

Religious dropouts and converts: who are they?

**Pierre Bréchon, emeritus professor of political science at Sciences Po Grenoble,
researcher at the PACTE laboratory (France)**

The process of secularisation (Bréchon, 2021), which has been underway in Europe since the 1960s, means that some religious people are moving away from their universe of beliefs and practices. The process of disaffection can be slow and gradual. We might think that the process first affects the frequency and regularity of practices¹ and the relativisation of certain religious beliefs. Gradually, religious attendance and personal prayer become rarer and rarer, sometimes to the point of disappearing, and beliefs become increasingly floating. The conception of God is no longer a personal God who takes an interest in every human being, but an impersonal spirit, a vital force that created nature, the great watchmaker (Bréchon, 2023); his existence is often considered a plausible possibility rather than a certainty. A certain openness to a possible transcendence and spirituality may remain, but the grand narrative of religions, particularly Christian denominations, is eroding strongly, especially in younger generations (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2023; Lambert, 2005), as numerous studies have shown that religious change is largely linked to generational replacement (Wittberg, 2021; Dargent, 2017; Bréchon, 2017; Crockett, Voas, 2006). Formal affiliation, seen as a simple sign of family or national belonging, can sometimes remain, while religious beliefs and practices have disappeared, particularly in the Nordic countries where affiliation to Lutheran churches is more a sign of national belonging than a religious one. There is therefore a great deal of religious indifference in Europe today (Quack, Shuh, 2017), particularly in the north and west of the continent.

Disconnections linked to ecclesial events

Shifts can sometimes be brutal, linked to exceptional personal or societal events. For example, the papal condemnation of contraception in the *Humanae Vitae* Encyclical in 1968 was very

¹ As for the Catholic Church, the widespread abandonment of individual confession, initially partly replaced by collective celebrations without individual confession of sins to a priest, was an early sign of the cultural break between a Catholicism that regulated the behaviour of the faithful and a culture of individualisation, i.e. the desire for individual autonomy without control from political, family or religious institutions.

badly received by Catholics who, after the Vatican 2 Council, which had raised hopes of acceptance of the values of modernity by the Catholic institution, did not understand the ban, which prevented couples from using the potential of science to choose the moment when their parental project seemed ready². They understood the papal decision all the less because it came just after an international commission set up by the Pope had issued a positive opinion on medicated contraception. As a result, internal protests saw the decision as illegitimate, the work of an intransigent power³.

From the outset, many Catholic women did not follow the Roman prescription and today, the difference in the use of contraceptive methods according to religion seems very small in Western European countries (Desgrées du Loû, 2015). Other Catholics have probably distanced themselves from their religion because of this regulation of sexuality by their Church. It is very difficult to quantify the phenomenon. The period from 1960 to 1970 saw a sharp drop in weekly worship, which is relatively easy to measure⁴. But it is not clear how much of this decline was specifically due to the ban on contraception. There have been complete and publicly asserted breaks, particularly in Catholic intellectual circles, but there has probably been more silent distancing, a hibernation of religiosity without an asserted break (Grémion, 2010) and which may have been spread out over time⁵.

² Nor did they understand that sexual pleasure only seemed to be allowed in order to have children.

³ This scenario of a decision deemed illegitimate by a significant proportion of Catholics was partly repeated with the publication in 1987 of the instruction *Donum Vitae* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which condemned medically assisted procreation, even between married couples, even though the majority of theologians were in favour of it and John Paul 2 had also declared himself in favour in 1980! But the event had much less impact, as the critical and protesting Catholics had already largely jumped ship and religious indifference led public opinion to give much less importance to Catholic news.

⁴ Yves Lambert (2003) has listed all the French surveys that measured the frequency of the main religious behaviours from the 1960s to the 2000s. A fairly regular decline in church attendance was observed: there was no collapse at any specific period, just a downward trend with modulations due above all to the margins of error. The explanation given by the author for the decline in the 1960s-1970s is rather the start of the "Second French Revolution", a revolution in values (permissive mores, individualisation, anti-authoritarianism, etc.) that Henri Mendras (1988) dated from 1965, in other words from the reaching adulthood of the children of the baby boom and the Trente glorieuses.

