

Article

The Relevance of God to Religious Believers and Non-Believers

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Abstract: This study presents a review about what great figures of history thought about the existence of God and a worldwide comparison between religious believers and non-believers using the World Social Survey (WSS) database, comprising a sample of 90,350 respondents. Results reveal that most people believe in the existence of God and consider that God is important and very important in their lives. Believers are mainly women; younger than non-believers; mostly married; less educated than non-believers; most of whom work, though fewer hours than non-believers; and perceive themselves as belonging to the middle class. There are more believers with no formal education than non-believers. The diversity of religious believers and non-believers, visible in the perspectives of humanity's important personalities, mirrors the diversity of ordinary people towards the relevance of God. The results obtained point to a correlation between the belief in God and the studied sociodemographic variables but also suggest that the difference between believers and non-believers may be artificial, having resulted from the adopted methodology. The relationship found between being a believer and defending traditional values also corroborates with previous studies, suggesting that humankind needs God to give meaning to the world around them, namely, in morality and conduct terms.

Keywords: believers; non-believers; World Social Survey (WSS); relevance of God

1. Introduction

The questions about the existence of God are metaphysical (Loux 2017) and the whole debate around these questions is embedded in metaphysical, philosophical and theological arguments (Kraay and Dragos 2013). Metaphysical questions about the existence of God cannot be scientifically answered because, and according to Ladyman (2007), metaphysical questions are meaningless, since they do not admit empirical confirmation or refutation, although Couvalis (1997) stated that, regarding scientific realism, metaphysical questions can be answered by science. Metaphysics is characterized by the generality and transparency of concerns, by stating what the fundamental facts are and by the a priori character of methods (Fine 2011).

The main arguments about the existence of God are: for (i.e., ontological, cosmological, teleological and moral content) and against (i.e., diversity of religions, incompatibility of the characteristics attributed to God, necessity of rejecting the idea of God until being proven, contrary to the cosmological

argument and in contradiction with the logical definition of God) (Stenger 2009). However, before the philosophical question about the existence of God, the question about the idea of God stands out. Robinson (2002) suggested that the idea of God that has been dominant in western civilization for centuries is irrelevant to the needs of modern men and women. Lovejoy (2017) stated that the idea of God is not a unit-idea and Nesteruk (2018) sustains that the idea of God implies a propensity to faith, and both faith in God and faith that God exists require belief that God exists (McKaughan 2018), which brings back the question about the existence of God.

1.1. Why Does Humankind Believe in God?

According to Barrett (2004, p. 11), “belief in God arises through a host of reasons that typically escape reflective notice.” Belief in God is originated in the same mental processes as other beliefs, i.e., the operation of mostly non-conscious mental tools. “All religions arise from and are maintained by transcendent experiences; therefore, they all lead us toward the same goal of wholeness and unity” (Newberg et al. 2008, p. 166). For the same authors, the neurobiological paths of spiritual transcendence suggest that the Absolute Unitary Being is a plausible possibility. “Reality happens in the brain” (p. 178). It seems that the brain has the “built-in ability to transcend the perception of an individual self” (p. 174) and “perceive a larger more fundamental reality” (p. 175). Pennycook et al. (2019) studied the role of the prefrontal cortex in the doubt, disbelief, and rejection of religious concepts. These authors showed that “while damage to the prefrontal cortex can lead to an increase in religious beliefs, the reverse is not necessarily true, i.e., individuals high in religious beliefs have prefrontal cortex brain damage” (p. 12). The same authors also found that sociodemographic, cultural and contextual variables significantly impact religiosity, independent of prefrontal cortex structural integrity.

This study does not aim to prove the existence (or not) of God, but to estimate the prevalence of belief in God and to assess the associations of this belief with other variables, namely demographic and social variables. If the existence of God cannot be deduced by the number of believers, one can understand its importance and implications. “Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts” (Cameron 1963, p. 13). This study will begin by reviewing what great figures in the history of humankind thought about the existence of God, intending to witness the complexity of the debate, as well as its many facets. Then, voice will be given to those who do not have it, i.e., anonymous citizens that were questioned about this issue, in order to expose their perspectives. Finally, relations between belief and disbelief and other significant variables, will be presented.

1.2. What Do the Great Figures of History Think about the Existence of God?

For Socrates (470 BC–399 BC), the soul participates in the divine nature and is given by God to humans; life does not depend on the body but on the soul (Burnyeat 1997). The doctrine of a divine principle in Plato’s theology is both nous and the Good (Menn 1992). For Plato (424 BC–348 BC), God is an intelligent force that tries to create order in the physical world (Armstrong 2004). Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC) calls God the ‘begetter’ (genetôr) of all that lives; God was the first unmoved mover (Menn 1992). Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) took the view that God geometrizes (Keele 1979). “Leonardo looked upon this world and saw in it a divine creation, a cosmos of law, a home every nook of which had revelations for the soul” (Thayer 1894, p. 532). Bausi (2005) stated that Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) thought of himself as a Christian that believes in a God of his own; “a God that loves justice, (. . .) who wants men to be strong so that they can defend (. . .) homeland. This God was (. . .) the true Christian God, in contrast with the God who wishes men to be humble, willing to accept (. . .) the suffering” (Viroli 2012, p. 1). In Michelangelo Simoni’s (1475–1564) fresco, the Creation of Adam, the image surrounding God and the angels had the shape of a human brain meaning an encoded message from Michelangelo that the divine part humans receive from God is the intellect, and not life (Meshberger 1990). Martin Luther (1483–1546) believed that the word of God should speak directly to the reader in an understandable way (sola scriptura) (Washington 1986). His God was hidden, revealed itself indirectly, by concealment, under

