

'Believing without Belonging' in Twenty European Countries (1981-2008)

De-institutionalization of Christianity or Spiritualization of Religion? ¹

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Abstract

Extending and building on previous work on the merits of Grace Davie's theory about 'believing without belonging', this paper offers a comparative analysis of changes in the relationships between 'believing' and 'belonging' across countries. In doing so, two renditions of the theory that co-exist in Grace Davie's work are distinguished, i.e., the typically foregrounded version about a *de-institutionalization of Christianity* and its often unnoticed counterpart about a *spiritualization of religion*. Societal growth curve modelling is applied to the data of the European Values Study for twenty European countries (1981-2008) to test hypotheses derived from both theories. The findings suggest that the typically foregrounded version of a *de-institutionalization of Christianity* needs to be rejected, while the typically unnoticed version of a *spiritualization of religion* is supported by the data.

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Keywords

Believing without belonging, religious change, religious decline, traditional Christian religiosity, spirituality, mysticism

1. Introduction

In her seminal work *Religion in Britain since 1945*, better known under the motto in its subtitle: *Believing without Belonging*, Grace Davie (1994) has influentially critiqued the notion of an unambiguous decline of religion. Distinguishing between 'believing' and 'belonging', she defends the argument that in Britain since World War II, and more generally in Western Europe, "[b]elieving (...) persists while belonging continues to decline – or, to be more accurate, believing is declining (has declined) at a slower rate than belonging." (Davie 1990a, 455)

Davie's 'believing without belonging' thesis sparked a lot of scholarly attention, and previous studies have already addressed vital elements of the theory in a range of different contexts. The current paper builds on and extends these earlier contributions by using them as vital and indispensable building blocks for a comparative analysis of the relationships between 'believing' and 'belonging' across place and time. So, in this paper, we study *whether the relationship between 'believing' and 'belonging' has weakened in those European countries in which 'belonging' is lowest*. We will answer this question by making use of the four available waves of the European Values Study (EVS), covering a time period of nearly three decades (1981-2008), and a geographical area of twenty European countries.

This article proceeds as follows. In section 2, we will set out Davie's 'believing without belonging' thesis, but as will become immediately clear, 'believing without belonging' is not one unambiguous thesis but in fact comprises two different theories on

religious change, viz. *de-institutionalization of Christianity*, and *spiritualization of religion*. In section 3, we describe the data, the operationalization of the variables, and explain the method that we use. In section 4, we present our findings, and in the last section we draw conclusions, answer our research question, and discuss our results.

2. Theory and hypotheses

Indeed, systematically testing Davie's 'believing without belonging' thesis is not an easy task due to its nuanced nature. Davie (1994, 93) warns her readers that "'believing' and 'belonging' are not to be considered too rigidly" because the whole idea of 'believing without belonging' is "to capture a mood, to suggest an area of enquiry, a way of looking at the problem, not to describe a detailed set of characteristics." Therefore, operationalizing 'believing' and/or 'belonging' "too severely is bound to distort the picture." (Davie 1994, 94) Correspondingly, Davie defines 'believing' and 'belonging' rather loosely, and this results not in one unambiguous thesis, but in fact in two different theories on religious change that run crisscross through each other in her book, and are not mutually exclusive. The first theory is about *de-institutionalization of Christianity*. This is the 'standard' interpretation of 'believing without belonging' and will be explicated in subsection 2.2. The second theory is about *spiritualization of religion*, a different theory indeed as will become clear in subsection 2.3. Before we discuss these two different theories in detail, we discuss the literature about religious change in Western Europe since the 1960s that is most relevant for Davie's work.

2.1 The decline of traditional Christian religion and the rise of post-Christian spirituality

Since the 1960s, the religious landscape of Western Europe has changed dramatically. Traditional Christian religion declined significantly and lost much of its former

dominance, appeal and legitimacy, especially in the northern and western parts of Europe (e.g. Norris and Inglehart (2011)). Historically rooted in the counterculture of the 1960s (Roszak 1969), a decidedly post-Christian / New Age spirituality emerged and spread in roughly the same time period and geographical area (Campbell 2007, Hanegraaff 1996, Heelas 1996). Various scholars, students of religious change in the West like Davie, have interpreted these recent developments as a shift from religion to spirituality. Heelas et al. (2005) for instance suggest that a 'spiritual revolution' may be unfolding, one in which the 'life-as religion' of the 'congregational domain' is increasingly giving way to the 'subjective-life spirituality' of the 'holistic milieu'. Building on Troeltsch's (1956[1931]), Campbell (1978) similarly understands these recent changes in terms of a shift towards 'spiritual and mystic religion', which he has more recently portrayed as a "fundamental revolution in Western civilization" that entails a gradual 'Easternization of the West', i.e. a process in which a basically monistic Eastern worldview gradually replaces its dualistic counterpart that has historically characterized the West (Campbell 2007, 41).

What the above-mentioned scholars have in common is that they all understand these processes of religious change as epitomized by the emergence and spread of a decidedly post-Christian / New Age spirituality that differs profoundly from traditional Christian religion as the West has known it for centuries (Houtman and Tromp 2020, Houtman, Aupers, and Heelas 2009). Adherents of such a post-Christian spirituality tend to self-identify as 'spiritual but not religious' and in doing so drive a wedge between 'religion' and 'spirituality', understanding the two as incompatible, firmly rejecting the former and embracing the latter. More specifically, they embrace a more individualized and subjective spirituality that prioritizes spiritual feeling and direct experience of the divine over Christianity's institutional, doctrinal and ritual aspects

(Hammer 2001, Heelas 1996, Houtman and Tromp 2020, Roof 1993, Zinnbauer et al. 1997). Indeed, they distance themselves both from the institutional church as well as from traditional Christian dogmas and doctrines (Nicolet and Tresch 2009, Roof 1993), because the problem with organized religions is in their understanding that the latter are “preventing rather than facilitating a personal experience of the transcendent.” (Turner et al. 1995, 437) For these ‘highly active seekers’ (Roof 1993), spiritual feelings and experiences are hence divorced from, and no longer associated with, organized religion (Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott 1999), i.e. “neither [with] the Church nor God as represented by theistic Christianity.” (Palmisano 2010, 238)

Indeed, many students of religion have meanwhile pointed out the emergence and growth of a spirituality that has completely broken away from religion, with the erosion of a church-based and belief-oriented religion giving rise to an individualized and experience-oriented spirituality (Ammerman 2013, Campbell 1978, De Groot and Pieper 2015, Flanagan and Jupp 2007, Marler and Hadaway 2002, Mears and Ellison 2000, Pollack 2008, Roof 1993, 1998, Versteeg 2006, Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005, Zinnbauer et al. 1997, Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott 1999).

