Western Europe: Religious Practice

In my last post, we looked at how many people in the countries of Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Spain, and Cyprus profess a God-focused worldview. Now let's consider some religious practices typically associated with an active faith. This worldwide survey did not ask many questions about religious practice, but the three questions asked highlight some interesting differences.

The three questions asked were:

1. Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you pray?
2. Do you have an active membership in a church or religious organization?
3. Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?

Let's look at the responses based on the country of the respondent, their religious preference, and their age (less than 30 or over 60). The "Pray" columns are those who pray daily or more often. The "Active" columns refer to those who say they have an active membership. The "Attend" columns are those who attend religious services once a month or more often.

Table 1 Those Actively Participating in Religious Practices

Country	Age	All (%)			Protestant {%}			Catholic (%)		
		Pray	Active	Attend	Pray	Active	Attend	Pray	Active	Attend
Germany	All	NA	14	20	NA	14	17	NA	27	35
	Under 30	NA	9	10	NA	13	7	NA	13	19
	Over 60	NA	18	25	NA	16	21	NA	31	48

Netherlands	All	19	11	17	65	46	64	31	18	30
	Under 30	9	6	11	42	42	77	20	5	21
	Over 60	26	16	24	70	48	67	38	22	39
Sweden	All	10	6	9	11	8	11	–	–	–
	Under 30	9	2	6	6	2	2	–	–	–
	Over 60	13	7	12	17	10	15	–	–	–
Spain	All	NA	7	20	–	–	–	NA	8	24
	Under 30	NA	3	6	–	–	–	NA	4	8
	Over 60	NA	14	41	–	–	–	NA	15	47
Cyprus	All	32	10	35	–	–	–	42	12	44
	Under 30	22	6	20	–	–	–	34	7	26
	Over 60	52	12	65	–	–	–	55	13	68

We see some widely varying results between countries and age groups, but none are very encouraging. How many say they pray daily or more often? In the Netherlands, almost 2 out of 3 Protestants and 1 out of 3 Catholics. The large number of Nones in the Netherlands drop the percentage for the country as a whole down to less than 1 out of 5. Sweden, on the other hand, has only about 1 out of 10 saying they pray regularly whether they are Protestant or otherwise. We will see how dismal this level is when we compare it to the United States later in this post.

Also, you can see that those under 30 are less likely to pray daily than older adults. However, the small number of adults of all ages praying daily is the dominant factor.

Being an active member of a church is a definite minority in all categories shown. Roughly one out of ten adults claim to be an active church member across all countries and age

groups. Once again, the relatively smaller number of young adults who claim to be active is overwhelmed by the small number across the board.

Those who attend church at least once a month reflect percentages almost equal with those who pray daily or more.

What does it look like when we consider those who combine all three of these characteristics as shown below?

Table 2 Those Who Pray at Least Daily, Are Members, and Attend Monthly or More

Country	Age	All (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Germany	All	9	7	19
	Under 30	3	1	7
	Over 60	13	10	25
Netherlands	All	8	39	10
	Under 30	4	35	5
	Over 60	12	43	12
Sweden	All	3	4	–
	Under 30	1	1	–
	Over 60	4	6	–
Spain	All	5	–	6
	Under 30	1	–	2
	Over 60	12	–	14
Cyprus	All	4	–	5
	Under 30	2	–	3
	Over 60	9	–	10

Note: For Germany and Spain this does not include “Pray at least daily”

Clearly none of these countries have a significant number of people who report a minimal amount of regular religious involvement. Only among Protestants in the Netherlands do we

see more than 1 in 10. The percent of Protestants in the Netherlands is small enough that only 8% of all people in that country report a minimal religious involvement.

Just looking at these three very simple practices, we see that the vast majority of people in all these countries do not actively practice their faith. And, those under the age of 30 are much less likely than their seniors to practice these characteristics.

Now let's compare the results for Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands with those from the United States as shown in table 3.

Table 3 United States Results Compared to Germany, Sweden and Netherlands (GSN)

Activity	Age	All (%)		Protestant (%)		Catholic (%)	
		U.S.	GSN	U.S.	GSN	U.S.	GSN
Pray daily	All	45	10	64	16	51	11
	Under 30	34	5	55	6	30	4
	Over 60	55	14	65	25	64	18
Active church member	All	35	11	54	17	40	23
	Under 30	26	6	40	10	34	11
	Over 60	42	15	58	22	48	27
Attend monthly or more	All	44	16	65	22	10	33
	Under 30	36	1	58	10	53	20
	Over 60	50	22	67	30	58	43
All three	All	26	4	45	9	27	4
	Under 30	15	1	32	3	14	1
	Over 60	35	6	48	13	41	6

As shown, the religious activities of Western Europeans lag significantly behind the level of activity practiced in the United States. When it comes to daily prayer, over 4 times as many Americans practice this activity across the general

population, the Protestant population and the Catholic population. Looking at only those under thirty, we find that over 7 times as many Americans practice daily prayer as do Western Europeans. This increase is not due to an increase in prayer among under 30’s in the United States, but rather due to a significant drop in daily prayer among young adult, Western Europeans.

