

# Sociological Report about The Reformed Church in Hungary 2014<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Márton Csanády Ph.D.<sup>2</sup>

On the request of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary started its research in church sociology in 2013. It was partly motivated by the fact that the 2011 Hungarian census data became available in 2013.<sup>3</sup> Considering that this has been the second time that a question related to religion has been included, it offered an opportunity to research the trends of religion. This particular question provided crucial information but in a very perfunctory way. Based on the feedback of the congregations and Church members, on experience and on international tendencies, the Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary (MRE) came to the conclusion that for the purpose of the optimal planning of church activities, it is indispensable to conduct social research on the social status and responsibilities of the Church as well as on the attitude of the members of society towards religion and church. A research of such nature has not been conducted before.

Another fortunate circumstance was that in 2012, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary (KRE) was finally able to start its university-level programme in sociology which has since become the second most popular among such programmes in Hungary. As a consequence, the research project could start with the involvement of our students of sociology, social work, psychology and theology. In 2013, the first phase of research focused on the analysis of census data. The second phase of research started this year, and consisted

---

<sup>1</sup> For the publication of any material related to the research in paper form or electronic form, please contact me at the following email address: marton@csanady.hu

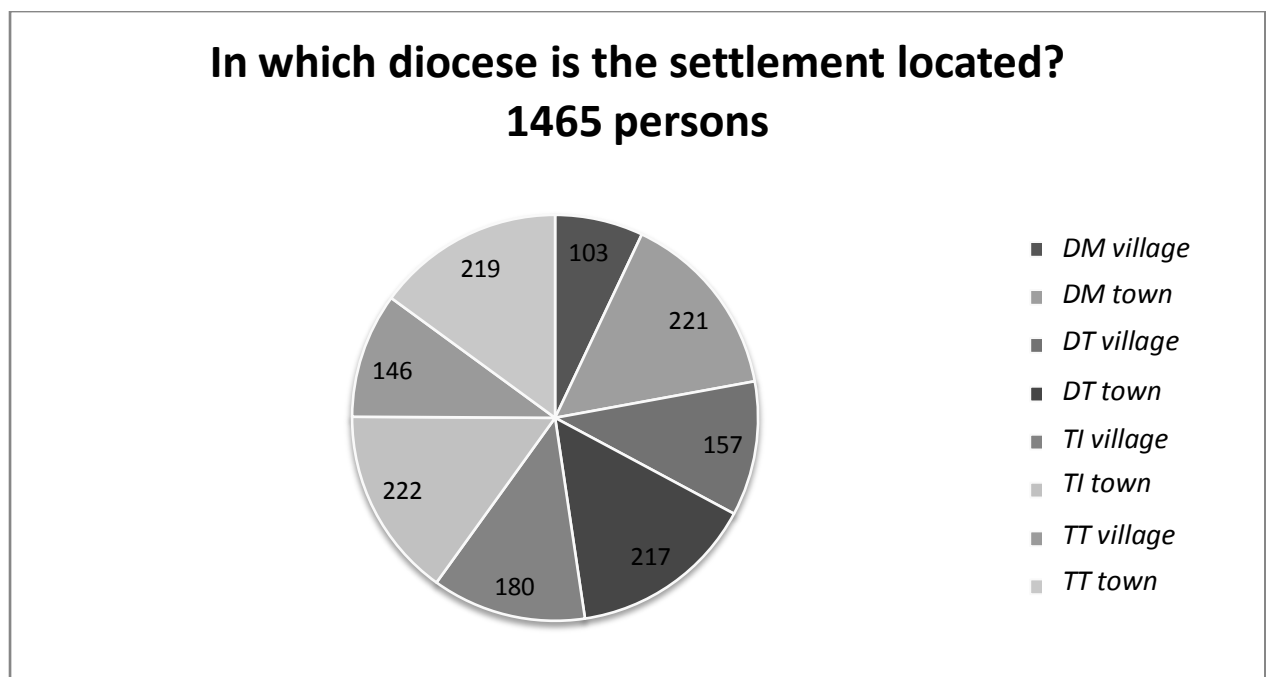
<sup>2</sup> Professor, Director of Research and Development of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/?lang=en>

of a phone research involving 400 congregations, and summer research camps organised at eight locations.

## Research camps

At the research camps, 1465 questionnaires were collected. In each of the four dioceses of Hungary, the research was conducted both in a town with the population of 15-25000 people and in a settlement group consisting of 1-5 villages. The most reliable method of data collection is the personal data collection conducted at research camps.



Nevertheless, taking the university's resources and its responsibilities towards students into consideration, this method is only appropriate for conducting research in settlements with a population of less than 30,000 people. Approximately 55% of the population is a resident of a settlement with a population of less than 30,000 people.

## Research methodology

Károli Gáspár University, Institute of Social and Media Studies with the Institute of Psychology and Institute of Social Work and Diaconia

Surveying period: June—August 2014

8 interview groups

120 interviewers

17 Hungarian settlements

1465 respondents

63 questions (30—50-minutes-long interviews)

