SUMMARY

The authors examine the religiousness of theology students and students in other disciplines at several German universities in a context of religious differentiation and pluralisation. Based on Batson's model, religiousness is classified into intrinsic, extrinsic and quest orientations. The religiousness of students of theology and students in other fields was found to differ significantly in the three dimensions. Non-theologians tended to ascribe negative value to the extrinsic and the intrinsic dimensions, with the intrinsic dimension being valued more negatively. At the same time they ascribed a slightly positive value to the quest orientation. Theology students valued all three dimensions positively, with especially strong positive value attached to the quest orientation. Using cluster analysis, four types of religiousness were developed: a “conventionally religious” type, a type described as “not religious in a Christian sense”, a “questioning and religious” type, and a “strongly religious” type. Theology students fit mainly into the “strongly religious” and “questioning and religious” types. Students in other fields were concentrated in the “conventionally religious” and “not religious in a Christian sense” categories. At the end, the results are discussed from the perspective of practical theology.

In the study of religiousness, the questionnaire developed by C.D. Batson, who distinguished between extrinsic, intrinsic and quest dimensions of religiousness, is considered a valid instrument. In the study reported in the following, we used this instrument in the revised form of L.J. Francis (2001). The study looked at students at German universities. There were two groups of respondents. The first consisted of 923 students of Catholic theology at several German universities, the second was made up of 327 students in the non-theological faculties at the University of Würzburg.

The question that we set out to answer was whether the two groups differed with respect to their religiousness. An initial assumption was that the extrinsic dimension of religiousness would be the least developed, because in the context of a plurality of worldviews the reasons for an extrinsic motivation no longer apply. A second assumption was that the intrinsic dimension of religiousness would predominate among the theologians and the quest dimension among the non-theologians. An intrinsically motivated religiousness could be considered characteristic of a modern, privatised
The issue of religiousness is an important one for practical theology, in which theory is always developed with reference to societal change. One fundamental characteristic of this change is plurality. In the following, we will first look at the societal and cultural context of religiousness (1). Then, we will present the empirical findings of the study (2), and conclude with a brief discussion from a practical-theological perspective (3).

1. Religion and Religiousness in Transition

Regardless of one's personal assessment of the degree of secularisation in Western Europe, few would dispute that European culture has been and continues to be shaped by Christianity (cf. Davie 2000; Hervieu-Légér 2000). At the same time, the cultural presence of Christianity has changed substantially. The change is evident in social and cultural practices and mores, in the church and other institutions, and in individual attitudes and behaviours. The beginning of the modern age marked a major realignment in this regard. For a long time, the unification of spiritual and state power in the hands of the prince-bishops (as for example in Germany) was the living expression of a religion that sought to — and by and large did — orient, guide and control societal and individual life. Roman Christianity’s claim to exclusivity remains valid to the present, even if, since Vatican II, it is now limited only to matters of faith and morality.

The overarching “sacred canopy” (P.L. Berger) thus created a unity of religious and societal life. This “canopy”, however, fell victim to the functional differentiation of the modern world. Societal functions have become increasingly differentiated and, in the process, autonomous. Politics, economics, law, medicine and culture are no longer under the control of religion, but evolve according to their own rules. Religion has become one discipline among many. At the same time this discipline is anything but unified. Religion is itself a plural phenomenon and the individual exercise of religion is affected accordingly (cf. Ziebertz 2001a).

This development affects particularly those who concern themselves deeply with religious matters, and students of theology are clearly among them. On the one hand, as “children of our time” they themselves are subjects of this process of change. On the other hand they are preparing to embark on a