the opposite (Fabiny 2006). Francis Bacon (1561–1626) thought that pure religion and being undefiled before God and the Father was true charity (Milner 1997); also believing that God created men without imperfections (Zaterka 2010). In William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) works, God's love and mercy manifest throughout the tragedies and asserts that Shakespeare's tragic heroes live (Barnet 1955). Fabiny (2006) used Luther's theology of the cross as a diagnostic tool of Shakespeare theology and found that God did happen to Hamlet: God's real face was hiding behind a mask, and thus Hamlet knew only the strange acts of God. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) stated that both religion and science were in the quest, even if differently, for one and the same truth; however, God exposed the truth through two specific languages for different audiences (Pisano and Bussotti 2017). For Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), the sun and its planets are surrounded by giants because of the power and creativity of God, for whom nothing is too big (Graney 2018). René Descartes (1596–1650) believed God created two kinds of substances, mental and physical, being the humans composed of a mental and physical substance, and plants and animals of a physical one (Hancock 2017). Isaac Newton (1643–1727) was a man of God (Dao 2008): "Gravity explains the motions of the planets, but it cannot explain who set the planets in motion. God governs all things and knows all that is or can be done" (Tiner 1975, p. 107). For Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), the "ultimate rationale for being a musician, that is, a performer-composer (...) was (...) to make a well-sounding harmony to the honor of God and the permissible delectation of the soul—for God and the neighbor" (Wolff 2001, p. 127). The God of François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) (1694–1778) was a free, intelligent, eternal being who creates and organizes matter through universal, immutable and self-sufficient laws (Caputo 2017). Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) advocated a natural religion according to which God speaks directly to the heart of the individual (Burch 2017). It is not known whether Antoine Lavoisier (1743–1794) "experienced a genuine change of faith while awaiting death, but his bitterness and his compassion were surely sufficient to reunite him with his companions in misfortune during the closing scenes of the tragedy" (Scheler and Smeaton 1958, p. 153). In Eroica of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), the emphasis was on humanity instead on God (Pisarczyk et al. 2017), although Losiev (Chernoivanenko 2014, p. 226) stated that "Beethoven has no God, he has God." Charles Darwin (1809–1882) was not an atheist leading a scientific conspiracy to destroy religion from the world (Brooke 2010); Darwin believed in a personal God, although there are contradictory writings on the subject (Foote 1889). Although Gregor Mendel (1822–1884) "read Darwin, he did not accept many of his theories, believing that God had created the world and blind chance could not be responsible for the outcome" (Graves 1996, p. 143). Levi Strauss (1829–1902) "emerges as a type of religious and philosophical thinker, a theologian in spite of himself, who cannot accept an apocalyptic notion of God and thus adopts an anthropological stance in order to ground his arguments in reality" (Diamond 1974, p. 315). Mohandas Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) (1869–1948) did not believe in a personal God; for him, God was not a person but a force, a living power—love; for Gandhi, God was truth (Grenier 1983). In his book *Why I Am Not a Christian* (Russell 1953), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) explains why he had abandoned Christianity around 18 years old and never returned: the world does not need a cause to exist; since Newton, the authorship of the laws of physics cannot be attributed to God; according to Russell, Darwin explains the observed facts better through evolutionary theory than God. Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur 2008) calls "masters of suspicion" to Marx (1818–1883), Nietzsche (1844–1900) and Freud (1856–1939). Marx (2000) theoretical atheism originates from metaphysical or dialectical materialism (matter is the unique cause of everything), historical materialism (i.e., the economic structure is the fundamental one) and absolute humanism (i.e., man is the supreme being); Marxists believed that humans created God and not the reverse (Marx 1977). Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, being that God was an anthropomorphic creation that served human purposes (Church 2018). For Freud, "God is an invention of the human mind, than which there is no higher reality. Abolition of the imaginary, alienating Father and re-possession of the human attributes we have projected onto him will restore man to himself" (Lynch 2018, p. 81). Vincent van Gogh's (1853–1890) "attitude towards God was determined by his attitude towards his father. God is clearly a Father-symbol; the attitude which the child had in respect

to his father is transferred to God" (Westerman Holstijn 1951, p. 241). Einstein (1879–1955) stated that the simplicity of God's concept makes it accessible to anyone (1940) as that God does not throw dice with the universe (Haug 2018). In the urban sublime of Edward Hopper (1882–1967) "The natural elements of light and wind, recurring in many of Hopper's images, serve as synecdoche for God Himself, in the same way He was previously embodied by natural phenomena" (Crouch 2007, p. 68). Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) and his metaphysical painting had a goal: "(...) to use his hands to shape the face of his God, whose presence he felt; his will was to make this face visible (...)" (de Chirico 2016, p. 63).