Davie’s theory about believing without belonging has however typically been interpreted as addressing something completely different from this, i.e. as referring merely to a *de-institutionalization of Christianity* – a decline in church attendance with many of those concerned nonetheless sticking to traditional Christian beliefs. Yet, observers like Voas and Crockett (2005) have correctly pointed out that a close reading of Davie’s book reveals that it does in fact feature two markedly different theories about increases in believing without belonging. The second rendition of her theory, which has more often than not remained unnoticed, does indeed address precisely the type of *spiritualization of religion* that we have just discussed.

It is equally striking to note that Davie's theory has typically not even been interpreted as a veritable theory, but rather as a merely descriptive claim about religious trends occurring in Western Europe. Yet, Davie brings forward a theory that accounts for these changes, pointing out that it is precisely the circumstance that "believing is declining (has declined) at a slower rate than belonging" (Davie 1990a, 455) that triggers increases in believing without belonging. For this theory to be empirically tenable, then, we should be able to observe increases in believing without belonging in those European countries where belonging is lowest. As explained below, this is however a hypothesis that has to the best of our knowledge not yet been systematically tested. In what follows, we discuss the two different renditions of Davie's theory, one about *de-institutionalization of Christianity* and one about *spiritualization of religion*, to conclude with the respective hypotheses that need to be tested to assess their empirical tenability.

2.2 De-institutionalization of Christianity

Davie asserts that what we have been witnessing in Britain since 1945, and more generally in Western Europe, is not so much a decline of religion *tout court*, but rather a decline in church attendance. What she argues is "that the majority of British people - in common with many other Europeans - persist in believing but see no need to participate with even minimal regularity in their religious institutions." (Davie 1990b, 395) This results in widespread "unattached religion," (Davie 1994, 199) "unattached belief," (Idem, 69) or "disconnected belief" (Idem, 123) and hence an "increasingly evident mismatch between (...) religious practice and (...) levels of religious belief." (Idem, 4) This mismatch takes the specific form of "relatively high levels of belief and low levels of practice (rather than any other combination)." (Idem, 4-5) This means that standard

accounts of secularization as a decline of religion are “getting harder and harder to sustain,” (Idem, 7) because it is in fact “more accurate to describe late-twentieth century Britain – together with most of Western Europe – as unchurched rather than simply secular.” (Idem, 12-13) The first theory that Davie brings forward here is hence a theory about *de-institutionalization of Christianity*: people do not cease to hold traditional Christian beliefs, but increasingly do so without (regularly) attending their churches’ services. Many scholars have taken ‘believing without belonging’ to mean precisely this, which is another way of saying that this first theory has pretty much become the ‘standard interpretation’ of ‘believing without belonging’ (Winter and Short 1993, Glendinning 2006, Nicolet and Tresch 2009, De Groot and Pieper 2015, Reitsma et al. 2012, Inglis 2007, Aarts et al. 2008). Whereas some scholars conclude, for Britain at least, that this version of ‘believing without belonging’ is empirically untenable (Voas and Crockett 2005), others find that this particular way of being religious is prevalent in the United States (Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott 1999) and Switzerland (Nicolet and Tresch 2009) and relatively popular in the Netherlands (De Groot and Pieper 2015).

While previous studies have already addressed important aspects of this first rendition of the theory in a range of different contexts, we argue that a full-blown test necessitates a combination of three crucial elements that has thus far been neglected. Firstly, believing and belonging should be studied simultaneously, because what is crucial for the theory is precisely the relationship between the two (Davie 1990a, 455). Secondly, in addressing this relationship the focus should be on multiple points in time, so on how it changes over time, with the theory predicting a decline (Idem). Thirdly and finally, it should be studied whether this relationship has indeed weakened over time in the countries where ‘belonging’ is lowest. For it is precisely the notion that a decline in ‘belonging’ incites the weakening of the relationship between the two that raises Davie’s

argument above the status of a mere descriptive claim to that of a veritable theory that uncovers a causal chain. We elaborate on each of these three vital elements below.

Firstly, instead of examining *relationships* between 'believing' and 'belonging', many of the existing studies (including Davie's own) address their aggregated volumes, either for one moment in time or across time (Inglis 2007, Davie 1990a, b, 1994, 1997, Lambert 2004, Pollack and Pickel 2007, Voas and Crockett 2005, Winter and Short 1993). Davie herself for instance presents data for the proportions of the British and Western-European populations that attend church monthly (1990b, 405) on the one hand ('belonging') and belief in (a personal) God, sin, soul, heaven, life after death, the devil, and hell on the other ('believing') (Davie 1990a, 460, 1990b, 405). Based on these statistics alone, however, no solidly grounded inferences can be made about the *de-institutionalization of Christianity*, because this does not necessarily imply that a more drastic decline in belonging as compared to believing has weakened the link between the two. The same problem holds for Winter and Short (1993, 640) who assert that 'believing *and* belonging' is in fact a more accurate description of the religious situation in rural England, based on their observations that in 1990, 88% of their sample belongs to a church, denomination or religion; that 42% believes in life after death; and that 25% "claimed some form of religious or spiritual experience." Indeed, Voas and Crockett (2005) claim precisely the opposite, namely that religion in Britain can be characterized as 'neither believing nor belonging'. They base this claim on their findings that belief and church attendance demonstrate equal rates of decline in their panel data, while belief has even declined more rapidly than attendance in their cross-sectional data. Pollack and Pickel (2007) make the same claim on the basis of their finding that both church attendance and belief in God have declined. The point to underscore is that all these claims about the tenability of this first rendition of Davie's theory are based on

isolated trends in church attendance and traditional Christian beliefs. These trends do as such not tell us much about either changes in the relationship between the two, nor about whether such changes have indeed been sparked by stronger declines in church attendance as compared to traditional Christian beliefs.

Other studies do investigate relationships between believing and belonging, yet without assessing how these change over time (Storm 2009, Pollack and Pickel 2007). Where Pollack and Pickel (2007, 618) present correlations (i.e. relationships) between church attendance and belief in God for western and eastern Germany in 1999/2000, Storm (2009) presents findings of a cluster analysis on nine religiosity items, identifying four clusters (or groups of individuals) of 'fuzzy fidelity' (Voas 2009), including one that she characterizes as 'believing without belonging'. She also presents data about the sizes of the various clusters, which makes clear that for the ten European countries in her sample, the 'believing without belonging' cluster has an average size of 10% in 1998-1999. Based on these cross-sectional studies alone, we can however not determine whether (the) 'believing without belonging' (cluster) has become more prevalent over time in the most unchurched countries.

