

# Turning Point in Christianity: Eastern Europe in the Late 20th Century

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## ABSTRACT

Ten years before the collapse of communism, there were warning signs that the Soviet Union's economy was becoming crippled. Soviet authorities controlled and influenced the Russian Orthodox Church and they jailed leaders of the church in all East European countries. The fall of the Berlin wall created a turning point in Christianity in 1989. More than 8 000 Russian Orthodox Churches were reopened between 1990 and 1995. The nineties could be described as a time of hope regarding religious revival in Eastern Europe. In this paradigm shift, freedom of religion became officially recognised as a basic human right and a multitude of denominations became free to compete for followers. In Prague, Cardinal Miroslav Vlk had ministered clandestinely to Catholics while officially working as a window-washer during communist rule. He was known by the people as the "generous pastor." After the Velvet Revolution, he became bishop and later cardinal in the Czech Republic. In many East European countries, religion and national identity are closely entwined. According to the Pew Research Centre report on Christianity, in Eastern Europe there was a sustainable increase in religious activities from the early 1990s until 2017. The fall of the Berlin wall had a significant influence on South Africa. It helped South Africa in its democratic process. The once dominating neo-Calvinistic control of society was replaced by a new paradigm of democratic freedom and an equal religious stance by the new government elected in 1994.

**Keywords:** Soviet era; Czech Republic; South Africa; Pew Research Centre; Berlin wall; glasnost; perestroika; paradigm shift; religious freedom; religious revival; religion and national identity; belief in God; believing without belonging

## Introduction

Religion has reasserted itself as an important part of individual and national identity in Eastern European countries. This has happened where communist regimes once repressed religious worship and promoted atheism. This paper explores a turning point in Christianity

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since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, with a closer look at the Soviet era, Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic and South Africa. We consider the Pew Research Centre's report on renewed religious activity in Eastern Europe, and the implications of a new era in Christianity, with special emphasis on the effect in South Africa.

## **The Soviet Era**

During much of the Cold War, in the years after the Second World War, the West still perceived the Soviet Union as strong—the Russian bear of the nineteenth century (Castleden 2006, 568). However, there were warning signs 10 years before the collapse, that the Soviet Union's economy was crippled. The biggest warning sign was the Soviet Union's huge debt. The invasion of Afghanistan by Russia in 1979 was the beginning of a long and expensive war that they had not foreseen. Economically, it was disastrous. Internally Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) opened the door for change (*New York Times* 2007, 523).

Maxwell (1988, v) states that glasnost is the willingness to throw open long-shuttered windows on Soviet life. This desire is a state of willingness, without any accompaniment of fear. It may be compared to releasing a natural force. Glasnost is one of the major democratic principles of the Socialist system. Soviet people have a real opportunity to express their opinion on any problem in public and political life (Aganbegyan 1988, 5). Glasnost has been institutionalised as the indispensable condition of the democratic nature of the Socialist system. Fallin (1988, 285) says one can't speak of democratisation without glasnost; and such glasnost would not be limited to members of the Communist Party. Glasnost also leads to openness in international relations (Fallin 1988, 292).

Glasnost means dialogue, and dialogues require a certain level of culture, tolerance and good will. Perestroika is a process of combining the achievements of the scientific-technological revolution and the planned economy, to bring about action. Perestroika provides for priority development in the social sphere, meeting the demands of Soviet people for good living and working conditions, education, medical services and opportunities for recreation. It also focuses on the spiritual and cultural enrichment of each individual and society as a whole. The ideological aspect of perestroika is no less important, which entails society energetically getting rid of distortions of Soviet morality. It means persistent realisation of the principles of social justice; the rise of honest, good-quality work and the fall of wage-levelling (Aganbegyan 1988, 1).

Perestroika is a new economic strategy for Russia's economic development. It means experiencing a new quality of growth. Economic growth here is supported by the intensification of development, which has been facilitated by the breakthrough of technical revolution. The old administrative system is dismantled and replaced by a fundamentally new and comprehensive system for managing the overall economy. Economic methods of investment planning, proper accounting of all financial transactions, market developments

and stronger incentives for more productive work, will lead to a fuller integration in the world economy.

