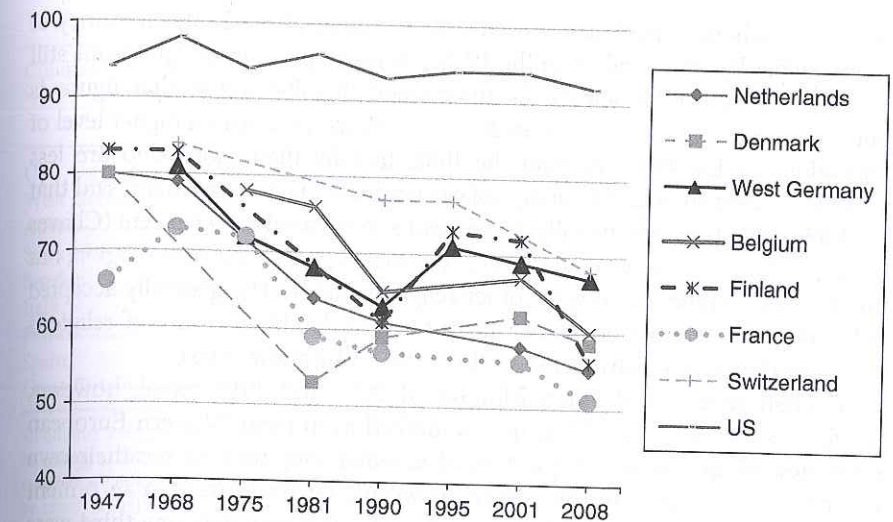


Fig. 10.6. Belief in God in selected European countries and the US (in %)

Sources: Norris and Inglehart 2004: 90; Religious Landscape Survey 2007; EVS 2008; ISSP 2008.

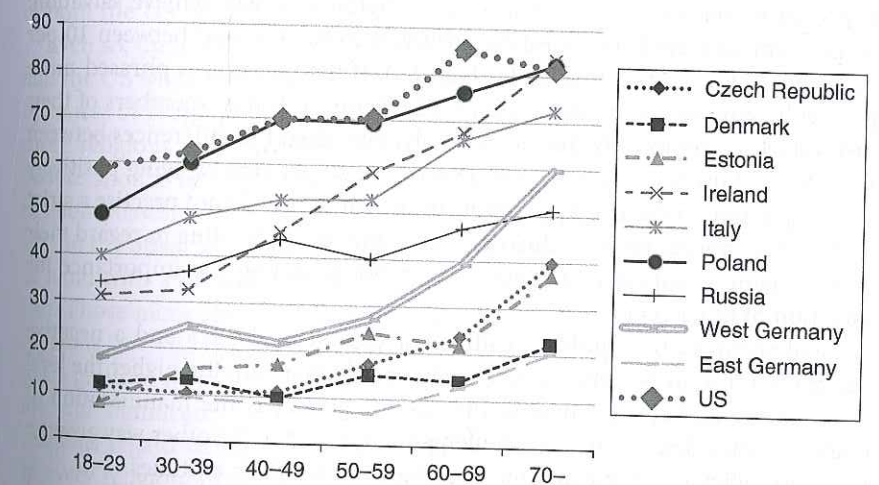


Fig. 10.7. Age and importance of God (8-10, in %)

Source: WVS 2005-8; EVS 2008.

all religions (Religion Monitor 2012). In religious questions, only about a third are convinced that their own religion is right, and that others are wrong (Religion Monitor 2007; 2012). In 1924, 91 per cent of high-school students in Indiana considered Christianity to be the only true religion. In 1977, only 44 per cent agreed with this statement (Caplow et al. 1983). People's belief in



their own orthodoxy has become even weaker. Equally, belief in the inerrancy of the Bible has become weaker. In the 1970s, about 40 per cent of Americans still believed that the Bible should be understood literally; today, that figure is approximately 30 per cent (Chaves 2011: 35). Here, those with a higher level of education are less likely to read the Bible literally than those who are less educated. Fewer than half as many college graduates as non-graduates said that the Bible should be taken literally: 17 per cent as compared to 39 per cent (Chaves 2011: 36). Not only do fewer and fewer Americans prefer their own religion, but an increasing number also value other religions highly. The generally accepted belief in God therefore does not rule out a considerable measure of religious tolerance (Olson and Carroll 1992; Olson 1997; Wuthnow 2005).

As analyses of the Religion Monitor of 2007 and 2012 reveal, however, religious tolerance in the US is not as marked as in most Western European countries. When asked the question of whether they tend to see their own religion as being right and the others as wrong, far fewer were in agreement in Europe than in the US. Whereas in the US, approximately one third were in agreement, that proportion was generally only between 10 per cent and 20 per cent in Western Europe (Table 10.5; see also Pickel 2013: 35). Even more striking are the differences with regard to the question of whether it is primarily members of a person's own religion who will achieve salvation: 50 per cent answered this question positively in the US, and between 10 per cent and 25 per cent in Europe (Table 10.5). If the question is phrased more pointedly, however, and people are asked whether it is *only* members of their own religious community that achieve salvation, then the differences between the US and Europe disappear, with fewer than 20 per cent replying positively to this question in the US. Apparently, most Americans do not practise a strict exclusivism, but rather an inclusivism, with Americans tending to regard their own religion as superior to others, while not excluding the importance for salvation of other religions.<sup>8</sup>

Meulemann (2013) finds a positive correlation in the US and a negative correlation in Europe between religiosity and dogmatism: the higher the level of religiosity and churchliness in the US, the greater is the manifestation of dogmatic attitudes. In Europe, Meulemann argues, it is the other way around: the more religious people are, the less dogmatic are their attitudes.

We cannot unequivocally confirm the differences between the US and Europe that Meulemann claims, however. Dogmatism, measured by people's conviction that especially their own religion is correct (orthodoxy), and that only members of their own religious community will achieve salvation

<sup>8</sup> For a distinction between exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, see Schmidt-Leukel 2005. What is not given sufficient consideration by Schmidt-Leukel, however, is religious relativism, which is increasingly spreading due to growing religious pluralism.

Table 10.5. Religious dogmatism

Country	My own religion is right	Especially my own religion is correct	Primarily members of my own religion will be saved	Only members of my own religion attain salvation
US	33.5	32.2	50.3	15.6
West Germany		14.6		5.9
Austria	22.2		23.9	
Switzerland	12.3	13.8	12.1	20.0
Sweden		17.4		11.4
Italy	21.5		8.9	
France	9.5	20.0	8.7	8.0
Spain	18.7	29.7	22.9	9.2
Great Britain	14.5	20.8	23.1	8.8

Questions: 'I am convinced that in questions of religion, my own religion is right while other religions tend to be wrong' (2007); 'I am convinced that in religious matters especially my own religion is correct and other religions are more likely to be wrong' (2012); 'I am convinced that primarily members of my own religion will be saved' (2007); 'I am convinced that only the members of my own religion attain salvation' (2012).

Sources: Religion Monitor 2007; 2012.

(assurance of salvation), correlates positively with religiosity and belief in God in both the US and Europe (Table 10.6).

Even so, there are serious differences in patterns of attitude between Europe and the US when it comes to the relationship between religiosity and religious openness or religious universalism. In Europe, those who regard themselves as more religious and devout also agree more frequently with statements that people should be open to all religions (religious openness) and that every religion possesses a certain truth (religious universalism) (Table 10.6). In the US, on the other hand, greater religiosity and devotion to God do not go hand in hand with a greater religious openness and a stronger religious universalism. Those more strongly religious in the US even favour less openness to all religions ( $r = -0.126$ ), and are less prepared to acknowledge that every religion has a grain of truth in it ( $r = -0.097$ ). The correlations are not high, but they are still significant. In Europe, those who believe in God and are highly religious regard being open to all religions, and discovering something true in every religion, to be desirable; in the US, in contrast, it is precisely highly religious people who regard being open to other religions and acknowledging that they possess a kernel of truth as being less desirable.<sup>9</sup> There seems in the

<sup>9</sup> The fact that our analyses differ from those of Meulemann is mainly because Meulemann brings together the variables of religious orthodoxy, religious openness, and religious universalism to create a 'dogmatism' index. This makes transparent the differences between the US and Europe regarding the correlation between religiosity and religious openness or universalism, while making the similar correlations between religiosity and orthodoxy, such as exist in Europe, invisible.



Table 10.6. Correlations between religiosity, dogmatism, and religious openness

		Religiosity	Orthodoxy	Religious assurance of salvation	Religious openness	Religious universalism
Belief in God	USA	0.664**	0.195**	0.233**	n.s.	n.s.
	Europe	0.753**	0.295**	0.217**	0.082**	0.340**
Religiosity	USA		0.345**	0.336**	-0.126**	-0.097**
	Europe		0.335**	0.276**	0.063**	0.289**
Orthodoxy	USA			0.540**	-0.425**	-0.275**
	Europe			0.413**	-0.221**	-0.068**
Religious assurance of salvation	USA				-0.317**	-0.263**
	Europe				-0.139**	n.s.
Religious openness	USA					0.502**
	Europe					0.316**

\*\* The correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2-sided); n.s.: not significant.  
 Question: Belief in God: 'How strongly do you believe that God or something divine exists?'; Religiosity: 'Altogether: How religious would you consider yourself?'; Orthodoxy: 'I am convinced that in religious matters especially my own religion is correct and other religions are more likely to be wrong'; Religious assurance of salvation: 'I am convinced that only the members of my own religion attain salvation'; Religious openness: 'One should be open to all religions'; Religious universalism: 'For me, every religion has some truth.'

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

US more than in Europe to be a conflict between religious communities, whereas in Europe the conflict tends to be between the religious and the non-religious. In situations where practically everyone believes in God, the tension between secularism and religion scarcely plays a role. This is where the major disputes occur between members of different religious communities, between different religious preferences and styles, different religious milieus and religiously motivated attitudes; in rejecting secularism, a person agrees with the majority. In Europe, on the other hand, religious followers are all the more inclined to regard other religions as belonging to their own camp, the more strongly they understand themselves as religious.<sup>10</sup> For them, it is not other religions that are the major competitors, but the ever growing horde of the

<sup>10</sup> The difference between the US and Europe in the attitude to the religiosity of others becomes clear again if we take a look at the correlation between belief in God and trust in other people. In Europe, people who believe in God have greater trust in other religious people regardless of the religion to which they each belong; in the US, this is not the case. Naturally, believers in God in Europe also trust members of their own religious community more strongly than others; this correlation cannot be demonstrated for the US, either. But when it comes to the relationship between belief in God and trust in those who are not members of any religion, there are clear negative correlations in the US, whereas in European countries there are either no, or even slightly positive, correlations (see Table 10.7).

irreligious.<sup>11</sup> Religion in the US is not only more vital, but also more controversial, than in Europe (Smith 1998), and there may well be a connection between the two.

