Religious classification

Can simple classification of religious adherence make it easier to cross ideological religious boundaries?

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

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Abstract

In this paper I attempt to make a simple classification system of religious adherence using Christianity as my example. With this method I attempt to verify if this classification might make it easier to discuss religion in a constructive manner.
Foreword

B.A. Degree in philosophy and Chinese studies
10 credits

This is the final paper for my B.A. degree in philosophy and Chinese studies at the University of Iceland.

I would like to thank my tutor Geir Sigurðsson for his patience and guidance during the development of this paper. I would also like to thank my girlfriend Anna Margrét Ingólfsdóttir for all of her help during this process. Finally I would like to thank my father Pétur Þór Sigurðsson for all of his moral support.
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1 Introduction

Religion affects our self-identity and ideas of the place of the human being in our reality. The philosophy of religion has a significant purpose in addressing the commitments and values of people all over the world in light of the immense amount of the world population that is either religious or affected by the local religious situations regardless of their own belief. In this paper I will attempt to review the idea of religion and discuss the concepts of what it means to be religious. It will be my goal to discover what it means to be religious and to see if the dialogue between religious and secular points of view can possible be improved by looking into the categorical differences of religious adherence. To do this I will be with a simple classification system to lay the foundation for mutually understandable arguments on both sides. Furthermore, although I will be critical in my discussion of religion in accordance to modern scientific breakthroughs, for example archeology, my goal is not to disprove religion or cause any breakthrough in religious viability. I would like to clarify that I am not an opponent of religious faith myself nor am I currently a follower of any major religion. I believe that religion should be discussed more openly and logically than is often the case, particularly in countries where religion has a strong presence.

I will begin with a short coverage of the philosophy of religion and its historical development as well as the main problem facing anyone discussing religion in a factual manner and not from the position of a believer. I will then review the statistics of religious adherents in the world as well as defining what religions my focus will be on and why. All ideas and arguments, when discussed in a logical manner must begin with an introduction and overall background information, even when those ideas are widespread or even considered common sense. This is unfortunately particularly apparent when discussing ideas and concepts as broad as the idea of any religious practice. While I feel the need to give a short introduction of some of the modern historical facts and interpretation of scripture problematic for religion. I will aim to make this part as short as possible since this information may be obvious to most readers.

I will then after having established this foundation for my discussion be moving into the status of religion in the world today and what it means to be a religious adherent.
I will discuss what makes someone a religious adherent and the difference types of religious classifications we can have. Afterwards I will discuss what these classifications may able to do for the purpose of possibly advancing cross cultural dialogue on religion as well as why they may be necessary. Finally I will have a closing chapter where I will finalize my arguments and discussion regarding religion and whether or not the ideas discussed in this paper have any actual value.
2 Philosophy of religion

The first use of the term “philosophy of religion” in English occurs in the 17th-century work of Ralph Cudworth. Up until then there was no distinction used for the study of religion outside of philosophy since philosophy used to cover all academia and was simply the study of knowledge, reality and existence.

Christian church dogma had for the most part been considered sacrosanct and it was not until the 14th – 15th centuries that they were challenged in any form by the advance of science which sometimes came into conflict with the God-given information of the Bible. It was necessary for men of science and reason to always argue within the enclosed frame of Christian reference. This conflict with science, as well as other religions, was clearest in the form of the Inquisition which existed in one form or another until the early 19th century. As one of the most famous examples it is worth mentioning that in the 17th century Galileo Galilei was tried as a heretic by the Inquisition and spent the rest of his life in house arrest for supporting the theory that the sun was the center of the solar system. In the 18th – 19th century the challenges of science truly gained more and more traction against Christian dogma and only in the 19th century it could perhaps be said that being a member of a religion in the western world became optional. This took place once theologians, especially in Germany started calling into doubt the historicity of religious texts, using the evidence of science and recorded history to do so. From then on forward there was less and less social and judicial pressure enforcing religion and more and more scientific support for abandoning it.

In this paper I will follow the example of the philosophy of religion in attempting to uncover facts about the reality of religion. Even though this is constantly becoming easier as barriers to dialogue are broken down, at least in some parts of the world, discussing religion can still be a difficult conceptual process. There is far too often still an apparently yet-to-be-surmounted gap separating the religious from the non-

2 Shulamit Ambalu et al., The Religions Book (London: Penguin Group, 2013), 242-244.
religious. We currently have very limited methods to measure this highly important social phenomena and a large reason for this is the fact that religion carries a certain seal as a deeply personal value which in many places makes it objectionable to question anyone’s religious faith. For the non-religious (whether identifying as an atheist or not) the intricacies and depths of religious faith may be difficult to understand, just like any foreign social aspect which can only be studied from the outside. Considering how difficult religious adherent have made studying religion objectively over the years and centuries, religion is perhaps in the forefront of phenomena which is hard to grasp from the outside. Some religious adherents even claim it is impossible due to the supernatural connection which many religious people claim is intrinsic to being able to understand religion. From this premise it is famously possible to argue along the lines of:

Credo ut intelligam – I believe in order to understand. A formula of Anselm’s implying that the intelligibility of Christian doctrine can only become evident after belief in it. The idea, especially frustrating for atheists, has echoes in the doctrine associated with the later work of Wittgenstein, according to which immersion in a way of life is necessary for understanding its specific structure and guiding concepts.⁵

This argument has taken many forms over the years. Here is the same idea in a more modern supposedly scientific format:

The special nature of religious understanding requires a certain methodology if it is to be approached in a philosophically appropriate way. An epistemology of detachment, so far from being the paradigm of proper philosophizing that it is often supposed to be, may be a way of hardening oneself against the porousness of receptivity that is a necessary condition for certain kinds of evidence to become salient. The disciplines of spiritual praxis can be interpreted as a training process that facilitates just the kind of interior moral transformation that will generate the required moral receptivity, as envisaged in the conversion process as traditionally understood. An important implication of this is that we cannot force the evidence for the truth of religion into a scientific template.⁶

Many consider this simply an attempt to avoid the argument entirely since this boils down to the idea that to understand a religion you have to truly believe, and if you

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question the religion you are not a true believer and therefore cannot understand. This is of course very difficult to disprove or even argue productively.

