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Religion and Transformation 4

Herman Westerink (ed.)

## **Constructs of Meaning and Religious Transformation**

Current Issues in the Psychology of Religion



**RT**  
Religion and Transformation  
in Contemporary European Society

Vienna University Press



# Religion and Transformation in Contemporary European Society

Band 4

Herausgegeben von Kurt Appel, Christian Danz, Richard Potz,  
Sieglinde Rosenberger und Angelika Walser



Die Bände dieser Reihe sind peer-reviewed.

Herman Westerink (ed.)

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With 12 figures

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

ISSN 2198-5235

ISBN 978-3-8471-0099-7

**Veröffentlichungen der Vienna University Press  
erscheinen im Verlag V&R unipress GmbH.**

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Printed in Germany.

Titelbild: RaT-Logo (Gerfried Kabas, Wien).

Druck und Bindung: CPI Buch Bücher.de GmbH, Birkach

Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Papier.

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

This volume results from a research project – “Constructs of Meaning and Values in Europe” – embedded in the interdisciplinary research platform “Religious Transformation in Contemporary European Society” (University of Vienna). According to its self-description, this research platform “investigates the contribution of religion to contemporary transformation processes and *vice versa* examines the influence of transformation processes on religion. The program focuses on the growing diversity of European societies and its impact on issues of pluralistic participation in social, political, religious and cultural spheres”. The research in the project “Constructs of Meaning and Values in Europe” put the focus on religion’s turn to the individual’s desire for transcendence and meaning in modern society, resulting in a multitude of individual and social forms of religion and constructs of meaning in which traditional religious forms are affirmatively and/or critically evaluated and reconfigured. In the present volume this issue is elaborated from the perspective of the psychology of religion.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to this book. I thank Susanne Heine for the initial cooperation and initiative, and I thank all the authors for their contributions and collaborations. I am grateful for the support from my colleagues of the research platform, Christian Danz, Kurt Appel and especially Angelika Walser. I want to thank Jason Valdez, Nadine Mund and Thomas Scheiwiller for their meticulous correction and editorial work.





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Herman Westerink

## **Introduction: Religious and Spiritual Constructs of Meaning and Transformation**

One of the major trends in the psychology of religion is the growing interest in religious and spiritual meaning making in relation to religious and spiritual transformation processes, notably as the aftermath of traumatic experiences and in situations of crisis, stress or disease when personal well-being is at stake, and coping activities and skills are enhanced. The present volume, *Constructs of Meaning and Religious Transformation*, covers this broad and complex area of interrelated issues. The underlying coherence of the present volume is guaranteed by the fact that all contributions, representing various psychological methods and theoretical perspectives, focus on religious and spiritual meaning making and transformation. The contributions in this volume do not compose an integrated perspective on religious meaning making and transformation processes. Rather, this volume assembles and presents the main – mostly European – research on this complex of issues. Thus it not only provides an excellent overview of the current psychological study of constructs of meaning and religious transformation, but also contributes to our knowledge of contemporary religious life in the context of socio-cultural transformation processes (pluralisation, globalization).

What is meaning making? Or, how do people construct meaning? How can we understand religious transformation? Crystal Park writes that “the notion of meaning as central to human life is a popular one” (Park, 2010, p. 257), and that it appears to be particularly important in critical and/or traumatic life situations. The question of meaning obviously gains importance in situations of crisis in which the meaning, sense, value or reason of things are no longer evident. According to Park, in these situations meaning making refers “to a process of working to restore global life meaning when it has been disrupted or violated”, so as to regain consistency and coherence by reconfiguring and transforming one’s beliefs (Park, 2005b, p. 299). Most psychological research on meaning making thus focuses on meaning making processes and efforts to construct meaning in situations of existential crisis, or on the conditions (depressions, addictions, and etc.) that produce a decrease of meaning and purpose in life and

of personal well-being. Yet, Park also notes that a definition of meaning or meaning making is difficult. Proposed definitions are often very broad and thus lack precision as to which cognitive, emotional, motivational and behavioural aspects of mental life are involved in meaning making processes, or which purposes, goals, objects or sources increase or provide meaning. The issue of religious meaning and meaning making becomes much more complex when we consider the fact that the majority of research stems from the USA, a much more religious society than some European societies. In Europe, therefore, we see an increasing interest in meaning making processes in a secular context in which religious, spiritual and existential orientations can be distinguished. Some recent studies on religion and meaning making in secular (European) societies have shown the need for more differentiated views on religion as meaning system (La Cour & Hvidt, 2010). In a secular context religiosity is not always intensified as a resource for coping with critical life events and, when it is intensified, it does not always generate well-being, and it does not always produce more helpful than harmful effects.

The issue of religious or spiritual transformation or change is at least as complex as the issue of meaning. The issue of religious transformation and change has always been a central issue in the psychology of religion: one only needs to think of the topic of conversion as a key issue in the studies of protagonists such as Edwin Diller Starbuck's *The Psychology of Religion* (1899) or William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). The psychological research on individual forms of religiosity and religious change has ever since been an important topic. The most important reason for this has remained the same throughout the years: many psychologists are concerned with human beings' development, growth and change, and psychologists of religion have always had a keen interest in the study of the individual's desire for transcendence and meaning in modern, often secular, society, hence in religious transformative processes (Paloutzian, 2005, p. 331). In (post-)modern societies there is a multitude of individual and social forms of religion, spirituality and constructs of meaning in which traditional religious contents (for example, creeds) and forms (for example, religious church communities) are affirmatively and/or critically evaluated, reconfigured or rejected. The psychology of religion studies the interaction between the individual and religion, i. e. it is the study of the appropriation of religion in individual life, the influence of religion on human psychic life, its structures, and the behaviour that is evoked by this. It focuses on the private acts of believing, the religious experiences or the lived religion of individuals, whose lives and views are embedded in (conflicting) religious and secular discourses, and whose lives are thus influenced and changed by religious factors.

## Meaning Making and Meaning Systems

Most psychological research on meaning making is concerned with specific critical life events, coping and well-being (mental health), and with individual efforts, activities and strategies that can be interpreted as interventions aiming at the reduction of the discrepancy between the actual life crisis situation and its related decreased sense of life's meaning and purpose on the one hand, and the meaning and orientation systems that provide the necessary framework for experiencing well-being on the other hand (compare: Park, 2010). Meaning is then, for example, defined as "the cognizance of order, coherence, and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and the accompanying sense of fulfilment" (Reker & Wong, 1988, p. 221). In such definition, meaning making refers to the mental activity of attaining and pursuing coherence and purpose in one's life.

It is not really surprising that in studies on meaning making, coping and well-being, religion is often defined as a meaning system that, amongst others, provides ways to understand suffering and loss (Park, 2005a, p. 711). According to Israella Silberman, "individuals operate on the basis of personal beliefs and theories that they have about themselves, about others, about the world of situations they encounter, and their relations to it. These beliefs or theories form idiosyncratic meaning systems that allow individuals to give meaning to the world around them and to their experiences, as well as to set goals, plan activities, and order their behaviour" (Silberman, 2005, p. 644). Such meaning or belief systems are seen as necessary for humans to function in this world. These systems reflect general human needs, such as the need for a coherent personal conceptual system, the need for pleasure and well-being in the foreseeable future, the need of self-esteem, and the need for maintenance of good relationships with significant others (Idem, p. 645). Religious meaning systems connect with these needs inasmuch as these systems not only include beliefs about the individual, others and the world, but also have the strength to prevail in critical circumstances where personal belief systems may be shattered (Idem, p. 648). Silberman and others, such as Kenneth Pargament (1997), regard the primary function of religion to be facilitating the optimal fulfilment of basic human needs. It is important to notice that the above-mentioned broad definitions of meaning and meaning making thus also contain very specific views and approaches. For, it is by no means evident that meaning in life can ultimately only be generated through or found in idiosyncratic and coherent meaning systems such as religion. There is no reason to assume that every coherent worldview facilitates well-being or coping strategies, and there is no reason to assume that the absence of a coherent meaning system automatically implies a decrease of experienced meaning in life. (The latter point is particularly important in a

secular pluralistic culture in which coherent worldviews have seemingly evaporated.) On an even more fundamental level, the question can be raised whether religions as meaning systems centre on the dynamics of needs and fulfilments. Such a view of the function of religion as facilitating life ideals, purposes and goals, has been criticized by psychoanalytic oriented scholars who argue that religion, as symbolic and cultural order, should not be regarded as the result of the unfolding of natural and dispositional needs and wishes, but rather as centring on inter-subjective issues such as love, distance, guilt or recognition, and the ever existing tension between demand and answer (Vergote, 1997; Stroeken, 1999). In slightly different words, when one assumes (with Freud for example) that the subject is inconsistent and divided in his emotional, (un)conscious and motivational character and behaviour, an/the adjustment to a coherent and consistent meaning system, and the related (re)unification of the self (positive and constructive self-transformation), will probably be considered with scepticism.

The writings of Pargament, Silberman and Park have been a profound stimulus for developments and research in psychology of religion on meaning making. Several contributions in this volume bear witness to this. European research on meaning making, however, has its own thematic focal points, related to specific traits of European secular and pluralistic societies. Also, in some countries the current research on meaning making not only mirrors international trends, but also continues an existing tradition in research on meaning, meaning making and giving of ultimate meaning. An example of this is the Netherlands, where in the psychology of religion the issue of giving ultimate meaning has been a dominant topic for decades (Westerink, 2010).

One of the reasons this field of research has become so important relates to general cultural developments in Western countries. We cannot confine the issue of meaning, meaning making and meaning systems to the realm of psychology of religion. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann have argued that the issue of the quest for meaning has become dominant in pluralistic and secular modern societies which lack all-embracing meaning systems that provide a steady framework for structuring experiences (1992). In other words, in individual religious meaning making processes, we are maybe witnessing the return of religion in individual life so often and openly discussed in recent literature on secularization. The lack of social coherence, accompanied by feelings of insecurity that characterize contemporary society, may prove to be a fertile soil for old and new forms of religiosity that provide meaning in the midst of the contingencies of the world (Van Harskamp, 2010, pp. 315 – 316).

There are sometimes more hidden or latent reasons why theories that treat religion as meaning systems have gained importance in the psychology of religion. Jacob Belzen has drawn attention to this, arguing that, although the

number of psychologists of religion employing a hidden agenda of wanting to prove the truth of Christianity (or another religion) is relatively small, and while the psychology of religion, having emancipated itself from theology, is becoming more and more profane, there are still many scholars that assume “religion is better than no religion” (Belzen, 2010, pp. 90–93), that a meaning system is better than no meaning system, or that positive values and moral principles (love, forgiveness, helpfulness, tolerance, etcetera) are more prominent among individuals who went through a processes of religious conversion or spiritual change.<sup>1</sup> Also, Belzen points out that some psychologists of religion implicitly or explicitly assume that human beings are religious by nature (*homo religiosus*). Certain psychologists reason, for example, that religions and coherent meaning systems are the result of man’s dispositional and biologically necessary need for meaning, man’s natural inclination to structure perceptions in coherent worldviews, man’s natural longing for integration in larger and more complex units such as humanity, the cosmos, the transcendent and the sacred, or man’s innate tendency towards religious or spiritual growth. Belzen argues that psychologists should study individual religious life without making assumptions about human nature – and he is probably right in this assumption. The questions that arise from literature on man’s natural capacity or inclination to be religious or spiritual, and about the positive influence of religion or spirituality on coping, well-being and happiness are these: Could it be that such basic assumptions about man’s natural religiousness express a certain nostalgic yearning for coherent religious systems that are currently dissolving in secular societies? Or do such assumptions perhaps express a scholar’s wish for a clear defined research phenomenon that one can study objectively? The two questions are related: in both questions the problem of a definition of religion is a key issue. Grand theories of religion and secularization have fallen short in identifying “the religious after religion” (Gauchet, 1997, p. 200). They tell us little about what people consider religious, how their search for meaning relates to religious traditions, or how the ordinary religion of the ordinary man is situated in the context of variable constructs of meaning. The analysis of religious and spiritual meaning making in everyday life, in which “the relationship between human and divine is sometimes oriented towards meaning, sometimes towards belonging, sometimes towards desired rewards, sometimes towards communion (or relationship), sometimes towards ecstasy, and sometimes towards moral guidance” (Ammermann, 2007, p. 227), should preferably be studied in everyday specific

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1 Please note, there is an increasing number of a psychological publications on limited pro-sociality and increased prejudice, intolerance, moral rigidity, etc., showing that religion can neither be solely associated with positive values nor with a supposed integrative function (for example, Saroglou, Corneille & Van Cappellen, 2009; Van Pachterbeke, Freyer & Saroglou, 2011)

contexts and in the lives of people living in a world of conflicting discourses and interests. Maybe these persons actively and autonomously pursue the fulfilment of needs, develop coping strategies or reduce the discrepancy between an event's appraised meaning and the individual's global beliefs; or maybe they simply feel lost in the postmodern neighbourhood supermarket of religious, spiritual and existential orientations. Several contributions in this volume present research results from qualitative research exploring individual (re)constructions of identity which gives us insight into the processes of meaning making in critical life situations.

## Transformation, Religion and Spirituality

Transformations in religions are as old as religions themselves. Beginning with the axis era, in which individual faith and salvation and individual religious experience becomes important in several world religions, we can also speak of individual religious transformation processes. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition these processes indeed concern faith, even though one might question whether faith is the central issue in this tradition. In recent years Jan Assmann's theory of the Mosaic distinction, for example, has caused furore: not faith, but the distinction between true and false faith is central in monotheism (Assmann, 2010). In line with this, one can argue that not faith, but a critique of religion aiming at transformation in individual and collective life is the real central issue in the Judeo-Christian tradition (De Kesel, 2010). Mark Taylor has, for example, reasoned that religion should not be seen as a symbolic system, but as an adaptive symbolic network that figures schemata of feeling, thinking and acting, thus providing meaning and purpose, while at the same time developing and being transformed through internal criticism and revisions, and therefore also disfiguring and disrupting every stabilizing (collective and personal) structure (Taylor, 2007, p. 12).

It is certainly no coincidence that in Western culture, with a religious tradition focusing on the inner life of believers, on true versus false beliefs, on faith development and religious growth, on the perils of the soul and the rewarding trust in the divine, at some point a scientific psychology emerges that studies healthy and unhealthy religiosity, faith development, spiritual growth, conversion and deconversion, intrinsic religion, etc. (Vandermeersch & Westerink, 2007). It is important to recognize the cultural-historic entanglement of the psychology of religion with the Western Judaeo-Christian tradition. This tradition, with its emphasis on faith and inner life, and with its various psychological models, does not simply provide a good object for scientific research – the relation between psychology of religion and its research objects is much

more complicated. From the days of William James and his plea for the natural religiousness of man, Edwin D. Starbuck's attempts to reconcile science and religion in the psychology of religion, Oskar Pfister's search for true and healthy religion against outdated dogmatism, Allport's defence of (intrinsic) religion against correlations with prejudice and intolerance, via important protagonists of the psychology of religion such as Antoine Vergote, Joachim Scharfenberg or Han Fortmann who combined psychological research with theological interests and aims, unto those present scholars who have maybe hidden religious agendas behind scientific research programmes or who in some form aim at a rehabilitation of the sacred heart and nature of religion (Stifoss-Hansen, 1999), there is a long apologetic tradition in the psychology of religion (Belzen, 2010; Westerink, 2012a, 2012b). Throughout the history of the psychology of religion, this scientific discipline not only studied religiosity, but was also influenced by theological trends. It was actively involved in religious transformation processes in modern secular society, thus contributing to the formation of new images and perceptions of religiosity and religious or spiritual identities. The uncomfortable entanglement with religious and theological positions is also important in view of one of the major trends in the psychology of religion: the shift from religiosity to spirituality as research object (Pargament, 1999). Should we interpret this shift as one further step in the psychology of religion's emancipation from theology and its tendency to become more and more profane, or is the situation perhaps more complex than this?

The emergence of a psychology of spirituality is understandable, since our secular era is the age of the religious after religion, of the sacred after tradition, of believing without belonging. The era of the spiritual after secularization has marginalized the societal meaning and impact of traditional religious commitments to beliefs and practices. In other words, the emergence of the concept of spirituality in the psychology of religion is closely related to the decreasing importance of traditional religious institutions and religiosity (as commitment to traditional contents of belief) on the one hand, and the increase of the importance of individual spirituality on the other hand (Ričan, 2004). Religion and religiosity are associated with commitments to particular traditions and with the doctrinal and denominational characteristic of beliefs and practices. Spirituality is much more associated with personal life principles and concerned with ultimate questions about life's meaning in relation to, or in search of, the transcendent or sacred (Pargament, 1999; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005, p. 25; Huguelet & Koenig, 2009, p. 1; Nelson, 2009, p. 8; Utsch & Klein, 2011, p. 32). Certainly, such distinction is artificial and does not deny overlaps. However, religion is clearly more associated with past traditions, and spirituality more with modern or postmodern individuality and secularity. And yet, the emergence of the concept of spirituality cannot simply be explained as the result of an



on-going process of secularization, i. e., of decline of traditional religious institutions and shared belief, on the one hand, and of an on-going process of privatization and individuation of religious and spiritual experiences, attitudes and world views, on the other hand. The concept of spirituality itself is highly ambiguous. It is used to describe post-religious religiosity, but it emerged first in French catholic theology where *spiritualité* indicated the existential component of religion, distinguished from doctrinal and theological components (Hvidt, 2012; Westerink, 2012b). In Germany the concept was taken up by Protestant scholars to describe piety (*Frömmigkeit*), lived religiosity and faith practice. In slightly other words, spirituality was a concept introduced to describe what was traditionally called *fides qua*, the mental act of believing, as distinguished from *fides quae*, the doctrinal content of faith people were committed to. This meaning of the concept of spirituality merged with another train of thought: spirituality as a concept that can be traced back to a variety of factors and phenomena ranging from the encounter with Eastern religions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to spiritist practices in Victorian times. Spirituality here encompasses a variety of religious practices and experiences (yoga, meditation, etc.) as tenets of spiritualism, esotericism and New Age holism (Hanegraaff, 1998). Here, spirituality is associated with search for the self, sacralisation of the self, and with a strong critique of rationalism and institutionalized religious traditions (including dogmatism and authority) (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Houtman & Aupers, 2008; Utsch & Klein, 2011, p. 35).

Hence, the concept of spirituality is ambiguous and problematic, as it both includes and expresses aspects of traditional faith, critique of religion and post-religious beliefs (compare also, Bregman, 2006; Westerink, 2012). Some psychologists of religion have rightfully argued that the concept of spirituality is a vague and diffuse concept (Koenig, 2008; La Cour & Hvidt, 2010). We should not be surprised about this. Spirituality is a polyvalent and multidimensional concept that encompasses a spectrum of experiences and intuitions ranging from traditional religious to secular-existential. Spirituality implies those forms of (practical) piety and faith that used to be embedded in religious traditions, doctrines, creeds and practices, which have become individualized and are now part of the inventory of the religious supermarket. Or better, the emergence of the concept of spirituality can, for a large part, be regarded as the result of transformation processes, of revisions and adaptations through internal and external criticism, within the Western religious tradition.

The emergence of psychological research on spirituality parallels the growing interest in religious and spiritual meaning making and religious transformation. Again, we should mention the broad context of secularization, which implies that traditional dominant religions can no longer be an integrative factor in collective and individual life. Societies have developed into a multitude of sub-systems

with specific functional logics. Religion is more and more perceived as a private agent for ultimate meaning in the individual's life. Religions, but also for example existential world-views, are perceived as resources for individual meaning making and life orientation in a globalized world. In other words, both the research on spirituality and on meaning making deals with the multitude of individual and social forms of religion and constructs of meaning in which traditional religious forms and life styles are affirmatively and/or critically evaluated and reconfigured. It is against this background that the traditional model of religious transformation – religious conversion – is currently mostly considered to be subsumed within the broader topic of spiritual transformation of a meaning system: spiritual transformation is “a change in the meaning system that a person holds as a basis for self-definition, the interpretation of life, and overarching purposes and ultimate concern” of which religious transformation is only a variant (Paloutzian, 2005, pp. 333–334).

## Short Description of the Content of the Present Volume

The present volume presents theoretical and empirical research, from mostly European psychologists of religion, on meaning and religious/spiritual transformation in modern, secular societies. The book is divided in two major parts. In Part I the focus is on religion, spirituality and religious and spiritual transformation. Part II centres on religious and spiritual meaning making, well-being and coping. The division into two parts is artificial and only serves the pragmatic aim of ordering and structuring the contributions and the book itself. Moreover, we are in fact dealing here with a complex of interrelated issues.

In Part I Niko Tiliopoulos reflects on an adequate scientific definition of religion, on substantive and functional, nomothetic and polythetic approaches to religion, and on the overlaps between the concepts of religion, religiosity and spirituality. Maik Arnold presents his views on religion as lived experience and articulated meaning from the perspective of a hermeneutical approach in cultural psychology of religion, arguing that such an approach can account for the diversity of individual religiosity and spirituality. James Day examines the empirical evidence for post-formal operations in human cognition, moral reasoning, and religious decision-making, and its implications for understanding religious experience, religious meaning making and transformation processes. In her contribution on construction and discursive perspectives in the psychology of religion, Caroline Shepherd argues for a discursive approach over cognitive perspectives, because such an approach recognises how people construct and change their knowledge claims to a personal faith. Tatjana Schnell and William Keenan, in their text on atheist spirituality as related to a broad range of

beliefs, values, practices and commitments, argue that such spirituality provides personal identity and world-view – most often without social and ethical consequences – in a secular de-traditionalized culture. Barbara Keller, Constantin Klein, Ralph Hood and Heinz Streib present an analysis of de-conversion and religious or spiritual transformation based on two interviews with two de-converts from Jehovah's Witnesses. In their analysis, this research material is related to faith development interviews and quantitative data.

In Part II the contributors focus on religious and spiritual meaning making, well-being and coping. Rosa Scardigno and Giuseppe Minnini explore the different meanings of well-being in different religious pathways, investigate the discursive construction of a person's religious positioning, and challenge the tendency in mainstream research where pre-determined meanings of well-being are used. Jessie Dezutter and Jozef Corveleyn elaborate on Park's theoretical model on meaning making as a framework for the study of how meaning making processes are important in the coping process when confronted with life stressors, and how religion and spirituality can play a role in this process. In Tuija Hovi's book chapter, the study of the concept of "healing" in the context of the Healing Rooms prayer service in Finland is central. Anthropological fieldwork and qualitative methods provide data for the discussion of the relationship between religiosity, spirituality and secularity. In Valerie DeMarinis' chapter the focus is on providing a means of understanding the different psycho-developmental and psychosocial functions of existential meaning-making and ritualizing being used for the maintenance of mental health in today's multicultural, diverse worldview contexts of Sweden, and that of the protracted refugee situation in Syria. Srdjan Sremac and Ruard Ganzevoort explore the interaction between constructions of meaning and spiritual transformation in religious conversion testimonies of former drug addicts. Based on an interview with a lung cancer patient, Jacques Körver, Marinus van Uden and Joseph Pieper investigate the various intertwined forms of religiosity and spirituality (religious, paranormal and magical convictions) that play a role in the person's coping with her illness and in composing a personal life story, showing that a lack of systematic consistency and coherence in religiosity can (nevertheless) strengthen a feeling of control and confidence. Marinus van Uden, Joseph Pieper, Janske van Eersel, Wim Smeets and Hanneke van Laarhoven investigate the effect of ritual counselling and brief pastoral interventions on the coping and transformation processes of people with a life-threatening illness. Johan Bouwer explores the spiritual component of leisure and its function as a moderator for happiness, mental health and well-being. Finally, Alexey Dvoinin elaborates the value and meaning orientations of religious individuals (priests and seminary students) in Russia.

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## **Part I: Religious and Spiritual Transformation**



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Niko Tiliopoulos

## In Search of a Scientific Definition of Religion

“The way we view the world says more about us  
than it says about the world”

(author)

### Chapter Aim & Organisation

The aim of this chapter is to critically discuss the main issues that make the endeavour of defining religion or determining the meaning of religion within the realms of scientific enquiry a frustratingly difficult task. Initially, the etymology of the word and its transformation through Western history are considered. This is followed by a discussion of the main approaches adopted since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the social, medical, political, and behavioural sciences towards a definition of the term. Finally, the author’s ideas of what elements an adequate definition should possess are elucidated.

### The Riddle of Religion

The notion of religion, having puzzled philosophers and scientists for decades, still resists a widely accepted, clear-cut, essentialist definition. Although most of us would have an intuitive sense of what it is, religion seems to be one of those concepts, like intelligence or mental health, which scholars find prodigiously difficult to define. Still, what is so difficult about the meaning of religion? Why is it such a nebulous concept, leading social scientists like Edward Evans-Pritchard (1965, p. 121) to declare it “indefinable”?

#### The Origin of the Word

The problem already begins with the etymology of the word (my approach draws partially from the analysis of the history of the definition of the term by Asad, 1993 and Smith, 1978). There does not seem to be a consensus regarding the



origins of the word *religion*. Cicero (c. 106–43 BC) (trans. 1933) suggested that the word derives from the verb *relegere* meaning “to treat carefully” or within the context of religion “to handle spiritual matters carefully”. For Lactantius (c. 240–320) (trans. 1871) the word comes from *religare*, which means “to bind”, and as an extension “to bind oneself with the Divine”. To make matters even more byzantine, Saint Augustine (c. 345–430) (trans. 1948) derives religion from *religere* meaning “to recover”, i.e. “to recover the Divine in oneself”. According to transpersonal psychologist David Fontana (2003) the term *religio*, which can be a derivative of all three of the above verbs, appears to have been used in cultic traditions of the early Roman times to refer to the responsibility, or perhaps the ethical duty, the individual had in performing certain actions. These actions were related to family values, oaths, spiritual ceremonies and the like. In that sense, religion was used as an adjective, rather than a noun, to mean something holy, sacred, or even taboo.

Sometime during the early Middle-Ages, its meaning became more exclusive and transformed into signifying a personal relation to a deity, a bond with the Divine (thus closely resembling Lactantius’ etymology of the term). This shift may have been caused, in part, by the widespread and established presence in the West of Christianity and Islam, their catalytic influences on state matters, and their exclusive, monopoly-like privileges with access to and meaning making of knowledge. In the Renaissance and later during the Enlightenment, the term became more complex and began conveying the idea of a systematic entity, a doctrine. Consequently, *religio* became a noun with certain values and properties of its own class. From then on, people not only could be labelled as religious and nonreligious, but also could identify themselves as members of a certain organised faith system (e.g. the Christian religion), thus differentiating one group’s religion or *religiones* from another’s. It seems that, roughly until the Middle-Ages, religion was conceptualised as *orthopraxis*, while with the rise and subsequent dominance of Cartesian dualism in the conceptual space of western thought, the concept shifted to *orthodoxy*. Thus, during this period, the notion of religion moved from the “right” thing to do to the “right” thing to believe.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, roughly in correspondence with the establishment and rise of the “new (social and behavioural) sciences”, the concept of religion as a distinctive entity was developed and used to characterise objective abstract systems of ideas as real things in themselves. This process of transformation, reification, and abstraction of religion has led to the term evolving to refer to a complex variety of phenomena that possess questionable unity. Its usage can now refer to personal piety or to an overt theological and historical system of, for example, beliefs or practices, which has an extension in time and is connected to a particular community. On the one hand, it can still be used as a singular systematic notion, for example “the religion of the Celts”,

while on the other hand, it can have a plural meaning, signifying the sum of all objective and abstract faith systems, separating them from other aspects of life, like the arts or science.

## Scientific Approaches to Defining Religion

### Reductive vs. Nonreductive Approaches

This brief history of the term may suggest that the problem of defining religion is not as difficult as it seems; the notion of religion has evolved to mean whatever it does at present. However, this position involves a set of implicitly embedded assumptions and premises. The above “evolution” is largely, if not exclusively, based on the Western tradition and, as such, it may be only applicable to Western (i. e. monotheistic) religions. Additionally, this meaning is inevitably bound by its Latin-based, linguistic, syncretistic, and etymological framework. Let me illustrate these possibilities by using as an example the etymology of the Greek word for religion (*θρησκεία*). The word, though not necessarily its meaning or use, has remained unchanged throughout the centuries and can be found in the same form in ancient Greek manuscripts and modern Greek literature. According to Isihios (Μπαμπινιώτης, 2002), one of the major Greek lexicographers of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, the word possibly originates from either the verb *θρήσκω*, which means “to understand”, or the verb *θράσκειν* (to remind oneself), or even the verb *ενθρείν* meaning “to safeguard”, while he also suspects a connection with the noun *θράνος* (throne). The above etymology, although it shares some parallels with aspects of the Latin-based word, especially those proposed by St. Augustine, still has its own unique origins and transformations.

Thus, with these limitations in mind it should be apparent, the *nonreductive approach* claims, that, inevitably, the idea of religion not only appears to be culturally bound, but as anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, pp. 23, 90) posits, it is also fundamentally defined and shaped by historical and discursive processes. Although symbolic faith systems that could be classified as religions arguably appear to be present in every society, the ways people seem to understand and express these systems are related to the ways they view life and their purpose and function in it. Therefore, to come to an agreement on an ecumenical definition of religion, a consensus would have to be achieved on the above matters as well, and that consensus is not possible since these matters appear to be at times dramatically diverse among cultures as well as eras. Similarly, Evans-Pritchard (1956; 1965) argues that our understanding of religion is biased and distorted, and attempting to apply a meaning of religion to social systems outside a Western context is inappropriate, if not meaningless, since in many of those

societies the concept of religion as an abstract and objective system appears to be absent. Subsequently, should we wish to understand religion we should see it *in its own terms*.

For example, Evans-Pritchard, in his book “Nuer Religion” (1956), claims that the Nuer people are not aware they are living religiously, and to a Westerner it would appear that they indeed do not possess a religion – at least as we, in the West, understand it. They do not seem to have a formal dogma, organised rituals and worship, or even a theistic-kind of mythology. However, Evans-Pritchard argues further that the Nuer people do possess all these elements in their richness, but they are so tightly fused with their culture that they are practically invisible to the Western eye. Since the Nuer “religion” evolved in a non-Cartesian system of thought, it appears not to distinguish between a *natural* and a *supernatural* world, the *matter* and the *mind*, the *objective* and the *subjective*, and thus, the notion seems to be greatly incompatible with the way we view it in the West.

Several scientists object to this localistic approach to religion as being constructed on epiphenomenal cultural characteristics that tend to distract from the universal essence of the construct. Sociologist Émile Durkheim (1976) and psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1955) are two of those theorists who claim that even though belief and practices may vary, at times indeed dramatically, between and even within societies, their underlying integrative functions are present in all social groups. As such, they can be universally expounded and studied through scientific investigation, since, according to scientific laws, the same causes result, or should result, in identical outcomes. What these scholars acknowledge is that religion cannot be rational in a scientific sense, and therefore one needs to look beyond the actual belief to explain it. This is, however, a *reductive approach*, in the sense that it attempts to explain religion away and arguably reduce it to something nonreligious, namely to a single or very few psychosocial functions and contexts.

Although I do not dispute the reductive approach’s theoretical soundness and value, I do question its empirical expediency. The attribution of religion to some form of archaic symbolic psychosocial function and context seems at times too vague, and the generalisations it claims too speculative to allow for the development of testable and operational constructs. At the same time, I do not entirely subscribe to the hermeneutic, nonreductive approach either. By explaining religion through a culturally-specific meaning, and the ways groups or individuals construct this meaning, in order to make unique sense of their world, this approach tends to be too time-and-place limited, seeming once again to lack a great degree of broad enough empirical power. At this point I do not suggest that a general definition of religion is impossible, rather, that when defining the notion, one ought to prudently and extensively consider the in-

teraction between the global and the local and, in doing so, one has to be aware of the potential restrictions and limitations of the generated definition. After all, since most modern scientific ideas have been generated under Western systems of thought, it would arguably make sense, when attempting to investigate religion scientifically, to use it in its Western construct. That said, one has to be aware that our definitions may, in consequence, only be applicable to Western societies, and thus, it may be safer to restrict research based on such premises to the West.

### Substantive vs. Functional Approaches

Another way in which scholars have attempted to explain religion is by focussing on two distinct aspects, namely its *substance* or its *function*. This approach forms a new independent dimension of what religion is and thus it can be viewed in parallel with reductive-nonreductive explanatory models (see also Berger, 1974).

*Substantive approaches* attempt to define religion through its content. According to these approaches, religions possess sets of fundamental, essential features that structure their philosophical makeup. This assertion allows certain belief systems to count as religions and others not; those that do, might, for example, involve beliefs in God or gods, or beliefs in spirits or the supernatural, i. e. elements and forces that science is largely unable to explain. Furthermore, religion is viewed as a system of utmost importance, because it leads to a better understanding of the world (the “correct” view of the world). The main aim of religion is seen as providing meaning by constructing a *true* model of reality. According to the substantive (also known as the *intellectual*) approach, religion possesses two central elements. The first is *faith*. This requires a belief in a transcendent reality; a reality that is beyond the sphere of ordinary life, a belief in “something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension” (Whitehead, 1926b, p. 191). The second substance of religion is the *sacred* or the *holy*. Two of the main proponents of this dimension are theologian Rudolf Otto (1936) and philosopher Mircea Eliade (1959). They assert that religious people separate the world into the sacred and the profane, and religion is concerned with the former. While with the sacred (the superlative of *precious*) they refer to superior, greatly respected, large concerns and the collective, they characterise the profane with features like the inferior, everyday life, and the individual. The sacred, according to the substantive approach, is the only reality, the *ultimate reality*, and it forms an intuitive quantity of human thought and activity. This being so, religion is needed to create encounters with the holy through *numinous*, i. e. spiritual, experiences. In other words, the substantive

approach perceives faith in the holy as the fundamental component of religion, through which humans make sense of their reality.

The *functionalist* camp attempts to define religion by focussing on what religion does. According to the functionalists, a belief system can only count as a religion if it performs specific and unique operations in the psychosocial world. Socially, religion functions as a bonding( at best) or restraining (at worst) mechanism. Through certain taboos and practices, such as rituals and rites of passage, it provides the necessary requirements for the formation of identity, social stability, roles and social control, and moral order. Within the realm of psychology and psychiatry, religious operations function positively or deleteriously on the emotional and intellectual states of the individual, through means of comfort, consolation, coping strategies, life meaning-giving and meaning-making, or moral codes, but also through guilt, distress, or at times pervasive mental illness. Existential psychiatrist Rollo May (1957), for example, suggests that religion operates on the individual at two different levels. At one level it fosters weakness and dependency through blind obedience to a supernatural power, while at another level, by promoting self-realisation, it is a source of strength. Humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow (1964) incorporates religion into his theory of personality through the satisfaction of hierarchical needs. At the top of Maslow's hierarchy lie self-actualised individuals, the *peakers*, who, among other attributes, tend to have unique religious experiences, which they utilise to enhance their personal growth. Therefore, for the functionalists (also known as *symbolists*), religion operates directly on human needs and it has a necessary, though for many not essential, role in human survival. Both Durkheim's and Freud's approaches mentioned earlier can also be classified as functional.

Although both substantive and functional approaches offer an insight into the meaning of religion, by focussing on certain aspects of religion, they can be criticised for largely missing the point altogether. Both tend to neglect each other's valuable contributions; religion cannot only have functions and not substance and vice versa. The sets of features they utilise to define religion tend to be vague and general thus allowing for a variety of belief systems (e.g. communism or *Jediism*) or social institutions (e.g. the scouts) to be potentially classified as religions. Therefore, a general criticism of these approaches could be that they appear to largely fail to identify the distinct components that make religion a unique entity (for a more detailed critique see Stark, 2001).

## Nomothetic vs. Polythetic Approaches

The nomothetic-polythetic polarity categorises the final pair of approaches towards a scientific definition of religion. The former attempts to define religion either on the basis of one or few essential features, or within a narrow and, arguably, limiting framework. Every approach I have discussed thus far can be classified as nomothetic and thus the argued descriptions and considerations apply. Before moving onto the polythetic approach, it is worth mentioning clinical psychologist John Schumaker's thesis, which to a degree endeavours to combine elements of all nomothetic approaches into a single conceptual framework. According to Schumaker (1995), religion is a consequence of the evolution of human high cognitive abilities. He claims that at one stage in our evolution "we became capable of recognising, and being negatively affected by, disorder" (p. 35). In order to cope with such capacity, the brain developed the ability to selectively process and store information into more tolerable and meaningful data. Thus, for the first time, a species evolved capable of regulating its own reality. At the individual level this ability of *reality distortion* manifests through psychopathology. At the collective level, however, it is expressed through religion. Therefore, Schumaker asserts, religion is an evolved system of reality-distorting ideas and practices that serves as the ultimate regulator of normality.

For the last thirty-five years or so, scholars appear to have largely abandoned the idea of trying to formulate an essentialist definition of religion, probably because they seem to have acknowledged that this enterprise can be a rather problematic, frustrating, and to an extent futile meaning-making process, with ambiguous results of little or no empirical value. Instead, they shifted their focus to identifying sets of prototypical features, or super-ordinate dimensions, that a belief-system ought to possess to a greater or lesser extent in order to be classified as a religious one.

This approach conceptually stems from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's ideas of *family resemblance* (1953). The most famous illustration of these ideas is Wittgenstein's discussion on what defines a "game" (1953, aphorisms 65–71). He postulates that since not all games share exactly the same features, a single definition of the concept of a game would be inappropriate and misleading. However, he observes that degrees of resemblances do exist that allow for all of those activities to be classified as games. These resemblances, which are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for class inclusion, are founded on a prototypical concept of a game, and the degree to which they are present in any activity makes such activity an approximate distinct exemplar of the family of games.

Utilising Wittgenstein's ideas as the philosophical basis of a classification

system, social and behavioural scientists have attempted to identify such family resemblances in the case of religion; the more of those features a system has, and the more prominent their position is in that system, the more the system resembles a religion. So far, several models have been proposed, involving two (Schmidt, 1988), three (Fontana, 2003), four (Loewenthal, 1995), five (Brown, 1973), seven (Smart, 1989), and even twelve (Nielsen et al., 1993), entitlement features.

Clinical psychologist Kate Loewenthal (1995), for example, proposes that the common features of religion comprise belief in a spiritual reality, a tendency towards a harmony of life, spiritual moral directives, and a system of social organisation and communication. Historian of religion Ninian Smart, in his book “The World’s Religions” (1989), offers a finer partition of the dimensions of religion by adding the domain of rituals and sacramental practices, the presence of myths and sacred narratives, and the material dimension of sacred landmarks and human creations of worship. Others, like philosopher Niels Nielsen and his colleagues (1993), further add belief in afterlife, and the desire to proselytize to the list of features. David Fontana (2003) observes that polythetic models appear to have three super-ordinate dimensions in common, viz. spiritual beliefs, spiritual rituals, and spiritual ethos – he uses the term *spiritual* to refer to a nonmaterial dimension of being that can be reached through mystical experiences and the afterlife. Finally, philosopher Roger Schmidt (1988) claims that religion can be characterised by just two highest dimensions, viz. the conceptual, and the performative / social one.

The polythetic approach has several major advantages over the others discussed in this chapter. By avoiding the potential pitfall of dictating what religion is or is not, and concentrating on what religion should be, it is lithe and adaptable. It does not treat religion as a categorical concept, but instead it places it into a multidimensional space where it is allowed to manifest itself in degrees of hue. In doing so, it considers a multitude of characteristics and meanings, potentially important, if not unique, to religion as opposed to limiting its focus on a subset of, at times, misleading micro-aspects. That said, the approach can be criticised for being over-pliable, and thus blurring the boundaries of religious and nonreligious systems. The nature, as well as the amount of features, a system should possess, in order to begin to be considered as a religion, tend to be arbitrarily defined. Therefore, it could be argued that although this approach tends to have a more pluralistic nature, it may not help us understand what religion is, any more than any of the other approaches discussed in this chapter. In fact, having reviewed the various approaches, clinical psychologist Kenneth Pargament (2002) expresses frustration on the realisation that any attempt to define religion appears to do nothing more than reduce it to a set of expressions of basic processes, without normatively taking into account elements of su-

pernatural revelation. As a result, he claims that the distinctiveness of the phenomenon of religion evaporates. Although he is convinced, in a “religious” way, that religion is unique, he is compelled to acknowledge that “the jury is still out” with regard to the best approach.

## Spirituality

At this point, although the centre of focus of this chapter is on religion, a short reference needs to be made to the issue of spirituality. Even though spirituality has been (and at times is still being) used as meaning the same as *religiosity* (that is, the religious capacity of individuals or institutions), the general tendency is to differentiate it from the latter (see also Fontana, 2003; Saroglou, 2003; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the various approaches to spirituality, a task that would have probably required another chapter as long as this. It would suffice to say that spirituality tends to be seen as a broader and far more abstract concept than religiosity, referring to the “degree of involvement or state of awareness or devotion to a higher being or life philosophy” (Walker, 1991, p. 208), and it can be present in religious and non-religious individuals alike. As clinical psychologist David Elkins graphically writes, spirituality “is the ability to see the sacred in the ordinary, to feel the poignancy of life, to know the passion of existence and to give ourselves over to that which is greater than ourselves” (1999, p. 45). Spirituality can indeed involve a variety of beliefs in metaphysical and supernatural phenomena, such as life after death, mystical or parapsychological experiences, possessions, and so forth, or it can simply be a way of life.

Although spirituality and religion overlap considerably, they do appear to occupy their own unique niches. As psychologist Robert Emmons (2003) puts it “religion is a (more or less) organized search for the spiritual” (p. 5, parentheses in the original). Indeed, there seems to be an understanding among scholars that spirituality is a principally independent and wider concept than religion, that can at times have rather distinct effects on individuals and their environment. Elkins (1999) for example, suggests that spirituality promotes good physical and mental health, whereas other studies argue that people who are involved in spiritual activities (such as mysticism, cults, and the like) are more likely than religious ones to be delusional (e.g. Peters et al., 1999) or even psychotic (e.g. Greenberg et al., 1992), yet others failed to find any association between psychological well-being and spirituality, but not religiosity (e.g. Crawford & Tiliopoulos, 2006). Finally, several researchers suggest that both beliefs may equally affect a number of important psychological problems (Lukoff et al., 1998; Seybold & Hill, 2001), and in fact, the “Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of



Mental Disorders” (DSM-IV-TR, code v62.89) in its latest edition does give equal weight to religious and spiritual problems (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

## Principles of an Adequate Scientific Definition of Religion

The presence of such a colourful and, at times, rather divergent plethora of approaches to the meaning of religion has inevitably resulted in a large number of definitions. Already by 1912, psychologist James Leuba in his book “A Psychological Study of Religion” was able to cite forty-eight definitions; in reviewing the literature, I have come across at least another hundred-and-fifty. My intention to this point was to discuss the various approaches through which meanings have been generated and transformed, in order to illustrate the complexity of the issue. Henceforth, I will present a few definitions, framing them within the main characteristics such definitions should, in my view, possess in order to be considered adequate and workable, beyond any of the approaches I have discussed. These characteristics are as follows:

1) *Testability*: Primarily, an adequate scientific definition of religion needs to be empirically testable through scientific inquiry. For example, Durkheim’s functional definition of religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden” (1976, p. 47) appears excessively abstract to be of much practical use. Another example of an untestable approach comes from the works of psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. Jung, who was a son of a Swiss pastor, studied eastern religious traditions and attempted to provide a classification that would account for both Eastern and Western systems of faith. For Jung, there is a deeper unconscious he calls the *collective unconscious*, which is shared by all humans and is passed on through tradition or heritage (1938; 1961). The structural elements of this unconscious he calls *archetypes*, which are concepts or images expressed in various ways through different cultures. The concept of the divine is one of those archetypes (the archetype of *wholeness*), and as such it is an inherent part of every human being. Psychic balance and self-realization (*individuation*) can only be achieved, according to Jung, if one accepts and integrates these archetypes – as they are understood and expressed in their culture and era – in their consciousness. Religion is a fundamental aspect of the psyche that guides humans through this process of realization (the *hero’s quest*) towards psychological wholeness, either by directly connecting them with the collective unconscious (e.g. through visions) or through symbolic representations of itself (e.g. rituals). Therefore, for Jung, religion is an expression of unconscious feelings and states, essential for a healthy humanity. Although the Jungian approach appears to possess a rather

exhaustive and fine analysis of the term, it is still structured around a plethora of novel and intricate concepts that are themselves hard to scientifically define and measure.

2) *Discriminability*: An adequate definition of religion should be capable of discriminating between the religious and the nonreligious. The philosopher Albert Whitehead defines religion as “what the individual does with his solitariness” (1926a, p. 47), while social psychologist Daniel Batson and his colleagues claim that religion is “whatever we as individuals do to come to grips personally with the questions that confront us because we are aware that we and others like us are alive and that we will die” (1993, p. 8). Both definitions are directly based on William James’ approach that viewed religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James, 2002, p. 29–30). According to these definitions, religion is primarily seen as a personal matter, present in different forms in all human beings. Thus, in that sense, and perhaps to the dismay of at least some of the atheists, all humans are religious. This position is, in fact, explicitly communicated in the writings of psychologist Gordon Allport, who claims that atheists, agnostics and humanists are nothing more than “reactive doubters”, with deeply religious concerns. As he puts it, they are “reacting against the intellectual slavery of an idea” and their “negativism often pertains to specific content rather than to basic values” (1950, p. 117). Although this argument may make sense within the premises of the above approaches, when it is assessed through scientific enquiry it, once again, becomes problematic. Researchers have indeed used, and to a degree are still using, empirical measurements that derived from this position indiscriminately on religious and nonreligious individuals and institutions, while others, including myself (see Johnstone & Tiliopoulos, 2008; Lesmana & Tiliopoulos, 2009; Tiliopoulos et al., 2007), have pointed out that this is a fallacious practice that produces non-comparable, if not meaningless, scientific deductions.

3) *Coverage*: Following on from the previous point, an adequate definition of religion should be neither too inclusive nor too exclusive. For example, anthropologist Edward Tylor’s substantive definition states that religion is a “belief in spiritual beings” (1958, p. 424). This is a rather minimalistic and exclusive approach to religion. It counts as religions only traditions that involve beliefs in a deity (viz. the *theistic* and *polytheistic* traditions), and excludes any *nontheistic* belief systems, such as several of the traditional forms of Buddhism. Another such example comes from Freud’s phylogenetic theory of religion. Freud in “Totem & Taboo” (1955) talks about the *protohuman* father who was killed (and subsequently devoured!) by his male children and successively was made into God. He postulates that “totemic religion arose from the filial sense of guilt, in an attempt to allay that feeling and to appease the father by deferred obedience to

him. All later religions are seen to be attempts at solving the same problem.” (p. 145). Absence of supporting evidence aside, this position could perhaps be applicable to monotheistic religions; but how about religions that have more than one god or involve the worship of female gods, like Hinduism? Or those that have no gods? Freud’s theory cannot explain their origins by any stretch of the imagination. Freud did not speak of multiple fathers, or the murder of the mother, and of course one is at a loss when no parents (no gods) are involved. However, Freud claims that his theory explains the universal origins of religion and its evolution through human history – not through *some* human’s history. Therefore, one is compelled to accept either that only monotheistic systems are true religions (which brings us back to the issue of the definition of the concept), or that Freud’s theory is false or at best limited.

4) *Bias*: Finally, an adequate definition of religion should not be ethnocentric or biased. Anthropologist Stewart Guthrie (1996) confesses that most anthropological (and I would add sociological) definitions of religion are ethnocentric, since they tend to be based on the Abrahamic tradition, and thus tend to define as religion systems of faith that involve beliefs in a single god. At the same time, sociopolitical theorist Karl Marx’s view of religion as “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (1975, pp. 43 – 44), and Freud’s dictum that religion is “the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity” (Freud, 1927/1961, p. 43), appear to possess obvious disapproving biases by neglecting or rejecting any positive, mature, and conscious aspects of religion. That said, a totally positive approach to religion can also result in bias. An example comes from Allport’s humanistic theory of religion (1950). Allport did not see anything bad in religion. Even the immature or peripherally practised forms of religion (that, in part, form the construct of *extrinsic religiosity*) serve their valuable purpose of providing the individual with the essential motives he or she needs to live their life the best way it makes sense to them. However, not long after he had published these ideas, Allport was faced with a set of empirical evidence he failed to comprehend. Allport was puzzled by findings that suggested that very religious people tended to exhibit rather negative social attitudes, namely with regard to prejudice and discrimination (see Adorno et al., 1950; Allport, 1955).

## Epimyth

It should be apparent by now that constructing a totally adequate, all-purpose, well-rounded definition of religion may not be possible. This realisation alone may have been enough to frustrate many scholars and lead them to abandon any

attempts to define religion, declaring it an idea with so many meanings that it has none – declaring it “indefinable”.

Religion is indeed an abstract, complex, and latent concept (according to *universalists*), or construct (according to *postmodernists*) that encompasses a profusion of phenomena, functions, meanings, structures, and features. Then again, so are many other abstract concepts, like freedom or God, and most psychosocial latent constructs, like mental health, poverty, or intelligence. On this basis I do not view religion as being any different. Although an all-encompassing definition of religion may not be possible, at the same time it may not be necessary for scientific inquiry. After all, a holistic model of the world, in which such a notion could meaningfully fit, does not yet, and may never exist. As Western science has largely abandoned, if not rejected, Aristotelian positions, *atomism* became one of the bases of explanation and thought that permeate all socio-psycho-political venues. Consequently, at least within Western religious settings, a cultural transformation began that asserted that each individual possesses a direct and unique relationship with the divine, which emerges as the meaning-making unit of the concept of religion. This *priesthood of the believer* further promotes an emphasis on individual spirituality and religiosity rather than a globalism of religious meaning. In the presence and mechanisms of such discrete meaning-making processes, as well as the rest of the issues discussed in this chapter, any attempt to generate a holistic definition of religion appears inane.

Within this context of thought, I would argue that it does not matter what religion really *is* – i. e., if there can ever be an ecumenical truth about its meaning. What ought to matter is how we, as scientists, perceive it and how we justify our perception of it when attempting to apply it to various research settings. It seems to me that it is more productive to think of what religion is or can be only within a given framework of thought or action. Therefore, I propose a transferral of focus from “what it is”, to that which a definition of religion endeavours to accomplish. At this level of treatment, religion can indeed be meaningfully defined for science, and science, paraplacing John Dewey, is well capable of bringing “the touch of reality in the life of the soul” (Dewey, 1884, p. 288). In fact, many of the definitions mentioned in this chapter can be adequate and workable when viewed within the theoretical context or research paradigms they were created and frequently employed.

Whatever the future of this enterprise may be, religion still remains one of those notions which challenge, in an entertaining way, our resourcefulness to define, understand, and investigate phenomena that are not easily studied scientifically.

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## **Religion as Experience: An Interpretative Approach to Cultural Psychology of Religion**

### **Introduction: The Concept of ‘Religion as Experience’**

The term ‘religion as experience’ is understood here as the core of a meaning-making process and is presented in the form of an interpretative approach which is empirically grounded on symbolic action theory (cf. Boesch, 1991) and cultural psychology of religion (cf. Belzen, 2010). This methodological and theoretical framework was developed as part of the author’s own empirical research on religious self-concepts in autobiographical narratives of German Protestants before, during, and after their involvement in religious missions (Arnold, 2010). This approach is inspired by the theoretically motivated studies in the philosophy of religion of Matthias Jung (1999; 2005), and sociology of religion of Hans Joas (2002; 2004), although in some important respects there is a need to go beyond their underlying argumentation, especially in the case of analysing the meanings of cultural actions in the process of interpreting lived experiences. Culture is referred to in this chapter as a “social, knowledge-based, symbolically imparted practice” (Straub, 2006, p. 174). This approach guides us – when studying religion, religiosity, and spirituality in everyday life – from a psychological perspective. It takes into account that the modes of description of underlying social, science-based concepts vary with regard to the social contexts, practices, and formulation of questions for research on religion. Likewise, no form of explanation can ultimately avoid reductions and schematisations either of the complex reality of experiences or the process of their formation and acquisition by human individuals. In view of this, this chapter argues for the integration and meaningful relation of a multiplicity of epistemological, theoretical, methodological, and practical aspects of empirical research on religion. Our concept has the ability to overcome the limitations of strategies of homogeneity (i. e. negation of differences), and thus is able to keep in mind precarious tensions, mutual incommensurability, and reductionisms.

In this context, the frequently used term, ‘experience’, is based on a holistic concept that involves cognitive assumption of facts as ‘true’, as well as personal



attitudes and affective conditions (such as states of great emotion and astonishment) – all the while remaining indissolubly linked to a practical and communicative approach to the individual self in its social environment (cf. Joas, 2004, p. 66; Jung, 1999, p. 264). Experiences are embedded in actions, which allow us to relate the quality of (religious) experiences to specific capabilities of articulation, and modes of expression. For such a pragmatic perspective we need, on the one hand, to distinguish between the primary (subjective) quality of lived experience and the closely related ‘creative’ performance of meaning-formation (cf. i. e. Joas, 2002). On the other hand, it is impossible to consider expression-formation (*Ausdrucksbildung*) and understanding of sense (*Sinnverstehen*) separately (Jung, 2005, p. 242; trans. MA), since every capacity for articulation is always interlinked with cultural and religious symbolic systems of beliefs, as well as their interpretation (or ‘re-interpretation’). Such a holistic and integrative concept of experience is picked up within the complex and overarching structure of a ‘spider’s web’ in which multidimensional relations – which can neither be considered independently nor defined only with regard to their place in the (whole) ensemble – exist between the single constituents. Experiences and actions, articulations and interpretations, are integrated into/within this multidimensional and polyvalent, reciprocal and pragma-semantic “network of interwoven and inter-definable terms” (Straub, 2006, p. 173) or “web of meaning-making activities” (Valsiner & Veen, 2000, p. 18).

This web of connotations and denotations goes beyond the suggested hermeneutic approach of experience-formation in form of a tripartite relationship between “(lived) experience-expression-understanding” (*Erlebnis-Ausdruck-Verstehen*; cf. Jung, 1999, p. 36; trans. MA) as described in the later work of Wilhelm Dilthey. The individual’s lived experiences are part of the system of “objective apprehension” (*objektiver Geist*; cf. Dilthey, 2002, p. 58; trans. MA) and are irreducible components in the process “understanding” (*Verstehen*; cf. Matthes, 1992). With regard to the terminology referred to here, the experience-formation process distinguishes between two interwoven levels of the interpretation of experiences (see Figure 1): a subjective perspective (inner circle), on the one hand, and an intersubjective perspective (outer circle) on the other. A transformation between these different levels is realized by the ‘articulation’ of the subject’s meaningful experiences. Thus, an interpretative cultural psychology of religion is described in this chapter in two parts: firstly, the basic concepts and components; secondly, the methodological approach.

First, we focus on the complex interplay between experiences and actions, expectations and unexpected events. Attention is given to the concept of articulation, the process of making one’s own experiences, and to the relevance of communicative action. A subject-oriented approach to an individual’s meaning-making process is regularly confronted with the problem that not every in-

dividual experience, or the singularity thereof, can be fully apprehended by appropriate language. However, language equips humans with the ability to articulate precarious tensions between the ‘sayable’ and the ‘unsayable’.

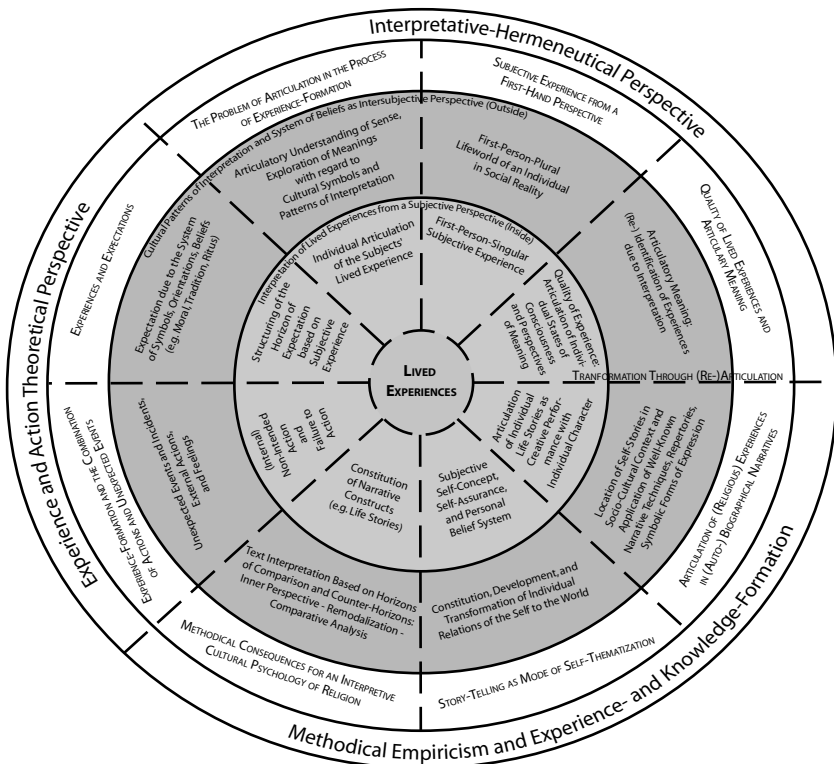


Figure 1: Basic concepts and terminology of an interpretative approach empirically grounded on symbolic action theory and cultural psychology of religion (Source: illustration from author)

In addition, our discussion not only needs to consider the perspective of the ‘first person’ singular or plural, but also the sequential structure of the experience-formation process. This process starts with a qualitative experience and ends with the interpretation of its meanings in the course of articulation. Conversely, collectively shared and culturally determined patterns of meanings, symbols, and articulatory expressions determine the making of experiences. Consequently, the articulation of experiences in the context of religion requires a specific cultural technique: story telling, in form of (auto-) biographical narrations, as a mode of ‘self-thematization’.

Second, we draw attention to the underlying methodical and methodological consequences for an interpretative cultural psychology of religion, starting with an outline of the problem of reductionism in the research of religion, and fin-

ishing with a description of a comparative analysis which attempts to identify, explain, and interpret types of experiences based on methodical empiricism and knowledge-formation in cultural psychology.

## Basic Concepts, Components, and Terminology of an Interpretative Psychology of Religion

### Relationships between Experience and Action, Expectation and Events

‘Experience’ and ‘action’ are not to be understood as disjunctive but as complementary categories. With the inclusion of perspectives from symbolic action theory in an experience theoretical framework, it should be possible to overcome the dualistic differentiation between activity and passivity in experience and action. As Jung (2005) has pointed out, with the dualistic concept in John Dewey’s (1896, p. 359) essay “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology”, it could be argued instead that both terms need to be embedded in an overall structure with relational character: actions are not single entities, or inseparable creative outputs of human experiences, but rather action go into experiences and *vice-versa*. Dewey (1896, p. 358) aptly clarifies the structural aspect of the relation between experience and action with regard to observations of the human physical organism. According to him, all human behavior is an interaction of both the receptive moment of a stimulus and the spontaneous quality of a reaction to that stimulus (Jung, 2005, p. 234). According to Dewey (1896, p. 358), a reaction, in the context of experience-formation, is “the so-called response (...) not merely to the stimulus; it is *into* it.” Within this pragmatic approach, this means that human action is not just a response to an experience, but that experience is also an action, which finds its way into the everyday world in the course of its occurrence. Consequently, in confronting its environment the experiencing self cannot do anything other than react. Therefore, on the basis of this relationship between experiences and actions, we can infer that a receptive and a spontaneous perspective of the self and its relation to the world are different “characteristic phases that remain in contrast to each other” (Jung, 2005, p. 243; trans. MA) and cannot be assumed to be disjunctive sequences of the process of experience- and knowledge-formation, as is usually assumed in theories of perception. Any attempt to merge human experience with such an empirical concept of perception inevitably leads to an unsubstantiated reduction of social reality (Alston, 1993, p. 186). First, theories of perception obscure the fact that, besides the content of religious experiences, acting subjects are themselves involved in the practical application of convictions and orientations

in ritual practice. Second, such theories also neglect the fact that experience is always regarded in a process-oriented “interdependence between lived experiences and the search for expressions” (Jung, 2005, p. 244) in which the entire existence of an ‘I’, acting in its life-world – perceiving, thinking, feeling, fantasizing, wishing, and remembering – is embedded.

As Ulrike Popp-Baier (2006, p. 141) emphasizes, the process of experience-formation always involves a combination of expectation, action, and “unexpected events” (Widerfahren). We can draw at least two implications from a pragmatic perspective on the ‘I-to-world’ relationship. First, on the basis of particular cognitive and emotional (affective) expectations and attitudes, which can be either met or disappointed, an individual is able to gain experiences. Generally, from an inside perspective, shared willingness, agreement, and belief in the semantic content of expressions (which also to some extent perform the perception) is necessary if we are to have experiences. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider typical, culturally shared meanings and forms of expression that can only be determined in the action and during such “semanticized practices that require an inner commitment to its semantic content” (Jung, 2005, p. 244; emphasis in original; trans. MA).

Second, in relation to the terms *expectation* and *action* it is also of paramount importance here that not every (generally human) behavior is predictable. As Niklas Luhmann (1971, p. 41) stated, individuals frequently encounter limitations while making experiences. Unexpected events and incidents surprise them or disappoint their expectations and interests. The experiencing ‘I’ is challenged to perceive what has happened, reflecting and interpreting its lived experiences, and making new experiences in the meantime. However, expectations are not inevitably disappointed in the making of experiences. What is more, it is also possible that through surprise and evidence which does not conform to expectation, conscious experience comes to be. In this sense, it can be concluded that our continuous exposure to the ‘intangible’ and ‘unavailable’, which we experience without actively *doing* anything (e.g. independent of our thinking, desiring, feeling, and action), is an anthropological constant. This has psychic implications for the persons affected, restricting or extending their facilities for action, marking specific moments in their life stories, or leaving a typeable “trajectory of life events” (Verlaufskurven; cf. Schütze, 1983, p. 288). Furthermore, the process of experience-formation includes the fact that subjects thematize and articulate their lived experiences in a specific manner, and that articulation is confronted with the basic obstacle of language.

## The Problem of Articulation in the Process of Experiences-Formation

In linguistic terms, ‘articulation’ has usually been understood merely as a category which primarily emphasizes the desire “to (adequately) express oneself.” According to this meaning, ‘articulation’ refers to vocalization and the precision of pronunciation in terms of phonetics (cf. Weisgerber, 1971). However, this usage of the term misses one particular aspect: namely, that articulation involves both a phonetic and a mental quality, which are responsible for expressive diversity. Joas (2002, p. 507) approaches the “problem of articulation” from a pragmatist and social theoretical perspective while considering the “necessary tension between the sayable and unsayable”, asking whether it “is indeed obsolete and naïve – or whether this idea – what I call ‘the problem of articulation’ – can lead us any further.” To answer this question he refers to the central problem of (analytical) philosophy of language in the twentieth century, which is based on the assumption that language is a characteristic of almost every human perception and schematization of reality. In the effort to develop a solution to this problem, Joas discusses Cornelius Castoriadis’ essay “The Sayable and the Unsayable” (1984).

In his essay, Castoriadis (1984), being interested in a ‘post-phenomenological’ conception of language, meditates on the late philosophical work of the French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the model of language essential to his philosophy of consciousness. Castoriadis’ reflection on Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1968) is an attempt to preserve the fundamental premises of a language-theoretical tradition in philosophy – such as a concept of experience as “always already mediated through prior understanding, so that we can never reach unschematized, non-linguistic ‘pure’ experience” (Joas, 2002, p. 506). At the same time, however, certain premises in the philosophy of consciousness need to be overcome, such as the assumption that mental consciousness is the starting-point of human perception, “that becomes only secondarily translated into language” (Joas, 2002, p. 507). Castoriadis (1984) rejects this position of a “pre-linguistic conditionality” of human consciousness out of hand. For him, language is nothing but a secondary transformation and translation of the “relationship between the consciousness and the world” (Joas, 2002, p. 507). In order to explore all possibilities for getting to the root of the problem, the relationship between language and its expression, Joas (2002, p. 509) states that the “idea of ‘expression’ in the sense of a pre-linguistically constituted meaning, which only secondarily becomes translated into language, is clearly overcome; but it is not replaced by the image of a closed set of linguistic meanings forming a finite repertory for the possibilities of experiences.”

This interpretation of Castoriadis’ idea of visibility and invisibility is also the

basis of our experience-theoretical considerations. Castoriadis (1984) deals with the principal problem of how new things can be created by language if we assume that human experience is primarily based on a limited capacity for articulations. We must not think of a concept of articulation as an exclusive act of “re-combination” (Joas) of previous thoughts, feelings, and actions. As such it would remain incomplete. ‘Expression’ is not merely determined by language, although language is a “privileged mode” of our “organization of the world” (Castoriadis, 1984, p. 123). In addition, the articulatory process is also influenced by various intentions of action, attitudes, and expectations. Conversely, symbolic expressions determine the diversity of meanings and the meaning-making process. But not everything that is intended to express is actually an expression. The use of language is always a struggle for expression, whereby the tension between what could be said (the primary intention or consciousness of an expression) and what is sayable, but has not yet been formulated (the secondary formation of an expression by use of language), cannot be completely resolved. If we were to content ourselves without a reference to the pre-linguistic origin of the ‘sayable’, we would have to finish our deliberations here with an imagination of a completely closed process of experience-formation, mediating between language and expression.

Another perspective is the thematization of social, cultural, practical, everyday experiences. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that in articulations of experiences we can also trace prior attempts at articulation. If we accept this we can argue with Castoriadis (1984), and also with William James (1902), that in the process of articulation an individual makes use of the richness of a complex, culturally preformed repertoire of (linguistic) expressions. Every articulating and experiencing subject has the opportunity to choose between different available and selectable alternatives of expressions, and is able to create new expressions to add to, differentiate, and expand that repertoire (e.g. neologisms). The non-identity of the repertoire of linguistic expressions with the lived experience in need of articulation will neither be relativized nor naturally disappear. Neither the articulatory repertoire nor human experience is qualitatively or quantitatively determined by the subjects’ capacities and possibilities of expressions, but are always culturally formed and shaped by individual biography.

According to Castoriadis (1984, pp. 129–130), we can summarize the results of our analysis as follows. The original idea of an expression is not always visible to us; we can, nevertheless, identify and observe the implications and effects of how new meanings are created. In the process of experience-formation interdependencies exist between subjective experiences, qualities of lived experiences, individual articulations, and the available finite repertoire of culturally preformed and determined linguistic expressions and interpretations (cf. Joas,

2002; Jung, 1999). In such use of verbal expressions specific, cultural experiences of difference, otherness, and alterity are elucidated, and common patterns of articulation are reproduced. In this regard, culture functions as a system of meanings, symbols, and orientations to life. In the process of interpreting lived experiences, or rather transformations and translations of qualities into expression, the question also arises of its meaning for the individual, who is continuously trying to achieve consonance and coherence between reflected experiences and his or her self and worldview.