The differences in the correlations between religiosity and religious openness (Table 10.6), as well as in the reactions to the question of whether one's own religion is right and whether it is primarily the members of one's own religion who will be saved (see Table 10.5), show that religious convictions in the US possess quite a different existential urgency than in most countries of Western Europe. For US Americans, their religiosity is much more about eternal salvation and eternal damnation, and the question of which side they stand on in this struggle for life and death, than it is for Western Europeans. For them, transcendence is occupied, and is dualistic. Approximately 80 per cent of Americans believe in heaven, and approximately 70 per cent in hell (see Table 10.1). Although in Europe a hefty majority of three quarters believe that there is a God or a higher power, only 45 per cent believe in heaven and only 35 per cent in hell (see Table 10.1). Transcendence for many of them is a vague uncertainty that remains uncoded and that can yield no communicable content.

The indeterminacy of the ideas of transcendence that Europeans have becomes particularly apparent in their image of God. More and more people in Western Europe imagine God not as a person, but as an impersonal higher being, as a spirit or life force (Table 10.8). In most Western European countries, the number of people who imagine God to be an impersonal force now exceeds the number of those who believe in God as a person. In the US, on the

Table 10.7. Correlation between belief in God and trust (standardized linear regression coefficients using gender, age, education, and people's own assessment of their economic situation as controls)

Country	Trust in religious people, regardless of whether they are members of one's own or other religions	Trust in members of the same religion	Trust in members of any religion
Switzerland	0.215**	0.177**	n.s.
Sweden	0.118**	0.188**	0.077*
Great Britain	0.194**	0.236**	n.s.
West Germany	0.235**	0.235**	n.s.
US	n.s.	n.s.	-0.236**

\*\* The correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2-sided); \* the correlation is significant at the level of 0.05 (2-sided); n.s.: not significant.

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

<sup>11</sup> It may therefore hardly be a coincidence that the theory of religious competition emerged in the US (Stark and Finke 2000), while the model of the 'silent battle' between religious and secular goods was developed by a European sociologist of religion (Stolz 2009).



Table 10.8. Changes in the image of God in Europe and the US in recent decades (belief in a personal God or a spirit or a life force in %)

Country	Personal God				Change	Spirit or life force				Change
	1981	1990	1999	2008		1981	1990	1999	2008	
Belgium	39.0	29.0	27.7	21.6	-17.4	23.9	20.4	35.8	37.4	13.6
Denmark	23.9	19.4	23.6	21.3	-2.6	23.7	32.5	36.1	34.2	10.6
France	26.2	20.3	20.8	17.6	-8.6	26.0	31.9	30.5	33.5	7.5
Ireland	73.2	66.8	64.2	53.4	-19.8	15.5	24.0	23.9	23.8	8.3
Netherlands	34.2	27.8	23.5	23.9	-10.4	29.1	41.0	48.9	43.2	14.1
Norway	38.5	29.1	22.9	22.9	-15.6	32.4	35.4	26.7	25.6	7.6
Spain	54.5	50.0	46.3	43.5	-11.0	23.2	26.9	36.7	38.1	2.5
Great Britain	30.4	32.4	28.4	25.0	-5.4	38.5	40.8	15.2		-0.3
US	65.7	67.7	80.7		15.0	24.8	22.8			-9.6

Sources: EVS 1981–2008; WVS 1990; Politics of Character Survey 2000.

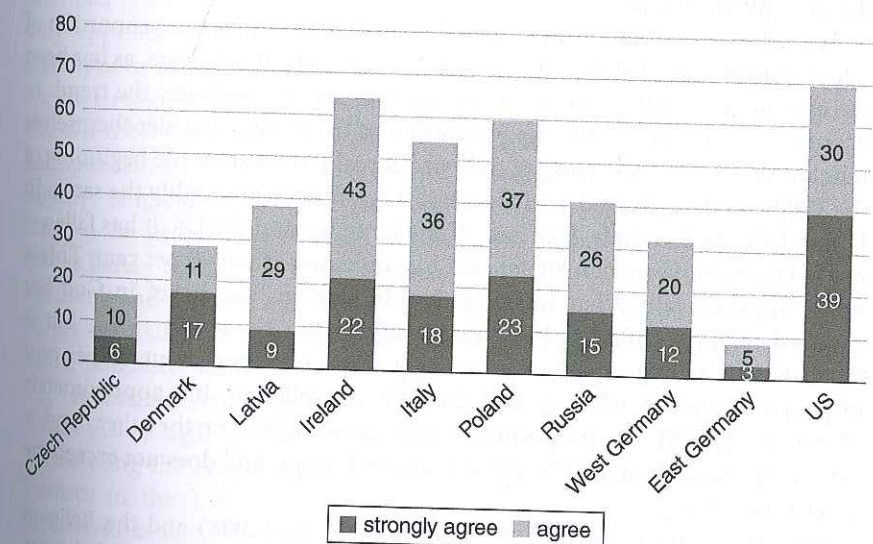


Fig. 10.8. 'There is a God who concerns Himself with every human being personally' (in %)

Source: ISSP 2008.

other hand, the number of those who have a personal image of God has risen in recent years, whereas the idea of an impersonal higher being has become less salient (Table 10.8). The number of those who believe in God is today five times as high in the US as the number of those who believe in a higher being.

This God who is conceived of as a person is a God who is concerned about people, who intervenes in their lives, who changes people, who compels them to change their ways, whom they can experience, and who communicates with them. The proportion of those who say that there is a God who is personally concerned about every human being is higher in the US than even in such highly Catholic countries as Ireland, Poland, and Italy (Fig. 10.8). In the US, it is many times greater than in East Germany or the Czech Republic. And there are also different experiential worlds in America and Europe when it comes to the question of the power of God to influence a person's life. In Europe, an average of around 22 per cent say that they have often had the experience of God intervening in their lives, while in the US that figure is 55 per cent (Religion Monitor 2012).

The question asking people whether they regard themselves as religious reveals something not only about personal religiosity, but also about the status of religion in the public domain of a country. In the US, the proportion of those who consider themselves religious is well above the European average. In West Germany, 21 per cent regard themselves as fairly or very religious on a five-point scale; in Switzerland 24 per cent; in Spain 18 per cent; in France



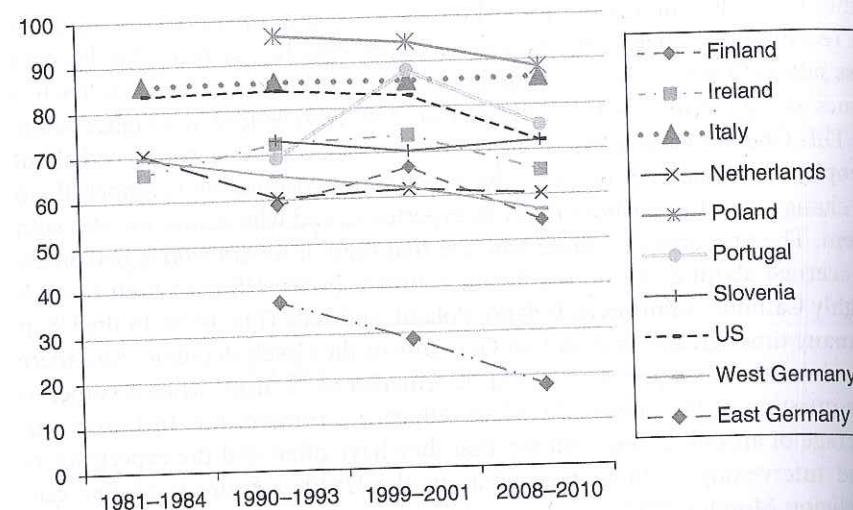


Fig. 10.9. Religiosity in Europe and the US over time: 'Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are a religious person?' (in %)

Sources: EVS 1981-2008; WVS 1990-2008.

30 per cent; and in Sweden a mere 12 per cent. But in the US, the figure is 41 per cent (Religion Monitor 2012). In other words, the proportion of people who consider themselves fairly or very religious is almost as high in the US as it is in Italy or Poland.

Examining the situation over time, however, shows that the proportion of religious people has fallen slightly in the US in the last thirty years, as has been the case in many European countries. Fig. 10.9 clearly illustrates the trend. In no country but Portugal has the proportion of those who consider themselves religious in the broadest sense of the word actually risen since the beginning of the 1980s. In Italy, Ireland, and Slovenia, it has remained roughly the same. In Finland, the Netherlands, East and West Germany, and the US, it has fallen—in the US, from more than 80 per cent to a little more than 70 per cent. This is not a dramatic fall. What we have already seen in how belief in God has changed is also confirmed here. Religiosity in the US is not rising, but is in actual fact falling slightly. Accordingly, it is no longer about 15 per cent of people in the US who say that they are not religious, but approximately 25 per cent (WVS). The proportion of convinced atheists, on the other hand, is extremely low both in the US and in Western Europe, and does not exceed the 5 per cent mark.

Some data sources such as the ISSP (1991; 1998; 2008) and the Religion Monitor (2007; 2012) suggest that, in the US, the proportion of the religious as well as the proportion of the non-religious have increased at the expense of the moderately religious. This slight tendency towards polarization should not be

exaggerated, however; it is embedded in the slight decline in religiosity that we have described, a decline that should also not be overdramatized. Just as belief in God has remained roughly constant since the 1970s, so has belief in heaven and hell. As many people say today that God cares for every person (more than 70 per cent) and that life is only meaningful because God exists (46 per cent) as several decades ago (Chaves 2011: 33). In terms of belief in God and religiosity, we have relative stability at a high level with a slight downward trend.

