

# Evangelicals and Nominalism

*and how does it feed into nationalism*

EEA General Assembly, Prague, 9-12 October 2017

See also:

*Europe and the Gospel*, chapter 14

# The phenomenon

How many Christians in Europe?  $\geq 75\%$  or  $\leq 2\%$ , depending on criteria

Nominalism...

Refers to registered members of a Church ('affiliated') who do not attend Church services / who do not practice this religion.

Category unnoticed in statistics based on 'affiliation'

*(Pew Forum, World Christian Encyclopedia)*

Besides Church affiliation, second indicator: Church attendance

*Pratiquant* = goes to Mass once a month (or so)

Typical European phenomenon. Still more widespread than elsewhere

Spain: 82.4 % Catholics, 39% practicing (at least once a month to Mass)

France: 65 % Catholics, 7-9 % practicing (...)

# 'God in Nederland'

	1966	1979	1996	2006	2015
<b>theïsten</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>ietsisten</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>agnosten</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>atheïsten</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>24</b>

'theïsten' geloven in een God die zich met ieder mens persoonlijk bezighoudt;

'ietsisten' geloven dat er iets is als een hogere macht die het leven beheerst;

'agnosten' weten niet of er een God of hogere macht bestaat

Tabel 1.2 Kerkelijke gezindten, per meetjaar

	1966	1979	1996	2006	2015
Rooms-Katholieke Kerk	35	29	21	16	11,7
Protestantse Kerk in Nederland*	25	22	19	14	8,6
<u>kleine protestantse kerken</u>	7	6	7	4	4,2
<u>overige kerken en religies</u>				5	7,7
<u>buitenkerkelijk</u>	33	43	53	61	67,8

- Tot 2004 bestaande uit drie afzonderlijke kerkgenootschappen (de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland en de Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk).
- In 1966 – 1966 zijn kleine protestantse kerken, overige kerken en andere religies samengenomen.

Tabel 1.5 Kerkbezoek, per meetjaar

	1966	1979	1996	2006	2015
<u>regelmatig</u>	50	31	21	16	1
<u>soms</u>	7	13	13	14	
<u>een hoogst enkele keer</u>	8	16	26	23	2
<u>nooit</u>	35	40	40	47	5

# Conclusions from *'God in Nederland'*

- Regular church attendance ( $\geq 1$ /month) less than Church membership
- Gap between the two is diminishing : les 'marginal Church membership'
- Occasional church attendance is higher than Church membership!!
- Belief in personal God. Roman Catholics 17%  
Protestant 54%  
Traditional Prot. and Evangelical 83% (17%??)
- Age composition. Roman Catholics 75% = 40+, 35% = 60+  
Protestant same  
Traditional Prot. and Evangelical 50% = 17-40

# Besides 'practicing Christianity'

'Practice' is an imprecise criterion, because 'non practicing people may...

- Observe Christian holidays, occasional religious ceremonies
- Wedding ceremony in Church, children baptised, Christian burial
- Hold to Christian norms and values and live accordingly
- Believe that God exists, Jesus the Son of God, heaven and a hell
- Read the Bible and/or pray in private, sometimes
- Active in Christian organisations, even mission organisations

Besides Practising Christianity there are:

- Popular Christianity
- Minimal Christianity
- Parallel Christianity (besides local Churches)
- Individualised and Cultural Christianity

