

“I Have Faith in My Thing, You Know What I Mean?” **Mixed Methods Elements on Individual Investments in Religious Markets**

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Abstract

In contemporary society, religious signification and secular systems mix and influence each other. Holistic conceptions of a world in which man is integrated harmoniously with nature meet representations of a world run by an immanent God. On the market of the various systems, the individual goes from one system to another, following his immediate needs and expectations without necessarily leaving any marks in a meaningful long term system. This article presents the first results of an ongoing research in Switzerland on contemporary religion focusing on (new) paths of socialization of modern that individuals and the various (non-) belief systems that they simultaneously develop.

Keywords: Modern Religiosity, Pluralism, Secularization, Spiritual Attitudes Switzerland

Introduction

For the past decades, the triumph of the modern occidental ideology, synonym of the secularization of various domains of society and the dominance of technical and scientific rationality, has been the main paradigm according to which sociology treated and refereed societal questions (Touraine 1995, 1997). On the one hand, ‘modern’ societies were secularizing, and distancing themselves from the normative authority of the churches; on the other hand churches were losing their historical influence on the organization of society and their legitimacy to define the conformity of morals, customs and faiths. Various international studies have shown (EVS, SSS, ISSP) there is a shift in beliefs that have become less and less Christian, that there is a growing number of people who have never belonged to any religion (Lambert 2004) and that the religious decline is observable not only in the regressing meanings attributed to beliefs and faiths, but also in religious participation. Furthermore, it

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has been shown that this decline concerns all age groups (Voas and Crocket 2005, 2006). Today, the axiom of understanding secularization only as the moving away from religion has lost some of its relevance, and it is becoming increasingly common to associate it with a certain religious vitality rather than link secularization to religious detachment or religious disappearance. As Linda Woodhead noted

‘sacralization’ is now as common a theme of religion in the contemporary world as secularization, and unilateral theories of religious decline are increasingly being abandoned in favor of more nuanced ‘mapping’ of religion and secularity and the factors which explain them (Woodhead 2002:11).

Similar observations can be found in the late work of Peter Berger, according to whom we have now entered a process of “*deseccularization of the world*” (1999) or with the new paradigm proposed by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead when they suggest that we have entered a “*spiritual revolution*” (2002, 2005). Although these authors claim that “*rather than giving way to the secular, the religious is giving way to the spiritual*” (Heelas 2002:358) for some other authors the social loss of religion should still be considered a unilateral process (Bruce 2005, Voas 2005).

Whether religion is giving way to the secular or to the spiritual, it remains that even though religion is losing its social significance, a considerable amount of people still declare that they believe in something. Sometimes, they are able to precisely define what they believe in, but other times they cannot specifically outline their beliefs and faiths. The main objective of my contribution or paper will be to draw attention to *the ways of believing*. Based on quantitative and qualitative material collected in an ongoing project taking place in Switzerland, this paper intends to argue that the ways in which people believe or do not believe are to be taken into account in order to understand the contemporary religious field or climate. This paper will be divided into four parts. Firstly, I will summarize the main aspects of our research project and its ‘mixed methods’ methodology. Secondly, based on quantitative material, I will present some trends of the religious climate in Switzerland. Thirdly, I will provide a short presentation of some of the beliefs of our qualitative informants. Finally,

based on a mixed methods analysis that is still ongoing, I will propose a typology of believing attitudes.

The Research Project And Its Methods

Entitled, *Religiosity in the modern world. Construction, condition and social change*, this research project belongs to a vast national research program (PNR58) funded by the Swiss National Fund for Scientific Research (FNS). Twenty-seven projects focusing on '*Religious communities, state and society*' are currently ongoing in Switzerland. The purpose of our research project is to bring elements of response to various questions, such as: "*Why are individuals still religious in secular contexts? How is religiosity influenced by social factors? How religious practices change over time?*" To answer these questions it was decided to follow a *mixed model research design*, that is, we developed quantitative and qualitative tools to simultaneously collect data and then analyze those two sets of data first separately and, then, triangulate them in an integrated analysis.