These relations between experience and its cultural meanings will serve to evaluate the tension between the sayable and the unsayable, and imply various consequences with regard to the concept/notion of articulation as it is used here. Although it is not possible to present these implications in detail (for an overview cf. Arnold, 2010, pp. 70–76), we can make two observations. First, the tension between pre-linguistic intuition and the available repertoire of linguistic expressions does not exist per se but can be articulated by means of language – although not with complete success or sufficient quality. Second, there is a reciprocal relationship of interpretation between experience and articulation. Therefore, the experience-formation process becomes an on-going process of the formation of expressions (through language), on the basis of available meanings, or the recreation of new expressions to develop and expand the repertoire of possible expressions by individuals. Thus, the meaningful articulations of individuals' subjective qualities of lived experiences need to be analyzed from a 'first-hand perspective', and, thereafter, the relation between the quality of lived experiences and articulatory meaning-making.

### Subjective Experience from a First-Hand Perspective

Experiences do not immediately become tangible to us, and cannot simply be made. They provide a subject-oriented approach to exploring one's own self in the social scene (Boesch, 1991). In paying attention to the self-concept and relationship to the world from the "first-hand perspective" of an individual, we take into consideration that the "conscious life of every individual has to be lived unjustifiably as one's own" (Jung, 1999, p. 268; trans. MA). A starting-point for a thematization of the first-hand relationship of the experiencing subject to its environment is provided in the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975), Paul Ricœur (1991) and Niklas Luhmann (1971), who all understand 'experience' as a "complexly structured first-hand relationship to the world" (Popp-Baier, 2006, p. 141; trans. MA).

In addition, analytical philosophy has investigated the epistemological reference to the "first person" (singular and plural) under the aspect of "privileged

access” (cf. Alston, 1971; Nagel, 1974). It is common sense that individuals have particular access to their own inner psychic being (thoughts, perceptions, feelings, dispositions, etc.). Not only the formal structure of the privileged access to the subject’s perspective, but also the preferred mode of this access to particular mental states is still in need of explanation (cf. Jung, 1999). Instead of taking the (descriptive) knowledge that “a person has of his own mental (psychological) states, such as thoughts and feelings” (Alston, 1971, p. 223) for granted we should speak of capacities for “articulation” (Jung, 1999, p. 272) in order to better respect the subjects’ first-hand experiences. Nevertheless, in the transformation of a description into an articulation, the interpretative tensions between articulation and claims to universal validity – like those of religions and philosophies of life – should remain intact (Jung, 1999, p. 287). However, articulation should not be misunderstood as a naïve representation of a subject’s inner world (cf. Taylor, 1980).

According to Jung (1999, pp. 290–291; trans. MA), descriptions can be illustrated by the metaphor of ‘seeking’ a possible expression of the sayable, while the term ‘articulation’ refers to both the metaphors of ‘seeking’ and ‘generating’ meaningful expressions. In this regard, we assume a meaning-making process in which a selection of particular forms of expression for lived experience occurs under the exclusion of a multitude of alternative interpretations. The choice of specific expression-formation is, therefore, an interpretation of the subjective content of lived experience, which cannot be reduced to the first-hand perspective. As Jung (1999, p. 291 trans. MA) notes, choosing a particular form of expression integrates (at least) two interlocking levels (cf. Figure 1): “schemata of objectification” (e.g. identification with religion) and “schemata of subjectification” (individuals’ horizon of experiences). Therefore, at the center of studies of religion is an individual who relates their subjective experiences, and the content of these lived experiences, by simultaneously using their cultural repertoire of symbols, interpretations, and expressions, while either subsuming the cultural repertoire under their own lived experience or creating a new expression through reflection.

This means, however, that in a scientific study of religion perspectives of the first person singular and plural cannot be simply reduced to the supposedly neutral position of an uninvolved ‘third person’, nor can they merge with the latter. The concept of a neutral scientist seeking objectivity (from the perspective of the third person) does not take into account the fact that particular qualitative contents of lived experience are not objectifiable, since they cannot be represented other than from the perspective of the first person (cf. Nagel, 1980). Therefore, the process of scientific experience acquisition and knowledge-formation needs to include expectations and attitudes as well as implicit and explicit knowledge (deriving from the cultural background of the experiencing



subjects under investigation), and not only the knowledge of the scholars participating in (textual) interpretation. In the scientific process of experience-formation, the existential singularity of religious interpretation is closely related to the conditions of the everyday life world, and the verbalizations of social and cultural practices. Thus, an articulation that refers to the social and cultural life world cannot avoid the theoretical perspectives of symbolic action theory.

### Quality of Lived Experience and Articulatory Meaning

Generally, the philosophical term ‘articulation’ subsumes a relation between ‘the whole’ and its ‘structure’. In his famous *Abhandlungen zur Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften* (1924/1957: Xcvi), Wilhelm Dilthey references Immanuel Kant, emphasizing the dynamically developing and differentiating structure and organisation of the whole, in the relation “(lived)experience-expression-understanding”. As will be shown in the following, from Dilthey’s (1924/1957) expression, “lived experience”, and Dewey’s (1896) concept of the “quality of lived experience”, we can elaborate a pragmatist perspective for the concept of articulation. The subject’s individual experience is thereby regarded as a core element of the experience-formation process.

Experience is not only the main focus of Dilthey’s relational model, but also constitutes an interface between the individual ability to form expressions and the available cultural repertoire of meaningful interpretations (Jung, 1999, p. 290). According to Dilthey, it is the particular relationship between lived experience and expression that underscores the concept/notion of articulation. The representation of lived experience becomes possible, owing to a shared cultural horizon of expectations and a corresponding culturally preformed structure of experiences of individuals, as well as to the knowledge of common forms of expression. Thus, experiencing is the process “in which the quality of lived experience is determined from the meaning of articulation and, *vice versa*, the phenomenal determination of the self is also qualitatively characterized by articulated values, norms, etc. themselves” (Jung, 2005, p. 245; trans. MA). It is especially through articulation that the subjective interpretation of the meaning of life becomes possible, whereby the individual makes accessible the qualitative content of lived experience by means and reference to a shared cultural system of action, orientation, and symbols. The experience-formation process is characterized by the fact that the articulatory process of the understanding of sense, and the opening up of new meanings based on subjective experiences, are two inseparably linked elements (Joas, 2004, p. 24): religions, religious traditions, and institutions provide individuals with a rich repertoire of cultural symbols and patterns of interpretation, out of which an experiencing subject borrows

patterns of interpretation for his/her lived experiences, in order to seek a suitable expression for the specific quality of the lived experience at hand. The lived experiences articulated by believers are not independent of the cultural repertoire. Moreover, individual and collective experiences and beliefs are indissolubly, interdependently, and dynamically related to each other.

Thus, cultural patterns of interpretation make it possible for believers to make particular experiences, which they then classify as religious: e.g. prayer, sacramental experiences. During such activities, a person has religious or mystical experiences, owing not only to familiarity with patterns of interpretation of ritual practices, but also to the accessibility of such experiences from the first-person perspective. Due to the the generation of individual interpretations of existing symbolic patterns of articulation, the qualitative content of the interpretation of religious experiences can be explained, and a process of the understanding of sense starts. In a way, this is also a prerequisite for the intersubjective transparency and validity of individual experience. As has stated above, experience and articulation cannot be separated from each other.

Assuming this structural limitation of a concept of lived experience, in the next step we will not be able to ask, in a Diltheyian sense (determined by expression), how an orientation to action could develop from this concept.

Since Dilthey does not help us to answer this question, we will refer to Dewey's essay, "Qualitative Thought" (1930), which clarifies the sequential structure of experience-formation, beginning with a qualitative experience and ending with an articulation of meaning (Jung, 2005, p. 246). According to Dewey, we cannot take the actual 'existence' of qualitative experiences as a starting-point and conclusions can only be inferred from the fact that lived experience, with a particular meaning for an individual, has been made and internalized. There is the "quality of a situation, but not existence itself" in the world of our experiences (Jung, 2005, p. 246; trans. MA). Inasmuch as qualitative experiencing is necessarily entangled in meaningful situations the lived experience becomes, so to speak, visible through an expression, pinpointing the inherent meaning. A conversation about the qualities of lived experiences becomes possible – although meaning can vary from individual to individual – because of a commonly shared descriptive vocabulary for articulation, and because the acting and articulating individual can extrapolate from a quality of lived experiences, situations and particular contents of experiences. In this context, Dewey (1930, p. 254) speaks of a "given, total, persuasive quality" of an experienced situation. As a requirement, this discourse about the qualities of lived experiences is only possible when the intended meaning of a situation is articulated from the first-person perspective. Conversely, in the articulatory meaning-making process, an individual always refers to the underlying cultural system of convictions, orientations, and symbols. Jung (2005, p. 247) also speaks, in this

case, of a “creative translation between culturally preformed patterns of interpretation and the qualitative act of life.” Between these two elements, which are sequentially related to each other in the experience-formation process (the “qualitative act of life” and the “cultural interpretation”), there is a lively interdependency, the regularity of which empowers the individual self to develop and to change on the basis of everyday lived experiences.

This means that articulation takes place within the process of experience-formation, which is limited in two ways. On the one hand, in the process of understanding, the biographically stacked-up lived experiences presume a specific (culturally and symbolically preformed) horizon of interpretation in conjunction with the selected forms of expression. On the other hand, the variety, variability, and infinitude of possible ways of articulation are limited, in reality, to the creative potentials of “selection, precision, clarification” (Jung, 1999, p. 291; trans. MA). Language is not simply reproduced in expressions, since an experiencing subject in need of articulation is constantly seeking an expression appropriate to a quality of the lived experience on the basis of a culturally shared repertoire of expressions. In this case, the impetus from symbolic action theory lies in the naïve and reflective interpretation of a phenomenon (Jung, 2005, p. 248): with an articulation of an intensive experience, an individual also attempts to understand the meaning of this experience and to find out the meaning of his/her lived life with reference to known interpretation. A newly arising perspective on life may guide individuals’ later action or, at least, lead to a change in the (creative) potential for action. As a result, different forms of development in biographically consistent and coherent personal identity are possible. Thus, in the process of articulation, seeking, finding, and creating meanings are closely linked by means of cultural symbols and corresponding actions. In order to be able to articulate specific experiences, subjects usually make use of a particular expressive form and mode of ‘self-thematization’.

#### Articulation of Religious Experiences in (Auto-) Biographical Narratives

Experiences refer to an experiencing subject. They do not exist in an ‘empty space’ but take place in the world and in everyday life. According to the Aristotelian definition of experience (εμπειρία), “everyday life experiences have to be understood as explicit foundations and frames of reference for all forms of knowledge formation” (Straub, 1989, p. 202; trans. MA). Everyday experiences are an important element of one’s own life story, which is also a history shared with other individuals. Major life events, in which an “I” locates itself, are partly predictable and partly unpredictable. Stories about life need to be understood and interpreted. The process and meaning of a life story is constructed by the

variety of possible representations of one's own experiences. The articulation of a life event and its reconstructed meaning always require a specific narrative form of expression, a narration.

In the process of experience-formation narrators become intuitively involved with their own life story, in story telling as an everyday communication practice, especially from the perspective of the first person (singular and plural).

In stories about everyday life, which follow particular rules, a person expresses his or her own lived experiences. A violation of these rules can only happen at the expense of understanding and traceability, and may also lead to the loss of consistency and coherence. Different "compulsions of storytelling" (Zugzwänge des Erzählens; Schütze, 1983; for an overview cf. Straub, 1989, p. 191) constantly guide the narrator. Nevertheless, the assumption of a homology between the constitution of stories and experiences has already been identified as a problem. Experiences are not simply retrievable or available at any time, but are already reflections of former lived experiences. Experiences once made can be overwritten and stacked up, not only via reflection, but also via other events, experiences, and narrations. Because all narrators tell their interesting and 'authentic' self-stories to express and thematize their own point of view, life experiences cannot be investigated without regard for the situation and context in which they are narratively expressed, or the presumed expectations of the recipients.

### Story Telling as a Mode of Self-Thematization

Story telling can be regarded as a widespread mode of 'self-thematization' (for an overview cf. Straub & Arnold, 2009). In life stories a person creates his or her own perspective on his or her life. Narrations are not simply reproductions of 'actual' or 'authentic' experiences which 'really' occurred in the way depicted, but are reconstructions of moments of shifting life, and are only accessible as more or less appropriate 'versions' of the past. The thematization of one's own life in stories depends on the narrators themselves, who act in the narration, or realize that something happened to them. An important and necessary condition is that they locate and position themselves on the basis of participation in a cultural practice.

The techniques and repertoire of storytelling, acquired during life, vary depending on the culturally shared repertoire of traditional narratives, adaptability to the life stories of significant others, and creativity in generating new stories about one's own life. The constitution, formation, and interpretation of self-stories is not only a creative performance of the memory, but also locates and thematize the self in a socio-cultural context (e.g. Straub, 2008; Straub &

Arnold, 2009). In self-stories a person not only remembers and evaluates what once happened, but also tells about future plans, notions of life, and whether their expectations and longings have been met or disappointed. Rational assessments and conscious decisions go hand in hand with emotional fluctuations and moments of elation. Rational arguments can suddenly stand side by side with beliefs. Precarious tensions may emerge. On a pragmatic level, narrations guide, organize, and regulate human action.

Stories never represent the entire life history, spaces of experiences, and horizons of expectations of the story telling 'I', but are selectively reduced to verbal articulations, remaining unavoidably incomplete, whereby the perspective of time and space cannot be separated from the narrated content (Popp-Baier, 2009). As a matter of course, narrations can also consist of non-accessible or rarely accessible articulations and seemingly cognitively inaccessible elements of one's own life story. Language, as a medium of articulation, makes it possible to express the tension between the 'sayable' and the 'unsayable' (Castoriadis, 1984), e. g. in meditations or prayers. In all cases, the narrator goes back in each description, explanation, and evaluation to (auto-) biographical elements of his/her own life.

Next, preceded by a discussion of the problem of reductionism, the methodological consequences of such an analysis of religion are described on the basis of an interpretive psychological approach, which in turn is based on the concept of religion as experience, also including pragmatic aspects of the subject's everyday life.

## **Methodological Consequences for an Interpretative Psychology of Religion**

### The Problem of Reductionism and Possible Solutions

As paradigmatic problems in religious studies, reductionist positions are "critical – distant to claims of validity of religious belief" (Jung, 1999, p. 364; trans. MA), while reductionist ways of interpretation and explanation do not necessarily depend on personal beliefs of the interpreter. Mircea Eliade (1984, p. 6) once observed – referring to Freud and Durkheim – that the most important aspect in the controversial debate on reductionism is this: on the one hand, there is the attempt to consider the object of research as a "religious datum", as a pre-interpretative, pre-scientific, or a priori fact; on the other, religious explanations and patterns of interpretation are more or less replaced by psychological, socio-

historical, or theological arguments. Hence, one could ask how reductionist argumentation can occur in descriptions and interpretations of experiences.

It is common sense that (religious) phenomena need to be analysed first 'on their plane of reference'. Wayne Proudfoot (1985) also follows this line, being critical and sceptical of religion when it comes to a detailed analysis, and confronts reductionism with a differentiation of the 'descriptive' and 'explanatory' aspects of the reductionist problem. First, as a methodological consequence of an experience-oriented theoretical approach, it is necessary that 'descriptions' of an object should be oriented as precisely as possible, and narrowed down as much as possible, to the research partners' understanding of reality. The verification of such descriptions is then guaranteed if the individual is able to recognize and identify himself/herself in the chosen form of articulation and expression in his/her first-person relationship with the world. Descriptions which do not arise from the horizon of the subject's experience are excluded, resulting perhaps in a misjudgement of the subjective-qualitative moment of the individual's experience. Second, an 'explanatory reduction' contains any offer of explanation of (religious) experience which is new, typical, and congenic to the subjects' horizon, e.g. from the psychology of religion or sociology. The explanatory content is thematized in a new and different context, and terms and patterns of explanations are applied which do not emerge from the experiencing subject's horizon of interpretation, and do not even need to be agreeable or consensual (Proudfoot, 1985, p. 197). Thus, in an explanation or interpretation, the subject's everyday world is no longer a normative directional indicator and, therefore, its identification in the found explanation, no longer necessary. However, deviations between the self-expression of an individual and of a religious community or even outsiders (non-believers or dissenters) are the normal scenario. Descriptions with which an experiencing subject could identify, recognize, or approve cannot *per se* be applied to the level of explanation. Accordingly, scientific statements and explanations about religious life do not necessarily require the individual's consensus to claim validity.

Thus, Jung (1999, p. 358) suggests a threefold differentiation of the problem of reductionism: (1) the inner perspective of an experiencing subject, (2) the evaluation of alternative explanations of the lived life and (3) the inclusion of external explanations. First, in an interpretative analysis, it is of paramount importance to assume a subjective form of expression and the pragmatic relations that are located in the everyday life of a subject.

Second, a "remodalisation of the actual" (Jung, 1999, p. 358; trans. MA) makes it possible that in the process of articulation – whether conscious or not, obvious or hidden – other possible and plausible ways of understanding need not be excluded. Furthermore, it becomes possible for an individual to decide on a personal perspective from a multitude of different possibilities which are

plausible for himself/herself and comprehensible to others. This is so because the “[k]nowledge of the choice made, as a choice, allows the recognition of dissonant choices” (Jung, 1999, p. 359; trans. MA). Thus, a broad spectrum of possibilities can be uncovered in which alternative forms of articulation can be investigated. Third, interpretative analyses should also include external explanations which do not have to comply with the subjective description of the lived experience or the alternative articulation. Objectifications on the basis of external explanations, and from the perspective of the third person, must always be sought within the horizon of meaning and interpretation of the experiencing subject. Finally, on this basis, a comparative approach to an interpretative psychology of religion can enrich our discussion and substantiate our methods.

### Comparative Analysis in the Cultural Psychology of Religion

A comparative analysis, based on the methodical principles of symbolic action theory and cultural psychology, predominantly aids the development and differentiation of categories in a systematic comparison of ‘cases’. In the scientific process of knowledge-formation, this comparative perspective makes possible interpretative analyses and categorisation of individual experiences, beliefs, and orientations regarding religious phenomena.

Generally, scientific interpretation is here understood as the reflective, purpose-oriented, meaning-anticipating action of a researcher who – in a methodologically comprehensible and intersubjectively appropriate way – aims to understand the verbally formed, interactively communicated, and ex post facto textually fixed part of reality (Straub, 2006, p. 185). An interpretation can itself be understood as an approach in which meanings of experiences and actions are actively and jointly constructed by the researcher and the subject under investigation. Thus, lived experiences are here analysed as articulated expressions in the form of narratives which are adopted in (auto-) biographical constructs via verbally communicated practices and textual manifestations, and produced at first hand from the perspective of a third person, such as a researcher or interpreter. Descriptions of experiences in stories are thereby not only regarded as ‘single’ points of a mostly complex life history which have an effect on the constitution, development, and transformation of personal identity and self-concepts, but can also be understood as the existential realization of an individual in a cultural and religious context. The process of a text interpretation consists of essentially three (ideal typical) components. As a matter of course, it is permissible, and sometimes necessary, to conduct these sequences in two different ways (as a mutually inclusive process of induction and deduction). The verbal isolation and separation from the subjectively articulated meaning in-

creases not only the degree of abstraction, advancing the content of the interpretative explanation, but also leads inevitably to “second-degree-constructs” (Schütz, 1962).

The first step aims at “thick descriptions” (cf. Geertz, 1973) of the experiencing subject’s inner perspective. According to Bohnsack (2007) and Straub (1999), this is a “formulating interpretation”: the interpreter “abstracts from the text as little as possible in the attempt of interpretation” (Straub, 1999, p. 213; trans. MA), and finds a thematic overview of the sequential structure of a text in the form of paraphrases, as well as via finding and indexing (sub-) headings. This stage in the procedure aims at a reformulation of what is said, in which no new aspects are added. Furthermore, the description of the analysed texts or text sequences are oriented as narrowly as possible toward the self-understanding and relation of the self to its life world perspective, as well as toward the spaces of experience and horizons of expectation of the subject under investigation. The degree of detail or selectivity of the paraphrased text sequence is determined by the relevance of the sequences to the research question. The purpose of this step is to elaborate a descriptive explanation of the phenomenon in question as a necessary criterion for the methodological control of all further procedural steps in the meaning-making process.

In the second stage of the procedure, a perspectivation of the descriptions from the experiencing subject is utilized via identification of possible alternative explanations for the lived life. This “remodalisation of the actual” (Jung, 1999, p. 373) can be understood as a meaningful and thorough weighing of the realistic against the realizable interpretations of one’s own life. Questioned, at the same time, are which kinds of actions and lived experiences are realized, and which other possibilities are negated. Due to the fact that chosen articulations of an experiencing subject exclude other possible articulations – and thus a reconstruction of the conscious or unconscious, obvious or hidden – articulation becomes possible. Deviating or non-approvable positions of descriptions of lived experiences remain valid. This act of ‘reformulating interpretation’ starts with the perspective of what is said, in compliance with the self-image, and the understanding of reality of all research partners. The ‘reciprocation’ of ‘alternative choices’ opens up room for articulation, which serves as a starting-point for comparisons and subsequent processes of categorisation, although this stage in the text interpretation procedure is still not a ‘comparative interpretation’. The identification of alternatives usually precedes the comparison and theoretical reflections in a structural-logical way.

The third stage in the text interpretation is the pragma-semantic operation, “Vergleichen” (Matthes, 1992), in which external explanatory perspectives are integrated.

This is the “comparative interpretation” (Straub, 2006) that realizes the as-



pects of relation, aggregation, and ‘putting-in-relation’ (not necessarily chronologically or argumentatively consecutive) of text segments, patterns of experience, and their interpretation with a shared content of meaning. As in the two previous steps, the meaning of the said is reconstructed and reproduced to a greater extent: it can be produced intra-textually and inter-textually and as text-transcendent, meaning-reconstructive reference (Straub, 2006). Comparisons refer to different horizons of comparison, and counter-horizons, such as the “interpreter’s knowledge of everyday life”, “explicit empirical substantial knowledge”, “scientifically grounded knowledge”, or “imaginations and creative meaning-making” (Straub, 1999, p. 225; trans. MA). Owing to the identification, assertion, and explanation of these sources of horizons of interpretations, a contrastive comparison becomes possible. By means of comparative operation, types (or categories) can be determined from the constructions of similarities and differences of the characteristics, and singularities of the research object, emerging from the horizons of interpretation: e. g. characteristics of people and situations, experiences and actions, orientations and beliefs, biographical events and processes of development, intentions and motives, as well as possible sub-differentiations. Depending on the researchers’ verbal articulatory performances of interpretation, these types may differ and deviate from the values and moral orientations of the subjects.

## Conclusions

As has been outlined, an interpretative approach to the cultural psychology of religion leads to new perspectives for the study of religious life in everyday practices. Such a hermeneutical approach, which draws attention to cognitive claims on truth, attitudes, beliefs, mental states, emotions, etc., and its practical and communicative implications to the individual self in its social environment, reminds us of the relevance and importance of a concept of ‘religion as experience’. Despite some restrictions – due to the practical implementation of this research in overcoming problems of reductionism in explanation and interpretation – an interpretative cultural psychology of religion (empirically grounded on a concept of religion as experience, which also includes pragmatic aspects of the subject’s everyday life) reveals a promising perspective. This theoretical and methodological framework sensitizes to the complexity and diversity of individual religiosity and spirituality. Furthermore, it addresses the methodological principles of a comparative analysis, in the empirical research of religion, from a cultural psychological perspective. In this sense, this chapter opens the study of articulations of subjective (first-hand) experiences in ev-

eryday life, and links perspectives of narrative psychology with qualitative social research in the psychology of religion.

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## Constructs of Meaning and Religious Transformation: Cognitive Complexity, Postformal Stages, and Religious Thought

### Introduction

What are “postformal operations,” why should they matter to the psychology of religion, and what relevance they have for our understanding of “constructs of meaning”, and “religious transformation”?

As a first step in exploring this question, we turn to some background material that will guide us through the paragraphs that follow.

Postformal takes its meaning, at least initially, from Jean Piaget’s claims about stage, structure, and sequence, in human cognition. Piaget asserted that development in human cognition was characterized by an upwards movement in capacity to manage complexity, upwards, because with increasing capacity came increasing ability both to understand how the world works, and to solve problems in it. Piaget held human beings to be fundamentally concerned, from their very beginnings, with meaning-making; a need, and quest, for understanding. Piaget systematically explored this development in several domains of cognition, and became particularly interested in questions of religious cognition, though he did not pursue research related to thinking about religion, when he wondered whether structural change in one domain would induce change in other domains. It seemed right to Piaget that such change would follow, since humans were inclined to use increased capacity in any given domain in applications related to other ones. Having become convinced that one could map stage change in a variety of domains, including moral cognition, where he believed people moved potentially from decisions based on factors of external might and authority to more autonomous modes of responsible actions that took increasing numbers of perspectives into account, he wondered whether there might be such a thing as *religious* development, and how shifts in other domains, including moral judgment, might affect how people interpreted religious categories. Thus, the question of cognitive development, which for Piaget equated with *structural transformation*, and the human subject as essentially concerned with the *construction of meaning*, came to include religious cognition.

For Piaget, a key moment in cognitive development occurred when structural change moved development to *formal operations*, which he esteemed to be the highest stage of cognitive functioning. With formal operations came the capacity to think about thought itself, to formulate and test hypotheses, and to think of the real in terms of the possible, instead of limiting the possible to the order of “reality” as it was already established in the world. Such change was enormously consequential, on his view, because with it people could become increasingly independent of immediate context in their appreciation of what variables should count in solving problems, whether personal or social, could share a scientific attitude towards questions of how things are in the world, and could imagine ideal worlds which could lead to inspired action for social change. Piaget hoped that in a world increasingly influenced by scientific method, the need for higher education, and democracy, there would be increasing opportunity for cognitive growth and for attainment, by increasing numbers of people, of formal operational reasoning. Piaget’s evidence suggested that formal operations could be attained only in mid to late adolescence, if at all; age made stage change possible because of maturation and opportunity, but never guaranteed it. We now know that many secondary school graduates never attain the stage of formal operations, but that some do, and that some adults also move *beyond* formal operations.

As we shall see, since Piaget, considerable work in the domains of cognitive development, and of moral and religious cognition has been accomplished, and there is now considerable consensus that there exist *postformal* orders of cognitive functioning that respect Piaget’s criteria for *stages* of human thought. It is the purpose of our chapter, as we have said, to examine the consequences of such orders for the human quest for meaning in religious terms.

## Transformation and Religious Development in Psychological Science

Psychologists have been interested in the question of religious development for more than a century, and religious experience, more broadly, since the inception of psychological science (Day, 2010a; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger & Gorsuch, 2003). Religious and spiritual *development* have been studied in at least three ways in psychological science: (a) as a distinct phenomenon unto itself; (b) in conjunction with other aspects of human development, such as personality development, affective development, and cognitive development; and (c) in close relation to moral development (see also Day, 2007a, 2008a, 2010a, 2010b; Day & Jesus, 2013).

Early efforts influenced by Piaget's conceptions of stage and structure, including Goldmann's (e.g., 1964), examined whether conceptual abilities and stage structures characteristic of reasoning in domains other than religious ones (mathematics, for example, and classical Piagetian experiments having to do with weight and volume, for example), would apply in the description and interpretation of religious words, symbols, and content-laden images (Day, 2010a). Goldmann found parallels between the logic employed by elementary and secondary school pupils in the Piagetian experiments, and descriptions and interpretations of images displaying religious content, findings largely confirmed by those who have replicated, with some variation, the transversal methods and conceptual models in Goldmann's research, including research with larger, and cross-cultural, samples, in a variety of educational settings, with strong predictive as well as stable interpretative results (Day, 2010a, 2010b; Degelmann, Mullen & Mullen, 1984; Hyde, 1990; Peatling & Laabs, 1975; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger and Gorsuch, 2003; Tamminen & Nurmi, 1995). Though confined largely to child and adolescent samples, and despite some criticisms which we have detailed elsewhere (Day, 2010a,b), these studies show how one may chart development in religious concepts in Piagetian terms.

Armstrong & Crowther (2002); Belzen (2009); Day (1997, 2008a, 2010a, 2010b); Day & Youngman (2003); Dillon & Wink (2002); Mattis, Murray, Hatcher, Hearn, Lawhorn, Murphy, & Washington (2001); Popp-Beier (1997); Ray & McFadden (2001); Roukema-Koning (2005); Wheeler, Ampadu, & Wangari (2002); Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott (1999), and others, have identified variables that need to be taken into account if we are to see the value of such neo-Piagetian studies in relationship to religious development in *adulthood*, and we shall return to some of these later in this chapter.

### **Three Neo-Piagetian Paradigms: Faith Development, Religious Judgment Development, Religious Cognition and the Model of Hierarchical Complexity**

The neo-Piagetian models which have dominated the psychological literature pertaining to religious and spiritual development are those of James Fowler, who uses the concept of *faith development*, and Fritz Oser and colleagues Paul Gmunder, and Helmut Reich, and their concept of *religious judgment* (Day, 2010a,b, 2008a, 2007a,b; Day and Youngman, 2003; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003; Streib, 1997; Tamminen & Nurmi, 1995; Vandenplas, 2001; Wulff, 1997). Using the concept of religious judgment, Reich has conducted studies in an effort to understand relationships across domains of religious

thought, critical thinking, and intellectual development (e.g. Reich, Oser, & Scarlett, 1999). Both faith development and religious judgment development research have taken *adult* development seriously. Researchers drawing from these models have studied large numbers of adults, as well as in some cases, though not as many as one would have hoped, undertaking longitudinal studies (Day, 2010a,b; DiLoreto & Oser, 1996). On our view, the later stages (5 and 6 in Fowler's model, and Oser's highest stage, stage 5) qualify as *postformal* stages, and in our own work (Day, 2011a,b; 2010a,b; 2008) we have established correlations between postformal stages using the Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC) developed by Michael Commons, and these stages in faith and religious judgment development models.

As we shall show, the Model of Hierarchical Complexity has particular relevance for establishing the empirical validity of (the?) postformal stage(s?), and is emerging as a useful conceptual and empirical tool for considering (the?) postformal stage(s?) in religious cognition.

One cannot meaningfully speak of work in the psychology of *faith and religious development* without talking about *moral development*, because the work of Fowler, Oser, is strongly influenced by Kohlberg's neo-Piagetian model of moral judgment development. In addition, both Fowler and Oser employ versions of Piaget's and Kohlberg's methods, relying at least in part on the use of hypothetical dilemmas and subjects' responses, in clinical interviews, to produce the data on which they base their findings. These interviews are structured by dilemmas employed to elicit subjects' "resolutions". The reasoning subjects use to explain their ways of resolving such dilemmas are then interpreted in terms of supposedly universal and hierarchical stages (Day, 2008a, 2010b; 2007a; Fowler, 1981, 1987, 1996; Fowler & Dell, 2006; Oser & Gmunder, 1991; Oser & Reich 1996; Oser, Scarlett, & Buchner, 2006; Reich, Oser, & Scarlett, 1999).

As we have observed elsewhere, Fowler himself, and those who have appraised his work (see Day, 2001, 2007a, 2008a, 2010b, in press a,b,c; Day & Youngman, 2003; Fowler, 1981, 1987, 1996; Tamminen & Nurmi, 1995) have documented that the faith development model is grounded in a multi-factorial view of human functioning, where "faith" includes elements of Piaget's concept of cognitive development, Kohlberg's model of moral development, Erikson's stage model of identity construction, Loevinger's and Levinson's concepts of ego development, Selman's model of role-taking, and Kegan's concepts of self-development. Faith development involves "a dynamic pattern of personal trust in and loyalty to a center or centers of value" (Fowler, 1981, p. 33), whose orientation can be understood in relationship to the person's trust in and loyalty to a core set of "images and realities of power" (Fowler, 1981, p. 33) and "to a shared master story or core story" (Fowler, 1981, pp. 31, 34) (see also Fowler, 1996). This understanding of faith, reflects influences of liberal Protestant theology (espe-

cially Niebuhr and Tillich), and the field of religious studies, (especially Wilfred Cantwell Smith's phenomenological, comparative, studies of religious traditions, practices, and communities) (Fowler, 1981, 1996) (see also, Day, 2010b).

Oser's vision focuses on a more narrow, concise, and empirically precise construct of "religious judgment development," in which people's reasoning about relationships between themselves and Ultimate Being (which may, or may not be conceived of as "God") are mapped on a stage hierarchy from states of relative simplicity, ego-centrism, and cognitive dualism, toward more differentiated, elaborated, and complex appreciations of self, relationship, context, perspective-taking, and person-God interaction (Day, 2008a,b; Day, 2010a,b, in press a,b; Day & Naedts, 2006; Day & Youngman, 2003; Oser & Gmunder, 1991; Oser & Reich, 1996). Oser has been concerned to view religious judgment as a dynamic phenomenon, and concerned with how people translate and appropriate their understandings of *ultimate being* in the working out of problems in the concrete situations of real-life (Day, 2010b, in press a,b,c).

For Oser, "religious judgment" reflects the cognitive patterns that characterize an individual's ways of thinking about her or his relationship to the Ultimate, and the rules that govern that relationship. [Oser and Gmunder, and Oser and Reich (1991, 1996)] He argues that this deep structure is a universal feature of religious cognition across the lifespan, regardless of culture or religious affiliation. As we have shown elsewhere (e.g. Day, 2010a,b, in press a,b,c), avowed atheists and agnostics (see also Kamminger & Rollett (1996) may be equally concerned with fundamentally religious questions of relationship to ultimate being and purposes in their lives and in the life of the world, and their thinking is thought to fit the stage scheme of religious judgment described by Oser and his associates (Kamminger & Rollett, 1996; Oser & Gmunder, 1991; Oser & Reich, 1996).

Fowler's model argues for a broad concept of *meaning-making* and the role religious concerns, beliefs, and practices play in shaping meaning in relationship to identity, the construction of values, and a sense of purpose in life. This inclusiveness in Fowler's model may make it rich for the conceptualizing of *spiritual* development among the increasing numbers of people in Europe and North America who identify themselves as spiritual, but *not* religious, as well as being useful to many who belong to traditional faith communities. Oser's concept is empirically more precise, is more narrow, and more explicitly religious in orientation. He insists that, in order to qualify as *religious*, the patterns of judgment studied using his model need to focus on participants' understanding of *ultimate being*, and its relationship to other factors in the working out of real-life, concrete problems in ways that can be observed and measured. (see also Day, in press, a,b,c; 2010b, 2008; 2007a,b; 2002; Day & Youngman, 2003). These differences between the two models mean that Oser's model comes closer to a



“hard stage” model in terms of Piagetian criteria, and that Fowler’s is, by his own admission, something more like a “soft stage” model (see also Day, 2007a; Power, 1991; Vandenplas-Holper, 2003, on this point).

## **Religious Development, Spiritual, and Moral Development: Conceptual and Empirical Relationships**

Fowler’s six-stage model and Oser et al.’s five-stage model assume that faith and religious judgment development are logically related to meaning-making in moral judgment development, as Kohlberg elaborated Piaget’s conception of it. Both religious reasoning and spiritual meaning-making include components of moral reasoning and, in both, it is thus considered logical that structural transformation in moral judgment reasoning will likely affect stage change in faith and religious judgment development. Since everyone must wrestle with moral dilemmas they will do so whether or not religious elements are part of their moral experience. Moreover, because moral questions figure in religious meaning-making, upward change in moral judgment will affect religious understanding (Day, 2008a, 2010a,b, in press a,b,c; Day & Naedts, 2006; Day & Youngman, 2003).

Empirical studies of stage and structure and comparisons between moral judgment and religious judgment based on thousands of subjects have not shown a clear pattern of moral judgment’s “precedence” to religious judgment. If Oser and Fowler were correct, on views shared with Kohlberg (1984), (the?) moral judgment stage should have been at levels equal to, and/or, mostly, higher than, (the?) faith development stage or religious judgment stage. Instead there is a scattering of relationships: in some cases moral judgment scores are higher than religious judgment ones, in other cases the reverse. Taken together, there is no statistically significant difference between the two (Day, 2002, 2007a; Day & Naedts, 2006, Day & Youngman, 2003). Based on these empirical studies, we don’t know whether the core structures of meaning-making in religious judgment and faith, as conceived by Oser and Fowler, are distinct from the elements that compose Kohlberg’s conception of moral judgment.

These empirical results have not changed the fact that both Fowler’s and Oser’s models are frequently used and appreciated in the training, formation, and continuing education of children, adolescents, and adults. They have raised valuable questions for people in faith communities, seminaries, psychology courses, training centers for doctors, nurses, hospice care personnel, religious educators, catechists, and others about human growth, the meaning of religious and spiritual “maturity”, and how we might measure, and promote, religious

and spiritual growth. (Day, 2008a, 2010b, in press a,b,c; Fowler, 1981, 1987, 1996; Oser, Scarlett, & Buchner, 2006; Reich, Oser, & Scarlett, 1999; Streib, 2010; Streib & Hood, 2010).

## Conceptual Questions and Empirical Problems in Faith Development and Religious Judgment Development Models: Can they be “solved”?

The conceptual and empirical problems in faith development and religious judgment theory and research echo problems common to Piaget’s earlier work and to other neo-Piagetian models across a host of domains (Day, 2008a, 2010a,b, 2011a). In the paragraphs that follow we address these problems and show how the Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC) can improve developmental models for the psychology of religious and spiritual development. Using the MHC, it is possible to show that religious and spiritual development can be conceived of, studied, and measured, using stage and structure. Rigorous empirical testing and studies using quantitative and qualitative methods and analyses have, moreover, shown that there exist *postformal* stages in religious cognition, with real consequences for constructing meaning, interacting with others, and with utility for problems in social life.

Commons and Pekker (2005) describe the problems inherent to Piaget’s methods and to most neo-Piagetian models, which we have also identified models and measures in faith, religious, spiritual, and moral development (see also Day, 2008a,b; 2010a,b,c; in press a,b). These may be summarized as follows:

- A lack of *precision* plagues the *stage definitions* within the models, especially when it comes to *half-stages*, often characterized as *transitional* between stages;
- Stage logic in the models is inferred from observation, without defining clearly enough what constitutes, or should constitute, an increment in developmental movement, structural transformation, or hierarchical attainment;
- Without such clear conceptions of what qualifies as an increment in developmental movement or attainment, it is difficult to lay out, and measure how to conceive of *higher order* performance;
- There is a problem of *horizontal decalage*, the problem of uneven performance across tasks by some individuals, again, throwing into question what qualifies as adequate stage definition;
- In addition to horizontal decalage, and related to it, is the problem of age-stage decalage. This problem has to do with those instances in which younger

subjects sometimes perform with greater competence than they would be predicted to do in the models concerned, while some older ones perform less well than they “should” according to the models’ logic. In such cases there is a *broader spread of competencies* in relationship to age and stage than we “should” expect in the models’ conceptions of stage and their relationship to development across the life cycle;

- Piaget’s supposition that *formal operations* should obtain by late adolescence has been unverifiable; some adolescents “make it” to formal operations, while many do not;
- On a related note, Piaget’s model did not account for the prospect of *post-formal operations*, and where post-Piagetian models have tried to do so, there has not been, prior to work with the MHC, a clear consensus among them as to how many have been found, and what their relationships are to one another, and to formal operations;
- Finally, there has been a *proliferation* of stage models in a variety of domains (ego development, parental development, aesthetic development, emotional development, role-taking development, identity development, intellectual development, moral and religious development) *with no clear explication of how models are, or ought to be, related across domains.* (Commons & Pekker, 2005; Day 2008a, 2010a,b,c; in press a,b).

## Meaning, Transformation, Religious Cognition and the Model of Hierarchical Complexity

The *Model of Hierarchical Complexity* (MHC) has recently become a rich resource for modeling human development, including religious meaning-making, supporting central elements in Piaget’s theory of stage and structure, with substantial empirical methods and evidence. The MHC is unique in providing a verifiable model of structural development *across* domains, and addresses problems in Piaget’s work and neo-Piagetian models such as those we have mentioned above, in the psychology of faith and religious judgment development and their relationships to moral judgment development.

Commons and Pekker (2005), furthering the initial work of Commons and Richards (1984), describe how (the) Model of Hierarchical Complexity establishes a framework for scoring reasoning stages in any domain with validity across cultural settings. In careful contrast to the errors in Piaget’s work and most other neo-Piagetian models, stage is based not on content or subject material, but on the mathematically calculated complexity of hierarchical organization of information in items, and problem-solving tasks. A given subject’s

performance on a given task at a given level of complexity represents the stage of developmental complexity the subject can use in a given domain. Through production measures, and ratings of established hierarchically ranged items, researchers can detect the stage of performance in a given domain, for a given subject, or group, and the relationship of that performance to what the subject(s) do(es) in other domains.

The MHC is rooted in a *Theory of General Stage Development* (Commons & Richards, 1984; Day, 2008a, 2010a,b, in press a, 2011a,b): a theory that describes a sequence of hard stages varying only in their degrees of hierarchical complexity, relying on empirical studies in which 15 stages have been validated. Researchers using the MHC have shown how Piaget's stages and sub-stages of cognitive development are validated and find a place in their stage scheme (Commons & Pekker, 2005).

Because the MHC is grounded in mathematical models, benefiting from the use of Rasch Scaling Analysis, which analyzes items in terms of their relative complexity, and allows researchers to establish clear increments across levels of complexity, arbitrariness in stage definition is avoided. Thus, researchers can establish hierarchical sets of tasks whose order of complexity can be measured, and compared within domains and across domains. Rasch Analysis permits researchers to construct items for scales of stage complexity, measure the merits of their statements at any given interval of stage, and have immediate feedback from Rasch scaling as to whether an item fits the criteria for increase in complexity over a previously constructed and supposedly "lower" stage item. Rasch Analysis contributes not only to the validity of items, but to their utility in measuring stage across cultural contexts as well as domains of meaning-making activity.

The MHC has particular utility for describing and validating *four post-formal stages* (Commons, 2003). The MHC helps establish that there *are* post-formal stages, and provides tools for *understanding and promoting* competence in cognition in situations of complex problem-solving in adult life. It may also help us understand why and how meaning-making and problem-solving competence may develop within a given domain, and across (or not) domains.

In the paragraphs that follow, we further address the utility of the Model of Hierarchical Complexity for the psychology of religious and spiritual development, its usefulness for understanding relationships to moral development, and ways in which some of the problems we set out in our empirical appraisal of faith development and religious judgment development are addressed by the Model's methods. We show, too, how the MHC, in conjunction with qualitative interviewing, can be useful in helping us validate and giving us a "feel" for postformal stage in religious cognition and problem-solving.

## **The Model of Hierarchical Complexity, Postformal Stage, and Religious Cognition in relation to other domains: Studies and Findings**

To date, there are some eighty published studies in behavioral science using the MHC, several of which consider religious cognition and problem solving where religious elements are concerned (Day, 2008a,b; 2009a, 2010a,b, 2011a,b; Day, Commons, Bett, & Richardson, 2007; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2009, 2010; Day, Ost, Commons, Lins, Crist, & Ross, 2007).

These studies employ a valid and reliable MHC measure called the Religious Cognition Questionnaire (RCQ) (Day, 2007). Using this measure, we have demonstrated the utility of the MHC in establishing stages of religious cognition, tested relationships between religious cognition stages in the MHC and religious judgment stages in Oser's model, tested relationships with (the) moral judgment stage and with (the) stage of reasoning in other domains, including informed consent. We have also operationalized and demonstrated the existence of postformal stages in religious cognition. We have explored questions such as how people manage varying degrees of complexity in moral problem solving when elements of religious belief, belonging, and authority are introduced into the moral scenario (e. g., whether people of religious conviction are prepared to abandon complexity in favor of religious authority when solving moral problems) (Day, Commons, Bett, & Goodheart, 2007; Day, 2008a, c; Day, 2009a,b,c,d; 2010b; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2010), whether atheists score at higher stages of complexity across domains than do the religiously committed (Day, 2011a), whether there are relationships amongst postformal stage, religious belonging, moral judgment, and conservatism (Day, 2009), whether people's interpretations of religious texts can be assessed in terms of stages in the MHC scheme of stage (Day, Commons, Bett, & Goodheart, 2007), whether scientists score higher or lower on levels of complexity in scientific domains on the basis of atheism or religious conviction, and whether some religious groups' adherents score higher than others do on interpretations of problem-solving scenarios where religious authority and counsel are involved (Day, Commons and Richardson, 2009). The RCQ has been used among agnostics, Buddhists, Jews, and Muslims, with equal success and comparable stage distributions to those found among Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant subjects across a broad variety of Protestant subgroups in Belgium, England, and the USA.

Some of our studies have had the aim of examining how adults think about religious issues, and how religious elements interact with other elements in moral problem-solving situations. This research may, in ways akin to uses of faith development theory and writing, and religious judgment development

work, be useful in applied as well as academic venues. Since our work with the MHC has paid particular attention to postformal cognition, it responds to Cartwright's (2001) and Sinnott's (1994) concerns that studies of religious and spiritual development have not taken postformal cognition into account in what becomes defined as spirituality in adult life, and Sinnott's assertion that research paradigms should make clearer links between postformal cognition and postformal stages in religious and spiritual development. We have demonstrated that it is possible to show there are postformal stages in religious cognition that are parallel to the four postformal stages outlined by Commons & Richards (2003). We have also shown that people reasoning at postformal levels are less likely than others to abandon (or move down a level from) their highest level of achieved complexity in managing problems in other domains when elements of religious authority enter into the equation (Day, 2008, 2010b, 2011a; Day, Commons, Bett, & Richardson, 2007; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2009, 2010).

## Postformal Stages and Religious Cognition: Empirical Validity and Cross-Domain Relationships

Piaget's hope for the likely attainment of *formal operations* by the time of late adolescence in modern societies has not been empirically confirmed. Research shows some adolescents attain this level of cognitive functioning whilst others do not, and that some adults move beyond formal operations to *postformal operations* in the construction of meaning. We have deemed it interesting to study *postformal operations*, esteeming that, in an increasingly complex world, knowing more about how some people attain postformal competence and apply postformal reasoning in religious and spiritual domains, would help us better understand possibilities for human development, and some of their consequences for problem solving in real life. If, as Piaget and Kohlberg and other researchers have convincingly demonstrated in the domain of moral judgment development, increased capacity in psychological development brings with it good both for individuals (enhanced problem-solving and relational abilities), and for the social world in which they live, it seemed to us opportune to examine such dimensions in relationship to meaning-making related to religious and spiritual experience. We have thus been concerned to examine the classical notion of individual development for social good (enhanced capacity for perspective-taking, greater ability to listen and take into account the views of others and thus help individuals as well as groups face and solve multivariate problems, greater ability to grasp the developmental features in others' thinking and thus, in professional as well as personal roles, help others attain maximal growth in

their own lives) in religious cognition and its relationships to religious belief, belonging, spiritual practice, and moral development.

As we have noted elsewhere (Day, 2010a,b), Commons and Richards (2003) provide an important review of the literature on the logic of postformal stage conceptions, debates, and validation studies in this domain. They show that psychologists have been successful in charting and measuring postformal operations of human perceiving, reasoning, knowing, judging, caring, feeling, and communicating. Researchers using the MHC have studied postformal operations in problem-solving capacities in algebra, geometry, physics, moral decision-making, legal judgments, informed consent and other domains. Our research shows there are postformal stages in cognition, assessing and describing problems where religious elements and authority are invoked, and in how people interpret widely known spiritual sayings, and that these findings are pertinent to comparing stage in religious cognition with other domains, as we have noted in preceding paragraphs (Commons & Richards, 2003; Commons & Pekker, 2005; Day, 2008, 2010a,b, 2011a; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2010). Our research corroborates the meta-analytic studies of Commons and Richards (2003), and Commons and Pekker (2005), showing there are four empirically verifiable postformal stages. These stages are briefly described below:

*Systematic Order:* subjects are able to discriminate the working of relationships between variables within an integrated system of tendencies and relationships. The objects of the relationships are formal operational relationships among variables. Commons estimates that about 20 % of the American population is able to function at this level. Our research in samples of hundreds of Belgian, British, and American subjects in the domain of moral, religious, and spiritual development show similar percentages.

*Metasystematic Order:* subjects act on systems, and systems become the objects of metasystematic actions, where systems are formal-operational relationships, and metasystematic actions compare, contrast, transform, and synthesize these systems. Commons' research has shown research professors at top universities, whose work relies on their capacity to operate in this way, provide an example of this kind of cognitive operation in action, and some of its value for social good. We have shown advanced graduate students, and doctoral-level professionals who must conceive and direct research activities in their work settings, to be capable at this level in moral and religious problem-solving, and in their assessments of religious elements in moral decision-making and ways of describing classical spiritual statements and axioms.

*Paradigmatic Order:* subjects are capable of creating new fields out of multiple metasystems, where metasystems are the objects of paradigmatic actions, which sometimes produce new paradigms resulting from improvements in metasystems which may be viewed as "incomplete" from a paradigmatic point of

view. Commons and Richards cite the example of Maxwell's 1817 equations, which proved that electricity and magnetism were united, as an example of this kind of creative operation and describe how such creative action may pave the way for further paradigmatic moves; Einstein's development of "curved space" to describe space-time relations, replacing Euclidean geometry with a new paradigm, for example.

*Cross-Paradigmatic Order*: subjects at this level of cognitive complexity operate on paradigms as objects of thought, resulting in new fields of thought, or radically transforming previous definitions of them. Examples from the history of science demonstrate the existence of such an order and its mechanisms and processes. Commons and Richards (2003) cite Descartes' coordination of paradigms in geometry, proof theory, algebra, and teleology, amongst other examples. Commons & Richards (2003, p. 208) have shown, using MHC questionnaires, that, although rare, some people use cross-paradigmatic strategies in their problem-solving activity. Rasch Analysis has validated the order of complexity of items and possible responses to them, on the orders of complexity represented in the four postformal stages, including this one (Day, 2008, 2010a,b, 2011a).

Research using the MHC (Day, 2008, 2010b, 2011a; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2009, 2010) has also demonstrated that stages in the psychology of faith and religious judgment development already shown, empirically, to parallel stages 4 and 5 in Kohlberg's model (i. e. stages 4 – 6 in Fowler's model, and 4 and 5 in Oser's) meet the criteria for postformal stages. Complexity and solving of problems, at orders higher than those in Piaget's descriptions and proofs of formal operational reasoning, have been observed and tested in the domain of cognition concerning religious concepts, beliefs, practices, and decisions where religious elements are taken into account; e.g. stages of faith and religious judgment, parallel to moral judgment at stage 4, meet the criteria for *systemic stage*, and those parallel at stage 5 and 6, fit criteria for *metasystemic stage* (Day, 2010a,b, 2011a; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2009, in 2010). There *are*, thus, stages in moral and religious cognition and thinking about religious texts and spiritual axioms that qualify as postformal stages.

It is worth recalling that Kohlberg (1984a, 1986) acknowledged the need for understanding postformal cognition in the moral domain when he argued that morality ultimately cannot explain itself. Kohlberg wrote that theories of moral reasoning and development cannot, on grounds of internal logic alone, say *why* one would decide to act on behalf of the good, or *why* one would adopt higher moral principles or try to translate them into action on behalf of the good. In the language of postformal stage, Kohlberg imagined a *paradigmatic stage*, a seventh stage, in the hierarchy of moral judgment reasoning. Kohlberg himself described this stage as a *spiritual stage*, related to notions of wisdom he thought to be



present in the world's great religious traditions, and confronted, in his own research, with high-stage reasoners who described their motivation for doing good as fundamentally religious or spiritual in character. In MHC terms, at this paradigmatic stage, subjects would construct paradigms capable of comparing and operating in relationship to consciously articulated systems of moral reasoning. For Kohlberg, this constituted a cosmological and explicitly "*spiritual*" articulation of a *transcendent logic*, motivating moral action, and criteria for evaluating whether action was good. This stage in Kohlberg's model forms a bridge between moral reasoning and religious concepts and systems and, in the language of the Model of Hierarchical Complexity, as we have outlined, a move from metasystemic to paradigmatic reasoning (Day, 2010a,b, 2011a).

Using the Model of Hierarchical Complexity we have shown (Day, Bett, Ost, & Robinett, 2008; Day, Ost, Commons, Lins, Crist, & Ross, 2007; Day, 2008a,b,c; Day, Commons, Bett, & Richardson, 2007), there are postformal cognitive operations when subjects are asked to address hypothetical scenarios where religious authority is at issue, and have been able to identify subjects operating at systemic, metasystemic, and paradigmatic levels of reasoning. These levels parallel the uppermost stages in moral reasoning in Kohlberg's model, and in religious judgment in Oser's model, meaningfully related to the existence of such stages in the other domains that Commons and other researchers have identified (Day, 2010a, 2011a; Day, Richardson, & Commons, 2009, 2010).

Using The Model of Hierarchical Complexity and Rasch Scaling and Analysis, we can establish clear relationships among stages of moral judgment and religious cognition, and provide empirical evidence that postformal stages in religious thinking can be described and demonstrated to represent an advance not only in terms of complexity of operations, but utility in problem-solving as well. This strengthens structural-developmental theory, and adds to the case for its utility for solving complex problems, both hypothetical and occurring in "real life," especially in the faith, spiritual, and moral, development of adults.

## **Quantitative Analyses and Qualitative Studies of Postformal Religious Cognition: Believing *as though*, or *as if***

Our *quantitative* studies have validated the existence of postformal stages in religious cognition, in faith development, religious judgment development, interpretation of religious texts, and problem-solving scenarios where religious elements are involved, with related domains of informed consent and moral judgment. These studies have been accompanied by *qualitative* studies, allowing a closer approach to how postformal stage and structure are related to the lived

experience of our research participants. These studies have shown – with subjects in Belgium, England, and the USA, from Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Buddhist, and a variety of Protestant traditions – that people measured at *postformal* stage evidence *common features* when talking about the meaning of *religious belief, religious rituals and practices, and how religion functions in the management of complex life situations and resolution of moral problems*.

We have found, for example, that with transformation in stage and structure come an *increasing number of perspectives* taken in moral problem solving. With every increment in stage, there are corresponding expansions in numbers of perspectives taken, numbers of actors taken into account, numbers of potential impacts a decision might have, and an ability to formulate solutions without rigid insistence, at the highest stages, of there being only one right possible answer (Day, 2010c, 2011a).

At *metasystematic* and *paradigmatic* stages, interviewees interpret the words *belief, commitment, belonging*, consistently framing these in the language of *living as if something were true, and imagination; of engagement with a meaningful set of categories in words, texts, liturgical forms, and gestures*, rather than speaking in terms of certainty. They have conviction without dogmatism or the need to impose their beliefs on others. They tolerate ambiguity in religious questions without feeling threatened, and find it meaningful and enriching to engage with people of contrasting, even formally opposed, religious points of view (Day, 2010c, 2011a).

At these higher stages, our research participants consider truth questions as non-dichotomous where interpretation is concerned, being more pre-occupied with the *consequences of casting one's life in a particular imaginative frame or set of practices*, than with the *content* of specific beliefs, affirmations, doctrines. Things cease to be merely true or untrue, may be both, and the formal epistemological grounds for deciding between the two take second place to questions about how believing in one way or another takes shape in relationship to self and others. There is explicit recognition that believing is as much socially constructed and relationally performative as it is informative of “internally” held beliefs or points of view (Day, 2010c, 2011a, 2002).

In related ways, *people reasoning at postformal stage levels evidence a marked sense of communion with others who live in this frame of complexity, transcending particular religious traditions*, including agnostics and atheists. a decided accent on *process, dialog, and discovery* (Day, 2010c, 2011a). They uniformly think it important that there be ecumenical and interreligious discussion, and do not see formal religious belonging to different or “opposed” traditions as barriers to understanding, friendship, neighborliness, or committed relationship in love and life partnership.

Increased numbers of perspectives, tolerance, a capacity for commitment amidst complexity and uncertainty, and a net good in relationship within acknowledged differences, within and across religious groupings, and between people of religious faith, or doubt- these characterize religious cognition at postformal stages of reasoning about religious belief, religious texts, religious practices, and religious elements in moral problems. People at these stages speak of the enrichment that has come to their lives as they have experienced transformation towards postformal modes of experiencing and acting. Moreover, they describe a kind of poignant loneliness, as well as a feeling of deep communion with others who understand how they can be both committed and unconcerned with ultimate certainty, and sometimes alienation from others who find their ways of believing untenable, even heretical. There appears to be irreducible value and incontrovertible rarity in accession to postformal stage. This accession is characterized by a sense of expansion of self and world, accompanied by sometimes acute feelings of pain at being misunderstood and, in some religious communities, exclusion altogether, on account of the movement that occurs in this “higher” direction.

### **Transformation and Postformal Stage: What supports higher stage attainment?**

If we have demonstrated that there *are* postformal stages in religious cognition, and that these stages represent a *distinctive and potentially valuable contribution* to human development, both individual and social, how might we imagine this would occur, and what do we know about the supports that are required in order for movement to higher stages to be more likely?

Traditionally, structural-developmental models and interventions have shown that constant exposure to higher stage reasoners able to enter into an individual’s modal stage of thinking, exposure to reasoning at one stage higher than one’s modal ways of operating, opportunities for role-taking, and discussion of issues relevant to the subject’s own concerns where the utility of higher stage reasoning can be seen in practice, augur for growth in intellectual, moral, and religious cognition and moral action. Pfaffenberger, Marko, and Combs’ (2011) *The Post-Conventional Personality: Assessing, Researching, and Theorizing Higher Development* offers an overview, across several domains, including religious and spiritual development, that includes suggestions about how postformal reasoning might be promoted and supported in practice.

Their work, as well as other recent research using models different from but, on our view, complementary to structural-developmental models such as those

we have reviewed here, would incline us to understand that stage movement is a multi-faceted phenomenon, involving affective as well as cognitive variables, relational as well as intellectual frameworks, sometimes painful discontinuity, as well as higher probabilities where secure emotional contexts are made available (Day, 2002, 2003, 2010c, 2011a, in press; Day & Jesus, 2013). It is entirely consistent with a postformal view, that we would require a pluriform, multi-disciplinary approach to understanding human growth in the construction of meaning and the processes of transformation associated with it, in religion, as we would, and do, in other domains.

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Caroline Shepherd

## A Discursive Psychology Framework for the analysis of Faith Attribution in Conversation

In conversation with friends recently I asked, “have you ever suddenly been asked by someone whom you didn’t know (perhaps you were at a party, or in the pub... or anywhere), ‘*Do you have a faith? Are you religious? Do you pray?*’ And if you were asked this, how would you reply?” After a few false starts and distractions, Sally replied as follows<sup>1</sup>:

“no I can’t, don’t think I have, but if I did have I’d say oh yes I do believe, erm, you know it started off when I was younger, my parents were ... both Welsh, my father both from, very very poor I mean real poor backgrounds. My mother’s father was a miner she was one of six and they ... lived you know there was no running water there was nothing we were really poor. My father’s family were, er, also hill farmers in, South Wales. So they were brought up in real poverty my father was a communist ... erm because of the poverty he’d seen...” continues (Source Shepherd, 2011: Ref S/1/104 – 111/4.1)

I had asked Sally to give an account of her self and of her faith and this reply on first hearing seems an interesting and relevant response; but why does Sally say this? If her own faith started when Sally “were younger”, why does she talk about her parents’ life in Wales before she was born? What relevance to Sally’s faith is it that her maternal grandfather was a miner and her father’s family were hill farmers? Why does she stress the poverty they experienced and mention that her father was a communist?

In a second conversation in response to my question, Joyce describes a whole series of unexpected and supernatural events that she takes to be instances of Divine activity in the world; her faith is in response to these. In the passage below, Joyce starts to relate how she hears a prophetic voice telling her that the person just now ringing her doorbell is the man she is going to marry and that ‘she is to be the wife of a priest’:

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1 These three passages are given a narrative transcription of the conversation for ease of reading.

“...and I really, ooh my goodness I really did have to work terribly terribly hard especially in the, with this sixth form girl you know preparing her stuff it was really I was really quite exhausted at the weekends. Anyway, er... mother has died, and about a fortnight later there came a ring I was playing my piano I used to relax playing my piano when I’d done my work at night and I could hear my father speaking and then I heard this voice and it was our young curate we’d got a young curate you know he’d just arrived well he’d been there about a fortnight and the vicar said to him, “oh you’d better go out and see those ((name)) you know their mother’s just you know died”, and I thought oh its the curate and I went on playing and playing and he didn’t seem to be going and I thought, ((sighs)) have to go and see him...” (Source Shepherd, 2011: Ref J/1/755 – 764/6.1)

Why does Joyce preface so carefully the supernatural event she is about to tell? She notes the time – in the evening after a hard day’s work and not only that she was playing her piano but emphasises that this was a typical past time of hers and that she only left of playing her piano reluctantly. She includes the direct speech of a third person – the vicar. What relevance do these details have to an instance of Divine prophecy?

A third conversationalist, Margaret, claimed always to have had a particular kind of “knowledge” of God, and that she could not remember a time when she did not have an understanding of a providential and loving God. This leads to a consideration of why a loving God should permit evil to happen in the world. As Margaret considers her reply she interrupts herself to say that she has just had a birthday and she repeats her age. Why should she say this here and why does she say it is *an instance* – an instance of what?

“...erm I think [my faith is] pretty much like a ground base, in music, that it’s always there... erm ... I... I have experienced, erm... well for instance now as I’m getting older, much older I mean I’m 75 now I was 75 last week....erm, and the news is so appalling and sometimes I think, and I say to my husband, oh for God’s sake let’s turn it off and it all seems that, side of things seems really dark, erm... but it doesn’t alter the feeling... that it is always there...” continues (Source Shepherd, 2011: Ref M/1/175 – 190/7.3 and 7.4)

To discuss these attributions of personal faith, and the relevance of the linguistic turn in psychology, the present chapter considers the coherence of three perspectives: The conceptual principle of *social construction*, of *ethnomethodology* and of its analysis in speech – *conversation* and *discourse analysis*, and the psychological perspective that brings these together – *discursive psychology*.

## Non-real “Facts”

A social constructionist (SC) view (see, for example Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985, 1999) is that the world ‘as it is’ does not objectively determine our knowledge of it, nor warrant the assertions of knowledge that we may make of it. We do not come to understand the world by the putting up and testing of hypotheses or by independent observation, because the world does not contain static objects of truth, pre-existing our independent discovery of them. Facts neither speak for themselves nor become items of data that we possess. A strong constructionist view may lead to radical doubt of the understanding and basis of all conventional knowledge. A softer view in the sociology of knowledge however (such as that of Berger and Luckman, 1966), distinguishes between ‘common sense’ knowledge – that which passes as everyday knowledge, and certain other specialised knowledge domains, such as mathematics and other technically bounded disciplines. In principle, social constructionism questions the empiricism of modernist science as the (only) basis for knowledge claims, particularly for the common sense assertions ordinary individuals make everyday. The debate from the sociology of knowledge in the 1950s expressed this as whether “scientists *qua* scientists add value” (see, for example Rudner, 1953), and in the 1960s that knowledge researchers corral their ‘facts’ into useful and appropriate paradigms (or stories) for their interpretation as much as explanation (Kuhn, 1962). SC asks us to make explicit the hidden assumptions present in knowledge claims and to suspend belief in a ‘taken for granted’ view of the world, particularly when dealing with the subjective truths of human identity and social behaviour. It is, therefore, less a model of the world than a conceptual methodology for its exploration, and can provide a basis to explore the questions raised at the start of this chapter where speakers assert a claim to ‘real’ faith and knowledge of it.

## Facts as Social Artefacts

If individuals do not make knowledge claims because of the world as it is, then how do we derive and warrant them? SC understands the world either in terms of social artefacts or as historically situated exchanges between people. It is through the co-operative behaviour of social exchange that an assertion to knowledge of these artefacts becomes possible. SC privileges the social over the individual; the whole span of culture, history, and the local community embrace personal interpreted experience: One is not alone in the subjective construction of knowledge. In this view, our assertions of the world and the behaviour that follows from them form in a layer of organisation and complexity beyond that of the individual agent. SC allows for the study of the historical and cultural bases of

human behaviour of all kinds since it recognises the situated-ness of humanity. It does not therefore concentrate on an individual actor, motivated and guided by internal goals. It looks first to understand an individual's behaviour as social and part of a community, either really present in any communal setting or vicariously so through a shared language, culture and history.

## Social Facts in Time and Context

A SC perspective recognises the role of ongoing social process in the maintenance of knowledge over time. Facts understood as static data, remain so and repeated observation of them upholds their validity. However, social construction holds that we do not give empirical validity to facts through observation or measurement alone, but in dialogue including conversation, negotiation, confrontation and rhetoric. We may uphold a knowledge claim in the *absence* of empirical evidence, even, sometimes, in the teeth of apparent evidence to the contrary. SC asserts that we maintain or change our views of the world through social exchanges as these proceed over time. In this way, knowledge is located within social relationship. What then counts for truth – he who has power and voice through access to conversational platforms where he more than others is listened to? This is not a necessary conclusion of the social construction argument, but it is a comment on what we mean by knowledge, the processes whereby we acquire it and the validity of our knowledge claims. As its name describes, this is a social, not empirical, epistemology.

## Social Facts and Behaviour

A further insight from social construction is its understanding of the relationship between knowledge assertions and behaviour. Forms of social knowledge inform activity of all kinds, including those of value and power in society. Individuals do not normally behave arbitrarily or unpredictably, but act appropriately concerning the knowledge they claim of the world and of themselves. Therefore, whilst individuals might certainly act according to inner needs, motivations or goals as they see them, social construction discusses individuals' actions linked to our understanding of the world and so to the categories that define us. When asked to describe ourselves, we might make a claim as to our working life – “I am a doctor or an academic”, for example; or our home life – “I am a mother or a carer”; or social or value status – “I am only a girl, or a victim, or ill or I am a Christian”. In each case, we would act appropriately to these self-ascribed identities. The claim from social construction is that the knowledge

process and consequent behaviours involved in making these identity statements is discursive and dialectical. We first make a knowledge assertion within a social relationship, where we debate, nuance and maintain it. This may lead, naturally, to other behaviours and other assertions about the real world. Ultimately, we would see ourselves behaving in accordance with these facts, these 'pieces of the world' as we have construed them. However, if we forget this link to a social origin, or deny it, then this identity category may become *reified* and take on the form of objective fact over which we apparently have no control or involvement. This may distort understanding, potentially leading to a 'false consciousness', which impairs development and impedes progress and change. It is because of this that many social and political groups, wishing to alter power and identity relationships in society, look first at consciousness raising efforts to restore the taken for granted understanding to its social and interpersonal base.

