

## The End of Secularisation in Europe?: A Demographic Perspective

### Introduction

One of the great sociological questions of our age is whether the religious proportion of the world's population will continue to expand due to the higher fertility of religious women, or whether religious apostasy will lead to a reduction in global religiosity. At the national level, the balance between secular and religious subcultures has important repercussions for electoral cleavages, party systems, public policy and international relations. Where precisely does the secular-religious balance lie in the West, which is supposed to represent the *telos* of developmental models of modernisation? This study interrogates the problem through the prism of ten west European countries, arguing that these societies will start to become more religious by the mid-twentieth century due to both immigration and religious-secular fertility differences within the majority population.

To date, few analyses of religious trends in Europe adopt a time-sensitive approach which can parse out cohort and life-cycle effects.<sup>1</sup> In addition, research in the sociology of religion, cultural demography and labour economics suggests an important relationship between religiosity and demographic indicators which can affect the size of religious and secular populations. Norris and Inglehart (2004), for instance, claim that while higher religious fertility is overwhelming religious apostasy in the developing world today, the balance swings in the other direction as human development proceeds. Though they admit that higher religious fertility is currently powering a growth in the

proportion of the world that is religious, they claim that, once begun, the secularisation process 'does not reverse itself', with religiosity surviving in advanced societies principally among those with lower levels of human development. (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 54)

However, this demographic theory of secularisation has not been systematically tested with individual-level data - even in the developed world where time series data is available. Moreover, research which uses inputs from models of past behaviour to make demographic projections of future secularisation scenarios is missing for western Europe. Finally, we know almost nothing about the degree to which the children of immigrants to Europe - particularly Muslims - retain their religiosity. This article attempts to fill these lacunae in the literature and map their theoretical significance.

## The Secularization Debate

The singular event which historians use to demarcate the modern era, the French Revolution, was defined by its rejection of religious authority. Since then, secularisation and modernisation have been intimately linked in the minds of many. All three 'founding fathers' of sociological theory - Marx, Weber and Durkheim - cast a narrative of modernisation in which religion was an inevitable casualty of advancing rationality. For Marx, under the pressure of industrial capitalism and science, 'solid' religious certainties would 'melt into air', profaning the sacred public sphere. (Marx 1973: 70-71) Max Weber spoke of the advance of 'disenchantment' as the acids of scientific modernity and bureaucratisation shrink the scope for religious explanations and supernatural beliefs. (Weber 1948: 155) Finally, Emile Durkheim, drawing on classical and Spencerian

thought, proposed a theory of structural differentiation and moral evolution whereby the role of religious expertise is confined to an ever shrinking sphere. Increasingly, as in France after the Revolution, society worships itself rather than a supernatural deity. (Durkheim 1995, [1893] 1984, ch. VI)

More recently, Steve Bruce has synthesised the work of previous modernisation theorists like Ernest Gellner and David Martin to argue for the irreversibility of secularisation in modern society. Social differentiation drives a relativism that leads to a constricting sphere of influence for religion in both public and private. (Bruce 2002: 2-43, 1998: 5-7, 15) Exceptions to this rule are found only in cases where religion acquires a this-worldly role, principally as a vector for ethnic or nationalist resistance - as in Poland under communism or in divided societies like Northern Ireland - or as a site of social integration during periods of rapid social dislocation, as with rural-urban migration. (Bruce 1998: 19-21) This argument is also made - albeit in a different way - by Anthony Giddens, who suggests that detraditionalisation involves the replacement of religious forms of expertise by scientists and their technological 'expert systems'. The work of Pippa Norris and Ron Inglehart dovetails with that of Bruce, and especially Giddens. They claim that rising material wealth and political stability reduce the ontological insecurities that drive religiosity. (Norris and Inglehart 2004) However, while Giddens foresees a 'return of the repressed' in response to high modernity's inability to address the ultimate questions of human existence, Norris and Inglehart tie religion's appeal exclusively to its ability to dispel insecurity, and thereby predict its obsolescence. (Giddens 1991: 194-5, 207-8)

Whereas much of the work on secularisation stems from the European context where declining religious attendance and/or belief seems more apparent, some largely US-based researchers take a different view. The so-called 'supply-side' or religious market model is methodologically individualist and focuses on the supply of religious services in contrast to the secularisation theorists' concentration on social structures and changes in individuals' demand for religion. Supply-side theories contend that a major reason for the lack of religious vitality in much of Europe stems from the dominance of state religions, which restrict competition in the religious marketplace and produce inefficient religious monopolists who fail to create religious demand. This is in marked contrast to the United States, where the early separation of church and state led to a freer market in religious provision which could cater to a wider variety of spiritual demands as well as providing the non-spiritual 'selective incentives' which often help to attract people to places of worship. While religious attendance remains low in Europe, they contend that religious beliefs there show a high degree of vibrancy. Advocates of the supply-side perspective maintain that the disjuncture between beliefs and practice is a result of a lax religious establishment failing to serve consumer demand within an over-regulated religious market. (Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Stark & Finke 2000: 57-79)