In René Magritte's (1898–1967) painting "Nightingale" (1962) "God is looking down on the train yard. (...) God isn't doing anything, he is just sitting on a cloud. This picture may very well represent Magritte's own deist view of God. The fact that God is not doing anything may be a direct picture of God's current work in the world (as Magritte saw it)" (Lecture and Drumm 2001, p. 17). Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) "was agnostic in the common sense that he did not believe in a personal and living God without excluding the possibility of the existence of God" (Eberhard 2007, p. 286). Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) said that "The true formula of atheism is not God is dead—even by substantiating the origin of the function of the father upon his murder, Freud protects the father—the true formula of atheism is God is unconscious" (Lacan 1981, p. 59). Karl Popper (1902–1994) "understood the universe as a creative entity that invents new things, including life, but without the necessity of something like a God. (...) evolution must, as the creationists say, work in a goal-directed way" (Miller 2017, p. 33). Salvador Dalí's (1904–1989) "portrait of Jesus' peaceful model provides us with a link between spirituality and science. (...) the peace poured from the head of Jesus is located in the triangle of Salvador Dalí's famous painting parallels (...). The matter of Christ's body turned into energy at the speed of light" (Frisch 2014, p. 113). Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) believed that "if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man" (Sartre 1963, p. 3). Emmanuel Levinas (1905/1906–1995) stated that "There can be no knowledge of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth and is indispensable for my relation with God" (Levinas 1969, p. 78).

Albert Camus (1913–1960) stated that he did not believe in God and he was not an atheist (2008). His anti-religious thought was a secret religion. For Camus, God withdrew from humanity through his death, leaving men and women to cope alone with anguish and pain (Wood 1999). Roland Barthes (1915–1980) wrote "writing (...) liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law" (Barthes 1994, p. 147). At the basis of science, for Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996), lies things not fully explainable in rational terms (Peterson 1998). "(...) there is nothing beyond the material realm, that all is explained by science and there is no need for God. But that is a paradigm and could easily change (...) there is no scientific basis for concluding that there is no God" (Ani 2016, p. 6). Gilles Deleuze's (1925–1975) thinking is "in line with a 'theophanic' conception in which every individual process or thing is conceived as a manifestation of expression of God" (Pearson 2007, p. 488). Michel Foucault's (1926–1984) life was devoted "not to killing God, but to filling the terrible vacuum left by God's apparent death (...). If appeals to Truth, Justice and Human Nature can mask power bids, then sophisticated intellectual argument can mask rebellion against God" (Coffey 1996, p. 4). According to Thomas Hanna (1928–1990) "The evolution of God-concepts is the evolution of a human need for justifying the world and man's place in it" (Hanna 2008, p. 10). Milan Kundera (1929–) stated that "what seems more likely, in fact, is that man invented God to sanctify the dominion that He had usurped for himself over the cow and the horse" (Kundera 1984, p. 286). Pierre-Felix Guattari (1930–1992) suggested that "Structuralism in psychoanalysis—as in other domains—can be thought of as an attempt to substitute a nameless God for the God of the church and the family" (Guattari and Dosse 2008, p. 241).

For Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), religion is impossible without uncertainty and God can never be fully known or adequately represented by imperfect human beings; “Derrida’s God is not simply an agent of deconstruction but also a God who deconstructs Himself” (Almond 2002, p. 521). Philip Roth (1933–2018) said he did not have a single religious bone in his body and if the whole world did not believe in God, it would be a great place (Roth 2015). According to Carl Sagan (1934–1996), God’s existence or non-existence is a scientific fact about the universe (Sagan 2006). “Where God comes from? (. . .) if we decide this to be unanswerable, why not save a step and conclude that the universe has always existed?” (Sagan 1980, p. 257). In the posthumous book *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (Hawking 2018) by Stephen Hawking (1942–2018), the author stated that there is no God. “Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist” (Hawking 2010, p. 69). For Salman Rushdie (1947–) “from the beginning men used God to justify the unjustifiable” (Rushdie 1988, p. 95). If someone tries to “describe reality as it is experienced by religious people, for whom God is no symbol but an everyday fact, then the conventions of what is called realism are quite inadequate” (Rushdie 2012, p. 376). Slavoj Žižek (1949–) wrote “the death of Christ is the death of the God in himself, not only of his human embodiment” (Žižek 2006, p. 1549). For Žižek (2006), the “view of the crucifixion in terms of financial dealings—that Christ died to pay for our sins—raises a basic question for us. The question here is: To whom? To whom did God pay this debt?”

2. Materials and Methods

The World Social Survey (WSS) (2014) database (World Values Survey Association 2014) (Wave 6, 2010–2014), comprising 90,350 respondents, “consists of nationally representative surveys conducted in almost 100 countries which contain almost 90 percent of the world’s population, using a common questionnaire” (Inglehart et al. 2014, p. 1). The WSS contains 258 variables about people’s values and beliefs, how they change over time and what social and political impact they have, namely, support for democracy, tolerance of foreigners and ethnic minorities, support for gender equality, the role of religion and changing levels of religiosity, the impact of globalization, attitudes toward the environment, work, family, politics, national identity, culture, diversity, insecurity, and subjective well-being. Statistical analyses, performed with SPSS version 25.0 software (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA) comprised univariate analysis to characterize the sample by frequencies, percentages and the nonparametric Chi-Square Test of Independence to determine whether there is an association between categorical variables. In addition, Spearman’s correlation coefficient was used to establish the relationships between variables. The Spearman coefficient is appropriate for both continuous and discrete variables, including ordinal variables (Lehman et al. 2013). Hair and colleagues (Hair et al. 2006) recommend that the correlation value be equal or greater than 0.300. To predict the value of a variable based on the value of two or more other variables, multiple linear regression analysis was used. The significance value was established as $p \leq 0.050$.

