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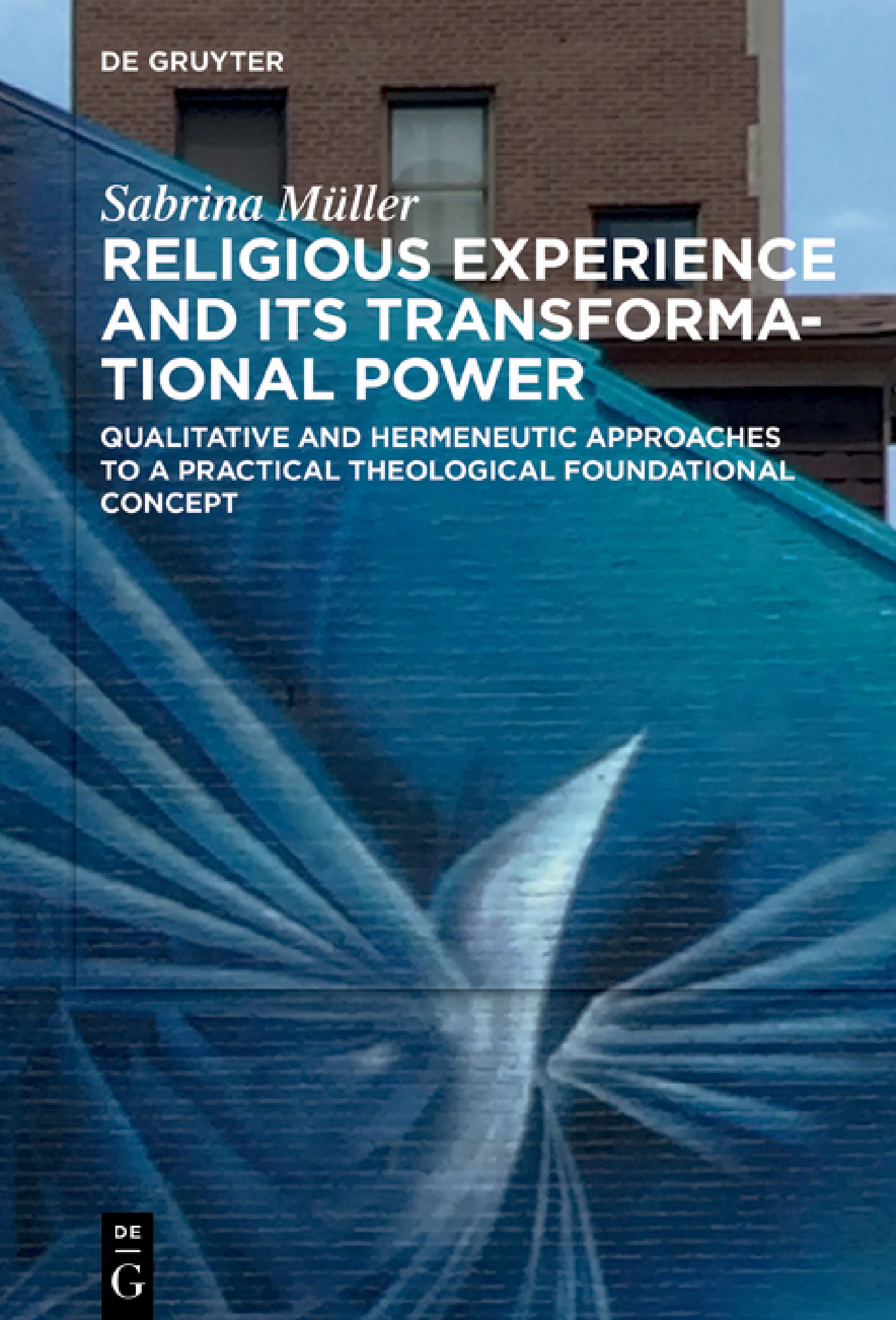
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND ITS TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER

QUALITATIVE AND HERMENEUTIC APPROACHES TO A PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPT



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For Andi

Preface

The Theological Faculty of the University of Zurich accepted the present study as a habilitation thesis in the autumn semester of 2021. This study was made possible by 20 co-researchers who entrusted me with their religious experiences. These individuals helped me understand the feelings, thoughts, and processes that trigger such experiences as well as their formative impact on individuals. As a qualitative researcher who enjoys working with people, I can only express my gratitude for the interest, cooperation, and openness that my co-researchers have shown me.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the three examiners of my work. My sincere thanks first go to Prof. Dr. Thomas Schlag, who prepared the initial assessment, accompanied me throughout the entire study with benevolence, and provided constructive criticism. He also offered me a postdoc position, which enabled me to gain a wide range of teaching experiences. Because of this, I was consistently encouraged, supported, and challenged to engage in practical theological research, teaching, and publishing. Without Thomas Schlag, I would not be where I am now, academically and theologically. Next, I would like to thank my second examiner, Prof. Dr. Ralph Kunz, for the perspectives he brought to the table. He always asked the right questions at critical junctures to help shape and develop me, practically and theologically. I also would like to extend my gratitude to the external examiner, Prof. Dr. Uta Pohl-Patalong, for her appreciative and encouraging report, her many helpful academic impulses, as well as the human support and encouragement she provided over the last few years.

This study was made possible thanks to the gracious and professional support of my friends and research colleagues. They encouraged me, offered constructive criticism, brainstormed with me about coding, helped me when I struggled with phrasing, and proofread my texts. I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Andreas Bosshard, Dr. Jasmine Hieronymi, Aline Knapp, Dr. Patrick Todjeras, and Michèle Wenger. You are all awesome!

Many others have contributed to this study at conferences, workshops, research societies, and academic discussions. For example, I would like to thank Prof. em. Dr. Dr. h.c. Dr. h.c. Ingolf Dalferth, who influenced the beginnings of this study during my time at Claremont. I would also like to thank the Claremont School of Theology, which hosted me as a visiting researcher for several months. Specifically, Prof. Dr. Philip Clayton, Prof. Dr. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, and Prof. Dr. Frank Rogers. I am also grateful to the practical theological "community" of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the International Academy of Practical Theology (IAPT), and the Ecclesiology and Ethnography network, which all taught me new ways to practise practical theology. I would also like to thank the tri-na-

tional practical theological research society of Groningen-Kiel-Zurich, which I have always perceived as an extremely interested, collegial, and encouraging research community.

I am also deeply indebted to the Stiftung Kirchgemeinde Zürich for their tremendous support, as they funded part of my research employment. I would also like to express my gratitude for the University of Zurich for providing me with a one-year research credit, the Center for Church Development (ZKE) of the UZH, where I first worked as a postdoc and theological executive, as well as the University Research Priority Program (URPP) "Digital Religion(s)" of the UZH, which enabled me to complete my habilitation alongside my job as an executive.

I would also like to thank Walter de Gruyter Verlag, especially Katrin Mittmann and Dr. Albrecht Döhnert, for their friendly cooperation. This study is being published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF). Only thanks to generous grants provided by the SNF is publishing this open-access research study possible.

Zurich, Easter 2023 Sabrina Müller

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1 Introduction: religious experience as a practical theological challenge

> The object of theology is found in the symbols of religious experience.[1]

More than a century ago, William James distinguished between research on institutionalized religion – whose focus is the church and systematic theology – and research on individual religion, which focuses on personal religious experiences.[2] His interest subsequently turned to research on personal religion and faith. As with James, the focus of this study is on the individual, experiential religiosity and the transformational logic that emanates from it.[3]

The explorative, empirical study presented here is a search for traces of how young urban adults understand and interpret their religious experiences and relate them to their everyday lives. This study intends to provide impulses for current practical theological theory formation on the horizon of social change. At the same time, practical theological theory and object reflection expand to include a contextual and inductive perspective of individualized urban people.

1.1 Problem horizon and aim of the study

Friedrich Schleiermacher did much to make it legitimate in theology to speak of religious experience as a scientific subject.[4] Since then, the issue has not lost its

1 Paul Tillich, 'Theology and Symbolism', in *Religious Symbolism*, ed. F. Ernest Johnson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), 108.

2 Cf. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Lexington, KY: Renaissance Classics, 2012).

3 At the beginning of the study, the author decided not to speak of spiritual but of religious experiences (in the Christian system of meaning). This is because the focus of the study is on the form of religiosity that, although based on personal experiences, clearly shows an orientation towards a specific and institutionally anchored religious system of meaning (religion). In contrast to this are spiritual experiences, in their syncretic arbitrariness, "which do not seek their justification in the social, but in the subject itself. It denotes the increasing tendency of members of society to regard their own experiences of transcendence as the source, evidence and 'goodness' criterion of their own religion." Hubert Knoblauch, 'Die Soziologie der religiösen Erfahrung', in *Religiöse Erfahrung*, ed. Friedo Ricken, vol. 23, Münchener philosophische Studien (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 78.

4 Grethlein on Schleiermacher: "Here, Herrnhut's congregational ideal shimmers through, in which religious experiences, not hierarchical offices, were regarded as decisive." Christian Greth-

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importance, but its position continues to grow, especially concerning questions of the relation of practical theology to the lifeworld. This is especially true because personal experiences have become the individual point of reference and orientation for interpreting the world and understanding oneself and God: "Instead of relying on tradition as before, one now relies on one's own experience,"[5] Gerhard Ebeling put it provocatively.

Human existence cannot be understood – either in practice or in theory – without *experience.* Experience is one of the most central concepts of practical theological research, social science, and humanities theory formation.[6] Nevertheless, even today, and more than half a century after Hans-Georg Gadamer's saying, the concept of experience is still one of the most unenlightened concepts in philosophy and theology.[7]

A theological sharpening of the terminology of experience on *religious* experience does not lead to a simplification of the discourse. Perhaps this explains the relatively small number of practical theological publications on the topic, which stands in contrast to the centrality of the terminology.

The complaint about the lack of experience in theology is not new and was already taken as an occasion for reflection in Protestant theology by Ebeling when he founded the *Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Theologie.*[8] He links the lack of experience in theology with the flood of experience in modern society: "The experience deficit – or in less fashionable terms: the lack of experience – means for theology a disease that can be fatal [...] Theology is not able to grasp the flood of experience in modernity, and through this contrast, its lack of experience becomes all the more noticeable. This threatens to destroy it."[9]

Since Ebeling, the discourse has not become more straightforward but has further increased in complexity within the horizon of social changes such as individualization, pluralization, digitalization, and urbanization. Nevertheless, and all the more so, practical theology, which at the same time sees itself as a science of per-

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lein, *Christsein als Lebensform: Eine Studie zur Grundlegung der Praktischen Theologie* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018), 70.

5 Gerhard Ebeling, 'Die Klage über das Erfahrungsdefizit in der Theologie als Frage nach ihrer Sache', in *Wort und Glaube. Band 3: Beiträge zur Fundamentaltheologie, Soteriologie und Ekklesiologie*, vol. 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975), 3.

6 Cf. Werner H. Ritter, 'Erfahrung. Religiöse Erfahrung/Erleben/Gefühl/Deutung', in *Handbuch Praktische Theologie*, ed. Wilhelm Gräb and Birgit Weyel (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 52.

