

**Does Belonging Accompany Believing?**  
**Correlations and trends in Western Europe and North  
America between 1981 and 2000**

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**ABSTRACT**

Using the European and World Value Surveys from 1981, 1990 and 2000, this paper examines trends in Christian beliefs, church attendance and the relationship between believing and belonging. It further looks at the influence of religious pluralism on this relationship in Western Europe and North America.

The evidence of a growing gap between believing and belonging is thus far unpersuasive. The main finding of this study is that in most countries there is no growing gap between Christian believing and Christian belonging. Indeed, the relationship between believing and belonging at the individual level has remained practically unchanged in the Western world over the past two decades. The slight weakening in the relation between believing and belonging measured for some countries stems from the fact that in those countries both believing and belonging declined, but the decline in belonging was stronger. Moreover, a higher degree of religious pluralism does not result in a stronger association between believing and belonging, as would be expected from supply-side theory.

## INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is abundant evidence that both church membership rates and church attendance have declined in most West European societies over the past decades (Martin 1991; Davie 1994, 2003; Lechner 1996; Stark and Iannaccone 1996; Bruce 2002). Although secularization and supply-side theory both explain why church membership rates and attendance have dwindled, the question of whether Christian beliefs have declined as well, resulting in a growing gap between believing and belonging, is not settled yet. This paper examines trends in the relationship between Christian believing and Christian belonging between 1981 and 2000 and investigates the extent to which religious pluralism affects this relationship.

Davie (1990a; 1994; 2002) added another dimension to the debate about secularization by explicitly focusing on the relationship between ‘belonging’, that is, church membership and church attendance, and ‘believing’, that is, adherence to religious beliefs. Davie’s analyses showed that countries with low church membership rates do not necessarily have low levels of religious belief. This was subsequently called ‘*believing without belonging*’ (Davie 1990b; 1994; 2002). Davie’s general hypothesis is that in Western societies a growing number of people uphold religious beliefs without formal attachment to a church. This hypothesis, however, was only tested by comparing church membership rates and average religious belief at the country level. To avoid the risk of the so-called ‘ecological fallacy’ (Robinson 1950), which arises from aggregating religious participation and religious belief, we explicitly examine the relationship between ‘believing’ and ‘belonging’ of *individuals* in Western Europe and North America. Furthermore, we derive rival hypotheses about the trend in this relationship from secularization theory and supply-side theory.

Secularization theory states that religious practice and belief are directly related and current trends are towards fewer individuals attending religious practice and towards fewer individuals expressing religious beliefs, although these trends possibly move at different speeds and in different directions (Berger 1967; Martin 1978; Wilson 1982; Bruce 2002). Because these two trends are related, the relationship between believing and belonging should by and large be stable over time. Alternatively, the relationship could also become stronger if more people who believe also start belonging, and people who stopped belonging, later, also stop believing. According to supply-side theory, religious belief is an exogenous phenomenon, which

is not affected by the extent to which individuals attend religious services. Subsequently, a decrease in religious practice is not necessarily accompanied by a weakening of religious belief or an adoption of secular ideas (Iannaccone 1997; Stark 1997). As a consequence, the relationship between believing and belonging should decline over time. Given these different expectations, our first research question has two parts:

- 1a. *What are the trends in religious belief (believing) and religious practice (belonging) in Western Europe and North America between 1981 and 2000?*
- 1b. *What is the trend in the relationship between believing and belonging in Western Europe and North America between 1981 and 2000?*

The concept of religious pluralism has played a key role in both secularization and supply-side theory. Secularization theory states that religious pluralism induces lower levels of both believing and belonging, because alternative religions tend to challenge the plausibility structure of well-established beliefs (Berger 1967; Bruce 2002). This may cause a decline in both individual belief and individual belonging. If this decline occurs at roughly the same pace, the relationship between believing and belonging is expected to be unaffected by the degree of pluralism in a society. In contrast, supply-side theory states that religious pluralism fosters religious participation, as societies with religious monopolies have large unmet religious needs while societies with a high degree of religious pluralism are more likely to satisfy diverse religious needs (Stark and Iannaccone 1994). If this is the case, a strong relationship between believing and belonging should be found in societies with more religious pluralism. Our second research question aims to provide insight into the relationship between religious pluralism and the extent to which individual believing and belonging go hand in hand:

2. *To what extent did religious pluralism affect the relationship between believing and belonging in Western Europe and North America between 1981 and 2000?*

This paper aims to improve upon previous research in three ways. First, neither Davie (1990a; 1990b; 1994; 2002) nor her critics (Voas and Crockett 2005) examined the relationship between believing and belonging at the individual level. Instead, they studied the relation between socio-demographic characteristics and religious commitment at an aggregate country level. However, comparing church membership

rates and percentages of people who express Christian beliefs may be misleading. For instance, if the percentage of people expressing beliefs is higher than the percentage attending religious services, one may infer that there is indeed believing without belonging. However, individuals who often attend religious services may have stronger beliefs than individuals attending religious services less often. In other words, even though more people uphold Christian beliefs than there are church members, there could be a strong association between the two at the individual level.

Second, our analysis focuses on believing and belonging in a strict Christian sense. Voas and Crockett (2005) call this the strong version of 'believing without belonging'. This implies that where people uphold Christian beliefs but do not attend Christian church services, there is 'believing without belonging'.<sup>1</sup> Davie did not relate Christian beliefs to Christian belonging. For example, if one examines belonging to a Christian church, one should also examine Christian beliefs rather than belief in any religious faith, since the gap between believing and belonging would otherwise be overestimated. Therefore, we explicitly focus on the relationship between Christian believing and Christian belonging (at the individual level). This offers a new opportunity to test both secularization theory and supply-side theory. The questions about religious beliefs in the data carry a monotheistic, Christian signature, therefore we solely focus on Christian believing and belonging.