First a brief explanation of the data collection: the quantitative material was collected together with the International Social Survey Program 2009 (ISSP). One thousand two hundred face-to-face questionnaires were conducted. In addition, we developed specific question about religion in Switzerland and about alternative practices and beliefs (such as fortune telling, meditation, yoga, beliefs in the power of stones or plants, etc). This data was collected with the support of a written questionnaire that the ISSP respondents were asked to complete and return to a polling institute. Seven hundred and ninety-five respondents (from the one thousand two hundred initially approached) completed and returned the written questionnaire. This data collection ended in November 2009 and the data should be delivered in December 2009.

Concerning the qualitative material, the data collection is complete. The field survey lasted eighteen months and was divided in two major phases. First, from October 2007 to May 2008 the initial phase of forty-one face-to-face interviews was directed or were conducted. The material was transcribed verbatim and systematically coded with the support of the program Atlas.ti®. A preliminary content analysis was then conducted. The goal of the first analysis was to decipher each respondent's or informants' answers to the main research questions of

the project. Thus, the goal was to attempt to extract their various world views, their attitudes towards religions and the religious, their subjective meanings of religion, religiosity or spirituality, their practices in regards to religion, etc. Once the first trends of the random sampling had been considered, it was decided to run a second round of interviews to correct some inequalities in the sample (for example, the inequality between the number of Catholics vs. Protestants in the sample after the first round) and to increase variety. To do so, more criteria was provided to the recruiters, who were asked to find potential informants that fell into specific groups for example: a Protestant male living in an urban region of French speaking Switzerland under the age of forty, or a Protestant female living in a rural area of German speaking Switzerland over the age of forty. This second round of interviews took place between March and May 2009. A sample of seventy-three informants were recruited on a random quota basis through a polling institute for face-to-face interviews to allow for further extended analysis.

Who are the 73 informants?

The informants are women (38) and men (35) of various ages and faiths. They come from different parts of Switzerland: 34 come from the French speaking part, 33 from the German speaking part and 6 from the Italian speaking part. Most of the informants are Swiss (65/73), including 7 that are bi-nationals. Concerning their confession, the sample is as follows:

<i>Confession</i>	
Catholics	33
Protestants	21
No religion	15
Evangelicals	4

Cautious to collect data that included various generations, but aware that a decade quota would be difficult to fill up, it was decided to organize the various age classes into the criteria under 40 or above 40 years old. The sample clearly contains more informants aged above 40 than under 40 (44 vs. 29), but this can be somewhat explained. In spite of the precautions taken concerning the age variable during the recruiting phases, it was recorded that the

informants that refused the interview after the recruitment were precisely those under the age of forty.

Ages	
Between 16 - 20 years old	4
Between 21 - 30 years old	6
Between 31 - 40 years old	19
Between 41 - 50 years old	13
Between 51 - 60 years old	13
Over 61 years old	18

It should also be emphasized that the respondents aged below thirty years old are unmistakably underrepresented in the sample. Apart from the fact that the under thirties are less likely to be available at home early evenings (late working hours, sports, children), it is further that this specific age bracket is that they are increasingly and sometimes exclusively using mobile phones to communicate meaning that this type of telephonic recruitment does not reach them. Indeed, mobile phone numbers do not usually appear in telephone directories or databases available to the polling institutes and it is not usual for young adults to stay in contact with their peers through multimedia such as Skype or MSN, instead of traditional phone lines. This transformation in means of communication seems to be one step ahead of traditional methods of the polling institute, making the younger generation less likely to respond to telephone researches.

Finally, it must be noted that the sample was not required to be a statistical representation of then Swiss population. However it was attempted to recruit enough informants to be able to qualitatively discover and demonstrate internal diversity within groups, may they be through gender, age, confession or region. Therefore, it is fair to say that on a random quota basis it was attempted to achieve a theoretical saturation among the different groups the focus group was composed of i.e. the Swiss population.

