

The Experience of Divine Presence: Religious Culture in Brazil, the United States and Western Europe

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Theoretical concepts and cross-national studies

In recent years, an increasing number of sociologists of religion have come to view the classical secularization thesis—which predicts a general loss in the significance of religion in modern societies—to be based on a misjudgment. The thesis is not categorically rejected by most of the new interpretive models and approaches used to explain the religious shift underway in modern societies. However, secularization as a concept has become more differentiated and limited to specific aspects (Casanova 1994). Some authors have even identified a global tendency towards a resacralization of social life (Riis 1998; Berger 1999; Riesebrodt 2004).

According to the thesis of the privatization of religion, secularization does not necessarily entail the demise of individual religiosity. Far more decisive here is the shift from the universalistic mass religions of the past to private religiosity and religious pluralism (Parsons 1968; Berger 1980; Luckmann 1991). This second thesis clearly represents an important corrective to the tendency to limit the sociology of religion to issues of church sociology. However, by watering down the concept of religion, some proponents of this thesis de facto deny the existence of non-religious people, which distances them considerably from the everyday understanding of religiosity. Furthermore, the privatization thesis contributes little to our understanding of why traditional church forms of religiosity in certain countries, particularly in Europe, have declined so dramatically in the course of the 20th century—and why this development has not been observed in other cultures.

In light of the results of numerous cross-national studies, Grace Davie and others have argued that the European form of secularization is an exception and does not represent, as previously maintained, a model that all cultures throughout the world will eventually follow (Davie 1999; Martin 2005). There are pres-

ently a range of approaches to explaining the specific religious developments in different countries and parts of the world, such as David Martin's "General Theory of Secularization" (1978 and 2005), José Casanova's "Public Religions in the Modern World" (1994) or the "Market Model of Religion" (Stark and Iannaccone 1996; Finke and Stark 2003), which is based on rational choice theory. According to the view shared by these authors, the decline of religiosity in Europe is primarily a consequence of the historical heritage of hierarchical state churches that weakened the individual initiative and the spirit of religious innovation.

Drawing upon the considerations of the authors named as well as much of my own previous work (Höllinger 1996, 2005, 2007; Höllinger, Haller and Valle-Höllinger 2007), I compare in this chapter the individual and collective significance of religion in Western Europe, the United States and Brazil. The central argument of my article is as follows: Brazilians and U.S. Americans are more attached to religion than Europeans because the former experience the presence of the divine more frequently and more intensively. The Religion Monitor permits a more thorough assessment of this thesis than has been the case with previous intercultural comparative surveys (World Value Survey, International Social Survey Programme) due to the fact that the research tool employed here also investigates the dimension of subjective religious experience (Huber 2003, 2007).

In the next section, the relevant empirical findings are presented and discussed. Following this, I examine the sociological determinants of the different religious developments in more detail. I aim to show that European state religion is only one factor for the decline of religious life in Europe. The varying degrees of intensity of religiosity in these countries are primarily determined by two further factors: As a consequence of the strong influence of indigenous and black African culture in Brazil and in the United States, spiritist forms of religion are still widespread in both countries. In Central and Northwest Europe, however, such forms of religion were systematically eradicated by the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter Reformation, with the church subsequently playing a diminishing role in the mediation of religious experience. The expansion of the welfare state in Europe and the associated increase in individual security, which have diminished the need for religious meaning as well as religious support in coping with the problems of life, constitute a further reason for the differences in the intensity of religious life.

The culturally specific intensity of religiosity

The following empirical analyses are based on the results of the Religion Monitor survey conducted in Brazil, the United States and six Western European countries: Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Austria, Switzerland and Spain. As the data in these countries were collected by means of telephone interviews, and in the case of Brazil only in selected metropolitan areas, it is advisable to first check to what extent the results for specific items correspond to those from other cross-national comparative studies.

For most countries Religion Monitor results show a slightly higher percentage of people that pray on a daily basis or attend weekly worship services than the World Value Survey from 2000 and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) from 1998 show. For Brazil, Italy and the United States, the difference is as high as 10 percent to 20 percent. It is surmised that these differences can be attributed only in part to an increase in religiosity, the main cause being the slight differences in the wording of the question as well as the respective sampling methods. However, in terms of these two indicators (prayer and attending religious services), the countries rank similarly in all three studies.

Religious intensity and emotionality

The innovative aspect of the Religion Monitor's conceptual framework lies in the tool used to measure individual religiosity according to six dimensions of religiosity (as defined by Charles Glock) that are assessed individually (Huber 2003, 2007):

- Intellectual dimension (engagement with religious questions)
- Ideological dimension (belief)
- Private religious practice
- Public religious practice
- Religious experience
- Consequential dimension (the influence of religion on everyday life)

An explorative cluster analysis of the indicators in question for all eight countries generated a highly uniform response profile for the Western European countries, with Italy being the exception. In the following analyses, the results for Germany, Great Britain, Austria, Switzerland and France are therefore summarized under the category "Western Europe" (without Italy).

Table 1 shows the results for selected questionnaire items relating to the first five dimensions of religiosity (the consequential dimension is not included in this and the following analyses). In the case of the questions relating to the personal experience of God and individual prayer, we see a difference of 50 to 60 percentage points between Western Europe and Brazil. We also see large differences between the countries on the issue of belief in God and the importance attached to attending religious services, whereas the differences on cognitive aspects of religiosity and the belief in an afterlife are far less pronounced (approximately 25 percentage points).