Recent research which tests these competing theories using European data suggests that the secularisation approach provides a more convincing explanation than supply-side theories. (Voas, Olson and Crockett 2002) Halman and Draulans (2006: 278) for instance, find no support for the supply-side postulate that greater religious diversity is linked to higher levels of religious belief or practice. Instead, the reverse seems to be the case. Using national-level data for a global set of countries, McCleary and Barro

(2006) found that attempts by the state to regulate religious markets (a practice often associated with communism) does lower religiosity, but the promotion of official religions by the state actually increases religious participation - possibly because of the additional resources flowing to organised religion. Pluralism seems to have a mixed effect on religiosity. Meanwhile, recent analyses of European survey data find a consistent pattern of religious decline encompassing participation (attendance), belief and affiliation. (Voas and Crockett 2005; Norris and Inglehart 2004, ch. 3)

In response, some theorists propose that the story is more complex than a linear theory of secularisation would allow, with trends varying between countries and with different trajectories depending on whether the variable of interest is religious practice, religious belief, religious traditionalism or religious affiliation. Andrew Greeley, using data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) religion modules contends that the religious situation in Europe defies any unitary process like secularisation. (Greeley 2002) Grace Davie, drawing on the recent European Values Survey (EVS), finds diverse religious pathways, but also a regularity of 'believing without belonging' in many European countries. She even avers that the data often show religious belief varying *inversely* with religious practice. (Davie 1994, 2002: 4-8)

### Demographic Aspects of Religion

Much of the research on the sociology of religion has focused on religion as a social phenomenon whose rise or decline depends upon the conscious choices of individuals within changing structural contexts. However, it is apparent that even in the absence of socially-inspired revivals/declines of religion, the degree of religiosity in a

society can fluctuate. The chief non-social mechanism of change is demography. If we consider 'the religious' as a population affected not only by assimilation/dissimilation into the secular population but by migration, fertility and mortality, we arrive at a more multivalent picture. David Voas is one sociologist who has urged that greater attention be paid to the use of demographic methods in the study of religion. 'People enter, exit, and move within religion,' he remarks, 'just as they are born, will die, and migrate, in life'. (Voas 2003: 94) For Michael Hout, 'demography helps shape the religious landscape ... The combination of differing demography and stable intergenerational religious socialization would be sufficient to equalize or even reverse the relative sizes of the religions.' (Hout 2003: 79-80). 'Silent' demographic effects can be profound in the long-term. For example, Rodney Stark shows how early Christians' favourable fertility and mortality rates as compared to Hellenistic pagans helped to fuel a 40 percent growth rate in the Christian population of the Roman Empire over several centuries. This gave rise to a population increase from 40 converts in 30 A.D. to 6 million by the year 300 leading to a 'tipping point' which helped Christianity become institutionalised within the Empire. (Stark 1996) Currently, many Islamic parts of what was once the Roman Empire have seen major declines in their Christian and Jewish populations due to emigration, lower fertility and mixed marriages. (Fargues 2001)

Those who study the religious marketplace in the United States have been impressed by the extent to which denominations have grown through migration and fertility advantage. Sherkat (2001), for example, finds that American Catholics have been able to offset large net losses to other denominations through gains arising from (largely) Hispanic-Catholic immigrants and their higher fertility. Fertility differentials can also

play a key role - especially in the long term. Mormons, once a very small sect, now equal or surpass Jews among post-1945 birth cohorts due to their fertility advantage over Jews and other denominations. (Sherkat 2001: 1472-4) Conservative Protestants, a much larger group than the Mormons, also benefit from relatively high fertility. Using the General Social Survey, Roof and McKinney (1987) noted that Southern Baptists had roughly twice the fertility of Jews and secular (unaffiliated) Americans. A recent article extends this finding by showing that three-quarters of the growth of conservative Protestant denominations is due to fertility rather than conversion. (Hout, Greeley and Wilde 2001) This has powered the growth of the religious right and increased the base of the Republican party. Indeed, a recent article demonstrates the extremely significant and robust correlation between non-Hispanic white fertility patterns and the Republican vote - especially in 2004. States whose white population tends to be liberal and postmaterialist have lower fertility - as per 'second demographic transition' theory (SDT) - and a lower pro-Bush vote share. (Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2005)

