SUMMARY

After a short view on the story of religious attitude measurement and indicating some problems with this kind of questions and items, a new model of religious attitude measurement is proposed, based on theoretical views of Ricoeur. Three dimensions are proposed: orthodoxy, external critique and historical relativism. Correlations with other measures of religious attitude and with measures of certainty, etnocentricity, anomia and personal orientation are presented.

1. Introduction

1.1 Some trace lines in the religious attitude study

It is not our option to resume the total story of the religious attitude research, others have done so before me, but we think that we can see some big lines through that story.

Many scales in the beginning of this history have used in fact dogmatic questions about belief, what a subject believes. Does he believe in heaven and hell, in God, in the devil and in angels, in the real presence in the Eucharist and so on. Other questions concern the importance of religion, the financial contribution to churches, the ethical impact on behaviour. We think that the classic model of Glock and Starck is in fact still using this group of items. Believers were then people who are believing certain things, doing many religious practices, indicating a high impact of their religion on their ethical life.

We have seen that this kind of approach is problematic because of the relation of this kind of measurement of religious attitude and ethnical prejudice. The occasion for Allport (Allport & Ross, 1967) to introduce his concepts of extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity, farewell the most used and misused concept in the psychology of religion. Indicating that the intrinsic is more mature than the extrinsic, gave rise to Meadow and Kahoe’s (Meadow & Kahoe, 1984)
scheme of religious development following the lines of this conceptualisation. We know that this model has been criticised by Batson and that Batson introduces a third kind of religious attitude, a better and in his view more mature one, the quest dimension.

An other approach of this religious attitude problem was considered by Hunt (Hunt, 1972) with his LAM scales trying to understand the way the subject is understanding the item of the belief scales, in a rather literal sense, an anti-literal or unbelieving sense or a mythological, perhaps better named as a symbolic way. It is strange to see that this approach never reaches the same success as did the extrinsic-intrinsic concept of Allport.

In the Leuven (Hutsebaut, 1980) tradition we have always studied the religious attitude-problem from a different viewpoint. We have seen the religious attitude as a structure of relations to God and we constructed in the mid seventies a scale differentiating 7 relational types to God, some more positive ones: co-humanity, identification, dependence, ethical norm; some more ambivalent ones, frustration and guilt; and a negative one autonomy. In the same tradition, we did several studies concerning the God representation of adults and adolescents with different kinds of open and closed questions (Hutsebaut & Verhoeven, 1991, 1995)

1.2 Some problems with this approach

Different types of questions can be asked about these different approaches.

- Most of these approaches are of an a-posteriori strategy, that means that the studies started with a very open approach and that the structuring of the data came out of the analysis of the data. In other words we have the impression that most of this studies did’n start from an more or less theoretical framework and that the theory came after the observations and the analysis of the data. We think that also in Allport’s model this was the case, because we see that the distance between his theoretical view on mature religion and the operationalization in his scale is large. This was also the case in the Leuven approach and certainly in the belief indices, where the only theoretical conception was, that people belonging to a religious group had to believe in some contents, considered as more or less important for that religious group. The only exception is perhaps the approach of Hunt in his LAMscales.

- We have the impression in using this kind of approaches for many years, that more and more people have problems in answering this kind of questions. More and more people have the idea that this kind of questions are interesting for other people but not for them. It seems that these kind of questions are coming from an other world and not from their world, including from their belief world. For many people in our country, this kind of items have become too catholic, too christian for them.