What deviates from this picture is the growth in spirituality that has occurred for several years now. Many surveys have investigated since the end of the 1980s not only the religiosity of Americans, but also their spirituality. Behind this new interest in spirituality is the question of whether the declining religiosity among Americans is balanced by a growth in spirituality (Marler and Hadaway 2002). Wade Clark Roof (1993) already observed in 1989 that many of those who did not see themselves as religious described themselves as spiritual. It has now become clear that the majority of Americans describe themselves not only as religious but also as spiritual, and that there is a close connection between religiosity and spirituality, even if the two orientations are not identical. The proportion of those who describe themselves as spiritual is even somewhat greater in the US than the proportion of those who describe themselves as religious. More than two thirds describe themselves as at least moderately religious, and more than three quarters as at least moderately spiritual (Table 10.9). In Europe, the proportion of those who describe themselves as religious or as spiritual is considerably lower. In Switzerland, for example, it accounts for approximately 50 per cent in each case; in Sweden, only approximately 25 per cent in each case. To contradict Roof's early assumption, and an opinion that can still be heard frequently today, we can see that religiosity and spirituality are not opposed to one another in the US. On the contrary, most Americans describe themselves as both religious and spiritual. Only approximately 15 per cent consider themselves not, or only slightly, religious, and at the same time not, or only slightly, spiritual. In Europe, the proportion of those who describe themselves as barely spiritual and as barely religious at all is between 30 per cent and 60 per cent. In West Germany and Switzerland, it is around 30 per cent; in Great Britain, around 40 per cent; and, in Sweden, around 60 per cent. Due to their proportions alone, religiosity and spirituality cannot be at odds with each other in the US. The correlation coefficient is  $r = 0.546$ . Despite deviant distributions, it is almost just as high in European countries, too.

Analysing the religious-spiritual group according to age reveals clear differences in the US. Among the over-50s, more than two fifths describe themselves as fairly or very religious, and at the same time as fairly or very spiritual; among the under-30s, however, that figure is less than a quarter (Fig. 10.10). Of the Western European countries investigated, there are some with similar age differences, but also some—for example, France and



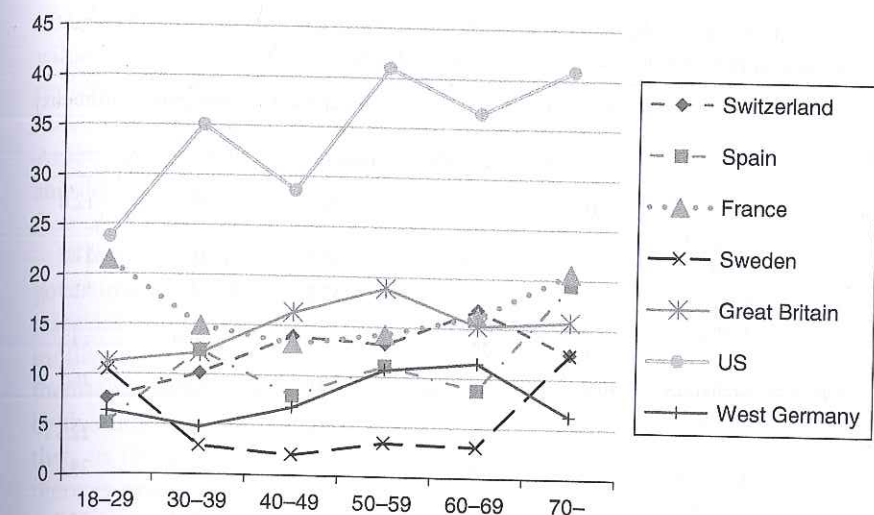
**Table 10.9.** Religiosity and spirituality in selected countries of Europe and the US, 2012 (in %)

		not at all/a little spiritual	moderately spiritual	fairly/very spiritual	Total
Switzerland	not at all/a little religious	31.2	7.3	4.7	43.3
	moderately religious	14.2	12.8	6.1	33.1
	fairly/very religious	4.5	6.8	12.4	23.7
	religious				
	Total	49.9	26.9	23.2	100.0
Great Britain	not at all/a little religious	42.2	6.6	6.8	55.6
	moderately religious	6.7	10.1	6.0	22.8
	fairly/very religious	2.6	3.7	15.3	21.6
	religious				
	Total	51.6	20.3	28.1	100.0
West Germany	not at all/a little religious	30.7	4.0	1.9	36.6
	moderately religious	24.7	13.7	3.9	42.3
	fairly/very religious	6.6	6.7	7.8	21.1
	religious				
	Total	62.1	24.4	13.5	100.0
Sweden	not at all/a little religious	61.1	6.6	4.8	72.5
	moderately religious	8.0	6.1	0.9	15.0
	fairly/very religious	4.5	2.1	5.9	12.5
	religious				
	Total	73.6	14.8	11.6	100.0
US	not at all/a little religious	15.1	6.9	8.9	30.9
	moderately religious	4.3	13.4	10.2	27.8
	fairly/very religious	0.3	6.9	34.0	41.3
	religious				
	Total	19.7	27.2	53.1	100.0

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

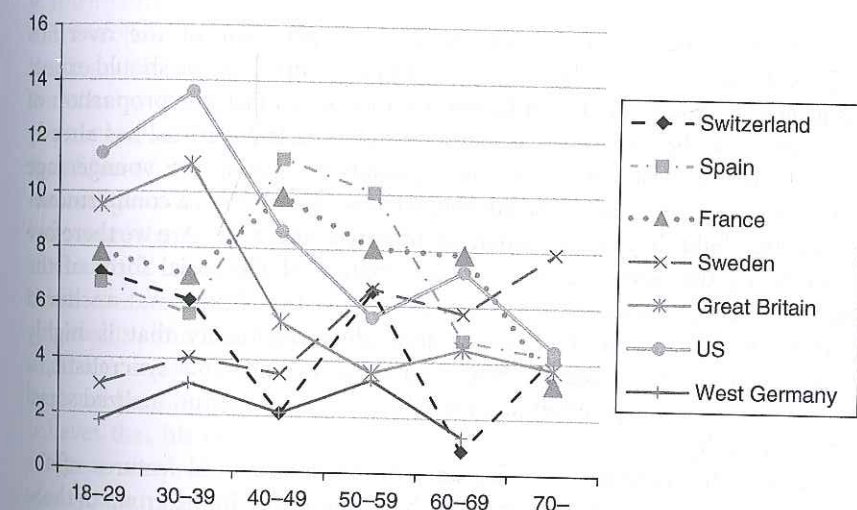
Sweden—where the proportion of the religious-spiritual rises again in the youngest age cohort. We can therefore assume that the religious-spiritual group in the US will in future probably decline in importance. We cannot make this kind of prediction for European countries.

What is decisive for assessing the trends in religiosity and spirituality is, however, the group of those who describe themselves as being not religious,



**Fig. 10.10.** Group of religious spiritual people according to age (in %)

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.



**Fig. 10.11.** Not religious, but spiritual according to age (in %)

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

but spiritual. We should first of all note that this group is a minority phenomenon. No more than approximately 9 per cent in the US describe themselves as being not religious or only somewhat religious, and yet at the same time as being fairly or very spiritual; in European countries, this figure is even lower (see Table 10.9). More than 12 per cent of the under-40s belong to this



**Table 10.10.** Religious characteristics of the areligiously spiritual in comparison to the overall population in selected countries of Europe and the US

		Religious affiliation	Church attendance (at least monthly)	Belief in God (very/fairly strong)	Reflexivity (often/very often)	Orthodoxy
France	Areligious-spiritual	37.0	2.7	8.3	50.7	12.0
	Total	62.2	16.6	37.7	31.4	21.2
Spain	Areligious-spiritual	36.5	6.7	33.3	54.7	11.5
	Total	69.1	27.6	43.9	29.7	32.1
Great Britain	Areligious-spiritual	40.0	17.9	36.4	64.7	26.1
	Total	61.0	24.5	43.8	38.4	22.5
US	Areligious-spiritual	62.5	35.6	72.9	35.7	29.4
	Total	78.9	51.9	76.3	25.4	33.7

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

group in the US, and only approximately 6 per cent of the over-50s (Fig. 10.11). In contrast to the religious-spiritual group, then, we should expect this group to grow in the US in future. As a matter of fact, the proportion of those who describe themselves as being not religious but spiritual has already increased in the past ten years, and especially so among the younger age groups (Chaves 2011: 39f.). It seems that what we have here is a countermovement to the slight downward tendencies otherwise observed. Are we therefore encountering the often described transformation of the social form of the religious from a traditional religiosity shaped by the church and anchored dogmatically in communities, to an individual spirituality that is highly reflexive, remote from the church, dogmatically fluid, and syncretistic, a spirituality that is in a position to replace over time the institutionalized social form of the religious?

Analysing the religious specifics and the socio-structural features of the spiritual group seems at first to confirm this assumption. In the group of those who describe themselves as at least fairly spiritual, but at most only somewhat religious (i.e. the 8.7 per cent mentioned in Table 10.8), there are particularly many in comparison to the American average who do not belong to any denomination and who attend church service less frequently, and especially few that adhere to the notion that only those members of their own religion will achieve salvation (Religion Monitor 2012). Likewise, the proportion of those among them who are constantly rethinking certain aspects of their personal belief is over-represented. Religious syncretism is no more strongly pronounced than on average. The group of areligious spiritual people

distinguishes itself from the average, however, through its unconventional value orientations. People oriented towards security and tradition are less represented among them; people who are cooperative, on the other hand, more. They are also more open to homosexual marriages than the average American. Three out of five Americans take the view that homosexual couples should be allowed to marry. In the areligiously spiritual group, that figure is four out of five.

When it comes to whether religious representatives should influence government decisions, the areligious-spiritual group tend to favour a more reserved approach. Whereas 30 per cent of Americans favour this kind of influence, only approximately 15 per cent do so in the group of those who see themselves as spiritual and areligious. All in all, then, and this is corroborated by the findings of the Religion Monitor 2012, we find confirmation of the fact that, in the areligious-spiritual group compared to the overall population, there is greater distance from the church, greater religious reflexivity and openness, less orientation towards tradition and security, and higher moral and sexual tolerance.

We might conclude from these data that there is a dominant trend towards a spirituality that is reflexive, critical of institutions, non-traditional, liberal, and individualistic, but this would be premature. First, because what we are dealing with here is still a small group encompassing only about 10 per cent of Americans. Second, this group is only slightly different from the overall population with respect to its religious and cultural orientations: just under four fifths of the American population are members of a religion; in the case of the areligious-spiritual group, the proportion of those with religious ties is a little more than three fifths (Table 10.10). Approximately half of Americans go to church at least once a month; among the areligious-spiritual, more than a third. The proportion of those who believe in God among the areligious-spiritual is almost as high as it is in the overall population. Whereas a quarter of Americans say that they often or very often consider certain aspects of their personal belief, a third of the areligious-spiritual do so. One American in three believes that his or her own religion is right in religious matters, and other religions are probably wrong; in the areligious-spiritual group, that figure is also approximately 30 per cent. The differences between the overall population and the areligious-spiritual are greater in some secularizing countries of Europe, especially in those where the Catholic Church once had a dominant position. With respect both to their religious affiliation, their attendance at church service, their belief in God, their religious reflexivity, and to their claim to orthodoxy, the areligiously spiritual deviate more strongly from the national average in, for example, France and Spain than in the US.

