Chapter 5
Secularization and the Sources of Morality: Religion and Morality in Contemporary Europe

Loek Halman and Erik van Ingen

5.1 Introduction

For a long time in history, a religious "Weltanschauung" dominated people's lives. God was the central point of reference to understand and interpret the natural and social order, human consciousness, and people's moral concerns. Public or civic behavior was to a large extent determined and restricted by religion and often took place within the churches or in activities organized by the churches. Churches were important resources for groups to mobilize; they created a sense of belonging and contributed to social integration, civic engagement, and associational life (see also Herbert 2003). In public affairs, moral decisions, and value judgments, churches and church leaders provided guidelines or directions grounded in a theology in which God was the ultimate authority, and fear of the Gods was for a long time an important motive to enforce the laws of society (Smith quoted by Yinger 1970: 52–53). Religion was a major source of inspiration of morality and the churches were the moral guardians of society.

A process of secularization is assumed to have made an end to this religious dominance in the modern world. Religion ceased to be "the all-encompassing reality in which the secular realm found its proper place" (Casanova 1994: 15), or as Peter Berger (1967) noted, the idea of religion as a sacred canopy has become questionable to a growing number of people. Due to social differentiation and specialization, religion gradually lost its overarching claims and its dominant position in society. The various institutional spheres, such as health care, judicature, economy, welfare, education, and family are no longer "under the presidency of religion" (Wilson 1996: 17). They developed independent from religion their own "secular" norms, which increasingly restricted the validity of the church norms to the specifically "religious sphere." Religion was gradually pushed back to a sphere of its own

L. Halman (✉) • E. van Ingen
Department of Sociology, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands
e-mail: loek.halman@uvt.nl; e.j.vaningen@uvt.nl

J. de Hart et al. (eds.), *Religion and Civil Society in Europe*,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-6815-4_5, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

and has become privatized and marginalized within its own differentiated sphere (Casanova 1994: 19).

As Bruce (2002) argued, secularization means that religion has become less important in contemporary society and that the number of people who live by the rules and norms provided by the churches has declined. According to some, this development has serious consequences for the moral order and civil society. For example, Francis Fukuyama (2000) argued that these social trends weakened the social bonds and shared values considerably, disrupted the social norms, and fuelled the view that "society's moral order has been on the decline" (Fukuyama 2000: 7). Because social bonds and moral commitments are vital for a vibrant civil society, civil society is in jeopardy (Wuthnow 1996).

In this chapter, we are interested in the connection between religion on the one hand and people's moral views on the other. As said, for a long time in history, religion has been an important source of inspiration for people's moral views and propagator of decent or civic behaviors. Religious authority is increasingly put into question, and humans are increasingly "abandoned to their own wits and will" (Bauman 1995: 18). In modern society, the role of the churches has become more limited and the churches do not seem to be the moral compasses of society anymore. To what extent the beliefs of the religious and nonreligious about a number of moral issues are different in contemporary Europe is explored in this chapter. In particular, we ask ourselves what the differences are between churchgoers and non-churchgoers when countries have advanced economically and have become more modern. In other words, we examine the differences between the religious and nonreligious across countries and investigate whether or not these differences are determined by a country's degree of modernization.

People in contemporary society are not only assumed to be no longer forced to be religious; also religiosity has become a personal matter. This appears, e.g., from the many people in the Netherlands who do not feel attracted anymore by the churches and do not consider themselves belonging to one of the churches. It also appears from the declining numbers of people who attend religious services regularly. All over Western Europe, church attendance is on the decline (Halman et al. 2011: 65). Of course there remain people who prefer to be religious and who still go to church as there are people who define themselves religious but do not go to church. Although churchgoers generally are more religious than people who do not or hardly go to church, religious people not necessarily have to attend religious services, and many of the religious people will not attend religious services for a variety of reasons. It raises the question whether these religious people are more civic than nonreligious people. Are they more strict in their moral judgments than nonreligious or less devout people? Are churchgoers more civic than non-churchgoers? To what extent do churchgoers still adhere to the prescriptions and lessons from their religious leaders, and hence, do they differ in moral views and convictions from people who do not go to church? Such questions are dealt with in this chapter.

Previous studies made clear that a distinction has to be made between religious beliefs and religious practices. Stark (2001) concluded that Durkheim was wrong in

claiming that religious integration is essential. Stark demonstrated that religious beliefs were more important predictors of moral values than church participation and thus falsifying Durkheim's claim. Others found opposite results (e.g., Parboteeah et al. 2008). Their analyses provided evidence that religious beliefs were not so important for people's moral views. Religious practices, such as church attendance and prayer, were negatively associated "to justification of ethically suspect behaviours" (Parboteeah et al. 2008: 394). Such contradictory results seem to make it necessary to distinguish religious beliefs from religious practices and investigate which explains people's moral values better: beliefs or practices.

Secularization may be a modern phenomenon; it seems mainly to be confined to Western Europe. The recent developments in Central and Eastern European countries seem to reveal a different story. In many of the countries in that part of Europe, religion and religious organizations grew since the fall of Communism (Tomka 2005). And also outside Europe, religion appears to remain of major importance in the lives of many people. For Peter Berger, once one of the fierce proponents of secularization ideas, reason to admit that he was wrong in predicting that by the year 2000, there would be no churches and religious communities anymore and that a worldwide secular culture would have developed (Joas 2006: 57). In his 2000 Paul Hanly Furfey lecture, he abandoned the old secularization theory because the empirical evidence refutes the theory; the world "is as religious as it has ever been, and in some places is more religious than ever" (Berger 2001: 445).

In many Central and Eastern European countries, it seems that religion and religious practices are increasingly attractive to ordinary people since the collapse of the Communist period. The secularization trends are thus not similar across Europe, and therefore, it is unlikely that civil society and people's moral views have developed similarly across Europe. In Central and Eastern Europe, the churches seem to have gained prominence. During communism, the state was accepted as the power "to regulate society over a wide area of life" (Crawford 1996: 26), though the majority remained very hostile towards the state (idem). After the fall of Communist regimes, the churches entered a transition phase, and in many parts of Central and Eastern Europe, religious communities increased. In contrast to the state during Communism, churches are considered as reliable problem-solving and uncompromised bodies and resources of spiritual guidance. A last research question addresses this issue: to what extent are the links between religion and morality stronger in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe?