## The Non-Representation of Language

An essential element of SC is the non-representational understanding of language, which emphasises the *interpersonal* (Wittgenstein, 1953), *social* (Vygotsky, 1962) or *functional* (Austin, 1975) principle of language over the *descriptive*. This is a key point, that the use of mental predicates within language is convention bound. This rejects the referential understanding of language which claims that, in use, language points away from itself to other external and independent objects of reality. The common sense view of language is that the spoken word is like a milestone that points to a place at a distance from it itself; or a mirror where speech holds up for our scrutiny and use, a picture of the world or a representation of reality that lies beyond and independent of our subjective agency. In contrast, Austin claimed that language hardly ever, if at all, *names* things in this way be they material objects, logical or abstract truths, or our own inner thoughts, intentions or intra-psychic organisation. If I say "I apologise" I do not describe an act of apology, or an assumed internal state of regret, but I perform an act (quite likely one of apology) – I am apologising to you. Indeed, if I do not actually say the words then I may not have apologised at all. So too Wittgenstein famously discusses the language "game" where language takes its use from its appearance as social activity and not from internal, mental representations. Language is not constitutive of reality – only God can bring the world into being with a word – but, through language, individuals engage with the world and with other people and with this engagement meanings, uses and all manner of social activity develop cooperatively in social exchange with others.

## Theoretical and Practical Implications of a Constructionist Perspective of Faith

A clear conclusion of the SC perspective is the loss of objective knowledge. The claim of a social epistemology blurs the distinction between objective and subjective understanding and denies an external and independent validation for truth and knowledge. It seems that SC cannot contribute to knowledge as conventionally defined; what it does provide, however, is an alternative definition. In social construction, reality is “that which passes for reality”, and knowledge becomes a process in which we engage rather than facts we possess. In particular, it distinguishes between the knowledge “*how*” from the “*what*” or the “*why*”. There is the view (see Gergen, 1985; Kvale, 1992) that psychology has a particular difficulty with this because of the nature of the discipline itself. Experimental psychology is a modernist project, basing its assertions of knowledge in the scientific method and aligning itself with the natural sciences. Its experimental methodology (the scientific method) is *designed* to exclude or strip out the very subjectivities that psychology wishes to study. It is oriented towards an inherently *exogenic* view (Gergen, 1992) of knowledge, where truth statements are able in principle to map or mirror, in an exact representation, the characteristics of a real world. This obscures a view of the world as *cognised*, that is, as an agent individually or socially, represents, understands, perceives and uses it. This view is the domain of the contrasting *endogenic* perspective of knowledge, of phenomenology and of the first cognitive turn within psychology (Bruner, 1990). However, as Gergen has argued (1985), it is not the aim of a constructionist psychology to replace an exogenic view of the world for an endogenic one, since this is neither desirable nor even possible. What social construction seeks to do is firstly to point this dilemma out, and in light of this critically examine knowledge assertions as they are made; and secondly, to attempt to overcome the dilemma by describing an alternative to empiricist epistemology and methodology. This approach mounts a fundamental critique of knowledge as mental representation, both as thoughts and as embodied in spoken language. Instead, it considers knowledge, not a possession of a single mind, but rather an activity that people do together. This is knowledge “to do” something, to assume or to assert or ascribe, for example, and its study is the analysis of the words that individuals choose to speak. In the case of an attribution of faith therefore, such as those with which the chapter opened, the object of such analysis is not a description of the characteristics of the intra-psychic organisation of the ascribed state of faith, but of the discursive activity relevant to its realisation in practice.

## Construction in Practice

The philosophical account of social construction does not provide an alternative to the positivism that it critiques; the systematic analysis as to how individuals 'do' work in speech is provided from sociology by *ethnomethodology* (see, for example Goffman, 1959) and its practical analysis – *conversation analysis* (CA) (see Sacks et al., 1974). Neither of these take a constructionist theoretical perspective as a starting position, however Schegloff (1988, p. 90) notes of Erving Goffman

“... in registering certain events and aspects of events as worthy of notice and available to acute and penetrating interpretation... materialised...a subject matter to study”. This domain was one of “noticing, and...knowing how to provide the first line of descriptive grasp of what [was] noticed.”

Through observation of mundane speech therefore, Goffman realised the whole of ordinary social linguistic exchange as a systematic organisation, highly structured and determining, through and in which individuals live out their lives. Thus Goffman (1967, p. 2): “the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his psychology, but the syntactical relations among the acts...”. Goffman’s work was to “bracket for description... a unit of social activity... found naturalistically in ordinary human inter-action” and this provides “one natural empirical way to study interaction of all kinds” (1967, p. 20). This is the systematic ‘doing’ of social activity in conversational exchange. Harvey Sacks’ subsequent interest in conversation was not due to a theoretical paradigm for talk but to its place as the arena for social activity and the quantities of research data immediately and constantly available:

“It was not from any large interest or from some theoretical formulation of what should be studied that I started from tape recorded conversation, but simply because I could get my hands on it and I could study it again and again, and also consequentially, because others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to disagree with me” (Sacks, 1984(a), p. 26).

The complexity of mundane speech is immediately apparent from its close analysis; talk-in-interaction is detailed, systematic and organised with a complexity that is not random or irrelevant. CA locates its analytical conclusions through its observation of this organisation, evidentially on display in the talk at hand, and its focus is to explore the dynamics of interaction identifying objective and recurrent patterns found in turn-by-turn conversation. Three more passages of talk follow below (taken from the same research interviews with which the chapter began) with a brief CA informed exploration of them.

Before the interview proper begins, Sally (S) and the interviewer (I) chat together and the talk includes a discussion of the laptop computer recording the



session. But during this chat, the interviewer whispers that she tried out the equipment the previous night and she gives a little laugh. It might be very reasonable to try out the recording equipment before an interview, so why does the interviewer say her words like this?<sup>2</sup>

- 1 S: [it ↑ must be very um ↑ sens↓ itive (.) cos we're not speaking=  
 2 =↑ loud↓ ly ↑ are ↓ we  
 3 I: ° tried it out last night °  
 4 S: and [it ↑ work↓ ed  
 5 I: [hhhaa ((*laughing out [breath]*)) ((it was))  
 6 S: [I'm ↑ so impressed  
 7 I: erm well ↑ I ↑ didnt want it to be sort of obtrusive ( ) are you ↑ happy with that  
 (Source Shepherd, 2011: Ref S/1/37 – 43/8.1)

A CA informed discourse analysis notes the inverted subject/verb form, “*are we*” (2) (Clift, 2006; Hepburn and Potter, 2011) the laughter (Jefferson, 1984) and laughter particles (5) (Potter and Hepburn, 2010) and the prosody (3) (see, for example Edwards, 2007; Wennerstrom, 2001) as research has shown these to be contributive to the fine detail of the organisation of the social activity of talk and highly targeted conversational resources. Rather than give a *description* of the activity of trying out the laptop the previous night, the speakers offer each other a *version* of this event designed to achieve an outcome in the present dialogue. Space prevents a detailed analysis, but briefly, the achievement here is to equalise the subjective dynamic between the two speakers away from ‘research interviewer’ and ‘respondent’ and towards ‘two friends’. The interviewer plays down herself as interviewer with her whisper, and her laugh indicates either trouble or multiple meanings to her speech; and Sally levels epistemic stance by including the interviewer in her assertion as to the sensitivity of the laptop by concluding her knowledge claim with a tag question. This affiliatory negotiation continues as the interviewer starts to discuss the details of the interview itself. When Sally incorrectly assumes the crib sheet contains a list of questions, the interviewer appears to flatly contradict herself (ines 14/15) – “*yeah*” she agrees, but immediately changes her mind – the crib sheet is not questions at all!

2 This is a detailed CA transcription where changes in pitch, loudness, tempo, overlaps, pauses and all voiced articulations are detailed. Each line is numbered and referred to in the analysis in a numbered bracket. Transcription conventions are given below.

- 7 I: erm well ↑I ↑didn't want it to be sort of obtrusive ( ) are you↑ happy  
 8 with that  
 9 S: yeah ↑quite happy [with ↑that  
 10 I: [erm (1.0) what I'll have to do is I'll just take a (.) copy  
 11 before we go and I'll keep one and you'll keep one  
 12 S: o↑k  
 13 I: and that's my crib sheet (.) erm  
 14 → S: the ↓questions  
 16 → I: ↓yeah it ↑isn't really ↓questions th:the idea .... *continues*  
 (Shepherd, 2011: Ref S/1/43 – 50/8.1)

This is an instance of a *preference* structure in conversation (Pomerantz, 1984) where one turn, or part-turn, leads to further speech in an orderly and predictable way. Sally makes an assertion to which the Interviewer wishes to disagree (14). But the Interviewer prefaces her reply with agreement and with matched lowered pitch (15) which accepts Sally's comment and at the same time delays the subsequent disagreement, ("*really*" is also a 'delayer'). This keeps the conversation running smoothly and without difficulty. This form of *weak agreement* prior to disagreement is very common in ordinary talk and constitutes part of the systematic organisation of talk that the detailed analysis reveals. A speaker apparently 'changing minds' is also common as the final passage discusses:

The Interviewer asks Sally the research question – has she ever been asked just casually in conversation if she has a faith, and in the following sequence Sally initially replies that she has had an experience of being quizzed on her faith<sup>3</sup> and describes what she might say, only to change her mind by the end of her turn:

"Yes I yes I do (said with a laugh in the voice) yes, erm... I've had people I've had people say to me do you believe in God and in the past I've said no, although I used to when I was younger and then I went through a phase when I decided I didn't, and then I've come back to it... erm and now if somebody says to me, do you believe in God and I don't think it has happened actually people tend not to talk about it" (Shepherd, 2011: Ref S/1/91 – 95/9.1)

In just a few short seconds later, after the passage given above, Sally gives yet another answer to this question, a completely different one; this is the one which the present chapter opens. The CA informed analysis of everyday, mundane (or naturalistic) speech reveals a complexity over and above 'mere description' of objective fact or of past events, which constitutes the systematic institution of dialogue.

3 But note the laughter in her voice.

## Discursive Psychology

A CA informed discourse analysis bases its assertions in the words of the study respondents evidentially on display via the extremely detailed transcription of the oral speech. It is empiricist, if not positivistic in this respect, grounding its analysis *from the first* in the sequential patterns found naturally in mundane speech. This is a very real, practical benefit of the approach for this reason. CA practitioners do not locate their analytical conclusions in an independent or objectively real intra-psychic state, precursive to language and with speech an *expression or description* of the mind; they describe themselves as “agnostic” towards the psychology of the individual. Valuable as it is as method, CA makes no theoretical commitment to constructionism in the manner of the principles and assumptions outlined in the opening paragraphs of the present chapter. The research perspective that is congruent with the implications of this conceptual perspective, as speakers play this out practically in actual talk, is *discursive psychology* (DP). Edwards and Potter have defined this as:

“[D]iscourse ... taken to be talk and text of any kind ... through which people live their lives and conduct their every day business. [Discursive psychology] is the application of principles and methods from discourse and conversation analysis to psychological themes” (Edwards 2005, p. 258, see also, Edwards, 2006; Edwards & Potter, 1992, 2005, p. 241; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

DP makes the theoretical assumption that the research data gathered represent a constructed *account* (in the present discussion of personal faith) and a rhetorical version of it, situated within the *spate-of-talk* at hand and within the research context. It notes the conceptual argument about the nature of ‘descriptions’, that stresses the indefiniteness or open-endedness of any description<sup>4</sup>, the various ways in which scenes and events are formulated, and the impossibility of producing a single definitive version, free of interests or perspective (see, for example Kuhn, 1970; Popper, 1959; Wittgenstein, 1953, all cited in Potter et al., 1993, p. 385). Analysts have found the inconsistent and varying versions of events, typical of talk in research interviews and naturalistic conversation alike, and rather than dismissing this variability as “noise”, Potter, Edwards, Wetherell, and other DP researchers focus on this talk as situated in its dialogic context. When analysed functionally and indexically, discourse displays a specific kind of order, one that is coherent and systematic and not the inconsequential “mess” with which mundane conversation is typically viewed. DP therefore critiques the epistemological privileging of cognitivist versions of

4 The author would like to stress *any* description. There is no intention here to make a claim specific to an account of *faith*.

reality, themselves based on individuals' (or academic psychologists') descriptions (or versions) of events.

The overriding perspective of DP is that talk is *action* and a discursive *practice*, and a framework for its study is the Discourse Action Model (DAM) of Edwards and Potter (1992). The table below summarises this:

#### Discursive Action Model

<p><b>Action</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The research focus is on <i>action</i> rather than cognition or behaviour</li> <li>2. As action is predominantly, and most clearly, performed through discourse, traditional psychological concepts (memory, attribution, categorization etc.) are reconceptualized in discursive terms.</li> <li>3. Actions done in discourse are overwhelmingly situated in broader <i>activity sequences</i> of various kinds.</li> </ol> <p><b>Fact and Interest</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. In the case of many actions, there is a dilemma of stake and interest, which is often managed by doing attribution via factual reports and descriptions.</li> <li>5. Reports and descriptions are therefore constituted/displayed as factual by a variety of discursive devices.</li> <li>6. Factual versions are rhetorically organised to undermine alternatives.</li> </ol> <p><b>Accountability</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Factual versions attend to agency and accountability in the reported events</li> <li>8. Factual versions attend to agency and accountability in the current speakers actions, including those done in the reporting.</li> <li>9. Concerns 7 and 8 are often related, such that 7 is deployed for 8 and 8 is deployed for 7.</li> </ol>
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Taken from Edwards and Potter, *Discursive Psychology* 1992 p.154; and in Potter, Edwards and Wetherell, 'A Model of Discourse in Action', 1993, p. 389.

The DAM is not a process model in the standard way that psychology might understand such things<sup>5</sup>, but rather a framework to highlight the three key points to DP, namely action, fact and interest, and accountability:

(i) *Action*. DP takes psychological phenomena such as memories and attributions, which cognitivist psychology conceptualises as mental constructs, representations or processes and recasts them as things people do in discourse. A memory or an attribution becomes not something one possesses but something achieved, worked up with another for whatever reason in ordinary speech. So in the first passage given above, Sally achieves *memory work* in the giving of her detailed account of her parental upbringing, and her personal faith attribution ("it all started when I was younger") is the conclusion, also achieved, by that account.

5 As Edwards and Potter rather whimsically point out, 1992, p. 155.

(ii) *Fact and interest*. Central to the view of the variability of descriptions is that this is exactly how people themselves experience and understand them. In everyday life, as people discuss events, or give opinions or make claims to knowledge, they treat other people quite naturally as having desires, motivations, biases, or allegiances, which they display in the accounts that they offer and the inferences of attribution they may make. People treat each other as *people* and not as philosophers of logic or as scientists<sup>6</sup> which explains the variations of their descriptions – they are not independent of their own differences and preferences. This gives rise to the so-called dilemma of “stake and interest”. To be believed as true or rational, an account must defend itself from a challenge of interest and be based on events external to the speaker. Alternatively, the best way to undermine another’s version is to suggest it.<sup>7</sup> So, in both the first and second passages above, the detail offered by Sally and Joyce (the poverty of Sally’s parents, or Joyce’s piano playing) are not so much objective descriptions of these events, as accounts *designed* to achieve the descriptions as objective. “Mere description” therefore is an *outcome* of dialogue and speakers work hard to achieve it.

(iii) *Accountability*. Accountability is the management of the attribution of responsibility, both as an inference of the reported-on events and the actors within it, and of the speaker herself, in working up the account in the version she does. Speakers are accountable both for the words they choose to speak and for the actions performed in so speaking.<sup>8</sup> This is a key point for DP because, through the accountability of speech, the psychological phenomena associated with it are realised in the course of the speaking.

In the DP perspective, through the public accountability of their descriptions of events, memories, attitudes and so on, and their stake and interest in them, speakers make certain psychological phenomena available. This demonstrates that a particular description (in contrast to alternatives) is psychologically relevant *to the speaker* and thereby he or she achieves the very phenomenon in the course of the speech. With this perspective, Edwards and Potter identify three distinct strands to DP: Firstly, as re-specification and critique of standard psychological themes; secondly, the common sense usage of lay or folk psychological themes, as ordinary people purposefully and meaningfully employ

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6 Scientists treat each other as people too and not as ‘scientists’, as Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) discovered.

7 As in the famous comment – “well he would say that wouldn’t he?”

8 The exception, discussed as “footing” (Goffman, 1979) is where speakers say words that are *not* of their choosing, where a speaker makes a speech written by another for example, or in a structured research interview where the questions are designed for a research purpose. It is for this reason that mundane conversation is usually preferred to research interviewing in DA/CA research.

them; thirdly, as these themes are managed and handled in what Edwards calls the “management of psychological business” (2005, p. 267). DP looks at the various psychological phenomena of academic and lay psychology, such as identity and personality, and of the central theoretical notions within cognitivism of motivation, causal attribution, attitudes, memory, and categorization, seeing these as discursive practices, worked up in speech, by participants for interactional purposes. For its analysis, DP studies talk, situated in whatever kind of talk-in-interaction, whether telephone calls, research or broadcast interviews, or group or individual conversation. Its focus is the detailed sequence of conversation and the practices of conversation and discourse analysis, in contrast to the categories of research interest imported from critical or social theory. The present author has described the DP method as a *conversation analysis informed discourse analysis* to emphasise that it is the sequence of a spate of actual talk, detailed in the transcription, which warrants analysis and shows how participants themselves orientate to the speech behaviour in each setting.

## Personal Faith Accounts

What now can we say, from a DP perspective, of the faith accounts with which the chapter opened?

(i) Sally’s account is rich in narrative detail. She uses the words “poor” or “poverty” five times in six lines of transcription. We are told “there was no running water” and that her “father was a communist”. Researchers have shown (see, for example Atkinson, 1990; Bruner, 1991) that it is the inclusion of detail such as this that constructs verisimilitude or a sense of authority on the part of the speaker. We believe what these speakers say and we take their stories as true.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, rhetoricians note a stylistic device in speech which they term *hypotyposis*. This is a highly graphic introduction that provides a contextual warrant for subsequent assertions. We may believe a speaker’s version of an event to be true when she provides so much incidental detail.<sup>10</sup> Narrative detail is a contrasting category – the kind of detail one speaker gives of a particular subject in certain circumstances is different to that given by another from an

9 Biblical exegesis notes of Mark’s Gospel, the story of the feeding of the five thousand – the grass was *green*, which in Galilee only occurs for a few weeks in March/April. This detail is missing from Matthew and Luke’s version but appears in John as “plenty of grass”. This little detail confers authenticity on the text, we believe the author to have been, or to have spoken with, an eyewitness to the events described.

10 See, for example, Edwards’ and Potter’s discussion, 1992, of the row surrounding journalists’ take on a brief by the then UK Chancellor, Nigel Lawson.

alternative perspective. Focalization (Bal, 1985; Genette, 1980) is the point of view that the narrative presents. In this sequence, Sally presents *zero* focalization, which is the omniscient, all knowing narrator who describes both the scene and claims knowledge of individual thoughts or motivations. This focalization addresses two constructing concerns: Firstly, in being all knowing and non-particular, Sally's account appears as the empiricist rhetoric of impartiality and thereby, true. Secondly, it gives Sally witness status – she gives her account as though she were there herself. Atkinson (1990) suggests that the careful build up of narrative detail, together with the rhetorical positioning of the speaker as 'present', constructs both the sense of reality or veracity and inclines the listener to view the account from the perspective of the speaker/narrator. A listener takes this (subjective) perspective as his or her own.

(ii) In addition to the significant detail, Joyce constructs her account with a pattern recognised by researchers as "at first X then Y". Sacks (1984b) describes this as, "people being ordinary", and Wooffitt (1992) notes this when people make claims of paranormal experience. He describes it as, "I was just doing X ...when Y". Speakers first begin with an X statement, constructing an ordinary event even if (or particularly when) they were engaged in some out of the ordinary activity at the time (Heritage & Watson, 1979). This distances them from the unbelievable Y statement that follows. This device orientates itself to an understanding that accounts are more believable if they are seen as coming from people whose general assumptions, perceptions and activities in the world are not themselves unbelievable or unusual. As Joyce tells it, her X preamble precedes her Y story in just this way. She was just doing what ordinary people do, playing the piano after a hard day's work, when....

(iii) In her account, Margaret was about to say something of her experience and instead (using the counterpositional "*well*") she mentions her age and that she has just had a birthday. This is relevant because it constructs Margaret with a category entitlement to knowledge of the ways of the world and events in it because of her 75 years experience of it. Earlier, Margaret had claimed that her faith was one of a "deep love and... purpose at the root of things", but this claim is challengeable by direct evidence to the contrary – by the presence of evil in the world. Before the interviewer asks of it, Margaret acknowledges this argument with an extreme case formulation (ECF, Pomerantz, 1986), "the news is so appalling", and introduces her husband using direct speech in the first person voice. First and third person reported speech often occurs in story telling but rather less often in account building, nevertheless it has been shown to do interactional work (Clift, 2006; Heritage & Raymond, 2005). Clift argues that reported speech in assessments indicates epistemic stance and that it is a "powerful evidential display of having reached an assessment first", (p. 578) that is, it displays the claim to epistemic priority over the interlocutor. It seems that

Margaret's passage of direct talk is not just an example of Margaret's acquaintance with mundane matters but is part of her claim to authority over the interviewer in respect to the assessments and claims she makes. She acknowledges the presence of evil in the world, "that side of things" and finally accounts for it, "but it doesn't alter". Finally, the present sequence constructs Margaret as "being ordinary", responding with horror to the evils of the world exactly as any one else would. Margaret introduces the vignette explicitly, "for instance", as an example of this and she brings her husband into her account as a "witness".

These three passages all show elements of *design*. They are accounts where speakers, recognising possible alternative versions, position their own *particular* version of events or arguments. They may use a range of formulations that are not perceptual, mental or real, but discursive, creating verisimilitude and robustness, so that the upshot when it comes (an attribution of personal faith) is believable and reasonable. In the process, speakers may construct their subjective selves in a particular way, as *witness* to an event, *ordinary*, or *experienced*, for example, and manage this subjective self in relationship with an interlocutor in dialogue.

## Final Concerns and Conclusions

Social construction raises methodological issues of central concern for many social scientists, since the post-modernist framework that embraces SC may deny the privileging of the scientific method itself as the way to knowledge and to truth statements of the real world. Roger Anyon, a British archaeologist commenting on the difference between the Zuni people's understanding of the world and that of the western world observes: "Science is just one of many ways of knowing the world. [The Zunis' world view] is just as valid as the archaeological view point of what prehistory is about" (quoted in Boghossian, 2006, p. 2). This is an "anything goes" philosophy, where truth statements slide into the mire of relativism, when objective standards for truth are abandoned. The analytic philosopher Paul Boghossian terms this the doctrine of equal validity defined as: "There are many radically different, yet 'equally valid' ways of knowing the world, with science being just one of them" (Boghossian, 2006, p. 2). He notes, as a consequence to this view, that for SC, "the rationality of a given belief is never solely a function of the evidence that there may be for it" (p. 24). Barnes and Bloor, writing on relativism from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, sum up this problematic view:

"For the relativist there is no sense attached to the idea that some standards of beliefs are really rational as distinct from merely locally accepted as such. Because he thinks



that there are no cultural free or super-cultural norms of rationality he does not see rationally and irrationally held beliefs as making up two distinct and qualitatively different classes of thing” (Barnes and Bloor, 1982).

In contrast to this view, the present chapter has outlined an approach that looks for knowledge defined as the “process of achieving knowledge”, and knowledge in this account is found through observation of how speakers work up their versions of the world and the truths and realities of it, and agree this with another in public discourse. This is the *epistemic constructionist* perspective of DP (Edwards & Potter, 2005, p. 243), and its discourse method is to show not that “anything goes” but how a *particular* assertion is achieved, warranted and agreed within a specific, localised setting of conversation. Whilst there may indeed be many versions of these assertions, DP argues for the significance and relevance of the *particular* version agreed. This is not *any* version, but *the* account, in which a speaker has stake and interest, and for which (s)he is psychologically accountable. In this manner, speech between conversationalists in dialogue *achieves* or *makes available* the very psychological phenomena relevant to it. This is a re-specification of personal knowledge, away from knowledge-as-fact that a speaker possesses after empirical study, to knowledge-as-process. It is a movement away from the internal location of intra-psychic knowledge, part of the private intentionality and cognitive processes and constructs of the individual, reforming it as discursive knowledge, locally situated and publicly available to both speaker and academic psychologist alike. Therefore, the present author queries the distinction of a “rational” versus an “irrational” basis for a knowledge assertion, as Boghossian and Barnes and Bloor argue, since this assumes a realist rhetoric. These are not terms relevant to the present account and a critique on this basis alone is not coherent with the conceptual position outlined here. Constructionists privilege the view that events of the external world, or accounts of intra-psychic reality are contingent upon our practical interests and social involvement, over one of correspondence to the world “as it is for and of itself”. This understanding recognises that, while there may be different accounts for the same thing, they are held for ‘rational’, but different ‘reasons’ (using these terms within a constructionist rhetoric<sup>11</sup>) by different individuals and groups at different places and times. A discursive account is to say “the different reasons men give for their actions are not themselves without reasons” (Mills, 1940, p. 904); and CA: “accounts of truth and reality are an oriented-to-production occasioned and fit-for-purpose within the talk-in-interaction to hand”. This is a different kind of reality and the claims to knowledge

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11 Constructionist papers tend to be littered with speech marks – inverted commas – because these show that the word can stand within, and be understood from, an alternative underlying epistemology.

reflect a different understanding of what constitutes knowledge and reality itself. It is not an ontological claim; it does not address issues of the world “as it is and of itself” – the knowledge *of or that*, but more practical – the knowledge *how*. In a sense, participants in talk mould their own realities to fit the work required of them at the time. The present chapter has explored how participants in conversation derive and construct their knowledge claims of personal experiences. Their systematic speech is designed to ensure these claims to be believable and reasonable and through this make available to the speakers the psychological attribution of personal faith which is achieved in the very process of its expression.

## Summary

The chapter has argued for a discursive over a referential or cognitive perspective because this recognises:

- 1 The institution of talk-in-interaction as systematic organisation. The discussion has noted, for example, preference structures of conversation that show that an agreement followed by its opposite does not inevitably indicate a *change of mind* but rather the action-orientation of talk to achieve a discursive objective – the management of disagreement in dialogue.
- 2 That variations or changes of view (so to speak) are common in dialogue. Speakers regularly say different things in different conversations to different people and at different times; or to the same person at the same time but from the beginning of the turn to the end, because they may be achieving different things with the particular spate of talk.
- 3 The constructive role of all speakers in any particular conversation (including the interviewer in a research interview).
- 4 The linguistic turn in the social sciences, which understands the performative or functional purposes of language and does not ignore the discursive context. This is what participants in conversation are *doing* and *achieving* with the words they speak.
- 5 The subjective context, where speakers have a *stake and interest* in the conversation and in the particular version they recount there. Because speakers are accountable for the words they choose and the actions performed in them, this realises the very psychological phenomenon of interest in the moment of their telling. This is the perspective of *discursive psychology*.

## Transcription Conventions

[	I: quite a [while S: [yeah	left square bracket indicates the point at which a current speaker's talk is overlapped by another's talk
=	I: that I'm aware of = S: = yes would you confirm	equal signs, one at the end of a line and another at the beginning of the next one, indicate no gap or pause between the lines
(.)	I: ok (.) right	a dot in parentheses indicates a tiny gap, a pause less than quarter of a second
(0.5)	S: yes (0.5) oh yes	numbers in round brackets indicate a pause estimated to 0.25 s of a second
↑	S: oh I ↑ can't remember	an up arrow placed in front of the word indicates rising or high intonation on that word
↓	S: I don't ↓ know	a down arrow in front of a word indicates dropping or low intonation on that word
°	I: ° give up and lose °	degree sign around a word or phrase indicates softer volume relative to the surrounding talk
hhhaa	I: hhhaa	out breaths – “laughter particles” the number of ‘h’ and ‘a’ indicating breathiness and length
(( ))	I: ((laughs))	double parentheses indicates descriptions of actions rather than spoken words; or the transcriber's interpretation of a word said
( )	S: and now I go to ( )	empty brackets indicate the transcriber's inability to hear the words said

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## The Construction of Atheist Spirituality: A Survey-Based Study

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to the interdisciplinary study of secular spirituality utilizing the European Value Survey as a data base. Contemporary atheist spirituality – defined *in brevis* here as non-deistic belief in the sacred or supernatural (cf. Schnell & Keenan, 2010) – is set within the light of salient historical precedents and the predominance of agency over structure in late modernity. Key components of atheist spirituality are identified. By relating them to a larger circle of beliefs, values and commitments, an evidential basis of the personal construction of atheist spirituality as a variety of contemporary personal identity and world-view is provided.

### Late Modernity: The Shift from Structure to Agency

Despite the general decline in the authority of the Christian church in the West, there is a perceptible flourishing in implicit and personalised religiosities (Bailey, 1997; Beck, 2008; Schnell, 2009). The “de-traditionalization” (cf. Giddens) of inherited patterns of belief proceeds together with individualization and differentiation of meaning systems (Bellah et al., 1996; Schnell, 2008a, 2011a). Unconfined by bonds and sanctions associated with dogmatic religious traditions, individuals are generating idiosyncratic meaning systems and validate them experientially (Schnell, 2008b, 2011b). This freedom of belief seems to have liberated a contemporary striving for *selftranscendence*. In terms reminiscent of Foucault, one might depict this profound cultural transition as an emancipatory movement out from under hegemonic religious regimes towards a new, unburdened and vital spirituality (cf. Heelas, 2008). Instead of following a predetermined traditional trajectory, decisions concerning religion are made by the individual (cf. Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Keenan, 1999). The authority for the meanings we make of our lives shifts from external constraints to internal resources, from the organized tradition to the privatized self, from the “church without” to the “God within”, as Barker (2004) puts it. Agency casts off structure

– at least its explicitly coercive expressions. Personal free choice spirituality trumps institutional church authority and, in consequence, a “given” shifts to a “task” (Bauman, 2000, p. 31). Not, *What creedal formularies and moral-theological prescriptions mark out my religion?*, but, *What set of personally meaningful commitments compose my spirituality?*, expresses readily this paradigm shift occurring in matters of meanings and beliefs in the late modern period.

Within this process, the conceptualization of “God” and “the sacred” is placed at the individual’s disposal. Your God is where your heart is (Luther); the sacred is what is ultimately meaningful to a person (Bailey, 2001; Schnell, 2009; Tillich, 1955). Reference to a transcendent reality is, thus, not necessarily a given within personal conceptualizations of selftranscendence. As a consequence, the somewhat paradoxical term of “atheist spirituality”, signifying a non-deistic or immanentist search for the sacred, becomes an intelligible manifestation of developments in today’s cartography of world-views. However, it is not an exclusively late modern endeavour to conceptualize spirituality without reference to a transcendent reality.

### **Precursors of Contemporary Secular Spirituality**

Historically, secular spirituality has had precursors which, while eventuating from different metaphysical and ontological premises, appear to arrive at comparable assumptions. Examples of such belief-systems range from pantheism to modern atheist theology. In pantheism, nature and the cosmos are considered divine, as the only and all-encompassing reality. In contrast to *panentheism*, which sees the world as one of the manifestations of god (Plotin, Krause), immanent-transcendent pantheism assumes god to come true through the world (Spinoza, Goethe, Schleiermacher), and physiomonistic pantheism sees the world and nature *as* god, thus denying an independent existence of god (Stoa). For Schopenhauer, pantheism, therefore, was a “refined kind of atheism” (Schischkoff, 1991). Nonetheless, representatives of both immanent-transcendent and physiomonistic positions readily ascribe *god-like* qualities to this all-encompassing natural reality. Experiences of awe, respect, even gratitude and devotion express the spiritual dimension of these world-views devoid of the idea of an external, transcendent god.

Atheist theology stands for another significant orientation to belief resonant with spiritual atheism. Representatives of this seemingly self-contradictory standpoint declare to treat of God and the gospel with radical seriousness. Through incarnation, atheist theologians argue, God has become one with humankind. Any supernatural location of the deity is thus inadequate. God can only be recognized in our neighbour’s face (Sölle, 1969). By committing our-

selves to the sacred cause of humankind, absolute immanence becomes “contemporary and kenotic realization of the Kingdom of God” (Altizer, 1966, p. 151 f). With secularists, atheist theologians share the assumption that there is no god in the sense of a primal origin, an ultimate end, transcendent and eternal (Winqvist, 2001). The givens of existence are the same for everybody. Being Christian, according to Sölle, is not about seeing things others cannot see, or where others cannot see. It is about seeing the *one* reality differently (1969). This specifically Christian view is characterized by a desire for the Absolute. Though psychologically impracticable, philosophically untenable and exaggerated to the rationalist, atheist theologians reach out beyond the confines of “realworldism” (cf. Keenan & Schnell, 2012). Instead of adjusting desires to what is offered, an atheist theologian’s approach strives for more, for meaning, love and purpose (Sölle, 1969). In line with Luther, fulfilment is not aspired for by means of deeds or creeds, but through a way of being, i. e. *not* being for one’s self (Luther: *incurvatus in se ipsum*), but selftranscending (Sölle, 1969). It is in this aspect of immanent selftranscendence that secular spirituality, as introduced by psychologists and philosophers, converges with atheist theology.

## Secular Spirituality Today

In his aim to promote existential well-being, Abraham Maslow endeavoured to demonstrate that spiritual values have naturalistic meaning, that they are not the exclusive possession of organized churches, that they do not need supernatural concepts to validate them, that they are well within the jurisdiction of a suitable enlarged science, and that, therefore they are the general responsibility of all mankind (Maslow, 1970, p. 33).

Through the advancement of Humanistic Psychology, Maslow’s theories have enriched models of personality by setting them within a wider, existentialist dimension. Psychologists have long shied away from relating it to religious or spiritual phenomena, as Maslow has done with ease and daring. However, his views have influenced recent developments in the conceptualization of subject-adequate religiosity, as in the theory of implicit religiosity (Schnell, 2003, 2009), and inspired the conceptualization of a humanistic model of spirituality (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988). Authors of the latter model aimed to define, describe and operationalize spirituality in a way that would be sensitive to both religionists and secularists. After reviewing writers who approached spirituality from a phenomenological perspective, they provide the following definition of spirituality:



“Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning “breath of life”, is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.” (Elkins et al., 1988, p. 10)

Nine major components are identified as core dimensions of spirituality. They are

1. An experientially based belief that there is a *transcendent dimension* to life, natural or super-natural;
2. Confidence that life is deeply *meaningful* and that one’s existence has purpose;
3. A sense of vocation or *mission in life*;
4. Belief that life is infused with *sacredness*;
5. Not seeking ultimate satisfaction from *material values*;
6. A strong sense of social justice and commitment to *altruistic love and action*;
7. Visionary commitment to the betterment of the world (*idealism*);
8. *Awareness of the tragic* realities of human existence (pain, suffering, and death); and
9. Discernible *fruits of spirituality*, effecting relationships to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.

For philosopher Comte-Sponville, whose work explicitly expounds the concept of atheist spirituality (2008), spirituality is the life of the mind – as spirit. Inherent in the *res cogitans* (Descartes) is the potential to access truth, universality, and laughter (p. 160). Through the capacity to think, we are receptive to eternity. Spirituality is the awareness and realization of this potential, by relating to an Absolute. The Absolute is not conceptualized as transcendent and personal, but as the totality of all conditions (nature), of all relations (the universe) or the totality of all possible and real positions (truth). This totality is necessarily unconditional, absolute and all-encompassing, and it can be experienced. Comte-Sponville uses the term *immanensity* to denote this – quasi mystical – experience of an Absolute. The infinite, eternal Absolute is immense in its scale, and completely *immanent*. A spiritual atheist’s attitude towards it is, according to Comte-Sponville, characterized by affirmation – not belief; by action – not hope; by love – not fear and submission. Consequences of encountering the Absolute are feelings of unity, abundance, simplicity, eternity, serenity, independence, and acceptance of death. But spirituality, Comte-Sponville contends, is not about reaching altered states of consciousness, about interiority and the self. Rather than encourage introspection, spirituality should support self-transcendence, and open up toward the world.

A similar position is held by Solomon (2002) in his case for “spirituality for

the sceptic". Spirituality, for him, is a mode of being, characterized by self-overcoming and growth: "In place of the dubious purpose of transcending life, let us defend the ideal of transcending ourselves *in* life" (p. 24). After ardently distinguishing spirituality from anything to do with religion –

"a nonreligious, non-institutional, non-theological, non-scriptural, nonexclusive sense of spirituality, one which is not self-righteous, which is not based on Belief, which is not dogmatic, which is not anti-science, which is not other-worldly, which is not uncritical or cultist or kinky" (p. xii) –

he describes his understanding of spirituality as

"the grand and thoughtful passions of life and a life lived in accordance with those grand thoughts and passions. Spirituality embraces love, trust, reverence, and wisdom, as well as the most terrifying aspects of life, tragedy, and death" (p. 6).

Passionate commitment to this world is central to this conceptualization of spirituality. It is grounded in a kind of *Urvertrauen* (Erikson), which Solomon refers to as "cosmic trust" (p. 44). This trust allows us to forgive "the world for the misfortunes it (inevitably) inflicts upon us" (p. 57), even to give meaning to suffering and be grateful (p. 88).

The three approaches by Elkins et al., Comte-Sponville and Solomon diverge in several ways. While Elkins and colleagues as well as Comte-Sponville relate to an ultimate, absolute reality and express an affinity to extraordinary, mystical experiences, Solomon is critical of any idea of the "Beyond" and finds mystical experiences rare and unhelpful. Some key components, however, are part of all three models. They include an affirmative and trusting attitude towards the world, a committed, engaged life, an ethics of love, and acceptance of the tragic of life. What is more, all three speak out for spirituality as a process of self-transcendence, of overcoming egocentric concerns and entering into a "broad and rich relationship with the world" (Solomon).

## Integration into the Ongoing Discourse on Spirituality

Reflections on secular spirituality are part of an ongoing discourse on spirituality, fuelled by an increasing popularity of personalized, experientially validated approaches to the sacred (cf. Schnell, 2011b and the Special Issue of *Implicit Religion*, Schnell, Francis, & Lewis, 2011). By considering as religious what ultimately matters to people, scholars of Implicit Religion (Bailey, 1997, 2001; Dupré, 2007; Nesti, 1990; Schnell, 1999, 2003, 2009) have been among the first to study phenomena of the sacralisation of the secular. The current discourse on spirituality has taken up the challenge to do justice to the complexity of per-

sonalized paths to the sacred. Numerous and incongruous attempts to define spirituality mirror the intricacy of the subject. The majority of recent definitions can be summarised as “referring to a personalised, active relation to a greater reality, implying preparedness for selftranscendence, and validated by experience” (Schnell, 2011b). The location of this “greater reality”, however, remains a stumbling-block for agreement on a definition. While, for some, reference to a transcendent reality is by no means a necessary criterion of spirituality (e.g., Nasrin & Dunning, 2009), it is a crucial element for many others (e.g., Gomez & Fisher, 2003; Kass et al., 1991; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). Hill and Pargament’s (2003) broad and inclusive definition of spirituality as *a search for the sacred* seems to circumvent the problem. They consider as sacred “concepts of God, the divine, Ultimate reality, and the transcendent, as well as any aspect of life that takes an extraordinary character by virtue of its association with or representation of such concepts” (2003, p. 65). The apparent inclusion of secular phenomena is qualified by Pargament’s elaboration on the sacred: “Only when they are invested with divine qualities (e.g., transcendence, boundlessness, ultimacy) or are perceived to be manifestations of the divine do important matters become sacred matters” (p. 51, 2007).

## A Structural Definition of Spirituality

In order to generate a common ground for discussion, whilst respecting different standpoints, a *structural* definition of spirituality is suggested (cf. Ruschmann, Ruschmann, Schnell, 2011). Drawing on content-analysis of experts’ subjective theories of spirituality (Schnell, 2011a) and integrative theoretical approaches to spirituality (Ruschmann & Ruschmann, 2011; Schnell, 2009), core dimensions of spirituality have been identified and related to each other. By use of the distinction of *horizontal* and *vertical selftranscendence* (Schnell, 2004, 2009, 2011b; Schnell & Becker, 2006, 2007), secular as well as non-dualist and deist approaches can be included in the model. The resulting structure can be applied to multi-faith and non-faith contexts. By linking it to world-view specific *contents*, *types* of spirituality ensue. Figure 1 shows the core dimensions of spirituality.

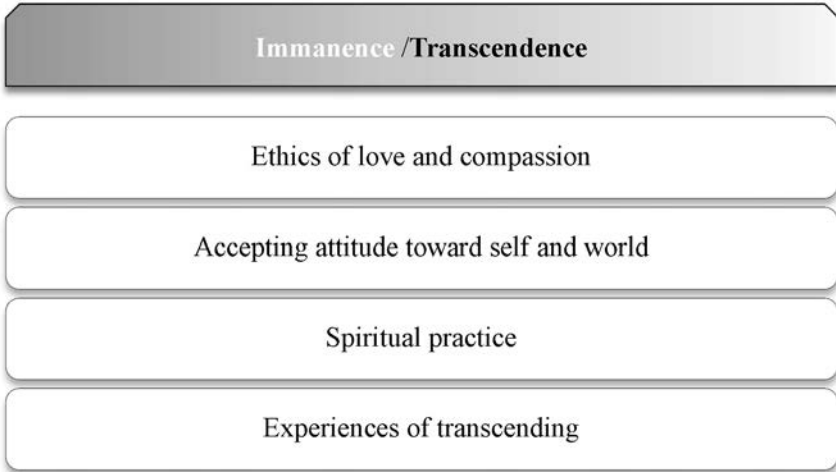


Figure 1. Structural model of spirituality

The lower four dimensions, from experiences of transcending and spiritual practice to an accepting attitude toward self and the world and an ethics of love and compassion, represent an approach to life that is either motivated by *horizontal selftranscendence* ('Immanence') or by *vertical selftranscendence* ('Transcendence'). Accordingly, immanent as well as transcendent types of spirituality can be posited (see Figure 2).

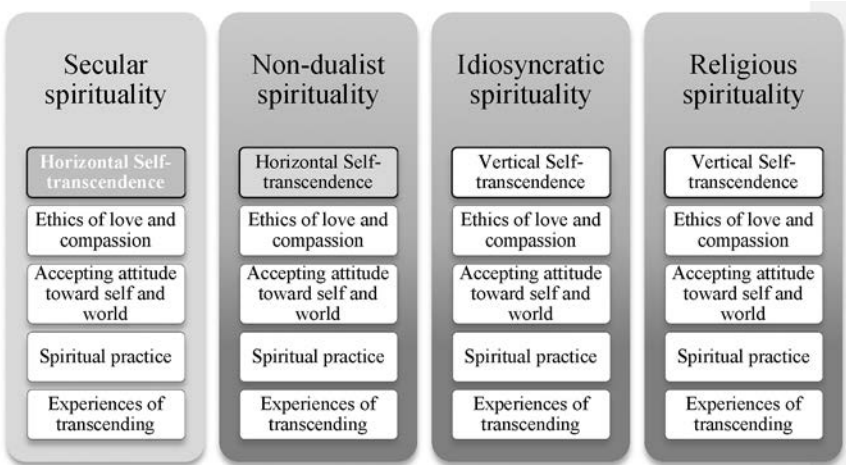


Figure 2. Secular, non-dualist, idiosyncratic and religious types of spirituality

The three theories of secular spirituality described above, by Comte-Sponville, Solomon, and Elkins et al., relate well to the type of secular spirituality depicted in Figure 2. They include *experiences of transcending*, such as awe, reverence, or unity; *spiritual practice* in the sense of both meditation/contemplation as well as active, engaged commitment to this world; an *attitude of acceptance* of life, the tragic, and death, and the importance of an *ethics of love and compassion*. All this, they propose, should be part of a process of self-transcendence, albeit within the context of immanence.

How common are these positions among contemporary atheists? And how representative are they of those atheists who self-describe as spiritual? Available data from the 2008 wave of the European Values Survey allow for the identification of self-declared atheists; they also include self-ratings of spirituality. The present study draws on these data to provide descriptive information on the distribution of spirituality among atheists in Europe, and test hypothesized relationships between their spirituality and several of the components of spirituality identified in the structural model above.

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

Inspired by the conception of secular spirituality as put forward by Comte-Sponville, Solomon, and Elkins et al., several research questions and expectations are formulated. A question of particular interest is the relevance of spirituality among contemporary atheists. How many convinced atheists actually claim an interest in the sacred or supernatural? Is this interest related to demographics? And which other beliefs and characteristics are associated with spirituality, thus assessed? While these questions will be dealt with exploratively, several hypotheses have been formulated in line with Comte-Sponville, Solomon, and Elkins et al., and will be tested:

Atheist spirituality is associated with both contemplative practice and active commitment to the world. It is linked to a sense of personal happiness and satisfaction, and it relates positively to trust in other people. Spirituality among atheists is further associated with values indicative of love and altruism.

## Method

### The Sample

Variables which identify secularists and assess their self-rated spirituality are available in the 2008 wave of the European Values Study. This dataset comprises

representative samples from 46 European countries, with an overall N of 67,786. Table 1 displays countries involved in the dataset used for the present study, and number of participants per country.

Table 1. Countries involved, number of participants per country and percentage of self-description as religious/non-religious and atheist per country

	Religious person (%)	Not religious person (%)	Convinced atheist (%)	N
Albania	90,9	6	3,1	1534
Azerbaijan	90,1	9,8	0,1	1505
Austria	64,1	31,2	4,7	1510
Armenia	88,9	9,6	1,4	1500
Belgium	59	30,1	10,9	1509
Bosnia Herzegovina	95	3,3	1,7	1512
Bulgaria	60,5	35	4,6	1500
Belarus	32,4	60	7,6	1500
Croatia	82,7	12,6	4,8	1525
Cyprus	92,4	7,1	0,5	1000
Northern Cyprus	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	500
Czech Republic	32,4	51	16,6	1821
Denmark	71,4	21,4	7,2	1507
Estonia	41,2	51,6	7,2	1518
Finland	54,4	37,4	8,2	1134
France	41,6	39,9	18,4	1501
Georgia	97,3	2,1	0,6	1500
Germany West	56,7	37,7	5,6	1071
Germany East	17,9	58,6	23,5	1004
Greece	85,9	11,4	2,8	1500
Hungary	55	41,4	3,6	1513
Iceland	67,6	26,1	6,2	808
Ireland	65,4	33,1	1,5	1013
Italy	86,1	9,2	4,6	1519
Latvia	75,9	20,4	3,7	1506
Lithuania	84,8	13,9	1,4	1500
Luxembourg	57	33,1	9,9	1610
Malta	67,3	31,9	0,8	1500
Moldova	82,8	16	1,2	1551
Montenegro	87,4	7,5	5,1	1516
Netherlands	60,2	33	6,8	1554
Norway	46,5	47,8	5,7	1090
Poland	88,4	9,3	2,3	1510
Portugal	75,5	18,2	6,3	1553
Romania	82	17,1	0,8	1489
Russian Federation	73,7	19,8	6,5	1504
Serbia	89,9	7,2	2,8	1512
Slovak Republic	81,2	16	2,7	1509
Slovenia	72	16,4	11,6	1366
Spain	53,8	34,7	11,5	1500
Sweden	32,1	52,9	15	1187
Switzerland	61	32,4	6,6	1272

Table 1 (Continued)

Turkey	90	9,9	0,1	2384
Ukraine	86	12,2	1,8	1507
Macedonia	84,7	10,3	5	1500
Great Britain	45	47,3	7,6	1561
Northern Ireland	61,4	36,5	2,1	500
Kosovo	99,5	0,2	0,2	1601
Total	70,6	24	5,5	67786

### Operationalization

In order to establish preliminary access to spiritual secularists' world-views and test hypotheses, key concepts are operationalized (albeit tentatively) using variables available in the EVS 4<sup>th</sup> wave data set. Atheists, in the EVS 2008, are identified through self-description as "convinced atheist", in contrast to "religious person" or "not religious person" (for percentages of atheists per country see Tab.1). Spirituality, in the EVS 2008, is (rather fuzzily) assessed through the following question:

*Whether or not you think of yourself as a religious person, how spiritual would you say you are, that is how strongly are you interested in the sacred or the supernatural?*

With the purpose of locating the phenomenon of secular spirituality within a context of demographics, religious belonging and beliefs, the following EVS variables are drawn on as potential predictors of secular spirituality:

1. Sex
2. Age
3. Education
4. Belonging to a religious denomination
5. Belief in life after death
6. Belief in re-incarnation
7. Belief in lucky charms

Operationalization of the dimensions of secular spirituality as described above (Fig. 2) is subject to the availability of variables in the EVS data set. Experiences of transcending are not assessed in the EVS. For measurement of spiritual practice, several variables offer themselves: Contemplative practice is tapped by the following two questions: *Do you take moments of prayer, meditation or*

*contemplation?* and *Do you have (your) own ways of connecting with the Divine?* Practice of active social commitment is assessed by variables asking about *belonging to* and *working unpaid for activist groups*. An accepting attitude toward self is measured by items asking about a *feeling of happiness* and *satisfaction with life*. An accepting attitude toward the world is tapped by a question about the *trustworthiness of people*. Several variables are interpreted as operationalizing an ethics of love and compassion; one set of items asks about acceptance of minorities (e.g., people with criminal record, people of different race, large families, Muslims, etc.) as neighbours; the other asks about values children should learn at school (feeling of responsibility, tolerance and respect, and unselfishness). Horizontal transcendence is identified through self-declaration as “convinced atheist” and self-rated spirituality.

## Results

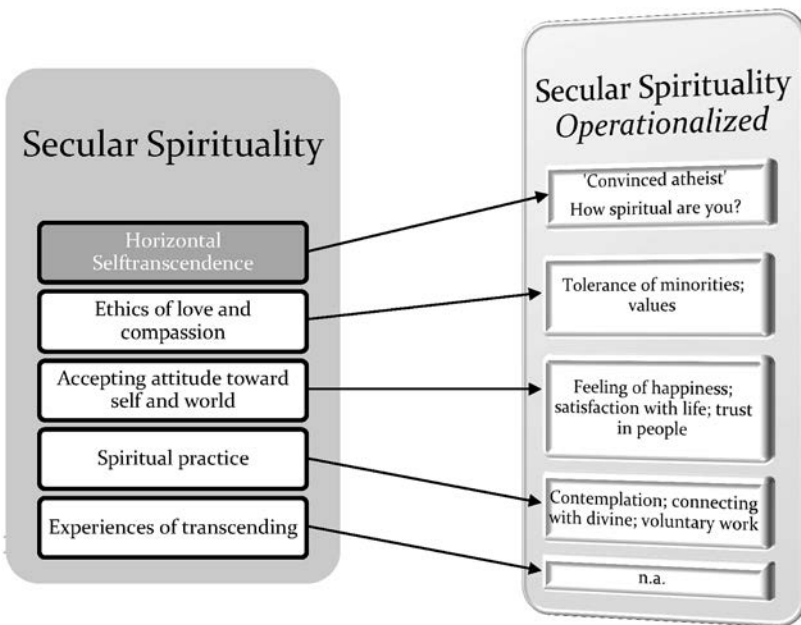


Figure 3. Operationalization of the dimensions of secular spirituality by EVS variables



## Descriptive Results

Table 1 displays percentages of self-described “religious persons”, “not religious persons”, and “convinced atheists” in each country. The number of convinced atheists varies considerably between countries, from 0.1 % in Azerbaijan and Turkey, to 24 % in East Germany. Among the  $N = 3374$  convinced atheists, a majority of 57 % self-describe as not spiritual, at all; 21 % claim little interest, 17 % some interest and 5 % strong interest in the sacred or supernatural. Countries with the highest percentage of highly spiritual atheists, in this sense, are Armenia (19 %), Montenegro (17 %), and Iceland (15 %), while there is *no* evidence of spiritual atheists in Bulgaria, Albania, and Poland, for example. This variance suggests links between variations of atheism and cultural and/or political contexts that will have to be explored in future studies. However, due to the generally low number of spiritual atheists, national differences will be disregarded in the present study.

### Who are the Spiritual Atheists? Demographics, Religious Belonging and Beliefs

Spirituality, in the EVS, is assessed as an interest in the sacred or the supernatural. It thus covers a wide range of possible beliefs to be associated with it. Through multiple regression analysis, world-view related predictors of spirituality among convinced atheists are identified. In order to clarify if “believing” has predictive power over and above demographics and “belonging”, hierarchic regression is employed. Table 2 shows beta coefficients and explanation of variance in the three consecutive models. Demographics only account for 3 % of the variance in secular spirituality, with female, younger, and more educated atheists being slightly more spiritual. Inclusion of religious belonging only adds two more percent of explained variance: atheists who belong to a religious denomination (16 %) are slightly more spiritual than those who do not belong. With inclusion of beliefs, sex and age lose their predictive power, but as much as 19 % of variance in spirituality are explained altogether. *Belief in re-incarnation* and *belief in life after death* contribute substantially, independently of each other, as does the *belief that a lucky charm protects*.

Table 2. Hierarchic multiple regression for prediction of secular spirituality among convinced atheists. Step 1: demographics; step 2: religious belonging; step 3: beliefs (N = 3118)

Model	Standardized Coefficients	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
	Beta		
1			
Sex	.08	.000	.03 (p<.001)
Age	-.11	.000	
What age did you complete your education	.09	.000	
2			
Sex	.08	.000	.05 (p<.001)
Age	-.10	.000	
What age did you complete your education	.09	.000	
Belong to religious denomination	.14	.000	
3			
Sex	.02	n.s.	.18 (p<.001)
Age	-.02	n.s.	
What age did you complete your education	.10	.000	
Belong to religious denomination	.11	.002	
Believe in: life after death	.14	.000	
Believe in: re-incarnation	.19	.000	
Lucky charm protects	.16	.000	

Note: sex: 1 = male, 2 = female

### Atheist Spirituality and Spiritual Practice

Atheist Spirituality has been conceptualized as being expressed through both contemplative practice and active commitment to the world.

Spirituality is positively related to an *own way of connecting with the divine* ( $r = .28, p < .001$ ) and *taking moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation* ( $r = .33, p < .001$ ). The relationship between spirituality and *belonging to an activist group* is very small ( $r = .13, p < .001$ ); that between spirituality and *volunteering for an activist group*, albeit significant due to the large sample size, is negligibly small ( $r = .08, p < .001$ ).

### Atheist Spirituality and an Accepting Attitude toward Self and World

Analyses were expected to reflect positive relationships between spirituality among convinced atheists and their happiness, satisfaction with life and trust in people. However, results do not confirm these expectations; spirituality is neither related to happiness and satisfaction with life, nor to a trustful approach to other people.

### Atheist Spirituality and an Ethics of Love and Compassion

When relating spirituality to tolerance toward minorities, results do not reflect any signs of *intolerance*, but correlations in the expected direction are negligibly small ( $< .10$ ). Relationships between spirituality and the three values of a) feeling of responsibility, b) tolerance and respect, and c) unselfishness are also significant in the expected direction, but negligibly small ( $r = .03/.09/.03$ ).

## Discussion

Atheist spirituality, as described by philosophers and psychologists, is a complex and sophisticated approach to life. “Spiritual” attitudes, values and commitments are distanced from religious world-views and the supernatural, and then established in an immanentist context. This seems to be especially intricate when it comes to one of the core elements of spirituality, transcendence. For the majority of spiritual secularists, from the past to today, a transcendent dimension plays a crucial part in a spiritual approach to life. To transcend is to “go beyond”. The realm of “beyond” is conventionally associated with a (vertically) transcendent reality. However, transcendence can also occur horizontally (Goodenough, 2001; Schnell, 2009; Schnell & Becker, 2007). It can take place in encounters with the *inner* (the medial, “true” self), the *outer* (social and natural environment) or the *other* (supernatural) (cf. Bailey, 1997; Schnell, 2009). Central to the concept is the *act* of transcending (Ruschmann, 2011). In a secular context, transcendence can thus be construed as entirely immanent by defining it as an act of *selftranscendence*.

As a core element of spirituality, selftranscendence – be it immanent or transcendent – is assumed to underlie and motivate spirituality in its various expressions. In line with the structural model of spirituality, these dimensions have been identified as experiences of transcending, spiritual practice, an accepting attitude toward self and world, and an ethics of love and compassion. An immanentist selftranscendence would thus be marked by a compassionate,

loving and accepting mindset, capable of and ready to contemplate as well as to passionately commit to concerns beyond one's immediate needs, to relate to and become part of an ultimate reality. In Elkins and colleagues', Comte-Sponville's and Solomon's accounts of "ideal types" of secular spirituality, all of these facets figure. But are they representative of atheists who self-describe as spiritual?

First of all, EVS data show that spirituality is a rare phenomenon among convinced atheists. Only five percent of European atheists describe themselves as very spiritual – that is "very interested in the sacred or supernatural". Fifty-seven percent say they are not spiritual at all; 21 % report little interest and 17 % some interest. By relating self-reported spirituality to demographics, religious belonging and beliefs, more information on this vaguely assessed spirituality has been gathered. Independently of sex and age, spirituality is slightly more common among more educated atheists. Breadth and complexity of knowledge thus seem to be conducive of interest in the sacred or the supernatural. Spirituality is also a little more common among atheists who (nominally) belong to a religious denomination. Here, the institutional confrontation with symbols and images of transcendence might inspire interest in the sacred or the supernatural – or, the other way round, interest in the sacred or the supernatural might be the motivation for atheists to remain associated with a religious denomination.

Maybe surprisingly, spiritual atheists, though, by self-definition as atheist, adverse to the idea of supernatural deities, tend to believe in reincarnation and life after death, and even in the protective power of lucky charms. At this point, the agentic and idiosyncratic character of today's meaning systems becomes particularly apparent. While denying belief in supernatural powers, a desire for a "beyond" is expressed. However, these creeds are primarily self-serving. Belief in reincarnation and/or life after death communicates a wish for eternity and personal continuity beyond death. Belief in the protective power of lucky charms seems to indicate a hope of outwitting contingency. Hence, acceptance of contingency and death as existential givens is avoided; this core characteristic of secular spirituality, as described by its theorists, does not feature in the majority of spiritual atheists' world-views.

One of the more prominent attributes of atheist spirituality in the EVS sample is the practice of taking moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation. Spiritual atheists also profess to use personal ways of connecting with the divine. But do these acts of contemplation and relation to an ultimate reality have real-world consequences? Do they strengthen personal well-being and ethical conduct? Here, again, the picture painted by the data is quite disillusioning. Spiritual atheists are neither happier nor more satisfied with their lives than non-spiritual atheists. Their spirituality does neither encourage trust in other people, nor does it enhance voluntary commitment, tolerance, responsibility or unselfishness.

## Conclusion

Summarising the findings, spirituality among atheists appears to be a predominantly personal issue, without social or ethical consequences. Alongside the declaration of interest in the sacred or supernatural, beliefs in life after death and supportive immaterial powers at work in this world express a desire for meaning and connectedness (see also Schnell & Keenan, 2011). However, this desire is probably not fulfilled, since neither personal nor interpersonal well-being are enhanced. How might these findings be interpreted? For the majority of atheists, a pronounced interest in the sacred or supernatural seems to be an expression of a need for meaning and transcendence rather than a conviction. Selftranscendence does not appear central to their identity. And, due to the complexity and sophistication of this orientation, it surely is difficult to anchor it in an immanentist world-view. Models and examples of immanent self-transcendence are rare, resulting in weak “plausibility structures” (Berger). Longitudinal studies are necessary to determine the stability of this kind of atheist spirituality. Is it a temporary disorientation, perhaps initiated by a drastic experience? Or is it an expression of increased openness toward another dimension of reality, the parameters of which are yet to be established?

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We would like to thank the University of Innsbruck research platform ‘Organizations and Society’, especially for their ‘Publishing with a View’ grant support to fund a four-day residence in the Pumafalle, Gschnitztal.

## Deconversion and Religious or Spiritual Transformation

### Introduction

Deconversion implies loss of formerly meaningful religious experience, of embeddedness in one's former community, criticism and doubt regarding formerly appreciated beliefs, rituals, and prescriptions, and, finally, disaffiliation from a community (Streib & Keller, 2004; Streib, Hood, Keller, Csöff, & Silver, 2009). Deconversion defined in these terms was explored in depth in the Bielefeld-based Cross-cultural Study on Deconversion in the US and Germany. The design of the study focused on the subsample of 99 deconverts, about whom we have collected deconversion narratives and faith development interviews (Fowler, 1981)<sup>1</sup>: We sampled for deconverts, first from new religious movements and fundamentalist groups, then from mainline denominations or integrated groups. In addition, to allow comparisons between deconverts and their former fellows in faith, 178 faith development interviews with in-tradition members (members of the religious groups from which the focus persons have deconverted) were conducted; also an additional 1,067 in-tradition members have filled out a comprehensive questionnaire. The total quantitative data sample thus consists of 1,197 cases from which we have questionnaire data. The three sorts of data (narrative interview on deconversion, faith development interview and questionnaire data) can be viewed as interrelated building blocks of the triangulation strategies, which we use in our research (Streib, 2005; Streib, Hood, & Keller, 2002).

This chapter is organized according to the research design: We start our exploration of what changes in deconversion with interviews of two deconverts from Jehova's Witnesses, one from each research context, and contrast their deconversion trajectories. We attend to their deconversion experiences as outlined in the narratives, then to their faith development interviews. The results of

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1 The complete subsample of deconverts consisted of 129 subjects.



these steps of analysis will be profiled against the quantitative data of current members – following the triangulation strategy of our study.

## Deconverting from Jehova’s Witnesses in Germany and the USA

To explore deconversion and transformation we focus on two case studies, one from the American, one from the German deconversion study sample. Both case studies involve men who were in their fifties when they participated in our study. Both had left Jehova’s Witnesses after a membership of three decades. Further similarities are found in their faith development interviews: Both men’s biographies are characterized by a troubled childhood with absent fathers and emotionally non-available mothers, and by the experience of war. Franz, in Germany, had lost his older siblings and his father in the Second World War. Tom, in the United States, had after a childhood characterized by neglect, served in the Vietnam War. Both converted to Jehova’s Witnesses in their twenties. In their adult lives, both have managed to find a profession and a spouse. Tom reports a divorce from a woman who had, from childhood on, to cope with a physical handicap. Franz is married to a woman with a history of earlier trauma. Neither have children. Both left Jehova’s witnesses upon conflict with authorities. Both claim to find themselves in harmony with God when they are alone in the wilderness, in nature. Both claim, in the four-options forced-choice format of our questionnaire, to be more spiritual than religious. However, their deconversions follow different trajectories: Franz has been identified as a type of deconvert who, upon leaving, feels “debarred from Paradise,” while Tom has been associated to the type of deconvert who is on a “life long quest” or making “late revisions” (cf. Streib et al, 2009).

### Deconversion Narratives and Trajectories

Now we will provide some biographical background of the deconversion trajectories. Franz, who grew up in a protestant family, states early in his deconversion narrative that he never met his father. “I have lost my father in the war, my mother remarried eventually, and, ahm, for me war was something terrible, because I have not suffered in any, any material way, but psychologically”.<sup>2</sup> Another narrative episode centers on his refusal to take part in con-

2 (“ich hab meinen Vater im Krieg verloren, ne, meine Mutter hat dann wieder geheiratet und, äh, für mich war der Krieg was ganz Furchtbares. Weil ich eben nicht-nicht materiell darunter gelitten hab, aber seelisch.”)

firmation, due to religious doubts. These doubts he describes as inspired by his questions regarding the war and religious war propaganda, which were not answered by the pastor:

“As is right and proper, I was supposed to go to confirmation classes and be confirmed. Then I have talked to this person there and asked questions about the war and how the Church’s position is to these issues; and at that time I learned that the soldiers are [...?]; they went to war with “God with us” and with “Hurra,” and I was completely disgusted. And he did not give me a sufficient answer to that, and my reaction was then, ‘Well, then I will not be confirmed’.”<sup>3</sup>

With his experience of confrontation with Nazi crimes and the holocaust, Franz felt left alone by his mother and his stepfather. He states, that they cared well for him as far as material things are concerned, but that he was left alone with fundamental questions of life. Consequentially, his story of his first encounter with Jehova’s witnesses is about the “answers” they provided to his big questions, which were left open by parents and pastor. When explaining his conversion, he refers to his seeking for orientation, longing for a father:

“How much would I have wished, as a boy, [...] someone who takes me by the hand. And explains to me what life is about. Actually, this, this was what I always, still as a young person, ahm, was waiting for.”<sup>4</sup>

Franz portrays himself as (having been a) naïve and young layperson who, longing for a father to take him by the hand and explain what life is about, was lured into the ideology of the Witnesses, when, as a young employee, he started life in a new environment. This account stands in a certain tension to other parts of his narrative, which describe that he later held positions of teaching and pastoral care in the JW community:

“My career then, with the Witnesses, I was, first, as they say, ministerial servant or deacon. Then, two or three years later, elder. Then I did several things, but almost everything there, starting with steward, treasurer, äh, servant, and I have directed the school for, ahm, long time – the study of the Watchtower.”<sup>5</sup>

3 “Weil sich das eben so gehörte, sollte ich auch zum Konfirmandenunterricht gehen und konfirmiert werden. Dann hab ich mit dem Menschen dort gesprochen und hab ihm über den Krieg Fragen gestellt und überhaupt, wie die Kirche dazu steht und zu der Zeit ist mir dann auch bekannt geworden, dass ja die Soldaten einem [...?] sind. Gott mit uns, in den Kriege gezogen sind und mit ”Hurra” und das hat mich also furchtbar abgestoßen. Und er hat mir da keine richtige Antwort drauf gegeben [dann?] und meine Reaktion war dann ”gut, dann werd ich auch nicht konfirmiert’.”

4 “Wie sehr hätte ich mir gewünscht, als Junge [...] einen, der mich an die Hand nimmt. Und der mir mal das Leben erklärt. Das-das war eigentlich das, worauf ich immer, schon als Jungendlicher noch, äh, gewartet habe.”

5 “Meine Laufbahn dann bei den Zeugen Jehovas, ich wurde, äh, erst, wie man so sagt, Dienstadtsgehilfe oder Diakon. Dann, zwei-drei Jahre später, Ältester. Dann hab ich ver-

Franz was well integrated when conflict arose with a visiting elder who criticized his activities. Then he experienced again, that his questions and objections, although based on Bible studies, were not answered, that authorities did not live up to moral expectations, and that there was no response to his appeals to solve the conflict. Therefore, he stepped from his responsibilities and finally left. He regrets that, due to JW expectations that Armageddon would be in 1975, he and his wife did not have children and also did not invest in buying their own house. He also regrets having discontinued seeing his relatives, due to the command of the Witnesses. Being disfellowshipped and shunned after decades of having only had social contact with other Witnesses, he and his wife feel isolated, victims of an ideology that proved false. Franz is reluctant to join a religious group ever again, even while keeping his faith. Therefore we categorized his deconversion as a privatizing exit.

