

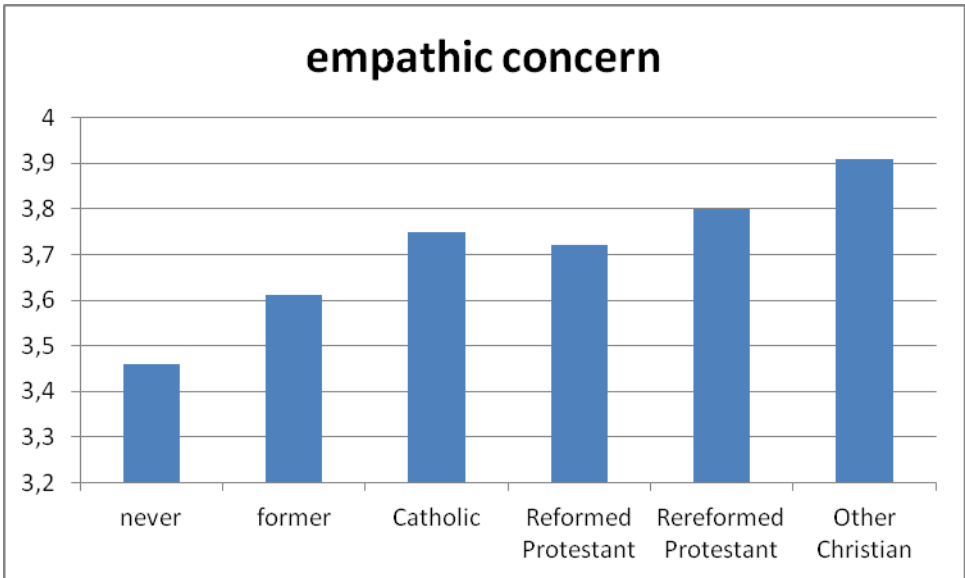
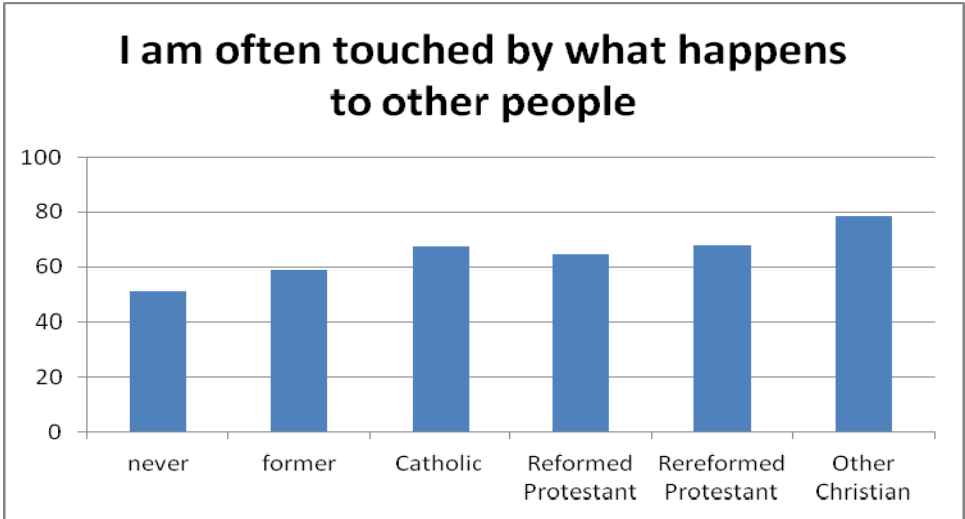
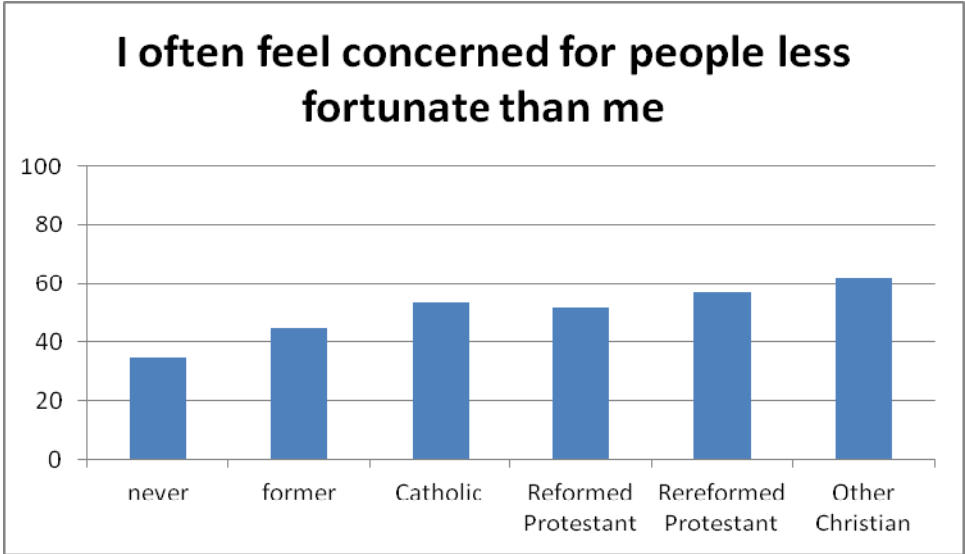
Religion and Compassion: Evidence from the Netherlands