Table 1: Selected indicators of religiosity

Dimension		Western Europe	Italy	USA	Brazil
Experience	a) How often do you experience situations where you have the feeling that God or something divine intervenes in your life? (often + very often)	17	35	51	76
	b) How often do you experience situations where you have the feeling that God or something divine wants to communicate or to reveal something to you? (often + very often)	16	33	39	64
Individual practice	c) How often do you pray? (once a day)	23	48	67	80
	d) How important is personal prayer for you? (quite important + very important)	32	74	66	89
Communal practice	e) How often do you take part in religious services? (once a week)	14	40	50	54
	f) How important is it to you to take part in religious services? (quite important + very important)	21	57	49	71
Belief	g) To what extent do you believe in God or something divine? (quite + very much)	45	80	82	93
	h) To what extent do you believe in an afterlife? (quite + very much)	35	56	63	59
Cognitive engagement	i) How often do you read religious or spiritual books? (often + very often)	12	15	42	39
	j) How often do you think about religious issues? (often + very often)	31	47	66	54

Response category or categories are in parantheses

All data in percent

Among those items where significant differences between the countries are observed, the common element seems to be that the role of the individual experience of the divine and the subjective importance of religious rituals for generating of such experiences is addressed in these cases. This aspect of religiosity is at the center of my article. The term I use to define this form of religiosity, as measured by the summation scale of the corresponding items (a, b, c, d, f, and g in Table 1) is *experience-based religiosity*. The values of the respondents (i.e., the national averages) on this scale display a similar tendency to those in Stefan Huber's centrality of religion scale (cf. Huber 2003). However, because the centrality scale considers all five dimensions of religiosity (each with one item), certain differences remain.¹

For the purpose of simplicity, I have divided my scale into three intervals (Figure 1). According to this classification, more than two-thirds of the respondents in Brazil and approximately one-half of American and Italian respondents can be termed highly religious, whereas in Western Europe only 20 percent of respondents fall into this category. According to this scale, 40 percent of Western Europeans as opposed to only 3 percent of Brazilians are categorized as hardly religious or non-religious at all. (When reference is made to highly religious, religious or non-religious people in this and the following analyses, these statements refer, without exception, to the experience-based religiosity scale.)

That the frequency and intensity of spiritual experiences varies significantly between cultures is supported by a further result from the Religion Monitor. In the survey, respondents were also asked how often they experienced certain sentiments and feelings in respect of God or the divine. The list presented included both positive (protection, gratitude, strength, joy, love, help) and negative feelings (guilt, anxiety, rage, desperation). Two further items are related to the "release from guilt" or "liberation from an evil power." Table 2 shows the average percentage of those who stated that they experienced such sentiments "often" or "very often." As the results for Italy and the United States were similar, they have been combined.

In all countries, positive feelings are mentioned far more frequently than negative feelings. The data also confirm the expectation that non-religious people experience hardly any emotions in relation to God (in which they do not believe at all or only in a highly vague form), whereas people who are convinced that they frequently experience the presence of God in their life and for whom (consequently) religious practice is very important generally have a highly emotional relationship to God. This applies in particular to positive feelings such as strength or joy, and to the release from guilt or liberation from an evil power. Highly religious people also experience negative feelings such as fear and rage in relation to God more frequent.

Figure 1: Experience-based religiosity

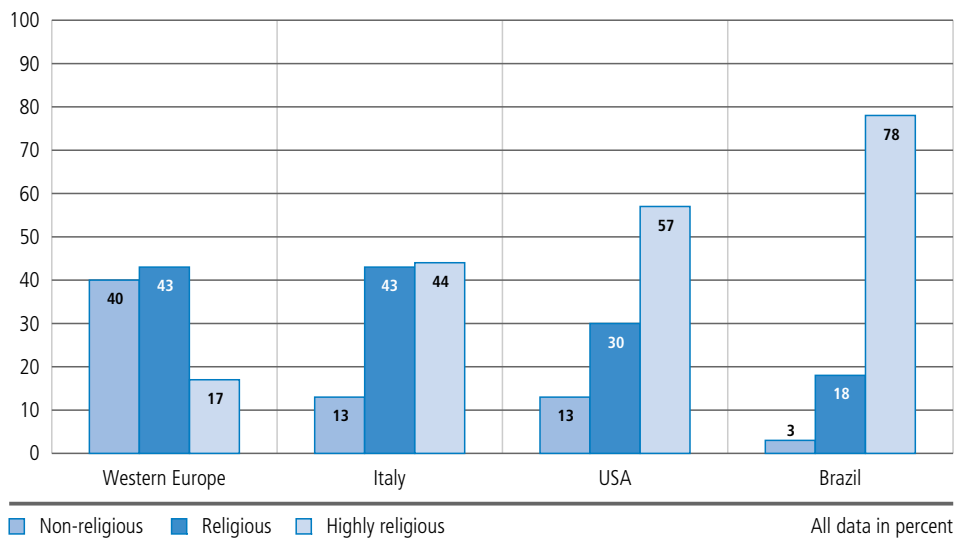


Table 2: Feelings in relation to God, by country and degree of religiosity

Degree of experience-based religiosity	Positive feelings	Negative feelings	Feeling of liberation/release
<i>Western Europe as a whole</i>	32	9	12
Highly religious	84	22	41
Religious	37	11	11
Non-religious	5	2	1
<i>Italy and the USA combined</i>	70	28	39
Highly religious	89	32	57
Religious	57	20	23
Non-religious	11	4	3
<i>Brazil as a whole</i>	79	34	53
Highly religious	87	38	61
Religious	64	25	31
Non-religious	13	4	0

Figures represent the percentage of respondents that experience such feelings "often" or "very often."

Once again, the same country ranking is observed as before: In Brazil, as well as in the United States and Italy, religion is more strongly connected with emotions than in Central and Western Europe. The differences are especially great in terms of the experience of religious catharsis. More than 50 percent of respondents in Brazil and approximately 40 percent of respondents in the United States and Italy, compared with only 12 percent of Western Europeans, frequently experience a release from guilt or liberation from an evil power through religion.

Religious intensity among different sociodemographic groups

The percentage of the highly religious in all countries drops continually from the oldest to the youngest age cohorts, with this difference smaller in Brazil relative to the other countries (Table 3). The differences between the age groups could be the result of two effects. It could be the case that people become more religious with increasing age. However, it could also be the case that the importance of religion for the younger cohorts has tended to diminish as a result of social change. Whether and to what extent the age cohort differences are related to the human life cycle or a shift in the attitudes of the cohorts cannot be determined on the basis of a single cross-section survey.

