

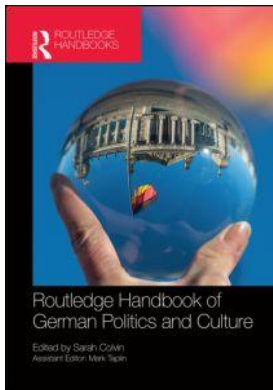
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Religious diversity

Volkhard Krech

Europe is an exceptional continent on the world religious map, and Germany illustrates that exceptionality. The other continents have historically been dynamic and very diverse in religious terms: in Africa, for example, Christianity and Islam exist alongside indigenous religions, while in Asia, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic communities coexist with Hindu religions, Buddhism, and traditional Chinese religion. Europe, by contrast, has long been dominated by Christianity; and yet the religious landscape, including in Germany, has always been more colourful than it seems. A recent growth in religiosity without formal religious affiliation, alongside the increased visibility of smaller religious communities, has made this diversity more visible. It has been further enhanced by immigration, the emergence of new religions, and the establishment of divergent theological currents within the mainline Christian churches.

This chapter offers an historical overview of religious developments in Germany over the last century before looking at the current religious situation and highlighting religious trends. Statistical data is used where available. Due to the legal conditions governing state–church relations in Germany, the two major Christian churches and some other religious communities have the status of public bodies, are organised by formal membership, and are financed by a church tax (*Kirchensteuer*) that is collected as part of general taxation. Formal membership starts with baptism, and people can choose to leave on reaching religious maturity at the age of 14. This explains why statistical data is more available in Germany than in other countries, although not for all religious communities. In the case of the latter, adherence has to be estimated.¹

Historical developments

The Reformation signalled the start of the ‘confessional age’ in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (Schilling 1994). At the Peace of Augsburg (1555), the principle of *cuius regio eius religio* was adopted, giving each sovereign the right to determine the official religion (Catholic or Lutheran) of the territory over which he ruled. Following the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), the Peace of Westphalia (1648) modified this principle by extending formal recognition to Reformed Protestantism and prohibiting any change to the religious status quo, even if the ruler himself converted to another faith. Thus the diversity of the religious landscape was strongly connected to the political geography of Germany during the early modern period.

Although the 18th and 19th centuries saw some liberalisation (through the Prussian Religious Edict of 1788, for example), the two major Christian confessions – Lutheran or Reformed Protestantism and Roman Catholicism – were generally privileged. This was the religious backdrop to the process of German nation-building. When the German Empire was established under Otto von Bismarck in 1871, the northern and eastern states were shaped mainly by Protestantism, while the southern states were dominated by Roman Catholicism. During the *Kulturkampf* (1871–8) Bismarck, a Prussian, attempted to restrict the role and power of the Roman Catholic Church, though with limited success. In the remainder of this section, I will look at religious developments in Germany between 1900 and the present, differentiating analytically between the level of the individual and the macro level of society.

Membership of and affiliation to the main Christian churches

Figure 15.1 provides a rough indication of formal church membership during this period.

The chart in Figure 15.1 shows religious affiliation to the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in the German Empire (*Kaiserreich*), the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and (re)unified Germany from 1990 to 2002. Around 1900, the vast majority of the German population still belonged to one of the major Christian churches. There was no significant change in the aggregate membership of the two main German churches until 1910, when it began to fall. This decline continued until 1940, but whereas between 1910 and 1925 the Catholic Church lost members, the Protestant Church gained. The trend was reversed between 1925 and 1939. The biggest change in membership of the two main Christian churches happened between 1945

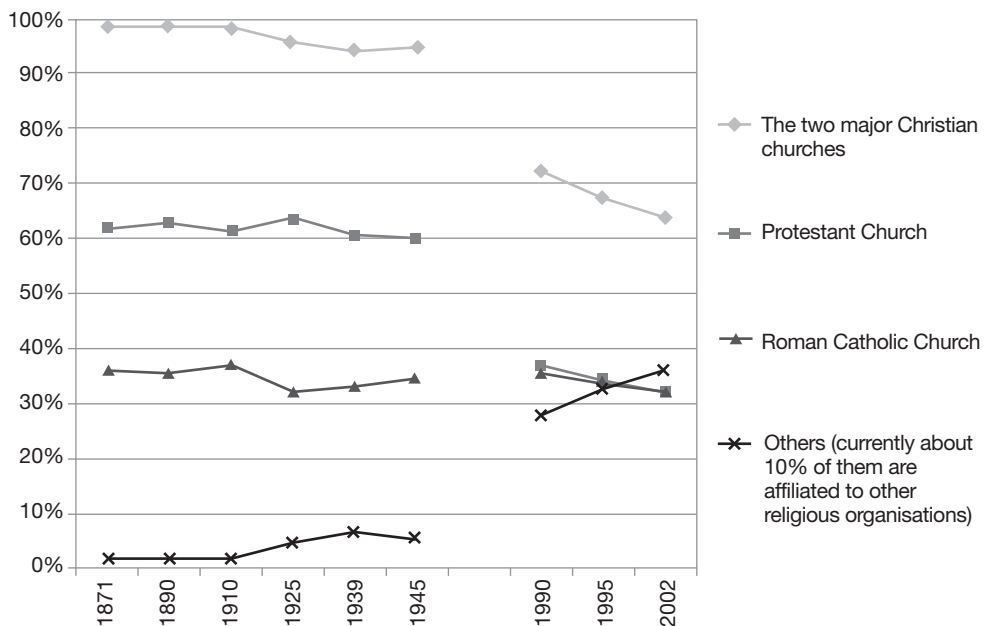


Figure 15.1 Religious affiliation in the German Empire (*Kaiserreich*), the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and unified Germany after 1990

Source: Kirchliche Jahrbücher (church statistics); Zentralstelle für Kirchliche Statistik des Katholischen Deutschland; own evaluation