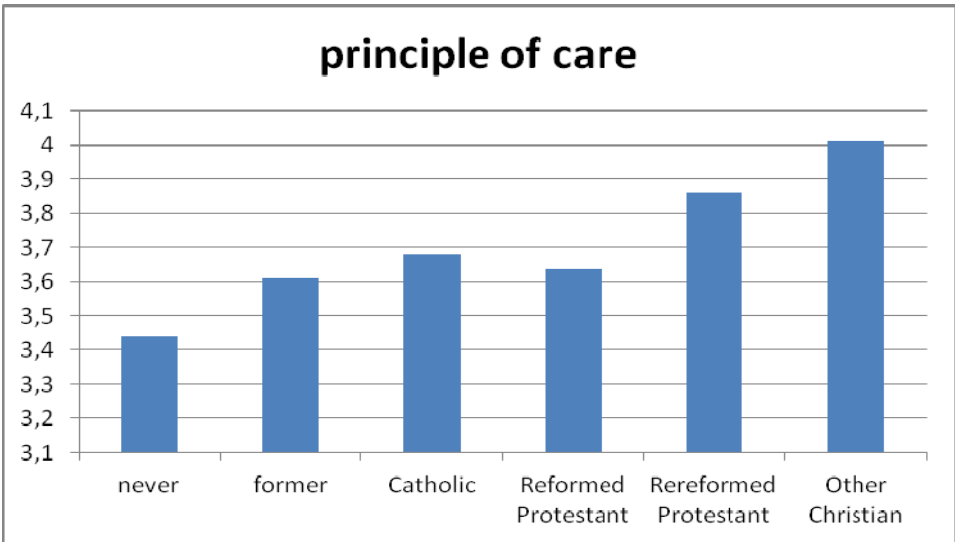
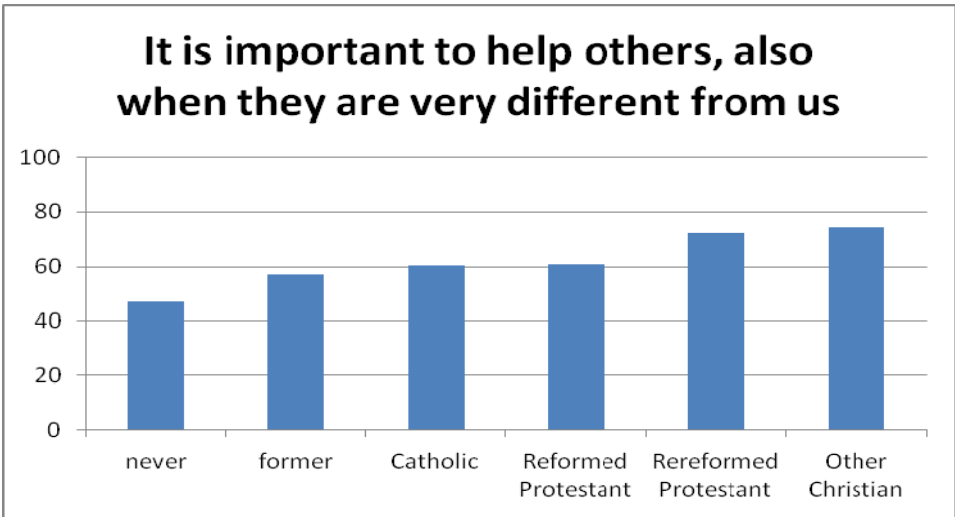
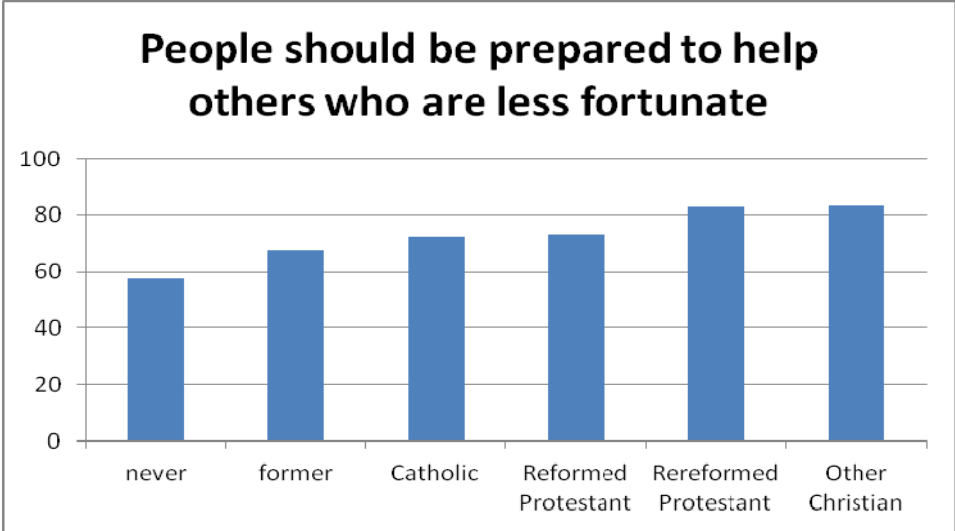
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Recently, a study on religion and compassion published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (Saslow et al., 2012) attracted attention in the media. 'Strongly religious people less compassionate', a Dutch news website reported (Boersma, 2012). This headline is misleading because the study did not show that religious people are less compassionate. In fact the research even showed evidence for the opposite, i.e. that more religious individuals report more compassion than less religious individuals. In their Study 1, Saslow and colleagues use data from the General Social Survey 2004 (GSS) finding that "those who reported a greater tendency to feel compassion were more religious individuals and people who reported behaving more prosocially." Also they find that "more religious individuals [are] reporting greater prosocial behavior."

