

„OVIDIUS” UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA

DOCTORAL SCHOOL

DOMAIN: THEOLOGY

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

**RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENTISM.
MISSIONARY EVALUATION**

PHD COORDINATOR:

Fr. Prof. PhD. Gheorghe ISTODOR

PHD STUDENT:

Valentin Țarcă

Constanța 2024

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. Research rationale and objectives
2. Relevance and topicality of the researched topic
3. Methodology used
4. Technical and conceptual vocabulary used in the research
5. Research status at national and international level
6. Structure of the doctoral thesis

CHAPTER I - SECULARIZATION AND THE MULTIPLICATION OF RELIGIOUS OPTIONS: IMPULSES OF THE RELATIVIZATION OF RELIGIOUS BELONGING

- 1.1 The impact of secularization in Europe: constructions of a new way of perceiving religiosity
 - 1.1.1 The lexicon of secularization
 - 1.1.2. Theories of secularization
 - 1.1.3 The historical frameworks of secularization and its impact on the religious consciousness of Europeans
 - 1.1.4. Secularization in a continuing transformation: four post-war "generations"
- 1.2 Trends and counter-trends of secularization in Europe
- 1.3 The impact of the wave of immigration on European religiosity
- 1.4. Desecularization of the world in the thinking of Peter L. Berger
- 1.5 The politics and norms of secularization in relation to society
 - 1.5.1. The ideology of secularism in pluralist society
 - 1.5.2. Grounding the principles of secularism in the State-Church relationship. The European example

CHAPTER II - RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENTISM AND THE DRIFT OF PSEUDO-SPIRITUALITY - A CONSEQUENT RESPONSE TO THE RELATIVIZATION OF FAITH AND TRUTH

- 2.1 Diversification and reinterpretation of the sacred in the new spiritualities
 - 2.1.1 Spiritual revolution. Multiplication of forms
 - 2.1.2. Spiritual individualization
 - 2.1.3. The explosion of spiritual movements
 - 2.1.4. Multiple spiritual identities
- 2.2. The phenomenon of leaving religion. Sociological and theological perspectives
 - 2.2.1. Sociological approaches to leaving religion
 - 2.2.2. Methodological perspectives
- 2.3. Conceptualizing religious indifference
 - 2.3.1. Indifference: conceptual genesis, symbolic power and its contestation
 - 2.3.2. Religious indifference as an indicator of secularization
 - 2.3.3 Indifference and modernity
 - 2.3.4. The significance of indifference in the non-religious domain
 - 2.3.5 Indifference as an indirect relation
 - 2.3.6. Differentiating indifference

CHAPTER III - NONES - TYPOLOGY OF DISINTEREST IN RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND RELIGIOUS SENSIBILITY

- 3.1 Nones in the European space: an undeniable reality
 - 3.1.1. Secularism and religious indifferentism

- 3.1.2. References for measuring nones adherents
 - 3.1.2.1. Great Britain: Sunday Assembly
 - 3.1.2.2 Norway: Human-Etisk Forbund
 - 3.1.2.3. Poland: Fundacja im. Kazimierz Łyszczyński
 - 3.1.2.4. ASUR - Secular-Humanist Association of Romania
- 3.2. Nones - a self-construction of identity-social validation
 - 3.2.1. How does one become a none?
 - 3.2.2. The religious and spiritual ecosystem
 - 3.2.3. The profile of none - a religious abstraction
- 3.3. Mission and dynamics articulated in the social framework of the nones
 - 3.3.1. What does the mission of nones groups entail?
 - 3.3.2. Forms of organized nonreligion
 - 3.3.3. Secularism and atheism - references in the representativeness of nonreligion
 - 3.3.4. Atheist activism and advocacy strategies
 - 3.3.5. Nonreligion in cyberspace
- 3.4. Non-religion and existential culture
 - 3.4.1. Typology of existential cultures: humanism, agnosticism, subjectivism
 - 3.4.2. Existential cultures in practice: everyday abstractions

CHAPTER IV - THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENTISM - FROM CRISIS TO NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR RENEWING THE DYNAMICS OF WITNESS

- 4.1. Mission of the Church in a secular world
 - 4.1.1. Mission as proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ
 - 4.1.2. Qualitative aspects of re-evangelization
 - 4.1.3. A possible missionary response to secular and pluralist European culture
 - 4.1.4. The Eucharist as an antidote to secularism
- 4.2. Missionary attention to the nones: from theory to practice
 - 4.2.1. Missionary directions applicable to the non-religious (nones)
 - 4.2.1.1 Promoting the aesthetic values of Christian worship and architecture
 - 4.2.1.2. Deepening faith in theological discourse
 - 4.2.1.3. Refocusing the centrality of salvation in Christ on the biblical text
 - 4.2.1.4 Engaging in radical witness
- 4.3. Re-evaluating the Church's missionary ministry
 - 4.3.1. Responding to the existential culture of the nones from a Christian perspective
 - 4.3.2. Dialogical pastoral ministry to the nones
- 4.4. Proclaiming the sacramentality of life and the authenticity of spirituality in the horizon of the non non nones of the religiously indifferent. Missionary frameworks
 - 4.4.1. The principle of sacramentality
 - 4.4.2. The integral God - world perspective
 - 4.4.3. Sacred and profane - dialectical vs. analogical approaches
 - 4.4.4. Spirituality as a foundation for Christian life
 - 4.4.5. Understanding Christian spirituality as a missionary spirituality
- 4.5. Theological engagement with the sociology of religion in constructing response strategies to secularity
 - 4.5.1 The multilateral approach
 - 4.5.2. Public theology: ecclesiastical and academic

CONCLUSIONS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Specialized literature
2. Webography

1. Argument and research objectives

Many decades have been debated in the theological and sociological literature about secularization and its effects in the social field. Thousands of studies and books have been written on this topic, which has confirmed that through secularization, between religion and society, there is a dynamic competitive relationship. At the beginning of the 2000s, this hyper-debated topic was considered no longer topical, as the invalidation of the sociological theories of secularization and religious desecularization was announced. A springtime spirit of reviving the presence of religion in the public domain. From this observation and research, the consequences of secularization and the competition between society and the Church on the psychology of people, especially Europeans, have too often been omitted. Moreover, the issue has not been considered in its complex interrelationship with the psychological state of anxiety of people after the two world wars. Attention has been focused on the changing optics of secular authority with reference to the status and actuality of Christianity in the European space, but the repercussions of this supposed antagonism on the post-1945 generations have been omitted.

