The end of secularization in Europe? A socio-demographic perspective

Journal Article

The secularization debate involves a lengthy time horizon and competing predictions over mankind's cultural future (Swatos and Olson 2000). Each party possesses its cherished 'master narratives': taken-for-granted outlooks regarding where we have come from and where we are going, which can structure interpretations of data (Taylor 2007: 427-8; 2009). In addition, the immense complexity of the terms 'religion' and 'secularization' and their symbiotic historical and etymological relationship problematize the issue (Casanova 1994). Notwithstanding these difficulties, at the most basic level, there exist competing visions concerning the relative trajectory of distinct 'secular' and 'religious' populations. With so much at stake, it is surprising that two major aspects of religious change in Europe have generally been overlooked: first, shifts in the *rate* (rather than merely the direction) of religious change; second, the population dynamics of religious change, i.e. demography. Demography is especially important for narratives of change, because it is the most predictable of the social sciences. One can use population age and sex structures, as well as migration patterns and fertility and mortality trends to make reasonable predictions about the future religious character of a population. If we assume that people's current religious preferences are unrelated to their previous views or those of their parents, and that people change their religiosity as they might a pair of clothes, then we may safely disregard demographic analysis. However, given that this is manifestly not the case, demographic approaches to the study of religion's rise or decline are essential. Moreover, demographic projections of religious composition become feasible - not as definitive predictions, but to reveal how the macro trend of religious growth or decline is affected by demographic factors and current switching patterns. In this paper, we use cohort component projections of Austria, Switzerland and

Spain to help inform the empirical picture deployed by secularization theorists and their adversaries.

Trends in religious conversion and apostasy in the 'native' European-origin population vary markedly between countries in Europe, and these social changes lie behind most of the variation in rates of religious decline between European countries (Greely 2002; Davie 1994; Halman and Draulans 2006). This study builds upon these observations, adding that rates of change can shift over time *within* societies as well as between them. In particular, it finds that rates of socially-driven religious decline seem to be most rapid when societies first undergo 'secularization' (in Steve Bruce's 2002 formulation) but tend to taper off in subsequent periods.

This paper also adds a demographic dimension, which it argues will become progressively more consequential for the European religious panorama in the twenty-first century. Demography is shaped by cultural and economic forces, but once 'birthed', population dynamics acquire a causal power which can reshape the social. The most important of these new demographic factors are religious fertility and religious immigration.[1] First of all, the growing importance of values in determining family size (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004) means that religious native-stock European women have significantly higher fertility than their 'secular' counterparts. Second, current patterns of immigration, coupled with differences in age structure and fertility between those of European and non-European descent as well as lower losses through conversion to other religions and secularism, are radically reshaping the region. Already, non-Europeans have changed the face of western Europe, especially the cities. Their numbers will triple

by 2050, and, towards the end of our century, those of unmixed European ancestry may be in the minority (Coleman and Scherbov 2005; Coleman 2006, 2009, 2010).

Importantly, these non-European immigrants tend to be more religious – typically Muslims or Christians - than their host populations (Phalet 2010). The limited evidence for second generation minority populations suggests that religious decline will occur more slowly (if at all) among them than it has among the majority population. In short, scholars can no longer juxtapose the religious exceptionalism of minorities with the secular European mainstream when minorities become mainstream. These interlocking trends – decelerating rates of net exit from religion, religious immigration and religious fertility – may signal a modest rebound of religion in western Europe by the mid-twenty first century.

The Secularization Debate

The term secularization is a contested concept, first used by Christian commentators in their discussion of secular time, which some suggest is reflective of a peculiar pattern of western theological modernization (Casanova 1994). Others aver that the term is a useful descriptor of reality and possesses two dimensions, one public (i.e. institutional relations between religion and the state) and one private (i.e. personal piety, whether in the form of beliefs, practice or affiliation). This study is concerned with the latter, but rather than enter into the wider debate over secularization, this paper narrows its focus to the less loaded question of religious decline. Consider, for example, the European trend of growing post-Christian, individualized spirituality among the young and well-educated. These individuals reject spiritual authority and conventional religious

categories (including ‘god’) but also spurn rationalistic atheism and embrace an immanent form of belief (Houtman and Aupers 2007; Taylor 2007: 507-16). For us, this represents religious decline, but its relationship to secularization remains ambiguous.

