THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF RELIGION OF MALTESE UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS

Abstract

Social representations is a relatively new area of research which is rapidly
becoming an important tool in understanding social behavior. In this chapter we
will be using this theory to understand how university students in Malta look
upon religion. A self-administered questionnaire was given to a random sample of
650 students at the University of Malta, of which 421 completed the
questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 35 questions about religious
attitudes and behavior, and also included the Post-Critical Belief Scale (Duriez et
al., 2005). The data were subjected to statistical analysis. The results were used to
identify the different social representations which students had of religion. The
implications for understanding how religious beliefs correlate with religious
behavior among students in tertiary education will be discussed.

Introduction

As early as the beginning of the 20th century the founding fathers of psychology Sigmund Freud,
Stanley Hall, William James and Wilhelm Wundt and others studied Religion and religious
experience from a psychological point of view. The term 'psychology of religion' seems to have
been first used by Stanley Hall in 1881 however many consider William James's "The Varieties
of Religious Experience" written in 1902 as one of the first important contributions to
psychological research on religion and religious beliefs (Belzen, 2005). Another important
contribution to the study of religion was the work by Wilhelm Wundt. His ten volume
Wolkerpsykologie is considered to be a milestone in the study and development of social
psychology especially European social psychology (Farr, 1996). Volumes 4, 5 and 6 are about
the psychology of religion. Although Wundt is considered to be the founding father of
experimental psychology, he argued that higher mental processes, objectified in such cultural
manifestations as language, myth and religion, could be understood only by means of the
historical and ethnographic methods of Folk Psychology (Wulff, 1997, p31).

More recent works on the psychology of religion by, for example Bateson et al.(1993), Wulff
(1997), Argyle, (2000) and Fontaine et al. (2003), use various tools to study the role of religion

in a person's life. In this chapter we will use a questionnaire to study the groundbreaking work by Wulff (1997) who argued that there are four main approaches to religious beliefs that can be captured on the basis of two underlying dimensions. In order to measure these different approaches and their underlying dimensions, the shortened version of Post-Critical Belief Scale developed by Duriez et al., 2005 was used. In addition, we relied on the theory of social representations to explain the metaphors used by participants that fall within these four approaches. Specifically we will study the religious beliefs of a sample of Maltese university students. Malta is a small country in the Mediterranean with a population of 400,000 people. More than 98% of the population is baptized in the Roman Catholic Church (World Factbook, 2008) and around 51% attend Church services regularly (Discern, 2005). Many of the Maltese people are going through a change in the way they look upon religion (Tabone, 1995). This change is perhaps even more pronounced among university students who are in constant interaction with foreign students who come to study at the University of Malta as well as other young people they meet through student exchanges and through their leisure travels. Students are also in contact with other people from all over the world through the Internet. As a result of this cultural interaction, students' views on religion are very different from what they were even just five years ago (Tabone et al., 2003, Bartolo et al., 2009). One of the objectives of this study is to find out what religion means to this sample of university students today and whether these perceptions can be described using the two dimensional scheme put forward by Wulff (1997). This is then followed by studying the social representations which these groups of students have of religion and an attempt is made to associate these social representations with Wulff's scheme.

Wulff's framework to describe approaches towards religion

Wulff (1997) suggested that attitudes towards religion can be understood by taking into consideration two important dimensions. The first dimension describes whether people accept the existence of God or some other transcendental Being or whether they live by other guiding principles such as, for example, science. This dimension, referred to by Wulff as the Inclusion vs Exclusion of Transcendence dimension, captures the extent of the religiosity or spirituality of the person. The second dimension describes how consistently the expressions of religious faith such as beliefs, images and rituals, are understood in a literal or symbolic way. This dimension is referred to as the Literal vs Symbolic Dimension. According to Wulff, these two dimensions,

Inclusion vs Exclusion of Transcendence and the Literal vs Symbolic dimension, describe the experience of religion and religious beliefs in a person's life. A person could fall in one of the four quadrants created by these two dimensions. In a later study, Duriez et al. 2007, describe these same four quadrants using terminology as described in Figure 1.
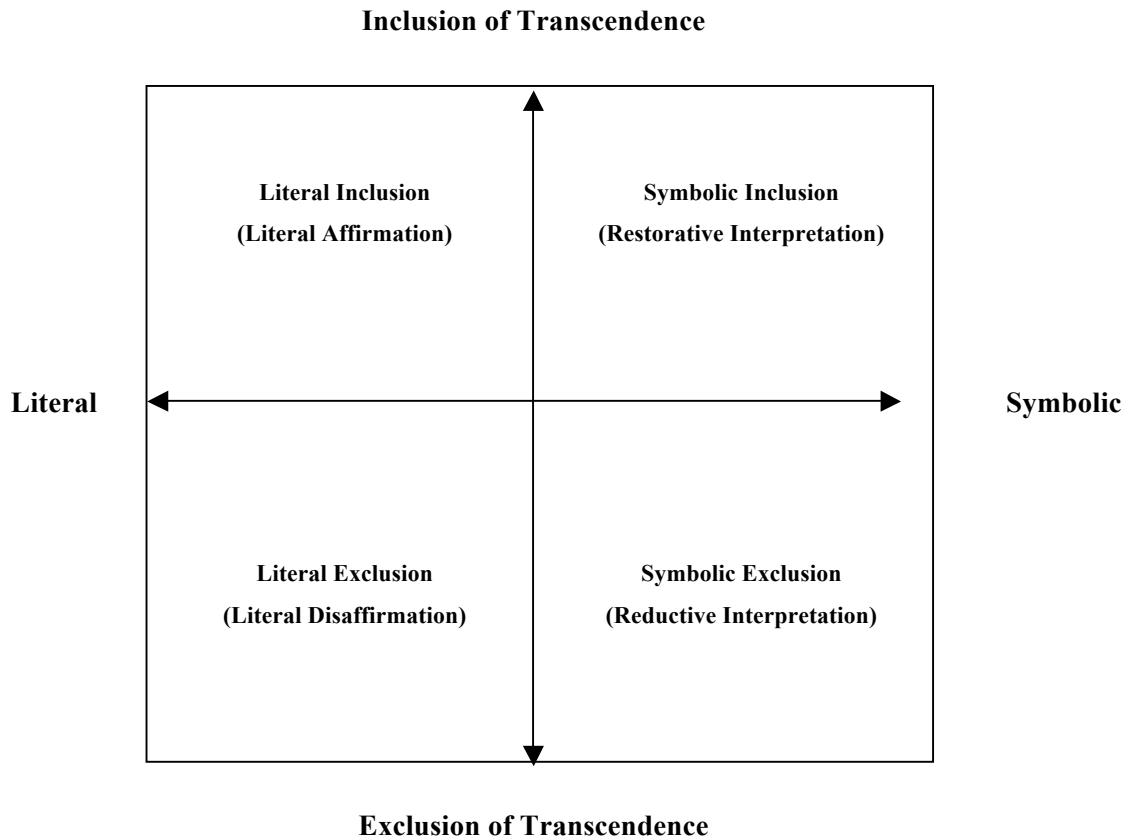
Inclusion of Transcendence