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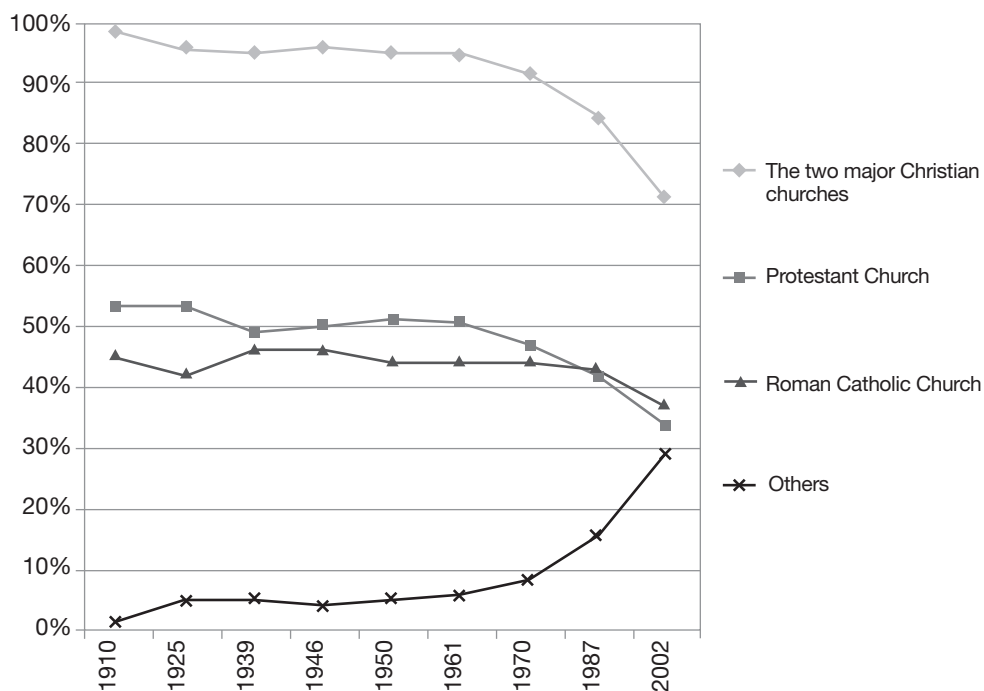


Figure 15.2 Religious affiliation in West Germany between 1900 and 2002

Source: Kirchliche Jahrbücher (church statistics); Zentralstelle für Kirchliche Statistik des Katholischen Deutschland

and 2002, which is hardly surprising: religious politics in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had a significant influence on church membership, and the Protestant Church lost many, if not most, of its members in the context of socialism and state-decreed atheism. The Roman Catholic Church was less severely affected (but had never been strong in East Germany).

These statistics reflect not so much a process of secularisation as a decline in the importance of religion due to sociopolitical developments. Religious politics in the GDR should be seen not as part of a structural development in modern society (secularisation) but as a cultural factor; in the context of Marxist atheism, religious politics belong to the ideological struggle (*Weltanschauungskampf*). And since atheism can be understood as a system of belief, religious politics in the GDR form part of the modern history of religions. When looking at the process of secularisation, then, it is necessary to isolate religious politics as a factor (see, for example, Dähn and Heise 2003; Pollack 1994). Given the severe dearth of empirical material for the GDR, however, the remainder of this section will focus on the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

The statistics for church membership (Figure 15.2) show that, taken together, the two main churches in the FRG experienced no significant change in membership from the end of World War II to the 1960s; when one church lost members, the other one gained. In the early 1970s, as a result of secularisation processes during the 1960s (McLeod 2007), the situation changed. At first only the Protestant Church lost a substantial number of members, but in the early 1990s the Roman Catholic Church experienced the same trend.

Religion in German society: the idea and process of secularisation

A closer look at the societal sphere reveals that secularisation moved from being a focus of discussion to establishing itself as an empirical fact. The idea of secularisation (other than as a legal term) comes from theology – that is, from within the religious sphere. Parallel to church building and the organisation of mass religiosity, Protestantism during the 19th century developed an *idea* of individual religious practice based on authenticity, faith, and integrity, in the light of which *actual* religious practice could only be seen as deficient. Secularisation in this sense means a lifestyle not wholly shaped by religious practice. From within the religious field, the idea of secularisation was used as a societal stimulus for religion among the public; it became an analytical term in the social sciences from the early 1950s onwards. The journey of the idea from the religious sphere, via the public sphere, to the social sciences was reflected in a rapid increase in the production of books on the subject (Figure 15.3).

The sheer volume of books can be considered an indicator of growing interest in the idea of secularisation in the course of the 20th century. After a slow start at the beginning of the century, the curve rises rapidly from the early 1950s until today. Both the proponents and the critics of the idea of secularisation contributed to this development.

There is an interesting correlation between the number of people giving up church membership and the number of books on the subject of secularisation; both also correlate strikingly with the ends of the two world wars (Figure 15.4).

Periods of mass exodus from the church are generally preceded by booms in the production of books on secularisation. In the early 20th century, a period of high demand for such works was followed by the first large wave of departures from the church, beginning in 1918. This was caused mainly by political (especially socialist) movements, but the end of World War I

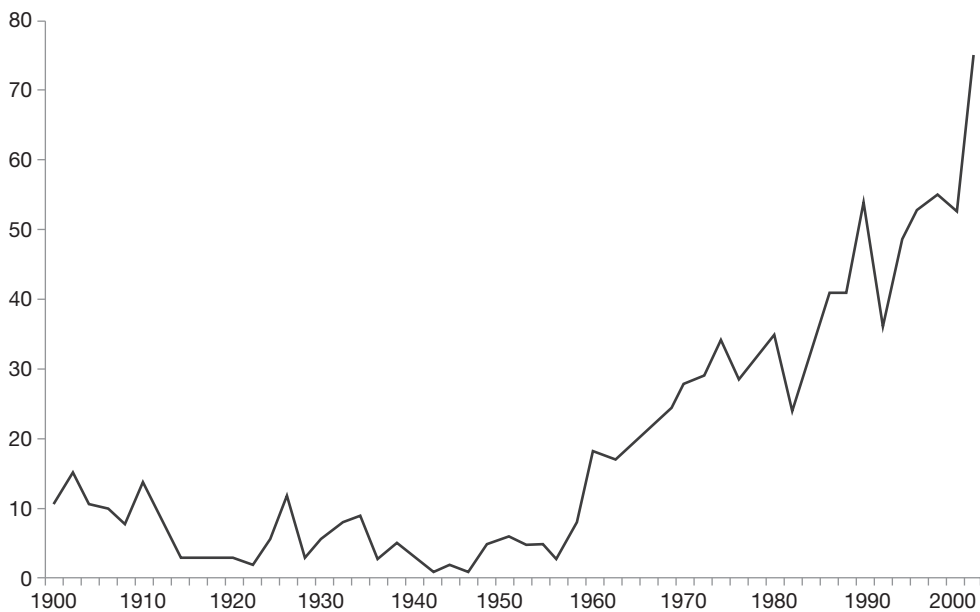


Figure 15.3 German book titles containing the words 'säkular' (secular), 'Säkularisation' (secularisation), or 'Säkularisierung' (secularisation), 1900–2003