Table 3: Percentage of the highly religious according to age, gender and education

		Western Europe	Italy	USA	Brazil
Age	18–29-years old	10	33	43	71
	30–44-years old	13	43	51	81
	45–59-years old	16	45	60	83
	60 years old and older	28	52	63	84
Gender	Male	12	28	43	72
	Female	21	56	66	85
Education*	Primary	16	49	50	78
	Secondary	17	43	67	75
	Tertiary	17	39	53	83

* In the Religion Monitor, the level of education is ascertained asking about the age of the respondent on completing their school or university education. This variable is reduced to three categories so that each of the three educational levels contains approximately the same number of people.

All data in percent

A comparison of the German, Austrian and British data from the 2007 Religion Monitor with the results of the ISSP from 1991 and 1998 reveals very similar percentages of people who pray daily. This could indicate that the decline of Christian-theistic religiosity over the last two decades in these countries has stopped. However, because fieldwork methods and the wording of the questions for each survey were not identical, it is impossible to make any precise statements here.

Empirical studies have repeatedly confirmed that women tend to be more religious than men. Our scale of experience-based religiosity shows this more clearly than the commonly used indicators such as prayer and attending religious services. For the entire data of the countries examined here, the correlation between gender and attending services is .07, between gender and prayer .15, between gender and experience-based religiosity .18.

Women also state more frequently that they experience positive or negative emotions with respect to God. Men's lower degree of emotional responsiveness to religion is, in my opinion, primarily a consequence of the gender-specific division of labor. In virtually all societies, men have carried—and to a large extent still do carry—the main responsibility for production processes, technological development and the political governance of the community. Men therefore have a more highly developed sense that they are capable of directing and controlling events in the world than women do. Given their more rational approach to the world, men are less receptive to feelings that defy logic and are termed as religious or spiritual by those who do experience them.

Following this line of argument, it is reasonable to assume that people with a higher level of education also have a more rational approach to reality and will thus be less receptive to religion. However, like the World Value Survey and the ISSP, the Religion Monitor shows a relatively weak correlation between education level and the degree of religiosity—a correlation that also varies from country to country. In Western European countries, the percentage of highly religious people is approximately the same at all three educational levels; in Italy the better educated are slightly less religious, whereas in Brazil this group actually appears to be somewhat more religious than the less educated.

The attainment of knowledge and the training of the cognitive faculties through higher education do not appear to exert much influence on individuals' religious perception of the world. Many social scientists are astonished at this empirical finding, as it contradicts the positivist credo of scientific reason triumphing over religious irrationality. A student survey conducted in 11 countries indicates that this credo continues to resonate strongly with the professional milieu of social scientists. According to this survey students of philosophy, soci-

ology, anthropology, political science and psychology are less attracted to theistic forms of religiosity than are students in the other scientific disciplines (Höllinger and Smith 2002).

In summary, we can state that the intensity of experience-based religiosity is far more dependent on the sociocultural environment (i.e., the country in which one lives) than on individual characteristics such as age, gender or education. The differences between the countries are far greater than those between men and women, age cohorts and education levels.²

Reasons for cultural differences in the intensity of religiosity

European state religion versus American denominationalism

The insights of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch regarding the connection between types of religious communities (*Vergemeinschaftung*) and the forms of religiosity that develop within these communities have long since become accepted knowledge in the sociology of religion. Churches are monopolistic, hierarchical and bureaucratic institutions that claim to include all members of society and try to eliminate religious competition. As a result of automatic membership at birth, as well as of the fact that the power to dispense sacraments is concentrated in the hands of the clergy, the religious zeal of the church members and the spirit of religious innovation tend to wither. In sects, by contrast, religious commitment is much higher because members come together of their own free will, have a specific religious motivation, place greater religious demands on themselves and, following the postulate of “universal priesthood,” seek direct contact with the divine (Troeltsch 1912; Weber 1922).

Rodney Stark and other proponents of the market theory of religion have emphasized that the presence (or absence) of a competition mechanism between different religious communities also affects the intensity of religious life. The dynamics of the religious market in a pluralistic system “force” the suppliers of religious goods to be more responsive to people’s religious needs and to continually develop new, attractive offers in order to retain their membership or to win new members (Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Finke and Stark 2003).

The religious culture of the United States, where this theory was developed, clearly exemplifies how this market mechanism functions. Given the deep roots of religious freedom and a pluralistic religious system that date back to colonization, the spirit of religious innovation has always been strong in this country

(Münch 1986). In Europe, however, the long historical tradition of Catholic and Protestant state religion has led to a routinization and degeneration of religious life (Stark and Iannaccone 1994).

We will now examine the results of the Religion Monitor survey with this question in mind. Figure 2 provides an overview of the religious affiliations of the respondents. In the case of self-proclaimed Protestants, a distinction is made between members of Protestant national churches and (smaller) Protestant denominations. The latter is merged with the remaining Christian confessions that only occur in very small numbers within the data (such as Jehovah’s Witnesses or the Mormons), to form the category “other Christian denominations.” The respondents of non-Christian faiths, which, in the majority of countries, are also relatively small in number, form the category “other religions.”