Literal Inclusion **(Literal Affirmation)**	**Symbolic Inclusion** **(Restorative Interpretation)**
Literal Exclusion **(Literal Disaffirmation)**	**Symbolic Exclusion** **(Reductive Interpretation)**

Literal ⟷ **Symbolic**

Exclusion of Transcendence

Figure 1: Wulff's two dimensions describing attitudes towards religion

According to Wulff, people who fall into the quadrant called "Literal Affirmation" (or Literal Inclusion) can be described as intellectually immature and showing signs of "naïve credulity". Some of the people in this group may embrace religious fundamentalism but those who are nearer the centre may not be particularly conservative. Like people falling in the previously mentioned quadrant, people in the quadrant "Literal Disaffirmation" (or Literal Exclusion) also interpret religious language in a literal way. However these persons reject what is written or said in the Bible and other religious texts. These people tend to be more intellectual and this group

would embrace those who loose sight of the possibility that religious words and ideas may refer to truths which must be understood metaphorically. The group of people who fall within the quadrant "Reductive Interpretation" (or Symbolic Exclusion) also deny the existence of the transcendental however they go beyond this denial and claim a privileged perspective on the meaning of religion's myths and rituals. Finally, the quadrant which Wulff termed "Restorative Interpretation" (or Symbolic Inclusion) is made up of people who believe in the existence of a transcendental realm but, unlike people in the Literal Inclusion quadrant who take religious language for granted, they search for the symbolic meaning of religious objects and ideas. They are usually complex, socially sensitive, insightful and relatively unprejudiced. For a more detailed discussion of the four approaches the reader is referred to Wulff (1997).

Building on the work of Wulff, Hutsebaut (1996) constructed a 33-item scale called the Post-Critical Belief Scale (PCBS) which was designed to access a person's approach to Christian religion. The PCBS was subjected to tests to assess its construct validity. Duriez, Fontaine and Hutsebaut (2000) found that the subscales provide accurate measures of Wulff's four approaches to religion while Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten and Hutsebaut (2003) have shown that when individual differences in acquiescence are corrected for, two components that can be interpreted in terms of Inclusion vs Exclusion of Transcendence and Literal vs Symbolic are sufficient to explain the relation between the PCBS items. Recently Duriez, Soenens & Hutsebaut (2005) proposed a shortened version of the scale with 18 short items. This version correlates strongly with the version proposed by Fontaine et al. (2003), with the correlation coefficients between scores on the long and the short scales greater than 0.90 (Duriez, Soenens & Hutsebaut, 2005).

The work of Wulff 1997, and Duriez et al. (2005) are the basis for this study of the social representations which university students have of religion and religious beliefs. The short form of the Post Critical Belief Scale was used to segment the students into four groups. Following this, the social representations which these four groups had of religion and religious belief was investigated using the data collected through close-ended and open-ended questions.

The Theory of Social Representations

The concept of Social Representations was first put forward by Moscovici. In his book "La psychoanalyse, son image et son public" published in 1961, Moscovici described what psychoanalyses meant to French people. He described how psychoanalytic concepts, normally discussed in the "reified universe" of psychologists and psychiatrists, proliferated among different groups of French society and gave rise to "lay" theories which were shared by groups of people. This seminal work was the beginning of an area of study which has today become one of the most important research areas in social psychology – Social Representations. In this chapter we will be using this theory to understand what religion means to a sample of university students. We will also study how religious beliefs influence religious behavior.

Social representations are "social reality"

Social representations are systems of preconceptions, images and values which have their own cultural meaning. They are "lay theories" and explanations the public give when discussing issues like health, politics and religion. They are the foundations for the beliefs and attitudes which they hold, on matters which are of interest to them. Moscovici defines social representations as a set of concepts and explanations originating in daily life in the course of inter-individual communications. Social representations "concern the contents of everyday thinking" and the values and ideas that give coherence to our religious beliefs, political ideas and the way we classify persons and explain their behaviour (Moscovici, 1988, p. 214). These systems of values and ideas enable people to understand and make sense of aspects of their material and social world and to master it (Moscovici, p. xiii in his forward to Herzlich, 1973). Social representations are not true or false. Neither are they clear and distinct theories. They are shaped and honed according to the time and social context in which they are circulating. In this respect they are dynamic and autonomous. They can change and develop independently of the circumstances and the people who created them. People sharing the same social representation of religion are more likely to have similar attitudes towards the teachings of the Church. On the other hand, people who share the same faith but have different social representations of religion might have different attitudes especially on controversial issues.

Once a representation is constructed, it acquires a force of its own – a force which has a significant role to play in people's lives. For example, when the idea of psychoanalysis was taking root in France, it was compared to other more familiar things and was slowly accepted. In the case of religious beliefs, it is not uncommon that such representations are created. In a study carried out on the social representations of organ donation, Lauri (2009) found that many people wrongly believed that the Church was against organ donation and this was the reason why some of them did not want to donate organs after their death and were against organ donation in general.

Metaphors

Moscovici (1984) posits the two closely linked processes of 'anchoring' and 'objectification' as the means through which a concept becomes part of everyday discourse. Anchoring is the "assimilation of unfamiliar phenomenon to pre-existing representations, thereby 'converting' an external object into a mental content" (Wagner, Elejabarrietta and Lahnsteiner, 1995, p.672). Objectification transforms abstract concepts into concrete images or things. Through objectification, the abstract is endowed with material characteristics so that "images become elements of reality rather than elements of thought" (Moscovici, 1984, p.40). For example an abstract concept like 'conscience' will first be anchored by comparing it to a more familiar mental construct such as 'an arbiter of good and bad' and then objectified by attributing a concrete image such as a heart to the mental construct. The heart will become a symbol or an image representing the conscience. Thus, a person with a good heart will represent a person with a clean conscience while another with a bad heart will represent a person with a bad conscience.

This example illustrates one key element often involved in the process of objectification - the metaphor. According to Wagner and Hayes (2005), social representations are related to thinking in terms of images, icons and metaphors. "The concrete form that content-rational knowledge and social representations adopts in the heads of its bearers can best be compared with images and metaphors" (p. 170). Wagner, Elejabarrietta and Lahnsteiner (1995) describe images, metaphors and symbols as "objectification 'devices', i.e. 'tools' by which the end of understanding through objectification is achieved" (p.673). Religious beliefs already form part of

everyday discourse, yet the meanings associated with some of these beliefs are understood using metaphors. For example, people's attitudes against euthanasia might be understood through the metaphor of the body as a precious gift from God. This metaphor implies that just like a precious gift is treasured, the body must also be treasured and cannot be destroyed. As in Lauri (2009), where metaphors were used to study the attitudes of respondents to organ donation, in this paper metaphors will be the key element which we shall use in order to investigate students' religious attitudes and behaviour, but here, these metaphors will be linked with the four groups of students associated with the four quadrants in Wulff's scheme.