The Christian Church, in its confessional variations, has shifted its attention to other religions, to the mission outside the European space, and has been preoccupied with contextualizing Christianity in other cultures. Somehow, the problem of Europeans who have experienced the anxiety of religious conflicts and the aggressiveness of secularist ideologies has not retained missionary attention. And today, unfortunately, the European countries are living the drama of an accentuated de-Christianization in its most subtle expressions. The tragic reality is this: the Church of England closes about 20 churches a year. Some 200 Danish churches have been deemed unviable or under-utilized. The Roman Catholic Church in Germany has closed some 515 churches in the last decade. In Europe, the Netherlands appears to be the hardest hit, with Roman Catholic leaders estimating that two-thirds of the country's 1,600 churches will be decommissioned within a decade, while about 700 of the country's Protestant churches are expected to close within a few years.

A wave of church closures and alterations is sweeping across Europe in a startling indication of changing cultural dynamics, reflecting the waning dominance of Christianity on the continent. Many of these impressive buildings, which once served as important places of worship, are now used as various entertainment venues: concert halls, theaters, hotels, restaurants, restaurants, clubs, cafes, shops, etc.[\[1\]](#).

The doctoral thesis brings to the forefront the analysis of the phenomenon of religious indifferentism, which is not only challenging to the mission of the Church, but also one that problematizes a reality increasingly present in the religious morphology of the world: nones, those who do not identify with any one religion, who do not have a hostile attitude towards religion and who make what we might call *nonreligion* a way of life. From the perspective of missionary theology, on the basis of the preceding statement, we are obliged to relate the *nones* phenomenon to secularization and its derivatives (secularity, secularism). The idea of a research devoted to answering the question what defines religious indifferentism, what are its causes and what are its prospects for the future is quite new in academic research. While philosophical,

theological, and historical considerations of atheism and related topics have a long history, it was only the attempt to focus research attention on "cultures of unbelief" or a "sociology of irreligion" in the late twentieth century that led to serious or systematic consideration of the notion as a field of social scientific study. [2] In the early 1970s, Colin Campbell began his ground-breaking contribution, *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion*, with the observation that "there is as yet no tradition for the sociological study of irreligion, and this book was written in the hope that it will help to stimulate the development of such a tradition." It was not until more than forty years later that this really began to happen. As Campbell has suggested, it is difficult to pursue such an "important and viable sphere of study" until "the subject of investigation has been shaped", at least in a preliminary way[3].

The particular kinds of meaning-systems of interest in our research have been called by many names: atheism and atheist(ic); non-theism and non-theist(ic); agnostic(ism); skeptic and skepticism; irreligion and irreligious; non-religion and non-religious; areligious; unbelief; infidel and infidelity; freethought; philosophical naturalism; non-spiritual or non-supernaturalism; secularity, secularist and secularism; humanism (secular) and humanist(ic). Much or most of the scholarly work cited in this dissertation has focused on why religious belief, identity or affiliation is 'lost' or weakened in certain circumstances. Much of this work has approached the question of non-religious or non-religious people 'from a secondary perspective' - as a residual or subordinate aspect of the study of religiosity - rather than focusing directly on learning what it means to be non-religious people, institutions and societies. This has influenced the kinds of questions that have been asked, the terms and concepts used to formulate them, the research methods used to pursue them, and the way in which results are interpreted. As a result, the relevance and validity of much of the existing data varies widely. The results of previous research need to be carefully evaluated to find out what they do and do not tell us about 'truly' non-religious people. Many of these are undoubtedly relevant to our topic. But the question remains: what is the subject? What do we call it and how do we define it? By answering these questions, even if only tentatively, we should better understand what is and what is not relevant.

We might say that we are interested in non-religious phenomena or systems of meaning, but this begs the question, "What is religious?" This is a more difficult question than it might seem. Religion is a well-established subject or field of study in many disciplines, from anthropology to theology. That said, there is no universally accepted definition - even within the social sciences. In fact, the question of whether 'religion' can be clearly and consistently defined and whether it should be used has long been debated.

Part of the problem is that although everyone has a pretty good idea of what religion is, these ideas - and our definitions of the term - are not all the same. The range of phenomena covered by 'religion' is incredibly wide and diverse. One person may have certain examples in mind (such as orthodox Christianity), while another may think of something quite different (such as tribal shamanism). Moreover, the concept of 'religion' does not have the same meaning or relevance from place to place or even over time. It is arguably more meaningfully applied to various forms of Christianity than Buddhism, Hinduism or Scientology, but it is used to describe all of them.

One way of dealing with the multiple meanings of 'religion', at least in the social sciences, is to distinguish between three general approaches that have been adopted: 'functional' or 'inclusive', 'substantive' or 'exclusive', and 'constructionist' or 'relational'. Arthur Greil and David Bromley usefully summarize the first two of these: "The academic debate over the

proper definition of religion has traditionally pitted *exclusivists* against *inclusivists*. Exclusivists wish to limit the subject of the social scientific study of religion to the beliefs, institutions, and practices traditionally regarded as religious. Exclusivists frequently adopt substantive definitions that consider that the defining characteristic of religion is its relation to the supernatural or *supraimperial* realm. Inclusivists advocate expanding definitions of religion to encompass activities, ideologies, and structures that appear to share characteristics with religion, although they are not always designated as such. Inclusivists often advocate functional definitions of religion, which argue that the essential feature of religion is, not its reference to the supernatural, but its capacity to provide an overarching structure of meaning or basis for the self[4].