What is most important, however, and this is our third point, is that the socio-demographic profile of the areligious-spiritual group does not support the assumption of a dominant trend towards a non-churchly, reflexive, and



individualistic spirituality. There are more younger people than in the average population among the areligious-spiritual, and also more women. But the differences in social situation and household income are scarcely significant, and there are no demonstrable effects of education at all. People describing themselves as areligious and spiritual have no formally higher level of education than the average American. If we assume that the level of prosperity and education will rise in the US in future, then the specific socio-demographic characteristics of the areligious-spiritual do not suggest that there will be a great increase in the social significance of this group in future. On the contrary, the group does not seem to have a strong profile in religious, cultural, and socio-demographic terms. Only the age distribution speaks in favour of its future growth. It will certainly become larger in future, but will scarcely indicate a dominant trend.

On the other hand, the group of the non-religious has clear socio-demographic contours. Those without denominational ties, who not only reveal below-average values in all variables of religiosity, but also stand out through their significantly greater scepticism towards tradition, as well as their greater moral-sexual liberality, are not only especially young (Fig. 10.12), but also educated to an above-average level (Religion Monitor 2012). Their proportion has increased since the 1990s from well below 10 per cent to about 20 per cent today (see Fig. 10.2), and will also continue to increase in future. Even a growth in the areligious-spiritual group, which cannot be ruled out, will therefore be counteracted by the simultaneous increase in the non-religious group, which undoubtedly possesses a greater dynamic. There may perhaps be

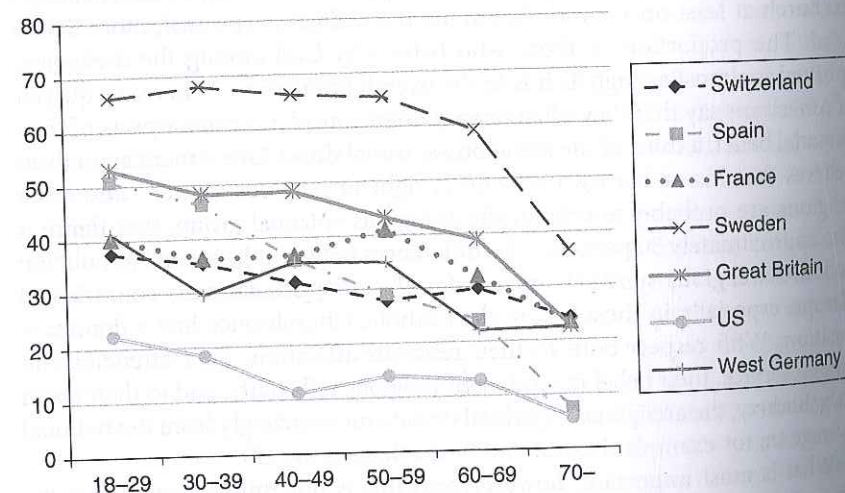


Fig. 10.12. Not religious and not spiritual according to age (in %)

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

a connection between the two developments. If this were the case, tendencies towards religious individualization, such as are appearing in the US, would be integrated into the more comprehensive trend towards secularization. Then, however, we would also need to answer the question of how the two trends are connected.

A possible explanation for the simultaneous occurrence of religious individualization and secularization could lie in the decline in attendance at church service. The lower immediate religious interaction is in the parishes, the greater the likelihood is not only of a non-church individualized spirituality, but also of a distancing by people from church and religion altogether. In section 10.1.3 we will deal with religious practice in the US.

### 10.1.3. Dimension of Practice

Church attendance is the most important indicator of religious practice in the US. Only 1 per cent of those who said that they had taken part in some kind of religious event during the previous week went to something other than a conventional religious service (Chaves 2011: 42). Those who take part in church life therefore as a rule attend church service, too. More people say that they pray than that they attend church service; but, if they practise their religion together with others outside their own home, this is mainly through going to church service. Approximately a quarter of the population in the US claim to do this regularly every week (Table 10.11). To this number must be added those who attend church on an irregular basis.<sup>12</sup> Taking together all those who attend church service, the General Social Survey—the most reliable

Table 10.11. Frequency of church attendance in the US, 1972–2014 (in %)

	Weekly	Monthly	More seldom	Never
1972	35.1	21.8	33.8	9.4
1977	29.7	22.2	34.2	13.9
1982	28.2	23.4	35.4	13.0
1987	28.7	25.8	34.6	10.9
1993	29.1	22.2	32.2	16.5
1998	25.4	22.9	32.2	19.6
2002	24.4	22.8	34.1	18.7
2008	26.3	20.0	32.6	21.2
2014	24.0	19.0	30.5	24.0

Source: GSS 1972–2014.

<sup>12</sup> Those going to church approximately every month have roughly a 25% chance of being included in the calculations for weekly church attendance.



source for recording through interview the levels of participation in church services in the US—arrives at a proportion of approximately 38 per cent who are supposed to be in church every Sunday (many of whom would say that they do not go to church every week).

As is well known, figures on frequency of church attendance that are based on statements by those polled are well above the figures of those attending church service that are calculated by means of diary studies or by on-site counts,<sup>13</sup> which arrive at approximately 20 per cent to 30 per cent of weekly church visitors. The frequently heard claim that weekly church attendance in the US has remained at around 40 per cent for decades is wrong. 'The true attendance rate is closer to 25 percent than to 40 per cent', says Mark Chaves (2011: 45), who in many studies has closely examined frequency of church attendance in the US. Compared with the European average, this value is still of course high (see Table 10.1).

If we look at how the frequency of church attendance has developed over the last thirty years in the US, the picture is quite clear. In 1972, 35 per cent of people said that they attended religious service every Sunday; the proportion of weekly churchgoers is now 25 per cent (Table 10.11). The number of those never attending church service rose particularly significantly in the 1990s. The critical decline in church attendance had already occurred in the 1960s, however. In 1958, 49 per cent of Americans still claimed that they had gone to church the previous weekend; in 1971, that figure was only 40 per cent (Flowers 1984: 39). In this case, the decline in the frequency of church attendance is mainly due to changes in the church attendance behaviour of Catholics. According to the admittedly optimistic polls provided by Gallup, the proportion of those Catholics attending church service fell from 74 per cent in 1958 to 51 per cent in 1982 (Roof and McKinney 1985: 29). Fischer and Hout (2006: 207) claim that the proportion has now approached the level of mainline Protestants.

As a glance at the age distribution of those attending church services shows, we can assume that the proportion of regular churchgoers will continue to fall in the US, as younger people attend church service much less often than older people (Fig. 10.13). One of the best predictors for attendance at church service is the religious upbringing that a person had as a child, and the frequency with which a person attended church service as a child. The correlation between frequency of church attendance as an adult and as a child is 0.337 in the US (ISSP 2008). If there is a positive correlation between church attendance as a child and as an adult, and if 20-year-old Americans, as Fig. 10.14 shows, state far less frequently today that they went to church as a child than do

<sup>13</sup> This discrepancy was first pointed out by Hadaway et al. (1993). For diary studies, see especially Presser and Stinson (1998). This article appeared in the February 1998 edition of the *American Sociological Review*, which discusses the subject in detail.

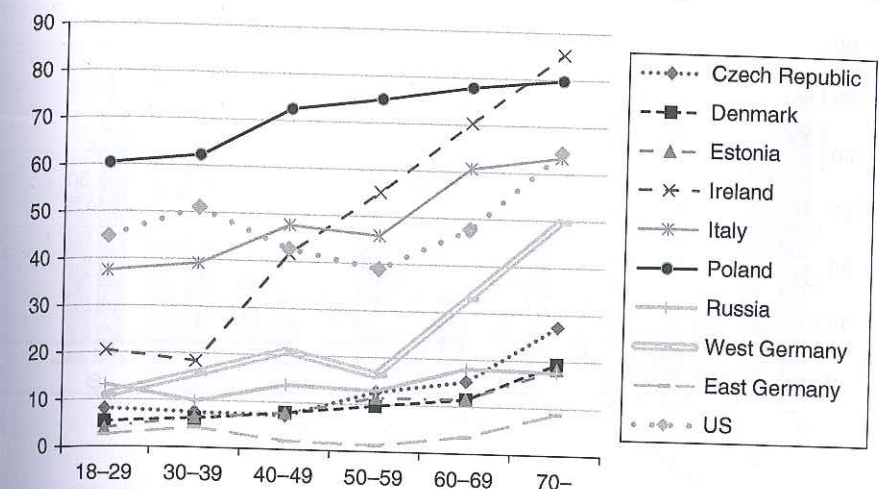


Fig. 10.13. Frequency of church attendance (monthly) according to age (in %)  
Sources: WVS 2005-8; EVS 2008.

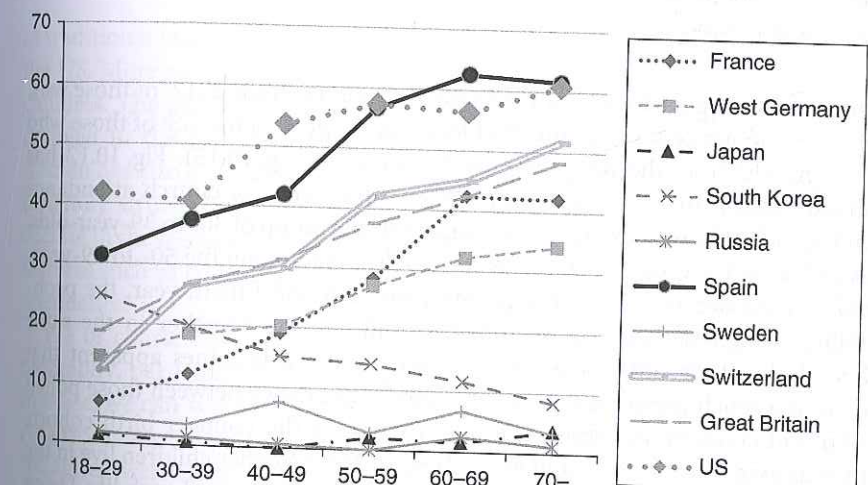


Fig. 10.14. Proportion of those who at the age of 11-12 went to church at least weekly, according to age groups (in %)  
Source: ISSP 2008.