Social representations, metaphors and the four quadrants

In a small homogeneous society such as Malta, where religion is so central to most peoples' lives, it might be expected that people hold the same beliefs and have similar attitudes towards the teachings of the Church, although university students might be expected to be more liberal and less traditional. However even within this cohort, students have different meanings, ideas and conceptions of religion and religious beliefs. One way to analyse the religious beliefs of such a group of students would be to determine within which of the four quadrants the students lie. But what does membership within a quadrant say about the person's religious attitudes and what might be called the person's moral behavior? To dig deeper into this question we shall attempt to identify social representations which the four groups have of religion via the metaphors they use to describe religious beliefs and behaviors.

We believe that this could be a fruitful direction to carry out the investigation because the creation of a social representation of an event, object or issue is influenced not only by the personal history of the individual, but, more than that, by the collective history of the social group or groups to which the person belongs (Augoustinos and Walker, 1995). In this respect, social representations are not just the product of an individual's experiences but are influenced by the actual or vicarious experiences of a group of people or of a whole society. They become for these people, a lens through which they view, make sense and understand what is happening around them. So one would expect that the social representations exhibited by this sample of Maltese students would reflect the society they live in. We believe that similar social

psychological analysis of the four quadrants of Wulff carried out within different societies would enhance this tool for studying people's attitudes towards religion.

Methodology

In their book "Empirical approaches to social representations", Breakwell and Canter (1993) have argued that virtually every method known to social science has been used at some point in order to study social representations. Some have used qualitative tools and methods to collect data, for example, ethnographic studies (eg. Jodolet, 1991), focus groups (eg. Jovchelovitch and Gervais, 1999) and interviews (eg. Molinari and Emiliani, 1990). Others have used quantitative data collecting tools like questionnaires (eg. Augoustinos, 1990) and even experiments (Abric, 1984). Moreover, different researchers use different tools to analyse the data. Multidimensional scaling (Uzzell and Blud, 1993), correspondence analysis (Hammond, 1993), cluster analysis (Fife-Shaw, 1993) and discriminant analysis (Zani, 1993) carried out on both quantitative as well as qualitative data are just four examples.

In this paper we used the questionnaire as a data collecting tool. It consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. The advantage of using this tool was to get a representative sample of the university population. The questionnaire also included the PCBS and therefore the participants could be classified using Wulff's two dimensions. The data were then subjected to Multiple Correspondence Analysis to discover associations between the different variables.

Sample

The questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 650 students made available by the Registrar of the University of Malta and the response rate was 65% (n=421). Both undergraduate and postgraduate students were included. The population of students at the University of Malta is over 9000. The sample was made up of 163 male respondents (39%) and 258 female respondents (61%) coming from all the faculties, institutes and centers at the university. The mean age of the participants was 20.9 years. In fact, 383 students (91%) were between 17 and 23 years of age, whilst the remaining 38 students (9%) were between 24 and 49 years old. The majority of students (91.2%) were Catholic, 4.1% were Christian, 3.5% said that they had no religion and 1.2% said that they embrace other religions.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was made up of 35 questions. The first 7 questions asked for demographic data. Questions 8 to 34 investigated students' attitudes and behavior regarding prayer, dogma, participation in Church activities, and teachings of the Catholic Church on social issues such as divorce, contraception and premarital cohabitation. Question 35 incorporated the shortened version of the Post-Critical Belief Scale (Duriez et al., 2005) made up of 18 items measured on a Likert scale.

Results

The sample was first categorized into four groups after analysing the responses to the questions in the Post-Critical Belief Scale (Duriez, Soenens, & Hutsebaut, 2005).This scale contains 18 items measuring Literal Inclusion (e.g., "Only a priest can answer important religious questions"), Literal Exclusion (e.g., "In the end, faith is nothing more than a safety net for human fears"), Symbolic Exclusion (e.g., "There is no absolute meaning in life, only giving directions, which is different for every one of us") and Symbolic Inclusion (e.g., "The Bible holds a deeper truth which can only be revealed by personal reflection"). Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Cases with missing values were excluded on a listwise basis only amongst those respondents who failed to answer more than three of the PCBS questions. For respondents with less missing data an estimation of these missing data was calculated. This gave a sample totalling 415 participants from the original sample size of 421.

As in previous research (e.g., Duriez et al., 2004), a level of acquiescence estimation was subtracted from the raw scores, after which a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was performed. The scree test clearly pointed to a two-component solution. Because PCA allows freedom of rotation (as a result of which structures obtained in different samples cannot be directly compared), components were subjected to orthogonal Procrustes rotation towards the structure reported by Duriez et al. (2005). Tucker's Phi indices exceeded 0.90, suggesting good congruence (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). The two components could be interpreted as Exclusion versus Inclusion of Transcendence and Literal versus Symbolic. A high Inclusion score indicates

a tendency to include transcendence. A high Symbolic score indicates a tendency to deal with religion in a symbolic way.

The next step was to discretize these two components. For each of the two components the participants were categorized into those whose score fell in the upper 40th percentile (High), in the lower 40th percentile (Low), and in between these two percentiles (Medium). Table 2 shows a cross-tabulation between these two discretized variables.

Table 1: Cross-tabulations between two discretized variables, Symbolic and Inclusion.

	SYMBOLIC		
INCLUSION	Low	Medium	High
High	71	31	64
Medium	29	17	37
Low	66	35	65

We then chose a sub-sample which would best represent Wulff's four quadrants by removing those respondents who scored "Medium" on any of the two discretized variables. That is, only those respondents who were in the High or Low category in both the variables were selected for the subsequent analysis. These were the respondents who fell in the four shaded cells in Table 1. These shaded cells correspond to the four quadrants of Figure 1. This gave a sub-sample of 266 participants. A new variable QUADRANTS was then created with four categories corresponding to the four High/Low combinations of the discretized components a participant was in. These four categories and the number of participants in each are described in Table 2.

Table 2: The number of participants in the four groups of the variable QUADRANTS

	Literal Inclusion (Literal Affirmation) Group 1	Literal Exclusion (Literal Disaffirmation) Group 2	Symbolic Exclusion (Reductive Interpretation) Group 3	Symbolic Inclusion (Restorative Interpretation) Group 4
Number of participants	71	66	65	64
Percentage of the sub-sample	26.7%	24.8%	24.4%	24.1%
Percentage of all sample	16.9%	15.7%	15.4%	15.2%
Roman Catholic	70	54	50	64
Christian	1	1	2	2
No religion	0	9	5	0
Male	21	28	29	30
Female	50	38	36	34
Average age	20.2	20.9	21.2	21.0

Religious Attitudes and Behaviors

We first tested the variable QUADRANTS by carrying out some cross-tabulations with some of the other questions in the questionnaire. When asked if they believed in God, the association with QUADRANTS was very significant (chi-square=26.1, df=3, p<0.001). All respondents in the Literal Inclusion and Symbolic Inclusion quadrants said that they believed in God, but surprisingly, 108 respondents evenly divided between the Literal Exclusion and Symbolic Exclusion groups also said that they believed in God. When the question was put on whether respondents believed in Jesus, the association was still very significant (chi-square=68.8, df=3, p<0.001) Respondents were also asked if they pray. There was very significant association between the responses to this question and the variable QUADRANTS (chi-square=63.3, df=3, p<0.001). As could be expected, all participants in the Literal Inclusion and the Symbolic Inclusion groups said that they pray. But there were still as many as 82 respondents out of the 129 in Literal Exclusion and Symbolic Exclusion groups who said that they do pray, 46 of which came from the Symbolic Exclusion group. This is interesting and probably peculiar to a society

such as Maltese society where belief in God and religious belief are societal norms and ingrained in the lifestyle of most members of that particular society.