3. Results

3.1. Who Are the Religious Believers and the Non-Believers?

Globally, believers are mainly women, with a mean age of 41.85 years old (younger than non-believers); mostly married; less educated than non-believers; most of whom work (though fewer hours than non-believers); and perceive themselves as belonging to the middle class. More specifically, there are more singles and widowers among believers than non-believers. Regarding education, there are more believers than non-believers with no formal education, incomplete primary school, incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type, and incomplete secondary school. Believers include more self-employed, housewives, students and unemployed than non-believers. Believers also include more people who consider themselves to be upper class and lower class than non-believers (Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics.

		V148								
		Believe in God: No		Believe in God: Yes		Total				
		N	%	N	%	N	%	χ^2	df	Sig.
Gender V240	Female	5066	43.6	36,391	53.7	41,457	52.2	401.917	1	0.000
	Male	6553	56.4	31,432	46.3	37,985	47.8			
		<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Age V242		44.98 (16.72)		41.85 (16.55)		42.06 (16.48)		18.787	79,371	0.000
		N	%	N	%	N	%	χ^2	df	Sig.
Marital Status V57	Married	6444	55.7	38,256	56.5	44,700	56.4	257.085	5	0.000
	Living together	1123	9.7	4483	6.6	5606	7.1			
	Divorced	589	5.1	2487	3.7	3076	3.9			
	Separated	222	1.9	1228	1.8	1450	1.8			
	Widowed	533	4.6	4366	6.4	4899	6.2			
	Single	2653	22.9	16,912	25.0	19,565	24.7			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	χ^2	df	Sig.
Highest educational level attained V248	No formal education	257	2.2	4003	5.9	4260	5.4	1004.253	8	0.000
	Incomplete primary school	279	2.4	4083	6.1	4362	5.5			
	Complete primary school	1562	13.6	7384	11.0	8946	11.4			
	Incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type	581	5.1	5423	8.1	6004	7.6			
	Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type	2382	20.8	12,946	19.2	15328	19.5			
	Incomplete secondary school: university-preparatory type	688	6.0	5642	8.4	6330	8.0			
	Complete secondary school: university-preparatory type	2089	18.3	11,754	17.5	13843	17.6			
	Some university-level education without degree	949	8.3	4981	7.4	5930	7.5			
	University-level education with degree	2659	23.2	11,108	16.5	13767	17.5			

Table 1. Cont.

		V148								
		Believe in God: No		Believe in God: Yes		Total				
		N	%	N	%	N	%	χ^2	df	Sig.
Employment status V229	Full-time	4763	41.6	20,188	30.3	24,951	32.0	1215.424	7	0.000
	Part-time	1317	11.5	5893	8.8	7210	9.2			
	Self employed	1185	10.3	8694	13.1	9879	12.7			
	Retired	1649	14.4	8150	12.2	9799	12.6			
	Housewife	877	7.7	10,742	16.1	11,619	14.9			
	Students	762	6.7	4903	7.4	5665	7.3			
	Unemployed	660	5.8	6603	9.9	7263	9.3			
	Other	237	2.1	1431	2.1	1668	2.1			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	χ^2	df	Sig.
Social class (subjective) V238	Upper class	177	1.6	1501	2.3	1678	2.2	246.560	4	0.000
	Upper middle class	2422	21.4	13,386	20.2	15,808	20.4			
	Lower middle class	4520	39.9	23,738	35.8	28,258	36.4			
	Working class	3261	28.8	18,927	28.5	22,188	28.6			
	Lower class	962	8.5	8771	13.2	9733	12.5			

In general, non-believers are mainly men, with a mean age of 44.98 years old (older than believers); mostly married; more educated than believers; most of whom work (more hours than believers); and perceive themselves as belonging to the middle class. Particularly, there are more divorcees and people living together among believers than among non-believers. Concerning education, there are more non-believers than believers with complete primary school, complete secondary school: technical/vocational type, complete secondary school: university-preparatory type, some university-level education without degree, university-level education with degree. Non-believers include more persons who work full-time, part-time and who are retired than believers (Table 1).