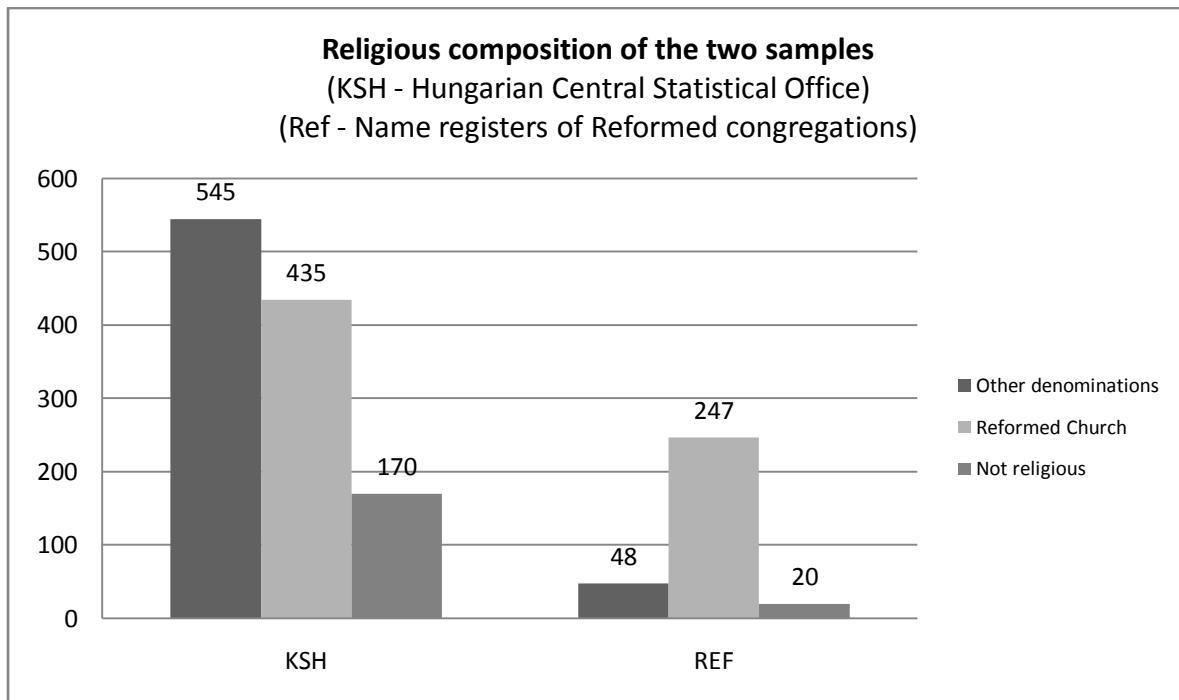
Topics analysed: *religiosity, image of the church, trust, life satisfaction, physiological and mental health, social networks, social status, social care*

## Research camps results

For the reasons mentioned above, we can only draw conclusions based on research camp data for the types of settlements where the research was conducted.

The fact that the majority of the country is of Catholic religion and that religious homogeneity is often typical in villages also has to be considered. Based on that, the number of people living in mixed-religion settlements with a population of less than 30,000 people is approx. 2,5 million. Moreover, in the visited settlements, the majority of the population is either a member of the Reformed Church or the number of them is significant. This also narrows down the scope of research.

Due to the fact, that we were equally interested in the external and internal attitudes regarding the Church, we were working with two samples. We received the bigger sample from KSH, the smaller from the name registers of Reformed congregations.

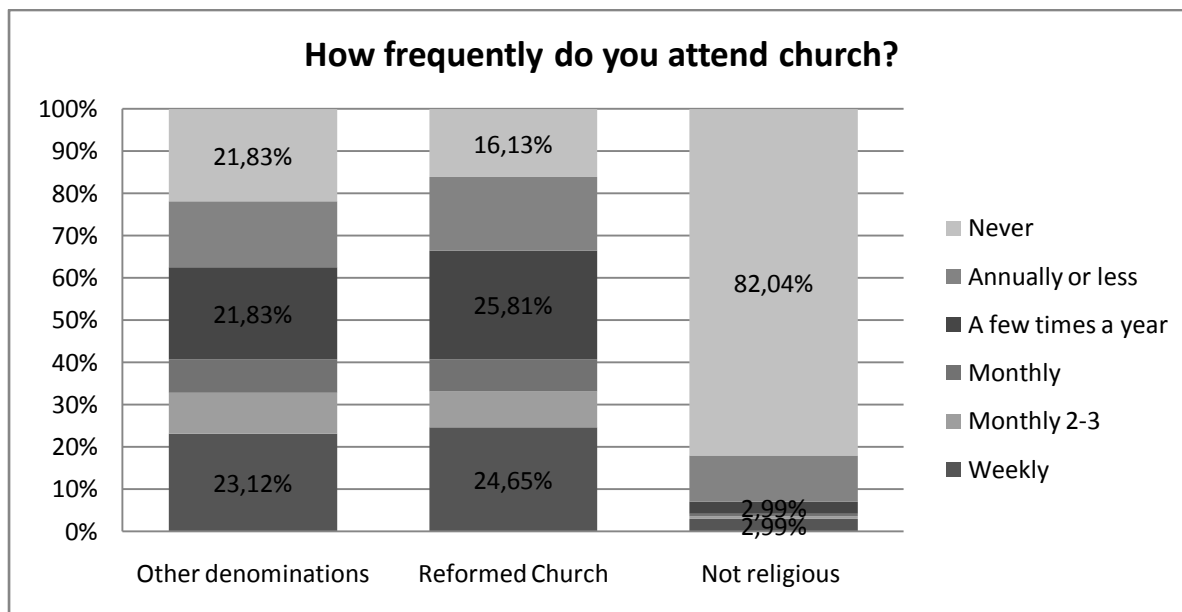


It has to be remarked at this point that sample survey method was only used in towns; in the villages we attempted to do a full range query.

## The results

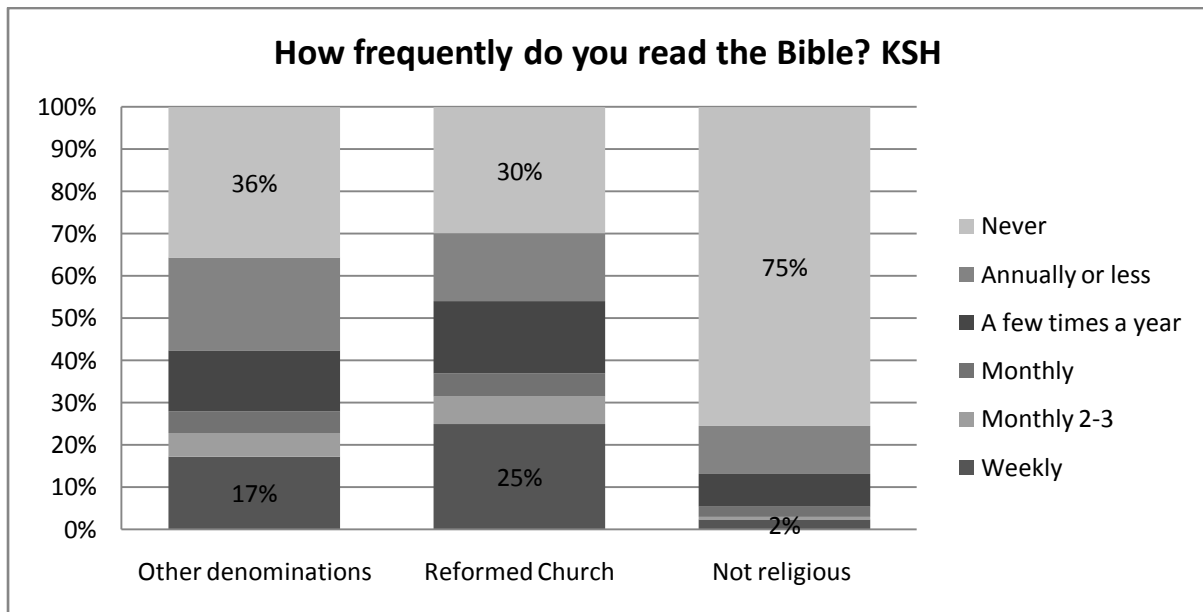
We are currently in the initial phase of processing the results. Hereunder we are focusing on reviewing the most important results. Based on KSH samples, 14,8 % of the apprehended individuals claimed not to belong to any congregation. This is almost entirely equivalent to the answers of the 2001 Hungarian census data (14,5 %). This proportion is slightly smaller than in the 2011 census data (18,2 %), but considering that all researches indicate a stronger religiosity in smaller settlements, it actually strengthens research reliability.