Third, with respect to the stability of Christian belief and church attendance, most research has employed only data from one or two points in time (Davie 1990a; Stark and Iannaccone 1994; 1996). A longer time period is preferable to obtain more accurate estimates of religious fluctuations. Therefore, we use data from the three waves of the European Value Survey in addition to similar data for North America, covering the period between 1981 and 2000.

## **THEORY AND HYPOTHESES**

Various explanations have been put forward to explain the strong empirical evidence of declining church membership and attendance throughout Western Europe (Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Bruce 2002). Moreover, there is disagreement as to whether the decline in religious participation has been accompanied by a decline in religious belief as well.

Secularization theorists argue that practice and belief are directly related. In their view, believing and belonging follow roughly the same downward trend. This argument contains a Durkheimian notion of religion. In order to have 'definite' beliefs one is dependent on the surrounding social environment, at least to some extent (Berger and Luckmann 1974; Bruce 1999). Religious gatherings are assumed to empower creeds, making church membership and attendance vital for individual religiosity to endure. Consequently, the relationship between believing and belonging is over time expected to remain about equally strong. However, if the secularization process in the long run leads to a small proportion of hardcore religious people and a large proportion of non-religious people, the relationship could become even stronger. The implication is that 'believing without belonging' is at best a short (individual) transitional phase in the emergence of a thoroughly secular culture, and not a new feature of late modernity (Voas and Crockett 2005). This leads to our first hypothesis:

1a. *In Western Europe and North America, there has been a decline of both individual Christian believing and belonging, and therefore the relationship between individual Christian believing and Christian belonging did not weaken over time.*

Supply-side theorists, on the other hand, argue that belief in the supernatural is strong and reasonably robust, while religious practice might be substantially less in case there is inadequate religious supply. While outward expressions of religion – like church membership and attendance – decline, individual belief endures. As a consequence, religious belief becomes heterogeneous and detached from traditional religious institutions. This results in a growing gap between believing and belonging. This gap is expected to continue to grow as long as European governments maintain their support to certain religious traditions, forcing religious organizations into competition for 'customers' and allowing the emergence of religious pluralism (Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Finke 1997). If, according to supply-side theory, individual belief endures and belonging declines, the relationship between believing and belonging will weaken over time. Therefore the competing hypothesis of supply-side theory reads:

1b. *In Western Europe and North America, individual Christian believing has been stable while belonging has decreased; therefore the relationship between individual Christian believing and Christian belonging weakened over time.*

Next to trends in believing and belonging and their (changing) relationship we focus on a factor that might influence this relationship, namely religious pluralism. According to secularization theory, the plausibility of religion in a monopolistic situation is massive and durable in consciousness. Furthermore, effective socialization in such a context means that religion is taken as self-evident (Berger 1967; Berger and Luckmann 1974). In other words, in a monotheistic society, the religious ‘canopy’ is stable and durable; hence religious belief and participation are widespread (Berger 1967). Secularization theory assumes that people who have religious beliefs belong to a church as well. Consequently, the relationship between believing and belonging is expected to be strong. If more religions co-exist in a society (i.e., if there is more religious pluralism), religious plausibility structures supposedly lose strength, therefore causing secularization. In such a situation, individual disbelief rises and levels of religious participation decline (Berger 1967; Bruce 2002; 2003). In sum, according to secularization theory, religious pluralism causes religious belief and participation to decline simultaneously. Consequently, the relationship between those two remains more or less the same, regardless of the level of religious pluralism. Correspondingly, hypothesis 2a reads:

*2a. The relationship between individual Christian believing and Christian belonging is independent of societies’ level of religious pluralism.*

Supply-side theorists, on the other hand, stress that the relation between belief and participation is affected by the degree of religious pluralism present in a country. They argue that the state influences religious participation by regulating religious markets – i.e., whether to allow religious pluralism via subsidizing or suppressing certain religious traditions (Berger 1967; Stark and Iannaccone 1994). It is assumed that a stable religious demand exists but also that people differ in their religious desires and tastes. Accordingly, religious diversity is rooted in social niches: groups of people sharing the same specific religious preferences (Finke and Stark 1988; Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Stark 2001). This diverse nature of religious demand necessitates pluralism. Thus, in societies where religious pluralism is absent or low, not everyone is able to satisfy their religious needs. This is due to the inherent inability to satisfy all distinct consumer preferences where there is only one religious institution (Stark and Iannaccone 1994). Levels of religious participation will

consequently be low. As it is assumed that all people have more or less stable religious needs, the relationship between believing and belonging will consequently be weak. When more religious suppliers enter a religious market, the urge to satisfy demands of individual customers becomes stronger. Therefore, churches will likely specialize, to stay attractive. Thus, the increase in religious choice enables more people to satisfy their religious needs – and they would express their belief by going to church – leading to religious revitalization (Finke and Stark 1988). Hence, a larger proportion of a population will be religiously involved and the relationship between believing and belonging will be strong. Hence, our hypotheses derived from supply-side theory reads as follows:

2b. *The relationship between individual Christian believing and Christian belonging in societies with a high degree of religious pluralism is stronger than in societies with a low degree of religious pluralism.*

## **DATA AND OPERATIONALIZATION**

### *CATEGORIES OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM*

Since the often-used index of religious pluralism, the Herfindahl Index, has proven highly problematic (Chaves and Gorski 2001; Voas, Olson and Crockett 2002), we use Martin's (1978) categorization of societies to determine the degree of religious pluralism. Most Western European societies have a long history of a strong bond with the church, which can be traced as far back as before Emperor Constantine (ca. 285-337). In recent history, this close entanglement of state and church has been largely dissolved. However, the historical situation in which one or two churches are supported by the state still resonates throughout Europe.

Societies with a history of Catholic monopoly, like France, Spain and Italy, have the least religious pluralism in Europe nowadays. These nations cannot be said to have an unregulated religious economy, nor do they have any substantial pluralism (Martin 1978; Stark and Iannaccone 1994).