In order to understand better the relationship between QUADRANTS and the responses to some of the other questions in the questionnaire it was decided to tackle the data in a multivariate fashion. We present here the results of a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) between the variable QUADRANTS and each of two sets of questions which the respondents had to answer. The two MCA studies analyzed how the respondents' belief styles corresponded with (i) their religious practices and (ii) their attitudes towards some of the Church's teaching. MCA is similar in spirit to factor analysis in that it tries to reduce the dimensionality of a data-set, but in this case, the variables are categorical. MCA assigns numerical values to subjects so that subjects in the same categories are as close together as possible while subjects in different categories are far apart. The categories themselves are given numerical values based on those given to the subjects within them. These values are called category quantifications. By comparing how close or far apart these categories are in terms of their quantifications, one can try to discover associations between the variables. If MCA gives a two-dimensional solution, then the proximity or otherwise between categories can be visually exhibited in a two-dimensional plot.

The first MCA, intended to study the relationship between the respondents' belief styles and their religious behavior, analyzed the variable QUADRANTS together with the following four categorical variables:

Question 10: Do you pray?
(Yes / No)
Question 30: Do you go to mass?
(Yes / No)
Question 31: Do you receive Holy Communion?
(Yes / No)
Question 32: Do you go to Confession?
(Yes / No)

The second MCA carried out, intended to study the association between belief styles and attitudes towards the Church's teachings on sexual behavior, analyzed the variable QUADRANTS together with these four categorical variables:

Question 15: Would you use artificial contraceptives for birth control?
(Yes / Yes if need be / No)

Question 16: Is abortion always wrong?
(Yes / No)

Question 17: Do you approve of premarital sexual intercourse?
(Yes / Yes as long as there is love / Not at all)

Question 18: Do you approve of premarital cohabitation?
(Yes / Yes as long as there is love / Not at all)

The first MCA analysis carried out indicated that a two-dimensional solution is appropriate in this case. The first dimension accounted for 60.0% of the variance in the sample and the second dimension accounted for 20.1% of the variance, with a mean Cronbach's alpha of 0.629. Figure 2 shows the category quantifications for the five variables plotted along the two dimensions extracted by the MCA.
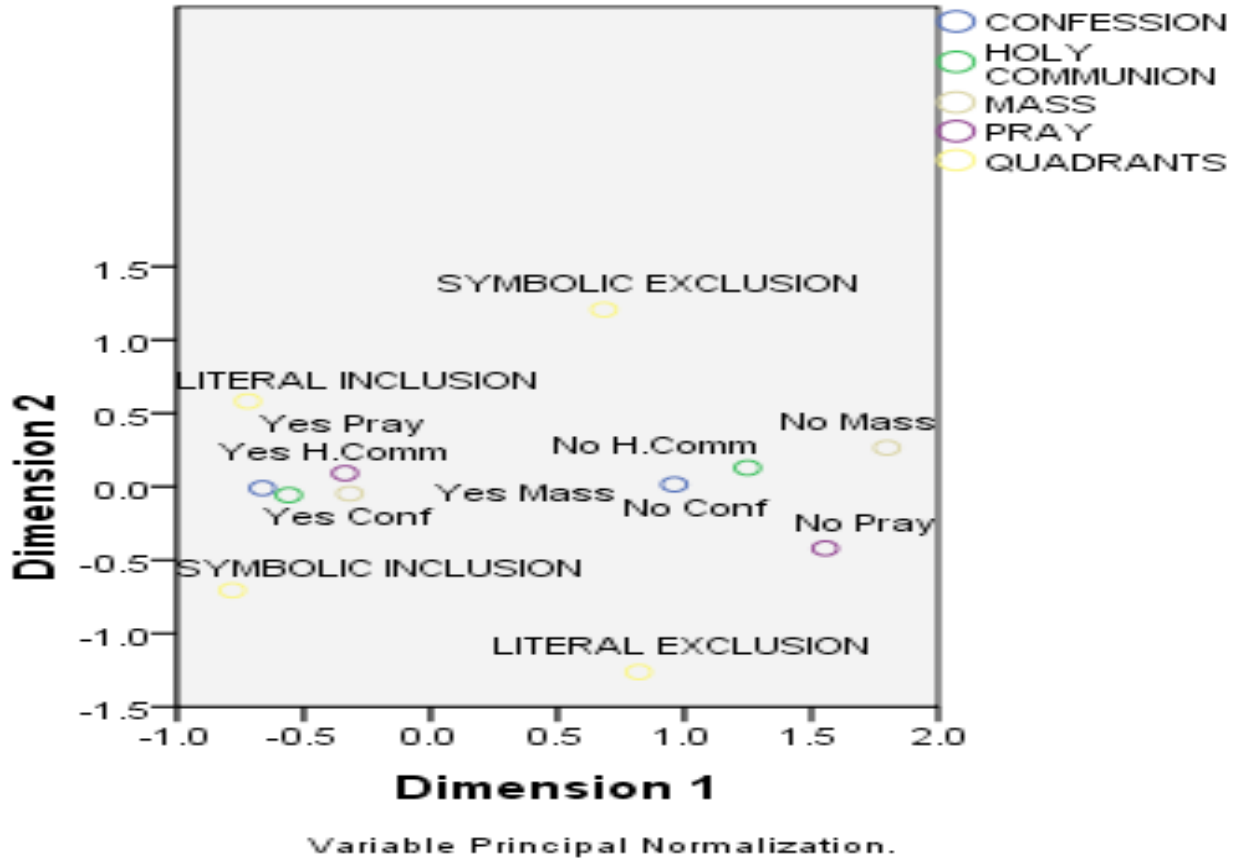
Figure 2: Joint quantification plot of the categories of the five variables in the first MCA showing attitudes towards religious practices (1= Literal Inclusion, 2= Literal Exclusion, 3= Symbolic Exclusion, 4= Symbolic Inclusion).

It is very clear that the first dimension discriminates between those who go to confession, hear mass, receive Holy Communion and pray (positive values of the dimension) and those who do not. As is to be expected, the region of the plot corresponding to this religious behavior corresponds to the Literal Inclusion and the Symbolic Inclusion quadrants, whereas the other region corresponds to the Literal Exclusion and the Symbolic Exclusion quadrants. It is more difficult to interpret the second dimension. It clearly separates the Symbolic Exclusion group

from the Literal Inclusion group and, to a lesser extent, the Literal Inclusion from the Symbolic Inclusion group.

Figure 3, gives the spread of the respondents along the two dimensions of the second MCA labeled by the group in which they belong. This plot confirms the previous observation and the "anomalous" results of the cross-tabulations.