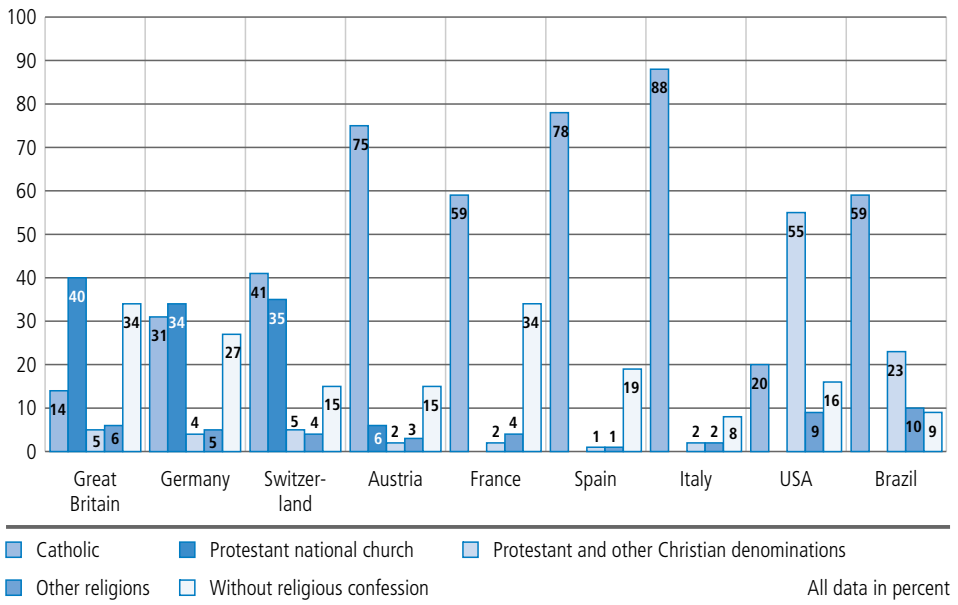
Due to the relatively small sample size (approximately 1,000 respondents per country), the sampling method employed and the imprecision in ascertaining religious affiliations, the data provide only a rough picture of the confessional structure of the individual countries. Because the survey was restricted to metropolitan regions, the proportion of respondents affiliated with Protestant denominations in the Brazilian sample is somewhat higher and the proportion of Catholics around 10 percent lower than in the whole of Brazil (in the 2000 Brazilian population census, approximately 70 percent of the population declared themselves to be Catholic, 4 percent to be members of traditional Protestant churches and 11 percent to be members of a Pentecostal church). In the United States, the proportion of Catholics in the population at large is also somewhat higher than in the Religion Monitor sample.

Table 4: Percentage of the highly religious

Religious affiliation	Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Great Britain	France, Spain	Italy	USA	Brazil
Catholic	22	19	48	60	79
Protestant national church	18				
Protestant and other Christian denominations	48	32	75	72	95
Without religious confession	3	1	4	7	29
Total	18	15	45	57	79

All data in percent

Figure 2: Religious affiliation of the respondents



What is of more importance here is the level of experience-based religiosity within the different religious groups (Table 4). As expected, the proportion of the highly religious in all countries is significantly higher among members of Protestant, Pentecostal and other Christian denominations than among Catholics and members of Protestant national churches.

According to the market theory of religion, the far higher level of religiosity among U.S. American Catholics compared to Europe can be explained by the fact that the Catholic Church, which has been integrated within the denominational system in the United States, has a greater capacity for innovation. An additional factor would appear to be of equal importance: A large number of American Catholics originate from those European countries such as Ireland, Italy and Poland where experience-based religiosity remains especially vigorous (according to the last U.S. census, approximately 20 percent of the population originates from these countries). Among immigrants from these countries and their descendents, the religious conditioning acquired from their country of origin is likely to continue in the new homeland. The same applies for the large number of Latin American Catholics who have emigrated to the United States over the last decades (according to the last census, Latinos and Latinas make up approximately 10 percent of the population).

Although the Catholic Church in Italy to this day has not been exposed to any serious competition from other religious groups, Italian Catholics are considerably more religious than their fellow believers in the majority of other Western European countries. However, the most religious of all are the Brazilian Catholics.

Until the end of the 19th century, the Brazilian church occupied—as in the majority of European Catholic countries—the position of a state religion. However, during the course of the 20th century, and in distinction to the European Catholic countries, Brazil experienced a significant expansion of Protestant, especially Pentecostal churches, as well as other new religious communities. This vitalization of the religious arena and the sometimes aggressive drive to expand on the part of the Pentecostal churches also led to an awakening in the Catholic camp. With the Charismatic Renewal Movement, which has also experienced strong growth since the 1980s, the Brazilian Catholic Church succeeded in establishing an alternative to Pentecostal spiritualism. According to a large, representative survey carried out by the Brazilian daily paper “Folha de São Paulo” in 1994, approximately 4 percent of Brazilians were supporters of the Charismatic Renewal Movement (Pierucci and Prandi 1997; cf. Carranza 2000; Chesnut 2003).

The country-specific patterns of religiosity can thus be explained in part by the different religious dynamics of churches and sects as well as by the mechanism of religious competition. However, a number of essential questions remain unanswered from this perspective. With the exception of the United States, all the countries examined here were shaped by a single dominant church that exercised its monopoly well into the 20th century (in Germany and Switzerland there were two churches which enjoyed a religious monopoly in specific regions of each country). Why, in Brazil as compared to Europe, do so many more people feel attracted to new church or religious movements? And why do Italian Catholics have a far closer connection to the church compared with their counterparts in other European Catholic countries?

In the case of Italy this may in part be due to the fact that, as opposed to Germany, France, England or Spain, its church has played the role of a countervailing force to secular rule far more frequently and is therefore less like a state religion. Compared with other European countries where the great ideological and political movements of the preceding centuries—the bourgeois revolution, the Enlightenment, Liberalism and Socialism—violently rejected and fought the church as a part of the repressive system of rule opposed to social progress, in Italy the relationship between the church and her ideological opponents was far

more friendly, as the films about Don Camillo and Peppone humorously illustrate (Höllinger 1996, 1999).

Within the individual countries (or groups of countries), the denominational groups display a certain convergence in terms of the incidence of experience-based religiosity (Table 4). This also applies to respondents without a confession. In Western European countries, there are hardly any indications of religious experience and practice among this group. However, in Brazil, almost one third of this group can be classified as highly religious according to our scale; many also attend religious services, without necessarily feeling committed to any particular religious community. Thus, it appears as if every society creates specific patterns of religiosity that influence the religious behavior of all members irrespective of their religious affiliation.