Thirdly and by contrast, Aarts et al. (2008) and Reitsma et al. (2012) do use repeated cross-sectional data to study differences in the relationships between 'believing' and 'belonging' over time and across countries, albeit not across countries with varying degrees of church attendance. Instead, Aarts et al. (2008) derive contrasting hypotheses from secularization theory and supply-side theory. With their first set of hypotheses, they investigate the relationships between 'believing' and 'belonging' over time, but do not distinguish between countries. With their second set of hypotheses, they do study the relationships between 'believing' and 'belonging' across countries (i.e. countries with high respectively low levels of religious pluralism), but not

over time. The same holds for Reitsma et al. (2012), who derive hypotheses from modernisation theory to study the relationships between ‘believing’ and ‘belonging’ across countries, but not over time. They also derive hypotheses from religious market theory to study the relationships between the two over time and across countries, to be sure, but in doing so they compare western countries with former communist ones³ rather than countries with higher respectively lower levels of church attendance.

In sum, it is evident that previous studies have already addressed vital elements of the first rendition of Davie’s theory about increases in believing without belonging, i.e., the theory about a *de-institutionalization of Christianity*, in a range of different contexts. To the best of our knowledge, however, the key hypothesis to be derived from this theory has thus far not been tested yet, i.e. *that the relationship between traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance has declined in those European countries in which church attendance is lowest* (Hypothesis 1).

2.3 Spiritualization of religion

Whereas this has gone unnoticed by many a scholar writing about ‘believing without belonging’, Voas and Crockett (2005, 12) have correctly pointed out that “the slogan lends itself to an unfortunate equivocation”, because a ‘strong version’ and a ‘weak interpretation’ of ‘believing without belonging’ can be distinguished. In this paper, we refer to the former with *de-institutionalization of Christianity* (as discussed above) and to the latter with *spiritualization of religion* (explicated below). Other authors (Aarts et al. 2008, Glendinning 2006, Reitsma et al. 2012) have acknowledged a similar

³ Davie only made predictions about Britain and Western Europe more generally, hence including former communist countries (Reitsma et al. 2012) or North-American countries (Aarts et al. 2008) seems unnecessary.

distinction, yet have like Voas and Crockett (2005) themselves only tested the 'strong version' of 'believing without belonging', leaving the 'weak interpretation' to remain untested at all.

Indeed, at various points in her book, Davie puts forward different sets of meanings of 'believing' and 'belonging'. The second rendition of her theory comes to the fore most clearly where she points out how in Britain and Western Europe more generally "feelings, experience and the more numinous aspects of religious belief demonstrate considerable persistence," whereas "*religious orthodoxy*, ritual participation and institutional attachment display an undeniable degree of secularization (...) both before and during the post-war period." (Davie 1994, 4-5, italics added) This second version of Davie's theory is hence not about people leaving the church, while sticking to their traditional Christian beliefs (i.e. *de-institutionalization of Christianity* as discussed above), but about people prioritizing spiritual feelings and experiences of the divine over Christianity's institutional, ritual *and* doctrinal aspects. This is the type of religion that the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1956[1931]) understands as 'mystical' religion. Despite the fact that the latter has traditionally been neglected in the sociology of religion (Daiber 2002, 329), it has meanwhile been picked up by contemporary sociologists of religion to interpret recent changes in the religious landscapes of the West as increases in 'religious individualism' (Bellah et al. 2008[1985], Campbell 1978, Daiber 2002, Streib and Hood 2011)

"Mysticism," as Troeltsch himself describes it, "shows a strong impulse towards the directness, presence, and inwardness of the religious experience, towards a direct contact with the divine, a contact which transcends or supplements traditions, cults, and institutions." (1911, 172) In Troeltsch's understanding, if mysticism 'transcends' rather than 'supplements' religion, it has broken away from religious traditions and

institutions and disdains the latter, understanding itself as “the true inner principle of all religious faith,” as Streib and Hood put it (2011, 448), “a religious principle in its own right divorced from a containing frame-work of dogma, ritual or ecclesiasticism” (Campbell 1978, 149), indeed “a distinct religion in its own right with a distinct system of beliefs.” (Idem, 147) It is precisely such “unchurched mysticism” (Parsons 1999, 141) or “post-Christian spirituality” (Houtman and Tromp 2020) that Davie refers to in her work. Because those concerned want to maintain a critical distance from religious institutions and doctrines alike, they typically self-identify as “‘spiritual’ rather than ‘religious,’ as in ‘I’m not religious but I’m very spiritual.’” (Bellah et al. 2008[1985], 246) In doing so they in effect drive a wedge between ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’, understanding the two as incompatible, firmly rejecting the former and embracing the latter (see also Streib and Hood (2011)).

In sum, Davie’s theory on *spiritualization of religion* comprises the rejection of Christianity’s institutional, doctrinal and ritual aspects, and the increased prioritizing of spiritual feelings and experiences of the divine. Hence, following the same logic as for Davie’s first theory, her second theory predicts *that the relationship between spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity has declined in those European countries in which traditional Christian religiosity is lowest* (Hypothesis 2).

3. Data, operationalization, and method

3.1 Data

We make use of the four available waves (1981, 1990, 1999, and 2008) from the European Values Study (EVS), a repeated cross-sectional dataset that covers a time period of nearly three decades and a geographical area of forty-seven countries in 2008, most of them European (EVS 2011). Our sample comprises the following twenty

countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and West-Germany. All twenty countries had data available for all four waves except for Austria, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Luxembourg, and Portugal who were not yet included in 1981. In addition, Croatia, Greece, and Luxembourg were not yet included in 1990 either, and Norway had one missing wave in 1999. This resulted in a dataset with 87,153 individuals distributed over seventy country-year combinations. The average number of respondents per country-year combination is 1,245 (SD = 467) with a minimum of 304 in Northern Ireland (1990), and a maximum of 2,792 in Belgium (1990).

3.2 Operationalization de-institutionalization of Christianity

Traditional Christian beliefs are measured with responses to five questions about whether or not one believes in (1) a personal God, (2) life after death, (3) hell, (4) heaven, and (5) sin⁴. The first item is measured with the question: *Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs?* The response options comprise: 1 'There is a personal God', 2 'There is some sort of spirit or life force', 3 'I don't really know what to think', 4 'I don't really think there is any sort of spirit, God or life force'. We dichotomize this variable by recoding the latter three responses as '0', and a conception of the sacred as a transcendent personal God as '1'. The items 2-5 were preceded with the statement: *Which, if any, of the following do you believe in?* The response options comprise: 0 'No', and 1 'Yes'. Factor analysis demonstrated that these five items indeed could be

⁴ The items about belief that 'people have a soul' and belief in 'the devil' were only available in the first two waves of the EVS and could therefore not be used for constructing the scale.

subsumed under one component (see Table 1). All five items had high and positive loadings on the first factor and could reliably be combined to form one scale (Cronbach's alpha = .843)⁵. Scale scores are assigned as mean item scores for those with at least three valid answers, resulting in a valid N of 80,334 respondents (92.2%)⁶.