⁵ Catherine Grémion (2010) used Hirshman's model of *Voice*, *Exit* and *Loyalty* to analyse reactions to the publication of the encyclical. In her view, there was a lot of Exit and Voice, not much Loyalty. She gives the example of Germany: "In Germany, the practice fell by 30% between 1968 and 1973, while the movement of disaffiliation (or registration on the tax rolls - the *Kirchensteuer* - as a member of a denomination) increased considerably". According to Toscer-Angot (2023), there was a peak in disaffiliations in 1970. Significant numbers of Catholics would have been leaving since 2010, in connection with the sexual abuse scandals that have come to light among the clergy.

The sexual scandals involving priests in recent years have also had a major impact on the Catholic faithful (Hervieu Léger, 2023; Béraud, 2021), leading some to question the sacred status of the clergy, its power and the entire system of governance of the Catholic Church. A movement of official disaffiliation⁶ has been underway in French Catholicism for several years now, and it seems to be gaining momentum since the media coverage of sexual abuse among the clergy. But the move away from religiosity is often much more gradual, linked to changes in value systems.

This movement of distancing oneself from religion is a movement that only concerns some members. So there are a significant number of devotees who will maintain their religiosity in spite of events. And there are also individuals who, despite the secularising global context, are experiencing a journey of increasing involvement in the religious world, a return for people who once had bits of religious socialization or a conversion among people who have been socialised outside religion altogether.

So there can be movement in both directions, in and out, with a core of followers who are little affected by the current situation. This paper seeks to construct a typology to distinguish between those who are constantly religiously affiliated, new followers, those who have always been without religion, and the more recently disengaged. To do this, I use the *European Values Survey* (EVS) carried out in 34 countries between 2017 and 2020.

Construction of the typology of religious/non-religious itineraries

The typology could be operationalised on the basis of the declaration of membership of a religion (Yes/No), followed for people who answered No by an additional question: were they members in the past (Yes/No), which makes it possible to distinguish relatively recent non-religious people from those who have always been non-religious (table 1).

⁶ Catholicism is refusing to de-baptise people who wish to do so, arguing that baptism is a definitive mark. However, it did accept that a note should be made in the baptismal registers indicating the baptized person's wish to leave. We could therefore count this movement of disaffiliation as affecting only militant and protesting people. But in France, the national Catholic authorities are not releasing any figures on the subject. According to estimates by journalists, there were 2,000 requests in 2019, at the start of the priest paedophilia cases, compared with 1,000 in 2008. See Cécile Bouanchaud, "Trop c'est trop" : face aux scandales sexuels dans l'Eglise, ils renient leur baptême", *Le Monde*, 23 May 2019.

Table 1. Members now and before (EVS 2017-2020, 34 European countries)

<i>In % of total</i>		Member before		Average
		Yes	No	
Member now	yes	Affiliated*		62
	no	Former member 12	Never member 27	38

* Among those who are affiliated, we cannot distinguish between those who have always been affiliated and those who have converted.

This typology shows that more than a quarter of Europeans have never belonged to a religion and that 12% are no longer involved. But it poses an initial problem: we don't know whether members have always been members or whether they joined later, through conversion. There is therefore no way of identifying converts with the 2017 EVS surveys, whereas this was possible with earlier waves (Bréchon, 2018).

It poses a second but less serious problem: affiliation has quite different meanings in different parts of Europe. In countries with national churches, or at least churches that have traditionally maintained close links with the state, membership may be more a marker of national identity than an indicator of religiosity. This is particularly the case in the Nordic countries, which are highly secularised, but where membership levels have remained high because of this significance. In these countries, in 2017, 69% were members, 20% were former members and only 11% were never members. Those who have always been secularised are therefore very much under-estimated according to the criterion of membership.

I have therefore preferred to construct the typology on the basis of two questions on the frequency of attendance at religious services, at the age of 12 and today. Each variable is dichotomised by considering as members all those who attend services at least some of the time during the year, and as non-members those who attend only once a year or never at all (table 2). A distinction is thus made between those who have always attended, those who are new, those who have given up and those who have never attended. Religious practice is a fairly

good indicator, through concrete behaviour, of the degree of integration into the religious world, which is ultimately more important than a formal declaration of belonging. Religious non-involvement concerns 58% of the population, whereas the criterion of membership was less selective, isolating only 38%.