However, my goal as previously stated is not to argue god’s existence in any factual manner, as has been attempted and arguably done many times over the years. My intent is to discover what it means to be religious and to see if the dialogue between religious and secular points of view can possible be improved by looking into the categorical differences of religious. Throughout this paper I will be using the term supernatural to for any and all references to terms supposedly not explainable by science.
3 Focus

Religion is an extremely broad concept and it is therefore necessary to limit the scope of this paper to something I can hope to cover in this paper. My discussion of religion will therefore focus on Christianity since it is both the religion with the most adherents as well as the religion which I am most familiar with personally, having been born in Iceland and originally brought up in Protestantism. However for the rest of the paper I may use the term “religion” more often than Christianity even though all of my information and sources will be taken from Christianity. The reason for this is that it is my intent to talk about religion generally with Christianity simply serving as my example in this paper. The idea of this paper is to categorize religious belief and the goal is to create non-particular categories which would be usable in discussing other religions as well and not just Christianity. In the conclusion at the end of this paper I will discuss if this is feasible.

The following are the estimated 2010 numbers for the major religious groups worldwide, based on the Pew-TEMPLETON Global Religious Futures Project7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Group</th>
<th>Estimated Followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>2,168,330,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>1,599,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>1,131,150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>1,032,210,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>487,760,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk Religions</td>
<td>404,690,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religions</td>
<td>58,150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>13,860,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Christians and Muslims are by far largest religious group in the world aside from the unaffiliated category followed closely by the Hindu religion. Christianity by itself has 2,168,330,000 followers or 31.44% of the world population. I will now move into a short overview of some of the main problems of the Christian religious texts.

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4 The problem with the religious texts

As I mentioned above it has not been so long since questioning the information in the Bible or historical events as recorded by religious institutions was not something that you could do without risk. With these developments the religious institutions of Christianity have had to retreat farther and farther away from scriptural claims which nowadays are not considered sufficiently coherent - historically, logically or scientifically. The early history and dogma of these old institutions is, as is to be expected, extremely inadequately documented, which is not surprising considering the time scale in question. It can be said that

Thus the mildest of criticism of religion is also the most radical and the most devastating one. Religion is man-made. Even the men who made it cannot agree on what their prophets or redeemers or gurus actually said or did. Still less can they hope to tell us the “meaning” of later discoveries and development which were, when they began, either obstructed by their religions or denounced by them. And yet – the believers still claim to know! Not just to know, but also to know everything. Not just to know that god exists, and that he created and supervised the whole enterprise, but also to know what “he” demands of us.

All religions have institutions which created and adapted to the “organized” part in organized religion. Throughout the history of Christianity, this organization has given a great deal of authority to individual people (mostly men). These individuals have been making decisions on behalf of their institutions for hundreds of years. This has not historically always worked out so well for the search of objective truth or the development of science.

I will not be going into detail on any particulars here on negative Christian church history. There are plenty of facts about the church opposing the sciences, declaring people heretics and infidels and aggressively and violently pushing conversion. This is also not just a matter of ancient history such as the crusades or the inquisition. More recent history of sexual education and freedom, women and homosexual rights and abortions are also filled with the contradictions and imperiousness of religious institutions. Often these positions have been in direct opposition to the claims of science. Whatever the details they all claim validity and trace their reasoning and their traditional claims to their sacred texts.

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To take a now infamous example of church dogma and faith resulting in wildly
inaccurate statement about reality, Archbishop James Ussher of Armagh, who in 1650,
calculated the exact creation of the world, which in his worldview only included the
planet earth. Using biblical information literally he discovered that the “world” had
been created on Saturday, October 22, 4004 BC, at 6 pm. While this is damning
enough for a religious world view taking place in 1650 AD, this dating was also
endorsed in a courtroom testimony in the third decade of the twentieth century⁹ and
is a good example of religious information superseding factual information or reason.
This modern view can perhaps best be expressed by the Catholic Church itself, in a
document called the Gift of Scripture which was published as a teaching document of
the Bishops’ Conferences of England, Wales and Scotland, (approved for publication
by decree of the Congregation of Bishops, Prot No. 134/2005 dated the 6th day July
2005:¹⁰)

The Scriptures themselves proclaim that they are inspired by God, that God is
their author, and that they were written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ... ‘all
Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction,
and for training in righteousness’ (2 Timothy 3:16). On the basis of usage and
acceptance in the Church, it was gradually determined which books were to be
regarded as inspired. ... The books thus declared canonical and inspired by the
Spirit of God contain ‘the truth which God wished to be set down in the sacred
writings for the sake of our salvation’ (Dei Verbum 11). It is important to note this
teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the truth of Scripture is to be found
in all that is written down ‘for the sake of our salvation’. We should not expect
total accuracy from the Bible in other, secular matters. We should not expect to
find in Scripture full scientific accuracy or complete historical precision.¹¹

As I mentioned earlier the Christian texts have been largely discredited historically.
And as can be seen in the text above this is clearly recognized at least by the Catholic
Church at the highest level. However despite claiming that total accuracy should not
be expected the claim that these documents were inspired by a perfect god remains.
This is however hard to fathom when the full extent of this lack of “full scientific
accuracy or complete historical precision” is laid bare. Throughout recent history texts
of Christianity have been critically analyzed successfully and found to be hopelessly

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¹⁰ Bishops’ Conferences of England, Wales and Scotland. “Gift of Scripture”
http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Scripture/GoS.pdf
¹¹ Ibid.
inaccurate as well as, in some cases, factually incoherent. I will go over a few select points relating to both the old testament as well as the new so as to give the impression on how challenged these texts really are.

The Old Testament is a collection of ancient writings – now commonly referred to by scholars as the Hebrew Bible. It is a collection of writings composed mostly in the Hebrew language and estimated to have been written sometime over the course of the first millennium BC. It is therefore, as the name implies, by far the oldest of the religious documents of Christianity. Israeli archeologists have in recent years confirmed that the Bible was ultimately a work of fiction and that major parts of the Old Testament never took place:

The world in which the Bible was Created was not a mythic realm of great and saintly heroes but a tiny, down-to-earth kingdom where people struggled for their future against the all-too-human fears of war, poverty, injustice, disease, famine, and drought. The historical saga contained in the bible – from Abraham’s encounter with God and his journey to Canaan, to Moses’ deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage, to the rise and fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah – was not a miraculous revelation, but a brilliant product of the human imagination. It was first conceived – as recent archaeological findings suggest – during the span of two or three generations, about twenty-six hundred years ago.

