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YOUTH, RELIGION AND CONFIRMATION WORK IN EUROPE: THE SECOND STUDY

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Introduction

I. Introduction

KATI NIEMELÄ, THOMAS SCHLAG, FRIEDRICH SCHWEITZER, AND
HENRIK SIMOJOKI

This volume presents the results of one of the largest studies on youth and religion that have become available so far: the second European study on confirmation work. The book examines the role and meaning of religion, faith, and church in the lives of Protestant youth in Europe. The basis for this analysis and the interpretation of its results consists of extensive data collected from nine European countries concerning confirmation work. For many young people confirmation time is crucial in determining their future attachment and relationship to religion, faith, religious identity and the church, their life orientations, moral attitudes and ethical reflection as well as their commitment to voluntary activities.

What makes young people join confirmation work in the different countries? What are factors that make it meaningful to them? What does confirmation time mean for the Churches and their workers and volunteers? How do young people and their relationship to religion, faith and church differ in different countries and how does this relationship change during confirmation time?

These are some of the questions that are examined in this book. The book is a contribution to studies aiming at understanding the role of religion in the lives of young people in Europe where religion is undergoing major changes and fast transitions. Religious pluralism is growing not only because of increased immigration but also because different and contradicting beliefs and worldviews can be found more and more among native citizens. At the same time, confirmation work should not be seen only as a central educational field of Protestant Churches but also as an important contribution to life orientation, civic education and a common understanding of how to live together. Therefore the results presented in this book can and should be interpreted against the background of European debates on education, youth and religion. Yet the Churches as religious and societal institutions can also benefit from the results of this comparative study in many important ways.

The results and interpretations presented in this volume are interconnected with the first European study on confirmation work which was conducted in 2007/2008 and which, in many respects, was the first study of its kind (cf. Schweitzer et al. 2010). With the first international study which was carried out in seven European countries – Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Nor-

way, Sweden and Switzerland (Zurich) – systematic international comparisons on an empirical basis became possible for the first time. The present study is based on new data from 2012/2013 in nine European countries. It builds upon the first study and expands it further, geographically by including Hungary, Poland, and Switzerland as a whole as well as in theoretical and empirical scope. Moreover, the Methodist Church in Germany (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche) also joined the study.

1. Youth and Religion in Europe

The study aims at understanding the role of religion, faith and the church among Protestant youth in Europe. In studying young Europeans and their relationship to religion, several key points need to be addressed. First of all, religious and spiritual expressions and practices have changed markedly over recent decades in many European countries. As a result of increased pluralism, the dominant position of traditional Christian Churches can no longer be taken for granted. Moreover, numerous studies raise the question if today's young Europeans are less religious than earlier age cohorts (Voas/Doebler 2011; Niemelä 2011; Kääriäinen et al. 2005, 141–144; Bucher 2009; EKD 2014). A decline of religion appears to be most evident in countries where religion in general is not valued highly and where the religiosity of average citizens is not very high (Bucher 2009, 625). One of the key reasons for the decline has been seen in the changes in family settings.

At the same time, the alleged decline of religion has been under much debate. For decades, secularisation theory has dominated the research and debate related to religious change. While it was first seen as an accepted explanatory model, it was widely rejected later on (see, e.g., Berger 1999; Wilson 1982; Swatos/Olson 2000). Instead of secularisation, the current transformation of the religious landscape has been increasingly described with terms like de-secularisation (Berger 1999), de-privatisation (Casanova 1994), re-sacralisation (Davie 2010), re-enchantment (Partridge 2004), post-secularity (Habermas 2006), or with terms that highlight the declining role of Christianity, like un-churching (Fuller 2001) and de-Christianisation (Brown/Lynch 2012). Others contest the assumption of secularisation altogether and therefore question concepts like post-secularity because they are based on the assumption of an earlier secular period (Joas 2012). At the same time, other researchers still uphold secularisation theory (Pollack 2003) and suggest that »religion is dead« (Brown 2009) or »God is dead« (Bruce 2002). Some have pointed to more eclectic forms of religious expression such as »believing without belonging« (Davie

1994) or the »two faces of religion« (Campiche 2004), which highlights the role of a personal choice instead of formal requirements. Still others speak of secular Christianity or fuzzy religiosity (Voas/Day 2009) in which people are neither Christian nor non-Christian. Most of these terms and descriptions highlight the shift from the assumption of secularisation to more pluralist views as well as the shift from obligation to consumption (Davie 2005, Stolz et al. 2014).

In any case, religion still plays a very important role in the lives of many European young people (see Schweitzer et al. 2010; Madge et al. 2014). However, the picture is increasingly complex and increasingly involves choice rather than simple obligation to tradition (Davie 2010).

Furthermore, in studying young people, it must also be highlighted that there are changes in relation to religion connected to age. Research indicates that religiosity tends to decrease somewhat after the teenage years, and early adulthood is often regarded as the period when the role of religion is lowest (see, e.g., Kääriäinen et al. 2005; Mikkola et al. 2007; Denton et al. 2008). It is a common assumption that religiosity again increases in older age. However, this assumption is not always supported by recent studies. Some of the studies indicate that, with certain cohorts, religiosity seems to remain more stable and does not increase with age (Voas/Doebler 2011; Niemelä 2011; EKD 2014). Even though religion and religious expression may take new forms in later life, childhood and youth is considered the most meaningful age-period in determining the relationship to religion throughout the life-course as well (see, e.g., Bengtson et al. 2013). This implies that the results of the present study are very likely to show much of the future patterns not only among the younger generation but among Protestants in Europe in general. Although it remains true that no one can reliably predict the future and that empirical insights are limited to the past and to the present, such considerations show that the results of the present study are of interest way beyond the Churches.

2. Youth in Europe and Confirmation Work

In recent years, promoted by the European Union's directives on youth policy and by intensified cooperation and networking opportunities, a joint research field of European youth research has emerged (European Commission 2009; Chisholm 2006; du Bois-Reymond 2010; Chisholm et al. 2011). Even though it would definitely be premature or even mistaken to speak of »European Youth« in the sense of a homogeneous entity, it has become widely accepted that it is indeed useful to broaden the traditional nationally-oriented view of youth towards a European perspective. However, a closer look at relevant stu-

dies or research overviews reveals that they rarely touch religion-related issues. Consequently, there is a clear lacuna concerning youth and religion in Europe.