Table 2. Involvement in a religion according to the criterion of practice (EVS, 34 countries)

		Religious involvement at age 12		
		Yes (sometimes a year)	No (once a year or never)	Average
Current involvement in a religion	Yes (sometimes a year)	Always involved 36 %	Newly involved 6 %	42
	No (once or never)	Disinvolved 22 %	Never involved 35 %	58
Ensemble		58	42	100

Two groups dominate: those who have always been involved and those who have never been involved. Each of them represent a good third of the European population This shows that people's current religious position is very closely linked to that of their youth. There is a great deal of reproduction of religious involvement over the life-course. If people were not practising their religion at the age of 12, this is generally a sign that their parents were already secularised, being either outside the religious world or in a gradual process of exit. So we can see that there is reproduction from one generation to the next for both the religious and the non-religious.

This classification is obviously a caricature, because it ignores a long period of time (from the age of 12 to the present day) during which individuals may have varied in their attitudes to religion⁷. But it is a useful caricature for grasping the major trends, with a fairly strong process of disengagement over the course of a lifetime (22% of Europeans) and a much weaker movement of conversion to religion (6%).

⁷ We know that a certain number of people abandon their religious practice when they are young and may return to it when they have children and think it useful to give them a "religious education" (Steggerda, 1993).

Verification: a typology closely linked to the degree of religiosity

Let's now check the religious attitudes in the 4 groups of the typology. I have constructed a religiosity index based on 10 indicators⁸ (table 3). With an average level of religiosity of 3.9, it is clear that religiosity is much higher among those involved and much lower among those disengaged. However, the newly involved are slightly less religious than those who have always been involved, and the disengaged are slightly more religious than those who have always been disengaged. So the newly involved are not hyper-religious and the recently disengaged are not fanatical irreligious. The myth of the hyper-mobilised neophyte should therefore be strongly relativised. Rather, they are people who are on the move and evolving, but who remain a little distant from established identities, whether religious or irreligious.

The rest of the table shows the same pattern for three specific dimensions of religiosity - intensity of prayer, belief in God⁹ and belief in a future beyond this world¹⁰: believers and religious practising are over-represented in the two groups of involved and not-believers and practising in the 2 groups of disengaged.

Table 3. Typology of religious involvement according to religious variables (EVS, 34 European countries)

<i>In horizontal %</i> (for the last 3 parts of the table)	Always involved	Newly involved	Disengaged	Never involved
Average index of religiosity (from 0 to 10)	6.1	5.4	2.7	2.1
Average	36	6	22	35
Prayer : weekly	67	10	2	12
Not very often	38	6	26	29
Never	6	2	29	62
God: strong belief	64	10	11	15
average	35	6	26	33
No belief	6	2	30	63
Extra-mundane future: strong belief	62	19	12	17
average	39	5	26	30
weak	16	4	30	52

⁸ Attend a religious service at least once a month, feel religious, believe in God, believe in a personal God or life force, believe in life after death, believe in reincarnation, say that God is important in their lives, pray at least once a week, think it is important to encourage religious faith in children, belong to a religious organisation (Cronbach's alpha=0.82). On this index, which ranges from 0 to 10, an average is calculated for each individual, then each group.

⁹ Believing in God, in a personal God or life force, finding God important in your life.

¹⁰ Belief in life after death, in heaven and hell.

A typology sensitive to national and religious contexts

Clearly, this typology differs considerably from one part of Europe to another, and according to the religion to which people belong (table 4). The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) are the most secularized: over half the population has never been involved in religion. If we add those who have distanced themselves from their religion, we obtain a total of 72% who are not involved in religious attendance. Western Europe (Germany, Austria, France, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Switzerland) is not very different today (70% outside religious circles), but the secularization movement is more recent (35% disengaged).

