

# THE OLDER, THE MORE RELIGIOUS?

## ANALYZING LIFE-COURSE RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN CONSECUTIVE GENERATIONS

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**Ádám Hámori – Anna Luxné Prehoda**



PÁZMÁNY PÉTER  
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY



NATIONAL RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT  
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# Life-course change in personal religiosity?

- religious change is strongly linked to intergenerational value change (Inglehart – Welzel 2005)
- British Household Panel Survey and British Social Attitudes surveys: belief has in fact eroded in Britain, decline is generational (Voas – Crockett 2005)
- religious affiliation, regular attendance at worship, and religious belief show nearly identical rates of intergenerational decline that has not been offset by any positive age effects in an aging society (Crockett – Voas 2006)
- personal religiosity shows a high degree of stability during life-course, secularization in Western Europe is, to a great extent, a result of generational replacement processes (Voas – Doebler 2011)

# Life-course change in personal religiosity?

- New Haven site of the Established Populations for Epidemiologic Studies of the near-deceased Elderly, religiousness at baseline (1982) and follow-up interviews in 1985, 1988, 1994: attendance at religious services declined, either stability or a small increase in feelings of religiousness and strength/comfort received from religion, overall levels of attendance and religious feelings high (Idler et al. 2001)
- 1970 British Cohort Study & 2012 sweep: large uncertainty in measurement, hard to detect genuine change; considerable unreliability in reported past and present affiliation; substantial proportion of teenagers who reported that religion was an important part of their lives became relatively unreligious adults (Voas 2015a)
- not only do religious agents on the supply side need time to adjust, the time lag is probably even greater among individuals on the demand side of the religious market; (Hagevi 2017)

# Life-course change in personal religiosity?

- World Values Survey/European Values Study 1981 to 2013: older age was associated with greater personal and organizational religious involvement, but this association differed by culture, with the largest mean effects occurring in Western nations (age effect)
- increase in per capita gross domestic product being related to declines in mean religious involvement, change was heterogeneous in direction and magnitude (period effect)
- individual aging processes and changes in the material environment may influence changes in religious involvement, but culture also plays a role in the nature and speed of these changes, cohort effect only in relatively few societies

(Hayward – Krause 2015)

# Life-course change in personal religiosity?

- robust empirical relationships between religion and material outcomes; to identify causes of these patterns, theoretical explanation offered of the religion-inequality link (status attainment and life course research, religion as both a background and a mediating component) (Keister 2011)
- Hungary: cohort effect applies only to the decrease of church-affiliated traditional religiosity, while increasing individualised religiosity of youth is more likely an outcome of biographical changes (Rosta, 2007)

# Factors of religious change

- National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972: religious participation increases with age during young adulthood, age and family formation (including divorce, cohabitation, and its dissolution) are interacting causes of religious participation; effects vary with age (Stolzenberg et al. 1995)
- in more secularized countries the religious family's impact on the religiosity of their children had the most powerful effect (Kelley, De Graaf, 1997)
- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) in 1994-95 and 2001-02: decreasing frequency of religious practice, diminished importance of religion and disaffiliation from religion, those who avoid college exhibit the most extensive patterns of religious decline, marriage curbs religious decline, while cohabitation, nonmarital sex, drugs and alcohol use accelerate diminished religiosity, especially religious participation (Uecker et al. 2007)
- 1975 and 1992 Wisconsin Longitudinal Study panel data: marriage and parenthood were positively associated with church attendance, divorce/separation has negative effects on church attendance; getting divorced had a significantly stronger negative impact on Catholics than Mainline Protestants (Patel et al. 2013)

# Effects of religious change on values

- US: changes in religious giving reflect changes in religious involvement: members of prewar cohort increased their religious giving and attendance as they aged, baby boomers in middle adulthood give less than expected to religion and attend less (Wilhelm et al. 2007)
- religiosity inversely associated with use and misuse of substances, decrease in religiosity from childhood was associated with increased likelihood of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use in the past year; however, increase in religiosity was also associated with past-year alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use. Findings support the use of a life course approach to understanding the relationship between religiosity and substance use outcomes. (Moscati – Mezuk 2014)
- 2011 Canadian General Social Survey, French-speaking Quebecers: having grown up with unmarried parents has no effect on the hazard of divorce/separation, religious attendance does have an effect despite its decreasing importance (Laplante 2016)