While the present study includes many insights into adolescents' views of religion, faith, and the church, it should also be viewed as a study that contributes to research on youth in Europe in general. By empirically describing the adolescents' views and attitudes concerning life and faith, the present study allows for a better understanding of young people in Europe, their orientations in society as well as their values and worldviews.

In addition to its size in terms of the participating countries as well as the large sample, the present study will also be of special interest because of the age-group to which it refers. In other studies on youth, this age-group of the 13 to 16 years old youth is often neglected or lumped together with all youth between 12 and 25 years of age (cf., for example, Shell Deutschland Holding 2010). Moreover, with the focus on confirmation work, the study is not just about religious attitudes in general but pays special attention to young people's relationship to institutionalised forms of religion (i.e., the Church), to worship services as well as to voluntary work. By including the voluntary workers, the study also sheds new light on the motivation, expectations, experiences and forms of confirmation work from this important perspective. In all of these respects, the present study goes far beyond the existing research concerning the relationship between youth, religion and the Church.

3. How the Protestant Churches in Europe Can Benefit from this Study

While it is important to realize that a study on youth and confirmation work in Europe is of general interest in terms of the moral and religious orientations of young people and also in terms of education, it should also be clear that the Churches most of all in the participating countries, but also in other countries, can benefit from this study in a number of ways.

First of all, confirmation work is the largest educational program of most Protestant Churches in Europe. Many resources have been invested into this program. Consequently, it is of prime interest how confirmation work is done and how successful it really is. In this respect, the study offers ample insights into the present reality of this field of work. Thus, the results of the study which show positive tendencies, affirm the manifold efforts that have been made, and can motivate the responsible persons to continue the work.

Yet it is not enough for the Churches to be better informed about the reality of confirmation work, its successes and possible shortcomings. The more far-

reaching aim must be to improve the practice of confirmation work. The present attraction to confirmation work should not be taken for granted. The many results and further analysis of the data also provide the Churches with multiple possibilities for improvements.

The international comparative approach pursued in the study has to be mentioned in this respect as well. From the perspective of the Churches, it means an important step towards a kind of ecumenical cooperation that was often lacking in the past, as well as openness for other contexts. The research project also entailed many stimulating opportunities for learning from each other and for receiving new impulses from other countries and Churches. Public lectures and training sessions as well as publications have helped to spread these insights and impulses beyond the academic world into the actual practice of confirmation work and the Churches.

The first study from 2007/2008 had a remarkably broad echo, within the Churches as well as in other fields. It is probably not claiming too much that the study had a booster effect on many people and institutions concerned with confirmation work. By making visible, with the help of scientific data, the scope and actual range of confirmation work as a link between the generations in the Churches, research of the present kind can motivate and encourage those who are doing the everyday work in this field. And last but certainly not least, it can help improve the public standing of the Churches in society offering educational programs in the non-formal sector, thus contributing, from a professional pedagogical and theological perspective, to a stronger civil society in Europe.

4. Non-Formal Education and its Contribution to Civil Society

There can be no doubt that issues of education in Europe must be increasingly understood within frameworks that go beyond national boundaries and beyond formal educational contexts. In educational policy making and in the scientific debates over the last decades, various metaphors have been used to describe the increasing degree of an Europeanisation of education, particularly in the member countries of the European Union. Compared to the normatively charged image of a »European (higher) education space« popularised by the Bologna Declaration of 1999, the reference to Europe's »educational landscape« is more descriptive and therefore preferable in the context of an empirical study like the present one. However, previous attempts to map this educational landscape have so far mainly been limited to the area of formal education and, triggered by the PISA-studies and the Bologna Process, often put their main em-

phasis on the question of the quality and performance of schools and universities. Only recently, the focus has turned more towards processes and settings of non-formal education, partly motivated by the »European Qualifications framework for lifelong learning« (European Communities 2008) in which formal, non-formal and informal learning are considered of equal weight. Considering the participation rates for confirmation work, it is easy to see that this program is an important factor in non-formal education, provided by an intermediary institution of civil society in which values and beliefs are communicated about and exchanged, and thus contributing to society in a broader sense. Each year in the countries involved in this study, altogether about half a million young people take part in confirmation work. Thus, this central educational activity of the Protestant churches proves to be one of the major forms of non-formal education in central and northern Europe.

Through the first study on confirmation work in Europe (Schweitzer et al. 2010) confirmation work was established as a new field of international-comparative research on (religious) education in Europe. Already this earlier study pointed out that confirmation work does not only have consequences for the individual person or for the church. It also has meaning for society at large (Pettersson/Simojoki 2010). In the present volume, this perspective is extended by an increased focus on civil society and on volunteerism.

Concerning civil society and volunteerism, it is again the inclusion of the workers which makes the present study special. The study offers empirical insights on these workers which allow for a better understanding of their motivation and experiences. Moreover, their expectations and experiences are compared and connected to those of the confirmands. Through this it becomes possible to capture the interplay between the religious attitudes of the adolescents on the one hand and institutionalised religion on the other.

5. The Rationale behind the Second International Study on Confirmation Work in Europe

The first study on confirmation work in Europe has exerted an unexpected and remarkable influence on the conceptual development of this field of work in the countries involved, including the training of future ministers as well as training programs for voluntary workers. The results of the study were presented in a number of nationally oriented monographs and articles in different languages (Ilg et al. 2009; Innanen/Niemelä 2009; Schlag/Voirol-Sturzenegger 2010; Krupka/Reite 2010; Christensen 2010; Høeg 2010; Simojoki et al. 2010; 2011) which have been widely discussed, especially regarding their implications for the prac-

tice of confirmation work in the respective contexts. Five years later, a second study is presented with a significantly expanded research design. This new study promises a number of specific advantages.