The table shows similar levels of differences between people in the United States and those in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands. Consider the young adults who practice all three of these religious activities. The Americans practice these activities from 10 to 15 times as often as their Western European counterparts. Once again, these huge differences are not due to high levels of faithfulness among Americans. Americans claim only 15% of those under 30 practice all three activities. But rather by the lack of faithfulness among Western Europeans; where only 1% claim to practice all three.

This look at the data on three questions, which describe a very nominal degree of commitment to one’s religious life, clearly shows that Western Europe has a very small remnant of active Christ followers. Without looking at this data, you probably would have agreed with the statement above. But now, you know how significant the problem really is. If they represent the rest of Western Europe, we see that the places where Protestantism was born and initially flourished have become places where Christian religious practice is relegated to a few and ignored by the many.

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Western European Religious Makeup

This is the fifth of a series of posts reporting on our analysis of the survey data collected by the World Values Survey project. Surveys were conducted in 57 countries between 2010 and 2014. In all, over 85,000 people were interviewed for these surveys. The survey had fifteen questions directly concerning religious beliefs and practices. But it also had questions in a number of areas that related to how people applied their religious beliefs to cultural and political issues.

The first four blogs dealt with the North American countries, the United States and Mexico. With this post, I begin a series on the beliefs across the five European countries included in the survey process: Germany, Norway, Sweden, Spain and Cyprus.

As you probably know, Germany and Sweden were at the heart of the Protestant revolution, with the Netherlands following in their footsteps. Spain and Cyprus retained a much stronger connection to Roman Catholicism. Let’s see how their self-declared religious affiliations line up today.

Table 1 | Religious Denomination					
Country	Age	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)	None (%)	Other (%)
Germany	All	29	33	31	6
	Under 30	29	34	30	7
	60 plus	33	38	28	1
Sweden	All	2	61	34	3
	Under 30	1	49	43	7
	60 plus	2	69	29	0

Netherlands	All	18	16	64	3
	Under 30	11	10	75	4
	60 plus	25	21	54	1
Spain	All	73	2	24	1
	Under 30	63	2	33	2
	60 plus	86	1	13	0
Cyprus	All	68	1	7	25
	Under 30	53	1	9	36
	60 plus	90	0	4	5

As shown the countries vary widely in their self-professed religious makeup. All of them, except Cyprus, have a significant percentage of Nones ranging from 24% in Spain to 64% in the Netherlands. Sweden, Netherlands and Spain have a significant increase in Nones among those under the age of 30 as we also observed in the United States and Mexico.

Apart from the Nones, each nation is somewhat unique in its distribution. Germany is almost equally split between Catholics, Protestants and Nones. Sweden has Protestants as a strong majority at the level of Protestants plus Catholics in Germany. The Netherlands has a strong majority of Nones with the remainder evenly split between Catholics and Protestants. Spain, of course, has a strong majority of Catholics and almost no Protestants. Cyprus also shows a strong majority of Catholics with a strong minority of Muslims among the younger generations.

As we will see in the following blogs, many of those who selected Protestant or Catholic denominations are not involved with the church in any significant way.

Pluralism

In the first blog of this series on the religious preferences of the United States and Mexico, we looked at how many agreed with this statement, “The only acceptable religion is my religion.” Let’s look at how this question was answered in Western Europe.

Table 2 | Agree or Strongly Agree: The Only Acceptable Religion is My Religion			
Country	Age	Catholic (%)	Protestant (%)
Germany	All	33	30
	Under 30	22	23
	60 plus	49	30
Sweden	All	16	8
	Under 30	0	4
	60 plus	30	12
Netherlands	All	10	25
	Under 30	19	36
	Under 60 plus	12	23
Spain	All	28	32
	Under 30	26	39
	60 plus	35	25
Cyprus	All	54	71
	Under 30	40	67
	60 plus	69	100

Note: Shaded areas did not have enough respondents to make the data useful

As shown, in Germany only about one in three Catholics and Protestants would say their religion is right and others are wrong. Those under thirty are much less likely to make that assertion. In any case, the vast majority of Germans take a

pluralistic view.

Swedes are much less likely that Germans to agree with this statement, with fewer than one in ten taking a non-pluralistic position. Protestants in the Netherlands are similar to Germans, but Catholics are significantly more pluralistic. Catholics in Spain are also similar to those in Germany.

Except for Cyprus, all the countries had the vast majority of those affiliated with a Christian church taking a pluralistic view.

It is interesting to note that on this question Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands combined were generally consistent with the United States. Mexico and Spain were also fairly consistent, with 49% of Mexicans and 32% of Spaniards taking a non-pluralistic view.

Clearly for Western Europeans, whether they claim to be Catholic or Protestant, most reject the teachings of the Bible in favor of a pluralistic doctrine. They change John 14:4 from "I am **the** way, the truth and the life" to "I am **a** way, **a** truth and **a** life."