The New Testament has been edited and re-edited many times. The documents represented in the New Testament were originally only a small part of the relevant documents of the Christian faith and much canonic dogma was created much later by the church. The relevant texts were selected from many other religious texts by church fathers, beginning most notably with Saint Irenaeus who in 180 AD had a large part in selecting the four gospels over other accounts (which consequently became heretical) and confirming the status of the Old Testament as scripture for Christianity, which until then was in doubt. Similar decisions about church creed and what exactly should be considered canon were made by Council of Nicaea in in 325 AD and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. These were far from the last of the edits or additions made to Christian dogma. A good example of gospel fallibility is the

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13 Ibid., 1
controversy accounts in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke regarding the ancestry of Joseph and the supposed story of how Jesus could have been born in Bethlehem. In Luke’s version of the story he even mentions historical events which did not take place in the timeframe necessary for the story to pan out.\textsuperscript{15} A detailed reading of the New Testament and some if it’s literal flaws make it fairly clear that it is in fact explicitly written with the purpose of forcing the story of Jesus to fit prophecies from the Old Testament so as to more fully support the idea that he was the prophesized savior.\textsuperscript{16}

I will not be going into more about the historical accuracy of Christianity. I do not find it necessary since despite all the strides in historical research and doubt on the veracity of scripture, Christianity, as was clear from the teaching document of the Bishops Conference mentioned above, has not been moved to redacting their claims in light of this academic development but simply adjust their message. As Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in Culture and Value in 1980:

\begin{quote}
Queer as it sounds: The historical accounts in the Gospels might, historically speaking, be demonstrably false and yet belief would lose nothing by this: not, however, because it concerns ‘universal truths of reason’! Rather, because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by men believingly (i.e. lovingly).\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

This has been the development that modern faith has undergone. Those that profess religion today can do so without necessarily believing the history of their religion or the history of the representatives of their religion. The institutions are happy enough that you claim to be a member.

\textsuperscript{16} Sam Harris, Letter to a Christian Nation. \textit{A Challenge to Faith} (London: Transworld Publishers, 2007), 57-60
\textsuperscript{17} Ludwig Wittgenstein \textit{Culture and Value}, G. H. von Wright (ed.) in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, Peter Winch (transl.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 32e.
5 The problem with the religious message

I would argue that a religion can be judged on at least three things; its veracity, message and followers. Leaving the followers for later, we can read the holy texts of Christianity to get an idea of the message that the church deems should be considered inspired by God, despite its above mentioned factually problematic foundation. However a reading of the holy texts of Christianity does not lead us to the conclusion that the message is better than the medium. It has been said before that perhaps the best way to challenge the adherents of any religions is by making them read their holy books in detail. Quite a lot of firm believers are extremely, and most likely blissfully, unaware of the personal history of their deity as recorded in their holy books. For instance if we were to take Old Testament at face value we would be forced to accept that.

The quote is originally written by Richard Dawkins at the beginning of his second chapter in his book The God Delusion. It paints a far from benign image of God but can be supported fully and in detail with direct information and quotes from the bible itself. This was in fact the cause of a book written by a former preacher Dan Barker named: God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction, in which every word in the list above has a chapter filled with references from the bible itself, supporting the above image of God. God and the bible have been criticized by an increasing multitude of authors since the 17th century. This information is therefore nothing new although never before has a whole book been written detailing all the apparently horrible moral character traits of god and justifying every statement with a direct quote from Bible itself. The Bible seen through the moral window of the modern age is not a moral guide but more of an image of the past which we should be glad we have left behind.

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But what about the New Testament? Is it a better example of Christian moral superiority? While a considerable improvement over the Old Testament the New Testament is far from a great moral guide and utterly fails as an apologist for the shortcoming of the Old Testament. The main reason for this is, as I mentioned above, that the New Testament is written and edited in a manner so as to force a connection between the Old and the New Testament. It is supposed to be a continuation of the same god, the same God which was responsible for the above quote. The New Testament therefore cannot be judged solely on its own story, it is another medium for the same god. Jesus himself claimed to be the God of the Old Testament and he did not hesitate to take the same tone on occasion:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set man against his father, and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.19

Still an improvement over the Old Testament but not, I think, by as great a margin as most Christians would like to assume. Jesus is also responsible for having created the concept of the fiery hell in Christian scripture. In short The New Testament while not being as heavy on destruction is still directly connected to the old and cannot be judged entirely on its own merits. There is also still same tone of overall jealousy and demand to be worshipped above all others and punishments for those that don’t submit.

I have now given a very basic coverage of the current reservations for the Christian holy books. I have not gone over these idea in great details since these facts can and have been the subject of many books and as I stated earlier it is not my intention to discuss the existence of God or to attempt to reach any permanent conclusion on these topics. Even if god were real and there were original stories made about him and his involvement with humanity thousands of years ago – we would currently have no objective way to measure which were true and which were fiction. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the modern academic facts point towards most of it being

19 Matthew 10:34-37
fiction. I have reviewed these things simply to clarify the foundation from which my later discussion builds on. In ages past the bible has been used as an ideological weapon, a recruitment method, as a justification of truly cruel acts and as validation for absolute political power in leaders. Regardless of the origins or objective value of the holy texts the fact remains that these texts have been monumentally important and influenced the development of humanity for thousands of years. An understanding of modern Christianity should not necessarily be focused on the historical factuality of the religion but rather the modern understanding that this religion carries for its followers.
6 What does it mean to be religious?

We have discussed the diminished state of these religious doctrines above and how they have changed over the centuries to adapt. What has this meant for the membership? What does Christianity mean for its contemporary followers and how can we constructively discover and discuss these values? The overall adaptation of the Abrahamic religious development, which includes Christianity, can be interestingly summed up by Daniel C. Dennett in his book Breaking the Spell in which he goes over these changes:

Much has been written over the centuries about the historic processes by which polytheisms turned into monotheism – belief in gods being replaced by belief in God. What is less often stresses is how this belief in God joined forces with the belief in belief in God to motivate the migration of the concept of God in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) away from concrete anthropomorphism to ever more abstract and depersonalized concepts.20

This move from anthropomorphism is the development away from the literal definitions of the Old Testament where god is seen as a male deity with powers but also the confines of very human emotions like jealousy and wrath. But how anthropomorphized do people want their god to be?

The genderless person without a body who nevertheless answers prayers in real time ... is still far too anthropomorphic for some, who prefer, to speak of a Higher Power ... whose characteristics are beyond comprehension – aside from the fact that they are, in some incomprehensible way, good, not evil. Does the higher power have (creative) intelligence? In what way? Does It (not He or She) care about us? About anything? The fog of mystery has descended conveniently over all the anthropomorphic features that have not been abandoned outright.21

The modern idea of the Christian god, as I discussed above is clearly very much in flux. The Christian religious definition of god has changed in recent history due to the attempt to adapt this ideal to fit developments in science and moral society. But how extensively can you change a concept until it becomes something different?

Mystery is declared to surround the various conceptions of God, but there is nothing mysterious about the process of transformation, which is clear for all to see and has been described (and often decried) by generations of would-be stewards of this important idea. Why don’t the stewards just coin new terms for

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21 Ibid., 206.
the revised conception and let go of the traditional terms along with the discarded conceptions? ... Why do people insist on calling the higher power they believe in “God”? The answer is clear: the believers in the belief in God have appreciated that the continuity of professing requires continuity of nomenclature, that brand loyalty is a feature so valuable that it would be foolish to tamper with it.  