Tom from the United States also tells a childhood story of disorder and early sorrow. His mother led an unstable life, involving multiple moves from one place to another, within and outside of the United States. The children had different fathers and some of them were given up for adoption. The adults in Tom's narrative about his young life are portrayed as emotionally unavailable, neglecting his need for relationship. Later Tom served in the Vietnam War and, upon his return, he worked with computers. In his view, Christianity was linked to the governmental decision to go to war. He has strong criticisms against the corruption of Christianity as reason for both World Wars and the Spanish Inquisition. He later reasoned that what he knew about Christianity stemmed from self-proclaimed Christians who were involved in sinful acts, rather than from the teachings of the Bible. This led him to seek a better understanding of the Bible and to accept the Jehovah's Witnesses' invitation to Bible study and finally to affiliate with the JW. The reason he gives for his conversion is that, having grown up in an "emotional vacuum", he was "looking for structure". In his deconversion narrative he shows appreciation of what he gained: "And, it provided an excellent uhm, environment in which to really get into the scriptures because it's a fundamentalist religion". Tom also tells in the interview that he underwent a process of change: "Bible is the bottom line. Uhm... I gradually got to the point though, where that was no longer working for me". He explains what he came to perceive as shortcomings in the JW community:

"And so they're missing spirit, they're missing relationships, and I was hungry for that more and more and more ... and just not finding it there. Went to all the different elders looking for answers, and uhm, as I got more and more frustrated uhm.. I settled down and I read through the Bible three times in the course of four years."

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schiedene Sachen, aber fast alles da gemacht, vom-vom Saalordner, oder, Rechnungs-, äh, diener, und, äh, die Schule hab ich, äh, lange Zeit geleitet – das Wachturm-Studium."

In these independent Bible studies he discovers that God was, in the New Testament, referred to as father. This is meaningful to him and to his interest in relationship. However, the elders could not share his views; thus the conflict between his new insights in the Christian doctrine culminated in his being disfellowshipped. “And, unlike most who are disfellowshipped, who feel all of a sudden you know, cast out of the life boat, for me it was a sense of relief.” Tom does not seem to feel like a victim nor does he report regrets. Tom has moved on to a more liberal denomination, which he believes has filled the void left by the Jehovah’s Witness community. We identified Tom’s deconversion trajectory as an integrating exit.

### Stages of Faith: Transformation as Structural Deconversion

Fowler’s model of faith development is based on the idea of a series of integrative adaptations of cognitive-structural patterns, which he saw as being stretched across the life span. His conception of faith includes seven Aspects: cognitive-structural development (drawn from Piaget), perspective taking (Selman), moral judgment (Kohlberg), adding bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, forms of world coherence, and level of symbolic functioning. These seven aspects of faith are assumed to develop in six stages that may be loosely related to age: Intuitive-projective (<6 years), mythic-literal (7–12 years), synthetic-conventional (adolescence, adulthood), individuative-reflective (adulthood), conjunctive, and universalizing faith.

In James Fowler’s conception of conversion, which is based upon his model of “stages of faith” (Fowler, 1981), the basic distinction is between structural and lateral conversion. Structural conversion involves stage transformation understood as progress to a higher stage, while lateral conversion does not. Applied to deconversion, this means that transformation or structural deconversion consists in moving upward in the invariant sequence of the stages of faith. Lateral deconversion refers to leaving one’s faith community without change in faith stage. This change should encompass all of the seven aspects of faith in Fowler’s model.

Applying this model of deconversion to our cases, we conclude: Franz’ disaffiliation from Jehovah’s Witnesses does not show any signs of transformation in terms of faith development. Franz does not give any statements about changes of his faith, which he rather seeks to defend. Comparing Franz’ faith development score (2.4) with the JW in-tradition members (mean score 3.0 for the German subsample, spanning from 2.1 to 3.7), we see him at the lower end of the spectrum. This suggests that Franz’ deconversion was a lateral deconversion.

Tom’s faith development interview sum score is 3.8 – which indicates the

development of Individuative-Reflective Faith. Tom himself comments on his development: “Uhm, just in the past few months have I finally moved over the line between teenager and adult”. Taking this together with the comparison against in-tradition members’ mean faith development interview score of 3.1 for the U.S. subsample, we have some evidence of a structural deconversion.

### Religious Styles: Transformation as Change of Configuration

Streib has taken up Fowler’s approach, criticizing the neglect of important dimensions of the self, such as affects and emotions or life history. He (Streib, 2001, p. 144) referred to Gil Noam’s criticism:

“It is my view that cognitively based theorists have overlooked the central structuring activities of the self by defining the epistemic self as the sole representative of structure. In the process, I believe, the cart was placed before the horse, life history became content to the structure of the epistemic self ... Epistemology replaced life history” (Noam, 1990, p. 378).

Streib (2001) also criticized the neglect of the psychodynamical and relational interpersonal dimensions, of the interpretative, hermeneutic dimension, and of the life-world dimension. He suggested drawing on the philosophical (phenomenological) contributions of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1988), and Paul Ricoeur (1990) to situate faith development in the life worlds of persons and on the psychoanalytical and psychological contributions of Erik Erikson (1968), Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979) and Gil Noam (1990) to account for the dynamics of individual developmental trajectories (Streib, 2001, pp. 145 – 147). The religious styles perspective suggests a model of religious development that integrates a broader variety of concepts from discourses such as life span developmental psychology and sociology of religion. Religious styles have been defined as

“distinct modi of practical-interactive (ritual), psychodynamic (symbolic), and cognitive (narrative) reconstruction and appropriation of religion, that originate in relation to life history and life world and that, in accumulative deposition, constitute the variations and transformations of religion over a life time, corresponding to the style of interpersonal relations” (Streib, 2001, p. 149).

This perspective takes up the descriptions of forms of faith provided by Fowler’s model, but understands these from a richer theoretical framework. A hierarchy of (five) styles is maintained, discarding Fowler’s sixth stage as more based on theological reasoning than on empirical findings (Streib, 2003, 2005). Insisting that biography be taken into account, the religious styles perspective allows for “regressions”, movements toward, or “revivals” of, less complex or earlier forms

of faith, while different styles remain active at the same time. Transformation may thus be understood as change in the configuration of styles.

A closer look into the faith development interview with Franz shows that scores differ across aspects: they vary from 2.0 in Moral Judgment (Aspect C) to 2.9 in Locus of Authority (Aspect E), referring to Franz' emerging criticism of leadership as neglecting needs of the persons in the community. The general interpretation is the preeminence of the mythic-literal style. After leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses, Franz continues to take the guidelines for a Christian life literally from the Bible. With reference to Hood et al. (2005), this can be interpreted as fundamentalist, as an intratextual understanding. His deconversion seems to have been more an issue of rejecting specific prescriptions (or rather their interpretation by the church authorities), than an issue of applying a new level of reasoning about religious matters. In his faith development interview, Franz states that he would rely on the commandments of the Bible if he had to make important decisions, and only secondarily asks whether the decision is reasonable and feasible:

“Uh, well, I'll think about this. A-firstly, well, in accordance with, uh ... the Biblical commands or principles, not commands, we don't have those anymore, okay with the Biblical principles, uh, then reason, this decision, is it reasonable, is it advisable to do something like that? This is the way I would. And then the do-ability of it.”

When asked how the evil comes into the world, Franz suggests that everything would be good, if everybody lived according to the rules of the Bible: “And I tell myself if-if all the-the principles that God gave us, exactly and consequently, were done by everybody then we'd be in paradise.”

Asked how religious conflicts might be resolved, Franz refers to the unambiguousness of God's word and states:

“Well, now I can't say that I, I, uh, read this text in the Bible, uh but in fourteen-hundred so and so pope whatshisname said something about this and then a Roman author once, they are all simply commentators, that's not the-the main principle that is here in the Bible. And then people have to uh do only what is said in the Bible.”

From the religious styles perspective, Franz does not show many signs of a change of style. His adherence to a mythic-literal form of faith, his reproach against the Witnesses, whom he now sees as misrepresenting the sacred texts, and his image of God as a powerful parental (father) figure, whose commands he has to obey in order to be accepted, point to what Streib has defined as an instrumental-reciprocal religious style.

In Tom's faith development interview, scores range from Stage Three to Stage Five, with lower scores on Aspect F, Form of World Coherence, and G, Symbolic Function (3.5). His scores thus span a range of two stages. From the religious styles perspective, the presence of different styles can be interpreted. For the case

of fundamentalist religiosity, heterodyning of styles has been introduced, together with the corollary, that “the mutuality or the individuating reflectiveness resists complete submission and surrender to the fundamentalist demand” and eventually this leads to the perception of contradictions (Streib 2001, p. 154). This may apply to Tom, who throughout his faith development interview shows a reflective and explicit way of dealing not only with issues of truth and interpretation of the Bible, but with his own past. The following passage about current relationships shows Tom’s self-reflective explanation of his difficulties to see God as father:

“Well, with both my fathers, they’re significant by virtue of having being just about null. And so, not wilful neglect but neglect, the emptiness none the less. [I.: Right.] That’s significant because it leaves me with an emptiness, left me with a real difficulty as seeing God as my father. [I.: Mhm.] because my awareness of what a father is a presence that does nothing. [I.: Mhm.] And... shifting that relative to a father who is out of sight and works indirectly- [I.: Right.] has been a challenge.”

Here Tom is reflecting on his own inner life in terms of his developmental history and self-selected worldview.

To illustrate the most advanced style present, we quote from Tom’s response to the question how Tom would generally go about decision-making, which has been scored Stage Five, conjunctive faith:

“Prayer, prayer and meditation and somewhere in the course it will come to me. [I.: How... how or when did you sort of come to that model of decision making?] (long pause for thinking) [...] I grew up uhm... extremely left brained. Personal decisions, personal work it out, figure out the logic of it, and come to the conclusions. And parallel with all of that was an intense fear of faith because my understanding of faith was blind faith. [I.: Mhm.] What I saw in Hebrews 11:1 is that we need foundation for our faith. We need evidence. [I.: Mhm.] and as I came to understand that I began to open up to something more than just what I could see, measure, analyze, etc. [I.: Mhm.] and... growing accustomed to that, allowing myself to go in that direction has been a very long process. [I.: Mhm.] Uhm... but I understood- [...] that my heart was totally shut down, but heart is what I needed in order to be able to do all this stuff. [I.: Right.] And I didn’t have a clue, how do I get the heart to open up the heart? [I.: Yeah.] But I just decided somehow I just got to have it. The scriptures say, “ask and ye shall receive” that’s what I am going to do. [...] - and so it took years before that process speeded up enough and there had been enough healing and enough faith to allow myself to heal more rapidly. [...] So, to answer your question of how and where- [I.: Yeah.] it’s just been a very gradual process.”

Here, Tom describes how he struggled to move toward a new religious orientation, involving, “the heart”, or basic trust in the terms of Rizzuto’s (Eriksonian) language, and in line with Streib’s description of the dialogical style.

### Traditional Psychodynamic Perspectives – From “Illusion” to “Transitional Space”

Psychoanalysis is traditionally notorious for its critical view of religion (Freud, 1927). According to the summarizing view provided by Pine’s (1988) portrayal of “four psychologies”, psychoanalysis can focus on drive and instinct, on taming socialization, and gratification of drives. Second, it can, as ego psychology, study the defenses of the internal and the adaptation to the external world. Third, object relations theory explores histories of inner representations of significant relationships with the aim of gaining freedom by understanding patterns no longer functional.

An account of the development of representations of God, starting from her reconstruction of “Freud’s implicit theory of object representation” has been put forward by Rizzuto (1979, p. 29). She traces the development of the God representation as a special type of object representation, which is created first in the transitional space (Winnicott, 1953), and then, across the life span, transformed according to life phases and developmental tasks (Rizzuto, 1979, pp. 206–207). Fourth, self-psychology aspires to understand and support the development of a differentiated and whole sense of self (Pine, 1988, pp. 582–583). These psychologies highlight different aspects of transformation of the cases under study: According to the classical assumption we can frame transformation as cancellation of a “crooked cure” (Freud, 1921, p. 142).<sup>6</sup> Tom and Franz corrected, by deconverting, the decisions of the young men who, instead of facing the harsh realities of their respective upbringings, were seeking the consolation of a religious community which provided answers (Franz) and structure (Tom). Deconversion resulted when the search for consolation proved illusory (Franz) or at least one-sided (Tom). An ego-psychology perspective would emphasize that both men in their respective troubled childhoods had insufficient possibilities to acquire reality testing, adaptive skills, and defenses. Their faith, giving answers and structure, served as compensation for an inner defense against drive, and supported their adaptation to the outside world (Hartmann, 1958). Transformation would then refer to pervasive change in ego-functioning. This might be inferred from Tom’s self-reflective and perceptive review of his development, as well as from his statement, that he felt relief upon leaving. For Franz, who feels devastated upon leaving, this seems to be a challenge. An object relations view might focus on early relationship experience condensed in object representations. The conflicts with the elders might be read as repetitions of

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6 The contemporary and less pathology-minded version of the drive psychology suggested by Ostov allows to portray conversions as motivated by a “spiritual drive”, originating from an instinctual need for attachment (Ostov, 2007, p. 61).



early drama: Again the father figures showed lack of interest and understanding. Transformation can be inferred from change in God representations, as indicated by Tom's turn to fatherly aspects. On a more sophisticated level, it would involve reflection and self-reflection, tying earlier to current experiences and perspectives, resulting in acknowledgment of one's own and others limitations – as we see in Tom's, less so in Franz' interview data: Tom shows awareness of his difficulties around relationships to others and to God. Franz hardly articulates the deep disappointment he feels, stemming from earlier and later relationships, arguing rather along standards of right and wrong. Self psychology might ask if lack of early mirroring and empathy lead to difficulties in the formation of a self that is experienced as strong, vital, and cohesive. This may have led Franz to look for support in form of a religious community with a reliable doctrine offered by father figures. Still vulnerable to disappointments after deconversion, he finds fault with them, not with his expectations. However, in the exit group he joined, he may find empathy and mirroring when sharing his experience. Tom, who started by looking for structure, to then find himself turning to a new search for “the heart”, shows self-awareness when he realizes that this change of direction – transformation – involves his biography and his decisions.

#### Relational Perspective: Change of Mode of Relating toward the Transcendent

Recent relational perspectives argue for an even closer rapprochement of psychoanalysis and religion (Sorenson, 2004; Hoffman, 2011). Drawing on recent discussion on primary intersubjectivity, on attachment, and the relational basis of understanding inner and social worlds in psychoanalysis, transformation can be understood as change of the mode of relating to the transcendent, and described according to criteria of integration and complexity.

Stephen Mitchell (2000) has suggested a hierarchy of four modes of interaction according to growing complexity: Mode 1 refers to non-reflective behaviour, to patterns of reciprocal influence, “to what people do with each other” (p. 58). Mode 2 is concerned with affective permeability, that is, with direct affect resonances between people, with empathy. In Mode 2, others participate in affective connections. Mode 3 is “experience organized into self-other-configurations” (p. 58). The self is shaped by different relationships and in relation to different others. In Mode 3, distinct others are symbolized, but play specific functional roles. Mode 4 means intersubjectivity, that is, mutual recognition as subjects; self-reflective intentionality and dependency. In Mode 4 others are organized as distinct subjects (Mitchell, 2000, pp. 58–62; cf. also Keller, 2008). Mitchell stresses the enduring importance of all his four modes of interaction, stating that conventional reality and conscious cognitive processing and com-

municating of information is but one way of relating to the world – and one that we construct and develop in interaction with other, traditionally regarded as less advanced, modes (Mitchell, 2000, pp.19–21). We take Mitchell’s model for an inspection of how both deconverts portrayed here relate to God or the transcendent:

Franz’ religious search seems mainly concerned with the regulation of interactions, mode 1 – reciprocal influence. He is also thinking about others with whom he can get together, striving to follow Jesus’ words and to build a congregation. He is affiliated with a support-group of other ex-witnesses, with whom he can share feelings and experiences (mode 2, affective permeability), positioning himself in the group and his experience against theirs (mode 3, self-other configurations), starting to reflect his story which might eventually open up functioning on mode 4, intersubjectivity – and thus support transformation.

The heterodyning we see in Tom’s profile of aspects might be constructed as the joint and dominant presence of mode 1 (non-reflective behavior, reciprocal influence) and 3 (self-other configurations) – indicating, according to his narrative, longstanding concern with these particular modes and challenges toward integration with the other modes of interaction. Relations with others might still be an issue for Tom. When asked what he would like to change about himself he describes his relationship with God as a major concern: “That’s an ongoing process. Uhm... the measure of intimacy that I have with God. That relationship...”. He is looking for intimacy (mode 2, shared affective experience), which has not played a major role in his life so far, implying that transformation involves change there, and that Tom’s self-reflective stance allows him to make this statement.

## Monitoring Transformation

Reflecting on his image of God during his time with the Witnesses Franz states:

“First, I have well, learned, learned many new things. Scripture, which then again is related to what (clearing his throat) watchtower says. Got some things straight, right? What actually leads us as human beings to salvation, all these precautions ahm, and have also that Christ came as our saviour. No matter what else was written. Was consolidating myself, only, then came, that, what the watchtower society teaches, that this contradicts the bible. But you can’t realize that so soon. Not if you are a Witness, for an active Witness, who is visiting the congregation, it is impossible to look through that.”<sup>7</sup>

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7 “Da hab ich .. gut, einmal gelernt .. viel Neues gelernt, Schrifttexte, die dann wieder mit dem (räusperst dich) Wachturm-Bild. dann immer wieder zusammenhingen. Wurde mir über die-,”

It seems that in Franz' view religious literature should correspond to scripture and life practice should be in accordance with both. Sacred text is understood as referring to reality, perhaps of another time and place, but referring to what is or was. There is no space for different views or interpretations, or other minds suggesting different readings. What is in the text corresponds to sacred reality not to be played with. Other perspectives, challenging this form of fundamentalism, may feel like a threat to reality per se – and are consequently discounted as wrong. This might be read as indications of the “equivalence mode” in terms of mentalization (Fonagy & Target, 2007). Franz does not show much self-reflection. His own inner states seem opaque to him. The serious depressive states he experienced have only recently gained that label. To him they felt like a fatigue he could not understand, neither could he make sense of the mood swings which he experienced throughout his life. The exit group, which he joined upon deconversion, may provide a secure environment encouraging him to explore his (and others') inner worlds more deeply, and to move toward transformation understood as pervasive change of his relating toward himself as well as toward the transcendent.

Tom claims that his life was without “real connections” to other persons until his early twenties. He reflects on his life, stating, for instance, that the lack of attachment to father figures is a challenge in his relationship to God. He shows awareness of his own and others' inner states, of process, when he discusses relationships and changes in his relationships. This stands in tension to the area of faith, where he strictly adheres to his Christian faith in a rather fundamentalist style. Asked how religious conflicts can be resolved, he states:

“with a lot of prayer and grace. If they can be resolved at all. A lot of forgiveness... In order to resolve religious differences there needs to be on the part of both parties, a desire to serve Christ. And a faith in his willingness and ability to be the light and then... a lot of prayer as I mentioned and an appreciation that uhm, sometimes because of coming from different backgrounds it may take a lot of work to resolve those differences, but there has to be flexibility. And humility that allows one to recognize 'I haven't got all the answers.'”

Notwithstanding the humility offered, everything is to be brought under the authority of Christ, which is not subject to reflection, nor open to transformation.

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über manche Dinge schon im Klaren, ne? Was überhaupt für uns Menschen zur Rettung führt, diese ganzen Vorkehrungen, äh, und hab also schon [auch...?], auch dass Jesus Christus als unser Retter . gekommen ist. Egal, was (räuspert sich) sonst so geschrieben wurde. Hab mich eigentlich gefestigt, nur, dann kam wieder die, äh .. das, was die Wachturm-Gesellschaft lehrt, dass das im Widerspruch zu dem steht, was in der Bibel ist. Kommt man aber auch. (hustet) so schnell nicht drauf. Also als Zeuge Jehovas, als tätiger und die Versammlung besuchender Zeuge Jehovas, ist das unmöglich dahinter zu kommen.”

## Deconverts and Members: What makes a Difference?

Before we compare Franz and Tom with former members of oppositional and accommodative groups, we give an overview on how the deconverts and members in the study differ on the central quantified (FDI-ratings) and quantitative measures (scales assessing personality, well-being, and fundamentalism) in the respective research contexts.

### Differences in FDI-Scores

The quantified result of faith development interview evaluation is the assignment of stage scores to the faith development interviews. Two thirds of our faith development interviewees in the total sample (63.2 %) are assigned to Stage Three of synthetic-conventional faith and 30.3 % to Stage Four of individuative-reflective faith. Stage Two of mythic-literal faith was assigned to 5.1 % of faith development interviews; Stage Five of conjunctive faith to only 1.4 %. Stage One and Stage Six were not assigned at all.

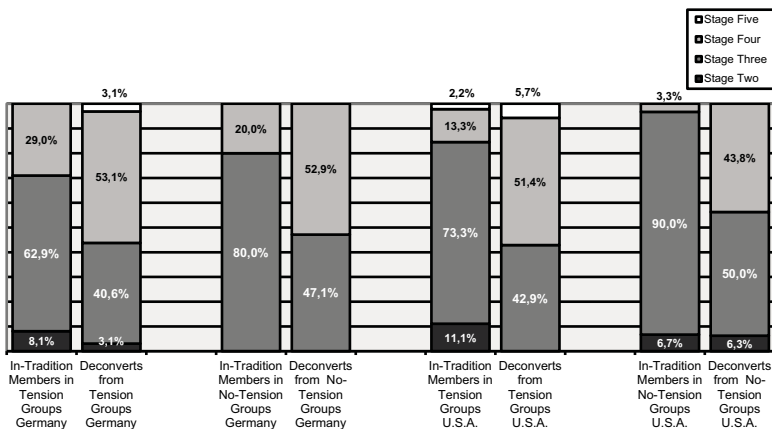


Figure 1: Stage Scores of In-Tradition Members and Deconverts for Tension and No-Tension Groups (cf. Streib et al., 2009, p. 102).

In terms of groups and their relation to society, the no-tension (integrated) religious organizations show a stronger presence of Stage Three (Germany: 80.0 %; United States: 90.0 %). This could reflect a difference between tension and no-tension groups: members in integrated religious organization may tend to be more conventional and need less individuative reflection than members of

religious groups which are in tension with their host culture. Oppositional and accommodating attitudes may require more explicit reasoning and argumentative justification. The majority of in-tradition members in both cultures and in both tension groups show Stage Three orientations. This appears to be the characteristic of in-tradition groups, while Stage Four assignments are the minority.

In contrast, Stage Four orientations apparently are more frequent among deconverts and amount to about 50 %. In Tom's and other cases we observed indicators of synthetic-conventional or individuating-reflective structures, together with indicators of mythic-literal orientations in the interview texts. Tom belongs, moreover, to a segment of respondents whose faith development interviews are assigned to Stage Three or above, but who showed a strong fundamentalist orientation: Of all interviewees whose faith development interview was assigned Stage Three, 26.5 % agree and 4.2 % strongly agree to the fundamentalist statements on the Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RF; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992).

The deconverts in both cultures in general have higher faith development scores than the in-tradition members. (Streib et al., 2009, p. 104). When discussing Franz's scores, we have seen however that the faith development score of a particular deconvert can be lower than that of the in-tradition members of the respective group the deconvert has left.

### Personality, Well-being, and Fundamentalism

For the quantitative personality assessment of deconverts and members we used the Five-Factor Model ("Big Five", consisting of extraversion, openness, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness) in its current (revised) NEO-FFI version (Costa & McCrae, 1985) for which an official German translation is available (Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1993; Streib et al., 2009, p. 59). This model has been defined as a broad internal dimensional spectrum of personality, which accounts for general consistencies in behavior, thought, and feeling observed across situations (McAdams & Olson, 2010, p. 519). In the German sub-sample the deconverts significantly differed on all subscales of the Big Five. Openness to experience was higher for deconverts while all other subscales of the Big Five were lower. (Streib et al., 2009, p. 75). Openness to experience also accounted for differences in the US sample. While this finding parallels that of Germany with respect to the openness to experience measure, it is radically different in that, unlike German deconverts, American deconverts do not significantly differ from American members on any of the other four subscales of the Big Five (Streib et al., 2009, p. 76). These results lie in the direction of expectations.

Table 1: Big Five personality profiles for deconverts and in-tradition members in Germany and the U.S. (cf. Streib et al., 2009, p. 74)

	Germany				USA			
	In-Tradition		Deconvert		In-Tradition		Deconvert	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
	n=368		n=53*		n=658		n=66	
Big Five Personality Factors								
<i>Emotional Stabil.</i>	41.66	7.07	<b>35.43</b>	<b>10.15</b>	39.28	7.61	41.26	6.65
<i>Extraversion</i>	40.57	5.75	<b>38.23</b>	<b>7.52</b>	42.73	6.12	42.08	7.30
<i>Openness</i>	41.22	5.82	<b>46.00</b>	<b>5.75</b>	38.63	6.24	<b>46.91</b>	<b>6.00</b>
<i>Agreeableness</i>	46.34	4.82	<b>44.15</b>	<b>5.57</b>	43.20	5.81	44.29	5.07
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	45.26	6.03	<b>41.30</b>	<b>7.23</b>	43.55	6.07	42.74	6.06
Psychological Well-Being and Growth	N=367		N=53*		N=660		N=66	
<i>Well-Being (total)</i>	204.63	19.02	<b>194.09</b>	<b>27.15</b>	200.58	23.31	<b>210.49</b>	<b>19.57</b>
<i>Autonomy</i>	31.66	4.47	32.60	4.97	32.20	4.76	<b>35.56</b>	<b>4.32</b>
<i>Envir. Mastery</i>	33.61	4.59	<b>29.66</b>	<b>6.74</b>	32.16	4.87	32.55	4.58
<i>Positive Relations</i>	34.98	4.26	<b>31.98</b>	<b>6.19</b>	34.05	5.53	34.03	5.63
<i>Purpose in Life</i>	35.09	4.09	<b>32.28</b>	<b>5.06</b>	34.30	4.90	35.12	4.35
<i>Self-Acceptance</i>	34.27	4.52	<b>31.09</b>	<b>7.34</b>	33.46	5.10	35.02	4.67
<i>Personal Growth</i>	35.05	4.18	36.47	4.14	34.38	4.56	<b>38.08</b>	<b>4.46</b>
Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism								
	N=363		N=53*		N=657		N=66	
<i>RF</i>	61.15	17.17	<b>42.55</b>	<b>16.31</b>	61.89	15.01	<b>40.79</b>	<b>14.49</b>
	N=363		N=53*		N=655		N=65	
<i>RWA</i>	79.28	19.93	<b>60.86</b>	<b>17.52</b>	89.36	18.07	<b>61.17</b>	<b>19.86</b>

\* Due to the sensitive subject we explored we do not have all types of data from all focus persons. Therefore, we have quantitative data for 119 (53/66) deconverts while we have 99 interviews of deconverts.

We also included C. Ryff's scale of Psychological Well-Being and Growth (Ryff & Singer, 1996) as a multidimensional measure of development. The Well-Being and Growth Scale was first developed by C. Ryff and B. H. Singer. The scale directly assesses six characteristics related to personal growth and well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998a, 1998b). The first is autonomy, which measures the extent to which an individual perceives himself or herself to be able to function independently of others. The second is environmental mastery or how well individuals adapt to and function in the world around them. The third is personal growth or the self-assessment of healthy psychological development

over time. The fourth characteristic is positive relationships with others. This taps into assessing how well people are able to form meaningful relationships. The fifth characteristic is purpose in life. This is an assessment of meaning often found through purposeful striving. The final characteristic of the Ryff-Scale is self-acceptance or how comfortable one is with one's self. We suggest viewing differences in the dimensions of the Ryff-Scale between deconverts and in-tradition members in order to reflect changes in self-reported well-being as a function of deconversion. However, we are aware that to test this hypothesis directly would afford a prospective design.

On the Ryff-Scale, the deconverts for our German sample score lower on the total scale and lower on four subscales (environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance). However, they do not differ significantly from in-tradition members in autonomy or personal growth (Streib et al., 2009, p. 75). In contrast, compared to members, U.S. deconverts score higher on the total Ryff-Scale, which is accounted for largely by the subscales autonomy and personal growth (Streib et al., 2009, p. 76).

As measures of religious fundamentalism and authoritarianism we selected the Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RF) and the Right-wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA; cf. Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, for both scales). As expected, deconverts score significantly lower on these scales, compared to members, making our cases exceptions (see below).

Summarizing the comparison of deconverts and members in Germany and the United States on the measures displayed we see: Deconversion in Germany is characterized by higher openness, and lower extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Also, self-ratings of psychological well-being display lower scores in purpose in life, self-acceptance, positive relations and environmental mastery. These differences were interpreted as developmental gains and losses involved in deconversion in the German sample.

In the United States by contrast, deconversion is mainly associated with openness from the Big Five, and with personal growth and autonomy as measured by the appropriate subscales of Ryff's measure of psychological well-being. German and American deconverts score considerably lower on Religious Fundamentalism (Streib et al., 2009, pp. 75–76).

Triangulation: Single trajectories, individual and group-related quantitative profiles

Finally, we compare Franz' and Tom's individual quantitative profiles with those of current members in their respective religious groups and triangulate them with the trajectories reconstructed from the narratives.

Franz scores significantly lower on emotional stability and extraversion from the Big Five, and comparable to current members on openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. His scores on all the well-being scales are also significantly lower than those of current members. His scores on the religious fundamentalism scale are lower than the mean for in-tradition members, but higher when compared to other deconverts; and his scores on right-wing authoritarianism are even higher than for current in-tradition members. This may imply that for him deconversion, at least at the time of the interview, involved a loss rather than a gain. This profile corresponds to the interview data, which reveal vulnerability regarding his outlook on his situation as well as rigidity of judgment.

Table 2: Single case questionnaire data of Franz compared to In-Tradition members of oppositional and accommodating groups in Germany (cf. Streib et al., 2009, pp. 78 and 159)

	Single Case Questionnaire Data of Franz	In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in Germany ( $n = 215$ )	
		Mean	SD
<b>Big Five Personality Factors</b>			
<i>Emotional Stabil.</i>	<b>23.00</b>	42.25	6.77
<i>Extraversion</i>	<b>25.00</b>	40.87	5.71
<i>Openness</i>	<b>40.00</b>	40.65	6.04
<i>Agreeableness</i>	<b>44.00</b>	46.79	4.48
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	<b>42.00</b>	45.17	6.15
<b>Psychological Well-Being and Growth</b>			
<i>Well-Being (total)</i>	<b>137.00</b>	204.99	18.74
<i>Autonomy</i>	<b>34.00</b>	31.51	4.52
<i>Envir. Mastery</i>	<b>22.00</b>	33.62	4.66
<i>Positive Relations</i>	<b>22.00</b>	35.40	4.04
<i>Purpose in Life</i>	<b>21.00</b>	35.34	3.92
<i>Self-Acceptance</i>	<b>16.00</b>	34.18	4.48
<i>Personal Growth</i>	<b>22.00</b>	34.93	3.91
<b>Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism</b>			
<i>RF</i>	<b>53.00</b>	68.00	14.67
<i>RWA</i>	<b>95.00</b>	84.37	18.76



For Tom the comparison with current members looks different:

Table 3: Single case questionnaire data of Tom compared to In-Tradition members of oppositional and accommodating groups in the USA (cf. Streib et al., 2009, pp. 78 and 203)

Single Case Questionnaire Data of Tom		In-Tradition Members in Oppositional and Accommodating Religious Organizations in the U. S. ( $n = 357$ )	
		Mean	SD
<b>Big Five Personality Factors</b>			
<i>Emotional Stabil.</i>	<b>30.00</b>	39.30	8.16
<i>Extraversion</i>	<b>26.00</b>	42.62	6.36
<i>Openness</i>	<b>50.00</b>	39.22	6.21
<i>Agreeableness</i>	<b>50.00</b>	43.32	6.01
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	<b>40.00</b>	43.40	6.22
<b>Psychological Well-Being and Growth</b>			
<i>Well-Being (total)</i>	<b>230.00</b>	200.45	24.58
<i>Autonomy</i>	<b>43.00</b>	32.28	4.86
<i>Envir. Mastery</i>	<b>31.00</b>	32.09	5.18
<i>Positive Relations</i>	<b>37.00</b>	34.08	5.61
<i>Purpose in Life</i>	<b>38.00</b>	34.20	5.08
<i>Self-Acceptance</i>	<b>40.00</b>	33.34	5.36
<i>Personal Growth</i>	<b>41.00</b>	34.36	4.60
<b>Fundamentalism/Authoritarianism</b>			
<i>RF</i>	<b>53.00</b>	59.73	15.85
<i>RWA</i>	<b>91.00</b>	87.29	18.96

Tom's higher scores on openness make him different from current members. He scores also higher on well-being in general, in particular on autonomy and personal growth, which may imply that his deconversion brought more gains than losses. His scores on fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism are not very different from those of current members. This corresponds to his fundamentalist religious attitude, which was apparent in the interviews, together with his open and reflective stance.

There may be a cultural aspect to the differences between Tom's and Franz' deconversions: In the USA, the majority of the population believe in God, there is a tradition of religious freedom, and a deconvert finds a multitude of religious alternatives. In Germany, the Catholic and the Protestant Churches are or-

ganized close to state institutions, and they dominate the religious field. Therefore, in Germany a move toward a tension group, like Jehova's Witnesses, means a move further away from the mainstream of society. Moving back, after deconversion, into the cultural mainstream may consequently involve more of an effort.

## Conclusion

We have contrasted two deconversion trajectories, one from Germany, one from the United States. While Tom and Franz both deconverted from Jehova's Witnesses after three decades of membership, their trajectories show similarities as well as differences. When comparing Tom and Franz from a structural faith development perspective, we see Franz making a lateral, Tom making a structural deconversion. Franz's religious style stays predominantly instrumental-reciprocal, Tom shows a heterodyning of styles, with even a dialogical style in the foreground, when he reflects on personal relationships. When it comes to his religion, however, a strong foundation in instrumental-reciprocal and mutual styles appears. The traditional analytic perspectives highlight different compensatory aspects of conversion as well as transformational aspects of deconversion. From a relational view, modes of relating to the transcendent can be described as follows: for Franz, intersubjectivity appears to present a challenge, while shared affectivity may pose a developmental task for Tom. Mentalization seems to be available for Tom, excepting aspects of his religious life. In this dimension of his life, he relies on the truth of scripture. Franz shows indications of a mode of psychic equivalence, especially, but not only, when discussing religion. The quantitative data exploring personality and psychological well-being correspond to these results, displaying for Tom openness along with fundamentalism, and, for Franz, a profile suggesting losses upon deconversion.

## Further Perspectives

When does deconversion involve transformation? From a psychological perspective, amelioration of suffering, or realization of the potential of an individual are important criteria with respect to individual development and transformation. Standardized measures allow the comparison of deconverts and members with reference to dimensions of personality and psychological well-being. Psychodynamic models highlight different aspects of religious affiliation as well as disaffiliation. Current models introduce a hierarchy of modes, or outline the developmental trajectory toward mentalization. These concepts,

measures and theories deserve to be considered for interdisciplinary dialogue with theology and philosophy of religion – a dialogue, which should integrate the perspectives of individual development with that of social and historical development, including the development of religious organizations and doctrine. Exploring the interface of individual and social development, longitudinal studies are needed as well as reflections on transformations of theoretical perspectives and their contexts.

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## **Part II: Religious and Spiritual Meaning, Well-being and Coping**



## What is it Like to Feel Good in this World? The Several Meanings of Religious Well-being

### Introduction

“What is it like to be a person?” (Mininni, 2010; Spaemann, 1996). Alongside efforts to find a solution to the thorny body-mind problem, the attempt to answer this question can be considered a genuine/true turning point in the theoretical and epistemological debates which have animated psychology since its origins. Inasmuch as it offers a “nowhere perspective” on social reality, Thomas Nagel’s original provocation, “what is it like to be a bat?” (1974), cued a direct critique of the nomothetic perspective in psychology. Just as discovering the neurophysiology of a bat cannot determine what it is like to be a bat, so psychology as a “hard science” precludes any understanding of the diversity of subjective experience, which is exclusively transacted from a “particular” point of view. The difference between nomothetic and idiographic stances (Windelband, 1914) in psychology cannot be grasped simply in terms of their respective “objects”, but rather in terms of their “attitudes”. They have different aims: the nomothetic approach seeks to establish general laws, while the idiographic approach endeavors to describe phenomena in their uniqueness. Likewise, they move along different methodological paths: the methodological course of the nomothetic approach employs quantitative methods based on hypothetical-deductive reasoning, while the idiographic approach employs qualitative procedures which rely on abductive logic. In a similar vein, Bachtin (1979) explains the distance between the “hard” and the “soft” sciences defining them respectively as “monological” (i.e. the investigative subject of natural science over against a mute object) and “dialogical” (i.e. the human sciences in which the object of the investigation is also subject with a voice).

In time, the hard, nomothetic and monological approach became mainstream in psychology and in the psychology of religion, thanks to research which offered generalizing and reliable results. However, the heart of the soft, idiographic and dialogical side continues to beat, and to vie for subjectivity and meaning. In



particular, it focuses on religiosity as the strictly personal relation which every person can establish with religious figures and/or institutions.

Dealing with “religion” and “meaning” requires one to be actively involved in these debates, to take a position and to coherently apply the epistemological and theoretical frame to the methodological structure.

## Debates on Meaning...

Crystal Park (2005; 2010) offers one of the most interesting perspectives on the relationship between religion and meaning. In her reflection and definition of religion, she combines two important claims. Her first claim is the enlightening intuition of Baumeister concerning the centrality of meaning in psychology and, as a consequence, the importance of religion, which offers “high-level meaning to human life” (Baumeister, 1991, p. 205) in the best and most reliable way. In other words, the essence of faith can be found in the “ultimate concerns” (Tillich, 1957) of human life.

Park’s second claim is the idea that religions act as both common and special systems of meaning (Silberman, 2005). Like other systems, religion can be acquired, developed and modified by “accommodating” its postulates to external phenomena which might weaken them. This is a necessary property of religious systems of meaning insofar as it allows them to cope with the “excess of sense” (Pace, 2008, p. 57) coming from reality. Nevertheless, because of the questions it attempts to answer – concerning the events of creation and the end of the world – religion remains quite different from other systems. Religion is also distinct from other systems in terms of “quality”, inasmuch as it facilitates the search for a way forward when the usual coping strategies are no longer effective.

Park offers two strategies for conceptualizing meaning: the global meaning and the meaning-making process. The reflection on global meaning (Park & Folkman, 1997) highlights three aspects in the person’s general system of orientation: *global beliefs* make up the cognitive component of this system, and as worldviews which deal with fairness, justice, coherence, benevolence and so on, they provide believers with core schemas for interpreting human experience (Mischel & Morf, 2003). *Global goals* constitute the motivational component of the system, arranging into hierarchies the ideals and states considered worthy of achievement or maintenance (Karoly, 1999), thus orienting activities and behaviors. A subjective *sense of meaning*, i.e. the feeling of having purpose or direction in life, regardless of the actual attainment of the goals or states deemed to be worthy, makes up the affective aspect of the system (Klinger, 1977).

The meaning-making process is anchored to reflection about situational meaning, that is, “meaning in the context of a particular environmental en-

counter” (Park, 2010, p. 258). When a potentially traumatic event occurs, a set of processes and outcomes is activated (cfr. Park, 2010): an assignment of meaning to the event, an assessment of the gap between appraised and global meaning, meaning making (the efforts to reduce the perceived discrepancy between appraised and global meaning (Joseph & Linley, 2005)), meanings made and adjustment to the event.

The relation between the above mentioned two reflections should highlight the centrality not only of interpretation, but also of the *interpreter*, and acknowledge the “co-constructive circularity between sense-making and sense-maker” (Salvatore & Valsiner, 2008). This circularity is a fundamental process in idiographic psychology, hermeneutical perspectives, psychology of meaning and qualitative research. The work of each interpreter is complex, inasmuch as she/he can move within three wide frameworks which may be labelled as ‘meaning’, ‘sense’ and ‘significance’. These terms describe a continuum which extends from maximum conventional agreement in activities of codification-decodification (meaning) to maximum intentional uncertainty (which is peculiar to the act of writing (significance)), passing through the intermediate state of ‘sense’, which intercepts additional significances given in the situational context and specific meanings. The human being, as *animal symbolicum*, manages codified information and adapts them to the infinite variability of situations of enunciation. Thus, his/her experience is articulated between *sense making* (which emphasizes the dynamic and organizational nature of sense production and management) and *sense-giving* (which focuses on the “same *act* that *makes* reality” (Gargani, 2005, p. 83)). Since “giving of sense” requires additional elaborations, inasmuch as the process activates a possible world, each religious form of life can be seen as a “system of communication” (Pace, 2008; Scardigno, 2010) which is materialized in narrative attempts to offer commandments, precepts and rules. Religions, like cultures (Benhabib, 2002), are “reservoirs of stories” (Belzen, 1999) which are “shared”, via the passage from the unutterable to the spoken word, through a person who functions as the medium between God and human beings. Furthermore, in answer to the need to put down on paper that which has been heard, these stories are “negotiated” for the sake their preservation in the archive of memory. This is not a shift from the “living” to the “dead” word. In fact, written texts are continuously questioned and interpreted. They become “contested” stories.

### ...and Debates on Well-being

Within the circle of the social process of sense-making and sense-giving, religions function as “lenses” (McIntosh, 1995) which allow believers to read, in-

interpret and act upon reality. In accordance with the theory of the global meaning system (cf. par. 1), attribution of meanings, positive emotions, encouraging beliefs and constructive aims (deriving from religious principles, goals and a subjective sense of meaning) can mediate the relationship between religiosity and well-being (cf. Park, 2005).

Over the years, several studies have revealed a positive correlation between religious belonging/practice and mental and physical health, especially in adult and later stages of life. The main factors in this correlation are (Jones, 2004):

- a) relaxation and other psychological effects (Benson, 1996) produced by particular practices – e.g. meditation, prayer, contemplative activities;
- b) influence on individual behaviors and life styles, e.g. reduced commitment to unhealthy conduct, social deviant nets or immoral activities. These negative behaviors are neglected for several reasons: the internalization of norms and moral rules, the fear of eventual divine punishment or of social sanctions. In the latter case, fear is related to the need for social appropriation from the community to which one belongs (Ellison et al., 2001);
- c) social support: sharing interests with other members of the community produces a feeling of satisfaction coming from the perception of spiritual and emotional support offered by the peers and the clergy (Krause et al., 2001). In addition, by allowing believers to feel embedded in a “religious lineage” (in a way that is similar way to the “filial line”) (Saroglou, 2003), life inside a religious community fulfills the need for continuity and affiliation;
- d) the integrative frame carried out by religious beliefs: religious beliefs make possible the construction of a sense of consistency that reduces the potential disputes in a person’s overall goal system (Emmons, 1999) and facilitates the experience of life as meaningful, with a positive outlook, oriented to the future (Antonovsky, 1987);
- e) the perception of self as deserving of trust and love: this idea is not just the outcome of social support; rather, it comes from relationship with a higher Being who/which is seen as helpful, full of love and goodness. As a consequence, self-esteem can be empowered.

In short, the religious form of life acts as a powerful resource of meaning in trying situations: religious beliefs play a fundamental role when personal resources which usually suffice to cope with misadventures are in jeopardy (Pargament, 1997).

On the other hand, stressful situations can be further embittered by religiosity: actions which are not in line with religious values, inasmuch as they result in reduced social support and, in particular situations, explicit condemnation by religious leaders, can cause believers to experience social stigmatization and deep feelings of shame (Strawbridge et al., 1998). Thus, con-

tinity and affiliation have a dreaded flip-side insofar as they are associated with traditional values and conformity. As a consequence, believers can show conservative dispositions and exhibit strong authoritarian traits (Saroglou, 2003).

So, debates about the (positive or negative?) effects of religious affiliation come upon the most familiar, and the most frustrating answer for psychologists: “*it depends*” (Pargament, 2002, p. 168). Religious affiliation cannot at all be viewed as a steady and undifferentiated process that is either good or bad. In fact, the “happiness” of religious experience varies in accordance with:

- a) the kind of religiosity: Religiosity can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Allport & Ross, 1967) – religion as “means” or as the “end” –, internalized or introjected (Ryan et al., 1993). It can be the outcome of a personal choice or of external pressures;
- b) the criteria of well-being: Whereas in most studies a reduced number of (not always shared) aspects is used, well-being is a construct composed of multiple dimensions and nuances. As a consequence, the relation between religion and well-being depends on how the criteria of well-being is defined and operationalized;
- c) persons and contexts: Historically, religions represented an indefeasible resource of strength and hope for subordinate groups, that is, for those who, having no power (or economic and social influence), can gain a sense of “social compensation”. Moreover, subjective differences are related to the level of religiosity, so that higher effects should be found among the “most religious” persons (Krause et al., 1998);
- d) the degree of integration of religiosity in persons’ lives. Integration is the fine-tuning of beliefs-motivations and practices-relations, and is to be contrasted to those who do not practice what they preach.

The variety of factors involved requires avoiding over-simple and stereotypical conclusions. The fruits of religiosity can be “bitter and sweet” (Pargament, 2002, p. 178). As a consequence, the question about the efficacy of religiosity can be formulated in a more comprehensive and appropriate way: “How helpful or harmful are particular forms of religious expression for particular people dealing with particular situations in particular social contexts according to particular criteria of helpfulness or harmfulness?” (Idem, 168).

The repetition of the word ‘particular’ suggests that the above presented theoretical proposals and studies neglected to investigate the role of religion as a holistic support for the construction of subjective and idiographic paths to well-being. By virtue of their (much neglected) heterogeneity, the dimensions of such constructions can be investigated at the boundaries of existential feelings (Mininni & Manuti, 2008).

In addition, the “otherness” which is considered by the idiographic per-

spective to be the truly fundamental dimension of the construction of the self – as Bachtin remarks, everything comes from the other, even our name – requires the consideration of several forms of intersubjectivity (Mininni, 2010). In particular, the intercultural dimension (Mantovani, 2008) also plays an important role in better understanding certain potentialities and practical implications of cultural and religious filters in the experience of life and well-being. Such an interest in practical implications is not based on a “deterministic” perspective (close to cross-cultural psychology (cf. Berry et al., 1997)) which postulates that cultural affiliation can determine one’s way of perceiving life experiences. On the contrary, intercultural psychology can be defined as “utopia, method and process”: it is not a mere call to goodwill; rather, it accepts a certain “amount of new interbreeding and socio-cultural synthesis” (Giménez, 2008, p. 166) in order to catch not only what is different, but also what is common. This means that it should work as a praxis generative of equality and freedom in the study of individual or collective subjects (Giménez, 2003). In the space of interaction between “particular we” and “particular they” (Geertz, 1973), cultures recover their dynamic and situated features as well as their focus on people’s needs and interests (Mantovani, 2007).

Against this multifarious theoretical background, and in accordance with a critical and cultural perspective in psychology, the theoretical research question which connects religion, meaning and well-being becomes “what is it like to feel good in this world”?

## The Research

### Aims

The overall object of this research is to investigate the manner in which the meanings offered by religious affiliation undergird the everyday life of adult persons. Work, family and extra-familial activities are the contexts in which generativity (Erikson, 1982) can be acted out, as persons can play their role in guaranteeing social and cultural continuity. Second, acknowledged, particular and situated relations between religious commitment and personal experience allow us to investigate the discursive construction of religious positioning, and to deepen the different meanings of well-being in accordance with different religious pathways. Acting as systems of meaning that organize repertoires of beliefs, aims and feelings, religions offer screens for interpreting and giving sense to events on both esthetic (“beautiful” or “ugly”) and moral (“good” or “bad”) axes.

In this exploratory research, we noted heterogeneous ways of relying on religiosity as a resource for evolutionary challenges. Furthermore, in our research we pointed out meaning-making pathways in accordance with specific values and beliefs postulated by the various forms of life. The meanings produced are oriented toward different feelings about what “well-being” is (Mininni & Manuti, 2008).

### Participants

This research involved 50 young adult and adult believers, age 25 to 58, coming either from stable religious groups (Catholic and immigrant Tamil Hindu adults), or from a religious shift (conversion to the Soka Gakkai Buddhism or to a vocation in a Franciscan community). The second group implied a clearer “transformation” on a religious path: *calling* demanded the full devotion of one’s life to religion, and *conversion* required one to embrace a new form of life while changing one’s own religious beliefs, values and practices.

Specifically, religious continuity was exemplified by 14 Catholics (4 males and 7 females) and 8 Tamil Hindus (4 males and 4 females), while religious change was illustrated by 17 Franciscan monks and nuns (9 males and 8 females) and 13 Buddhists (5 males, 8 females from the Italian Buddhist Institute Soka Gakkai).

### Methodology

We conducted 10 focus group discussions (Zammuner, 2003) in the four different contexts (2 discussions for each community with the exception of the Franciscans, where 4 discussions took place). Before the discussions, a phase of familiarization (Thomas, 2004) took place: this entailed meeting the spiritual leaders, the believers, and clarifying that the meeting houses were necessary starting points for learning the features of (group)specific language, as well as for acquiring a basic understanding of the religious setting (values, beliefs and rituals). Discussions were held in rooms offered by the communities and followed a semi-structured outline. Questions had an overturned-pyramid orientation so as to first investigate the overall religious experience, and then move on to more and more specific subjective feelings.

## Analytical Procedures

The focus group discussions were transcribed and then analyzed by means of Content Analysis (CA) and Discourse Analysis (DA). CA was carried out through T-Lab (Lancia, 2004), text analysis software that focuses on the occurrences (how many times each lexical unit occurs in each context unit) and co-occurrences (the number of elementary contexts in which each lexical unit appears with every other word) of words.

DA is considered to be the primary way of pointing out the several “cultures of expression” which emerge in different religious contexts (Kleinman, 1988). DA tries to deepen the dynamic talk-in-interaction procedures and elaborates subjective, polyphonic and unsystematic perspectives.

The sense of each discourse can be fully understood if it is analyzed in relation to its explicit and implicit contexts (Slama Cazacu, 1959/1961). Thus, the deep sense both of well-being and of religious experience can be grasped in the dynamic and reciprocal relations between narrations and explicit (religious) as well as implicit (subjective) experiences. In order to gain access these deep relations we grounded DA on the psychosemiotic device named “diatext”. Diatext is “the context as it is perceived by the enunciators of the text, as they imagine it and show that they take it into account” (Mininni, 1992, p. 63). Diatextual analysis is based on the assumption that sense does not reside permanently within texts, but rather passes through them as a result of the joint action of enunciators who negotiate the frame of the situation (*stake*) which they are actively involved in. Thus, sense can be grasped by answering three basic questions: *Who says it? Why does she/he say it? How does she/he say it?* These questions organize the interpretative procedures of the “SAM Model” (Mininni et al., 2008), inasmuch as they suggest looking for a series of markers which indicate:

- 1) *Subjectivity* – the way the text speaks of its subjects, in particular the images the enunciator elaborates of her/himself and of others;
- 2) *Argumentativity* – the axis of semiotic pertinence which allows the discourse to articulate arguments, that is to organize “meanings why”, and to give voice to reasons and aims as to why one says something;
- 3) *Modality* – the articulation of the “*dictum*” and of the “*modus*” of discourse that shapes meaning and enables texts to acquire a “*Gestalt* quality” which can be evaluated as “good” or “bad”, “nice” or “awful”, “effective” or “insipid” etc.

## Main Results

“What” Well-being is...

As cultural psychology claims, both life and religious experiences are shaped more by variety than by similarity. This is tied not only to the macro-cultural belonging, but also to the indefinite micro-cultural commitments that materialize in the wide range of microcosms where persons interact and co-construct meanings and beliefs. So, the religious dimension can be better understood if it is considered as a holder of values that are shared on a macro-level while being contextualized on a micro-level in the believers' lives. One person reaffirms the cosmos in which she/he was born; while another refuses her/his original niche and enacts a religious *switch* (Hill, 2004), moving toward unknown scenarios. The analysis of specificity offered by T-Lab enables the comparison of the preferred semantic fields among believers belonging to the same community.

For instance, the lexicon of the Catholic subgroup inspires a “quiet” atmosphere: the words ‘serenity’, ‘peaceful’, ‘smile’, ‘quiet’ and ‘good’ (stressed as typical of this community) construct such an atmosphere. The usage of family roles – ‘husband’, ‘wife’, ‘children’, ‘mother’ –, as well as the personal pronouns ‘you’ and ‘me’, and the nouns ‘couple’ and ‘marriage’, emphasizes the centrality of the relational domain in connection with religiosity. Even if Catholics experience a continuous path, their faith can, nevertheless, encounter with troubles: the phrases ‘keep holding on’, ‘to go on’, ‘to cry’ suggest the presence of difficult situations. At any rate, such troubles can be faced by the same faith, as suggested by the term ‘rediscovery’, which implies a renewed commitment in opposition to a fixed religiosity.

As for the other community characterized by continuity (the Tamils), their experience cannot be analyzed apart from the contextual jolt they received as immigrants: the words ‘Italy’, ‘island’, ‘culture’ and ‘Mauritius’ testify to this jolt. In addition, the terms ‘you’ (as second person plural pronoun) and ‘we’ testify to comparison in relation to several domains. The Hindu experience appears to be anchored to three essential cores: religion, work and family. Religiosity is acted out in the ‘church’, where both ordinary activities (‘prayers’) and collective meetings (‘parties’, ‘Sundays’) take place. In the working context great importance is attached to ‘trust’ and ‘sacrifice’, whereas in family life there are many references to roles (‘relative’, ‘parents’, ‘children’, ‘father’). A significant feature is the group dimension as highlighted by the words ‘together’, ‘our’, ‘we’, ‘every one of us’.

The Franciscan group makes use of a highly value-oriented lexicon: many abstract substantives –such as ‘well-being’, ‘love’, ‘peace’, ‘faith’, ‘truth’ – reveal the mixing between religious beliefs and philanthropic attitudes. Along with



terms referring to their dynamic pathway ('way', 'to try', 'to come'), others show their agency ('choice', 'will'), and also the value of current life ('community' and 'brotherhood'). The words (typical of this group) 'Lord', 'God', 'prayer' and 'Jesus' reveal the founding elements of their community life, while the terms 'to love', 'listening', 'welcome' testify their concrete application to everyday life.

Unlike the Franciscans, the converts to Buddhism reveal a clear preference for practical experience: 'practice', 'problem', 'to solve', 'to face', 'action' and 'ability' are just some examples of this leaning. In addition, their vocabulary is oriented toward achievement and change, being emphasized by the words 'to transform', 'aim', 'to become', 'fight'.

These specific interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1995) offered by the analysis of specificities can be further explored through some associative nets emerging from the "words association" (Lancia, 2004). In particular, in accordance with the role of religions as filters and lens in the sense-making process, we can investigate what the groups say about "well-being".

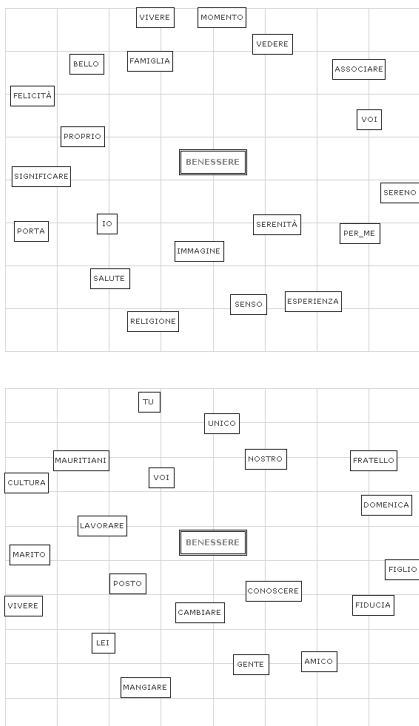


Fig. 1 and 2: Associations of words related to the word 'well-being' in the Catholic and Hindu groups

While the Catholic believers (fig. 1) relate the concept of “well-being” to the words ‘peacefulness’ (‘serenità’), ‘health’ (‘salute’), ‘family’ (‘famiglia’) and ‘happiness’ (‘felicità’), the Hindus (fig. 2) describe a less calm feeling, as suggested by the associations with ‘to change’ (‘cambiare’), ‘to know’ (‘conoscere’), ‘to work’ (‘lavorare’), ‘to eat’ (‘mangiare’). Alongside these needs, typical of their immigrant status, there are more abstract references, as highlighted by the term ‘confidence’ (‘fiducia’) and by words coming from the cultural-familiar domain.

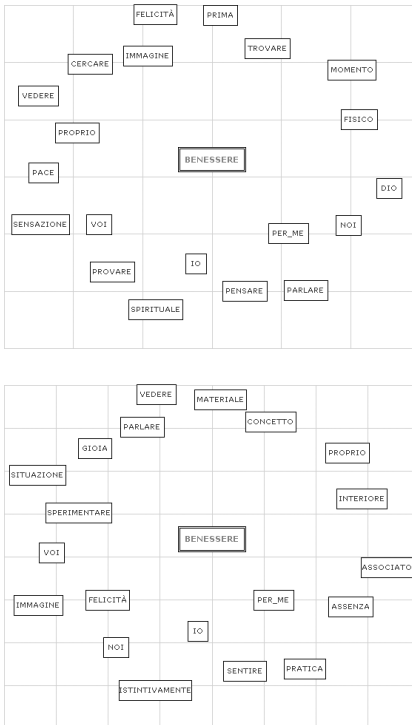


Fig. 3 and 4: Associations of words related to the word ‘well-being’ in the Franciscan and Buddhist groups

In the Franciscan context (fig. 3) “well-being” is related to abstract terms such as ‘peace’ (‘pace’) and happiness (‘felicità’), to spirituality and to verbs revealing an unfixed connotation – ‘to look for’ (‘cercare’), ‘to try’ (‘provare’), ‘to find’ (‘trovare’), ‘to think’ (‘pensare’) and ‘to speak’ (‘parlare’). The Buddhist group (fig. 4) stresses the experiential dimension: ‘to experience’ (‘sperimentare’), ‘to feel’ (‘sentire’), ‘situation’ (‘situazione’), ‘instinctively’ (‘istintivamente’); and the composite feature of well-being, presented simultaneously as ‘internal’ (‘interiore’) and ‘material’ (‘materiale’).

In conclusion, content analysis has an important function, since it can say something about what persons think about their religious experience and their well-being. Thus, it constitutes an important step for analyzing the meaning-making process. However, in the discursive perspective, it is merely a preliminary kind of analysis, since it is based on the correct but sometimes reductive hypothesis of the correspondence between manifest and the latent content. Discourse analysis can offer an in-depth, more holistic and contextualized analysis of the meaning-making processes. Consequently, it can aid the understanding, not only of “what” is said, but also of “how” something is said.

...and “How” Well-being is

The meanings of religious experience, and the concept of well-being, can be better understood by means of diatextual analysis, inasmuch as it enables us to investigate: how persons discursively construct their commitment to and positioning toward the religious sphere, their subjective way of viewing themselves, the context, and the dynamic interactions between enunciator and contexts. The discursive texture of the four religious forms of life allows us to position the subjective feeling (and experience) of well-being at the poles of the enunciative positioning of *embrayage* (I-here-now) and *débrayage* (not I-not here-not now). In this way, different chronotopes (Bachtin, 1975) about well-being can be organized. The different discursive styles cannot really be positioned “at” these poles; rather, each person is closer to one of the two poles. On the basis of this preamble, the forms of “well-being” constructed by these believers can be defined as “here” (for the Catholic context), “now” (for the Buddhist community), “not here” (for the Tamil group), and “not now” (for the Franciscans).

Well-being: “Here”

The Catholic discourses construct the experience of faith as a constant feature: well-being is contextualized in the enunciated “here”, inasmuch as religiosity comes along with daily experiences, ordinary activities, common social interactions – e.g. “we can see the Lord every day in the friends’ and the intimate persons’ eyes” (M3, C). Even if it is not an immediate experience, the consistency of faith is guaranteed by both the verb ‘to see’ and the contextualization – ‘everyday’, ‘intimate’. Religion acting as a continuous resource allows the believers to effectively face troubles and unease.

Ex 1: Here it's not just keeping hold, here it's certain, it's certain that God helps you in several ways. He can't physically help you, but He lets you see. (M1, C)<sup>1</sup>

Ex 2: Since that bereavement, something much bigger was born. (F2, C)

These extracts share the contextualized references – 'here' and 'that', highlighting the commitment and the construction of a feeling of certainty. This interpretative repertoire is created by the repetition and the opposition in 1, and in 2 by the juxtaposition of "birth", a symbol of hope, and "bereavement", which is related to discouragement.

Another important focus of Catholic discourses is on "we": it is referred not just to the immediate contexts – such as family and work – but to every interpersonal relation. This communitarian sphere appears as the distinctive feature of this group, as it often marks the *enjeu* of discussions: phrases such as 'what He says to us' (F6, C), 'our religion sees well-being as [...]' (F3, C) and 'this is what He asks of us' (F7, C), emphasize the sense of belonging and legitimate what is said.

Ex 3:

F7. Then, in effect, think about, if you live well with the outsiders, it's obvious that you can live well for yourself as well as with insiders.

The meta-discursive forms – 'then', 'in effect', 'it's obvious that' – contribute to construct a relationship of cause and effect between the well-being of others and one's own well-being. In addition, the use of the singular second person enables the conversation to gain a more concrete and involving dimension.

However, even if they have some traits in common, Catholics nevertheless articulate various existential pathways, as well as several ways to relate with God:

- a) for example, a reverential attitude which presents God as a "judge", articulated by certain (especially female) expressions, such as 'in front of God', 'God doesn't admit this', 'now they live in sin in front of God' (F1, C);
- b) an emotional disposition, that testifies to the internalization of several attributes of God, who is seen not only as a "judge" but also as "benevolent". This frame also allows unexpected discursive forms, such as dialectal phrases. Far from being irreverent, they can enlighten a whole discourse with simplicity in the way of metaphorical and common expressions – e.g., 'we lived a week in God's shoes' (F7, C), 'it was a place where Christ is dead' (F2, C);
- c) a critical attitude (meaning a self-conscious religiosity), in opposition to mere cultural indoctrination. In accordance with the meaning-making

1 Each extract is followed by the explication of the group (C for Catholics, I for Hindus, B for Buddhists, F for Franciscans), of the gender (M for male and F for female) as well as of the participant (each person was identified by a number from 1 to 9).

model, across a lifespan, persons can experience situations that are not consistent with their system of meanings. As a consequence, they can experience either distrust or a strong negativity. This is the end of the story of a disappointed woman: “I grasped the Sister’s neck and I shouted ‘you’re a bastard!’. From then on I hate Sisters too” (F7, C). Even if Sisters are Catholic figures, they can be the addressees of unfriendly feelings.

Well-being: Not here

The atmosphere during the focus group discussions of the Hindu community was strongly characterized (more than any other) by a homely feeling: participants appeared as belonging to a single family whose members know and share their stories, who can read and can tell in advance what another person is about to say. In comparison with the other groups, the Hindu community had highest level of cohesion and agreement on the topics discussed and, as a consequence, the lowest levels of disunion and repairs. Usually, the taking of turns was characterized by either confirmation or extension of what was said by the “colleague” (how the men named each other during the discussion). In this direction, the main discursive clue is the inclusive “we” that can be referred either to the religious domain – “we-Hindus” – or to the nation – “we-Mauritians”. These are the two salient positions resulting from the experience of a situation of the double minority – ethnic and religious – which they shared as immigrants. In line with this situation, well-being is strictly related to the common life, family above all.

In this context, the image of the nuclear family is outstripped by a trans-generational dimension that also involves grandparents. The family attachment is enacted by a double *embrayage*: the first referring to the original family – “there and then” –, the second to the “here and now” family. The “remembered” family, having been the “lived” family, is a resource for well-being, representing a bridge to the mythical original reality.

In any case, the present family is the social cell where religious traditions, values, beliefs and practices can be transmitted.

Ex. 4: “We pray every day, but when we do it, we have to stay all together. We say our prayers, the ones we know; everything we learned from our parents, we have to teach to our children, otherwise tomorrow they won’t know anything about our religion and culture.” (M3, I)

Close behind the family, well-being is experienced in the community.

Ex 5: “and I feel good... just like now, even if I came a bit late, it doesn’t matter, but we all stay together, then we talk, we joke altogether.... For me, life is more beautiful with

everybody, whereas it's lonely at home... I feel a bit bad, because I know that there is prayer at the church, and I stay by myself... So, it's better if I stay here, all together."  
(M2, I)

The importance of religious community is exemplified by simple activities, such as talking and joking, as well as by the opposition between the positive connotation of "we"/"the church" and the negative connotation of "I"/"home". *Embrayage* (present verbs and particular references), affectivity ('a bit', 'more beautiful') and meta-discursive markers ('just like now', 'for me', 'so') emphasize subjective involvement.

Despite several efforts to experience well-being, it is hard to get it "here and now", since present life is marked by nostalgia. The symbol of characterization of well-being is "not here".

Ex. 6:

M4. You miss the family

M2. You miss them... as people say, for having bread it's necessary to go away from your country – it's so. (I)

Their life appears to be focused on survival rather than well-being: "bread" can be seen as a metonymy that exemplifies the basic condition for meeting fundamental human needs. The sense of "not here" is stressed also by the direct answer to the question about what is well-being: "Mauritius, since we were born there, and so...our land..." (F3, I).

In Hindu practice, religion is lived as communion and commitment. The fundamental faith practice is prayer. Its main functions are not comfort, support and thanksgiving – as for the Catholic group – rather, it aims to "ask for something". This feature may be the consequence of precarious living conditions, and highlights the role of prayer as a *coping* strategy (Pargament, 1997). In particular, its value varies depending on life priorities.

Ex. 7:

M1. First of all, when we pray... we first ask for health, courage and that we can be well, all together.

M2. Most of all...

M1. peace...

M2. For the one who is suffering more than us, He can give light, at least a meal for day. (I)

Ex 8:

F4. We pray God for health, so I can work...

F1. We don't ask for money, health is enough. (I)

The believers' claims concern concrete and basic requests, include community, and do not demand "too much". In addition, the meta-discursive expressions –

‘first of all’, ‘most of all’, ‘at least’ – emphasize the will to be satisfied. The importance of faith is expressed by certain metaphors:

Ex 9: by praying... we can find the light (M2, I)

Ex 10:

F1. You can see...

F3. You can feel...

F1. You can feel the big heart [smiling]. (I)

Males compare faith to the “light”, the essential tool which can direct and find the way in dark situations that can become frightening obstacles. Females evoke the “heart”, the symbolic seat of emotions. Both metaphors are based on sensations, namely, of sight and “feeling”.