On both sides of the debate, there is wide agreement that religiosity can rise and fall over time. Secularization theorists claim that human development, social differentiation, expressive individualism and cultural relativism lead to religious decline in modern societies (Bell 1996 [1976]; Dobbelaere 2000; Bellah [1985] 1996). Revivals are driven by human insecurity or ‘secular’ movements like ethno-nationalism and regionalism which use religious symbols and institutions to mobilize people (Bruce 2002; Martin [1978] 1993). Advocates of the supply-side perspective maintain that religious decline is a feature of societies with a poorly developed religious marketplace. In particular, those with an established religion tend to spawn a lax religious establishment which fails to cater to the wide spectrum of religious demand latent in a population. Revivals are linked to new religious innovators who tap unmet spiritual demands (Stark and Iannaccone 1994; Stark and Finke 2000: 57-79).

While both secularization and religious markets theorists agree that religious decline is possible, religious trends have theoretical implications because secularization theorists posit a link between modernizing processes and religious decline while religious markets theorists declare them largely independent. So religious decline over time tends to be taken as confirmation of the secularization paradigm (and a rise as evidence for religious markets) even if the theories cannot be strictly judged on this evidence. Thus even the ‘facts’ (i.e. data) of religious decline or revival tend to be fiercely contested. For western Europe, some analyses of 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). Others discern variation between countries on these measures, with trajectories turning on whether the variable of interest is religious practice, belief, traditionalism or 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 religious decline (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). This work builds on these nuanced studies of religious trends in western Europe by highlighting variations in attendance and belief both between and within particular countries. However, this paper remains agnostic as to whether these patterns are best explained by secularization or religious markets perspectives.

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 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 institutionalized 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 and secularization 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. Hout, Greeley and Wilde (2001) find that three-quarters of the growth of conservative Protestant denominations against their liberal counterparts is due to fertility advantage rather than conversion.

In Europe, there has been less attention paid to fertility differences between denominations. However, 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 modest 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). All of which indicates that religious decline may fail at the aggregate level even if it is occurring at the individual level (Kaufmann 2006; 2010). This article thereby investigates the hypothesis that *a combination of higher religious fertility, immigration and slowing rates of religious apostasy will eventually produce a reversal in the decline of the religious population of western Europe.*

Data and Methods

In order to test this hypothesis, this paper draws upon data from several sources. These include the EVS of 1981, 1990, 1999-2000, 2008 and the second wave European Social Survey (ESS) of 2004. We use these datasets because of their combined historical time-span (30 years) and the fact that they ask the same (or similar) questions on

religiosity and fertility. This study also draws upon three surveys of ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom to examine Muslim religious dynamics (Berthoud et. al 1997; Home Office 2003; Office for National Statistics and Home Office 2005), and complements this with Austrian, Swiss and British census data. These are the only west European countries (bar Ireland) to ask a religion question on their census.

The study is limited to ten west European countries, with roughly 1000 cases per country in a given year. Countries included are Spain, Belgium, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Britain, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Sweden. These countries were selected because they are the only cases that were sampled across all waves of the EVS and ESS on the research questions of interest. This therefore maximizes the number of countries and cases within the constraint of repeated measures over time.[2] Rather than weighting each country sample by its population, they have been aggregated in additive fashion to prevent larger countries skewing the results.

Though these countries only represent a sample of European nations, we believe they broadly represent 'western European' (i.e. all but eastern Europe) trends. To situate the dataset in a European context, one can examine the same ten countries using data from the World Christian Database (WCD), aggregate them the same way, and see how their combined degree of nonreligiosity - this time measured in terms of no religious affiliation - compares with Europe as a whole.[3] The comparison is not perfect, of course, since our terms of reference are not identical. The WCD works with aggregated baptismal data, which gives a good measure of affiliation, while we are more interested in attendance and subjective measures of religious belief, which come from the EVS, ESS and minority surveys.[4] That said, the comparison with WCD agnosticism data in figure 1

does help reassure us that this sample, labeled '10 dataset' in figure 1, is not exceptional within western Europe.

[Figure 1 here]

Source: World Christian Database 2008. Note: data not available for identical time intervals.