Functional or inclusive definitions aim for "religion" to be universally applicable. It is an aspect of human experience that focuses on the "ultimate" concerns, the "enduring problems" of existence, or what is "most valuable" among human beings[5]. From this perspective, "religion" is "intrinsically human". As such, however, "if we refer to religion in its broadest sense then, indeed, every human being is religious". This is clearly not sufficient for our purposes, since it "overlooks the phenomenon of irreligion [or irreligiousness or secularity] altogether, either by claiming that it does not exist or by defining it as non-existent".

Of course, significant distinctions can be drawn between religious and non-religious approaches in grappling with the permanent or ultimate concerns or values of human existence. Substantive or exclusive definitions of religion allow for this by suggesting that religious phenomena contain elements that non-religious ones do not, such as 'supernatural', 'transcendent', 'super-empirical' or 'spiritual' ideas, experiences, entities and realms. While this 'makes room' for systems of meaning that can reasonably be called non-religious, this approach brings with it a challenge of a different nature: it is difficult to define consistently what is (and what is not) 'supernatural'. In many cultures or intellectual traditions, the distinctions between "natural" and "supernatural" realms or phenomena are blurred or non-existent. Who, then, is to be the arbiter of what is natural or supernatural, physical or metaphysical, of this world or transcendent "otherworldly"? Usually, in practice, the arbiter is the intellectual perspective or tradition (or bias) of the investigator. Most research in such areas has been conducted within the Western intellectual tradition.

The third general approach to understanding 'religion' attempts to avoid the limitations of functional or substantive approaches. It does this by not defining 'religion' at all - at least from the investigator's perspective. The definition is left to 'social actors'. In social constructivist or relational approaches, we simply observe and report how people in various social, cultural or institutional contexts use or construct terms and concepts such as 'religious' or 'non-religious', 'believer' or 'non-believer', 'sacred' or 'secular', 'theist' or 'atheist' and so on.

One advantage of the constructivist approach is that there is no need to predefine terms such as "religious" or "non-religious". However, a problem with this approach is that the markers or labels for "religious" or "non-religious" are no more universal than the distinctions between the natural and the supernatural. In fact, the term or concept of 'religion' has no precise equivalents in many cultural contexts.

L. Lee defines "nonreligion" as "anything that is primarily defined by a relation of difference from religion" or "any position, perspective, or practice that is primarily defined by or in relation to religion, but is nevertheless not considered to be anything other than religious." Nonreligion "takes 'religion' as its point of reference." [6] As such, it is defined "only as a general form of response" or as a "characteristic set of responses" to religion, as Colin

Campbell has said of "irreligion." [7] As Paul Pruyser has observed, "irreligion is not just the absence of something, and it is certainly not just the absence of something good, desirable or pleasant. It is much closer to the adoption of an active position or attitude, involving the act of excluding another position which, despite its popularity or naturalness, is considered to be inappropriate." [7] Nonreligion, however, tends to convey hostility or neglect of religion. Lee seeks a slightly broader and more neutral concept that implies a "less oppositional notion of difference" rather than rejection. According to Lee, "irreligion is the rejection of religion, and nonreligion is a related, more inclusive concept that denotes anything that is identified by how it differs from religion, whether that sense of difference involves hostility, contempt, curiosity, or even awe." [8]

In more concrete terms, as Lee defines it, non-religion encompasses atheism, agnosticism, (secular) humanism, anti-religious actions, irreligious experiences, anti-supernaturalism, anti-clericalism, blasphemy, and "indifference to religion - a position that requires at least some awareness of religion and, therefore, taking a certain stand." It does not, however, include "rationalism", which Lee considers "ontologically autonomous from religion" rather than defined or differentiated in relation to "religion." [9]

Lee also considers, but rejects, variants of "atheism" and "secular" as possible labels for the field of study he is considering. While "atheism" and, to a lesser extent, "non-theism" appear with some regularity in current scholarship, Lee emphasizes that - at least semantically, if not always as used - they refer only to the absence or rejection of belief in God or gods. As such, it represents "only one aspect of non-religious studies". It positions 'nonreligion' between 'atheism' and 'secularism' in terms of the breadth of their meaning or the range of phenomena they encompass. The former is too narrow, while the latter (along with its many cognates) is too broad and ambiguous.

Lee sees in "secular" (as well as in "secularity," "secularism," and "secularization") a sense of "otherness" or separateness, rather than overt differentiation, from religiosity. For Lee, "the secular is something for which religion is not the main point of reference." [10] In later work, Lee argued that "secularization implies the marginalization of religion" and that "secularity is when religion is relatively, though not necessarily absolutely, marginal." [11] "Therefore," she explains, "marginalization and marginality are the best and most useful ways to understand secularization and secularity." [11]

Thus, nonreligion is defined as worldviews and lifestyles that actors perceive or overtly designate as different from religion. Irreligion is included in nonreligion, but denotes an active (or hostile) criticism, rejection of religion, while nonreligion is a more neutral designation. Secularity denotes conditions or circumstances in which religion is marginalized or supplanted by sources of authority or "points of reference" completely separate from religion or other than religion.