Religious Trends In Switzerland

Studies of the international surveys such as ISSP, EVS, ESS, the household panels and the censuses made in Switzerland since the 1960s, show that secularization is a trend of the Swiss societies. Surveys show that there has been a drastic decrease in religious belonging. On the one hand, there is a decrease in people mentioning their religious membership and on the other hand there is an increase in the number of declarations of non-adherence. Two other classical indicators of individual religiosity and secularization are the religious praxis (mainly church going) and the credo, mainly the belief in a personal God. The above mentioned research also points out that church attendance is in constant decline as is the belief in a personal God. This traditional belief is slowly replaced by the abstract belief in a superior entity endowed with numerous qualities and attributes (vital breath, life force, soul, etc.). Indicators related to religious belonging, religious practices and individual beliefs all show that membership as well as the religious fervor are in regression. A closer look at the results of previous research based on the various censuses mentioned above in Switzerland show that there are three major trends in the Swiss religious field (Campiches 1992, 2004, Bovay 2004). The first one, already mentioned above, is the constant erosion of individual institutional religiosity. The second is the existence of an individual religiosity, independent from any religious institution such as churches, that expresses itself for instance in the New Age spiritualities. The third and final trend is the permanence (do you mean preeminence?) of atheism, a non-believing expression based on science and reason. Switzerland is no exception and those trends can be found in other European countries as well such as France, Germany, Britain and Scandinavian states. A quote from Inger Furseth seems to describe this shift in regards with religion very well. According to the Norwegian sociologist

These religious changes imply a turning away from tradition and organized religion to more individualism and plurality. It is a turn from the idea that 'everything has a meaning' to 'I want to believe in something'. (2005:159).

Other sociologists such as Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead also notice those trends and argue that between the regular church attenders and the atheists, there is a blurry territory in which all kinds of religiosity and spirituality are developing. According to Heelas and Woodhead, *"a spiritual revolution is under way within the territories between institutionalized*

religion and atheism/ agnosticism.” (Heelas 2002:361). The concept of “*spiritual revolution*” is based on three main arguments: first of all, the record that New Age spiritualities are increasing, secondly that the content of the beliefs are becoming more and more diffuse and fuzzy and thirdly, that inside the traditional-institutional religious territories theistic spiritualities of life are also gaining in success (such as charismatic and evangelical movements (Woodhead and Hellas 2005).

The ways of believing that will be developed below are specifically trying to catch some of the processes that are evolving in the in-between territories. But before going any further, let us examine some of the beliefs of the Swiss informants and demonstrate, by way of example, the complex combinations and sometimes coherent/incoherent meanings being attributed to them.

What do Swiss People say they believe in?

This is a vast topic with endless possible replies. Based on a mixed method analysis taking into account previous quantitative researches on religion in Switzerland and qualitative data recently collected in the project, it is possible to say that Swiss people express beliefs that take into account traditional institutional beliefs and the territories of the “*spiritual revolution*”. In these territories, one can find various beliefs such as a growing interest for Oriental and ‘alternative’ practices such as Qi Gong, Tai chi and Reiki, a return of ‘Celtic’ beliefs and practices reinterpreted in light of the contemporary context (mainly an ecological concern) or humanistic beliefs. Those different beliefs are expressed through a diffuse and ‘fuzzy’ or vague religiosity.

So far, the analysis speaks in favor of the “*spiritual revolution*”. On the one hand, it shows that declared atheism stays marginal and there is significant diversity of beliefs and believing systems among the respondents. Indeed, among the sixty-two informants analyzed so far, only ten specifically claimed to have no religious affiliation or declared to be neither religious nor spiritual. Even though nine of the remaining fifty-two also declared agnosticism or to be non-believers, they had nevertheless developed some kind of symbolic system. It is therefore not uncommon to meet an agnostic that believes in life after death, in cosmic energy and the effectiveness of the Reiki, or an atheist who attends Wicca cults and believes in the forces of

nature. Indeed, if Switzerland is traditionally a Christian country, nowadays the beliefs of the Swiss people largely surpass traditional Christian frontiers. On one hand, Christianity is subject to contemporary metaphorical interpretations, but thanks to (or because of) globalization, the borrowing of other symbolic, philosophic or religious traditions is becoming increasingly common. Karma, reincarnation, beliefs in 'lucky' coincidences, also feature in our informants universe of beliefs. Therefore, in an attempt to reduce the complexity of the data, it was decided to organize and analyze them ('it' – as in the data or 'them' as in the informants?) taking into consideration the content of the beliefs.