# Aspects of religious change

- intergenerational longitudinal study of the IHD at UCB, data spanning early (30s) and older (late 60s/mid-70s) adulthood: spirituality increased significantly between late middle (mid-50s/early 60s) and older adulthood, predicted by religious involvement and personality characteristics in early adulthood and subsequent experiences of negative life events (Wink – Dillon 2002)
- British Household Panel Survey and British Social Attitudes surveys: belief has eroded in Britain at the same rate as two key aspects of belonging: religious affiliation and attendance, levels of belief are lower than those of nominal belonging (Voas – Crockett 2005)
- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) in 1994-95 and 2001-02: only religious participation suffers substantial declines in young adulthood (Uecker et al. 2007)
- 1970 British Cohort Study & 2012 sweep: many individuals go back and forth between the religious and non-religious categories – boundaries are fuzzy; real changes that are most evident are those between age 16 and adulthood (Voas 2015b)



# Analyzing questions

- I. What factors influence personal religiosity apart from the primary socialization agents?
- II. How does the change of personal religiosity influence world-view and personal values?
- III. Which aspects of personal religiosity (i.e. formal religious practice, religious identity, personal faith, etc.) are affected, and to what extent, by life-course change in religiosity?

# Changings in personal religiosity

DIRECTION OF CHANGE				
COHORT*	Increase	Decrease	Not changed	„Atypical”
1 <sup>st</sup> generation (elderly)	0	4 (3, 6, 8, 12)	4 (1, 2, 4, 9)	3 (4, 5, 11)
2 <sup>nd</sup> generation (middle aged)	3 (3, 4, 5)	1 (6)	7 (1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12)	0
3 <sup>rd</sup> generation (youth)	1 (12)	4 (2, 3, 4, 5)	5 (6, 7, 8, 9, 11)	1 (1)

\* Family type no. 10 is missing from the sample.

# I. What factors influence personal religiosity apart from the primary socialization agents?

- Focusing on change
- Change can be observed in every cohorts
  - A. 1<sup>st</sup> generation: only decrease / temporary adjournment („atypical” type)
  - B. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation: mainly increase
  - C. 3<sup>rd</sup> generation: mainly decrease

## A. Examples

„This was the way **we liked to attend, liked to listen the conversation, we paid attention**, what does the priest say, he always hugged our shoulder, and said, he honestly looking forward seeing us again. Well we were attending for a long time, very long time. We were always **growing up, we said, that oh, mother, we are already grown up, we don't want to go to the church, rather go to work.** (...) Like 14 year old. I already said to mother, that alright, we like to go, but now the **work is needed**. We save up the money, the **money is needed**, we are grown up, we like to go to the party, we like to go out.” (12<sup>th</sup> elderly)

## A. Examples

„Q: Did it influence your relationship with religion that **you moved away from home?**

A: Yes, I was **attending church even less often.**” (3<sup>rd</sup> elderly)



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## B. Examples

„My father died when I was 2, so my **mother raised me up alone. She wasn't religious**, at least not in front of us, if she believed in God at all, we didn't know. My grandmother used to go to church, she was a Calvinist, but I don't really remember. I remember, that she taught me the Lord's prayer, so that was it.” (...) **“In high school. That was the time when I converted.** I was even more strengthened, so after that I applied to a postal tuition for catechist major in Debrecen, of which I graduated, and taught it afterwards.”  
(3<sup>rd</sup> middle)

## C. Examples

„We attended the mass every Sunday, they (*his parents*) also attended the special masses. (...) If there is a high festival on the workday, they attend it as well. **They are permanently within the ecclesiastical life.** So they are quite an active members. **I used to be one for a while, but not anymore.** But they are still. (...) I assume this change happened approximately when I was 14-15-16 years old. It was catalysed – lunched on the first place, that **negligence**, that I don't care, I don't want to go, I don't want to do that, **I rather want to be somewhere else.**” (4<sup>th</sup> youth)