Object Points Labeled by QUADRANTS
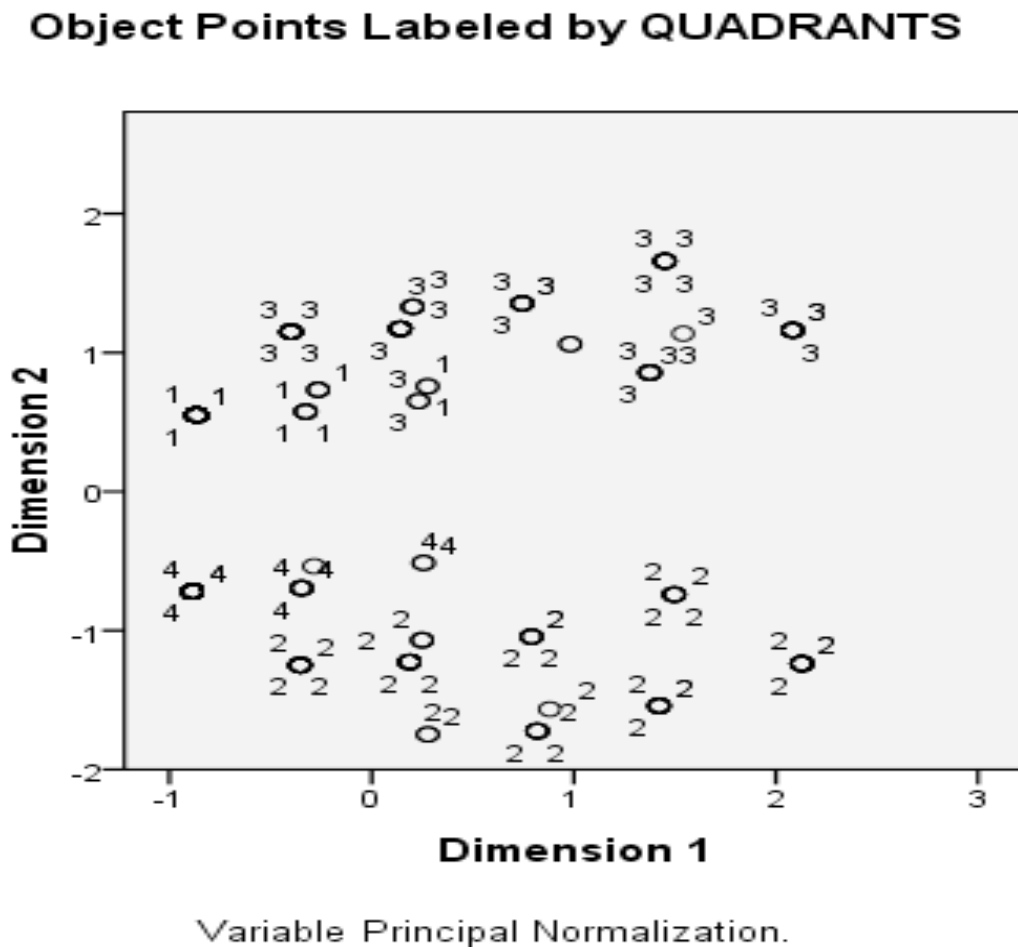

Variable Principal Normalization.

Figure 3: Quantification plot of respondents labeled by group number for the second MCA (1= Literal Inclusion, 2= Literal Exclusion, 3= Symbolic Exclusion, 4= Symbolic Inclusion).

The second MCA analysis carried out indicated that a two-dimensional solution is also appropriate in this case. The first dimension accounted for 57.0% of the variance in the sample

and the second dimension accounted for 31.4% of the variance, with a mean Cronbach's alpha of 0.684.

Figure 4 shows the category quantifications for the five variables plotted along the two dimensions extracted by the MCA.

Joint Plot of Category Points

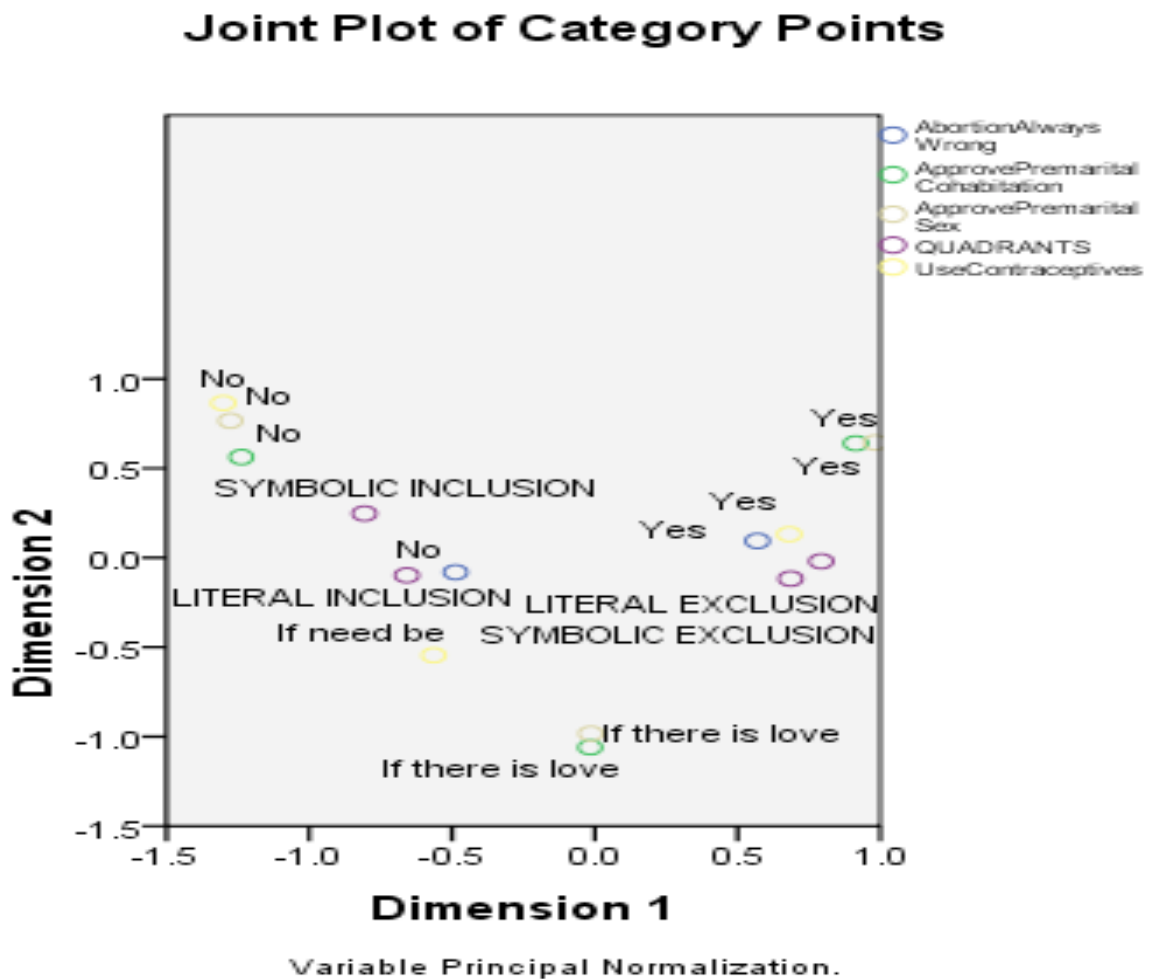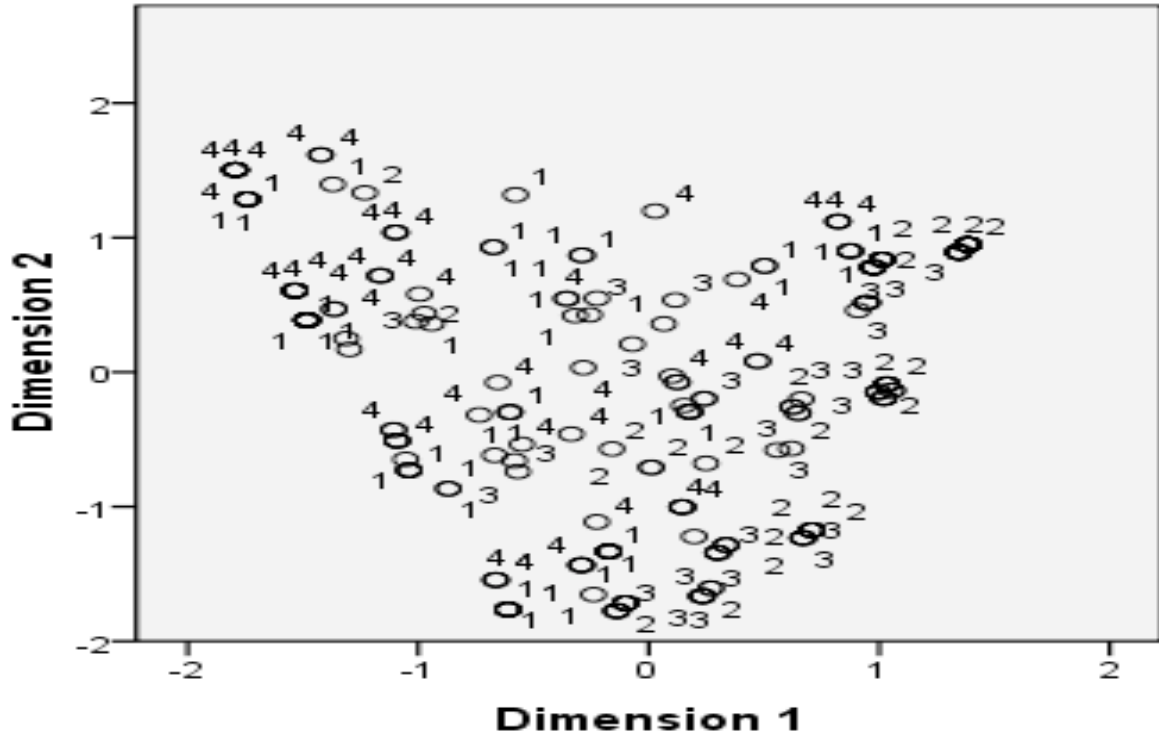Variable Principal Normalization.