In Europe, there has been less attention paid to fertility differences between denominations. However, the growth of the European Muslim population through immigration is a trend that is widely acknowledged. (Buijs and Rath 2006) Several studies have discovered that immigrants to Europe tend to be more religious than the host population and - especially if Muslim - tend to retain their religiosity. (van Tubergen 2006) Though some indicators point to religious decline toward the host society mean, other trends suggest that immigrants become more, rather than less, religious the longer they reside in the host society. (van Tubergen 2007) Austria is one of the few European countries to collect religious data on their census. A recent attempt to project Austria's

population to 2051 found that a combination of higher fertility and immigration will increase the proportion of Muslims (excluding apostates) in the country from 4.6 percent of the population in 2001 to between 14 and 26 percent by 2051. Certainly the secular/unaffiliated population increased from 4 percent in 1981 to 10 percent in 2001, and is projected to grow in the near future. However, the secular population in Austria has a total fertility rate (TFR) of just .86 children per couple, limiting its long-term growth potential. This means that in the event that secularisation ceases - to say nothing of religious revival - the secular population will peak and begin to decline as early as 2021. (Goujon et al. 2006: 24) All of which suggests that secularisation may fail even if the secularisation thesis is correct. This article will thereby test the hypothesis that *a combination of higher religious fertility and immigration will lead to a growth in the religious population (defined in terms of belief) of the most secular nations of Europe that exceeds the net loss of communicants through religious apostasy.*

## Data and Methods

In order to test this hypothesis, we draw upon data from several sources. These include the EVS of 1981, 1990 and 1999-2000 and the second wave European Social Survey (ESS) of 2004. We use these datasets because of their time-series dimension and the fact that they ask the same (or similar) questions on religiosity and fertility. The study is limited to ten west European countries, as these are the only cases that were sampled across all specified waves of the EVS on our variables of interest. Germany was dropped because of the difficulties of pre and post-Unification data collation. Second wave ESS data was used because, unlike wave 1, this dataset has a fertility measure and enabled us



to match countries with the EVS. We will also be using three surveys of ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom to probe the phenomenon of second-generation immigrant religiosity: the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, 1993-1994 (Berthoud et. al 1997), and the 2001 and 2003 waves of the UK Citizenship Survey (Home Office 2003; Office for National Statistics and Home Office 2005).

Rather than use weights to account for variations in the relative samples of different countries, we have opted to create a standardised west European dataset with a fixed ratio of cases between countries. The desire to maximise the number of countries and cases subject to the strictures of attaining a uniform time-series dataset has resulted in the geographic apportionment within Europe shown in table 1 for all datasets for the period 1981-2004.

[Table 1 here]

This is clearly not a proportional representation of western Europe and should not be interpreted as such. Nonetheless, while the dataset features a strong Scandinavian dimension, it also contains a range of cases including late-developing Catholic (Spain, Ireland) as well as mixed-faith (Holland, Britain) societies. Though some geographic representativeness is sacrificed, the dataset provides a critical time-series dimension which is missing from most individual-level studies. Finally, all multivariate analyses use Stata 7.0. It is also worth mentioning that survey data is not equivalent to a complete sample, as with a church census, and that the four survey events leave the dataset open to being influenced by period effects in any given survey year.

## Results

Our first task is to establish whether secularisation has indeed occurred in these countries. The standard WVS/EVS question on religious attendance for 1981, 1990 and 2000 asks 'Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?' The EVS allows for a seven-category response to this question. This was transformed into a dummy variable for tabulation purposes. This was coded to distinguish between those who attended weekly or more and the rest, i.e. those who attended monthly or less. The ESS adopted the exact same question, so coding strategy is identical. The results are presented in figure 1 for ten-year cohorts. Notice that there is a pronounced pattern of declining religious attendance as we move from the earliest to most recent birth cohorts. The only exception to this trend is the earliest (pre-1915) cohort. Also evident is the lack of any life-cycle pattern whereby respondents begin to attend as they get older: the four wave lines do not shift upwards in chronological order. The vertical pattern almost certainly owes more to period effects and differences in survey methodology than anything else. This confirms some of the findings of secularisation theory, which argues that religious attendance falls across generations and does not revive as one ages through the life course.

### **Figure 1.**

[Figure 1 here]

Source: EVS 1981, 1990, 1999-2000 & ESS 2004

\* Data for 2000 uses Norway responses from 1997

\*\* Data for 2004 from ESS which uses same question but different methodology

In addition to attendance, the EVS asks a battery of questions concerned with private religious belief. Though these do not match up with the ESS questions, there is a high degree of comparability between the EVS and ESS questions on private religiosity. The EVS question asks: 'Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are: 1-a religious person, 2-not a religious person, 3-an atheist'. The ESS question asks 'Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?' The ESS uses an eleven-point scale from 'not at all religious' to 'very religious', as opposed to the three categories used by the EVS. Based on comparing percentage responses with the 2000 EVS, we have collapsed the highest six ESS scores into the top EVS score. All others are considered to be 'not religious' or atheists. Looking at the proportion of self-identified 'religious' people by cohort in figure 2, we find that private religiosity, like religious attendance, has declined steadily within these societies across birth cohorts.