This definition of contemporary faith being in some part a version of brand loyalty is a good modern explanation to help us explain some factors about religious membership as we see it in many places and countries today. Brand loyalty can be described as a positive emotional feelings towards a brand and commitment to purchase the same product or service repeatedly now and in the future.

In a competitive marketplace, brands need to maintain continuous meaningful engagement in order to identify consumer needs and expectations. Brands are most successful when they address emotional values that are important to their target customers.

The continuation of religious adherence despite massive changes in the “product” itself as well as the social situation of most of the world’s population can be understood as historical and sociological religious brand loyalty. Add to this the difficulty of creating a new brand, one without the historical authentication and mystery of the established ones and it is obvious why “new products” without established nomenclature cannot really compete on the same field. This may go a long way towards explaining the longstanding strength and endurance of the main world religions, including Christianity. Regardless of what we may dig up (quite often literally) about these religions and how out of date with modern morality their original message may be, there is nothing that can replace antiquity, ancient tales of miracles and mystic relics. Any modern competition would have to face modern scrutiny. Finally there is nothing else that promises answers to some of the questions that we have regarding life, death and the well-being of our loved ones that have passed away. This is so powerful that even if we do not really believe it we can possibly believe in believing in it, like in the above quote, and if we can’t do that many of us would still very much wish to be able to do so.

22 Ibid., 208.
I believe that this should not surprise anyone, especially in light of our above review, that within a religious group and between countries, adherence to creed and dogma and belief in god come in many difference shapes and form. People interpret their religion differently and to a varying personal degree and importance. It would therefore be immensely important for improving our understanding of these religions if we could quantify and research in a more accurate manner the actual differences in levels of belief of religious adherents. To attempt this, let us start with the numbers of adherence listed in each religion. Above you can see the number of religious adherents by religion. But a religious adherent according to the above study in question is the following:

This study is based on self-identification. It seeks to estimate the number of people around the world who view themselves as belonging to various religious groups. It does not attempt to measure the degree to which members of these groups actively practice their faiths or how religious they are.²⁴

Furthermore the study is the result of “national censuses, large-scale surveys and official population registers”²⁵ which can obviously extensively vary in detail and accuracy between countries. As an example of these limitations, the religious affiliation of infants and children can be particularly challenging:

While censuses usually enumerate religion for the entire population, including children, general population surveys do not usually include interviews with children. ... children were assigned religious affiliations when necessary based on the best methods available ... In most cases, the religious affiliation of the respondent or head of the household was assigned to all additional members of the household who were not surveyed.²⁶

My point is not to discredit or demean the study. These methods are currently the only way to organize studies like these, but rather to illuminate slightly what is behind the projections of all such studies. Just like many other subjects the religious adherence of people is something that cannot be objectively measured with full accuracy. Censuses and surveys are our only way to research subjects like this but they

²⁴ Pew Research Center "Religion and Public Life"
http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/
²⁵ Pew Research Center "Religion and Public Life"
http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/
²⁶ Pew Research Center "Religion and Public Life. Appendix A: Methodology"
http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-methodology/
are far from a perfect process. In fact, any subject that has strong ethical or cultural connotations and implications, not to mention possible organizational enforcement, might be impossible to research accurately without interference. In such surveys we will always face the problem that these methods require trust in the institution making the survey as well as a lack of strong social pressures influencing what the “correct” answer should be.

In March 2011 the decennial UK national census was held\(^\text{27}\) which, among other things, asked about religious adherence. To further research the meaning of self-identified religious adherents the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (RDFRS) “commissioned the respected polling organization Ipsos MORI to survey the actual religious held by those who had self-identified as Christians”\(^\text{28}\). The fieldwork “was done between the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) and 7\(^{\text{th}}\) of April 2011”\(^\text{29}\) so only a week after the census was completed. The sample used was made up of “1136 people who had self-identified as Christians”\(^\text{30}\) and several questions regarding the details of their religious knowledge and inclinations were asked. The information gathered from this survey clarifies the different levels of religious belief I have been talking about by asking people questions which show the discrepancy within a group of people who all profess the same faith. This is an important example in how to crack the self-identification culturally dependent social barriers in an attempt to quantify and research the actual differences in levels of belief. I would like to look at the following questions in more detail:

**What would you say is the MAIN reason you think of yourself ... as being of this religion?**

I was christened/baptized into this religion 46%  
I believe in the teachings of this religion 18%  
One or both of my parents are/were members of this religion 13%  
As a child I went to a Sunday school run by this religion 8%

\(^\text{30}\) Ibid.
I currently attend religious services at a church of this religion other than weddings, christenings/baptisms or funerals 4%
I went to a school run by this religion 4%
I used to attend religious services at a church of this religion other than weddings, christenings/baptisms or funerals 3%
My husband/wife/partner is/was a member of this religion 1%
I don’t really think of myself as a member of this religion 0%
My child/children attend/s a school run by this religion 1%
Don’t know 2%
Prefer not to say 1%

Which of the following statements comes CLOSEST to describing you?
I have strong religious beliefs and I am a Christian 30%
I do not have strong religious beliefs but I think of myself as a Christian 29%
I do not have strong religious beliefs but I was brought up to think of myself as a Christian 19%
I wouldn’t really call myself religious at all 12%
I think of myself as being spiritual rather than religious 8%
None of these 1%
Don’t know 1%
Prefer not to say 1%

Which of the following statements best describes YOUR personal view of God?
I believe in God and I believe that Christianity is just one way of knowing him 37%
I believe in God and I believe that Christianity is the only true way of knowing him 17%
I think of God as being the laws of nature and everything in the universe 13%
I don’t believe in God but think there may be some kind of supernatural intelligence out there 10%
I think of God as being whatever caused the universe 9%
I don’t believe in God 6%
None of these 1%
Don’t know 4%
Prefer not to say 2%
Several assumptions can be made based on these answers. No one answered that they did not think of themselves as a member of Christianity (this being a sample of those that had already self-identified as such in the 2011 Census) but only 30% claimed to have strong religious belief and more than 68% consider themselves Christian for reasons other than having strong religious beliefs (Question 2). The reasoning for considering themselves Christian were also telling. Only 18% claimed (as their main reason) that they believed in the teachings of Christianity while 72% considered themselves Christian due to cultural or contextual reasons or upbringing, which in most cases they had no control over. Being born or brought up in religion is something many consider as automatic, and inherent a process as your ethnicity or nationality. It seems to be much harder to leave a religion than to enter one since so many enter the religion through no active decision of their own while it requires not only a personal decision but also some paperwork to officially leave it.