Regarding the trust in the institutions, it is gratifying that the churches enjoy the greatest trust among all the institutions. Compared to the previous researches of such nature, this also shows a restructuring in favour of the churches. Among the Calvinist respondents, this index was slightly more favourable.

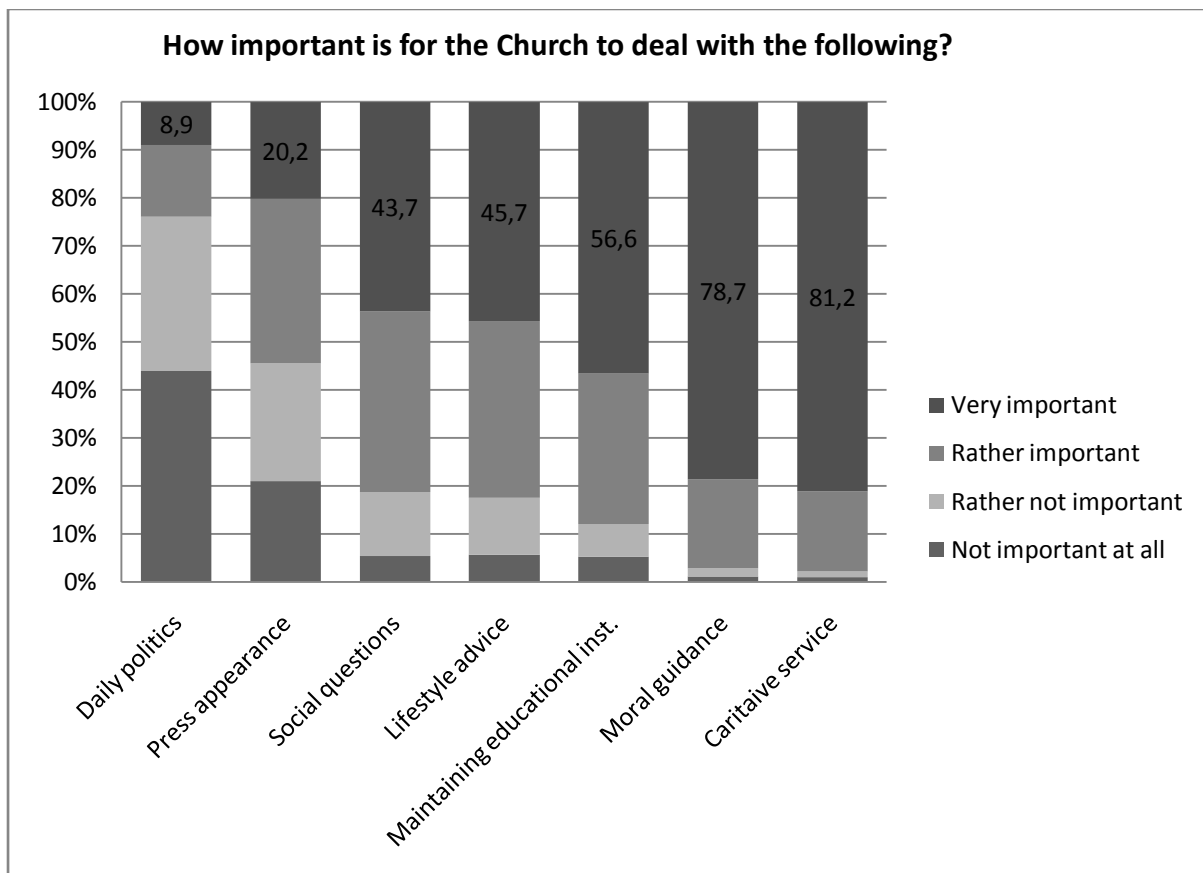


Regarding the frequency of church attendance, it can be concluded that among all persons involved in the research, the frequency of church attendance is perceptively higher (20,8 %) than in previous researches which included a question of similar nature. Researches that included such questions were conducted before the outbreak of the crisis, which is a possible reason for the higher number of frequent church attenders. Another explanatory factor could be the shift of age composition in favour of the old. Following the crisis, there was a significant number of young people moving to the capital or bigger cities.

Among those who claimed to belong to a congregation, the frequency of weekly church attendance is slightly higher in the Reformed Church (24,56%) than in other congregations. Regarding the cumulative data, there is no difference regarding weekly and monthly church attendance. Among those who claimed to belong to a congregation, 40% attends church on a monthly basis or more frequently. Considering the entire population, this is 35,4 %. The fact that the proportion of regular Bible readers is significantly higher among the members of the Reformed Church is interesting, but – given the traditions and original mission of the Reformed Church – not at all surprising.