That said, there are some interesting divergences from the findings for religious attendance. First, the religious belief data lend support to the life cycle hypothesis that individuals become more religious as they age. Leaving aside the 2004 ESS, which is calibrated to match the 2000 EVS, the lines clearly shift upward across all cohorts with each survey wave. For example, among those born during 1955-65, the proportion describing themselves as religious leapt from 35 percent in 1981 (when they were aged 16-26) to almost 60 percent two decades later when they reached their 30s and 40s. This contrasts with the findings of some recent researchers who have noted no evidence of a

life cycle effect for religious affiliation in the British case. (Tilley 2003; Crockett & Voas 2006) Moreover, the link between aging and greater religiosity in this data appears to be strengthening among more recent cohorts, though we must be careful in interpreting 2000 data as there may have been a millennium period effect which temporarily raised religiosity.

**Figure 2.**

[Figure 2 here]

Source: EVS 1981, 1990, 1999-2000 & ESS 2004

\* Data for 2000 uses Norway responses from 1997

\*\* Data for 2004 from ESS which uses different question and different methodology

Within our ten country dataset, it is useful to prise apart cases where secularisation took place relatively early (France plus the five largely Protestant countries) from those where it has taken hold more recently (three Catholic countries plus part-Catholic Holland). The results are presented in figures 3 and 4. The data shows that weekly church attendance in the early-secularising (i.e. mainly Protestant) societies is effectively flat for those born after 1945 while it continues to plummet in the mainly Catholic societies. The decline in church attendance across all cohorts is roughly 10-20 percent in the early secularising countries, but 30-50 percent in the late-secularising ones.<sup>2</sup> Though beyond the scope of this paper, we may wish to ask whether these differences are caused by the different timing of secularisation (i.e. early vs. late) or by

Protestant-Catholic differences. The former would entail a certain 'exhaustion' effect whereby secularism loses momentum as it encounters progressively higher marginal resistance among those who remain religious. If, on the other hand, the Protestant-Catholic difference is key, divergent historical trajectories might explain the difference. For example, the link between Catholicism and nationalist mobilisation in Spain (i.e. Francoism) or Ireland, or the institutionalisation of confessional party cleavages in the Low Countries, and the dismantling of these structures in recent decades, may be responsible for rapid, recent Catholic secularisation. This might contrast with the successful social penetration of anti-clericalism in France as early as the Third Republic (1871) and the earlier spread of secular state education systems in Protestant Scandinavia and Britain. (Baycroft and Hewitson 2006)

**Figure 3.**

[Figure 3 here]

Source: EVS 1981, 1990, 1999-2000 & ESS 2004

\* Data for 2000 uses Norway responses from 1997

\*\* Data for 2004 from ESS which uses same question but different methodology

**Figure 4.**

[Figure 4 here]

Source: EVS 1981, 1990, 1999-2000 & ESS 2004

\* Data for 2004 from ESS which uses same question but different methodology

The picture is less distinct for private religiosity (see figs. 5 and 6), but differences are noticeable: whereas private religiosity declines by a substantial 20-30 percent across cohorts in the early-secularising societies, it dives by 30-40 percent in late-secularising ones. The evidence again points to a flattening out of secularisation. Here it is important to note that the cessation of secularising trends for religious belief (figure 5) should manifest itself in a different pattern than that found for attendance in figure 3, where we literally see the curves flatten out. This is because people return to religious belief (but not attendance) as they age, so we should expect downward sloping lines across cohorts, but upward-shifting lines with each survey wave. The proper metric of comparison is to compare the second, third, fourth or fifth points in each survey wave, and we find that these are roughly at the same religiosity level. This picture suggests a steady-state pattern in which younger people in the most secular societies are less religious than their elders but become just as religious over the life course, yielding little change in the overall level of religiosity. It is especially noteworthy that the trough of religiosity among the youngest cohort seems to have been reached in 1981 or 1991 rather than 2000.

It would appear that early-secularising societies have arrived at a baseline of around 5 percent church attendance and perhaps 40-45 percent private religiosity. Here it is worth noting that while private religiosity stands as one of the strongest of all religious indicators on the EVS, it is exceeded by some 10-15 points by belief in god. In the 2000 EVS, for example, 77 percent of respondents in early secularising societies affirmed their belief in god, even though just 64 percent claimed to be religious. Assuming that trends

in Catholic Europe follow those in the early-secularising countries, we may well see a future in which western European church attendance falls to very low levels even as society remains fairly evenly divided between religious and non-religious populations. This would appear to corroborate Grace Davie's (1994) observation that many Europeans are 'believing without belonging', though an equivalent number seem, as David Voas and others have observed, to be neither belonging nor believing.