The next two questions further support this point as well as striking a chord with the later chapters of this paper.

Which of the following statements BEST describes your personal view of the Bible as a guide to morality?

* The Bible is not a perfect guide to morality as some of its teachings are not appropriate today, but it is still the best guide we have 42%
* The Bible is not the best guide to morality today, there are better ways of knowing right from wrong 24%
* The Bible is a perfect guide to morality and its teachings hold true today 23%
* None of these 3%
* Don’t know 5%
* Prefer not to say 3%

What is the first book of the NEW Testament?

* Matthew 35%
* Genesis 19%
* Acts of the Apostles 3%
* Psalms 3%
Don’t know 39%
Prefer not to say 1%

When, if at all, did you last read any part of the Bible? I mean independently and from choice, and not as part of a church service or other religious meeting.

In the last week 15%
In the last month 7%
1 to 6 months ago 10%
7 to 12 months ago 6%
Over 1 year and up to 3 years ago 9%
More than 3 years ago 36%
I have never read any part of the Bible independently 15%
Don’t know 1%
Prefer not to say 1%

The former question asks about the validity of the bible as a moral guide and 65% percent answer that it is a valid moral guide, either a perfect moral guide (23%) or simply the best we have (42%). Earlier in this paper I have severely questioned this point a view but let’s bear in mind that this is a survey giving only to people that have already self-identified as Christians. A certain predilection for the bible is to be expected. We can however question whether this opinion is based on the sample member’s personal comprehensive knowledge of the bible, whether through personal reading of it or by attending church sermons, or simply his idea of the bible as scripture of his religion.

The second question above seeks to examine this idea by asking for specific knowledge of the New Testament “what is the first book of the New Testament? This question is easier than it may look to most atheists with no knowledge of the New Testament since only two of the four possible answers are actual books of the New Testament, the right answer (Matthew, which 35% answered correctly) and Psalms. This lack of knowledge might be fairly puzzling to those that had actually independently read the New Testament. The third question about the bible cuts to the meat of the matter by asking just that, when was the last time the sample members independently read the bible. Only 38% of the sample membership had read the bible
independently in the last year and 51% had either read it more than three years ago or never. In fact 15% of the people surveyed had “never read any part of the bible independent which is less than the amount of people that did not have an option of the bible as a moral guide in the previous question (None of these 3%, don’t know 5%, prefer not to say 3% ).

These questions might be biased to a point, since it is commonly maintained that devout Catholics do not read the bible as much as devout Protestants. “Practicing Catholics know they read and hear Scripture at every Mass. ... for most Catholics, the Scripture they hear and read is not from the Bible. It is from a worship aid in the pew.” However, this idea that Catholics do not read the bible is an old one and has been changing ever since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in which it was decided to allow the Catholic mass to be “celebrated in the vernacular ... All of this contributed to Catholics becoming more familiar with the Bible and more interested in reading the Scriptures and praying with them.”

Regardless however of how people are familiar with their scripture, having personally read it, by choice, speaks volume about a religious adherent’s familiarity of scripture and therefore knowledge of the message of his religion. Like I mentioned above, only those that have not read the bible in detail can actually believe it to be a moral compass.

The survey raised more points about morality than just the relevance of the bible. The last question I will quote from the survey is the one asking about the value the sample members give to their religion’s teachings on morality.

When it comes to right and wrong, which of the following, if any, do you MOST look to for guidance?

My own inner moral sense 54%
Parents, family or friends 25%
Religious teachings and beliefs 10%
Philosophy and reason 7%
None of the above 2%

32 Ibid.
Don’t know 1%
Prefer not to say 1%
In light of the previous questions this question on morality is particularly telling. When they need to make a choice about morality only 10% of the sample members choose religious teachings and beliefs. This is from the same sample group of which everyone is a self-identifying Christians, of which 65% said that the bible was a good moral guide (best we have 42% and perfect guide 23%). Despite the sample group’s predilection towards the bible or at least their interest in valuing the bible, most people turn to more logical and contemporary guidance when in need.

Before moving on I would like to point out that it is of course clear that we cannot use this survey to make any specific claims about self-identifying Christians in general, not to mention any estimations about self-identifying members of other religions. This was a survey in one liberal country. As we discussed above, there are massive differences in religious customs between countries and many different interpretations of Christianity. However I maintain that this research is a good example of the methods we need to use to acquire more details on difficult issues such as this as well as why it is necessary. It is a reminder about the meaning of self-identification as well as the connotations this carries for any official statistics regarding religious adherents.

It is clear that the definition of a believer can be extremely vast and that there is currently no officially recognized way to clarify membership in a religion other than self-identification. This obviously does not give us much information on the actual values held by individual members of the group or their level of religious belief, there is currently no official method for an outside researcher to clarify if the self-identified member within a group truly belong to that group or if they should possibly be categorized differently or in more detail. There is no way to measure the depth of the membership other than making a survey which requires the full compliance of the subject matter as well as either cross-examining questions like in the survey above or their own understanding of the categorizations involved and personal honesty to answer accordingly.

Using a long cross-examining questionnaire is both costly and difficult but it is more likely to give us quantifiable research data than simply asking direct questions and
hoping that people understand, agree with and/or are honest about the categories which we are researching. If the survey above had not asked cross examining follow up questions, such as in the case of the value of the Bible as a moral guide, we would not have gotten the same impression of the subject matter. Many Christian members, at least in the UK apparently considers themselves a member due to their original situation outside of their control or does not really see themselves as members at all. However they do not want to risk the social or cultural bonds which are often tied in with religion. Regardless of their self-identification, these members cannot really be considered true believers of the religion.

So what can we consider a true believer and what is the distinction between a true believer and someone that is simply a religious adherent? I maintain that for the simple religious adherent and those that supporter religion by believing in belief (which I mentioned early in this chapter) membership should be sufficient. However to be a true believer it should be necessary to believe in something more than just the earthly institution, believing in some of its claims would also be necessary. Therefore, someone who says that they do not believe in the actual existence of a supernatural being who is at least to some degree connected to the dogma of the religion and correctly represents said religion cannot be said to be a true believer, despite quite possibly being an adherent of the institution.

This has of course been a recognized problem in academic work and has caused interest in recasting theories in the philosophy of religion as religious behavior rather than religious belief:

While religious beliefs are not identifiable, religious behavior is, and this aspect of the human experience can be comprehended. What is needed is an explanation of this observable religious behavior that is restricted to what can be observed.33

This along with my own argument before clarifies that there is no way to truly know for certain the religious beliefs of people in different social situation all over the world. With a deeply personal topic such as this, which is also deeply politicized and both politically and socially enforced in some places, factual accuracy cannot be

guaranteed. I have already detailed some of the reasoning for this and the list would go on extensively if we attempted to make it exhaustive.