Besides nations with a history of a Catholic monopoly, there are nations which are traditionally Protestant. Examples are the Scandinavian countries, England, and Canada. These societies continue to have Protestant monopolies. In most Protestant Western European nations, especially the Scandinavian countries, there is however

some degree of pluralism but only within the state-church. This makes them slightly more pluralistic than traditionally Catholic societies (Martin 1978).

Countries like the Netherlands and Germany traditionally have a mixed situation. Historically, these societies are partly organized on a confessional basis (Martin 1978). Sometimes, the United Kingdom is also regarded as a religiously mixed country due to the presence of Catholics and Protestants, with their fierce conflict, in a predominantly Anglican society. Since we aim here to improve on work of Davie, we categorize the United Kingdom, similar to Davie, as traditionally mixed (Davie 2002). The United States is characterized by separation of church and state and a highly unregulated religious economy (Stark and Iannaccone 1994) which makes it highly pluralistic.

In sum, societies can range from having virtually no pluralism to having a highly pluralistic religious economy. Traditionally Catholic countries have virtually no pluralism, while traditionally Protestant societies have a higher degree of pluralism. Societies with a traditionally mixed situation are even more pluralistic, while the United States has the highest degree of pluralism.

To test our hypotheses we constructed a repeated cross-sectional dataset from the European Value Surveys and the World Value Surveys including the waves from 1981, 1990 and 2000. We selected the United States and Canada and 11 Western European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom). Not included were countries that were only available in one or two waves and countries that missed important items measuring traditional Christian beliefs. East Germany was excluded because of its post-communist character. The selected respondents were individuals between 18 and 90 years of age who were either non-denominational or belonged to a Christian denomination. No adherents of other faiths were included because the focus is on Christian believing and belonging. These selections resulted in a combined dataset of 55,464 individuals distributed over 13 countries. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents over the countries and respective waves.

Table 1: Respondents per country and wave.

	1981	1990	2000	Total per country
<i>Traditionally Catholic societies</i>				
Belgium	1005	2725	1776	5506
France	836	975	1580	3391
Ireland	1172	997	969	3138
Italy	1347	2004	1986	5337
Spain	2296	4104	2366	8766
<i>Traditionally Protestant societies</i>				
Canada	1254	1650	1840	4744
Denmark	1165	928	992	3085
Iceland	823	667	923	2413
Sweden	884	985	1003	2872
<i>Traditionally mixed societies</i>				
Germany	1297	2079	1080	4456
Netherlands	1166	974	946	3086
United Kingdom	1490	1649	894	4033
United States of America	2206	1593	838	4637
Total N	16941	21330	17193	55464

Source: WVS 1981, 1990, 2000.

## VARIABLES MEASURING CHRISTIAN BELIEFS AND BELONGING

The European Value Surveys measure various aspects of Christian belief. We selected those which were asked in all societies and in all three waves: belief in (i) God, (ii) life after death, (iii) heaven and (iv) hell.<sup>2</sup> The answer categories employed were ‘no’ and ‘yes’. The ‘don’t know’ response category turned out to be a small proportion of the respondents, with an average of approximately 10 percent in any of the waves. We omitted this category from further analyses, because the response signifies doubt at the least and disbelief at the most (Bruce 1995, Lechner 1996).<sup>3</sup>

To answer our research questions we constructed an overall Christian belief scale (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.81).<sup>4</sup> Respondents had to have a valid answer on at least three of the four Christian beliefs to be included in the overall scale.

Religious participation – *belonging* – is measured by church attendance. People were asked how often they attended religious services, apart from weddings, funerals and festivities. All holy day categories were merged, as well as attendance of ‘less than once a year’ and ‘almost never’. The answer categories derived thus ranged from ‘less than once a year’ to ‘more than once a week’ and were converted into a per year attendance scale.<sup>5</sup> Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables in the analyses.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of variables.

	Range	Mean	Standard deviation
Belonging	0-104	18.83	30.25
Belief in: God	0 / 1	0.81	0.39
life after death	0 / 1	0.59	0.49
heaven	0 / 1	0.53	0.50
hell	0 / 1	0.32	0.47
Christian belief	0-1	0.56	0.38

Source: WVS 1981, 1990, 2000.

## ANALYSES

From secularization theory and supply-side theory we inferred competing predictions about possible changes in Christian belief. To get a detailed picture of the changes in Christian belief that took place between 1981 and 2000, we first separately analysed each item that measures an aspect of Christian belief. Since floor and ceiling effects are conceivable, we used logistic regression to estimate a trend parameter.<sup>6</sup> Table 3 displays the results of the analysis.

Table 3: Belief in God, life after death, heaven and hell, in percentages per country per wave and estimated log linear trends.