Source: Verbundkatalog GBV; own evaluation

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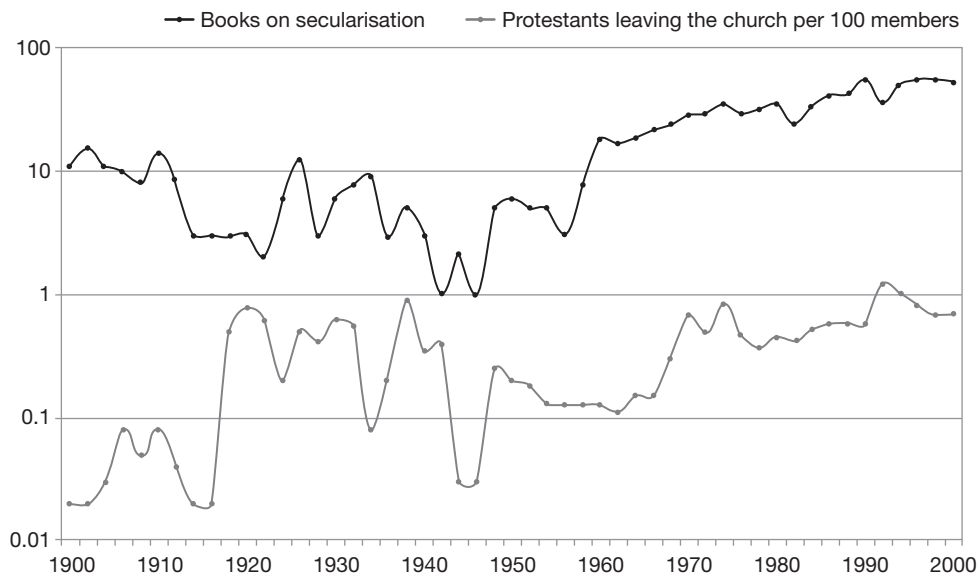


Figure 15.4 Secularisation literature and the decline in church membership (*Austreten*) in Germany, 1900–2000

Logarithmic scale; source: Verbundkatalog GBV and church statistics of the EKD; own evaluation

may also have been a significant factor. After World War II, works on secularisation appeared in ever increasing numbers from the beginning of the 1950s; a corresponding wave of people leaving the church started in the late 1960s. I do not wish to construct a simplistic causal relationship between these two indicators. However, they do tend to support the idea that, in addition to social and religious factors, public discussion of secularisation stimulated church leaving, and vice versa.

One can compare the number of books on religious topics with overall book production (Figure 15.5). The top line shows overall book production in Germany. The middle line shows the production of scholarly literature on religion, and the bottom line, which rises steeply, shows the number of popular and non-scholarly works. While church membership has been in decline since the 1990s, the production of popular religious books has increased. A German consumer polling organisation (the Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung or GfK Group) identified a 20 per cent growth rate for the esoteric book market, and in 1998 the volume of sales in this sector exceeded DM 100 million. If these facts are interpreted as indicating a growing interest in religious topics, it could be argued that organised religion is evolving into ‘vagrant religiosity’.

General religiosity

Religiosity has numerous dimensions ranging from religious experience to cultic practice like worship, receiving the sacraments, and so on. This makes it difficult to determine how religious and, in particular, how religiously diverse the population of the Federal Republic of Germany is. An initial indicator is provided by the figures for adherence to particular religious organisations or currents (Table 15.1).

About 59 per cent of the resident population belong to one of the two mainline Christian churches, while the members of other Christian or Christian-affiliated religious communities

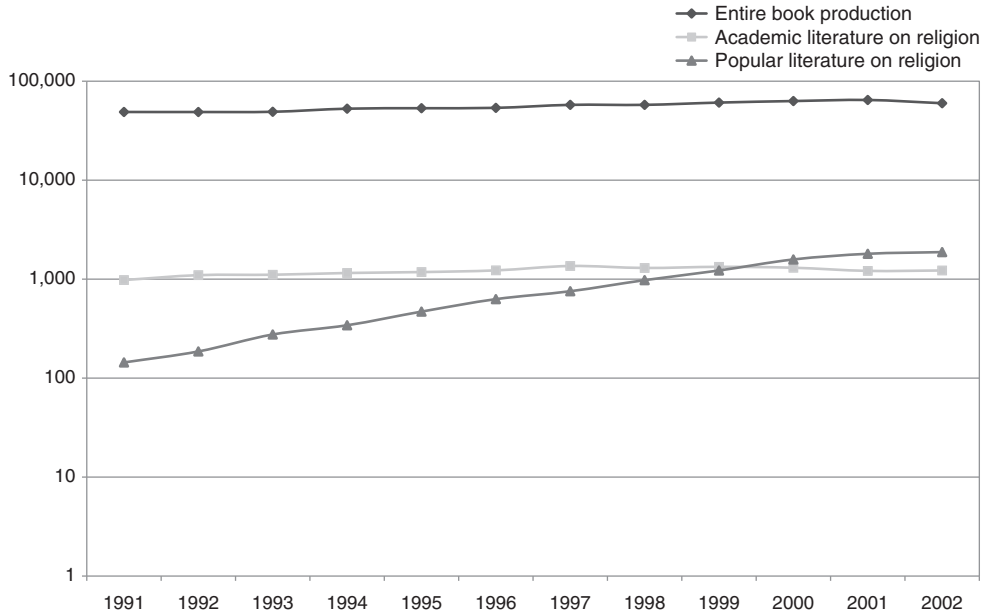


Figure 15.5 Academic and popular literature on religion in relation to total book production in Germany, 1991–2002

Logarithmic scale; source: Verbundkatalog GBV, Amazon, 'Buch und Buchhandel in Zahlen'; own evaluation

Table 15.1 Adherence to a religious organisation or current in Germany 2011

Members of the Protestant Church of Germany	29%
Members of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany	30%
Adherents of other religious communities and currents	10%
<i>These include:</i>	
• Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Eastern Catholic churches	1.9%
• Other Christian communities	1.0%
• Jews	0.2%
• Muslims	5.5%
• Buddhists	0.3%
• Adherents of Hindu religions	0.1%
• Adherents of new religious movements and the esoteric spectrum	1.0%
Non-affiliated persons	31%

Source: REMID 2011

comprise about 3 per cent. Islam is the second-largest religion with 5.5 per cent, followed by Buddhism with 0.3 per cent, Judaism with about 0.2 per cent, and Hinduism with 0.1 per cent. New religious communities and currents, as well as the esoteric spectrum, add up to about 1 per cent of the German resident population. Roughly 31 per cent of the German population is not affiliated with any religious community or tendency – a figure far above the global average of 16 per cent. Any increase in this number will have profound implications for the status of religion, but it is impossible to predict future trends based on the data available. The numbers do not say anything specific about the religiosity of people living in Germany: formal membership of or affiliation with a religious organisation can be explained in non-religious terms (social conventions, supporting the sociopolitical participation of religious communities, or a general need for social involvement); and the major religions are always more than just religions – they also mark lines of cultural, political, and sometimes (in Judaism and Hinduism, for example) ethnic identification. Moreover, the category ‘without affiliation’ does not reveal whether an individual is religious or not; s/he could just as well be cultivating an individualised form of religiosity.