However, while this may be true we can at least conceptually clarify simple categories which would be useful to have and work with if we had a method of selection to designate people accordingly. These simple categories could then at least be a foundation for further work and a conceptual foundation for discussing possible theories or policies. We have already discussed the category of the Simple Adherent which is a member of religion solely due to social factors and circumstance, not personal belief. We have also mentioned the Believers in Belief category who at the very least support the religion in questions and possible desire to actually believe. And we have also talked about the true believer which is someone who believes in something more than just the early institution, who believes in at least some of the supernatural claims of their religion including the existence of God. There is of course clearly a large variety to anyone’s version of “true belief”. A lot of people are clearly (as we have already discussed and can be seen in the survey above) selective in their belief someone who is, possibly without realizing it, selective about the parts of the religious scripture and dogma he accepts in his religion while having true belief in his God. This idea plays extensively into the first part of this paper in which I pointed out the now widely accepted understanding regarding the limitations of the historical value of scripture as well as the amount of dogma that conflicts with our modern morality and values. I also went into some detail about the extensive factual adjustments and development that religion has gone through in the last few centuries. In light of this, it is reasonable that a great many people who have true belief in the supernatural claims of their religion and belief in God do not feel the need to necessarily believe in the entirety of scripture and all of the various supernatural claims made by their religion throughout its history. We could refer to this kind of true believer as a Selective Believer. Of course there are also those believers that belief in scripture and dogma without question. Any information which contradicts or is even simply not supported by scripture, does not factor into their equation of values. It is simply not the place of man to question. We can refer to these believers as Fundamentalist.
7 Fundamentalists

I have separated the discussion of the Fundamentalist into its own chapter. The reason for this is that the Fundamentalist category of a religious believers is perhaps the main reason that we need quantifiable research on religious belief as well as developments of a classification system to understand it. It is usually the Fundamentalist that objects to any claims or arguments counter to his religion, requiring no further proof than the undisputable word of scripture and absolute claims of their dogma. The purpose of the survey above was to show an example of the various differences of religious adherents that we could have. Not to assume that a similar result from a similar survey would be the case everywhere else in the world, or even that the results would be the same if repeated in the UK. The term Fundamentalist can have various meanings, it can mean everything from someone who simply rejects some aspect of moderate contemporary religious approach to someone who takes the entirety of his religious history and scripture literally. I will be using the term to mean someone who submits to the authority of his religion to such a degree that the rules and principles in question carry with them the highest possible authority and moral imperative. Consequently he may also submit absolutely to those that he or she has chosen to represent their idea of religion. Only in Fundamentalism do we have absolute belief in both the supernatural and religious dogma and it is therefore most commonly in Fundamentalism that we find blind belief, belief which does not require any input from anything else than the absolute authority that the Fundamentalist has accepted. This can be hard for people with strictly secular views to conceptually comprehend. However the idea of Fundamentalism is not necessarily so surprising, there can be surely great benefits in having a firm ideological foundation in any religion which:

Promises its adherents that they – and they alone – are the “chosen of god”, guaranteed salvation no matter what, and assured that the almighty (or whatever form the gods take) will assist them through their current difficulties if the right rituals and prayers are performed. This undoubtedly introduces a profound sense of comfort in times of adversity.34

The difference between a Selective Believer and a Fundamentalist is fairly straightforward in concept but can be difficult to discover. All actual believers in God believe in some aspect of the supernatural with regards to their religion but while the Selective Believer takes only some aspects of his religion as God given the Fundamentalist places no limitation on his belief in God. The difficulty in verifying this this difference most likely lies in the difficulty of getting the selective believer to take an official stand in his belief rather than determining the identity of the Fundamentalist. The United States are often considered to have one of the largest Christian population of Fundamentalist:

According to a recent Gallop poll, only 12 percent of Americans believe that life on earth has evolved through a natural process, without the interference of a deity. Thirty-one percent believe that evolution has been “guided by God” ... 53 percent are actually creationists. This means that ... more than half of the American population believes that the entire cosmos was created six thousand years ago. This is, incidentally, about a thousand years after the Sumerians invented glue. Sam Harris, Letter, p.xiv

A system which allows or sustains fundamentalism often enforces it as well. It may be difficult in places where Fundamentalism is popular to go against the flow. This is especially true if the person in question still actually believes in God and is simply a Selective Believer. Going against others who categorically self–identify with you due to your own personal ideological differences can be hard. The differences between the religious populations of different places, often within the same countries is one of the main reasons some kind of a classification system is necessary. Just looking at adherents gives us no idea of their actual religious views and when an adherent of any category of belief looks at these numbers he may assume that his religion is similar all over.

A majority of Westerners find it difficult to appreciate the power of religious impulses to motivate certain attitudes and actions. We have become so used to analysis of the world in terms of psychological, political and sociological categories that any statement of a purely religious motive is almost bound to be met with utter incomprehension.35

As the above quote makes clear, it is difficult for those that do not believe in religion to comprehend the absolute certainty that true believers experience. This can be a dangerous blind spot since it may ultimately mean that we can be arguing about things from entirely different perceptions of reality, something which will never result in a beneficial discourse.

Finally I want to make a clear distinction between Fundamentalism and Extremism. I want to be very clear in this distinction. Any adherent to a religion can believe whatever they want, this is what freedom of religion means. And although it may have fallen out of favor in the west any person can believe the most outrageous thing about the world, its creation, humanity and divinity. Belief in anything, by itself, can only ever make you a fundamentalist and there is not necessarily anything wrong with that. It may be considered non-productive towards debate or the development of education and many may even consider it morally wrong but it remains a person’s decision what to believe, always. You cannot, in my opinion and in accordance to the definitions that I have clarified here, ever call someone an Extremist simply due to their religious beliefs. An Extremist is someone that attempts to push his believes on the world onto others forcefully, either through violence or politically from a position of strength, someone that robs people of the basic right of having a choice in their opinion, mundane or religious. This can be done through physical force or by enforcing social pressure or by the creation of false information. I will not be discussing extremism in more detail in this paper. As I have just stated I belief it does not fit within the simple classification that I am making in this paper. I simply mention it here because of the psychological connection that some people make between Fundamentalism and Extremism.
8 A simple classification system