TABLE 1 *Factor Loadings of Five Items Measuring Traditional Christian Beliefs (N = 63,527)*

Items	Component 1
Personal God	.689
Life after death	.752
Hell	.821
Heaven	.872
Sin	.783
Eigenvalue	3.089
% of Variance	61.8%

Church attendance is measured with the question: *Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?* Response options comprise 1 'more than once a week', 2 'once a week', 3 'once a month', 4 'only on

⁵ Iceland and Norway have respectively the lowest and highest Eigenvalues (2.124 and 3.256) and proportions explained variance (42.5% and 65.1%). The factor loadings varied from .57 to .82 (Iceland), and from .79 to .86 (Norway). Iceland and Norway have respectively the lowest and highest Cronbach's alpha's (.656 and .865). Only in Croatia and Malta will the alpha increase slightly if the item about a Personal God is deleted from the scale (from .830 to .875 in Croatia, and from .725 to .814 in Malta).

⁶ If we set the minimum to four or five valid answers, we will lose respectively 13% and 27% of the sample. This is due to relatively high proportions of missing values for the items belief in life after death (16.1%), heaven (11.9%), hell (11.5%), and sin (9.4%). Nearly all respondents who have a missing value on one or more of these questions answered them with "I don't know".

special holy days/Christmas/Easter days', 5 'other specific holy days', 6 'once a year', 7 'less often', and 8 'never, practically never'. We mirrored all response options and merged both holy day categories, so that recoded church attendance ranges from 1 'never, practically never' to 7 'more than once a week' with higher values indicating that individuals attend church more frequently.

Country-level church attendance is computed for each country separately by taking the average level of church attendance in that country in the year 2008 (i.e. EVS wave 4).

Time is measured with a variable that indicates the year range in which the survey was administered. It is recoded into (0) 1981-1984; (1) 1990-1993; (2) 1999-2001; (3) 2008-2010 and treated as linear.

3.3 Operationalization spiritualization of religion

Traditional Christian religiosity consists of a combination of *church attendance* and *traditional Christian beliefs* as already discussed in the previous subsection. Scores have been assigned in four steps: 1) all respondents with invalid scores on either or both variables were excluded, resulting in a valid N of 79,961⁷; 2) both variables were standardized (with means = 0 and standard deviations = 1) because they have different scales; 3) scores were assigned as means of the two resulting standardized variables; and 4) the resulting index for traditional Christian religiosity is normalized to a range of 0-1.

⁷ This is 91.7% of the original sample.

Country-level traditional Christian religiosity is computed for each country separately by taking the average level of traditional Christian religiosity in that country in the year 2008 (i.e. EVS wave 4).

Finally, we need a measure for *spiritual religion* but this is easier said than done as questions about spirituality in general, and spiritual feelings and experiences of the divine in particular, are virtually absent in today's large internationally comparative survey programs, and the European Values Study is no exception (Houtman, Heelas, and Achterberg 2012). Though it is clear that there is no way to tackle this methodological shortcoming in a fully convincing manner, we selected a question about taking moments for prayer, meditation or contemplation – spiritual practices typically used for “turning inward,” (Campbell 2007, 65) “direct experience of ‘the real’,” (Idem, 67) or “direct contact with the divine.” (Troeltsch 1911, 172) “[S]uch practices often lead to an experience of connectedness with a larger reality, yielding a more comprehensive self; with other individuals or the human community; with nature or the cosmos; or with the divine realm.” (Huss 2014, 49-50) The exact wording of the question we use is: *Do you take some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation or something like that?* Respondents could answer this question with 1 ‘yes’, or 0 ‘no’. The advantage of using this single item to measure *spiritual religion* is that prayer, meditation and contemplation are being practiced both within and without a traditional Christian context (Ammerman 2013, Berghuijs, Pieper, and Bakker 2013, Huss 2014, Lucas 1992, Pargament et al. 1995, Schlehofer, Omoto, and Adelman 2008, Versteeg 2006, Woodhead 2011, Zinnbauer 1997). For meditation is not only a popular practice among New Agers (Donahue 1993, Huss 2014, Lucas 1992) but also among visitors of a Jesuit spiritual center in the Netherlands (Versteeg 2006). Alongside prayer it is moreover not only embraced by charismatic-evangelical Christians, but also by Catholic and

Protestant churches considered mainstream and historic (Woodhead 2011). If the relationship between spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity does indeed weaken across time, as Davie’s theory about spiritualization of religion predicts, experience-oriented spirituality has become increasingly disconnected from traditional Christian institutions and doctrines.

See Table 2 for the descriptive statistics of all the variables that will be included in our models. We also include the general trends of all the scales, and of all the variables that are used to construct these scales, so as to provide the reader with a more complete picture of how the various religiosity indicators behave over time (see Table 3).

TABLE 2 <i>Descriptive statistics</i>	N	MIN	MAX	M	SD ^a
Spiritual religion					
- Prayer / meditation / contemplation ^b	84,561	0	1	.620	
Traditional Christian religiosity					
Traditional Christian religiosity	79,961	0	1	.435	.326
- Church attendance ^c	86,620	1	7	3.433	2.082
- Traditional Christian beliefs	80,334	0	1	.463	.382
Personal God ^d	83,935	0	1	.406	
Life after death ^e	73,087	0	1	.559	
Hell ^f	77,146	0	1	.296	
Heaven ^g	76,769	0	1	.487	
Sin ^h	78,919	0	1	.582	

Correlation Christian beliefs; church attendance ⁱ	70	.261	.667	.505	.085
Correlation spiritual religion; Christian religiosity ⁱ	70	.314	.666	.501	.080
Country-level church attendance 2008	20	2.104	5.668	3.274	.923
Country-level traditional Christian religiosity 2008	20	.196	.823	.423	.165

^a Standard deviations are not shown for dichotomous items.

^b With 3.0%, the proportion of missing values for this item is fairly low (minimum = 0.8% in Malta, and maximum = 9.2% in West-Germany).

^c With 0.6%, the proportion of missing values for this item is extremely low (minimum = 0.2% in The Netherlands, and maximum = 2.1% in Sweden).

^d Sweden and Malta have respectively the lowest and highest country-means for this variable (.166 and .744). With 3.7%, the average proportion of missing values is fairly low for this item (minimum = 1.4% in Iceland, and maximum = 6.1% in Belgium).