Table 4. Typology of religious involvement according to geographical area and religion (EVS, 34 countries)

<i>In horizontal %</i>	Always involved	Newly involved	Disinvolved	Never involved
Averagee	36	6	22	35
Nordic countries	21	7	19	53
Western Europe	27	3	35	35
Southern Europe	50	2	28	20
Eastern Europe inside EU	61	5	14	20
Eastern Europe outside EU	37	20	6	38
Russia	26	13	5	57
Catholic	67	2	23	8
Protestant	43	7	29	22
Orthodox	48	19	7	26
Muslim	44	14	6	36
Other	48	8	20	24
No religion	8	3	28	62

Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal) is clearly more religious, with half the population always involved. Eastern Europe within the EU (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) is even more religious (61% always involved). Non-EU Eastern Europe (Albania, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bosnia, Belarus, Georgia, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia) is a little less involved, but is characterized by a high proportion of new believers, which can probably be explained by the fairly broad freedom of worship regained after the end of the Communist era. Russia appears quite specific compared to other non-EU countries : there have never been many churchgoers, and the return to

religiosity after 1991 was more limited. 57% of Russians appear to be not attending, and although Orthodoxy is the majority religion, it concerns only 44% of the population.

Beyond the differences by zone, we could look at the situation for each country. A comparison between France and Poland is illuminating. In the former, only 20% of the population have always been involved and 2% are newly involved, while 40% are recently disengaged and 38% have always been disengaged. The latter, on the other hand, is 81% always involved, 1% newly involved, 15% recently disengaged and 3% disengaged from childhood. We have here two typical countries: France has experienced a long-standing secularization process that has been prolonged over the last few decades, resulting in a very high level of de-involvement, in line with the transformation of societal values; Poland, on the other hand, is a country that has remained strongly marked by Catholicism and very little secularization. The process of distancing oneself from the dominant religion has only just begun, so there are virtually no permanent disinvolved and only 15% recent disimplicants. Our typology therefore functions in part as a barometer of the level of secularization.

In the second half of Table 3, we can see that Catholicism seems to reproduce itself fairly well from one generation to the next (69% involved, almost all of them for their entire lives). The same is true of the Orthodox, even if 19% did not attend church in their youth because of communism, but have since returned to it (67% involved today). Muslims are less likely to be involved (58% overall). Protestants are the most marked by internal secularization¹¹ and, according to our typology, are only 50% involved. This is consistent with this denomination's emphasis on modernity and individual choice. Protestantism is therefore particularly fragile (Willaime, 1992). These differences in reproduction from one generation to the next can vary from country to country. In France and a number of other Western countries, Islam reproduces very well and better than Catholicism or Protestantism (Bréchon, 2018; Drouhot, Simon, Tiberj, 2023).

¹¹ This does not apply to the Protestant evangelical movement, which is growing rapidly almost everywhere in the world.

Obviously, geographical area and religion are two related but not redundant variables. Most Orthodox are in Eastern Europe, Protestants in the West, and Catholics tend to be in Western Europe, but are also very numerous in Poland, Lithuania and Croatia, countries where religion is still very prevalent.

From a socio-demographic point of view, gender and age are much more decisive than social position

Taking into account the main socio-demographic variables (Table 5) confirms, first of all, the stronger connivance of women with religiosity and of men with non-religiosity. What is most interesting is that this connection applies not only to those who have always been involved or disengaged, but also to those who have changed. Newly involved people are more likely to be women than men. At the same time, men disengage slightly more than women.

Table 5. Typology of religious involvement according to socio-demographic variables (EVS, 34 European countries)

<i>In horizontal %</i>	Always involved	Newly involved	Disinvolved	Never involved
Average	36	6	22	35
Male	32	5	24	48
Female	41	8	21	31
Age : 18-34 years	32	5	19	44
35-54 years	35	7	20	38
55 and other	41	7	26	27
Social position very low	37	7	20	36
fairly low	36	6	20	38
fairly high	34	5	27	33
Social position very high	35	5	26	33

There is also an age effect, or rather a generation effect. In the younger generations, there is a higher proportion of people who have never been involved, i.e., who have probably not been socialized to religion and reproduce the indifference or even rejection of religions. Older people, on the other hand, who are more religiously educated, are also more faithful to their original religiosity.

Finally, it should be noted that there is virtually no link between this typology and the social position of individuals. The latter is measured using the *International Socio-Economic Index*

(ISEI), which takes into account occupation, income level and qualifications, controlled by age. The working classes are slightly more religious than the privileged (Bréchon, 2023a and 2023b): they include slightly more people involved in religion, which contradicts the received idea of strong elective affinities between the bourgeoisie and religions.