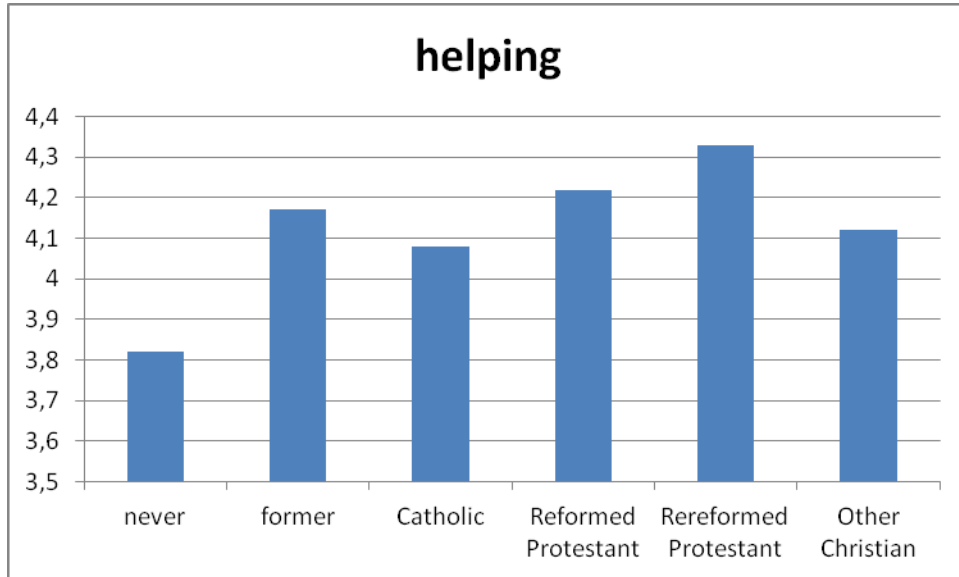
Analysis of survey data from the Netherlands show that these results also hold true in the Netherlands. The Family Survey of the Dutch Population conducted in 2009 is similar to the GSS2004 and included measures of religious affiliation, empathic concern (the tendency to empathize with the misfortune of others), the principle of care (the moral principle that people in need should receive assistance), and various measures of helpfulness, including charitable giving. The Dutch survey showed that more religious individuals report more empathy and a stronger endorsement of the principle of care, as well as more helping behavior in the past year. Respondents who reported affiliation with a religious group, Catholic, Protestant or otherwise, also reported more agreement with statements measuring empathy (e.g., "I often feel concerned for people less fortunate than me") and statements measuring the moral principle of care (e.g., "It is important to help others, also when they are very different from us"). Respondents who reported they were not considering themselves as religious anymore while having grown up in a religious family expressed less agreement with the statements measuring empathy and the principle of care. Respondents who reported they did not consider themselves as religious and had never done so reported the lowest levels of empathy and care.