5.2 Religion and Morality

Religious beliefs are considered important sources of people's moral principles. For religious people, it seems usually quite clear what is ethically right and wrong and they do not need laws to guide their conduct across a host of behaviors. According to the divine command theory, there exists a strong connection between religion and morality, simply because moral rules are considered the rules given by God (see

Gert 2005: 118). The basic idea is that "what is good or right is good or right only because God wills it or commands it" (Wainwright 2005: 73). The waning of the dominant position of religion in modernizing society fostered the establishment of a "new morality" or "permissive morality" (Wilson 1982: 86). Since the moral guidance of the churches and religion is less self-evident and under heavy pressure, it can be assumed that people's religious orientations are no longer, or less strongly, linked to their moral views. Individualized people are free, autonomous, and independent from the traditional institutions in general and churches and their leaders in particular. As Taylor (1989: 312–313) argued, "masses of people can sense moral sources of a quite different kind, ones that don't necessarily suppose a God."

This is also how Casanova sees secularization, or at least one of the propositions of secularization: it is the differentiation of secular spheres from religious institutions and norms (Casanova 1994: 211). He goes on to argue that this remains a general modern structural trend. One of the consequences is that religious authority over moral convictions has diminished or has lost its determining power over morality. In contemporary modern society, people are assumed to have become their own decision takers, no longer bound to be influenced by religion and independent from their religious beliefs. If that is true, we would expect to find declining differences in moral views between religious people and nonreligious people and between churchgoers and non-churchgoers because moral convictions in both groups will be less and less determined by their religious views and behaviors. Both believers and nonbelievers have become free and autonomous people and decide for themselves what to believe and who/what to follow. Neither of them needs a church as a moral source. Not only churchgoing is a matter of personal choice: also moral convictions are personal considerations. Hence, *(H1a) the more modern a country is, the smaller the differences in moral views between churchgoers and non-churchgoers and between believers and nonbelievers.*

However, it can also be argued that the differences between churchgoers and non-churchgoers remain, because churchgoers and strong believers still rely on their church or their beliefs in moral decisions and hence remain more morally strict than unchurched people. Differences could even become larger: a countermovement may occur among the group of churchgoers, in which a reorientation on religious beliefs takes place in response to the secularizing forces in society. In that case, it can be expected that the differences in moral outlooks of both believers and unbelievers become more salient and more marked. This would not be inconsistent with an overall decline in the extent to which people subscribe to clerical norms: if the group of non-churchgoers grows at the expense of the group of churchgoers, this may also affect the average beliefs in the population. Hence, *(H1b) the more modern a society is, the more the believers and nonbelievers will differ in their moral views*.

According to the secularization theory, religion has become privatized and people are increasingly defining their religiosity in a personal, nontraditional, and institutionally loose way. Grace Davie (2000, 2002) coined the situation as "believing without belonging." People turn away from the churches but do not necessarily become less religious. Also others like Wilson (1982: 149) and Chaves (1994: 750) pointed out earlier that secularization should not be understood as the decline of

religion as such, but as "the declining scope of religious authority." Thus, secularization refers to the declining authority of religion or "the displacement of religion from the centre of human life" (Bruce 2011: 1), which not necessarily should be equated with declining levels of individual beliefs and religious ideas. Only those who remain to adhere to the teachings and lessons from the churches will be stricter. In their moral choices, the voice of the churches and church leaders are echoed. For those who are not churchgoing, the moral voice of the church will be irrelevant. But what to expect when it comes to religious beliefs? Why would people who are more devout, but not churched, be more strict than churched or less devout people? It would assume that atheists are immoral people or have lower standards of morality, which seems unlikely to be true. Hence, we predict that *(H2) the differences in moral views are smaller when it comes to religious and non- (less) religious people than between churchgoers and non-churchgoers.*

As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, earlier studies (e.g., Stark 2001; Parboteeah et al. 2008) provided evidence that religious beliefs and religious practices were differently related to people's moral views. Their studies also revealed that other factors may explain the effects of religion on morality. One suggestion of Parobeeah et al. was to look at religious pluralism. Following studies of Voas, Olsen, and Crockett (2002), they suggested that "the degree to which single religions are not dominant and there are any alternatives available could also be potentially linked to ethics" (Parboteeah et al. 2008: 396). In the article they referred to, Voas et al. did not focus on the relationship between religion and morality but on religious involvement. They did not find evidence that religious pluralism affected levels of participation. Also Halman and Draulans (2006) were not able to substantiate the claim of rational choice theorists that religious pluralism in Europe had any impact on religious practices and religious beliefs. Voas et al., however, concluded that "the question of whether religious diversity promotes or undermines commitment – and by implication how modernization affects traditional belief and practice – remains one of the most interesting problems in the field" (Voas et al. 2002: 227). As far as we know, the issue of religious pluralism has never been studied in relation with moral views and the impact religious diversity might have on people's moral convictions and values.

In mono religious settings, there is no competition between religions and hence no competition between moral views. Following the arguments of the proponents of the rational choice theory, in such circumstances, the churches do not have to do their best to be attractive to the believers. In case churches have to compete with each other, they have to do their best to attract believers, who on their turn will not only be stronger believers but also more strict followers of the religious and moral messages and teachings of the church leaders. Hence, we may expect to find stronger associations between religion and morality in such competitive environments than in mono religious societies. The following hypotheses can be formulated: *(H3a) The more religiously diverse societies are, the stronger religiosity impacts moral values.*

The adherents of the secularization ideas argue the opposite. According to them, religious pluralism undermines the plausibility structure of religion (Berger 1967), and therefore, people will be less inclined to follow the religious and moral messages

of the church and their leaders. From this opposite point of view, we can formulate the following competing hypothesis: *(H3b) The more religiously diverse a society is, the weaker the impact of religiosity on moral values.*

5.3 Central and Eastern Europe

As noted before, the recent developments in Central and Eastern European countries seem to reveal a different story which does not fit the secularization ideas. In many countries in that part of Europe, religion and religious organizations grew since the fall of Communism. Religion and religious practices are becoming increasingly attractive to ordinary people now that state communism has vanished and with it the dominant provider of morality. In many parts of Central and Eastern Europe, religious communities and churches are considered reliable problem-solving and uncompromised bodies and sources of spiritual guidance.