70-year-olds, then these data also support the idea that there will be a further decline in the frequency of church attendance in the US.

Attending church service is affected not only by the religious influences that a person was exposed to as a child, but also by the family constellation which a person currently finds himself or herself in. Those questioned who have children state much more frequently than those without children that they



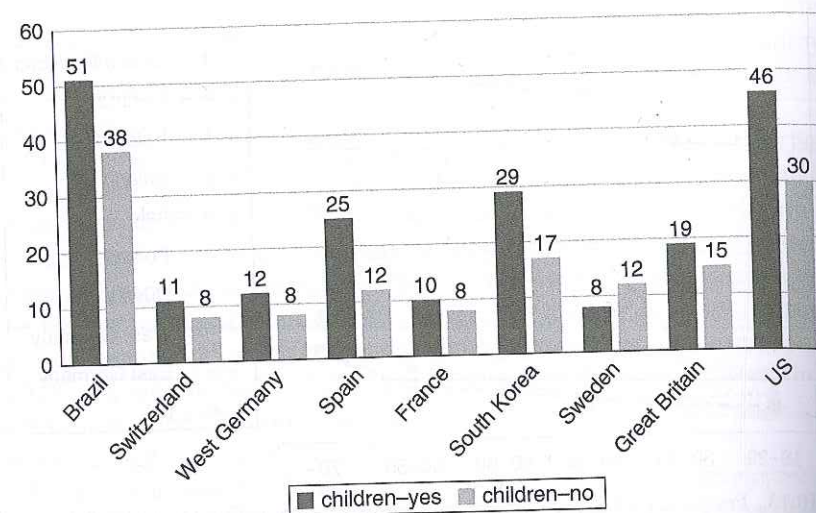


Fig. 10.15. Proportion of weekly church attenders, according to whether they have children or not (in %)

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

go to church regularly. According to the Religion Monitor 2012, of those with children, 46 per cent go to church at least once a week in the US; of those who have no children, the figure is only 30 per cent (Fig. 10.15). Fig. 10.12 has already shown that the correlation between frequency of church attendance and age is not linear. Frequency was higher in the group of 30- to 39-year-olds, as well as in the group of 40- to 49-year-olds, than among the 50- to 59-year-olds. In the decades between a person's thirtieth and fiftieth year, the probability is highest that parents and their children live together in the same household. If we differentiate by age once more, it becomes apparent that there is a much greater difference in church attendance between those polled who had children and those without children in the younger birth cohorts than among those aged 60 and above (Fig. 10.16). Whether children live in the household clearly has a strong influence on participation in church life. Using an analysis based on all General Social Surveys from 1972 to 2008, Chaves has been able to show that married people with children at home are twice as likely to attend religious service weekly than those without children who have divorced, separated, or never married: in the first group, the likelihood is 32 per cent; in the second, 16 per cent (Chaves 2011: 52). The rate of church attendance of childless married couples was closer to the church attendance behaviour of those who were not married than to those who were married with children: 21 per cent.

The close relationship between family structure and church involvement is true not only of the US, but also of Europe. And, as in Europe, the proportion

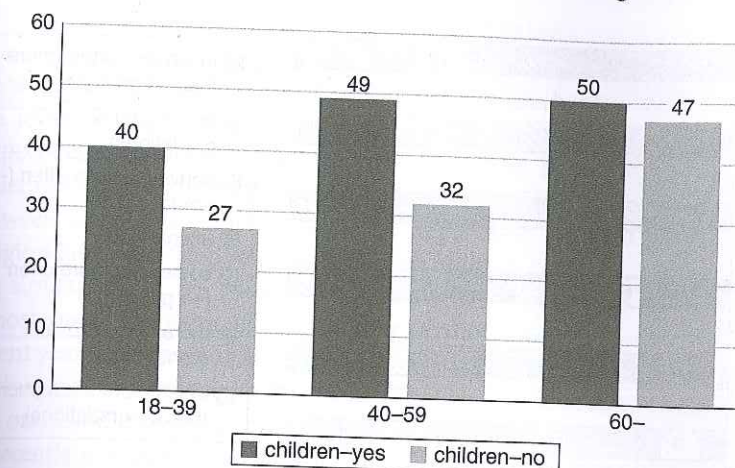


Fig. 10.16. Proportion of weekly church attenders in the US in the various birth cohorts, according to whether they have children or not (in %)

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

of traditional families consisting of two parents and children is also declining in the US. More and more people in the US are not marrying and are remaining childless. The proportion of unmarried people among 21- to 40-year-olds has doubled in the last thirty years (Wuthnow 2010: 55). Childlessness among women has also doubled since the 1960s (Fischer and Hout 2006: 68). Changes to family structures in the US confirm once again the claim of a continuing decline in the frequency of church attendance in the US. Other socio-structural features such as education or economic situation have no influence on church attendance.

We of course also have to bear in mind that, in the course of a person's biography, participation in church life increases with age. But, even if this is the case, we can still see an overall downward trend in the US. Three fifths of Americans say that they attend church service less often today than they did at the age of twelve (Fig. 10.17). Only 15 per cent say that they go to church more often now than they did in their childhood. However, if the decreases in people's life cycles exceed the increases (Fig. 10.17), and attendance at church service is lower among younger people than it is among older people (see Fig. 10.13), then the age differences demonstrated can be interpreted as cohort effects.<sup>14</sup>

To make such a claim is by no means trivial, for, contrary to one popular opinion (see only Knoblauch 2009), attendance at church service is not simply

<sup>14</sup> See Voas and Chaves (2016: 1543f.) who demonstrate that decline in attendance in the United States as elsewhere in the West is driven by generational differences.



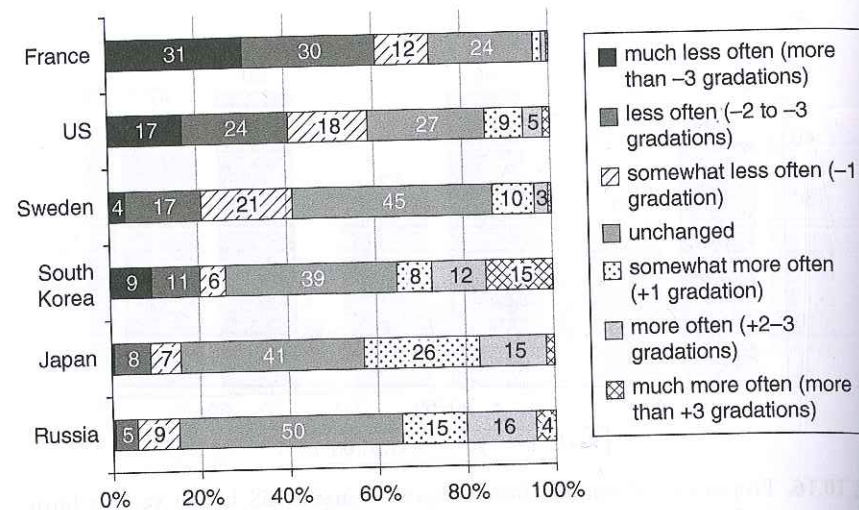


Fig. 10.17. Attendance at church service in a comparison between today and the time when the person questioned was 12 years old (in %)

Source: ISSP 2008.

Table 10.12. Correlation between indicators of religiosity and church attendance

Country	Prayer	Belief in God	Religiosity	Spirituality	Belief in life after death	Belief in demons
Switzerland	0.568	0.447	0.522	0.235	0.366	0.285
Italy	0.648	0.493	0.540	0.219	0.425	0.276
France	0.714	0.610	0.661	0.400	0.496	0.267
Great Britain	0.677	0.615	0.666	0.477	0.477	0.300
US	0.716	0.561	0.655	0.415	0.532	0.445

Source: Religion Monitor 2007.

just a marginal feature of individual religiosity; instead, it has a close statistically demonstrable link to many other indicators of individual religiosity, and even to those usually treated as being opposed to churchliness, such as spirituality or belief in demons (Table 10.12). The correlations are particularly high in the US, which means that, with the decline of religious communication in church service, belief in God and life after death, as well as religiosity, spirituality, and other religious orientations, will diminish in the short or long term. These religious convictions are still disproportionately high in the US as compared with European countries, and the declines in the dimension of belief are still relatively weak. If, though, we are correct in our claim made above (see p. 192) that losses in the dimension of religious practice precede losses in the dimension of belief, then sooner or later there will be stronger losses in the latter dimension.

## 10.2. EXPLANATION

As we have seen in the descriptive sections of this chapter, the differences in the level of religiosity between the US and Western Europe are in many respects considerable. Thought needs to be given to the high acceptance of belief in God, and belief in heaven and hell, as well as to the high fluctuation between the denominations, and to the importance ascribed by individuals to religion and belief in God. What was also striking, however, were the surprising similarities in the profile of religiosity between the US and Europe, the almost parallel growth in the number of those without a denomination in recent years, the more or less similar level of religious plurality, and the decline in church attendance since the 1970s. What we therefore need to explain is, on the one hand, the comparatively high level of religiosity in the US, which is differently contoured in terms of content, and, on the other, the loosening of church ties and the weakening of church practice.

1) To explain the high level of religious vitality in the US, we largely have to discount the thesis of competition propounded by economic market theorists. If we treat Protestantism as a single denomination, then the index of pluralism for the US at the level of society as a whole is not above, but below, the index for West Germany, France, Great Britain and Switzerland (see p. 297). If we differentiate within Protestantism, then it is higher in the US than in the European countries mentioned; but the differences are slight. At the county level, which carries more weight than the level of society as a whole in influencing the choices that an individual makes among the various religions on offer, the degree of religious pluralism is even lower. In two thirds of the more than 3,000 counties in the US, over 50 per cent of all those who belong to a denomination are members of a single religious community, and the religious landscape is therefore dominated by a single denomination. We can therefore not really talk at all in terms of religious plurality in the majority of counties.