	Belief in God				Belief in life after death				Belief in heaven				Belief in hell			
	1981	1990	2000	Trend	1981	1981	2000	Trend	1981	1990	2000	Trend	1981	1990	2000	Trend
<i>Traditionally Catholic societies</i>																
Belgium	86.8	70.9	70.2	-0.38**	50.0	44.3	44.1	-0.10**	42.6	33.1	31.0	-0.24**	22.1	16.1	17.2	-0.13**
France	85.4	61.1	60.9	-0.54**	52.0	43.5	44.3	-0.14**	36.4	31.8	30.8	-0.12**	20.1	16.6	18.9	-0.02
Ireland	97.8	97.6	96.7	-0.22	85.0	83.3	81.6	-0.13**	89.6	89.5	87.1	-0.13*	60.2	52.4	55.3	-0.11**
Italy	87.9	90.0	93.5	0.36**	56.9	67.6	72.7	0.36**	44.3	52.4	58.7	0.30**	33.3	40.4	49.1	0.35**
Spain	91.5	85.5	85.0	-0.29**	66.9	51.0	53.1	-0.28**	55.5	52.0	50.9	-0.10**	38.3	29.3	36.7	-0.03
<i>Traditionally Protestant societies</i>																
Canada	93.3	88.3	91.1	-0.10	70.7	68.9	74.9	0.13**	75.3	71.4	76.8	0.07	42.3	40.9	51.2	0.21**
Denmark	63.0	66.9	68.7	0.14**	29.7	33.5	37.6	0.19**	16.5	18.6	17.9	0.05	8.0	7.4	8.7	0.05
Iceland	82.0	86.2	84.1	0.08	82.2	81.4	77.8	-0.15**	58.4	57.3	58.2	-0.00	13.0	11.6	16.8	0.18**
Sweden	61.8	45.6	53.2	-0.16**	34.3	38.8	46.3	0.27**	31.2	30.9	30.2	-0.03	9.5	8.0	8.8	-0.04
<i>Traditionally mixed societies</i>																
Germany	79.6	77.4	71.7	-0.23**	45.8	49.6	40.5	-0.11**	33.9	36.4	32.0	-0.05	14.7	14.1	20.7	0.23**
Netherlands	70.7	63.4	57.9	-0.30**	50.5	44.4	49.3	-0.03	44.2	36.4	35.4	-0.20**	16.1	13.5	12.6	-0.15**
United Kingdom	84.3	81.6	71.3	-0.41**	63.3	55.2	58.7	-0.13**	67.8	64.4	56.8	-0.24**	38.5	34.3	37.1	-0.05
United States of America	98.0	96.3	96.0	-0.39**	80.7	79.0	84.8	0.11*	91.0	87.4	88.5	-0.17**	74.6	71.9	75.3	-0.01

\*\* = sign  $p < 0.05$  (two-tailed).

\* = sign  $p < 0.10$  (two-tailed).

Source: WVS 1981, 1990, 2000.

Belief in God declined in more than half of the traditionally Catholic societies. In Ireland there was no significant change while in Italy we observed a significant increase. In all of the traditionally mixed societies and in the United States belief in God has significantly declined. In half of the traditionally Protestant societies there was no significant change. Sweden witnessed a decrease in the number of people who believe in God, whereas Denmark saw a slight increase.

Believing in life after death decreased significantly in most Catholic countries. Again, in Italy we note a rise in belief in life after death. In traditionally Protestant and mixed societies, the results vary. For instance, in the Netherlands there was no significant change, while in Iceland, Germany and the United Kingdom there was a significant decline. In Canada, Denmark, Sweden and the United States the number of people who believe in life after death increased significantly.

Belief in heaven declined in four out of the five traditionally Catholic societies, only Italy witnessed an increase. In the traditionally Protestant societies no change was measured in belief in heaven. In Germany, the percentage of people who believe in heaven did not significantly decline, while in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States a significant downward trend occurred.

For belief in hell the pattern is diverse. Somewhat less than half of the countries experienced no significant change in belief in hell. In traditionally Catholic societies there was either a decline or stability, with the exception of Italy where it increased. The opposite was true for the traditionally Protestant societies, where belief in hell either remained stable or increased. For the traditionally mixed societies, there was no significant change in the United Kingdom and United States. In Germany belief in hell increased and the Netherlands saw a decline in the percentage of people who believe in hell.

Next, we estimated the *general* trend in Christian belief and belonging as displayed in Table 4. The largest absolute decrease in Christian belief was found in France (-0.05 per 10 years), whereas the largest increase was in Italy (0.07). In six countries (Belgium, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom) the trend in Christian belief is significantly downward. Interestingly, along with Italy, Germany and the United States, in none of the traditionally Protestant societies was there any sign of an overall decrease.

Almost the same conclusions can be drawn from the estimated trend in church attendance, that is, Christian belonging. In traditionally Catholic societies, except

Italy, and in traditionally mixed societies, church attendance rates are on the decline. In the traditionally Protestant societies of Denmark and Iceland there is stability, the trend is significant negative for both Canada and Sweden. The United States again shows no change in church attendance rates during 1981-2000. In order to compare the trends in believing and belonging per country we also calculated a standardized trend for each country. In most of the countries with a downward trend in believing, the downfall in belonging was relatively stronger. In only two societies, Canada and Sweden, did Christian belief remain stable or increase somewhat, while belonging to a church decreased, indicating a trend towards 'believing without belonging'.

Table 4: Christian belief (total) and belonging (church attendance), in mean scores per country per wave and estimated unstandardized and standardized linear trends (decennial change).

	Christian belief					Belonging (church attendance)				
	1981	1990	2000	Trend		1981	1990	2000	Trend	
				unstandard.	standard. <sup>†</sup>				unstandard	standard. <sup>†</sup>
<i>Traditionally Catholic societies</i>										
Belgium	0.496	0.404	0.397	-0.04**	-0.12	20.90	17.78	12.75	-4.42**	-0.16
France	0.476	0.378	0.372	-0.05**	-0.14	9.75	6.85	5.75	-1.99**	-0.11
Ireland	0.834	0.810	0.807	-0.01**	-0.06	58.05	54.53	43.93	-7.38**	-0.22
Italy	0.545	0.616	0.683	0.07**	0.20	22.67	26.87	28.48	2.92**	0.09
Spain	0.627	0.540	0.558	-0.03**	-0.10	27.97	20.84	18.54	-4.88**	-0.15
<i>Traditionally Protestant societies</i>										
Canada	0.704	0.676	0.735	0.02**	0.06	22.02	19.36	19.75	-1.05*	-0.03
Denmark	0.275	0.305	0.319	0.02**	0.08	2.89	3.02	3.21	0.17	0.02
Iceland	0.586	0.593	0.588	0.00	0.00	3.22	2.55	3.23	0.03	0.00
Sweden	0.333	0.302	0.335	0.00	0.01	4.74	4.21	3.20	-0.82**	-0.06
<i>Traditionally mixed societies</i>										
Germany	0.425	0.434	0.401	-0.01	-0.04	13.65	12.92	10.78	-1.50**	-0.06
Netherlands	0.451	0.388	0.385	-0.04**	-0.10	17.65	13.29	9.71	-4.19**	-0.16
United Kingdom	0.629	0.590	0.557	-0.04**	-0.10	16.23	13.49	9.42	-3.54**	-0.13
United States of America	0.864	0.839	0.863	0.00	-0.02	32.36	32.46	33.10	0.035	(0.01)

\*\* = sign  $p < 0.05$  (two-tailed).