The secular ideology and the Communist efforts to destroy religion make it likely to expect lower levels of religiosity in Central and Eastern European societies (Pollack 2003). However, it has been pointed out that the atheist ideology did not destroy religiosity. For example, Hormel (2010: 50–52) argues that not expressing your religious identity was merely a means to avoid scrutiny or to gain status. It does not reveal that state-imposed atheism was fully internalized or accepted. This is also what Tomka (2005: 16) noted: "Communism undeniably weakened the churches and the institutional and official forms of religiosity, but it also contributed to the growth of informal religious life as well." As such, the atheist doctrine appeared not very successful. It means that it would be all too simple to expect levels of religiosity to be lower in Central and Eastern Europe because of its secular ideology or to expect that levels of religiosity have increased after the collapse of Communism and the end of state atheism allowing previously hidden religious feelings to be openly expressed (again). Furthermore, Central and Eastern Europe are far from homogeneous in this regard. Tomka points to differences in imposed structural transformations of the economies. The forced industrialization and urbanization in countries like Eastern Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, and Slovenia disintegrated the old rural families and dissolved the rural social system and hence traditional culture too. These most industrialized societies appear to be most secularized indeed (Pollack 2003: 324). In countries like Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, the old social system persisted, and where that is the case, traditional culture is maintained (Tomka 2005: 22).

In other countries, the churches accommodated with the Communist regimes, e.g., Moldova and Bulgaria, and other churches challenged the regimes, e.g., "the catholic Church in Lithuania and Ukraine, the Lutheran church in Estonia and the Orthodox church in Georgia" (Hormel 2010: 50). In case the churches successfully co-opted by the regime, the churches lost their "credibility among religious believers, who then disaffiliated in substantial numbers" (Gautier 1997: 290; see also Caplow 1985: 106). In case the churches did not accommodate with the regime, they remained in a strong position and "despite Soviet efforts to sanction their activities,

were able to maintain public interest" (Hormel 2010: 50). The weak international and organizational structure of the Orthodox churches and traditions of close ties between state and Orthodox Churches are a major factor to understand why these churches more or less voluntary subordinate to the totalitarian regime. The Catholic churches had a tradition of opposition to the state and above all have strong international and organizational structures that defended local churches from an international position to accommodate with the regime (Borowik 2006: 269).

What can be expected with regard to the impact of religion on morality in Central and Eastern Europe? Even if the Soviet doctrine had survived and all people had turned into atheists, it is of course not very likely that morality has disappeared or destroyed as well. In Central and Eastern Europe, it can be suggested that because the state had taken over the legitimating functions of religion, Communism weakened the link between religion and morality (see also Stark 2001: 619). Therefore, it seems most plausible to assume that the impact of religion on morality will be weaker in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. Hence, the hypothesis (H4a) reads: *Church attendance and religious beliefs are weaker predictors of opinions on moral issues in Eastern Europe than it is in Western Europe.*

However, since the collapse of Communism, religious organizations and church attendance seem on the rise in many Central and Eastern European countries. Especially in the first years of the post-Communist period, a religious revival was reported (Tomka 2005: 11) which slowed down in the later years. Tomka added to this that in general, also in Central and Eastern Europe, the younger generations appear less religious. Hence, also in this part of Europe, cohort replacement will eventuate in a gradual decline of religiosity possibly accelerated by modernization processes. The religious revival may imply that people are increasingly eager to follow the religious leaders and their moral views. As Tomka noted, "regular church attendance and frequent prayer distinguish one group. Another one is distinguished by the lack of any sign of religious practice" (Tomka 2005: 83). Thus, also in Central and Eastern Europe, a polar situation will exist. However, it must be noted that it seems unlikely that this ideological polarization resembles the polarization in the west. In Central and Eastern Europe, there does not seem to be much evidence "that the decline of traditional religiosity would be compensated for by unorthodox forms of religion" (Tomka 2005: 83–84). Hence, it can be expected that religious and nonreligious people will differ significantly in their moral views and that these differences between religious and nonreligious groups will be stronger in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe where nontraditional forms of religiosity have developed. In other words, in Central and Eastern Europe, believing without belonging has not developed and thus believing and churchgoing are strongly connected. Religiosity outside the churches is not widespread or even nonexistent, whereas in Western Europe, an increasing number of people turn away from the churches but remain religious one way or the other.

Following such arguments, it can be expected that in Central and Eastern Europe, the differences in moral views between religious and nonreligious people will be more marked than in Western Europe. Our last hypothesis is *(H4b): Church attendance and religious beliefs are stronger predictors of opinions on moral issues in Eastern Europe than it is in Western Europe.*