7 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1965), 329.

8 Cf. 'Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft Für Theologie', accessed 26 February 2020, http://www.wgth.de/index.php.

9 Ebeling, 'Die Klage über das Erfahrungsdefizit in der Theologie als Frage nach ihrer Sache', 3.

ception[10] and orients towards the lifeworld,[11] is called upon to confront precisely this complexity of experienced and lived religion and theology.[12] This is in the knowledge that both hermeneutic and empirical approaches to the concept of religious experience, especially from a practical theological perspective, can only ever be fragmentary and incomplete and must be contextualized.[13]

A current practical theological science theory must necessarily turn to these individual and contextual interpretations of people and integrate them into its theory formation.[14] Experience as a life process and life as an experiential process cannot be separated.[15] Instead, "[it] was and is necessary to model practical theological work balancing the ability to connect to theological theory-building and the reference to the concrete lifeworld."[16]

I pursued this balance in this study with a consistently inductive[17] and discursive approach, which attempts to do justice to individual religiosity's processual dy-

10 Cf. Albrecht Grözinger, *Es bröckelt an den Rändern: Kirche und Theologie in einer multikulturellen Gesellschaft* (Munich: Kaiser, 1992), 51–52.

11 Cf. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, 'The Contributions of Practical Theology', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 1–3; Cf. also: Thomas Klie et al., eds., *Lebenswissenschaft Praktische Theologie?!* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2011).

12 E.g. Wilhelm Gräb, *Religion als Deutung des Lebens: Perspektiven einer Praktischen Theologie gelebter Religion* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006); Albrecht Grözinger and Georg Pfleiderer, eds., *'Gelebte Religion' als Programmbegriff Systematischer und Praktischer Theologie* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2002); Sabrina Müller, *Lived Theology: Impulses for a Pastoral Theology of Empowerment* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021).

13 Representatives of liberation theologies, contextual theologies as well as feminist theologies have repeatedly referred to the contextuality of all theologies as well as to experience as primary sources of knowledge. E.g. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973); Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976); Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Revised (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2007); Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002).

14 "A practical theology oriented towards the religious individual must develop the guiding concepts of religious identity, life history and biographical reference, orientation towards experience and religious development. Aspects of the sociology of religion are important here, because the individual is not to be considered in isolation, but in the context of his or her social and institutional location." Kristian Fechtner et al., eds., *Praktische Theologie: Ein Lehrbuch* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2017), 46.

15 Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, *Wort und Glaube. Beiträge zur Fundamentaltheologie, Soteriologie und Ekklesiologie*, vol. 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1975), 17.

16 Grethlein, *Christsein als Lebensform*, 10.

17 "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and

namics[18] and liquidity.[19] The reference literature raises awareness of the topic as an epistemological counterpart for discussion and a hermeneutic visual aid. However, it is not used in the sense of a specific guiding theoretical approach.

This study intends to contribute to a better understanding of every day, individual and social religious reality construction, religious imprints, and the emergence of religious identity. In addition, aspects of a narrative practical theology *from below,* i.e., from the theology-productive, late-modern subject, are outlined.

1.2 Research question and structure of the study

This interdisciplinary study is an inductive, empirical, contextual Western (European and North American), and foundational exploratory contribution to practical theological research. Theories are used as a net to capture the lived, experienced, and narrated reality of the religious experience of young, urban people.

Specifically, I empirically investigate how and why urban people perceive their experiences as religious and how they categorize them and put them into language. In addition, I ask inductive questions about transformation logics in religious processes, which can be mapped, for example, concerning self-perception and perception of the world, identity or personal theologizing. Based on this, I reflect on theological implications and action-guiding impulses for practical theology.

A fourfold perspective determines the structure of the study. This follows the classical design of qualitative research in the paradigm of grounded theory:

1. In the first part of the study, I present and discuss theoretical foundations in terms of *sensitizing concepts* in chapters two and three. In chapter two, different understandings of religious experience are presented, especially concerning relevance for practical theology. In chapter three, I discuss social changes with particular attention to the discourse of urbanity. The aim is to raise awareness both for the topic of religious experience and for the changed living conditions of latemodern, urban people. In presenting different concepts of religious experience and social analysis, the focus is on the thematically rele-

analysis." Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980), 306.

18 Individual religion at the place of the subject is therefore to be understood and accompanied in practical theological terms fundamentally as a dynamic process. Cf. Martina Kumlehn, 'Religion und Individuum', in *Praktische Theologie: Ein Lehrbuch*, ed. Kristian Fechtner et al. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2017), 54.

19 This way of working is typical for qualitative, explorative work in the style of Grounded Theory, but also for practical theological research in the Anglo-Saxon context.

vant, hermeneutic discourse contexts. Through the hermeneutic foundation of contemporary historical and academic lines of development, I open the possibilities of perception and interpretation of religious experience in the context of urban people.

2. In the second part, in the sense of a methodological interlude, chapter four discusses the significance of qualitative social research – here especially *grounded theory* – for practical theology and describes the methodology of this study in detail.
3. In the third part of the study, I present the *results from the qualitative data analysis* in detail. This is done first in chapter five through individual case presentations, which focus on the content of religious experiences. I present the findings across cases and groups in chapters six and seven: chapter six focuses on fundamental observations, and chapter seven focuses on the processual aspects of religious experiences.
4. Against this empirical background, in the fourth and final part of the study, I discuss and classify the inductively elaborated theories *theologically.* Specifically, in chapter eight, the results are discussed theologically within the horizon of the initial questions. In chapter nine, the resulting conception of the *experience of Christian perspectives of hope is* made fruitful for practical theology, especially within the horizon of *lived theology.*

1.3 Personal interest and self-reflexivity

During the ten years that I worked as a youth worker and the six years that I worked as a pastor, religious experiences were often a topic: in pastoral counselling, at team meetings, in confirmation classes, but also at church festivals and in church services. Light broke into a problematic divorce situation, self-doubt became self-confidence, a bulimic dared to take the step into therapy, religious demarcation became friendship across borders, and laypeople dared to talk about their individual faith experiences in the service, to name just a few observations. As a pastor and youth worker, I was – and still am as a theologian – a listener and witness to many stories about religiously interpreted experiences and the resulting, often every day, transformation processes.

Such observations were the initial point for this study as well as the astonished (co-)experience of how a religiously connoted experience changes people, redirects life trajectories and releases intrinsic transformation potential. However, I did not remain with this wondering listening, but these observations became

the basis for the practical theological investigation presented here.[20] Therefore, the research object and the research question have a lot to do with me as a researcher and theologian. They are based on the fact that I have allowed myself to be affected by these stories and thus also by the people and their existential experiences. A deep interest in these multifaceted experiences has grown out of this.[21]

The works of the systematic theologian Paul Tillich have repeatedly been a visual aid and a dialogical counterpart for me in the research process, especially where it concerns the core task of theologians, who must allow themselves to be affected to approach their object of research: "The theologian, quite differently, is not detached from his object but is involved in it. He looks at his object (which transcends the character of being an object) with passion, fear, and love. This is not the *eros* of the philosopher or his passion for objective truth; it is the love which accepts saving and, therefore, personal truth. The basic attitude of the theologian is the commitment to the content he expounds. Detachment would be a denial of the very nature of this content. The attitude of the theologian is 'existential'. He is involved – with the whole of his existence, with his finitude and his anxiety, with his self-contradictions and his despair, with the healing forces in him and his social situations [...] The theologian, in short, is determined by his faith."[22].[23]

The awareness of the interrelatedness of personal religious existence and academic theological work, especially concerning theological preference and difference, does not hinder the necessary self-reflexivity but promotes it.[24]

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20 Cf. Hans-Günter Heimbrock and Astrid Dinter, 'Erträge für praktisches Handeln (in) der Kirche', in *Einführung in die Empirische Theologie: Gelebte Religion erforschen*, eds. Astrid Dinter, Hans-Günter Heimbrock, and Kerstin Söderblom (Göttingen: UTB, 2007), 119.

21 One challenge in particular should be highlighted: as a researcher, I can only ever tell and interpret – especially when it comes to experiences that cannot be observed – how a narrative told to me is interpreted in relation to the narrative itself, the life process, and transformation processes.

22 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 22f.

23 In contrast to religious studies, which consciously seeks to deal with the external perspective of Christian faith, theology works just as consciously with the internal perspective. "Both are to be distinguished, but related to each other, in many ways even dependent on each other." Wilfried Härle, *Dogmatik*, 3rd ed. (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2007), 10. Both theology and religious studies know numerous different foreign and self-determinations. In this respect, the respective reference to each other must be determined contextually and a juxtaposition, in a classical dualistic sense, is always a gross simplification.

24 Konrad Schmid, 'Wissenschaftliche Theologie und Pfarrerbildung. Einführende Worte aus der Perspektive der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie (WGTh)', in *Pfarrer oder Pfarrerin werden und sein. Herausforderungen für Beruf und theologische Bildung in Studium, Vikariat und Fortbildung*. ed. Bernd Schröder (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2020), 35–36. "The first danger is our self-banalisation: if we do not fully face up to the critical questions that we ourselves and

Theological-hermeneutical reflections are shaped by the theological reference just described, but also by the personal social location of the researcher: "social location, [...] the researcher's position in the academic field, [...] and the intellectualist bias"[25]; that is, biography, gender, age, skin colour, academic position, and the reference to practice, among other things, shape the reflections and program of the researcher.[26]

My perspective, in addition to many years of ecumenical practical church experience in Switzerland and abroad, is determined by the fact that I grew up in Switzerland as a white woman – in the traditional middle class without an academic background – and that I lived in the USA for more than two years and did research in England for a more extended period. I am mainly influenced by German-language practical theology. Still, through my various research experiences abroad and my interest in Anglo-Saxon and ecumenical theological perspectives, these aspects also flow into my theological reflections.[27]

Through my many years of practical experience, I am also convinced that practical theology cannot be *armchair research*[28] but must actively enter the field to inductively get to know the various facets of the reality of people's lives and the object of study. Connected to this is also the goal that the theoretical discourse flows back into practice to support life-promoting developments in individual

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others have of Christianity, we will hardly have a flourishing future ahead of us. The second danger is the creeping docetism in the church and in theology: our talking about God cannot hover quasi-docetically over what we have to say critically on the subject, as if this had nothing at all to do with our faith."

25 Jaco Dreyer, 'Knowledge, Subjectivity, (De)Coloniality, and the Conundrum of Reflexivity', in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, eds. Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, vol. 2, Theology in Practice (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 99.

26 Cf. Joey Sprague, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2016), 3–4.

27 During my time as a visiting researcher at Claremont School of Theology (CST) in the USA, I noticed big differences between Anglo-Saxon and German-speaking academic environments, especially in dealing with the relationship between theory and practice and the theme of experience. In German-speaking academic-theological circles, there is hardly any talk about religious experience and what intrinsically drives theologians. In Anglo-Saxon academic circles, personal experiences and faith convictions are reported more freely, without this casting doubt on a person's academic competences and self-reflexivity.