**Figure 5.**

[Figure 5 here]

Source: EVS 1981, 1990, 1999-2000 & ESS 2004

\* No data for Norway in 2000

\*\* Data for 2004 from ESS, which asks a slightly different question and is calibrated to EVS 2000

**Figure 6.**

[Figure 6 here]

Source: EVS 1981, 1990, 1999-2000 & ESS 2004

\* Data for 2004 from ESS, which asks a slightly different question and is calibrated to EVS 2000

## Religiosity and Fertility

One postulate of second demographic transition theory is that secularisation is linked to lower fertility. (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004; van de Kaa 1987) Several studies examine the link between religiosity and fertility in Europe and the United States, and most have found a significant effect in at least some models. (Norris & Inglehart 2004: 110; Adsera 2004: 23; Berman, Iannacone and Ragusa 2005; Westoff and Frejka 2006; Berghammer, Philipov and Sobotka 2006) The fertility difference in terms of number of children ever born (among women aged 18 or over) between those who describe themselves as 'religious' and those who describe themselves as 'not religious' or 'atheist' averages between 50 and 60 points depending on the wave of the EVS or ESS we consider. In 2000, for example, adult females in the EVS who were religious bore 2.19 children over their lifetime as against 1.59 for the nonreligious. These numbers are misleading, however, since religious respondents tend to be older and thus are more likely to have completed their fertility and come from more fertile cohorts. Figure 7 attempts to surmount this difference by illustrating the difference in percentage terms by birth cohort and survey wave.

### **Figure 7.**



[Figure 7 here]

Source: EVS 1981, 1990, 1999-2000 & ESS 2004

\* No data for Norway

\*\* Data from ESS, which asks a slightly different question and is calibrated to EVS 2000

Clearly, there is an important difference between religious and secular fertility behaviour that does not disappear with cohort controls, but what about other controls? Table 2 employs multivariate analysis which demonstrates that religiosity remains a significant predictor of fertility in these ten countries when further control variables are applied. We thus accept the notion that the religious have higher fertility, but we will use the average secular-religious fertility differential within cohorts, net of outliers. This yields an average fertility differential of about 15-20 percent (net of outlying cohorts) which is in the range of the coefficient of .176 found for the EVS model.<sup>3</sup>

[Table 2 here]

### Projecting the Religious Proportion of the Population

Alone among the surveys considered here, the 1991 EVS asked respondents, 'Were you brought up religiously at home?' Cross-tabulating this question with the 'are you a religious person' question gives us a picture of how many religious individuals have left

the faith and how many of the secular have become religious. Here we focus upon the countries which secularised earliest as they are arguably in the vanguard of religious apostasy and thus closest to the endpoint envisioned in developmentalist secularisation theories. Table 3 provides data comparing the currently religious/nonreligious population with the population raised religiously/nonreligiously, by age and sex. Note the striking gender difference: women in 1991 at virtually all ages tend to be more religious than they were raised while the reverse is true for men. Previous research has highlighted the greater representation of women in the religious population *stock*, and this finding confirms that women are also overrepresented among religious retainers and converts in the net religious-secular *flow*.<sup>4</sup>

[Table 3 here]

If we assume that women tend to pass their values on to their children, this means that the religious population gains in strength from its skewed gender balance, though the analytically tricky issue of secular-religious mixed marriage may counter this.<sup>5</sup> Combined with higher religious fertility, this heralds religious growth in the future. On the other hand, as our previous models illustrated, age is an important predictor of religiosity in the 'Protestant' countries. The secular population is younger than the religious one, and hence more likely to be in the childbearing age range. Secularisation may therefore be able to prevail over demographically-driven religious growth.

If we use the above apostasy figures in combination with 1991 EVS data on the age structure, gender and size of the religious and non-religious population, we have the

basis for a 100-year projection of the religious-secular balance in the early secularising countries (see figure 10).<sup>6</sup> Any such exercise must remain highly speculative given the possibility for short-run political and social changes that affect religiosity, but in many situations in the past - as with the rise of Christianity in the first three centuries A.D. - demography has proved an enduring source of social change. (Stark 1996: 74-128) We begin with an assumption that religious women will have a constant total fertility rate of 1.8, as against 1.6 for nonreligious women. This represents an average intra-cohort fertility difference between religious and non-religious women in 1991 that is in the 10-15 percent range.<sup>7</sup>

Using table 3, we calculate a constant annual net 'migration' flow of apostates/converts between the religious and non-religious populations for each five-year age band. The results for the religious population are shown in table 4. In practice, the fluctuations in migration by age that we see are only partly the result of life cycle effects, and most likely reflect period or cohort effects or statistical fluctuations in the data. Consequently, we opt to smooth out fluctuations by averaging the flows into three 20-year age bands (see table 4).<sup>8</sup>

[Table 4 here]

Figure 8 shows the results of our projection under three scenarios. First is our expected scenario (1.8 vs. 1.6 religious-secular fertility gap, and 6-country conversion/apostasy trend), labeled '1816-E6'. Next comes a projection, labeled '1818-E6', which assumes the same conversion/apostasy, but no fertility gap (1.8 vs 1.8). Finally, we consider a scenario labeled '1816-E10' under which there is a 1.8 vs 1.6 religious-secular fertility

gap, but where conversion/apostasy flows are drawn from an average across *all ten* countries in this study (including fast-secularising Catholic ones). Figure 8 shows that secularisation has flattened out by around mid-century in the first two models, but continues strongly in the 1816-E10 model. To repeat: our prediction is that secularisation will begin to move in reverse after mid-century, culminating in a more religious picture in 2104 than in 2004. This runs counter to much of what has been written about west European religious trends.