According to Aganbegyan (1988, 73) the new strategy requires reconceptualisation of changes that will lead to qualitative changes at the base of a diversified economic life. Communism under Soviet Union power was known for its central control. The leaders used power to control every aspect of society. There was no aspect of life that was private. The Soviet Union took control on every level of the citizens' existence. One was not supposed to think anymore. The police force and army took absolute responsibility. There was, however, one positive side; the state provided numerous free social services such as education, health, and so forth. Unemployment was a crime and missing a day's work could lead to six months of corrective labour. It was also a crime to be an entrepreneur or work for one self. The state employed everybody.

Lenin promulgated a policy of "militant atheism" and wanted to systematically stamp out religion wherever it could be found. Atheism was set up as a scientific truth, and churches were torn down. In their place, the Soviets built edifices that could be called churches. Even the seven day work week was a problem. Lenin didn't like the idea of people measuring time based on the biblical story of creation and of taking the Lord's day off, so he made his own calendar ([www.bizarre-ways-the-soviet-union-controlled-its-people/](http://www.bizarre-ways-the-soviet-union-controlled-its-people/)). Lenin frequently quoted Marx that religion is the opium of the people ([www.en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion in the Soviet Union](http://www.en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_the_Soviet_Union)).

As for the Russian Orthodox Church, Soviet authorities sought to control it and, in times of national crisis, to exploit it for the regime's own purposes. However, the ultimate goal was to eliminate the Russian Orthodox Church. During the first five years of Soviet power, the new regime executed 28 Russian Orthodox bishops and 1 200 priests. Many others were imprisoned. Under Brezhnev, there were 7 000 active Russian Orthodox Churches in 1975. Leaders of the church were jailed. Their place was taken by docile clergy, who were obedient to the state. The church was also infiltrated by KGB agents and was utilised as a useful tool to the regime (U.S. Library of Congress. 1994, [www.countrystudies.us./russia/38.htm](http://www.countrystudies.us./russia/38.htm)). In the mid-1980s, Russian Orthodox Churches were reduced to an all-time low of 3 000 churches (see in this regard video: <https://youtu.be/8feVMryQgaw>).

### **The Paradigm Shift**

The fall of the Berlin wall created a turning point in Christianity in 1989. This led to a paradigm shift in Russia and Eastern Europe. A paradigm is a set of rules and regulations (written or unwritten) that does two things:

1. It establishes or defines boundaries.
2. It tells you how to behave inside the boundaries in order to be successful (Barker 1993, 32).

The Soviet Union had established the paradigm of communism in Eastern Europe. With the fall of the Berlin wall this paradigm shifted. Joel Barker (1993, 32) states that when a paradigm shifts, there is a change to a new game, with a new set of rules. Planyi (1958, 288) states: “As long as one lives and thinks within the pattern of a given paradigm, that paradigm provides one with a plausibility structure according to which all reality is interpreted.” That paradigm may be a scientific worldview or a religion or an ideology, and in each case the conceptual framework has almost all-embracing interpretative powers.

President Gorbachev used his glasnost policy to impose new laws in 1989 that specified the churches’ right to hold private property. In 1990 the Soviet legislature passed a new law on religious freedom (U.S. Library of Congress. 1994, [www.countrystudies.us./russia/38.htm](http://www.countrystudies.us./russia/38.htm)). More than 8 000 Russian Orthodox Churches were reopened between 1990 and 1995. In Moscow, the state also erected the new Christ the Saviour Cathedral at an expense of US\$300 million. The Russian Orthodox Church’s social services have expanded considerably. A new wave of catechism and religious education was implemented. Enrolment of new priests became a priority and a chaplain service was introduced in the Department of Defence. Patriarch Aleksiy, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, officiated at President Yeltsin’s inauguration in 1991 (U.S. Library of Congress. 1994, [www.countrystudies.us./russia/38.htm](http://www.countrystudies.us./russia/38.htm)). Sannikov (1996, 1) describes the beginning of the nineties as a time of hope for religious revival in Eastern Europe. Hundreds of missionary organisations of the West actively started working in Eastern Europe. It was the era of evangelistic crusades and it was evidenced over many of the major cities in Eastern Europe. In these evangelical crusades, people made a commitment to accept Christ in their lives. However, the percentage of evangelical Christians remains under five per cent of the population in most Eastern European countries (Sannikov 1996, 1).