Evidently the sample used in this analysis, which blends cases fairly evenly from the WCD regions of northern, western and southern Europe, is well within the bounds of the four regional European trends, though lying closest to the northern European pattern.

Results

Has religious decline occurred in these ten countries? Most contemporary analyses examine aggregate trends over time or inter-cohort trends at one point in time (i.e. Norris and Inglehart 2004; Voas 2009).[5] Here we utilise the EVS time-series of nearly thirty years to provide an age-period-cohort (APC) analysis to distinguish life cycle, period and cohort trends. The standard WVS/EVS question on religious attendance for 1981, 1990, 2000 and 2008 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 (0 or 1) variable for tabulation purposes, coded to distinguish between those who attended weekly or more (1) and the rest, i.e. those who attended monthly or less (0). The ESS 2004

adopted the exact same question, so coding strategy is identical. The results are presented in figure 2 for ten-year cohorts, with the percentage of weekly attenders along the Y-axis and ten-year birth cohorts along the X-axis. Lines represent different survey wave years. Notice that there is a pronounced pattern of declining religious attendance as we move from left to right, from the earliest to the most recent birth cohorts.[6]

In addition, attendance is declining with each survey so the most recent lines are below the older ones, apart from a jump in the 2000 EVS which may be a period effect. Also evident is the lack of any life-cycle pattern whereby respondents return to worship as they get older: the five wave lines do not shift upwards in chronological order with 1981 at the bottom and 2008 at the top. This appears to confirm the findings of secularization theory, which argues that religious attendance falls across generations and does not revive as one ages through the life course.

[Figure 2 here]

Source: EVS 1981, 1990, 1999-2000, 2008 and ESS 2004

* Data for 2000 uses Norway responses from 1997

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

To get at Davie's 'believing without belonging' argument, one must probe private religious belief. The EVS 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'.[7] Looking at the proportion of self-identified 'religious' people by cohort in figure 3, We find that individual religiosity, like attendance, has declined steadily within these societies across

birth cohorts, with those born more recently, ie. 1985-94, much less religious than those born earlier, i.e. 1935-44. The same cannot be said for spirituality: the EVS question, 'How spiritual are you?' reveals that in 2008, approximately half of those across all age cohorts count themselves as 'somewhat' or 'very' interested. Moreover, recent findings from the ISSP 2008 show that the belief in life after death is higher among younger than older age groups, while belief in god shows the reverse pattern. This has led Voas to remark that the 'afterlife has replaced God' among European youth (Voas 2010). In essence, the EVS religion question, which exhibits inter-cohort decline, does not seem to be tapping a generalized spirituality.

Is this proof of west European religious decline? Yes and no. True, the trend is toward decline across generations. Yet there are some interesting divergences from the attendance patterns in figure 2. First, the data on self-assessed religiosity support the life cycle hypothesis that individuals become more religious as they age. This is an interesting departure from the secularization position, and contrasts with the pattern we noted for attendance. The lines generally shift upward across all cohorts with each survey wave, though there was a significant increase over 1990-2000 and a decrease between 2000 and 2008 (this seems to be a 2000 period effect). For example, among those born during 1955-64, the proportion describing themselves as religious rose from 42.5 percent in 1981 (when they were aged 16-26) to 54.9 percent three decades later when they reached their 40s and 50s. This *religious intensity* pattern contrasts with the findings of some who, for the British case, find no evidence of the return of the aged to religious *affiliation* (Tilley 2003; Crockett and Voas 2006).

[Figure 3 here]

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

* Data for 2000 uses Norway responses from 1997

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

Within the ten country dataset, one can distinguish cases where religious decline took place relatively early (France plus Nordic countries and Britain) from those where it has taken hold more recently (three Catholic countries plus half-Catholic Holland). Why do this? Because one would expect, from religious markets logic, that certain religious consumers gain more utility from their religiosity than others for the same 'price', i.e. they place different values (reserve prices) on their faith despite paying the same market price. When religious norms give way to secular ones, the costs of leaving religion fall and the price of remaining rises (viz. shifting individual budget constraints and utility functions), such that those who leave are likely to be individuals who do not value their religious goods as highly. People begin to exit until marginal utility equals marginal cost. As increasing numbers leave, reserve prices approach market prices and the marginal propensity to leave falls.