# 1. Peer group effect

„Then it wasn't bound to any religious theory at all, and **it was really passive in connection with this** (*upbringing*). He (*her father*) didn't pen any negative opinion, but nether a positive one. (...) ...it was a **quite good school community, and we visited religious education classes together**. So this was also only because it was a quite good program at school, that we go once every week, and we spend 1-2 hours. (...) So I used to go to church and religious education class **until 8<sup>th</sup> grade in ground school**, time of my confirmation. **I was looking forward to the end of it**, so that I don't have to go to church anymore. So in my opinion, that was it, the time of my confirmation, maybe I visited the church two-three times, and that was the attrition-time.” (11<sup>th</sup> youth)



## 2. Local congregational community, role of the priest

### A. Positive effect

„My old form master is once again a separate ‘area’, with whom we are in friendship, and she drew my attention, because she lived at Pasarét, that (*rev.*) **Kálmán Cseri was holding such a series**, and I should go for those lectures, if I could, because they are so good, and I was really having a hard time mentally too, and I really went. **So these thing touched me always. (...) It’s (*another church*) in my neighbourhood**, and I went there, mostly before high festivals, because **there are such series and days for devotion**, so I went there.” (5<sup>th</sup> middle aged)

## 2. Local congregational community, role of the priest

### B. Negative effect

„He was collecting the church-tax, and then he came to mom too, and collected. We were running on the street, pell-mell, and saw, that **the priest seized mom’s chicken**. Then we said to mom, that **the priest is preaching, lying**, because he seized mom’s chicken. (...) **That is what was left in my mind about priest.**” (12<sup>th</sup> elderly)

„While it was a catholic village, I remember, that as a child I went with my school-mates once or twice to the church, (...) and **the priest said that there is no place in a catholic church for a Calvinist. From that time I wasn’t going.**” (11<sup>th</sup> elderly)

### 3. Local community, settlement

„I was raised religious as a child, so my family was an especially religious family. Already nobody visited the religious education classes, only the three girls (*she and her sisters*). Nobody. (...) As we grow up, **then it fell off, to go to church, because there was no opportunity, no priest. Nádudvar is especially communist.**” (8<sup>th</sup> elderly)

## 4. Institutional effects

### A. Effects of education

„Q: Have you ever passed through any **turning point in your religious life?**

A: Yes I did, when I got a 180<sup>0</sup> turn. I have **turned completely against the religion**, because **I was constrainedly on it**. For example: there was daily late night mess **in the college**, hymn (...)” (3<sup>rd</sup> youth)

## 4. Institutional effects

### B. Effects of workplace

„Me and **my husband** we were so weak. He hasn't been a member of the communist party, but he **was in a leader position at his job**. We baptized **our children**, but they **didn't attend religious education classes** and they **didn't confirm**, because we were **coward...** (...)

Q: How often could you talk about such things (*religious themes*) with your **colleges**, at your working place? Did you talk about your belonging to Reformed Church?

A: **Not really, it still has been the 'comrade' era**. Despite of most editors being teachers, intellectual people, it was not a theme between us.”  
(5<sup>th</sup> elderly)

## II. How does the change of personal religiosity influence world-view and personal values?

### Example

#### „Atypical” religious changing: 5<sup>th</sup> elderly

- Raised in church religiosity
- Calvinist family environment and settlement
- 1<sup>st</sup> changing: giving up religiosity (young adulthood)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> changing: restart religious practice (before pension)

## Example

„I can't say that my husband was afraid of his bosses or he worried about his job, but somehow **he left his religiosity easily**, and later **I followed him** in this. I don't want to compliment myself, but maybe **I was the one, who brought us back to restart it** (*practicing their religiosity*).”

# Socialization

„They were **very religious** (*her parents*), there was an incredibly beautiful church at Decs, which was a monument. My parents haven't been going there because of it was a monument, but **they were really religious**. Everybody was Calvinist in my family, as long as it is possible to retrospect.”

„We were living in that **atmosphere, as everybody else there.**”



## 1<sup>st</sup> changing: giving up religiosity (youth adulthood)

„...at the ministry (*her husband's working place*), during that era it was a **risk to let our children to attend religious education or confirmation classes**. He was not a member of the communist party, he was only the head of department, but who knows whether we were observed or not.”