\* = sign  $p < 0.10$  (two-tailed).

<sup>†</sup> = trend parameter is standardized within country: -0.12 means a decrease of 0.12 standard deviation in 10 years.

Source: WVS 1981, 1990, 2000.

From secularization theory and supply-side theory, we derived competing predictions about possible changes in the relationship between Christian believing and belonging. We then formally tested the extent to which Christian believing and Christian belonging at the individual level went together over the past two decades. We used OLS regression analysis to estimate the linear trend in the Pearson correlation coefficients between Christian beliefs and Christian belonging. Table 5 displays the results.<sup>7</sup>

With the exception of the United States, all trends in the relationship between believing and belonging are negative. As pointed out earlier, in only two countries (i.e., Canada and Sweden) this decrease is the result of stable Christian belief and decreasing church attendance rates (cf. Table 4). In Italy, for instance, the estimated correlation was 0.536 in 1981 and dropped significantly, by 0.05 points every ten years. This, however, is the result of a trend towards *stronger* beliefs and *higher* rates of belonging. Interestingly, the correlation between believing and belonging in the United States did not change between 1981 and 2000.

A rather low correlation between believing and belonging does not necessarily imply that belief is widespread while belonging is marginal. In countries with a history of a religious monopoly there might well be ‘belonging without believing’, i.e., widespread attachment to institutionalized religion with relatively weak Christian belief (Hamberg and Pettersson 1994). Besides, religiosity may be driven by non-religious incentives. It is known that there are non-religious sanctions for non-participation in the United States (Martin 1978; Moore 1994; Chaves and Gorski 2001). However, in our analyses we found no corroboration for these arguments. We thus conclude that the correlations presented indeed reflect ‘believing without belonging’, as found in off-diagonal effects. Changes towards ‘believing without belonging’ are stronger and far more common than changes towards belonging without believing.<sup>8</sup> In general, people who have Christian beliefs but do not attend church cause the gap between Christian believing and Christian belonging rather than individuals belonging to a Christian church without expressing Christian beliefs. In addition, in traditionally Catholic and mixed societies correlations between believing and belonging remain high. This indicates that there is no widespread Christian believing without Christian belonging in those countries.

In sum, we find evidence in favour of hypothesis 1a: The relationship between believing and belonging, in general, did not weaken significantly over time. Where

the relationship did weaken, it was not the result of a trend towards ‘believing without belonging’. Mostly, any weakening of this relationship was the product of a process by which both Christian belief and belonging declined, however – and this is crucial – , at different rates.

Table 5: OLS regression (per country) of Christian beliefs on Christian belonging (church attendance) and wave, and observed correlations between Christian beliefs and Christian belonging per country and wave (cf. note 7)

	Estim. corr. 1981	Decennial change	corr 1981	corr 1990	corr 2000
<i>Traditionally Catholic societies</i>					
Belgium	0.509**	-0.017	0.504	0.496	0.474
France	0.456**	-0.058**	0.425	0.453	0.342
Ireland	0.401**	-0.019	0.418	0.346	0.384
Italy	0.536**	-0.053**	0.489	0.541	0.411
Spain	0.555**	-0.053**	0.552	0.510	0.452
<i>Traditionally Protestant societies</i>					
Canada	0.375**	-0.034*	0.384	0.330	0.315
Denmark	0.438**	-0.058**	0.451	0.357	0.340
Iceland	0.212**	-0.069**	0.223	0.121	0.089
Sweden	0.414**	-0.039	0.379	0.443	0.314
<i>Traditionally mixed societies</i>					
Germany	0.549**	-0.039*	0.528	0.540	0.455
Netherlands	0.564**	-0.033	0.557	0.549	0.494
United Kingdom	0.434**	-0.054**	0.434	0.383	0.332
United States of America	0.274**	0.023	0.226	0.317	0.301

\*\* = sign  $p < 0.01$  (one-tailed).  
2000.

\* = sign  $p < 0.05$  (one-tailed).

Source: WVS 1981, 1990,

The results in Table 5 also provide an answer to the question of the extent to which religious pluralism influences the relationship between believing and belonging. The relationship between believing and belonging in societies with a little religious pluralism is not uniformly weaker than in societies with a high degree of religious pluralism. The situation in the United States is striking in this respect. Despite a high degree of pluralism, the correlation between individuals believing and belonging is relatively low. This suggests a relatively lot of Christian religiosity outside of churches, compared to countries with a lower degree of pluralism. Moreover, the correlation between believing and belonging is relatively high in traditionally Catholic and mixed societies. These findings do not lend support to either hypothesis 2a or 2b.

## CONCLUSION

In this study we uncovered several important facts associated with Christian religiosity in modern Western societies. First, we derived testable and rival hypotheses about the relationship between believing and belonging from secularization and supply-side theory. In this respect our main finding was that in most countries there is no growing gap between Christian believing and Christian belonging. The relationship between believing and belonging at the individual level has remained practically unchanged in the Western world over the past two decades. As we showed, the slight decrease in the relationship between believing and belonging that was found for some countries was due to the fact that both believing and belonging declined in those countries; but that belonging declined more strongly than believing. Along with decreasing religious belief, this implies that ‘believing without belonging’, as Voas and Crockett (2005) argued, is at best a short transitional period as a predominantly secular culture appears and not a characteristic of late modernity.