In response to our question, a preliminary analysis showed that the beliefs of the Swiss informants can be classified under five recurring themes.

1. God,
2. Life after death,
3. The existence and power of energies (cosmic energies or energies of nature),
4. The beliefs in protective entities (beloved deceased, guardian angels, spiritual beings and imaginary creatures)
5. Secular beliefs articulated through humanistic values (faith in mankind, faith in life and creation).

It is therefore usual for the belief in God to coincide with the beliefs in energies, in vital breath, in faith in spiritual entities such as angels and/or demons, or in imaginary creatures such as fairies and dwarves, belief in a cosmic order or faith in the laws of nature. Far from excluding each other, these different types of beliefs tend to 'blend' together or even influence one another. Note that each of these categories may be interpreted subjectively and there are as many significations as there are informants. There are absolutely no universal interpretations.

The belief in God is a good example. Simon, a Catholic man aged 50, says that he believes in God. For him, God is the creator of the universe, but he (God) is not acting alone. Instead for Simon, the stars are the hands of God and the power of God radiates on earth channeled through stars: *"I think that God is the creator and that the stars, they are the hands I mean, they are a way of capturing and transmitting God's energy"* (113). For Simon, God is not just

an abstract entity up in the sky; he is everywhere, in everything and in everyone. “*We are all a part of God*” he says, God created the universe, God *is* the universe. Mankind, being part of God’s creation, contains the divine. God and mankind are not separate, they are both part of the same essence. Simon also believes in life after death. Even though he has difficulties finding his words and expressing his beliefs, Simon says he believes in life on another planet or an immaterial (do you mean here that he believes in an after life where we do not have physical form?) life on this planet. This example demonstrates were the Christian belief in a creator God meets with a New Age concept of a unified world (non-dualistic) where everything is ‘One’. His concept of the stars being the hands of God, questioning the uniqueness of God, is also a consequence of the New Age influence. Finally, when he talks about life after death, we understand that he has also been influenced by UFO theories.

How do the Swiss believe?

Since nowadays it belongs to general culture that the beliefs are in a process of institutionalization, autonomization and de-Christianization, it is becoming more relevant to shift the interest and to focus on the ways the individual believe (or do not believe). As Meredith McGuire noticed

To grasp the individual’s religion, we need to be able to take into account, not just symbols and cognitive frameworks, but also individual emotions, embodiment and experience.” (2008: 216).

Taking McGuire’s precious advice into consideration, the following questions may bring some elements of response: How do Swiss people believe? Do they believe in an unending manner? Are they skeptical? Can they explain why they do or do not believe? Do they ever criticize their beliefs or not? So many questions that need a meticulous analysis of the discourse of our informants and that require common analysis criteria of data, both quantitative and qualitative. In order to comprehend the inner diversity of the various subjective (a)-religious universes, the data was organized into a typology of believing attitudes based on two main criteria. The first is an indicator of the quantitative questionnaire: the question *I know that God exists and I have no doubts about it*. The second comes from

the qualitative data. It occurs that this belief in God is rarely stated so clearly. Taking this fact into account, it was decided to consider the following dichotomies:

1. the subjective declaration to believe or not to believe in something (believer vs. non-believer)
2. to be convinced by ones beliefs or to be moderate about them. (Convinced vs. moderated).

Based on these two criteria, four types of attitudes were developed.

	CONVINCED	MODERATED
BELIEVING	1) A confident and convinced believing attitude	2) A moderate and ambiguous believing attitude
NOT BELIEVING	4) A convinced atheistic attitude	3) A moderate agnostic attitude

Before more clearly defining these four attitudes types, it should be emphasized that inside **each** category, moderation is fundamental. Indeed, it is not because an informant matches a type that the informant *is* the type. As Anne-Sophie Lamine noted,

even the virtuoso believer is not one hundred per cent believer: in everyday life, the religious is not always present and even in religious practices, there are moments of distraction or discrepancy (2008:156, my translation).