In the previous chapters “What does it mean to be religious?” and “Fundamentalism” I introduced the idea behind four categories of religious belief which we can separate Christians into. The Simple Adherent, the Believer in Belief, the Selective Believer and the Fundamentalist. I will now attempt to explain these categories further and I hope that this will give at least some foundation for further discussion on religion. I will, for the rest of this paper, be referring to these categories as a whole as the “simple classification system”. The first two categories, the Simple Adherent and the Believer in Belief do not have actual belief which I classified as “someone who beliefs in something more than just the early institution, who beliefs in at least some of the supernatural claims of their religion including the existence of God”. We can classify the Simple Adherent as those that were born into or otherwise placed into religion and have either never given it much thought or have decided that they are not religious but are unwilling due to social pressure to actively declare or register as such. Believing in belief in god only requires you to belief that belief in god exists – which is not something that I think anyone will object to. Those Believers in Belief think that belief in god is a good thing, something to be both encouraged and fostered. However they don’t actually believe (as per our definition above) in the literal existence of God, they may be atheists or agnostic. It is quite possible that some of those that only believe in the belief of god might consider the doubt a negative and possible shameful thing and some might even be hoping to regain or spark their faith by going thought the motions. Also In some places where the social pressures are great it may be simply unwise to not declare belief in god regardless of your personal opinion. The last two categories of the simple classification system are the two categories which have true belief. However before I go into more detail on these two categories I need to clarify religion as a term. While I have already classified actual belief I have not yet classified religion above and beyond the normal use of the word as well as the understanding that we are, in this paper, using Christianity as our factual foundation and therefore limiting our concepts to only being definitely applicable to the Christian religion. I would like to clarify religion as the sum total of scripture and dogma as well as the institutional constructs surrounding the management of the religion. For those that truly believe in God, religion is all the “personal” information they have, on their God.
As I already mentioned the Selective Believer and the Fundamentalist both have actual belief in God, their main difference lies in the fact that they have extensively different priorities and understanding of their religion.

To explain their difference in detail let us look into the difference between religion and true belief. It may sounds straightforward to claim that true belief cannot exist without religion and while this very likely was true at one point the lessening authority of the church as well as the dilution of their credibility in modern times have caused a schism between religion and true belief. This is where the idea of brand loyalty comes in. I explained brand loyalty earlier as a “positive emotional feelings towards a brand and commitment to purchase the same product or service repeatedly now and in the future”. The brand loyalty of Christianity is such that it is tied into the very identity of some societies. Even with all the adaptation of Christianity and the lessening of its authority the brand loyalty is so strong that some people still identify with the idea of their God, not requiring the official identity of religion, modern or archaic but simply the idea of “their” God of the Christian brand. In this manner we can say that true belief does not need religion anymore, the brand has grown beyond needing the cradle of it’s foundation.

In this manner Selective Believers are either ignorant of or consciously selective of some of the scripture and dogma of their religion. In the case of simply being ignorant of the details of their religion they are similar to Simple Adherents in the manner that they may not have selected the religion but they have true belief in their god regardless due to brand loyalty with possibly strong lineage, social or even political ties. In the case of being consciously selective the Selective Adherent is more like the Believer in Belief in the manner that he supports the religion but has consciously ignored some part of the religious dogma or scripture while choosing other parts to belief in.

This brings us to the last category, the Fundamentalist. Since I already spent a chapter on this category I will not be going into detail here. I simply reiterate that only in this category do we have absolute belief in both the supernatural and religious dogma and that it is most commonly in Fundamentalism that we find blind belief in religion and all of its archaic claims. Now that we have reviewed our explanation and understanding of the simple religious categorization it might be good to see it on a graph as well so as to further cement our understanding of it.
Fundamentalist: Absolute belief in religion and absolute belief in the supernatural

Selective Believer: Strong but varying and selective belief in both the supernatural as well as the dogma and scripture of their religion.

Believers in Belief: Belief in the positive aspects of religion, possibly desire to believe fully but for a variety of reasons cannot find belief in either the religious foundation or the supernatural claims.

Simple Adherents: No belief in the religious foundation or the supernatural claims but is registered in a religion due to being listed automatically at birth or due to social pressures.

This is a simple chart of our simple categorization and an example of how we can conceptually represent the idea of these categories. The main idea of representing these ideas in a graph is to point out that the biggest conceptual difference between categories is the step between the Believers in Belief to the Selective Adherent since this step requires an individual to move to the commitment of actual belief in God. Also, this graph does not reflect knowledge about dogma and scripture but belief in it. People without actual belief in God may be very knowledgeable about religious facts but they would not actually belief in it. It is possible to reject religion dogma and
scripture and embrace god but not to reject God and still belief somehow in his origin story. This is why belief in religion and belief in the supernatural goes hand in hand in this graph. Extremism is not on this chart for the reasons previously mentioned. Extremism requires other factors than just a certain measure of belief and faith, it depends also in a separate measure of willingness to see political and military action as part of their faith.
9 The Dangers of religion

Many people have pointed out the dangers of religion and while the danger of various religion may be vast the main point boils down to the dangers of blind belief.

Blind belief is not limited to religion and may be found more or less at any level in society. To clarify I would classify blind belief as the process wherein someone acts, or has strong opinions, based partially or entirely on a medium which they believe absolutely. This may be anything from a newspaper to a twitter celebrity but the person in question abandons the responsibility of going through the trouble of actually informing themselves objectively on the subject. What makes blind belief so insidious in religion is that religion has a long history of claiming to have all the answer and furthermore to claim that blind belief in the information given should be the customary receptive attitude, therefore directly and purposefully propagating blind belief. In this paper we have gone over the literature and the message of Christianity and found that at least large portions of it not in line with mainstream morality. Despite this fact questioning the truth of religion is still openly frowned upon in many places. In modern times, advertising unverified, counter intuitive and possibly harmful information is nowhere permitted or unquestioned anywhere as extensively as in religion. This is the main reason why religion can be so dangerous in the wrong setting. This is enforced by the restrictions on questioning religious information, the history of Christianity and the great number of believers that are members of these religions. Together these factors create and enforce a system of belief.

A belief is not held in isolation, but is part of a system ... all our beliefs have links to neighboring ones ... This element of free play in interpreting evidence can be exploited by someone determined to cling to a belief. No matter, how absurd, any belief can be preserved if you are prepared to make sufficient adjustments to the rest of the system ... have Beliefs rather than beliefs. Their system characteristically contain Beliefs which are treated as extremely rigid. And such Beliefs are often based on appeals to authority.  