A little more clarity is added by asking how many people consider themselves religious. The German General Social Survey (ALLBUS/GGSS) of 2012 offers the results shown in [Table 15.2](#).

According to this data, about 45 per cent of the German population consider themselves more religious than not religious, and 55 per cent consider themselves more not religious than religious. Ronald Inglehart’s studies on value change (namely, from traditional to secular-rational values, and from survival to self-expression values; see Norris and Inglehart 2011) suggest that in Western industrial societies generally the number of those who are rather or very religious has been slightly higher than this – at a constant 55 per cent – for the past 20 years (Inglehart and Minkenberg 2000: 136ff.).

To understand further the influence of religion in Germany we might ask how important religion and church are deemed to be ([Figure 15.6](#) and [Table 15.3](#)).

As one might expect, there are significant differences between the eastern and western German population. Whereas about 40 per cent, on average, of the west German population considered religion and the church to be important in the 1980s and 1990s, only about 18 per cent of the

Table 15.2 General religiosity of the German population in 2012

<i>Valid percentage</i>			
Not religious	-1-	22.6	
	-2-	8.6	
	-3-	7.8	
	-4-	4.0	
	-5-	9.5	
More not religious than religious			52.5
	-6-	8.3	
	-7-	11.1	
	-8-	11.7	
	-9-	6.9	
Religious	-10-	9.5	
More religious than not religious			47.5

Source: German General Social Survey 2012 (ALLBUS/GGSS)

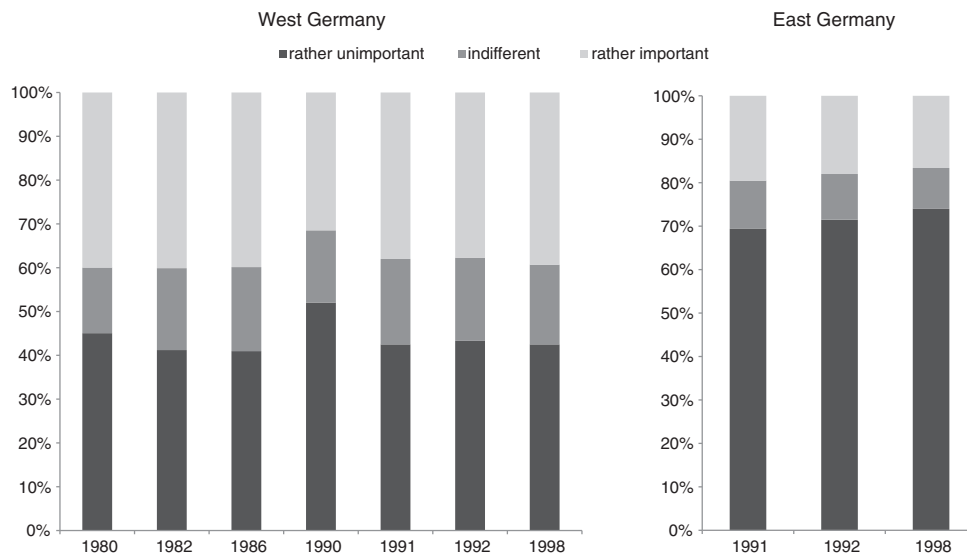


Figure 15.6 Importance of religion and church between 1980 and 1998

Source of data: German General Social Survey (ALLBUS/GGSS)

Table 15.3 Importance of religion and church in Germany 2012

		Valid percentage
Not important	-1-	26.0
	-2-	14.3
	-3-	14.0
	-4-	15.9
	-5-	11.5
	-6-	8.7
Important	-7-	9.6

Source: German General Social Survey (ALLBUS/GGSS)

east German population held the same view. In west Germany, attitudes stayed relatively constant over the 20 years covered by the survey. In 2012 about 54 per cent of the total German population think of religion and church more as not important than as important, and 30 per cent consider religion and church more important than not important.

These figures offer comparatively unambiguous information about religious self-understanding, as well as about the actual importance of religion in people's lives and their attitudes towards religious organisations. However, they also raise the question of what any unspecific indicator of general religiosity actually measures. More specific information is provided by an inquiry into content-specific and concrete statements of faith (Table 15.4).

According to the ALLBUS/GGSS survey of 2012, about 22 per cent of the German population considered themselves theistic and 34 per cent avowed a general belief in a transcendent entity (Table 15.4). Seventeen per cent were agnostic or indecisive, and roughly 27 per cent

Table 15.4 Statements of belief among the German population in 2012

		Valid percentage (rounded)
Theistic faith	(There is a personal God)	23
General faith	(There is some kind of higher being or spiritual power)	31
Agnostic or unsure	(I do not really know what I should believe)	15
Atheism	(I do not believe that there is a personal God, a higher being, or a spiritual power)	31

Source: German General Social Survey (ALLBUS/GGSS)

avowed atheism. There are good reasons to consider atheism another form of faith: after all, atheists do not *not* believe, but rather *believe* that there is no extramundane entity. If we ignore this, however, about 56 per cent of the population are believers as against 44 per cent who are agnostic/unsure and atheists.

Religious communities and currents in Germany

About 70 per cent of the German population, then, belong to a religious community or tendency, but only about half subscribe to any form of religious belief. Today Germany is home to about 230 different religious communities and currents,² the largest of which are briefly described below.

The mainline Christian churches

In terms of membership, the two mainline Christian churches account for by far the largest segment of the religiously affiliated population in Germany. However, membership offers only limited insight into a church's sphere of activity. After all, the mainline churches are not only 'service providers' for their members but also collective agents performing relevant tasks in society. It would be difficult to quantify the 'religious factor' in this sphere of activity, so I will limit myself to an outline of membership. I refer to the findings of the fourth church membership survey of the Protestant Church in Germany. Evaluation of the data led to a typology of church membership that differentiates between the five types shown in [Figure 15.7](#) (Höhm and Krech 2006).