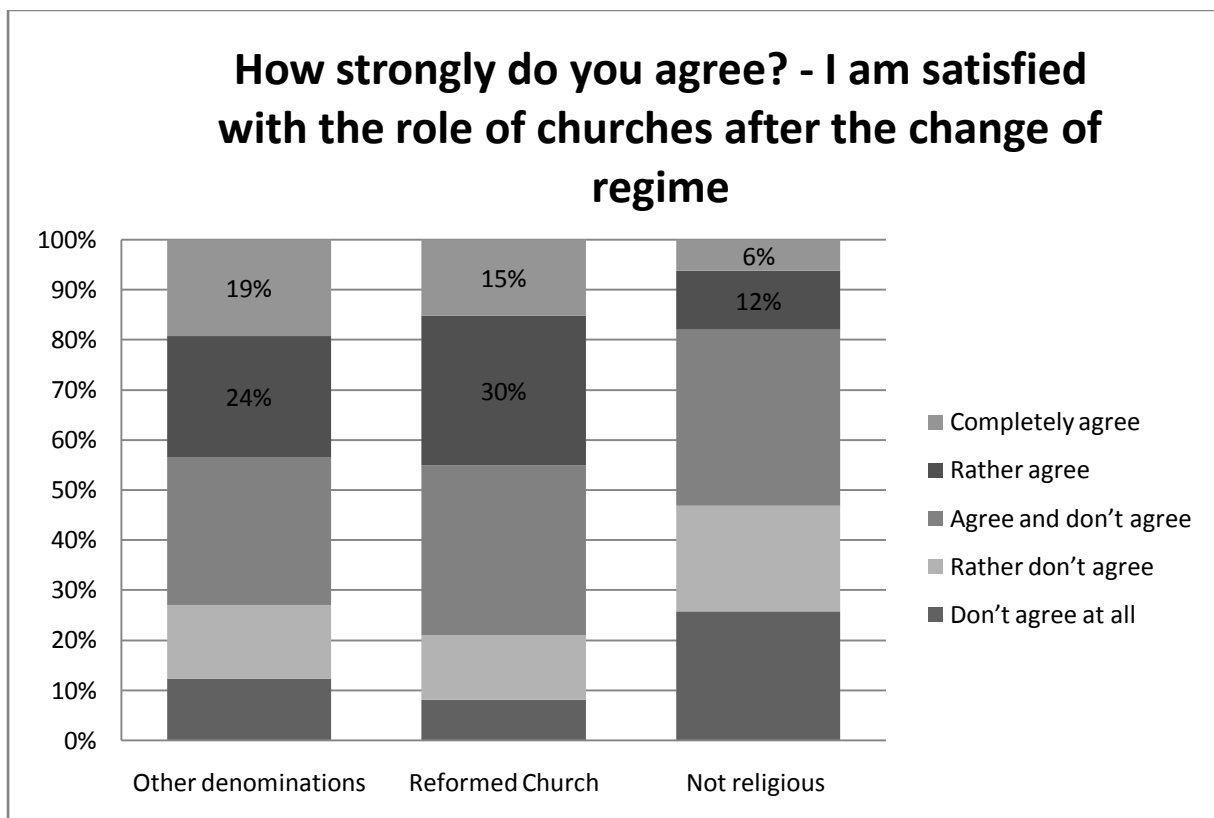


According to members of the Reformed Church, the primary task of the Church is the caritative service. This is followed by the task of moral guidance in an equally high proportion (78,7%). More than 50 % of the respondents believed that maintaining educational institutions is an important task of the Church.



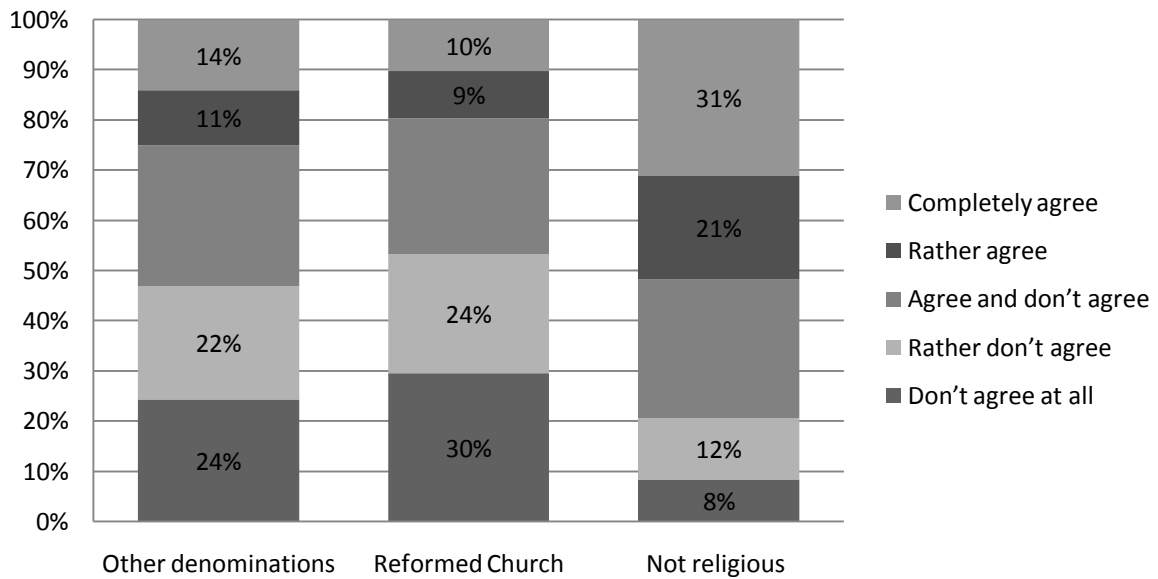
Less than 10% of the respondents believed that it is very important for the church to deal with political questions. Almost 50% did not believe this was important at all.

Interestingly, the answers of Reformed Church members to the question of how satisfying they find the role of the churches in Hungary after the change of regime were more polarised than the answers received from other churches. Both the proportion of those completely satisfied and of those rather dissatisfied was lower.