Second, secularization theory and supply-side theory are both refuted when it comes to hypotheses regarding the extent to which religious pluralism influences the relationship between believing and belonging. The relationship between Christian believing and Christian belonging varies for societies that differ in their degree of religious pluralism, but not in the expected direction. Strikingly, the relationship between Christian believing and Christian belonging is relatively weak in the United States, the most religiously plural country. This finding is opposite to supply-side theorists’ expectations (Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Finke 1997). The relatively weak relationship between Christian believing and Christian belonging in a highly pluralistic society is in accordance with previous findings of Kelly and De Graaf (1997). According to supply-side theory, societies with religious monopolies should have large unmet religious needs, unlike highly pluralistic nations like the United States, where diverse religious needs are expected to be met. This implies that those who do not attend church are more devout in monopolistic societies. Like Kelley and De Graaf (1997) we found the opposite: People who do not, or to a lesser extent, belong are more devout in religiously pluralistic societies – such as the United States – than in societies with a low degree of religious pluralism. Perhaps we should

examine more country-specific characteristics to explain these differences in correlations between believing and belonging.

We can best summarize this study by saying that supply-side theory explains little of the recent changes of direction in religiosity. For now, secularization theory does a better job. Most religious beliefs are declining, and the process of secularization seems to still be continuing in Western societies – with the possible exception of Italy. Although Christian belief is high in the United States, belief in God and heaven are declining too. It is quite likely that the results found in this study underestimate the actual situation, due to differences in fertility. Religious people, on average, have more children than non-religious people (Hout, Greeley and Wilde 2001). This means that a larger group of people would be somewhere in the transitional phase moving from religious to secular. This would further weaken the relationship between believing and belonging, since religious people lose their faith more often than non-religious people become religious.

A promising avenue for future research would be to take changes in the number of religious services into account, in addition to religious diversity. Denominations might vary in the extent to which they invest in their own supply. Availability of religious services does seem to influence religious participation (Hamberg and Pettersson 1997; Bernts and De Graaf 2003). This might explain the relative success of predominantly Catholic societies, which is otherwise a troubling anomaly for supply-side theory (Iannaccone 1991; Chaves and Cann 1992; Chaves and Gorski 2001).

Processes of secularization in modern Western societies present a complex and mixed picture. Nevertheless, in this general outline, secularization theory seems most plausible for the time being, compared to supply-side theory. Unlike Davie, we found no evidence of a common European trend towards more believing without belonging. When it comes to the question of whether belonging still accompanies believing, our answer would be yes, at least for now.

## NOTES

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1. The weak version of 'believing without belonging' is, according to Voas and Crockett (2005), a comparison of Christian belonging with whatever individuals express as religious beliefs. Beliefs in the weak version can be as vague as a belief in 'something'. We argue that the strong version provides more insight into the process of secularisation and religious vitality than the weaker version since the latter is rather difficult, if not impossible, to falsify.

2. Although the beliefs used here are not *solely* Christian, they are definitely *typical* of Christian religions.

3. We also merged the 'don't know' and 'no' categories. This did not substantially change our results. Of all estimated trends, 45 remained the same, in two cases the trends became even more significant and in five cases significant trends disappeared.

4. For the 1981, 1990 and 2000 waves, Cronbach's alphas were also calculated for each country separately, all resulted in reliable scales with no substantial deviations from the overall Cronbach's alpha. Results are available at <http://www.ru.nl/methodenentechnieken/bb/results/>.

5. The distribution of the church attendance measure (a per year scale) is skewed to the right in most countries, which might result in non-linear relationships between Christian belief and church attendance. As a consequence, the Pearson correlation coefficients (cf. Table 4) could be an underestimation of the real relationship between Christian belief and church attendance. To check whether skewness is a serious problem, we computed for each country and wave the Eta coefficient (we assume Christian belief to be metric). Next, we compared each observed Pearson correlation coefficient and the Eta counterpart and found only small differences. This led us to conclude that it is warranted to present the widely used and easy to compute Pearson correlation coefficient instead of Eta figures. Results are available at <http://www.ru.nl/methodenentechnieken/bb/results/>.

6. At the individual level, we used the following logistic equation:

$\text{Log}(p_1/(1-p_1)) = a + b_1 \cdot \text{wave}$ . In this equation,  $p_1$  is the probability of scoring 1 on any of the items measuring Christian belief, and  $b_1$  is the trend parameter indicating

whether this particular item became more popular (positive b) or less popular (negative b) over the years. Note that the variable wave is a metric measure with three categories: 1981, 1990 and 2000.

7. In Table 5 the individual scores on Christian beliefs (Likert-scale) and Christian belonging have been standardized within each country and wave (average=0, standard deviation=1). Then, we estimated for each country an OLS model with Christian beliefs regressed on belonging and the interaction between belonging and wave (the intercept and the b-coefficient for wave equal zero because of within country/wave standardization). The b-coefficient for belonging denotes the estimated correlation in 1981 while the b-coefficient for belonging\*wave denotes the (linear) decennial change of the 1981 correlation. Because we assume a linear change, this is an approximation of the observed correlations in our samples. Therefore, we provided also these observed correlations between Christian beliefs and Christian belonging within each country and wave. So, in the sample from Belgium a correlation of 0.504 was found, while in the OLS regression this correlation is estimated to be 0.509. The observed correlation in 1990 amounts to 0.496 (decline of 0.008) while it amounts to 0.474 in 2000 (decline of 0.022). According to OLS estimates the correlation dropped (linear) from 0.509 in 1981 to 0.492 in 1990, to 0.475 in 2000 (decennial linear change -0.017 and non-significant). Overall, the differences between the observed correlations per wave and the correlations assuming linear change are small. They can be calculated from Table 5 and available at

<http://www.ru.nl/methodentechnieken/bb/results/>.

8. For a complete overview of the relationship between individual believing and individual belonging, we refer to Table 6 in the appendix.