Among the respondents who reported being religious, Catholics tended to report a bit higher empathy than Reformed Protestants ('Hervormden'). Rereformed Protestants ('Gereformeerden') reported empathy at similar levels as Catholics. The highest levels of empathy were found among respondents with an 'other Christian' affiliation, including Evangelical Protestants, Jehovah's witnesses, and members of other small (and generally speaking more strict) Protestant denominations.

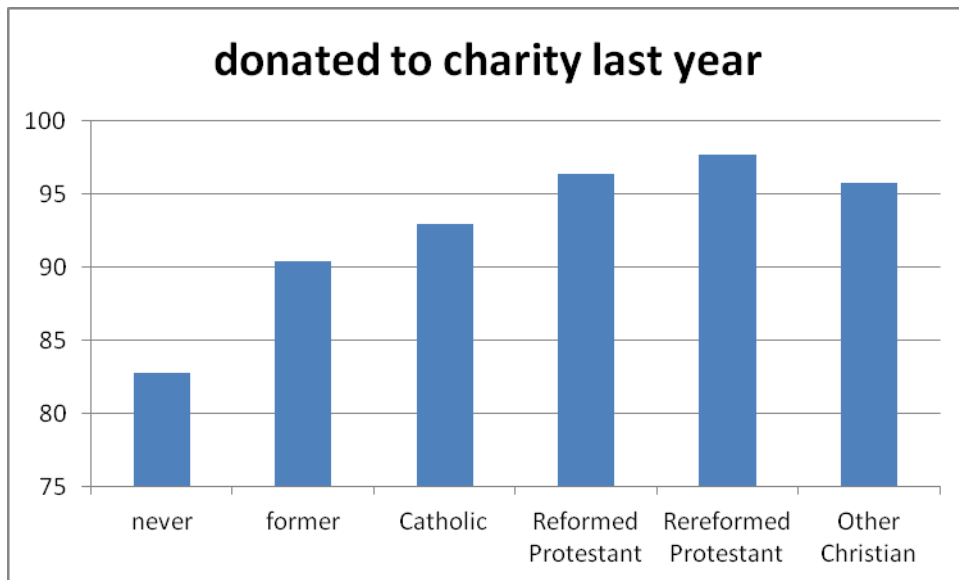