Spiritist forms of religion in America and Europe

Despite the fact that over one-half of the population of Brazil now declare themselves to be white, Brazilian society and consequently its religious culture are strongly influenced by the cultural traditions of the indigenous inhabitants and African slaves. Among both native Indians and slaves, as well as their descendants, archaic trance techniques to induce spiritual possession and to awaken the magic-religious charisma were, and to some extent still are, at the focus of religious life.

Up until the middle of the 19th century, over 50 percent of the Brazilian population was black. There was an intensive ethnic amalgamation between the Portuguese colonists, native Indians and blacks that was accompanied by a strong syncretic mixing of medieval Portuguese Catholicism and the religious traditions of the blacks and native Indians. Thus, despite the formal Christianization of the entire population, animistic-spiritist conceptions and practices such as the use of trance techniques to experience the presence of spiritual forces have remained very much alive in Brazil (Bastide 1978; Höllinger 2007: 65).

Away from the public eye, some slaves and their descendants continued to practice the religious traditions of their native culture, often concealed behind Christian symbolism. To this day there are a large number of spiritual healers, seers and mediums in Brazil. Spiritist practices were also integrated into Catholic folk religiosity, now performed by both male and female lay Catholics equipped with special spiritual abilities. Due to the continual shortage of priests during the colonial age, it was not uncommon for church sacraments such as the sacra-

ments of baptism or marriage to be administered by lay priests in rural areas (*ibid.*: 25; Zaluar 1983; Brandão 1986).

The Catholic Church in Brazil also did attempt to combat deviant forms of religious faith and practice by means of visitations and the institution of the inquisition (Maggie 1992). However, in light of limited manpower resources, the inadequate education and lack of commitment on the part of the lower clergy, these efforts met with little success. It was only with the increased import of European priests and members of religious orders beginning in the second half of the 19th century that it proved possible to enforce the “Roman” church’s official codes of religious conduct on a somewhat wider basis, at least in urban areas (Ribeiro de Oliveira 1985).

The situation in Europe was completely different. Here, spiritist forms of religion had declined more dramatically before Christianization than was the case in Africa or America. As a result of the closer-knit organizational structure of the European church and the greater time span in which its work was able to take effect, it proved possible to eradicate the remains of “heathen” religiosity far more thoroughly than in Brazil. In Europe, the clergy not only had a monopoly on the dispensing of the sacraments, it also controlled the performance of popular religious rituals such as the blessing of fields or domestic animals. As many priests chose their profession on the basis of status considerations rather than because of a religious vocation, their religious authority lacked the natural charisma characteristic of the lay spiritual experts in Brazil (Höllinger 2007: 232).

While Catholicism recognized the possibility of a spiritual transfer of power in the form of the sacraments and made concessions to the masses’ need for magical forms of salvation with the cult of the saints, religion underwent a radical disenchantment during the Reformation. The Protestant faithful were now to take full personal responsibility for their own fate and forgo all forms of magical manipulation of divine forces. With the doctrine of “universal priesthood,” the assumption, common in all previous religions, that some individuals have a special charisma at their disposal was rejected and the role of the priest as mediator between God and man was overturned (Weber 1985: 321 ff.). The cult of the saints was completely abolished. Through the witch hunts of the early modern period, individuals (predominantly women) in possession of magical occult powers were subject to increased attacks and forced to the margins of society.

During the Counter Reformation, the Catholic Church also adopted a harder line on magical conceptions and practices. Due to the retention of the sacramental rites and the Latin liturgical language, the festive and mystical character of religion continued to have a stronger presence in Catholicism than in Protestan-

tism. However, with the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the “destruction of sensualism” (Lorenzer 1981) initiated by Protestantism was carried forward. The magical-mystical dimension, precisely that element which many people see as the primary source of the religious was excluded from the liturgy. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that church-religious practices experienced the most dramatic decline in those regions of Europe where magical folk religion was most vigorously fought: in central, northern and northwest Europe, and to some extent in Spain. However, where the connection between popular and official religion was maintained to a larger extent—in Ireland, Italy and Poland—the connection between the population and the church remains relatively strong to this day (Höllinger 1996: 249 ff.)

Despite its European roots, certain fundamental aspects of U.S. American Protestantism developed along completely different lines than those of European Protestantism. In contrast to the centralized organizational structure of the Protestant national churches in Europe, many denominations in the United States were committed to the principle of congregationalism, a principle that grants a high degree of autonomy to the individual congregations relative to the church as a whole. This principle facilitated the development of autonomous groups and promoted the tendency toward a periodic revitalization of religious life. A number of times throughout U.S. history, such renewal initiatives have led to great awakenings that have spread throughout the entire country and across denominational divides (Wuthnow 1996: 83 ff.) With such initiatives, American Protestantism has tried repeatedly to return to the origins of Christianity, that is, a religiosity inspired by a miracle-working Messiah and the Pentecostal experience (Höllinger 2007: 235).

In a similar manner to Brazil, the ethnic structure of the U.S. population is also an important factor in the formation of the country’s religious culture. Although the percentage of Africans in the U.S. population was lower and blacks and whites were strongly segregated, the presence of Afro-Americans has still had a strong influence on cultural development in the United States. This influence is clearly demonstrated in 20th century American popular music where African rhythms form the driving element.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the African influence has also made itself felt in the religious field (*ibid.*). American Pentecostalism developed out of the combination of a (white) Protestant revivalist movement and the spirituality of the blacks (Chestnut 1997). The enthusiastic religiosity of Pentecostalism was subsequently adopted by a number of the traditional Protestant denominations and later by the Catholic Church in the form of the Charismatic Renewal.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the belief in spiritual entities is much more widespread in Brazil and also in the United States than it is in Europe (Figure 3). Approximately two-thirds of Brazilians, more than half of Americans and only 20 percent of western Europeans believe in the efficacy of angels. Over 60 percent of Brazilian Protestants and Pentecostals believe in demons, and almost 40 percent of U.S. American Protestants believe in them, whereas this applies to only 7 percent of western European Protestants and Catholics. In Brazil and the United States, the percentage of Catholics believing in demons is significantly lower than that of the Protestants, but two to three times higher than in western Europe. Once again, Italy is positioned between the values of the American and the other western European countries.