- 1 The first type is the highly integrated church member. S/he makes up roughly 16 per cent of all church members and corresponds to the classic pattern of what the church expects from its members: s/he espouses traditional Christian beliefs that are mirrored in her or his lived experience. Furthermore, s/he is distinctly attached to the church, regularly attends church services, and participates in church life, at least occasionally.
- 2 The second type represents about 10 per cent of all church members and is comparatively strongly integrated into the church as an organisation: s/he feels attached to the church, is not inclined to leave the church, frequently attends church services, and occasionally participates in church events. However, s/he does not share the traditional Christian belief in God, so her or his religiosity is less strongly developed than is the case for the first or third (see (3) below) types.

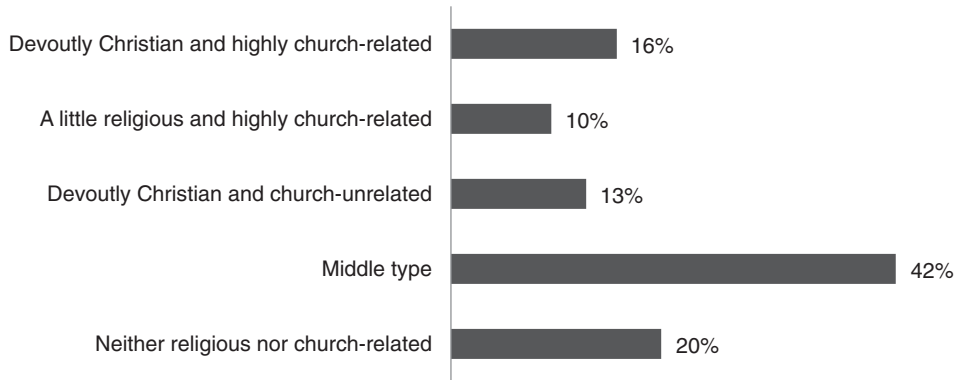


Figure 15.7 Types of membership in the Protestant Church of Germany, 2002

- 3 The third type, which accounts for around 13 per cent of all church members, follows the Christian faith but is comparatively weakly attached to the church as an organisation. S/he espouses traditional Christian beliefs that are mirrored in her or his daily experience. However, her or his attachment to the church is less strong than that of the first or second type. S/he only occasionally attends church services and, for the most part, does not participate in church activities.
- 4 The fourth or 'middle' type is the most common, with 42 per cent. This type lacks clearly positive or negative positioning towards Christian beliefs as well as towards an attachment to the church.
- 5 The fifth type represents about 20 per cent of all church members and is the opposite pole of the first membership type. S/he is neither attached to the church as an organisation nor does s/he particularly follow the Christian faith.

Orthodox Christians

According to statistics published in 2005 by the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (a Protestant research institute based in Berlin), the Orthodox Church showed the strongest growth of all Christian churches and communities in Germany between 1993 and 2003, growing from 500,000 to 1.4 million believers. It is now Germany's third-largest Christian church (Thon 2008). This rapid growth is based largely on immigration from eastern European countries: nearly 99 per cent of Orthodox Christians in the Federal Republic have an immigrant background, and two thirds of them have come to Germany in the past 15 years. Only the Greek and a large proportion of the Serbian Orthodox have been living in Germany for decades, having arrived as part of the wave of 'guest workers' (*Gastarbeiter*) that began in the 1960s (see Hansen and Street in this volume).

Immigrants from Greece, Russia, Ukraine, the former Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia, Syria, and Eritrea find their religious home in the 17 branches of the Orthodox Church represented in Germany. The different Eastern Orthodox traditions (although not the Oriental Orthodox and Eastern-rite Catholic churches) are united under an umbrella organisation, the Conference of Orthodox Bishops in Germany (Orthodoxe Bischofskonferenz in Deutschland or OBKD), formerly the Commission for Orthodox Churches in Germany (Kommission der Orthodoxen Kirche in Deutschland or KOKiD). Compared with

some other religions that have spread in Germany in the wake of immigration, the Orthodox communities are quite well organised. However, in religious terms they are just as active as other faith groups with an immigrant background.

Judaism

The Shoa had a massive impact on the demographics of German Jewry: of the approximately 500,000 Jews living in Germany in 1933, around 300,000 emigrated to escape Nazi persecution, and between 160,000 and 180,000 were murdered in the Holocaust. Nevertheless, Jewish communities began to be re-established in the postwar period, made up partly of Holocaust survivors from Germany itself and partly of Jewish refugees from eastern Europe. The Jewish communities in Germany are largely Conservative or Orthodox theologically; recently, liberal Jews have begun to found their own congregations to reflect their different understanding of the liturgy and issues such as gender relations (Rubinstein 2008). However, the establishment of liberal Jewish congregations is not an entirely new development, since Germany was the birthplace of Reform Judaism in the late 18th and during the 19th century. Up until the early 1990s, the Jewish community in Germany shrank steadily, partly as a result of an ageing population and the emigration of young Jews to Israel, America, or neighbouring European countries, but also because of a high rate of interfaith/mixed marriage. Since the early 1990s, immigration from Russia and other eastern European states has led to a strong growth of Judaism in Germany; more than half of the members of most contemporary congregations belong to this group. This has posed new challenges for the established congregations, as the immigrants often have little knowledge of Jewish tradition. The religious education of migrants has, therefore, become one of the key duties of Jewish congregations. Moreover, the congregations contribute greatly to the integration of immigrants by offering language classes and social services.

Islam

Islam, like Christianity, is a highly diverse faith, with 34 different currents, organisations, and associations represented in the Federal Republic (Chbib 2008). Islam's presence in Germany is essentially the result of immigrant movements, and ethnicity is an important criterion of differentiation. Its adherents' countries of origin range from Turkey (which accounts for a large proportion of German Muslims) to the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo), Albania, the Arab world (especially Morocco, Lebanon, and Iraq), Iran, various sub-Saharan African countries, Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan. Apart from ethnic plurality, there is a diversity of religious currents. Besides Sunni and Shia orthodoxy, these include Sufism and independent communities that have separated from the mainstreams and developed their own traditions over time (e.g. Alevis and Ahmadis).

Mosques are generally the focal point of Islamic life. Nowadays they offer a number of services apart from Friday prayer, such as pilgrimages, Islamic weddings, corpse washing, and burial rituals. There are often sports activities and youth programmes to choose from: mosques have become a sociopolitical force that goes beyond the purely religious. These social activities are not limited to specifically Islamic interests, as mosques also offer assistance with integration. For example, they provide language and tutoring classes, and often German-speaking contacts are available. This has led to increased co-operation with the municipalities, and there are many mosques and religious associations that now see themselves and are generally recognised as playing a leading role in integration.