Well-being: Now

The discourses of those who converted to Buddhism reveal that the religious “turn” and the adherence to a new form of life support the feeling of well-being “now”. The sense of conversion can be understood by two phrases: the first is “everyone has to flourish in the manner that is adequate to his own nature” (M1, B). This testifies and claims the concept of vocation – usually referred to priests and nuns – as a “natural guide” (Kling, 1959) in discovering that certain personality features can be better manifested by meeting particular religious or spiritual needs.

The second phrase is “from then on I never gave up”. This was repeated five times during the two discussions. This sentence highlights the radical turn, whereby the form “from then on” appears as a clear watershed between “before” and “then”, presenting the illocutionary strength of an oath of allegiance.

The strength of their discourses is expressed by both the lexicon and metaphors, as well as by the impersonal forms and the modals.

Ex 11: There is one thing that nobody can withhold: this deep... awareness and conviction that you have this... this weapon, that allows you to get through the sea of suffering. (F8, B)

Ex 12: First of all, it means to be the master of one’s own destiny and to know how to address it, not being overcome by disease and by the fear of death. (F8, B)

Faith is presented like a “weapon” whose significance is slightly different from the usual: it is useful in hard situations and it helps to avoid being swept away by events – a sensation transmitted by the metaphor of the “sea”.

In 12, self is represented as the “master”, in other cases as the “ruler”, of one’s own existence. Thus, the Self is self-sufficient and complete and, as a con-

sequence, does not need any Other. Also, the metaphor of “the fuel to grow up” (M3, B) enforces the sense of self-determination.

Argumentative and rhetorical strategies can depict the practice as a mere mass of “commandments” to be followed: discourses are often constructed by impersonal forms – ‘it’s having a tool for’, ‘many things can be understood’, ‘it’s necessary’ – and by modal verbs and adverbs – ‘you have to decide’, ‘we must do it’, ‘we absolutely have to find the way’. In addition, the lexicon appears to be very pragmatic – e. g., ‘to face and to overcome’, ‘to go on’, ‘to find’, ‘to act’ –. All of this can give encouragement to believers, since they are able to experience the Buddhist pinnacles in everyday life. The synthesis of this orientation is observable in one believer’s words: “it really works very well” (F7, B).

The meaning of well-being in this context is anchored to its holistic character: participants propose an all-embracing definition and avoid siding with or against partial positions.

Ex 13: In my advice, anyway, I mean well-being as getting satisfaction both on a material and on a spiritual level. (M1, B)

Ex 14: Well-being means to create value, to create value as Franco also claimed, doesn’t it? That is, to be fine with oneself, that is to develop his own self, that is to become better persons, probably more kind and more competent persons, but the value is... as to say... material. (M3, B)

Even if some expressions – such as ‘to be fine’, ‘value’ – recall a common feature, they assume a different connotation: they are referred to the “self” rather than to the interpersonal dimension, whether vertical (the relation with God) or horizontal (the relation with the family and the community). The argumentation takes the shape of “both...and”, “not only...but also”, presenting subjective definitions that are also shared by the group (“in my advice... as Franco also claimed”). In addition, well-being is not just represented as a “state”, but is a dynamic concept. This mix is constructed by the alternation between static verbs (‘to stay’, ‘to be’) and more dynamic ones (‘to create’, ‘to develop’, ‘to become’).

### Well-being: Not now

The Franciscan participants construct the sense of their “calling” by reconciling two theoretical perspectives on vocation: divinity as a “special” and “natural” (Kling, 1959). As a matter of fact, vocation is defined as “realizing what God imagined with you” (F3, F), and by “the tuning of two wills... between God’s proposal and my will” (M3, F). God is the subject of two actions – “to imagine” and “to propose” – which testify to the intervention, not the imposition, of the



divine will. The confirmation of such integration comes from the proposition of God as the condition of the existence of the community (“If He didn’t exist, we could not live together” (F1, F)), and as a guide (“I try to let myself be guided by the Lord day by day” (F2, F)). The metaphors which explain the meaning of their existence are related to places:

Ex 15: In my opinion, the synonym of well-being is peace... ehm... so, in my opinion, well-being is peace and peace is to occupy the place that God imaged for me. I believe this can be so for every man. This doesn’t mean that place is comfortable, does it? (M2, F)

In opposition to the abstraction which is often attributed to religious contexts, this metaphor emphasizes a more concrete conception. The reference to place is supported by other sentences dealing with space, which sometimes evoke a “somewhere else”, meant as “not here” but above all as “not now” – e.g., “you find well-being where He places you”. Phrases such as ‘we are just passing through this way, aren’t we?’ (M3, F), and ‘what matters is to invest our life to reach our destination’ (M5, F), reveal the impossibility of finding complete satisfaction, as a consequence of the temporary nature of this reality.

Ex 16: That will allow me to reach eternal life, and that is the place where I really will stay well forever. (M1, F)

Even if verbs have a future conjugation, they contribute – together with the demonstrative ‘that’, the meta-discursive word ‘really’ and the generalizing expression ‘forever’ – to the construction of a feeling of certainty and confidence.

Another feature of this group comes from the use of the pronoun, “we”, as accompanied by the meta-discursive and metanarrative forms. These expressions – such as “maybe we all agree” (M2, F), “I noticed that now... we harmonized... somewhat” (M6, F), “it’s obvious that these are our interests, in short” (F3, F) – work together to transmit a homogeneity, and a complicity, that are more suggested than claimed. In fact, the meta-discursive markers ‘maybe’, ‘somewhat’, ‘in short’, as well as the subjective verb ‘to notice’, weaken the assertiveness of positions. Even if the level of commitment is high, it is depicted as more discreet than that of the Hindus, who used “we” most of the time. In addition, the Franciscans do not fail to emphasize the strictly subjective relation with God.

Ex 17: It’s wonderful and... I can’t explain, then you say “wow, it’s true!” [everybody smiles] that is, it’s the craziness, the madness of love ! One can imagine... I don’t know... when you are outside you idealize it and you make fantastic romantic dreams... then you come here and you understand that all your fairytales really exist but they are more... that is, there is no comparison, can you understand? You go off your head! [everybody smiles] I’m sorry if I narrate in this strange way [she smiles]. (F3, F)

Religious calling is presented as falling in love in much the same way as that of young girls who experience love at first sight. Both the features ('romantic dreams', 'fairytales') and the effects ('to go off one's head') are the same as those of love at first sight. Yet, the relation with God is presented as a truly unique form of love, which is also, via meta-discursive sentences, an attempt to persuade the listener to believe.

The meaning of well-being is constructed by two main argumentative strategies, which function to present the life experience of the Franciscans as "different". The first argumentative strategy is contraposition, acted in several ways:

- a) between the interpretative repertoires of exteriority (lived by *débrayage* and polarized by means of negative attributions) and inwardness (an intimate positive pathway depicted in concrete and actual terms);
- b) between "sight" (as the sense organ which directly experiences, and distorts reality) and "hearing" (the evaluation of silence, not as a lack of sound, but as a positive tool for well-being). These positions are supported by determining a connection between exteriority and falsity, and by viewing silence as the condition for hearing and obeying to the calling;
- c) between symbols evoking a mundane and a vocational context and, as a consequence, the opposition between richness/power and poverty/sacrifice (e.g. "seeing myself with a BMW, and then making a vow of poverty and wearing a frock... it's not an easy lay" (F2, F)).

The opposition between the two ways of living well-being is enhanced by the semantic oppositions of adjectives and sentences: ephemeral *vs.* continuous, an orientation toward pleasure *vs.* an orientation toward growth, material *vs.* heart-relation.

The second argumentative strategy is negation.

Ex 18: "When you don't think about you... that is, I feel good when I really am able to not think about me, in practice, the opposite of what I lived before. Once well-being was... anyway was getting pleasure, satisfaction. By contrast, I now feel good, I really am at peace when I'm able to not think about me. Since, when you can do this, your thought widens, broadens out and widens toward everybody. And there, there is well-being, there is this light, this peace... for me this is well-being, that's it." (F3, F)

Social research conceptualizes well-being as the possibility to live either positive emotions (the hedonic perspective) or to fulfill the self, to achieve the set goals (the eudemonic perspective). According to these participants, well-being occurs in affective, unpleasant situations (the "un-hedonic" perspective) or in self-forgetfulness (the "un-eudemonic" perspective). Another kind of negation is expressed by "un-social" well-being: "I very strongly felt that I did not belong anymore to society, to the world, that is, I no longer shared their priorities."

## Concluding Remarks

Both nomothetic and idiographic psychology acknowledge the role of religion as a subjective resource for coping with evolutive tasks over a lifetime. In this research, participants, despite their different religious contexts, emphasize the function of religion in the strengthening of the integrative frame and in improving self-esteem. Thus, religion is a resource that allows persons to trust in the “radically Other”, or in the Self, in their daily and existential strivings for well-being. The certitude of choices – both as confirmation and as conversion – and the significance of faith are testified by several discursive markers which are aimed at emphasizing the commitment (especially agentivity, *embrayage/débrayage* and affectivity markers), uniqueness and comprehensiveness of the experienced form the life.

A common feature in their discourses about well-being is the orientation on a “vertical” axis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980): happiness, good mood and physical well-being are “high” – e.g., “today I feel high”. A great number of sentences are constructed in this way: “When I fall down...” (M2, C), “When we are in a low vital state...” (M4, B) and, by contrast, “We will attain/apprehend the celestial sphere...” (M1, F) and “We try to gain a high state of vitality...” (M4, B).

On the other hand, participants show very different ways of living well-being: on one hand, the experience of well-being “*depends*” on several factors; on the other hand, the religious system of meaning offers original and “other” ways to live well-being, which contrast with both the common and scientific definitions of well-being. This state of affairs cannot be satisfied by any effort to conceptualize and operationalize such a polyphonic concept by any presumably exhaustive definition.

Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis offer some answers to the contextualized question “what is it like to feel good?”: CA explains that well-being can be related to the feelings of quietude (as in the catholic community) as well as of essentiality (as with the Hindus). In addition, it can emphasize the value dimension (among the Franciscans) as well as a more practical connotation (coming from the Buddhist discussions).

DA deepens the different interpretative repertoires about well-being: enunciated profiles characterized by continuity can be set in the spacial dimension of “here-elsewhere”, whereas shifting experiences seem to be placed on the temporal axis of “now-not now”. Religions act as reservoirs of meanings, values and practices that can be both “assimilated” by the original tradition and “accomodated” through both horizontal (life in community) and vertical negotiation (the subjective relation with the Transcendent). Being part of a religious system of meaning does not merely entail applying old or new labels; rather, it also implies the reshaping of the whole range of opportunities and boundaries

through which ways of feeling good, making meaning, perceiving reality, defining the self and relating with others are experienced.

Based on the clear differences found both in the topics and in the discursive forms, the central thread of the above conversations is that belonging to a religious form of life offers exclusive and diverse opportunities for experiencing well-being. What persons share, apart from a strong and staunch faith, is a perception of their values as being genuinely distant from the world of their daily lives. In an “other” perspective about well-being, persons can simply feel good by talking, telling, dialoging and presenting their personal experience as one possibility in the polyphony of voices, in which the religious self oversees and interacts with the other selves. Phrases such as ‘sincerely, since we are opening ourselves up like books...’ (M4, C), and ‘look here, this interview made me realize that...’ (F1, F), show the cathartic function of words, as well as the positive effects of idiographic research, thereby allowing the researcher also to feel good by listening to “here, with you now, I’m talking and I feel good” (M3, C).

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## **Meaning Making: A Crucial Psychological Process in Confrontation with a Life Stressor**

Experiencing meaning in life is acknowledged as an important aspect for optimal psychological functioning (e.g., Baumeister, 1991). However, the confrontation with stressful situations shatters the individual's sense of meaning which can create feelings of loss of control and loss of predictability, leading to the experience of intense stress (Park, 2008). Coping with severe life stressors such as trauma, bereavement or medical stressors will thus involve trying to re-establish meaning in one's life as well as trying to find meaning in the stressful life event. The aim of this chapter is to describe how meaning is important in the coping process, when confronted with life stressors, and to clarify how religion and spirituality can play a role in this process.

### **Religion as a Meaning System**

In the past, religion often seemed to be an obvious resource to turn to in times of sorrow, worries, and pain. Saying a prayer, burning a candle, or making a pilgrimage were part of the range of coping resources one could appeal to when confronted with life stressors. With the rise of medical science and the beginning of secularization in most Western-European countries, religion as a coping tool seemed to have disappeared from the public domain. However, recent research (Büssing, et al., 2009; Gall, 2000; Park & Ai, 2006) shows that aspects of religion and spirituality are still important in coping with severe life stressors such as trauma, loss, and chronic illness. For example, in a study with long-term breast cancer survivors religious resources, rather than non-religious resources, predicted emotional well-being (Gall, 2000). In a sample of older arthritis patients, McCauley and colleagues (2008) found that 80 % of the patients turned directly to their religion/spirituality for comfort and strength. Glover-Graf and colleagues (2007) found that pain clinic patients report prayer as the most frequent response to pain after taking medication. It seems as if personal religious, and spiritual factors are still important for individuals, but these factors are less



overtly visible and more secluded in the private realm. This conclusion fits with the observation in the sociology of religion that in more secularized and postmodern areas, such as Western European countries, the impact of institutionalized religion has been steadily waning, and organizational dimensions of religion have decreased in importance over time (Becker & de Hart, 2006). In Belgium, for example, church attendance and denominational affiliation are very low, and the majority of the population are not active members of any religious tradition (Botterman, Hooghe, & Bekkers, 2009). Despite this resistance toward church affiliation and active involvement, most individuals still believe in a transcendent reality and the presence of a divine being, and they adhere to a more personal transcendent faith, not necessarily rooted in one specific religious tradition or denomination (Jagodzinski & Dobbelaere, 1995). Davie (2005) has further observed that religious beliefs have become increasingly personal, detached, and heterogeneous, resulting in a phenomenon of “believing without belonging” for West European individuals. This “believing without belonging” attitude seems to spread in secularized and postmodern societies, in which individuals may have turned away from culturally prescribed religious content but may, nonetheless, continue to value their personal constructs of beliefs and faith.

A simple inquiry of denominational affiliation or church involvement seems no longer adequate in the investigation of religion nowadays. In the scientific study of religion, and in the research of the role of religion in coping with life stressors, it seems therefore important to extend beyond this simple inquiry. A new and promising approach, especially suitable for postmodern and secularized countries, is the meaning systems perspective (e. g., Park, 2005; Silberman, 2005). A meaning system is the framework through which the individual views the world and his- or herself. Based on this orienting system, he or she interprets and evaluates experiences and encounters. This meaning system consists of cognitive, motivational, and affective components, and it functions as a core scheme in response to the events one is confronted with, or as a lens through which reality is perceived and interpreted (McIntosh, 1995). Park (2005) described a system of global meaning, which includes global beliefs (cognitive aspect), global goals (motivational aspect) and a subjective sense of meaning or purpose (affective aspect). She states that global beliefs are basic internal cognitive structures. These global beliefs consist of ideas and opinions on, for example, predictability, control, justice as well as ideas on self-view and worldview. Silberman (2005) parallels this view stating that the major postulates of the meaning system are concerned with the nature of a person, the nature of the world, and propositions relating to these two. These constructs, then, guide people through life by construing reality and by structuring their global goals. These global goals are the basic internal representations of desired processes,

events or outcomes that motivate people in their lives (Park & Folkman, 1997). A subjective sense of meaning refers to feelings of meaningfulness and sense of coherence, and is a more affective indicator of global meaning. The meaning system of the individual provides a way to understand daily events and hassles, but becomes particularly important when something traumatic occurs. Meaning systems are supposed to function outside people's awareness and they are constructed *via* the interaction between the accumulated personal experiences and the surrounding culture (Baumeister, 1991). However, when something traumatic occurs, people may become more aware of their global meaning systems (Silberman, 2005).

This individual meaning system can have a transcendent or immanent/secular character. An immanent meaning system consists of beliefs and goals without reference to a holy core or a transcendent reality. It consists of humanistic or philosophical beliefs, ideas or personal theories in the secular realm. A transcendent meaning system centres on what is perceived to be the sacred. The sacred refers to concepts which are set apart from the ordinary (Pargament, Magyar, & Murray-Swank, 2005). This demarcation of the sacred exceeds concepts, which are experienced as very special and valuable, such as children, family and home, by referring to higher powers which are considered holy. The interpretation and design of this sacred core can be very different and varies greatly from individual to individual. The description of a transcendent meaning system is consistent with Vergote's (1987) and Geertz' (1973) idea of religion as a system of symbols that refers to a spiritual, divine, or transcendent being (or beings) and, that is able to generate strong and profound emotions and motivations. The content of a transcendent meaning system consists of an integrated set of beliefs, strivings, and guidelines for living. This content can be offered by a specific religion, or can be constructed by the individual self in a very private and personal manner, relying on different religious and spiritual sources. The individual can thus take the whole "package" of a religious tradition or make an individual "bricolage".

As Park (2005) and Silberman (2005) stated before, religion as a meaning system is unique and permeates a broad range of psychological functioning in several life domains. When religion is incorporated in the meaning system, it will influence self and world beliefs (e.g., human beings are sinful), contingencies and expectations (e.g., sinners should be punished for their actions), goals (e.g., benevolence, piety), actions (e.g., charity, political choices), and even emotions (e.g., joy) (Silberman, 2003, 2004). Religion as a meaning system has exceptional features both in terms of its comprehensiveness and its quality (Silberman, 2005). In terms of comprehensiveness, a transcendent meaning system is able to give meaning to history as well as to every aspect of human life from birth to death and beyond (Silberman, Higgings, & Dweck, 2005). In terms of quality, a

transcendent meaning system is able to provide answers on life's deepest questions (Silberman, 2005). Thus, it offers meaning both on a broad horizontal level as well as on a deep vertical level. In the comparison between an immanent and a transcendent meaning system, one can notice that the transcendent meaning system often offers a "transcendent" resource in addition to the "immanent resources" available to all individuals. For example, a chronic pain patient with an immanent meaning system can experience support from his or her family when confronted with the enduring pain. The pain patient with a transcendent meaning system can also feel supported by his or her family, but he or she might additionally experience support from a divine being or a god. Pargament and colleagues (2005) mention that a transcendent meaning system seems to have a special ability to provide meaning and order when there seems to be no rational explanation for events, or when stressful events cannot be repaired through problem-solving strategies.

The meaning system, both transcendent and immanent, does not hold the same central place in every person's personality. Huber (2003), therefore, stressed the importance of distinguishing the content of the meaning system on the one hand (e.g., a Roman Catholic content learned through education and socialization during childhood), and the centrality of the meaning system on the other hand (i.e., the integration of the meaning system within the personality structure of an individual). Huber postulates that the impact of the meaning system on an individual's experience and behaviour is dependent on the centrality of this system. If the meaning system has a central position in a person's personality, his behaviour and experiences will significantly be influenced by it. If the meaning system has a minor position, the influence will be weak. Thus, centrality determines the importance of the content of the meaning system in a person's life. If the importance of the meaning system is high, it is likely that other life domains will be influenced. For individuals for whom religion or spirituality is important, a transcendent meaning system provides a comprehensive framework for perceiving, understanding and evaluating their experience, as well as organizing and directing their behaviour. Spencer and McIntosh conducted a study relevant to this topic (see McIntosh, 1995). In their study, students were offered a number of religious and non-religious adjectives on a computer and they were asked to indicate whether the adjectives were descriptive of themselves or not. Next, the researchers compared the speed of the responses of those who defined religion as a central part of their lives with those whose religion was less important. The groups did not differ in their processing speed for non-religious adjectives, but they did differ for religious adjectives. The more religious students responded more quickly to the religious adjectives than the non-religious or less-religious students. This seems to indicate that when religion or spirituality occupies a more central place and is strongly em-

bedded in the meaning system, it will be more quickly and easily accessible for use in the lives of the individual. Applied to the domain of coping, Pargament (1997) states that “we cope with the tools that are most available for us” (p. 145). If a transcendent meaning system is central for the individual, the religious or spiritual content of the meaning system will be a readily accessible resource that may offer coping tools and strategies when one is confronted with stressful situations.

## Meaning-making in Confrontation with Stressful Events

During life, individuals are confronted with a broad range of possible stressors and adversity such as disease, bereavement, job loss, divorce, and financial problems. Despite the pain, sorrow, and suffering that these stressors bring along, people try to adapt to these situations and mount continuing efforts to recover from them. The majority of the research studying these recovery processes focuses on coping strategies. A central theoretical model is, for example, the transactional model of stress and coping, formulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). In the transactional model of stress and coping adjustment is conceptualized as a dynamic and active process through which the individual uses cognitive appraisals and specific coping strategies to cope with various life demands. Coping can thus be defined as the cognitive, emotional and behavioral efforts that individuals perform in order to manage demands. It has been assumed that an individual's choice of coping strategies will determine his/her adjustment to the stressful event and research has focused largely on identifying coping styles and studying the efficacy of different coping strategies (e.g., Rosenstiel & Keefe, 1983). Several possible ways of coping are introduced such as active versus passive coping (e.g., Brown & Nicassio, 1987), approach versus avoidance coping (e.g., Roth & Cohen, 1986), behavioral versus cognitive coping (Moos & Schaefer, 1993), and problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However, some theorists have argued that the transactional model is not suitable in situations that are not solvable or repairable such as trauma, loss or chronic medical stressors (Mikulincer & Florian, 1996). The transactional model, along with other coping models, reflects a traditional conceptualization of coping with a focus on controlling, solving or adapting to the stressful situation, whereas some events are not amenable to ‘problem solving’ strategies (McCracken, Vowles, & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2007). In these kinds of highly stressful chronic events, which can hardly be changed or solved, issues of meaning are often central. For example, the chronic pain patient ruminates on the meaning of his or her life with this en-

during pain. The parent who has lost a child does not experience any meaning in life anymore.

Although issues of meaning are central in recovering or adapting to these stressors, the topic of meaning has been rather neglected in theoretical models on stress and coping. The meaning-making model, introduced by Park (2005, 2010), meets this objection. This meaning-making model assumes that individuals need to engage in intra-psychic processes in order to transform the meaning of the stressful experience. Therefore, the meaning-making model expands the transactional model by focusing more explicitly on aspects of meaning in the coping process. The meaning-making model proposes that confrontation with stressful situations shatters meaning systems and that the discrepancy between the appraised situation and the meaning system creates distress. For example, the diagnosis with a life-threatening disease can violate one's beliefs that bad things only happen to bad people and that God protects His people. Discrepancies between the appraised situation and the beliefs of the meaning system can create feelings of loss of control and loss of predictability, leading to the experience of intense stress (Park, 2008). The perception of these discrepancies is thought to initiate attempts to reduce distress, resulting in a process of meaning making. In this process, in which the restoration of meaning is strived for, both cognitive strategies (i.c. re-appraisal) as well as emotional strategies (i.c. emotional processing) can be activated. Some scholars, therefore, refer to cognitive-emotional processing (Rachman, 2001). The products of these meaning-making processes can be called "meanings made" (Park, 2010). Park states that "meanings made" are the end results, or changes, derived from the attempts to reduce discrepancies between the appraised situation and the meaning system. Many different meanings can be made such as "feelings of having made sense", "acceptance", "benefits found", and "positive growth" (e.g., Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). When individuals achieve these end products of the process, reductions in discrepancy are assumed. This reduction in discrepancy would result in a reduction in distress and in a better adjustment to the stressful event (Park, 2010). As long as attempts to make meaning continue, the discrepancy between the appraised situation and the meaning system is still present. When a meaning is made, the meaning-making attempts are expected to decrease and, over time, meaning made should be related to better adjustment

However, not everyone agrees that meaning making is a critical process in adjusting to stressful events. Some researchers have argued that meaning making attempts are linked with rumination, reflecting maladaptive processes, or that individuals who do not attempt to make meaning are better off than those who do take part in meaning-making attempts (Bonanno, Papa, Lalande, Zhang, & Noll, 2005). Despite these critical notes, most researchers assume that a

meaning making process is important in the confrontation with stressors characterized by chronicity, and insensitivity for problem-solving or controlling strategies (Park, 2010).

## Religion/Spirituality and Meaning-making Processes

Meaning making processes can involve several processes and literature provides various categorical schemes to describe these processes (for an overview, see Park, 2010). These schemes focus on different dimensions of the meaning making process and are, therefore, overlapping rather than mutually exclusive. Park (2010) focuses on four schemes, namely, automatic/deliberate processes, assimilation/accommodation processes, searching for comprehensibility/significance, and cognitive/emotional processing, describing them as the major distinctions in the literature. In line with others (e.g., Park, 2007; Silberman, 2005), we assume that a transcendent meaning system, in which religion and spirituality take a prominent place, can be valuable sources in stimulating specific sub-processes in meaning making. We assume that several aspects of a transcendent meaning system can affect the adaptation to stressful events through specific cognitive and emotional processes. In the following, we would like to focus on intrapersonal processing, in confrontation with life stressors, and the possible role of religion/spirituality in these processes.

Mikulincer and Florian (1996) introduced a distinction in the coping responses that might be useful in the meaning-making context as well. They state that in the confrontation with stressful events the general tripartite categorization in problem-focused coping, emotion-focused approach coping (i.e., with a cognitive and affective 'stay' in the stressful situation), and emotion-focused avoidance (i.e., with avoiding of facing the stress) is not sufficient. A further division of the emotion-focused approach category is required. They propose to differentiate between reorganization and reappraisal strategies. According to these authors, reappraisal strategies entail the positive reinterpretation of external events so that inner structures remain intact. Reorganization strategies entail the accommodation of existing cognitive-motivational structures to reality constraints. We assume that a transcendent meaning system can play a role in both re-appraisal and re-organization strategies.

## Reappraisal

Coping models assume that the appraisal process is important when individuals are confronted with a new event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the appraisal process, two types of appraisal can be distinguished: the primary appraisal of a stressful event, conceptualized as evaluating the situation as harmful, threatening, or challenging, and the secondary appraisal of stressful events, conceptualized as evaluating one's abilities to handle the situation. In the context of a confrontation with non-solvable, chronic and severe stressors, we assume that a reappraisal of the situation is especially important. It is logical that the stressor firstly will be interpreted in negative terms as threatening, dangerous and harmful for the self and the direct environment (family, relatives). Individuals confronted with loss of a beloved one, a critical diagnosis, a violent event, or other traumatic situations will interpret these as terrifying, and noxious. However, these individuals have also the opportunity to reframe this event and try to understand the situation in a different way. This is not an easy task due to the strongly negative connotations and feelings associated with these stressors.

Mikulincer and Florian (1996) seem to evaluate this reappraisal strategy merely negatively, stating that reappraisal results in a partial denial of the threat. They continue, asserting that reappraisal involves the use of selective attention on positive information, and results in the creation of positive illusions. Reappraisal, therefore, would provide only temporary relief, and, moreover, may delay a real solution to the problem. However, after reviewing the existing research literature, Mikulincer and Florian conclude that reappraisal has beneficial effects in dealing with the consequences of bereavement and chronic physical illnesses. Also, more recent studies (Park, 2010) seem to point to the positive impact of reappraisal techniques in confrontation with traumatic conditions. Park and colleagues (2001), for example, revealed that in a sample, with HIV patients, positive reappraisal was cross-sectionally and longitudinally related to a less depressed mood.

We assume that a transcendent meaning system can be helpful in this reappraisal or reinterpretation process by providing a strong framework with many options for understanding or explaining the meaning of these events. When we look more profoundly at the role of religion/spirituality in the reappraisal of events, the function of a transcendent meaning system can be twofold. First, the religious or spiritual beliefs may modify one's reappraisal of the stressor by offering a framework to re-interpret the situation. For example, a pain patient can positively reassess the meaning of the pain and see it as an "opportunity" for spiritual growth, or as part of the divine plan, instead of as a threat. In this manner, a transcendent meaning system can provide a cognitive framework that enables a healthier appraisal of the stressors by promoting a

positive and coherent worldview, hope or optimism. However, religious re-appraisals can also be negative in nature (e.g., patients can experience their illness as a punishment of God), although most theorizing focused on the benevolent appraisal possibilities (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). Second, religion can offer additional resources, affirming to the patient that he or she is able to stand up to the stressor (for example, relying on support from a divine being, experiencing that God is taking part in the suffering). A central transcendent meaning system can especially function as a source for transforming the detrimental character of the stressor and re-evaluating it in a more positive way. If the transcendent meaning system takes a central place in the psychological system of the individual, it will be an easily accessible resource which the individual can draw on.

We assume that a transcendent meaning system can function as a strong cognitive-emotional framework. The underlying reasons for this strength can be twofold. First, most religions or spiritual movements are anchored or embedded in an age-long tradition. The believer, therefore, steps into a transcendent (religious) reality, with historical roots, that goes beyond his/her own life. They become part of a timeline that began before their birth and probably will continue after their death. Moreover, most religions or spiritual movements also refer to some notion of infinity or eternity, in different forms, such as a hereafter, reincarnation, heaven. The feeling of being part of this larger scheme, and of being uplifted above the futility of human life, can empower their meaning system and turn it into a strong framework, helpful in coping with stressors that do occur. Second, a transcendent meaning system can be linked with a faith community in which individuals can be involved. This faith community provides shared human experiences, beliefs, and values that bind the community together (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). The knowledge that other like-minded believers share the same transcendent meaning system can enlarge the strength of the individual's meaning system by presenting it as a solid system, carried by a large group of people.

#### Acceptance – Reorganization

Mikulincer and Florian (1996) distinguish, in addition to reappraisal, a reorganization strategy. Reorganization coping implies a series of intra-psychic steps (acceptance, working through the experience, and restructuring of inner structures), resulting in the acceptance of the new reality and its incorporation in mental structures. According to Mikulincer and Florian, this coping strategy involves the pursuit of more realistic goals. They state that reorganization coping is activated when the stressful events cannot be changed by the individual's own



efforts and the situation asks for an inner change in schemes, values, and goals to reach a better adaptation to reality. In their review on adjustment to loss reorganization showed to be a valuable strategy in the confrontation with interpersonal and personal loss.

Similar theorizing can be found in the field of chronic pain, which can be seen as an enduring stressful event, impacting the life of the individual as well as the environment. McCracken, Vowles, and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2007) stated that investigations of coping with chronic pain primarily focused on problem-solving, and thus on methods for gaining greater control over pain. Research within this framework of problem solving, however, showed especially the detrimental effects of specific coping strategies, but limited evidence for beneficial coping strategies. McCracken and colleagues (1999) state that the focus of these strategies is often the gaining of control over the pain and pain-related distress. Together with his colleagues, he claims that coping should be placed in a broader and more flexible framework, instead of the almost exclusive control of pain. McCracken and Eccleston (2003) recommend the inclusion of acceptance as a valuable strategy. They define acceptance as “a willingness to experience pain without attempts to control it, and as persisting with healthy activities while pain is present, but doing so in a manner that is free from influences of the pain itself” (p. 339) (McCracken, Vowles, & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2007). This seems to parallel the ideas of Mikulincer and Florian who see acceptance as a sub-process of reorganization coping. In line with the positive impact of acceptance and reorganization coping in confrontation with loss, McCracken and colleagues (McCracken & Zhao-O’Brien, 2010; Thompson & McCracken, 2011; Vowles & McCracken, 2010) found support for the beneficial role of acceptance in the adaptation to chronic pain.

Recently, the potential beneficial use of acceptance is implemented in the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Hayes et al., 2006). ACT is a cognitive-behavioral therapy that assumes that psychopathology arises from the attempts to control the intrapersonal world and from a lack of clarity of one’s values and beliefs (Karekla & Constantinou, 2010). It encourages individuals to embrace and accept their psychological experiences, without trying to change or control them, and to clarify one’s values so that the individual can live in accordance with these values. Recently, ACT has shown to be a valuable approach in the management of chronic conditions (Hayes et al., 2006).

We now assume that acceptance can be an important aspect in the meaning making process, similar to the role of reappraisal. In addition, we assume that a transcendent meaning system can offer a framework that stimulates this acceptance process. The notion of acceptance is present in nearly all the major world religions, including Christianity and Judaism, but also in Eastern traditions such as Buddhism. The notion of a spiritual surrender, in which the be-

liever turns the stressful situation over to God, higher power, or some other transcendent reality, is advocated by Judeo-Christian and Islamic faith, whereas acceptance of the situation is often mentioned in Buddhism (e.g. reaching enlightenment through acceptance). An example of how acceptance is implemented in coping with unpleasant reality can be found in AA and other 12-steps recovery programs. For example, in the AA it is recommended that one "let go" of personal efforts to control use of alcohol or drugs and, instead, surrender by letting God or one's higher power take over one's life. Also therapists working with the ACT approach implemented spiritual and religious aspects in order to stimulate the acceptance process in coping with stressors (e.g., in coping with cancer, Karekla & Constantinou, 2010).

### **Empirical Testing of the Role of a Transcendent Meaning System in the Meaning-making Process**

Up to now, we described the meaning making process as developed by Park (2010) and we tried to elaborate further on how a transcendent meaning system can stimulate meaning making in confrontation with life stressors. We focused, therefore, on different domains in the coping literature (e.g., McCracken et al., 1999; Mikulincer & Florian, 1996) and we distinguished two cognitive-emotional processes that, firstly, might play a valuable role in meaning making and, secondly, that might be stimulated by a religion or spiritual framework (i.e. transcendent meaning system). Especially reappraisal and acceptance seem to qualify as underlying mechanisms in this association. Reappraisal of the life stressor based upon the personal transcendent meaning system can help the patient to find meaning in his or her situation and to give support and hold in coping with the pain. Acceptance of an unsolvable stressor can enhance a healthy adaptation and this acceptance process can be fuelled by a personal transcendent meaning system.

In order to verify our hypothesis, that the reappraisal process will have a benevolent influence on the well-being of individuals confronted with a life stressor and on their quality of life, we have conducted two cross-sectional questionnaire studies. We also wanted to explore if prayer, a religious practice offered by the transcendent meaning system, can function as a cognitive reappraisal technique for the chronic pain patient, and we have tested this in a third questionnaire study. In our studies, we focused on chronic pain as a severe and enduring life stressor with a high impact on the lives of the patients as well as on their families (Brevik et al., 2006). Further studies are warranted to test the role of acceptance in this process.

In the first study (Dezutter, Robertson, Luyckx, & Hutsebaut, 2010), we investigated the association between the centrality of the transcendent meaning system (i. e., the importance of the meaning system in one's life) and the life satisfaction of the pain patients. Two hundred and seven chronic pain patients filled out several instruments measuring the centrality/importance of a transcendent meaning system, pain duration and pain severity, and satisfaction in life. Results of the study indicated that there was a strong positive correlation between the level of centrality (low versus high importance) of the transcendent meaning system and life satisfaction in this group of pain patients. Pain patients for whom religion/spirituality was very important reported higher levels of life satisfaction in comparison with pain patients for whom religion/spirituality was not important. We also examined whether the degree of centrality of a transcendent meaning system was a buffer against the detrimental influence of pain severity on life satisfaction. Earlier studies showed that the increase in the pain intensity or severity is linked with a decrease in the life satisfaction of pain patients (Strine et al., 2008). If the meaning system offers tools to cope in a more positive way with the pain experience, it might also buffer against the decrease in life satisfaction.

Interaction analyses showed that the pain severity did impact the life satisfaction of the pain patients, but only under the low centrality condition, i. e., the pain severity compromised life satisfaction ratings when the transcendent meaning system was reported as being not central to one's life. Conversely, the life satisfaction ratings of patients reporting a very central transcendent meaning system were not negatively influenced by higher levels of pain, which indicated that the central transcendent meaning system might have buffering capacities in confrontation with the chronic pain. To summarize, the central transcendent meaning system appears to function as a resource for the pain patients by promoting adjustment to pain and facilitating the maintenance of life satisfaction ratings. Although the study seemed to indicate that the transcendent meaning system can play a role for the pain patient, especially when religion/spirituality are central in the life of the patient, no clarity was obtained with regard to the underlying dynamics of this phenomenon. Therefore, two new studies were set up in order to focus on the underlying psychological mechanisms that might explain the association between religion/spirituality and the pain experience.

In the second study (Dezutter, et al., 2010) we focused on a specific aspect of the transcendent meaning system, namely the God image, which reflects how the individual emotionally experiences God (Rizzuto, 1979). We explored the associations between positive and negative God images and the happiness of the chronic pain patients, and we investigated whether cognitive re-appraisal was a mediating mechanism in these associations. We hypothesized that a positive

God image can stimulate a positive re-appraisal of the pain experience resulting in more feelings of happiness. The contrary was expected for more negative God images such as an angry God image. One hundred and thirty-six chronic pain patients completed questionnaires measuring demographics, pain condition, God images, disease interpretation (as operationalization of cognitive re-appraisal), and happiness. Results showed meaningful associations among God images, disease interpretation, and happiness. First, happiness was positively related with positive God images (consisting of feelings of kindness, love, and warmth) and negatively related with angry God images. Second, we focused on the possible mediating role of disease interpretation (as an operationalization of cognitive reappraisal) in the relationship between God images and happiness. We have thus investigated whether the associations between God image and happiness could be (partially) explained by a positive interpretation of the pain condition. The underlying theorizing is that the God image might influence the reinterpretation or reappraisal of the chronic pain condition, influencing the feelings of happiness. A God image characterized by feelings of warmth and love might stimulate a positive interpretation of disease or a positive reappraisal of the pain experience resulting in increased feelings of happiness. A God image characterized by anger or fear might result in the opposite. Correlational analyses indeed confirmed that disease interpretation was related with both God images and happiness. Path analyses showed that, in the context of enduring pain, disease interpretation had a mediating function between God images and happiness. A positive God image was linked with higher levels of positive disease interpretation resulting in higher levels of happiness. An angry God image was linked with lower levels of positive disease interpretation resulting in lower levels of happiness. However, because the pain severity had a significant influence on both the interpretation of disease and on happiness, we controlled for pain severity in an ancillary set of analyses. The resulting model showed that especially positive God images were important in the prediction of happiness. Positive God images had both a direct effect as well as an indirect effect (through the path of interpretation of disease) on happiness, irrespective of the level of pain severity. These results seem to indicate that patients with a positive God image are more able to reappraise their pain and illness experience in positive terms. They probably focus more on the growth and learning possibilities in this situation and less on its threatening or harmful character.

In the third study (Dezutter, Wachholtz, & Corveleyn, 2011), we investigated a behavioral aspect of the transcendent meaning system. We explored the role of prayer as a possible individual factor in pain management, and tested whether cognitive positive reappraisal was a mediating mechanism in the association between prayer and pain. We expected that prayer would be related to pain tolerance in reducing the impact of the pain on patient's daily life, while not

necessarily being related to pain severity. Although both concepts (pain tolerance and pain severity) are based on the patient's pain perception, the patient may report that he or she experiences the same pain severity but displays better coping with pain (i.e., higher pain tolerance). Confronted with the same symptoms (i.e., similar levels of pain), some pain patients might show lower levels of disability than others and might have less difficulties in accomplishing daily life tasks. Reappraisal of the pain experience in more positive terms might partially explain this difference between patients. The prayer activity might offer a demarcated place, both in space as in time, to perform this reappraisal act, stimulating a more healthy adaptation to the pain. Two hundred and two chronic pain patients completed a number of instruments measuring demographics (incl. religiosity), prayer, pain outcomes (i.e., pain severity and pain tolerance), and cognitive positive reappraisal. Our findings seemed to support our hypotheses. First, correlational analyses showed that prayer was indeed positively related to pain tolerance, but not to pain severity. However, additional analyses showed that the relationship between prayer and pain severity, as well as between prayer and pain tolerance, depends on the religiosity of the pain patient (i.e., believer or nonbeliever). Results indicated that, for believers, high levels of prayer were related with lower levels of pain severity, whereas this was not the case for nonbelievers. Furthermore, for the group of believers, high levels of prayer were also related to more pain tolerance. It seems that prayer can only function as a reappraisal activity for pain patients who are religious. We assume that prayer, as a religious act, has to be embedded in a transcendent meaning system in order to be able to function as a useful reappraisal activity. Only when prayer is incorporated in the transcendent meaning system of the patient, can it function as a tool in pain management. This parallels our earlier findings on centrality and life satisfaction, which showed that the meaning system was only a buffer for pain patients for whom the meaning system was central. Furthermore, mediation analysis revealed that cognitive positive reappraisal was indeed an underlying mechanism in the relationship between prayer and pain tolerance. The full mediational effect indicated that prayer was not related to pain tolerance directly, but that cognitive reappraisal was the underlying factor explaining the relation between prayer and pain tolerance. This seems to indicate that prayer alters the impact of pain on daily life activities by means of the psychological process of reappraisal. We assume that the pain patient, by praying, reframes his or her pain condition in more positive and meaningful terms and, thus, that prayer functions as a positive reappraisal technique. In sum, prayer offers the chronic pain patient the opportunity to reinterpret his or her pain condition within the transcendent meaning system, re-establishing a sense of meaningfulness and purpose in life despite the pain.

## Conclusion

The role of religion and spirituality in the adaptation from life stressors is an intriguing question, having occupied theorists and researchers for decades (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). In this chapter, we elaborated further on a theoretical model (Park, 2010) that can offer a sound framework in studying how religion and spirituality can stimulate a healthy adaptation in the confrontation with severe stressors. We focused on reappraisal and acceptance as valuable mechanisms in the meaningmaking model, with a transcendent meaning system as a plausible catalyst in the process. We illustrated this theoretical framework with empirical studies.

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Tuija Hovi

## Meanings of Healing: Experiences of Prayer-Team Members at the Christian Healing Rooms Service in Finland

Well-being and healing are nowadays vital themes in the religious and spiritual marketplace. This is obvious, above all, in so-called alternative spiritual practices, but also within traditional Christianity in Europe. Religion, spirituality and well-being intersect and overlap in traditional, modern and contemporary cultures (Utriainen et al., 2012; Bowman, 1999). Pentecostal-Charismatic movements, especially the trends representing the Health and Wealth Gospel, are the kind of religiosity that has traditionally perceived the “need for healing” and connected the idea of healing and well-being with the idea of spiritual development and religious transformation.

The Healing Rooms is an international network of Christian intercessory prayer service that has been operating actively since the 1990’s. It emerges from Pentecostal-Charismatic evangelizing but it specializes in a single activity, faith healing, with the implicit basic mission of winning new followers for Christianity. The Healing Rooms can be positioned thematically as an “inter-charismatic” network which does not clearly commit itself to any single Christian church or movement, but rather aims to co-operate with all of them. It has spread very quickly to every continent, taking advantage of already existing and functioning local religious (basically Protestant Christian) infrastructure.

The Healing Rooms was introduced to Finland in 2006. By autumn 2011, 26 “prayer clinics” were founded around the country. A prayer clinic is a meeting point for two interacting groups: the inner circle community of the trained prayers and their clients, people who come to the clinic in order to be prayed for. Differing from locally organized charismatic Christian communities, the Healing Rooms does not provide congregational activities or an opportunity for a client to become a member of an exclusive community demanding personal commitment. It simply offers a place for momentary spiritual experience appealing to the universal human need for well-being.

It is not my aim to study the actual effects of prayer. The broad discussion on the relationship between prayer in its different forms and health outcomes is thoroughly reviewed recently (Baesler & Ladd, 2009). In lieu of studying prayer

as a ritual or measuring its outcomes, I focus on another perspective. In this article, I study what the concept of healing includes in the context of the Healing Rooms prayer service. I approach this theme by ethnographic means. Anthropological field-work and qualitative methods can provide fresh insights to formerly strictly quantitative and sociological questions, such as discussion of the relationship between religiosity, spirituality and secularity (e. g. Jespers, 2011). Correspondingly, narrative analysis can shed new light on questions of religiosity, giving voice to experiential and life historical aspects of religiosity in a way that, for instance, correlational studies cannot reach. (Belzen, 1999; Popp-Baier, 2001; Tromp & Ganzevoort, 2009).

## Constructs of Meaning and Religious Transformation

How is meaning constructed? Who may define meaning and who may not? What is the right meaning and why? What does it actually mean ‘to mean’ something? Such questions turn out to be central when discussing ways of understanding health, illness, healing and well-being within the context of personal experience of transformation and religious tradition. Meaning can be hidden simultaneously in several different, mutually exclusive answers. This paradox is a classic theme in anthropology. Matt Tomlinson and Matthew Engelke (2006) have deciphered the concept of meaning by reflecting particularly Talal Asad’s (1993) criticism on the Geertzian “dominant concept”. They have reviewed meanings of meaning as different aspects of the concept, such as structure, intention, being and relation to the symbol (Tomlinson & Engelke, 2006, pp. 9ff). The dimensions that emerge as fundamental for different sides of meaning are the roles of agency, experience, context and relationships. As Tomlinson and Engelke point out, meaningfulness is often made visible by searching the *limits* of meaning (Tomlinson & Engelke, 2006, p. 23). In religious life, tradition is the standard and the norm by which plausible meanings are given. Health and illness are concepts that are easily given meanings that go beyond medical explanations when they are taken as religious concerns. Thus, health and illness are understood in spiritual or supernatural terms, or getting sick and healing as personal religious processes that carry meanings beyond mere human bodily conditions. Illness and health also have a symbolic dimension. Furthermore, there are no universal criteria for defining health as such, rather, health functions as a cultural ideal that varies over time and from culture to another (McGuire, 2008, pp. 129 f). Health, as well as religion, is a social and cultural construction, and meaning is by no means “embodied” in healing (cf. Tomlinson & Engelke, 2006, p. 3; Asad, 1993, p. 28). Healing can be understood as a religious symbol when it is in relation to previous experiences and *observed religious* tradition that give a

believer certain mechanisms for making sense (Ilder, 2004, p. 24). In terms of perceptual psychology, such observance can also be understood as a believer's acceptance of a certain role, and biblical attributions which have an impact on personal experience, for instance, cognition of health (cf. Hovi, 2004).

However, the official, visible and ritual dimensions of religion do not cover all areas of life that have something to do with health and well-being. How religion is practiced (or observed), and what it means for believers in everyday life, are questions which Meredith McGuire approaches by using the concept of *lived religion* to distinguish the actual religious experience of individuals from the religion of institutionally defined tradition. Instead of occasional rituals, lived religion is affected by embodied practices, by which the sacred is made real and present through the experiencing body and material aspects of life in connection with the spiritual (McGuire, 2008, pp. 12 f). Still, this definition does not exclude the intersubjectivity of religion nor its cognitive aspects. In everyday life, lived religion is connected in many ways with well-being for those people who do not experience their spiritual lives as separate from their physical, mental and emotional lives. In the idea of *holistic healing*, the combination of body and mind form a whole that is cared for as a solid unit. With this respect, lived religion is inseparably connected with healing, which can be understood even as a lifelong process (cf. McGuire, 2008, pp. 137 f). This idea is also actively advocated by the Christian Healing Rooms prayer service.

After all, the meaning of healing is both an anthropological and a psychological question, and I approach its complex conceptual relations with religion by ethnographic means. When defining the concept of healing in a certain context it is important to take into consideration what is included in the idea of health, what is counted as healing and how it is strived for. Furthermore, we must ask what are seen as healing effects and what possible improvements are not to be regarded proper healing – in other words, where are the limits of healing.

## Ethnographic Approach

Ethnography as methodology is associated with two levels of study. It covers a range of methods by which qualitative research material is compiled, as well as the contextualizing perspective at the level of analysis.

*1. Methods of collecting empirical material.* The “field” in this study includes prayer clinics, homes, internet and publications. It is not just a physical place. I compiled my research material during the spring term of 2011 by using thematic interview and participant observation. I interviewed first the leading couple of the Finnish branch of the movement, and thereafter, 28 members of prayer teams representing five clinics in different districts. Thematic interview was semi-

structured by open ended questions which focussed on becoming a practitioner as well as meanings and functions of prayer-work. The discussion with each interviewee took on average 1,5 hours. In addition to the interviews of prayer team members, the short questionnaire was directed to the clients in every prayer clinic in the country. Even though the interviews and the questionnaire material are the main corpus of this study, they are only samples of a bigger picture. I found it important to get contextualizing information by doing participant observation (clinical receptions, a “conference”, homes, a closed meeting of a local prayer team). Also, an unavoidable source in the study of contemporary religiosity is the Internet. In addition to the HR websites giving basic information about functions of the organization, much contextual information about networking can be found on the Internet.

2. *Holistic perspective in analysis* refers to the different ways of reading ethnographic material (Davis, 2008; Honkasalo, 2009). Interview speech is not interpreted as mere text, but in relation to (the researcher’s understanding of) the field and other empirical material. In anthropology, varying categories of material are used for *contextualization* (Geertz, 1973) while, in sociology, cross-reading methods like *data triangulation* (Denzin, 1970) serve the same purpose. What people say in an interview situation often becomes more understandable in relation to what they read, hear or do in other situations (training courses, meetings, Bible reading, receiving information from the Internet and other media, attending services in local churches etc.).

Thus, the empirical material for this study on the whole includes four categories: 1. thematic interviews of 30 pray-ers, 2. questionnaire to clients (N=124), 3. feedback-stories of the clients collected and published cumulatively by Healing Rooms Finland on its website, 4. participant observation documented in personal field notes. With the help of narrative analysis, I focus on meanings given to healing and illness in the interview material (Riessmann, 2008). The questionnaire responses provide information about the backgrounds of the clients indicating also what kind of situations motivate the use of such services and what they mean in the search for well-being.

## Who are the Consumers of Prayer Clinic Services?

The questionnaire was distributed to all 24 prayer clinics that were operating in the country between late March and early May 2011. The response rates differed from one clinic to another, because the “customer flow” varied. According to the interviewees, the average number of clients per night was 5 – 10. On the whole, I got back 124 responses. It goes without saying that this kind of questionnaire

distribution excluded those clients who have visited a prayer clinic only once and, for one reason or another, do not visit again.

Among the clients who did answer the questionnaire, first time visitors were 30,64 % of the respondents, which means that most of them are more or less regular customers. The great majority of the respondents – 74,19 % – also belong to the mainline church<sup>1</sup>. 7 respondents did not belong to any religious community and quite as many (7 respondents) belonged to Neo-charismatic communities. Others were Free Church members (9,7 %) and Pentecostals (12,9 %). Nevertheless, nominal membership does not tell much of an individual's religiosity. So, I also asked about attendance and interests in religious activities. It was no big surprise that 78 % of the respondents participated more or less regularly in charismatic Christian services and meetings. 12,90 % of the respondents denied participating in any other religious or spiritual events, besides occasional or regular visits to a HR prayer clinic. On the whole, interest in spiritual services (other than Christian) among the respondents was quite limited. According to the questionnaire responses, customers of HR services are principally Christian believers who draw a strict line between Christian and New Age ideas. However, 20,26 % of the respondents said they have tried or used other spiritual services: most of them mentioned reiki, spiritual healers, clairvoyants, angel therapy, energy healing and Rosen therapy.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the respondents were women (71 %). This is also typical considering that women are said to attend more actively to religious life in Finland (Käär-äinen et al., 2005, p. 135). According to interviewees, the number of male clients is gradually increasing. Men covered 25 % of the respondents. A few persons did not want to indicate their gender. The clinical intercessory prayer service seems to appeal mostly to the middle-aged. The biggest age group among the respondents is the 36–45 year age-group (31,45 %), while the second and third biggest groups are 46–55 years (24,19 %) and 56–65 years (20,16 %). Clients younger than 30 years and over 60 years were few, and both very old and very young people were missing. Thus, clients basically represent actively working age groups.

To the question of education, 44,35 % of the respondents have had vocational training while a little fewer, 36,30 %, of them checked academic education. The rest were students or had done only basic school. Considering the age groups, surprisingly many were retired (29 %). This result may indicate, for instance, the

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1 78,2 % of the population were members of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland in the end of 2010 (<http://evl.fi/>, read 4. 11. 2011). According to the latest quadrennial report of the church, nearly half of the members go to some type of service at least once a year (Haastettu kirkko 2012, p. 92).

2 Such alternatives as TM, homeopathy, hypnosis, intuitive healing, fire healing, stone therapy, chakra opening and flower therapy were mentioned only once each.

frequency of disability pensioners among the clients. The biggest professional category among the respondents was that of clerical employees (31,44 %), with laborers (17 %) being the second biggest professional category, and 7,25 % of the respondents representing entrepreneurs. In the spring 2011 in Finland, the unemployment rate was around 8 %, which was visible also in the questionnaire responses – 8,87 % of the respondents were unemployed.

## Procedure at the Prayer Clinic

The Healing Rooms concept differs radically from prayer services operating in congregational settings, such as a collective altar calls and pastoral counseling between two persons. For this reason, I give a short description of what actually happens during the reception at a prayer clinic.

The trained members of prayer-teams serve at local HR clinics as volunteer workers. The starting point for becoming a member in a prayer-team is to be a “born again” believer who belongs to a Christian church or congregation, no matter which one. In Finland, the team-members come from various Christian backgrounds, mostly mainline Evangelical-Lutheran, Pentecostal and Free Church. The clients<sup>3</sup>, for their part, are not required to tell about their religious affiliations or to confess anything if they do not want to do so. The atmosphere is meant to be easy, safe and comfortable for clients, and not at all condemning. Nevertheless, if a client is not a believer, his or her conversion is indeed prayed for between the lines, but active proselytizing is not allowed. Team-members are advised to be “customer-oriented”.

The local HR clinics are arranged once a week or fortnightly. The procedure is precisely the same at every clinic. Before the clinical reception opens for the clients, the prayer teams get prepared by praising and praying by themselves for an hour. The prayer-ers whom I have interviewed regard this meditative moment

3 The term a “client” may sound misleading in this context because it is usually understood to be connected with economical exchange of products and money. Even though HR services are free of charge for those who use them, I call the visitors at the clinics by the name “clients” because most of the members of the prayer-teams in Finland do so. The Finnish word “*asiakas*” literally means a “client” in English. Basically, the interviewed prayer-team members did not see any problem with the use of the term, even though as used in other contexts it has a commercial connotation. Occasionally, HR clients are also called by some other names, such as “*kävijät*” (attenders/visitors) or “*rukoultavat*” (those who are prayed for). All these terms can be used as synonyms at prayer clinics without differentiating between them. However, a medical doctor whom I interviewed in his surgery in a hospital, at first accidentally used the word “*potilas*” (a patient) but he very quickly corrected the expression by starting to talk about “*palveltava*” (a person to be served) drawing thereby a strict line between his professional work at the hospital and the spiritual service at the prayer clinic.

of preparation as a necessary step for being able to take the role of a mediator, to be a *channel* between God and a client, as they call themselves. Actually, many of them use a lot more time for preparing for the service. They do it, for instance, by praying alone during the day or even by fasting. After the spiritual preparations, they form the serving teams of three members, preferably having representatives of the both sexes in every team.

The reception for clients takes two hours. The clients wait for their turn in a waiting room where a receptionist gives each and every client a form to fill out. After the clients have written down their requests for prayers of intercession, they are invited one by one to the prayer room where the team prays for each client individually, according to his or her request. Each prayer event may take, depending on the case, 10 to 20 minutes.

It is expressly emphasized that the HR service is not supposed to be therapy-like pastoral care. Praying for various problems is the only service provided and, if other needs are expressed, clients are advised to turn to their home congregations, physicians or other professional helpers. There are strict and explicit rules for a team to encounter a client. A client must be treated respectfully and in a discreet manner. For instance, praying in tongues is not allowed because it may make somebody feel uneasy. It is also important that a client is not touched without his or her permission. Respecting privacy is considered of great importance and it is supposed to be advantageous for the positive effect of the visit.

## The Role of Prayer-Team Members

Prayer-team members at the Healing Rooms understand healing as a means of triggering profound changes in an individual's way of life, beliefs, attitudes, and orientations. They simply take up an instrumental position, as very curtly expressed by an interviewee, whom I call here Ann<sup>4</sup>:

TUIJA: So, what do you think the healing effect is based on?

ANN: Eh... on God, God. I mean, it's based on the fact that, in a way, it is God's power that heals.

TUIJA: And you need a prayer between [God and you]?

ANN: That's right. It is like a channel that makes it possible. (IF mgt 2011/054)

The underlying purpose of the HR activity is evangelizing, but it is implemented exclusively by praying for clients according to their wishes. Observing the prayer

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4 The names of the interviewees are pseudonyms. The code after each interview excerpts refers to the recording that is archived in Åbo Akademi University.



requests of the clients, physical illnesses are a main topic, but they are said to reflect also psychological, spiritual, social and practical problems. However, pray-ers do not give diagnosis but they pray using their charismata, for instance, “words of knowledge” or “words of wisdom” emphasizing their channelling role.

The members of prayer-teams see the activities of Healing Rooms very much as being in a mediating position which also aims at connecting different, often conflicting Christian traditions before “the great breakthrough”, as they call the fulfillment of their evangelizing mission. Pray-ers define themselves, in terms of agency, in two ways. Firstly, they define themselves as lay persons in the role of authorized actors. For them, Healing Rooms meets the need of *doing* something by using their personal, spiritual skills and capacities, instead of merely sitting in a pew. However, team members are very loyal to their home churches. Secondly, they present themselves as “tools of God”.

The social-psychological concept of agency includes both the ideas of *instrumentality* and *subjective self-efficacy* as an individual’s consciousness of being able to control his or her own life, produce experiences and shape events (Bandura, 2001). Both sides of agency are present in the act of a prayer-team. In Neo-charismatic Christianity, it is typically held that miracles and supernatural healing can be channelled through all believers, not just through religious specialists like preachers or pastors (e.g. Poloma & Hoelter, 1998, p. 259). This idea is at work in the Healing Rooms as well. The prayers regard themselves as obedient *instruments* lacking responsibility of their own (cf. Milgram, 1974, pp. 145 f). Simultaneously, they are very confident of being capable to bring about advantageous changes with the help of their personal spiritual know-how. For them it is important to have different kinds of people, equipped with different skills, serving as team members. This confirms also the collective and relational aspects of their agency (cf. Bandura, 2000, p. 75). Almost every interviewee expressed this by saying “it is team work; there is no room for solo-ists”. Team-work, obedience and willingness to follow the rules were regarded as most important criteria in successful prayer-work.

## Health, Illness and Healing

I focus on the concepts of health, sickness and healing as they are expressed in the collected material. During the interviews, I approached this theme by asking the following rather simple questions:

- what causes illness?
- what is the healing effect based on?
- is it natural or supernatural?
- does healing have more to do with body or soul?
- why does not everyone get healed?

### Illness – Natural and Supernatural

As the concept of healing is understood broadly, so is the concept of illness. Diseases, pain and physical problems are often seen in connection with, and sometimes even caused by mental states such as envy, anger, mercilessness or sorrow.<sup>5</sup> However, definitions of illnesses and accidents are also connected to the problem of theodicy, i. e. the question about God's all loving and all powerful nature in the face of the existence of evil (cf. McGuire, 1988, p. 45).

Since the team members come from very different Christian backgrounds, there is no perfect consensus on the origin of illness. The idea that belongs to the HR training is rather straightforward in associating illness with sin, and health with faith. Even though it is taught by the respected authorities of movement, it is not necessarily accepted as such. This comes up, for instance, in Vera's reasoning:

TUIJA: Is it possible to get sick because of a supernatural reason?

VERA: No. Getting sick belongs to human life somehow, I think. I don't know... the other day we had a team meeting and we talked about these things. And the leaders said that Jesus is like... that illness and sin, they are somehow... that illness is like a result of sin. But it is, of course, the Original Sin that came to mankind already a long time ago because of the Fall of Man. So we can't help it, but God wants to help and heal us. (IF mgt 2011/051)

Another perspective was presented by Paul, who is a specialist in medical treatment by profession. As a bystander witnessing a prayer situation, he could not recognize the symptoms of the person who was prayed for, so he ended up drawing the conclusion of the presence of a supernatural factor:

PAUL: [T]he person was not in psychosis, I'm sure. [--] I couldn't understand it in any other way but by seeing the person being possessed by demons. (IF mgt 2011/073)

He rationalized his interpretation, as a physician, by referring to his diagnostic expertise which could not provide any explanation for what he saw. Thus, the only interpretative pattern which fit the kind of behavior he was witnessing in a

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5 The very same idea is the focal point in intuitive healing (cf. Judith Orloff, 2009; Louise Hay, 1994).

religious meeting was reference to supernatural evil in a biblical frame. However, as becomes obvious later on, this kind of explanation could not work for him in his professional role.

Since a human being is understood as an arena for two opposite, and continuously conflicting supernatural powers – God and Satan – illness, accidents, failures and fears were, in many cases, seen as results of Satanic intervention, whereas healing is understood to be possible only with the help of God. This does not exclude the use of medical care, because it is understood as one of God's means to heal people.<sup>6</sup> The fact that Western medical science is a part of the everyday life of my interviewees does not exclude the possibility – or sometimes even the need – of reference to other dimensions of reality. Discussing the dangers of “the spirit world”, Vera referred to the HR training course and a recommended textbook on demonology giving fitting instructions for her own worldview and common sense:

VERA: ...[I] think, it does have an effect if a person is possessed somehow, like being restless. People may use a lot of alcohol or something, and well, it brings another problems and diseases then. It is like a roundabout, I don't know if the spirit world really can directly cause diseases nowadays, like in the world of the Bible, they thought that the evil spirits caused, for instance, epileptic attacks because somebody fell down spitting foam. They did not understand then, but nowadays medicine is so well developed and we know what it is all about, and we can't say illness is caused by an evil spirit, but there are roundabouts.

TUIJA: Like making people behave in a self-destructive way, you mean?

VERA: Yes, just like that, in a self-destructive way. (IF mgt 2011/051)

It is the undefined evil that is understood as a manipulator, which harasses defenceless human beings by causing hardships – in the modern world, mostly indirectly. In the context of HR, one hardly hears the designation of “Satan” directly, but more often references to “the evil spirit” or “demons”, as in the examples above. These malevolent powers are typically linked above all with resistance to evangelization, and thus, the transforming aim of the Healing Rooms.

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6 This belief was eagerly held among the members of a local congregation that represents Health and Wealth Gospel whom I interviewed for my previous study in the end of the 1990's. (Hovi, 2007)

## Healing – Natural and Supernatural

Just as illnesses can be understood as being caused by malevolent, transcendent powers, or by organic factors, there is often said to be only a thin line between the natural and the supernatural with regard to healing. The prayer team members also did not want to differentiate between these two explanations of healing. Like Ann, they accepted both explanations as normal ways to get healed:

TUIJA: Does it make any sense to think that healing this way [with the help of prayer] is supernatural?

ANN: Yes.

TUIJA: But on the other hand, there is evidently natural healing going on at the same time, isn't there?

ANN: Mm... Everything is possible. But I can't draw the line, what is natural and what is supernatural healing. Of course, when there is sudden and inexplicable healing, it is easy to classify it as supernatural, because it is. No-one can explain [such healings], and they do occur. But when you get healed gradually, does it mean that your bodily system is after all, by now, ready to heal? What is it, I don't know. I am not thinking it over too much, because... like in prayer, it is the most important thing that people can come and share their problems and worries. It is also important that you may become visible with your problems, at least to someone. (IF mgt 2011/054)

Both explanations belong to this narrator's cognition of health, as well as the social and psychological dimensions in a prayer service event, which actually turn out to be very important. As a rule, the interviewees were very conscious of the therapeutic impact of social and emotional aspects of the service they provided to the clients, and they emphasized the holistic perspective of each individual life situation.

Paul, as a doctor, explained his twofold understanding of healing with a rather role-theoretical switch<sup>7</sup> between two mutually exclusive realms of meaning:

I distinguish between my work and what happens in the Healing Rooms, completely. Here [at the hospital] I strictly represent medical science [--] and there [at the prayer clinic] I see it purely as a spiritual process. So, I don't see here any paradox with regard to my work, but there I practice my faith as I have the legal right to do. And, well, I think that the healing that happens there, it is purely a spiritual thing. (IF mgt 2011/073)

These two meaning systems – healing as natural or supernatural – are mutually exclusive for him in the sense that they are never active simultaneously. However, he accepts them both as convincing explanation patterns in the right contexts and situations.

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7 Cf. "phase-shift" (Holm, 1995).

## Healing as a Miracle

“Everything is possible” is a frequently repeated conception in the context of HR, and it includes the miraculous, inexplicable aspects of healing. Miracle is definitely the kind of healing event that is connected with Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. The great Healing Revival at the turn of the 1950’s was, in fact, the outburst of miraculous healing phenomena within Pentecostalism (e.g. Harell, 1975; Anderson, 2004). Healing is seen as a representation and unquestionable evidence of God’s power:

VERA: But of course [healing] is supernatural in the sense that [disease] has been proved with X-rays ... and doctors have been confused when some tumour has disappeared completely, or, or bones have coalesced or something. [--] It is possible. So, I do believe that God does miracles through us. There doesn’t have to be any emotional excitement, but someday you just notice that there is no more pain.(IF mgt 2011/051)

In the Healing Rooms, a miracle is an often touched topic of discussions on healing, although very few of the interviewees actually interpreted anything witnessed by them at a prayer clinic as a miracle. It is more typically an exemplary narrative, told about something that has happened somewhere else to someone else. None of my informants had recognized sudden miraculous healing from a severe illness at their own clinics. However, a few of the interviewees had experienced quick and surprising relief which they interpreted as miraculous healing by the aid of prayer. This is Vera’s case:

It was in the end of the 1980’s when I was once in a big prayer happening of Pirkko Jalovaara<sup>8</sup>. My back was very achy, especially after long skiing trips. I like sports and all, and always when I went to bed after skiing it was difficult to stretch the body and the back hurt a lot. Then first, Pirkko looked at my legs and said that one leg was one and a half centimetres shorter than the other. And during her prayer my leg grew. I have had no back ache since then. (IF mgt 2011/051)

As a traditional narrative motif, the experience of growing limbs is quite common in the context of miraculous healing and collectively shared witness stories (e.g. Csordas, 1997, pp. 58ff). It is noteworthy that in this narrative pattern the problem is always said to be the shorter leg (or arm), never the longer one, and it is always prayed that the shorter leg would grow to be of the same length with the other. Never is prayer focused on the shrinking of the longer leg even though, in the terms of physiology and anatomy, the other leg being too long is the other side – or another explanation – of the same problem, the imbalance. The idea of *growth* is simply a strong symbol and metaphor that is pivotal in all spiritual

8 Pirkko Jalovaara is a famous Finnish evangelist who has run an itinerant prayer service since the 1980’s. Her work is closely connected to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church.

processes, also in those that are linked with physical health. Talking about decreasing, lessening or shortening would never produce the same vision of improvement as the idea of growing.

This cognitive pattern that actually produces certain type of experiences indicates the power of internalised tradition, both literal and oral. The tradition of witnessing, sharing the experience of God's grace, is a powerful evidence to a believer of what is possible, and how.