^e Denmark and Malta have respectively the lowest and highest country-means for this variable (.35 and .89). With 16.1%, the average proportion of missing values is quite high for this item (minimum = 7.9% in Malta, and maximum = 24.9% in Finland).

^f Denmark and Malta have respectively the lowest and highest country-means for this variable (.09 and .85). With 11.5%, the average proportion of missing values is relatively high for this item (min = 6.4% in Iceland, and max = 20.9% in Finland).

^g Denmark and Malta have respectively the lowest and highest country-means for this variable (.19 and .91). With 11.9%, the average proportion of missing values is relatively high for this item (min = 5.9% in Malta, and max = 21.4% in Finland).

^h Denmark and Malta have respectively the lowest and highest country-means for this variable (.24 and .94). With 9.4%, the average proportion of missing values is relatively high for this item (minimum = 4.1% in Malta, and maximum = 17.9% in Finland).

ⁱ Data are unavailable for ten country-year combinations, hence the valid N = 70.

TABLE 3 Trends of all the variables (EVS 1981-2008, Twenty European Countries)

	1981	1990	1999	2008	absolute change	relative change
Spiritual religion						
- Prayer / meditation / contemplation (%)	60.1	60.6	64.8	61.6	+1.5	+2.5
Traditional Christian religiosity						
Traditional Christian religiosity (mean)	.44	.43	.46	.42	-0.02	-5.7
- Church attendance (mean)	3.49	3.46	3.55	3.27	-0.22	-6.1
- Traditional Christian beliefs (mean)	.47	.44	.49	.46	-0.01	-2.2
- Personal God (%)	38.8	39.7	44.8	38.9	+0.1	+0.3
- Life after death (%)	56.9	53.2	58.5	55.3	-1.6	-2.8
- Hell (%)	27.8	24.6	32.9	32.2	+4.4	+15.8
- Heaven (%)	49.3	47.9	49.9	48.0	-1.3	-2.6
- Sin (%)	61.8	59.0	59.2	54.8	-7.0	-11.3

3.4 Method

We test our hypotheses using Fairbrother's (2014) *societal growth curve modelling*. This technique is very similar to individual-level growth-curve modelling, but then applied "to the higher-level units in comparative longitudinal survey data." (Idem, 125)

Researchers often use growth-curve models to analyse individual-level panel data, i.e. the same individuals are measured on multiple occasions, a structure that implies a multilevel model in which the measurement occasions are nested within the individuals. Growth-curve models can be used to study whether an independent variable x causes change in a dependent variable y over time, and this predictor variable x can either be time-variant (such as age) or time-invariant (such as gender). In the dataset that we use, the European Values Study (1981-2008), all the individuals are only measured once, however, the same countries are measured up to four times. Taking societies as the units of analysis, societal growth curve modelling can be used to examine “whether the absolute level of some time-invariant (...) [independent] variable x_j leads to faster or slower change in [dependent variable] y . (...) An x_j variable (...) could be the country mean \bar{x}_j (...), though it could also denote some other time-invariant macro-level characteristic.” (Fairbrother 2014, 125). Subsequently, an interaction term between the independent variable x_j and *time* needs to be added to the model. We will treat the twenty countries in our sample as ‘individuals’, each of them measured on two, three, or four occasions (i.e. the number of available EVS waves). This implies that country-waves are nested within countries. The models require the inclusion of a time-invariant predictor variable (x_j), and an interaction term between the latter and *time*. Needless to say, the model therefore also requires the inclusion of a main effect of *time*.

To test our first hypothesis, the required dependent variable y should express the relationship between two variables. Hence, we will calculate for each country-wave combination a unique Pearson’s correlation coefficient between traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance. The required x_j variable is country-level church attendance. In sum, we will test whether the correlation between traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance has weakened in those European countries in which

church attendance (country-level) is lowest. The data that we will analyse for this purpose can be found in Table 4, and the countries are sorted by their mean level of church attendance (ascending).

TABLE 4 *Correlations Between Church Attendance and Traditional Christian Beliefs and Country-level Church Attendance 2008 of Twenty European Countries (EVS 1981-2008)*

	1981	1990	1999	2008	Country-level church attendance 2008
Sweden	0.54	0.54	0.47	0.52	2.10
France	0.59	0.57	0.50	0.49	2.24
Finland		0.56	0.48	0.58	2.46
Great Britain	0.45	0.48	0.43	0.52	2.48
Belgium	0.59	0.55	0.53	0.48	2.49
Norway	0.50	0.58		0.54	2.60
Iceland	0.32	0.32	0.26	0.41	2.70
Denmark	0.46	0.38	0.37	0.35	2.78
Spain	0.64	0.62	0.62	0.56	2.82
Luxembourg			0.49	0.43	2.84
Netherlands	0.62	0.59	0.59	0.58	2.92
West-Germany	0.63	0.62	0.54	0.55	3.10
Austria		0.57	0.50	0.56	3.23
Croatia			0.54	0.50	3.92
Portugal		0.59	0.47	0.42	3.97
Northern-Ireland	0.53	0.44	0.52	0.49	4.11

Italy	0.56	0.67	0.56	0.61	4.29
Greece			0.45	0.44	4.38
Ireland	0.55	0.43	0.45	0.50	4.41
Malta	0.37	0.36	0.45	0.44	5.67

To test our second hypothesis, the required dependent variable y should express the relationship between prayer/meditation/contemplation (a nominal variable) and traditional Christian religiosity (a scale variable). Hence, we will calculate for each country-wave combination a unique point-biserial correlation between ‘prayer, meditation, contemplation’ and ‘traditional Christian religiosity’. The required independent x_j variable is country-level traditional Christian religiosity. In sum, we will test whether the point-biserial correlation between prayer/meditation/contemplation and traditional Christian religiosity has weakened in those European countries in which traditional Christian religiosity (country-level) is lowest. The data that we will analyse for this purpose can be found in Table 5, and the countries are sorted by their mean level of traditional Christian religiosity (ascending).