5.4 Data, Measurements, and Analyses

To test our hypotheses, we use the data from the most recent European Values Study. Data was collected in all European countries, from Iceland to Azerbaijan and from Malta to Finland (see www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu). The following countries were included in our analyses (alphabetically, with country abbreviations and the number of cases in brackets): Albania (AL; 1534), Austria (AT; 1510), Armenia (AM; 1477), Belgium (BE; 1507), Bosnia Herzegovina (BA; 1512), Bulgaria (BG; 1500), Belarus (BY; 1500), Croatia (HR; 1498), Cyprus (CY; 999), Northern Cyprus (CY-TCC; 495), Czech Republic (CZ; 1793), Denmark (DK; 1507), Estonia (EE; 1518), Finland (FI; 1134), France (FR; 1501), Georgia (GE; 1498), Germany (DE; 2038), Greece (GR; 1498), Hungary (HU; 1513), Iceland (IS; 808), Ireland (IE; 982), Italy (IT; 1519), Latvia (LV; 1506), Lithuania (LT; 1499), Luxembourg (LU; 1609), Malta (MT; 1497), Moldova (MD; 1551), Montenegro (ME; 1516), Netherlands (NL; 1552), Norway (NO; 1090), Poland (PL; 1479), Portugal (PT; 1553), Romania (RO; 1489), Russian Federation (RU; 1490), Serbia (RS; 1512), Slovak Republic (SK; 1509), Slovenia (SI; 1366), Spain (ES; 1497), Sweden (SE; 1174), Switzerland (CH; 1271), Turkey (TR; 2326), Ukraine (UA; 1507), Macedonia (MK; 1493), Great Britain (GB-GBN; 1549), Northern Ireland (GB-NIR; 495), and Kosovo (RS-KM; 1601).[1]

The questionnaire includes questions on attitudes and opinions in a wide variety of life domains, including religion. For more information, we refer to the EVS website: www.europeanvalues.nl. Data on a society's level of modernization come from the International Monetary Fund and refer to 2008 (http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/01/weodata/index.aspx). Data on religious pluralism are from Barro (2011; http://rbarro.com/data-sets).

5.4.1 Measurements

The Dependent Variables

Moral orientations in the European Values Study are tapped by a long list of items covering a wide range of moral issues and particular behaviors. Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not these issues and behaviors could always be justified, never be justified, or something in between (1 = never to 10 = always). The statements presented range from cheating on taxes and avoiding paying a fare to political assassinations, homosexuality, and euthanasia.

[1] EVS surveys were conducted in Northern Ireland and Northern Cyprus separately. In the final analyses, we merged Northern Ireland and Great Britain and Northern Cyprus with Turkey. For Northern Ireland and Northern Cyprus, country characteristics are of course from Great Britain and Turkey, respectively.

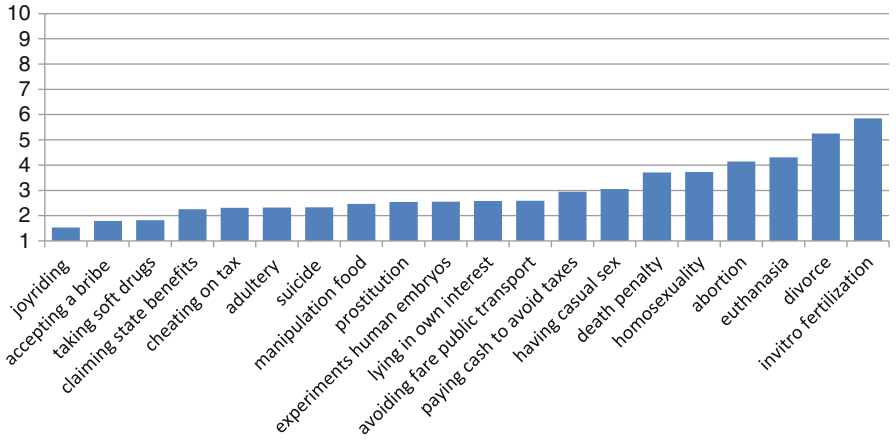

Fig. 5.1 Justification of various behaviors and issues in Europe. (Country means on 10-point scales: 1 = never justified, 10 = always justified) (Source: EVS 2008)

Behaviors which are considered to be most of all justifiable are in vitro fertilization and divorce, whereas joyriding, bribery, and using drugs are considered least justifiable. It should be noted, however, that "rarely does a score exceed the halfway point of the scale (i.e., 5.5 out of 10), and most of the scores are considerably lower than" (Harding et al. 1986: 7). In other words, high proportions of the Europeans consider most of the behaviors as "never or hardly justified," suggesting that, generally speaking, people in the countries investigated by the European Values Study are very reluctant to accept such issues and behaviors. In Fig. 5.1, the mean scores are displayed for Europe.

There appear to be two major areas of permissiveness: one with regard to behaviors defined by the law as an offense or a crime. It includes the acceptance of claiming state benefits which you are not entitled to, taking free rides on public transport, tax fraud, lying in your own interest, accepting a bribe, and joyriding. The other concerns issues and behaviors which were, and often still are, regarded as sinful according to traditional Christian doctrine, such as homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, and divorce. We calculated mean scores for each of these two dimensions which we labeled "acceptance of law violations" and "moral permissiveness," respectively.[2]

The Independent Variables

Our main explanatory variables are people's religious convictions and their religious practices: personal religiosity and religious involvement.

[2] Factor analyses yielded two dimensions which appear reliable scales with Cronbach's alpha of .82 and .79 for "moral permissiveness" and "acceptance of law violation," respectively.

Table 5.1 The combination of churchgoing and non-churchgoing and being religious or not

Religiosity combined	Frequencies	%
Nonreligious and non-churchgoer	17,220	27
Religious and non-churchgoer	27,281	43
Nonreligious and churchgoer	973	1
Religious and churchgoer	18,231	29
Total	63,705	100

Source: EVS (2008)

As indicators of individual religious involvement, we included one measure of traditional institutional religiosity which is tapped by church attendance. This is measured by the question: "Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?" The answer possibilities ranged between 1 (= more than once a week) and 8 (= never, practically never). For our analyses, this item was dichotomized: 1 = at least once a month, 0 = less often.

Religiosity is tapped by the answer to the question "independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are: a religious person; not a religious person; a convinced atheist." Also this item was dichotomized: 1 = religious, 0 is not religious.

In order to further test the effects of churchgoing and religiosity (Which affects moral orientations stronger?), we classified our respondents according to the combination of church attendance and religiosity. We defined 3 dummies: (1) those who are religious and go to church at least once a month, (2) those who are religious and do not go to church once a month, and (3) nonreligious people who do go to church at least once a month. The last category is of course very small. In Table 5.1, we displayed the frequencies. The combination of nonreligious and non-churchgoers will be the reference category in the analyses.