Borawik (2002, 501) argues that the break-up of the Soviet Union brought a radical shift in Eastern Europe when the legal position of the churches changed dramatically, with the new governments recognising freedom of religion as a basic human right. In Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, the number of those who declared their belief in God hiked immediately. In these countries there is still an adherence to the Orthodox tradition. Some social elements of communism that had fallen away were taken over and were administered by the Orthodox churches, such as old age homes, orphanages, shelters and feeding schemes. Norris and Inglehart (2011, 114) state that the collapse of living standards and the disappearance of the welfare state after communism led them to anticipate a short-term revival of religiosity in low-to-moderate income groups

The more vulnerable segments of the population, such as the elderly—who were living on dwindling state pensions while facing hyperinflation in food and fuel costs—would become even more vulnerable. Widespread feelings of insecurity were also spread by the sudden introduction of neo-liberal free markets. These produced severe recessions, throwing millions of public sector workers out of work, and household savings were threatened by hyperinflation (as in Azerbaijan and Belarus). Even more uncertainty was created where

political stability and government leadership were undermined because of corruption and a banking crisis (Norris and Inglehart 2011, 114).

The fall of the Berlin wall and the paradigm shift away from communism activated a turning point in Christianity in Russia and in the rest of Europe during the last decade of the twentieth century.

### **The Rest of Eastern Europe**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism brought a radical change in the relationship between church and state throughout Eastern Europe. Religion was not destroyed but had been discouraged in most of these societies (Tomka 1998, 229). In this paradigm shift, freedom of religion became officially recognised as a basic human right and a multitude of denominations became free to compete for followers.

In Eastern European countries, where churches had been actively involved in resistance against the Soviet regime and involved in the struggle for independence, public religiosity continues to be relatively high. In Poland and the Czech Republic, for example, the role of the Catholic Church in opposing the communist state—and with its Western orientation and organisation links with Roman Catholics—meant that the church maintained or even strengthened its role after independence. Polish Catholicism became associated with nationalism, freedom, human rights, and democracy (Norris and Inglehart 2011, 118).

Norris and Inglehart (2011, 112) state that in Poland, Soviet-led attempts at repression of religion were contra-productive in the communist era, leading to Polish people emphasising their attachment to religion as a way to preserve their Polish identity. According to Norris and Inglehart (2011, 113), countries such as Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia experienced changes after the fall of communism. These countries markedly lost economic ground during the 1990s with economies characterised by large numbers of peasant farmers, faltering heavy manufacturing industries, structural underemployment, negative growth, poor basic healthcare, shrinking average life spans, social inequality, and widespread poverty. In Hungary the Evangelical Church made some inroads and became the fourth largest religious body. Its “prosperity gospel” had an extensive appeal among the Budapest middle class who were linked to the neo-liberal element in government (Berger 1999, 48).

### **The Czech Republic**

In the Czech Republic church leaders had experienced huge constraints during the communist era. In Prague, Cardinal Miroslav Vlk ministered clandestinely to Catholics while officially working as a window-washer during the communist rule. He was known by the people as the “generous pastor.” After the Velvet Revolution, he became bishop and later cardinal. It was common practice to ordain Roman Catholic Church priests and bishops underground because a lot of them were imprisoned or prosecuted after 1968 (Corley 1993, 171).

In 1968 Russia invaded Czechoslovakia and made it a satellite of the Soviet Union. The Velvet Revolution changed everything in Czechoslovakia and even after 1992, when the Czech Republic was formed, more radical changes were experienced. The Czech Republic had religious freedom but still kept their suspicions of the Roman Catholic Church alive, since the Catholic Church was responsible for the death of their church reformer, Jan Huss in 1415. Economically the Czech Republic has been successfully integrated in the EU but secularisation and individualism may be the root causes for poor church attendance.