Beliefs and belief systems evolve over time and are permeable to the individuals' experiences. Even informants with a convinced believing attitude, may occasionally have questions and doubts about his beliefs. While analyzing, it is important, as a sociologist, to keep in mind that the informants' discourse stays a *discourse of self presentation that occurred during a specific interaction* between a respondent and an interviewer and as such, is partially influenced by the interviewers' questions. Thus, although in order to better understand data it is sometimes necessary to classify it and explain the reality it belongs to, it is also important not to reduce cases to types.

With that being said, we can now define the four attitude types:

A: A confident and convinced believing attitude

The first attitude designates individuals who firmly state that they believe in religious, esoteric or magical elements and consider that those beliefs have a more or less important influence on their everyday life. The beliefs can be inherited, constructed or specifically chosen. They are generally (but not exclusively) linked to the credo of a religious institution, in our cases the traditional churches of Switzerland. The beliefs work as an interpretative principle meaning that the individual bases the interpretation of his everyday life on his beliefs, forecasts his future and explains his past in respect to them.

Michel, a sixty-three year old man, can be used as an example. Throughout the years Michel, socialized in the Catholic faith, has developed a personal system of beliefs that articulate Christian hermetism and esoterism. When asked about his desire to enter the seminar at the age of ten, Michel answered that:

It also always depends on the beliefs that people have, right? Like me, I have a kind of inner certainty about reincarnation. I think that (3) it was something that came from a previous life for me (.) I must have made some sort of repetition, I was probably a priest in a previous life (1) and there it (the desire to enter the seminar) was a kind of repetition. I was repeating my life over again.

What is stunning here is that throughout the entire interview, Michel never uses the term of beliefs for his personal beliefs. He constantly designates them as *"inner certainties"*.

This type of attitude can also be found in Barnabé's account. When he was twenty years old, his father had a severe tractor accident. In what precedes the account, Barnabé explains that this accident raised questions about life and death, the meaning of life and the role of his life on earth. He explains that shortly after the accident he was invited to a meeting eh of evangelization eh where we were told about Jesus Christ, Jesus the Savior, the Seignior and at that moment I realized that yep eh the supernatural exists, death exists (.) It doesn't come from anywhere, besides life doesn't come from anywhere either. All those questions that I had never asked myself before. But from that moment on, I have asked myself those questions, death, life exists, deaths exists. Where does it come

from? The supernatural exists (1) eh they told me about a supernatural God that I had heard about at the time of the catechism but (.) vaguely, in a superficial manner and at that moment I decided that I wanted to know the supernatural God, the God from Jesus Christ, that I wanted to know him, I wanted to know who he was, what he means to me and who I am for him and it is from that moment on that inch by inch I found fundamental answers for my life. I found my answers in Jesus Christ.(Barnabé, 56, farmer, evangelical)

B: A moderate and ambiguous believing attitude

The second attitude is that of informants who claim to have beliefs, but who are more prudent and cautious about them. The beliefs are more latent, and do not systematically condition the individual's everyday life, but appeal to them as they enable them to overcome some contradictions with which they are confronted in their everyday lives. As such, they work as an occasional interpretative principle. The main difference with the previous attitude is that the individuals **always** stay critical and skeptical of their beliefs systems. In this second attitude, there are no solid beliefs. Instead, beliefs often remain blurry and fuzzy (Zinnbauer, 1997) and there seems to be a major tendency towards syncretism. This attitude therefore groups people with various beliefs' systems. For instance people who say they do not believe in God but believe in life after death, or people who enter a church to meditate and think about Buddha.