3.2. Identification of the Religious Variables

In the WSS database, Wave 6, twenty variables related to religion were identified: (V9) *Important in life: Religion*, rated on a 4-point scale (1—Very important, 2—Rather important, 3—Not very important, 4—Not at all important) (inverted); (V19) *Important child qualities: Religious faith*, a dichotomous question (1—Mentioned, 2—Not mentioned) (2 becomes 0); (V25) *Active/Inactive membership: Church or religious organization*, with three response options (0—Not a member, 1—Inactive member, 2—Active member); (V41) *Would not like to have as neighbors: People of a different religion*, a dichotomous question (1—Mentioned, 2—Not mentioned) (2 becomes 0); (V106) *How much you trust: People of another religion*, rated on a 4-point scale (1—Trust completely, 2—Trust somewhat, 3—Do not trust very much, 4—Do not trust at all) (inverted); (V108) *Confidence: The Churches*, rated on a 4-point scale (1—A great deal, 2—Quite a lot, 3—Not very much, 4—None at all) (inverted); (V132) *Democracy: Religious authorities interpret the laws*, rated on a 10-point scale (from 1—Not an essential characteristic of democracy, to 10—An essential characteristic of democracy); (V144) *Religious denomination*, whose response options correspond to the number of religions included in the WSS; (V145) *How often do you attend religious services*, rated on a 7-point scale (1—More than once a week, 2—Once a week, 3—Once a month, 4—Only on special holy days, 5—Once a year, 6—Less often, 7—Never, practically never) (inverted); (V146) *How often do you pray*, rated on an 8-point scale (1—Several times a day, 2—Once a day, 3—Several times each week, 4—Only when attending religious services, 5—Only on special holydays, 6—Once a year, 7—Less often than once a year, 8—Never, practically never) (inverted); (V147) *Religious person*, with three response options (1—A religious person, 2—Not a religious person, 3—An atheist) (inverted); (V148) *Believe in God*, a dichotomous question (1—Yes, 2—No) (2 becomes 0); (V150) *Meaning of religion: To follow religious norms and ceremonies vs. To do good to other people*, with four response options (1—Follow religious norms and ceremonies, 2—Do good to other people, 3—Neither of them, other, 4—Both); (V151) *Meaning of religion: To make sense of life after death vs. To make sense of life in this world*, with four response options (1—Make sense of life after death, 2—Make sense of life in this world, 3—Neither of them, other, 4—Both), (V152) *How important is God in your life*, rated on a 10-point scale (from 1—Not at all important, to 10—Very important); and, at last, (V153) *Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right*, (V154) *The only acceptable religion is my religion*, (V155) *All religions should be taught in public schools*, (V156) *People who belong to different religions are probably just as moral as those who belong to mine*, all rated on a 4-point scale (1—Strongly agree, 2—Agree, 3—Disagree, 4—Strongly disagree) (inverted) and (Y003) *Autonomy Index* with five options response (−2—Obedience/Religious Faith; −1 ; 0; 1; 2—Determination, perseverance/Independence).

After analyzing the content of the twenty questions, they were separated into three groups: (1) religious identity (V9, V144, V147, V148, V52 and Y003), (2) religious practice (V25, V145, V146), and (3) religious convictions (V19, V41, V106, V108, V132, V150, V151, V153, V154, V155 and V156). Regarding religious identity, there are significant Spearman correlations ($p < 0.000$) between all the items that include it (ranging from $r = 0.323$ to $r = 0.601$), and the highest correlations occur between variables V9 (*Important in life: Religion*) and V152 (*How important is God in your life*); and V148 (*Believe in: God*) and V152 (*How important is God in your life*). The only exception is for the Y003 (*Autonomy Index*) whose significant correlations above $r = 0.300$ are set only with the variable V9 (*Important in life: Religion*) and the variable V152 (*How Important is God in your life*); the correlations established with

the remaining variables of religious identity, although significant, are below $r = 0.300$ (according to Cohen (1989), negligible correlations).

Concerning religious practice (V25, V145, V146), it has also been found significant Spearman correlations ($p < 0.000$) between all these items (ranging from $r = 0.297$ to $r = 0.634$); the highest correlation occurs between variables V145 (*How often do you attend religious services*) and V146 (*How often do you pray*). Finally, religious convictions present significant Spearman correlations ($p < 0.000$) between almost all the items, however, most of these correlations are below $r = 0.300$; so, only correlations above $r = 0.300$ were retained.

Thus, correlations above these values were found between V19 (*Important child qualities: Religious faith*) and V108 (*Confidence: The Churches*) ($r = 0.334$); between V19 (*Important child qualities: Religious faith*) and V153 (*Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right*) ($r = 0.421$); between V108 (*Confidence: The Churches*) and V153 (*Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right*) ($r = 0.379$); between V150 (*Meaning of religion: To follow religious norms and ceremonies vs. To do good to other people*) and V151 (*Meaning of religion: To make sense of life after death vs. To make sense of life in this world*) ($r = 0.341$); lastly, between V153 (*Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right*) and V154 (*The only acceptable religion is my religion*) ($r = 0.564$). Variables V41 (*Would not like to have as neighbors: People of a different religion*), V106 (*How much you trust: People of another religion*), V132 (*Democracy: Religious authorities interpret the laws*), V155 (*All religions should be taught in public schools*) and V156 (*People who belong to different religions are probably just as moral as those who belong to mine*) did not present minimal correlations (above $r = 0.300$) with any variable of the religious convictions dimension and, for this reason, they were excluded. The remaining religious variables are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Dependent variables.

Religious Dimension	Number	Variable
Religious identity	V9	<i>Important in life: Religion</i>
	V144	<i>Religious denomination</i>
	V147	<i>Religious person</i>
	V148	<i>Believe in: God</i>
	V152	<i>How important is God in your life</i>
	Y003	<i>Autonomy Index</i>
Religious practice	V25	<i>Active/Inactive membership: Church or religious organization</i>
	V145	<i>How often do you attend religious services</i>
	V146	<i>How often do you pray</i>
Religious convictions	V19	<i>Important child qualities: Religious faith</i>
	V108	<i>Confidence: The Churches</i>
	V150	<i>Meaning of religion: To follow religious norms and ceremonies vs. To do good to other people</i>
	V151	<i>Meaning of religion: To make sense of life after death vs. To make sense of life in this world</i>
	V153	<i>Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right</i>
V154	<i>The only acceptable religion is my religion</i>	

Regardless of the theological, metaphysical, and philosophical arguments about the existence or not of God, the authors' aim is to answer the fundamental question about the existence of God through the data available for this purpose. The authors considered that to answer this question, the analysis of the religious dimension of identity, composed of five variables, is the most appropriate.