At the individual level, we also included control variables age, gender, and level of education. For gender, we included a dummy variable for men. Age was measured using year of birth and recoded as age in years. Level of education is tapped in six categories: 0 = up to preprimary education, 1 = primary education or first stage of basic education, 2 = lower secondary or second stage of basic education, 3 = (upper) secondary education, 4 = post-secondary non-tertiary education, 5 = first stage of tertiary education, and 6 = second stage of tertiary education.

Macro characteristics include the degree a society's modernization, measured by GDP per capita (in thousands of dollars at purchase power parity) in 2008 (International Monetary Fund; http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/01/weodata/index.aspx).

Further, we included a measure for religious diversity and a dummy for Eastern European countries.

Religious diversity is measured by the so-called Herfindahl index as calculated by Barro and McCleary (2003). The index is the sum of the squares of the population fractions belonging to each religion. In case everyone in a country belongs to the same religion, the Herfindahl index equals one, and hence, the pluralism indicator equals zero. The more divers, the lower the Herfindahl index and higher the pluralism index (Barro and McCleary 2003: 764). Table 5.2 provides an overview of all independent variables.

Table 5.2 Descriptive statistics of continuous and dummy variables

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Christian morality	67,061	4.339	2.557	1	10
Acceptance of law violations	67,391	2.154	1.373	1	10
Women	67,774	0.555	0.497	0	1
Age	67,495	46.526	17.787	15	108
Church attendance	66,960	0.293	0.455	0	1
Religious person	64,282	0.714	0.452	0	1
GDP (centered)	75,680	0.000	24.598	–24.007	177.123
Religious diversity (centered)	70,739	0.000	0.219	–0.421	0.410
Eastern Europe	67,786	0.538	0.499	0	1

5.4.2 Analytical Strategy

We applied multi-level models with individuals nested in countries. All models included a random (country) intercept. The independent variable of interest (a dummy variable that indicated being religious or going to church) was allowed to vary across countries (i.e., its slope was random) and the covariance between the random slope and intercept was also estimated. To see whether the effect of the dummy variable was affected by a country characteristic, we included cross-level interactions. We used the xtmixed module of Stata 11 with maximum likelihood estimation in all models.

5.5 Results

In Fig. 5.2, the countries' mean scores on the two moral dimensions are displayed in a two-dimensional graph. The law violations appear to be accepted most in Belarus, followed by Russia and Slovakia. At the bottom, we find Turkey and Turkish Cyprus, Kosovo, and Malta. Also in Denmark, these civic issues and behaviors are rejected. Again, it should be stressed that also in the most lenient societies, the acceptance is rather modest. In no country, the mean acceptance exceeds the halfway point of the scale (i.e., 5.5 out of 10), and all scores are considerably lower than this!

The general acceptance of the issues and behaviors that we considered indicative of moral permissiveness is higher than with regard to law violations, although again in the majority of the countries, the acceptance does not exceed the halfway point of the scale. Most lenient appear now countries in the North-Western part of Europe: Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and the Netherlands. Least permissive appear again Kosovo and Turkey. Also in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Cyprus, Malta, and Bosnia Herzegovina, people appear mostly reluctant in accepting these issues and behaviors.

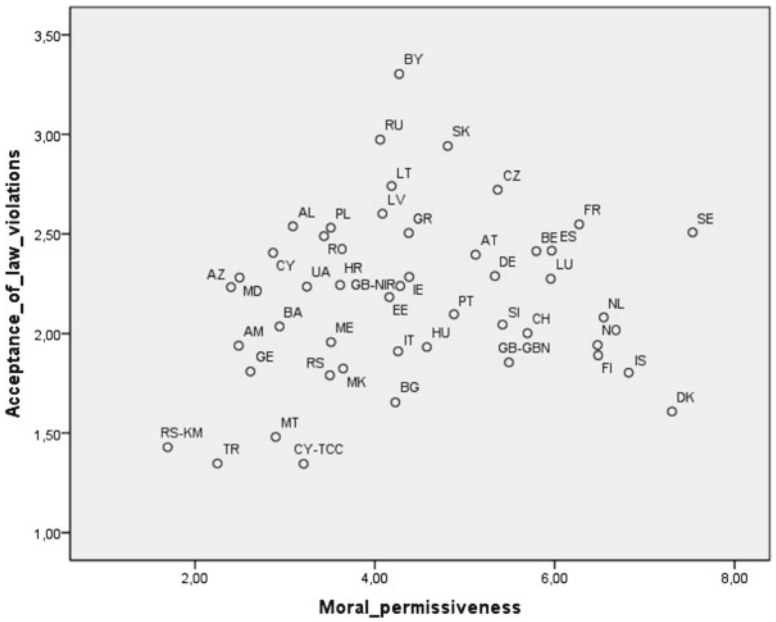

Fig. 5.2 Countries' mean scores on the two moral dimensions (Source: EVS 2008)

It is not easy to find a clear pattern in these permissiveness dimensions. Countries do not differ much with regard to the acceptance of law violations; in most countries, these are rejected, but there exists some more variation with regard to the acceptance of behaviors that are condemned by the (Christian) churches and which have to do with life issues such as abortion, euthanasia, in vitro fertilization but also with issues such as homosexuality and divorce. Roughly speaking, the division is East–west; the West being more lenient than the East.

Table 5.3 shows the results of our analyses concerning moral permissiveness. As a first step, we explored the variance of this variable and find out how large the share of the total variance is that is due to country variation. This turned out to be .32, which is considerable and it indicates that country characteristics play a role in explaining differences in this kind of morality.