Thus we would expect the *rate* of decline to be lower in societies that have experienced earlier falls in individual piety. In other words, there is an exhaustion effect in which religious decline loses momentum as it encounters progressively higher marginal resistance among the remnant who remain religious. The data, presented in figure 4, show that the percentage of weekly church attenders in the 'early-declining' (i.e. mainly Protestant) societies is effectively flat for those born after 1945. By contrast, in the late-declining (mainly Catholic) societies, postwar cohorts born more recently, i.e.

1985-94, are much less likely to attend than those born earlier, i.e. 1945-55. The decline in church attendance across all cohorts is roughly 10-20 percent in the early-declining countries, but 30-50 percent in the late-declining ones.[8] David Voas, who has examined a wider range of European countries (albeit at just one point in time) using 2007 ESS and 2008 ISSP data similarly confirms that 'in the most secular countries...the curve [of decline] appears to flatten out in the last couple of decades (Voas 2009; 2010).'

[Figure 4 here]

Source: EVS 1981, 1990, 1999-2000, 2008 and ESS 2004

* Data for 2000 uses Norway responses from 1997

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

The picture is different for private religiosity: inter-cohort declines are sharp in both early and late secularizing societies, but the return to religiosity across the life cycle appears to be considerably stronger among those in early secularizing countries to the extent that life-cycle effects broadly counterbalance cohort effects.

It would appear that in the ten west European societies we have examined, levels of religiosity appear to be approaching a baseline of around 5 percent church attendance 40-50 percent private religiosity. Moreover, it is worth noting that while individual religiosity stands as one of the strongest of all religious indicators on the EVS, it is exceeded by some 10 points by belief in god. In the 2008 EVS, for example, 64.8 percent of respondents in these ten countries affirmed their belief in god though just 55.6 percent claimed to be a religious person. Assuming that trends in Catholic Europe come to

resemble those in the early-declining countries, we may well arrive at a future in which western European church attendance falls to very low levels even as society remains fairly evenly divided between the religious and non-religious. 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.

Religiosity and Fertility

The patterns of religiosity detailed in the preceding analysis could have been produced by either demographic or social forces, but the swift pace of religious decline in the postwar period its distinctively age-graded profile incline us toward a sociological interpretation. The fact that the rate of religious decline has slowed in these west European societies may, however, offer an opening for demography to more significantly affect the religious composition of west Europe's population.

How might demography enter this picture? Second Demographic Transition theory postulates that as material factors fade and contraception becomes more readily available, values bulk larger as a determinant of family size. Accordingly, religious decline is associated with lower fertility (Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004). Several studies examine the link between religiosity and fertility in Europe and the United States, and most find a significant effect in at least some models. This holds whether religiosity is measured as belief, attendance or affiliation (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 110; Adsera 2011; Berman, Iannacone and Ragusa 2005; Westoff and Frejka 2007, 2008; Berghammer, Philipov and Sobotka 2006; Regnier-Loillier 2008; Hackett 2008). 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 somewhat skewed, however, since religious respondents tend to be older and are thereby more likely to come from more fertile cohorts and have completed their fertility than the nonreligious. But even when controlling for age, survey year, birth cohort, sex, education and income, table 1 shows that religious women in these ten countries still enjoy a significant fertility advantage over nonreligious women.[9] This is very much in line with the existing literature.

[Table 1 Here]

A further finding in the literature is that women are less likely to leave organised religion (Hayes 1996). These data confirm that this holds as well for religious attitudes. The 1991 EVS (but no other waves) asked respondents, 'Were you brought up religiously at home?' Cross-tabulating this question with the 'are you a religious person' item yields a picture of the number who have left or entered religion since early adulthood. Women were less likely than men to leave, especially in the important 18-45 year-old childbearing age range.[10] Mothers are more apt to influence their children's religious orientation than fathers (Lutz 1985; Blume, Ramsfel et al. 2006). Combined with higher

religious fertility, this gender influence may prove a source of religious growth in the future. Not all demographic indicators are favourable to religion, however: the nonreligious population is younger than the religious one, and hence more likely to have members in the childbearing age range from where endogenous growth springs. Furthermore, the relatively female skew of the actively religious population could redefine religion as a female pursuit, deterring male communicants.