Julie, a 24 year old student can be quoted in order to illustrate this second attitude. When asked about her way of coping with the recent death of her father, she answered:

I'll tell you how it sort of went for me. First of all I was baptized and confirmed as a Catholic. Since my parents are Portuguese we are Catholic by definition (laughs) but very quickly I found the catechism's class awfully boring so I..., I stopped going. It wasn't very interesting for me. So I had an atheistic period where –um– finally all those stories were completely stupid (laughs) I think that we..., we often go through those kinds of periods when we are teenagers. And then later on, at 18, I made those famous trips to India, those famous trips somewhat initiating where everything is fantastic. And then I got interested in

Buddhism and then –um– that also I think is linked to being a teenager and then this quest for esoterism that is really fashionable nowadays. And then afterwards I started to let go of all of it and am now coming back to Christianity, but, I..., I don't think that I can define myself as a real believer but I try everything in between.

As you can see, Julie moves from one tradition to the other. Her beliefs are ephemeral and her use of the religious can be compared with those of Roof's seekers (Roof 1994, 2000). Confronted with the shocking death of her father two days before Christmas, Julie started looking for answers and explanations in Orthodox Christianity. Her use of religion and spirituality resembles that which Edio Soares conceptualized as the "butinage religieux"¹. With this metaphor, Soares designates the specific process of picking religious or spiritual elements when they are needed, and then dropping them once they have stopped serving their purpose². The "butinage" implies immediate needs and immediate responses and as such, ephemeral systems. Another characteristic of the "butinage" is that it designates individuals who do not seek in a linear manner, but who select their beliefs in a circular way, returning to elements and experiences that they have already tried but since abandoned.

Lea, a 36 year old female Chemist, and self declared "green militant", says that she does not belong to any religion. Rather she develops her own spiritual theories in order to conciliate her two roles. When trying to find answers to her metaphysical questions, Lea explains:

So (3) I think that we, all of us, even though each of us has their own individuality, we are an 'all-in-one'. In order to evolve, there is a need for all the facets of everyone of us, that is to say the good and the bad, but well, let's say, good and bad belongs to us, it belongs to the 'all-in-one', there is a need for all the energies in order to evolve, in order to allow the human, animal and vegetable races to keep on living because (4) the living (2) there is a real part, the visible part and the part eh more ephemeral more (3) a part that we don't grasp, that belongs to

1 The «butinage» designates the activities of the bees that are going from one flower to the next, collecting pollen, but leaving some along the way and keeping some to make into honey.

2 Soares refutes the concept of "bricolage", a concept that implies a substantial result, because in his opinion, this utilitarian way of using religion and spirituality never builds any tangible believing system.

us, it serves the evolution, with no doubt, it serves life. So, well. Me, I lean on some theories like reincarnation for sure. To allow the evolution of the person and to allow the person to live different lives, to live a little bits of all sorts of different situations that will allow you to be a complete being. Then to be able to be, probably nothing, to be able to belong to this energy that make it possible for the living beings to reproduce themselves and keep on living. All living beings. Me, I don't really make any differences between human beings and other living beings.

C: A moderate agnostic attitude

The third type is the attitude of people who present themselves as non-believers but who nevertheless, have mystical, esoteric or magical beliefs (in sum, clearly non institutional beliefs). It also concerns people who claim not to be religious but who acknowledge that religion can be important under certain circumstances and consequently 'leave the door open' to it. Thus in this attitude we find people who clearly define themselves as non-religious, but who baptize their children under the pretext that religion contributes to structuring individual identity. Moreover, they believe that religion can provide a sense of belonging to a community. This third attitude also concerns people who claim to be non-religious, but who believe in the power of 'mother earth' or in a cosmic energy or "*to have faith in their thing*".

This is precisely the case of Blandine, a 63 year old housewife. When asked about her religious socialization, Blandine answered:

I'm not, I mean, I am Catholic but I don't practice my religion. I, yes, I go to church from time to time but I am not keen on it. So. Then I –um– I believe, I believe I have faith but –um– in my own thing. You know what I mean?

When asked what she meant, she revealed that she had a gift of 'magnetism'; that is, she has the power to help, allay or remedy people's sufferings. She said that she was often called upon by hospitals to help men or women suffering from radiology during cancer treatment or people suffering from severe burns. Although, Blandine claims not to be religious, she calls upon specific saints and recites particular prayers.