28 The term *armchair research* comes from ethnology and goes back to Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski argued that other peoples cannot be studied from the university library, but that one must go into the field and live with the people and become part of their community. Cf. e.g. Efram Sera-Shriar, 'What Is Armchair Anthropology? Observational Practices in 19th-Century British Human Sciences', *History of the Human Sciences* 27, no. 2 (2013): 26–40.

lives, church, and society.[29] It is undisputed that my social and theological location also helped determine the research design.

For methodological reasons, the open naming of such backgrounds is desirable because the explanation of personal imprints and biases leads to normativity being set less unconsciously. Thus, credibility can be increased, especially in qualitative research.[30] The synopsis of subjectivity and reflexivity is seen as a strength in qualitative research, as it increases the self-reflexivity in a study and can counteract normative ideologies.[31]

29 The understanding of practical theology on which this study is based fits into the classic theory-practice circle of German-language practical theology: "as a way of thinking and a discipline, practical theology is the reflection of the theory-practice relationship in the field of tension between theological science and lived Christian religion." Volker Drehsen, 'Praktische Theologie', in *Handbuch Praktische Theologie*, eds. Wilhelm Gräb and Birgit Weyel (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 174; Equally, however, many references go beyond the German-speaking context, which leads to the fact that a pragmatic Anglo-Saxon understanding, which is to be located close to practice, also determines the investigation. The circle here is as follows: 'practice-theory-practice'. Cf. Don Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 5–7.

30 For a detailed reflection on bias in research, cf. e.g. David Harker, *Creating Scientific Controversies: Uncertainty and Bias in Science and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and here specifically David Harker, 'Two challenges for the naïve empiricist', in *Creating Scientific Controversies: Uncertainty and Bias in Science and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 37–59.

31 Cf. for example Raymond Madden, *Being Ethnographic. A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 20–23.

Part I **Sensitizing Concepts**

Introduction

In this first part of the study, I present *sensitizing concepts* in two chapters on *religious experience* and *human existence in late modernity*. The so-called *sensitizing concepts* are mainly used in qualitative social research to increase sensitivity of the researchers and readers towards a research subject. In addition, they promote an open and flexible approach to conceptualization, especially at the beginning of a research project. *Sensitizing concepts* are a starting point for the study, particularly in qualitative research and especially in grounded theory.[32]

The use of *sensitizing concepts* goes back to Blumer, who wanted to avoid the narrowing of horizons and premature definitions that go hand in hand with operationally precise conceptualizations: "A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed benchmarks. [...] A sensitising concept lacks such specification of attributes or benchmarks, and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitising concepts merely suggest directions along which to look."[33]

This fundamental openness is essential and, at the same time, characteristic of inductive qualitative studies, especially those that stand in the paradigm of grounded theory, such as the one presented here.

The first part of the study, the two following chapters, will sensitize the reader to the topic with many references and different approaches. However, these first two chapters do not aim to present a ready-made theological concept or definition to approach the empirical material afterwards. In collecting and analyzing the data, I attempt to arrive at increasingly precise ideas and then discuss and classify them theologically in the final part of the study.

32 Cf. Glenn A. Bowen, 'Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5, no. 3 (2006): 14.

33 Herbert Blumer, 'What Is Wrong with Social Theory?', *American Sociological Review* 19, no. 1 (1954): 7.

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2 “Religious experience”: a conceptual approach

Hamlet to Horatio: There are more things in heaven and earth,
Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.[34]

Religious experience is the starting point of various world religions because it is at the beginning of the frame of reference of religious systems of meaning. This suggests that religious systems unfold their function primarily when understood neither as a system of values nor as a quasi-scientific doctrinal edifice but as an attempt to interpret human experience.[35]

Through religious experiences associated with revelations, visions, and auditions, founders of religions took on an authoritative function. Thus, Siddharta Gautama’s work began with an awakening, Mohammed received his revelations through visions and auditions, and Jesus of Nazareth’s work began (in the Johannine tradition) with a miracle story. In the Jewish tradition, the lives of the founding fathers and mothers were shaped by experiencing JHWH in many ways.

Thus, in most religious systems of meaning and traditions, religious experience is equivalent to a form of subject-specific revelation triggered by a divine/transcendent instance. In this, “a genuine encounter with the divine is considered possible”.[36] These experiences are interpreted substantially by people and described as experiences of immediacy. In Christianity, in particular, religious experiences are associated with a direct and relational experience with God.[37]

Various scientific disciplines have questioned and controversially discussed this substantial interpretive practice over the last 200 years.[38] Today, substantial interpretations of the world are contrasted with functional approaches, in which “everything encountered in human experience [is considered] a purely innerworldly entity.”[39] A functional approach to the phenomenon of religious experi-

34 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Holger Klein (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993), Act 1, Scene 5.

35 Cf. Hans Joas, *Glaube als Option: Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums* (Freiburg/Breisgau: Herder, 2012), 152–53; Cf. Ritter, ‘Erfahrung. Religiöse Erfahrung/Erleben/Gefühl/Deutung’, 58.

36 Joas, *Glaube als Option: Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums*, 153.

37 This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in pietistic, evangelical, or charismatic churches. Cf. Eva Baumann-Neuhaus, *Kommunikation und Erfahrung: Aspekte religiöser Tradierung am Beispiel der evangelikal-charismatischen Initiative ‘Alphalive’* (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 2008), 104–27.

38 For example, through the criticism of religion by representatives such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud in the 19th century.

39 Joas, *Glaube als Option: Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums*, 153.

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ence is widespread, in the psychology of religion,[40] the sociology of religion,[41] but also neurology,[42] among other fields.

As can be seen from this introduction, quite different strands of discourse could be taken up to sensitize to the phenomenon of religious experience. However, this sensitization chapter aims not to trace an overall view of discourses but to give an insight into selected, predominantly Western (Christian) strands of discourse and problems and to reflect the dualistic tension of substantial and functional approaches.

2.1 Experience – an etymological definition

The German word *Erfahrung* (experience) is derived from the Middle High German word *ervarunge* and meant initially as much as to wander and explore a country. From the 15th century onwards, the term is also used to indicate knowledgeable and wise.[43] Etymologically, it becomes clear that the spectrum of meaning became more extensive overtime. The term moves in tension between activity and passivity, product and process.

Meanwhile, the term has a fourfold meaning in German and a threefold meaning in English. In German, experience stands firstly for a routine/knowledge that one acquires through repetition (e.g., practical work). Secondly, it refers to an experience through which one becomes wiser or gains valuable knowledge for life. Thirdly, especially in philosophical usage, it refers to knowledge gained through perception, sensation, and contemplation.[44] The fourth meaning is expressed by the expression “to learn something”.[45]

The English word *experience* comes from the Latin *experientia* and is used in the Cambridge Dictionary as follows. Firstly, it refers to the generation of knowledge or skills through seeing, feeling, or doing certain things. Secondly, it relates

40 Amongst others cf. ‘IFEG – Institut Für Europäische Glücksforschung’, IFEG, accessed 24 January 2018, http://ifeg.at.

41 Cf. Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

42 Cf. –amongst others– the bestseller by Hagerty Barbara Bradley Hagerty, *Fingerprints of God: What Science Is Learning About the Brain and Spiritual Experience* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009).

43 Cf. Friedrich Kluge and Elmar Seebold, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), 254.

44 Here we should recall the classical execution of Aristotle’s εμπειρία.

45 ‘Duden | Erfahrung | Rechtschreibung, Bedeutung, Definition, Herkunft’, accessed 3 September 2020, https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Erfahrung.

to life experience, which comes about through past events, knowledge, and feelings, and is decisive in shaping character. Thirdly, experience describes an event or experience that influences feeling.[46]

2.2 Lived experience and experience

Unlike the English "experience" the German language distinguishes between the lived experience in the moment (*Erlebnis*) and experience more broadly/life lession (*Erfahrung*). The lived experience is punctuated, refers to a single concrete event, is subjective and normative, and often does not allow for questioning. The lived experience is exposed to the encounter with and the inviolability of life and contingency.

Lived experience forms the basis for the construction of experience (more broadly). In common parlance, experience refers to the sum of practical knowledge gained from what has been lived experience. Experience is an already completed conscious or unconscious process of reflection or processing within a particular horizon of interpretation.[47] Experience thus designates an accumulation of lived experiences that lead to subjective (and often objective for the subject) knowledge through their interpretation.

Experience is also characterized by subjectivity since it can only be reported but not observed.[48] The truth claim of an experience can be questioned since understanding the self, world, and belief depends on one's own and the contextual framework of interpretation. Experience, therefore, takes place continuously in the course of life.[49]

As such, the human being is a hermeneutic being, constantly striving to interpret his lived experience, make sense of it, and embed it within his horizon of ex-

46 'EXPERIENCE | Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary', accessed 3 September 2020, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/experience.

47 Cf. e.g. Richard Schaeffler, *Erfahrung als Dialog mit der Wirklichkeit: Eine Untersuchung zur Logik der Erfahrung* (Freiburg/Breisgau: Verlag Karl Alber, 1995), 303: "Erlebnisse hat man, Erfahrungen macht man."; Cf. also Ritter, 'Erfahrung. Religiöse Erfahrung/Erleben/Gefühl/Deutung', 56.

48 The reason why in a dialogue about the truth of a matter the reference to one's own experience can acquire a conclusive character as an argument is surely due to its permanent anchoring in the subject, to the 'subjectness' that characterizes experience. Cf. Hans Wissmann, 'Erfahrung I', in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, eds. Horst R. Balz et al., vol. 10 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1982), 84, //www.degruyter.com/view/TRE/TRE.10_083_3.

49 Cf. Joachim Track, 'Erfahrung III/2. Neuzeit', in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, eds. Horst R. Balz et al., vol. 10 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1982), 117, //www.degruyter.com/view/TRE/TRE.10_083_3.

perience.[50] Experience is, therefore, an active hermeneutic act of the individual, whereby the passive aspects, in particular, should not be underestimated. The individual’s possibilities of interpreting experience are conditional because they are always tied to cultural, social, historical, religious, and biographical references.[51] The social framework of reference as an interpretative framework is decisive for all experiences. This is all the more decisive when specifically *religious experience* comes into view. This experience is also objective for the subject and leads to a gain in knowledge.[52]

2.3 Religious experience – a brief historical overview

The discourse on experience is highly complex in its history of impact and its diversity of meaning and goes back to the pre-Socratics and Plato. The subject experienced its first real flowering through Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* and the *Analytica posteriora*.[53] Here, the focus was not on religious experiences but on the experienceability of reality.

The Aristotelian concept of experience already contains all the elements of the modern discussion. Aristotle led the philosophical discourse from speculative theories to an experiential basis, whereby the ἐμπειρία (experience) lies at the centre of his conception. Aristotle distinguishes the ἐμπειρία from τέχνη (art) and ἐπιστήμη (knowledge). For Aristotle, experience is the basis, and art and knowledge are the result of it because man’s perceptive and memory faculties form the starting point of the τέχνη.[54] The Aristotelian concept of experience is thus based on

50 Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Der Konflikt der Interpretationen: Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, eds. Daniel Creutz and Hans-Helmut Gander (Freiburg/Breisgau/Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 2010), 23–47.

51 Cf. Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen, Bd. 2: Wandlungen der Gesellschaft: Entwurf zu einer Theorie der Zivilisation*, 32nd ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010).