The Impact of Immigration

Fertility differences - especially the modest differences noted in table 1 - do manifest themselves in compositional change, but only over a long period of time. Arguably the most important near-term demographic driver of religious change is immigration. Ethnic minority respondents are undercounted in the EVS, as indicated by the 1.4 percent Muslim component of the 2008 survey, well below the 2010 estimate of 4 percent Muslim for northern Europe and 6 percent for western Europe (Pew 2011). Our preceding discussion thereby presumes that the population of these ten countries remains largely unaffected by immigration. Clearly the opposite is true for the countries under consideration as all have below-replacement fertility and positive immigration.[11]

The 2004 ESS data for the ten countries under study had a more representative Muslim sample (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 notices among most European Christians.[12] These studies suffer from small Muslim sample sizes, but surveys which sample ethnic minorities and immigrants show

that most are more religious than their west European hosts (van Tubergen 2006). Moreover, studies of second generation ethnic Turks and Moroccans in Holland, Sweden, Belgium and Germany show relative stability of religiosity between the immigrant and European-born generations (Phalet and Haker 2004: 17-22; Phalet 2010)

Affiliation data from three UK studies from of ethnic minorities in the 1994-2003 period also reveal strong religious retention in the second generation (Berthoud et al. 1997; Home Office 2003; Home Office and ONS 2005). This is true for Sikhs and Hindus, but especially true of 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 tallies with 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 at Church of England services.[13] Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the UK, many of whom adhere to Pentecostalist and other evangelical Protestant sects (Martin 2001), tend to be more religious than white Christians, though the second generation are far more likely to leave religion or intermarry with whites than their Muslim compatriots. Further work is needed to establish whether Christians of non-European origin will follow the native pattern of religious decline or the non-Christian inclination to remain religious.

The religiosity and fertility of most immigrants, coupled with non-Christian religious retention in the second generation, will reshape the European religious landscape. Currently, Muslim and religiously unaffiliated Britons have a comparable age profile: 70 percent of Muslims and 64 percent of nonreligious Britons are under 35, as compared with just 39 percent of the country's Christians (UK Census 2001). As the

twenty-first century progresses, secular populations may begin to age due to low fertility and declining flows of native Christian apostates.

Meanwhile, Muslim demography and high religious retention will permit western European Muslims to retain their youthful age profile (Phalet 2010). Muslim fertility has certainly been falling across western Europe in most countries (Westoff and Frejka 2007), as it has in the Muslim world. Yet there are several reasons to expect ongoing Muslim demographic expansion, including: 1) demographic momentum from today's youthful age structures; 2) migration from higher-fertility, less developed regions of Muslim countries (i.e. southeastern Turkey); 3) fertility rates remaining well above replacement in source countries (thus far only western Turkey, Tunisia, Iran and Morocco approach European TFRs); and 4) groups retaining higher fertility when in the minority. (Goldscheider 1971; Pew 2011)

Projections of Religious Change in Western Europe

It is possible to undertake cohort-component demographic projections of religious belief based on EVS data (models available upon request) but belief is arguably a less concrete category than affiliation (Skirbekk, Kaufmann and Goujon 2010). In addition, we cannot derive immigrants' and minorities' age structure data based on religious belief, so projections which integrate sociological switching, religious fertility and immigration are more difficult. However, it is possible to shed some light on what Europe's religious future may look like by using affiliation data, as this is asked on four west European censuses (Austria, Switzerland, Britain, Ireland) and contains sufficient sample sizes to

generalize about immigrants and minorities. Here we present findings for Austria and Switzerland as, unlike the other cases, it is possible to determine religion raised, and hence to adduce switching patterns.

We apply cohort component methodology to projecting affiliation in Austria and Switzerland as per the methodology and sources in (Goujon, Skirbekk et. al 2006; Goujon, Skirbekk et al. 2007).[14] Though not among the ten countries whose trends we analyzed above, the west European location of these two countries places them squarely within the purview of the trends examined in this paper.

Projections

Our projections use the censuses to derive a total fertility rate for women of all major religious affiliations, including those who state that they have no religion (see table 2). Note that even in these two low-fertility countries, the nonreligious have significantly fewer children than others while Muslim fertility rates, though modest, are well above the national average and over twice as high as the nonreligious rates.