Depending on the degree of religious involvement or withdrawal, differences according to the values of individualisation and individualism

Let's now look at the value system of those involved and those disengaged on the basis of 2 synthetic indices enabling us to assess their overall level of individualisation and individualism. Contrary to what we might think based on common representations, individualisation and individualism are two very different major value dimensions - too often lumped together in the single term of individualism - but they give a great deal of structure to value systems (Bréchon, 2023c)¹². Individualisation corresponds to the desire for autonomy and individual choice in all areas of life, whereas individualism refers to a tendency to withdraw into one's private interests, based on the principle of "every man for himself". Individualisation is opposed to traditional values based on duty, conformity and respect for authorities. Individualism is opposed to altruism and the values of solidarity.

The individualisation index is based on 15 indicators. 5 relate to the liberalism of morals: finding homosexuality, abortion, divorce, euthanasia and suicide justified. 3 concern the meaning of work: finding it important to have initiative in one's work, to be able to achieve something, to have responsibilities. 5 relate to qualities to be encouraged in children: independence, a sense of responsibility, imagination, tolerance and respect for others, determination and perseverance. Finally, there is a question on priority objectives: valuing freedom of expression and the desire to participate in public decision-making. All these indicators provide an overall measure of individuals' desire for autonomy, without mechanically following the norms laid down by the various authorities (religions, State, media, families, etc.).

¹² I had already dealt with this dichotomy between individualisation and individualism on the 2008 data (Bréchon, 2014).

The individualism index comprises 17 indicators. 9 are derived from a battery of questions measuring lack of interest in different categories of the population: not feeling concerned by the living conditions of people in the neighbourhood, the region, fellow citizens, Europeans, humanity as a whole, but also the elderly, the unemployed, immigrants, the sick or the disabled. 2 are indicators of depoliticisation: not finding politics important in one's life, not being interested in politics. 4 concern low participation in protest (never or rarely signing petitions, demonstrating, going on strike, boycotting products, etc.). Finally, not being a member of associations and not wishing to financially support actions against environmental pollution. All these indicators measure an attitude of withdrawal both from helping others, from taking an interest in social problems and collective action to improve our collective future.

The analysis of EVS data shows that these two major attitudinal dimensions are in fact orthogonal and that the more individualised people are, the less individualistic they tend to be. Individualised people are more open to others. Individualisation and individualism are therefore in tension, and it is very interesting to consider their relationship with the typology of religious and non-religious groups (table 6).

Tableau 6. Typologie de l'implication religieuse en fonction des indices individualisation et d'individualisme (EVS, 34 pays européens)

<i>In horizontal %</i>	Always involved	Newly involved	Disengaged	Never involved
Average	36	6	22	35
Individualisation : low	44	8	15	32
middle	33	4	28	35
high	22	3	36	40
Individualism : low	38	5	28	29
middle	38	6	26	30
high	34	7	20	39

The typology is very strongly linked to the level of individualisation ($V=0.20$)¹³. People with a high level of individualisation are very often very distant from religions, especially if they have

¹³ Within the individualisation index, indicators on the relationship to sexuality and the body are even more strongly linked to the typology ($V=0.28$).

never been involved. On the other hand, people with a low level of individualisation, who support traditional values, authority and order, are often lifelong followers of religion.

The relationship is much weaker with individualism ($V=0.09$). This can probably be explained in part by the different orientations of religions according to countries and geographical areas, and in part by national cultures, as shown in table 7, which presents the relationship between involvement/dis-involvement and high individualism by geographical area.

Table 7. Typology of religious involvement *for highly individualistic people* according to geographical area (EVS, 34 European countries)

<i>In horizontal %</i>	Always involved	Newly involved	Disinvolved	Never involved
Strong individualism	34	7	20	39
Northern Europe	17	7	20	56
Western Europe	20	2	37	42
<i>Southern Europe</i>	51	2	28	18
<i>Eastern Europe inside UE</i>	61	4	16	19
<i>Eastern Europe outside UE</i>	35	18	6	42
Russia	26	13	4	57

In the most religious geographical areas (Eastern Europe inside and outside the EU apart from Russia, Southern Europe as shown in table 3), the level of individualism among religious people is high. In the less religious countries (Northern and Western Europe), however, this level is very low. In these countries, the high level of individualism is concentrated among people who are never involved or who are disengaged.

