

# **Measuring religious indifference in the international sociological quantitative surveys (EVS and ISSP)**

**Pierre Bréchon – University of Grenoble – Institute of Political Studies**

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Does Europe become indifferent to the religious dimension of existence? In many theoretical discussions about secularization (for example Wilson, 1966; Berger, 1969; Bruce, 1996; Deremath III, 2007), the definition of the phenomenon has been debated: if in many countries religious indifference seems to be rising, is the end of religion foreseeable as some sociologists of secularization claimed it? Or the change would only entail a loss of significance of main established religions replaced by much more pluralist religious groups and a deregulation of beliefs and faith? So the religious phenomenon would become floating and blurred. Religions are no more the central institutions of societies and the basis of the social cohesion, they only become a dimension among others (Karel Dobbelaere, 2002)<sup>1</sup>, separated from other areas of life. The same idea was developed by Yves Lambert (1985), explaining in a very lively monograph of a large Brittany village, that the catholic religion was only become a “stand of the charity fair”.

At the same time, some refused the idea of secularization, arguing that the religious needs were incompressible and that they simply were less visible and dynamic in European societies due to the monopoly of a unique religion, whereas in the United States, religious competition would lead to a continuation of religiosity in a hyper-developed context, thus in a very modernized society (Finke and Iannaccone, 1993; Stark and Bainbridge, 1985). Modernization would not lead mechanically to secularization, this last process would not be universal, and Europe would be an exceptional case (Davie, 2002), what is discussed by Inglehart and Norris (2004).

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<sup>1</sup> According to Dobbelaere, the process of secularization works at three interrelated levels: societal, individual (weakening of the religiosity of people), organizational (churches are affected by a process of internal secularization).

But what does it mean to say that the current situation is characterized by a rising religious indifference? There are at least two ways of understanding, one which goes less far than the thesis of secularization, the other which goes further:

- Less far: a development of religious indifference would be observed but not an anti-religious opposition. Simply religion would no longer interest many people, without appearing as condemned by the evolution of the modern world.

- Further: religious indifference would mean that religion is useless and that it is even no more a “stand at the fair” or a small dimension of existence, separated of others domains. It could be possible to very well live in a total absence of religious concern. It would not be necessary and useful to be in opposition to religion, as did the anti-religious. Religions would have become insignificant, folkloric and of another era. We would be in a post-secularized world.

The data of the European Values Study and also of the International Social Survey Program should allow us to better grasp religious indifference. In general, the sociologists of religion analyzes data watching especially the level and forms of religious indicators and they do not consider as important to thoroughly regard the no religious and anti-religious people. Here we focus our attention on them. We will present EVS results for the 27 countries of the EU in 2008 and we will compare the results with the wave of 1990 where the survey was carried out in almost all the countries of the EU. For ISSP data, we take into account European countries where the survey is fielded<sup>2</sup>. But outside the EU of 2008, we also consider Croatia, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and outside Europe the United States of America, an interesting case to compare with Europe, as many debates have yet been growing to know if there is an European exception or a US one concerning religious evolution.

### **Religious institutional indifference**

A first possible operationalization of the religious indifference consists to consider its institutional aspect measuring the number of people declaring not to belong to a religious denomination. They are indifferent to the institutionalized religions, they have no feeling of belonging, whatever the reasons of the declared no affiliation.

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<sup>2</sup> The ISSP is not a European survey. The annual modules are carried out in about 40 countries in the world on all the continents. Religion was the subject in 1991, 1998 and 2008. We only consider the modules of 1998 and 2008, the number of countries fielded in 1991 being too weak.

Table 1 shows that in the EU, 30 % of the adult population declare to have no affiliation to a religious group. Thus it is clear that a majority of Europeans continue to belong to a religion. They are not completely indifferent, even if they are often not strongly connected with their denomination<sup>3</sup>. The rate of no affiliation is growing, moving from 25 % in 1990 to 30 % in 2008. The distance expressed with the main religions is very different from one country to another. On table 1, countries are ranked from the most secular, the Czech Republic and Estonia, where more than two third of population is without declared religion, to the most religious at the bottom: in Cyprus, all people declare a religious belonging and it is almost the same thing in Malta, Romania and Greece.

Comparing with 1990, evolution is very different according to national contexts. In the more developed Western countries, the percentage of no religion are growing: France, Belgium, Sweden, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Finland and even Italy. In many countries of the Central and Eastern Europe<sup>4</sup>, the rates are conversely often declining: Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Lithuania. The explanation is probably not completely religious: in 1990, these countries are still partly under the communist rule and the liberty of expressing one's religious identities was not complete. The possibility to express one's religious feelings is now guarantee and more people declare their affiliation to the church, very often to the orthodox one. For these countries, Niko Tos (2013) speaks of a revival of their ethnic-religious identity interpreted as a rather superficial come back.

A third group of countries is characterized by a rather stable level of no religious persons: the Netherlands, Great Britain, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, Romania. But the level of no affiliated was high from the 80's in the Netherlands, Great Britain and Hungary.

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<sup>3</sup> For some people, declaring a religion is only an objective reminder of their family origin, without any religious feeling. If a feeling is linked to this statement, it may be a filial one, a moved memory of religious experiences when one was child.

<sup>4</sup> The Czech Republic is the unique case of a country of the Central Europe where the rate of no religious people is growing between the two dates. It is one of the most irreligious country in the world.

Table 1 - Religious affiliation from 1990 to 2008 (EVS - UE 27)