In the US, though, the contacts that people have in the neighbourhood and at the workplace with people who mostly belong to a religious community other than their own do not have the effect of raising the frequency of attendance at church service or increasing belief in God. Our calculations, based on data provided by the Religion Monitor 2012, which asked questions about people's regular contacts with members of other religious communities in the family, in the neighbourhood, at the workplace, and during leisure time, come to the opposite result. The proportion of those who, in their contacts in the family, in the neighbourhood, at the workplace, or in their leisure time, encounter people who mostly belong to a religious community other than their own is in fact higher in the US than in Europe, although it is lower than expected and generally does not exceed one quarter (Table 10.13). Where the



**Table 10.13.** Frequency distributions of interreligious contacts in the family, in the neighbourhood, at the workplace, and during leisure time, according to country (in %)

Country	People in your family and relatives with whom you have regular contact: how many belong to a different religious group than yourself?			Total
	fewer than half	about half	more than half	
Switzerland	80.8	10.2	9.1	100.0
Spain	90.3	4.9	4.8	100.0
France	76.9	13.8	9.3	100.0
Sweden	89.1	5.1	5.9	100.0
Great Britain	74.8	13.4	11.8	100.0
West Germany	85.5	7.0	7.5	100.0
US	64.5	18.1	17.4	100.0

Country	People with whom you have regular contact in your neighbourhood: how many belong to a different religious group than yourself?			Total
	fewer than half	about half	more than half	
Switzerland	70.8	16.5	12.7	100.0
Spain	84.8	7.6	7.6	100.0
France	60.7	20.8	18.5	100.0
Sweden	80.6	13.4	6.0	100.0
Great Britain	62.3	18.8	19.0	100.0
West Germany	75.7	10.6	13.7	100.0
US	51.6	24.8	23.6	100.0

Country	People with whom you have regular contact at your work or place of training: how many belong to a different religious group than yourself?			Total
	fewer than half	about half	more than half	
Switzerland	64.4	18.3	17.4	100.0
Spain	83.7	7.8	8.5	100.0
France	62.7	18.5	18.9	100.0
Sweden	77.7	11.0	11.4	100.0
Great Britain	57.5	15.0	27.4	100.0
West Germany	69.2	11.3	19.6	100.0
US	55.5	16.8	27.7	100.0

Country	People with whom you have regular contact in your spare time: how many belong to a different religious group than yourself?			Total
	fewer than half	about half	more than half	
Switzerland	76.3	14.8	8.9	100.0
Spain	88.7	5.2	6.1	100.0
France	67.0	17.7	15.2	100.0
Sweden	83.8	8.7	7.5	100.0
Great Britain	68.3	16.9	14.8	100.0
West Germany	77.9	11.0	11.1	100.0
US	61.3	20.3	18.5	100.0

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

majority of those with whom Americans have regular contact in the family, in the neighbourhood, at the workplace, and during leisure time do belong to a religious community other than their own, then they do not attend church service any more frequently, but even tend to do so less often than those whose circle of regular contacts comprises fewer than half who are members of a different religious community (Table 10.14). In the US, contacts with members of other religious communities therefore do not help to increase attendance at church service, but tend to have the reverse effect. In the European countries investigated, on the other hand, there is no significant correlation between inter-religious contacts and frequency of church attendance, not even one that is negative (Table 10.14).

Even clearer are the correlations between regular contacts with majorities holding other beliefs, and belief in God. In the US, people who in their family, neighbourhood, at their workplace, and in their leisure time have regular contact with people who mostly belong to religious communities other than their own are less likely to believe in God and to attach significance to religion or spirituality in their own lives than those who regularly have contact with people who mostly belong to the same religious community (Table 10.14). These correlations are not to be found in Europe. Here, belief in God and religiosity are not restricted by a religiously heterogeneous environment; in some European countries—in Sweden, Switzerland, and

**Table 10.14.** Correlation between religious plurality in a person's immediate environment (sum of all four variables) and individual religiosity (church attendance, belief in God, significance of religion, and spirituality)

Country	How often do you attend religious services/at a synagogue/go to temple/take part in Friday prayer/spiritual rituals or religious practices? (1 = at least once a month, 0 = less frequently)	How strongly do you believe that God or something divine exists?	Importance of area of life: Religion	Importance of area of life: Spirituality
Switzerland	n.s.	n.s.	0.153**	0.141*
Spain	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
France	n.s.	0.207**	0.185*	0.219**
Sweden	n.s.	0.192*	0.217**	n.s.
Great Britain	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.269**
West Germany	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
US	-0.126*	-0.143**	-0.189**	-0.124*

\*\*The correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2-sided); \* the correlation is significant at the level of 0.05 (2-sided); n.s.: not significant.

Source: Religion Monitor 2012.



France—belief in God and a high importance attached to religion and spirituality are in fact more likely among people whose contacts are with people who mostly have a different faith. The correlations between religious plurality and religious vitality are therefore the exact opposite of what representatives of the economic market model would expect. In the US, religious homogeneity tends rather to reinforce religious vitality; in Europe, in Sweden, Switzerland, and France, in countries, that is, in which processes of secularization are relatively far advanced, those surveyed who had strong interreligious contacts tend more towards belief in God and towards a high valuation of the significance of their religiosity and spirituality than people with weak interreligious contacts. The explanation for this surprising result, which effectively turns previous assumptions on their head, could be that, in the highly religious US, contacts with people of different faiths are perceived as being more of a challenge to a person's own religiosity than in secular countries, where contacts with members of a religion, even if they are members of a different religious community, are perceived to a greater extent as corroborating a person's own religiosity.

In the US, it is apparently people of other faiths that pose the decisive challenge, whereas in the secularized countries of Europe it tends to be non-believers that members of a religion tend to define themselves against, and see their own beliefs strengthened through contact with those of another faith. In both cases, religious practices and beliefs tend to be strengthened rather than weakened through contacts with kindred spirits, whether they be members of their own denomination or people with any religious affiliation. In the one case, it is those of a different faith that have a detrimental influence on a person's own religiosity; in the other, however, it is the areligious. A religiously homogeneous environment, however disparate its boundaries may be defined, therefore does not lower religious vitality, but actually increases it. In other words, religiosity increases when people move in surroundings where they are supported in their religious practice and their religious beliefs through their family, neighbours, and work colleagues. The classic theses propounded by Peter L. Berger (1969; 1979) are strikingly confirmed by the data of the Religion Monitor.

The positive correlation between religious homogeneity and religious vitality is also made apparent by another question in the Religion Monitor 2012, which measures whether more than half of those with whom a person has regular contact are religious or not. As a summary of our calculations (not shown here) demonstrate, if more than half of those with whom a person has regular contact are religious, regardless of the religious community to which they belong, then frequency of attendance at church service and affirmation of belief in God increase. This is as true for Europe as it is for the US. In whichever way the situation is considered, what is true is that integration into religious networks strengthens religious beliefs and religious practice.

If market theory occasionally detects a positive effect exerted by religious diversity on the acceptance of religious ideas and on the intensity of religious commitment, then it is probably because the internal binding forces of religious communities are reinforced by a religiously plural environment.

Also, competition between different providers of religion is not increased by greater religious plurality in every case. There is probably no competitive relationship at all between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Swedish Lutherans, as they are not part of the same religious market. A transfer from one church to the other, even if both are located in the same neighbourhood, is therefore highly unlikely. Competition requires a certain similarity in terms of content, such as exists between the different Protestant denominations, where there are in fact relatively frequent transfers. But it is Protestantism in particular, and especially the Protestantism of the *mainline churches*, that is losing its appeal in society. The attraction of Evangelical groupings still holds good, and has even risen over the long term. It may rightly be asked whether the ability of the Evangelical churches to keep their members and attract new ones is actually based on free competition or rather on conflict. If the ability of the Evangelical churches to integrate can be attributed primarily not to their competitiveness, but to the effect of conflict mechanisms, then clearly religious plurality does not function as a mobilizing factor; what then needs to be investigated is what actually constitutes the mobilizing effects of religious conflicts.

We can summarize our argument by saying that religious plurality, competition between different suppliers of religion, and regular contact with people who mostly have different beliefs, have barely any mobilizing effects on church attendance or belief in God in America.<sup>15</sup> If such effects can be demonstrated in the US, then this is probably due mainly to the effect of relatively religiously homogeneous networks in which the majority of people belong to the same denomination, have little contact with members of other faiths, have similar religious beliefs, and therefore move within relatively self-contained plausibility structures. The effectiveness of such plausibility structures depends on two conditions: a comparatively strong regional fragmentation that is typical of the US, and, in comparison to Europe, a lower depth of penetration by trans-regional institutions. The great differences in the degree of religiosity between the more secularized areas on the East Coast in the north and on the West Coast, and the deeply religious regions in the South and Mid-West are well-known. In Louisiana, for example, the proportion

<sup>15</sup> Similar conclusions were reached by a project led by Daniel V. Olson, which investigated the influence of contextual religious pluralism on individual religiosity (church attendance, strength of religious ties, etc.). The project was able to show scarcely any influence for the US; internationally, though, the effects of contextual religious pluralism on individual religiosity were nonetheless negative: <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~dvolson/> (accessed 22 October 2013).



of those without religion amounted to 3 per cent in 1990; in Oregon to 17 per cent (Kosmin and Lachman 1993). Support for the thesis of regional fragmentation can also be found, however, in the strong differences in the distribution of religious majorities at the county level, as illustrated in Fig. 10.5. The thesis of the lower depth of penetration by the central institutions in the US is supported by Steve Bruce (2002: 223–7), for example, who argues that the education system and the mass media are much more centralized in Great Britain than in the US, which is why deviant worldviews and religious subcultures are much more able to sustain themselves in the US. The more open and diffuse structures of regulation in the US make it easier to found private schools, to push through a curriculum that is independent of national specifications, to found private colleges, to publish independent newspapers, and to set up radio and television stations, and so on. The higher level of religious vitality in the US is therefore based not on free competition between religious communities in an unregulated market, but on the greater autonomy of local religious subcultures brought about by less centralization and standardization, subcultures where religious actors operate relatively independently of trans-regional influences, and where they can mutually confirm each other's religious interpretations of the world and practices.