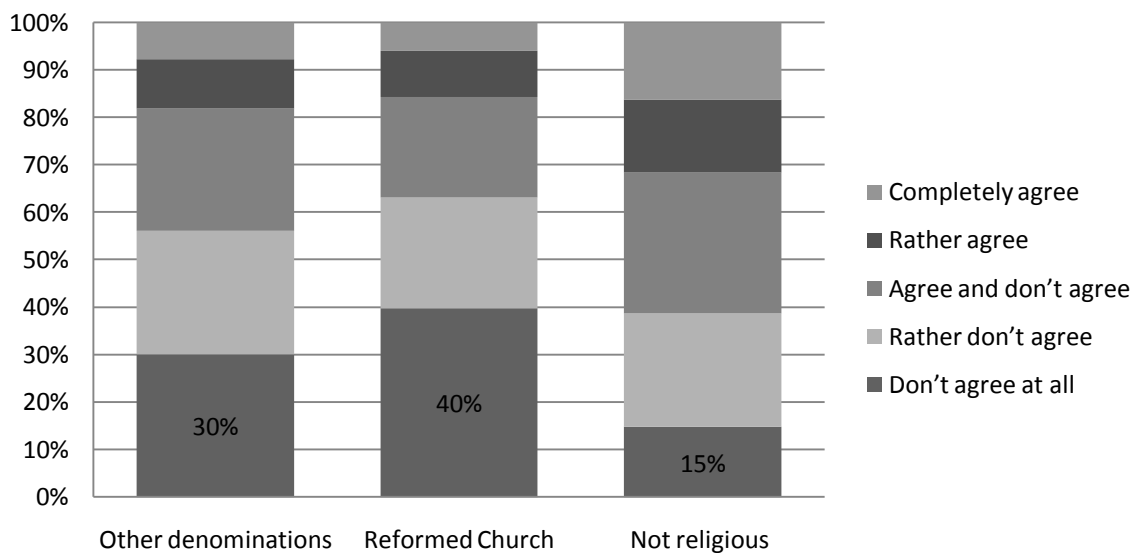
The majority, almost 60 % is more or less satisfied. The proportion of those believing that the church seeks its own interest was significantly lower among the members of the Reformed Church.

### How strongly do you agree? - The Church primarily seeks its own interest



There is an even more significant difference in the answers regarding the question on the Church's attitude towards progress.

### How strongly do you agree? - The Church is anti-progress

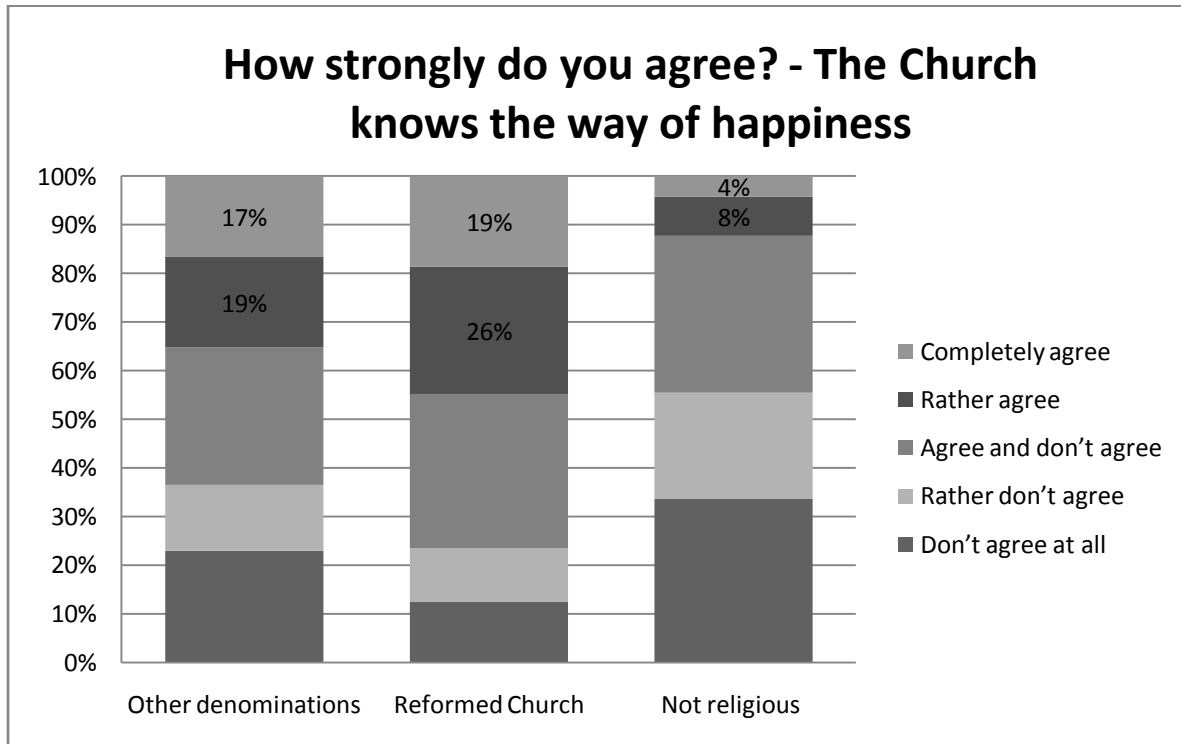


While 40% of the respondents of the Reformed Church did not believe that their Church was anti-progress, this proportion was only 30% among the members of other churches. We find



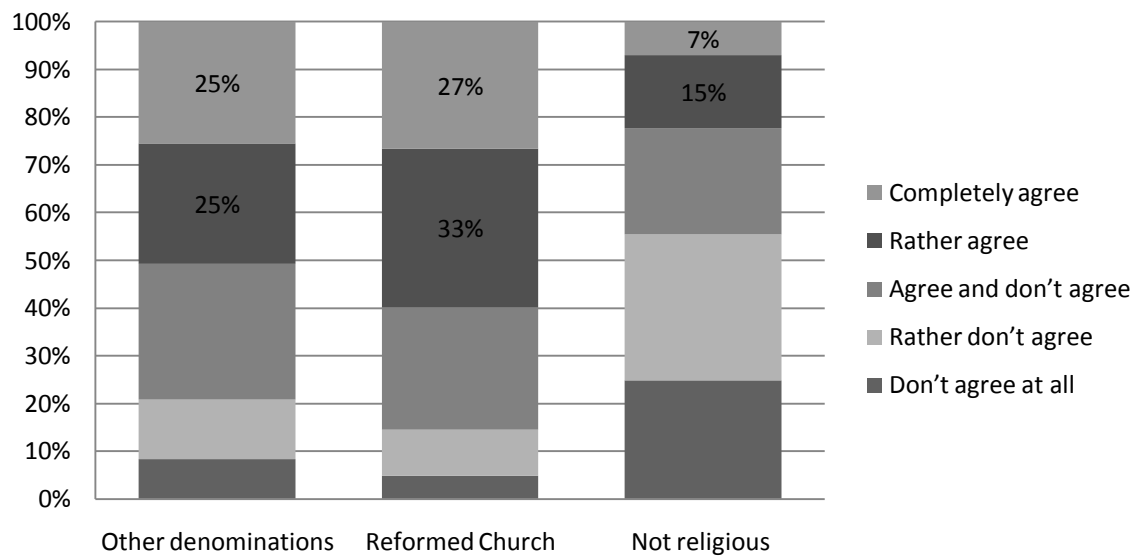
a slightly smaller but significant difference in the answers regarding the question on the Church's appearance orientation.