|                 | 2008               |           |           |           |          | 1990               |           |           |           |          |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
|                 | <b>No religion</b> | Catho.    | Prot.     | Ortho     | Other    | <b>No religion</b> | Catho.    | Prot.     | Ortho.    | Other    |
| Czech Republic  | <b>72</b>          | 24        | 2         | 0         | 2        | <b>61</b>          | <b>35</b> | 4         | 0         | 0        |
| Estonia         | <b>69</b>          | 1         | 11        | 16        | 2        | <b>87</b>          | 0         | 8         | 4         | 1        |
| The Netherlands | <b>52</b>          | 23        | 21        | 0         | 4        | <b>50</b>          | 29        | 17        | <b>0</b>  | 4        |
| France          | <b>52</b>          | 41        | 2         | 0         | 6        | <b>39</b>          | <b>58</b> | 1         | 0         | 2        |
| Hungary         | <b>46</b>          | 41        | 13        | 0         | 1        | <b>42</b>          | <b>43</b> | 13        | 0         | 3        |
| Great Britain   | <b>45</b>          | 11        | <b>36</b> | 0         | 9        | <b>43</b>          | 9         | <b>47</b> | 0         | 2        |
| Belgium         | <b>43</b>          | <b>51</b> | 1         | 1         | 4        | <b>33</b>          | <b>65</b> | 1         | 0         | 2        |
| Sweden          | <b>37</b>          | 2         | <b>59</b> | 1         | 1        | <b>18</b>          | 1         | <b>76</b> | 0         | 5        |
| Latvia          | <b>35</b>          | 20        | 22        | 23        | 1        | <b>64</b>          | 15        | 10        | 8         | 2        |
| Slovenia        | <b>30</b>          | <b>66</b> | 0         | 2         | 3        | <b>27</b>          | <b>69</b> | 1         | 0         | 4        |
| Germany         | <b>28</b>          | 35        | <b>34</b> | 1         | 2        | <b>11</b>          | <b>45</b> | <b>43</b> | 0         | 1        |
| Luxembourg      | <b>27</b>          | <b>66</b> | 3         | 1         | 4        | -                  | -         | -         | -         | -        |
| Bulgaria        | <b>27</b>          | 0         | 0         | <b>59</b> | 13       | <b>68</b>          | 0         | 1         | 24        | 7        |
| Spain           | <b>26</b>          | <b>56</b> | 0         | 1         | 17       | <b>14</b>          | <b>86</b> | 0         | 0         | 1        |
| Finland         | <b>25</b>          | 0         | <b>73</b> | 1         | 1        | <b>12</b>          | 0         | <b>85</b> | 1         | 2        |
| Slovaquia       | <b>24</b>          | <b>68</b> | 7         | 0         | 1        | <b>29</b>          | <b>58</b> | 9         | 3         | 0        |
| Italy           | <b>20</b>          | <b>79</b> | 0         | 0         | 1        | <b>15</b>          | <b>83</b> | 1         | 0         | 0        |
| Portugal        | <b>19</b>          | <b>76</b> | 2         | 0         | 4        | <b>28</b>          | <b>71</b> | 0         | 0         | 2        |
| Austria         | <b>17</b>          | <b>73</b> | 6         | 1         | 3        | <b>17</b>          | <b>77</b> | 6         | 0         | 1        |
| Lithuania       | <b>16</b>          | <b>79</b> | 1         | 4         | 1        | <b>38</b>          | <b>57</b> | 1         | 3         | 2        |
| Ireland         | <b>15</b>          | <b>80</b> | 3         | 0         | 1        | <b>4</b>           | <b>93</b> | 2         | 0         | 1        |
| Denmark         | <b>12</b>          | 1         | <b>85</b> | 0         | 2        | <b>8</b>           | 1         | <b>89</b> | 0         | 2        |
| Poland          | <b>7</b>           | <b>91</b> | 0         | 11        | 4        | <b>4</b>           | <b>94</b> | 0         | 0         | 2        |
| Greece          | <b>4</b>           | 1         | 0         | <b>93</b> | 2        | -                  | -         | -         | -         | -        |
| Romania         | <b>3</b>           | 5         | 2         | <b>86</b> | 4        | <b>6</b>           | 2         | 2         | <b>88</b> | 2        |
| Malta           | <b>3</b>           | <b>96</b> | 1         | 0         | 1        | <b>3</b>           | <b>97</b> | 0         | 0         | 0        |
| Cyprus          | <b>0</b>           | 2         | 0         | <b>96</b> | 2        | -                  | -         | -         | -         | -        |
| <b>UE mean</b>  | <b>30</b>          | <b>43</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>8</b>  | <b>5</b> | <b>25</b>          | <b>51</b> | <b>18</b> | <b>5</b>  | <b>2</b> |

Another manner to measure the religious institutional evolution in the European Union is to consider if interviewees declare that they have always been a member or not. 67 % have always been affiliated to the same religion and only 3 % have changed of religion. So the two thirds of Europeans are stable in their religious belonging since their birth. So the process of secularization is rather slow since it is linked –as we will show it further - to the renewal of generations.

Among the 30 % of no affiliated persons (table 2), 19 % say they have never belonged to a religion<sup>5</sup> but 11 % recognize that they are members before. This last figure is important. 11 % of Europeans explain they were before member of a religion but not now. The process of secularization can be read under this figure. It signifies a process of detachment from the main religions during life for a little part of the population which have not a continual religious identity. The religious permanency of each generation is not complete.

Table 2 - Distinction between always and now out of religion (EVS 2008)

|                 | <b>Total of no religion</b> | Always no religious | Now but not before |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Czech Republic  | <b>72</b>                   | <b>68</b>           | 4                  |
| Estonia         | <b>69</b>                   | <b>65</b>           | 4                  |
| The Netherlands | <b>52</b>                   | 26                  | <b>26</b>          |
| France          | <b>52</b>                   | <b>30</b>           | <b>21</b>          |
| Hungary         | <b>46</b>                   | <b>39</b>           | 7                  |
| Great Britain   | <b>45</b>                   | <b>32</b>           | 13                 |
| Belgium         | <b>43</b>                   | 20                  | <b>23</b>          |
| Sweden          | <b>37</b>                   | 17                  | <b>20</b>          |
| Latvia          | <b>35</b>                   | <b>32</b>           | 2                  |
| Slovenia        | <b>30</b>                   | 23                  | 6                  |
| Germany         | <b>28</b>                   | 17                  | 10                 |
| Luxembourg      | <b>27</b>                   | 13                  | 14                 |
| Bulgaria        | <b>27</b>                   | 26                  | 1                  |
| Spain           | <b>26</b>                   | 15                  | 11                 |
| Finland         | <b>25</b>                   | 3                   | <b>21</b>          |
| Slovaquia       | <b>24</b>                   | 20                  | 4                  |
| Italy           | <b>20</b>                   | 11                  | 9                  |
| Portugal        | <b>19</b>                   | 13                  | 6                  |
| Austria         | <b>17</b>                   | 5                   | 12                 |
| Lithuania       | <b>16</b>                   | 12                  | 2                  |
| Ireland         | <b>15</b>                   | 5                   | 8                  |
| Denmark         | <b>12</b>                   | 5                   | 7                  |
| Poland          | <b>7</b>                    | 4                   | 3                  |
| Greece          | <b>4</b>                    | 3                   | 1                  |
| Romania         | <b>3</b>                    | 2                   | 1                  |
| Malta           | <b>3</b>                    | 1                   | 2                  |
| Cyprus          | <b>0</b>                    | 0                   | 0                  |
| <b>UE mean</b>  | <b>30</b>                   | <b>19</b>           | <b>11</b>          |

<sup>5</sup> In this group, many have parents who are themselves without religion. And they educated their children with secularist values.

The details of these figures by countries are also useful (table 2). In some countries, the process of secularization seems have been ancient as a large amount of people say that they have never been a member of a religious denomination. It is the case for the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Great Britain, Latvia, France. In other countries, it seems that secularization is a newer phenomenon or an old process which fast continue as in the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, France, Finland.

From the ISSP survey, we can consider the same kind of data for almost the same countries in 1998 and 2008 (table 3). In general, measures are close<sup>6</sup> and the ranking of countries is almost the same. In this table, results are distinguished for Eastern and Western Germany. The difference is huge between the two parts of this country, Eastern Germany being even more secularized than the Czech Republic.

Table 3 also shows that the USA religious landscape is not so exceptional that it is sometimes asserted. The level of no religious people is neither very high, nor very low and in fact not very different of many European countries. Croatia, Ireland, Portugal, Italy or Poland even seems here more religious than the USA<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> It is normal that certain differences appear. In many countries, the two surveys have not the same mode of administration, the ISSP questionnaire being often auto-administered while the EVS one is always face to face.

<sup>7</sup> According to the Pew Research Center (“America’s Changing Religious Landscape”, [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org), May 12, 2015), the level of no affiliated Americans is quickly rising, from 16 % in 2007 to 23 % in 2014.