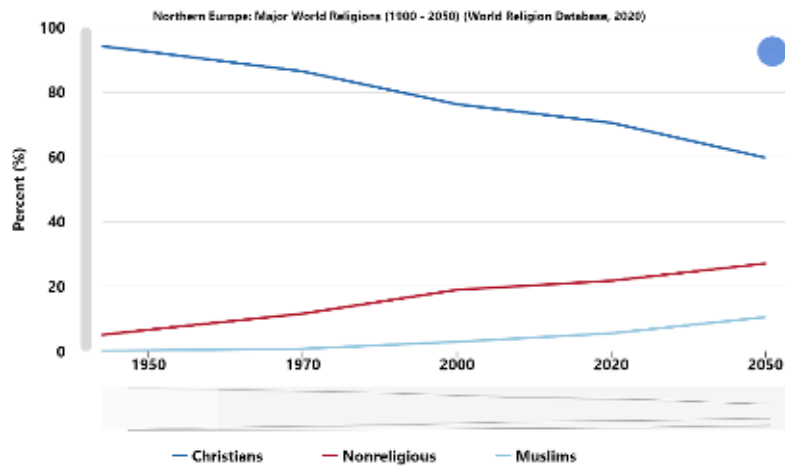
The field of research we are considering is concerned with both differentiation from religion and marginalization of religion. It is interested in the professed antipathy towards religion as well as the indifference or total ignorance of it.

2. Relevance and topicality of the topic

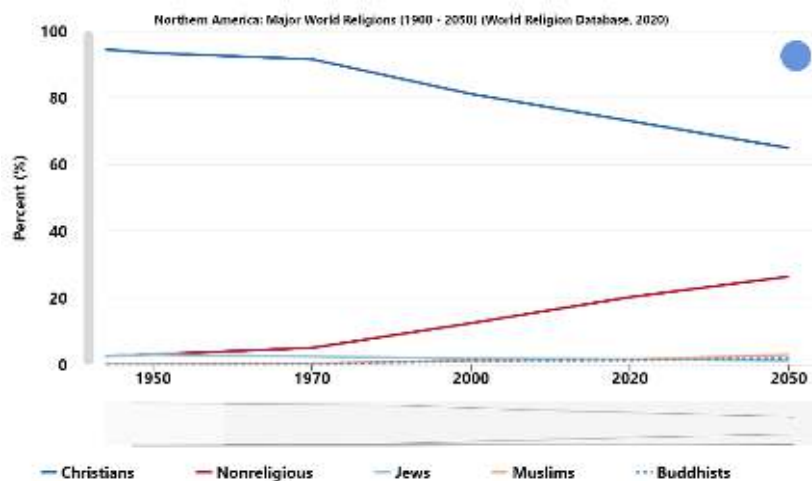
Religious indifferentism is a contemporary reality which calls for urgent missionary and pastoral responses. Responses that cannot be developed individually, by local churches, but by the whole of Christendom in its ecumenical intention. *Nones* is a global reality, and the response must be thought out and formulated in ecumenical and unitary consensus by the whole of

Christendom. Otherwise, it is futile, for the impact of religious indifference is backed by the force of secularist trends globally. The statistical data are not encouraging, but reflect truly worrying situations.

The following data are provided by the *World Religion Database* and taken from ARDA - The Association of Religion Data Archives[\[12\]](#).

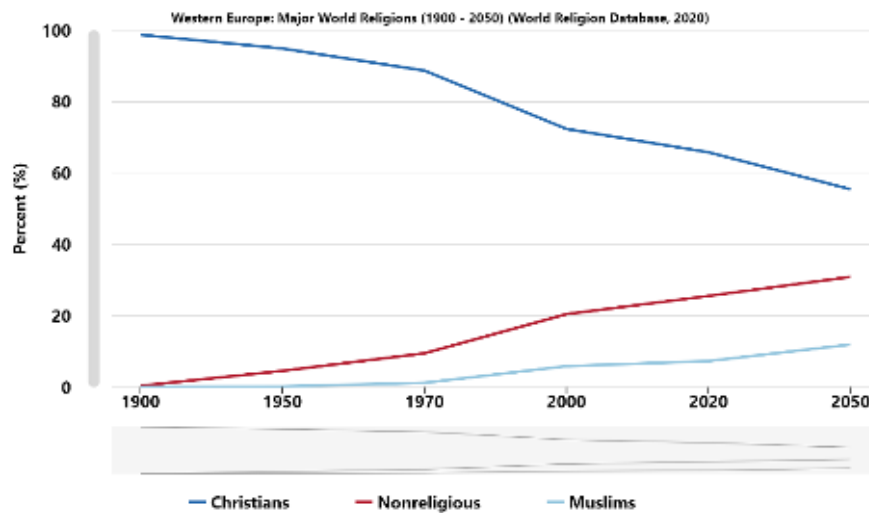


YEAR	christians	nonreligious	muslims
1900	98.128	1.397	0.001
1950	92.424	6.634	0.273
1970	86.362	11.615	0.774
2000	76.241	18.954	2.928
2020	70.505	21.746	5.534
2050	59.75	27.102	10.546

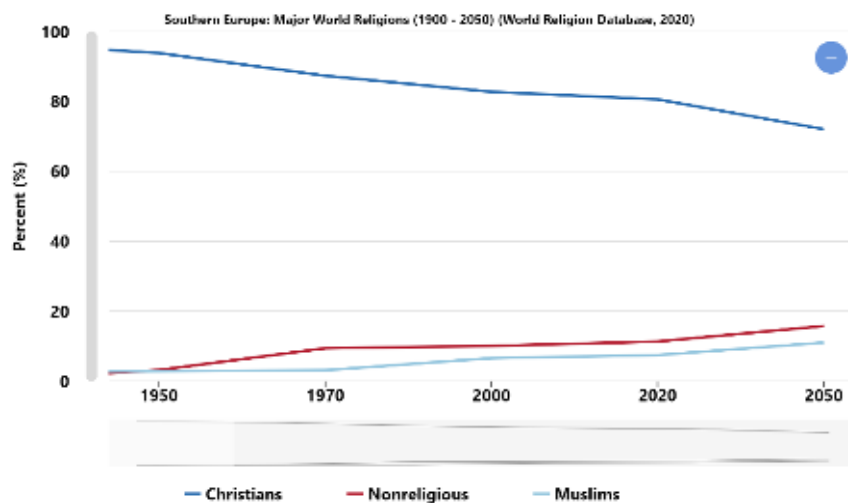


YEAR	Christians	Nonreligious	Jews	Muslims	buddhist
1900	97,094	1,24	1,316	0,012	0,05
1950	93,439	3,098	3,001	0,117	0,036