**Figure 8.**

[Figure 8 here]

The big story behind the stalling of secularisation in our predicted (1816-E6) scenario is the major reduction in apostasy rates in the six early-secularising societies as compared to the rapidly-secularising Catholic countries. For instance, the difference between the two '1816' apostasy scenarios is 21 percent whereas the gap between 1816 and 1818 fertility scenarios is only 7 percent. In other words, three-quarters of the story of twenty-first century de-secularisation in northwest Europe can be attributed to the drying up of apostasy flows and one quarter to higher religious fertility. Note, however, that religious fertility still has a substantial 7-point impact on the religious-secular balance in 2104. If the religious-secular fertility gap widens, as some (Adsera 2004) claim is now occurring, this will have a dramatic impact in the long run, especially under conditions of religious stasis in which large-scale apostasy has ceased. Finally, demography is also important

because the female skew of the younger religious population raises the religious proportion of the population under all three scenarios.

A quarter of the projected trend can be explained by demography and three-quarters by reduced apostasy rates. This should prompt us to think theoretically about the social mechanisms which underlie falling apostasy rates. Why have religious apostasy rates slowed so dramatically in these northwestern European societies? Though beyond the scope of this article, several possibilities present themselves and could be pursued by further research. Supply-side theorists could plausibly argue that the growth of Evangelical and Charismatic sects in northwestern Europe reflects an increasingly deregulated and dynamic religious marketplace which may portend an even more dramatic religious revival than that predicted here. Invigorated attendance might have beneficent effects on religious beliefs more generally. A more theologically conservative religious population may in turn lead to even sharper religious-secular fertility differentials, as in Israel or the United States. On the other hand, secularisation theorists might counter that non-Christian immigration may be reducing ontological security among younger members of the ethnic majority and/or prompting a pause in the differentiation of society. Thus anti-immigrant (especially anti-Muslim) sentiment reinforces religiosity amongst Christians, and it is the (temporary) secular functions of religion that account for the observed trend, rather than unmet spiritual demand.

### The Impact of Immigration

Our discussion thus far presumes that the population of the most secular countries remains unaffected by immigration. Clearly the opposite is true for the countries under

consideration as all have below-replacement fertility and positive immigration. Our 2004 ESS data for the ten countries under study had a small Muslim sample of 3.2 percent, and these data show that younger Muslims are as religious as their elders. Trends across the full range of European countries sampled in the 2004 ESS show the same pattern, which diverges from the trend of religious decline with age that one can find for Christians.<sup>9</sup> These studies suffer from small Muslim sample sizes, but surveys focusing on ethnic minorities and immigrants show that most immigrants are more religious than their west European hosts. (van Tubergen 2006) The religious behaviour of second generation immigrants is therefore critical, and is the subject of several current studies.<sup>10</sup>

Data from three UK studies from of ethnic minorities in the 1994-2003 period also demonstrate strong Muslim religious retention in the second generation. We can see this in table 5, where those of Bangladeshi/Pakistani and Afro-Caribbean origin are many times more likely than the UK white population to express a religious affiliation, attend weekly or emphasise the importance of their faith in their lives. This is especially true of mainly Muslim ethnic groups like the Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, a finding confirmed for North Africans in a recent study of the Dutch case. (van Tubergen 2007) This reflects widely reported trends such as the relative youth and vitality of Muslim congregations in Britain and the fact that weekly Mosque attendance now exceeds weekly attendance for the Church of England.<sup>11</sup>

Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the UK also tend to be more religious than white Christians, adhering to Pentecostalist and other evangelical Protestant sects, though they acculturate more rapidly than Muslims to secular UK norms in the second generation. (Martin 2001) Notice also that while the second-generation of all immigrant ethnic

groups tends to gravitate to the UK norm, this is more true of attendance than belief.

Once again, the pattern of religious retention is particularly noticeable among Muslims, who will likely comprise a significant proportion - if not a majority - of future immigrants in heavily secular France and Protestant western Europe in the future.

[Table 5 here]

In addition, we find that of those who were raised in a particular faith, people of immigrant ethnic origins are far more likely than those of British origin to say they 'practice' their religion and that they participate in religious worship (see table 6). This is especially true of Muslims, and 2003 data show that British Muslims under 35 are if anything more likely to express a Muslim affiliation than those over 50.

[Table 6 here]

The combination of immigration, higher immigrant fertility, higher immigrant religiosity and Muslim religious retention will lead to a radical reshaping of the UK religious landscape. Already, as figure 9 shows, British Muslims and secular Britons have a comparable age profile. As the twenty-first century progresses, secular populations will age due to declining flows of Christian apostates and low fertility while Muslim demography and high (97%) second generation religious retention will allow Muslims to retain their youthful age profile.