The new constitution, other laws and policies heralded a new era of religious freedom. In practice the government generally enforced these protections. Religious affairs are the responsibility of the Department of Churches in the Ministry of Culture. Thirty two state-recognised religious organisations have been recognised. Religious organisations received US\$78 million from the government in 2010, which was used to pay salaries of clergy, for church administration and maintenance of church property ([www.state.gov.czech-republic](http://www.state.gov.czech-republic)).

### **The Pew Research Centre on Christianity in Eastern Europe**

The Pew Research Centre is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world, and conducts public opinion polling (Pew Research Centre, [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org), 2017, 1).

According to the *Economist* (Erasmus 2017, 2), a study (the findings are presented in figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 below) of 18 countries by the Pew Research Centre based in Washington D.C., showed that huge majorities were professing their adherence to Christianity in its locally dominant form. In this process religion and loyalty to the church and socially conservative views have been linked. The Catholic faith is professed by 75 per cent of the Lithuanians, 84 per cent of Croats and 87 per cent of Poles. The Czechs are an exception, with one of the most secular profiles in Europe: some 72 per cent profess no religious affiliation (Erasmus 2017, 2). Pew's editors found a neat way of summing up their findings. A British sociologist, Grace Davie, had once coined the phrase "believing without belonging" to describe the spirituality in Western Europe: people wanted a spiritual aspect in their lives but had little interest in joining a church or attending worship. Pew's editors found that people linked faith with collective identity but only a small minority accepted Christianity's burdensome demands. In Russia, only 15 per cent of respondents said religion was "very important in their lives." That might be called "belonging without believing" (Erasmus 2017, 3).

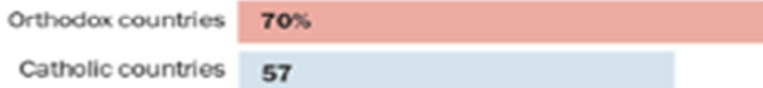
Across Central and Eastern Europe, religion affects people's attitudes to ethical questions. In some places there are huge generational differences. Gay marriage is favoured by 42 per cent of the younger groups in Poland, but only by 28 per cent of the older groups. In conservative Russia, the respective figures are nine per cent and three per cent (Erasmus 2017, 3). Abortion is fairly easily available, and widely practised, in most of the countries studied, with the striking exception of Poland. The proposition that "abortion should be legal in all or most cases" was accepted by 80 per cent of Bulgarians, 63 per cent of Serbs and 36 per cent of Russians (Erasmus 2017, 3).

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## Strong association, especially in Orthodox-majority countries, between religion and national identity

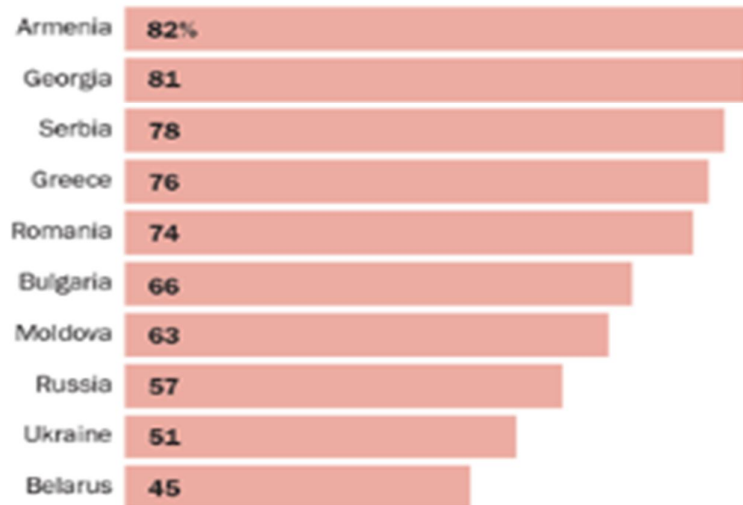
*% who say being Orthodox/Catholic is very or somewhat important to truly share their national identity*