TABLE 5 *Correlations Between Prayer/Meditation/Contemplation and Traditional Christian Religiosity (TCR) and Country-level TCR 2008 of Twenty European Countries*

	1981	1990	1999	2008	Country-level TCR 2008
Sweden	0.53	0.51	0.39	0.51	0.20
France	0.55	0.58	0.57	0.49	0.25
Denmark	0.55	0.51	0.50	0.46	0.26

Belgium	0.57	0.62	0.52	0.48	0.28
Norway	0.40	0.34		0.35	0.29
Luxembourg			0.57	0.51	0.31
Netherlands	0.56	0.49	0.38	0.45	0.33
Finland		0.48	0.49	0.50	0.33
Great Britain	0.50	0.51	0.57	0.58	0.35
West-Germany	0.47	0.48	0.67	0.59	0.36
Spain	0.51	0.58	0.56	0.55	0.37
Iceland	0.43	0.39	0.38	0.36	0.37
Austria		0.49	0.49	0.54	0.40
Croatia			0.57	0.52	0.52
Portugal		0.63	0.61	0.56	0.54
Italy	0.50	0.57	0.53	0.56	0.58
Greece			0.50	0.53	0.61
Ireland	0.52	0.40	0.38	0.53	0.63
Northern-Ireland	0.62	0.43	0.58	0.59	0.67
Malta	0.34	0.37	0.31	0.45	0.82

4. Results

Before moving immediately to hypothesis testing, let us start with briefly examining some trends and between-country differences of the central variables in our analyses. In Table 6, one can find the country means of traditional Christian beliefs, church attendance, prayer/meditation/contemplation, and traditional Christian religiosity. Dependent on data availability, country means are presented for two, three or four

waves. Clearly, many things can be said about this table, but we limit ourselves to three observations. First, the data seem to support Davie’s suggestion that not only in Britain but also in Western Europe more generally “believing is declining (has declined) at a slower rate than belonging.” (1990a, 455) Concerning the *de-institutionalization of Christianity*, more countries experienced declines in the mean levels of church attendance than in traditional Christian beliefs. Regarding the *spiritualization of religion*, more countries experienced declines in the mean levels of traditional Christian religiosity than in taking moments of prayer/meditation/contemplation. Secondly, when we examine the country trends of all four indicators simultaneously, Belgium and Spain seem to have experienced the greatest declines (e.g. their mean levels of traditional Christian religiosity decreased with approximately one-third in the period under study). Thirdly, both conceptualizations of ‘belonging’ (i.e. church attendance and traditional Christian religiosity) are least prevalent in the northern and western parts of Europe (especially in Sweden and France) and most prevalent in the southern part of Europe (especially in Malta). The only exceptions to this general rule are Ireland, Northern-Ireland and Spain.

TABLE 6 *Country-Means of Traditional Christian Beliefs (TCB), Church Attendance (CHAT), Prayer/Meditation/Contemplation (PMC) and Traditional Christian Religiosity (TCR) of Twenty European Countries (EVS 1981-2008)*

	1981	1990	1999	2008
Austria TCB		0.43	0.42	0.42
Austria CHAT		3.87	3.83	3.23
Austria PMC		0.72	0.70	0.62
Austria TCR		0.46	0.45	0.40
Belgium TCB	0.42	0.34	0.34	0.32
Belgium CHAT	3.31	3.27	2.98	2.49
Belgium PMC	0.62	0.56	0.63	0.51
Belgium TCR	0.41	0.36	0.34	0.28
Croatia TCB			0.59	0.55

Croatia CHAT			4.34	3.92
Croatia PMC			0.74	0.65
Croatia TCR			0.58	0.52
Denmark TCB	0.22	0.21	0.22	0.22
Denmark CHAT	2.40	2.41	2.55	2.78
Denmark PMC	0.46	0.43	0.51	0.48
Denmark TCR	0.23	0.22	0.24	0.26
Finland TCB		0.46	0.52	0.42
Finland CHAT		2.85	2.83	2.46
Finland PMC		0.22	0.73	0.71
Finland TCR		0.38	0.41	0.33
France TCB	0.30	0.32	0.31	0.30
France CHAT	2.33	2.51	2.21	2.24
France PMC	0.42	0.46	0.40	0.41
France TCR	0.26	0.28	0.25	0.25
Great Britain TCB	0.50	0.50	0.51	0.47
Great Britain CHAT	2.64	2.76	2.48	2.47
Great Britain PMC	0.49	0.54	0.50	0.47
Great Britain TCR	0.38	0.40	0.39	0.35
Greece TCB			0.58	0.65
Greece CHAT			4.28	4.38
Greece PMC			0.61	0.74
Greece TCR			0.56	0.61
Iceland TCB	0.46	0.53	0.54	0.47
Iceland CHAT	2.61	2.75	2.80	2.70
Iceland PMC	0.43	0.46	0.54	0.51
Iceland TCR	0.36	0.41	0.41	0.37
Ireland TCB	0.80	0.76	0.76	0.69
Ireland CHAT	5.76	5.76	5.23	4.40
Ireland PMC	0.81	0.84	0.85	0.78
Ireland TCR	0.80	0.78	0.73	0.63
Italy TCB	0.45	0.59	0.65	0.60
Italy CHAT	4.07	4.38	4.52	4.29
Italy PMC	0.71	0.75	0.79	0.74
Italy TCR	0.48	0.58	0.62	0.58
Luxembourg TCB			0.37	0.32
Luxembourg CHAT			3.33	2.84
Luxembourg PMC			0.57	0.52
Luxembourg TCR			0.38	0.31
Malta TCB	0.89	0.86	0.85	0.86
Malta CHAT	6.19	6.00	5.86	5.67
Malta PMC	0.91	0.88	0.92	0.90
Malta TCR	0.88	0.85	0.83	0.82
Netherlands TCB	0.40	0.33	0.33	0.34
Netherlands CHAT	3.29	3.12	2.80	2.92
Netherlands PMC	0.61	0.68	0.70	0.66
Netherlands TCR	0.39	0.34	0.31	0.33
Northern-Ireland TCB	0.83	0.80	0.76	0.80
Northern-Ireland CHAT	4.80	4.73	4.31	4.11

Northern-Ireland PMC	0.74	0.76	0.71	0.74
Northern-Ireland TCR	0.73	0.71	0.67	0.67
Norway TCB	0.45	0.36		0.30
Norway CHAT	2.86	2.61		2.60
Norway PMC	0.62	0.64		0.63
Norway TCR	0.37	0.31		0.29
Portugal TCB		0.55	0.61	0.58
Portugal CHAT		3.94	4.12	3.97
Portugal PMC		0.66	0.75	0.70
Portugal TCR		0.52	0.57	0.54
Spain TCB	0.56	0.49	0.47	0.45
Spain CHAT	4.07	3.65	3.47	2.82
Spain PMC	0.71	0.61	0.64	0.62
Spain TCR	0.54	0.47	0.44	0.37
Sweden TCB	0.27	0.25	0.25	0.22
Sweden CHAT	2.57	2.24	2.29	2.10
Sweden PMC	0.34	0.34	0.45	0.44
Sweden TCR	0.27	0.23	0.23	0.20
West-Germany TCB	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.36
West-Germany CHAT	3.39	3.42	3.47	3.10
West-Germany PMC	0.63	0.69	0.60	0.54
West-Germany TCR	0.38	0.39	0.40	0.36

Now in order to formally test our hypotheses, we performed societal growth curve analyses with IBM SPSS Statistics 25, using the Linear Mixed Models procedure, and Maximum Likelihood estimation. Our findings can be found in Table 7. Concerning Davie's first theory on *de-institutionalization of Christianity*, we find that the relationship between traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance has indeed declined across time. The total decrease of -0.034 in the correlation is not particularly overwhelming⁸, but is nonetheless negative and significant ($b = -0.011$; $p = 0.032$). While traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance have as such drifted apart in the period 1981-2008, the non-significant interaction effect between time and country-level church attendance points out that this has not happened in those European countries where church attendance is lowest (cf. Model 1a and 1b in Table 7).