- Since this representative study replicates the basic design of the first one (with questionnaires at the beginning and towards the end of confirmation time) and since about two thirds of the items were retained, it is now possible for the first time to capture long-term developments in confirmation work: Which trends prevail? What changes can be observed? As the contributions to this volume show there is indeed both, much stability of the overall picture but there also are some remarkable discontinuities.
- The first survey was conducted to deliver a broad overview of the current practice of confirmation work in Europe. The high degree of satisfaction with confirmation work expressed by the adolescents has been perceived as encouraging. 72 % of the confirmands taking part in the study were satisfied with their confirmation time (Schweitzer et al. 2010, 316). Moreover, a number of positive aspects like high participation rates and innovative forms and methods were found. At the same time, the results also indicated a number of points which require in-depth investigation and sometimes improvement. To name some examples: The empirical results of the first study suggested that the voluntary work of young people contributes to the quality of confirmation work in various ways (Pettersson/Simojoki 2010, 273 ff.). It also turned out that worship services are of little interest to today's confirmands who, in most cases, consider them »boring« (Schweitzer et al. 2010, 314). In the second study, such issues that are central to the practice of confirmation work are examined in more detail.
- Furthermore, some central variables for the interpretation and development of confirmation work are scrutinised in more detail. In addition to a range of social factors like gender, social background, religious socialisation, etc., special emphasis is given, for example, to the influence of urban-rural differences and of majority-minority situations.

To put it more generally, questions like the following can be discussed on the basis of the current study:

- Are the very positive results from the first study rather coincidental, i. e., expressive only of a certain point in time, or can the results be generalised? The same has to be asked for the problematic indications which could also turn out quite different some years later.
- On the one hand, the first European study showed that a number of adolescents were active in voluntary work after confirmation. On the other hand, the majority distance themselves from the church and their parish and seem to show little interest in church-related programs after confirmation. How can these different developments be explained and which opportunities can

be developed for young people to connect their positive experiences during confirmation time with the time afterwards? This is of course a very far-reaching question that can only be answered in part from the data of the study. Further research that is in the process of being carried out by the present research team, will shed additional light on this question.

- The first European study aimed at providing new impulses for the practice of confirmation work and to contribute to the further development of this field. With the five years interval between the two studies, it is possible to ask if at least some improvements can be observed concerning those aspects that, in light of the results of the first study, were considered problematic.

In addition to such questions, the advantages of studies carried out repeatedly, can be seen in a clear increase of the validity of the interpretation of the results. Without a comparative perspective, empirical results can hardly be interpreted at all. High acceptance rates can simply be a snap-shot impression, with possibly a significant decline following right after it. Developments can only be identified by long-term and longitudinal studies.

A common perspective behind such questions can also be seen in the interest in sustainability of educational efforts and in long-term improvements. Working with studies carried out repeatedly is a promising procedure. Yet what about the timing of the two studies with five years between them? The logic behind this timeframe can be explained by two considerations. On the one hand, the time between the studies should be long enough to allow for significant changes (in this respect the German so-called Shell-Studies on youth that work with similar timeframes, can be quoted as a well-known example; cf. Shell Deutschland Holding 2010); on the other hand, the time between the two studies should not be too long because comparisons make more sense especially to practitioners if not too much time has elapsed between the different studies.

6. The Participating Countries and Churches

In the first international study on confirmation work, the contextual diversity of confirmation work in Europe under study was confined to the German speaking countries and Scandinavia. All of these countries – Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland – also took part in the present study. In most of them, either the majority of the population is Protestant (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) or at least one third of it (Germany, Switzerland). Moreover, Protestantism was established as state church or similar structure in these countries, at least in the past. Although in the present, this only applies to Denmark and Norway, the situation continues to be influenced

by the former forms of established Churches. Only in Austria, Protestants are a small minority while the majority there is Roman Catholic. All of these countries are often considered »Western« in the sense that they are affluent countries and belonged to non-Socialist Europe in the second half of the 20th century.

The second study includes new countries and a Church with a different structure:

- With Poland and Hungary, two central European countries that were part of the so-called East-Block Countries participated in the study. Including these countries does not only broaden the geographical scope of the present study but also widens the perspectives of comparative analysis in important respects. In both contexts, confirmation work faces historically shaped conditions and challenges that in many ways differ considerably from those of the previously studied countries. In Poland, Protestants are a small minority – the majority of the Polish population is Roman Catholic. In Hungary, 37 % of the population are Roman Catholics and about 14 % Protestants.
- With the German Methodists (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche, EmK), a type of Church is part of the new study that differs from the other Churches in important respects. Most of all, the other participating Churches are regional or state-wide Churches and through this, are defined by geographical references. This is not the case with the Methodist Church that has never defined itself geographically and that has always stayed away from any connection to the state. In this respect, it considers itself a »free church«. Its inclusion in the study consequently allows for interesting comparisons concerning different structures of the church. Yet readers should keep in mind that the Methodist data require special interpretation in line with the different context. For this reason, the data from the EmK were not included in calculating the totals presented in the appendix.

Unfortunately, the inclusion of additional countries was not without difficulties. In Poland, it was not possible to obtain data from the workers. In Hungary, the research team encountered a number of unforeseen difficulties that could only be overcome with much effort (see below, p. 266 ff.). This is the reason why the data from Hungary could not be included in all steps of the evaluation and interpretation of the data. This refers especially to the calculation of the totals.

In the appendix as well as in the tables throughout the book, the data from the Methodists and from Hungary are separated from the other data by a double line to indicate that these data were not included with the calculation of the totals for the other countries and Churches.

7. Research Questions

In correspondence with the first study, the main questions referred to expectations and experiences with confirmation work for the confirmands as well as the full-time and the voluntary workers. One of the questionnaires can be found in the appendix (cf. p. 395 ff.). It may serve to illustrate the explanations in the following.

In order to achieve a set of data that allows for valid comparisons between the first and the second study, it was decided that about two thirds of the items from the first study should be used again in the second study. Only responses to identical questions allow for comparison. The items to be retained were chosen on the basis of their meaning for the study as a whole. Items that had turned out to be problematic or less meaningful in terms of interpretation were dropped. New items were developed in conversations within the international research team, with a special eye on the questions and problems that emerged from the first study, for example, concerning worship services and voluntary work. Moreover, a number of experts external to the research team were asked for suggestions. In the end, limitations of space played a decisive role. Although not all questions of interest could be asked, preference was given to a brief questionnaire that would encourage the confirmands as well as the workers to answer in a serious manner.

Two general questions can summarise the main interest pursued in this volume:

- What are the expectations of the confirmands and of the full-time and voluntary workers concerning confirmation work?
- What are the experiences of these different groups with confirmation work and what are factors that explain differences related to these experiences?

Both of these questions can now be examined comparatively and from various perspectives (see below), making use of the data from t_1 and t_2 as well as from the two studies from 2007/2008 and 2012/2013.