### Median results of surveyed countries



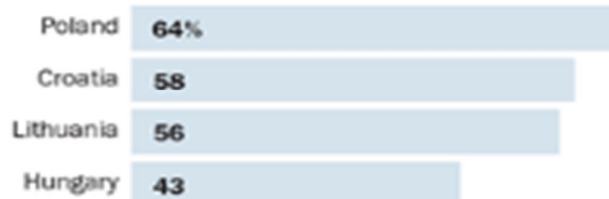
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Among those in **Orthodox-majority countries**, % who say being **Orthodox** is very or somewhat important to truly be a national of their country



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Among those in **Catholic-majority countries**, % who say being **Catholic** is very or somewhat important to truly be a national of their country



Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries.

See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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**Figure 1:** Association between religion and national identity

**Source:** [www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/](http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/) 2017, 3

## People in former Soviet republics see their countries as more religious today than in 1970s and 1980s

% who say ...

Post-Soviet republics	Their country is very/somewhat religious today	Their country was very/somewhat religious in 1970s & 1980s	Difference
Georgia	87%	25%	<b>+62</b>
Ukraine	59	15	<b>+44</b>
Russia	55	15	<b>+40</b>
Armenia	81	52	<b>+29</b>
Belarus	57	29	<b>+28</b>
Latvia	43	23	<b>+20</b>
Estonia	23	11	<b>+12</b>
Lithuania	53	49	<b>+4</b>
Moldova	46	56	<b>-10</b>
<i>Other countries</i>			
Serbia	69%	46%	<b>+23</b>
Bosnia	75	53	<b>+22</b>
Bulgaria	53	33	<b>+20</b>
Croatia	73	64	<b>+9</b>
Hungary	51	47	<b>+4</b>
Czech Republic	22	30	<b>-8</b>
Greece	60	87	<b>-27</b>
Romania	59	86	<b>-27</b>
Poland	56	86	<b>-30</b>

Note: Statistically significant differences are highlighted in bold.

Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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**Figure 2:** People's views on religious beliefs and their countries

**Source:** [www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/](http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/) 2017, 5

This information reflects a general turning point in Christianity in most Eastern European countries over the past 30 years.



### Religious majorities in Central and Eastern Europe

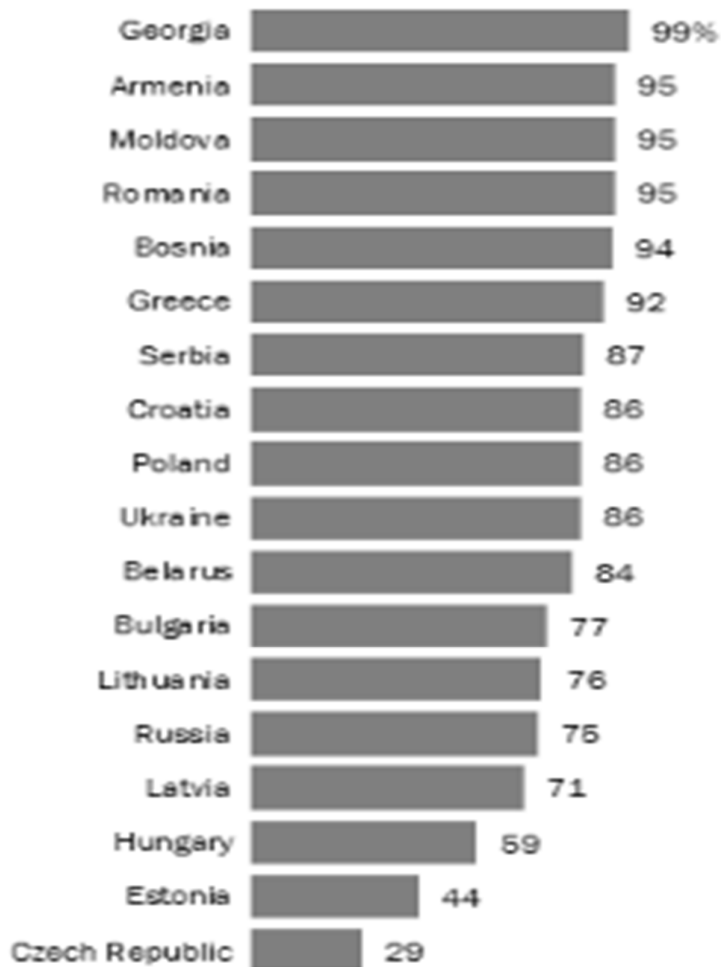


**Figure 3:** Religious majorities in Central and Eastern Europe  
**Source:** [www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/](http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/) 2017, 11