Almost half of the respondents of the Reformed Church completely agreed or rather agreed that the Church knows the way of happiness.

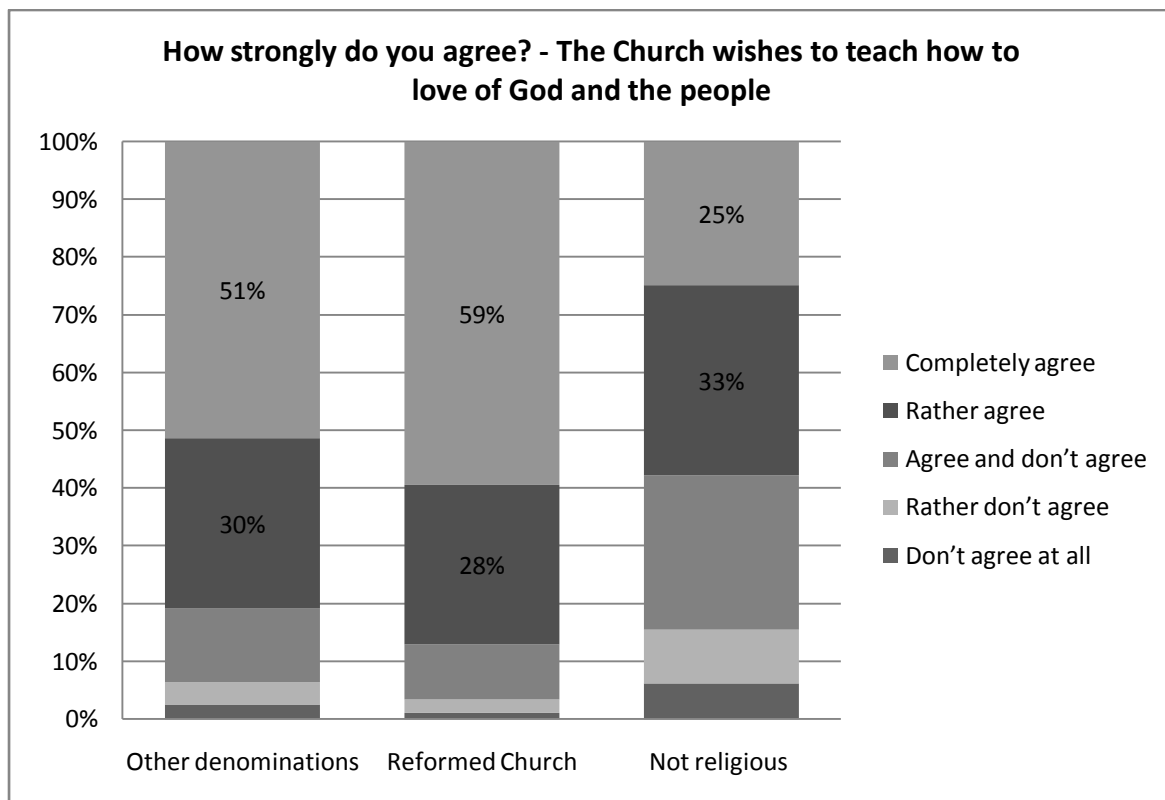


This proportion does not reach 40% among the respondents of other churches. We also find a prominent difference regarding the question of whether the Church respects the opinion of others.

## How strongly do you agree? - The Church respects the opinion of others



While 60% of the respondents of the Reformed Church completely agreed or rather agreed that the Church respects the opinion of others, this proportion was only 5% elsewhere. 87% of the members of the Reformed Church completely agreed or rather agreed that the Church wished to teach us how to love God and the people.