Many Islamic congregations are organised into unions. The largest include the Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş (IGMG), the Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion (DITIB), and the Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren (VIKZ). Aside from these, there are a large number of independent congregations. At Federal level, the exact rates of affiliation beyond formal congregational membership are unknown. In March 2007, the Muslim Coordinating Council (Koordinationsrat der Muslime) was founded, which united the unions DITIB and VIKZ with the Central Muslim Council (Zentralrat der Muslime or ZMD) and the Islamic Council (Islamrat). About 98 per cent of all Muslims in Germany live in former West Germany (Haug *et al.* 2009: 106), most of them, due to labour migration, in industrial and urban centres.

Eastern religions

Immigration is also largely responsible for the presence of eastern religions in Germany. Migrants with an eastern religious background have come to Germany from nearly every country in the Far East and south-east Asia, although Hindu Tamils from Sri Lanka and Vietnamese boat people of Buddhist faith are particularly well represented (Kötter 2008). Because of the nature of religious practice in these traditions (for example, the private rites of Shinto devotion) and the infrastructure situation (the few Hindu temples in Germany are widely scattered), the religious life of these communities is centralised only to a small degree, but people do nonetheless gather for important celebrations. For example, the Hindu-Tamil temple in Hamm, which is the largest south Indian temple in Europe, attracts about 20,000 believers to its solemnities. The immigrants find not only a religious home in their place of worship, be it the Hindu temple or the Sikh gurdwara, but also an oasis of familiarity; like many migrants, they find that their religious practice serves a sociopolitical function that goes beyond the purely religious.

There are also German followers of eastern religions, who are for the most part Buddhists. They form a community that is barely connected to the ethnic Hindus and Buddhists and have a very different practice: German converts to Buddhism focus on teachings and ethical conduct (Baumann 1995), whereas ethnic followers of eastern religions are more concerned with worship and community. In times of conflict, the boundaries are very different. Whereas German Buddhists prefer to discuss official interpretations of Buddhist teaching and the right to practise it, migrants' concerns are dominated by the conflicts 'they brought with them', such as the Sri Lanka conflict, the annexation of Tibet, and intra-Indian disputes. And whereas German Buddhists participate in different traditions – they might attend a speech by the Dalai Lama as well as a meditation weekend Zen-style – ethnic Hindus and Buddhists mostly stick to one tradition.

Small religious communities and currents

Among Germany's current population of roughly 82 million inhabitants, about 1.4 per cent represent smaller Christian communities, with between 0.2 per cent and 0.3 per cent – depending on how one estimates – representing new religious communities and the esoteric spectrum. However, we need to take into consideration that for most small religious communities and currents only persons over 14 years of age are accounted for in the data (this is also the age of religious majority in the legal sense). In general, people start consciously to join religious groups, organisations, and movements at that age. This is particularly the case for smaller Christian communities, insofar as they are based on voluntary membership and adult baptism (true of all save for the Methodists and Herrnhuters).

The Christian and Christian-affiliated spectrum

The figures for small Christian and Christian-affiliated communities and tendencies can be broken down as shown in [Table 15.5](#).

For reasons of space, I will not go into statistical details. Instead, I will limit myself to certain key observations on the most numerically significant communities:

- 1 First, it is notable that the two largest communities, namely the New Apostolic Church with 382,800 members and the Jehovah's Witnesses with 164,000 so-called 'preachers' as active members, connect Christian lore with extrabiblical sources of truth and revelation. Although Jehovah's Witnesses see themselves as scripturalists, they believe that their governing body's interpretations of the Bible are divinely guided. In the case of the New Apostolic Church, living apostles are quasi-official bearers of revelation.
- 2 Next, the Baptists with roughly 85,000 and the Methodists with 64,000 members represent the largest associations within the classic free church spectrum. They are in third and fourth places in the statistics.³ The corresponding maps of the *Atlas der Kirchen und der anderen Religionsgemeinschaften in Deutschland* (Henkel 2001: 140ff.) show a concentration of Baptists united in the Union of Evangelical Free Church Congregations in regional strongholds such as East Frisia/Oldenburg, the Bergisches Land, southern Lower Saxony, and south-west Saxony; 56.5 per cent of members live in urban centres, a figure slightly above the German average.
- 3 The *new* free churches seem to be booming, at least in terms of community formation. Like the traditional free churches, they emphasise their differences from the two major Christian churches (*Volkskirchen*) in the categorical separation of Christian and civic community, the corresponding freedom of the church from the state, voluntary membership, and personal confession of faith.⁴ The new free churches are also characterised by a strong commitment to missionary work. Finally – and this is the most important characteristic from a sociological perspective – they are heavily based on the congregationalist principle, that is, they form local and independent congregations and therefore have a comparatively low degree of organisation. Some new free churches, such as the Pentecostal churches and the Union of Free Evangelical Churches, are members of the Association of Evangelical Free Churches (Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen or VEF). Others, such as the Brethren churches, have a critical stance towards both the two major Christian churches and the traditional free churches. The Forum of Free Pentecostal Churches, the largest umbrella organisation of the Pentecostal charismatic congregations, is in fifth place with roughly 50,000 and the Brethren churches in sixth place with 45,000 members. If one adds together the charismatic Pentecostal and the neo-pietist Brethren churches (both of which have a highly developed congregationalist principle) they rank second with nearly 100,000 members and followers.

Not least because of the congregationalist principle, the distribution of these communities varies across the regions. The maps in the *Atlas der Kirchen* (Henkel 2001: 174ff.) show a concentration of congregations belonging to the Forum of Free Pentecostal Churches in Baden-Württemberg. However, the Pentecostal movement in Germany is comparatively evenly spread. The proportion of its members living in urban centres is above average, at roughly 62 per cent.