Another example is Qasim, a 38 year old man. He considers himself a man with no religion, but who nonetheless has questions about life and death. Asked about his opinion about the possibility of life after death, Qasim answered:

Oh that, yes, I think a little bit about it yes but –um– it's not going to bother me (3)
 Yep I ask myself 'Is it', typically, I tell myself it's not possible that I was born in 1970 and –um– I am now close to 40 years old and I tell myself that maybe in 30 or 40 years it will be over and what would I have contributed during those 40 years? What is the purpose? Is the purpose to come here for 70 years? I lead a life that is really quite like that of 95% of the other people, I didn't create anything extraordinary; I didn't invent anything (.) I do my small job 9 hours a day (2) we had children like –um– 90% of the people so I didn't do anything extraordinary did I? And I ask myself 'But what's the point?' Hem? So I tell myself that maybe I already had a previous life? And that maybe I will come back to childhood and relive all those school years and the rest of it in 100 or 200 years? (1) But (.) now am I going to reincarnate into a dog or something else? That, I don't think about it, I don't ask myself the question (1) and (1). No is that all! I tell myself that it is true that when I see that I only have another 40 years to go I tell myself 'If there really is somebody up there that put me here, that allowed me to be born for a precise purpose I say that I don't feel like I accomplished anything. And then I tell myself 'my life has to have a purpose, there must be a reason, then I'll have to come back in 150 or 200 years (75)

D: A convinced atheistic attitude

Finally, the fourth attitude is that of individuals who develop a resolutely non-believing argument. In this last attitude, everything to do with religion will be negatively interpreted: religion is a crutch, religion promotes intolerance, religion is hypocritical, and/or religion incites violence and wars. Individuals who match this attitude present themselves as rational and/or scientific individuals and reject everything that has anything to do with religion or the religious. Gregory, a 70 year old retired architect spontaneously shared his opinion on religion:

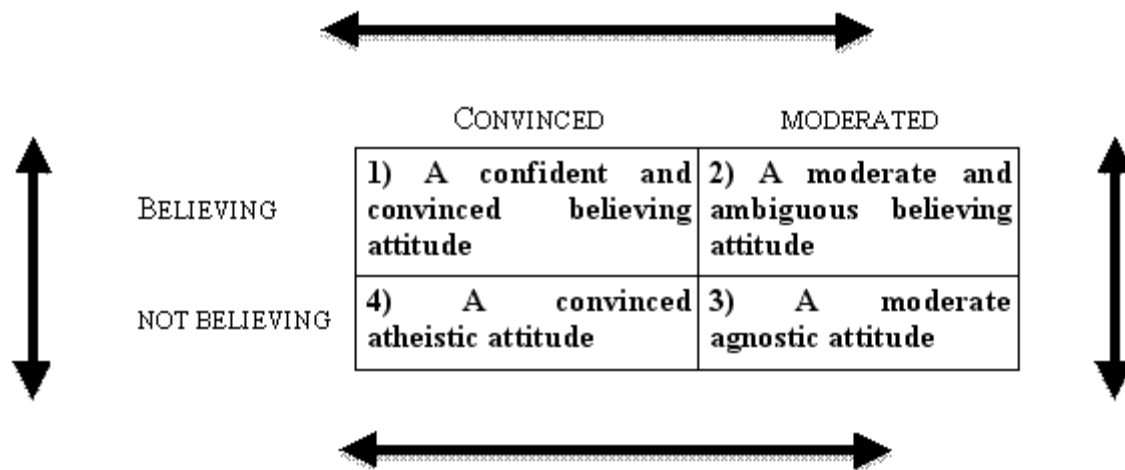
I am not a believer (2) but I ask myself a lot of question about religion because in my opinion, I don't want to use words that are too extreme but it is, it is nevertheless a moral (1) fraud. No, it's just that (2). I think, in my opinion it is a skillful exploitation, excuse me if you are a believer, but it is a skillful exploitation of –um– yes human weakness (36).