52 On the objectivity of experience: According to Gadamer, humanistic experience, for example, also strives for a different kind of objectivity, but one that is nevertheless independent. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke 1 Hermeneutik I*, 6th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), Part two.

53 Cf. Friedrich Kambartel, ‘Erfahrung’, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie – Onlineversion*, eds. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer and Gottfried Gabriel (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1972), 609.

54 Cf. Gerd Haeffner, ‘Erfahrung – Lebenserfahrung – religiöse Erfahrung. Versuch einer Begriffsklärung’, in *Religiöse Erfahrung*, ed. Friedo Ricken, vol. 23, Münchener philosophische Studien (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 18.

repetitions and memories.[55] It, therefore, amounts to a *remembered practice*[56]: "To have experiences means that they accumulate in one and organise themselves into an event, or that one collects them and draws from them a kind of informal conclusion."[57]

These introductory remarks are relevant because it should be noted that experience is not in itself a religious or theological term. Rather, it's a simple concept "applied to religious phenomena"[58] whose use includes ambiguities, overlaps, and various interpretations. Experience is thus contextual, selective, and individually generated activity knowledge.[59] Religious experience is a construct term[60] that has found its way into theology and other humanities and human sciences research. At the same time, the discourses on religious experience have primarily been led by Western thinkers.[61] To not fall into the ethnocentric trap, the origin of the topic, its historical roots and its present, mostly Western contextuality must be taken into account.[62] The subject of religious experience has a long history of impact. In the following, I will give a brief overview of decisive contributions to the history of concepts and religions.[63]

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55 Empiricism arises in men from memory; only many memories, namely, of one and the same thing yield the faculty (δύναμις) of an experience. Aristotle, Met. 980 b 28–30, cf. in: Friedrich Kambartel, 'Erfahrung', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1972), Sp. 609.

56 Cf. Eilert Herms, 'Erfahrung II', in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, eds. Horst R. Balz et al., vol. 10 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1982), 89, //www.degruyter.com/view/TRE/TRE.10_083_3.

57 Haeffner, 'Erfahrung – Lebenserfahrung – religiöse Erfahrung. Versuch einer Begriffsklärung', 19.

58 Ulrich Köpf, 'Erfahrung III/1. Mittelalter und Reformationszeit', in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, eds. Horst R. Balz et al., vol. 10 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1982), 109–10, //www.degruyter.com/view/TRE/TRE.10_083_3.

59 Cf. Haeffner, 'Erfahrung – Lebenserfahrung – religiöse Erfahrung. Versuch einer Begriffsklärung', 20–21.

60 Cf. Ritter, 'Erfahrung. Religiöse Erfahrung/Erleben/Gefühl/Deutung', 58.

61 Cf. Knoblauch, 'Die Soziologie der religiösen Erfahrung', 70.

62 A scientific-theoretical striving for general validity is not possible, especially with this topic. "Truth orientation can only mean that one remains oriented towards the better in each case and thus gives room for improved convictions so that new evidence, new hypotheses and [if necessary] a completely new vocabulary can emerge." Jürgen Werbick, *Vergewisserungen im interreligiösen Feld* (Münster: LIT, 2011), 102.

63 A complete philosophical, religious-historical, religious-psychological, and theological overview is not possible within the framework of this thesis due to the abundance of material, texts, and reflections. The criterion used was relevance as a sensitizing concept of the specific discourse for the following chapters.

2.3.1 Religious experience in monasticism, Martin Luther, and Pietism

Monasticism’s contemplative way of life, oriented towards religious introspection, provided fertile soil for a deeper reflection on religious experiences, for the nun or monk was encouraged to bring their own (religious) experiences into conversation with other experiences and thus to expect and receive teaching and guidance from a more experienced person in the monastery and the Scriptures.[64] In Byzantine monasticism, the spiritual life was closely linked to religious experience.[65]

In Western monasticism, religious experience was exemplarily thematized by Bernard of Clairvaux. For him, it is precisely the passivity of the religious subject during the process of experience that is central. God gives experience, which precedes all activity; it is grace. According to Clairvaux, however, it is precisely this kind of religious experience that, in turn, releases activity, which manifests itself both in talking about and in the desire to repeat the experience. “Thus, it becomes the comprehensive source of religious life. It creates relevance and certainty and leads to understanding the Holy Scriptures and foreign experiences. Conversely, one’s own experience is not only stimulated by foreign experience but also receives indispensable help in interpretation.”[66] Although Clairvaux’s thoughts were taken up in early Franciscan theology and the role of religious experience for religious cognition and the knowledge of God was emphasized, this (contemplative) way of knowing God and thus the religious concept of experience could hardly establish itself in the Western Middle Ages. Experience mainly was reduced to *sapientia* (wisdom) and placed behind *ratio* (e.g. by Anselm of Canterbury). In addition, from the 13th century onwards, the idea of being able to understand the world through experimentation and observation became increasingly central.[67]

Martin Luther made the concept of experience the explicit theme of theology, with such relevant statements as “*Sola autem experientia facit theologum* [only through experience does one become a theologian]”.[68] He drew on monastic, mystic, and scholastic approaches, integrated his personal experiences into his theological reflections, and explicitly stated this. Experience and faith thus belong close together for Luther because God’s effectiveness must be experienced to be under-

64 However, it should not be forgotten that there were precursors in the Jewish tradition and that the reference to experience found its way into monasticism via the desert fathers and mothers.
65 An impressive written testimony of Orthodox experiential monasticism is the Philokalia. St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth, *The Philokalia*, ed. Philip Sherrard (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).
66 Köpf, ‘Erfahrung III/1. Mittelalter und Reformationszeit’, 111.
67 Cf. Köpf, 111–13.
68 Martin Luther, *WA TR* (Weimar, 1883), 1; 16,13.

stood. Therefore, faith always strives for experience. It is this experienced theology that makes someone a theologian.[69] For Luther, religious experience occurs in affect, i.e., appealing to the inner senses. This becomes clear, for example, in his interpretation of the biblical word *cognoscere* (to recognize). Recognizing one's sin means less a rational comprehension than grasping and experiencing through one's feelings.[70] Luther also expands the concept of experience in the sense that he places religious experience amid life and everyday life and classifies it as an experience that liberates from challenges and temptation. Thus, for Luther, experience leads to knowledge of God and Christ and to a religious existence that is always bound to the promise and the unavailable gift of the experience of faith.[71] According to Luther, the degree of maturity of a theologian consists in the experience of doubt, challenge, and temptation.[72] The connection between faith, experience, and theological existence must also be understood in this sense.[73] Thanks to Luther, the religious concept of experience finally became at home in theological thought.[74]

But it was not until Pietism that the personal experience of faith became a central theme. The most substantial impetus came from Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705). Spener had a significant influence on the North German nobility, primarily through his famous pamphlet *Pia desideria.* Spener emphasized that the testimony of Scripture and the certainty of grace should become visible in one's own life and the practice of piety in the community. Pietism contrasted this ideal of a personal and emotional practice of piety with the conventions of church and state. For it was not the catechism but the *faith of the heart,* the *experience of faith,* and the *praxis pietatis* that were to be at the centre.[75]

Even though religious experience as a phenomenon was already addressed by the mystics, Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther, Pietism, etc., the *modern* discourse goes back to Friedrich Schleiermacher.

69 Cf. Ebeling, *Wort und Glaube*, 3:12–15.

70 Cf. Köpf, 'Erfahrung III/1. Mittelalter und Reformationszeit', 114.

71 Cf. Track, 'Erfahrung III/2. Neuzeit', 119.

72 Cf. Ebeling, *Wort und Glaube*, 3:11.

73 Cf. Ebeling, 3:10f.

74 And as Ebeling notes "no longer to be passed over with impunity" is on the theological agenda. Ebeling, 'Die Klage über das Erfahrungsdefizit in der Theologie als Frage nach ihrer Sache', 11.

75 Cf. Karl Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte*, 18th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 395–96.

2.3.2 Religious phenomenological and sociological conceptions of religious experience – selected examples

In modern discourses, two main scientific-theoretical approaches to *religious experience* can be identified: a) the phenomenological approach to religion, which assumes the possibility of transcendent encounters or experiences, and b) the sociological approach to religion, which assigns these experiences to a purely inner-worldly entity, i.e. in which the religious interpretation of an experience makes it a religious experience.[76] Behind the two interpretative approaches lie fundamentally different reference systems: the world is either transcendent or immanent, ’God’ is an external entity in its own right, or God is an inner-human concept that serves to cope with contingency. In other words, religious experience is either a Widerfahrnis[77] or an interpretation of life-historical meaning.

In a first step, I will present authors who belong more to the sociological tradition of religion as examples. In the second step, I will show those located in the phenomenological tradition of religion.[78]

2.3.2.1 Examples of sociological approaches to religious experience

The definition of religious experience is one of the fundamental problems in the sociological discourse on religion. For example, the psychologist of religion Jacob van Belzen takes the approach that it is not the task of psychology to define what a religious experience or religion is at all: “What a religious experience is, what is religious about an experience or even what makes an experience a religious experience are questions that should be dealt with by other disciplines, thinking first and foremost of phenomenology and philosophy”.[79] Nevertheless, the topic also arouses great interest in the psychology and sociology of religion.

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76 Cf. Friedo Ricken, ‘Einführung’, in *Religiöse Erfahrung*, ed. Friedo Ricken, vol. 23, Münchener philosophische Studien (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 11.

77 The term Widerfahrnis is challenging to translate. Among other things, it stands for a combination of the following words: event, happening, incident, experience, and knowledge.

78 It is important to mention here that the classification of authors is not always as simple as the dualism just described would lead one to believe; rather, the boundaries are fluid. In addition, in the following presentation, the phenomenological position of religion will be presented in more detail, as it offers a variety of theological points of contact.

79 Jacob A. van Belzen, ‘Was ist spezifisch an einer religiösen Erfahrung? – Überlegungen aus religionspsychologischer Perspektive’, in *Religiöse Erfahrung*, ed. Friedo Ricken, vol. 23, Münchener philosophische Studien (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 41. It can be added that it is precisely for the discussion of this domain of questions that not only phenomenology and philosophy, but also theology and especially practical theology, whose object is lived religion, can contribute decisively.

From the perspective of the sociology and psychology of religion, what is specific to a religious experience is the interpretation of an experience in religious categories. The same experience can thus be interpreted religiously or non-religiously, or substantially or functionally.[80]

Typical representatives of sociological approaches to religion interested in a systematizing classification include Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Clifford Geertz, Thomas Luckmann, Peter L. Berger, Alister Hardy, Ann Taves and many more. They all tried and still try to systematize religious experiences, mainly focusing on *how* people believe but less on *what* they think.[81]

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Max Weber (1864–1920) are fundamental to the modern sociological discourse on religion; their approaches are considered classics of the sociology of religion.[82] In the following, I will discuss these two sociologists in particular.[83]

The sociologist Durkheim was less interested in institutionalized religion than in the elementary forms of simple belief systems. He hoped to locate the central building blocks of religion in these.[84] He understood the core of religion as a system of beliefs, rites, and sacrifices related to sacred objects. Religious thought and action are rooted in human nature, with a social and collective origin. Religion in society constantly brings to life and consolidates the sense of collectivity and collective ideas.[85] In the process, religious categories and classifications are applied to explain the world.[86] The genesis of religion is thus rooted in the social structures of

80 Cf. van Belzen, 'Was ist spezifisch an einer religiösen Erfahrung? – Überlegungen aus religionspsychologischer Perspektive', 53.