**Figure 9.**

[Figure 9 here]

Source: UK Census 2001

The same dynamics will operate in other west European countries, echoing our earlier small-sample ESS 2004 findings. A recent Dutch study confirms these results: the proportion citing 'no religion' among second-generation Turkish (4.8% for N=566) and Moroccan (3.1% for N=514) Dutch respondents is far lower than the general population and differs little from the first generation, though attendance shows a modest decline. Multivariate analysis indicates that generation has no effect on the religious identity of respondents from these Muslim ethnic groups and only a modest impact on mosque attendance. (Phalet & Haker 2004: 17-22) Meanwhile, census-based Austrian projections indicate that affiliating Muslims will form between 14 and 26 percent of the national population by 2051 on the basis of a very conservative annual net immigration of 20,000. (Goujon et al. 2006) Europe's population has begun to decline in real terms during 2000-2005, some three decades after fertility dipped below replacement. Given this decline, levels of immigration may increase for economic reasons, and we may see nonwhites forming half the population in several countries by 2104. In the United States, for instance, this point will already have been reached by 2050. (Kaufmann 2004: 211)

Naturally, any exercise in projection is only as robust as its assumptions, but it is worth noting that ours are developed from surveys of respondents born throughout the twentieth century who responded to surveys across a 25-year period. Yet some inputs are more predictable than others. For instance, given the results of our multivariate analysis and our statistics on generational fertility patterns, it would be very surprising if secular-religious fertility differentials decline. Assuming that fertility differentials between the



religious and non-religious remain as they have for cohorts throughout the twentieth century, we can see how age, sex and fertility structures constrain the direction of future religious change. Thus the imminent death of religion in Europe seems extremely unlikely. This dovetails with Austrian census-based projections showing a long term slowing or reversal in the growth of the religiously unaffiliated population in that country - a population which has hitherto expanded rapidly, but has a fertility rate of just .86 children per woman and may begin to decline by 2021. (Goujon et al. 2006)

Apostasy scenarios may vary more, but again, it is difficult to discern a return to higher rates of religious apostasy in the most secular six countries on the basis of a sustained post-1945 generational trend, sampled over a 25 year span. In short, an acceleration in religious apostasy rates appears as unlikely as a major religious revival. Should surveys show the religious population remaining stable in the early secularising countries in the next decade or two, longer-term religious growth will become increasingly likely. This does not mean that major change is impossible, however, especially in the event of major shocks, such as a large-scale terrorist attack in a major European city or sharply increased inter-ethnic violence.

Immigration - especially Muslim immigration - may also vary widely, though it is worth mentioning that the general trend over the past two decades has been toward higher than predicted levels, recently bolstered by concerns about soaring dependency ratios in the context of aging and declining ethnic majority populations. Thus, the recent Danish and Dutch immigration reductions run counter to the wider European trend of increased immigration exemplified by such countries as Britain, Germany, Spain or Italy. The most recent ethnic projections for northwestern Europe put the non-European origin population

of these countries at 15-25 percent by 2050, with Muslims comprising perhaps 10-15 percent of the total, up from 2-3 percent today. (Coleman and Scherbov 2005; Coleman 2006) Muslim fertility will almost certainly converge toward the host society mean over several generations, but there is no basis for predicting any significant decline in Muslim religious retention rates. Once again, however, major changes in the international security and ideological climate could conceivably result in a less mobilised sense of Islamic identity among European Muslims, leading to greater apostasy and inter-faith marriage. All told, while we project a modestly more religious Europe in 2100 than in 2000, we need to exercise caution in making definitive statements since a number of unpredictable conditions could alter this scenario.

## Conclusion

This essay has tried to address some of the shortfalls in the current literature on secularisation in Europe which have been caused by an insufficient consideration of demographic dynamics. Most participants in this debate tend to frame their arguments in the form of either secularisation theory or supply-side theory, both rooted in the sociology of religion. However, a further possibility is that an equilibrium has been reached on the sociological front, in which case demographic factors become more central. In the ten west European societies we have sampled, we find evidence of generational decline in both participation and belief, suggesting that the secularisation theory has validity. However, this is skewed by Catholic societies like Ireland and Spain, where religiosity is high and secularisation is proceeding rapidly. By contrast, in France and the mainly Protestant countries, secularisation took hold much earlier. These

societies are in the forefront of secularisation, thus we need to look to them to find out where the future of religion lies.