1970	91,557	5,043	2,468	0,365	0,094
2000	81,154	12,457	1,811	1,315	1,271
2020	73,068	20,262	1,61	1,537	1,343
2050	64,929	26,425	1,268	2,952	1,87



YEAR	Christians	Nonreligious	muslims
1900	98.735	0.377	0.048
1950	94.899	4.562	0.204
1970	88.689	9.485	1.215
2000	72.347	20.459	5.865
2020	65.813	25.545	7.314
2050	55.427	30.892	11.937



YEAR	Christians	Nonreligious	muslims
1900	96.786	0.253	2.753
1950	93.853	3.189	2.895
1970	87.375	9.414	3.144
2000	82.776	10.094	6.616
2020	80.602	11.353	7.477
2050	72.07	15.78	11.042

Basically, there are two situations of analysis and relevance to the study of religious indifferentism, in the US and in Europe. The pulse of the state of belonging to and assumption of the Christian faith is varying more and more accelerated.

Research by the Statista Research Department - "Religion in Europe - Statistics and Facts"[\[13\]](#) provides a panoramic view of the situation in Europe. At a rough level, Europe is divided along three religious lines: Protestant in the north and west, Catholic in the south and Orthodox in the east. Each of these churches is further subdivided liturgically and nationally. There are state churches in countries such as England, Malta, Denmark and Iceland. In other countries, state religion has declined in importance since the 19th century. For example, although the Netherlands was officially a Protestant country until 1848, Catholics now form the largest group of believers, with 18% of Dutch people identifying themselves as Catholics in 2021. Various Protestant churches are attended by around 14% of Dutch people.

In England and Wales, Christianity had an estimated 27.52 million adherents in 2021. Of Finland's 5.6 million inhabitants, 3.74 million identified themselves as Christians in 2022. In terms of denominations of Christianity, in Sweden, almost 7.6 million people were members of Sweden's main church, the New Church. In the Netherlands, although declining, membership of the Catholic Church amounted to over 3.66 million in 2021. The decline of Catholicism is also taking place in Germany. In 1950, 46% of that country's residents identified as Catholic, while by 2022, that percentage had fallen to just under 25%.

With the arrival of migrant workers, people from former colonies and refugees, the number of Muslims in Europe has increased. In 2022, around 22,300 Muslims lived in Finland. In England and Wales, from 2011 to 2021, the Muslim population grew by more than a million people. However, in the Netherlands, the population professing Islam has remained at five percent since 2010.

The geographical proximity between the Vatican and Italy's capital, Rome, contributes to Catholicism being the most prominent faith in this southern European nation. In 2022, only 2.5 million of the roughly 59 million Italians were not part of the Roman Catholic Church, the majority of whom were Protestant. In Spain, almost 33 million people said they were Catholic, even though the share of people identifying as Catholic has been declining since 2013. In Portugal, more than 80% of the population declared themselves Catholic in 2021. However, this proportion falls to 49% when only people aged between 18 and 34 are taken into account from 2023.

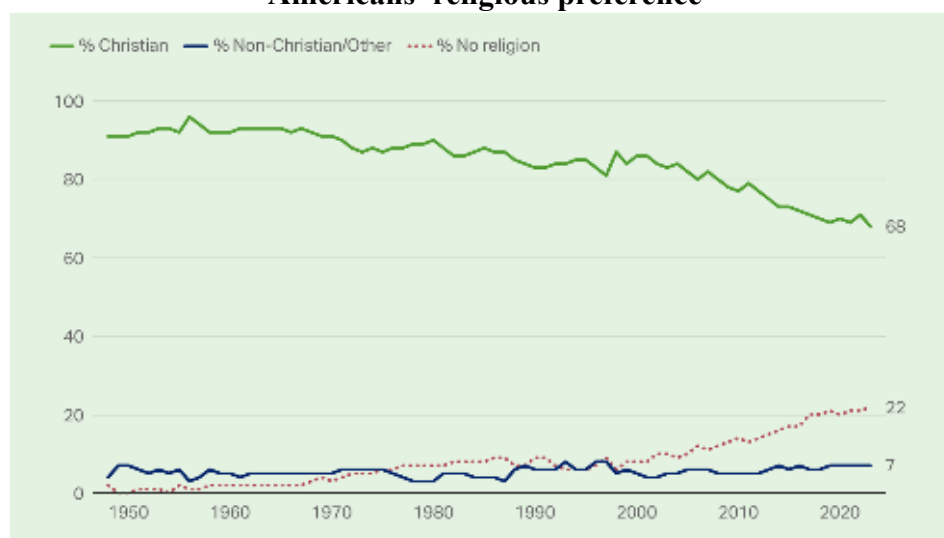
By 2030, more than six million Muslims are expected to live in France. In Italy, foreign nationals who identified themselves as Muslims numbered around 1.6 million in 2020, with around 450,000 of these being Moroccans and a further 205,000 from Albania. In 2022, Spain

recorded 2.3 million believers of Islam. In Portugal, on the other hand, evangelical Christians have become the country's largest minority religious group.