Table 3 - Religious affiliation from 1998 to 2008 (ISSP)

|                   | 2008        |           |           |            | 1998        |           |           |           |
|-------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                   | No religion | Catho.    | Prot.     | Other      | No religion | Catho.    | Prot.     | Other     |
| East Germany      | <b>76</b>   | 4         | 19        | 2          | <b>69</b>   | 5         | 26        | 1         |
| Czech Republic    | <b>65</b>   | 30        | 4         | 1          | <b>45</b>   | 47        | 0         | 0         |
| France            | <b>49</b>   | 48        | 1         | 3          | <b>44</b>   | <b>52</b> | 2         | 2         |
| The Netherlands   | <b>43</b>   | 27        | 21        | 10         | <b>58</b>   | 17        | 17        | 5         |
| Latvia            | <b>39</b>   | 19        | 22        | 20         | <b>36</b>   | 21        | 24        | 18        |
| United Kingdom    | <b>33</b>   | 18        | <b>37</b> | 11         | <b>51</b>   | 9         | <b>37</b> | 4         |
| Sweden            | <b>30</b>   | 1         | <b>67</b> | 3          | <b>29</b>   | 1         | <b>69</b> | 1         |
| Switzerland       | <b>26</b>   | 30        | <b>36</b> | 8          | <b>10</b>   | 44        | <b>42</b> | 4         |
| Belgium (Flandre) | <b>22</b>   | <b>74</b> | 1         | 3          | -           | -         | -         | -         |
| Spain             | <b>22</b>   | <b>75</b> | 1         | 3          | <b>14</b>   | <b>75</b> | 0         | 0         |
| Slovenia          | <b>20</b>   | <b>74</b> | 1         | 5          | <b>24</b>   | <b>72</b> | 1         | 3         |
| Slovaquia         | <b>19</b>   | <b>69</b> | 11        | 1          | <b>16</b>   | <b>69</b> | 14        | 1         |
| Finland           | <b>18</b>   | 0         | <b>78</b> | 4          | -           | -         | -         | -         |
| Norway            | <b>16</b>   | <b>1</b>  | <b>79</b> | 5          | <b>10</b>   | <b>0</b>  | <b>85</b> | 4         |
| Austria           | <b>16</b>   | <b>76</b> | 4         | 4          | <b>13</b>   | <b>80</b> | 5         | 3         |
| West Germany      | <b>16</b>   | 41        | <b>36</b> | 7          | <b>15</b>   | 38        | <b>44</b> | 3         |
| US of America     | <b>16</b>   | 26        | <b>49</b> | 9          | <b>18</b>   | 27        | <b>51</b> | 4         |
| Hungary           | <b>15</b>   | <b>62</b> | 21        | 1          | <b>31</b>   | <b>52</b> | 16        | 1         |
| Bulgarie          | -           | -         | -         | -          | <b>13</b>   | 1         | 0         | <b>86</b> |
| Denmark           | <b>14</b>   | 1         | <b>83</b> | 2          | <b>12</b>   | 0         | <b>87</b> | 2         |
| Poland            | <b>13</b>   | <b>86</b> | 1         | 1          | <b>7</b>    | <b>92</b> | 0         | 1         |
| Italy             | <b>11</b>   | <b>88</b> | 1         | 0          | <b>8</b>    | <b>90</b> | 0         | 2         |
| Portugal          | <b>10</b>   | <b>86</b> | 3         | 2          | <b>7</b>    | <b>90</b> | 0         | 2         |
| Ireland           | <b>8</b>    | <b>86</b> | 3         | 3          | <b>8</b>    | <b>88</b> | 4         | 0         |
| Croatia           | <b>7</b>    | <b>88</b> | 0         | 5          | -           | -         | -         | -         |
| Cyprus            | <b>0</b>    | 1         | 1         | <b>99</b>  | <b>1</b>    | 0         | 0         | <b>99</b> |
| Turkey            | <b>0</b>    | 0         | 0         | <b>100</b> | -           | -         | -         | -         |
| <b>Mean*</b>      | <b>24</b>   | <b>43</b> | <b>23</b> | <b>11</b>  | <b>23</b>   | <b>43</b> | <b>24</b> | <b>10</b> |

*\*Not weighted by the population of each country.*

### Feeling to be not religious

We can now try to measure religious indifference with more subjective indicators. In the EVS survey, it is asked to interviewees if they feel themselves “religious, not religious or convinced atheist”. And in another question, they have to say if religion is a domain of their live “very important, quite important, not important, not at all important” (table 4). In the ISSP survey, we have a close subjective indicator. Those who respond have to choose their position on a scale going from 1 “extremely religious” to 7 “extremely no religious” (table 5).

The dominant feeling remains rather in favor of religiosity (table 4). 60 % say they are religious (against 67 % in 1990). Only 40 % of Europeans assert in 2008 that they are not religious or atheists (against 34 % in 1990). So it is difficult to think we are in a post atheist era. But we have to consider the huge discrepancies between countries. The same geographical differences are noticeable for subjective religious feelings than for denominational belongings. The absence of religious concern is frequent in some countries (Czech Republic, Sweden, France, Estonia, Great Britain...). Religious indifference is growing in many countries but shrinking in some others (from Central and Eastern Europe).

Table 4 – Feeling to be religious, no religious or convinced atheist\* and importance of religion in one's life (1990-2008, EVS - UE 27)

|                 | 2008     |              |           |                               | 1990     |              |           |                               |
|-----------------|----------|--------------|-----------|-------------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
|                 | Atheist  | No religious | Religious | Religion not at all important | Atheist  | No religious | Religious | Religion not at all important |
| France          | 20       | 39           | 41        | 31                            | 11       | 38           | 51        | 29                            |
| Czech Republic  | 17       | 51           | 32        | 55                            | 6        | 53           | 42        | 38                            |
| Sweden          | 15       | 53           | 32        | 42                            | 7        | 62           | 31        | 34                            |
| Slovenia        | 12       | 16           | 72        | 23                            | 8        | 19           | 73        | 23                            |
| Spain           | 12       | 35           | 54        | 32                            | 4        | 29           | 67        | 20                            |
| Belgium         | 11       | 30           | 60        | 26                            | 8        | 24           | 68        | 27                            |
| Luxembourg      | 10       | 33           | 57        | 27                            | -        | -            | -         | -                             |
| Germany         | 9        | 42           | 49        | 34                            | 3        | 32           | 65        | 24                            |
| Great Britain   | 8        | 47           | 45        | 31                            | 4        | 39           | 57        | 19                            |
| Finland         | 8        | 37           | 54        | 37                            | 3        | 39           | 59        | 22                            |
| Estonia         | 7        | 52           | 41        | 34                            | 3        | 76           | 21        | 42                            |
| The Netherlands | 7        | 33           | 60        | 24                            | 6        | 34           | 60        | 29                            |
| Denmark         | 7        | 21           | 71        | 22                            | 5        | 23           | 73        | 30                            |
| Portugal        | 6        | 18           | 76        | 12                            | 5        | 25           | 69        | 17                            |
| Bulgaria        | 5        | 35           | 61        | 12                            | 8        | 56           | 36        | 37                            |
| Italy           | 5        | 9            | 86        | 8                             | 3        | 11           | 86        | 10                            |
| Austria         | 5        | 31           | 64        | 19                            | 3        | 17           | 80        | 14                            |
| Hungary         | 4        | 41           | 55        | 25                            | 4        | 39           | 57        | 21                            |
| Latvia          | 4        | 20           | 76        | 30                            | 4        | 42           | 54        | 32                            |
| Slovaquia       | 3        | 16           | 81        | 20                            | 4        | 18           | 78        | 19                            |
| Greece          | 3        | 11           | 86        | 5                             | -        | -            | -         | -                             |
| Ireland         | 2        | 33           | 65        | 13                            | 1        | 27           | 72        | 4                             |
| Poland          | 2        | 9            | 88        | 5                             | 1        | 3            | 96        | 2                             |
| Lithuania       | 1        | 14           | 85        | 12                            | 3        | 42           | 55        | 20                            |
| Romania         | 1        | 17           | 82        | 3                             | 1        | 24           | 75        | 7                             |
| Malta           | 1        | 32           | 67        | 4                             | 1        | 26           | 74        | 1                             |
| Cyprus          | 1        | 7            | 92        | 1                             | -        | -            | -         | -                             |
| <b>UE mean</b>  | <b>9</b> | <b>31</b>    | <b>60</b> | <b>24</b>                     | <b>5</b> | <b>29</b>    | <b>67</b> | <b>20</b>                     |