[table 2 here]

We also build in immigration estimates drawing on immigrant source-country religious demography (from CIA World Fact Book), and incorporate Austrian and Swiss religious statistical yearbook data on religious switching for all 5-year age bands of each religion. A standard mortality schedule is used for all groups.

Selected results from these integrated projections are presented in figure 5. We limit the scope to nonreligious and Muslim populations to spotlight the difference between the largely sociologically-driven increase of the nonreligious group and the demographically-driven rise of the Muslim population. Two projected nonreligious population scenarios are displayed, the 'expected' projection based on existing (fast) rates of net switching to nonreligion, and a 'low decline' projection which assumes that net rates of religious apostasy slow to zero by 2026-31 at which point the flows between religion and nonreligion are deemed to neutralize each other for the remainder of the projection period.

[Figure 5 here]

Source: Dataset from Goujon, Skirbekk et al. 2007.

A number of striking patterns emerge from this exercise. Notice that in both countries, curves of Muslim growth to 2050 are rising, while those of the nonreligious are convex. This indicates that the demographic forces propelling Muslim growth are more powerful in the long run than the sociological ones powering nonreligion. Indeed, even if rates of secular attraction can be maintained at current levels – which entails increasing Muslim apostasy quite substantially – the demographic disadvantage of nonreligion leads it toward declining growth rates, with a plateau soon after 2050 and eventual decline.

Muslim resistance to disaffiliation and the flattening rates of religious decline we encountered in early-declining countries lead us to expect apostasy rates to begin to slow

in Catholic (or significantly Catholic) European countries like Austria and Switzerland as their religious decline matures. Should this come to pass, the desecularization point is reached as early as 2021 in Austria and 2026 in Switzerland. Regardless of which scenario one assumes, the take-home point is that even with losses from switching, demographic forces can reverse religious decline.

This should give pause to both secularization and religious markets theorists. Anyone familiar with the rapid growth rates of pronatalist religious groups like the traditionalist Mennonites of northwestern Alberta (who have made their remote region one of the fastest growing in rural Canada) or ultra-Orthodox of Israel (who have increased from several percent in 1960 to a third of Jewish first graders today) can attest to the power of demography to rapidly alter the religious balance in a territory (Kaufmann 2010). In a more modest sense, non-European immigration and religious fertility can have a similar effect. In fact one could readily imagine an equilibrium in which religious decline among individuals coexists with religious stability or modest increase at the collective level in twenty-first century Europe (Kaufmann 2006).

Any exercise in projection is partly dependent on its assumptions - though much less so than other social sciences given the demographic momentum locked into age structures. Some inputs are more predictable than others. For instance, given the existing literature, the results of the multivariate analysis in table 1, and the statistics on generational fertility patterns in the first four figures, it would be surprising if secular and religious fertility rates converge.

Assuming that fertility differentials between the religious and non-religious in western Europe remain as they have for cohorts throughout the twentieth century, our

projections show how age and fertility structures can alter the direction of future religious change. Apostasy scenarios may vary more, but again, it is difficult to discern a return to higher rates of disaffiliation in the least religious countries of western Europe on the basis of a sustained post-1945 generational trend, sampled over a 30-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-declining countries in the next decade or two, longer-term religious growth will become increasingly likely.

Immigration, both Muslim and Christian, may also vary, 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. Moreover, one of the most important determinants of the size and composition of the immigration flow are the existing ethnoreligious networks in the host country, which intimate that Muslim flows will continue (Pedersen, Pytlikova et al. 2006). 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; Pew 2011).

Conclusion

This essay has tried to address some of the shortfalls in the current literature on religious decline in Europe which have been caused by an insufficient consideration of a) changes in the *rate* of religious change; and b) the demographic dynamics of religion. Most participants in this debate tend to frame their arguments in the form of either secularization or supply-side theory, both rooted in unidirectional sociologies of religion. Neither rates of change nor demographic forces are considered.

In the ten west European societies sampled, we find evidence of generational decline in both participation and belief. However, this is skewed by Catholic societies like Ireland and Spain, where religiosity is high and religious decline is proceeding rapidly. By contrast, in France and the mainly Protestant countries, religious decline took hold much earlier and the marginal propensity to leave among the religious remnant is lower than it was in decades past. These less religious northwestern European societies have reached a level of 'maturity' in their religious decline. Weekly religious attendance has troughed 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).