# Believing – belonging - behaving

**Believing**

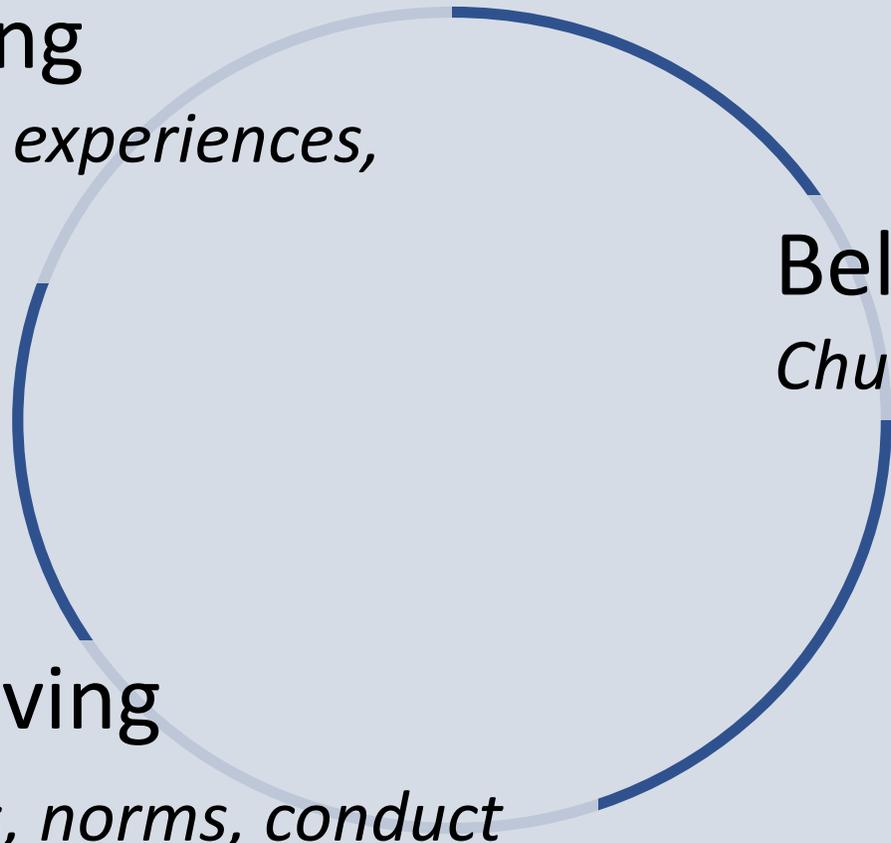
*Feelings, experiences,  
beliefs*

**Belonging**

*Church attendance*

**Behaving**

*Values, norms, conduct*



# Believing – belonging – behaving, *to be more precise*

**Believing**

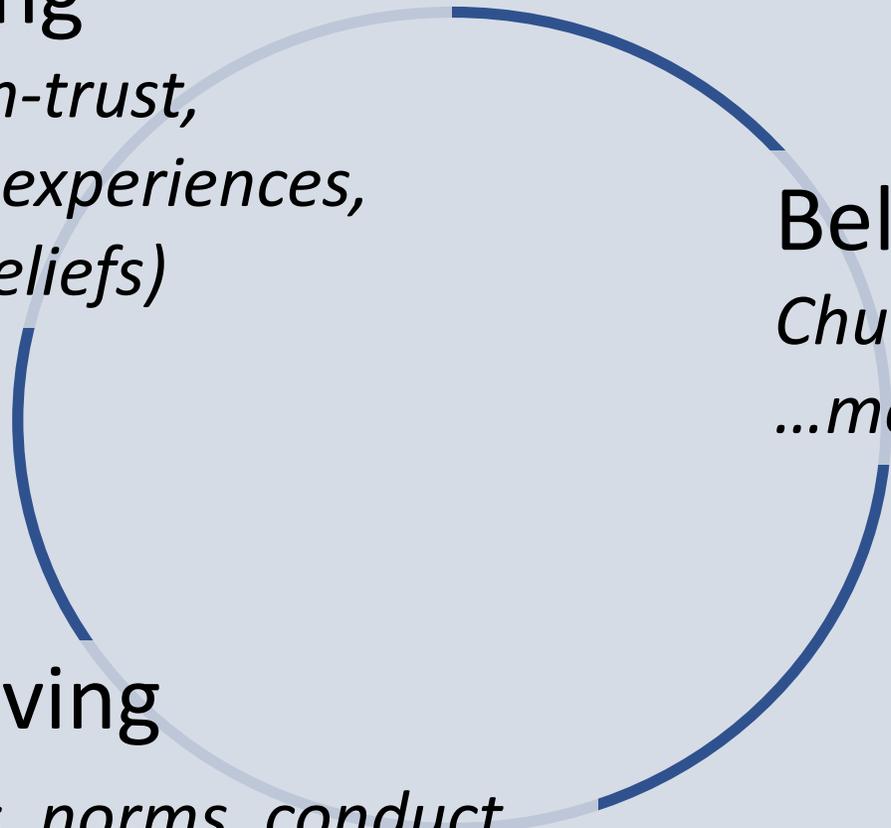
*...in (faith-trust,  
feelings, experiences,  
...that (beliefs)*

**Belonging**

*Church attendance  
...membership*

**Behaving**

*Values, norms, conduct*



# Believing – belonging - behaving

## Individualised religion – believing without belonging

*West Europeans remain, by and large, unchurched populations rather than simply secular. For a marked falling-off in religious attendance (especially in the Protestant North) has not resulted, yet, in a parallel abdication of religious belief – in a broad definition of the term. In short, many Europeans have ceased to connect with their religious institutions in any active sense, but they have not abandoned, so far, either their deep-seated religious aspirations or (in many cases) a latent sense of belonging(Grace Davie)*

## Cultural Christianity – behaving without belonging

*They find that they live as a Christian should, because their lives reflect the values of Jesus Christ. Sometimes they feel the need to attend a Church on such occasions... They want family weddings and funerals to be held at a Church. They watch and feel uplifted by Songs of Praise, a cathedral Matins or Evensong. They see the Church as a spiritual resource. But they do not want to belong (Allan Billings)*

## Belonging without believing/behaving?

# Marginal church membership

A collective term for forms of Christianity outside Sunday assembly

*Nominal, Popular, Minimal, Parallel, Individualised, Cultural*

Roman Catholic and Orthodox regions

Protestant regions

Evangelical churches and their periphery

Christian identity related to active church membership.