The end of state religious monopolies and the introduction of the freedom of religious choice had different effects in Brazil than in Western Europe. In Western Europe, the abolishment of obligatory religion gradually weakened the ties to religion and the church, which is documented in the continual decline in the frequency of attendance at religious services throughout the course of the 20th century (Höllinger 1996: 77). In the intervening period, numerous new religious communities have also succeeded in establishing themselves there. However, due to the centuries-long process of the demystification and desensualisation of religion and the consequent weakening of the receptivity to a theistic-spiritual perception of the world, these new religious communities have attracted only relatively small numbers of followers.

However, for Brazil, the abolishment of the Catholic state religion meant that the previously hidden, though nonetheless widespread, spiritist forms of religion could now be practiced in public. With the exception of Catholic liberation theology, the decisive factor in the success of the new religious movements that spread throughout the country during the course of the 20th century has been their ability to answer people's need for intensive spiritual experiences. In all these groupings, spiritual healing rituals are at the focus of religious activities, whereby the term "healing" in this context does not refer just to physical and psychological disabilities, but also applies to the liberation from other difficulties such as family problems, material hardship and unemployment (Chesnut 2003).

In contrast to these currents, liberation theology raises as its central concern the political struggle for structural changes in the interests of an egalitarian society *not* spiritual healing and the improvement of an individual's life situation. The committed activists of the Catholic Church's basic ecclesiastical communities undoubtedly played a decisive role in the struggle to defeat Latin American

Figure 3a: Belief in spiritual entities (angels)

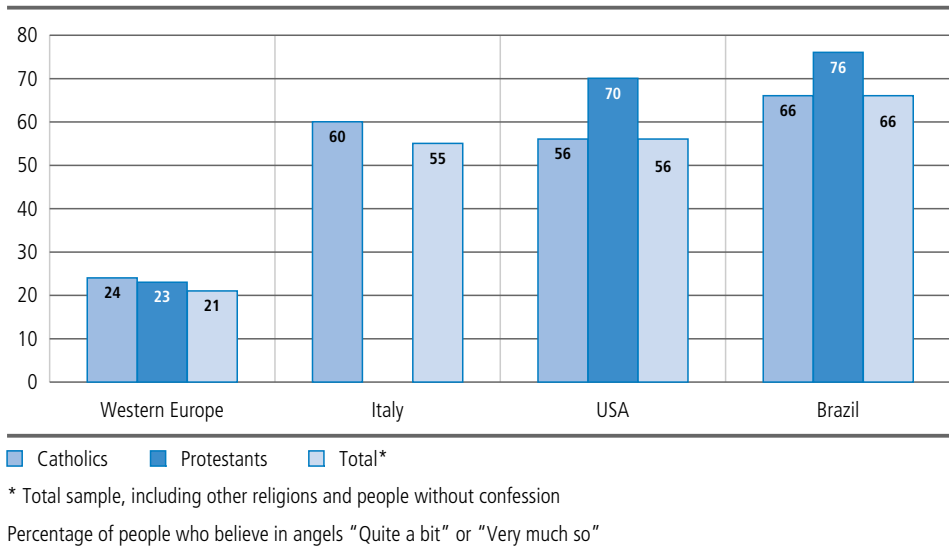
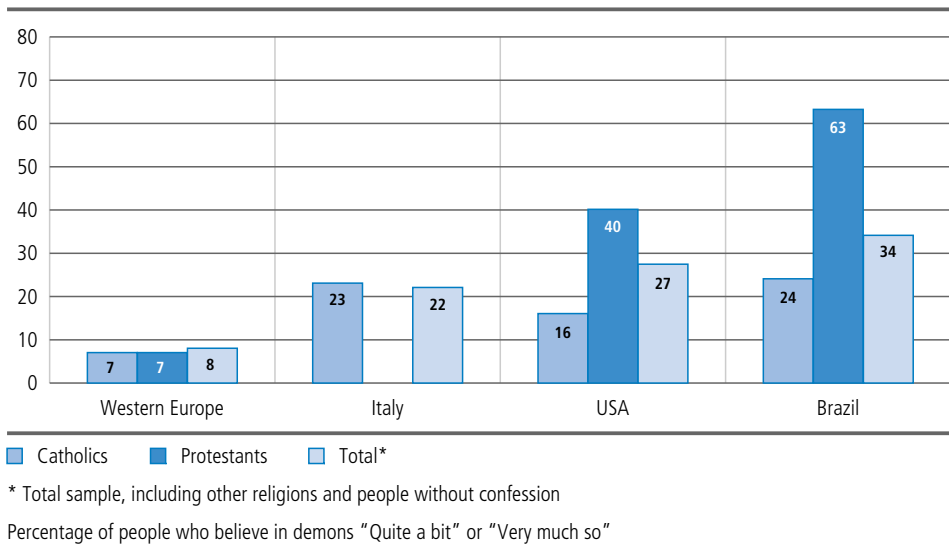


Figure 3b: Belief in spiritual entities (demons)



military dictatorships and in the implementation of numerous social reforms in the concluding phase of re-democratization.

However, over the course of the last two decades these grassroots congregations have experienced a significant decline in the number of their followers,

whereas those groups that offer enthusiastic forms of religion and spiritual healing rituals have recorded a strong influx. Commentators from the social sciences attribute this development, among other factors, to the high proportion of Brazilians who, in search of religious support for the solution to concrete life problems, place more faith in spiritual healing rituals than in the political discourse of liberation theology (Burdick 1993; Vasquez 1998).

