

# Decline in Religious Observance among Catholics and Protestants (1960–1989)

## Abstract

Indicators of religiosity declined noticeably in the last decades of the twentieth century. The Protestant Church lost 3.5 million members, and the number of Protestant baptisms and weddings fell by 50%. The Catholic Church was able to avoid a similar decline in membership, but the number of Catholic baptisms and weddings still fell sharply, as did mass attendance.

## Source

### I. The Catholic Church

At the end of 1989, about 26.7 million Catholics were living in West Germany. They made up about 43 percent of the total population. This share has remained virtually unchanged since 1950. The number of Catholics declined from 1974 to 1988 but has been rising again since 1988. Until that point, the influx of Catholic foreigners into Germany—mostly guest workers and their families—had more than compensated for declining baptism figures and the growing number of people who left the Church at the beginning of the 1970s (1970: 69,000). In 1989, 93,010 people left the Church.

The Catholic Church in West Germany is divided into twenty-two dioceses (five archdioceses and seventeen dioceses). In 1989, there were 12,436 parishes and other places of spiritual guidance. About 12,200 diocesan priests and religious priests worked in pastoral care in 1979; there was one pastoral caregiver, on average, for every 2,200 believers. An acute shortage of priests, however, meant that not all parishes could have their own. Another 7,300 priests were active in other fields of work.

Basic information on church life is shown in the table below. Between 1960 and 1989 participation in Sunday Communion dropped by about 5.8 million churchgoers, or 49 percent. In 1989, an average of 23 percent of all Catholics attended Sunday Mass. Far more participate in the Eucharist on holidays or the Church's main feast days.

The Catholic Church in West Germany

Year	Catholics (in thousands)	Baptisms (in thousands)	Marriages (in thousands)	Church Funerals (in thousands)	Participants in Sunday Communion (in thousands)
1960	24,710	473	214	262	11,895
1970	27,192	370	164	296	10,159
1980	26,720	258	125	288	7,769
1985	26,308	254	113	286	6,800
1987	26,306	270	114	278	6,430
1989	26,746	282	113	281	6,092

[Figures from the secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, Statistics Department, Bonn]

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## II. The Protestant Church

The Protestant Church in Germany [*Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*] had 25.1 million members in late 1989; this represents roughly 40 percent of the total population and about 44 percent of the German population. In the 1950 census, these percentages were still around 51 percent each.

The Protestant Church in West Germany

Year	Members (in thousands)	Baptisms (in thousands)	Marriages (in thousands)	Funerals (in thousands)	Participants in Sunday Eucharist (in thousands)
1963	28,796	476	204	335	7,727
1970	28,480	346	156	369	6,813
1980	26,104	222	94	347	9,056
1987	25,413	239	97	324	9,669
1989	25,132	252	101	321	9,319

[Figures from the Protestant Church in Germany (EKG), Hanover, not including the Protestant Free Churches (*Freikirchen*)]

Source: Federal Office of Statistics, ed., *Datenreport 1992. Zahlen und Fakten über die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Bonn, 1992, pp. 190–91.

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