Models I and II of Table 5.3 tested our hypotheses 1a and 1b. The churchgoer effect ($b = -1.07$; model I) indicates the difference between churchgoers and non-churchgoers in countries with an average GDP per capita (the GDP variable in the model is centered). The 1 point difference on the 10-point scale is relatively large: it equals .42 standard deviations (SDs) of moral permissiveness (see Table 5.1). The negative interaction effect indicates that the difference between churchgoers and non-churchgoers was larger (more negative) in more modern countries. The size of this interaction effect was also considerable. For example, in a country with a GDP that is two standard deviations above average (Switzerland is the nearest country to that position in the distribution), the estimated difference between churchgoers and non-churchgoers equaled −1.85. Alternatively, the estimated difference in a country with a GDP of two SDs below average equaled −0.28.

Table 5.3 Multi-level regression of moral permissiveness on explanatory variables (unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors)

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Churchgoer	−1.068** (0.082)				
Religious person		−1.004** (0.087)			
GDP (centered)	0.031** (0.006)	−0.031** (0.010)	0.018** (0.006)	0.011 (0.007)	−0.007 (0.008)
Churchgoer × GDP	−0.016** (0.003)				
Religious person × GDP		0.001 (0.003)			
Religiosity:					
None (ref.)			0	0	0
Religious and non-churchgoer (d1)			−0.725** (0.063)	−0.697** (0.052)	−0.905** (0.080)
Nonreligious churchgoer (d2)			−0.850** (0.115)	−0.827** (0.098)	−1.067** (0.131)
Religious churchgoer (d3)			−1.637** (0.121)	−1.657** (0.119)	−2.171** (0.139)
Religious diversity (RD)				−1.625 (0.956)	
Religiosity × RD:					
None × RD (ref.)				0	
Religious and non-churchgoer × RD				1.052** (0.244)	
Nonreligious churchgoer × RD				1.217** (0.436)	
Religious churchgoer × RD				1.346* (0.563)	
Eastern Europe (EE)					−2.433** (0.453)
Religiosity × EE:					
None × EE (ref.)					0
Religious and non-churchgoer × EE					0.365** (0.111)
Nonreligious churchgoer × EE					0.524* (0.208)
Religious churchgoer × EE					1.032** (0.191)
Random-effects parameters					
Var. churchgoer	0.280				
Var. religious person		0.306			
Var. religiosity d1			0.154	0.087	0.112

(continued)

Table 5.3 (continued)

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Var. religiosity d2			0.203	0.087	0.118
Var. religiosity d3			0.621	0.563	0.374
Var. intercept	1.158	4.744	1.396	1.589	1.289
Cov. churchgoer/intercept	–0.370				
Cov. religious person/intercept		–0.722			
Var. residual	3.914	3.947	3.791	3.840	3.780
Intercept	4.268** (0.172)	4.906** (0.332)	4.729** (0.188)	4.786** (0.207)	6.092** (0.316)
N (countries)	65,527 (45)	62,937 (45)	62,409 (45)	58,213 (42)	62,409 (45)

Note. All models are controlled for gender, age, and education

**$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

The results of model II, concerning the impact of religiosity, are different. The estimated difference between religious and nonreligious persons in a country with an average GDP was roughly similar to the difference between churchgoers and non-churchgoers ($b = -1.00$). However, there was no significant interaction effect. The size of the difference between the religious and nonreligious did not vary with GDP.

Based on models I and II, we conclude that our findings with regard to church attendance are in line with hypothesis 1b (hypothesis 1a is rejected) and that with regard to being a religious person, our findings are not in line with hypothesis 1b (hypothesis 1b is rejected). However, there is also not much evidence that the differences between religious and nonreligious persons in their moral views are smaller in more affluent, that is, more modern societies.

In model III, the indicators of church attendance and religiosity are combined. In our data, 27 % considered themselves to be nonreligious, 43 % was religious but did not go to church frequently, and 29 % was religious and went to church frequently. A small share (1.5 %; $N = 973$) indicated to go to church without being religious. We are unsure how to interpret this response, but we provide their scores in our models for the sake of being complete. As model III shows, both religious and churchgoing groups reported significantly lower levels of acceptance than the nonreligious, not churchgoers. Moreover, going to church added to the difference among the religious: the effect of religious churchgoer is more than twice the effect of the religious and non-churchgoer, and this difference was significantly different from zero (Chi2(1) = 46.98; Prob > Chi2 = 0.000). This finding is in line with hypothesis 2 and suggests that church attendance adds to the negative effect of being religious.

In model IV, an interaction effect between religiosity and religious diversity (to test hypothesis 3a and b) was added. The effect of religious diversity was centered, which means that the "main effects" of religiosity should be interpreted as the differences in a country with average religious diversity (such as Romania or Austria). As the significant interaction effects show, the differences in countries with a high level of religious diversity are smaller (less negative). For example, the estimated difference between religious churchgoers and the nonreligious in a country with a religious diversity that is one SD (see Table 5.1) above average (such as the Czech Republic) equaled −1.36, whereas the same difference in a country that is one SD religious diversity below average (such as Croatia) was estimated −1.95. This is in line with hypothesis 3b (hence, hypothesis 3a is rejected).

Model V shows a similar pattern. An interaction with a dummy variable that indicates the difference between Eastern and Western Europe is added to the model. This means that the main effects of religiosity should be interpreted as the estimated differences in Western Europe. The interaction effects show that Eastern Europe is different. The differences between the religious and the nonreligious were smaller in Eastern Europe (less negative). For example, the difference between religious churchgoers and the nonreligious people is approximately half the size of the same difference in Western Europe (−2.17 + 1.03 = −1.14). This means that hypothesis 4b is rejected.