Reciprocal factors:

The decline of religiosity and the improvement in living conditions

Even though the thesis of a causal link between modernization and secularization is rightly called into question, one cannot ignore the fact that the level of religiosity in economically advanced countries is generally significantly lower than in the so-called developing countries (Inglehart and Baker 2000). This linkage becomes even more clear if one considers the level of modernization as based not only on measures of economic development (GNP per capita) but also on the Human Development Index (HDI)—which includes measures of literacy, life expectancy and national average income—as well as the Gini Index (a measure of social inequality) in each country. I term the combination of a high HDI value with a low level of social inequality the *quality and security of (material and social) living conditions*.³

The relationship between the level of religiosity for all countries in which the Religion Monitor survey was conducted and the index value for the quality of living conditions is presented in graphic form in Figure 4.⁴ In most of the 21 countries, there is a relatively high congruence between the two dimensions. However, the two Catholic countries (Italy and Poland), the United States and the three Muslim countries (Indonesia, Tunisia and Morocco) are significantly more religious than would be expected in terms of the linear correlation between religiosity and the quality of living conditions. The opposite is the case with respect to Russia, Great Britain and France.

Among sociologists it was Max Weber who most clearly recognized that the correlation between the decline in religiosity and the improvement in material well-being and social living conditions can be viewed as a reciprocal cause-effect relationship. His thesis of the disenchantment of the world explains one tendency within this connection: The more people within a society experience and feel that they themselves, on principle, are able to control and shape their living conditions by technical means (i.e., the less their lives are threatened by natural

disasters, hunger, incurable illnesses, epidemics, corruption, violence, etc.), the less they believe that mysterious and unpredictable higher forces or powers intervene in their lives, and consequently, the less likely they are to seek recourse to magical means as a way of coping with life (Weber 1988b: 594).

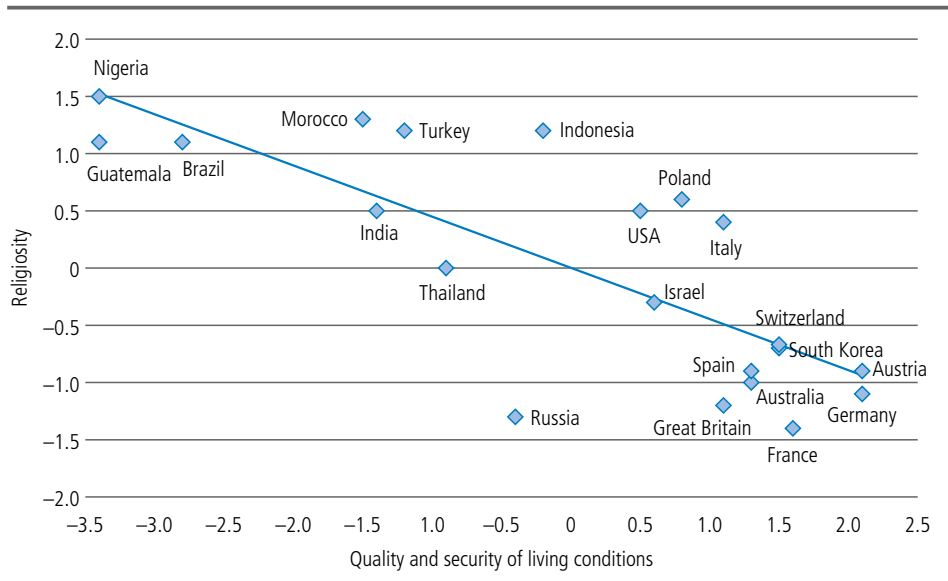
Thanks to technical, economic and medical progress, the lives of people in developed industrial societies are now less threatened by strokes of fate beyond their influence than was the case in earlier societies. It is now no longer necessary to constantly secure the benevolence of the higher powers. The distribution of national income and the security provided by the welfare state are also decisive in this respect. The relatively strong income inequality and the lack of welfare state institutions in the United States could, alongside the factors already discussed, be a further reason for the considerable social significance of religion in a country with such a high level of economic development.

Despite considerable economic growth in the preceding decades, the Latin American countries still count among the poorest and, above all, least egalitarian societies in the world. Consequently, many social scientists (e.g., Mariz 1994; Chesnut 1997, 2003) support the thesis that the boom of Pentecostalism and other spiritist religious communities in Brazil and other Latin American countries is primarily due to the expectation of the poorer social strata that the offers of spiritual healing provided by these groups will lead to an improvement in their difficult living conditions. However, the Brazilian population census from 2000 shows that the average income of the members of Pentecostal churches is only slightly lower than that of the general population. In fact, the majority of the members of the *Comunidades Espíritas* (Kardecists) come from the educated, wealthy middle class.

World Value Survey and ISSP data have shown that within the individual countries, there is only a very weak correlation between the personal or family income of the respondents and their degree of religiosity—similar to that in respect of education. This applies to the North and South American countries as well as to Europe.

Religiosity is thus determined less by individual material circumstances and far more by the living conditions of an entire social environment. A high degree of social inequality is generally associated with increased social tensions and anomia, conditions which affect both the wealthy and poorer sections of society. The expansion of the welfare state in Europe, by contrast, has led to a relatively harmonious and violence-free social climate. The international comparison of homicide rates clearly illustrates this difference. In the two Latin American countries Brazil and Guatemala, approximately 25 to 35 people per 100,000 inhabitants per year suffered a violent death in the period between 2000 and 2005;

Figure 4: Religiosity and the index of “Quality and security of living conditions”



Source: Human Development Report 2007/08; R^2 linear = 0.61

in the same period in Central and Western Europe there were only 2 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants on an annual basis.

Social conditions alone do not determine the type and intensity of religiosity in a country; the culturally mediated value accorded to religion also plays a decisive role here. People in Brazil turn to spiritual offers of healing not simply because they cannot afford medical or psychotherapeutic treatment—many Brazilians are actually convinced of the efficiency of these methods.

As Max Weber convincingly argued in his study “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” it is possible to consider the relationship between economic and religious development in modern Europe from the other side. The disenchanted worldview of Protestantism and its individualistic ethic of self-responsibility were fundamental preconditions for the formation of capitalism.