3.3. Frequencies of Religious Identity

Most people believe in the existence of God; more than half of the sample considers that God is important and very important in their life; most people consider themselves religious; and consider that religion is important in their life. Regarding the *Autonomy Index*, most of the participants are in the core values (0 e 1). The most representative religions are the Muslim and Roman Catholic (Table 3).

Table 3. Dependent variables.

		WSS 6	
		N	%
<i>Believe in: God (V148)</i>			
Valid	No	11,633	12.9
	Yes	67,846	75.1
	Total	79,479	88.0
Absent	Total (Inapplicable; Inappropriate response; Refusal; Not asked in survey; No answer; Don't know)	10,871	12.0
Total		90,350	100.0
<i>How important is God in your life (V152)</i>			
Valid	Not at all important	6482	7.2
	2	2843	3.1
	3	2430	2.7
	4	1919	2.1
	5	5316	5.9
	6	4854	5.4
	7	6035	6.7
	8	7532	8.3
	9	6213	6.9
	Very important	41,886	46.4
Total		85,510	94.6
Absent	Total (Inapplicable; Inappropriate response; Refusal; Not asked in survey; No answer; Don't know)	4840	5.4
Total		90,350	100.0
<i>Religious person (V147)</i>			
Valid	An atheist	4767	5.3
	Not a religious person	22,543	25.0
	A religious person	58,404	64.6
	Total	85,714	94.9
Absent	Total (Inapplicable; Inappropriate response; Refusal; Not asked in survey; No answer; Don't know)	4636	5.1
Total		90,350	100.0
<i>Important in life: Religion (V9)</i>			
Valid	Not at all important	10,161	11.2
	Not very important	14,160	15.7
	Rather important	19,670	21.8
	Very important	45,025	49.8
	Total	89,016	98.5
Absent	Total (Inapplicable; Inappropriate response; Refusal; Not asked in survey; No answer; Don't know)	1334	1.5
Total		90,350	100.00

Table 3. Cont.

		WSS 6	
		N	%
<i>Autonomy Index</i>		(Y003)	
Valid	Obedience/Religious Faith	8685	9.6
	−1	18,786	20.8
	0	28,443	31.5
	1	24,029	26.6
	Determination, perseverance/Independence	10,380	11.5
	Total	90,323	100.0
Absent	Total (Missing)	27	0.00
Total		90,350	100.0
<i>Religious denomination</i>		(V144)	
Valid	Muslim	18,526	20.5
	Roman Catholic	14,817	16.4
	Orthodox	8072	8.9
	Protestant	5703	6.3
	Hindu	5006	5.5
	Buddhist	3876	4.3
	Sunni (WSS6)/Shia (WSS5)	3185	3.5
	Others	24,845	27.6
Total		84,030	93.0
Absent	Total (Inapplicable; Inappropriate response; Refusal; Not asked in survey; No answer; Don't know)	6320	7.00
Total		90,350	100.0

In addition to the correlations between the religious variables presented above, correlations between the five variables of religious identity and other dimensions (social, demographic, political) were sought, through the determination of Spearman correlations. However, the variables V148 (*Believe in: God*), V147 (*Religious person*) and V144 (*Religious denomination*) do not correlate significantly above $r = 0.300$ with any variable except with the above-mentioned religious variables.

The variable V152 (*How important is God in your life*) is significantly correlated above $r = 0.300$ with the following variables: V49 (*One of my main goals in life has been to make my parents proud*) (1—Agree strongly, 2—Agree, 3—Disagree, 4—Disagree strongly) ($r = -0.327$; $p < 0.001$); the more important God is in people's lives, the more they agree that making parents proud is an important goal; V79 (*Schwartz: Tradition is important to this person; to follow the customs handed down by one's religion or family*) (1—Very much like me; 2—Like me; 3—Somewhat like me; 4—A little like me; 5—Not like me; 6—Not at all like me) ($r = -0.342$; $p < 0.001$); the more important God is in people's lives, the more they agree with the fact that tradition is fundamental; V203 (*Justifiable: Homosexuality*) (from 1—Never justifiable to 10—Always justifiable) ($r = -0.352$; $p < 0.001$); the more important God is in people's lives, the more they consider that homosexuality is not justifiable; V204 (*Justifiable: Abortion*) (from 1—Never justifiable to 10—Always justifiable) ($r = -0.386$; $p < 0.001$); the more important God is in people's lives, the more they consider abortion unjustifiable; V206 (*Justifiable: Sex before marriage*) (from 1—Never justifiable to 10—Always justifiable) ($r = -0.375$; $p < 0.001$); the more important God is in people's lives, the more they consider that having sex before marriage is not justifiable; and V207A (*Justifiable: Euthanasia*) (from 1—Never justifiable to 10—Always justifiable) ($r = -0.404$; $p < 0.001$); the more important God is in people's lives, the more they consider that euthanasia is not justifiable. Taken together, these variables predict 23.7% of the variance of the variable V152 (*How important is God in your life*) ($R^2 = 0.237$; $F(5, 29,542) = 1839.43$, $p < 0.001$).