Less nominalism

High turnover in some churches (front-door/backdoor)

‘Once evangelisch’ (*Ooit evangelisch*) in 2011

‘Christians out in the field’ (*dans la nature*)



# 'Nominal' versus 'true' Christians

## Lausanne Movement

*Nominal Christian: a person who has not responded in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord. He may be very religious, a practicing or non-practicing Church member, give intellectual assent to Christian doctrines and claim to be a Christian. He may attend services and be actively involved in Church affairs. But in spite of all this, he is still destined for eternal judgment because he has not committed his life to Jesus Christ.*

*True Christian: one who has responded in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord... The heart of true Christianity is being a disciple of Jesus Christ in the terms of faith, love, and obedience (LOP, 1980).*

'True' equals Evangelical? Or...?

Lausanne consultation on Nominalism, 2018

# Developments

Deregistration (e.g. Scandinavian countries)

Demands to annul baptism (e.g. Belgium)

Gradual disappearance of popular, cultural Christianity

*In the past, there was a certain cultural transmission of Christian convictions, even though people were not always aware of the roots of these convictions, but they belonged to the shared values that formed the basis of Western culture. From now on, one is no longer Christian simply because one is born in a Christian culture, but because one has made a choice to be a Christian.*

*This has a far-reaching consequence for the way in which those categories of the population that are least culturally equipped, can have access to the Christian faith. Those who have the means to compare, can exercise their free discernment, but the others, no. That is why there is a loss of a popular Christianity that was closely linked to a form of social rituality. Once this is disappearing, popular Christianity loses its vitality and is left devitalised (Cardinal Jean Vingt-Trois, archbishop of Paris).*

Could marginal church membership be disappearing? Not sure

# Marginal Christianity and nationalism

## Benedict Schubert (Basel)

Many people feel attached to the cultural heritage of Christianity, while they are indifferent and ignorant with respect to what it means to be a Christian. In debates on migration, there is much emphasis (among non Church goers) that we are a 'Christian country'.

## Pascal Perrineau (France)

The FN has largely penetrated the nominally Catholic population for whom 'Christianity' is the same as the traditional culture, that the category of practicing Catholics has largely remained resistant to the vote for the FN.

## Presidential Elections France, May 2017, Score of Marine le Pen (FN)

	1. Round	2. Round
National score	21.5 %	34 %
Catholics occasionally going to Church	24 %	45 %
Regularly practicing Catholics	16 %	29 %

# Connecting with marginal Christianity

## ***New Evangelisation (RC)***

Connecting non-practicing Catholics to the Church community

Helping them to understand their baptism and

Starting 'new communities for evangelisation' parallel to the parish structure

## ***Alpha courses and similar methods***

More response among nominal Church members than among non-affiliated.

## ***Rites of passage***

What the Church can offer for people at key moments in their life

## ***Charges of 'proselytism'***

'Ownership' of marginal Church members? Sheep stealing = improper term

Transparent attitude – discuss 'transfers' with leaders of Churches concerned

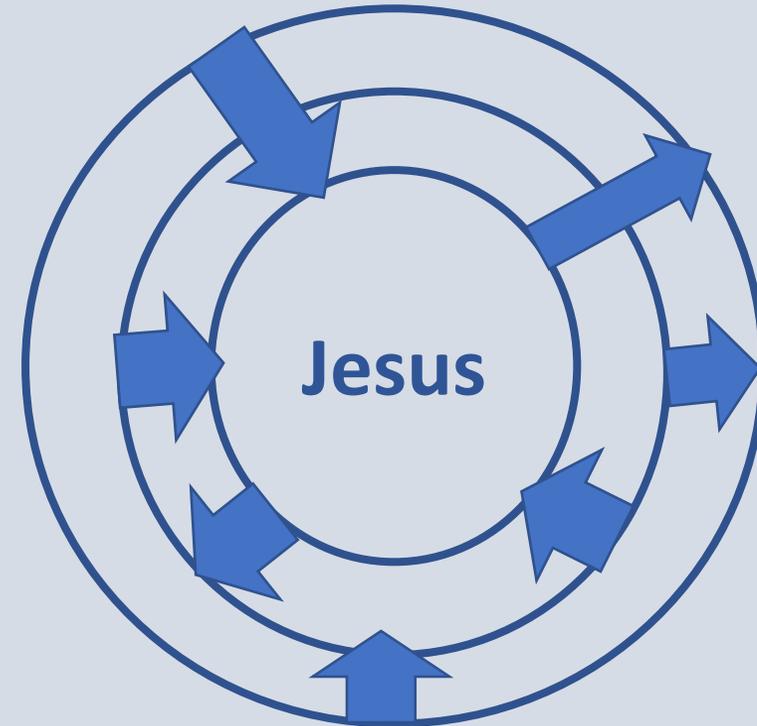
# Periphery, pastoral care and evangelistic outreach

Inner and wider circles around Jesus

*Disciples*

*Crowd*

*Indifferent and critical people*



Churches and their periphery

*Movements towards the centre*

*Movements towards the periphery... and further*

What is the 'centre' in our pastoral/evangelistic practices?

Jesus and/or Church?

# Evangelical Churches and their periphery

- 1) Welcoming Churches – also for undecided and irregular attenders
- 2) Listening pastors – why do people ‘silently leave’?
- 3) Are Evangelical Churches too demanding?
- 4) Prevention of movements to the periphery – lessons from ‘leavers’