Figure 4: Joint quantification plot of the categories of the five variables in the first MCA showing attitudes towards teachings of the Church on sexual morality (1= Literal Inclusion, 2= Literal Exclusion, 3= Symbolic Exclusion, 4= Symbolic Inclusion).

This plot indicates that the first dimension discriminates mainly between those who are in the Literal Exclusion and Symbolic Exclusion groups and are in favor of pre-marital sex, pre-marital cohabitation, abortion and contraceptives (for positive values of the dimension) and those who are in the Literal Inclusion and Symbolic Inclusion groups and are against pre-marital sex, pre-marital cohabitation, abortion and contraceptives (for negative values of this dimension). The second dimension, although weaker than the first, seems to discriminate mainly between those who are categorical in their attitudes towards the issues taken up by the other four questions (high values on this dimension) and those who would compromise under certain circumstances (low values on this dimension).

Figure 5 shows a plot of the actual respondents along the two dimensions, labeled by the group they are in. One can see that the horizontal dimension largely separates the Literal Exclusion and the Symbolic Exclusion groups from the Literal Inclusion and Symbolic Inclusion groups, but one can also see that no easily identifiable region of the plot can be associated with one particular group, a reflection of the "anomalous" cases encountered when we discussed the bi-variate crosstabulations.

Object Points Labeled by QUADRANTS

Variable Principal Normalization.

Figure 5: Quantification plot of respondents labeled by group number for the first MCA (1= Literal Inclusion, 2= Literal Exclusion, 3= Symbolic Exclusion, 4= Symbolic Inclusion).

It therefore seems from this discussion that the four belief systems in relation to the other variables included in this analysis can be discriminated mainly on the Inclusion or Exclusion of Transcendence, that is, Wulff's first dimension.

The insights afforded by these cross-tabulations and the MCA's will be used in the next section when we discuss the social representations of the four groups of students by analyzing their responses to other questions in the questionnaire.

Social representations of religion of university students

In this section we shall discuss how the four groups of students differed in their social representations of religion, taking into consideration their responses to both close-ended and open-ended questions on religious beliefs and behavior. The four groups correspond to those described by Wulff (1997). Table 3 compares the classifications put forward by Wulff (1997), and Duriez et al. (2007) to describe these groups. For a more detailed discussion of the differences between these classifications, one can refer to Duriez and Hutsebaut (2000). The table also gives the social representations which these four groups seem to have of religion and which will be discussed in more detail below.

Table 3: Approaches toward religion

	Wulff (1997)	**Duriez et al. (2007)**	**Social Representations of Religion**
Group 1	Literal Affirmation	Literal Inclusion	Religion is the benevolent advice of God the Father
Group 2	Literal Disaffirmation	Literal Exclusion	Religion is a search for meaning in the order of things
Group 3	Reductive Interpretation	Symbolic Exclusion	Religion is a copying mechanism
Group 4	Restorative Interpretation	Symbolic Inclusion	Religion is a roadmap for life

Group 1: Religion is the belief in God and the teachings of the Church.

Students in this group all see themselves as members of the Roman Catholic Church and as one participant put it 'not actually believing 'in' it [the Church]– being a part of it…, rather!' (Participant 229). To this group of participants, the metaphor that describes their representation of religion is that of benevolent advice. They see God as a father guiding his children. Participants with this representation of religion feel they are being looked after and know that

they can always turn to their father in time of need. They believe that they should follow religious rules and obligations and they also believe that the way to gain eternal life is by following faithfully the Church's teachings. This kind of religious belief is very often learnt in childhood and many uphold this type of religion even when they grow up. Like children believe that their parents love them and only give good advice, so do participants in this group believe that God, their father, shows them the way to achieve happiness by giving them direction through the teachings of the Church. Some students said that their family put pressure on them to practice their religion when they were younger. This type of pressure may lead to a ritualistic and a conventional type of religious practice.