In more detail, the following perspectives guided the research (in parenthesis, the respective chapters of the book are mentioned):

1. *Personal views*

- beliefs, religious attitudes, values and worldviews of the confirmands (II.1)
- expectations and experiences of the confirmands (II.3)
- religious identity (III.4)
- the confirmands perception of church services (III.7)
- expectations, aims and experiences of the workers (II.4)

2. *Comparisons over time*

- developments and changes during confirmation time ($t_1 \rightarrow t_2$)
- longitudinal developments (first study $\rightarrow$ second study)

3. *Influence of different contextual aspects*

- comparison by differences in the national contexts (country reports, IV)
- comparison by differences in the personal context (gender, educational background and religious socialisation)
- comparison by differences in the regional contexts (urban-rural, III.5)
- comparison by denominational differences (majority-minority Churches, EmK, III.6)

4. *Pedagogical perspectives*

- aims of confirmation work (II.2)
- settings and concepts of confirmation work (II.2; III.1)
- methods and materials of confirmation works (II.2)

5. *Effects of confirmation work*

- religious change, influence on the relationship to the church and parish (II.5)
- effects on the perception of church services (III.7)
- effects of different models of confirmation work (III.1)
- contribution to volunteerism and civil society (II.6)

6. *Methodological perspectives*

- further refinement of an international comparative research on youth, religion and education (VII)

While this volume is put together, the research team is getting ready to send out a third set of questionnaires to be filled in by the former confirmands two years after confirmation (t_3). The aim of this part of the study is to find out more about the question of what comes after confirmation. In some of the countries, a considerable number of the confirmands join the voluntary workers active in confirmation work, thus becoming young leaders in this field themselves. In other countries, programs of Christian youth work are offered. The study will, however, not be limited to the group of those who remain active in church-related contexts but will also try to reach those who distance themselves after confirmation. Some of the questions to be addressed in connection with t_3 will be:

- What can be done to support young people in staying in touch with the church?
- Are there long-term effects of different experiences with confirmation work?

- What are the motives of those who become volunteers in confirmation work?
- What are the experiences of the young volunteers?
- Are there certain preconditions for joining the volunteers or for taking part in youth work after confirmation that can be identified empirically?

Since the results from t_3 are not available yet, the book cannot address answers to these questions. They will be taken up in another publication in this series expected for 2016/2017.

8. The Design of the Study

The aim of the present study was to allow for comparisons concerning confirmation work in Europe over time, in respect to its potentials as well as its continuing need for further improvement. Moreover, in order to make comparisons possible, the basic design of the first study had to be used again.

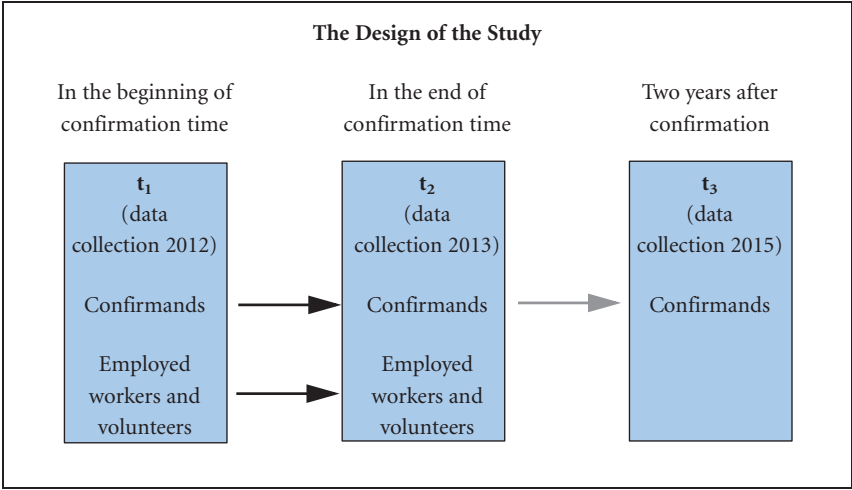
At the same time, as mentioned above, the present study will also be the presupposition for an important further extension of the research still under way. Two years after confirmation, the young people will be given a third questionnaire. This questionnaire will include a special focus on their participation or non-participation in church-related programs and their relationship to the church in order to investigate the possible long-term effects of confirmation work. This third part of the study will be another innovative element, because, compared, for example, to the United States (cf. Smith/Snell 2009), such long-term surveys are rare to non-existent in the European context.

Figure 1 gives an overview on the different parts of the study from t_1 to t_3 ; Table 1 shows the sample sizes for the participating countries.

Table 1: Sample sizes for the countries involved (t_1)

Country	Total	DE EKD	AT	CH	DK	FI	NO	SE	PL	HU	DE EmK
units/ groups	1635	576	28	477	61	111	48	59	42	134	99
confir- mands	28 070	10 191	495	7217	2024	2436	2337	1381	362	866	761
workers	4172	1667	126	905	80	679	105	357	–	115	138

Figure 1: Overview on the different parts of the study



9. How the Study Developed

The group of researchers, who carried out the study presented in this volume, has worked together for almost ten years. Many of the group members first came together in 2006, and many meetings in all of the participating countries followed. Early on, the group decided to form its own network, the »International Network for Research and Development of Confirmation and Christian Youth Work« founded in 2007. It was the shared interest in doing empirical research on confirmation work and to make possible international exchange and comparison that brought this group together.

In addition to electronic means of communication that played an important role for this group of researchers, a number of meetings took place in most of the participating countries. These meetings gave the group a chance to get at least a glimpse of the different situations in the countries where the meetings took place. The meetings were supported and facilitated by the local Churches in very generous ways. We are very grateful for this generosity that was extended to the researchers in a truly ecumenical spirit.

While the authors of the present volume carried the main load of work with the research, there also was much support from others that at least must be mentioned here – in the following, the teams and sponsors are listed in the order of how the countries are presented in this volume. Marianne Martin (Tübingen) was responsible for the language editing.

More information about the authors of this study can be found in the appendix.