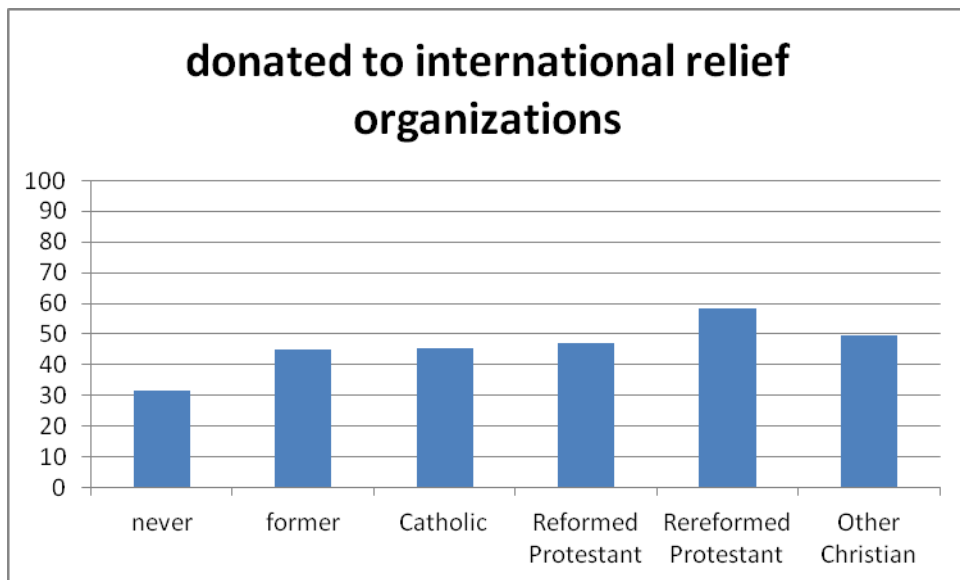
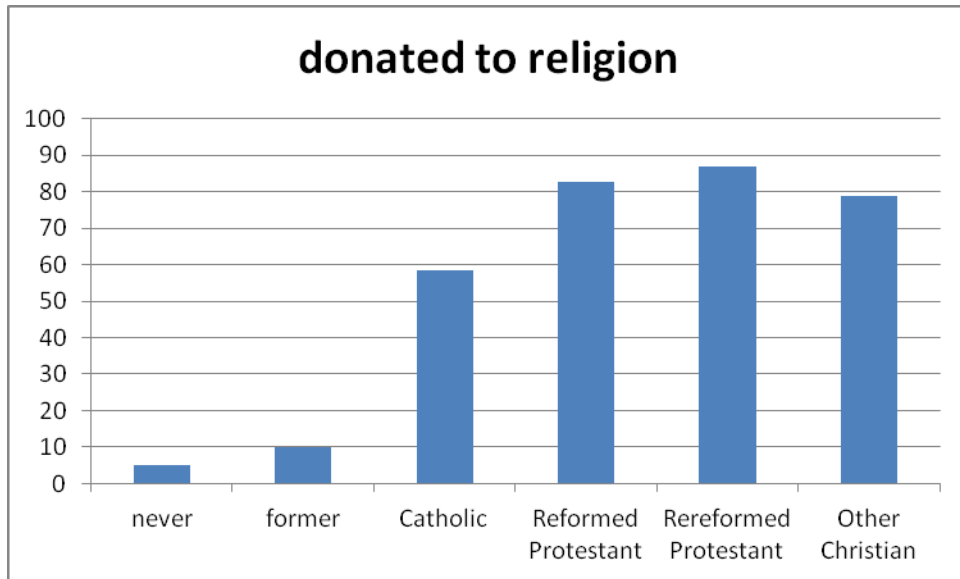
In addition, the Family Survey of the Dutch Population showed evidence for higher prosociality among religious persons. Counting the number of helping behaviors in the past year that the respondents reported engaging in, members of Protestant groups had the highest scores. Interestingly, former church members reported higher levels of helping than Catholics. Those who have never considered themselves as religious report the lowest levels of helping.