What we find is that the more secular societies have reached a level of developmental 'maturity' in which secularisation seems to have run its course. Religious attendance has flatlined at around five percent of the total, but the proportion of the population expressing religious beliefs remains close to 50 percent, suggesting a 'believing without belonging' dynamic among a large segment of the population. (Davie 1994) Religious beliefs are not a lightly-held survival from a past era: indeed, nonattending believers are significantly more like attenders than the nonreligious when it comes to fertility behaviour, and there is evidence that the same is true for ideological self-placement.<sup>12</sup>

In the absence of sizeable shifts in a society's *weltanschauung* toward religiosity or secularism, the oft-neglected demographic dimension of religious change takes over. This is evident in our projections of the religious share of the population in the six most secular countries in our study. Differences in the age and sex structure of religious and secular base populations, and among the flow of converts and apostates, combine with secular-religious fertility differentials to produce some surprising contrasts. First of all, the long-term predicted trend in these societies is toward a *growing* religious population well before 2050. The biggest reason for this shift is the virtual cessation of net religious apostasy among those born after 1945 in these six societies. Muslim immigration and religious retention will also have a strong and rapid impact, but there are further demographic reasons for us to predict the revival of religion in the most secular countries of western Europe.

First, the fertility difference between secular and religious populations in these countries will raise the religious share of the population by 7 points over the course of the twenty-first century. Second, females are overrepresented among those under 45 who remain religious. Females are critical to population growth and childrearing, and thus their disproportionate religiosity has a major effect on the overall trend. Set against these currents is the younger age structure of the secular population stock and the relative youth of religious apostates. The demographic momentum of previous generations of secularisation will take three or four decades to pass, and will keep the religious share of the population on a gently declining trend for several decades. Thereafter, de-secularisation will begin to escalate unless patterns of religious apostasy return to earlier levels.

This is not the end of secularisation, which will continue with vigour in Catholic Europe, as it may in the United States. (Hout and Fischer 2002) However, in the 'post-secularising' atmosphere of France and Protestant Europe, the steady-state outlook for secularism by the mid twenty-first century is one of gradual, long-term reversal. Add to this the dramatic impact of European Islamic growth and religious retention, and a picture emerges which is distinctly at odds with developmental 'End of History' narratives that foresee the end of religion and religious conflict.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Exceptions being the studies on Britain and the Netherlands which confirm that the decline in religiosity is a generational rather than life cycle effect. (Voas & Crockett 2005)

<sup>2</sup> These figures are based on weekly attendance. Some claim that weekly attendance may not be as good an indicator as monthly attendance within the main European churches that are not congregationally organised, though the trends in this data hold for both monthly and weekly attendance. For a general critique of weekly attendance figures, see Hadaway et al. 1993.

<sup>3</sup> In surveys where samples for the oldest and youngest cohorts are small, numbers tend to fluctuate a great deal, thus these results are omitted.

<sup>4</sup> Hayes (1996) also finds that women are significantly less likely to switch denomination, but did not note the prominence of women among converts from secularism.

<sup>5</sup> See Hayes (1996: 644) for further references on the role of women in the transmission of religious values. Religious couples may fail to pass on their values to their children, of course, something which we cannot test from our survey data. There is also the question of the impact of mixed marriages between secular and religious people on the level of secularisation, which falls outside the scope of this paper. Voas finds that mixed marriages in Britain and the Netherlands tend to lead to apostasy among formerly religious spouses. However, these two studies are a) based upon measures of religious affiliation rather than religiosity, and b) remain unclear about whether those who leave their religious affiliation after marriage to a secular spouse are self-selected to do so. In

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addition, 'the religiously sterilising' effect of mixed marriage appears to vary with the degree of secularism in the country such that there is no similar effect in the more religious context of the United States. (Voas 2003: 91-3) All told, it is difficult to infer that 'religious' people are becoming 'not religious' or 'atheists'. It may therefore be the case that marriage patterns reflect, rather than affect, overarching patterns of secularisation.

<sup>6</sup> Assumes that the tempo of fertility in all cases follows a 'late fertility' pattern and standard developed country mortality schedule based on the Brass General Standard. Assumes constant fertility differences and constant levels of religious-secular 'migration' by age and sex throughout the duration of the projection. Projections use *People* version 3.0.

<sup>7</sup> Note that this figure is for the six most secular countries and is somewhat less than the 15-20 percent for all ten countries sampled.

<sup>8</sup> These grouping assumptions have important consequences for our projections because the unsmoothed data show a large influx of female converts in the 18-24 age group and a slow apostasy thereafter whereas the smoothed results assume a more modest influx of female converts into the childbearing age ranges. Smoothing substantially reduces the proportion of religious population in 2104, by around ten percentage points.

<sup>9</sup> Just over 400 Muslim respondents were captured in the 2004 ESS, of which 173 lived in the ten countries studied in this article.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the 'Muslim Communities in Europe' study or the new NORFACE research programme on the 'Re-emergence of Religion as a Social Force in Europe' <<http://www.norface.org>>.

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, 'UK Mosque Goers to Double Church Attendance: Stud',  
Ureader.co.uk 29 October 2005 <<http://www.ureader.co.uk/message/2123353.aspx>>

<sup>12</sup> Our analysis found that religious belief significantly predicted left-right self-placement (in a conservative direction) in these ten societies when controlling for demographic background variables.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Fukuyama 1992 or Norris & Inglehart 2004.