81 Cf. James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard Pub, 1989), 16; A purely functional definition of religion is criticised not only by theologians but also by sociologists of religion themselves. Cf. a. o. Anna Daniel and Frank Hillebrandt, 'Von "religiösen Vergemeinschaftungen" Zu "spirituellen Erfahrungen" – Eine genealogische Betrachtung des religionssoziologischen Diskurses', *PERIPHERIE*, no. 2 (2014): 195–203; Cf. Frank Neubert, *Die Diskursive Konstitution von Religion* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2016), 26–33.

82 Cf. for example Daniel and Hillebrandt, 'Von "religiösen Vergemeinschaftungen" Zu "spirituellen Erfahrungen" – Eine genealogische Betrachtung des religionssoziologischen Diskurses', 189.

83 Newer approaches from the sociology of religion are discussed in discussion with the results of the qualitative analysis in chapter 8.

84 Cf. Émile Durkheim, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens*, trans. Ludwig Schmidts, Theorie (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1981); Cf. also Gernot Saalmann, *Rationalisierung und säkulare Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Religionssoziologie* (Baden-Baden: Ergon-Verlag, 2020), 69.

85 Cf. Daniel and Hillebrandt, 'Von "religiösen Vergemeinschaftungen" zu "spirituellen Erfahrungen" – Eine genealogische Betrachtung des religionssoziologischen Diskurses', 190; Neubert, *Die diskursive Konstitution von Religion*, 30.

86 Cf. Saalmann, *Rationalisierung und säkulare Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Religionssoziologie*, 69–72.

society, and religious experiences[87] are an experiential part and expression of this, whereby these experiences are not simply a matter of the individual but an expression of religious practices of a community.[88] Religious experiences are thus a product of society and do not precede it, as, for example, in James' theory.[89]

The sociologist Weber had a great interest in religion, devoted a considerable part of his scientific activity to it and is still deeply influential for a sociology of religion that emphasizes a pronounced orientation towards this world.[90] The *disenchantment of the world*[91] is one of the leitmotifs. Religious action and religious experience as profane, everyday experience, is emphasized: "Religiously or magically motivated action is oriented towards this world in its primordial state."[92] This leads to the function of religion being seen in meaningful explanations of human experiences of contingency. So expressly, these interpretations can only be provided by religion. Thus, "religious meaning-making [...] consists of selecting from an infinite number of possible meanings. The chosen possibilities of thought and action are then oriented towards the values and goals given in religion."[93]

In the war and post-war period, religious experience was hardly a topic in the sociology of religion because the focus was on "religion in terms of its ecclesiastical organization or its social function".[94] It was not until the 1970s, with the onset of

87 "Like a newer defender of faith, we also assume that religious beliefs are based on a specific experience." Durkheim, *Die elementaren Formen des religiösen Lebens*, 559.

88 Cf. Baumann-Neuhaus, *Kommunikation und Erfahrung*, 142.

89 Cf. Daniel and Hillebrandt, 'Von "religiösen Vergemeinschaftungen" zu "spirituellen Erfahrungen" – Eine genealogische Betrachtung des religionssoziologischen Diskurses', 192.

90 He was particularly concerned with the question of the close connection between capitalism and Protestantism. Cf. Max Weber, 'Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*, 7th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1978), 17–206.

91 "The increasing intellectualisation and rationalisation does not mean an increasing general knowledge of the conditions of life under which one stands. Rather, it means something else: the knowledge of it or the belief in it: that if one only wanted to, one could experience it at any time, that in principle there are no mysterious incalculable powers that play a role in it, that one can rather control all things – in principle – by calculation. But that means: the disenchantment of the world. No longer, like the savage, for whom such powers existed, does one have to resort to magical means in order to control or petition the spirits. Instead, technical means and calculation accomplish this. This above all means intellectualisation as such." Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, 11th ed. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2011), 16–17.

92 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie. Studienausgabe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 245.

93 Baumann-Neuhaus, *Kommunikation und Erfahrung*, 144.

94 Daniel and Hillebrandt, 'Von "religiösen Vergemeinschaftungen" zu "spirituellen Erfahrungen" – Eine genealogische Betrachtung des religionssoziologischen Diskurses', 195.

research on happiness and a successful life,[95] that individual religiosity came back into focus. Therefore, the discourse on religious experiences became relevant again, not least in the context of research on human quality of life and resilience. Although pathological and constricting forms of religious conviction have also been documented, they statistically lag behind the much more numerous positive effects.[96] Meanwhile, Ann Taves[97] and researchers affiliated with the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre[98] strongly shape current debates.

Ann Taves, in particular, gives the topic of experience significance in Anglo-Saxon discourse on the sociology of religion. Taves emphasizes the religious interpretation of experience ("experiences deemed religious")[99] and its function. Religious experience helps the individual situate themselves in a more extensive meaning-making framework of reference ("meaning-making system"), through which the existential questions of life ("Big Questions") can be answered.[100]

2.3.2.2 Examples of religious phenomenological and theological concepts of religious experience

Modern scientific discourse on religious experience began with Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834). His reflections on religion as a *sense of the infin-*

95 Cf. e.g. the book of the 'happiness research pioneer' Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Happiness*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001).

96 Cf. e.g. Bernhard Grom, *Religionspsychologie*, 3rd ed. (Munich/Göttingen: Kösel-Verlag, 1992); Bernhard Grom, 'Religionspsychologie und Theologie im Gespräch? Mehr als nur ein Burgfriede', in *Zukunftsperspektiven im theologisch-naturwissenschaftlichen Dialog*, eds. Patrick Becker and Ursula Diewald (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 326–35.

97 Cf. Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*; Ann Taves, 'Finding and Articulating Meaning in Secular Experience', in *Religious Experience and Experiencing Religion in Religious Education*, eds. Ulrich Riegel, Eva-Maria Leven, and Daniel Fleming (Münster/New York: Waxmann, 2018), 13–22.

98 'Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre | University of Wales Trinity Saint David', accessed 17 October 2019, https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre/.

99 Cf. Craig Martin and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds., *Religious Experience: A Reader* (Sheffield/Bristol, CT: Routledge, 2014), 122–23.

100 Cf. Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*; Ann Taves, '[Methods Series] On the Virtues of a Meaning Systems Framework for Studying Nonreligious and Religious Worldviews in the Context of Everyday Life.', *NSRN Online* (blog), 2016, https://thensrn.org/2016/10/04/methods-series-on-the-virtues-of-a-meaning-systems-framework-for-studying-nonreligious-and-religious-worldviews-in-the-context-of-everyday-life/; Taves, 'Finding and Articulating Meaning in Secular Experience'.

ite are still central to phenomenological approaches to religious experience.[101] Schleiermacher, whose roots lie in Pietism and Romanticism, appeared at the time when criticism of the Enlightenment was being voiced. During this period, he reacted to the exaltation of the intellect, a rationalistic understanding of religion as morality, the disregard for tradition and, at the same time, an orthodox understanding of religion as metaphysics. The central intention was to valorize a positive form of religion and define religion as an independent, subjective, “specific and necessary dimension of human life”[102] whose interpretation is accessible to the individual mind.[103] In his second address, *On the Nature of Religion*, Schleiermacher attempts to grasp religion differently by distinguishing it from science and ethics. Thus religion is “neither thought nor action, but contemplation and feeling”,[104] and likewise, “religion is sense and taste for the infinite.”[105] Religion is thus related to the immediate or the divine, and so is an experience independent of human thought.[106] This form of religion leads to a particular way of interpreting life that belongs to being human and is grounded in subjectivity theory.[107] Therefore, religious experience becomes the powerful constitutional feature of faith, and theological statements are its explications. The religious experience thus becomes something that determines all other experiences and is at the same time independent.[108] In Schleiermacher’s sense, “religion […] is essentially an experience, more specifically, a lived experience that involves the whole of the subject in her innermost becoming […] religious experience brings one into direct contact with a re-

101 Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001); Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 9–15.

102 Wolf-Dieter Hauschild, *Lehrbuch der Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, Bd.2, Reformation und Neuzeit*, 3rd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), 743.

103 Cf. Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte*, 411.

104 Friedrich Schleiermacher, ‘Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern (1799)’, in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Bd. I/2: Schriften aus der Berliner Zeit 1769–1799*, ed. Günter Meckenstock (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1984), 211.

105 Schleiermacher, ‘Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern (1799)’, 212.

106 Cf. Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 1–3.

107 Cf. Wilhelm Gräb, *Vom Menschsein und der Religion: Eine praktische Kulturtheologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 45.

108 Cf. Hauschild, *Lehrbuch der Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, Bd.2, Reformation und Neuzeit*, 763; Track, ‘Erfahrung III/2. Neuzeit’, 121 and 124.

gion of reality that is distinct from all other regions [...] this one reality contains a reference to transcendence."[109]

Schleiermacher's approach to defining religion from the point of view of feeling, inwardness, and thus also from the point of view of personal experience, has remained relevant up to the present debate. It has led to religious experiences being seen as particularly individual, diverse, and subjective, but not independent of context and culture.

Impressed by Schleiermacher's focus on the inwardness of religion, renowned thinkers such as William James (1842–1910) joined this tradition. James, an American psychologist and philosopher, is regarded as one of the founders of pragmatism and the father of American psychology and is the most popular representative of the discourse in this discipline.[110] In his work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*[111] James discusses the phenomenon of religious experience from a psychological perspective. This classic, which is still relevant today, lent popularity to the discourse and, above all, initiated research that systematizes religious experience and examines its genesis, but less so its content.

In James's psychological and philosophical reflections, religious experiences and thus also religious feelings are essential, as they already were for Schleiermacher, so James understands religion to mean: "[T]he feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand concerning whatever they may consider the divine."[112]

Although religious experience is interpreted functionally here, the focus is directed towards inwardness.[113] Therefore, James counts religion among the inner life-enhancing processes related to something/the sacred.[114] He understands reli-

109 Sergio Sorrentino, 'Feeling as a Key Notion in a Transcendental Conception of Religion', in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue*, ed. Brent W. Sockness, vol. 148, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 97.

110 Cf. Martin and McCutcheon, *Religious Experience*, 37.

111 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

112 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 31.

113 Cf. a.o. Baumann-Neuhaus, *Kommunikation und Erfahrung*, 132–33; Daniel and Hillebrandt, 'Von "religiösen Vergemeinschaftungen" zu "spirituellen Erfahrungen" – Eine genealogische Betrachtung des religionssoziologischen Diskurses', 192.

114 "James thus saw what all forms of religion had in common in their life-enhancing effect, which was concretised in the form of 'religious experience' or as an awareness of something 'higher' or as an inkling of an invisible reality that could spontaneously break into the everyday world." Baumann-Neuhaus, *Kommunikation und Erfahrung*, 133.

gious experiences as individual human experiences,[115] triggered by religious practices or drugs.