2) The claim that a clear-cut distinction between church and state can benefit the vitality of religion and church can hardly explain the high level of religiosity in the US, either. As comparative surveys of countries (see pp. 395ff.) show, the level of state influence on church affairs correlates with the level of religiosity in a country either weakly or not at all. Using the criteria developed by Fox (2008) to measure the influence of the state on religion, we can see that state involvement in religion takes effect only with regard to denominational affiliation, and not to church attendance or belief in God, and that this effect is positive. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, who arrive at similar results in their comparative case studies (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 99), use a third variable to explain this positive influence. That religiosity is at its highest where state regulation of the church is strongest is, they argue, due to the fact that it is here where processes of modernization and the guarantee of existential security have made least progress (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 131f., 230). A high level of existential security, they say, promotes not only secularization, but also the safeguarding of political rights and civil liberties, including freedom of faith and the renunciation of privileging one religious community over others. Empirical analysis provides no backing for the assumptions of market theory. Rather, state deregulation of the religious domain tends to go hand in hand with secularization and not with religious vitalization.

3) On the other hand, what may be relevant to the high level of religiosity in the US is the degree of social inequality. The higher the Gini coefficient used to

measure social inequality in a country, the more likely it is that the population of that country will attribute a high importance to belief in God (see Fig. 10.18). The US does not deviate from the regression line. Of all the countries included in the analysis, the US has the highest level of social inequality as measured by the Gini coefficients. At the same time, the US is one of the countries in which belief in God, as measured on a scale of 1 to 10, has a score of 8, making it one of the countries which attributes the greatest significance in this respect.

4) The high level of religious vitality in the US is also likely to have been influenced by its Puritanical and Evangelical legacy. In scarcely any modern country is the relationship between religion and politics as close as it is in the US. That the US has a divine mission in the world, that it is the light among nations, the shining 'city upon a hill', to quote the Puritan John Winthrop, destined to bring democracy and freedom to an unenlightened world—is something that many Americans still believe today (Torpey 2010). The political elite celebrate in civil religious rituals America's favoured position in the world, and establish a direct link between the United States and the will of God. Between America and God there is a covenant that obliges the American people to be obedient to God, but that also promises them that they will receive God's blessing if they follow His will. Even if the notion of a covenant has weakened since the eighteenth century, when it fulfilled the spirit of the New England Puritans (Noll 2002: 39), elements of this civil religious belief are still alive. Where, as in the US, there is such a close link between the religious

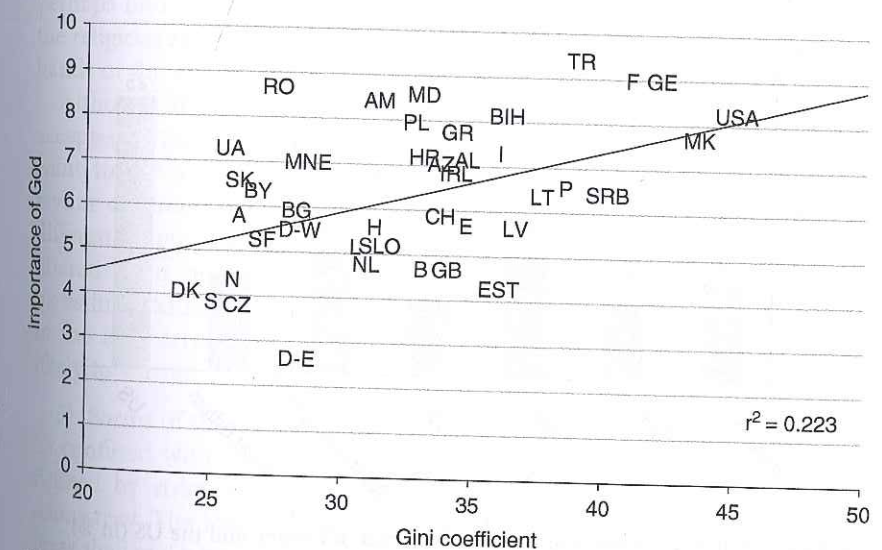


Fig. 10.18. Correlation between the Gini coefficient and the significance of belief in God in 43 countries

Sources: WVS 2005–8; EVS 2008; World Bank.



history of salvation and the political human history, this is where such belief fuels religious fervour.

The counter-argument put forward by Joas (2009: 323), which draws on Finke and Stark, that the Evangelical and Puritanical heritage can have no significant role to play, since at the time of the foundation of the US the proportion of church members in the population was very low and only grew to today's level in the course of American history, misses the point, since, when the US was established, membership of the church was open only to the tax-paying, and therefore property-owning, citizen. Church membership in the eighteenth century therefore says little about the degree and intensity of religiosity at that time. Religiosity cannot be reduced to churchliness today, and it certainly could not be so reduced in that day and age, either.

In order to demonstrate the closeness between religion and politics that is characteristic of the US, we need to turn to a question frequently asked in surveys, and one that the Religion Monitor 2012 asked in a slightly modified form. The question asked respondents to say how far they agreed with the statement: 'Only politicians who believe in God are suitable to hold political office.' In the US, the proportion of those who agree fully or mainly with this statement is more than twice as high as in Europe: approximately 25 per cent compared to less than 10 per cent in Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Great Britain, and to somewhat more than 10 per cent in France and West Germany (Fig. 10.19). When put to members of Evangelical and Charismatic

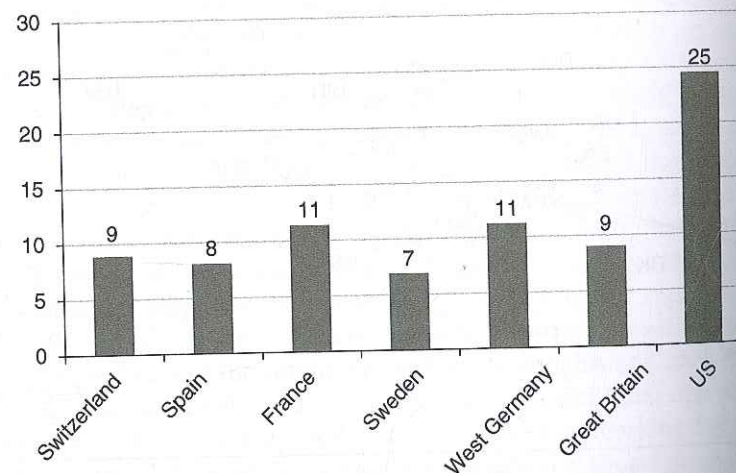


Fig. 10.19. Belief and politics in selected countries of Europe and the US (in %)  
Question: Agreement ('strongly agree'/'tend to agree') with the statement: 'Only politicians who believe in God are suitable for public office.'  
Source: Religion Monitor 2012.

communities in the US, the question is answered in the affirmative by 40 per cent of respondents.

At the same time, support for the idea that politicians should believe in God as a condition for assuming public office correlates with the intensity of religiosity. In Switzerland, the correlation coefficient is 0.214; in Spain 0.288; in France 0.217; and in Sweden 0.125. In the US, it is even higher, reaching a value of 0.385. The more religious a person is, the more he or she tends to regard a politician's belief in God as a condition for taking on public office; or, conversely, the more a person is in favour of mixing religion and politics, the more religious he or she is.

If those in the US without a denomination are asked, however, the proportion of those who favour mixing politics and religion is as low as it is in Europe, and does not exceed the 10 per cent mark. The sharp difference in attitude to the relationship between religion and politics among Evangelicals and those without religion indicates once again the conflicts and political nature of religious attitudes in the US. The data presented here give even greater plausibility to the explanation given above for the growth in recent years of the proportion of non-religious people. Given the combination of religion and politics that a substantial proportion of Americans practise, especially those who are very committed religiously, it is understandable that especially those Americans who are in any case distanced from religion should relinquish their religious ties completely when confronted with religious zealots who take a political stance that they reject and that they even perhaps find abhorrent. The politically charged religious conflict encourages the religious zealots, but drives the more liberal members of a religion into the hands of the opposing party.

Although the mixture of religion and politics is much more frequently accepted in the US than in Europe, it is still only a minority in the US who want to see a close connection between the two domains. The majority favour differentiating between religion and politics. If we assume that the differentiation of religion and politics will find increasing favour with the liberalization of values and an increase in the level of education, then investing political positions with religion may win votes in the short term; in the long term, however, the appeal of the Evangelical fanatics is most likely to shrink.

5) Forms of the civil-religious blending of religion and politics should not be confused with the legal relationship between church and state, which is defined by strict separation in the US unlike almost any other Western democracy. The First Amendment to the US Constitution proclaimed: 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.' In most Western European countries, however, church and state have been closely allied since the Confessional Age. In



England, Denmark, and Greece there is still a state church; in Sweden and Norway, it was only recently abolished. In the Western European countries, the legacy of the close ties between state and church continues to have an effect today (Martin 1978). Large sections of the population still perceive the church as an authoritarian organization, as a quasi-state institution of rule, one that seeks to control the religious individual, is alien to people's needs, and has too much power. In the US, on the other hand, church and state have been legally separate from the outset, with religious communities being sceptical towards state influence, but also towards state support. And this with two serious consequences. First, the formation of church communities and parishes was regarded as being the task not of church administrations and consistories, but of the parish members who joined together. To this day, church communities in the US have a much greater independence in financial, organizational, and spiritual terms than parishes in the Western European countries influenced by the history of the state church. While in the countries of Western Europe there very often prevails a kind of caring mentality on account of the parochial order in the parishes, a large proportion of parish members in the US understand the organization of parish life as their own task.

The other consequence of the sharp separation of church and state in the US is that the population does not perceive the churches as authoritarian institutions that are close to power, but as agents of the people, and the population has much greater confidence in them. In 1981, not much more than half of the population in Western Europe expressed their confidence in the church. The average value for all countries included was 57% and had sunk to 51% by 2008. Countries particularly strongly influenced by the state-church legacy, such as France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Sweden, have particularly low levels of confidence in the church (see Table II.1, p. 68). In the US, on the other hand, confidence values amounted in 1981 to a stately 77% (WVS 1981). Since then, however, they have also declined in the US: to 66% in 2008 (WVS 2005/2009). In the US, 89% say that religious institutions bring people together and strengthen communal bonds; 87% that they play an important role in helping the poor and needy; and 75% that they protect and strengthen morality in society (Pew Research Forum 2015: 93). In Central and Eastern Europe, the corresponding proportions are around 50% (Pew Research Forum 2017: 94), in Western Europe where trust in the church in many cases does not exceed the Eastern European level they may not be higher (data not available yet).

6) What might also have a positive influence on the level of religiosity in the US is the large yearly influx of immigrants. At least as far as membership of the Catholic Church is concerned, religious communities in the US have benefited enormously from the stream of immigrants entering the country (see pp. 298f.). Without this influx, the percentage not only of Protestants, but also of Catholics, would have dropped considerably. Forty-six per cent of

immigrants are Catholic, with Catholic Christians accounting for one quarter in the country overall (Pew Forum 2008: 47). The assertion that the high level of religiosity in the US has nothing to do with the influx of immigrants is not confirmed by the data.