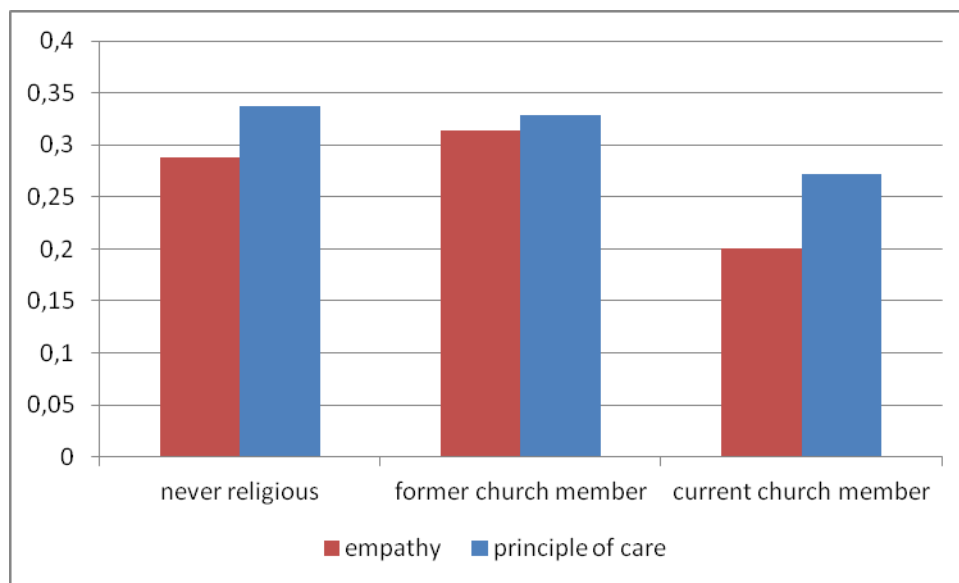
One of the most popular helping behaviors in the survey is donating to charity. This behavior shows the clearest evidence of an increase with religious affiliation. In terms of religious beliefs, Catholics tend to be less strict than Reformed Protestants, who are less strict than Rereformed Protestants. The 'other Christian' group is most strict, and forms an exception to the pattern.



It is often argued that religious persons donate primarily to their own church, and are not different from the non-religious when it comes to donating to other organizations. Indeed giving to religious organizations increases with religiosity. Donations to international relief organizations – mostly helping people in need who are from different religious groups than the respondent – are made at similar levels by former church members, Catholics, and Reformed Protestants. Those who have never considered themselves as religious are least likely to report donations to international relief organizations. Rereformed Protestants are most likely to donate to international relief organizations.



The research by Saslow and colleagues showed that empathic concern was less strongly related to helping among more religious respondents. The Dutch data show some evidence for this pattern, though the differences are not very strong. The correlation of helping with empathic concern is weaker among current church members ($r = .201$) than among those who never considered themselves as religious ($r = .288$). Interestingly, the correlation is strongest among former church members ($r = .314$). In line with prior research (Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010), generally speaking empathic concern is less strongly related to helping than the principle of care. The correlation between the principle of care and helping is similar among the never religious and former church members ($r = .337$ and $.329$, respectively). Among current church members the correlation is somewhat weaker ($r = .272$).



References

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Wilhelm, Mark Ottoni, and René Bekkers (2010). 'Helping Behavior, Dispositional Empathic Concern, and the Principle of Care'. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 73 (1): 11-32.