The variable V9 (*Important in life: Religion*) is significantly correlated above $r = 0.300$ with the following variables: V49 (*One of my main goals in life has been to make my parents proud*) ($r = -0.350$; $p < 0.001$); the more important Religion is in people's lives, the more they agree that making parents proud is an important goal; V79 (*Schwartz: Tradition is important to this person; to follow the customs handed down by one's religion or family*) ($r = -0.357$; $p < 0.001$); the more important Religion is in people's lives, the more they agree with the fact that tradition is fundamental; V203 (*Justifiable: Homosexuality*) ($r = -0.328$; $p < 0.001$); the more important Religion is in people's lives, the more they consider that homosexuality is not justifiable; V204 (*Justifiable: Abortion*) ($r = -0.373$; $p < 0.001$); the more important Religion is in people's lives, the more they consider abortion unjustifiable; V205 (*Justifiable: Divorce*) (from 1—Never justifiable to 10—Always justifiable) ($r = -0.310$; $p < 0.001$); V206 (*Justifiable: Sex before marriage*) ($r = -0.417$; $p < 0.001$); and V207A (*Justifiable: Euthanasia*) ($r = -0.325$; $p < 0.001$); the more important Religion is in people's lives, the more they consider divorce unjustifiable. Taken together, these variables predict 24.8% of the variance of the variable V9 (*Important in life: Religion*) ($R^2 = 0.248$; $F(6, 29,715) = 1633.34$, $p < 0.001$).

The variable Y003 (*Autonomy Index*) is significantly correlated above $r = 0.300$ with the following variables: V12 (*Important child qualities: independence*) (1—Mentioned, 2—Not mentioned) ($r = -0.561$; $p < 0.001$); those who have a higher degree of autonomy mention more the qualities of independence of the child as being important; V18 (*Important child qualities: determination and perseverance*) (1—Mentioned, 2—Not mentioned) ($r = -0.510$; $p < 0.001$); those who have a higher degree of autonomy mention more the qualities of determination and perseverance of the child as being important; and V21 (*Important child qualities: Obedience*) (1—Mentioned, 2—Not mentioned) ($r = -0.610$; $p < 0.001$); those who have a lower degree of autonomy mention more the qualities of obedience of the child as being important. Taken together, these variables predict 82.6% of the variance of the variable Y003 (*Autonomy Index*) ($R^2 = 0.826$; $F(3, 90,319) = 142,814.62$, $p < 0.001$).

4. Discussion

In the current world, the religious landscapes are dominated by a “piece of shot silk” (Toynbee 1956) of different religious and non-religious groups. Driven, in part, by globalization, religious diversity has contributed to calling into question the dominance of traditional religious groups. This evidence is combined with the secularization theory (Casanova 1994), that has been discussed by several authors and no consensus has been reached (Berger 1999; Davie 2001; Moniz 2017; Zepeda 2010). If some past dominant religious groups are losing believers, that does not mean that all groups are also losing. In fact, what has been found in some national and international studies is a growing body of new religious groups that are playing their role in the religious scenario. Belief or not belief in God seems to follow from social differences that are somewhat related with the way citizens live, think and act in the society (Moniz 2017). In accordance to this author, the analyzed data of this study reveals a trend that has been reported in a past study by Dix (2013). In fact, non-believers, or the secular ones, are present in all social classes, but significant correlations were found between them and a predominance of males, young, urban and with high education levels. It is quite impressive that, and according to a national study carried out in Portugal by Teixeira (2012), in the secular universe, 71.1% are men and only 28.9% are women. The results in this study reveal that 56.4% of non-believers are males, so believing in God is more predominant in females than males. In what concerns the education level, Dix (2013) has found similar results to the present study.

A significant correlation between secularity and people with high education levels has been identified, suggesting that believing in God is associated with less educated people. According to the same study, 6.5% of non-believers have a master or doctoral degree and 22.9% have university-level education with a degree. In the believers' group, 4% have a master or doctoral degree (2.5% less than non-believers) and 21.5% have university-level education with degree (1.4% less than non-believers). An educational disparity has been found in the present study, specifically in the segment of people with university-level education with a degree. Non-believers represent 23.2%, contrasting with

believers representing 16.5% (6.7% less than non-believers). These results have natural repercussion in the subjects' professional activity. If less educated, believers tend to be at the bottom of the social pyramid, more vulnerable to unemployment and, in the case of females, more prone to be housewives (Banerjee and Bloom 2014). This situation has been confirmed in the past, namely by Cabral (2001) and Dix (2013) works, analyzing data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) of 1998, in which a positive correlation among gender, age group, education level, cultural capital, income and lower religious practice, was found (International Social Survey Programme Research Group 2000). Cabral (2001) confirms that non-believers are mainly young (unlike this study), more educated, with higher cultural capital, more urban and with high income. Alongside, non-believers assume themselves as belonging to middle and upper middle class, in professional leadership positions. Several authors (e.g., de Hart and Dekker 2015; Furman 1997; Herteliu et al. 2019; Kaneko 1990) also found that non-believers are younger than believers, contrary to this study.