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## Large majorities of adults in most Central and Eastern European countries believe in God

*% who say they believe in God*



Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries. See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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**Figure 4:** Adults in Central and Eastern Europe believing in God

**Source:** [www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/](http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/) 2017, 14

The information from the Pew Research Centre provides general trends in terms of religion and Christianity and supports this research that after the fall of the Berlin wall there was a turning point in Christianity in Eastern Europe.

### **Implications for Today**

Beyers (2013, 21) states that in a new paradigm, the question arises whether religion can currently be seen as a private or public matter. If seen as something private, the question arises whether religion has any significance for society, and if it does, how should religion be defined if it is confined to a personal choice and practice by the individual? Or, is religion still regarded as visible in society and does it exert influence on society through social intervention (Beyers 2013, 21)?

Classical Secularisation Theory—largely based upon the works of sociology’s founding fathers, Marx, Durkheim and Weber—linked the decline of religion with the advent of industrial society. As argued by Weber and later developed by sociologists of the 1960s and 1970s (Berger, Martin and Wilson), they saw the development of Western rationality as making the world calculable, predictable and controllable in such a way that God and religion were no longer required in explanations of natural and social day-to-day general occurrences. Rational science also came into conflict with religion, which rests on belief (Pérez-Nievas and Cordero 2010, 3).

These two brands of secularisation theory came under strong criticism from the 1990s onwards. Berger later switched his position to deny secularisation as a universal process and Chaves (1994) defined secularisation as “the declining scope of religious authority” (Pérez-Nievas and Cordero 2010, 3). There were clear and sharp increases in church attendance in Slovakia, Romania and Poland. Regarding the importance of God in people’s lives, Eastern Europe shows a clear religious revival which includes Hungary, but a slight decline has been noted in the Czech Republic and Slovenia (Pérez-Nievas and Cordero 2010, 6).

According to the European Values Survey (1980–2008), Eastern Europeans were divided into two groups with regards to their confidence in churches. There was a remarkable increase in the case of Romania, while the increase was quite moderate in the case of the rest of the East Europeans. Poland showed a clear loss of confidence in the church over a period of 20 years (Pérez-Nievas and Cordero 2010, 6). A factor that influenced this decline in confidence could be the solidarity which the church had shown 20 years earlier with the people against the communist regime. European Catholicism had given more organic political responses to secularising threats, according to Pérez-Nievas and Cordero (2010, 10). This might explain why the erosion of religion began later and was at a slower speed in Catholic Europe.

Pérez-Nievas and Cordero (2010, 11) expect religiosity levels to be stronger among those groups of society who are more vulnerable to risks. Norris and Inglehart (2011, 29) defend the modified version of the secularisation thesis, known as the Existential Security Model.

According to this theory, women, the unemployed and individuals with low incomes all show higher levels of religious involvement than do individuals who enjoy higher levels of incomes. Pérez-Nievas and Cordero (2010, 11) reflect that married individuals showed higher levels of religiosity than individuals who remain single. This is evidenced across all types of societies.