⁸ The correlation decreased from 0.523 in 1981 to 0.489 in 2008.

TABLE 7 *Societal Growth Curve Models of Twenty European Countries (EVS 1981-2008)*

Model		1a	1b	2a	2b
Random	Country-Wave	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.003
Effects					
Variances	Country	0.005	0.004	0.003	0.003
Fixed	Time	-0.011*	-0.033+	-0.002	-0.029+
Effects		(0.005)	(0.017)	(0.006)	(0.015)
Coefficients					
	Country-level		-0.026		
	church		(0.019)		
	attendance				
	Time *		0.007		
	Country-level		(0.005)		
	church				
	attendance				
	Country-level				-0.150
	traditional				(0.102)
	Christian				
	religiosity				
	Time *				0.067+
	Country-level				(0.034)
	traditional				

Christian religiosity					
Intercept	0.523***	0.607***	0.505***	0.567***	
	(0.018)	(0.065)	(0.018)	(0.046)	
-2LL	-192.5	-195.0	-177.0	-181.0	
N	79,961;	79,961;	78,184;	78,184;	
	70; 20	70; 20	70; 20	70; 20	

Note: SEs in parentheses. Ns are for respondents, country-waves and countries, resp.

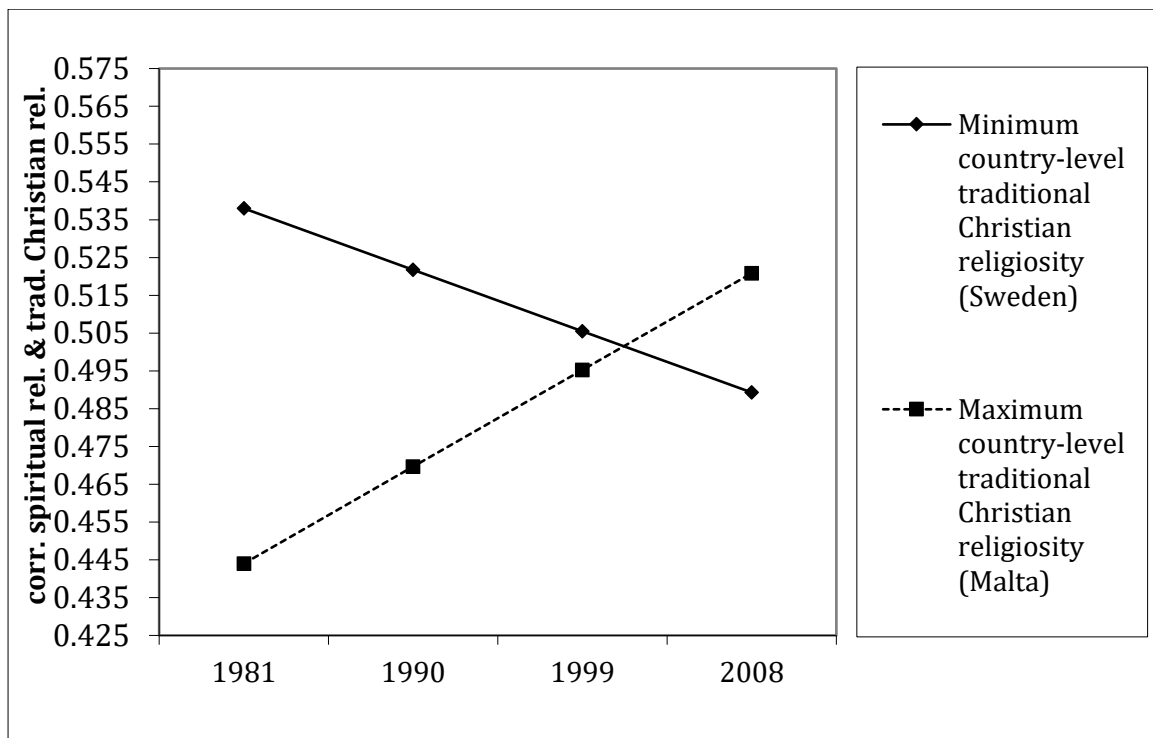
Hypothesis 1 derived from a *de-institutionalization of Christianity* is tested in Model 1b, viz. the relationship between traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance has declined in those European countries in which church attendance is lowest.

Hypothesis 2 derived from a *spiritualization of religion* is tested in Model 2b, viz. the relationship between spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity has declined in those European countries in which traditional Christian religiosity is lowest.

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ + $p < .10$

Regarding Davie's second theory on *spiritualization of religion*, we find that there is no overall decline in the strength of the relationship between spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity (see Model 2a in Table 7). There is however a marginally significant interaction between time and country-level traditional Christian religiosity ($b = 0.067$; $p = 0.055$, see Model 2b in Table 7). This means that depending on a country's level of traditional Christian religiosity, the relationship between spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity either strengthened or weakened over time.

Fig. 1 Changes in the Correlations between Spiritual Religion and Traditional Christian Religiosity by Country-Level Traditional Christian Religiosity (Supporting Hypothesis 2)



As predicted, in those European countries in which traditional Christian religiosity is lowest⁹, the relationship between spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity weakened over time. In other words, in the period 1981-2008, spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity became less associated with each other in those European countries in which the latter lost most of its adherents. Hence, our second hypothesis and Davie's second theory on *spiritualization of religion* are supported by the data. Again, a total decrease of -0.049 in the correlation is not particularly overwhelming¹⁰, but the negative slope for those countries in which traditional Christian religiosity is lowest is in the hypothesized direction. See Figure 1 for a

⁹ We make use of the continuous variable country-level traditional Christian religiosity 2008 (see Table 5)

¹⁰ The correlation decreased from 0.538 in 1981 to 0.489 in 2008.

visualization of the interaction effect with the upper solid- and the lower dashed line representing the countries that are respectively least and most traditionally Christian¹¹.