Karine, a 68 year old retired teacher, also spoke firmly about her religious identity:

I lost faith little by little I guess. I also think, I think that my literature teacher who was a true atheist also had an influence on me and I think he influenced some of the other pupils too. But I don't think that that's the only reason. Already when I was young I was skeptical and today I am definitely not a Christian anymore, not at all.

Conclusion

Although this typology may be seen as too simplistic, it does have four major interest. Firstly, in the absence of criteria of content (criteria such as specific Christian beliefs or practices) each type allows seizing (or recognition of) the dynamic that the act of believing implies. Far from being a static position, the act of believing evolves through time, age and experiences. This evolution is definitely not linear, rather it is more circular and can move from one direction to another. It is therefore not unheard of, for example, to meet individuals who were a little religious during childhood, then became agnostic or atheist during their teenage years, before coming back to religion for some important moments in life, such as marriage and the birth of children. These same individuals may then seemingly abandon religion in their middle age, returning to religion intermittently, when sickness or an accident affects their families, before finally deciding to not believe in anything.



A second interesting point is that this typology permits grasping some of the blurriness of the ‘in-between’ territories described by Paul Heelas. Individuals, who, at one time or another fit one type of moderate attitude, are specifically in these territories between institutional beliefs and declared atheism. They are non churchgoers, who do not have unequivocal institutional beliefs but, on the other hand, are not really atheist either. They are women and men of various religious backgrounds who encounter metaphysical and existential questions, but who have not yet found adequate responses to these questions. Therefore, a precise analysis of the qualitative data offers opportunities to best describe the territories between institutional religiosity and declared atheism.

A third interesting aspect resides in the difficulty classifying each of the informants. Not all of them fit into a category. The growing sub-population that is neither religious nor unreligious, is a key issue of contemporary sociology of religion. As it was mentioned before, declared atheism and the uses of alternative spiritualities tend to be stable, whereas institutional religiosity is regressing. A close look at the qualitative data tends to explain this interval with a ‘new’ type of social actor, namely the *indifferent* or what David Voas calls the “*fuzzy Christian*” (Voas, 2009). The *indifferent* is the individual who cannot say he believes or does not believe, he simply has no interest in religious matters, believing that religion and spirituality are none of his business. He was never socialized in any religion or spirituality and never had any contact with religious or spiritual persons. In sum, religion does not belong in his world. He neither has a good nor bad opinion about religion or spirituality, as both constitute two totally irrelevant subjects. The notion of “*fuzzy fidelity*” developed by David Voas to designate a

casual loyalty to religious tradition specifically describes social actors for whom religion usually plays a minor role or even no role at all (Voas, 2009:161). In this article Voas articulates a specific typology, expressing characteristics of groups between Christian based religion and Christian based irreligion³. Without taking into account specific confessional criteria such as Christianity, “fuzzy fidelity” also characterizes “the rise and fall” of religion in the two moderated attitudes.

A final point of interest, is that within one type, we can find women and men of various ages and milieus, with diverse faiths and beliefs’ systems. Further, as demonstrated above, we can find both Evangelical and Gnostic informants in the same type (Barnabé and Michel). This typology can also show that declared atheists and the adamant religious believer, develop the same kind of argumentation and both can be as conservative or liberal as the other.

As mentioned in the introduction, the typology proposed in this paper is still under analysis, and to follow in from this study, it would be interesting to challenge it further with quantitative items regarding gender, age, generational effect and education.

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3 In this article David Voas proposes a typology of the population entertaining “fuzzy fidelity” in regards with Christianity. He mentions 1) the conventionally religious divided between a) the actively observant and b) the privately committed 2) the unconventional religious/spiritual divided between c) the sheilaists and d) the popular heterodoxy 3) the nominal adherents divided between e) the natal nominalists, f) the ethnic nominalists and g) the aspirational nominalists and finally 4) the non-religious divided between the h) the agnostics and i) the atheists. The items religious vs. non-religious had been elaborated in regard with ISSP questions. (Voas, 2009:164)

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