„Q: Have you ever **gone to church, when your children were young?**

A: No, **not at all**. This was the mistake, we let them to be without any religion. (...) Somehow we were not religious. **We haven't denied it, but we didn't keep up to our believes at all.**”

„It hurts so often, but **I see it as my fault, it was our weakness**. I don't mean that we should have pushed them, but **we should have 'shepherded them on that path'.**”

## 2<sup>nd</sup> changing: restart religious practice (before pension)

„I was not pensioned yet, but **we restarted to go to church**, when we were **elderly.**”

„Our children were grown up, when we restarted to go to church, and **later we have found this congregation. At first we came to and fro to church service.**”

„**Our relationship is shallow** (*with the members of their congregation*), but if we meet, we have a conversation about our children or our life. We have only this kind of acquaintanceships, but **haven't formed closer relationships**, as friendship, and we are not going out with them.”

## 2<sup>nd</sup> changing: restart religious practice (before pension)

„On Thursdays I could go there (*to the church*), because there is **reunion for elderly people**, but **I have a kick against that.**”

„**I used to pray**, only to myself, but **never aloud.**”

„Q: If you should describe yourself, what would you say, **are you religious as the Church tenets teach**, or **are you religious on your own way?**

A: I think, **I am religious as the Church tenets teach**, **because I have been raised in that mentality**, as I went to religious education class, I went to church, I knew these tenets...”

### III. Which aspects of personal religiosity are affected, and to what extent, by life-course change in religiosity?

#### Example

#### „Atypical” religious changing: 1<sup>th</sup> youth

- Raised in church religiosity (Greek Catholic)
- First person in her family, who is practicing her religiosity distinctly
- Decrease in extrinsic religious practice
- Increase in intrinsic religious practice

# Example

„When my world-view has been started to form, the turning point haven't been came. I am between two states right now.”

# Socialization

„We went to the church every **Sunday** and on **high festivals**, we were **praying before the meal**, sometimes after that as well, but not always. We were **praying together** after the bedtime story, when they put us to sleep at night.”

„**My parents** believe everything what is written in the **dogmas**. I notice mostly on my mother, but sometimes on my father as well, that they **doesn't talk about their personal thoughts**, but only what the church says.”

## Peer group and institutional environment

„I have a **friend**, and she lost her mother three years ago, as I can remember. When we were in a very good relationship, **I experienced this religious stuff much deeper**, I went to the church more **willingly** and I wanted to be with her. (...) Maybe she had a good impact on me in the field of the religion.”

„Nevertheless I attend to a **catholic school**, the 95% of my **classmates are not or barely religious**, and it had an impact on me. While my world-view was forming, **I took into consideration more factors than what do my parents said to me**. As I am getting older, there are many things what impress me more, than they do.”

## Personal religiosity

„When I would like to ask something, I **ask it from God**, or **I go to the church before and after all of my exams**, to return **thanks** for it, or I thank it only in words. My religiosity is realized mostly in these things.”

„When I am at the mass, but I feel that I don't want to be there, I don't go to take holy Communion. **I go to take holy Communion**, **when I feel that I could pray during the mass**, I could pay attention and I wanted to be there. I don't like to go to the church every Sunday, because I feel bad, if I go there, but I don't really want to be there.”



## Personal religiosity

„Basically I can't say that I don't believe in **the tenets of the church**, I don't dare to state that, because **I have been raised in this atmosphere. I confess them, but not everything.** It could be change later, now in this period, my views are changing a lot.”

„Q: Which tenets are what you **can't agree?**

A: **Those what are not really get with it.** (...) In the Catholic Church, it **isn't allowed to get divorce.** (...) **To live together with your partner** is not the worst thing in the world, I think, particularly if divorce is forbidden. In this case you could getting married with someone, who you can live with.”

„In my opinion **everybody can believe in what they want**, I would **never want to change them.**”

# DISCUSSION

- 1st wave of the European Social Survey (ESS): (Voas 2009)
- each generation in every country surveyed is less religious than the last
- the magnitude of the fall in religiosity during the last century has been remarkably constant across the continent
- many people are neither regular churchgoers nor self-consciously non-religious, religion usually plays only a minor role in the lives of such people
- *fuzzy fidelity* rises and then falls over a very extended period
- no support for age effect

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# Thank you for your attention!

Ádám Hámori

[adamhamori@gmail.com](mailto:adamhamori@gmail.com)

Anna Luxné Prehoda

[anna.prehoda@gmail.com](mailto:anna.prehoda@gmail.com)

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