James typologizes religious experiences by dividing human beings into *once-born* and *twice-born.*[116] The typology of the once-born describes the person of *sound mind*. Here, a connection between personal religiosity and positive feelings is identified. The positive feeling serves the believer as proof of the authenticity of his faith. In contrast, the religiosity of the *twice-born* is described in much greater detail. The *twice-born* struggle with feelings such as guilt, pessimism, sadness, and the presence of evil. According to James, these psychic sufferers often experience an emotionally intense religious experience of redemption.[117] His reflections describe "many descriptions of these different processes by which people come to experience salvation".[118]

Another more content-rich and substantial definition of religious experience was made by Rudolf Otto (1869–1937). Otto described and analyzed individual segments that are constitutive of religious experience. For example, in his main work *Das Heilige (The Sacred)*, he defines religious experience as an *a priori* category of values.[119] Here, religious experience is related to concepts such as love, gratitude, confidence, and devotion, behind which the *numinous* stands. The numinous itself underlies the essence of religion and can be found in all cultures and religions.[120] Religious experience, although it cannot be defined per se, is linked to human thought and action. This feeling and its peculiar experiences cannot be taught; it can only be awakened and stimulated.[121] In contrast with Kant, for whom the *a*

115 "Religious happiness is happiness. Religious trance is trance." James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 17.

116 Cf. William James, *Die Vielfalt religiöser Erfahrung: Eine Studie über die menschliche Natur*, trans. Eilert Herms and Christian Stahlhut, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Insel Verlag, 1997), 110; Cf. Martin and McCutcheon, *Religious Experience*, 38.

117 Cf. James, *Die Vielfalt religiöser Erfahrung*, 197.

118 Wissmann, 'Erfahrung I', 85.

119 Cf. Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, 4th ed. (Breslau: Trewendt & Granier, 1920), 5–6. "[…] in relation to the peculiar category of the sacred. The sacred is first of all an interpretative and evaluative category that occurs in this way only in the religious field, […]. For the sacred without the moral and ethical components, Otto uses the term numinous. The numinous designates a peculiar and numinous category of evaluation and mood, which always occurs where the latter is applied. Since it is completely *sui generis*, it is, like every primary and elementary datum, not definable in the strict sense but only discussable."

120 Cf. Hubert Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion: Auf dem Weg in eine spirituelle Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2009), 62.

121 Cf. Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, 7–9.

priori categories make experience possible in the first place, this creates an *a priori* category out of experience: through this new category, religious experience is discerned as valid in its specific way.

Religious experiences remain irrational because they elude rational articulation and are thus dependent on interpretive categories. In this sense, experiences are defined by the terms *mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans*. Both terms condition one another, because the *mysterium tremendum*, the shuddering terror of the overwhelming power of the sacred, does not remain in the absolutely uncanny but is transcended by the *mysterium fascinans*, the fascinating, attractive moment of trust.[122] "The basis for such experiences is the 'creature feeling' a concept Otto uses as he attempts to grasp Schleiermacher's notion of a feeling of absolute dependence anew."[123] Otto's approach has been criticized in particular because it moves within a specific religious frame of reference in which numinous feeling and the existence of the numinous condition each other and serve as proof of the latter's existence.

In the systematic theology and philosophy of religion of the 20th century, the concept of experience was taken up again and again and extensively debated. For example, Karl Barth (1886–1968) criticized Schleiermacher's idea of experience and defined religious experience as experience with the Word of God.[124] Outside of the experience of the Word of God, therefore, there is no search for an experience and knowledge of God.[125]

Barth's definition has been challenged, especially since the 1950s, by Paul Tillich (1886–1965), among others. Tillich sees the experience of alienation as the basis of the question of God. He tried to interweave religion, subject, experience, and culture in his reflections. Thus, his overall theological concept cannot be thought of without either experience or contextual reference. He comes to such pointed statements as: "The object of theology is found in the symbols of religious experiences".[126]

Pneumatology is essential to Tillich's understanding of the relationship between God and man and his concept of religious experience. In pneumatology, the limitlessness of God through the Spirit, as *God with us,* is most plausibly and forcefully presented. Here, religious experience is not dependent on intellectual as-

122 Cf. Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, 13–51.

123 Wissmann, 'Erfahrung I', 85.

124 Cf. Karl Barth, *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes. Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 1 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1993), 6.3.

125 Cf. Track, 'Erfahrung III/2. Neuzeit', 125.

126 Tillich, 'Theology and Symbolism', 108.

sent but on the experience of being taken by the Spirit of God and receiving the gift of *agape* in human life and culture.[127] The Spirit first seizes people before they can fully grasp this dimension of religious experience.[128] The consequence of being grasped is unambiguous life. This religious experience is “like breathing-in of another air, an elevation above average existence”.[129] In this conception, religious experience is fundamental for personal faith. It has a catalytic function[130] because it can give rise to a life grounded in the *courage to be*.[131] Doubts regarding belief are transformed by the experience of an immediate certainty of faith. At the same time, this experience is linked both to the concrete context and to the relational, affirmative action of God.[132]

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, I aimed to introduce and explicate key elements of the book’s central topic, especially in historical-theological, religious phenomenological, and sociological terms.

In the introduction, it was pointed out that religious experience is often seen as a form of revelation in religious systems of meaning. Christianity, for example, is frequently associated with a relational experience with God. This substantial interpretive practice is hence in tension with functional conceptions in this context.

At the beginning of the chapter, I made an etymological definition of experience, which focused on the range of meanings of the term. Subsequently, I pointed out the distinction between *lived experience* (*erleben*) and *experience* more broadly (*erfahren*). I emphasized that *lived experience* refers to individual concrete events that are not always controllable. However, an integral part of an experience is a hermeneutic process through which what is experienced is interpreted and placed in the context of life. The process of interpretation is decisively determined by context, culture, tradition, and biographical processes.

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127 Cf. Frederick J. Parrella, ‘Tillich’s Theology of the Concrete Spirit’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell R. Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 74–90.88–89.

128 “Man in his self-transcendence can reach for it, but man cannot grasp it, unless he is first grasped by it.” Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 112.

129 Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3*, 236.

130 “No command to believe and no will to believe can create faith.” Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 1957), 38; Cf. also Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 3, 132.

131 Cf. Paul Tillich, *Der Mut zum Sein*, 2nd ed. (Berlin/Munich/New York: de Gruyter, 1991).

132 Cf. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 102–5.

The experience discourse went back to the pre-Socratics and experienced its first flowering with Aristotle, primarily through his definition of experience as remembered practice. I noted that experience, again, is not a religious but rather an everyday concept that is also applied to religious phenomena.

Monasticism, Martin Luther, and Pietism illustrated the discourse on religious experience in historical-theological and church-historical terms. Bernard of Clairvaux was formative for the topic of Western monasticism. According to Clairvaux, religious experience is the source of religious life that leads to the knowledge of God. The theme gained renewed importance through Martin Luther. For Luther's theological reflections, his own religious experiences are fundamental because, for him, experience and faith are closely connected because they lead to the knowledge of God. The discourse on religious experiences was also lively in Pietism because, in Pietism, the opinion prevailed that the faith of the heart is nourished by religious experiences and not by a learned catechism.

Following this brief historical outline, I traced the beginnings of the sociological and phenomenological discourses on religion. Here, the fundamental differences in the interpretation and classification of religious experience become apparent, which have survived today. Thus, a religious experience can be interpreted within the horizon of transcendence – mostly substantially – or the horizon of immanence with a definite focus on this-worldliness – primarily functionally. Durkheim and Weber are the classics of the functional, sociological approaches to religion. In Durkheim's approach, the function of religion and religious experience is primarily the creation and maintenance of social cohesion. In Weber's approach, on the other hand, the focus is on religious action, through which individual and social meaning is created and conveyed, and which helps to cope with experiences of contingency.

Modern discourse on the phenomenology of religion began with Schleiermacher, who defined religion as a *sense and taste for the infinite* and made it a constitutive feature of faith. The most popular thinker of this discourse was James. He was influenced by Schleiermacher's approach but took it further because his interest lay in the genesis and systematization of religious experience. Another representative of the religion-phenomenological discourse was Otto. He related religious experiences to the numinous, which stands behind concepts such as love and gratitude. Religious experiences also held a central role in the systematic theological approach of the theologian Paul Tillich. For Tillich, the object of theology is religious experience; this is to be reflected upon within the horizon of *God with us.* For it is in an experience that we are touched by the Spirit of God, which has a catalytic function for life and is the basis of faith.

3 Human existence in late modernity

> To borrow an image from Nietzsche, we have all been summoned to become Cosmic Dancers who do not rest heavily on a single spot but lightly turn and leap from one position to another. As World Citizen, the Cosmic Dancer will be an authentic child of its parent culture, while closely relating to all. The dancer's roots in family and community will be deep, but in those depths they will strike the water table of a common humanity.[133]

Human beings as citizens of the world[134] – networked, individual, and urban: this is the image Smith paints of modern people. In practical theological discourses, too, increased attention is being paid to social changes: theories of secularization are placed alongside ideas of individualization, pluralization, and, more recently, digitalization.[135] This is insofar as religion is anchored in the horizon of (individual) interpretation and reassurance of meaning in the lifeworld and life-history.[136] Thus increased attention is paid to contextuality.[137]

In contrast with individualization, pluralization, and secularization theories, practical theological discourses on urbanity and urbanization with a lifeworld orientation are rare. Occasionally, this perspective is integrated into the survey literature on practical theology, for example, in the thematic field of *contemporary culture*. Occasionally, a specific theological reflection is published on urbanization or urbanity.[138] However, the phenomenon of urbanity is not taken as a basis for theological reflections with the same degree of self-evidence as theoretical approaches to individualization and pluralization. This is astonishing as advancing urbaniza-

133 Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), 7.

134 "I argue that citizenship refers to membership of a political community – the city, the nation, or other community." Sian Lazar, 'Citizenship', in *A Companion to Urban Anthropology*, ed. Donald M. Nonini (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 65.

135 Cf. a.o. Fechtner et al., *Praktische Theologie*, 29–54; Gräb, *Religion als Deutung des Lebens*.

136 Cf. Gräb, *Religion als Deutung des Lebens*, 10–14.

137 In practical theological work, the tension between the reference to the concrete life world and the connectivity to theological theorizing should be maintained. Cf. Grethlein, *Christsein als Lebensform*, 10.

138 Cf. for example Christina Aus der Au et al., eds., *Urbanität und Öffentlichkeit: Kirche im Spannungsfeld gesellschaftlicher Dynamiken* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2013); Felix Eiffler, *Kirche für die Stadt: Pluriforme urbane Gemeindeentwicklung unter den Bedingungen urbaner Segregation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020); Drew R. Smith, Stephanie C. Boddie, and Ronald E. Peters, eds., *Urban Ministry Reconsidered. Contexts and Approaches* (Louisville, Ky: Westminter John Knox Press, 2018).