The conception of relations between men and women is very closely linked to the values of individualisation¹⁴. The more individualised people are, the more they are in favour of gender equality and the absence of differentiated roles for men and women in the family and society ($V=0.46$). It is therefore quite normal to also observe a relationship between the conception of male/female relations and typology (table 8).

¹⁴ Also showed by Welzel (2013 and 2014).

Table 8. Typology of religious involvement according to the conception of relations between men and women (EVS, 34 European countries)

<i>In horizontal %</i>	Always involved	Newly involved	Disinvolved	Never involved
Average	36	6	22	35
Equal relationships/sharing of tasks	32	4	28	35
Unequal relationships/different roles	41	9	14	35

Those involved in religion are more in favour of differentiated relationships, whereas the disengaged are rather in favour of equality. It is possible that the distancing from one's religion can be explained in part by a conflict of values between what the religious world conveys in terms of male/female relations and the egalitarian orientations of the people who are distancing themselves from their religion. On the other hand, the new people involved are more in favour of different roles like those who have always be involved. This model will be found for many values: the newly involved and disengaged from their socialisation have almost similar values to those who have always been involved and disengaged.

Religious involvement, disengagement and political values

The relationship between the typology and political values is actually weaker than with individualisation, sexuality, the family and relations between the sexes (table 9). This can probably be explained by the importance of cultural differences between countries and by the different orientations of different denominations and even of the same denomination in different countries.

Table 9. Typology of religious involvement according to political values (EVS, 34 European countries)

<i>In horizontal %</i>	Always involved	Newly involved	Disinvolved	Never involved
Average	36	6	22	35
Left-leaning	29	5	28	39
Right wing	42	7	20	31
Confidence in institutions : strong	43	7	21	29
Confidence in institutions : low	33	5	25	38
Satisfied with the system of government	40	6	21	33
Dissatisfied with system of government	33	5	25	37
Democracy: involvement of religions				
Essential	48	9	13	30
Not essential	33	5	26	36
Political system: exclusively democratic	35	6	24	36
In favour of 2/3 authoritarian systems	42	7	18	33
Nationalism: strong	40	7	20	33
Nationalism: weak	33	5	25	39
Xenophobia: excludes 1-4 ethno-religious categories	41	8	16	36
Excludes none of these categories from neighbourhood	35	6	25	35

Nevertheless, in terms of individuals' overall political orientation, measured on a scale from left (1) to right (10), there are differences across all the countries surveyed: those involved are more likely to say they are right-wing and those who are not involved are more likely to say they are left-wing. There is also a significant difference in the degree of trust in institutions: those involved are more trusting and those disengaged are more distrustful. Those involved are more satisfied with the way the country's political system works than the disengaged.

In a series of questions on what is essential in a democracy, we looked at the responses to one item: "Religious authorities ultimately interpret the laws". We looked at the two extremes of the responses (1-4 and 7-10). Significantly more of those involved in religion would like their religion to be able to control political power than those who are not involved, who are slightly more in favour of a secular democracy where religions should remain within their own sphere and not seek to influence political power based on a democratic vote.

Another question concerns 4 political systems considered good or bad: a democracy, a system in which experts decide, a military government, a strongman who does not have to worry about parliament or elections. The "exclusive democrats", who support democracy but reject other systems, make up only 38% of the population, 36% also accept a non-democratic system and 26% accept 2 or 3 of them. The relationship with typology is weak, but there is nevertheless a more frequent acceptance of non-democratic systems among those who have always been involved.

There is also a link, although not a very strong one at the level of the survey as a whole, with nationalism, which is slightly more developed among those who have always been involved. The link with xenophobia is more or less the same. As nationalism and xenophobia are linked, it is normal that there should also be a relationship with typology. Those who have always been involved are therefore both more nationalistic and more xenophobic. On the other hand, the recent religiously disengaged are less often xenophobic. The strong presence of those who have always been involved among the nationalists and xenophobes should raise questions for religious institutions: according to their values, they should be open to foreigners. Obviously national histories, which have often highlighted the role of religions in the construction of the nation state, can explain this gap between principles and their implementation.

The construction of a typology of involvement and disinvolvement in a religion shows that the religious positioning of individuals owes much to that of their family and their socialisation. However, over the course of their lives, there are changes in this dimension of their identity, changes that are more frequent in Western and Southern Europe, whereas stability is stronger throughout Eastern Europe because of the prevalence of inherited religion, but also in the Nordic countries because of the long history of secularisation: it is now non-religion that is a constant in the lives of a fairly large majority of Scandinavians.