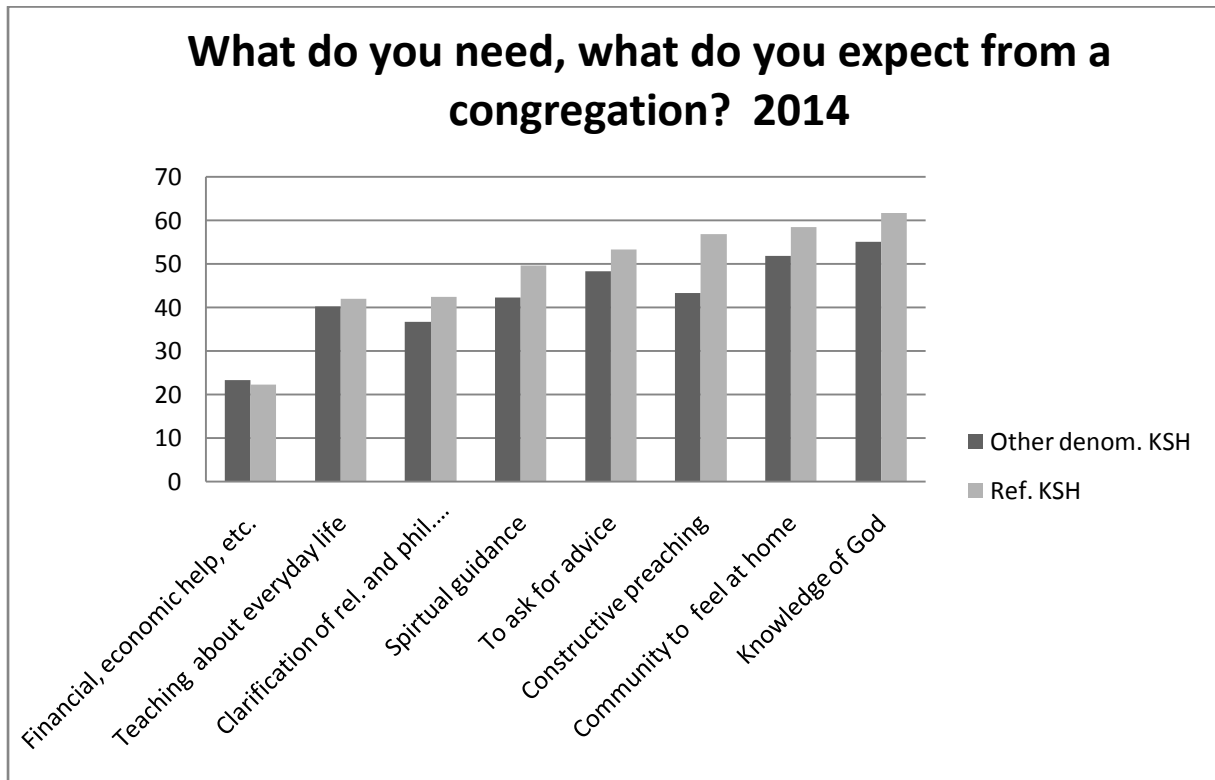


Surprisingly, the proportion of such respondents is higher here as well (by 6%).

Finally, to the question regarding the needs and expectations towards the congregation, we received the following answers. More than half of the members of the Reformed Church found it very important that the Church should help them achieve knowledge of God and wanted to get constructive preaching for that.

At this point we remark that there is an interesting difference between the followers of the Reformed Church and other religions which also indicates a living presence of Calvinist peculiarities. The other two areas where the answers “very important” were above 50% were the claim to belong to a community where they could feel at home, and the claim to be able to ask for advice from the pastor. What is least required or expected from the Church – especially on the part the members of the Reformed Church – is providing financial help. The claim which is clearly recognizable from the answers of this block of questions is the human

expectation towards congregations to provide a framework for community among the otherwise disintegrating relations systems.



This claim well reflects the request for the more active presence of Church functions in Western-European societies, where this was impossible during the pressured decades of Socialism.

## Results of the national census conducted in 2011

According to the census of 2011 72.84% of the respondents answered to the questions regarding religiosity. In this regard, the 2011<sup>4</sup> census saw a 16.33% (89.17%) decline compared to the previous census of 2001.<sup>5</sup>

Hungarian censuses data %				
	1930	1949	2001	2011
Catholic	67,1	70,5	54,5	38,9
Calvinist	20,9	21,9	15,9	11,6
Lutheran	6,1	5,2	3	2,2
Jewish	5,1	1,5	0,13	0,11
Other denomination	-	-	1-1,5	1,8
Not religious	-	0,1	14,5	18,2
Non-responders	0,7	0,7	10,8	27,16

The phrasing of the question in the questionnaire of 2011 differed from that of the 2001 questionnaire. The question asked in 2001 was: „What is your religiosity, denomination?” And the question of 2011 was: „To which religious community, denomination do you belong? Due to the difference in what the questions measure, the two ought not be compared. Despite this, I am now going to make the comparison.

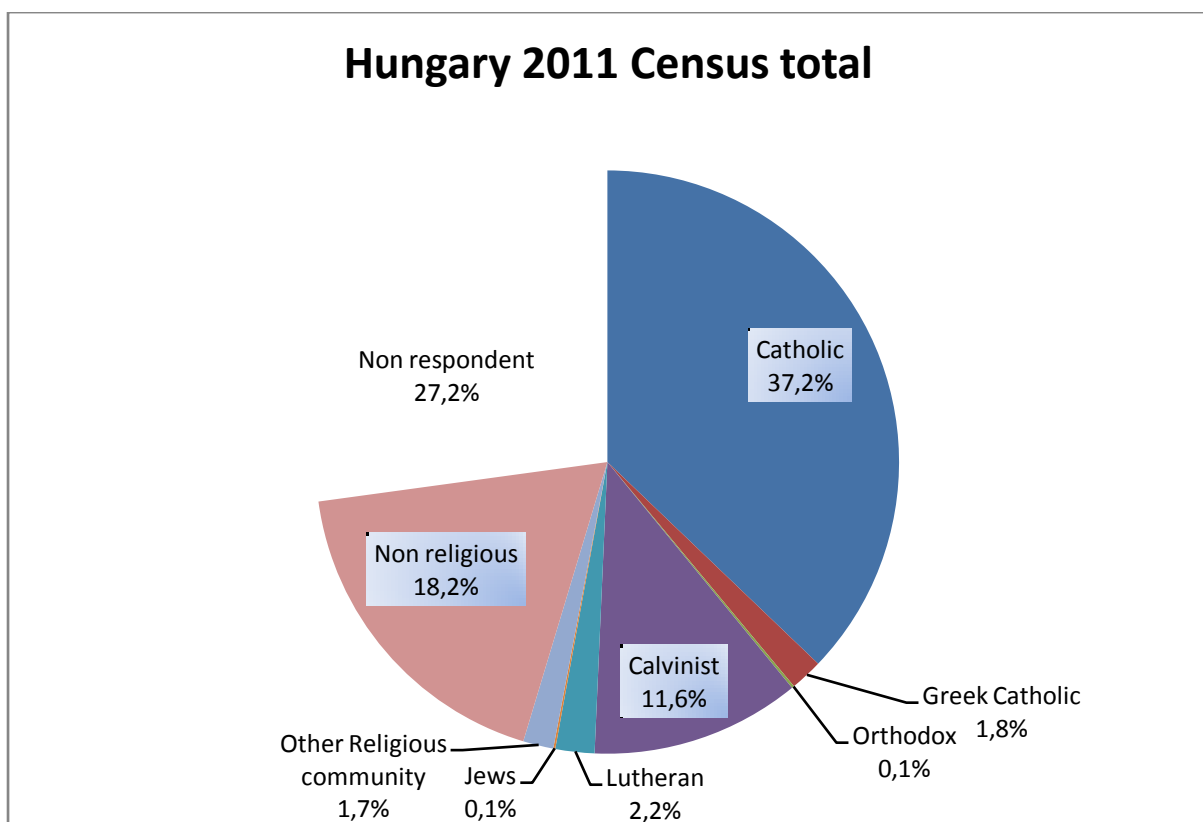
<sup>4</sup> (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2013)

<sup>5</sup> (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2001)

75.04% of the respondents said that they do belong to some religious community. This is 8.65% (83.69%) less than it was in 2001.