\*Results on expressed answers. In 2008, 3 % do not know and 1 % do not answer. In 1990, 7 % were not knowing.

Considering the importance of religion in the life of interviewees, the conclusion is rather similar. In 2008, 24 % say religion is not at all important in their life, 27 % not important but 29 % quite important and 20 % very important. The distribution of answers is very balanced. A comparison can be done with other domains of life, also measured in the same battery: if family, work, friends and acquaintances, leisure are domains much more valued, religion comes behind, but rather far before politics (24 % of Europeans say they find politics not at all important in their life, 37 % not important, 30 % quite important and only 8 % very important). So few people live only for political aims but however many believe in some general political ideas (as many surveys show it). In fact, the Europeans are rather less indifferent towards religion than towards politics!

Saying to be a convinced atheist is a strong statement of anti-religious thought. And in fact the Europeans who say to be convinced atheists are only 9 %, a level rising of 4 points since 1990. France is here the country the most secularized with 20 % of atheists. The importance of anti-religious ideas and the strength of the secular tradition since the end of the XIX<sup>e</sup> century in France – with the separation of State and Churches in 1905 - probably explain this high level. Public opinion on religion is probably more split than in many other countries.

Table 5 shows the ISSP scale of religious feeling in 2008 compared with 1998. As on table 3, we do not observe any change on the European average but they are only ten years between the two waves of the survey. The results are congruent with those of the EVS: 29 % declare in 2008 that they are not religious (from 5 to 7), 22 % are in an intermediate position but 47 % choose to confirm a religious feeling (from 1 to 3). The non-religious feeling is only dominant in some countries, particularly in East Germany and Czech Republic, partly also in France, and Sweden. People in intermediate position could be hesitating persons but also individuals who would refuse to situate themselves on this dimension. But we can hypothesize that such a refusal is very rare as in the EVS survey, for the question with only three positions (religious, non-religious and atheist), thus without central position, the rate of no answer/don't know is rather low: 4 % en 2008.

Table 5 – Feeling to be not religious or religious from 1998 to 2008 (ISSP)\*

|                   | 2008               |           |             |           |                | 1998               |           |             |           |                |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------------|
|                   | Very non religious | Some-what | Neither nor | Some-what | Very religious | Very non religious | Some-what | Neither nor | Some-what | Very religious |
| Eastern Germany   | <b>69</b>          | 6         | 6           | 13        | 3              | <b>63</b>          | 7         | 8           | 14        | 4              |
| Czech Republic    | <b>38</b>          | <b>19</b> | 23          | 13        | 4              | <b>23</b>          | 12        | <b>33</b>   | 19        | 6              |
| France            | <b>27</b>          | 16        | 27          | 23        | 3              | <b>23</b>          | 13        | <b>29</b>   | 24        | 6              |
| The Netherlands   | <b>26</b>          | 6         | 17          | 29        | 17             | <b>20</b>          | 6         | 18          | 36        | 16             |
| Slovenia          | <b>22</b>          | 10        | <b>29</b>   | 28        | 10             | <b>16</b>          | <b>15</b> | 12          | <b>42</b> | 14             |
| Finland           | <b>22</b>          | 10        | 28          | 30        | 7              | -                  | -         | -           | -         | -              |
| Denmark           | <b>22</b>          | 13        | <b>40</b>   | 18        | 4              | <b>16</b>          | 13        | <b>42</b>   | 22        | 6              |
| West Germany      | <b>21</b>          | 12        | 15          | 36        | 12             | <b>27</b>          | 9         | 20          | 29        | 12             |
| United Kingdom    | <b>21</b>          | 10        | 21          | 35        | 9              | <b>14</b>          | 13        | <b>30</b>   | 32        | 6              |
| Sweden            | <b>21</b>          | <b>19</b> | <b>38</b>   | 14        | 4              | <b>8</b>           | <b>21</b> | <b>40</b>   | 12        | 4              |
| Bulgaria          | -                  | -         | -           | -         | -              | <b>21</b>          | 9         | 18          | 36        | 14             |
| Switzerland       | <b>20</b>          | 17        | 22          | 27        | 14             | <b>26</b>          | 11        | 22          | 28        | 7              |
| Norway            | <b>20</b>          | 7         | <b>34</b>   | 28        | 7              | <b>13</b>          | 7         | <b>38</b>   | 29        | 9              |
| Austria           | <b>20</b>          | 12        | 17          | 35        | 14             | <b>15</b>          | 8         | 17          | 40        | 17             |
| Belgium (Flandre) | <b>19</b>          | 8         | 22          | 36        | 13             | -                  | -         | -           | -         | -              |
| Hungary           | <b>17</b>          | <b>21</b> | 23          | 28        | 8              | <b>15</b>          | <b>18</b> | 27          | 30        | 9              |
| Italy             | <b>16</b>          | 10        | 13          | <b>47</b> | 14             | <b>11</b>          | 11        | 13          | <b>50</b> | 14             |
| Latvia            | <b>14</b>          | 17        | <b>34</b>   | 26        | 7              | <b>12</b>          | 17        | <b>32</b>   | 32        | 6              |
| Spain             | <b>14</b>          | 18        | 24          | 34        | 9              | <b>20</b>          | 10        | 29          | 28        | 9              |
| Slovaquia         | <b>14</b>          | 10        | 16          | 38        | <b>20</b>      | <b>9</b>           | 16        | 21          | 34        | <b>21</b>      |
| Portugal          | <b>12</b>          | 12        | 10          | <b>43</b> | <b>22</b>      | <b>6</b>           | 12        | 6           | <b>48</b> | <b>28</b>      |
| US of America     | <b>9</b>           | 6         | 7           | <b>51</b> | <b>26</b>      | <b>8</b>           | 5         | 9           | <b>47</b> | <b>25</b>      |
| Ireland           | <b>7</b>           | 7         | 20          | <b>52</b> | 13             | <b>5</b>           | 7         | 23          | <b>54</b> | 10             |
| Croatia           | <b>7</b>           | 4         | 12          | <b>47</b> | <b>30</b>      | -                  | -         | -           | -         | -              |
| Poland            | <b>5</b>           | 6         | 13          | <b>59</b> | 16             | <b>2</b>           | 4         | 10          | <b>65</b> | 16             |
| Cyprus            | <b>2</b>           | 4         | 24          | 36        | <b>31</b>      | <b>1</b>           | 3         | 14          | <b>47</b> | <b>33</b>      |
| Turkey            | <b>2</b>           | 4         | 6           | 32        | <b>55</b>      | -                  | -         | -           | -         | -              |
| <b>Mean**</b>     | <b>18</b>          | <b>11</b> | <b>22</b>   | <b>33</b> | <b>14</b>      | <b>17</b>          | <b>11</b> | <b>22</b>   | <b>35</b> | <b>13</b>      |