The religious evolution of individuals is most often in the direction of disimplication linked to the process of secularisation and the rise of individualisation. The culture of individual autonomy and control over their lives does not sit well with a religious culture based on duties to be respected and subjection to an often sacralised religious authority.

Religious involvement goes hand in hand with traditional values in terms of the family, sexuality and the body. Links with the political world are more limited, even though religions favour right-wing values, order and conformity towards authorities and institutions, while the disaffected are more critical and value democracy more highly.

People who have distanced themselves from their original religion and those who have moved closer to a religious universe are not religious extremists, but rather people whose value system is more in line with the universe of stable, unchanging groups.

It is not possible to define the sense of causality in religious itineraries. Is it the evolution of values that leads to a change in religious positioning, or is it religious mobility that causes the value system as a whole to evolve? In fact, there is probably a wide variety of individual motivations in the itineraries that qualitative interviews could highlight. What is certain is that religious or irreligious positions and value systems are closely intertwined. Events such as the rejection of contraception in the 1970s and, more recently, the sexual scandals involving clerics who were relatively protected by their hierarchy, only amplify the distancing from religious institutions and the revolution in values.

Bibliographie

Béraud Céline, 2021. *Le Catholicisme français à l'épreuve des scandales sexuels*, Seuil, 2021.

Bréchon Pierre, 2023a. « Les milieux populaires en Europe : quelles croyances et pratiques religieuses ? », dans Darteville Patrice (dir.), *Pourquoi croit-on en Dieu ?* Bruxelles, Association Belge des Athées éditions, p. 105-131.

Bréchon Pierre, 2023b. « Les invisibles: Religious and Political Values among different Social Classes », in Polak Regina, Rohs Patrick (eds.), *Values - Politics – Religion: The European Values Study. In depth Analysis – Interdisciplinary Perspectives – Future prospects*, Springer Cham, August, p. xxx-xxx.

Bréchon Pierre, 2023c. « Montée de l'individualisation, mais régression de l'individualisme ! », dans Bréchon Pierre (dir.), *Les Européens et leurs valeurs. Entre individualisme et individualisation*, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, p. 271-287.

Bréchon Pierre, Robert Max-Valentin, 2023d. « Un sentiment national puissant, un sentiment européen limité », dans Bréchon Pierre (dir.), *Les Européens et leurs valeurs. Entre individualisme et individualisation*, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, p. 179-190.

Bréchon Pierre, 2021. « Sécularisation, théories et empirie en Europe », *L'Année sociologique*, vol 71/2, p. 301-336.

Bréchon Pierre, 2018. « La transmission des pratiques et croyances religieuses d'une génération à l'autre », *Revue de l'OFCE*, n° 156, p. 11-27.

Bréchon Pierre, 2014. « Individualisation et individualisme dans les sociétés européennes », dans Bréchon Pierre, Gonthier Frédéric (dir.), *Les valeurs des Européens. Evolutions et clivages*, Armand Colin, p. 221-239.

Crockett, Alasdair, Voas David, 2006. "Generations of Decline: Religious Change in 20th-Century Britain", *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 45/4, p. 567-584.

Cuchet Guillaume, 2015. « La crise du sacrement de pénitence dans le catholicisme français des années 1960-1970 », *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, n° 3, p. 397-428 (<https://doi.org/10.4000/rhr.8414>).

Dargent Claude, 2017. « Religious Change, public Space and Beliefs in Europe », in Bréchon Pierre, Gonthier Frédéric (dir.), *European Values. Trends and Divides Over Thirty Years*, Leiden: Brill, p. 104-122.

Desgrées du Loû Annabel, 2015. "Contraception : les couples et l'Eglise font chambre à part", *Etudes* n° 11, novembre, p. 31-42.

Drouhot Lucas, Simon Patrick, Tiberj Vincent, 2023. « La diversité religieuse en France : transmissions intergénérationnelles et pratiques selon les origines », in *Immigrés et descendants d'immigrés en France*, coll. « Insee Références », p. 39-48.