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tion is one of the worldwide mega-trends of a late-modern society, which goes hand in hand with migration movements and is a typical indicator of modernization.[139]

Research on religiosity and spirituality in urban centres is promising because changes are reflected more quickly here and are thus more apparent; against these backdrops, the spiritual search movements and religious location can be considered as individual decisions in a multi-religious environment. This is because changes in society change personality, which influences people's religiosity. Therefore, this chapter aims to present not only the individualized and pluralized spaces of human experience, but also the urban living space. Because it is in this space of life and experience that the late modern person makes religious experiences.

This chapter is also part of the *sensitizing concepts,* so these remarks intend to contribute to a context-sensitive, practical theological reflection on the religious experiences of urban people living in Western contexts.[140] It is essential to note that the description of late modern life and social concepts must be multi-perspectival: "What is required is no longer the systematic and subsuming thinking that was characteristic of the analytical and synthetic procedures of modernity, which sought to grasp phenomena as particular instances of a certain general concept; what is required instead is a topical thinking within perspectives and horizons that is sensitive to the multiple aspects and recombinability of the phenomena that are brought into view. Such topical thinking, that is, seeks to view these phenomena within diverse perspectives and horizons, and so no longer aims to fix them conceptually, so that they are 'properly' understood in one and only one way."[141]

By way of introduction, human existence in late modernity will be outlined. Then the late modern phenomena of digitalization, individualization, and pluralization will be dealt with in an overview under the term *experiential space*. The unique features of the urban living space are then presented in greater depth.

139 Cf. Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2015), 36.

140 I am aware that macro-sociological descriptions of entire societies fall short, tend to be generalizations, deterministic, and ethnocentric. Nevertheless, rough classifications can be an approximation to a system of life, meaning, and thought and thus helpful for classifications (without aiming at standardization). Cf. Pollack and Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne,* 29–38.

141 Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Evangelische Theologie als Interpretationspraxis: Eine systematische Orientierung* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004), 12.

3.1 The living and experiential space of urban people

Social developments and changes shape religious and spiritual existence, just as social developments, behaviour patterns and value systems are shaped by religious changes. One thinks, for example, of the subjectification of religion, which was partly triggered by impulses from the Reformation.[142] Religious systems of meaning still have an implicit effect on society today and shape its cultural patterns of interpretation.

The process of modernization is not finished: the pluralization of lifestyles continues to increase,[143] which leads to the fact that finding identity and meaning is increasingly becoming a personal orientation service based on individual experience.[144] In this context, not only is access to and interpretation of religion individualized, but also a person's entire life plan.[145] The core of the individualization thesis is that a late modern person has the freedom to shape their norms, their system of relationships, their religious attitudes, and ultimately, their life themselves. A wide variety of life designs exist side by side and with each other, and each person is challenged to create themselves.[146]

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142 Cf. Kristian Fechtner, 'Christentum und moderne Gesellschaft', in *Praktische Theologie: Ein Lehrbuch*, eds. Jan Hermelink et al. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2017), 29.

143 Cf. Linda Woodhead, 'Introduction', in *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, eds. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (London/New York: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2012), 1–4.

144 Cf. Ulrich Beck, 'Jenseits von Stand und Klasse? Soziale Ungleichheiten, Gesellschaftliche Individualisierungsprozesse und die Entstehung neuer sozialer Formationen und Identitäten', in *Soziale Ungleichheiten. Soziale Welt, Sonderband 2*, ed. Reinhard Kreckel (Göttingen: Schwartz, 1983), 35–74.

145 Cf. e.g. Michael Scherer-Rath, 'Narrative Reconstruction as Creative Contingency', in *Religious Stories We Live By*, eds. R. Ruard Ganzevoort, Maaike de Haardt, and Michael Scherer-Rath (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 133. "Late modern people are increasingly aware of living in a contingent world. The latitude for thought and action in daily life is no longer presupposed or determined by structures with unquestioned significance and normative influence. Individuals have to evolve their own frameworks of thought and action in which to interpret their action and decide on a course of action."

146 The fact that human existence and identity can only be understood in fragments is no longer disputed in practical theology, at least since Henning Luther. In his reflections on the incompleteness of educational processes under the heading Identity and Fragment, this becomes explicit: "However, if one looks at human life as a whole, i.e. both in its temporal extension and in its breadth of content, then it seems to me that only the term fragment is legitimate as an appropriate description". Henning Luther, *Religion und Alltag: Bausteine zu einer Praktischen Theologie des Subjekts* (Stuttgart: Radius, 1992), 168.

In this process, identity[147] is subject to a continuous construction process and is a constant personal evaluation performance of self-knowledge and self-fashioning.[148] Little argues that "every human being is a scientist who actively tests, confirms and revises hypotheses about persons, objects and events in life."[149] Experiences form the foundation on which a sense of continuity is built. In this context, perceived identity is "the subjective sense of one's situation and continuity and distinctiveness, which an individual gradually acquires due to her various social experiences."[150]

Zygmunt Bauman describes these changes in mentality and lifestyle as a transition from a modern to a reflexive-modern way of life.[151] In the latter, socio-structural change and the change in personality structure correlate with each other to a high degree. This means that the individual's religious experience is also changed and shaped by individualization, pluralization, digitalization, and urbanization. Norbert Elias already described this process of interdependence in 1939. His definition of civilization attributes the long-term change in personality structures to changes in social systems.[152] Thus, in individualization, beliefs and religiosity become personalized (God becomes a personal counterpart) and dependent on individual experiences.[153] The Big Questions[154] are no longer answered by social asso-

147 "Personal consistency is no longer to be thought of as uniformity, but rather as a composition of the differential; this composition never reaches a reliable conclusion in life, but remains constantly in motion; … 'Identity' does not mean that a human being would ever be able to become completely transparent to himself, but rather also contains the insight that the human being always remains somewhat withdrawn from himself." Rudolf Englert, 'Komposition des Differenten. Inwieweit ist so etwas wie eine "religiöse Identität" heute noch möglich?', in *Mensch – Religion – Bildung: Religionspädagogik in anthropologischen Spannungsfeldern*, eds. Thomas Schlag and Henrik Simojoki (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2014), 138.

148 Cf. Rolf Oerter and Leo Montada, *Entwicklungspsychologie*, 5th ed. (Weinheim: Beltz PVU, 2002), 292; Cf. also Ulrich Beck, *Der eigene Gott: von der Friedensfähigkeit und dem Gewaltpotential der Religionen* (Frankfurt/Main: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2008), 123–75.

149 Brian Little, *Mein Ich, die anderen und wir: Die Psychologie der Persönlichkeit und die Kunst des Wohlbefindens*, trans. Martina Wiese (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer Spektrum, 2015), 7.

150 Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Über Techniken der Bewältigung beschädigter Identität*, trans. Frigga Haug (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010), 132.

151 Cf. Matthias Junge and Thomas Kron, *Zygmunt Bauman: Soziologie zwischen Postmoderne, Ethik und Gegenwartsdiagnose*, 3rd ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2014), 6–10.

152 Cf. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*.

153 Cf. Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity; Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2014).

154 The Big Questions include questions like: What is? Where do we come from? What is good and what is evil? Where are we going? How should we act? Cf. Taves, 'Finding and Articulating Meaning in Secular Experience', 15.

ciation or clan structures. Individuals are responsible for answering these questions themselves and thus also for giving direction and meaning to their life.[155]

In these transformation processes, pluralization, individualization, digitalization, and urbanization go hand in hand. The degree of urbanization, 73% in Europe and 82% in North America, can be seen as a framework condition that promotes individualization and pluralization and creates a specific frame of reference for experiences.[156]

Thus, the urban way of life differs in many areas from the rural one,[157] for example, through access to education, culture, mobility, and the "spatial and temporal separation of living and working, consumer households, i.e. supply via markets instead of self-sufficiency, life in the nuclear family, and the related separation of a private sphere as the place of intimacy, physicality and emotionality and a public sphere as the place of stylized self-expression (Bahrdt) and a mentality characterized by indifference, blasé attitude, aloofness and intellectuality (Simmel 1903)".[158]

The perception of space also changed in life and correlative research due to urbanization. Since the *Spatial Turn*, geographical space has undergone a paradigm shift in the cultural sciences, humanities and social sciences and has become a carrier of meaning for culture and society. This is especially true since space is understood as the result of social relations, which individuals or social groups constitute.[159] This is evident, for example, in virtual space, which is formed by relational interactions. In social networks, these relational spaces are created, among other things, through preferences, shared values, needs, and biographical and lifeworld identification.[160] Of practical theological relevance is the fact that the interpretation of meaning and life, the formation of theological opinions, religious experiences, and the construction of faith based on them are predominantly

155 Cf. Joas, *Glaube als Option: Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums*; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Müller, *Lived Theology*, 19–20.

156 Cf. 'World Urbanization Prospect. The 2014 Revision. Highlights.Pdf', 1, accessed 15 January 2016, http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Highlights/WUP2014-Highlights.pdf.

157 Whereby the rural way of life is not to be confused with the spatial experience of "land".

158 Walter Siebel, 'Die europäische Stadt', in *Handbuch Stadtsoziologie*, ed. Frank Eckardt (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012), 202–3.

159 Cf. Julia Lossau, 'Spatial Turn', in *Handbuch Stadtsoziologie*, ed. Frank Eckardt (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012), 185.

160 Cf. a.o. Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 64–67; Swantje Luthe, 'Trauerarbeit online – Facebook als Generator für Erinnerungen', in *Tod und Trauer im Netz: Mediale Kommunikationen in der Bestattungskultur*, eds. Thomas Klie and Ilona Nord (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 63–74.

carried out by the individual and their networks, whereby there are reciprocities with a religious education through family, community, peers, and media.

3.1.1 The digital experience space

What initially began as the transformation of analogue data into digital formats fundamentally changed the primary anthropological conditions. The dynamics of digitalization affect all areas of life and radically change the conditions of being human.[161] Thus, not only are interpersonal communication and interaction digitalized, but also information technologies, healthcare, the labour market, production techniques, transport and logistics, cities (smart cities), and increasingly religion and spirituality.[162]

In his work *Homo Deus*, the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari links people's longing to become like gods to digitalization: "Throughout history, most gods were not considered to have omnipotence, but rather specific superhuman abilities: to shape and create living beings, to change one's own body, to control the environment and the weather, to read minds and communicate from afar, to travel at high speeds and, of course, to escape death and live forever. People are eager to acquire this ability and a few more."[163] In the process, the old religious systems are being replaced by *dataism*,[164] the belief that all of reality can be described by data streams.[165] Harari's remarks show that digitalization is much more than mere technical innovation; it is essentially about how we have to understand human life.[166]

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161 "It is not overstating the case to say that digital means of communication are revolutionizing the way humans interact with one another as well as how we produce knowledge." Deanna A. Thompson, *The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 13.

162 For the question of digitalization and religious communication cf. Kristin Merle, *Religion in der Öffentlichkeit: Digitalisierung als Herausforderung für kirchliche Kommunikationskulturen* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2020), 3–14.136–219.

163 Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: Eine Geschichte von Morgen*, trans. Andreas Wirthensohn, 10th ed. (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2017), 69f.