\*Codes 6 and 7 for the most non-religious positions have been added. And idem for the other part of the scale (codes 1 and 2).

\*\*Not weighted by the population of each country.

### An elusive religious indifference

With the table 6, we try to compare the level of religiosity of people not affiliated to an institutionalized religion and people without religious feeling. Obviously, people with no religious denomination show very low levels of beliefs or religious practices. It is the same thing for the no religious persons and even more for convinced atheists. It is important here to underline that those who present the lowest levels of religiosity (last line of table 6) are the convinced atheists (65 % of religiosity 0) and not the people saying they are not religious (35 % of religiosity 0). But the complete indifference, manifesting itself by a total absence of

religiosity, is rather rare since even the atheists may sometimes declare a religious behavior or belief: on the scale of religiosity, if 65 % of the atheists are at the level 0 and 21 % to the note 1, 9 % obtain the note 2 and 5 % have between 3 and 6!

Table 6 – Religious membership and subjective religious feeling crossed with other religious indicators (EVS 2008, UE 27)

|  | %         | Affiliation or not |        |       |        |           | Subjective religious feeling |           |              |
|--|-----------|--------------------|--------|-------|--------|-----------|------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
|  |           | Mean               | Catho. | Prot. | Ortho. | Other     | No religion                  | Religious | No religious |
| God in one's life: not at all important* | <b>20</b> | 4                  | 14     | 3     | 6      | <b>51</b> | 2                            | 38        | <b>81</b>    |
| No life after death                      | <b>48</b> | 33                 | 46     | 36    | 31     | <b>75</b> | 28                           | 72        | <b>89</b>    |
| Never meditate nor pray God**            | <b>31</b> | 12                 | 28     | 8     | 12     | <b>66</b> | 8                            | 60        | <b>83</b>    |
| Never/practically never attend offices   | <b>36</b> | 17                 | 30     | 6     | 26     | <b>76</b> | 15                           | 64        | <b>89</b>    |
| No religiosity***<br>(0 on a 0-10 scale) | <b>17</b> | 4                  | 11     | 3     | 4      | <b>43</b> | 0                            | 35        | <b>65</b>    |

\*Mean on a scale where 1 signifies "not at all important" and 10 "very important".

\*\*Scale from two questions: "to take some moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation or something like that" (yes or no) and a scale of frequency of prayer to God (from "every day" to "never")

\*\*\* With 10 indicators present in the 4 waves of the survey: declaring to be member of a religious or parochial association, attending religious services at least monthly, feeling to be religious, believing in God, believing in a personal God or life force, giving a great importance to God in one's life (level 8 to 10 of a scale), believing in life after death, finding that religion brings strength and comfort, take moments to pray and meditate, make a very or fairly great confidence to the churches.

It appears that many Europeans are in fact not completely clear with their religious feelings. The number of strong believers and practitioners is not very high in many countries and is shrinking. The number of people without religion and stating antireligious beliefs are also weak but rather rising in many countries, particularly in the Western part of Europe (Bréchon, Gonthier, 2013). So the majority of people are in between, developing more or less floating and blurred beliefs and showing weak religious behaviors. They are not much worried with a religious future.

The ISSP survey very well measures the importance of the intermediate opinions on God in a fascinating question with six different statements, while traditionally believing in God could be measured with a dichotomous question: "Do you believe in God (yes or no)?" With the increase of uncertain believers and religious indifference, this last question appears to be too rough. The ISSP question is labelled like this:

Please indicate which statement below comes closest to expressing what you believe about God.

I don't believe in God

I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out

I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind

I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others

While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God

I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it

Table 7 – Believing or not in God (ISSP, 2008)

|                   | Do not believe | Do not know | Believe in Higher Power | Sometimes believe in God | When doubts, feel that I do believe | Believe, no doubts |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| East Germany      | <b>52</b>      | 13          | 9                       | 8                        | 8                                   | 8                  |
| Czech Republic    | <b>37</b>      | 15          | 16                      | 7                        | 11                                  | 13                 |
| France            | <b>22</b>      | 16          | 13                      | 11                       | 20                                  | 17                 |
| The Netherlands   | <b>20</b>      | 14          | <b>22</b>               | 8                        | 15                                  | 21                 |
| Sweden            | <b>19</b>      | <b>19</b>   | <b>29</b>               | 7                        | 15                                  | 10                 |
| Latvia            | <b>18</b>      | 9           | <b>24</b>               | 11                       | 15                                  | 22                 |
| United Kingdom    | <b>18</b>      | 19          | 14                      | 13                       | 19                                  | 17                 |
| Denmark           | <b>18</b>      | 13          | <b>25</b>               | 9                        | 20                                  | 13                 |
| Belgium (Flandre) | <b>17</b>      | 15          | 17                      | 14                       | 18                                  | 14                 |
| Norway            | <b>17</b>      | 14          | <b>24</b>               | 7                        | 22                                  | 15                 |
| Hungary           | <b>15</b>      | 12          | 10                      | <b>19</b>                | 19                                  | 23                 |
| Slovenia          | <b>13</b>      | 6           | <b>29</b>               | 10                       | 16                                  | 24                 |
| Finland           | <b>11</b>      | 14          | 17                      | 11                       | <b>25</b>                           | 20                 |
| West Germany      | <b>10</b>      | 12          | 17                      | 12                       | 21                                  | 27                 |
| Spain             | <b>10</b>      | 10          | 12                      | 8                        | 20                                  | <b>39</b>          |
| Slovaquia         | <b>10</b>      | 5           | 11                      | 13                       | 18                                  | <b>40</b>          |
| Austria           | <b>8</b>       | 11          | <b>27</b>               | 12                       | 20                                  | 21                 |
| Switzerland       | <b>8</b>       | 9           | <b>29</b>               | 7                        | 16                                  | 28                 |
| Croatia           | <b>5</b>       | 4           | 9                       | 7                        | 16                                  | <b>59</b>          |
| Italy             | <b>5</b>       | 7           | 6                       | 12                       | <b>27</b>                           | <b>43</b>          |
| Portugal          | <b>4</b>       | 4           | 11                      | 9                        | 18                                  | <b>54</b>          |
| Ireland           | <b>4</b>       | 5           | 10                      | 14                       | 22                                  | <b>45</b>          |
| US of America     | <b>3</b>       | 5           | 10                      | 4                        | 17                                  | <b>61</b>          |
| Poland            | <b>3</b>       | 6           | 6                       | 9                        | 14                                  | <b>63</b>          |
| Cyprus            | <b>2</b>       | 3           | 7                       | 8                        | 21                                  | <b>59</b>          |
| Turkey            | <b>2</b>       | 1           | 1                       | 1                        | 2                                   | <b>93</b>          |
| <b>Mean*</b>      | <b>13</b>      | <b>11</b>   | <b>15</b>               | <b>10</b>                | <b>18</b>                           | <b>33</b>          |