### Healing as a Process

I got hepatitis A in the spring. It is a difficult virus, and normally, after a long and heavy treatment only 55 % of the patients get healed. I came to be prayed for and the treatment started 7<sup>th</sup> of May. Already by the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June the virus was almost negative and the medication was reduced. It was a miraculously quick healing when, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, I was diagnosed completely healthy. (<http://www.healingrooms.fi/?sid=14>, read 29.12.2010)

Defining healing as a miracle does not have to follow the strict criteria given by clerical authorities<sup>9</sup>, as the above feedback from a witness, on the website of the Healing Rooms Finland, indicates. Usually healing is understood as a process, and the prayer-team members try to make sure that all their clients understand and accept this interpretation, not least to avoid disappointments. Even though the healing process is going on, it may feel too slow or insufficient. The team-members consider it an important part of their prayer-work to help a client adapt to the idea of gradual healing. Repeated visits to a prayer clinic are recommended to clients, and are said to catalyze the healing process. The therapeutic support of prayer is seen as an important function in a difficult life situation, even if a client has not been able to explicate his or her problem thoroughly. An important function of a prayer clinic is being a psychological support in challenging life situations, not just in a case of some physical illness. Vera emphasized the importance of repetition:

If they come many times and they tell us what they have realized during the week when they have thought it over, it is like a tangle opening. It can be a long process, but we want

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9 For instance, in 1735 Cardinal Lambertini, later Pope Benedict XIV, defined the classic criteria for miraculous healing: 1. The disease must be serious, incurable, or unlikely to respond to treatment. 2. The disease which disappeared must not have reached a stage at which it would have resolved by itself. 3. No medication should have been given, or if some medicines were prescribed then must have had only minimal effects. 4. The cure must be sudden and reached instantaneously. 5. The cure must be complete, not partial or incomplete (Dossey, 2006, p. 251).

to stand by and listen, and of course, it is always better that a person himself becomes aware of the problem. The change is much more continual than (IF mgt 2011/051).

At a prayer clinic, regarding healing as a process includes two aspects. With respect to physical sickness, pray-ers aim at helping clients to become more patient and calm about their disorders. As many of the interviewees pointed out, a sick person often gets frustrated and irritated by slow natural healing processes or by having chronic pain despite treatment. Clients are never advised to give up medical treatment if they have any. On the contrary, they are encouraged to be careful with medication and look for professional help for their diseases. The other process that is meant to be kicked off with the help of prayer work is spiritual awakening and increasing interest towards religion. Growing spiritual activity is regarded as the first step to being healed physically.

### Healing as Holistic Experience

I have had a chance to experience holistic healing. I have been emancipated from addiction to alcohol and tobacco, and now I also got rid of migraines. I bless the workers of the prayer clinic in thy name Jesus, amen! (<http://www.healingrooms.fi/?sid=14>, read 29.12.2010)

This compact witness story on the website of the Healing Rooms Finland is a good example of the kind of change in lifestyle which is actively supported at prayer clinics. All kinds of addiction, as well as unsocial misbehavior, are regarded as “bindings” to the Evil that blocks the individual’s spiritual development, setting barriers to the achievement of a good and healthy life. The witnessing person above has obviously accepted and internalized the believer’s way of life, and he or she also interprets bodily healing, the disappearance of the headache as a result of this.

To my question whichever is the main concern in the Healing Rooms – body or soul – I got “both” for an answer. Since people are perceived as psycho-social beings, the interviewees did not want to separate these mandates in their prayer-work. Bodily disorders, and both mental and spiritual troubles, were seen as so tightly interwoven that the interviewees found it difficult to differentiate between them. The most analytical view was given by Paul, a professional healthcare specialist:

Well, we hope, of course, soul. And I wouldn’t even like to care for the mind there. I think mental care belongs to a psychiatrist. But naturally, we can pray for it and for healing, but we do not care for the mind at the prayer clinic. And the body... we don’t actually cure anything else either, we just pray, we give prayer service. But perhaps... we

don't really take care of soul either, it doesn't belong to us. We give prayer service and we hope that above all the soul would feel better afterwards. (IF mgt 2011/073)

As a matter of fact, he skipped the question of bodily healing as secondary or almost irrelevant issue and concentrated on purely spiritual dimension of the service, and not even the caretaking aspect of it, but its purely instrumental function.

A big thematic area in healing stories that I analyzed in my previous study was the so-called "wounds of soul". That is how different, unsolved, traumatic earlier experiences are called when seen as being encapsulated in bodily pains as well as mental disorders (Hovi, 2007, pp. 135 f). "Inner healing" and "becoming whole" are big issues in the Healing Rooms prayer clinics, too. The pray-ers recognized, in many cases, problems that derive from early childhood in their clients. Vera looked at the problem from her professional angle when I offered a historical perspective on the matter that we discussed:

VERA: There are quite a lot of such troubles that people go through [like] troubles in their childhood and in their relationship to their mother. There are a lot of such cases. So, they understand now what they missed as a child, cause it was like it was. Then we, in a way, help them in that situation.. [--]

TUIJA: That's interesting, the relationship to mother and childhood home, that it comes up as you said. If you think of the age distribution among the clients... they are people whose parents experienced the war.

VERA: Yes, that's right. Then, the culture of parenting was really rough in Finland. I am a specialist in upbringing by profession and I know, considering the emotional development of a child, what the result is, when there is not attention and space for children's emotions, and how the self-esteem, self-confidence is built up. In a way, they have to pick up the pieces, for instance, still at the age of sixty. (IF mgt 2011/051)

A vast area of unsolved traumatic experiences is intentionally focused on in prayer-work. The theme that Vera also refers to corresponds to what the anthropologist Thomas Csordas has analyzed in his study of Catholic charismatic healing groups as "healing the memories" (cf. Csordas, 1997, pp. 109ff). In the case of those groups the procedure was completely different, being more verbally interactive, including pastoral care conversations and visualization of the Virgin Mary as the healer of the inner wounds. By contrast, in the context of the protestant HR rhetoric, it is Jesus who is seen as the gentle supporter.

## Health as Balance and Acceptance

However, an essential theme in addition to actual improvement is learning to live with the present situation, and being relieved by such insight. Remission of pain



is a clear sign of the effects of prayer, even though disease itself remains. Learning to frame the life situation anew can also be a healing experience:

VERA: And, of course, everyone doesn't get healed. But it's always possible to pray and make the condition easier, and at least to learn to accept the illness or the condition. [--] I think it is already an enormous act of God if you have some serious disease and you can take it calmly and accept it anyway. (IF mgt 2011/051)

Even though a person does not get healed, the situation is not regarded as hopeless in regard to Christian teaching of the last Judgment. The discussion about the possibility of not healing with Jane and Martha – Lutheran and Pentecostal – ended up with the idea of the eternal life, free of diseases, for believers:

TUIJA: So, all the people don't always heal, do they?

JANE: No, they don't.

MARTHA: No they don't, no they don't.

JANE: All people will probably never heal when...

MARTHA: But there is the fact that all people who believe in Jesus' atonement and in his uprising... so, when we cross the border we'll be completely healthy. [--] So it is the last gate... it is ahead of us anyway.... Even if I were sick now, and nothing mundane could help, nor prayers, I know that on the day when you cross the border you won't take any pain or tear drops with to the heaven.

TUIJA: So you mean that you sort of heal when you die?

MARTHA: Yes, when you cross the border. I mean, it's only a border.

JANE: When you step into the new life. (IF mgt 2011/035)

Death is actually seen as a chance to heal and get full compensation even after suffering from incurable sickness. This idea is more familiar to traditional Pentecostalism, and also to Pietistic and Lutheran worldviews, than to the Neo-charismatic Health and Wealth ideas. However, the same women were also convinced that illness is never God's will. They were not willing to reason further, for instance, to consider the question of theodicy.

### Limits of Healing

The question of not healing was seen as a part of human life, as some earlier examples showed. However, human life can also be a hindrance for healing, that can function as "spiritual interaction," as illustrated in the following excerpt from Paul:

I see this healing process such that we human beings take a [first] step, after which God can take the second step. [--] It is like chequers, you move first, and then God can also move something. So, people may have barriers in themselves. It is grace that we heal. (IF mgt 2011/073)

He put stress on an individual's own responsibility in the healing process by comparing the relationship to God with a game. Human "wrong moves," like committing a sin or being unwilling to develop personal faith undoubtedly complicate the healing process – the steps that God is supposed to take in return. He connected healing with the help of prayer strictly as a spiritual process that leads to conversion and Christian faith. Paul also clarified his views with the essential content of his personal faith in the following way:

PAUL: ...diseases do not come from God, God wants that all are healthy and live here on earth as long as it is predestined. I cannot believe... for instance, what you hear in sermons, even in my own church, that God is testing the sick. I can't believe in it when I read what Jesus said. Sickness is something else. God wants to heal.

TUIJA: This "God's testing", like in the old Pietistic movements<sup>10</sup>, it is a broadly cultivated idea, isn't it?

PAUL: Yes, but I don't agree with it. God's starting point is the aim to heal everyone [--] there are several chapters in the Gospels where it is told how Jesus healed everyone who came. [--] I have a couple of chronic diseases that have not been healed but still, I believe in it, and it is not taken away from me if somebody else gets healed in the Healing Rooms. It is a victory for all. (IF mgt 2011/073)

When tracing the line between what is regarded as meaningful and what is meaningless, by placing emphasis on success and failure, limits of meaning may offer a useful sight (cf. Tomlinson & Engelke, 2006, pp. 23 f). Considering especially the concept of healing, there is never a full guarantee of success at the prayer clinic. Or, the expected outcome may turn out to be surprisingly different or even a disappointment. Thus, healing in the context of the HR prayer clinics does not have limits, since all alterations in condition can be regarded as different aspects of healing, as long as it is connected to a positive stance toward Christian faith.

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10 In Finland, the old Pietistic movements are nowadays closely connected to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church. The informant himself was actively involved with one of them.

## Conclusions

The Healing Rooms “rehabilitates the concept of healing and brings it back to its original biblical meaning after having been stolen by New Age thinkers” as the Finnish HR website informs visitors<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the reasons and meanings for illness and healing are strictly connected to religious (Christian) transformations, belonging to such processes as conversion, awaking consciousness of sin, sense of divine presence etc. The members of prayer-teams consider their HR activities to be a mediating position, which also aims at connecting different, often conflicting Christian traditions by creating co-operation between them in front of their apocalyptic vision of “the Last Judgment”. They desire to see their work, acting as agents of transformation, in a wider context, while the clients who use these services give meanings to healing through their personal experiences and situations in their private life at the moment.

In the narrative perspective, healing as well as not healing can be understood as the realization of coherence in life (cf. Linde, 1993). According to previous comparison between the answers of help seekers and prayers, which was carried out in Helsinki Evangelical-Lutheran parishes in Finland, it was the prayers who believed in healing more than help seekers. Nevertheless, intercessory prayer was meaningful to help seekers; 45 % of them experienced some kind of help (Räsänen, 1990, pp. 88 f). What such improvement is all about is another story. In the Finnish HR prayer clinics, the pray-ers are advised to make sure that a client understands that there is no guarantee for being completely healed, and that healing may be gradual and take its time. Furthermore, it is also explicitly emphasized that healing can be understood and experienced in many different ways. The activation of a client’s spiritual life is the underlying purpose for the prayer service, and actualized healing is simultaneously taken as a sign of growing faith.

Being more than only a bodily condition, illness serves as an idiom for communicating distress, suffering and dissent (McGuire, 2008, p. 130). Thus, to study meanings of healing, it is also relevant to give a few thoughts to what is meant by illness in this context, because both questions are intertwined in the problem of creating coherence in life. The way in which an individual places events in a certain relation to each other, makes his or her life meaningful in certain context. In the context of prayer clinics, an illness or some kind of a disorder in life is understood as incoherence or imbalance at the levels of an individual’s body, mind and soul. Consequently, it is dealt with by framing it within the charismatic Christian tradition, and the meaning system based on a benevolent God, and the malevolent spirit world.

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11 <http://www.healingrooms.fi/?sid=11>, read 21.12.2011.

Studying what the concept of healing includes in the Healing Rooms prayer service, one inevitably ends up with the notion of holism. Health is connected to much more than mere being free from bodily disorders. Thus, illness does not necessarily limit the idea of healing. In the context of the prayer service, the holistic definition of complete healing covers physiological and therapeutic effects in addition to emotional, social and religious transformations, and in some cases even death. What is understood as healing is the experienced improvement in relation to the past. It is either bodily recovering from a disease, or accepted reframing of the situation, for instance, of having an incurable disease. Simultaneously, complete healing is associated with acceptance of more religious (Christian) orientation in life.

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## **Existential Meaning-Making and Ritualizing for Understanding Mental Health Function in Cultural Context**

This chapter is focused on providing a means of understanding the different psychosocial functions of existential meaning-making and ritualizing being used in today's multicultural, diverse worldview contexts of Sweden, and that of the protracted refugee situation in Syria. For the purposes of this chapter, Sweden and Syria can each be thought of as a kind of 'existential meaning-making laboratory' where people are trying to find their way, through different paths and experiences, to and through existential meaning and its ritualizing expressions. Existential ritualizing is the term being given to these efforts, to the expressions of meaning in relation to how life is and should be lived. For some, these expressions take place in and through established religious ritual contexts. Others combine symbols and ritual expressions from newer attempts and exercises in spiritual expression. Still others have found that the best way for them is to divide up their ritualizing among different traditions and expressions. Sometimes the existential ritualizing process is done through a very conscious decision-making process, sometimes not. What is in common for these efforts are psycho-developmental and psychosocial needs for meaning-making and for the maintenance of mental health.

The structure of the chapter begins with actual case examples gained from my clinical research work in mental health contexts of addiction in Sweden (see, DeMarinis, Scheffel-Birath, & Hansagi, 2009) and on-going research with Psychosocial and Mental Health programming for UNHCR in Syria. Theoretical models for understanding some of the underlying processes involved and their psychological consequences are then presented. The framework offered is that of preventive public mental health. Finally, critical reflection is focused on how society may be able to do more in this critically important area (existential meaning and meaning-making) of preventive public mental health.

Approaching the topic in this way reveals some things about my 'location' in the mental health field, and in one of its subfields, clinical psychology of religion. This subfield has many different traditions, and these traditions approach topics in different ways and with different areas of accountability. It is important to be



clear about these points as otherwise scientific work will risk being lost between areas, or will not meet the scientific criteria found in each of these traditions. I am approaching clinical psychology of religion from a psychological vantage point (see DeMarinis, 2003, 2008, 2011). This means that the primary interests and responsibilities here are to understand how existential meaning-making and ritualizing activities actually function, or do not function, in relation to psychological concerns for individuals in a given cultural context. The central working concepts here are drawn from depth psychology, cultural psychology and cultural psychiatry.

The case examples for this chapter are drawn from Syria and Sweden. Both cultural contexts have been the focus of my research in relating clinical psychology of religion, existential meaning-making and ritualizing, and mental health. I have chosen these very different case examples in order to illustrate the new kinds of questions that are being posed, by forced migration on the one hand, and challenges of secularization on the other, to understanding the nature and function of existential meaning-making and ritualizing for mental health.

### **Case Example from Syria**

Mazen is a 45 year old Iraqi man who fled to Damascus, Syria in 2006. He has been in Syria for several years waiting to be relocated as a quota refugee through UNHCR to the US, Sweden or any other Western country. However, the chances of his being relocated are not good as many countries no longer recognize Iraqis as a priority group for their refugee quotas. Before the war in Iraq, he was a successful computer programmer, married, with two children. Fleeing to Syria was a last effort to survive. Mazen's wife and one child were killed in Iraq, as well as his parents. The multiple trauma experiences in Iraq have been followed by the uncertainties of being in a protracted refugee situation. Mazen's status in Syria does not allow him to work or become a citizen of that country. He and his teenage son struggle to get by with the assistance provided by UNHCR as well as the small odd jobs he can get. Mazen has many of the posttraumatic stress symptoms common to refugees, as well as the actual daily stresses of living with so much uncertainty. He is worried for himself and for his son who is struggling with how to face the unknown future. Mazen is a man of deep religious faith. For him, Islam and its beliefs and practices are critically important for his being able to get up and face each day. Mazen participates almost every day in a centre located in one of the refugee-dense areas outside of Damascus. This centre, one of the projects in the mental health and psychosocial support program of UNHCR in Syria, is run by refugees who themselves have a background in psychosocial work and who are supervised by a trained psychologist. Coming to

the centre provides a safe space, structure, opportunity for learning new skills, and for re-building trust in oneself and others. For Mazen the centre is a haven where Muslims and Christians can gather. Though it is not a place for religious services, it is a place where he feels free to pray and be respected as well as to show respect. It is here where he can find those to talk to who also feel and share the frustration as well as hope in the future. In Mazen's words:

“Here [at the centre] I find some inspiration. I find a way to understand that I feel both punished and strengthened by my faith. I am trying to see myself in a different way in order to survive, for my son and myself. Sometimes doing yoga here, or painting, I get new ideas. I now take my medication as I should and am trying to make sense of this difficult life. I cannot talk about these things with my doctor, he does not understand these things or it does not seem to be a place open to these thoughts, but here I can if I need to. To come here is to breath.”

## Case Example from Sweden

Anna is a 37 year old ethnic Swedish woman living in Stockholm. She describes herself as being

“typically Swedish in the sense that I am not religious in a traditional way, but I was baptized in the Church of Sweden and was also confirmed. I don't believe in God in any scientific way- but I think there is something, or at least I feel connected more fully to myself and to life when I am at my special place by the lake where I walk and sometimes just sit and be.”

Anna is a well-educated professional, working in the financial sector. She is married with a teenage daughter, but the marriage is not so stable. Part of the problem, as Anna describes it, is her alcohol consumption. Anna has been struggling with her drinking for many years. Her concern is now that her daughter is with a group of friends who are beginning to experiment with alcohol. She is afraid her daughter will develop the same problems. Anna has tried different alcohol treatment programs, but has repeatedly relapsed. Anna is not addicted to alcohol but is a problem drinker. She uses alcohol as a kind of reward at the end of the day, but realizes this has become a problem. She needs to find something else to DO. She often feels that her turning to alcohol, during and after her teenage introduction to it, has to do with deeper issues of loneliness and not belonging. She also feels she has never sufficiently dealt with an abortion during her late teen years that initially started her on experimenting with alcohol. Anna also struggles with depression. She has been on and off medication for this. Anna's husband has been, for many years, verbally abusive about Anna's drinking and has little understanding of the difficulties involved in her attempts to get help. Though he had not been physically abusive before, he has now begun

to push and shake her when she has been drinking. Anna is unsure of what to do. She has a strong sense of desire to hold the family together, and feels both shame and guilt for being unable to stop drinking. She feels responsible for the family problems to a great degree. Her husband will not agree to any kind of couple counseling up to this point. Anna has felt some frustration that mental health and other health professionals in the Swedish system are very skilled in medical and technical information but not always in seeing the person that is sitting across from them. Anna is looking for a “safe place where I can talk about these deeper things, at least to some extent, but not in a religious context but in a helping context as that might help me find some good strategies for my drinking and other issues.”

### **Linking Clinical Psychology of Religion, Existential Meaning-making and Ritualizing, and Mental Health Concerns**

The cases of Mazen in Syria and Anna in Sweden are very different in many respects. However, at the depths of each case there is existential information, information that helps us to understand what is meaningful to Mazen and to Anna, information that is very important for their mental health states.

In making the links among clinical psychology of religion, existential meaning-making and ritualizing, and mental health concerns, in order to analyze the cases of Mazen and Anna; some basic concepts and understandings are needed. As ritualizing expressions, of both conscious and perhaps not fully conscious existential meaning-making elements, are so central for mental health (DeMarinis, 1994, 1996, 2008; DeMarinis, Scheffel-Birath, & Hansagi, 2009) turning to developments in the field of ritual studies is the first point of departure.

The eminent history of religion scholar in this the field of ritual studies, Catherine Bell, noted that over time the nature and value of how rituals are understood both within popular and scholarly contexts has changed (Bell, 1997). At the time when such classical scholars as Frazer, Tylor and Durkheim developed theoretical perspectives for the study of ritual activity, ritual was considered as archaic and something far away, in cultures more primitive than those in the ‘more-civilized’ world. Ritual and magic were set against rationalism, modernity and the developments of science. In the second half of the twentieth century, attitudes began to change and rituals began to be understood as more universal phenomena, though in and through very different kinds of cultural expressions. Such expressions were not necessarily connected to religious traditions. In the harsh and technocratic modern world, ritual began to be pre-

sented as a natural and even spiritual resource for renewal. Though the analysis of the return of ritual in Bell's, Victor Turner's (1996) and other scholars' works is complex and worthy of lengthy examination, the point being made here is that established rituals and activities of importance, a ritualizing process, that eventually become such rituals, have become a topic of interest in both scholarly and popular contexts.

For the purposes of this chapter rituals, in general, are defined as activities of significance that help us make meaning and order out of living. Existential rituals are those activities that signify the meaning itself in life and death. Existential rituals and ritualizing activities involve those activities that help to contain and maintain our existence. In this sense they are necessary for mental health and wellbeing. To be deprived of these activities is to experience a loss; if the deprivation continues and if new ritualizing activities are not developed, mental distress occurs (DeMarinis, 2008).

In order to understand why this is so, explanations can be partially found in both developmental psychology and depth psychology. In the well known developmental theory of Erik H. Erikson (1983) ritual experience is a central component but one fairly overlooked until more recent scholarship the increased interest in and understanding of the importance of ritual experience. Erikson understands ritual experience and ritualization as part of the developmental process. Erikson sees ritualization here as participating in those religious and cultural institutions through which society is shaped. For Erikson this kind of experience aids in the formation of the child's identity as one becoming a part of a family, a community, and over time as an active and productive member of society. Not having sufficient and constructive ritualization is problematic for the person's identity development and sense of belonging.

Depth psychologist Paul Pruyser (1983), building on the object relations' work in children of, amongst others Donald Winnicott (1988), brought object relations theory into adult psychology and clinical practice. Pruyser considered religious experience in general, and religious ritual experience in particular, to be a crucial resource for providing psychic balance and stability. This type of ritual activity in Pruyser's model is "one of the primary resources of the illusionistic world which serves to balance the processes of the Autistic (inner) and the Realistic (outer) Worlds" (DeMarinis, 1994, p. 12). For Pruyser the illusionistic world is not one of escape or unreality, but the centre for the work of the imagination and the required fantasy for psychic balance. For the individual's experience of religious ritual to function in a psychologically healthy way, such experiences need to provide nurture to the imagination and to be a source of stability and belonging in a community context. If these rituals are done compulsively then they may be a sign of a neurotic expression of the autistic world.

Likewise, if they are done only as a fulfillment of others' demands, they may be a sign of an empty expression in the realistic world. In either of these cases, the psychic balance is disturbed and results in mental dysfunction.

When thinking about the above theories, and the different kinds of empirical and clinical evidence used in their constructions, it is always important to bear in mind that theories are always cultural constructions, based on the state of the theoretician, the way scientific investigation is understood, and the populations that were used to form the basis of the scientific evidence supporting these theories or models.

Understanding these and other theories and models as cultural constructions does not preclude their being abandoned. It does mean, however, that these theories and models need to be set into the present context and their validity tested and re-tested. This usually results in adjustments being made to fit the context and population at hand. In other words, the potential applicability of these theories needs to be tested when they are brought into societal and cultural situations with different institutional structures and patterns of interaction.

It is perhaps a good idea at this point to look more carefully at how we are approaching the term culture as we all are surrounded by- and products of the cultural context in which we live. A working definition of culture, from cultural psychologist A. Marsella, includes attention to learned behaviour and meanings, socially transferred in various life-activity settings for purposes of individual and collective adjustment and adaptation. Cultures can be transitory or enduring (e.g., ethnocultural life styles), and always dynamic (i.e., constantly subject to change and modification). Cultures are represented internally (i.e., values, beliefs, attitudes, axioms, orientations, epistemologies, consciousness levels, perceptions, expectations, personhood), and externally (i.e., artifacts, roles, institutions, social structures). Cultures shape and construct our realities (i.e., they contribute to our worldviews, perceptions, orientations), and with this, ideas, morals, and preferences (Marsella, 2005, p. 657).

In attempting to operationalize this definition through the perspective of this chapter, we can see the importance of understanding and finding ways to study the cultural dimensions of how existential meaning-making and ritualizing experience are expressed and experienced in different cultural contexts, and within those contexts both for majority and minority populations. From a psycho-development as well as a depth-psychology perspective, access to cultural information is necessary for translating how general patterns of developmental and psychosocial processes are given form and content in a particular context. Culture, as noted above, is not a static entity but a living process. Small or larger cultural changes can come both from inside and outside the particular cultural context that one is studying. Cultural patterns also influence how a society's institutions are constructed, how societal values are formed, and the

codes of conduct and ethics in psychosocial interactions. Looking especially at existential meaning-making constructs and ritualizing activities in a given cultural context, it is possible to make a cultural mapping for the majority and minority populations of these activities. In this way a behavioural meaning-making analysis can be done.

This kind of analysis of how meaning is made, and of the workings of culture in general, is not something that is done automatically. In reality, interest in and systematic reflection on the impact of culture has been in large part a response to the planned or often unplanned ‘meetings of cultures’ caused by the effects of globalization and the results of forced migration. These meetings, simply put, bring people who are the living embodiment of different cultural expressions into contact. These contacts may often result in conflict depending on the distance between the cultures, in terms of how meaning is made, the customs and traditions of expression, and the expressions of existential rituals. With respect to situations of forced migration and of host countries receiving refugees, as one example of this contact, there is usually limited preparation of the receiving host institutions such as schools, health care organizations, and social services. In such situations there can be a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding for both the refugee person as well as those working in these institutions and trying to provide services. Often there is a language issue, and so learning to work with translators is one challenge. However a difference between ‘meaning-making languages’ is a far deeper challenge. If realistic integration is to take place in these situations, both the host society and the newcomer will need to become conscious about how culture forms and informs the way meaning is made and enacted. As representatives of different cultural expressions begin to live and work together, new cultural formations take place. These can be at a relatively surface level of new developing types of ethnic restaurants, or at a deeper level of finding ways of experiencing existential rituals in a new cultural setting.

An important part of assessing theories of development and psychosocial interactions, as well as for analyzing existential meaning-making constructs and ritual expressions through the lens of cultural analysis, in the globalized contexts in which we live, is understanding trauma experience. Trauma can be experienced by anyone living in any culture. Exposure to similar kinds of trauma experiences will not necessarily have the same impact on different people. How people respond to trauma, and the impact trauma has is, in part, related to the internal and external mental health, existential and psychosocial resources that are available. In situations such as forced migration, refugee trauma often involves multiple trauma experiences. In protracted refugee settings, such as the one in Syria, it may be extremely difficult to begin the healing process or gain access to internal mental health and existential resources due to the uncertainty of the situation, as well as the often devastating personal losses of family

members and a functioning life structure. Understanding the full extent of the losses or changes is necessary, as well as finding ways to identify and support the resource systems available. Of the survival and adaptation models available in refugee post-trauma contexts, the one developed and tested by psychiatrist Derrick Silove stands out. In his model the following systems are included: *Security/ safety, Attachment, Justice, Role/ identity, and Existential meaning* (Silove, 2005). Multiple-trauma experience in these kinds of situations may affect all levels. Any program of intervention needs to take account of each of these systems and see what the level of functioning, and what resources are available to address the often multi-level nature of problems. The functioning of the existential meaning system is central to the model. Intervention resources aimed at this level can make an extraordinary difference in supporting coping processes at the individual, family, and group levels.

With these working definitions and theoretical concepts and models we are now able to return to our cases to gain a better understanding of how these can be applied to the actual lived experiences of Mazen in Syria and Anna in Sweden. To facilitate the application of the theoretical concepts presented above, in a working structure for clinical psychology of religion, the following model is presented.

The model's outer layer involves a mapping of the cultural context in which the assessment is taking place. Assessment of possible factors in the political situation impacting upon the cultural context is also included in the analysis (see DeMarinis, 2011; DeMarinis, Ulland, & Karlsen, 2011) for inclusion of the political dimension in an analytical model for clinical psychology of religion research. Thinking back to Marsella's working definition of culture, it is important to remember that this assessment also includes an analysis of the health care institutions in the cultural context and, of special importance, is the degree of awareness and training in assessing how cultural- and existential components of meaning are understood to shape both the professional's and the patient's images of disease and health.

The model's next layer has the four system components, *Security/ safety, Attachment, Justice, Role/ identity*, as separate areas yet with a common overlapping section allowing for assessment of interdependent factors. The fifth system, *Existential meaning*, is placed as the central layer indicating that it is at the core of the systems. This central placement indicates that the function of this system is critically important for the functioning of the other systems as one needs to make meaning around experiences, not in the least traumatic ones. Within this system existential rituals and ritualizing activities are especially highlighted as the function of these activities provides essential information as to the person's coping abilities, ability to make meaning in the current situation, and to begin to identify and make use of both internal (intrapsychic) as well as

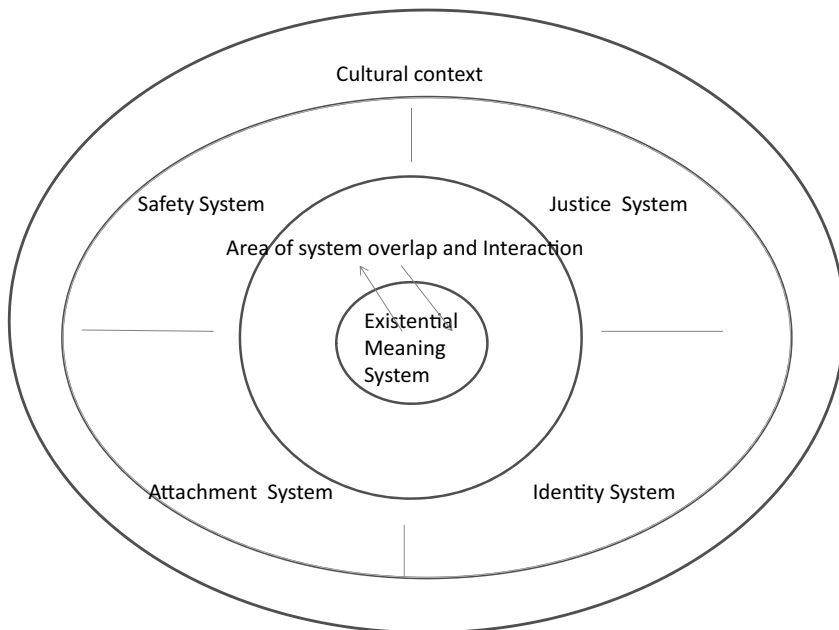


Diagram: Interactional analysis of system function for assessing mental health problems and resources in cultural context (*Adaption by DeMarinis of Silove's (2005) model in cooperation with Silove*)

external (interpersonal) resources for the healing and/or adjustment processes (Kleinman, 1980; DeMarinis et al., 2011; DeMarinis, 2008). Depending upon the circumstances, the assessment can be done focusing only on the current situation in a more crisis-intervention context, or more thoroughly in a psychotherapeutic context where a lifecycle timeline would be used.

Though space here permits only a very limited case analysis, some points related to the model's systems will be noted.

## Mazen in Syria

As already mentioned in the brief case description, the situation for Iraqi and other refugees groups in Syria is primarily that of a temporary relocation, in that no permanency in terms of citizenship is possible. However, this 'temporary' relocation can become a protracted reality. In terms of the mental health care and psychosocial support in Syria, part of the UNHCR program includes national capacity building for these areas (for more information on the Psychosocial and Mental Health program in Syria see: Quosh, 2011; UNHCR, 2007). From a



societal perspective, religion is central. Different religious communities, Muslim, Christian and others co-exist in the society. Daily existential rituals can be seen and heard through the Muslim prayer calls and the Christian feasts and street processions. That religion is a central component of the Iraqi worldview, and should be considered in terms of understanding resilience factors, is evident in the World Health Organization's report on Iraqi mental health (World Health Organization, 2009). However, religion is also a very politically volatile topic in Syria, and is not often a part of public discourse. In terms of the possibility of its inclusion in assessment and treatment planning in relation to mental health care, there is virtually no provision for this. The words of one Syrian psychiatrist, from a focus group interview with mental health professionals, can be considered as representative of the situation.

“We understand the importance and place of religion and religious activities in the Iraqi patients and our own [Syrian] patients. But talking about religion is not done openly in Syria. And, we have no training or tools to work in this area. There is a need to find a way to do this, especially in terms of trying to work with religious practices as mental health resources. Just now topics related to religiosity may come up more in terms of causing guilt- as a problem for mental health. But seeing things from both sides, and especially the components of religiosity that give hope and help with daily coping are important to work with too.”

If we now move to the Systems in the model for Mazen, we need to begin with his Existential Meaning System. Mazen has a functioning existential meaning system that he is able to draw upon to establish a sense of survival and meaning in his current situation, which he himself describes as one of deep survival. Mazen has not been able to bring his existential meaning system into his meetings within psychiatry, and does not feel, as noted in the case description, that this information can be understood there. Being at the mosque provides some sense of order for Mazen but he reports that he does not feel a sense of community there, and often times being there he is haunted by thoughts of being punished for his wrongdoings, feeling guilty for being the one who survived, and feeling alone. The time spent at the Centre is the most hope filled and stabilizing for Mazen. Here is his safe and sacred space in a tangible way. The prayers he silently prays here have a different effect on and for him. The Centre is also the safe space where he and his son can meet, be more relaxed, and participate in activities. For Mazen, it is vitally important to have this space for relating with his son as there is so much tension and uncertainty all around and at home. Though it is impossible to know for sure, it is at least possible to hypothesize that, without the Centre, Mazen's existential meaning system would most likely not be as functional as it is. One important point to note is that Mazen, as is so often the case with those who have survived very traumatic situations, is haunted by a sense of

survivor guilt and struggles with a sense of divine punishment as being the result of his wrongdoings. In the killing of his wife and child, the perpetrators used religious symbols in a desecrating way. This abusive existential ritualizing activity is one of the most intrusive memories in Mazen's experience of post-traumatic stress symptoms. The risk here is that without Mazen's balancing existential experiences and activities, literally and symbolically at the Centre, the existential guilt and sense of divine punishment and the intrusive memory of the abusive existential ritual might move into a dysfunctional experience of religiosity, in the Autistic World, in Pruyser's terms.

In Mazen's case, examining the other Systems in the diagram, it is clear that each of these has been profoundly impacted by the multiple-trauma experiences he and his son have undergone both in Iraq as well as in the current protracted situation in Syria. The challenge in applying this model in a protracted refugee context is that the different Systems in the model cannot be rebuilt in the same way as in a post-conflict situation. This is described well in Mazen's words:

"The abnormal has now become the normal. Though the weapons are gone, the constant sense of uncertainty is my reality. I am trying to survive and help my son. It is hard to hope but I have no choice for his sake. Small things mean a great deal now. I just try to find meaning day by day. On the better days I can see the point of re-creating my life, who I am as person and father."

Mazen's rebuilding processes, in this protracted situation, are being concentrated in the Attachment and Identity Systems, and mediated by the functioning and support of his Existential Meaning System.

## Anna in Sweden

The cultural context of Sweden is considered to be one of the most secularized in the world in terms of the majority population and traditional religious systems. However, recent analyses of this 'secularized' label need to be refined in terms of growing minority populations with strong religious and cultural identities, as well as a variety of different existential worldviews, and privatized religiosity among the majority population (see Pettersson, 2006). In terms of an analysis of this cultural context, from the vantage point of clinical psychology of religion, the category of existential meaning is no less important in the Swedish context than in other more traditionally religious contexts. In reality, there is growing evidence that attention needs to be paid to how existential meaning is lived in this context and where safe spaces for existential ritualizing can be found (DeMarinis, 2008, 2003; DeMarinis, Ulland, & Karlsen, 2011; Liljas Stålhandske, 2005).

In terms of how existential information is, in general, understood within mental health care services, the words of one psychiatrist being interviewed for an ongoing research project on cultural and existential competency are representative:

“In a secularized society such as we live in here in Sweden, there is nothing that prepares us for understanding let alone making use of a way to tap into a patient’s religious or other kind of existential system. I know things like religious rites or practices can be therapeutic sometimes, but I am at a loss of how to get to this. Should talking about this be a part of what I do? I sometimes wonder if by intentionally avoiding this area I am doing harm.”

In Anna’s case, we know that she has not been able to or felt invited to talk about any of her existential meaning concerns or practices in her interactions with the health care sector. This is clearly a frustration for Anna.

Moving to the Existential Meaning System in the model, Anna’s system here presents an interesting challenge. On the one hand, Anna does not have a traditional religious system, but there is information about activities that, from a psychological perspective focused on functionality, can be designated as existential ritualizing, e. g. her walking and being in Nature. If this activity fulfills the function of helping Anna come into a sense of deeper communication with her own process as well as with a sense of life, then it is a part of her existential meaning system and, as an activity of special significance for her, can be classified as existential ritualizing. With this type of existential ritualizing done privately, Anna does not have a community or even a common safe space to which she can go to share her experiences. In terms of assessing the functionality of her Existential Meaning System, it is there but limited. This is one of Anna’s struggles. She has not been able to bring this existential meaning information into the treatment context, and this is problematic as she can harness this existential meaning system’s resources in only a limited way. In addition, another of Anna’s existential ritualizing activities has been her private drinking ritual. This, however, has become a destructive ritualizing experience and she wisely realizes that she needs to find another ritualizing activity. However, this is very difficult to do when one is alone and vulnerable. Anna clearly would benefit from a safe and open place to go where she could find other resources to work on this need for re-ritualizing in a gender-informed alcohol treatment context. Left unaddressed, this re-ritualizing need for her private drinking ritual behaviour prevents her from moving forward with her plan to reduce or eliminate drinking, as well as exacerbating her depression symptoms (DeMarinis, Scheffel-Birath, & Hansagi, 2009). In terms of Pruyser’s categories, Anna is at risk of losing her ability to make use of her existential ritual resources, losing confidence and grounding in her own abilities, and of becoming lost to herself through the

pressures of the Realistic World inhibiting her capacity to use her existential ritualizing towards a healing process.

In looking at the other Systems in Anna's case, the Security/Safety System is not functioning well. Anna is dealing with an escalating system of both verbal and now physical abuse. The home context has become an unsafe space, living with the condition of domestic violence. The changes in the marital relationship, and the growing tensions in the relationship with her daughter, signal that the Attachment System is also under threat.

In both of these cases, even in this very brief analysis, it is the author's hope that the functioning of the Existential Meaning System and the central place of existential meaning-making and ritualizing in that system have come through. With growing evidence of the usability and adaptability of this analytical Systems Model for addressing post-trauma situations, the challenge is to work with existing public mental health systems to adapt to this way of working. Along with this is the larger society's challenge to design and maintain 'safe spaces' for existential ritualizing, not in the least in cultural contexts such as Sweden. This is a clear public mental health need.

## Conclusion

The meaning-making process with special attention to existential rituals and ritualizing components is important for an individual's psychological development and for maintaining psychosocial structure in cultural context. These components are also essential in the developmental process following experiences of trauma. Through two very different types of cases presented, one from Syria and the other from Sweden, there are three common themes in focus: the importance of understanding how meaning-making has been affected; the importance of engaging existential rituals and ritualizing for maintaining psychological health; and identifying resources for addressing psychological problems.

In Syria religion is very important for the majority- and minority groups and religious ritual practices are commonly seen in daily expressions. In Sweden, one of the world's most secular countries in terms of official religiosity, private expressions of belief or of other types of existential meaning making are important. These expressions can take a variety of forms.

The theoretical concepts used here are from a development- and depth-psychology perspective as well as from post-trauma theory and models. A clinical model is presented. The importance of existential rituals and the possibility for continued ritualization after trauma is discussed and illustrated through the two cases.

A challenge for the clinical psychology of religion, as illustrated in both cases, is to continue the theoretical and clinical work with understanding and addressing meaning-making interruption, and the use of planned existential ritualizing expression in addressing both individual and group needs following trauma.

#### Notation

Partial funding for the preparation of this article has been provided through a grant from the research program, Impact of Religion: Challenges for Society, Law, and Democracy, a Centre of Excellence at Uppsala University and financed through the Swedish Research Council 2008 – 2018.

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## Testimony and Transformation: Addiction, Meaning and Spiritual Change

Testimony transforms witness, in which the heart, mood, emotions and understanding are involved.

Wessel Stoker, *Is Faith Rational?* 108

### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the interaction between meaning and transformation in the specific context of addiction. The paper takes a narrative approach focusing on religious conversion testimonies of former drug addicts. In order to understand the processes of the construction of meaning and spiritual transformation among recovered drug addicts, we have to see how they craft narratives about their addiction experiences and conversion, how they tell these testimonies to themselves and to others, and ultimately how these testimonies become convincing to them.

Addictions often develop in response to life crises or trauma and identity loss (Dayton, 2000; Najavits, 1998; Najavits, Weiss, & Shaw, 1997). Research has also shown that spirituality is important for change and identity development in the recovery process. Experiences of spiritual transformation, including religious conversion, can be an important element in the coping process that is inherent to recovery (Brent & Mc Govern, 2006; Ng & Shek, 2001). In posttraumatic growth research spiritual transformation proves to be one of the key dimensions (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2006; Ganzevoort, 2009), offering a form of healing for troubled persons. Although the connections between several of these key terms (trauma, identity, addiction, recovery, spirituality) have been investigated, there has not been much direct attention to the role of testimonial in reconstructing a viable narrative of the self, accounting for trauma, addiction, and conversion, and embedding this narrative in a particular social and spiritual context.

The intersection of addiction and spirituality in our research also builds on clinical insights. In the treatment of addictions, the Alcoholics Anonymous “12 steps”-model has proven to be an invaluable approach. It was shown to be



effective not only for alcohol dependency, but also with other addictions. The Minnesota Model, based on AA-principles, is by now widely accepted in a variety of contexts. Interestingly, this approach has strong spiritual overtones and highlights the importance of a transcendent, higher power. Although this is usually understood as referring to the AA-group itself (Murken, 1994), the AA-principles closely follow the spiritual models of conversion and faith development. Similarly, religious organizations offering drug rehabilitation programs often emphasize the spiritual dimension and encourage spiritual involvement. Many conversion stories can be found involving such a spiritual turn in overcoming addiction. Apparently, parallels can be drawn between the process of developing and overcoming addiction and the process of conversion. These parallels regard identity development, relational belonging, existential meaning and lack thereof, reconstructing the self, spiritual transformation, and witnessing to others about the changes in the self.

Addiction is here seen primarily as a psychological disorder related to the problematic construction of one's narrative identity. Conversion influences the (re)construction of this narrative identity and the restructuring of the relationship between self and others. Testimony is understood as the performance of one's narrative identity for a particular audience. It lends new credibility to the narrative that had become questionable because of the addiction. Spiritual transformation is seen as an adaptive mechanism that helps former addicts to cope with psychological conflicts and create meaning and a reconstructed self-narrative.

Experiences of spiritual transformation, like religious conversion, can thus be an important element in the coping process inherent to recovery. In the context of conversion and addiction research testimony is the *biographical reconstruction*, or *renarrativization*, of one's life, where the subject actively reinterprets past experiences and self-conceptions from the vantage point of the present, in such a way that it redefines the relationship with self and others.

Based on ongoing research by the present authors, this paper explores how former drug addicts construct meaning and experience spiritual transformation. More specifically, we will look at the role of conversion testimonies as the narrative performance of conversion. Furthermore, we want to see how testimonial discourse functions as an interpretative framework in terms of which former drug users live and organize their experiences. Understanding testimony as a performative discursive practice allows insight into the strategies former drug addicts employ to negotiate their identities and meanings in the recovery process. Therefore, this chapter focuses on questions of how recovered drug addicts seek to give meaning to their lives through testimonial discourse, and how they construct their testimonies with regard to spiritual trans-

formation. In other words: how can telling one's testimony contribute to the (trans)formation of a new identity?

Therefore, in this chapter we will proceed as follows: after describing how conversion functions in the life stories of two former substance abusers, we will give particular attention to the hermeneutics of testimony. In the second part we will look at conversion as a narrative construct in religious identity that brings self-transformation for the former drug addicts.

## Stories of Addiction, Conversion, and Identity

Before we explore the concepts in more depth, we introduce two short biographies which will function as main case studies of our analyses in this chapter. These cases will serve in the following sections to provide examples of the ideas to be introduced.

### Mirjam's Story

Mirjam is the youngest of five children in a Dutch, Christian, middle class family. When she turned 6 her brother started sexually abusing her, which continued until she was 12. Initially, she did not really understand what went on but, when she turned 8, she thought: "What is happening here? What is going on? This is not OK." She was afraid of her brother and did not feel safe at home. Most frightening of all was that she never knew when it was going to happen again.

In the aftermath of the abuse Mirjam did not trust people anymore. She felt it easier to "hide" behind a big mask. She was confused, did not know where she was or what she was doing. "I was totally lost." Although she felt distanced from them, she had some friends with whom she would have some fun. She feels positive about that, "because if you don't have any peers, you'll feel abandoned and miserable."

Mirjam went to high school, but she had many problems there. Because of her intelligence she had enjoyed privileges at the elementary school, but this was no longer the case. She became very stubborn and held no respect for authority. After school she joined a gang where they smoked pot and drank alcohol. Mirjam mistrusted everyone. She often felt angry and sad, interspersed by moments of excitement and even happiness. Because of her experiences, and the development of a lesbian identity, Mirjam felt she needed to create more space for herself outside the social confines of home and school. This was exactly what she found in the gang.

Another factor contributing to his choice was her remaining fear of her

brother. She thought: "What can I do to manage this problem? Maybe I will join a gang with people he is afraid of." In those years Mirjam's brother worked at a pub that attracted many criminals, and he was afraid of them. This drew Mirjam toward them and to the hard drugs they were involved in. Mirjam felt that drugs calmed her down and helped her cope with her personal problems. Her substance abuse increased over time and she became involved in criminal activities. As she did not feel safe at home, she used to sleep in the streets or squats in Amsterdam.

At that point, Mirjam reached the decision for a radical change of life. Two weeks later she was enrolled in a rehab program that included trauma therapy. It was there she had a religious experience. In the first week of therapy she walked down the hallway and thought: "I cannot succeed, not on my own and not this way. I have now given up my survival tools and I am as vulnerable as possible. I should have faith that from now on, everything will improve, otherwise, I will die." Mirjam experienced an epiphany, realizing that God cares for her.

During the time at the clinic Mirjam attended an Evangelical church on a regular base. She was touched by the patience of the pastor towards people. However, because of her sexual orientation, she felt she was not fully accepted, which made her very sad. Given these experiences of rejection and exclusion, she started to look for a more liberal church.

After 15 months in the rehab program Mirjam returned to the "real" world. She found this exciting, especially as she had no idea how people would judge her. Mirjam went to a private school to finish her education and decided to devote her life to a religious career. According to her, there are two significant religious experiences in her story. The first is that she was taken care of when she went through hell. The second is that there was a new road, a new beginning, for her. These experiences have become central to her life story. She concludes that faith has given her a new identity and changed her as a person.

### Luka's Story

Luka was born in the early 1970s in a Serbian atheist and communist family of artistic intellectuals. His father was a famous artist and a professor at the art academy, and his mother was a professor of language and literature. Luka says that his childhood was tense and insecure since his parents used to live a bohemian life. The relationship with his father was cold, lacking in necessary attention, and was characterized by a strong feeling of rejection. He had a somewhat better relationship with his mother, but he felt ashamed and angry over her alcoholism. His parents divorced when he was 11. Although he spent

very little time with his father, those occasions represent the most beautiful memories of his childhood.

After his parents' divorce, Luka lived with his mother who had no control over his life. Luka was neither punished for his sometimes problematic behavior, nor aware of the consequences. He had learning difficulties and became aggressive at school. Around the age of 14 or 15 Luka became interested in music and assembled his first punk-rock band. Within the punk subculture he was strongly influenced by anarchist philosophy. Having started taking soft drugs at age 13, Luka took heroin intravenously for the first time at age 16. His first fix, he said, was like something he had longed for his entire life. Heroin brought him a sense of security and ease. At the age of 21 Luka became a heroin addict with all the withdrawal symptoms.

In his late twenties Luka married a girl who was also addicted. They were both involved in criminal acts. After three years of a troubled marriage, Luka decided to divorce her. His late twenties were the darkest period of his life, and he used drugs in large amounts. The civil war in former Yugoslavia was raging, and the country was isolated. Heroin, however, was easily available like never before and became an anesthetic to escape from the difficulties of life.

Suffering from bad health, chronic hepatitis C, and physical and mental exhaustion, Luka was at the end of his strength at the age of 30. This proved to become a turning point for him. "One morning the police took me to prison while I was in an abstinence crisis. Then I realized I was tired of doing drugs. I told myself that I would never go through this again. I could not go back to addiction and everything... I was mentally deranged, I had a bad memory, I was full of fears, somewhat paranoid – in a very complicated mental and physical condition.... They told me at work that I could not stay there until I become well again. My mother let me stay with her, gave me a bed to sleep in, and told me I had to change my life. I was in debt financially, and I did some criminal acts because of which the prison sentence awaited me. I felt empty within, and I was tired of such a life. I simply could not find more money to buy drugs.... There was a turning point when I came to God, alone, without having gone to church or talked to other people. I told him I wanted to live with him [God], and that I did not want to take drugs any more. That was my prayer to God on Christmas 2001. I have never taken drugs since then."

Not long after that Luka met people from the rehabilitation centre. These included an acquaintance he used to buy drugs from 15 years earlier. This time his former dealer told him about God, and how he had managed to recover from his addiction. Luka was convinced by this powerful testimony of a former drug dealer who had changed radically. Luka went through the rehabilitation centre program and completed it successfully. In the first few months of rehabilitation Luka prayed a lot and talked to other people. Now, eleven years after the re-

habilitation, Luka works at the rehabilitation centre helping other drug addicts to get rid of their addiction problems. Luka re-married, this time to a girl who had also completed the rehabilitation program. They now live together and have two children. Although he still suffers from some medical consequences, Luka describes himself as a successful man who is motivated to fight for life, both for himself and for others. He also sees himself as a useful member of society who helps drug addicts. After 16 years of addiction, Luka has not taken drugs for 11 years now, and he has never felt compelled to revert to using.

These two stories highlight some of the recurring themes in the life stories collected in the research. Like many others, both Mirjam and Luka describe a childhood of abuse and/or neglect. These (sub)traumatic experiences are interpreted in the narratives as significant antecedents of the addiction. Added to them is the factor of the availability of drugs, sometimes connected to the example of parents and peers. The conversion itself is narrated as occurring at a rock bottom moment, where the person has no other choice than to change radically. This does not mean that there is an instantaneous religious experience, nor that the decision to change is immediately interpreted in religious terms. That may happen at a later moment. The further future is defined to no small degree by this radical and religious decision. Both Mirjam and Luka decide to rebuild their life into a religious or helping career.

Differences between Mirjam's and Luka's stories have to do with the different contexts they come from. The research project includes three samples: one of autochthonous Dutch participants, one of migrants in the Netherlands, and one of autochthonous persons in Serbia. This comparative approach will allow us to study the construction of meaning in the interaction of (sub)traumatic experiences, addiction, recovery, spiritual transformation, and cultural and societal influences on the processes of coping and the attribution of meaning. Influences include the civil war, collective trauma and consequent erosion of moral values in Serbia that contributed to an epidemic of drug abuse. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, narratives of addiction more often refer to individual trauma than to collective societal instability. Migrants' stories tend to include either collective trauma, as in the Serbian sample, or individual trauma, as in the Dutch sample (partly depending on their geographical background), but with the additional experience of migration. Another influence is the differing roles of religion in these cultures. Whereas the Netherlands shows a steady decline of a formerly strong religious presence, the last fifteen years in Serbia portray a process of de-secularization and revival of formal religiosity and neo-traditionalism, as well as a rise of evangelical Christian churches. Background cultures of the migrant sample tend to have a consistently high level of religiosity. Finally, the samples differ with regard to the societal stances toward drugs with the Dutch society expressing liberal social policies, and Serbia imposing an

authoritarian approach and a strong prohibition of drugs, together with an increase in the addiction rates.

In these different contexts narratives of addiction, conversion, and recovery may be given their particular shape. Our interest lies in the ways testimonies of conversion are constructed by former drug addicts and the role of these testimonies in their recovery. We are interested in their spiritual transformation, especially at the level of their narrative presentation. Drug addicts' conversion stories can be seen as adaptive efforts to resolve psychological conflict and create a new self-narrative. For recovered drug addicts sharing their testimonies is an opportunity to reinterpret and reconstruct their past, plan their future in the framework of the new religious (canonical) language and, consequently, construct a life story as a typical conversion story. Therefore, the main reason to focus on conversion narratives, rather than on the experience of conversion itself, is that the performance of conversion narratives is central to the efficacy of the conversion. Inasmuch as the testimonial narratives are located before specific audiences (congregations, cultures), they are cast in particular ways to use the symbols and canonical language of the intended audience. The result is a richly textured account of an individual's autobiography as it relates to larger religious and cultural stories (Roof, 1993).

## Hermeneutics of Testimony

The notion of *testimonio* – testimonial narrative – features prominently on the agenda of the human and social sciences (Randal, 1985). The reason for this is, in part, the fact that “*testimonio* intertwines the “desire for objectivity” and “the desire for solidarity” in its very situation of production, circulation, and reception“ (Beverley, 2005). A *testimonio* is a narrative, spoken or written text in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts (Beverley, 2005, p. 547). According to Beverley, “its unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or significant life experience” (Beverley, 2005, p. 547).

In every fellowship meeting of *Alcoholics* and *Narcotics Anonymous*, as in many faith-based rehabilitation programs, individuals have the opportunity to give a personal account of their experience with God. This testimony is a central “technique of the self” (Marshall, 2009), and the principal mode of creating a new identity and collective belonging. Testimony as practice of the self “involves acts and experiences of faith whose focus is on interiority, enacting in various forms processes of self examination and giving an account of oneself” (Marshall, 2009, p. 129).

The perspective of testimony also offers rich resources for understanding the

nature of conversion, the prototypical form of spiritual change. For Rambo, personal testimony is a common method for the public display of commitment. He defines testimony as “the narrative witness of a person’s conversion and it entails two interacting processes: language transformation and biographical reconstruction” (Rambo, 1993, p. 136). This psychological perspective can be broadened with a social-psychological view on group engagement. Conversion then can be seen as the reconstruction of the self around a new center of meaning, as the adoption of a new rhetoric or language system, and as a new form or degree of affiliation to a specific (religious) group. Therefore, testimonial talk is always socially constructed by use of the canonical language of the particular religious community. In this sense, testimonies, as scripted and discursive modes of speaking, are informed by a theological framework that reflects an implicit theology of the converts. Testimonies, therefore, form the basis of the convert’s “new spirituality” and theology. These three processes come together in a person’s testimony.

The opportunity to testify before an audience, George Jensen notes, can be a deeply liberating experience. In many faith-based programs “stories are told at the meeting; they are ritualized, performed, created, as one embodied voice stands before others” (Jensen, 2000, p. 1). Giving testimony of conversion and addiction is essential to the process of recovery and to the group dynamic. Therefore, the testimony serves to reconstruct biographical information, integrating the convert’s and religious community’s story. It is also the performance of a new social identity which is the result of a successful conversion.

Likewise, in contemporary philosophy, the term *testimony* is used as a label for the spoken or written word, when this purports to pass on the speaker’s or writer’s knowledge and experience, conveying factual information or other truth. From the perspective of philosophy of religion, Stoker describes the Christian faith itself as a testimony to Transcendence. According to him, such a testimony has two poles: on the one hand, a manifestation and proclamation of Transcendence and, on the other, the human being as a witness of what he or she has seen, heard or experienced (Stoker, 2006, p. 102). For Stoker, testimony to Transcendence concerns being a witness, “giving an answer to the manifestation and proclamation of religious Transcendence” (Stoker, 2006, p. 118). Thus, testimonies function as dynamic, discursive devices in which converts stress the presence and active involvement of Transcendence in everyday life (Klaver, 2011, p. 282).

Despite the wide variety of views on testimony, a single proposition is widely accepted: testimony is the assertion of a declarative sentence by a speaker to a hearer or to an audience (Coady, 1992; Fricker, 2004; Graham, 2000). In this sense, *testimonio* might be seen as a kind of speech act that sets up special ethical

and epistemological demands. Therefore, testifying, or giving testimony, is a linguistic action, and testimony is its result, an intelligible speech act of telling.

Conversion testimonies then can be understood as a discursive practice of self-performance in which converts give evidence of their spiritual transformation through public confessions (testimony) of their past life and their present situation. These conversion testimonies, as they are retold orally and composed as autobiographies, become the paradigms by which people interpret their lives (Rambo, 1993, p. 158). In the context of recovered drug addict converts, these testimonies help individuals in a new way to construe a new religious identity, and help them to cope with the past as something that could be both overcome and redeemed. In particular, they enable new forms of conduct that offer recovered drug addicts ways of extricating themselves from a spoiled identity. In this sense, conversion testimony functions as mechanism of reinforcement and commitment (Cartledge, 2010, p. 17).

Here we can benefit from Paul Ricœur's (1979) seminal essay, *The Hermeneutics of Testimony*, which was among the first to explore testimony as the distinctive Christian hermeneutic. In this article, Ricœur tries to analyze testimony from a semantic perspective, providing language and terms to describe the philosophical and theological aspects of testimony. Ricœur tries to show that a philosophy of testimony can only be a hermeneutic, that is, a philosophy of interpretation (Ricœur, 1979, p. 143). He argues that interpretation of testimony is a twofold act, an act of consciousness of itself and an act of historical understanding which is based on signs that the absolute gives of itself. According to Ricœur, "the signs of the absolute's self-disclosure are at the same time signs in which consciousness recognizes itself" (Ricœur, 1979, p. 143). Therefore, the hermeneutics of testimony arise in the confluence of two exegeses – the exegesis of historic testimony of the absolute and the exegesis of the self in light of the criteria of the divine. The expression and/or transformation of the self, in light of the criteria of the divine, is of great importance for our research. Thus, in the context of addiction and conversion research, we define testimony as the discursive performance of telling and retelling one's personal narrative of addiction and conversion (God's engagement) in former drug addicts' lives. As such, it is a responsive and creative expression of faith.

Also, for our purpose here, it is important to note the two elements Ricœur describes: *testimony-confession* and *testimony-narration*, which are present in conversion testimonies. Former drug addict converts are engaged in testimony-confession when they declare that the power of God helped them to be free from drugs. Testimony-narration consists of the associated narrative of how they gained that testimony and what the significance of that testimony is. Stating that God delivered them from drugs will always be tied into a narrative of salvation in Jesus Christ or, in the words of Ricœur, a narration of "the acts of deliverance"



(Ricœur, 1979, p. 134). If we examine the ways in which the experience of conversion is described in testimony, we see that the individual invariably presents this “spiritual moment as an intensely powerful and private dialogue of the self with the self, yet one in which the individual recognize him- or herself as being in the grip of a power that goes beyond the individual, a power that reveals itself in an imperious fashion, demanding that one cede or capitulate” (Marshall, 2009, p. 147).

## Addiction, Conversion Testimony and Recovery

Many authors argue that human beings are routinely involved in redefining their autobiography and self-identity in the light of new experience (McAdams, 1993; Giddens, 1991). Bruner gives an explanation of how the process of change from one story to another takes place. According to him, it is the perceived inconsistency, between the previously accepted story and the new situation, that leads us to reject or question the old narrative, and it is the perceived relevance of the new narrative to our own life situation that leads to its acceptance (Bruner, 1986, p. 153). We argue that conversion can be thought of as a specific spiritual example of this common process. Therefore, from this conversion perspective, as we already mentioned, testimony is *biographical reconstruction*, or re-narrativization of one’s life, whereby the subject actively reinterprets past experience of self-conceptions from the vantage point of the present, in such a way as to change the meaning of the past for the subject (David & Machalek, 1983, p. 266). In those regards, as Berger and Luckmann have reminded us, conversion experiences generally involve dramatic transformations of a person’s social reality. They wrote that “the old reality ... must be reinterpreted within the legitimating apparatus of the new reality. This involves a reinterpretation of past biography *in toto*” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 179).

Thumma sees conversion as a *core identity construct*, in which both conversion and identity experiences lead to important changes in the lives of individuals (Thumma, 1991). Similarly, Beit-Hallahmi defines conversion as “a perceptible change in one’s religious identity – a conscious self-transformation” (Beit-Hallahmi, 1989, p. 114). Bailey Gillespie (1979) points out that both the experience of religious conversion and of personal identity formation have profound effects on the actual perception of the meaning of life. Moreover, religious conversion can help relieve a sense of psychological crisis, because it can provide meaning in the face of meaninglessness, and identity integration when confronted with circumstances that cause individuals to question their sense of identity (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997). With specific reference to drug addiction, some authors have argued that religious conversion gives a new

identity to rehabilitated drug addicts that enable them to begin a new life (Ng & Shek, 2001). Snow and Machalek (1983) call this *embracing a master role* in which the subject sees a full integration of the new religious identity with all other identities, the subordination of all other identities to the new religious identity, or the elimination of other identities incompatible with the new religious identity.

It is, however, not only the personal identity that is reconstructed in the conversion process. As we indicated earlier, conversion has to do not only with reconstructing the center of one's identity, but also with finding new language and affiliating oneself anew with a social group. These two elements are directly connected to one's social identity, or, in other words, to the intended audience of the life story (Ganzevoort, 2012). A successful narrative reconstruction entails all three elements. More than that, the integration of the three elements is essential for a plausible new narrative identity. The language and canonical stories of the group one wishes to belong to, the reinterpretation of past events and the performance of the story before the new audience together make for a viable new story.

This is why, in the process of identity construction, testimonies play an important role. They perform the narrative reinterpretation of one's past before the audience of one's future, adopting the language and canonical models offered by the audience. For former drug addicts, telling and retelling their testimonies is an opportunity to reinterpret and reconstruct their past and plan their new future in connection with the group they want to be part of. Consequently they construct their life story as a typical conversion story (Popp-Baier, 2002). Denzin argues in his book, *The Alcoholic Society*, that testifying at AA articulates the transition between two selves: "the old drinking self of the past...and the new nondrinking self of the present and future" (Denzin, 1993, p. 310). In this narrativization of the self, storytellers describe their former addiction-self and the new self they are struggling to become. In the light of this, Miller and McCrady use the term "passionate testimony," that provides an alternative representation, or script, which enables the addict to take pride in his/her status as a former or recovering addict (Miller & McCrady, 1993).

At this point, it is useful to mention that the conversion testimony creates a new social identity, and non-shaming role, that replaces the identity of the "criminal". This means that the convert not only finds a new position vis-à-vis the religious group, but also with regard to wider society. Moreover, conversion testimony allows someone to move from a life of addiction to one in which (s)he has interpretative control over his or her life, "warding off the stigmatizing labels that are applied externally by replacing them with a religious identity and universe of discourse" (Shadd, Louise, & Kathryn, 2006, p. 174). The conversion narrative, then, may function as a source of shame management that creates a

new social and religious identity and enables the person to develop stronger self-esteem (Shadd, Louise, & Kathryn, 2006, p. 161). In Luka's case study, for example, the conversion testimony helps to cope with shame in several ways. The testimonial narrative creates a new social identity that replaces the labels of "criminal" and "junkie," and eventually positions him as a caregiver. Telling and retelling the testimony can therefore be seen as a narrative coping mechanism. The new testimony brings purpose and meaning in life, turning drug addicts into agents of God.

When people "switch worlds" and adopt a new religious and social identity, they need to find a new audience, with new significant others, who are willing to endorse the new narrative identity (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The central component of successful recovery from addiction is acceptance of that new identity narrative by his or her significant others, who may or may not be the same people as before. As Biernacki correctly recognized, non-addicted others must come to accept the abstainers as ordinary people who are no longer addicted, and "act toward them in terms of the new, 'ordinary' identities that they present" (Biernacki, 1986, p. 142). Social stigma and exclusion can be a huge barrier that must be overcome if former drug addicts are successfully to stop using drugs and transform their lives. Buchanan and Young (2000), in their empirical research, provide examples of how the process of stigmatization, marginalization and social exclusion, lead to chronically relapsing drug use.

The addict's reconstruction of such narratives of the past provides the necessary basis for the addict to discover meaning in his or her struggle with addiction. The recovering addict's new religious identity not only needs to be developed, it also requires positive reinforcement experiences that demonstrate the benefits of being drug-free and encourage the former addict to feel good about herself or himself (McIntosh & McKeganey, 2002). Often addicts interpret their addiction testimonies as God's will which led them to salvation. A new testimony brings a new understanding of addiction as a gift or opportunity. This is all the more true when the audience supports and endorses the testimony. Justifying the experience of addiction with meaning and purpose in this way can be seen as a coping strategy. For some people this may not be an adequate coping strategy, but it helps them to cope with stigma and shame and to construct their new identities.

In our two case studies we see that Luka's and Mirjam's conversions are *sudden*, or *crisis* types of conversion. Many authors highlight the importance of a specific "turning point" when one stops using drugs, a point at which the decision to give up drugs is taken and/or consolidated (McIntosh & McKeganey, 2002, p. 155). According to Shaffer and Jones, this process is often experienced as a life crisis where the addict recognizes that his or her lifestyle must change if he or she is to regain control" (Shaffer & Jones, 1989, p. 169). This decisive moment

is variously described as an “existential crisis” (Waldorf, 1983, pp. 237 – 280), an “epistemological shift” (Shaffer & Jones, 1989), “an epiphany”<sup>1</sup> (Denzin, 1989, p. 141) or as hitting “rock bottom” (Maddux & Desmond, 1980, pp. 15 – 25). This kind of existential crisis or turning point is an essential step to recovery from addiction (McIntosh & McKeganey, 2002, p. 5). In the case of Luka and Mirjam, this happened when they ended up in the prison or the rehab clinic. This crisis event also can be understood as the beginning of their conversion. In Luka’s story, it is clear that both coping and conversion are processes of change, in which the individual experiences a transformation in either a mental or a spiritual (or both) sphere, through finding a way out of crisis. His crisis experience was an antecedent of conversion and occurred under pressure. Crises life events (*parental divorce, addiction, war*) forced Luka to confront his limitations and stimulated religious resources to resolve problems.

On the level of narrative, this critical junction in the story serves to make plausible a dramatic shift in the story, accounting for both the past and the present. In these case studies the conversion testimony works as a form of shame management and as a coping strategy in several aspects. The new narrative creates a new social identity to replace label of a criminal and junky. By telling his story Luka coped with his guilt and shame. His message is: *I am not as bad a person as I was*. He says:

“I would describe myself as a successful man. I am successful in the sense that I am a man who has a family which functions normally. I am also successful since I work in an association which helps drug addicts. I help others, and I think I am a useful member of society. I am happy with my life. I see myself as a person motivated to live a new life, to fight for life, for my family, for myself, for others. I am ambitious, and I have my aims and goals. To cut a long story short, I am a man happy with his life.”