Table 5.4 has exactly the same setup as Table 5.3 but now the dependent variable is the other moral dimension: the acceptance of law violations. The variance of that variable is mostly due to individual level differences: only 9 % of the total variation

Table 5.4 Multi-level regression of the acceptance of law violations on explanatory variables (unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors)

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Churchgoer	–0.144** (0.030)				
Religious person		–0.249** (0.030)			
GDP (centered)	0.005 (0.002)	0.003 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	0.011** (0.003)
Churchgoer × GDP	–0.003** (0.001)				
Religious person × GDP		–0.001 (0.001)			
Religiosity:					
None (ref.)			0	0	0
Religious and non-churchgoer (d1)			–0.210** (0.025)	–0.207** (0.025)	–0.181** (0.035)
Nonreligious churchgoer (d2)			0.063 (0.086)	0.072 (0.085)	0.023 (0.110)
Religious churchgoer (d3)			–0.319** (0.034)	–0.318** (0.034)	–0.349** (0.049)
Religious diversity (RD)				0.547 (0.327)	
Religiosity × RD:					
None × RD (ref.)				0	
Religious and non-churchgoer × RD				0.194 (0.244)	
Nonreligious churchgoer × RD				0.538 (0.384)	
Religious churchgoer × RD				0.264 (0.159)	
Eastern Europe (EE)					0.622** (0.180)
Religiosity × EE:					
None × EE (ref.)					0
Religious and non-churchgoer × EE					–0.056 (0.049)
Nonreligious churchgoer × EE					0.100 (0.173)
Religious churchgoer × EE					0.053 (0.067)
Random-effects parameters					
Var. churchgoer	0.032				
Var. religious person		0.030			

Var. religiosity d1			0.018	0.017	0.017
Var. religiosity d2			0.144	0.129	0.140
Var. religiosity d3			0.038	0.036	0.038
Var. intercept	0.190	0.218	0.196	0.180	0.178
Cov. churchgoer/intercept	–0.019				
Cov. religious person/intercept		–0.041			
Var. residual	3.914	1.591	1.574	1.590	1.574
Intercept	3.169** (0.075)	3.307** (0.080)	3.283** (0.077)	3.313** (0.078)	2.927** (0.128)
N (countries)	65,826 (45)	63,198 (45)	62,661 (45)	58,453 (42)	62,661 (45)

Note. All models are controlled for gender, age, and education

**$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

was due to country differences. We already concluded that the country differences are modest and that most people in all countries simply reject these behaviors and issues. It will not come as a big surprise that the main conclusion from the table is that all differences are considerably smaller than those found for moral permissiveness. This is true in terms of absolute differences – compare the effects of churchgoers in models I, for example, ($b = -0.14$ vs. $b = -1.07$) – but also in terms of relative differences. The difference between churchgoers and non-churchgoers (model I) in the extent to which they approve law violations equaled .10 SDs (against the .42 in the case of moral permissiveness). The interaction effect in model I indicates that this difference was somewhat greater in countries with a high GDP.

The findings in models II and III show that religious people reported lower levels of acceptance than the nonreligious people and that church attendance had an effect on top of being a religious person.

Another main difference with the Table 5.3 is that interactions with religious diversity and Eastern Europe are now lacking. The size of the differences between the religious and the nonreligious was not found to vary according to these country characteristics.

5.6 Conclusion and Discussion

In this chapter, we addressed the relationship between religion and morality. In modern societies, religion is not any longer a self-evident and valid rational justification of objective moral standards, and according to MacIntyre, this implies that "there are no such standards in contemporary society" (MacIntyre 1981: 254). Also proponents of secularization ideas suggested that the diminishing role of religion will eventuate in a permissive society (Wilson 1982: 86). This can be seriously questioned for it suggests that secular people or atheists, because they are no longer bound to the religious leaders and religious principles, will have no morality or lower moral standards than religious people. It also suggests that only the churches and their leaders are able and allowed to provide moral guidelines and that these guidelines need to be religious. If such arguments are taken seriously, and thus if it is indeed religion that provides moral norms, we must ask ourselves, how can society survive without religion? (Beit-Hallahmi 2010: 114).

In this chapter, we explored the relationships between religion and morality. With regard to religion, we distinguished religious beliefs from religious practices. The latter refers to institutional religiosity, the first refers to one's own perception that one considers himself religious or not. As for morality, we make a distinction in moral permissiveness and the acceptance of law violations. The latter kind of permissiveness implies that actions and behaviors which are against the law are accepted. The other moral dimension includes the acceptance of various behaviors that were and are strongly rejected by the churches.

We investigated the relationships in Europe and we argued that the impact of religion on morality will depend upon the degree to which societies are modern. We

formulated two competing hypotheses with regard to the impact of modernization on the differences between churchgoers versus non-churchgoers and the religious versus the nonreligious. We found empirical evidence supporting the idea that differences between churchgoers and non-churchgoers are larger in economically more developed countries. This may seem contradictory at first sight, but it is not. A decreasing share of the populations of the more economically developed countries in Europe is going to church. At the same time, the "effect" of church attendance goes up, defined as the difference between churchgoers and non-churchgoers. In other words, it increasingly makes a difference whether you go to church, but the (larger) effect of churchgoing affects a shrinking group of people. As a result, the churches are less and less able to control the opinions of the overall population (indicated by a growing acceptance of abortion, euthanasia, etc.). The findings regarding religiosity are different. The cleavage between the religious and the nonreligious appears to be not larger in more modern societies compared to less modern countries.

We also found that both religiosity and church attendance have an (independent) effect on people's opinions. It seems that not Durkheim but Stark was wrong when the latter concluded that religiosity is more important for people's moral views than church attendance. In line with Durkheim's reasoning, we find that the institutional ties are significant predictors for rejecting homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, and divorce in more modern settings. Religiosity also affects people's moral views but church attendance has an effect on top of that, and their effects are of roughly similar size.

We also tested whether religious pluralism affects the relationship between religion and morality. Our analyses corroborated the hypothesis that the more religiously diverse a society is, the weaker the impact of religion on moral convictions will be. In religiously pluralistic societies, the differences in moral outlooks between religious and nonreligious people are smaller than in religiously less diverse societies. This contradicts the claims of some American sociologists of religion that religious pluralism enhances religiosity. A greater diversity of religions available in a country implies more competition and consequently a religion that fits better the individual preferences (see also Barro and McCleary 2003: 761). Although more religious diversity may stimulate greater religious participation and beliefs, it does not imply that religion has a stronger impact on people's moral choices. In more religiously diverse societies, churchgoers and non-churchgoers as well as religious and nonreligious people resemble each other more than in non-pluralistic societies. The differences between religious and nonreligious people are more pronounced in less pluralistic societies.