*\*Not weighted by the population of each country.*

Between sure unbelief and belief without doubt, four items allows respondents to describe their intermediate positions: incertitude and impossibility to know, impersonal higher power of some kind, sporadic faith, voluntary effort necessary to believe! Table 7 shows that believing without doubts remains the more frequent option (33 %) whereas clearly no believers are only 13 %. 54 % have more or less doubts and all the intermediate answers gather about the same amount of people (between 10 and 18 %). Perhaps that the European situation is rather marked by a quite uncertainty (open on a possible religious viewpoint) than an indifference. With obviously always strong differences

depending on countries. Some of them are clearly leaning towards unbelief while others remain very religious and believing.

In the same survey, another question allows us to catch, at least partly, the very irreligious and religious positions. It is asked to respondents what best describe them with four items: following a religion being also spiritual, following a religion without to be spiritual, not following a religion but being spiritual, being neither a religious follower nor a spiritual person<sup>8</sup>. It is an interesting attempt to measure attitudes consisting to stay distant of institutionalized religions but declaring an interest for spirituality, here defined like the sacred and the supernatural.

The results (table 8) show that a little more people choose the intermediate positions rather than the clearest ones. The most indifferent persons are those who are neither follower nor spiritual (23 %). A group of 15 % are adepts of a no institutionalized religion: they do not declare to be members of a religion but they say they are open to the sacred and the supernatural. So they are far to be completely indifferent to the religious dimension of life.

The most astonishing group is constituted by the 33 % of people declaring they are followers of a religion but not interested by the sacred and the supernatural<sup>9</sup>. Probably it simply means that they are followers but not strong believers and involved people. This interpretation is confirmed by table 9, crossing the answers to this question with some indicators of religiosity (intensity of religious feelings, monthly attendance to office, believing to life after death, say having one's own way of connecting with God without churches or religious services). The followers being not spiritual are much less religious than the spiritual followers.

Nevertheless, the intermediate categories have the highest level of people declaring they have their own way to connect to God. These categories probably gather a larger part of individualized religious persons, with a personal approach of religion. They are not at all indifferent religious people.

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<sup>8</sup> The four items are labeled like so: "I follow a religion and consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural, I follow a religion, but don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural, I don't follow a religion, but consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural, I don't follow a religion and don't consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred or the supernatural."

<sup>9</sup> We touch here the limit of quantitative surveys: it is not always easy to well understand the logic of answers. From this point of view, qualitative interviews are very fruitful.

Table 8 – Followers of a religion and spiritual identity (ISSP, 2008)

|                   | <b>No religion<br/>no spiritual</b> | Not religion<br>but spiritual | Religion but<br>no spiritual | Religion and<br>spiritual | DK/NA     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| East Germany      | <b>70</b>                           | 8                             | 10                           | 4                         | 8         |
| Czech Republic    | <b>52</b>                           | 12                            | 19                           | 10                        | 8         |
| Sweden            | <b>35</b>                           | 15                            | 24                           | 10                        | 16        |
| United Kingdom    | <b>33</b>                           | 18                            | 22                           | 12                        | 15        |
| Norway            | <b>32</b>                           | 17                            | 22                           | 13                        | 16        |
| France            | <b>31</b>                           | 15                            | 30                           | 12                        | 11        |
| The Netherlands   | <b>31</b>                           | <b>21</b>                     | 23                           | 12                        | 13        |
| Belgium (Flandre) | <b>31</b>                           | 3                             | 32                           | 9                         | 16        |
| Hungary           | <b>29</b>                           | 18                            | 31                           | 14                        | 8         |
| West Germany      | <b>28</b>                           | 10                            | 34                           | 10                        | <b>18</b> |
| Finland           | <b>27</b>                           | 19                            | 27                           | 12                        | 16        |
| Latvia            | <b>25</b>                           | <b>23</b>                     | 31                           | 15                        | 6         |
| Denmark           | <b>25</b>                           | 15                            | 33                           | 16                        | 11        |
| Slovenia          | <b>22</b>                           | <b>24</b>                     | 26                           | 18                        | 11        |
| Austria           | <b>22</b>                           | 19                            | 30                           | 15                        | 14        |
| Spain             | <b>21</b>                           | 14                            | 37                           | 20                        | 8         |
| Switzerland       | <b>19</b>                           | 18                            | 38                           | 19                        | 7         |
| Slovaquia         | <b>17</b>                           | 7                             | 35                           | <b>33</b>                 | 8         |
| Italy             | <b>14</b>                           | 8                             | <b>43</b>                    | <b>31</b>                 | 4         |
| US of America     | <b>11</b>                           | <b>23</b>                     | 22                           | <b>39</b>                 | 5         |
| Croatia           | <b>10</b>                           | <b>25</b>                     | <b>43</b>                    | 23                        | 0         |
| Poland            | <b>9</b>                            | 7                             | <b>59</b>                    | 18                        | 7         |
| Ireland           | <b>8</b>                            | 2                             | <b>41</b>                    | <b>31</b>                 | 8         |
| Portugal          | <b>7</b>                            | 6                             | <b>53</b>                    | <b>32</b>                 | 2         |
| Cyprus            | <b>5</b>                            | 6                             | <b>51</b>                    | <b>28</b>                 | 10        |
| Turkey            | <b>4</b>                            | 20                            | 28                           | <b>47</b>                 | 2         |
| <b>Mean*</b>      | <b>23</b>                           | <b>15</b>                     | <b>33</b>                    | 20                        | <b>10</b> |

*\*Not weighted by the population of each country.*

Last point to comment on this table 9: those who do not answer do not seem completely indifferent as they do not present the weakest level of religiosity. These rather numerous non answers (10 %) are probably explainable by the difficulty they have to choose their religious identity between these four possibilities!

Table 9 – Religion and spirituality crossed with indicators of religiosity (ISSP 2008)

|                              | Religious feeling<br>++ (5-7) | Monthly<br>attendance | Life after<br>death | Own way to<br>connect to God |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Religion + spiritual         | 93                            | 66                    | 83                  | 50                           |
| Religion but not spiritual   | 66                            | 36                    | 55                  | 57                           |
| No religion but spiritual    | 29                            | 11                    | 54                  | 59                           |
| No religion and no spiritual | 4                             | 3                     | 14                  | 23                           |
| Can't choose/No answer       | 30                            | 18                    | 35                  | 40                           |
| <b>Mean</b>                  | <b>48</b>                     | <b>29</b>             | <b>49</b>           | <b>47</b>                    |

As it seems not obvious to clearly ascertain religious indifference and to can count how many people can be defined as belonging to this category, we will prefer to consider the religious dimension as a continuum going from strong religiosity to its opposite. For that, we consider the attitudinal scale used in table 6 (at the bottom) as the best possibility to measure the level of religiosity, taking into account together religious feelings, behaviors and beliefs (Bréchon, 2013). This scale will allow us to better understand who are the Europeans characterized by a weak religiosity.