Pérez-Nievas and Cordero (2010, 16) use the European Values Survey (1980–2008) to divide the 18 countries into two blocks: countries which were former communist states versus countries that were not communist. In all dimensions of religiosity (except in the degree of confidence in churches) former communist countries experience higher levels of religiosity than their non-communist counterparts. Only with regard to confidence in churches, do former communist countries present higher levels of religiosity than non-communist countries for the whole period. Former communist countries show levels of higher church attendance than non-communist past countries. Poland is a clear case of religious revival. There are also positive trends of religious revival in Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria. In other Eastern European countries, there are also signs of increasing levels of religiosity, which have little effect on other traditional measures such as church attendance (Pérez-Nievas and Cordero 2010, 23). One of the reasons why church attendance in Eastern Europe never increased again, can possibly be found in the following viewpoint. Berger (1967, 33) refers to this as the “privatisation of religion.” Religion is no longer a public matter, but a personal one. Sundermeier (1999, 13) attests that the growth of new religious movements and the resurgence of fundamentalism and esotericism merely prove that religion seeks new ways of expression; no longer institutionally, but privately.

According to Beyers (2013, 6), religion is not static and under certain social conditions, religious affiliation and religious form can change. Weber (2003 [1958], 121,122) identifies the loss or change of political power as one factor that may change religion. When the privileged ruling classes lose political control or political influence, religion is influenced by taking on a salvific form.

In many Eastern European countries, religion and national identity are closely entwined. This is true of former communist states, such as the Russian Federation and Poland, where majorities define their identity with their religion, saying that being Orthodox or Catholic is important to being “truly Russian” or “truly Polish.”

Strong association, especially in Orthodox majority countries, exists between religion and national identity.

### **Implications for South Africa**

The paradigm shift from communism to liberal democracy in Eastern Europe has had radical implications for South Africa. The burden of colonialism and apartheid constrained freedom in South Africa until 1994. With the free elections of 1994, a new liberal democracy brought a new paradigm of freedom on all levels. The era of apartheid in South Africa was hugely

influenced by a religion of neo-Calvinism which had constrained society on every level (Tolmay 2017, 145). We may illustrate this neo-Calvinistic control of society before 1994 with the following quote of Scott Peck (1993, 145):

One of the great sins of organized religion is that it corrupts some very holy words and when people encounter these words, they associate them with the hypocrisy of organized religion and can no longer see or hear their real meaning.

As religion and faith had a new impulse and vitality in Eastern Europe after communism, the same applied to our situation in South Africa after 1994. Pickering (1984, 476) states that in Durkheim's view, religion will change as society changes. The old religion might die out, but a new religion will be born. This creative process is part of society and of human nature.

The decision by South Africa's apartheid government to release Nelson Mandela in February 1990 changed the face of South Africa. The ban on the African National Congress was revoked and a transition to democratic majority rule was negotiated two months after the fall of the Berlin wall; these events are intimately connected (Karon et al. 2014, 2). The Reagan administration protected the white minority government because the white government was seen as a Cold War ally against the ANC, which was a friend of Moscow. But with the Cold War winding down, Washington no longer needed its anti-communist allies in Pretoria; F.W. de Klerk read the writing on the wall correctly and opted to negotiate from a position of relative strength, opening a way to a peaceful end to apartheid (Karon et al. 2014, 3). According to Slabbert (2006, 34) a liberal democratic paradigm and market-driven paradigm became the basis of the negotiated process for the 1994 democratic elections. The 1996 Constitution was based on a liberal democracy in South Africa. The fundamental principles of the liberal democracy have the following implications:

- Everyone is free.
- Every person is equal.
- Every person has to be treated according to human rights.
- A Constitutional Court was formed to protect these principles and the rule of law.
- Within this framework is imbedded the freedom of religion. The fall of the Berlin wall also caused a paradigm shift away from a neo-Calvinistic paradigm, where Afrikaans mainstream churches had been the beneficiaries, to a new paradigm of equal and free belief regarding participation in society (Tolmay 2017, 10).

## **Conclusion**

A large paradigm shift in Christianity occurred in Russia during the nineties of the previous century. In most Eastern European countries, over the past 30 years, there has been a change of attitude towards Christianity. Each of the Eastern European countries has its own narrative. In general, a turning point in religion occurred in most Eastern European countries. This turning point was stimulated by religious freedom after the release of Soviet communist control. One has to evaluate this turning point in the context of this political change. During the first part of the 21st century, the influence of secularisation and the impact of other internal aspects in specific countries have to be evaluated.

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