The highest concentration of Brethren churches can be found in the Bergisches Land and its neighbouring regions, as well as in Saxony. Unlike the Pentecostals, these churches are also

Table 15.5 The Christian and Christian-affiliated spectrum

<i>Smaller Christian religious communities* (partially with elements of neo-revelationism)</i>	<i>Adherents</i>	<i>Source</i>
New Apostolic Church	382,800	REMID
Jehovah's Witnesses	164,000	REMID
Union of Evangelical Free Church Congregations (Baptists; members of the Baptist World Alliance or BWA)	84,975	REMID
United Methodist Church (UMC)	64,100	VEF
Forum Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden (Forum of Free Pentecostal Churches; largest umbrella organisation of Pentecostal charismatic churches):		REMID
– Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden (BFP; Union of Free Pentecostal Churches)	34,600	REMID
– Ecclesia – Gemeinde der Christen e. V.	4,000	REMID/HRGW
– Volksmission entschiedener Christen e. V. (Popular Mission of Convinced Christians)	3,600	REMID
– Mülheim Association of Free Churches and Evangelical Communities	3,000	VEF
– Gemeinde Gottes - Evangelische Freikirche (Church of God – Evangelical Free Church)	3,000	VEF
– Vereinigte Missionsfreunde e. V. (United Friends of the Mission)	1,000	REMID/HRGW
– Apostolische Kirche/Urchristliche Mission (Apostolic Church/Early Christian Mission)	250	REMID/HRGW
– Internationale Jesusgemeinde (International Jesus Church)	36	HRGW
– Jugend-, Missions- und Sozialwerk Altenstieg (Youth, Mission, and Social Relief Altenstieg)		
Brethren churches	45,000	REMID
Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK; Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church)	37,460	SELK
Gemeinschaft der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten (STA; Seventh Day Adventists)	35,948	APD/VEF
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)	35,447	REMID
Bund Freier evangelischer Gemeinden (BfeG; Federation of Free Evangelical Churches)	33,107	Idea
Old Catholics (Union of Utrecht)	25,000	REMID
Mennonite Churches (in the Mennonite World Conference)	24,414	REMID
Apostelamt Jesu Christi (Apostle Ministry of Jesus Christ)	20,000	REMID
Christengemeinschaft (Christian Community; anthroposophists)	20,000	HRGW
Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden (Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches; outside the Mennonite World Conference)	15,000	REMID
Bund Evangelisch-reformierter Kirchen Deutschlands (Federation of Evangelical Reformed Churches in Germany)	14,000	REMID

continued

Volkhard Krech

Table 15.5 continued

<i>Smaller Christian religious communities* (partially with elements of neo-revelationism)</i>	<i>Adherents</i>	<i>Source</i>
Reformiert-Apostolischer Gemeindebund/Apostolische Gemeinschaft (Reformed Apostolic Church Federation/Apostolic Community)	12,000	REMID
Bruno Gröning Freundeskreis (BGF; Bruno Groening Circle of Friends)	12,000	HRGW
Catholic Apostolic Churches (following Edward Irving)	10,000	REMID
Christengemeinden Elim (Elim Christian communities)	10,000	REMID
Pilgermission St. Chrischona/Evangelische Stadtmission (St Chrischona Pilgrim Mission/Evangelical city mission)	9,000	REMID
Free Baptist churches (outside the World Alliance)	8,000	REMID
Evangelisch-Altreformierte Kirche in Niedersachsen (Evangelical Old Reformed Church in Lower Saxony)	7,500	REMID
Evangelische Brüder-Unität (Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine; Moravian Church)	7,200	REMID
Apostelamt Juda/Gemeinschaft des göttlichen Sozialismus (Apostleship of Judah/Community of Divine Socialism)	4,000	HRGW
Universelles Leben (Universal Life)	4,000	REMID
Evangelische Waldenserkirche (Deutsche Waldenserkirche/Freundeskreis der Waldenser; Evangelical Waldensian Church)	3,500	REMID/HRGW
Unitarian:		
– Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft (German Unitarian Religious Community)	2,000	REMID
– Freie Religionsgemeinschaft Alzey (Humanistische Gemeinde Freier Protestanten; Free Religious Community Alzey)	1,000	HRGW
– Bund Deutscher Unitarier – Religionsgemeinschaft europäischen Geistes (German Unitarian Alliance – Religious Community of European Spirit)	300	REMID
– Unitarische Kirche in Berlin e.V. (Berlin Unitarian Church)	100	HRGW
Johannische Kirche (Johannine Church)	3,300	REMID
Churches of Christ/Gemeinden Christi	2,800	REMID/HRGW
Freikirchlicher Bund der Gemeinde Gottes (Free Church Alliance of the Church of God)	2,500	VEF
Church of the Nazarene	2,300	VEF
Evangelisch-Reformiertes Moderamen Berlin-Brandenburg (Evangelical Reformed Moderamen of Berlin-Brandenburg)	2,200	REMID
Salvation Army	2,000	VEF/HRGW
Christian Science/Christliche Wissenschaft	2,000	REMID
Lorber Society	No estimate possible	

continued

Table 15.5 continued

<i>Smaller Christian religious communities* (partially with elements of neo-revelationism)</i>	<i>Adherents</i>	<i>Source</i>
Christliche Gemeinschaft Hirt und Herde (Christian Community of Shepherd and Flock)	1,500	REMID
Reformadventistische Gemeinden (outside the STA; reformed Adventist communities)	800	REMID
Community of Christ (until 2001: Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)	750	REMID
Fiat Lux	750	REMID
Internationale Gemeinden Christi/Boston Church of Christ	500	HRWG
Religiöse Gesellschaft der Freunde (Quakers)	400	REMID
Worldwide Church of God	400	REMID
Disciples of Christ/Christliche Gemeinde Tübingen	300	REMID
MCC Hamburg – the church (not only) for lesbians and gays	50	REMID
Total	c.1,164,000	

* The members of some of these communities are also members of a Protestant regional church.

Sources: REMID (www.remid.de/remid_info_zahlen.htm, accessed 20 October 2010); Reller 2000 (HRGW); Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen, Berlin (EZW); Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen (VEF); Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK); freikirchlicher Nachrichtendienst der Freikirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten (APD); Evangelische Nachrichtenagentur idea e.V (Idea)

strongly represented in east Germany; nearly half can be found in that area, though these are generally smaller churches. An above-average share of their members (63 per cent) lives in an urban environment (Henkel 2001: 200ff). Overall, the Pentecostal and Brethren churches are fairly evenly distributed across Germany: where one of them is less well represented, the other has a stronger presence.

In conclusion, the statistical findings suggest that those communities within the Christian spectrum that are based on special forms of Christian beliefs (including elements of neo-revelationism and/or stronger local community formation, as well as emphatic practices of communitarianisation) are experiencing a boom. The congregationalist principle seems to be particularly attractive because of its 'emotionally supported communality', something people miss in the traditional churches.⁵

Small religions and the esoteric spectrum⁶

I will make just a few key observations on these statistics.