### **Social background of persons with weak religiosity**

Table 10 shows the relationship between the level of religiosity and different socio-demographic variables. The religiosity of the people remains very dependent on the gender: women are significantly more religious than men. And this relationship is verified in all countries. The explanation of the phenomenon is controversial. Some social scientists explain it mainly by differences in male and female roles, investment at home or at work. Family aims would conduct to more religious orientations than work and outside contexts (Sullins, 2006). Others talk of more natural reasons: women would take less risks and would be - by nature - more fearful, what would lead to a more frequent religious orientation (Miller, Hoffman, 1995).

**Tableau 10 – Attitudinal scale of religiosity and socio-demographic variables**  
(EVS 2008, UE 27)

| <i>horizontal %</i>   | Level of religiosity |               |               |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
|                       | Weak (0-2)           | Average (3-6) | Strong (7-10) |
| <b>Mean</b>           | <b>34</b>            | <b>30</b>     | <b>37</b>     |
| Man                   | <b>42</b>            | 29            | 30            |
| Woman                 | 26                   | 30            | <b>44</b>     |
| 18-24 years old       | <b>45</b>            | 30            | 25            |
| 25-34 years old       | 38                   | 31            | 31            |
| 35-49 years old       | 36                   | 32            | 32            |
| 50-64 years old       | 32                   | 30            | 38            |
| 65 years old and more | 21                   | 24            | <b>54</b>     |
| Primary school        | 18                   | 28            | <b>54</b>     |
| Junior high school    | 34                   | 30            | 36            |
| Senior high school    | 34                   | 30            | 36            |
| University            | 38                   | 30            | 32            |
| Very low income       | 21                   | 25            | <b>55</b>     |
| Rather low            | 29                   | 28            | 43            |
| Rate high             | 37                   | 30            | 33            |
| Very high income      | 40                   | 34            | 27            |

Religiosity is also strongly depending on the generation of individuals: the young are much less religious than the old generations. Here also, the relationship exists – more or less strongly – in all countries of the EU. An analysis by birth cohorts allows us to explain the phenomenon (table 11): a generation effect is very clear: each generation is characterized by a certain level of religiosity and is very stable during all its life. We can just note a slight effect of life cycle: generations seem become a little less irreligious with aging and approaching the death age. It is possible that some growing older people find again some beliefs or practices but it is not the main tendency.

**Tableau 11 – Weak religiosity by birth cohort (EVS, UE 27 – en %)**

|                   | 1981*     | 1990      | 1999      | 2008      |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| From 1982 to 1990 | -         | -         | -         | 43        |
| From 1973 to 1981 | -         | -         | 35        | 38        |
| From 1964 to 1972 | -         | 44        | 34        | 37        |
| From 1955 to 1963 | 43        | 40        | 33        | 36        |
| From 1946 to 1954 | 39        | 35        | 32        | 31        |
| From 1937 to 1945 | 29        | 27        | 26        | 25        |
| From 1928 to 1936 | 26        | 23        | 21        | 20        |
| From 1919 to 1927 | 22        | 19        | 21        | 18        |
| From 1910 to 1918 | 17        | 15        | 19        | -         |
| From 1901 to 1909 | 17        | -         | -         | -         |
| <b>Mean</b>       | <b>30</b> | <b>31</b> | <b>30</b> | <b>34</b> |

\*For 1981, the survey was only carried out in 10 western countries, plus Malta.

Coming back to table 10 (at the bottom), we can consider the effect of the level of education and income. People with only a primary school education are much more religious than others (verified in almost all countries even if the link is not always very strong). It can be hypothesized that education is one of the possible explanations of individual religiosity<sup>10</sup>. Doing studies lead to cogitate, not to simply reproduce ideas and values internalized in the family socialization; whereas non educated people would be easily superstitious and open to irrational thoughts.

The relationship between religiosity and income is about of same intensity than the previous one (Cramer's  $V=0.10$ ). When Europeans have a low income, they tend to be more religious. And well off categories present rather less religiosity. If gender, age, education and income are

<sup>10</sup> But the level of education is also depending of generations. We will consider a little further the respective weight of the two variables, all things considered as equal on other dimensions.

correlated with religiosity, occupational belongings are reversely almost without effect ( $V=0.06$ ).

Some of these variables being linked, we have carried out a binary logistic regression (with two categories of religiosity, low for 0 to 5 and high for 6 to 10), adding a variable of geographical area<sup>11</sup>. Table 12 shows that the gender effect is very high. In many domains of values differences between men and women are shrinking but concerning the religious dimension, discrepancies remain important. All things equal, the generational effect remains rather high, with a strong religiosity among aging Europeans. Now, all things equal, almost all the generations have the same religiosity except the oldest (statistically 1.7 time more religious than the 18-24 years old). What is congruent with the explanations on value change beginning with the baby boom generations, which were also the generations during which the length of studies exploded. In the regression model, the education effect is not so high than in the mere crossed table, even if educated people are rather less religious. Comparatively to other variables, the effect of income on religiosity is weak, except for the very high income who are less religious.

Table 12 – Binary logistic regression of religiosity (EVS 2008, UE 27)

|                       | Wald by ddl | Exposant de B |
|-----------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Man                   | 866         | 1             |
| Woman                 |             | 1.4           |
| 18-24 years old       | 181         | 1             |
| 25-34 years old       |             | 0.8           |
| 35-49 years old       |             | 1             |
| 50-64 years old       |             | 1.2           |
| 65 years old and more |             | 1.7           |
| Primary school        | 76          | 1             |
| Junior high school    |             | 1             |
| Senior high school    |             | 0.8           |
| University            |             | 0.9           |
| Very low income       | 10          | 1             |
| Rather low income     |             | 1             |
| Rather high income    |             | 1             |
| Very high income      |             | 0.8           |

<sup>11</sup> This variable (Occidental, Oriental, Northern, Southern Europe) only allows us to neutralize composition effects as income and education are linked to the economic situation of each country. So it is not presented in table 12.

### The system of values of weakly religious persons

The system of values of individuals is still very depending on their positions concerning religiosity. It is even the variable having the strongest effect on value system (Gonthier, Bréchon, 2014). Here we will show this impact considering a large number of attitudinal scales, about all the domains of life (table 13). Each of these scales has been tested and validated in our previous publications<sup>12</sup>.

On many value dimensions, differences depending on religiosity are appearing. The least Europeans are integrated to a universe of religious beliefs and practices, the least they support values of traditional family and leftist values, and the most they are in favor of moral permissiveness and of equality between men and women. Irreligion goes hand in hand with a weaker work ethic, a very low support to a morality with clear principles, to authoritarian values, to nationalism, to solidarity values (feeling to be concerned by life conditions of others, particularly the disadvantaged). Concerning political action, religious people have a rather higher rate of electoral turnout (not presented in the table 13) but they show a weaker protest participation (non-conventional).