Many participants in this group pray daily. Participant 300 said that he or she feels 'the need to do so'. Some of them recite the rosary and other vocal prayer. For others, prayer is sometimes just being physically in God's presence' (Participant 229). One participant said 'I feel safe and at peace when I pray' (participant 291) and another participant said "I feel I am not alone, there is always someone I can turn to' (Participant 209). They all believe in God the creator of all things, in Jesus, in the Holy Trinity, in the Holy Spirit, in saints and in the virginity of Mary. Most of the members of this group believe in heaven, hell, the devil and the afterlife. None believe in fortune telling or in horoscopes. They give importance to the sacraments; go to mass once a week and some even more often. They receive Holy Communion regularly and go to confession less often but regularly. For these participants 'religion makes no sense when there is no relationship with God' (Participant 231). Like a parent communicates and shows love to their children, so does God the father, communicate with them through the sacraments and prayer and shows his love constantly through his people and the institution of the Church.

In spite of their belief in the teachings of the Church, some of the participants practiced premarital sex and approved of premarital cohabitation. On the other hand there were as many who strongly believed that sex can only be practiced in a marital relationship. One of the participants who did not agree with premarital sex said that that sexual intercourse is the 'ultimate form of love thus it should only take place after marriage' (Participant 191) while another participant said that 'a man and a woman need God to perform something so special which can only be achieved during marriage' (Participant 150). Some were less sure and said

that they 'do not approve; ideally at least' (for example participant 229). Participant 8 said 'sometimes things happen which are beyond our control however I prepare to wait after marriage''. Some seem to experience cognitive dissonance. For example though some believe that premarital sex is wrong, they still practice it. Another example is that some participants think that contraception is morally wrong even though some of these same participants may actually use it. Most are against abortion at any cost while some would consider abortion as right only 'when the mother's life is in danger' (for example participant 145). Many participants in this group are against legalizing divorce and a substantial number believe that divorce is morally wrong. Some members belong to a religious organization and are even involved in the parish or community they live in.

Even here, the MCA also suggest that this group (high on Inclusion and low on Symbolic) are consistent in their beliefs and practices except for some who disagree with the Church's teachings on sexual ethics. They pray and practise the sacraments. In a sense, they are the believing counterpart of Group 2 (high on Inclusion and high on Symbolic).

Group 2: Religion as a search for meaning in the order of things
This group is characterized by students who seem to be ambivalent toward Christian faith. For this group, the metaphor that describes best their representation of religion is a search for meaning. Like a person searches for something that he or she has lost, these participants are searching to understand something that they once believed in unquestioningly and which now no longer has a clear meaning for them. In spite of the fact that according to the PCBS these participants fell within the group Literal Exclusion (Literal Disaffirmation), many of them still believe in God and some of them pray. In this sense, they do not represent the typical member of this group as described by Wulff.

One member of this group said that he or she 'stopped practising' (Participant 378). This position is very typical of this group. As infants, they were baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, were made to go to catechism lessons, and study religion at school. When they matured and started the individuating process, these young people started asking questions and searching for answers

which so far were only partially and unsatisfactorily answered by the catechism they had been forced to learn and believe. They were no longer afraid to voice their doubts.

Most of the participants do not believe in resurrection, incarnation, reincarnation, virginity of Mary, saints or in other gods. About half of the participants in this group claimed that they do not believe in Jesus, in the devil, in Mary mother of God, in the resurrection and in afterlife. On the other hand many believed in God. What is interesting in this group is that a good number believed in the devil, in angels and in hell. It seems like this "search" for meaning is similar to when a person is looking for something among the clutter of things collected from the past. He or she can come across things which were once meaningful and may decide to keep them rather than throwing them out. Other things are now not important anymore and can readily be parted with.

Some participants do 'not see the Bible as a religious message' (Participant 115). While the students in this group do not seem to believe in the Church as an institution, yet some say they pray. Many still want to marry in the Church even though they do not hold it in high esteem. Many participants said that they do not go to mass and for some, for example participant 225, mass is "a waste of time". On the other hand some participants believe in the sacraments, attend mass weekly or monthly but, rarely receive Holy Communion and rarely go to confession. It seems that while these young people are questioning their faith, they are unsure whether to reject religion completely or whether to keep on searching for meaning through faith.   Another explanation could also be that most participants still live with their parents, and therefore are still under some parental pressure to practice what they were taught when they where young.

The comments made by members of this group confirm that they have problems with the teaching of the Church regarding sexual ethics. About half of the participants practice premarital sex and with the exception of a few participants do not think that contraception is morally wrong. More than half approve of premarital cohabitation. Participant 241 said that cohabitation makes it possible for the 'partners [to] get to know each other better'. Many participants are in favor of legalizing divorce. About one third of the participants believe that abortion is always morally

wrong but some participants believed that whether or not abortion is wrong depends on the context. Participant 26 believed that "in case of poverty and rape" abortion should be allowed.

The ambiguous positioning of this group also comes out clearly from the two MCA presented above. While they share with members of Group 3 their approval of sexual practices not condoned by the Church, when it comes to prayer and participation in the sacraments they are distant from Group 3 but yet not quite similar to Groups 1 and 4.

Group 3: Religion is a coping mechanism needed by some to help them cope with life's problems.

Although members of this group of students were baptized when young, and most believe in God, at this stage in their life, some did not believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit or the Holy Trinity. For example participant 15 said 'I was christened Roman Catholic when I was a baby; wouldn't say [my religion] was a free choice'. Some participants in this group found it difficult to accept the church's teachings (e.g. participant 379). Some students question the existence of one God and a few believe that there could be other gods besides the one God Christians believe in. The metaphor that describes the representation this group has of religion is that religion is a mechanism needed by some to help them cope with life's problems. They differ from the first group in that they are relatively convinced that religion was created because people felt the need to believe in an almighty god who can help them when hey are in difficulty. Participant 203 wrote '… I believe that religion makes a great deal of work in maintaining social order. I respect it for that but I don't conceive of the supernatural including God and the sacraments'. Another participant said 'I believe in doing good in this world, and that whether or not this is rewarded in the next or not is irrelevant as long as my work here has a direct impact on the lives of people' (participant 49). Many 'do not believe in the church as an organization' (for example participant 360) and participant 208 said 'I do not believe in organized religion and what it stands for'. Participant 320 said 'I don't agree with the church. Too many gold and statues and at the same time other people are dying of hunger. Moreover I do not agree that priests have the right to represent God.' For this group of participants, the institution of the Church is a superficial representation of religion. They see it as an artificial construct which people believe in and they question its authenticity.

Many of the participants do not embrace basic tenets of the Church like the Resurrection, the Incarnation and the Virginity of Mary, mother of God. To them these were just teachings which they believe should be ignored. About one third of the participants in this group believed in heaven and hell while some others believed in the devil and in other energies! Many do not believe in the sacraments and therefore do not go to confession and do not receive Holy Communion. Participant 208 said 'I do not believe the Holy Communion to be the personification of Jesus Christ'. In spite of this, about one third of the participants in this group go to mass every week. It is this fact that triggers the question "Why do some of these participants still hold on to some religious practices when they do not believe in the Church and its teachings. Could it be that while they criticize the Church, they still are unsure of whether to believe or not? Could it be that it is a transition from childhood belief to unbelief, maybe to a mature belief? Participant 245 who did not go to mass said that the reason for not going is 'Because firstly I don't believe in God and secondly I cannot be bothered to wake up on a Sunday morning'. This statement is interesting because if the student did not believe in God whether or not he or she is bothered to wake up on a Sunday morning is irrelevant. Another participant said that 'since I do not really believe, I feel like a hypocrite and only go [to mass] extremely rarely when a surge of guilt gets to me.' (Participant 347). The mention of guilt is to be noted since although some participants claim that they do not believe, they still experience moments when they doubt whether they are right in their beliefs.