A growing number of Europeans practise no religion. In the Netherlands, the number of people who don't identify with any religious faith rose from 45% to 57% between 2010 and 2021, making the non-religious group larger than any of the Christian churches. In Finland, the number of people who belong to no religion has risen from around 1.14 million to 1.78 million in the last ten years. The proportion of the Swedish population who were church members has fallen over the same period from 69% to 54%, while in France the proportion of people who do not believe in God has risen from 44% to 56% over the last 19 years.

In the USA the same changing situation, from which we can draw some conclusions about the religiosity of Americans. Most Americans identify with a religion. According to an average of all *Gallup* polls in 2023^[14], about 3 out of 4 Americans said they identify with a particular religious faith. By far the largest proportion, 68%, identify with a Christian religion, including 33% who are Protestant, 22% Catholic, and 13% who identify with another Christian religion or simply as "Christian." 7% identify with a non-Christian religion, including 2% who are Jewish, 1% Muslim and 1% Buddhist, among others. 22% of Americans said they have no religious preference, and 3% did not answer the question.

Americans' religious preference



Source: <https://news.gallup.com/>

Fifty years ago, in 1973, 87% of American adults identified with a Christian religion, 6% were non-Christian or other, and 5% had no religious preference. Therefore, much of the change in the US has been a shift from Christian religions to no religion. 45% of Americans say religion is "very important" in their lives, another 26% say it is "somewhat important" and 28% say it is "not very important."

When Gallup first asked this question in 1965, 70% of respondents said religion is very important. The percentage dropped to 52% in a 1978 poll, but rose to nearly 60% between 1990 and 2005. Over the past 20 years, a shrinking percentage of Americans say religion is important, falling below 50% for the first time in 2019.

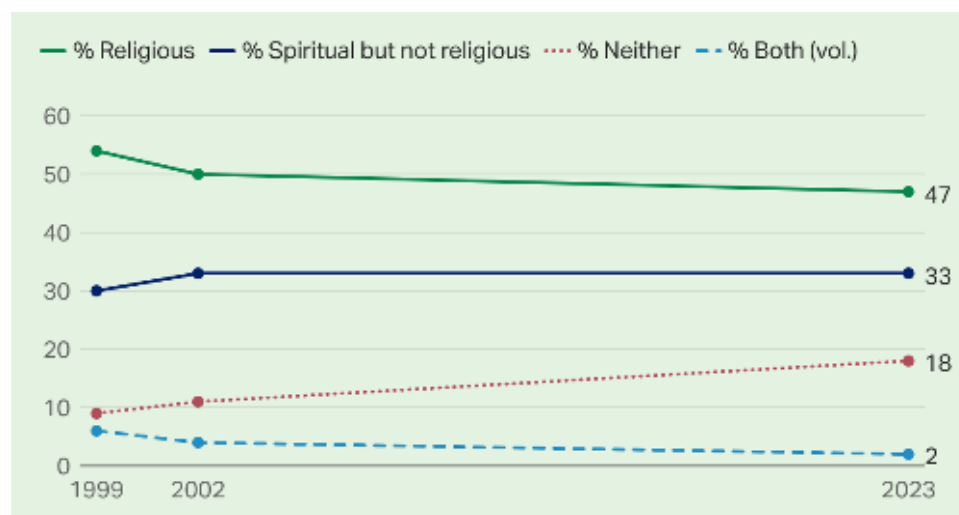
Church attendance is falling. Even though most Americans have a religious preference and say religion is at least somewhat important to them, much smaller proportions regularly attend religious services. Asked whether they have personally attended church, synagogue,

mosque, or temple in the past seven days, an average of 32% of U.S. adults in 2023 reported doing so, either in person or virtually. In 2000, 44% went to church in the past seven days, and in 1958, 49%.

The long-term decline in church attendance is linked to a decline in religious identification in general - especially for Protestant religions - but also to a decline in weekly attendance among U.S. Catholics. When describing their behavior more generally, 21% of Americans say they attend religious services "every week," another 9% say they do so "almost every week," and 11% say they attend about once a month. Most say they attend religious services "rarely" (26%) or "never" (31%).

Gallup trends on this measure of church attendance go back as far as 1992, when 34% of American adults said they attend church every week. In addition, less than half of Americans, 45%, belong to a formal house of worship. In each of the past four years, church membership has been below the majority. In 1937, when Gallup first asked this question, 73% of respondents were members of a church; in 1999, 70% were. The decline in formal church membership has been driven largely by younger generations of Americans. Just over one-third of young adults in the US have no religious affiliation. Moreover, many young adults who identify with a religion do not belong to a church. But even older adults who have a religious preference are less likely to belong to a church now than in the past.

In the same line of analysis, Gallup research indicates that nearly half of Americans (47%) describe themselves as religious, another 33% say they are spiritual but not religious, and 2% say they are "both." [15] Although the vast majority of U.S. adults have one of these orientations toward the non-physical world, the 18 percent who say they are neither religious nor spiritual is twice the percentage Gallup measured when it first asked this question in 1999. Over the same period, the percentage who identify themselves as religious has dropped by seven percentage points.



Source: <https://news.gallup.com/>

These results are based on a July 2023 Gallup poll, which updated a question that had previously been asked in 1999 and 2002. Overall, 82% of Americans have some type of spiritual belief system. This proportion is down from 90% in 1999 and 87% in 2002.

The decline in the number of Americans who identify themselves as religious is consistent with trends in other Gallup measures of religiosity and religious practice, particularly

over the past two decades. However, Gallup has documented steeper declines in formal religious practice (church attendance and church membership) than in belief in God and prayer.

This double religious reality of two historically Christian spaces, in which the intensification of religious indifferentism is evident, confirms the relevance of the theme investigated.