With regard to the hypotheses concerning the differences between Western and post-Communist societies, the results of our analyses suggest that both religiosity and church attendance are weaker predictors of moral orientations in post-Communist societies than in Western Europe, but not for the acceptance of law violations. Hence, our hypothesis 4a is confirmed and 4b, which suggested the opposite, is rejected.

Overall, the differences between the religious and the nonreligious and churchgoers and non-churchgoers are far less pronounced in the case of the acceptance of

law violations than they are with regard to moral permissiveness. This may have to do with the fact that moral permissiveness includes behaviors and issues which are strongly condemned by the churches. It is more or less obvious that churchgoers differ more with regard to these issues than when it comes to law violations. In that respect, Durkheim's claim that the degree of integration in the church is important still counts. Religious integration was important and remains important for people's moral views in contemporary Europe.

Although citizens in contemporary society may increasingly question the traditional sources of religious authority and no longer feel bound by common religious moral principles and have become their own moral guide, most people are very reluctant in accepting all kinds of uncivic behavior. A vast majority of the Europeans reject uncivic behavior, but when it comes to such issues as homosexuality, abortion, divorce, and euthanasia, many Western Europeans are more permissive, and Europe appears more varied in the acceptance of these behaviors and issues. Perhaps because the latter issues are increasingly considered matters of private concern and we do not want to interfere or let others interfere in such private affairs as long as no body is harmed or threatened. Uncivic behavior on the other hand may harm us and the broader community, and as such, the acceptance of these issues does not show much respect for others' properties and collective goods. Violations of these are regarded hardly justifiable. This indicates some sort of alternative morality: people are free to do what they want but that freedom is restricted by the demand not to harm others.

Churchgoers appear more reluctant to accept these violations than non-churchgoers or not religious people who appear to be more lenient in these matters. However, the differences between religious and nonreligious people are negligible. The idea that secularization ultimately will lead to a permissive morality, as predicted by Bryan Wilson (1982), or that an ethos of anything goes will develop has to be rejected. Most people are opposed to uncivic behaviors and that is perhaps also the reason why so many people in contemporary Europe are so concerned about other people's misbehaviors. As far as this is concerned, we did not find any signs of a *disruption* of society.

References

Barro, R. (2011). *Religion adherence data*. 2003. Downloaded from: http://scholar.harvard.edu/barro/publications/religion-adherence-data

Barro, R. J., & McCleary, R. M. (2003). Religion and economic growth across countries. *American Sociological Review, 68*(5), 760–781.

Bauman, Z. (1995). *Life in fragments. Essays on postmodern morality*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Beit-Hallahmi, B. (2010). Morality and immorality among the irreligious. In P. Zuckerman (Ed.), *Atheism and secularity* (pp. 113–148). Santa Barbara: Praeger.

Berger, P. (1967). *The sacred canopy*. New York: Double day & Company.

Berger, P. (2001). Reflections on the sociology of religion today. *Sociology of Religion, 62*(4), 443–454.

Borowik, I. (2006). Orthodoxy confronting the collapse of communism in Post-Soviet countries. *Social Compass, 53*(2), 267–278.
Bruce, S. (2002). *God is dead*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
Bruce, S. (2011). *Secularization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Caplow, T. (1985). Contrasting trends in European and American religion. *Sociological Analysis, 46*, 101–108.
Casanova, J. (1994). *Public religions in the modern world*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Chaves, M. (1994). Secularization as declining religious authority. *Social Forces, 72*(3), 749–774.
Crawford, K. (1996). *East Central European politics today*. Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press.
Davie, G. (2000). *Religion in modern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Davie, G. (2002). *Europe: The exceptional case*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
EVS. (2008). European values study 2008: Integrated dataset (EVS 2008). *GESIS data archive, Cologne. ZA4800 data file version 3.0.0.* http://dx.doi.org/10.4232/1.11004. doi:10.4232/1.11004
Fukuyama, F. (2000). *The great disruption*. New York: Touchstone.
Gautier, M. L. (1997). Church attendance, religious belief in postcommunist societies. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 36*, 289–296.
Gert, B. (2005). *Morality. Its nature and justification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Halman, L., & Draulans, V. (2006). How secular in Europe? *The British Journal of Sociology, 57*(2), 263–287.
Halman, L., Sieben, I., & Van Zundert, M. (2011). *Atlas of European values*. Leiden: Brill.
Harding, S., Phillips, D., & Fogarty, M. (1986). *Contrasting values in Western Europe*. London: Macmillan.
Herbert, D. (2003). *Religion and civil society*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
Hormel, L. M. (2010). Atheism and secularity in the former Soviet Union. In P. Zuckerman (Ed.), *Atheism and secularity* (pp. 45–72). Santa Barbara: Praeger.
Joas, H. (2006). *The genesis of values*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
Parboteeah, P. K., Hoegl, M., & Cullen, J. B. (2008). Ethics and religion: An empirical test of a multidimensional model. *Journal of Business Ethics, 80*, 387–398.
Pollack, D. (2003). Religiousness inside and outside the church in selected post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. *Social Compass, 50*(3), 321–334.
Stark, R. (2001). Gods, rituals, and the moral order. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 40*(4), 619–636.
Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Tomka, M. (2005). *Church, state and society in Eastern Europe*. Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.
Voas, D., Olsen, D. V. A., & Crockett, A. (2002). Religious pluralism and participation: Why previous research is wrong. *American Sociological Review, 67*, 212–230.
Wainwright, W. J. (2005). *Religion and morality*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
Wilson, B. (1982). *Religion in sociological perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Wilson, B. (1996). Religious toleration, pluralism and privatization. In P. Repstad (Ed.), *Religion and modernity* (pp. 11–34). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
Wuthnow, R. (1996). *Christianity and civil society: The contemporary debate*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International.
Yinger, M. (1970). *The scientific study of religion*. New York: Macmillan.