“Age, in the broadest sense of the word, has become the status variable that best predicts religious attitudes,” wrote Yves Lambert in a scrupulous study relying mainly upon the EVS\(^1\) data from 1981 and 1990 (1993: 525). From the outset, our late colleague stressed that the survey data available at that time made it possible to demonstrate, in the context of “a cross-section of ages, generations and intergenerational trends,” (1993: 538) that France, alongside Great Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands, appeared to be one of the essentially secularised countries “where generational effects and their resulting trends are the most intense.” (1993: 552) Some years later, after considering the EVS data from 1999, he reaffirmed this judgment: “France is one of the countries where the change in attitudes between ages and generations has been the most radical.” (Lambert 2004: 218) It therefore seems like a particularly appropriate moment to take a new look at the relationship between young people and religion in France. This also seems like the right time to present the sociological research going on in this field in France to researchers beyond the French-speaking world.

In this article, our goal is to present and analyse the principal data currently available, making use of various quantitative and qualitative surveys that offer valuable information on the religious attitudes of young people in France, and on their relationship to religion in general. From 2006 to 2009, the European REDCo\(^2\) programme focused on the issue of religion in school. Within the framework of this programme, the French participants carried out surveys among young

---

1 EVS: European Values Surveys. These surveys on the values of Europeans, carried out in 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008 (see below) and comprising some thirty questions on religious attitudes, can be taken as periodic polls on religious belief. The resulting data can be analysed both from a temporal point of view—comparing results from one survey to the next—and from a geographical point of view, comparing results between different European countries. In these surveys, the term “young people” refers to people between 18 and 29 years of age.

2 REDCo stands for Religion in Education. A contribution to Dialogue or a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European countries. All the details of this European research programme are presented in the third part of this article.
people from 14 to 16 years old that provided a wealth of information on the religious attitudes of French youth, above and beyond the specific questions in the surveys dealing with religion in school life and instruction. In *Les jeunes, la religion et l’école* (ed. Béraud/Willaime, 2009), this data has already been put to use, particularly by Séverine Mathieu, in order to explore the relationship between young people and religion. While one of our goals here is to analyse this data in greater depth, we would especially like to resituate it within the context of the research on young people and religion in France by calling upon other sources of surveys and analyses. After consideration in the first part of this article of the difficulties in defining and characterising the category “young people,” we shall give an overview in the second part of the state of research in this area, on the basis of data obtained prior to the REDCo programme (the EVS data in particular). Finally, in the third and last part, we will present and analyse the valuable information that the REDCo data has given us on young people’s religious attitudes.

“Young People”: The Social Constitution of a Category and its Sociological Construction

The category “young people” corresponds to different age groups depending upon the source material in question. Whereas in the REDCo surveys it refers to those from 14 to 16 years old, in many other surveys—the EVS surveys in particular—it refers to young adults from 18 to 29 years old. While we are conscious of the problems this may pose, our data does not allow us to go into an analysis here of the differentiations in attitudes between the 14–16, 16–18, 18–24 or 24–29 age groups. However, the REDCo survey of the 14–16 age group should encourage us never to forget that this group consists of adolescents who are often different people from one day to the next, who are not necessarily as opinionated as their elders in the 18–29 age bracket of the EVS surveys. Therefore, in the context of this article, we shall use a variable for young people with flexible boundaries, depending upon the data source; what is important is to identify significant changes in comparison with other age groups. Focusing on “young people and religion” also inevitably means confronting the need to distinguish between effects related to age and those related to generations. Here, we shall concentrate particularly on generational issues, given that the