Germany:

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Sponsors: The Regional Churches, EKD, Comenius-Institute, University of Tübingen

Austria:

Team: Stefan Grauwald, Dagmar Lager, Karl Schiefermair

Sponsors: Evangelische Kirche A.B. (Lutheran Church) and Evangelische Kirche H.B. (Reformed Church), University College of Teacher Education of Christian Churches Vienna/Krems, Austria (Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Wien/Krems)

Switzerland:

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Sponsors: Cantonal Churches, Faculty of Theology and University of Zurich

Denmark:

Team: Leise Christensen, Henrik Reintoft Christensen, Birthe Jakobsen, Helle Sangild Qvist, Church of Denmark-Center for Further Education of Research, Eberhard Harbsmeier (Loegumkloster), Hans Vium Mikkelsen

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Sponsors: Church Research Institute, Tampere, Christian Education and Family Work/The Church Council, Helsinki, The Center for Church Swedish-speaking Work/The Church Council, Helsinki

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Sponsors: The Church Council of the Norwegian Church, IKO-kirkelig pedagogisk senter (Church Educational Centre), KIFO-Institutt for religions- og livssynsforskning (Institute for Church, Religion, and Worldview Research) and KUN – Kirkelig utdanningscenter nord (Northern Norway Educational Centre of Practical Theology), scanning company Viascan

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Poland:

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Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche in Deutschland (German Methodists):

Team: Tobias Beißwenger, Achim Härtner
 Sponsors: Theologische Hochschule Reutlingen (Reutlingen School of Theology), Kinder und Jugendwerk der Süddeutschen Jährlichen Konferenz der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche (Department for Children and Youth Work of the Southern Annual Conference, United Methodist Church in Germany)

10. Explanation of the Terminology

For most of the items, the answers were measured by a scale of 1 to 7, with wordings given in the questionnaire like 1 = »not applicable at all« and 7 = »totally applicable«. In order to reduce the complexity of the tables in this publication, the answering levels 1, 2 and 3 are summarised as »No«, 4 »Middle« and 5, 6 and 7 as »Yes«. In computing the data (e.g., for correlations), the original answering levels have been kept. When reporting results, usually »percentages yes« are reported which is easier to understand than mean values.

The following statistical abbreviations will be used throughout the book:

- *Items* are the questions within a questionnaire.
- *Percentages (%)* refer to valid percent. The number of missing answers is usually about 1-4% of all answers and will not be stated for every item. Rounding accounts for deviations of percentage sums not equalling 100%.
- *Percent points* indicate the differences between percentages.

- The *scale level* of the Likert-scales (rating scales) is metric.
- *Sample size* (N) stands for the number of valid answers to a certain item.
- *Mean value* (M) is the average of all answers for a certain item.
- *Standard deviation* (SD) indicates the spread of the answers to a certain item.
- *Level of significance* (p): In this book a level of 5 % ($* = p < 0.05$) or 1 % ($** = p < 0.01$) or 0.1 % ($*** = p < 0.001$) is used. Due to the large number of questionnaires, not all significant differences can be considered relevant. As the sensitivity of significance test is connected to sample size, even small differences become statistically significant in countries with large sample sizes. All differences reported are significant at least on a 0.05-level. Statistical details (F-values, degrees of freedom, etc.) are mostly not reported in order to make the book more accessible to readers without statistical training.
- *Correlation coefficient* (r) states the degree of interdependence of two variables. It ranges from - 1 to + 1. The closer it is to 0, the smaller the interdependence between the variables.
- *Cronbach Alpha* (α) measures the degree of internal consistency of the items in an index.

When presenting data, the following order of countries is used, which is no more than a technical convention: Germany (DE EKD), Austria (AT), Switzerland (CH), Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), Norway (NO), Sweden (SE), Poland (PL), Hungary (HU). The data from the German Methodists (DE EmK) are presented last because of the different structure of this Church.

The Basic Picture

II. The Basic Picture

1. What the Adolescents Believe

HENRIK REINTOFT CHRISTENSEN, IDA MARIE HØEG, DAGMAR LAGGER, AND
FRIEDRICH SCHWEITZER

1.1 Introduction

How young people relate to religion, to religious institutions and traditions has been of major interest in many countries in recent years. There are a number of different reasons that motivate this interest. Politicians are worrying about the growing pluralism of religious orientations and worldviews in society. Churches are concerned about the future development of their membership. Parents are wondering about what their children might come to believe. Moreover, there are controversial debates within the academic field concerning the ways one can interpret the religious changes of the present. Are we to speak of secularisation or rather of religious pluralisation and individualisation? The question how to describe and to explain the religious orientations of young people refers to a contested field. Many studies on youth actually make little or no reference to religion. More or less tacitly, they seem to assume that religion is no longer a reference point for young people. At least implicitly, such views follow one of the oldest social scientific theories of religion – the theory of secularisation that, more recently, has come under much debate. The concept of secularisation refers to a historical process of transformation through which religion loses its former influence on culture, and society, as well as on the life of the individual person. Such effects are often interpreted as an inescapable consequence of social and cultural modernisation. According to this view, a rational understanding of human life leaves no space for religious orientations. Additional factors are economic affluence and modern medicine that make life feel secure and self-determined.

While there are certain regions or even countries that can be cited as evidence for the theory of secularisation – former East Germany, for example – generally speaking this theory has lost much of its credibility. The reason for this loss simply is that the expected effects of ever decreasing religious influences have never become a reality in most parts of the world. Moreover, a number of analysts like José Casanova (1994) and Charles Taylor (2007) have pointed out that the standard narrative of secularisation is far too simple in order to capture the

complexities of history – and speaking of a »narrative« in this case already highlights the construed character of this theory. Theories of secularisation are increasingly viewed as interpretive constructions and not as factual accounts. Consequently, the term secularisation cannot be taken simply as a distinct explanatory concept anymore (Luhmann 2000, 278), which is not to say, as will also become clear in the following, that religion goes unchallenged by the changes in culture and society.

Such second thoughts concerning secularisation explain why other concepts like religious individualisation and pluralisation have recently gained in influence with many analysts. In this view, young people keep their distance to religious traditions and, even more, to religious institutions. They want to be free to come to their own decisions concerning their faith or their refusal to assent to any given religion, rather than following what they consider the narrow expectations of churches or other religious bodies.

Making religion dependent upon individual preferences necessarily leads to more religious plurality, within as well as beyond the churches. In this respect, religious pluralisation is a consequence of religious individualisation. At the same time, this pluralisation also is the result of migration, internationalisation, or globalisation. Secularisation, individualisation and pluralisation are the three major interpretive approaches in the discussion on youth and religion today in Europe. On a more specific level, the views developed by Grace Davie (1994) under the rubric of »believing without belonging« should be mentioned as well. Davie's interpretation refers to the growing difference between those who see themselves as believers and those who feel part of a religious body like the church. In the following, these views of religion will be used as interpretive lenses, and at the end of this chapter, the question will be taken up of how the data fit or do not fit with different theoretical approaches.

1.2 Analysis

Beliefs and Religious Attitudes

In the present study, confirmands from nine countries were asked about their belief in God and religious attitudes as well as their overall attitude to religious faith and Christian knowledge. The responses reflect that the confirmands have a relatively individualised relationship to Christian traditions. In the beginning of confirmation time, approximately 60 % of the confirmands believe in God and the same share have an image of a loving God who cares about each one of us. 51 % believe in an afterlife and 41 % that Jesus has risen from the dead. 38 % believe in God as creator, and this is the belief with the lowest support. 37 % have experienced that faith in God helps in difficult situations. From the per-

spectives of the churches, the main intention of Protestant confirmation is to achieve knowledge of Christian faith and culture. Already at the beginning of confirmation time, half of the adolescents report that they know what the Christian faith entails. The beliefs in each country are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Christian beliefs (t_1): approval rates in international comparison (%)

	DE EKD	AT	CH	DK	FI	NO	SE	PL	HU	DE EmK
CE01: God created the world.	46	45	33	37	24	35	22	92	77	80
CE02: There is a life after death.	52	57	52	56	36	46	56	86	74	75
CE03: God loves all humans and cares about each one of us.	66	66	53	64	46	60	55	93	85	90
CE04: Jesus has risen from the dead.	52	59	37	42	31	40	27	96	80	85
CE05: I am not sure what I should believe.	31	31	38	35	31	44	47	15	25	24
CE09: I believe in God.	68	71	51	67	35	46	30	92	86	90
CE08: Faith in God helps me in difficult situations.	44	46	34	33	25	30	21	88	75	75
CE10: I know what the Christian faith entails.	53	54	46	45	41	51	41	88	64	45

N (countries) = 353-10075; scale: 1 = not applicable at all; 7 = totally applicable; the share of those with a positive response (5, 6, 7).

The status of Christian beliefs among the confirmands in the beginning of confirmation time shows interesting national and regional patterns. Minority confirmands score higher on Christian belief-items than confirmands from countries where Lutheran or Protestants constitute a large proportion or the majority of the population. This is evident for confirmands from Poland, to some extent Austria, and this is also the case for the Methodists (EmK) in Germany. The Danish confirmands have just as much in common with confirmands from Germany, Austria and Switzerland as with confirmands from the other Nordic countries. The other Nordic countries (Finland, Norway, and Sweden) share similar belief patterns. An overall impression is that the existence of minority Churches on the one hand, and secularisation in the Nordic countries on the other hand, are significant factors for interpreting the confirmands' beliefs.

There are distinct internal differences in beliefs among the confirmands. God as a creator and God as a loving and caring God is among the attitudes with the

highest degree of support from German, Austrian, Swiss, Polish, and Danish confirmands. These two attitudes are not as strong in Norway, Finland, and Sweden. Here the perception of God as creator scores lower. In Norway, Finland, and Sweden, the confirmands tend to have a stronger belief in life after death than in God as creator. God as a loving and caring God and life after death are the two religious beliefs that most of the confirmands agree with. The question then is whether the aim of confirmation work is achieved: do they learn more about Christian faith and culture? In Table 3 the change in belief attitudes between t_1 and t_2 is examined.

Table 3: Change in Christian belief (t_1 to t_2): approval rates in international comparison (Mean)

	iCE1 Christian belief (t_1)	iKE1 Christian belief (t_2)	Mean difference
Germany EKD	4.72	4.78***	0.06
Austria	4.73	4.83	0.09
Switzerland	4.11	4.12	0.01
Denmark	4.49	4.53	0.04
Finland	3.67	4.07***	0.41
Norway	4.15	4.40***	0.24
Sweden	3.72	4.01***	0.30
Poland	6.44	6.27*	-0.18
Hungary	5.94	6.02	0.08
Germany EmK	6.02	6.00	-0.02
Total	4.44	4.57***	0.13

N (total) = 22654; N (countries) = 295-8945; scale: 1 = not applicable at all; 7 = totally applicable; the means of individual differences is computed as t_2 value minus t_1 value. Only matched cases were used. Sig. (paired t-test): * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

Confirmation work does have an impact on the confirmands' religious path. In most of the countries, there is change in religious attitudes during confirmation time, although the changes are rather small in some of the countries, and actually negative for the Polish confirmands. The positive effect is strongest for countries where confirmands start their confirmation time with relatively low levels of religious attitudes. Switzerland, Finland, Sweden and Norway are among those countries. In this respect, confirmation time does not have the same effect on the Swiss confirmands as it has on confirmands from the three

Scandinavian countries, and not even as the Norwegian confirmands who had exactly the same starting point as the Swiss.

Attitudes to Church and Christianity in General

According to secularisation theory, the expectation is that most people and perhaps especially young people would not have a good opinion of the church and even less a positive attitude towards it. As individualised persons they are brought up in a culture in which institutional religion has less impact than it had a few generations ago. The study asked whether the church has answers to the questions the confirmands find important, and if it is important for them to belong to the church.

Table 4: Positive attitudes towards the Church (t₁): approval rates in international comparison (%)

	DE EKD	AT	CH	DK	FI	NO	SE	PL	HU	DE EmK
CG02: The Church does not have answers to the questions that are important for me.	31	30	36	24	34	28	21	25	19	26
CG01: It is important for me to belong to the Church.	41	42	27	26	28	31	18	82	63	70
CG05: The Church does a lot of good things for the people.	72	67	62	64	67	75	75	88	79	83
CF02: Positive attitude towards the Church	71	84	55	48	34	47	54	88	80	87

N (countries) = 353-10054. The share of those with a positive response to the question (5, 6, 7 for CG01, CG02 and CG05; 4, 5 for CF02).

The confirmands were asked to what degree the Church does not provide answers to the questions they find important in their lives. The table shows that fewer Scandinavian and Polish confirmands agree that the Church does not provide such answers than in the other countries. In the German speaking countries and in Finland, more confirmands agree that the Church does not provide answers to important questions.

At the same time, it is less important for the confirmands to belong to the Church in the Nordic countries. The Swedish confirmands are least likely to agree that the Church does not have answers to important questions but it is not important for them to belong to the Church. The Swedish confirmands aside, one could hypothesise that the more you agree that the Church can answer important questions, the more important it is to belong to the Church.

There are, however, no correlations between the two except for Germany, which shows a very small correlation ($r_s = .06, p < .001$), and Norway where it is actually negative ($r_s = -.11, p < .001$). In Norway, it is less important for the Church to answer important questions, the more important it is to belong to the Church.

Most confirmands find that the Church does a lot of good things for people, yet many of them do not find it important to belong to the Church. Surprisingly there is only a very weak correlation between the personal attitude of CG02 and the communal attitude of CG05 ($r_s = .04, p < .001$). This might be due to different directions in some of the countries. In Poland, Hungary and among the EmK confirmands, the correlation is strongest and most significant whereas it is not significant in Austria, Finland, and Sweden and actually points in the other direction in Norway. Finally, regarding the share of positive attitudes towards the Church, the Nordic state Churches and the Reformed Church in Switzerland are grouped together below the average while the Austrian, German, and Polish Churches show higher values.

Fewer confirmands in the Nordic countries and Switzerland agree to having a positive attitude toward the Church, with only 34% in Finland in contrast to the 84% and 88% in Austria and Poland respectively. Again one could hypothesise that the more positive you feel about the Church, the more important it is to belong to it. This time, there are significant correlations in all countries, ranging from .22 and .29 in Poland and Sweden respectively to .42 and .48 in Finland and Norway, with the rest of the countries in between.

Religious Background

So far, the religious beliefs and attitudes of the confirmands were examined at the start and ending of confirmation time. The confirmands are not blank slates, however, and come with a background, some of them also with a religious background. Contact with religion and church starts mostly within the family. 94% of the confirmands are already baptised and some of them have parents interested in religion and have also attended church activities earlier in their life. According to the confirmands, 59% of the parents are »somewhat interested in religion«, 20% are »quite interested«, 4% »very interested« and 17% »not interested at some«. Looking at the correlation between the estimation about parents' religious interest and their own religiosity, CG01/KG01 »It is important for me to belong to the church« and CE09 »I believe in God«, a significant connection can be found in some of the countries in t_1 ($p = 0,4$ for Denmark and Poland, $p = 0,6$ for Finland and Norway, $p = 0,5$ for all other countries; $p < 0,01$) and t_2 ($p = 0,5$ for Germany EKD, Switzerland and Denmark, $p = 0,6$ for the other countries; $p < 0,01$). Parents obviously play an important role in this respect. Evening prayer with the parents (CJ02) is an exam-

ple for religious practice in the family. But 27 % of the confirmands state that they never did it and 24 % do not remember. Only 15 % remember an evening prayer »sometimes« and just 11 % daily. This traditional form of religious practice is unevenly distributed between the countries from 59 % with the German Methodists to 6 % in Denmark and Sweden with the rest of the countries in between: Poland (46 %), Norway (21 %), Switzerland (20 %), Finland (19 %), Germany (17 %), and Austria (16 %). Reading the Bible (CH04) is an even rarer practice than evening prayer. 74 % of the confirmands ticked the box »never«. This method of getting familiar with Christian faith plays no role for the majority of the confirmands. More confirmands have attended group activities offered by the church, for example, Sunday school, children or youth groups. The higher frequency for participation of children in church groups with the German Methodists and in Poland could be connected to the minority situation. In Switzerland, the girls and boys have to pass a mandatory catechetical program before confirmation.

Table 5: Previous participation in group activities (t₁) in international comparison (%)

	DE EKD	AT	CH	DK	FI	NO	SE	PL	HU	DE EmK
CM11: when you were 5-9 years?	47	48	48	19	37	36	37	85 ^a	43	71
CM12: from the age of 10 years until now?	51	45	63	24	13	22	23		51	71

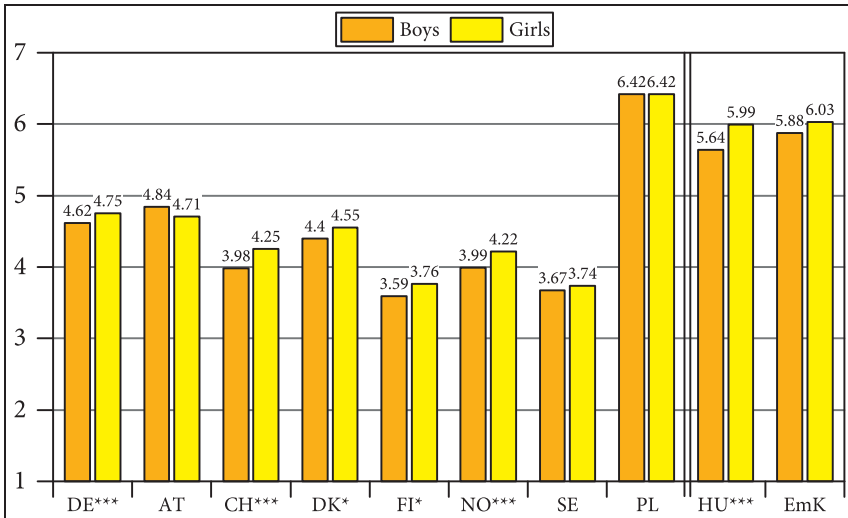
N = 302-9488; the share of those answering yes to the questions of participation.

^a In Poland, the question was not differentiated in relation to age.

Gender Effects on Beliefs and Attitudes

Above, the national differences concerning Christian belief were shown. It is generally assumed that women are more religious than men, and to some degree, this turns out to be the case with the adolescents in the present study as well. Examining gender differences in belief, Figure 2 shows the mean scores on the belief index in each country for both boys and girls (this index is a sum variable of items from the CE/KE section of the questionnaire, cf. p. 345).

The differences are not large but in five countries they are significant. In Sweden and in the two minority countries, Austria and Poland, the girls are not more religious than the boys. In Poland, both show the same extremely high mean score on the belief index (6.42 out of 7), and in Austria, boys actually score higher than girls. However, due to the small sample size, these results are not significant. In all the other countries, the girls are significantly more religious

Figure 2: Mean score on belief index by country and gender, t_1 

N (countries) = 358-10024; scale: 1 = not applicable at all; 7 = totally applicable. The means have been compared using ANOVA. * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

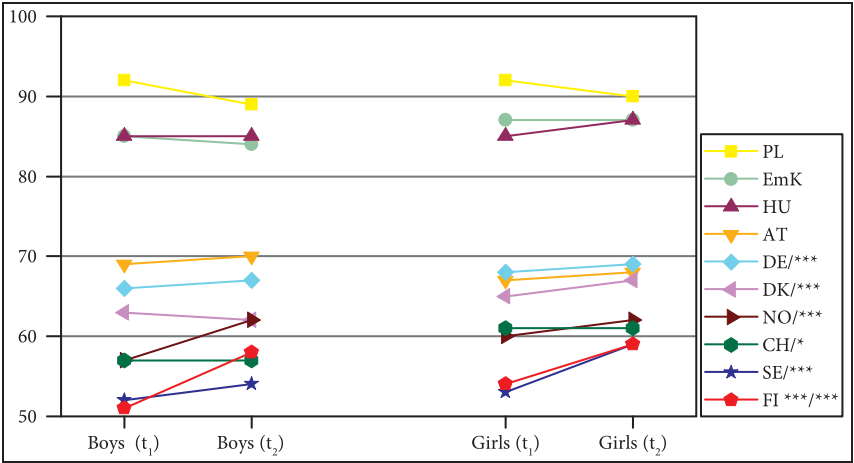
than the boys although the actual difference is often rather small. How do the results at the beginning and at the end of confirmation time compare in relationship to gender? The following Figure 3 gives a first impression. Each line represents the score of either boys or girls in each country.

Figure 3 shows an increase for the boys in most countries, but decreases in Denmark and Poland. However, the difference is only significant in Germany and Finland. Looking at the girls, the change in belief is more marked. Here, significant differences can be found in all countries except Poland and Austria. The change itself is biggest in Sweden and Finland (the lines are almost overlapping in the figure), but these confirmands are still scoring lowest on the belief index.

When looking at the development in attitudes towards the church from t_1 to t_2 , fewer confirmands answer that they have neither positive nor negative attitudes towards the church at t_2 . The biggest positive change is found with Finnish girls, with an almost 50 % increase in positive attitudes (from 36 % to 52 %). On the other hand, even though more confirmands become more positive and fewer become less indifferent during confirmation time, there is no strong decrease in negative attitudes.

Figure 4 shows that boys are generally more negative towards the church than girls at the beginning of confirmation time as well as at the end. Looking at the

Figure 3: Development of belief (iCE1/iKE1) during confirmation time (t_1 to t_2) by country and gender (paired t-test)



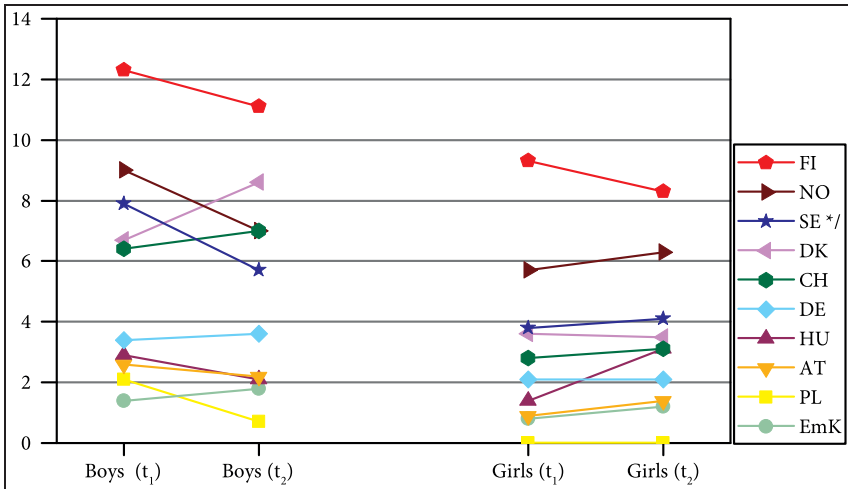
N (countries) = N = 145-4248 (boys) and 155-4471 (girls); significance is given in the legend for each country for boys and girls respectively. The score was normalised as a score between 1 and 100, but only scores from 50 to 100 are shown. The slope indicates if the belief score has increased or decreased between t_1 and t_2 . * $p < .05$ and *** $p < .001$. Countries are listed in the order of their appearance in the figure (Boys t_1).

development between the two points in time, one can see that the share of boys with a negative attitude has increased in Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, and decreased in Austria, Finland, Norway, Poland, and Sweden. It is, however, only the Swedish boys that show a significant decrease between t_1 and t_2 . Considering the development among the girls, the negative attitudes have not significantly decreased during confirmation time.

1.3 Comparison between the First and Second Study

The situation in the seven countries shows notable stability. Belief in God and that Jesus has risen from the dead, reveals no changes from 2007 to 2012. This is also the case for knowledge about Christianity. A similar percentage express the opinion that they know what the Christian faith entails. However, some changes in religious belief in the beginning of confirmation time in 2007 and in the beginning of confirmation time in 2012 have occurred. In 2012, confirmands were more likely than in 2007 to believe that faith in God helps them in difficult situations (significant difference) and God loves all humans and cares about each one of us (significant difference). Moreover, confirmands in

Figure 4: Development of negative attitudes towards the church during confirmation time (t_1 to t_2) by country and gender in percent (paired t-test)



N (countries) = 135-3008 (boys) and 163-3451 (girls); significance is given in the legend for each country for boys and girls respectively; * $p < .05$. Countries are listed in the order of their appearance in the figure (Boys t_1).

2012 were less likely to believe that God created the world (significant difference).

The comparison over the five years between the two studies shows that the Christian beliefs at t_2 are surprisingly similar, although the religious starting point was somewhat stronger in 2012 than in 2007 (see Figure 6). This holds true for all of the belief-items except for the statement that faith in God helps one in difficult situations and knowledge about Christian faith. Confirmands in 2013 are less likely to know what the Christian faith entails than in 2008. This means that confirmation time did not have the same effect concerning knowledge as in 2008. Yet confirmation work seems to have positive effects on confirmands' belief in a God who helps them in difficult situations. The substantial increase in the experience that faith in God helps one in difficult situations, is related to the practical as well as to the personal dimension of religious belief.

The finding suggests that religious belief tends to be seen in more personal terms than five years earlier and that there is a positive psychological benefit for young people from believing. This may reflect a turn in religion to subjective experiences and feelings (Heelas/Woodhead 2005) so that religion would have gained importance for adolescents and young adults in terms of subjective well-being and problem-solving (Smith/Deuton 2005, Smith/Snell 2009).