The new narrative identity brings purpose and meaning in life, turning Luka and Mirjam into agents of God. The new narrative provides them with a new language and new roles vis-à-vis their respective audiences. Their testimonies are the narrative performance through which this reconstruction is achieved.

In Luka and Mirjam’s search for meaning, and their struggle with addiction, they are constantly interacting with other individuals and groups. The rehabilitation community in which they converted helps them to find meaning in times of crisis. The cases of Luka and Mirjam illustrate how their identities are influenced by the social context, coping and religion. For example, Luka’s conversion narrative is constructed in the context of his interaction with the rehabilitation program which he has joined. His self-understanding is formed in

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<sup>1</sup> Epiphany in the sense of Denzin as “a moment of problematic experience that illuminates personal characteristics and often signifies a turning point in a person’s life”. (Denzin, 1989, p.141).

his interaction with the new religious group. Therefore, Luka's story underlines the important role that social context plays, in the coping process, by supporting the new narrative. Luka achieved his goal telling others that there is hope to recover from addiction. He says:

“My life vision is to help fight against addiction in Serbia by being involved in the rehabilitation centre work and by helping young people to abstain from drugs. My vision is also to share the Gospel with the people in my town and in Serbia, especially with my friends.”

Luka and Mirjam's identity are entirely reshaped and their life stories got a new meaning. By reinterpreting past and future in a direct interaction with a new audience, they were able to develop a new narrative for the present. This new narrative proved to be a plausible and viable alternative story to live in. Their testimonies are the performances through which they rehearsed their new identity and entered into a new relation with their audience.

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## Post- or Para-Modern Devotion in the Netherlands?

### Introduction

At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a religious movement arose that has become known by the name of Modern Devotion (*Devotio Moderna*). Groups of men and women established households resembling communes or monasteries, pursuing a way of life in which spirituality or devotion had a central place. They lived in the midst of life in the city as ordinary neighbours, sharing possessions and rent, producing fabrics or books for the local market, and developing a contemporary spirituality. The most widely known reflection of this spirituality is Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*. These "Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life" declined to take monastic vows and neither did they want to marry. They opposed the indifference and superficiality of many of their contemporaries as well as the privileged and hedonistic life of many clergy. In their view, devotion or spirituality had to return to its essence and to permeate daily life. Whether this movement can be interpreted as the beginning of the Reformation, as a precursor of the French Revolution, as an impetus to Christian humanism, or as "only" a quasi-monastic, ascetic styling of medieval Catholicism: the fact was that these women and men were treated with suspicion by their contemporaries, in particular by ecclesiastical and civil rulers. They were regarded as heretics or fanatics, as a danger to the social and religious order. Their emphasis on interiority, on study and writing spiritual texts, on living without (monastic) rules and vows, on a re-evaluation of the position of women, and on a devotion that made self-awareness central: all of these accents made them suspect. Their social and cultural context was, of course, that of a society in which only one religious tradition possessed authority and jurisdiction, in which the municipal administration closely guarded everything that occurred within its walls, and in which every individual was fettered to overlapping familial, economic, religious and political collectives – a context very dissimilar to ours. At the same time, these brethren and sisters represented an already age-old tradition of converts who advocated a free form of religiosity, based on interiority. Theirs was a challenge



addressed at the ecclesiastical and social *status quo*, as well as a quest for forms of personal religiosity that matched with the times (Van Engen, 2008).

In our time too, people are searching for contemporary forms of religiosity, spirituality or devotion. Time-honoured religious traditions get competition from all kinds of new religious, spiritual, alternative and paranormal movements (De Hart, 2011). Church affiliation is decreasing, but at the same time it is clear that religion is not disappearing, in spite of the secularisation proposition. A transformation is taking place, even a double transformation. The institutional, ecclesiastical forms of religion are losing importance, while new manifestations of religion that defy the well-organised classical frameworks of religious forms are cropping up simultaneously. These new unfettered styles of spirituality are usually oriented towards meaningmaking, lifestyle and self-awareness, and they are hardly institutionally embedded and take personal choice as their point of departure (Van de Donk et al., 2006).

Based on an interview with a lung cancer patient<sup>1</sup>, in this paper we will explore the ways in which she is dealing with her illness in a religious sense, in the process of which she amalgamates several forms of religiosity and spirituality into a personal life story. In order to give more contours to her story, we will position it within the context of our research into lung cancer patients' religious/spiritual coping.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, it is necessary to consider the meaning of coping and of religious coping. We conclude with some insights which this life story provides for meaningmaking and for religious transformation within the present-day Dutch context.

## Interview: Peerke and Hanuman

At the time of the interview, it has been almost 4.5 years since Mrs Verwater, in her mid-fifties, was diagnosed with lung cancer. In her case, it is one of the most aggressive forms of lung cancer, almost always with a fatal outcome. She has almost reached the "magical" survival limit of five years. After six months of intensive treatment (surgery and chemotherapy), plus the after-effects (infection), she had picked herself up. When she talks about this period she does so

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1 When filling in the questionnaire, she consented to an interview and to the anonymous use of it.

2 This PhD project takes place at Tilburg University. The empirical part consists of a quantitative part (questionnaire) and a qualitative part (semi-structured interviews). This explorative research project in the field of the psychology of religion aims at (1) a contribution to the development of theory about the connection of religion, spirituality, ritual, coping strategies, and (lung) cancer, and (2) some recommendations with regard to adequate forms of (spiritual) care and ministry to people with (lung) cancer.

extensively and in detail, as if she is seeing this period pass before her eyes like a movie. The support from her immediate relatives (daughter, son-in-law, ex-husband) has been very helpful. She has found it hard to be dependent and in need of help. In any case, one of her coping strategies is to not allow herself to be pushed into the patient role or into that of a dying person. She wants to do her housekeeping herself, to be independent, to be approached as a normal person. Through the illness she has become less reserved and more assertive, more clear-cut in what she wants and does not want, also regarding her treatment. She is active in lung cancer forums on the Internet where, on the one hand, she shares her experiences and, on the other hand, gathers information about her situation. She has accepted that she has lung cancer (she thinks the “why me?” question to be selfish; lung cancer is not a punishment), and at the same time, she has not given up. This latter aspect is nourished strongly by the wish to see her granddaughter grow up, but also by a kind of intuition or spiritual sensitivity that grants her confidence in the future.

Mrs Verwater is a cradle-Catholic. She attended her First Holy Communion, but is not involved with the church anymore, having been influenced by her father who has had negative experiences with church officials. However, from way back, she does feel attracted to Peerke Donders<sup>3</sup>. After having received the definitive diagnosis, she went to his shrine immediately. She still goes there regularly, and occasionally writes something in the guestbook. She has a statuette of him in a glass display case, a book about him in which she reads occasionally, and a picture of him in her handbag. People have pumped water for her from Peerke’s well, two bottles. It is not for drinking, “They have washed me with it a couple of times”. Before the operation, with a bunch of flowers and her picture to be put in the church, her ex-husband went to the local Capuchin Friary to request a novena.

Her Hindustani son-in-law has given her a pendant of Hanuman, the Hindu god of health. She received it in the week prior to the start of chemotherapy; she has not taken it off since: “I didn’t need any more chemos, nothing else anymore. And the illness came to a standstill”. She keeps it on even when having an X-ray; she then puts it in her mouth. Through this experience in particular, Hinduism has come to take a larger place in her life. She has been struck by “the flexibility” of Hinduism, “Everybody is welcome”. Since becoming ill, her interest in Hinduism has increased. In the glass display case are four statuettes of Hindu gods. Just as she has been washed a couple of times with water from Peerke Donders’s

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3 Peerke (regional Dutch version of Peter) Donders, son of a poor weaver, born 27 October 1809 in Tilburg, missionary among the lepers in Suriname, was beatified on 23 May 1982. The basis for his beatification was the miraculous recovery in 1929 of the Tilburg lad Lowieke Westland, whose serious leg infection had been cooled down with compresses dipped in water from the well near the house of Peerke Donders’s birth.

well, likewise she has been washed with blue water, a Hindustani ritual. She is impressed by how Hinduism has practices and safeguarding rituals for every situation in life: blue water, a pocketknife under the mattress, a black bead, washing with limes. She is especially impressed by the gratitude evident in the various rituals.

The display case in her lounge reveals how her Catholic background and the Hindu influences have become merged in her life. To the left of the shelf are a number of Hindu gods. Next to them, a number of Catholic statuettes: a Sacred Heart, Peerke Donders, Thérèse of Lisieux, the Virgin Mary. She got these last mentioned statuettes from her mother-in-law, after her death. In her view, it all fits: just as in Hinduism every god is “for something special,” the same applies to the saints in the Catholic Church. But she finds Hinduism easier: everybody is welcome, whereas “in the church... only if you’re a Catholic: no one else is allowed in, for you have to have been baptised”. She thinks that Hinduism is more suitable for our time. Amidst the Hindu and Catholic statuettes, there is also a Chinese Buddha, the medicine Buddha holding a medicine; she received it from her brother, “it all appeals to me”.

She considers herself to be “a bit spiritually-minded”, in that she believes a bit in everything. She regularly has extraordinary spiritual experiences. There was, for instance, a clairvoyant, a healer, who visited the woman in the hospital bed next to hers, while she – after lung surgery – was recovering from an infection caused by a hospital bacterium. This healer had, according to her fellow patient, already helped many people, including people with cancer. Not just alleviation of the pain, but also more. When, at Mrs Verwater’s request, her fellow patient had phoned the clairvoyant lady for a visit, the fellow patient’s reaction had been, “you’ve already been with her last night”. Subsequently, the healer had come to the hospital, had stroked Mrs Verwater over her shoulders, “and vibrations, in the shoulders, a bit of massage and all”. She also had said that Mrs Verwater’s father is very close by, that her mother is still alive, and that her deceased sister does not want to be with her. After the clairvoyant had left, Mrs Verwater’s wound had burst open and all the pus had come out, “like a volcano”. That had been the beginning of her recovery, and of the return of her energy and her appetite.

She has always had this spiritual sensitivity. Her daughter and granddaughter have it too. When she was a child, she had been afraid of it. She saw things that others didn’t see, for instance, a man standing in the room. When that happened, she refused to go to bed. She doesn’t know who that man was, though. She does think, however, that, some 10 years ago, when she came round from the anaesthetic after an operation of an open bone fracture, her father was standing at her bed, wearing a cape. “I kept saying like, ‘who are you?’ And then he said, ‘if you turn away your face, if you turn towards the window, I’ll take off my cape and

then you can see me.' I said, 'I won't do that, I want to see you now'. And he has come back three times. In hindsight, I think, that was my father." Similarly, she also sees her deceased granddaughter regularly. After the diagnosis, Mrs Verwater herself had the very strong feeling that she would make a quick recovery in spite of being very ill. This spiritual sensitivity gives her a sense of consolation. Sometimes, however, she doubts it, "Is it true? (...) You have no guarantee anywhere." Furthermore, she always tries to find out the meaning of dreams; she values her dreams. And sometimes she has the feeling of already having been somewhere before. Based on this spiritual sensitivity, she sometimes makes decisions intuitively. She has the feeling that her father is continuously with her.

Every day, she prays before going to sleep, "I learnt than from my Nan". She does this of her own accord, always for a little while. She prays in her own way (not a Hail Mary or the Lord's Prayer), and gives thanks. In doing so she addresses Peerke, but it can also be the Good Lord, Allah or Shiva. "I'm lying in bed, and then I say, I hope tomorrow everything will be well with my daughter and my granddaughter". As mentioned above, she never has seen her lung cancer as a punishment, and she never has asked herself the question, "Why me?" Her motto is, "don't think, but carry on". She is positive-minded and she does not fear death: "When the day is there, then it is time". In the past few years she has not been in contact with a pastor or chaplain. That was something she could do without.

## Lung Cancer: Backgrounds, Illness and Well-being

In total, 237 people with lung cancer, or who have suffered from lung cancer in the past, have filled in the questionnaire as part of our PhD study of religious coping and lung cancer. The questionnaire was distributed among 489 patients, via the Outpatient Departments of 12 hospitals in the Southern part of the Netherlands. The response percentage was 48.5 %. The group of respondents, with an average age of 66 years and almost exclusively (98.3 %) older than 45 years, consists of two-thirds men and one-third of women. The majority of them (84 %) have a partner, with women relatively more often being single (20.1 %). The majority have children (88.6 %); the modal number of children is 2. Compared to the Dutch (working) population, the group of respondents has only had basic education and, in as far as they are still employed, they work more often in lower paid professions. Hence, the response group belongs to the lower socio-economic classes in which smoking, the main cause of lung cancer, is more taken for granted than in the higher educated classes. Lung cancer is a *poor man's disease*.

Within the response group, the average length of time since being diagnosed

is 32.6 months (2.7 years). 54 % are in stages III or IV of the illness, which implies the expectation that they will die within a fairly short time. But from those who are in stages I or II of lung cancer, almost 30 % are also uncertain about the outcome. Moreover, 70 % of respondents are within the two-year timeframe after being diagnosed; the statistics of the Dutch Cancer Registration show that only 25 % will survive the first two years and only 13 % the first five years after being diagnosed. 10.2 % of respondents reply that they have given up or are in the terminal stage of the illness, and another 61 % reply that they have to wait and see, and hence are uncertain about the outcome. Therefore, the respondents' situation and prospects are exceptionally bad.

86.4 % of respondents have a Catholic background, 69.5 % still feel affinity with Christianity at present, 46.2 % consider themselves to be people of faith, and only 14.8 % connect themselves to a religious/ideological group. Almost 25 % of the response group do not feel affinity with any religious/ideological trend. In the response group other religious movements, new forms of spirituality or *New Age* and humanism, have hardly any role at all (together only 5.9 %). A small part of respondents (11.9 %) consider themselves to be spiritual persons, and an even smaller part (5.1 %) think they are paranormally sensitive. Strikingly, women relatively more often consider themselves to be spiritually and paranormally sensitive.

The questionnaires show that, in general, respondents complain little about physical discomfort, that they rate their quality of life fairly positively, that they do not deviate from the general population with respect to their mental well-being (anxiety and depression) and hence are making the best of it, and that their existential well-being is high. This last mentioned aspect means that they find their life meaningful and that they judge it positively. This existential well-being has a significant connection with their religious involvement.

Mrs Verwater is 55 years old, is divorced and has one child. She has attended lower vocational training. At the time of filling in the questionnaire, the diagnosis had been made 3.6 years prior. She is in lung cancer stage II. It is clear from the questionnaire that she is reporting relatively many physical complaints, and is showing a relatively high degree of anxiety and depression. Yet, her subjective feeling of health and of the quality of her life is high – just like her existential well-being (life is meaningful and she judges the future positively).

Could anything be said about her coping strategies, so that it becomes clearer why she, on the one hand, is displaying significant physical and mental complaints and, on the other hand, is positive about the quality of her life, considers her life to be meaningful and judges the future positively? Prior to saying something about this, it is expedient to make a few theoretical excursions about coping and religious coping.

## Coping

Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory is the most elaborate and has gathered the largest following (see e. g., Folkman, 2011). In this theory, coping is a dynamic form of information processing, in which the individual is in continuous interaction with the environment, and in which coping behaviour is not directed by structural personality characteristics, but is influenced by the interaction between person, event and context. Moreover, coping is multi-dimensional, which means that coping can be *problem-focused* as well as *emotion-focused*, active as well as avoidant, and can have interpersonal as well as intrapersonal functions.

Oosterwijk (2004), who has investigated cognitive coping strategies in women with breast cancer, lists the strategies with respect to coping with cancer, which are mentioned by about ten research groups. She records a considerable diversity in the naming and definitions of the strategies, and eventually concludes that the strategies can be classified in three categories:

- Immediately tackling the problem;
- Addressing the emotional consequences of the problem; and
- Influencing the meaning of the problem.

She describes coping as follows, "Coping is the cognitive and behavioural effort that a person makes in order to face up to demands that are made of them by others, the situation or themselves, and of which they estimate that they will put their capacities to the test or maybe even will defy them. This effort is aimed at controlling, neutralising, reducing or tolerating the stressful situation" (Oosterwijk, 2004, p. 25).

Park and Folkman (1997) have further elaborated the importance of meaningmaking in the framework of coping with major events. For this purpose, they designed a conceptual framework in which they clarify the roles of core convictions, goals and meaningmaking. In this model, the central role of re-evaluation in particular comes to the fore, as well as the importance of congruence between an individual's comprehensive experience of meaning and their estimated significance of a specific event. A more or less major event, after a first appraisal of its significance, always also evokes a search for meaning, and both of these can influence the individual's comprehensive experience of meaning. The individual's comprehensive system of meaningmaking is stable and coherent, implying that initially one tries to fit new experiences into this system, and hence interprets them in such a way that they will be consistent with the existing convictions and goals. In general, the comprehensive system of meaningmaking is of an optimistic disposition. Moreover, it usually has a personal and concrete character rather than an abstract or theoretical one. Coping that is mean-

ingmaking draws on positive re-evaluation, and through this, people find meaning by interpreting their situation in terms of their deepest convictions. Furthermore, this coping strategy is able to revise life goals in such a way, that a feeling of purposefulness and control still remains. Additionally, spiritual convictions and experiences will be activated and will lead to a stronger degree of existential well-being (Park & Folkman, 1997; Park, 2011).

## Religious Coping

In Pargament and his collaborators' research regarding religious coping, the relationship between coping and meaningmaking has been further elaborated (Pargament, 1997, 2011). They succeeded in further differentiating religion as a coping tool by distinguishing three coping styles based on three God images: a *deferring* style in which God is made responsible, a *collaborative* style in which God and humans work together, and a *self-directing* style that presupposes that God has given humans the skills and resources for independently tackling the problem (Pargament, 1988). Later, a fourth style was added: *surrendering*, in which there is no passive waiting, as in the deferring style, but an active and conscious choice of surrendering the responsibility of finding a solution to God (Wong-McDonald & Gorsuch, 2000). In addition, Pargament and his collaborators have developed a questionnaire, the *RCOPE*, which addresses five areas of religious coping: meaningmaking, control, comfort, intimacy and transformation (Pargament et al., 2000). Based on this extensive questionnaire, a brief version has been developed, the *Brief RCOPE*, which highlights positive and negative religious coping strategies (Pargament et al., 1998). Recent research has shown that precisely the "religious struggle", the simultaneous occurrence of positive and negative religious coping and hence of ambivalence, is an important indication of the degree of psychosocial and existential well-being (Sherman et al., 2009).

Religion and spirituality turn out to be frequently used forms of coping, in particular when problems constitute a serious threat to existence, are unpredictable and cannot or hardly be influenced. Religion and spirituality often turn out to be the best predictors of recovery and survival. Furthermore, research has shown that religion and spirituality are a form of coping in a class of their own, which cannot be relegated to other forms of coping. Pargament (1997) defines religion as, "the search for significance in ways related to the sacred" (p. 32) and coping as, "the search for significance in times of stress" (p. 90). Religious coping, therefore, concerns the search for meaning in the confrontation with major life events. In this search people make efforts to discover, to preserve, and if necessary to adjust important goals and values in which religious con-

victions, insights, customs, rituals, symbols, objects, places and times play a central part. This can be achieved by holding on to important existing values, in particular by protecting these values or by reconstructing them. If it is impossible to hold on to important existing values, the only solution is to search for new values, either with known means or with new means (Van Uden et al., 2009). In this context, five empirically supported conclusions are important (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Pargament, 2011):

1. Some forms of religion are more positively supportive than others. Religion that is internalised, intrinsically motivated, and based on a safe relationship with God shows a positive correlation with well-being, whereas religion that has been imposed and in which there is a “thin” relationship with God and the world, shows a negative correlation with well-being.
2. In every religious expression advantages and disadvantages are a given; this applies also to fundamentalist forms.
3. Religion is helpful for socially marginalised groups in particular.
4. Religious convictions and practices turn out to be exceptionally valuable in stressful situations that push people to the limits of their skills and resources.
5. The effectiveness of religion corresponds with the degree to which religion has been integrated in the individual’s life.

The underlying concepts of the tools, developed by Pargament c.s., originate in the cultural and religious situation of the USA, where an active and personal God image is (often) a matter of course. For that reason, these tools have proved to be less suitable for the Dutch (and Western European) situation, where a rather more impersonal image of the divine prevails. Moreover, people do not always – with or without God – immediately head for a solution, but rather, out of a receptive attitude, try to be open to situations or events that they are unable to control, predict or master. For that reason, Alma, Pieper and Van Uden have developed, for the Dutch and Belgian situation, the *Receptivity Scale*, which meets the two objections mentioned above (Alma et al., 2003; Van Uden et al., 2004). Elsewhere in Western Europe, a number of studies about religious/spiritual coping and cancer have been published in recent years, focussing on the specific Western European social, cultural and religious context, e.g. in Sweden (Ahmadi, 2006), in the German speaking countries (Klein et al., 2011) and in Great Britain (Thuné-Boyle et al., 2006).

Research regarding religious/spiritual coping predominantly addresses the conscious choices that people make in view of personal goals, as a result of which there is a strong emphasis on studying convictions, interpretations, explanations and estimations. Major life events as well as religion, however, are characterised by their elusiveness and in particular by the fact that they escape words. Complementary to the (*Brief*) *RCOPE* and the *Receptivity Scale*, we have



designed the *Spiritual Coping List*. In this list coping strategies have been included that take account of the fact that many people (also in Western late-modern societies), when in times of serious crises and faced with uncontrollable major events, appeal in their coping process to particular spiritual and mystical experiences, to magical actions and thoughts, and to all sorts of paranormal convictions and experiences. As of yet, these particular coping strategies have hardly been included in coping research, although they offer people in stressful and difficult situations a sense of control, provide meaning, and help with the emotional processing of these events. From the perspective of religion studies, Kwilecki (2004) highlights the necessity of taking into account, in the framework of coping research, magical rituals and experiences, mystical experiences, near-death experiences and experiences of contacts with the deceased. In a number of studies, paranormal experiences and convictions have been presented as coping strategies, these coping strategies being concerned with control (Callaghan & Irwin, 2003), with emotional processing (Roger et al., 2006) or with meaningmaking (St-James, 2007).

In formulating items for the new *Spiritual Coping List*, we relied on the classification of spirituality subsectors listed by Van IJssel (2007) in her dissertation. She distinguishes the following five subsectors: spirituality as (1) particular experiences of reality (among which she reckons mystical as well as paranormal experiences), (2) a dynamic transformation process (searching for balance and for a more profound understanding of reality), (3) a search for interpretations of reality (a world in which everything is connected with everything else, beyond the boundaries of space and time), (4) attitude to life (a basic attitude manifest in the other four subsectors), and (5) praxis of ritual/symbolic practices. Finally, some items have been included that can be labeled explicitly as magical actions or thoughts. These items have been inspired by items from the *Revised Paranormal Belief Scale* (Tobacyk, 2004) and the *Magical Ideation Scale* (Eckblad & Chapman, 1983).

## Religious and Spiritual Coping in the Present Research

In the questionnaire, the respondents' ways of coping have been uncovered using the *Brief COPE* (Carver, 1997). In this response group, factor analysis has resulted in 5 factors:

- denial (denial, distraction, giving up, expressing negative feelings)
- active coping (active approach, making plans, re-evaluation)
- support from others (emotional support, help/advice from others)
- acceptance & humour
- religion (consolation from faith, praying/meditating).

Table 1: Coping and Religious Coping in Questionnaire and in Mrs Verwater

	<i>Questionnaire</i>	<i>Mrs Verwater</i>
Brief COPE: denial	1.5 (scale 1 – 4)	2.0
Brief COPE: active	2.1	2.4
Brief COPE: support from others	2.5	1.3
Brief COPE: acceptance & humour	2.3	2.5
Brief COPE: religion	1.7	2.0
Re-evaluation	3.7	3.4
Brief RCOPE: negative	1.3	1.0
Brief RCOPE: positive	1.6	1.6
Receptivity	2.0	2.4
SCL: popular religion	1.5	2.6
SCL: deeper reality	1.3	2.4
SCL: natural living	1.9	2.5
SCL: spiritual/meditative practice	1.2	3.3

Table 1 shows the averages in the response group while, next to it, Mrs Verwater's scores are shown. Compared with the averages of the whole response group, she scores higher on active coping, denial, acceptance & humour, and on religion as coping strategies. Regarding the emotional and practical support that she expects and receives from others, she scores lower than the average. Strikingly, the so-called negative forms of coping are unmistakably present. She is evidently showing resistance, denying and avoiding the seriousness of the situation, and searching for distraction in order to not constantly be confronted with her situation. Recent Dutch research has shown that resistance and denial do not necessarily have to be counter-productive in the course of processing lung cancer, and hence are actually not negative in all circumstances. According to medical criteria (Vos, 2009), although there often is serious physical discomfort (being short of breath, fatigue, pain and nausea), people who deny it or play it down are often better able to manage these complaints, while the complaints still are present. Mrs Verwater shows a similar pattern: she is constantly short of breath, easily tired, has to use an electric wheelchair when she goes out, and is dependent on help for the more strenuous household chores. Additionally, after 4.5 years it still remains uncertain whether she will survive. At the same time, she clearly shows forms of active coping: she values aspects of her life more and differently (in particular her daughter's and granddaughter's well-being), she makes plans (she has moved house in the course of her illness), she looks for information about her situation, and wants to support others (mainly via the Internet). Moreover, she accepts her situation (why not me?) and she regularly shows a sense of humour. Recent studies regularly draw attention to the finding

that people have multiple coping strategies at their disposal, and that especially the combination of negative and positive forms of coping (denial and active coping) in the coping process is beneficial (Stroebe, 2011).

Strikingly, Mrs Verwater expects less from the emotional and practical support of others, although in the interview she mentions the support of people close to her. Her life story makes clear, however, that until her illness she mainly adopted an attitude of helpfulness towards others (relatives, husband, colleagues), but that her illness has made clear to her that she has to be more assertive, that she herself wants to determine what will happen to her. In any case, she does not want to be treated as a patient or as a dying person. Subsequently, religion turns out to have a clear significance as a coping tool, although – as we have seen above – this does not go via a traditional road.

With respect to religious coping, we have used three instruments in the questionnaire. The *Brief RCOPE* is an American-made instrument that uncovers positive and negative forms of religious coping. It is an instrument that presupposes the existence of a personal God who actively intervenes in our existence (Pargament et al., 1998). The response group as a whole scores, on average, low on this instrument, and Mrs Verwater is no exception. More than that, in fact, she scores a 1 on all items of the negative scale. That is to say, these items never, or hardly ever, play a role in her coping process. In these items, issues are mentioned such as: my illness is a punishment from God, God does not care about me anymore, and my fellow believers are abandoning me.

Mrs Verwater feels more affinity with the items of the *Receptivity Scale*, which has been designed as a correction of this personal and active God image. According to this scale, religiosity indicates receptivity and trust that a solution will present itself, through a divine agency or not (Alma et al., 2003; Van Uden et al., 2004). Finally, in the questionnaire we have attempted, with the help of a new list – the *Spiritual Coping List (SCL)* –, to bring to light which (late-modern) spiritual opinions and practices, religious and magical rituals and customs, and particular spiritual experiences people appeal to during major and life-threatening situations in their lives. Factor analysis has discovered four components in this specific group of respondents:

1. return to familiar rituals (customs/rituals from the sphere of popular religion, often linked with local shrines and family traditions)
2. connectedness with a deeper reality (the fundamental feeling that my life is embedded in a larger context, beyond the limits of space and time)
3. return to natural living (convictions and practices geared towards the restoration of the original balance within myself and in relation to surrounding nature)
4. spiritual/meditative practice (rituals and practices having to do with meditation, the set-up of a sacral place in the house, incense and candles).

In the response group as a whole, these coping strategies on average occur to a moderate degree. Most clearly present is the factor “natural living”, which shows the highest correlation with the *Receptivity Scale* of these four factors. This means that this factor refers to a basic trust that solutions will be found, and to an open, receptive attitude towards all that presents itself in life. Mrs Verwater scores relatively high on all of these factors. Her story makes intelligible how these numbers can be given flesh. From childhood, she has been familiar with Catholic popular devotional customs, grafted in particular on local saints, shrines and traditions that have played a role in her family (Peerke Donders, holding a novena). In her view, Hindu customs and convictions fit in seamlessly with this. Catholic saints and Hindu gods go hand in hand, are in some way even interchangeable. This applies also to some popular devotional and Hindu rituals and customs. Official ecclesiastical convictions and precepts play no role in this, and neither do religious doctrine and a personal God who actively intervenes in her existence. There even is an aversion to the Church, and no need whatsoever is felt for pastoral care. For Mrs Verwater, being connected with a deeper reality refers to her spiritual sensitivity, including a number of particular spiritual experiences in past and present: the presence of somebody, the connection with and almost tangible presence of her deceased father and her deceased grandchild, the treatment by the alternative healer. She also scores high with respect to the third factor, natural living. Based on her spiritual sensitivity, she has confidence in the future and, as a consequence of the illness, she has been able to bring a better balance into her life. She feels closer to her origin, closer to herself, closer to nature. And finally, the fourth factor: spiritual/meditative practice. The glass display case in her lounge speaks volumes in this respect: it is her sacred space in her home. This is evident, additionally, from the Hanuman pendant, from the picture of Peerke Donders and from the visits to Peerke Donders’s shrine and her participation in a number of Hindu festivities and rituals. All this, together and intermingled, nourishes her spirituality. In Mrs Verwater, no clear boundaries can be denoted between religious, spiritual, paranormal and magical experiences and rituals. As a coping strategy, they constitute a conjuring of the potentially negative outcome of the illness, and they grant her the conviction that life is meaningful and positive.

## Religion and Spirituality

In recent decades, the concept of spirituality has caught on widely in Western society, and has become distinctly differentiated from religiosity (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005), in common parlance as well as in scientific discourse. This development has taken place against the backdrop of the decline of the great

traditional religious institutions, the increase in individual forms of faith expression, a movement away from adhering to the churches' teachings and towards the immediate experience of the sacred, and a growing culture of religious pluralism. In the Netherlands, the transition of church-bound faith to individual spirituality has taken place fairly rapidly. Whereas, a few decades ago, there still was a very robust church affiliation along with a strong "pillarisation" (i.e. the compartmentalisation of Dutch society along denominational lines), now over 60 % of the Dutch population consider themselves to be non-churchgoing, a percentage that, in all probability, will only increase in the next few decades (De Hart, 2011). It is, however, striking that – in spite of all opining about secularisation, predicting the disappearance of church and religion from (Western) societies – the decrease in church affiliation does not mean the disappearance of religiosity and spirituality. As is becoming clear, religion is not disappearing at all from (Western) societies, also not from the public arena. Religion is, however, in a process of transformation. To an ever lesser degree it is taking place in the context of the traditional religious institutions (Van de Donk et al., 2006; Aupers & Houtman, 2010). In this connection, there is talk about "unattached spirituals" (Kronjee & Lampert, 2006) or about "hovering believers" (De Hart, 2011) who, as regards meaningmaking, no longer use the traditional churches but search for their own way and draw from various traditions. The chosen form of spiritual meaningmaking reflects the individual's lifestyle which, in our time, is strongly influenced by de-traditionalising, consumption patterns, an emphasis on experience and aesthetics and on personal styling of one's life story.

In the context of these developments, a tension has arisen between the concepts of religiosity and spirituality. These concepts have even become diametrical opposites. In much recent literature, religiosity is deemed to be substantial, static, institutional, group oriented, objective, dogmatic, whereas spirituality is judged in exactly the opposite way, i.e. as functional, dynamic, personal, subjective, creative, based on experience. Spirituality is valued positively, religiosity negatively (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). This specific distinction between religiosity and spirituality is made not just in scientific literature, as has been shown from a number of studies regarding the immediately involved individuals and their opinions about (their) spirituality and religiosity. "Religious" cardiac, cancer and HIV patients, asked about their attitudes with respect to their illness, make a connection between their convictions and institutional, traditional, ritualised and social expressions of faith, considering their recovery to be something that is conferred upon them. "Spiritual" patients, on the other hand, view their opinions and practices as a step towards transcendence and unity, and their recovery as an event that comes about through or in collaboration with themselves (Woods & Ironson, 1999). Compared with nurses, who associate religiosity with formal and institutional forms of faith, and spirituality

with closeness to God and a feeling of harmony with life and the world, clergy understand religiosity and spirituality in terms of participation in religious meetings and of loyalty to church doctrines and norms (Emblen, 1992). People who have left the church compare the attractive atmosphere of equality and openness that is connected with spirituality, with the unattractiveness of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the rigidity of religious dogma (Hay & Hunt, 2000).

Zinnbauer and Pargament (2005) show that such a polarisation of both concepts is not very meaningful and obscures the view on reality. Religiosity is not just substantial, but is also oriented towards functioning in the individual's life, while spirituality cannot do without a substantial core in order to differentiate itself from other dimensions in human existence. Religiosity is, in principle, oriented towards personal faith, emotion, behaviour and experience. It is understandable, in a culture in which the individual and personal autonomy represent the highest values, that the concept of spirituality is associated with personal experience and with resistance against traditional, authoritarian and institutional religious/ecclesiastical structures. There is, though, a connection between the two: both have to do with meaningmaking, both are about a search or quest, and the sacred is central in both concepts. The Dutch cultural anthropologist Droogers argues for a comprehensive definition of religion in which not only personally coloured spirituality plays a role, but also all behaviours, symbols, objects, places, persons, rituals etc. that determine and influence religious life. He opposes the tendency to distinguish religion from spirituality, in which personally coloured spirituality is postulated as positive and modern, as opposed to traditional and collective religion that apparently occurs away from people (Droogers, 2010).

Such an integrative approach would create space for the pragmatic, non-systematic, non-cognitive aspects of religion in which, in particular, the boundaries between religion, magic and the paranormal would fade away. The British anthropologist and liturgical scholar Stringer shows convincingly that religion first and foremost is not a logical, coherent, transcendent and transforming human phenomenon. Religious statements more often lack consistency, are incoherent and even contradictory to each other (Stringer, 2008). He shows how the deceased, ghosts and saints appear in religious experiences, in a brotherly and sisterly way, and assist in the process of coping with everyday and special events. He draws attention to the fact that people combine paranormal and religious experiences, and that magical actions and Christian rituals are in line with each other. Similarly, the American professor of Catholic Studies, Orsi, makes understandable how, in religious life, saints are just as familiar as far-away relatives and as such are part of social intercourse (Orsi, 2007).

Comparable experiences emerge from the interview with Mrs Verwater. In her coping process no clear boundaries can be shown between religious, paranormal

and magical convictions. These experiences, convictions and actions prove to strengthen her feelings of control and confidence in the outcome – something that has been explicitly described in the literature (McGarry & Newbarry, 1981; Subbotsky, 2010). Mrs Verwater reports physical and mental problems above average. At the same time she reports high existential well-being: she sees her life as meaningful, the future looks positive, and she enjoys every day of her life. This seems to be a discrepancy. Although a causal relationship cannot be demonstrated, religion and spirituality seem to play an important role. Religion, magic, and paranormal experiences provide consistency in life, connectedness with other people, nature and transcendent reality, control and understanding with respect to disturbing events, and the ability to adapt to the changed living conditions. Every religious ritual has something magical, just like every magical action has something religious. In every religion, experiences are described that can be called paranormal, and in paranormal experiences something religious can be indicated. The foundation upon which Christianity has been built has been shaped by magical and paranormal thinking and acting. In our time, in which we observe secularisation and the loss of influence by the great religious and theological traditions, this foundation becomes more visible (again). Thus, magical thinking can be labelled as the older sister of religion (Streib, 2010), and each pastor is a bit of a magician (Vreekamp, 2010). And present-day believers? They deal creatively with convictions, rituals and experiences from very diverse traditions and sources. In this way, they try to face the problems of life, outside of the customary church frameworks, but often within the popular devotional ones (Jespers, 2011). Unlike the *Modern Devotion*, they move not only within the exclusively Catholic/Christian frameworks, but they freely and unworriedly generate combinations of multiple traditions, old and new, which are available via TV, Internet and other media. In this sense, one might speak of a Postmodern Devotion or, even better, of a Paramodern Devotion. Intriguing fare for psychologists and theologians!

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## Ritual Counseling and Religious Coping Processes in Cancer Patients

### Introduction

Learning to live with cancer is a tough and difficult process. In this coping process, religion can be an important complementary element, because cancer patients quite often see religion as a source of support, consolation and strength. During a hospital admission, healthcare chaplains are available to help patients with their process of meaning making. However, because of the increasing move towards community-based healthcare, more and more people are treated in outpatient departments. In this trajectory pastoral care is not apparent.

Brief counseling contacts with a healthcare chaplain might combine well with the limited number of contact hours in the outpatient department. In the pilot study reported here, we have chosen to offer this kind of support in the format of ritual counseling, being a form of brief pastoral intervention. This intervention has a directive character and takes the patient's worldview as its starting point. It is focussed on ritual and imagination.

In order to investigate to what extent ritual counseling might actually offer a solution, we felt that we first had to acquire more insight into cancer patients' coping processes and into the role that religion does or does not play in these processes. For that reason, we formulated two research questions. The first one was: "*Which religious and non-religious coping strategies can be distinguished in people with a life-threatening illness like cancer?*" We have reported earlier about this question (see Van Uden, Pieper, Van Eersel, Smeets & Van Laarhoven, 2009). The second question was: "*What is the effect of ritual counseling on the coping processes of people with a life-threatening illness like cancer?*" It is this second question that is central in the present article.

## Research Methods

### Subjects

The people who, between October 2003 and January 2004, participated in this project, were patients of the Department of Medical Oncology of the Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre (Nijmegen, the Netherlands). At the time of the study these patients were receiving chemotherapy because of cancer at the outpatient clinic. In the selection of the patients, their condition was taken into account. Doctors and nurses of the Medical Oncology Department approached all patients.<sup>1</sup> All patients who were approached received not only an oral explanation about the study, but they were also given written information to take home. Subsequently, a nurse contacted the patients by telephone with the question whether or not they were prepared to participate. In this way, we obtained a list of patients who might be willing to take part in the project.

Two trainee psychologists<sup>2</sup>, who were members of the project group, regularly contacted the Medical Oncology Department to collect this list of patient data. Subsequently, the patients were contacted by telephone, the procedure of the study was again explained and possible questions were answered. After the patients had given their definitive consent, their data were passed on to the chaplains, who then contacted the patients.

In total, fifty-four patients were approached, twenty of whom expressed their willingness to participate in the study. All subjects were from the city of Nijmegen and its environs, with the exception of two patients who were from the Leiden area. Eight of them were men and twelve were women; nineteen of them were receiving palliative care and one was receiving curative treatment.<sup>3</sup> Of these twenty subjects, five patients dropped out during the trajectory because of a deterioration of their health condition. Because of this, fifteen subjects eventually completed the entire trajectory of three interviews. This group consisted of five men and ten women, of whom fourteen were receiving palliative care and one was receiving curative treatment. Their ages varied from 41 till 70 years, the average age being 59. On the basis of practical considerations<sup>4</sup>, we decided to

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1 N. Pellen, Staff Nurse, M. Verhoeven, Team Leader, and H. W. M. van Laarhoven, medical oncologist of the Department of Medical Oncology of the Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre were responsible for coordinating the recruitment of patients.

2 S. Räckers, trainee clinical psychologist, and J. van Eersel, trainee cultural and personality psychologist.

3 Palliative care is aimed at delaying complaints as long as possible and at alleviating them. This method of treatment is chosen when it is certain that no (further) cure is possible. Curative treatment is aimed at achieving restoration to health.

4 'Practical considerations' here means: poor sound quality of the tapes, and the time necessary for elaborating the verbatim interview reports.

make a selection of seven out of this research group of fifteen patients. Of each of these seven patients, all three interviews have been elaborated in full (see Table 1).

Table 1. Data of the selected subjects<sup>5</sup>

Patient	Gender	Age	Diagnosis	Treatment	Interviews	Setting
Hoff	male	66	Colorectal	Palliative	3	At home
Laverne	female	51	Adeno carcinoma	Palliative	3	At home
Rowantree	female	51	Mamma carcinoma	Palliative	3	At home
Hansen	female	66	Colorectal	Palliative	3	At home
Weaver	female	59	Ovarian carcinoma	Palliative	3	At home
Beals	male	62	Melanoma	Palliative	3	At home
White	female	70	Mamma carcinoma	Palliative	3	At home

## Procedure

The chaplains who participated in this pilot study all attended the pastoral counseling seminar at the Institute of Pastoral Studies of Radboud University Nijmegen. In total, there were nine Christian ministers and one imam. They were divided into four seminar groups, each with a different tutor.<sup>6</sup> Each chaplain had to conduct two interviews with two of the patients. During the first interview, an anamnesis had to be carried out using a uniform interview schedule that had been developed specifically for this purpose. The result of this interview was then discussed in the group of chaplains and their tutor. The purpose was to find an adequate ritual intervention, appropriate for each specific patient in his or her specific context. The intervention was intended to activate and encourage the religious coping process. The intervention could take several forms: for example, reading a religious text, discussing a piece of literature or art, listening to a piece of music, implementing a goodbye ritual, etc. The intervention was to activate the patient's world of religious imagination and representation. In the second interview with the patient, the chaplain had to carry out the intervention exactly as planned by their seminar group.

After the first two interviews, the chaplain contacted one of the trainee psychologists, in order for her to approach the patient for the final interview. The trainee arranged an appointment with the patient for this last interview, the

<sup>5</sup> The patient names in the Table are fictitious.

<sup>6</sup> The seminar groups were conducted by M. van Uden, W. Smeets, M. Scherer-Rath and H. Siemerink. The two first-mentioned tutors were also members of the project group.

evaluation interview. The evaluation interview focussed on the question whether any changes had resulted from the interviews with and the intervention from the chaplain. In addition, after the interview the patient filled in the “Coping with a Serious Illness” questionnaire.

### Instruments

In this pilot study, several instruments were used. Interview schedules had been designed for the anamnesis as well as for the evaluation interview. This was done in order to decrease the discrepancy between the interviewers and in this way to (better) facilitate comparability between the patients. The interview schedule for the anamnesis, in the first interview with the chaplain, was focussed on obtaining background information about the patients. The schedule covered several themes, like the course of the illness, the current situation, the patient’s religious background and worldview, their sources of strength and their future perspective. An interview schedule was also used in the evaluation interview with the trainee psychologist. This interview entailed a review of the two earlier interviews that the patient had had with the chaplain. In this last interview, the patients described how they had experienced the first two interviews. The themes from the anamnestic schedule were once again reflected on, in order to check whether change had occurred in any of these areas. For example, there was a question about the patient’s personal experience of their faith, and whether this had changed as a result of the interviews with and the intervention from the chaplain.

After the third interview, the “Coping with a Serious Illness” questionnaire was handed out. This questionnaire purports to obtain additional information about the influence of the patient’s faith or worldview, in particular with respect to the process of coping with their illness. In the questionnaire, the following working definitions of worldview and faith are used. “Worldview” is defined as: “the whole of beliefs, values and norms that people draw on when they think about the meaning and purpose of life”. In “faith”, these beliefs, values and norms are fully or partly derived from an existing religion, like Christianity. A worldview does not have to be religious, because it can also refer to non-transcendent sources of meaning making, like art and philosophy. Still, for many people worldview coincides with faith.

The “Coping with a Serious Illness” questionnaire consists of two separate questions and three scales. The two questions inquire about the degree to which people experience a positive or a negative influence from their worldview or faith in coping with their problems. These two questions are answered using a 5-point Likert scale (going from “fully agree” to “fully disagree”). Subsequently, these

questions are explored further by presenting two scales: the “Negative Influence of Faith” scale and the “Positive Influence of Faith” scale. These scales consist of six and eight statements, respectively. For example: “*my faith or worldview has a negative influence on my problems, because my faith or worldview encroaches on my independence*”. The subject answers this statement using a 3-point scale: yes (= 2), a little (= 1), and no (= 0). The highest possible score on the ‘Negative Influence of Faith’ scale is 12. A person with this score is experiencing a high degree of negative influence from their faith or worldview. The highest possible score on the “Positive Influence of Faith” scale is 16. A person with this score is experiencing a high degree of positive influence from their faith or worldview. The third scale used was the “Receptivity Scale”, which consists of eight statements. For example: “*when I am worried, earlier experiences make me trust that I will be shown a way out*”. These statements are answered on a 5-point Likert scale, going from “never” (= 0) to “always” (= 4). When a respondent ticks “always” for all eight statements, they obtain the maximum score (= 32). A high score on the Receptivity Scale implies that the respondent has a more receptive attitude in coping with problems. This means a passive stance, characterised by trust that the problems will be solved. This scale does not contain explicit references to a transcendent reality, but from earlier studies (Alma, Pieper & Van Uden, 2003; Van Uden, Pieper & Alma, 2004; Pieper & Van Uden, 2005) we know that religious people in particular implicitly assume that the solution offered originates from a transcendent reality.

## Results

The research question that we discuss here was: “*What is the effect of ritual counseling on the coping processes of people with a life-threatening illness like cancer?*” To answer this research question, the interview data were interpreted by the project members using four guiding questions:

1. Which intervention has the chaplain implemented?
2. Has the intervention been implemented as was agreed?
3. Is there an effect of the pastoral interviews (i.e. the intervention), and if so, which?
4. What information do the data from the questionnaire add with respect to the effects of ritual counseling on the patient’s religious coping?

Regarding the answers to the guiding questions about the intervention, we considered the kind of intervention (question 1) and the degree to which the chaplain had followed the seminar group’s instructions in the second interview (question 2). According to the project group, the intervention could bring about



four possible effects (question 3): a positive transforming effect, a negative effect, no effect, or what we have come to call confirmation, a positive confirming effect. Confirmation occurs when the person finds validation of his existing faith, which causes it to grow stronger. For that reason, confirmation is considered to be a positive effect. Which kind of effect had been brought about in each patient was assessed on the basis of the data from the second interview (the intervention implemented by the chaplain) and the third interview (the evaluation interview with the trainee psychologist). Furthermore, the “Coping with a Serious Illness” questionnaire was administered (question 4). Using the answers to the questionnaire, we checked whether the patient’s scores corresponded with the general trend from the interviews, and whether there was supplementary information in addition to that which was already known. The answers to the four guiding questions together constituted the “interpretation” of each interview. In the next section, first an overview will be given of the data from the questionnaire, followed by a discussion of the interpretations.

### Results of the Questionnaire

As stated above, this questionnaire consists of three scales (we will not go into the two separate questions here): the first one measuring the negative influence of faith or worldview, the second one measuring the positive influence of faith or worldview, and the third one measuring “receptivity”. These three scales differ in their number of statements and scale points, which makes it difficult to make comparisons between them. In order to solve this problem, the patients’ responses have been converted into scores. These scores have been divided by the maximum score attainable on that scale. In this way, comparisons between the scales have become possible, because all scores on every scale now consist of a figure between 0 and 1. To illustrate this: Mr Hoff replied four times “no” (= 0), once “a little” (= 1) and once “yes” (= 2) on the first scale, negative influence of faith or worldview. His score on this scale is 3. By dividing this score (= 3) by the maximum attainable score on this scale (= 12), we obtained a figure between 0 and 1, namely 0.25. In this way, the responses of all patients have been scored and converted into a figure between 0 and 1. Table 2 presents these figures for the seven selected patients.

Table 2. Scores on the 'Coping with a Serious Illness' questionnaire

Patient	Gender	Age	Negative Influence	Positive Influence	Receptivity
Hoff	male	66	0.25	0.56	0.75
Laverne	female	51	0.00	0.69	0.88
Rowantree	female	51	0.00	0.06	0.31
Hansen	female	66	0.00	0.75	0.78
Weaver	female	59	0.00	1.00	1.00
Beals	male	62	0.00	1.00	0.75
White	female	70	0.00	0.88	0.97

### Interpretation

Below we will present the interpretations of the seven selected cases, based on the four guiding questions.

#### Interpretation Mr Hoff

1. *Mr Hoff's chaplain entered the second interview with the intervention: Psalm 121 as a challenge to be able to face death, putting his trust in God's support.*
2. The psalm was read, but subsequently the theme was insufficiently elaborated.
3. The effect of the intervention and the interviews was confirmation. Mr Hoff's faith had been strengthened: *"Not necessarily different, but still strengthened. Let's say there was already a fine coat of paint on it, but it needs one more coat. That's how I actually see it, stronger, nicer"*.
4. On the one hand, Mr Hoff indicates in his questionnaire that he experiences a slightly negative influence from his faith. This is because he does not have a guiding faith and because he experiences to a slight degree that his faith emphasises guilt and guilt feelings. On the other hand, it becomes clear that Mr Hoff, in spite of the slightly negative influence, experiences a predominantly positive influence from his faith in coping with his problems (0.56). Moreover, he scores high on the Receptivity Scale (0.75). These scores confirm his story.

### Interpretation Mrs Laverne

1. Mrs Laverne's chaplain had been given as an intervention: to explore her mainly instrumental faith and to discover what believing in God means to her (more than just lighting candles etc.). On his own initiative, the chaplain had brought along a poem from a book *Gedachten over lijden en sterven. Leven van het komende rijk* (Thoughts about Suffering and Dying. The Life of the Coming Kingdom). He asked her to read it aloud. Subsequently, he did not go into the content of the text because Mrs Laverne did not want this. It implied too strong a confrontation with death. She was not yet ready to think about her own death and about saying goodbye.
2. The intervention was reasonably implemented. In several different ways the chaplain tried to discover what kind of role God plays in the patient's life. The chaplain's poem was less well received by the patient, because it confronted her (too) strongly with her own death.
3. Initially, the effect of the intervention was negative because of the poem the chaplain brought along on his own initiative. This negative effect was caused by Mrs Laverne being confronted with her illness and death, which caused her positive stance to waver. In the evaluation interview, however, it is clear that this effect was restored.
4. The data from the questionnaire show that Mrs Laverne does not experience a negative influence from her faith, and that she experiences a mainly positive influence from her faith in coping with her problems (0.69). Moreover, she scores high on the Receptivity Scale (0.88). These questionnaire data confirm the story that she told.

### Interpretation Mrs Rowantree

1. Mrs Rowantree's chaplain entered the second interview with the intervention: to introduce his own belief in God: "*I believe; this does not hold true for you. But I think it's marvellous, the way in which you deal with that*". The chaplain was, furthermore, told to read aloud a passage from the prophet Jeremiah. The situation described in this passage is one of clinging to false gods who offer an illusory certainty.

2. The intervention was carried out well, but it did not correspond with Mrs Rowantree's worldview.
3. The intervention had no effect. Jeremiah's passage about false gods was out of place, because Mrs Rowantree is not religious. The intervention of introducing the chaplain's own faith, accompanied by the statement that it is very well possible to cope with this illness without having a faith, only raised questions.
4. Mrs Rowantree indicated that she is not religious, and hence she crossed out "faith" in the questionnaire and only answered for "worldview". At questions where this was impossible, she wrote "not applicable". She did this with all of the "negative influence" items and with two of the "positive influence" items. As a result, the questionnaire shows that she does not experience a negative influence and hardly a positive influence (0.06) from her worldview. Mrs Rowantree scores low on the Receptivity Scale too (0.31). These low scores are not surprising, as the items of this questionnaire imply a transcendent reality. For this reason, the questionnaire data are in keeping with the story that she told in the interviews.

#### Interpretation Mrs Hansen

1. The intervention of Mrs Hansen's chaplain was to explore the following themes in depth:
  - the Virgin Mary as a support,
  - solidarity with Mary, who herself had suffered much as a mother,
  - soon having to let go of motherhood and to say goodbye.
  - Added to this, the chaplain on his own initiative, brought along several pictures of the Virgin Mary. The patient appreciated this.
2. All themes were reasonably well explored, except the saying goodbye. That was not discussed explicitly.
3. The patient did not indicate what influence the interviews had on her. No really positive or negative influence appears to have emanated from the interviews.
4. The data from the questionnaire show that Mrs Hansen does not experience a negative influence from her faith. She experiences a mainly positive influence from her faith in coping with her problems (0.75) as well as a great deal of support from her faith. She also scores high on the Receptivity Scale (0.78). These scores confirm her story.

### Interpretation Mrs Weaver

1. The intervention of Mrs Weaver's chaplain was to further explore the following themes:
  - saying goodbye to her husband and children,
  - where do negative feelings go, if everything is a learning process? (For Mrs Weaver almost every negative life event is the starting point of a learning process).
2. The intervention was carried out well. In the first interview, the patient brought forward only a few negative feelings from her life. The intervention made clear which negative feelings play a role in her life. In the evaluation interview, the patient indicated that she enjoyed being allowed to express these negative feelings.
3. The adequate implementation of the intervention helped the patient in daring to undertake the confrontation with her negative feelings. This resulted in a confirming effect.
4. In the questionnaire, Mrs Weaver indicated that she does not experience a negative influence from her faith. She experiences a very strong positive influence from her faith in coping with her problems (1.0). On the Receptivity Scale she also has a maximum score (1.0). These questionnaire scores are in keeping with the content of the interviews that she had with the chaplain and the trainee psychologist.

### Interpretation Mr Beals

1. Mr Beals's chaplain was given as intervention: to further explore the resistance against being rebellious for religious reasons, with the help of Psalm 10 ('Why Lord do you stand far off?'). The chaplain himself determined which psalm would go best with this theme.
2. The intervention was carried out moderately well. Its purpose was to clarify that rebelliousness against God does happen, but that this does not necessarily imply disobedience towards God. These feelings of rebelliousness are legitimate and do not have to be suppressed. However, the psalm chosen by the chaplain was too all-inclusive and hence the purpose of the intervention was not achieved.
3. In the interview, the patient indicated that he attained a feeling of recognition in the psalm. Yet, it is clear from the evaluation interview that the intervention hardly had any effect. No positive or negative effect occurred.
4. It is clear from the questionnaire that Mr Beals does not experience a negative influence from his faith, but on the contrary a very positive influence (1.0). He

also scores high on the Receptivity Scale (0.75), in particular on the statements asserting that a way out is offered by a “higher power”. The questionnaire data confirm the story that he told in the interviews.

#### Interpretation Mrs White

1. The intervention of Mrs White’s chaplain was: to let the patient herself discover which positive sources of support she has that compensate for a central theme in her life, a feeling of inferiority. The attention should be focussed on highlighting the positive developmental lines that are present in her past: her Baha’i faith, her brother as a significant person, her stutter therapy, and the period after she left the monastery.
2. The intervention was carried out well, but could have corresponded better with the religious way in which she copes with her illness.
3. The intervention hardly had any effect. However, the interviews had a confirming influence.
4. In the questionnaire, Mrs White indicated that she does not experience a negative influence from her faith, but on the contrary a strongly positive influence (0.88). Mrs White scores very high on the Receptivity Scale (0.97). The questionnaire data confirm her story.

#### General Overview of the Interventions

Table 3. Overview of Implementation of Brief Pastoral Care

Patient	Kind of Intervention	Implementation of Intervention	Effect of Intervention	Questionnaire Data		
				Neg.	Pos.	Rec.
Hoff	Psalm 121	Reasonable	Confirmation	0.25	0.56	0.75
				Confirming		
Laverne	Exploring themes	Reasonable	Slightly negative effect	0.0	0.69	0.88
				Confirming		
Rowantree	Prophet Jeremiah	Reasonable	No effect	0.0	0.06	0.31
				Confirming		
Hansen	Exploring themes	Good	No effect	0.0	0.75	0.78
				Confirming		

Table 3 (Continued)

Weaver	Exploring themes	Good	Confirmation	0.0	1.0	1.0
				Confirming		
Beals	Psalm 10	Moderate	No effect	0.0	1.0	0.75
				Confirming		
White	Exploring themes	Good	Confirmation	0.0	0.88	0.97
				Confirming		

## Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to gain more insight into cancer patients' coping processes and into the role that religion can play in them. In this article we have tried in particular to map the effects of ritual counseling, being a specific kind of brief pastoral care focussed on ritual, creative and imaginative dimensions.

It has been difficult to answer this research question accurately, because of several problems that have arisen in the implementation of this brief pastoral care intervention. Firstly, the chaplains, who helped to realise this pilot study, participated within the framework of a training project (the pastoral counseling seminar). In spite of the fact that a specific interview schedule was designed for carrying out the anamnesis, not all chaplains were able to do this in an equally consistent way. Secondly, it was difficult for the seminar groups to determine an appropriate intervention for every case. The intervention had to match the patient's need properly, but the absence of necessary background information made it difficult to determine an appropriate intervention. Thirdly, not all interventions had the directive religious or existential character originally intended. Some interventions aimed only at the exploration of certain themes that had emerged in the first interview. And finally, the implementation of the interventions did not happen without problems, because the chaplains did not always adhere to the seminar group's instructions.

In three patients (Mrs Hansen, Mrs Rowantree and Mr Beals), neither the interventions nor the full brief pastoral care brought about an effect. This was for different reasons. The intervention for Mrs Hansen lacked the intended directive character, because the intervention was aiming at exploring several themes. Furthermore, the intervention had a too comprehensive design. Presumably for these two reasons, the intervention was not able to bring about any effect. The intervention regarding Jeremiah's passage about the false gods, selected for Mrs

Rowantree, was out of place. Hence, it is not surprising that Mrs Rowantree did not feel any affinity with it, and that the intervention, in spite of its passable implementation, has had no effect. The intended purpose of the intervention selected for Mr Beals was to bring up the rebelliousness that he sometimes feels against God. This agreed with Mr Beals's needs. He also indicated that he attained a feeling of recognition in the psalm. However, because the chosen psalm was too comprehensive, the intended goal was not achieved and the intervention did not initiate any effect.

The interventions had a confirming effect in three patients (Mr Hoff, Mrs Weaver and Mrs White). The intervention chosen for Mr Hoff, to be able to face death putting his trust in God's support, corresponded with Mr Hoff's needs. Through this correspondence and a reasonable implementation, the intervention had a confirming effect and Mr Hoff's faith was strengthened. For Mrs Weaver, the intervention chosen was to further explore two themes, both concerning "negative" emotions. The intervention was implemented well and had a confirming effect. Moreover, Mrs Weaver indicated that she appreciated being able to express these "negative" emotions. The intervention chosen for Mrs White was to let her discover for herself which positive sources of support she has, by bringing up a number of themes. This intervention corresponded insufficiently with Mrs White's needs due to the comprehensive design, and hence did not bring about any direct effect, in spite of its correct implementation. In its totality, the brief pastoral care did, however, have a confirming effect.

In one patient (Mrs Laverne) the intervention had a slightly negative effect. The intervention that was chosen corresponded well with her needs and was implemented reasonably well. In addition, the chaplain brought along a poem for confronting her with her own death. However, Mrs Laverne preferred to avoid the confrontation with her illness and death. The confrontational contents of the poem were detrimental to Mrs Laverne's positive attitude, which in turn led to a slightly negative effect.

In the conclusions regarding the patients individually, we have described how in three patients there has been a confirming effect, in one patient a slightly negative effect, and how in three patients no effect could be established. In the patients in whom a confirming effect was established, brief pastoral care and the ritual interventions appear to have strengthened their faith. This strengthening can help cancer patients in the existential crises with which they often are confronted in the various stages of their illness process. Unfortunately, the present pilot study cannot give a definite answer as to the exact effects of ritual counseling. Further research will have to be carried out in order to be able to chart the effects of this kind of brief pastoral counseling contact with a healthcare chaplain.



## Discussion

To conclude, we will highlight a number of themes that have emerged in the execution of our project.

The insights we have gained regarding changes in religious coping correspond with Pargament's (1997) distinction between "transformation of significance" and "conservation of significance." In times of crisis, people will usually first revert to their existing sources of meaning-making. Drawing on these sources, they will try to cope with the problems and to convey significance to them. This will often engender a more intensive use of the existing resources. For example, people will begin to pray more or to attend church more frequently. Most people will experience this as an adequate coping strategy. Sometimes, however, the existing possibilities will fail and patients will have to transform their value system in order to be able to convey meaning and significance to what is happening to them. In such a situation, non-religious people may turn to God. However, this kind of transformation rarely happens.

Secondly, it has become clear yet again that an intervention can only succeed if it corresponds closely with the patient's (religious) life history. Also, directive pastoral care needs a preceding non-directive stage in which, by means of continuing questions and reflective reactions, the patient gets the opportunity to clarify their own position (Bierkens, 1992; Lang & Van der Molen, 2000). This highlights the need for an adequate anamnesis.

Because of the ever-increasing move towards community-based treatment, increasing numbers of cancer patients are being treated in outpatient departments. In this trajectory, pastoral care is not apparent, in contrast to the situation of a hospital admission. In a small-scale exploratory study by Hanrath and Veltkamp (2002), the need for pastoral care was shown to indeed exist. In this study, breast cancer patients were approached after hearing the diagnosis, with the question whether they had a need for a meeting with a chaplain; 89 % of the 94 patients who were asked this question accepted the invitation. Hence, Hanrath and Veltkamp concluded that, on the basis of the quality criterion of optimal patient care, outpatients too are entitled to pastoral care.

The results of our pilot study indicate that it is possible to offer pastoral care also in an outpatient setting and, in this way, to compensate for a deficit in the delivery of optimal patient care.

In follow-up research, clear preconditions have to be stipulated. Firstly, consistency in the implementation of the interventions has to increase. This could be achieved, for example, by limiting the number of chaplains participating in the study, or by only working with chaplains who are experienced in employing our method of brief ritual counseling. It would require a considerable attitude change for chaplains to operate in this almost cognitive-behavioural

manner. In this way, differences between chaplains, in the implementation of brief pastoral care, could be spotted more adequately. Secondly, clear agreements have to be reached regarding the designing of ritual interventions, because the interventions have to correspond accurately with the patient's needs. Thirdly, it would be worthwhile to consider administering questionnaires that measure the patient's adjustment. If this took place at different moments in time, the result could be a better picture of the exact effects of our brief pastoral care. Fourthly, in the selection of patients, the duration of the patient's illness should be taken into account. The reason for this is that the duration partly determines the extent to which the patient has interwoven their illness into the story of their life.

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## Leisure as Moderator for Spiritual Well-being?

### Introduction

It is commonly accepted that leisure is important for the well-being or happiness of people – a viewpoint that has come a long way. The ancient Greeks and Egyptians, for example, believed that leisure and recreation are of the utmost importance to learning, good health and recovery from illness and trauma. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, saw leisure as a way of living, a state of being free from work (a spiritual matter (Russel, 2002, p. 22)), and saw recreation as the rejuvenation of workers in order to gain emotional and physical strength to do their work. (Raychaudhuri & Samdahl, 2005, p. 1). Leisure was perceived as a matter of knowledge and health, ultimately leading to pleasure and happiness. This position is also present within contemporary worldviews. To mention only one example from a (predominant) religious tradition: Christianity. Generally, it is conveyed that leisure, and leisure activities, refer to rest (Sabbath) with the purpose of worshipping God (Schulz, 2001, p. 84). This supposedly leads to happiness.

The positive effects and meanings ascribed to leisure are, therefore, not new. When focusing more specifically on the effects of leisure on *well-being*, leisure's importance becomes visible in different domains of individual and social life. Participation in leisure activities not only gives pleasure to the person performing them, but also contributes to his/her physical and mental health (OECD, 2009, p. 20). In a derivative sense, leisure also influences the well-being of people other than those directly involved with the leisure activities. But more than that, the benefits of leisure exceed the personal domains of the individual, e.g. by effecting recuperation from stressful work conditions, and by spilling over into the realm of personal relationships in families, circles of friends or social networks. Leisure even influences the quality of life and health of whole communities. For example, results of a study of the variables that are instrumental in enhancing quality of life within communities point out that a statistically significant relationship exists between leisure and overall quality of life (Johnson &

Backman, 2010, p. 112). Other studies have focused on the relationship between leisure and life satisfaction. Iso-Ahola, Kelly and Godbey reported a positive relationship between the mentioned two realms (Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 2002, p. 9). In addition, Leitner and Leitner posed more specifically that "...leisure behavior is the most important or one of the most important determinants of life satisfaction and psychological well-being..." (1996, p. 26). Research has also been undertaken on the role of leisure in areas adjacent to well-being, e.g. in the lives of psychotic patients (Pondé, Peireira, Leal, & Oliveira, 2009); determinants of daily happiness during vacation (Nawijn, 2011); leisure, stress and coping (Schneider & Iwasaki, 2010); the benefits of leisure for people with disabilities (Lord, & Patterson, 2009) and leisure and subjective well-being of older adults (Heo, Lee, McCormick and Pedersen, 2010). It is even believed that leisure and recreation might be one of the best means to address the high costs of health care (Godbey & Goodale, n.d.). In sum, considerable research has been done on the positive effects of leisure and different, but related, concepts have been used as variables.

These positive effects have resulted in the inclusion of leisure in the socio-political policy of a vast number of countries around the world. Haworth, for instance, mentions that well-being has become a central theme in the Economic and Social Research Council's priorities on life course, lifestyle and health in the USA (2004, p. 172). In addition, the abovementioned report of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) not only acknowledges the economic relevance of leisure, but also the importance of the subjective well-being of citizens. In many studies done in this field, the most common measure of subjective well-being is the questioning of respondents concerning their overall level of life satisfaction or happiness (Krueger, Kahneman, Fischler et al., 2009, p. 7). These positive effects of leisure logically refer to factors that contribute to making statements about life satisfaction and happiness. Warr, for instance, has identified several "situational" factors that are deemed important for well-being, and that are [measured (according to?) different dimensions]. These are, "opportunity for control, environmental clarity, opportunity for interpersonal contact, valued social position, availability of money and physical security," which have been complemented with the factor of "enjoyment" (Haworth, 2004, pp. 177 – 178). These factors could be rubricated under the denominators physical, social, cultural, psychological and material well-being.

Despite evidence that, both in ancient and modern times, the nature of leisure has been understood also to have a spiritual side, spirituality itself has not been widely included when studying the benefits of leisure on well-being. However, the interest in the relationship between spirituality and leisure is growing among leisure scholars. Schmidt, for example, indicates that the spiritual potential of leisure, the spiritual benefits of leisure and the relationship of leisure to people's

spirituality in general have indeed been studied by some scholars, but often “anecdotally” (2007, p. 175). This situation gives rise to the central aim of this paper, namely, to theoretically assess whether leisure can be seen as a moderator for spiritual well-being and, thereby, contribute to reflection on the (nature of) determinants of well-being. The following route will be traveled: Firstly, leisure, spirituality and well-being will be conceptualized. Secondly, a brief review of literature reflecting research on the spiritual potential of leisure, done by two pioneering scholars in this domain, will be given. Thirdly, the review will be brought into dialogue with the described concepts, in order to search for an answer to the question whether leisure moderates spiritual well-being. Fourthly, recommendations for further investigation will be made.