Systems such as this are a lot easier to understand and counteract if they are understood. And the only way to understand them, just like with anything else, is to

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quantify them into understandable component parts which we can then use for constructive theory and policy making. For this purpose I have in this paper clarifies a simple classification system which I believe might be a step in the right direction in discussing religion more constructively. The need for this should be apparent when we look at what it is that we are categorizing. On the upper half of the axis of both religious and supernatural belief we have the Selective Adherent and the Fundamentalist, both categories which have genuinely committed to the belief in god. Both categories, although far more the Fundamentalist, can hold blind religious beliefs which can range from harmless to fanatical. However we should also have a great number of Selective Adherents which do not believe in any fundamentalist doctrines as well as presumably many Fundamentalists which have no radical or extremist views or tendencies. These moderates are in the awkward position of belonging to the same religion as other actual believers who experience blind religion and fanaticism. It is hard to argue against people who support their ideological zealotry with sound theological references and arguments from your own religion. Even the best intentioned Selective Adherent well-adjusted to contemporary moral culture and political developments or well-meaning Fundamentalist who does not feel the need to fanatically pressure their views on others, as part of a divine obligation, may not want to oppose something that is technically supported by the scripture and dogma of their shared religion.

These well intentioned and energetic people are singularly ineffective in dealing with the more radical members of their own faiths. In many instances they are, rightly terrified of them. ... It is time for the reasonable adherents of all faiths to find the courage and stamina to reverse the tradition that honors helpless love of God – in any tradition. Far from being honorable, it is not even excusable ... There is only one way to respect the substance of any purported God-given moral edict: consider it conscientiously in the full light of reason, using all the evidence at our command.37

It is the helpless love of god which is objectionable, which is another way of saying blind belief. Whatever the history or message of your religion, in the modern age the substance of a moral edict must be argued on the grounds of reason. So, for the

purpose of furthering reason we should not hesitate to quantify religion and stop viewing a religious group as a singular unit. As a tool to do this we can use this simple categorization of religious belief and ask people that self-identify as a member of religion to further self-identify into one of the categories of religious belief. This should be especially important to anyone who does not agree with either their leadership or a radical group within their religion. However the biggest problem may be to convince the majority of the group that they are in some shape or form responsible for the behavior or direction of the whole group simply because they self-identify with them. However the silence of large parts of the membership as well as the lack of outcry from active members makes it easier for Fundamentalists to maintain their beliefs as well as for possible extremists to justify their actions. At minimum supporting a simple categorization of religious belief would at least rob the radical element of the comforting belief that they represent the majority. In fact, categorizing some fanatical true believers as non-Fundamentalists, and then explaining in detail why, could have positive developments. The benefit of developing a basic categorization system is that you can phrase you selection criteria to fit within the concepts of the religions ideological and theological understanding, it is, in itself not an argument against the religion. Creating categories or distinction within groups which share ideological dogma is likely to also interfere with the “us vs. them” mentality common to such situations.
10 Conclusion

The main point of this paper has been to look at different categories of religions adherence and creating a simple system to understand said categories better. In this paper, I focused solely on the Christian religion as our example. The idea is that we need in religion, just as in anything else, a common foundation of understanding and how to classify details. In the philosophy of religion, as in most philosophy, we have this perhaps less than in any other academic pursuit. In the first part of the paper, I made a short overview of Christianity so as to settle the foundation of my discussion. I went over some of the problems of the history and message of Christianity so as to clarify the distinction between how it has historically been understood and the status of Christianity today. The changes which the religions have undergone in recent centuries and decades have fundamentally changed them, therefore making it more important than ever before to be able to understand them. I already went over some of the benefits of a simple categorization system in the previous chapter. The main point of this paper is that to understand religion we have to understand the people that self-identify as religious and the various differences they may have for doing so. Having some sort of a system which gives us an understanding of the reasoning and values of religious adherents would help us extensively in doing so. This would also give those that are interested in refining their own direction or faith an understanding of how their own group is composed. Most importantly it would give those that are Fundamentalists and with possible extremist leaning a better knowledge of the real numbers identifiable with their religious point of view and the understanding that just because many people share their religion, they do not necessarily share their particular religious opinions. The main danger I pointed out was the danger of blind belief which could be connected to Fundamentalism but is not a prerequisite. I stated that blind belief was particularly dangerous in religion but that it was in no way limited to it. I wholeheartedly support any form of religious opinion as long as the person in question is at least open to basic dialogue regarding its logic. When they are not they are blinded by their beliefs and it may be impossible to reach them.
More detailed classification and research into actual belief may also make it easier to separate those who use religious claims and religious authority to gather political power.

To take a small step in this direction I made a simple classification system for religious belief mostly based on the survey I introduced. One factor that I pointed out was that a large part of registered members of religion probably do not actually believe in a supernatural god. Having an understanding of the real religious opinions and beliefs of a religious group will make it possible to make sure that we do not let a loud minority dictate impressions, perception and even policies while shouting supposedly on behalf of the entirety of their numbers. It is however obvious that not everyone will fit into this categorization - as I stated already this was a simple categorization for the purpose of this paper and for the purpose of being able to possibly look at religion in a more constructive manner. A more complex idea of religious categorization would be needed of course to do this as well as a method to classify people, especially in countries which have enforced religious views or enforced social standards regardless of the law. This is not a system aimed towards disproving religion but simply making religion more understandable and approachable as a conceptual system. My personal view on religion is that a person’s religion is their opinion on the state of the world and its mechanics. Anyone is free to maintain any philosophy and opinion they may want to have as long as they do not turn to extremism to affect others. Broadening the concepts I have discussed here in more detail and using them to do qualifying research on religion in many countries might be an important step in moving us closer to understanding better the ideas and values of religion which too often has been considered sacrosanct and above questioning. This would add a much greater dimension of understanding on the true value which different societies and nations place on religion. This might help policy makers to understand the requirements of their society better.

I assume that the most objectionable point a true believer of any religion might raise about the contents of this paper is the fact that my simple categorization only separates true believers into two categories, therefore ignoring an ocean of important distinctions possible in belief as well as placing everyone who believes in the primacy
of the Bible under the category of Fundamentalists. This is a good point ... but my main point with the simple dual classification of true believers into Selective Adherent or Fundamentalist was to, in light of my introduction of the Christian religion at the beginning of this paper, point out how many true believers would categorized as Selective Adherents and possibly how few would truly be considered Fundamentalists. I mentioned at the beginning of this paper that I wanted to use the term religion throughout this paper rather than Christianity, the only religion I was actually reviewing because I wanted the system to more easily be applicable to other religions as well. I maintain that for the monotheistic religions at least a system such as this would always at least be beneficial toward understanding even though each religion would have to be approached separately. In fact any religion could benefit from an approach similar to this since, as I have already implied a couple of times in this paper, the main problem with crossing ideological religious boundaries is the difficulty in discussing it openly with religious people.
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