In the absence of sizeable shifts in a society's *weltanschauung* toward religiosity or secularism, the oft-neglected demographic dimension takes over. Differences in the age and sex structure of religious and secular base populations and secular-religious fertility differentials and sex ratios play a role, but exert an impact only in the very long run. By contrast, non-European immigration and religious retention – especially among Muslims - makes a strong and rapid impact. Set against these currents is the younger age structure of the nonreligious population stock and the relative youth of new religious

apostates. Those who leave at younger ages will not return to the pews, but many will return to belief.

Demographic projections based on belief are difficult, but projections of affiliation - for countries where this is possible - provide a proxy, and they reveal that the demographic momentum of previous generations of religious decline will take three or four decades to pass. This will keep the religious share of the population on a gently declining trend for several decades. Thereafter, aggregate religious revival will begin to escalate unless people once again begin to leave religion at the rapid rates recorded during the mid-twentieth century.

This is not the end of religious decline, which will continue with vigour in Catholic Europe, as it may in the United States (Hout and Fischer 2002). A more assertive European anti-clerical atheism combined with the demise of multiculturalism could raise the cost of remaining religious. Moreover, other trajectories are possible. Major geopolitical changes could ease tension between Muslims and other Europeans; liberalizing theological shifts could pave the way for an increase in the rate of Muslim apostasy. Immigration could become ethnically controlled, as in Japan or Singapore, due to a surge of ethnic nationalism, thereby slowing the demographic growth of religion. A new vogue for family life might narrow the fertility gap between the secular and the religious. These changes would set European religious decline back on its formerly robust course.

However, in the absence of such changes, the steady-state outlook for western Europe by the mid twenty-first century is one of gradual, long-term reversal, probably around 2050. The dramatic impact of immigration and Muslim religious retention will

bring this process forward – even in Catholic countries – such that we may begin to see 'de-secularization' in western Europe in the coming decades. Indeed, this is already visible in the continent's religiously-vibrant immigration cities. We acknowledge that further research, using alternative datasets and methodologies, is required to confirm where the balance in Europe lies between religious decline through switching and religious growth through population change. In particular, scholars should pay attention not only to the valence of religious change but to shifts in *rates* of religious change.

The idea that religious decline among individuals can coexist with a modest rise in religiosity at the national level is a distinct possibility. All of which suggests that both altered rates of religious change and demography need to be more fully incorporated into the dominant secularization and religious markets paradigms.

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[1] Mortality differences between the religious and secular are unlikely to play an important role as such differences, if they exist, would largely take effect beyond the reproductive age range. In addition, we cannot estimate mortality for religious groups based on existing data. Hence we use a standard mortality schedule as per Skirbekk et al. 2010.

[2] See appendix 1 in www.sneps.net/RD/appendices.htm for further details.

[3] Note that this figure excludes atheists, so does not exhaust the 'nonreligious' category, but data inconsistencies led us to prefer the WCD's 'agnosticism' measure over a combined measure. There is roughly one atheist for every six 'agnostics' in Europe, and this is fairly consistent across regions and years.

[4] For an empirical evaluation of the WCD, see Hsu et. al 2008.

[5] One exception is David Voas' as yet unpublished study based on the 1991, 1998 and 2008 ISSP survey (Voas 2010).

[6] The only exception to this trend is the earliest (pre-1915) cohort.

[7] Naturally respondents' interpretation of 'religious' may encompass spiritual beliefs that some sociologists would place outside the bounds of 'religion' but the fact that more people in the survey declare themselves believers in God than 'religious' gives us some assurance that respondents have a traditional notion of what religion is.

[8] 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.

[9] See appendix 2 in www.sneps.net/RD/appendices.htm for coding details.

[10] See appendix 3 in www.sneps.net/RD/appendices.htm for methodological details. 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.

[11] France and Sweden have reached the replacement-level 2.1 period TFR in certain years, but this tends to form the higher end of a fluctuation which can dip as low as 1.75 in other years.

[12] Just over 400 Muslim respondents were captured in the 2004 ESS, of which 173 lived in the ten countries studied in this article.

[13] See, for example, Gledhill, Ruth, 'Churchgoing on its knees as Christianity falls out of favour,' *Times*, May 8, 2008

[14] Please see Goujon, Skirbekk et. al. 2006, 2007 for methodological details.