## Conceptualization: Leisure, Spirituality and Well-being

Leisure, spirituality and well-being are, all three, fuzzy concepts. They are often used interchangeably with other concepts like free-or spare time, or recreation (in the case of leisure), religion (in the case of spirituality), and health, life satisfaction or happiness (in the case of well-being). It is therefore important to create a clear conceptual framework against which the theoretical analysis will be made.

### Leisure

Leisure is a multifaceted concept that – as indicated in the introduction of this paper – also has multiple meanings in ancient cultures. Its meaning depends on the very context it is conceptualized in. It is expressed in art, music, literature, festivals, holidays, gardening, travel, games, sports, hobbies, to mention only a few examples (Russel, 2002, p. 35).

The classical conception of leisure is ascribed to Aristotle. He defines leisure as *skholé*, meaning unobligated time, unconditional and related to learning, creation and cultivation of the mind. It is therefore a state of mind (Blackshaw, 2010, pp. 4–5). The German philosopher, Pieper, follows this line of thought as well. He compares leisure with contemplation. It resembles a higher order than the active life. He famously states that leisure has to be seen as the very basis of any culture, because it is not simply the result of external factors and the inevitable result of spare time, but an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul (Pieper, 1998). Blackshaw amends this by stating that “the meaning of life is the meaning of leisure” (2010, p. 152), because it touches the very essence of being

human. It is capable of providing opportunities for self-expression, self-achievement and self-actualization (Russel, 2002, p. 34).

However, leisure is perceived to have other dimensions as well. It is also seen as free time, recreational activity, social status or as a social instrument (Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 2002, pp. 34–37). Leisure as free time and activity will be given prominence here, since the other two denominators more or less represent motivation, which can be linked to leisure activity.

Leisure is, generally considered, being free from obligation and having time to spend at one's own discretion. The "free time" dimension is debatable in the sense that it is not a universal construct that fits all people and all cultures. People from different life-phases and in different social positions and roles, e.g., have varying amounts of obligations and therefore varying amounts of free time. Usually, people refer to non-working time as free time. But it is argued that leisure is a product of residual time (what's left over from other obligations), and presupposes that "individuals have choice, autonomy and freedom to exercise their will to experience leisure" (Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 2002, p. 35).

As a recreational activity leisure is differentiated from other life activities, such as work and life maintenance. As an activity, it has also been subjected to much debate, because scholars feel that identifying and rubricating certain activities, like leisure, should be complemented by study of motivation (Russel, 2002, p. 33). Leisure activities are driven by a specific purpose and, although it is difficult to identify the (longed for) experiences underlying this purpose or motivation, it is of paramount importance. Russel (2002, p. 66) points out that leisure activity could, e.g., be focused on relaxation, refreshment, diversion, recreation of the spirit—being done in pursuit of happiness, pleasure, reward or solitude amongst others or social status, as indicated by Edginton et al. above.

The psychologist, Neulinger, poses a holistic theory that encompasses all three dimensions described above. He holds that leisure is a state of mind brought about by activities engaged in under conditions of perceived freedom (1981, p. 34). The perceived freedom is related to choice, and choice in turn, is based on intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (Idem, p. 30). Another representative of the holistic approach, Kraus (1990), advocates a position that avoids fragmentation of life into different spheres, but promotes leisure as related to experiences of creativity, involvement and being fully alive – which can occur within the different spheres of life. These positions are complemented with research done on the ways people experience leisure. Watkins' and Bond's respondents labeled leisure experiences as "passing time, exercising choice, escaping pressure and achieving fulfillment" (2007, p. 295).

The sociologist, Stebbins, introduced an alternative for describing leisure. He indicates that 'serious' leisure (opposite to 'casual' leisure), entails the "sys-

tematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge and experience” (Stebbins, 1992, p. 13). On the contrary, casual leisure falls outside the three mentioned basic types of serious leisure, yet it is intrinsically rewarding and pleasurable, and requires no training to enjoy it.

In conclusion, from the exposé on the nature and definition of leisure given above, the conceptualization of leisure falls out in three broad (structural) socio-psychological categories: (a) it is discretionary time, (b) participation in leisure activities and (c) the behavior and experience of leisure. In one sentence: “Leisure is the time, activities and experience derived, characterized by freedom” (Page & Connel, 2010, p. 15). The third category makes room for the philosophical, Aristotelian viewpoint of leisure as a category entailing meaning. Leisure is contrasted with recreation, which is related to activities undertaken in one’s leisure time and which is directed towards renewal (Idem). Their objectives are not synonymous.

### Spirituality

In this paragraph spirituality will be described from different perspectives, namely, psychology, philosophy, sociology and theology or religious studies.

Within psychology, spirituality has emerged as a domain of study opposite to religion. It represents an individual’s striving to reach sacred or existential goals in life, such as meaning or wholeness, exploring one’s inner potentials to the best of one’s ability, or connecting with fellow human beings in an uplifting way. Spirituality is more and more seen as a conviction that is related to the world, and gives meaning to life. Analysis of the commonalities and differences between religion and spirituality brought Zinnbauer to define spirituality as “a personal or group search for the sacred,” and religiosity as a “personal or group search for the sacred that unfolds within a traditional sacred context” (2005, p. 35). He hereby defines spirituality as the broader construct. Paragament holds religion to be the broader construct by relating spirituality to the “search for the sacred” and religion to the “search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (2005, p. 36). Whatever the case may be, the common denominator between spirituality and religion is the sacred – be it within traditional communal contexts of religious exercise, based on an articulated set of convictions and rituals, or outside this context in the domains of everyday life as experienced by individuals.

Sociology got interested in spirituality as a social phenomenon fairly recently. Within this context, spirituality focuses on the connection between the personal



experience and the institution and their relationship with the sacred. Leisure is specifically being done from the perspective of the freedom of the individual, and no longer from the (perspective of) obedience to an external authority (Flanagan & Jupp, 2010, p. 16). Spirituality opens up the sacred for the individual, by means of which meaning in life is found. Within postmodernity leisure requires a way of infiltrating secular domains of social life (Holmes, 2005, p. 34). Thus the search for meaning and self-actualization has also captured a place within the field of sociology.

Spirituality has also been studied by philosophers. Robert Solomon studied spirituality as a source of inspiration for skeptics. He advocates a “natural” spirituality that embraces the material world, the desires, sex and sensuality, the body and, perhaps, fast cars, money and luxury as well – all in the right proportions (2004, p. 51). Such a “natural” spirituality depicts a broader consciousness of life. It embraces both rationality and emotionality and seeks to discover a bigger ‘I’. The most important passions of spirituality are love (compassion), awe and (cosmic) trust (Idem, pp. 62 – 71). These properties are all seen as forms of acceptance. Roothaan (2007) designed a spirituality “for the future” based on four co-ordinates. These are (a) the definition of what life is, (b) orientation toward life, (c) life in the spiritual western tradition and (d) openness towards the future. Inspired by the thought of Hannah Arendt, Roothaan advocates a spirituality that should be able to show a way of dealing with dilemmas surrounding the vulnerability of human life. Puchalski, a medical doctor, defines spirituality as “the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose, and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature and to the significant or sacred” (2009, p. 1). As such, spirituality often gives people a sense of well-being, improves quality of life, and provides social support.

Scientists of religion and theologians also hold different views on the differentiation between spirituality and religion. For many, these two concepts are synonyms. For others, they are antonyms. As far as the study of spirituality is concerned, two approaches can be identified in the last century. One approach, a deductive one, is strongly theologically oriented. The other, an inductive one, starts from the lived experience. Waaijman’s research on the phenomenology of Christian spirituality shows three basic forms. These are (a) the established schools of spirituality (defined as historical syntheses, displaying a great diversity of forms, like the monastic system, Benedictine, Jesuits, Reformational spirituality, etc.), (b) primordial spiritualities such as lay (everyday) spirituality, indigenous spirituality and secular spirituality (it is closely related to life as it is directly lived) and (c) counter spirituality, which offers opposition against established power configurations (2006, pp. 5 – 12). His analysis of the fundamental structures of spirituality pointed towards three elements. These are the

following: (a) a relational process between God (divine pole) and man (human pole), (b) a gradual process from awe to love and (c) transformation in/of human existence (on personal, social and socio-cultural levels).

In conclusion, this brief review indicates that spirituality seems to have the following characteristics: (a) a direct and personal experience of what is deemed to be sacred, (b) a broader consciousness of life depicting compassion (love), (c) awe and cosmic trust, (d) a sense of meaning, purpose and connectedness (relationality) and (e) a process of transformation in/of human existence. It is distinguished from the concept of 'religion' which indicates a spiritual stance within a communal setting and which is based on a set of (communal) beliefs and rituals.

## Well-being

Well-being is often associated with health. This association is based upon the most cited definition of health, namely that of the World Health Organisation (WHO). It states that "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and illness or infirmity", thereby confirming, on the one hand, that it is scientifically untenable to define a phenomenon on the basis of characteristics it does not have and, on the other hand, rejecting the medicalization of the concept (Schrijvers, 1994, p.15). Health has to be regarded as a set of positive attributes, not just the absence of illness.

These "positive" parameters, namely physical, mental and social well-being, refer to conditions which indicate the (a) absence of disease and disability and the energy to accomplish daily tasks and active leisure without undue fatigue – also called the functional health status, (b) absence of mental disorders and the ability to meet daily challenges and social interactions without undue mental, emotional or behavioural problems and (c) the ability to interact effectively with other people and the social environment – thus fulfilling a normal role in society with respect to one's age, gender and social-cultural background. The concept of well-being refers to a condition of being contented and in which one experiences welfare.

Several scholars rose objections against this definition on different grounds, e.g. (a) the term "complete (...) well-being" gives the impression that an ideal condition of health can be achieved for human beings (Schrijvers, 1994, p. 15). The term "complete" has to be dropped. According to Schrijvers health should be seen as a state of physical, mental and social well-being, thereby avoiding the impression of normativity, which one fundamentally cannot account for, (b) on a material level people argued that the WHO definition rests on a reductionist anthropology, because the spiritual dimension has not been taken into account.

Human beings are, per definition, agents of meaning making. From a specific frame of reference, i. e. a view of life, experiences of contingency – which give rise to existential questions – are interpreted with the purpose of finding an “answer” to them. Therefore the physical, mental and social dimensions need to be supplemented by a spiritual dimension (Orchard, 2001), (c) the “measurements” or criteria underlying the dimensions of health in the WHO definition, presuppose the “normal” situation. In turn, what is “normal” functioning is based on statistical average. Samson holds that a broad philosophical theory is needed which can integrate the different scientific approaches on a general level. According to him, health is a condition characterized by meaning: healthy are those who are able to give meaning to their lives (Samson, 1989:60), (d) the concepts of health and illness do not exclude each other mutually, because it is possible that a person is healthy and nonetheless has a disease, or is not healthy without having any disease (Sadegh-Zadeh, 2000, pp. 606 – 607).

Nordenfelt addresses these objections by proposing that health should be related to “the ability to realise one’s vital goals”, which, in turn, are related to long-term happiness (2000, pp. 79 – 88). His definition of health then is as follows: “A person is completely healthy, if and only if he is in a mental and bodily state which is such that he has a second-order ability, given accepted circumstances, to realise the states of affairs which are necessary and together sufficient for his minimal happiness in the long run” (Nordenfelt, 2000, p. 93). Health is, therefore, an existential phenomenon which overlaps with a view of life. A person is not healthy if he is not spiritually healthy (Stifoss-Hanssen & Kaltenberg, 1996, p. 29).

This critique of the “scientific” concept of health brought social researchers, e. g., to feel more comfortable with using health indicators such as functional health, specific physical illnesses and subjective health, in combination with measures of positive well-being such as life satisfaction, satisfaction with aging, e. g., and experience of positive emotions (Smith, Borchelt, Maier, & Jopp, 2002, p. 716). In research on subjective well-being different dimensions have been identified, such as physical, psychological, social, material, cultural and existential well-being, thereby avoiding speaking about physical health only (Marcoen, Van Cotthem, Billiet, & Beyers, 2002, p. 156). All of these six dimensions can be conceptualised in their relevance for health, but it would go too far to do so here, in view of the question that is at stake in this article. It is sufficient to state that the accent lies on the subjective, positive experience of the individual.

Fortunately, positive psychology – concerned with what makes life most worth living – conveys a way of operationalizing well-being. Subjective well-being (SWB), also understood as happiness, entails high levels of positive affect, low levels of negative affect and the judgement that one’s life has been lived well

(life satisfaction) (Diener, 1984). Samman took this viewpoint a step further and researched the phenomenology of the overlapping concepts of well-being, life satisfaction, happiness and came up with a fourfold categorization of well-being that addressed both eudaimonic and hedonic criteria. These are (a) meaning in life, (b) in the context of self-determination theory: the basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence (where (a) and (b) together are taken as psychological well-being), (c) domain-specific and overall life satisfaction and (d) happiness (2008, p. 37).

Now, how does well-being relate to leisure? Stebbins found in an early stage that the respondents invariably communicate enjoyment and satisfaction with their (serious) leisure activities (1997, p. 129), which are positive valuations. Mannell (2007) came up with evidence which suggests that leisure, seen as discretionary behaviour outside the work domain and other obligations, can influence physical and psychological health positively, where spiritual well-being is regarded as a psychological health outcome. This definitional ‘problem’ (as it relates to the meaning of and relation between ‘spiritual’ and ‘psychological’) will be addressed later on.

In conclusion, well-being as a generic concept should not unilaterally be associated with health, but, on the personal level, be conceptualized as the subjective, positive experience of an individual comprising meaning in life, psychological well-being, life satisfaction and happiness. Each of these aspects can, in turn, be operationalized in factors representing different realms in life. To give one example: life satisfaction has different dimensions such as physical, material, communal, (etc.) well-being. This applies to the other dimensions as well. Strikingly, the existential or spiritual disposition of human beings has been acknowledged as a dimension of well-being, but has not specifically been conceptualized as “spiritual well-being” and, where the concept has indeed been used (e.g. by Mannell), it has indiscriminately been defined in terms of psychology.

Given the fact that scholars increasingly acknowledge spirituality as an important outcome of psychological health (Hawks, Hull, Thakman, & Richins, 1995), and even (sporadically) started to relate it to the field of leisure (Mannell, 2007), it offers an opportunity to dig a bit deeper into the interrelationships between leisure and spiritual well-being – the issue which is at stake in this paper. This will be investigated in the next section.

## Relationships between leisure, spirituality and well-being: review of research

As stated earlier, not much research has been done on the relationships between leisure, spirituality and well-being. In this section, a review will be given of research done by two leisure scholars, namely Heintzman (from Canada), who did both conceptual and empirical work on this relationship, and Schmidt (from New Zealand), who has undertaken qualitative research into the experience of the spiritual potential of leisure. Schmidt hereby has zoomed in on a challenge raised from earlier research done by Heintzman.

### Leisure and Spiritual Well-being

Heintzmann developed a conceptual model of the relationship between leisure and spiritual well-being, on the basis of theoretical analysis and empirical study (2002, pp. 147–169). He thereby draws heavily on the conceptual work of Chandler, Holden & Kolander (1992). The background for this endeavor was the need of professional practitioners in the leisure industry (in this case, amongst others, in the fields of camping, public land management, tourism and community recreation) to contribute to the spiritual well-being of partakers in recreation, whereby a good understanding of this interrelationship was necessary.

His model rests on two conceptual pillars: leisure style and spiritual well-being. Leisure style, on the one hand, refers to “overall patterns of leisure activity engagement and time usage,” and has the following dimensions: time, activity, setting and motivation (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997, p. 59). Leisure experience, which involves interplay between these four dimensions, is capable of becoming a context in which spirituality can be explored. According to Heintzman, leisure style is the medium through which leisure experiences with a spiritual character can lead to spiritual development. Spiritual well-being, on the other hand (used as a synonym for spiritual wellness and spiritual health by him), is expressed through “(a) a sense of life purpose and ultimate meaning, (b) oneness with nature and beauty and a connectedness with others, (c) deep concern for and commitment to something greater than self, (d) a sense of wholeness in life, (e) strong spiritual beliefs, principles, ethics and values, (f) love, joy, peace, hope and fulfillment and (g) experience of communion or having a personal relationship with a higher power (Heintzman, 2002, p. 151).” This constellation of factors can be reduced to two general dimensions: a vertical dimension that entails a continuum expressing “repression of the sublime, c.q. spiritual ten-

gency” on the one end, and “spiritual emergency, c.q. preoccupation with spirituality” on the other; and a horizontal dimension that represents a process in which spiritual experiences lead to spiritual development.

Spiritual well-being is placed around the midpoint of the continuum and could be facilitated through sacrilization, c.q. resacrilization (sensitization to the spiritual) and grounding or ‘working through’ spiritual difficulties (Heintzman, 2002, pp. 153 – 154). When combined with the four dimensions of leisure style, Heintzman argues that (a) spiritual well-being is dependent on the way time has been used, and the character of the activities undertaken, in the sense that it might help a person to cope with difficulties or facilitate spiritual awareness through sacralization or resacralization (2002, p. 156); (b) “seeking” leisure activities lead to healthier individuals than “escapist, passive” leisure (motivation) which, in turn, hypothetically leads to either (re)sacrilization or repression of spiritual well-being (2002, pp. 157 – 158); and (c) places, spaces and environments that have a restorative function, e.g., leading to opportunity to clear the mind, recover from tiredness and reflection on life (problems) (Kaplan & Kaplan, 189), are also instrumental in the facilitation of spiritual well-being.

Heintzman did some follow-up research in this field. In a review article he draws some strings together and looks for confirmation of his own research outcomes on benefits of leisure for spiritual well-being. He came up with a more articulated definition of spiritual well-being, found evidence that the leisure style components positively correlate with spiritual well-being (except for constraints on leisure participation). Moreover, he found that frequency of participation also correlates positively with spiritual well-being and beautiful and relaxing environments also enhance spiritual well-being (2009, pp. 423 – 425). The definition of spiritual well-being reads as follows:

“A high level of faith, hope, and commitment, in relation to a well-defined worldview or belief system that provides a sense of meaning and purpose to existence in general, and that offers an ethical path to personal fulfillment, which includes connectedness with self, others and a higher power or larger reality” (2009, p. 423).

In other studies he found evidence that supports his findings that an open attitude, life balance, quiet contexts expressing human history, and activities that provide for “true to self” experiences, were all conducive to spiritual well-being (Heintzman, 2010a, p. 20). More specifically, reading and activities that enhance personal development, such as culture and outdoor activities, were significantly correlated with spiritual well-being. Nature-related recreation, like picnicking, gardening and zoo or park visits, were identified as facilitators of outdoor activities leading to spiritual well-being (Heintzman, 2010b).

The main conclusion that can be drawn from Heintzman’s work is that, formally speaking, a leisure style that facilitates development and maintenance

of a person's worldview and connectedness with others, might be regarded a moderator for spiritual well-being. More specifically, "the need for some individuals to avoid social contacts, to seek solitude and calm conditions (...) and rest and to unwind themselves" (Beard & Ragheb, 1983) is congruent with the "relaxational component of leisure satisfaction" as a contributor to spiritual well-being (Heintzman, 2009, p. 425). In other words, sacralization, sense of place and repression avoidance are seen as specific spiritual functions of leisure. Leisure can therefore be either a catalyst or a suppressant in facilitating spiritual experience, c.q. spiritual well-being.

### The Spiritual Potential of Leisure

Schmidt did phenomenological research on the experience of the spiritual dimensions of leisure expressed by 24 co-researchers. The background of his study regards research findings or notions that (a) leisure is capable of enhancing people's physical health, sense of well-being and quality of life, (b) a spiritual dimension can be identified as a benefit of leisure and (c) that leisure can be seen as a "space" in which people explore what it means to be fully human (Schmidt, 2007). Schmidt actually presupposes Heintzman's findings, and wants to generate new information about the factor(s) that contributes to the spiritual character of experiences themselves (Idem). In this sense, Schmidt's research helps to understand Heintzman's notion of spiritual well-being.

Schmidt generated his data by means of open, unstructured interviews and reflective journaling, and focused on seeking rich description of "specific instances of leisure that were spiritual and the actions and contexts in which these emerged" (Schmidt & Little, 2007, p. 228). The data reported that spiritual experiences occurred in different places, environments (both urban and nature) and contexts, including both individual and social experiences, active and passive activities. More specifically, activities like bushwalking, travel, reading, walking, rock climbing, being in nature, meditation, fire walking, amongst others, were reported (Schmidt & Little, 2009, p. 229). This indicates that spiritual experience can vary in context, conditions, kinds of activity and situations. Schmidt, in analyzing his data, rubricated the data under three headings: triggers (what sparked off the experience), responses (reaction of the respondent to the triggers) and outcomes (results). The following schema shows the interrelationships between these three parameters:

Table 1: Common themes of spiritual leisure experiences (Schmidt &amp; Little, 2007, p. 234)

Triggers	Responses	Outcomes
Nature (space, beauty, etc.)	Emotion & sensation (awe, wonder, fear, satisfaction, etc.)	Awareness (surrounding world, place in the world, greater power than self)
Newness & difference (different places & activities)	Struggle for control (of self & circumstance, loss of control, etc.)	Connection (God, energy, nature, life, self, others, belonging, etc.)
Challenge (risk, fear)	Overcoming (personal limits)	Growth (learning, change, etc.)
Ritual & tradition (habitual patterns, focus)	Reflection & contemplation (in situ & post experience)	Freedom (escape, opportunity, knowing).

The outcomes suggested that the respondents experienced greater consciousness of and connection with themselves, others and/or God. They also experience personal growth and greater freedom through learning and transformation. The spiritual experiences were triggered by nature, combined with newness and difference which, in turn, evoked a challenge of some kind (e.g. a physical test or mastering technical abilities). A fourth trigger is related to the role ritual and tradition played in the creation of those experiences. They helped respondents to focus on the world and find new ways of looking at it. Feelings and sensations, (c.q.) emotions were reported to be central in these leisure experiences, which concord with the awareness that these experiences were spiritual (Schmidt & Little, 2009, p. 242). The meanings ascribed to these experiences are essentially related to awareness of self as being, becoming and belonging, and the valuation of time and place as 'spaces' for self.

In describing his theoretical framework, Schmidt conveys the concept "spirituality" as a broad concept that revolves around meaning in life. Following Chandler, Holden & Kolander (1992), he relates spirituality to the human capacity and an inclination of transcending existing knowledge, expressing belief in a higher power and to a mystical state (Schmidt, 2007, pp. 174 – 175; Schmidt & Little, 2007, p. 224). For the purpose of his research he characterizes spirituality as "including a frame of reference wider than the immediate, the material, and the everyday and leading the believer to seek or experience a personal meaning in their own life" (Idem, p. 175). This broad view of spirituality was adopted in order to make room for the personal definitions and conceptions of the respondents concerning spirituality. Generally speaking, the respondents did not convey a clearly articulated definition of spirituality either. Yet, they were prepared to convey several characteristics associated with leisure experiences that they have deemed spiritual (see table 1). These experiences were not isolated, but embedded in a constellation of factors like "context, emotion, action,



reaction, knowing, achievement, wonder, and awareness” (Schmidt & Little, 2007, p. 241).

In another, more focused, study Little and Schmidt (2006) researched the lived experience of 10 leisure travellers and the meanings they allocated to them. The findings were congruent with their other studies. The respondents gained an enhanced awareness of self, other or God, experienced an increased sense of connection with someone/something that goes beyond the self. Their experience of travel was also more intense, including sensations related to awe, wonder, fear and release. This also concurs with findings related to nature-based recreation (Heintzman, 2010b).

The main conclusion that can be drawn from Schmidt’s research is that his findings reinforce the hypotheses that leisure might moderate experiences that could be called ‘spiritual’. The respondents, in fact, described these experiences as spiritual due to their transcendence of self and the finding of new meaning and understanding. More specifically, the meanings allocated to the responses related to triggers of spiritual experience were described as a greater awareness of self, a sense of connection with self, others and/or God, personal growth through new understanding of self, the life-world and humanity, with the result of personal transformation, and a sense of freedom. Schmidt poses the question to what extent his findings on spiritual leisure could be related to phenomena like flow and peak or optimal experience on the one hand, and concepts like self-actualization, transcendence and authenticity on the other (Schmidt, 2007, p. 190).

Although both scholars directed their investigations to the potential spiritual functions of leisure (Heintzman concentrated more on leisure as a facilitator of spiritual well-being, while Schmidt focused on the generation of more information about the nature and structural components of spiritual leisure based on the lived experience of people) there certainly is some overlap in their conceptualizations and findings. As indicated earlier, Schmidt presupposed the findings of Heintzman’s research, and zoomed in on one aspect of the relationship between leisure and spiritual well-being, namely experience. Strikingly, the “sacred” dimension of spirituality – as explicated in the conceptual section of this article – did not come to the fore specifically. However, Schmidt did identify a “transcendence” dimension, but it apparently is not regarded as identical with “sacred” by the respondents.

The following question arises: How do these findings match with the theoretical-conceptual description of the three key concepts introduced in the first part of this article, and are they capable of issuing an answer to the leading question, namely, could leisure be regarded as a moderator for spiritual well-being?

## General Discussion

Although sporadic, there seems to be consistent conceptual and empirical evidence that leisure is capable of renewing the human soul and providing a free space for exploring the self and human connection. Scholars have started to study the spiritual benefits of leisure and have described them as “nourishment of the spirit, renewal of the spirit and reconnection with the ground of being” (Heintzman, 2009, p. 421). These undertakings are congruent with research on the different “general” meanings leisure could possibly have for individuals. They also connect with a very specific meaning of leisure. To give one example: Watkins and Bond (2007) identified 4 meanings of leisure on the basis of phenomenographic research. These are: (a) leisure as passing time, (b) leisure as exercising choice, (c) leisure as escaping pressure and (d) leisure as achieving fulfilment. This fourth meaning of leisure was more specifically characterized as a spontaneous and happy feeling about “oneself, interaction with others or one’s own environment” (Idem, p. 299). It was also experienced as being independent of time and activity; as a feeling of being absorbed in the situation, as pleasure, mental and spiritual relaxation, satisfaction and self worth. The following elements resemble some of the main components of the description of spirituality in the conceptual part of this paper: connection, meaning, experience of wonder and transformation. The concept “spiritual” was even in this “general” study used to describe certain experiences. The outcome of leisure was experienced as self-actualization and the underlying emotion described as happiness and spiritual relaxation. There clearly seems to be a link between leisure and spirituality and Heintzman’s and Schmidt’s work confirm this relationship.

However, can leisure be seen as a valid moderator for specifically spiritual well-being? The theoretico-conceptual part of this paper expresses the fuzziness of the key concepts under scrutiny. And, although both scholars have done groundbreaking work in this realm (with Schmidt moving in the slipstream of Heintzman), the definitions they used – especially that of “spirituality” – are not identical. The most fundamental question to be put to the explicated findings is whether a sound point of departure and distinction have been made with regard to the conceptual foundations. It has been assessed, earlier in this paper, that scholars often indiscriminately see spirituality as a function of the psyche, while an argument could be made that the pneuma (spirit) is a different phenomenon than the psyche (mind). It could also be argued that the psyche is a function of the spirit. It would go too far to do an exhaustive conceptual analysis of these two human domains at this place, because all different anthropological positions like dualism and monism (and the different position that can be distinguished within these two, like radical and holistic dualism, and idealism, materialism and physicalism) would then have to be explicated (Bouwer, 2008, p. 446). It might

suffice to put forward that it is impossible to separate the spirit and the psyche from each other – since both phenomena are features of the human mind – but it seems possible to demarcate their domains. When focussing on the construct, “meaning”, a distinction can be made between “everyday meaning” and ultimate or “ontological” meaning. This last kind of meaning deals with the quest for the meaning *of* life – and is therefore related to the spirit and spiritual well-being – while the psyche deals with subjective meaning *in* life, which is related to an orientation toward possible barriers in the mind which prevent the subject from reaching a state of psychological well-being. It could, therefore, be possible that Heintzman’s and Schmidt’s findings were in reality not brought into relationship with spiritual well-being, but with psychological well-being. This argument also applies to the conceptualization of leisure and well-being.

As far as leisure is concerned, it has been put forward that it could be conceptualized from different perspectives. The classical, Aristotelian definition holds leisure to be *skholé* – a condition of the soul, meaning something that concerns people ultimately. Yet, Heintzman and Schmidt have chosen to use the socio-psychological definitions of leisure, which of course enables them to come to greater differentiation of the determinants of leisure as phenomenon. Nevertheless, it would have been more appropriate – since their study objectives revolved around spirituality – to take on the challenge of conceptualizing and operationalizing leisure as *skholé* instead of leisure as *anapausis* (recreation) as they did. Schmidt did undertake an attempt to zoom in on this subject matter, and he certainly came up with valuable information regarding to the relationship between leisure and spirituality, but he did not seriously follow the lead back to leisure specifically as *skholé*. It would also have been of great interest if these scholars had retrospectively looked for the impact and value of their findings for the conceptualization of spirituality. It could have led to considering self-discovery, e. g., as a structural motive of a specific kind of (primordial) spirituality that is related to leisure, and/or reflection on the value of and conceptual interrelationships between the “sacred” and the “transcendental” as dimensions of spirituality.

These arguments also concern the concept of well-being. Well-being is not identical with health. Health, according to several scholars, encompasses well-being (on different levels). Others build their conceptualization on a “reverse” argument: well-being encompasses health, among other things. Nordenfelt tried to escape from this impasse by connecting health with the preconditions and possibilities people have to realize happiness in the long run. Positive psychologists (e. g. Diener) came up with a conceptualization of subjective well-being which includes parameters related to both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, such as life satisfaction and happiness. Yet, Heintzman takes spiritual well-being, spiritual health and spiritual wellness to be synonyms. This com-

plicated the validity of his research findings. The implicit normative and cultural (western) stance, and debatable conceptual choices, clouds the question as to whether he has studied spiritual well-being, or rather feelings related to life satisfaction, or SWB, or happiness, or health, to mention a few options. Research done in South Africa, e.g., pointed out that leisure/relaxation, amongst other factors, was regarded as less meaningful in the lives of the respondents, than family and spirituality, which gave the most meaning in life (Coetzee, Wissing, & Temane, 2010). These findings support the critical remarks made above.

## Future Research

The main points discussed in the previous section show the direction in which future research regarding the question whether leisure can be seen as a moderator for spiritual well-being could be conducted. The analysis done on the reviews in this paper characterizes the research objective as a question and not yet as a statement. It is still to be conceived as a hypothesis, although evidence exists for a possible relationship between leisure and spirituality. It is therefore proposed that future research should be directed to (a) the following conceptual levels: (1) a more rigorous analysis of the nature of spirituality should be done, that includes the philosophical distinction between the two domains of the human mind, namely the spirit and the psyche; (2) a more rigorous analysis of the nature of leisure is necessary, whereby specifically the challenge of operationalizing leisure as *skholé* is taken on; (3) a more rigorous analysis of the concept of well-being is needed before it is used in one construct together with the concept of spirituality and (b) more quantitative designs.

## Conclusion

The leading question of this article is whether leisure, given evidence that leisure is supportive of physical and mental health and well-being, can be regarded a moderator for spiritual well-being. Although evidence from both ancient and modern times conceives the nature of leisure as having a spiritual side (as well), spirituality has not been widely included when studying the benefits of leisure on well-being. However, the interest in the relationship between spirituality and leisure is growing among leisure scholars. Two scholars who have undertaken research into this field are Paul Heintzmann and Chris Schmidt. In order to look for evidence that confirms a relationship between leisure and spiritual well-being, a conceptual analysis of the key concepts at stake in this article, namely leisure, spirituality and well-being, has been made, followed by analysis of a

review of research undertaken by Heintzman and Schmidt. Heintzmann worked both conceptually and empirically on the development of a model that reflects the relationship between leisure and spiritual well-being. His presupposition was that leisure has a positive impact on spiritual wellness/well-being. He concludes that leisure experiences, which involve “an interplay of time, activity, motivation and setting”, can offer a space where spirituality, (c.q.) spiritual distress can be explored instead of repressed, and spiritual leisure experience can lead to spiritual well-being and growth. Schmidt, proceeding from the notion that leisure has a potential for having a “meaningful impact on people’s physical health, sense of well-being and perceptions of quality of life, and may hold a key for people’s free expression and exploration of truth, beauty and knowledge”, undertook phenomenological research into the nature of those lived leisure experiences people interpreted as spiritual. He found that people experienced leisure to be a valuable and edifying aspect of their lives when it comes to spirituality. The respondents experienced growth towards self-actualization, which includes elements of spirituality.

Although the aforementioned scholars’ research certainly contributed to new knowledge about the determinants of leisure in relation to well-being, several objections have been raised against their conceptual handling of the three key concepts under scrutiny. No valid conclusions can be drawn about the proposed relationship between leisure and spiritual well-being, because the foundations underlying the domains of the spiritual and the psychological, the specific nature of leisure as *skholé*, and the nature of well-being in relation health, happiness, life satisfaction and SWB need a more rigorous analysis than was the case among the researchers discussed in this paper. The final conclusion is that the existent evidence for supporting the statement that leisure is a moderator for spiritual well-being is (conceptually) too weak to make a valid case for it.

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## Value and Meaning Orientations of the Religious Individual

### Theoretical Perspective

The growth of the role of religion in social life is distinctly traceable in the contemporary world. It is visible in the cooperation of Churches with political institutions and secular organizations, in the (re)activation of various traditional and modernistic cults, in the increasing religiosity of some ethnic groups and in social conflicts which are grounded in faith. In certain countries, the hope of rebirthing the spiritual and moral basis of society is closely related to traditional beliefs and the spreading of religions. All of the above indicates that value and meaning orientations, determined by religious faith, are becoming an important component of the consciousness of contemporary people, as well as an active regulator of their behaviour.

Under the conditions of post-industrial society, where marketable and materialistic relationships prevail, religion remains one of the few social institutions expressing a humane and spiritual concern for humanity, providing possibilities for maintaining moral foundations, discovering meaning in life, and finding a personal “point of support”. In its psychological facet, religion facilitates the formation of a person’s value and meaning orientation system, defining his or her attitude toward life, toward the world as a whole, as well as regulating their conscious behaviour.

Rather, recently, the term “value and meaning orientations” has come into use in the science of psychology, being derivative of the concept of “value orientations”, with its rich history of scientific development and widespread popularity in contemporary research. Both concepts cover an almost identical phenomenological area/field and are used in similar contexts in scientific literature.

The concept “value orientations” was introduced into the general vocabulary of scientific psychology in the 1920s by the Polish scientists Thomas and Znaniecki. They defined value orientations as a person’s state of mind directed toward a value (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1976). They also introduced “attitude”, a

similar term which has become very popular in Western social psychology and sociology.

The concept of “value orientations” was used productively, in the areas of cultural psychology and social science, to reveal cultural differences. The *value orientations* (as distinct from *values* and *attitudes*) of certain societies were investigated, resulting in discoveries of cross-cultural differences in social ideals and general value representations (Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Kluckhohn, 1951; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990; Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 2008 etc.). However, Hutcheon (1972) states that the *term* “value orientations” seems to have gained popularity more rapidly than has the *concept*, and is now often confusingly interchanged with “attitude”.

Also, there are investigations in which value orientations are considered apart from cultural context as a regulator of the social behaviour of persons (Surina, 1996; Surina, 1999; Yadov, 1975), which is also a basis of group formation (Petrovsky, 1982). In psychology and social science, the problem as to the kind of phenomena of an individual’s inner world to which value orientations belong is solved in different ways. Value orientations are considered as *global orientations* in a personality structure, as the *attitudes* of a person, as a *focus* on values and as *value representations* of consciousness.

One attempt to unite different psychological interpretations of value orientations may be observed in a series of studies by Golubkova (1998) and Kornienko (2003), which resulted in an eclectic mix of various mental phenomena. For example, the Czech psychologist Hudeček argues: “*The psychological basis of an individual’s value orientation is a structure of various needs, motives, interests, purposes, ideals, beliefs and worldviews, participating in the creation of a person’s global orientation, and expressing a person’s socially determined relations to reality*” (Hudeček, 1989, pp. 109 – 110). Also, there is no consent among scholars concerning the mental domain to which value orientations belong. The majority of researchers claim the cognitive nature of orientations (Clauson & Vinson, 1978; Kahle and Homer, 1988; Rokeach, 1973; Rotter, 1967; Kluckhohn, 1951; Schläeder, 1993 etc.), while some consider value orientations as phenomena of the emotional domain (Dodonov, 1978; Frankl, 1985; Längle, 2004, Vasilyuk, 1982 etc.).

We assert that it is not correct/appropriate to reduce personal value formations (including value orientations) to cognitive structures. First, according to this approach, there will always be a divergence between a person’s values and his or her actual behaviour. This, in turn, makes the study of individual values as regulators of behaviour impossible. Secondly, the cognitive perspective on value formations seems to distort the interpretation of some mental phenomena. For example, when a person appreciates another person, we either have to interpret

this appreciation as a *belief* in the importance or significance of the other, or as a *concept*, or as a *cognitive operation of comparison* of one person with other individuals. Aesthetic value, then, has to be understood as a *concept* of beauty etc.

Inasmuch as it does not explain certain peculiarities of individual social behavior, the emotional approach to values also has limitations. For example, how is an act based on the value of any idea possible if this value is in conflict with other feelings? With Bratus, (1990) we believe/are convinced that understanding the meaning-based nature of personal values helps solve these contradictions. First, meaning-based formations unite the intellectual and affective processes. They allow us to regard personal values as real, effective regulators of different types of behavior. Secondly, mental phenomena – such as a person’s appreciation of another person or an aesthetic value – are more adequately characterized as the realized and accepted significance (meaning) of that person, or the realm of beauty. Thirdly, the meaning-based nature of human values expresses meaning as an attribute of every value. Thus, the concept “value and meaning orientations” expresses *the meaning-based* nature of value orientation. Furthermore, the concept “value and meaning orientations” allows one to do away with the empirical understanding of value orientations. As we have mentioned above, all previous interpretations of the phenomenon of value orientations are based on the empirical approach. This means that the term “value orientations” is taken to denote empirically observed phenomena. The empirical understanding of value orientations is shown as follows. While researchers who discuss the “system”, “structure”, “hierarchy” and “clusters” of value orientations refer to empirically discovered statistic tendencies and correlations, they nevertheless do not refer these features to any specific theoretical model. Zhuravleva writes: “The structure of a person’s value orientations is understood as a hierarchy of values which is defined through the ranging of them by the person himself” (Zhuravleva, 2006, p. 28).

In our view, the concept of “value and meaning orientations”, as a theoretical construct, is able to explain different empirical tendencies. According to this perspective, we consider value and meaning orientations in both *dynamic* and *substantive* aspects.

### Value and Meaning Orientations as a System of Coordinates for a Person’s Way of Life

As regards the substantive aspect, value and meaning orientation is a system of the coordinates for a person’s way of life. This means viewing value and meaning orientations as a process of orientating. A similar opinion was expressed by the

Russian psychologist Kruglov, who concluded that a person's value orientations include not only evaluative opinions concerning phenomena of reality, but "a certain type of evaluative orientating activity" (Kruglov, 1983, p. 9). Nevertheless, despite the attention which some scholars have paid to its dynamic aspect, the interpretation of value orientations as static constructions is still dominant in contemporary psychology (Bitueva, 2000; Grigor'eva, 2003; Kornienko, 2003).

Value and meaning orientation, or orientating, signifies the construction of a *system of the value and meaning coordinates* of person's way of life. This system determines the *relations* of subjective significance and meaning among different phenomena of reality, forming a certain "network", embracing life events, people and representations etc. It is possible to say, metaphorically, that value and meaning orientating happens when a person tries to orient himself in an unfamiliar place and circumstances. The system of value and meaning coordinates reveals itself as a value "map" of a certain life situation on which "parallels" of significance and "meridians" of meaning are marked.

The process of value and meaning orientation begins in situations of value contradictions. Sometimes a life event becomes so ambiguous that it disorients a person. The situation is characterised by disorder in a person's subjective understanding of significance and the meaning of reality. Value and meaning orientating becomes necessary in new circumstances. Based on the results of this orientating, the person finds a certain direction in life. In this way, *value and meaning orientations signify the formation process of the core of one's identity.*

### Value and Meaning Orientations as a System of Coordinates of a Person's Way of Life

In the substantive aspect, value and meaning orientation is a system of the coordinates of a person's way of life. This system consists of scales of quantity and quality for the measuring, generalising and interpreting of the phenomena and facts of reality. The quantity scale measures the subjective significance of reality, whereas the quality scale measures the importance and clarity of its meaning. Thus, value and meaning orientations are not a combination of value representations within consciousness, but are the structural basis, the "axis" of consciousness (Zdravomyslov & Yadov, 1966). Similar ideas may be found in the scientific literature pertaining to this topic – for example, values and meanings as a "network of coordinates" (Yashin, 2006), and "value and meaning coordinates of the multidimensional world of an individual" (Klochko and Galazhinsky, 1999; Rybin, 2005).

The above described theoretical model of value and meaning orientations in its dynamic and substantive aspects is presented in Figure 1.

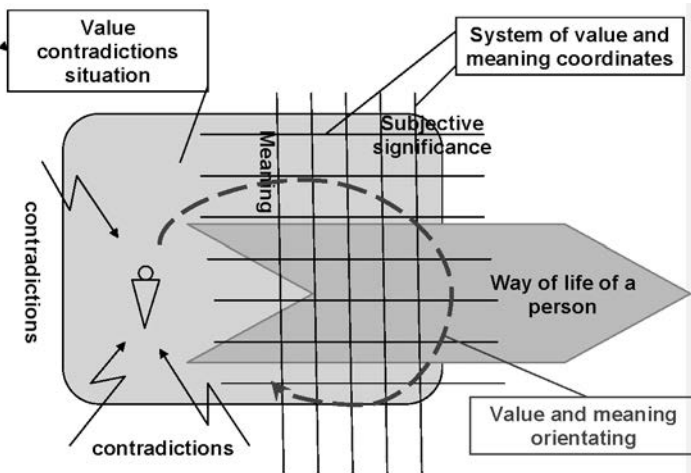


Figure 1. The model of value and meaning orientations

A person's value and meaning orientations are reflected in his or her self-consciousness (Mukhina, 1999). Self-consciousness is interwoven in the process of value and meaning orientations, since these orientations always define the significance and meaning of something *in relation to the person's own existence*.

## Specificity of Value and Meaning Orientations of the Religious Individual

The specificity of value and meaning orientations of the religious individual can be illustrated by considering the believer's ontology. In the ontological aspect, there are two realities of the believer's existence. The first reality is the human, created, "worldly" reality; it is finite and ever-changing. The second reality is the supernatural, transcendent and divine; it is ultimate, absolute, total and has the attributes of infinity and permanence. Thus, the life of a believing person who belongs to the first reality is included in relationship with the supernatural, transcendent reality. A person with a religious worldview is led by religious value and meaning orientation. In the context of this orientation, *the subjective significance and meaning of the facts and events of reality are determined by their close relation to divine reality and their correspondence to divine purposes and laws of creation*.

In different systems of value and meaning coordinates, different types of

actions, illegal actions for example, are considered differently: “the ends justify the means”, “justice is above all” etc. In the religious system of coordinates, for example, illegal actions are considered to be sins. Thus, all “worldly” phenomena receive a different meaning: body becomes flesh, death becomes freedom, life events become divine Providence and so forth. Supernatural reality adds the “other” dimension to ordinary phenomena, characterising their essence from the stance of the eternal and ultimate being.

If a person is led by a religious value and meaning orientation, then that person’s orientations have the important feature of being *centred on supernatural reality*. An unbelieving individual has multi-directed systems of value and meaning coordinates, a spectrum which is defined by the variety of one’s life relationships with the world. The co-existence of these orientations which can, at times, be in contradictory relations with each other is explained by the fact that the average person very rarely rises up to the level of deep reflection on his or her own orientations.

By comparison, the leading religious orientation in the believer’s domain of value and meaning reveals itself as quite general in relation to other orientations. Other orientations are regarded as derivatives of “worldly” reality. Being a *meta-orientation* in the structure of value and meaning orientations, the religious orientation implies a distinct meaning for the person’s life. This meaning is defined by divine aims. Other value and meaning orientations are ordered according to the common “strategic” direction. Khramova (2004) argues that believers absorb the ethical values and moral beliefs of the religious social group with which they align themselves, whereas the palette of social relations of unbelievers, being a stimulus for identification, is wider.

Another important peculiarity of a religious person’s value and meaning orientations is a distinct *hierarchy*. Numerous research studies discover the traits of hierarchy in an individual’s system of value and meaning orientations. The hierarchy of a believer’s orientations is expressed rather distinctly because it is defined by an emphasis on supernatural reality. Religious orientation can be regarded as the “core” which determines the underlying levels of significance among other orientations.

### Peculiarities of Religious Value and Meaning Orientations

One of the essential traits of religious value and meaning orientation was elicited in the research of Allport. Studying the religious values, Allport introduced the Religion Orientation Scale (Allport, 1966; Allport & Ross, 1967) which allowed the revelation of *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* religious orientations. Extrinsic orientation is directed toward the ceremonial and cultic features of religion, as well

as its social and therapeutic functions, whereas intrinsic orientation is directed toward world outlook, ideas and doctrine. A religious orientation can be structured according to the principles of “to have” or “to be”. The application of this well-known philosophical principle to the interpretation of mental phenomena has been perfectly demonstrated by Fromm (2007). If a religious value and meaning orientation is structured according to the principle “to have”, religious experience becomes something that one should *gain*. A person aspires for the *increment* and *expansion* of this experience, striving to *seize* truth. According to this principle a person tries to *possess* God (God becomes an idol) and thereby *submits* to God. This is an example of a *materialistic* religious value and meaning orientation. If a religious orientation is based on the principle “to be”, a believer tries to *deepen* his or her own religious experience. The sacredness of experience and co-participation of a person and God become more important than vividness and frequency of religious emotions. In this case, a person tries, not to *possess* truth, but to *comprehend* it, to approximate it, to touch God. The religious orientation here is *existential*.

Approximating to God (appealing to “super-meaning”, in Frankl’s terminology) becomes possible through the mechanism of self-transcendence – by coming out of one’s own existential limits. In this case, God becomes a partner in the internal dialogue (Frankl, 1985). From here, it is possible to draw a conclusion about another specific trait of religious value and meaning orientation – its *fundamental nature*: this orientation focuses on the most fundamental existential questions.

The next peculiarity of religious orientation is *canonicity*. Canonicity is understood as the preservation of the meaning content which is fixed in the canons of a specific religion, in its original and invariable forms. This feature of orientation is explained by one characteristic of religious knowledge – its *dogmatism*. All religious doctrine is constructed deductively. It consists of general claims (dogmas) which are not subject to doubt. Afterwards subsequent statements are deduced. The/A canon presents itself as a set of religious dogmas.

Studying young Muslims and Jehovah’s Witnesses, Khramova (2004) has discovered that their self-consciousness is filled in with the value and meaning orientations of their religions. The canonicity of religious value and meaning orientation manifests itself in a low level of reflection, focused on standards of identity promoted by doctrine. Similar empirical results were shown in Perevoznikova’s research in which the self-consciousness of teenagers from orthodox and atheistic families was investigated (Perevoznikova, 2000).

Mukhina and Vasil’chenko, generalising their own empirical studies of young orthodox seminary students (future clerics), conclude: “Persons, who have decided to serve God, strictly follow the canonized way and show uniformity in



the basic postulates of perspective on their own essence” (Mukhina & Vasil’chenko, 2006, p. 57).

The canonicity of a person’s religious value and meaning orientation, as well as a clear awareness of the meaning of life, contribute to the fact that any given orientation is *easily demonstrated verbally*. As certain explorations have demonstrated, this happens in situations in which a believer is asked about the ultimate goals of his or her existence (Khramova, 2004; Perevoznikova, 2000). An unbeliever has more difficulties verbalizing his or her multidirectional value and meaning orientations, in formulating his or her meaning of life.

All the points mentioned above show that (when expressed verbally) a person’s religious value and meaning orientation, as a rule, complies with the canons of his or her religion. However, what value and meaning orientations do believers display in frustrating, real life situations? That is the core of the *scientific problem* in our empirical research.

## The Program of the Empirical Research

*The aim* of the research was to elicit specific value and meaning orientations of orthodox youth in frustrating situations.

*The hypothesis* of the research was formulated as follows – we assumed that young orthodox adults would display complex value and meaning orientations in frustrating real life situations.

*The participants of the research* – students of two educational institutions were selected as participants: students of the Moscow Spiritual Academy and Seminary (the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, Segriev Posad city) – 50 young male adults (age  $M = 23$ ), and students of the Orthodox St. Tikhon’s Humanitarian University (Moscow city) – 30 young male adults (age  $M = 22$ ). Students of these two institutions are preparing to be orthodox clerics, missionaries and theologians. In recruiting these participants, we planned to investigate more pronounced value and meaning orientations. This was made possible by studying, not just common church parishioners, but individuals who have decided to make religious activities their own life mission.

Engaging students of rather different educational institutions has allowed us to study value and meaning orientations of young orthodox adults under the conditions of differently proportioned social factors.

The Moscow Spiritual Academy and Seminary is classified as the “closed” type of educational institution. The ordinary way of life of the seminary students – future clerics – is in compliance with the functioning of not only the church educational institution, but also with the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra as a whole. Therefore, the education process is built into ordinary church life –

temple visiting, observance of church dates, carrying out of house-keeping duties etc. The strong influence of internal religious and educational factors is combined here with the reduction of external influences –cultural, philosophical, political, ethnical etc. This is the consequence of few social contacts of students outside of Lavra.

The Orthodox St. Tikhon’s Humanitarian University belongs to the “open” type of institution, and combines strong internal influences with natural external influences. Typical distinctions between the two institutions allow for the characterizing of the students of the seminary (from a religious standpoint) as believers in relative separation from the world, and the students of the orthodox university as believers living in the world.

*Research methods* – for the investigation of the value and meaning orientations of young orthodox adults, the projective method of self-consciousness structure deprivation (by Muknina & Khvostov) was applied (Mukhina & Khvostov, 1996; Mukhina, 2002). The method makes it possible to find a person’s value and meaning orientations through their typical responses to frustrating situations. This method consists of picture-based situations of communication between a respondent and projective characters (a priest, parents, believing peers and unbelieving peers). The example of the pictures is presented in Figure 2.

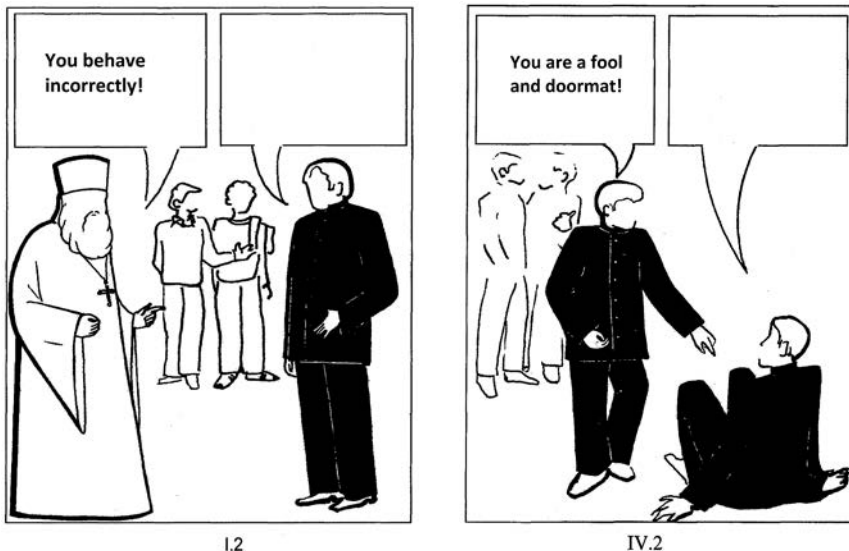


Figure 2. An example of the stimulant material from the method of self-consciousness structure deprivation (by Muknina & Khvostov) (extracted from: Dvoinin, 2011)

In projective situations every character addresses a respondent with a negative verbal commentary directed at personal frustration and the deprivation of value and meaning orientations in the structure of his self-consciousness. For example:

- "Hey, you! That's quite a name you have!"
- "You don't even look like a man!"

These situations of frustration were regarded as situations of *value and meaning disorientation* for a respondent, in which his real system of value and meaning coordinates reveals itself.

The responses of respondents were classified into 5 types:

- 1 - *tolerant adequate response* - The respondent tries to clarify the reasons for the negative verbal commentary from the projective character, asking him to explain his opinion. This is an adaptive form of reaction to a frustrating situation.
- 2 - *tolerant inadequate response* - This means agreement with a character's negative verbal commentary.
- 3 - *aggressive response*. (?)
- 4 - *ignoring*. (?)
- 5 - *passive response*. This indicates simple silence as an answer.

*Statistics:* The Chi-square Test ( $\chi^2$ ) has been used for the findings of statistic differences between variances. L. Zaks's criterion (Z) has been applied to estimate the differences between frequencies of concrete types of responses.

## Results

To check the research hypothesis, deprivation of value and meaning content of respondents' self-consciousness was carried out. This allowed gathering various responses of young orthodox adults to this deprivation. The variances of the seminary and orthodox university students' response types in frustrating situations are presented in Tables 1<sup>1</sup> and 2. If the two samples showed statistically significant differences between concrete types of responses, fixed by L. Zaks's criterion, those responses were marked in bold. For all the Chi-square Test data, presented in the text, the degree of freedom is  $df = 4$ . With regard to the variances of response types, the following tendencies have been revealed.

*Tolerant (adequate and inadequate) responses to a priest's commentary are*

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1 Mukhina and Vasil'chenko have contributed to this part of the research conducted at the Moscow Spiritual Academy and Seminary.

dominant. Aggressive and ignoring behavioral reactions are least expressed. This data indicates the adaptation of respondents to their social conditions. Because of the limits of the Chi-square Test ( $f \geq 5$ ), it was impossible to determine the size of the differences in variances between the seminary students and the orthodox university students. Nevertheless, L. Zaks' criterion showed that both samples have the same responses to the priest ( $\rho \geq .05$ ).

Generally, the students of both educational institutions also reacted *tolerantly to parents*. The total number of aggressive and ignoring responses grew. The seminary students are more *adequately tolerant* than the students of the orthodox university ( $Z = 2.365, \rho \leq .05$ ), showing a lesser degree of *aggression* ( $Z = 3.235, \rho \leq .01$ ) and *ignoring* responses ( $Z = 3.457, \rho \leq .01$ ). The differences between samples are significant:  $\chi^2 = 27.727, \rho \leq .001$ .

Table 1 – Seminary students' types of responses in frustrating situations (%)

Series N <sub>Q</sub>	Frustrating characters	Type of response*				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Priest	43.50	45.17	1.0	2.50	7.83
2	Parents	46.0	21.0	5.0	6.33	21.67
3	Unbelieving peers	27.84	17.17	20.33	12.33	22.33
4	Believing peers	35.0	16.17	16.17	10.50	22.16
Total		38.08	24.87	10.63	7.92	18.50

\* Type of response: 1 – tolerant adequate; 2 – tolerant inadequate; 3 – aggressive; 4 – ignoring; 5 – passive.

The seminary students display a dominant propensity to react *with adequate and tolerance to unbelieving peers*, but *aggressive* and *passive* responses are expressed as well. The orthodox university students react *aggressively*. The given type of behavior is at the top of all types in this sample. The other responses are distributed more or less equally. Thus, seminary students are more *adequately tolerant* ( $Z = 2.206, \rho \leq .05$ ) and *passive* ( $Z = 3.741, \rho \leq .01$ ), but less *aggressive* ( $Z = 2.117, \rho \leq .05$ ). The observed differences between the two groups are statistically significant:  $\chi^2 = 18.256, \rho \leq .001$ .

The verbal commentaries of *believing peers* chiefly provoke *adequately tolerant* responses in the seminary students' sample. In comparison with these respondents, two dominant behavioral types, having approximately the same frequency of occurrence, are observed in the sample of orthodox university students – *adequately tolerant* and *aggressive*. Variances between samples differ ( $\chi^2 = 14.881, \rho \leq .01$ ). The orthodox university students display more *aggressive* responses than the seminarians ( $Z = 3.515, \rho \leq .01$ ), but less *passive* reactions ( $Z = 2.20, \rho \leq .05$ ).

Table 2 – Orthodox university students' types of responses in frustrating situations (%)

Series №	Frustrating characters	Type of response*				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Priest	38.89	40.83	5.56	4.17	10.56
2	Parents	35.0	20.84	13.33	16.11	14.72
3	Unbelieving peers	18.89	15.28	35.83	15.56	14.44
4	Believing peers	28.89	16.39	29.72	11.11	13.89
Total		30.38	23.3	21.22	11.72	13.38

\* Type of response: 1 – tolerant adequate; 2 – tolerant inadequate; 3 – aggressive; 4 – ignoring; 5 – passive.

Describing the *total* results, one may note the dominance of the *adequate tolerant* type of responses in the seminary students' sample. The *inadequate tolerant* type of responses is in second place and *ignoring* behavior is in the last place. In spite of the same picture being observed by the group of orthodox university students, variances in the samples are statistically different ( $\chi^2 = 57.576$ ,  $\rho \leq .001$ ). Also, we have found differences in all concrete types of responses (excluding *inadequate tolerant*) on the p-value level 1 %. The seminarians are more *adequately tolerant* ( $Z = 3.405$ ) and *passive* ( $Z = 2.907$ ) than the orthodox university students, but display less *aggressive* ( $Z = 6.307$ ) and *ignoring* behavior patterns ( $Z = 2.783$ ).

A uniform tendency of responses to specific characters' verbal commentaries is observed in every group of young orthodox adults. Responses to a priest differ from reactions to parents and all the peer characters. The Chi-square Test has revealed this in the group of orthodox university students on a p-value level  $\rho \leq .01$ :  $\chi^2 = 32.899$  with parents;  $\chi^2 = 86.301$  with unbelieving peers;  $\chi^2 = 57.698$  with believing peers. The same tendency has been traced based on L. Zaks' criteria, while the Chi-square Test was inapplicable. Indexes of L. Zaks' criterion results are shown in Table 3.

Responses to parents are distinguished from reactions to unbelieving peers and believing peers (in the seminarians' sample  $\chi^2 = 48.398$  and  $\chi^2 = 27.481$ ; in the orthodox university students' sample  $\chi^2 = 27.290$  and  $\chi^2 = 13.715$ ) – differences are significant at the levels of 1 % and 0,1 %. The responses to unbelieving peers and believing peers differ (in the seminarians' sample  $\chi^2 = 4.573$ ; in the orthodox university students' sample  $\chi^2 = 6.224$ ).

Table 3 – Differences between types of responses to a priest and to other characters in the seminary students' group (Indexes of L. Zaks criterion<sup>2</sup>)

Series №	Frustrating characters	Type of response*				
		1	2	3	4	5
2	Parents	<b>0.811</b>	8.354	–	2.606	5.748
3	Unbelieving peers	5.413	9.687	–	5.091	5.961
4	Believing peers	2.911	10.035	–	4.426	5.907

\* Type of response: 1 – tolerant adequate; 2 – tolerant inadequate; 3 – aggressive; 4 – ignoring; 5 – passive.

The described variety of responses of young orthodox adults to the deprivation of the value and meaning content of their self-consciousness does not only indicate manifestations of socially normative and non-normative behavior, but also testifies to complex value and meaning orientations.

## Discussion of the Results

In generalizing the results of the young orthodox adults' responses to the deprivation of the value and meaning content of their self-consciousness, it is necessary to say the following: the dominance of *tolerant* types of responses to a *priest*, combined with no differences in concrete response types between samples, can be explained in light of the peculiarity of a frustrating situation which is also a normative situation.

According to a Christian worldview and the accepted norms of the church, the negative commentary or remark of a priest should be perceived by the orthodox pupil as edification care for the pupil's spiritual condition. This explains the students' concessions toward the priest character, and their apologetic and *tolerant* type of behavior. This likely signifies the *internal core* (conscious humility and obedience) rather than weakness or conformism.

Similar value and meaning orientations are displayed in many places in the New Testament (James 2:13; 1 Peter. 5:5), and are also contained in the edifications of the Orthodox Church Fathers (Sirin, 1998; Makary Veliky, 2004 etc.). The respondents explained their tolerant responses as follows: "A priest is a teacher, he has to guide me, that is why I listen to him"; "In any case, a priest is an image of Christ, he knows better..." etc.

The steady tendencies to respond *tolerantly* to the *parent* character in frus-

<sup>2</sup> Note: The significance levels for L. Zaks criterion are: 5 % –  $Z \geq 1.99$ ; 1 % –  $Z \geq 2.7$ . Insignificant differences are marked in bold. It was impossible to estimate the differences on the 3<sup>rd</sup> aggressive type of response because of the limits of the given criterion.

trating situations are probably explained by the young orthodox adults' value and meaning orientation based on the Christian precept "Honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20:12; Matthew 15:4; Mark 7:10).

The increase in the total shares of *aggressive*, *ignoring* and *passive* responses to parents is explained by the fact that, as it has been found, some respondents grew up in incomplete families or had unbelieving parents. These conditions quite often stimulate aggressive behavior. Ignoring and passive reactions can be regarded as ways to prevent possible conflicts in frustrating situations.

Unlike the *tolerant* responses, which young orthodox adults displayed mainly towards seniors (a priest and parents), *aggressive* and *passive* reactions to *peers* (regardless of their beliefs) were displayed, along with tolerant behavior. This shows that, in situations of communication with seniors (a priest or a parent), the respondents' behavior is regulated mainly by religious value and meaning orientation, whereas, in the situations involving peers, universal (i. e. worldly) value and meaning orientations and behavior patterns are actualized. Thus, two rather independent systems of value and meaning coordinates (the worldly one and the religious), which intersect each other like Euler's circles, can fill the self-consciousness of a believer.

Historically developed universal patterns of behavior, according to which appropriate responses to adults differ from responses to peers, are acquired by a person as value and meaning orientations, and substantially fill in a person's self-consciousness in the process of individual development. Christian representations, forming specific religious value and meaning orientation, are "imposed" on universal orientations concerning the special honoring of clerics and parents, forming a dichotomy in the value and meaning content of believers' self-consciousness. Universal (i. e. worldly) and religious value and meaning orientations in one's self-consciousness regulate a person's behavior differently. The actualization of one or the other orientation depends on the social environment modeling certain life relationships.

The above conclusion is confirmed by the qualitative analysis of the examinees' verbal responses. See the typical example below. The respondent K. (age 19, Russian) displays an *inadequate tolerant* behavior type in the communication process with a priest character:

Priest: "You're behaving badly!"

K.: "I agree with you, I'll try to do better."

Priest: "You have lived the wrong way before, and nothing has changed."

K.: "The mistake was that I didn't listen to seniors... Now I understand that I'm not right and I'll try to change my life."

Projective situations of the respondent's communication with the priest are characterized by a certain type of life relationship. In this relationship, the young believing adult is in the role of a person who aspires to spiritual growth – to become an image of God. The priest is presented as a spiritual teacher who contributes to his growth and cares about him.

Naturally, this situation and the projective character are able to actualize a religious value and meaning orientation which regulates the respondent's behavior. According to this orientation, the orthodox young adult perceives the priest's verbal commentary as a remark caused by the cleric's care for his spiritual and moral condition. Yet, the responses of K. to unbelieving peers are *aggressive*:

Unbelieving peers: "Hey, you! That's quite a name you have!"

K.: "I don't care what you think!"

Unbelieving peers: "You are a fool and a doormat!"

K.: "Get lost!!"

Unbelieving peers: "Are you a real man?"

K.: "Look at yourself!"

In the situations of K.'s communication with unbelieving peers, worldly life relationships have remained. According to these kinds of relationships, an insult demands a reciprocal insult. Thus, this situation has provoked a display of worldly value and meaning orientation in the respondent's behavior. The given example illustrates the common tendency for young orthodox adults to display a dichotomy of value and meaning orientations. Nevertheless, some respondents reveal uniform religious value and meaning orientations that shows the stability of their religious worldview, having been manifested in the same responses towards all projective characters.

If we compare received results with the data of similar research studies of young secular adults (Afonasenko, 2004; Ivanova, 2001; Kalinichenko, 2004), it is possible to establish that young orthodox adults display *tolerant* reactions to all characters, more than do secular youth. The common tendency of increasing *aggression*, being inherent among all young adults, characterizes believers to a lesser degree. *Passive* responses are observed in the young orthodox adults' group more often than in the secular youth samples, whereas *ignoring* responses are more typical for young secular adults. Thus, the hypothesis of our empirical research has been confirmed.



## Conclusion

As said above, the term “value and meaning orientations” having rather recently come into use by the science of psychology, has not been clearly distinguished from the term “value orientations”. Scientific literature lacks a unified view of value orientations, which include attitudes, relationships and focus, etc. The term “value and meaning orientations” embraces the notion of the meaning-based nature of value orientations. In its dynamic aspect value and meaning orientation is a process of attaching subjective significance and meaning to reality, on the basis which a person finds a certain direction in life. Therefore, value and meaning orientation signifies a formation of the core of one’s identity. In the substantive aspect, orientation is a system of value and meaning coordinates. The quantity scale of the system measures the subjective significance of reality, whereas the quality scale measures the importance and clarity of its meaning.

The value and meaning orientations of the religious individual are distinguished by an emphasis on supernatural reality and a clear hierarchical pattern. The specific traits of religious value and meaning orientation are fundamental in nature, focusing on the most basic existential questions, canonicity, easy verbalization, extrinsic or intrinsic character and a materialistic or existential way of being.

In the context of a religious value and meaning orientation, the subjective significance and meaning of facts and events of reality are determined by their close relation to divine reality and their correspondence to divine purposes and laws of creation.

Regarding the specifics of value and meaning orientations of young orthodox adults, the following facts have been established. When expressed verbally, a person’s religious value and meaning orientation, as a rule, complies with the canons of the religion. In real life situations of frustration, future clerics and believers living in the world display complex behavioral responses. For example, when structural parts of self-consciousness are deprived of their value and meaning content, young orthodox adults predominantly respond with tolerance. Such a tendency in their responses is explained by the stability of a Christian value and meaning orientation, which interprets tolerance as an expression of humility and obedience. In the same way, future clerics express stronger tolerance than believers living in the world. Secular youth displays considerably less tolerance in situations of frustration.

When believers are faced with frustrating situations, their universal (i.e. worldly) value and meaning orientation is actualized along with the religious one. These orientations create a dichotomy in the value and meaning content of the believers’ self-consciousness, and their interaction is marked by contra-

diction in the regulation of behavior. The actualization of one or another orientation depends on the following factors:

- Social environment
- The context of the situation modeling certain life relationships
- Internal conviction, centered on the value and meaning contents of self-consciousness

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