Table 13 – Support to different values according to the level of religiosity (EVS 2008, UE 27)

|   | Weak<br>(0-2) | Average<br>(3-6) | Strong<br>(7-10) | Mean |
|---|---------------|------------------|------------------|------|
| Very in favor of traditional family (6 indicators)          | 15            | 24               | <b>40</b>        | 27   |
| Strong moral permissiveness (8 indicators)                  | <b>50</b>     | 35               | 13               | 33   |
| In favor of sharing male female roles (4 items)             | 56            | 50               | 45               | 50   |
| When jobs are scarce, keeping them for men                  | 13            | 16               | 23               | 18   |
| In favor of a morality with clear principles                | 18            | 21               | <b>34</b>        | 25   |
| Support to work values (5 indicators)                       | 40            | 44               | <b>55</b>        | 47   |
| Feeling of happiness (2 variables)                          | 55            | 55               | 56               | 55   |
| In favor of civic permissiveness (7 indicators)             | <b>62</b>     | 56               | 44               | 54   |
| Support to authoritarian values (4 indicateurs)             | 41            | 48               | <b>60</b>        | 50   |
| Reject foreigners from one's neighborhood (at least 2 cat.) | 17            | 17               | 21               | 19   |
| Very proud to be from one's country                         | 33            | 42               | <b>51</b>        | 42   |
| At least one action of protesting participation (on 5)      | <b>59</b>     | 55               | 44               | 52   |
| Strong support to economic liberalism (6 indicators)        | 35            | 37               | 36               | 36   |
| Supporter of democratic system (4 indicators)               | 40            | 36               | 39               | 38   |
| Strong politicization (3 indicators)                        | 50            | 50               | 50               | 50   |
| Right-wing political orientation (6-10)                     | 26            | 31               | <b>35</b>        | 31   |
| Trust in others (3 indicators)                              | 51            | 50               | 47               | 49   |
| Belonging to at least one voluntary organization            | 42            | 41               | 40               | 41   |
| Supporting solidarity values (10 indicators)                | 41            | 46               | <b>57</b>        | 49   |
| Strong level of individualization                           | <b>64</b>     | 50               | 22               | 44   |

<sup>12</sup> For not making this paper too heavy, we do not present in detail each scale.

The last line of the table is as a sum up: irreligious people are much more individualized, individualization being defined as willing in all domains to choose themselves what is good for them, without being determined by their family or social entourage, by the State or a church. Individualization is in fact the main tendency of value change in the last decades in Western Europe (Ester, Halman, de Moor, 1993). Individualization and secularization are tightly connected. The religious decline is associated to a rejection of a supreme order, allowing each individual to claim his individual autonomy, without having to follow a God and a religion allocating norms and behaviors. If the association is very clear, it is not possible to say in what way the correlation works: is the decline of Gods leading to individualization or does the will of individual autonomy lead to the religious retreat?

Even if religiosity is a very important factor in value preferences, it must be underline that all the attitudes are not correlated with it. Conversely to what it is sometimes said, religiosity do not lead to a better feeling of happiness. The level of politicization, of trust in others, of associative membership, of xenophobia and foreigners' rejection, of support to economic liberalism and democratic system are very similar and not different among religious and irreligious people.

When we separately consider the effect of the level of religiosity for men and women, it appears that the strong explaining variable is the religiosity and not the gender. Gender discrepancies on values taken into account on the table 13 for each level of religiosity are small<sup>13</sup>. The results when age is checked are not identical (table 14). Age as an effect more important compared with that of gender. Religiosity and age have in fact effects which reinforce each other, even if religiosity seems to be in general more determinant. So we can observe rising or decreasing figures from the group of the young with a weak religiosity to the old people with a strong one. Young geneations share ore individualizes values and they are also more secularized.

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<sup>13</sup> For the same level of religiosity, women are a little more in favor of individualized values ad a little less in favor of traditional values.

Table 14 – Support to different values according to the level of religiosity and age (EVS 2008, UE 27)

|                                   | Weak religiosity (0-2) |             | Strong religiosity (7-10) |             | Mean |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|------|
|                                   | 18-34                  | 55 and more | 18-34                     | 55 and more |      |
| In favor of traditional family    | 10                     | 24          | 36                        | 46          | 27   |
| Strong moral permissiveness       | 58                     | 42          | 20                        | 13          | 33   |
| Sharing male female roles         | 59                     | 53          | 47                        | 43          | 50   |
| Morality with clear principles    | 15                     | 22          | 28                        | 38          | 25   |
| Support to work values            | 34                     | 52          | 47                        | 64          | 47   |
| Support to authoritarian values   | 39                     | 46          | 53                        | 65          | 50   |
| Very proud of one's country       | 32                     | 38          | 45                        | 56          | 42   |
| At least one protesting action    | 54                     | 59          | 44                        | 41          | 52   |
| Support solidarity values         | 35                     | 49          | 51                        | 60          | 49   |
| Strong level of individualization | 75                     | 54          | 30                        | 18          | 44   |

### Conclusions

In relation to the two thesis about religious indifference (less far or further than secularization), it is clear that religious indifference is a less absolute and complete attitude than the anti-religious dynamics. We are not in a post-secularized world. Secularization is a more or less quick movement depending on periods and countries and corresponds to a decline of institutional religions and of their religious universe. Beliefs become uncertain, possible but not sure. Religions will probably not be disappearing, they are losing their social strength, they are changing and are the place of complex processes of new arrangements. Dobbelaere (2014) explains that in this situation, sociologists have to study other meaning systems than those elaborated by religions. Before doing that, we can yet assert that people with a low religiosity share very different values compared with highly religious people.

People who seem to be religiously indifferent are very often not completely clear on their religious position. They do not say the same think at each time, they are very floating and rather often in favor of a possible religious phenomenon, but for them the existence of something beyond our world is not a very important question as they probably do not think that their current acts determine their potential future beyond. Their values are very often in between those of strong religious and not religious people.

Data also show the enormous religious differences between countries, what underline that religions are not completely an individual choice. In some national contexts, religion remains

the social norm while in some others irreligion and atheism are socially more and more dominant. From this point of view, the USA are not an exceptional case of a wealthy and nevertheless religious country. This country remains strongly religious but no more than some European countries, in particular Ireland and Italy which are also rather affluent countries. And the USA are also not homogeneous religiously speaking<sup>14</sup> as Europe is not. So it is exaggerated to speak of exceptional cases, as well for Europe than for America.

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<sup>14</sup> According to a large survey carried out by the Association of Statisticians of American religious Bodies, the counties could be divided in four categories : if in about a quarter of counties, the rate of affiliated members to a denomination was 75% and more, the lowest category was 35 % and less (Glenmary Research Center, 2000). But, in the last Pew survey (quoted before), the percentage of no affiliated is not very different according large areas, probably themselves too heterogeneous: 19 % of the adult population in the South, 22 % in the Midwest, 25 % in the Northeast and 28 % in the West declare they are without religion..

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