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## APPENDIX:

Table 6: Traditional Christian beliefs and attendance (belonging), in percentages, per country per wave. For convenience of comparison the traditional Christian beliefs scale was merged into three categories.

Belgium.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	33.0	6.7	6.8	46.5	38.1	4.8	6.1	48.9	38.7	6.6	6.7	52.0
once a year	2.2	0.8	0.8	3.9	2.1	0.5	0.4	3.1	3.3	1.3	0.7	5.4
on holy days	2.5	2.2	2.5	7.2	6.1	4.0	3.1	13.2	7.8	4.2	4.4	16.3
once a month	2.5	1.2	4.3	8.0	3.1	2.0	2.9	7.9	2.9	1.9	3.7	8.5
once a week	4.7	4.9	20.5	30.1	3.9	4.8	12.7	21.3	2.6	3.0	8.0	13.6
more than once a week	0.3	0.3	3.7	4.3	0.7	0.6	4.3	5.6	0.1	0.5	3.7	4.3
	45.2	16.1	38.7	100	53.9	16.7	29.4	100	55.4	17.4	27.2	100

France.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	35.2	8.4	9.0	52.5	47.2	7.4	6.4	61.0	49.6	8.7	11.2	69.4
once a year	2.5	1.3	1.3	5.2	4.1	1.4	1.6	7.0	3.0	1.1	1.9	6.0
on holy days	6.3	4.2	7.0	17.5	5.8	3.8	5.6	15.2	5.2	2.4	5.6	13.2
once a month	1.2	2.4	5.4	9.0	0.9	1.6	4.4	6.9	0.5	1.5	2.3	4.3
once a week	0.4	2.7	11.0	14.2	0.4	1.2	7.0	8.6	0.2	0.8	4.3	5.3
more than once a week	0.1	0.3	1.2	1.6	0.1	0.0	1.1	1.2	0.2	0.3	1.2	1.7
	45.5	19.3	34.9	100	58.4	15.4	26.2	100	58.7	14.8	26.5	100

Ireland.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	3.0	0.4	1.7	5.1	2.4	0.5	1.6	4.6	2.5	1.2	5.0	8.7
once a year	0.4	0.4	0.5	1.3	0.1	0.2	0.9	1.2	1.3	0.9	2.1	4.3
on holy days	0.4	0.6	1.9	2.8	1.0	1.5	2.8	5.3	1.8	1.6	6.9	10.3
once a month	0.5	1.4	3.3	5.2	0.5	0.9	4.9	6.3	0.7	1.7	6.5	9.0
once a week	1.8	4.3	51.1	57.1	2.4	5.2	51.4	59.0	2.0	2.8	45.4	50.2
more than once a week	0.2	0.7	27.7	28.6	0.4	1.1	22.1	23.6	0.2	0.4	16.9	17.5
	6.2	7.7	86.1	100	6.9	9.5	83.7	100	8.6	8.6	82.8	100

Italy.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	21.1	2.8	3.7	27.6	15.3	2.5	1.9	19.7	9.5	3.2	3.3	16.1
once a year	2.9	1.2	0.9	5.1	2.1	0.9	1.3	4.4	1.9	0.6	1.3	3.8
on holy days	8.1	3.2	7.6	18.9	8.8	3.8	7.8	20.3	6.7	5.3	12.3	24.3
once a month	3.5	3.5	6.9	13.9	2.4	2.2	8.0	12.7	2.3	2.6	8.2	13.1
once a week	3.3	3.9	19.7	26.9	2.0	3.9	25.0	30.9	2.7	4.2	24.3	31.3
more than once a week	0.4	0.5	6.6	7.5	0.3	0.7	11.0	12.1	0.4	0.9	10.3	11.5
	39.3	15.2	45.5	100	30.9	14.0	55.1	100	23.5	16.8	59.7	100

## Spain.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	19.5	5.9	5.6	31.0	28.5	4.9	7.2	40.7	28.3	5.5	9.4	43.2
once a year	1.9	1.1	1.2	4.2	1.5	0.8	1.4	3.7	1.5	1.2	1.9	4.6
on holy days	3.1	2.6	3.1	8.8	5.2	3.3	6.3	14.8	5.2	2.5	6.4	14.2
once a month	2.1	2.3	7.6	11.9	1.5	2.0	5.6	9.1	2.3	1.8	7.2	11.2
once a week	2.1	3.9	26.0	32.0	2.1	3.0	17.2	22.3	1.9	2.1	14.7	18.7
more than once a week	0.2	0.8	11.2	12.2	0.3	0.5	8.6	9.5	0.2	0.7	7.1	8.0
	28.2	16.6	54.6	100	39.2	14.6	46.2	100	39.4	13.9	46.7	100

## Canada.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	10.2	5.8	14.6	30.6	15.0	4.9	14.4	34.3	10.7	5.2	17.8	33.7
once a year	2.0	1.7	5.2	9.0	1.7	1.3	5.2	8.3	1.8	1.5	7.1	10.3
on holy days	2.4	3.1	7.6	13.1	2.4	2.9	10.9	16.2	1.6	2.9	12.1	16.6
once a month	1.3	2.1	10.8	14.2	1.0	2.2	9.3	12.5	1.0	1.2	8.1	10.3
once a week	0.5	2.4	21.7	24.6	0.8	1.9	18.8	21.5	0.5	1.0	19.9	21.5
more than once a week	0.2	0.2	8.2	8.6	0.2	0.7	6.3	7.2	0.0	0.7	6.9	7.6
	16.6	15.3	68.1	100	21.2	13.8	65.0	100	15.7	12.4	72.0	100