3. Methodology used

The research is carried out on a twofold approach: sociological and theological. Given that the theme under discussion opens up many levels of analysis of data provided by numerical measurement tools (census, demographic projections, statistics, etc.), the methodology used is of the same kind: interpretation of statistical data provided by specialized literature and various research projects. This analysis is coupled with a systematic theological discussion of how religious indifferentism impacts the mission of the Church, and in fact, how the Church responds missionally to this very topical challenge. Last but not least, we have appealed to the comparative method of data and historical method, but referring to some historical developments of the phenomenon of religious indifferentism.

A deeper commitment to the clarification of the analyzed theme pushes us to clarify the difference and the relationship between two distinct faces of secularity: secularity as a relative disengagement from religious culture and authority and secularity as a potentially powerful but dissident form of engagement with religion. These two forms are discussed by focusing on terminology, presenting a method of making this distinction in the language we use.

This discussion is situated in relation to the broader conceptual challenges facing any researcher or student in the field, which extend beyond this single, albeit crucial, problem of distinguishing between substantive and non-substantive forms of 'secularity'. Terms used in the field frequently require qualification: 'and now I am talking about secularity in the sense of x, rather than in the sense of y or z'; indeed, Taylor^[16] refers to secularities 1, 2 and 3'. There is also a close disparity between the existence of several concepts related to secularity - atheism, non-theism, freethought, non-religious humanism, skepticism, religion, non-religion, irreligion,^[17] irreligion,^[18] non-religion, and so on - and a lack of sustained, theoretically and empirically grounded accounts of these concepts. It is reasonable to assume that these two situations are closely related to each other - that the lack of systematic and detailed conceptual work has facilitated the generation of more and more new terms as a quick-fix solution to the problems and shortcomings that users inevitably encounter. Such a piecemeal approach may solve immediate difficulties, but it is also likely to introduce new overlaps and slippages between terms, thus replacing old problems with new ones. Indeed, scholarship on secularity and/or non-religiousness is replete with terms that are either imprecise or too narrow, and that are conflated and conflated without coherence and often without reason. Some scholars^[18] have gone so far as to argue that such terminological problems are at least partly responsible for the inhibition of secular scholarship to date^[19].

Notes:

[1] See: AJ Paz, "European Churches Transformed Into Nightclubs and Hotels Amidst Plummeting Attendance Rates", *Christian Daily*, June 28, 2023, <https://www.christianitydaily.com> (accessed 14.08.2024)

- [2] R Caporale. and A. Grumelli, *The Culture of Unbelief*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971; N. J. Demerath, "Irreligion, A-religion, and the Rise of the Religion-less Church: Two Case Studies in Organizational Convergence." *Sociological Analysis* 30, 1969, pp. 191-203.
- [3] C. Campbell, *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion*. London: Macmillan, 1971, p. vii.
- [4] Phil Zuckerman, Luke W. Galen, Frank L. Pasquale, *The Nonreligious. Understanding Secular People and Societies*, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 19.
- [5] M. E. Spiro, "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation", in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Banton, London: Tavistock, 1996, p. 96
- [6] L. Lee, "Research Note: Talking about a Revolution: Terminology for the New Field of Nonreligion Studies", in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27, 2012, pp. 129-139.
- [7] P. W. Pruyser, "Problems of Definition and Conception in the Psychological Study of Religious Unbelief", in *Changing Perspectives in the Scientific Study of Religion*, edited by Allan W. Eister, New York: Wiley, 1974, p. 195.
- [8] L. Lee, "Secular or Nonreligious? Investigating and Interpreting Generic 'Not Religious' Categories and Populations", in *Religion*, 44, 2014, p. 468.
- [9] L. Lee, "Research Note: Talking about a Revolution: Terminology for the New Field of Nonreligion Studies", p. 131.
- [10] *Ibid*, p. 135.
- [11] L. Lee, "Secular or Nonreligious? Investigating and Interpreting Generic 'Not Religious' Categories and Populations", p. 468.
- [12] Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds. *World Religion Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022), ARDA - The Association of Religion Data Archives, <https://www.thearda.com/>.
- [13] *Statista Research Department*, Religion in Europe - Statistics and Facts, Sep 2, 2024, <https://www.statista.com>.
- [14] *How Religious Are Americans*, March 29, 2024, <https://www.gallup.com>.
- [15] Jeffrey M. Jones, "In U.S., 47% Identify as Religious, 33% as Spiritual," Sept 22, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com>.
- [16] Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 15.
- [17] We mention from the outset that this concept is not used in the Romanian language, as it is not found in the *DEX*. But given the fact that it nuances certain dimensions of religious behavior and attitude, in order to differentiate it from other concepts, we will use it throughout our research.
- [18] Colin Campbell, *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion* Alcuin Academics, 2013, p. 18; Frank L. Pasquale. *Empirical Study and Neglect of Unbelief and Irreligion*. In T. Flynn (ed.). *The New Encyclopaedia of Unbelief*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007, pp. 760-766.
- [Lucy Lee. *Religion: Losing Faith?* In A. Park, E. Clery, J. Curtice, M. Phillips, and D. Utting (eds). *British Social Attitudes* 28. London: SAGE, 2012 pp. 173-184.