In his studies on the making of the modern identity, Charles Taylor also established a connection between religious change and the dismantling of social inequality in Europe. Protestantism rejected the then prevailing view that monks and priests had privileged access to the religious goods of salvation. With the “sanctification” of vocational work and ordinary life, it promoted the idea of universal equality and the personal responsibility of individuals for their own religious salvation. The strengthening of personal responsibility and the common

person's feeling of self worth subsequently brought about a transfer of the religious ideal of equality to the social and political plane. Through the Enlightenment, which continued the ideological transformation introduced by Protestantism, the new concepts of man and society also spread to the Catholic countries within Europe (Taylor 1989; Souza 2003).

In Latin America, however, a large section of the population remains under the influence of a syncretistic mixture of popular Catholicism and indigenous religion. According to this religious worldview, the well being of people both on earth and in the afterlife is dependent on earthly and supernatural agents of salvation. There is therefore a strong tendency to accept social living conditions as God-given (Cursino dos Santos 2006).

Whether and to what extent Pentecostalism in Latin America serves to initiate modernization processes similar to those initiated by historical Protestantism in Europe remains a subject of controversy (Garrard-Burnett and Stoll 1993; Bastian 1997). A series of empirical studies have demonstrated that the deep-seated spiritual experience of "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" combined with the support of the religious community often leads to a strengthening of the personality, enabling believers to overcome the feeling of personal incapacity and improve their own living situation through a disciplined lifestyle (Martin 1990; Burdick 1993). However, in the last decades the Pentecostal ideal of the sanctification of life and of overcoming harmful spiritual forces has been increasingly replaced by the spiritist conceptions and practices of traditional Latin American popular religiosity. Newer Pentecostal churches with their religious supermarkets awaken the expectation that all problems can be simply and efficiently solved by means of spiritual healing rituals (Mariano 1999).

The controversy over the modernization potential of Latin American Pentecostalism addresses a question central to the sociology of religion: Is the disenchantment of the world actually, as Max Weber argued, a necessary condition for the emergence of the modern ethic of self-responsibility (*Gesinnungsethik*)? Given the fact that the Protestant ethic was able to develop in the United States despite the relative prevalence of magical-spiritist conceptions, it seems that the thesis of the incompatibility of a modern identity and magical-charismatic forms of religiosity needs to be questioned, or at least relativized. Religious currents of a similar character in other countries should therefore not be denied, a priori, any social innovation potential.

The continued vitality of religion

Given the spread of new religious movements in many parts of the world, analysts of contemporary sociological developments, as well as the media, increasingly speak of a global tendency toward reenchancement or the return of religion in contemporary society. However, in countries such as Brazil or the United States, what we are witnessing is less a religious renaissance than the continued vitality of traditional forms of religion.

The vitality of religion in Brazil is essentially due to the close connection between religion and magic, that is, the employment of spiritual experiences for religious as well as therapeutic and other practical purposes. Because know-how of the mechanisms of spiritual trance and healing rituals has been passed down from one generation to the next, and has also been held in high social esteem, there are many spiritual experts today who are able to produce astounding effects with their techniques. Through the physical sensations brought about by trance rituals, immediate empirical evidence is provided for the belief in the presence of spiritual entities. The belief in spirits and in the ability of the healer—male or female—to influence these spirits is in turn a precondition for the effectiveness of the healing ritual. This leads to the formation of a closed circuit in which the magical-spiritual charisma of the healer and the belief in the existence of spiritual entities continually reinforce each other in a reciprocal process.

The results of the Religion Monitor survey for Guatemala and Nigeria indicate that the forms of religiosity characteristic for Brazil are also widespread in other Latin American and black African countries. In Guatemala, the percentage of respondents with strong religious convictions, an intensive religious practice and frequent spiritual experiences is as high as that found in Brazil. In Nigeria, this percentage of respondents appears to be even higher.

The intensity of religiosity in the United States, by contrast, is primarily a consequence of the denominational religious system, which was especially favorable to the continual renewal and reactivation of religious life. However, the relatively high incidence of belief in spiritual entities (angels, demons) in the United States, similar to that in Brazil, must be seen in the context of the cultural diffusion of elements of African spirituality.

In Europe, where religion was washed of its magical and mystical elements through the Reformation and the Counter Reformation within the framework of a bureaucratically centralized state religion, the cultural mediation of the experience of divine presence was fundamentally weakened. To the extent that the function of providing therapeutical and social support was transferred from reli-

gion to medicine and other modern methods of coping with life (such as psychology, psychotherapy, social work), religion lost much of its practical relevance.

Since the emergence of the New Age movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the potential of “holistic” methods to improve physical and psychological well being, methods which have their origins in spiritual and esoteric traditions, have been “rediscovered” in Europe. Practitioners of such techniques often emphasize the practical benefits (i.e., promoting a harmonious energy flow through the body, cathartic-therapeutic effects) over the spiritual dimension. However, this development can be attributed also to the need to regenerate a capacity for spiritual experiences.

Endnotes

- 1 My scale does not take into account any pantheistic (i.e., cosmocentric) religious experiences and practices, which means one could call the form of religiosity analysed here “experience-based theistic religiosity.” However, the analysis of the data shows that in the majority of cases, respondents claiming that they meditate frequently or regularly also claim that they pray just as frequently. The majority of these respondents also state that they believe in God or something divine. Consequently, theistic and pantheistic (i.e., cosmocentric) forms of religious practice and experience generally occur in combination.
- 2 A multiple classification analysis of experience-based religiosity by country, gender, age and education results in the following beta values: country = .47, gender = .17, age = .16, education = .01.
- 3 The combined index “quality of living conditions” is calculated in the following way: In a first step, the national values for the HDI and the Gini index are standardized (z-transformed); the Gini value is then subtracted from the HDI value. The lower the HDI value and the higher the social inequality, the lower the total value.
- 4 The standardized national averages on the “experience-based religiosity” scale were used as indicator for the level of religiosity. As the questions concerning personal experiences of God were not suited to measuring the intensity of religiosity in Buddhist and Hindu countries, this item was excluded from the scale here.

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