- 1 If one excludes the Yazidi and the Sikhs as ethnically bound religions, the following communities with numbers of members or followers in at least five figures remain. Ranked first are the Religious Humanists, with 40,000 members. There are neither statistics nor reliable estimates for the German Faith and *Völkisch* groups, unions, and movements. According to the *Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften und Weltanschauungen* (Handbook of religious communities and worldviews) edited by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, one can reckon with roughly 25,000 followers. Individual circles and associations in this

Table 15.6 Small religions and the esoteric spectrum

<i>Small religions and the esoteric spectrum</i>	<i>Adherents</i>	<i>Source</i>
Religious Humanism	40,000	REMID
German Faith or <i>Völkisch</i> groups, unions, and movements	25,000	HRGW
Kurdish Yazidi	20,000	REMID
Freemasons:		
– male lodges	14,500	REMID
– female lodges	350	REMID
– mixed lodges	300	REMID
Scientology	6,000	VS NRW
Bahá'í	5,000	REMID
Sikhs	5,000	REMID
Osho/Neo Sannyas movements	5,000	REMID
Rosicrucians:		
– Lectorium Rosicrucianum	4,200	REMID
– Other Rosicrucian associations	2,000	REMID
Grail Movement	2,300	HRGW
Transcendental Meditation	1,000	REMID
Unification Church (Moon movements)	600	REMID
International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)	350	REMID
Divine Light Mission	300	HRGW
Holosophic Society/Kirpal Ruhani Satsang	500	REMID
Brahma Kumaris	300	REMID
Free Zone	200	REMID
Sahaja Yoga	200	REMID
New Church (Swedenborgianism)	200	REMID
Spirituelle Lebensgemeinschaft AUM (Berlin)	200	EZW
Kulturgeister – umbrella organisation for Traditional Paganism	150	EZW
Artgemeinschaft – Germanische Glaubensgemeinschaft wesensgemäßer Lebensgestaltung	140	VS NRW
Ananda Marga	100	REMID
Twelve Tribes	60	REMID
Weltloge Tanatra	28	REMID
The Family (Children of God)	20	REMID
ScienTerra/study group following L. Kin (Scientology secession)	20	REMID
Sathya Sai Baba	No estimate possible	HRGW
Total	c. 140,000	

Sources: REMID (http://www.remid.de/remid_info_zahlen.htm; accessed 25 August 2010); Reller 2000 (HRGW); the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (EZW); and Verfassungsschutz Nordrhein-Westfalen (VS NRW)

category are kept under observation by the German government agency responsible for safeguarding the constitution (*Verfassungsschutz*) because of their right-wing extremist views. The Freemasons, with about 15,000 members, are ranked third, insofar as they are considered a religious community. Thus the statistics are headlined by religious communities that represent a kind of universal religion and oppose any confessional constriction: the Religious Humanists and the Freemasons. They make up nearly half of the members, in the narrow sense of the term, of neoreligious or syncretic communities.

- 2 A second large category is represented by associations or movements from the Asian cultural sphere. The Bahá'í religion and the Osho movement, with 5,000 active members each, and Transcendental Meditation, with a narrow circle of 1,000 teachers and 5,000–10,000 'sympathisers', belong in this category.
- 3 A third category contains esoteric associations like the Rosicrucians, with a total of 6,000 members, and the Grail Movement, with 2,300 members. The Scientology organisation is a special case because it is most heavily influenced by scientism – or rather, by elements of science fiction.

The non-communally constituted esoteric spectrum does not represent the hermetic part of religious history as a whole, but rather that segment of the religious field in which practices such as astrology, rebirthing, reiki, gemstone healing, yoga, pendulums, Ayurveda, channelling, various meditation techniques, tarot, and so on are used. They mostly represent a mixture and an additional interpretation of various (often Asian, but also pagan) traditions. Instead of the binding validity of a religious tradition within which religious beliefs are passed from one generation to the next, a multitude of 'salvation providers' compete with one another for paying clients and customers in an increasingly market-oriented way. Because these forms of interaction are normally only short-term, relatively noncommittal and open to individual needs, this part of the religious spectrum is difficult to quantify. A survey conducted in the department of religious studies at the Ruhr University Bochum on religious diversity in North Rhine–Westphalia showed that the *institutionally bound* following of esoteric practices in the narrow sense accounts for about 0.8–1 per cent of the population of North Rhine–Westphalia (Hero 2008); this figure is probably typical for Germany as a whole.

Summary and outlook

Despite attention from the public and the media, visible and organised religion in Germany is not growing. However, the religious field is becoming more plural, a development that reflects religiosity without affiliation, immigration, the increasing visibility of small religious communities, the emergence of new religions, and the establishment of different milieus and tendencies within the mainline Christian churches.

Whether religiosity is becoming more intense against the backdrop of increasing religious diversity needs to be analysed more closely. Studies on religious diversity in North Rhine–Westphalia have shown that there is a strong connection between religion and immigration (Nagel 2012; Nagel and Jansen 2007; Lehmann 2005): about 43 per cent of immigrants in Germany are involved in religious organisations (Krech 2008). That is more than double the proportion of the overall population who are members of one or other of the mainstream Christian churches (of which 15 to 20 per cent can be considered so-called core members based on the criteria of participation in church activities and a relatively strong faith).

If we look at the majority of members of the two mainstream Christian churches, it seems that the religious situation in Germany is characterised by neither strong identification with a

particular religion nor a clear rejection of religion and its organisations but rather by creeping religious indifference or, at most, goodwill towards religion without practical consequences. One can speak of a religious atmosphere of new departures, if at all, only in the Evangelical and Pentecostal charismatic movements. Nonetheless, public interest in and discussion of religion – stimulated by conflicts of (identity) politics on the geo-political global and national levels because of the immigration that Germany has experienced – have increased noticeably. And religion is experiencing a certain boom as a semantic resource to address ethical problems at the borders of instrumental action (on questions of abortion, prenatal diagnostics, manipulation of stem cells, and medically assisted suicide, for example). While a significant increase in religious adherence is unlikely in the near future, one may reckon with a persistence of religion in Germany alongside the various manifestations of the *zeitgeist*.

Notes

- 1 If not otherwise noted, data are taken from the Religionswissenschaftlicher Medien- und Informationsdienst, Marburg (REMID), as of 2011. See www.remid.de.
- 2 See, for example, the study on North Rhine-Westphalia (Hero *et al.* 2008); on the whole project, see www.plureligion.net.
- 3 However, if one adds together all the full and guest member churches of the Association of Evangelical Free Churches, they rank second with 285,000 parishioners and 2,639 congregations (Henkel 2001: 191 with note 9).
- 4 On the characteristics of traditional free churches see Geldbach (1989). See also Niethammer (1995), who differentiates between the antitypes of the state church, the territorial church, the official church, and the people's church.
- 5 The term is borrowed from Danièle Hervieu-Léger, cited in Hempelmann (2003: 8).
- 6 The adherents to some of these communities belong to more than one religious community.

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