51% of the respondents belong to the Roman Catholic Church. This differs by 7.17% from the results of 2001 (58.17%). According to the 2011 census 2.48% belong to the Greek Catholic Church. (In 2001 this was 2.96%)

1,153,442 people said they belong to the Reformed Church, which is 15.93% of the total respondents. This is a 1.91% difference from the 2001 census.



214,965 people belong to the Evangelical Church, which is the 2.97% of the total respondents. The difference here is 0.38% (3.35%).

0.19% of the respondents belong to orthodox churches, which is a 0.03% increase since the 2001 census. That year 0.16% said to be belonging to an orthodox church. 0.15% of the respondents belong to the Jewish Churches.

This is a 0.01% increase compared to the results of 2001. 2.31% of the respondents belong to other smaller religious communities. This is 1.25% more than it was in 2001 (1.06%). 17,705 (0.25%) people said to be belonging to the Baptist Church in 2001. The number belonging to the *Pentecostal Church* is 9,326 (0.13%) people. In 2001 5840 (0.03%) people belonged to the Adventist Church, while in 2011 their number increased to 6,213 (0.09%). 2,416 (0.03%) belonged to the Methodist Church. In 2011 6,820 (0.09%) belonged to the Unitarian Church. 18,220 of the respondents said to be belonging to the Faith Church. According to the latest census, the Baptist Church is just as populous as the Faith Church (0.25%). The biggest religious community in the category of the smaller communities is the Church of Jehovah's Witnesses. 31,727 people belong to this church (0.44%).

The most populous church in the category of the non-Christian communities is the Buddhist, with 9,758 people belonging to their community. The second most believers belong to the Muslim community. There are 5,579 Muslims among the respondents.

### **Curiosity of Hungarian 2011 census religiosity data**

In eleven of the censuses questions regarding to religiosity were present.<sup>6</sup> Out of these, in the cases of three censuses the ratio of non-responders was higher than 11%.<sup>7</sup> These states were the Czech Republic, Hungary and Germany. The ratio of non responders was especially

---

<sup>6</sup> The census of 2011 was conducted in cooperation with other member states of the European Union. As part of the IPA Cooperation Programme, eight non-member states conducted the census as well. The census in the participating countries used different methods and expanded the basic questionnaire. The questions regarding religiosity were not included in the basic questionnaire provided by Eurostat. The processing of the census was very slow in Hungary, as well as in other member states. There have been even more problems in the accessibility of the results. Although I aimed to collect all the available data during my research, some available data might still be missing.

<sup>7</sup> Among the 27 member states only 12 made the results of the questions regarding religiosity available. These states are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia. In the case of Denmark, the data of the 2012 Statistical Yearbook and those of the Kirkeministeriet were utilized. The Norwegian data were collected from the National Bureau of Statistics.

high in the Czech Republic<sup>8</sup>, where 46.5% decided not to give an answer to the above mentioned questions. In the case of Germany, where the second most people did not answer these questions, the results are problematic. The options to the answer were very limited, and the category of "non-response" included the category „other churches (not Evangelical or Catholic)" and „not specified" at the same time. Understanding is made even harder by the fact that 4.3 million of those who chose this answer are not of German nationality.<sup>9</sup> In the Hungarian census, the three above mentioned categories were separated; however, if these categories are added up, it is found that the ratio in Hungary is even higher than in Germany. In this case it can be stated that among the three countries, the ratio of non-responders is the second highest (27.16%) in Hungary.

### **Interpretation of 2011 census data with data of EVS forth wave (2008)**

The results of the census provide an important source to understand the trends of religiosity. However, since many European states do not provide such data, and while those who do use different methods, construing the results can be difficult. The task is made easier by the European Value Study (EVS)<sup>10</sup>, which provides a firm base with the diverse questions and wide range of variables utilized. Since the very first conduct of the EVS, the number of participating states has grown considerably.

This research aims to find the real reasons behind the changes of the trends of Hungarian religiosity. The primary goal is to find the reason of the increase of non-responders.

---

<sup>8</sup> (Czech Statistical Office, 2011)

<sup>9</sup> „The variable "Religion" contains under "Other, none, not specified" persons who belong to a religious society under public law other than the Roman Catholic or the Evangelical Church. Municipalities with at least 10,000 inhabitants (as well as larger regional units) additionally include persons who do not belong to any religious society, religion, persuasion or belief or whose affiliation is unknown." (Datenverarbeitung, Bayerisches Landesamt für Statistik und, 2011)

<sup>10</sup> (European Values Study, 2010)



First, it has to be stated, that non-responders cannot be interpreted as being non-religious or not to be belonging to any religious community, because options to express this was given in the questionnaire. It might be assumed that there is some other reason behind this trend. As a basic hypothesis, it might also be assumed, that people do not like lying, as long as it is not necessary. If this hypothesis is accepted, then it can be stated that there is some other reason that motivated the non-respondents.

Upon analyzing the results of the **EVS**, an interesting trend becomes visible. Hungary has been participating in the EVS research since 1981. According to the results of this data collection, 42.9% of the population belong to some church or religious community. The next research was conducted after 1991, when 56.4% of the respondents said that they belonged to some church. Since then, the results have been constantly around statistical margin of error. The advantage of the **EVS** is, that although other researches (eg. **ESS**) have shown different ratios, the constant methods applied by the **EVS** grant the least of probability of methodological and data collections differences. The results of the EVS conducted in 1999 are the same as those of 2011 (54.64%).

There are two questions remaining to be answered. What is to be done with the group of those who gave no response? How can the higher results of 2001 census be interpreted?

In order to find the answer, some other questions of EVS is analyzed. In Europe, questions regarding the importance of belief and rite of passages (birth, wedding, death) are asked in order to measure the respondents' relation to religion.

The result of this analysis is surprising. 66.5% said that they do believe in God, while only 28.2% said they do not believe in God.

To the question regarding the importance of religious rites, such as christening, 70.9% responded positively. 69.5% thought a religious wedding was important. 77.7% of the

answerers said that religious rites were important at a funeral. 80.2% thought at least one of these ceremonies were important. However, these rituals must be connected to some church. These trends are leading to the final answer. In the census of 2011, 18.2% of the respondents said that they did not belong to any religious communities. According to the **EVS**, 17.4% of the respondents never during their lives thought religious rites to be important. 2.4% did not or was not able to answer this question.