The "Global Religious Landscape report" (Pew Research Center 2012) found 2.2 billion Christians (32% of the world's population) followed by 1.6 billion Muslims (23% of the world's population) in 2010. In the present study, the most representative religions are the Muslim (20.5%) and Roman Catholic (16.5%) ones. Due to the fact that the data analyzed in this study relates to 2010–2014, it is possible to observe a reverse trend: a decrease of Roman Catholic religion and an increase of other religions, such as the Muslim, which supports the many critics of the secularization theory. The same Pew Research Center (2012) report also comprises an important contribution to this thematic: roughly, one-in-six people around the globe (16%) have no religious affiliation, making them as the third-largest non-religious group worldwide, behind Christians and Muslims. This does not mean that they do not believe in God or in a universal spirit. They just do not identify with a particular faith. They believe without belonging, as stated by Davie (1990); religion is conceptualized as having three distinct, yet interrelated dimensions: religious belief, religious belonging, and religious behavior (Kellstedt et al. 1996; Smidt 2019). This evidence is aligned with the results of the present study that found that most people believe in the existence of God and consider that God is important and very important in their life; most people consider themselves religious and consider that religion is important in their life. Regarding the Y003 (Autonomy Index), most of the participants are in the core values (0 e 1).

Some authors studied the social basis, nature, and extent of religiosity and spirituality of secular groups in the United States (Baker 2015; Baker and Smith 2009). Baker and Smith (2009) compared three groups (atheists, agnostics and unchurched believers and affiliated believers) regarding their private religiosity and spirituality and attitudes toward religion, and found differences between them, being unchurched believers more privately religious or spiritual and atheists and unchurched believers more opposed, compared to agnostics concerning attitudes toward religion. However, it is not easy to generalize the conclusions of the studies, since many of these religious persons without affiliation assume themselves as non-religious. According to Saroglou et al. (2011, p. 484), "believers seemed to ignore that non-believers see them as dogmatic and non-believers often exaggerated their meta-stereotypes in comparison to how believers actually saw them. (...) highly identified group members tended to deny the outgroup's core characteristic, that is, believers' relative higher altruism and non-believers' relative lower dogmatism."

Another relevant finding in this study is that the more important God and religion is in people's lives, the more they agree that making parents proud is an important goal and with the fact that tradition is fundamental. The importance given to the tradition is also visible in the divergence towards homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia and sex before marriage. In what relates to euthanasia, believers are committed with the sovereignty "... that denotes that the lives and bodies of persons are created by, and ultimately return to, God (...) Thus, the fundamental passages in human life, including birth and death, are of divine concern" (Campbell 2000, pp. 1–2). In his study, Sharp (2018) has also found that respondents' beliefs about how close they are to God and how close they want to be with God predict negative attitudes toward voluntary euthanasia. The same happens with homosexuality.

According to the “World Publics Welcome Global Trade—But Not Immigration. 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey report” (Pew Research Center 2007) found that mainly in Africa, Asia and Middle Eastern countries, the majority of respondents states that faith in God is necessary to have morality and good values and so society should reject homosexuality. However, in the secular regions of the globe, namely in Western Europe, it is reported that morality is possible without faith and believing in God, so homosexuality should be accepted (Pew Research Center 2007). The abortion is also marked by divisions between believers and non-believers. The Religious Landscape study (Pew Research Center 2014) confirms that 79% of those who state that abortion is illegal in all cases are believers in God.

These results can be explained, in part, by what the most important figures of humanity think about the existence of God. Starting with Plato (Armstrong 2004), his statement that God is an intelligent force that tries to create order in the physical world, and that is visible by the religious dogmas which are seized without question by the believers, is quite impressive. That is also directly related with Isaac Newton (Tiner 1975), who said that God governs all things and knows all that is or can be done, in accordance with the reason why believers tend to be against abortion, euthanasia and homosexual practices: if God said, it should not be in any doubt about it. This can be even clearer in what Vincent van Gogh stated: God is understood by the believers as a Father-symbol and that implies an attitude which the child should respect (Westerman Holstijn 1951), and accept without question. This “Father-symbol” could also be interpreted as a need to be guided during life, representing someone that is always there, constantly present, making believers feel that they are not alone. Voltaire’s words make everything clear about belief in God: God creates and organizes matter through universal, immutable and self-sufficient laws (Caputo 2017), and that is thus understood as the meaning of everything.

Being the idea of God, a fascinating one, whose adherence was studied through the belief in the existence of God, and using an internationally recognized database, it can be concluded that the diversity found on the theme concerning the most important figures of humanity had an echo in the diversity of the common people. In fact, it is difficult to summarize the obtained results regarding the belief and non-belief dichotomy. Between one extreme and the other, there is a wide variety of attitudes and beliefs towards God that go beyond the aforementioned dichotomy. Corroborating with previous studies, the obtained results point to a correlation between belief in God and sociodemographic variables, such as gender, age group, educational level, social class, employment and marital status. However, the mentioned diversity can make it difficult to interpret these data, suggesting that the difference between believers and non-believers may be artificial, having resulted from the methodology itself. The relationship found between being a believer and defending traditional values also corroborates with previous studies, suggesting that humankind needs God to give meaning to the world around them, specifically, in terms of morality and conduct.

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