7) What also play a role in the level of religiosity in the US are the majority ratios. The argument may at first appear tautological, but this is not the case on closer inspection. If, in the course of their lives, only 46 per cent of those without a denomination remain so, but the others join a religious community, and if at the same time the retention rate of the largest denomination—namely, that of the Protestants—is 80 per cent (see Table 10.3), then it is clear that the religious majority ratios strengthen religious ties and are detrimental to non-denominationalism. In America, more people change from one denomination to another than change from a denomination to having no denomination. Moreover, unlike in Central and Western Europe, Protestantism in the US not only gains more members through transfers than Catholicism, but also loses fewer. In the US, the Protestant churches possess a stronger binding force and a stronger attraction than the Catholic Church. All this speaks for the normativity of church ties in the US, a normativity that exerts a strong pressure on all those not tied to a church, even if their numbers are constantly growing. The religious landscape in the US is extremely changeable. The increase in the proportion of those without a denomination is accompanied by a strong movement away from the camp of the non-denominational, with the latter being more strongly exposed to the gravitational pull of those with religious ties than those with religious ties are exposed to the pull exerted by those without a denomination. The religious majority sets itself apart from those without a denomination, and puts very little trust in them (see Table 10.7). It is probably more difficult for the religiously unaffiliated to devalue the majority tied to the church in a similar way. In the US, as everywhere else in the world, the religious majorities possess a strong normative force. The normativity of church and religious orientations in the US also expresses itself in the fact that, even among those who do not belong to a denomination, a relatively large number still attend church service and believe in God (see p. 295). This proportion is substantially higher than in the secularized countries of Europe.

8) As Hugh McLeod (2007: 251ff.) has demonstrated, the high level of religiosity in the US may also, however, be linked to the penetration of popular culture by religion. Universities and the media may well be bastions of secularity in the US, but when it comes to entertainment and sport, religious influences are easy to identify. Madonna's performances and songs show strong leanings towards religious ideas and metaphors, and Lady Gaga's albums contain striking references to religious motifs. It is not only in the field of popular music, but also in sport, as McLeod points out, where reference to religious ideas and practices is evident. Football matches begin



with a prayer; many boxers make reference to God in their victories or defeats, and incorporate prayer into their public appearances. Conversely, preachers also often use figures of speech taken from the world of sport, use church services as forms of entertainment, and use dance and rock music as show elements. Megachurches become places of social entertainment, childcare, consumption, and marriage brokerage. Church communication serves a wide variety of functions, not only communal and social, but also charitable, medical, educational, and party-political. As with the relationship between religion and politics, so it is also with the relationship between religion and entertainment, religion and sociability, religion and sport, and religion and charity: processes of dedifferentiation increase the ability of religion and church to integrate, and make them more attractive. If there are tendencies towards the dedifferentiation of religion with regard to other social spheres in the US, then these tendencies provide an important explanation for the high level of religiosity there.

9) The vibrant religiosity of the US cannot be attributed only to factors external to religion, however; the reasons for it also reside in the inner structure of American religiousness. As we have already seen (see Fig. 10.8), the proportion of those who believe that God is concerned about every individual is in no country higher than it is in the US, not even Poland, Ireland, or Italy. In the US, people imagine God as a person, as a being that can influence the world, someone that they can experience and whose power they must take into account. The idea of an active God intervening in the world goes closely together with a higher level of religious activity: people who believe in a God who intervenes pray more frequently, attend church service more frequently, and are more willing to make sacrifices for their religion and to convince others of their beliefs (Religion Monitor 2012). This applies not only to the US, but also to the Western European countries included in the Religion Monitor 2012. In both the US and Western Europe, a close connection may be observed between the idea of an active God and the belief in the power of demons. Not only is heaven not a void; it also provides a stage for fateful clashes between the powers of good and evil. It is clear that these confrontations also have an effect on life on earth. Here, too, the battle is waged between good and evil. Those who believe in a God who intervenes in these matters are quicker in assuming that it is important for their own religiosity to be vigilant in the face of evil and to fight against evil, and that there are clear norms for distinguishing between good and evil. They are of course more strongly convinced than others that their own religion is the right one and that others are wrong, and that only members of their own religion will achieve salvation. They represent more strongly than others a dualistic view of the world in which good and evil are clearly separated. The end of the world is close at hand, so they believe. This is why in the battle between good

and evil it is important to be on the side of good, and to ensure that good is victorious.

It hardly comes as a surprise, then, to learn that people who believe in an active God understand their religion in political terms and are critical of separating religion and politics. They see their political opinions as being more strongly shaped by their faith than others (Religion Monitor 2007), and, as already mentioned, advocate more strongly than others the idea that only politicians who believe in God should hold political office, and that religious leaders should exercise an influence on government decisions (Religion Monitor 2012). What we are dealing with here is an interactive, ethically oriented, politicized, and apocalyptically tempered mode of belief that has similar characteristics both in Europe and the US, but that can be encountered far more often in the US than in the religiously moderate zones of Europe.

As Paul Froese and Steven Pfaff (2012) emphasize, the belief in a God who actively intervenes in the world is mainly to be found in countries with a low level of education, and correlates strongly with a low per capita GDP. The extent to which empirical research can confirm these correlations must be left to further investigations.

10) If we conclude by speaking of factors involved in explaining the trend of secularization in the US, we must point out not only the effect of politico-religious conflicts, but also processes of functional differentiation and individualization. As we have already seen, conflicts between religious conservatives and religious liberals concerning issues of abortion, gay marriages, or US military interventions abroad not only strengthen the conservative camp, which can use these conflicts to set itself apart from the outside world and ensure that its own ranks remain united. They also supply the opposite camp with motives for turning away from every religion. The religious-political conflicts not only benefit the two opposing camps, however, but also weaken moderate positions. Positions represented by the middle way, by moderation and by compromise are less attractive than extreme positions that rub up against each other, find ammunition for their arguments from the tension so generated, and feel justified on account of the conflict that has arisen. The consequences of this mechanism can be seen in the declining appeal of the mainline churches, which, although they are not losing as many members as previously to the Evangelical and conservative Protestant churches, are also less able than before to take members away from them (see p. 296). Where conflicts become increasingly polarized, moderate positions seem to become less attractive.

Tendencies of secularization and dechurchification, though, are promoted not only by religious-political conflicts, but also by processes of functional differentiation. If dedifferentiation increases the relevance of religious orientations and practices, then it comes as no surprise that differentiation has the



opposite effect. There is already evidence of this effect for the areas of school, university, and the media, but it can also be demonstrated for other fields, too. Until the 1960s, social advancement was closely associated with religious ties. Socially underprivileged children from Catholic families, for example, attended Catholic schools, Catholic universities, and moved within an environment that was strongly marked by the denomination. Once the majority of Catholics had achieved social advancement in the 1960s, however, church ties loosened considerably. Within a little more than twenty years, weekly church attendance among Catholics fell by a third, from 74 per cent in 1958 to 51 per cent in 1982 (Roof and McKinney 1985: 29). Acquiring a higher level of education and higher social positions was no longer linked to the support offered by the religious community, but could also be realized independently of it. The social advancement of members of Evangelical churches over recent decades has resulted less and less in their changing congregation and joining Protestant *mainline churches*: transferring to more respectable churches has in fact become increasingly irrelevant when it comes to gaining social recognition (Chaves 2011: 89). Decoupling religion from other domains clearly has negative effects on its social relevance.

11) Finally, an explanation for the observable processes of secularization in the US might also be found in the economically determined change in values. Although the US has a far more traditional system of values than any other highly modern society (Inglehart and Baker 2000: 31), the direction taken by the change in values is no different in the US to that in other wealthy societies. Ultimately, postmaterialistic values that correlate negatively with forms of traditional religiosity are reinforced (Inglehart and Baker 2000: 40). If economic growth in the US, as well as in other modern societies, leads to the increased acceptance of values of self-realization, confidence, tolerance, the equality of men and women, preservation of the environment, and moral and sexual freedom, then this also helps to weaken religious ties.

As we have seen, it is in many respects not Europe but America that is the exception. This relates to the level of social inequality, which is unusually high for a modern society, the strong tendencies towards functional dedifferentiation, such as between religion and politics, and the traditionalism of the culturally accepted system of values. The high level of religiosity in the US is linked to these distinctive features. Those describing Europe as the 'exceptional case' rather than the US (Davie 2002) reveal that they have understood something of the postcolonial doctrine about the reprehensibility of Eurocentrism, but only very little of the specific social situation of the US. Their claim rests not on the comparison between the prosperous countries of the OECD, but on the comparison of Europe with the whole of the world (Torpey 2010: 154).

## 11

### South Korea

#### The Simultaneity of Modernization and Christianization

When Pastor David Yonggi Cho began his missionary activities with a house church service in Seoul on 15 May 1958, five people took part. After months of hard work, the congregation had grown to fifty and had to move into a tent. David Yonggi Cho knocked on doors, organized help for the poor, prayed for the sick, and proclaimed that physical health and financial prosperity belonged just as much to the divine plan of salvation as saving the soul. By early 1961, his church had recruited 1,000 members. People found his gospel of hope, with its promises of prosperity, healing, and happiness, attractive. The congregation had to leave the tent and build a church. In 1964, it had 3,000 members; in 1968, over 6,000. Cho decided to restructure his church. The whole of Seoul was divided into separate districts, with church members living there forming small groups that met on weekdays to pray and study the Bible at the home of so-called group leaders. On Sunday, they went to church together. The group members invited their friends and acquaintances until the group was so big that they had to be divided again. From the 125 groups in existence in 1967, several thousand more emerged steadily. The congregation built a new modern church in 1973, whose auditorium was able to hold 12,000 worshippers. Over the years, more and more Sunday services were held, but that still did not satisfy the stream of visitors, and therefore satellite churches were also established. Today, the religious community founded by David Yonggi Cho is the world's largest church, with more than 800,000 members. Not only are there enthusiastic church services with large music ensembles and choirs; but the church also runs hospitals and universities, publishes magazines, newspapers, and books, and operates missionary stations. Its religious services are broadcast all over the world in over sixteen languages on television and radio. The secret of success, though, lies in the small home circles that make up the congregation. We are talking here about the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul.