Christel Gärtner, Linda Hennig, Olaf Müller (eds.)

Families and Religion

Dynamics of Transmission across Generations

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Families and Religion

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I.
Introduction

Transmission of religion across generations

Christel Gärtner, Linda Hennig, Olaf Müller

1. Research interests

This book examines the transmission of religion and values in families across generations, using these findings to help explain religious change. Our research builds on the many empirical findings that show that institutional religiosity and religious practice have steadily declined in most European countries and Canada since the 1960s, and more recently also in the US (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Voas and Chaves 2016; Beyer et al. 2017; Pollack and Rosta 2017; Brauer 2018; Beyer 2018). In this context, we rely on the widely shared interpretation that this religious change can be understood primarily as a process of generational replacement, i.e. that over time less religious generations are replacing their more religious predecessors (Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere 1993; Davie 2007; Pollack 2008; Voas and Doebler 2011; Müller 2013; Rosta 2013; Garelli 2016; Gärtner 2016; Stolz et al. 2016; Voas and Chaves 2016; Gärtner 2018).

What is new about our research is that we investigate how, when exactly, and under what circumstances subsequent generations become less or differently religious. To gain further insights into these questions, we adopt a family perspective, drawing on the general thesis that (religious) socialization in the family is crucial for the transmission of (non-)religious worldviews, affiliation, practice, identity, and belief (see McIntosh and Spilka 1995; Hood et al. 1996, 74; Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 99; Chatters and Taylor 2005; Bengtson et al. 2009; Smith and Snell 2009; Vaidyanathan 2011; Bengtson et al. 2013; Pollack and Müller 2013; Smith et al. 2014; Manning 2015; Petts 2015; Barry et al. 2018; Brauer 2019; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019; Francis 2020; Goodman and Dyer 2020; Wilkins-Laflamme 2020; Barrow et al. 2021; Smith and Adamczyk 2021; Beider 2023). Our study draws on the claim that religious decline is due mainly to the changing conditions and influences that subsequent generations experience in childhood, and particularly in adolescence. In other words, it is primarily determined by

what happens to them "before they reach adulthood", as Linda Woodhead (2018) puts it.

Of course, familial religious socialization does not take place in a vacuum. Whether it is successful or intended at all also depends on the social context (Kelley and Graaf 1997; Voas and Storm 2021). Furthermore, as our analyses very quickly show, decisive changes take place not so much in childhood as in adolescence, and are therefore determined not only by the direct effects of family circumstances, but also increasingly by the social environment, which plays a greater role in adolescence.

With the design of our study, which uses a mixed-methods as well as a comparative approach, we hope to gain insights that go beyond those available to date. Our data focus not only on parent-child relationships, as is often the case in other studies, but also on three-generation families (grandparents, parents, and children), and thus cover a period of well over half a century. We will analyze the successive generations and their changing practices of socialization depending on the social context in which the families are embedded. We also adopt an international comparative perspective, and have carried out the project in five countries in Europe and North America (Germany, Italy, Hungary, Finland, Canada).[1] These countries are similar in that they have a strong Christian heritage while having undergone secularization since the 1960s. However, they also differ in terms of their religious and denominational composition, as well as other characteristics such as political or migration history and structure.[2]

Historically, *Germany* was a religiously mixed country with a Protestant majority and a Catholic minority. The denominational landscape then changed considerably after the Second World War and the division of the country into East and West, this leaving a deeply divided religious field. In West Germany, there is a roughly equal distribution of Catholics and Protestants, increasing religious diversity due to migration (especially since the 1970s), and a slow but steady decline in religion. On the other hand, East Germany (the former German Democratic Republic, 1949–1990), until about 1950 predominantly Protestant with a few Catholic regions, has turned into a non-religious area due to the anti-religious politics of the state. The ratio of religious to non-religious people in East Germany (approximately 25 % : 75 %) is almost the exact reverse to the ratio in West Germany (approximately 75 % : 25 %).

1 We have not included the US, but draw for comparison on research conducted there. Part of the comparison was done in collaboration with the research project "Pro-Social Values and Spirituality in the Absence of Religion Among Millennials and their Families", led by Merril Silverstein (Silverstein et al. 2024).

2 Each country-specific chapter in Part II begins with a detailed description of the religious field in that particular country.

Italy is a predominantly Catholic country in which Catholicism is still closely interwoven with social, educational, and cultural institutions. Despite the great importance of Catholicism for national identity, there has been a decline both in practice, i.e. in the number of churchgoers, and in people's involvement in the parishes, with an increasing number of *Nones* among young people (Garelli and Ricucci 2023). On the other hand, the waves of migration in Italy since the 1980s, with a strong presence of Muslim and Orthodox communities, have led to a diversification of the religious field.

Located in Central Europe, *Hungary* is a predominantly Roman Catholic country with significant Reformed, Lutheran, and Greek Catholic populations. During the communist era (1949–1989), religions were suppressed and religious people persecuted. Of the post-communist countries, Hungary is one of the more secularized: unlike some other countries of the Eastern Bloc, it has seen only a moderate religious revival since 1990. Individualized forms of belief ("religious in his/her own way") are more prevalent than church-affiliated religiosity.

A Nordic country, *Finland* is predominantly Lutheran, with both the Lutheran and the Orthodox Church as national churches. Traditionally, Lutheranism has been closely interwoven with the national identity. Despite an increase in the number of non-affiliated people, membership of the Lutheran Church is still comparatively high. At the same time, Finland can be seen as a highly secularized country, in line with the maxim "belonging without believing".

Canada, with both a French (1600–1760) and British (1760–1870[1960]) colonial history, is today still mainly a European-settler society in which Protestantism and Catholicism were much in the ascendancy until the late 20th century. In the post-1960s era, migration, economic prosperity, and a liberalization of values have resulted in an altered social context, one marked by a strong regionalism, featuring especially a French-speaking and nationalist Quebec, a sharp increase in religious and cultural diversity concentrated in the larger cities, and a steady decline in the salience of religion.

From its initial conception in 2019 until its completion in 2024,[3] our project aimed to understand and explain religious transmission and change across generations by investigating the following key research questions:

1. How are religion and non-religion transmitted from generation to generation? How has the transmission of religion changed across generations and within families? How does the transmission, transformation, or abandonment of religiosity and values take place in processes of socialization over generations?
2. How have the meaning and practice of religion and non-religion changed across generations and within families, and how is this linked to the changing societal context?
3. Which factors and mechanisms in a family promote the transmission or discontinuation of religiosity (e.g. family relationships, nurturing styles, trust, equality, attentiveness, tolerance, religious profile, and conservatism or liberalism)?

Before presenting our methodological and theoretical approach, we would first like to discuss the research that is relevant to our research questions.

2. Related findings

Our study addresses an outstanding research gap: namely, why some families are able and willing to pass on their beliefs and values while others are not (Putnam and Campbell 2010). To illustrate the insights that we are building on, but also to show where we are breaking new ground, we will give a brief overview of the current state of research on our theme. Two findings seem relatively certain: family socialization is important for the transmission of religion, and religious upbringing in families is declining, especially in highly industrialized countries and most strongly in Europe (e.g. Bucher 2009, 625; Niemelä 2011; Pollack and Müller 2013, 15–16; Stolz et al. 2016; Stolz et al. 2020; Hohenschue et al. 2022). Drawing on their

3 Both the initial project "The transmission of religion across generations: a comparative international study of continuities and discontinuities in family socialization" (ID 61361) and the follow-up project "Explaining religious change across generations: an international study of religious transmission in families" (ID 61361) were based at the University of Münster. It involved researchers from the University of Münster (Germany), the University of Turin (Italy), the Pázmány Péter Catholic University Budapest (Hungary), the University of Eastern Finland, and the University of Ottawa (Canada). More information and material (including the survey data) are available on OSF (https://osf.io/6mxy5/). This research was funded by the John Templeton Foundation, for which we are very grateful. The opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

studies in Switzerland, Stolz et al. (2016, 159) argue that religious socialization has not only decreased, but also changed fundamentally in terms of its status, from being a social practice deemed natural and necessary to something that is considered optional. Although this development varies from country to country in Europe, there does seem to be a general trend, one that sees even parents who regard religion as important failing to pass religion on to their children (Voas and Doebler 2011); or, to put it differently, parents who respect and honor the personal religious choices of their children, even when they find it difficult to do so (Manning 2015; Barrow et al. 2021).

Parents who are theists, religiously conservative, or very religious generally wish to pass on their religious beliefs, practices, and commitments to their children (Pollack and Rosta 2017; Chelladurai et al. 2018; Barrow et al. 2021; Smith 2021). This is especially true for families who belong to a minority religion or who have a migration history (Fleischmann and Phalet 2011; Bramanti et al. 2020). Barrow and colleagues have identified interactions that express the desire of parents for their children to continue the religious tradition, these including teaching principles and values, expecting religious participation and responsibility, and setting an example, with an authoritarian parenting style seeming to promise more success (Barrow et al. 2021, 231). In contrast, religiously liberal parents or deists are either less likely to transmit their religiosity to their children (Pollack and Rosta 2017; Smith 2021), or try to honor their children's own agency (Barrow et al. 2021). This effect is reinforced when adults marry partners who either have religious beliefs that differ from their own, or claim not to be religious at all. On average, their children become less religious than children from families in which there is one shared religion (Voas and Crockett 2005; Bruce 2006), and these children are themselves less likely to transmit their religiosity to the next generation of the family (Bengtson et al. 2013; Woodhead 2017; 2018). This does not mean, however, that parents with no religious affiliation do not transmit their worldview and values to their children (see Manning 2015; Bengtson et al. 2018; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019; Gärtner 2022; Malone 2023). A qualitative study with a sample of non-believers (born 1933–1953) shows that the participants recall their own upbringing as being different to their own children's upbringing, when the idea of freedom of choice became central (Malone 2023, 344). The study identifies not only different socialization practices, but also a gender difference: while mothers, even when they themselves do not believe, are usually neutral in certain situations and are more supportive of their children in activities related to religion, fathers seem to express their non-belief more clearly in the upbringing of the children and transmit "more explicit non-religious—and sometimes anti-religious—norms and beliefs" (Malone 2023, 336).

Barrow and colleagues (2021) use interviews with parents and children in their study of how religious families transmit religion, and suggest that future research concentrate not on the results of socialization, but on the processes, meanings, and relationships connected to socialization (see also Klingenberg and Sjö 2019). We agree, and have embedded this approach in our study, as well as focusing on religious change.

As already stated, there have been very few studies that explain exactly how the transmission or discontinuation of faith takes place across generations. So far, the largest studies on the transmission of religion, secularity, values, and worldviews across generations have been carried out by Monika Wohlrab-Sahr et al. (2009) for East Germany, and by Vern Bengtson et al. (2013) for southern California.[4] One focus of the three-generation family interviews conducted by Wohlrab-Sahr et al. (2009) was the relationship between religion and secularity. The study reveals how the different generations attempt to maintain family unity in the face of diverse life opportunities, and how this diversity is reflected in their attitudes toward the GDR and East German society in the post-reunification period, as well as in their attitudes toward religion (Wohlrab-Sahr 2011). Drawing on their longitudinal study of families across three and four generations, Bengtson and colleagues (2009; 2013) argue that there is a significant degree of religious influence across the generations, and that the importance of religion in families is a matter not only of the nuclear family, but of the extended family, too, and of the grandparents' relationship to religion, with parents and grandparents (especially grandmothers) being agents of religious socialization both separately and jointly (see also Schwab 2007; Zehnder-Grob et al. 2009; Manning 2015; Vrublevskaya et al. 2019). Although Bengtson et al. (2013, 185) show that some familial influences have weakened, they conclude that parental influence has in fact not declined, and that religious families are generally successful in passing on their religious beliefs and practices.

Several authors have also explained the success of the intergenerational transmission of faith by pointing to the importance of a loving and positive relationship between parents and their children (Day et al. 2009; Bengtson et al. 2013; Spilman et al. 2013; Sârbu et al. 2021); this is also true for families in the US with no religious affiliation (Manning 2015). There is some evidence that these results correspond to findings in other countries. For example, surveys in West Germany (Haumann/

4 Research on families and the transmission of (non-)religion, belief, and worldviews as such have also been the subject of quite a few other studies over a long period of time (Hoge et al. 1982; Clark et al. 1988; Cornwall 1988; Francis and Brown 1991; Zehnder-Grob et al. 2009; Manning 2015; Barrow et al. 2021). However, they are all limited to a certain context or only take the perspective of either parents or children.

Forum Familie Stark Machen e.V. 2010) show that religious families are usually dominated by values and attitudes that ensure good family cohesion and therefore make parenting more likely to succeed. This is not surprising and points to a general trend identified by qualitative studies (Gabriel et al. 2002; Gärtner 2003; Feige and Gennerich 2008; Gärtner 2013b) that show that, since the 1970s, families have become much more nurturing, while at the same time the passing on of the religious tradition, norms, and dogmas has decreased. Thus, given the social development of the increasing focus on nurturing in families and the simultaneous decline in religious transmission, we must adopt a more nuanced perspective and question the premise that good family relationships as such lead to the successful transmission of religion. As Nunner-Winkler (2001) shows, the extent to which children are recognized as personalities has a positive effect on their ability to show commitment and be oriented toward the common good. There is also evidence that supportive family contexts favor the intergenerational transmission of values in general (Pratt et al. 2008). But it is not necessarily the case that children will continue either their parents' religious faith or their religious practice (Gärtner 2013b; 2016). Conversely, when parents follow the pattern of "narrative of choice", this means allowing their children the freedom to form their own opinions on religious matters and to make their own personal decisions (Manning 2015). This parental ideal corresponds to modern society's expectation that adolescents develop their own answers to practical life questions (King 2002). The ideal developed gradually in Western countries during the second half of the 20th century (we can see this pattern clearly in our study in the generation of parents who started a family around 1990). Following this ideal may be easier for non-religious or moderately religious parents than for parents who are religious (see Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019).

The study by Dollahite and colleagues (2019) confirms that a loving relationship and encouraging children to make their own decisions are not sufficient for transmitting religion. They suggest that the most successful parents in religious transmission are those who integrate firmness as well as flexibility, and who give meaning to religious beliefs and rituals while leaving room to change or adapt rituals according to circumstances. The authors conclude that

> (a) religious firmness without religious flexibility may result in religious rigidity, (b) religious flexibility without religious firmness may result in religious haphazardness and loss of sacred beliefs and practices, while (c) religious firmness integrated with religious flexibility is more likely to result in a balanced, healthy style of religious parenting (ibid., 14).

Other studies also emphasize that the influence that families have depends on whether there is a safe and secure attachment between parents and children, and on whether there is spousal agreement concerning religion (Zehnder-Grob et al.

2009; Granqvist 2020). There have also been studies showing that religious transmission between generations is fostered by a "democratic" relationship between parents and children, by parents acting as examples, by encouraging children to reflect on their own values, and by children being given a positive experience of a religious way of life and a religious community (Kuusisto 2003; Smith and Snell 2009; Smith et al. 2014).

In addition, some studies highlight the importance for the transmission of religion of conversation. They suggest that religious transmission benefits from a certain way of talking about religion, such as "bi-directional reciprocity in parent-child communication" (Boyatzis and Janicki 2003, 264), open, child-centered, and respectful conversations (Dollahite and Thatcher 2008, 638; Smith and Adamczyk 2021, 5), while contrary forms complicate transmission. Studies on institutional transmission, for example through first-communion catechesis, also claim that the communication of faith in families has a positive effect on children's religious development (see Forschungsgruppe "Religion und Gesellschaft" 2015, 320–22). However, relatively little is known about the actual frequency of communication about religion and its effects in combination with other factors on intergenerational religious continuity. A quantitative study among Anglicans has found that the example of parental church attendance has a reinforcing effect when parents (especially the mother) talk about religion with their children at home (Francis 2020).

Others conceptualize socialization somewhat more broadly and go beyond the family as the central factor of socialization by considering that the transmission of religion also depends on political, cultural, and social conditions (Kelley and Graaf 1997; Klingenberg and Sjö 2019; Vrublevskaya et al. 2019; Stolz et al. 2020; Voas and Storm 2021; Beider 2023; Conway et al. 2023). For instance, in a widely discussed article, Kelley and de Graaf (1997, 641, 655) argue that family religiosity strongly shapes children's religious belief within secular societies, precisely because religious parents make a greater effort to raise their children religiously, e.g. by controlling their environment and restricting their choices (for a critique of this claim, see Voas and Storm 2021). In this context, it has also been found that the costs of religious socialization also increased in former socialist countries, where the state previously repressed religion (Müller et al. 2014; Stolz et al. 2020). Various studies also point out that generally it makes a difference whether a person belongs to a religious majority or minority: while religious majorities take their religion for granted but experience a greater religious decline over time (Smith and Snell 2009), religious minorities, who also often share the same ethnicity and culture, tend to become more religiously committed in order to preserve their religious identity (Vaidyanathan 2011; Bengtson et al. 2013; Bramanti et al. 2020; Leath et al. 2022, 865). Some studies have found that the outcomes

of religious transmission not only depend on various factors of socialization and contextual conditions, such as what the institution can offer young people (Stanford et al. 2023), but also vary by denomination (Vaidyanathan 2011).

While there is a broad consensus that adolescents and young adults are less religious than their parents, and that the loss of religiosity takes place in adolescence (see, for example, Smith and Denton 2005; Uecker et al. 2007; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017; Nynäs et al. 2022; Malone 2023; Stanford et al. 2023), this is linked to an interpretive gap in the theory of intergenerational religious decline. As Stolz and Tanner ask: "What is it that children and adolescents experience that makes them less religious than the generation of children and adolescents before them?" (2019, 10). Our study aims to answer this question by showing what exactly happens in the phase of adolescence and young adulthood of each generation that is confronted with a different context to the previous generation. Furthermore, we intend to understand how the influence of the wider societal context is a driver of religious change in the phase of adolescence.

Finally, studies that attempt to investigate how the transmission of faith takes place or fails to take place across generations are often limited in terms of their generalizability. This is also the case with the otherwise excellent studies with three generations conducted by Wohlrab-Sahr et al. (2009) and Bengtson et al. (2013). Since both are restricted to a single region, they cannot answer certain questions: What impact does the general level of religiosity, secularity, and religious plurality at the local and societal level have on the process of transmission? What role is played by other contextual factors (socioeconomics, political circumstances,[5] historical specificities, etc.)? Is religious transmission affected by whether a person belongs to a majority or minority religion? To answer such questions, we conducted a comparative study involving the countries mentioned above, which differ with respect to these dimensions. We expect that the conditions for successful or unsuccessful religious socialization vary depending on the historical context in those countries. Our study of three-generation families also aims to cover a historical period that is long enough to allow us to explain religious change. Thus, our approach enables us to analyze the different effects of social, institutional, and cultural agents of socialization (parents, religious communities,

5 Unlike with liberal Western countries, it is important here to consider the persistence of communist legacies: there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the anti-religious ideology in most communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, with its repression of churches and persecution of religious people, greatly weakened religious socialization (Müller 2013) and hindered the intergenerational transmission of religiosity in the 1950s and 1960s. We will draw on our data from East Germany and Hungary to gauge how far the communist legacy still affects the situation today.

peers, culture in general) against the background of the contextual factors in each country.

3. Theoretical and methodological approach

3.1 Theoretical approach: linking two different concepts of generation

To understand the transmission of religion in families across generations, we use two different concepts of *generation*. Families are settings in which members of different generations meet: grandparents, parents and children have both a generational relationship to each other (vertical), while also belonging to different historical generations (horizontal). Since each generation has different social experiences during their adolescence, a time when they position themselves with respect to the religious or non-religious worldviews that they acquire in the context of childhood family socialization, we see both familial and societal conditions of transmission as being crucial. This systematic interweaving of the two reveals both the dialectic between the general (the historical-generational layer) and the specific (the families and milieus), and the differences and ruptures, as well as commonalities and continuities, between the generations.

This means that we need to look at both the familial and societal conditions that affect patterns of socialization, as well as religious continuity or discontinuity. To gain a deeper understanding of these processes within families in different social contexts, we base our theoretical framework in part on Vern Bengtson et al.'s (2013) theory of *intergenerational religious momentum*, which demonstrates how various familial, institutional, and societal influences throughout childhood and into adulthood affect the development of a religious orientation. The theory foregrounds family influences such as loving relationships between parents and children, but also stresses different contextual factors such as the influence of contemporary culture, historical events, generational differences in how religion is expressed, as well as the influence of religious organizations, friends, and school, all of which can increase or decrease the likelihood that a child will adopt their parents' religion (see Bengtson et al. 2013, 193).

However, we will also link Bengtson's theory to Mannheim's theory of *historical generations* (see Mannheim 1964; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2009; Gärtner 2013a; 2014; 2016; 2018), a cultural-theoretical approach that argues that there is a formative phase for generations when (religious) beliefs can develop that have a certain permanence. Mannheim suggests that the process by which historical generations are formed sees an entanglement of two different formational parameters: namely, the biographical experience of time on the one hand, and the historical

developments and events that embody social change on the other (see Fietze 2009).

The *first parameter* refers to the formative phase in the individual's history of development. We can define this phase in the light of contemporary developments in socialization theory as a step-by-step developmental process of ontogenesis (Gärtner 2016). Embedded in their social context, individuals acquire in their childhood societal values and interpretations, modified by their respective milieus, such that they are endowed with collective (religious and non-religious) self-images and myths (see Mead 1962; Handel 1997). Assuming that worldviews, norms, and patterns of interpretation are already reworked in the process of transmission to the next generation, they can then be explicitly questioned and transformed in adolescence. This phase serves to separate the individual from their particular family, thereby leading to the formation of a new generation that replaces the previous (historical) one (King 2002). Adolescent confrontation and development do not take place separately *from* the family, society and peers, however, but rather *between* them, and are therefore embedded in generational relationships and cultural traditions. In modern societies, adolescents are expected to generate their own responses in order to have a successful future life; they integrate the norms and interpretations associated with their milieu of origin into these responses, processing the norms and interpretations in discussion with their peers, and in conjunction with the discourses of crisis that are important for their generation. Adolescents can thus help shape change through new interpretations and lived practice.

The *second parameter* refers to the formative power of collective social events, with the state of the specific historical-political community to which a person belongs being one important point of reference that opens up the spectrum of the possible actions that the person can choose and thereby realize.[6] While, for Mannheim (1964, 544), the historical *situation* of generations creates a common *space of opportunity* that widens the frame in which decision-making takes place, thereby both opening up and limiting opportunities, we can only speak of *historical generations* when (collective) actors make "age-specific interpretations of situations" of social crisis (Fietze 2009, 50).

From this, we can draw the following conclusion for our investigation: while in the phase of childhood it is primarily the family that influences religious beliefs and practices, in the phase of adolescence it is the societal and cultural context. Even if the person's general attitude, openness, and need for religion are already shaped during childhood, it is during adolescence that the person's religiosity is

6 For example, while communist states tried to restrict the practice of religion, democratic states have seen secularization create a context in which religion has gradually had to justify itself.

most likely to undergo change. As we will show in this book, it is this change during adolescence that is responsible for the changes in religiosity between generations over the last few decades. At the same time, however, it is important to stress that there are also continuities in (non-)religious beliefs and practices between both familial and historical generations (Dillon 2007, 544). By adopting Bengtson's theory of *intergenerational religious momentum* as well as Mannheim's theory of *historical generations*, we hope to do full justice to both the continuities and discontinuities of religiosity across generations.

3.2 Methodological approach: mixed-methods design

While studies on the transmission of religion usually use either quantitative or qualitative methods, we adopt a mixed-methods approach, this allowing us to combine the strengths of both methodological paradigms: on the one hand, the representativeness of quantitative surveys, and their ability to provide causal explanations; on the other, the fine-grainedness of qualitative family interviews, which allows us to reconstruct precisely the mechanisms and patterns of transmission across generations, and to create typologies based upon them.

We were aware from the outset that triangulating the methods would be a major challenge. This we met by sometimes using each of the two methodological paradigms separately, while also at various stages repeatedly linking them, and relating and comparing to each other the results that each paradigm yielded. While we discussed and developed the standardized questionnaire jointly, which enabled us to incorporate the initial findings from the qualitative interviews into the questionnaire, we collected and analyzed the data separately according to the methods of each paradigm. While the quantitative survey primarily meant discussing certain items in terms of their functional and semantic equivalence, the qualitative teams from each country discussed their experiences with regard to sampling strategies and recruiting three-generation families, and agreed on an initial question for the family interviews. These separate methodological discussions reflect the fact that, although there is a common research question, each sub-project (the quantitative and the qualitative) collected data according to the standards of its own methodological paradigm.

From the outset, we did not aim for a comprehensive triangulation during data collection, as this has its limitations. While in family interviews there was room for narratives that refer to complex contexts that can be reconstructed retrospectively, the survey questions had to be standardized and formulated as precisely as possible. Thus, as already mentioned, although it was possible while formulating the standardized questionnaire to take into account some ideas from

the qualitative study already underway (e.g. the singing of religious songs in the family as a means of transmission), other findings were too complex to be implemented in a standardized form (e.g. particularities in the phase of adolescence in a specific generation, such as the request to do without mealtime prayers when friends visit). Other characteristic differences in the design also prevented comprehensive triangulation at this stage. While the standardized questionnaire had to be very limited in scope due to the method chosen (telephone interview; see below), the family interviews could last up to three hours. In addition, in the standardized survey only one person was interviewed, i.e. the person representing the third, the youngst generation (G3) of a family, while people from all three generations took part in the family interviews.

Both sub-projects, the quantitative and the qualitative, are based on the same theoretical approach, but the methodologies differ slightly. In the quantitative sample, the respondents themselves can initially be understood in each case as representing both a specific historical generation and G3 of a family. To gather information about the entire family structure (especially about the parents and grandparents, and the respondent's relationship with them), we used retrospective questions that the respondents answered from their memories as members of G3 (see 4.1 below). In contrast, in the qualitative sub-project, we interviewed families usually with all three generations present. In the quantitative survey, G3 includes all age groups, while in the qualitative sample the grandparents are the oldest (G1), the parents the middle (G2), and the children the youngest generation (G3), in terms of both familial and historical generations. This enables us to look directly at both familial and historical generations, with the family interviews therefore yielding more concrete insights into family socialization from the perspective of all family generations.

In analyzing the data, the country teams used different definitions of *generation*. The German team used a typology of historical generations that is also known from the literature (see chapter 1.2, footnote 4), one that Bengtson et al. (2013) used, and that the Canada team also used with a few deviations in the oldest and youngest generations. As the formation of the cohorts for the analysis is based on historical generations (and not on 10-year intervals, as is usually the case in Italy, Hungary, and Finland), the data in the German sample are comparable.[7] In contrast, the quantitative analysis used by the teams from Italy, Hungary and Finland used 10-year cohorts rather than historical generations, one consequence of which was that the analysis of the family interviews could not be directly related to the results from the survey data.

7 This cut is also used for the cross-country comparison based on the quantitative sample (see chapter 6).

4. Data collection and analysis

4.1 The quantitative survey: method, sample and questionnaire

The quantitative analyses are based on a survey conducted in all five countries between January and March 2021. The target group comprised persons aged 18 and over in private households. The sampling was carried out under systematic and controlled conditions in a multi-stage stratified random selection procedure based on random sampling together with a random selection of respondents. A dual-frame procedure (mobile phone vs. landline) generated two separate samples in each of the countries surveyed, the interview being conducted in the mode by which the respondent was reached.[8]

After the survey, we subjected the data to weighting before analyzing them. Weighting was required because of the disproportionate sampling in Germany (overrepresentation of East Germany), and because surveys cannot reach all groups of people equally, resulting in unintentional distortions in the survey data. Different selection probabilities that result from the design of the sampling are compensated through the design weight (also called *transformation weighting*). Through the weighting step of *redressment*, we mathematically adjusted the sample structure to reflect the official statistics. In the process, we compared the empirical distribution of selected sociodemographic variables with the official target values. The weighting specifications for the representative sample are based on data from Eurostat 2020 (and for Canada, on census data). Age, gender, region, and education were used as comparative variables.[9] Before the main survey, we pre-tested the questionnaire on 30 respondents per country. A total of 8,408 interviews were completed.

With a few exceptions, the questionnaire consisted of fully standardized questions. The interviews lasted just under 22 minutes on average. We collected data on the sociodemographic profile of respondents, their religious (or non-religious) beliefs, spirituality, religious practices and values, significant events or transitions in childhood and adolescence affecting their religiosity (or non-religiosity), how their families have influenced their religiosity or non-religiosity, as well as other beliefs and values, their shared religious practices, and their assessment of their relationships with their parents, grandparents, and other family members. If the respondents were themselves parents or were planning to become parents,

8 Since almost 100 % of the population have a telephone in the countries surveyed, telephone sampling can be used to make representative statements for the entire population.

9 Detailed information on the weighting as well as further information on the technical implementation and the sample profile can be found in the method report, which is available from the authors on request.

we also asked them if they were raising, or intended to raise, the children religiously. In addition, we asked the respondents questions about their family and household structure, and the religiosity of their parents and grandparents, in order to obtain data on the childhood family and other family members (mainly on the first and second family generation). Thus, in line with the concept of *generation* that underlies our study, we treated the respondents, irrespective of their age at the time of the survey, as belonging to G3 of their family (although they also belong to different historical generations). It is true that such a procedure entails certain risks. For example, we cannot rule out that respondents misremember or rationalize things retrospectively, or that gaps in memory or simple lack of knowledge can mean that some data are incomplete (although the number of incomplete answers was within the usual range for these questions, too). Nonetheless, in terms of the range and depth of questions asked, our survey went far beyond existing international studies in this regard.[10]

Despite the problems associated with collecting data on the childhood family and its members retrospectively, this method also has certain advantages: for one, it allowed us to collect data that trace how religious transmission between generations has developed and changed over a longer historical period. Furthermore, the choice of questions enabled us to focus on explanatory factors in our statistical analyses at the individual level that play a central role in the model developed by Bengtson et al. (2013, 192–95), while also considering variables not taken into account in that model.

4.2 The qualitative sub-project

4.2.1 The family interviews

We chose the method of family interviews for the qualitative part of our research (see Hildenbrand 1999; Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008, 122–32; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2009), our intention here being to bring three generations together to talk to each other and to discuss their experiences as family members.

While this method certainly has both advantages and disadvantages, we believe that the former outweigh the latter. Although it is more time-consuming to find families who are willing to come together for a conversation, there is a crucial theoretical difference between when individuals talk about their life *in* a

10 For example, with regard to the religiosity/religious activities of other family members, respondents are asked at best in the ISSP or the EVS/WVS which religion their own parents belonged to or how often they attended church services when the respondents were 11/12 years old.

family, and family members communicate *as a family*, even though each member talks about their own experiences. The latter gives us an insight into the structure and identity of the family, as well as into family myths and conflicts. This method suits our research question, which focuses on family interactions, processes of meaning-formation, and the relationship between generations with regard to the transmission of (non-)religious worldviews, affiliation, faith, and practice. Unlike studies that examine only the parental perspective (see Barrow et al. 2021; Kelley et al. 2021; Malone 2023), or both parents and (mostly adolescent) children (Dollahite and Thatcher 2008; Dollahite et al. 2019; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019; Goodman and Dyer 2020; Smith 2021), or only adolescents or young adults (Klingenberg and Sjö 2019; Sârbu et al. 2021; Nynäs et al. 2022), the family interview reveals not only the perspectives of three generations simultaneously, but also the interactions and associated family relationships. By conducting family interviews, we can observe *how* religion or other values are communicated within the family, in which atmosphere, and in which style. We can also see differences in faith and religious practice between the generations, and thus gain an insight into generational change.

Nevertheless, one possible disadvantage of our method is that people might not talk openly about their religiosity when other family members are present (as we saw in some Finnish families, which is why some of the family members were interviewed individually). On the one hand, we compensated for this *disadvantage* by conducting individual interviews, and by including siblings from G2 and G3 so that we could gauge if and why siblings from the same family take different trajectories. We started with face-to-face interviews in October 2019, with a large proportion of the interviews being conducted digitally (via Zoom) due to COVID. This meant that family members could participate in these interviews who might otherwise not have been able to do so because they lived a long way apart. On the other, this *disadvantage* also has an *advantage*: namely, family interviews allow us to reconstruct how families create unities or bridge differences. In addition, they also give us insights into how practices such as *talking about religion* change across generations: for example, when grandparents say that religion was not talked about in their generation, but they talk about their religious experiences, practices, and attitudes in the interview in the presence of their children and grandchildren. Experience has also shown that such patterns (of not talking) can be broken down in family conversations, when family members are asked about differences between generations (e.g. in relation to past and present religious practices in the family). The family and individual interviews can also be used to reconstruct how people describe themselves religiously, this presumably differing from generation to generation. By including both family and individual interviews, we were able to understand family dynamics, and especially so

by interviewing an entire three-generation family. By splitting up the interviews, we could see the consistencies and inconsistencies of what people said, as well as when they hid or revealed something.

4.2.2 *Data collection and analysis*

Our aim was for each country team to conduct approximately 15–20 family interviews. While this may seem a small number, this is not the case, since our aim was to achieve not a representative sample, but a sample of contrasting cases that represent the religious field of a country. We thus adhered to the recruitment criteria of the qualitative paradigm, and initially selected the families according to "theoretical sampling" (see Glaser and Strauss 1967; Hildenbrand 1999, 65–71; Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008, 177–78; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2009, 51–53; Rapley 2014), i.e. we selected our sample not randomly, but by using specific demographic and theoretical criteria. We also used other strategies to gather our qualitative samples, including location and institutional specificity, such as press releases, contacting institutions, social media, and snowballing. By doing so, we aimed to make our sample as diverse as possible by selecting the cases according to minimum and maximum contrasts, with the researchers first taking as a basis the historical and cultural situation of the religious field in the respective country. We chose pre-established contrasting criteria such as (non-)religious affiliation, membership of a religious majority or minority, partly with an immigrant background, and regional differences.[11] During the analysis, we added criteria from the cases themselves (e.g. successful or unsuccessful intergenerational transmission). We continued to collect data until December 2022, by which time we had achieved a satisfactory sample (Bryant and Charmaz 2008; Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008; Flick 2014a).

We opened the interviews with the same question in all countries: "We are interested in how values and beliefs have been passed on in the family from one generation to the next; what is important to you in general; and what has changed in the process of transmission over time. Can you tell us what it is like in your family?" After the interview, we collected demographic data for all participants (such as births, educational trajectories, career decisions, marriage, divorce, mobility, deaths, religious upbringing and change, life events and crises), and data on their own biography and that of their parents and grandparents. This yielded data covering five generations, which we used to create a genogram (family tree) for each

11 See section 1.2.2.1 for an example of the German sampling strategy.

family (Hildenbrand 1999, 86; Bengtson et al. 2013, 14).[12] This genogram maps the key historical data in terms of personal family characteristics covering about a century. The genograms served to integrate data at the micro and macro levels. In addition, the Finnish team asked the family members to draw a picture showing the connections to the persons important to their religious upbringing. All interviews were transcribed and anonymized or pseudonymized.

In line with the qualitative paradigm, we closely linked data collection and analysis from the very start, and analyzed different types of data (genogram, drawings, interviews). However, different methods were used to analyze the data (see Flick 2014b). Some of the teams (Finland, Hungary) used the method of content analysis, which is prevalent in qualitative research, while others (Italy, Finland) used in addition the method of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Bryant and Charmaz 2008), especially to identify common themes among the families. Since the central challenge within the qualitative paradigm lies in evaluating the interviews, or in our case in reconstructing patterns of socialization in families, some teams (Germany, Canada) used hermeneutical methods, mainly sequential analysis (see Oevermann 2000; Jindra and Jindra 2003; Maiwald 2005; Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2009; Wernet 2014). This line-by-line analysis allowed us to evaluate the interactions between family members and to reflect on the process as well as the structure of meaning-making (see Willig 2014). Because a case reconstruction goes beyond a mere case description, we can form types on this basis; these can then be specifically searched for and interviewed or explicated as a type. This methodological approach explains why we do not need a large number of interviews and allows us to place the events narrated precisely in their historical context, and thus to relate social and familial developments to one another.

The final goal of the qualitative data collection and analysis was to compare the family cases systematically so as to gain insights into the conditions in which religious traditions in the family are passed on to the next generation, or are discontinued or transformed. We wanted to understand this process against the historical background of social change in each country, especially during each generation's phase of adolescence. Finally, we compared the cases to identify similarities and differences between religious traditions and between generations, thus enabling us to help explain religious change.

12 As we have committed ourselves to safeguarding the anonymity of the families, we will include the results of the genogram analysis, but will not publish the genograms themselves.

5. Structure of the book

The second part of the book presents the main findings in Germany, Italy, Canada, Hungary, and Finland. Each country-specific chapter begins with a brief overview of the history and characteristics of the religious field in the country, these having important implications for religious transmission in families. This is followed by a section detailing how each team carried out the data collection, the sampling, and the analysis. How the chapters are then structured varies from country to country. They deal with similar themes in different ways, and present the data differently according to the specifics of the country, such as the culture of not speaking in Finland or the divided religious field in Germany. Not only was the analysis in each country data-driven; the chapters also differ in how they link survey and interview data. For example, while the German team initially analyzed the data separately according to each methodological paradigm, other teams linked the qualitative and quantitative analyses at a much earlier stage. In addition, each team presented the results according to their own weighting, thus highlighting the country-specific characteristics. The same applies to the relation of the quantitative and qualitative findings regarding the presentation of the transformation of religion across generations. Each country chapter ends with a conclusion outlining the key findings.

In the chapter on *Germany*, the presentation of the results begins with selected quantitative findings on religion and models of religious upbringing in families and their impact on the later religiosity of the respondent (1.3). The next section is dedicated to the interplay of interfamilial and social context based on family interviews and the historical background. It shows how social conditions have a different effect on the religious worldviews, practices and beliefs of the individual generations, and how this affects religious change. The section describes this for all three generations as well as for West and East Germany separately (1.4). This is followed by a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative results regarding continuity and discontinuity of transmission. In this section, transmission groups are formed from the survey data and the results of the family surveys are related to these groups (1.5).

In the chapter on *Italy*, both the quantitative (2.3) and the qualitative part (2.4) of the research delve into the role of the family, its main actors and its internal dynamics in the transmission of religion between generations. While both methodological approaches examine also the role of the external environment in shaping people's religiosity, an exclusively qualitative point of view is used to address some themes relating to individual biographies, such as turning-points, bricolage, and the paths to inner spirituality (2.4.3).