In addition, what the theory did not predict and therefore is an unexpected finding of this analysis, is that the relationship between spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity *strengthened* over time in those countries in which the latter is still strongly adhered to (see the lower dashed line in Figure 1). For those countries, the correlation between the two increased in the period 1981-2008 (+0.077 in absolute terms, from 0.444 in 1981 to 0.521 in 2008, see Figure 1). Hence, we must conclude that spiritual religion and traditional Christian religion have become increasingly related in countries that have remained most traditionally Christian. This trend therefore runs in the opposite direction compared to the one in those European countries in which traditional Christian religiosity is lowest. This does not contradict Davie's theory, to be sure, because the latter predicts decreasing relationships between the two due to a decline in traditional Christian religion, which is what we also find. We return to this in the discussion section as this puzzling finding asks for further research and theoretical explanation.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Grace Davie's influential 'believing without belonging' thesis has sparked a lot of scholarly attention since its introduction a quarter of a century ago. Extending and building on previous studies that have already addressed vital elements of the theory in a range of different contexts, we offered an integrated comparative analysis of the relationships between 'believing' and 'belonging' across place and time. More precisely,

¹¹ i.e. Sweden (0.196) and Malta (0.823).

we studied the relationships between 'believing' and 'belonging' for twenty European countries in the period 1981-2008, using data from the European Values Study.

Specifically, we studied *whether the relationship between 'believing' and 'belonging' has weakened in those European countries in which 'belonging' is lowest.*

Strikingly, our findings suggest that *spiritualization of religion* is empirically supported, even though 'believing without belonging' is rarely understood in this way and has not been tested until now. Specifically, we find that the relationship between spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity indeed weakened in the period 1981-2008 in those European countries in which the latter is lowest. This means that in those countries the two are now less associated with each other than they were in the past. This is consistent with much previous research according to which 'spirituality' has broken away and differentiated from 'religion' (and 'religiousness') (Hill et al. 2000, Huss 2014, Mears and Ellison 2000, Wuthnow 1998, Zinnbauer et al. 1997). More specifically, personal spiritual feelings and experiences have become increasingly disconnected from organized and institutionalized religion (Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott 1999). Roof's (1993) 'highly active seekers', adherents of New Age or post-Christian spirituality, and those self-identifying as 'spiritual but not religious', all to be found in the 'cultic' or 'holistic milieu' (Campbell 1972, Heelas et al. 2005), are the people most likely to be responsible for these changes.

Remarkably, our results also show that precisely what has become the 'standard' interpretation of 'believing without belonging' as *de-institutionalization of Christianity* appears to be untenable. For while the relationship between traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance did decline across time in all European countries in our sample, it did not do so in the most unchurched countries, as the theory predicts. Pollack and Pickel (2007, 627) are absolutely right in saying that traditional Christian beliefs and

church attendance “statistically correlate quite strongly,” but it must be noted that the strength of their relationship did attenuate over time. In short, the answer to our research question - *whether the relationship between ‘believing’ and ‘belonging’ has weakened in those European countries in which ‘belonging’ is lowest* - is ‘yes’ if ‘believing without belonging’ is understood as *spiritualization of religion*, but ‘no’ if it is interpreted as *de-institutionalization of Christianity*.

There are two possible explanations for the unexpected and puzzling finding that spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity have become increasingly related in those countries that have remained most traditionally Christian. A first explanation takes this as evidence for a trend of religious polarization, i.e., people increasingly taking sides by means of clear-cut self-identifications as either ‘religious *and* spiritual’ or ‘neither religious nor spiritual’, with the latter consisting of convinced atheists who strongly oppose both. Previous research namely indicated that anti-religious attitudes are especially found in those Western-European countries that are highly religious (Ribberink, Achterberg, and Houtman 2013) and/or have a Catholic religious heritage (Ribberink, Achterberg, and Houtman 2018). A second possible explanation stems from Palmisano’s (2010, 238) work who found that the majority of Italians in fact connect their “religious experience [...] with the sacred which is and remains ‘external to’ and ‘higher than’ the individual (typically the Christian God).” They have (mystical) experiences of a “profound and immediate unity with all that is absolute.” (Idem) These “mystical experiences” are subsequently understood as “ineffable events which confirm the truth of religious orthodoxy.” (Idem, 233) In Troeltsch’s (1956[1931]) understanding, this is precisely the type of mysticism that ‘supplements’ rather than ‘transcends’ church-based religion. We invite further research to test and elaborate on these potential explanations.

Of course, the potential limitations of our study deserve attention as well. First of all, the actual declines in the relationships are not particularly overwhelming, hence we need to be a bit cautious with making too strong claims based on these findings alone. At the same time, this may be due to an underestimation of religious change. Regarding *de-institutionalization of Christianity*, the European Values Study surely contains many good questions to track changes in traditional Christian religiosity, but the brief period of time that it covers implies an overly strict test. For the EVS's first wave took place as recent as 1981, while a large (if indeed not the largest) part of the religious decline and change took place prior to that year, not least the "marked drop in both [religious] membership and attendance figures in the 1960s." (Davie 1994, 122) Hence, we are only able to study the latter (and arguably less intense) part of these processes of religious change. There is no easy fix for this limitation as alternative repeated cross-sectional and internationally comparable datasets starting before 1981 do not exist either.

Concerning *spiritualization of religion*, it is the other way around. Post-Christian spirituality of the 'New Age' variety only emerged in the West in the latter part of the 1970s, and was fully developed by the 1980s (Hanegraaff 1996, Campbell 2007), so we should have been able to study this process from the start. Unfortunately, a reliable and valid multi-item scale to measure *spiritual religion* is lacking in the European Values Study (as well as in all other internationally comparative survey programs). So while these data can be used to study the changing relationship between traditional Christian religiosity and spiritual religion, as we hope to have demonstrated, they preclude a nuanced measurement of the latter. Because of this, contemporary theories (such as Davie's *spiritualization of religion*) about an increased prioritizing of spiritual feelings

and experiences of the divine over religiosity's institutional, doctrinal and ritual aspects are difficult to test properly.

While our analysis demonstrates that spiritual religion and traditional Christian religiosity became less associated with each other in those European countries in which the latter lost most of its adherents, what exactly this spiritual religion looks like thus remains ultimately a matter of theoretical speculation. This is why we would like to make an urgent call for better survey data, especially by including more useful scales in the large internationally comparative survey programs such as Hood's (1975) Mysticism Scale or Houtman and Tromp's (2020) Post-Christian Spirituality Scale. Adding such scales to the large international survey programs would make the lives of students of religious change in the West a whole lot easier.

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