Selected bibliography

1. *Bible or Holy Scripture*, printed under the guidance and care of the Holy Father Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, with the approval of the Holy Synod, Editura Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodox Române, Bucharest, 2013.
2. Altemeyer, B. and Hunsberger, B., *Amazing Conversions: Why Some Turn to Faith & Others Abandon Religion*, Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1997.
3. Amarasingam, Amarnath, ed, *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal*, Leiden and Boston, 2010.
4. Bakke, Raymond, *A Theology as Big as the City*, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Academic, 1997.
5. Bakunin, Mikhail, *God and the State*, trans. Benjamin Tucker, New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1916.
6. Barron, Robert, *Renewing Our Hope: Essays for the New Evangelization*, The Catholic University of America Press, 2020.
7. Baxter, M., "'Whose Theology? Which Sociology?'" in M. H. Barnes, ed, *Theology and the Social Sciences*, Wipf and Stock, 2018.
8. Beckford, James A., *Social Theory and Religion*, Cambridge, 2003.
9. *Unbelief: Studies and Proceedings from the First International Symposium on Belief, held at Rome, March 22-27, 1969*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
10. Berger, P. L., Berger, B., and Kellner, H., *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973.
11. Berger, Peter L., "Secularization and De-secularization," in Linda Woodhead, Paul Fletcher, Hiroko Kawanami, and David Smith, eds, *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
12. Beyer, Peter, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, eds, *Global Modernities*, London: Sage, 1995, pp. 25-44; Idem, "Europeanization as Glocalization," in Roland Robertson, ed, *European Glocalization in Global Context*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 6-34.
13. Beyers, Jaco, "The Church and the Secular: The Effect of the Post-Secular on Christianity," in *HTS Theological Studies* 70, No. 1, 2014.
14. Bilgrami, Akeel, "Secularism: Its Content and Context," in Alfred Stepan and Charles Taylor, eds, *Boundaries of Toleration*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
15. Casanova, J., "Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective," *The Hedgehog Review* 8 (1-2), 2006, pp. 7-22.
16. Casanova, J., "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds, *Rethinking Secularism*, Oxford University Press, 2011.
17. Casanova, Jose, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
18. Casanova, Jose, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
19. Collins, P. M. and Fahey, M. A., eds, *Receiving 'The Nature and Mission of the Church': Ecclesial Reality and Ecumenical Horizons for the Twenty-first Century*, London and New York: T&T Clark, 2008.
20. Connolly, William E., "Some Thesis on Secularism," *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (4), 2011.

21. Cornille, Catherine, "Multiple Religious Belonging," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, edited by David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
22. Cottee, S., *The Apostates: When Muslims Leave Islam*, London: Hurst and Company, 2015.
23. G. Davie, "Is Europe an Exceptional Case?" *The Hedgehog Review* 8 (1-2), 2006.
24. Garrett, William R., "Thinking Religion in the Global Circumstance: A Critique of Roland Robertson's Globalization Theory," in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31 (1992).
25. Gavriliuță, Nicu, *Mișcări religioase orientale. O perspectivă socio-antropologică asupra globalizării practicilor yoga*, Iași, Editura Fundației Axis, 2006.
26. Gavriliuță, Nicu, *Sociologia religiilor. Credințe, ritualuri, ideologii*, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2013.
27. Gavriliuță, Nicu, *Noile religii seculare. Corectitudinea politica, tehnologiile viitorului și transumanismul*, Polirom, Iași, 2018.
28. Gauchet, M., *Il disincanto del mondo: una storia politica della religione*, Torino: Einaudi, 1992.
29. Hollinger, David A., "After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity," *The Journal of American History* (2011): pp. 21-48.
30. Hormel, Leontina M., "Atheism and Secularity in the Former Soviet Union," in *Atheism and Secularity: Global Expressions*, ed. Phil Zuckerman, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010.
31. Hout, Michael and Fisher, Claude S., "More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations," *American Sociological Review* 67, pp. 165-190.
32. Lee, L., "Research Note: Talking about a Revolution: Terminology for the New Field of Nonreligion Studies," in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27, 2012, pp. 129-139.
33. Lee, L., "Secular or Nonreligious? Investigating and Interpreting Generic 'Not Religious' Categories and Populations," in *Religion* 44, 2014.
34. Lee, Lois, "Western Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 587-600.
35. Lee, Lois, *Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular*, Oxford University Press, 2015.
36. Lee, Lois, *Recognizing the Non-Religious: Reimagining the Secular*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
37. Lee, Lucy, "Religion: Losing Faith?" in A. Park, E. Clery, E. Clery, J. Curtice, M. Phillips, and D. Utting, eds, *British Social Attitudes* 28, London: SAGE, 2012, pp. 173-184.
38. Lemert, Charles, "Science, Religion and Secularization," in *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1979), pp. 445-461.
39. McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994, pp. 7-21.
40. Mehta, Uday and Puniyani, Ram, Ram, eds, *Secularism in India: Concept and Practice*, Kalpaz Publications, 2017.
41. Meulemann, Heiner, "Enforced Secularization - Spontaneous Revival? Religious Belief, Unbelief, Uncertainty and Indifference in East and West European Countries 1991-1998," *European Sociological Review* 20(1), 2004, pp. 47-61.
42. Milbank, John, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Malden: Blackwell, first published 1990, 2006.

43. Modood, Tariq, "Civic Religion and Respect for Religion in Britain's Moderate Secularism," in Yahya Birt, Dilwar Hussain, and Ataullah Siddiqui, eds, *British Secularism and Religion: Islam, Society and the State*, Markfield: Kube Publishing Ltd, 2011, pp. 55-76.
44. Quack, J. and Schuh, C., eds, *Religious Indifference: New Perspectives from Studies on Secularization and Nonreligion*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2017.
45. Quack, Johannes and Schuh, Cora, "Conceptualizing Religious Indifferences in Relation to Religion and Nonreligion," in *Religious Indifference: New Perspectives from Studies on Secularization and Nonreligion*, ed. Johannes Quack and Cora Schuh, Springer International Publishing, 2017.
46. Quack, Johannes, "Outline of a Relational Approach to 'Nonreligion,'" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26 (4-5), 2014, pp. 439-469.
47. Quack, Johannes, "Was ist 'Nichtreligion'? Feldtheoretische Argumente für ein relationales Verständnis eines eigenständigen Forschungsgebietes," in *Säkularität in religionswissenschaftlicher Perspektive*, ed . Peter Antes and Steffen Führding, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht UP, 2013, pp. 87-107.