## Denmark.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	52.0	3.6	4.2	59.8	45.9	6.1	5.1	57.0	40.3	7.0	4.3	51.6
once a year	11.5	1.1	1.9	14.5	9.1	3.9	2.3	15.3	11.1	2.9	2.6	16.6
on holy days	10.9	1.9	2.4	15.2	12.4	2.3	2.1	16.8	12.5	4.0	3.6	20.2
once a month	2.3	0.8	4.3	7.3	2.3	1.7	4.3	8.3	3.6	2.5	2.9	9.0
once a week	0.0	0.1	2.9	3.0	0.1	0.3	1.9	2.3	0.1	0.3	1.5	1.9
more than once a week	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.6	0.87
	76.7	7.5	15.8	100	69.9	14.2	15.8	100	67.7	16.8	15.5	100

## Iceland.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	16.9	9.9	20.3	47.2	13.5	11.4	19.1	43.9	16.3	8.0	19.3	43.6
once a year	3.1	3.7	8.5	15.3	3.7	3.2	8.8	15.7	3.5	3.6	11.1	18.2
on holy days	3.1	5.5	18.1	26.7	2.8	8.0	20.4	31.2	3.6	7.2	15.8	26.6
once a month	0.3	1.0	6.8	8.1	1.1	0.9	5.2	7.3	0.4	1.9	6.7	9.0
once a week	0.0	0.1	2.0	2.1	0.0	0.4	1.1	1.5	0.4	0.5	1.2	2.1
more than once a week	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.4
	23.4	20.2	56.4	100	21.1	23.9	55.0	100	24.2	21.6	54.2	100

## Sweden.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	45.3	5.4	4.6	55.2	53.4	6.9	6.5	66.9	44.2	7.8	7.3	59.3
once a year	10.1	3.6	4.2	17.9	6.7	1.8	1.7	10.1	11.9	3.8	5.1	20.7
on holy days	8.0	2.0	3.1	13.0	5.8	1.5	4.1	11.4	4.1	3.0	3.8	10.9
once a month	1.5	1.1	6.0	8.6	1.0	1.2	4.0	6.2	1.0	0.6	3.6	5.2
once a week	0.3	0.0	2.6	2.9	0.3	0.1	3.1	3.5	0.2	0.1	3.1	3.5
more than once a week	0.2	0.3	1.8	2.3	0.0	0.0	1.9	1.9	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.5
	65.3	12.4	22.3	100	67.1	11.6	21.3	100	61.5	15.4	23.1	100

## Germany.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	34.2	4.9	3.1	42.3	34.3	4.2	4.5	43.1	33.6	3.9	3.3	40.8
once a year	6.6	1.9	1.4	9.9	5.4	1.7	0.9	8.0	4.8	1.1	1.5	7.4
on holy days	5.6	4.4	2.9	12.8	6.6	3.9	4.1	14.5	10.9	3.3	5.0	19.2
once a month	3.2	4.1	7.2	14.5	3.7	3.2	7.1	14.0	4.2	4.7	8.6	17.5
once a week	1.8	2.1	12.4	16.2	0.7	2.4	13.5	16.6	2.7	2.8	7.9	13.3
more than once a week	0.1	0.5	3.6	4.3	0.0	0.4	3.4	3.7	0.0	0.2	1.5	1.7
	51.5	17.9	30.6	100	50.7	15.7	33.6	100	56.2	16.0	27.8	100

## Netherlands.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	36.3	4.1	5.5	45.9	39.8	5.0	4.7	49.4	42.1	8.7	7.3	58.1
once a year	2.6	1.0	0.7	4.2	4.1	0.7	1.2	6.1	3.9	1.6	1.0	6.6
on holy days	4.0	2.6	2.5	9.0	8.1	3.3	4.6	16.0	6.3	2.7	4.3	13.2
once a month	3.3	2.9	6.8	13.0	2.6	2.4	4.8	9.8	2.3	2.1	5.8	10.2
once a week	1.2	2.8	19.4	23.4	1.6	2.2	11.4	15.2	0.7	0.9	6.7	8.4
more than once a week	0.4	0.2	3.7	4.3	0.0	0.2	3.2	3.5	0.1	0.2	3.1	3.5
	47.9	13.6	38.5	100	56.1	13.9	30.0	100	55.5	16.2	28.3	100

## United Kingdom.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	21.4	8.8	18.6	48.8	25.7	6.8	17.1	49.6	31.9	6.1	23.8	61.8
once a year	2.3	1.0	3.7	7.0	2.1	1.6	4.1	7.8	2.0	1.2	3.6	6.8
on holy days	1.7	1.9	5.6	9.1	2.7	1.7	6.2	10.6	3.6	1.2	6.4	11.2
once a month	0.9	0.8	8.5	10.2	0.9	1.3	8.6	10.8	0.5	0.3	4.1	4.9
once a week	0.6	0.8	15.3	16.8	0.7	1.8	13.3	15.8	0.8	0.9	8.3	10.0
more than once a week	0.0	0.1	8.0	8.1	0.1	0.3	4.9	5.3	0.0	0.2	5.2	5.3
	26.9	13.4	59.7	100	32.3	13.5	54.2	100	38.7	9.9	51.4	100

United States of America.

	1981				1990				2000			
<b>Christian beliefs</b>	0	1	2		0	1	2		0	1	2	
<b>Attendance</b>												
never	3.4	2.4	14.7	20.4	5.1	2.8	15.8	23.7	5.3	2.5	12.9	20.7
once a year	0.5	0.6	5.1	6.2	0.7	0.5	5.2	6.3	0.6	0.8	6.8	8.2
on holy days	0.7	0.8	8.4	9.8	0.9	1.0	5.6	7.5	0.3	1.0	7.8	9.1
once a month	0.6	1.3	15.7	17.6	0.8	1.4	12.5	14.8	0.1	1.3	13.2	14.6
once a week	0.4	1.1	29.6	31.0	0.7	1.3	30.2	32.1	0.8	0.3	31.5	32.5
more than once a week	0.1	0.5	14.4	14.9	0.0	0.5	15.1	15.5	0.0	0.4	14.5	14.9
	5.5	6.7	87.9	100	8.2	7.4	84.4	100	7.1	6.2	86.6	100