Grémion Catherine, 2010. « La décision dans l'Eglise. Contraception, procréation assistée, avortement : tris moments clefs », *Esprit*, février, p. 122-133.

Lambert Yves, 2003. « Religion : développement du hors-piste et de la randonnée », dans Bréchon Pierre (dir.), *Les valeurs des Français*, Armand Colin, p. 164-194.

Lambert Yves, 2005. « Un regain religieux chez les jeunes d'Europe de l'Ouest et de l'Est », dans Galland Olivier (dir.), *Les jeunes Européens et leurs valeurs*, Paris: La Découverte, p. 65-91. <https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.galla.2005.01.0065>

[Mendras Henri, 1988. *La seconde Révolution française, 1965-1984*, Gallimard.](#)

Portier Philippe, Willaime Jean-Paul, 2021. *La religion dans la France contemporaine. Entre sécularisation et recomposition*, Armand Colin.

Quack Johannes, Schuh Cora (eds.), 2017. *Religious Indifference New Perspectives from Studies on Secularization and Nonreligion*, Springer.

Steggerda Moniek, 1993. Religion and Social Position of Women and Men, *Social Compass*, vol. 40/1, p. 65-73.

Toscer-Angot Sylvie, 2023. "Les Eglises allemandes ne fournissent plus les ressources pour donner un sens à ce que vivent les individus", *Le Monde*, 5 mai.

Voas David, 2009. « The rise and fall of fuzzy fidelity in Europe », *European Sociological Review*, vol 25/2, April, p. 155-168 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcn044>).

Welzel Christian, 2013. *Freedom Rising. Human Empowerment and the Quest of emancipation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Welzel Christian, Moreno Alvarez Alejandro, 2014, "Enlightening People. The Spark of Emancipative Values", in Dalton Russell J. and Welzel Christian (eds.), *The Civic Culture Transformed: from Allegiant to Assertive Citizens*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 59-88.

Wilkins-Laflamme Sarah, 2023. *Religion, Spirituality and Secularity among Millennials. The Generation Shaping American and Canadian Trends*. Routledge.

Willaime Jean-Paul, 1992. *La précarité protestante. Sociologie du protestantisme contemporain*, Genève, Labor et Fides.

Wittberg Patricia, 2021. « Generational change in Religion and Religious Practice: a Review Essay », *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 63, p. 461-482.

Abstract

The process of secularization at work in Europe can be studied by focusing on the group of "dropouts" and exiters. But secularization does not prevent itineraries of "return to religion" for some people.

So, the objective of this paper is to try to identify these two groups - dropouts and "returners-converts" - from existing quantitative data and to understand who they are and what their value system is. Both the religious dropout and return could be linked to changes in the overall value system of individuals.

To address this issue, we use data from the *European Values Study* (EVS). Rather than constructing our target groups by cross-referencing current religious affiliation with past affiliation (this procedure is shown to be unsatisfactory), we use religious attendance today and at age 12. This allow us to distinguish between those who have always practiced, those who are new, those who have lost their practice and those who have never practiced. Then this typology is crossed with a series of value dimensions, notably individualization and individualism.

Décrocheurs religieux et convertis : qui sont-ils ?

Le processus de sécularisation à l'œuvre en Europe peut s'étudier en concentrant l'attention sur le groupe des « décrocheurs ». Mais la sécularisation n'empêche pas des parcours de conversion et de « retour au religieux » chez certaines personnes.

L'objectif de cette communication est donc d'essayer d'identifier ces deux groupes – décrocheurs et « revenants-convertis » à partir de données quantitatives existantes et de comprendre qui ils sont et quel est leur système de valeurs. Le décrochage tout comme le retour religieux pourraient être liés à des évolutions de l'ensemble du système de valeurs des individus concernés.

Pour traiter cette question, on utilise les données de la European Values Study (EVS). Plutôt que de construire nos groupes-cibles en croisant l'appartenance religieuse actuelle et l'affiliation autrefois (on montre que cette procédure est peu satisfaisante), on utilise l'assistance au culte aujourd'hui et à 12 ans. On peut ainsi distinguer les pratiquants de toujours, les pratiquants nouveaux, ceux qui ont perdu la pratique et ceux qui n'ont jamais pratiqué. Cette typologie est ensuite croisée avec une série de dimensions de valeur, notamment l'individualisation et l'individualisme.