These participants do not believe in the teachings of the Church regarding sexual behavior. Many practice premarital sex, are in favor of premarital cohabitation and are in favor of legalizing divorce. Participant 266 said that sex is an 'important part of the relationship which must be experienced BEFORE (sic) marriage'. Participant 213 said that 'Partners need to get to know each other as in everyday life so as to avoid many of the separations taking place in this day and age' while participant 89 said that '…having sexual intercourse is an act of love and thus once love exists it can be justified'. Some are in favor of abortion only in special cases such as 'in cases of rape, to save a mother's life and other complicated situations' (Participant 49). What is interesting in the context of the above is that about two thirds of the participants in this group said that they pray. This seems to point out that while believing that the Church is just an

institution people need to belong to, participants in this group are still ambivalent about more abstract and symbolic aspects of religious beliefs.

The results of the MCA discussed above also confirm that they do not take part in the sacraments, and they are in disagreement with the Church's teaching. But sometimes they go to mass and pray!

Group 4: Religion is a complex system of symbols whose meanings inform one's understanding of God.

This group of students believe in the existence of God. They are more mature in their religiosity and unlike Group 1, they do not follow the teachings of the Church literally but appreciate the symbolic meaning behind the Church's teaching and the text of the Bible. The metaphor that best describes their representation of religion is a roadmap for life with signs and indicators. For these participants the bible, as well as the Church's teachings, are a complex system of symbols which serve as a guide and have to be interpreted in a particular context. These participants most often do not conform because of pressure to observe religious rules. Like children who grow up into mature adults, participants in this group have grown out of obeying for fear of being punished. They practice their religious beliefs freely and in a more mature way. The participants seem to have a more personal relationship with God. Participant 299 said that he or she has 'a relationship with God because I believe that he loves me.' They pray regularly and use mental prayer more often than vocal prayer or reading the Bible. Participant 312 said that he or she uses prayer `for support'.

A few participants do not believe all the teachings of the Church. For example one third of the participants do not believe in the resurrection and a few do not believe in an afterlife. Many believe in heaven and hell, the devil, in angels and in saints but others question their existence. Many believe in the virginity of Mary, mother of God. Once again the participants in this group seem to be mature enough in their belief to be able to accept the teachings of the Church without feeling constrained to believe in or even agree within all that the Church says.

Most attend mass at least once a week, receive Holy Communion and go to confession regularly. Regarding the teachings of the Church on sexual behavior, many still are against sex before marriage. On the other hand some said that they had practiced pre-marital sex in the last year. Participant 90 said that 'sometimes it may help the relationship.' Many, however, still believe that it is wrong. Participant 299 said 'I do not agree with sex outside marriage because God gave authority to the church to guide us and the church says no'. Participant 288 said that "if done before [marriage] sex would loose much of its significance. Many think that divorce should not be legalized even though this goes against the teachings of the Church. All participants said that abortion is wrong with very few exceptions who said that in cases where the child is going to be born with a disability abortion can be considered. As opposed to Groups 2 and 3 some participants belong to religious organizations and are also actively involved in the community where they live. Once again this seems to indicate that these participants do not look upon faith as something abstract but rather their faith is the stimulus for their behavior.

The MCA results indicate that while Group 2 (low on Inclusion and Low on Symbolic) are the uncertain disbelievers, this group (high on Inclusion and high on Symbolic) are their believing counterparts. Figure 2 indicates that they pray and participate in the sacraments but Figure 4 shows that, at least with regards to pre-marital sex, pre-marital cohabitation and contraceptives, they allow themselves to go against the Church's teachings if there is love in the relationship.

Table 4 summarizes very briefly the above relationships between Wulff's four quadrants, social representations, religious beliefs and religious attitudes for this sample of students.

Table 4: Summary of relationship between the four groups, social representations, religious attitudes and religious behaviour for the sample of students.

Group	Social Representations	Attitudes	Behavior
Group 1	Religion is the benevolent advice of God the father	See themselves as part of the Church; they accept the Church's teachings on most issues; have a positive attitude towards religion	Pray; attend mass every Sunday; practice the sacraments regularly; they observe religious duties rigorously
Group 2	Religion is a search for meaning in the order of things	Ambivalent towards Christian faith; do not believe in the Church as an institution but still believe in some of its teachings; in favor of legalizing divorce; have an ambivalent attitude towards religion	Practice some of the sacraments; sometimes attend mass but do not receive Holy Communion and do not go to confession; sometimes they pray
Group 3	Religion is a coping mechanism	Have very negative attitudes towards the Church; do not accept the Church's teachings; are in favor of premarital cohabitation; are in favor of legalizing divorce; believe that for many, religion is a just a way of coping with life's problems;	Do not go to mass; do not practice the sacraments; practice premarital sex; despise the riches of the church , its gold and its statues;
Group 4	Religion is a roadmap for life	Believe in God; accept the teachings of the Church; understand and accept the symbolic meanings of religious messages and do not feel constrained by them; have a positive attitude towards religion	Practice religious beliefs freely and without pressure; Attend Mass regularly; Pray; practice the sacraments

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the scale 'inclusion/exclusion of transcendence' may have different meanings in different countries and perhaps different cohorts depending not only on personal beliefs but also on societal norms and even traditions. Whereas exclusion of transcendence is often found to be correlated with non-belief in a god or a transcendental being and non-attendance to church functions, in this study, it seems that participants, even some of those who scored very low on inclusion, believe in God and in at least some teachings of the Church. These same participants sometimes pray and also go to mass. They do not however receive the sacraments. The difference between those at the two ends of the scale inclusion/exclusion of transcendence differ mostly in the type of beliefs towards the Church and its teachings and rather than believing or disbelieving in God.

Even in the second dimension, the literal vs the symbolic, it again appears that with this cohort, even those who are high on symbolic are somewhat more traditional than one would expect and still give importance to some symbolic elements and observe rituals. It is being argued that the two dimensions put forward by Wulff are 'tempered', at least in this study, by whether or not the persons still live with their parents and how free they are to live their life according to what they really believe and by the society they live in. Although the mean age of the participants is 21, many have still not moved out of their parents' home and therefore are not yet free of their influence and control (in Malta, most university students at that age still live with their parents). Moreover, living in a country where Catholicism and the church are still very important influences in society, people, including students, find it very difficult to go against the expectations of parents and significant others.

It would be interesting to find out how the social representations of religion change once the students grow older and live their life independently of their parents. It is being hypothesised that when this happens, attitudes may change and religious behaviour may become more congruent with attitudes, however the social representations will remain the same. This is because although attitudes may change with age and social context, the roots are firmly grounded in the systems of values of a particular group and hence more resistant to change.

This of course can only be borne out by a longitudinal study with the same sample and even better if an experimental longitudinal study can be carried out. Future research in this area will help to find out the relationship between attitudes and social representations and how these influence religious behaviour.

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