164 Cf. Harari, *Homo Deus: Eine Geschichte von Morgen*, 534.

165 "If life is the movement of information, and if we think that life is good, it follows that we should deepen and broaden the flow of information in the universe. According to Dataism, human experiences are not sacred and Homo sapiens isn't the apex of creation or a precursor of some future Homo deus. Humans are merely tools for creating the Internet-of-All-Things, which may eventually spread out from planet Earth to pervade the whole galaxy and even the whole universe. The cosmic data-processing system would be like God." Harari, *Homo Deus: Eine Geschichte von Morgen,* 386.

166 Cf. Volker Jung, *Digital Mensch bleiben* (Munich: Claudius, 2018), 41.

For example, smartphones, tablets, and computers are changing the forms and possibilities of communication, one's perception of the world,[167] and access to knowledge. Access to information is much easier today than it used to be, but it is more difficult to distinguish between fiction and reality, *fake news,* and scientifically based reports.[168] Communication is possible everywhere and at any time, but it often occurs in personally preferred networks, the so-called filter bubbles.[169] Even a division of communication into public and private no longer works on the internet. What has been posted once is already public: "If we are on the web, we are publishing, and we run the risk of becoming public figures – it's only a question of how many people are paying attention. Individuals will still have some discretion over what they share from their devices, but it will be impossible to control what others capture and share."[170]

The influence of traditional institutions is steadily declining,[171] but individual digital influencers are becoming more and more important; this is shown, among other things, by their number of followers, who give them an enormous reach.[172]

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167 "The screen is able to inform us much more precisely about where we are at the moment, what the weather is like (temperature, air pressure, humidity, visibility, etc.), what the world around us is like, but also what we did yesterday or will do tomorrow (appointment calendar), whether we are tired enough and have had enough exercise, what we like and dislike, who our friends are and finally: who we are, than we could do from ourselves. But despite this enormous enlargement, refinement and deepening of the section of the world that we can reach, control and understand, we are in danger of losing precisely those accesses to the world as resonance and response spheres that we open up in this technical way. [. . .] No longer being able to feel, sense or hear oneself has become a central symptom of this loss." Hartmut Rosa, *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2016), 716.

168 In view of the increasing amount of data and information, hermeneutic approaches are more necessary than ever. Because they clarify the world before it is explained and they clarify and question existing interpretations. They encourage self-determined reflection on thought and action, so that these become personally and civically constructive and life-enhancing. Cf. Sabrina Müller and Jasmine Suhner, 'Eine Frage der Relation: Praktisch-Theologische Annäherungen an die Frage nach Irrtum und Erkenntnis', *Conexus* 2019, no. 2 (2019): 20.

169 Cf. Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What The Internet Is Hiding From You* (London: Penguin, 2012).

170 Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, *The New Digital Age: Transforming Nations, Businesses, and Our Lives* (New York: Vintage, 2013), 56.

171 "I see our institutions shining with a brilliance like that of those constellations that astronomers tell us have long been extinguished." Michel Serres, *Erfindet euch neu!: Eine Liebeserklärung an die vernetzte Generation*, Deutsche Erstausgabe (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2013), 23.

172 In the church context, for example, think of the so-called "Sinnfluencers" (religious influencers) such as @seligkeitsdinge, @theresaliebt, @andersamen, etc., who are pastors in a congregation, but at the same time have an enormous – also theological – reach and thus a great influence due to their more than 40,000 followers.

Algorithms such as those used by Google and Facebook can control search queries, consumer behaviour, public-political opinion-forming, and relationship networks. In addition, companies make a lot of money with the users' data: "If you are not paying for the product, you are the product."[173]

Since both the benefits and dangers of digitalization are often opaque and sometimes merge into one another, ethical, social science, and theological reflections on the topic are on the rise. In May 2019, for example, the *Vienna Manifesto on Digital Humanism* emerged from an interdisciplinary research group. It argues for fair digital human standards. Under the heading *The system is failing,* the Manifesto argues for a just and democratic society in which technological progress must serve the good of human beings: "Digital technologies are disrupting societies and questioning our understanding of what it means to be human. The stakes are high and the challenge of building a just and democratic society with humans at the centre of technological progress needs to be addressed with determination as well as scientific ingenuity. Technological innovation demands social innovation, and social innovation requires broad societal engagement. […] We must shape technologies in accordance with human values and needs, instead of allowing technologies to shape humans."[174]

Along with its advantages and disadvantages, digital communication and interaction have become an essential part of human life. On- and offline can no longer simply be separated but belong to the same fluid reality of life.[175]

Thus, in digital network culture, traditional religious hierarchies, and powers of interpretation essentially lose their influence,[176] and people interpret for themselves.[177] Lived religion on the net has no denomination; it is ecumenical in a broad sense. In social media, many people are theologically productive[178] across denominations (and religions) in the sense of the General Priesthood: "There are new and emergent centres and sectors of authority, rooted in their ability to

173 Philip Specht, *Die 50 wichtigsten Themen der Digitalisierung: Künstliche Intelligenz, Blockchain, Robotik, Virtual Reality und vieles mehr verständlich erklärt* (Munich: Redline Verlag, 2018), 151.

174 'Vienna Manifesto on Digital Humanism', accessed 21 August 2019, https://www.informatik.tuwien.ac.at/dighum/.

175 Cf. Mia Consalvo and Charles Ess, 'Introduction', in *The Handbook of Internet Studies*, eds. Mia Consalvo and Charles Ess (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 1–8.

176 This does not mean that there are no more powers of interpretation, but rather that there is a shift in the power of interpretation. Cf. Martina Kumlehn, 'Deutungsmacht', 7–9, accessed 14 December 2019, https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/200577/.

177 "The network can promote flattened rather than hierarchical structures […]." Campbell and Garner, *Networked Theology*, 14.

178 Cf. Müller, *Lived Theology*, 47–49.

find audiences, to plausibly invigorate or invite practice, and to direct attention."[179] Especially in the digital space, the individual has the "dynamic freedom of self-chosen interpretive practice concerning religious content, symbolic meanings, ritual practice and individual value preferences."[180] This leads to the fact that it is not the sending but the receiving person who decides whether something is relevant to them: "In late modern society, something is not considered important and meaningful in itself, but subjects judge the relevance that something has for them. Relevance judgements are individual; they cannot claim absolute validity but acquire more general meaning only because many individuals make comparable judgements. In part, the question of relevance seems to have replaced the question of truth. At the very least, relevance determines whether the question of truth is even seriously considered – because only what appears to be relevant gets attention."[181]

The hermeneutics of religious experiences and convictions occurs both individually and in social networks,[182] linguistically and especially through images.[183] This changes the language games, language systems, and aesthetic expressions of religious communication in a digitalized society.[184] Moreover, speaking of truth in *perspectives* becomes even more vivid in the truest sense of the word.[185]

For example, pastoral care has changed and follows a different logic than the church-institutional one. Experiences of loss, prayer requests, sympathy, words of comfort, and encouragement are posted spontaneously on social media and relational interactions thus take place at any time of the day or night. Grief work,

179 Stewart M. Hoover, 'Religious Authority in the Media', in *The Media and Religious Authority*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover (Pennsylvania: University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016), 10.

180 Thomas Schlag, 'Öffentlichkeit 4.0', in *Reflektierte Kirche: Beiträge zur Kirchentheorie*, eds. Konrad Merzyn, Ricarda Schnelle, and Christian Stäblein (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018), 321.

181 Eberhard Hauschildt and Uta Pohl-Patalong, *Kirche* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013), 110–11.

182 Cf. e.g. 'Of Wandering and Wondering'. The book reads like an individual-community confession. However, in the individual contributions, some of which are very personal, the common programme becomes recognizable again and again. Maria Herrmann and Sandra Bils, eds., *Vom Wandern und Wundern: Fremdsein und prophetische Ungeduld in der Kirche* (Würzburg: Echter, 2017).

183 Cf. e.g. Hubert Burda and Christa Maar, *Iconic Turn: Die neue Macht der Bilder*, 3rd ed. (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 2005).

184 Cf. Christian Grethlein, 'Mediatisierung von Religion und Religiosität', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 115, no. 3 (2018): 367–68.

185 Cf. for example Ingolf U. Dalferth and Philipp Stoellger, eds., *Wahrheit in Perspektiven: Probleme einer offenen Konstellation*, vol. 14, Religion in Philosophy and Theology (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

for example, takes place in personal and authentic visual and textual language and again in networks.[186]

Accordingly, the internet reveals a highly diversified and colourful religious network formation and discourse culture, contrary to purely secularization-theoretical descriptions of society.

Within this horizon, urbanity in digital times is also possibly simply a metaphor for an urbanity that is no longer only territorially distinguished but is rather to be understood in an individualized urbanity or as urban individuality.

3.1.2 The individualized and pluralized space of experience

In church practice and the context of church membership studies, secularization is still spoken of, especially at the macro level.[187] However, in many practical theological discourses, the controversial secularization thesis has been mostly replaced by pluralization and individualization theses. The core questions of secularization theory, e.g., how the status of religion (and church) changes in society, remain highly relevant.[188]

Pluralization comes etymologically from the Latin *plures* and simply means *several*. In progressive pluralization, social, scientific, and economic differentiations are becoming apparent. Thus, sub-areas such as medicine, education, family, science, and economy are increasingly becoming functionally independent, which has a tradition-shattering power and leads to the fact that there are no worldviews, norms, values, and religious systems that transcend society.[189] Therefore, "pluralism […] is a social situation in which people with different ethnicities, worldviews, and moralities live together peacefully and interact with each other amicably."[190]

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186 Examples among many are the Facebook groups on grief and suicide or the hashtag #notjustsad on Twitter, under which people affected by depression exchange and encourage each other. In the church sector, hashtags like #digitalekirche, #dnkgtt, #prayfor, etc. have spread very quickly.

187 Cf. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm and Volker Jung, *Vernetzte Vielfalt: Kirche angesichts von Individualisierung und Säkularisierung. Die fünfte EKD-Erhebung über Kirchenmitgliedschaft. Mit CD-ROM* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015).

188 Whereby the mutual causes and effects of secularization, individualization, and pluralization are difficult to separate. Therefore, both secularization and individualization are often seen as the main drivers of religious pluralization. Gert Pickel, *Religionssoziologie. Eine Einführung in zentrale Themenbereiche* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), 135–225.

189 Cf. Pollack and Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne*, 38–39.

190 Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity, Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*, 1.

In particular, pluralization (and secularization) is causing states with an egalitarian self-image to withdraw their support for specific religious communities and systems. As a result, religious institutions – primarily churches – increasingly lose their influence on the public sphere and personal faith development. Religion is thus no longer embedded in a homogeneous society but was and still is privatized and individualized.[191] The claims to interpretive power of a religious system or a specific Christian denomination thus ring increasingly hollow in Western societies. Concerning the religious system of a society, pluralization refers in summary to the differentiation and multiplication of religious institutions, attitudes, and identities. "The concept of religious pluralization is based on an open idea of religion that recognizes religiosity and spirituality beyond the boundaries of established religious traditions [and institutions]."[192]

In the wake of these changes, the individual interpretation of life and meaning becomes increasingly relevant: even in a late-modern culture, people still look for orientation, connectedness, and transcendence or experiences in these directions. As already mentioned, however, "religious faith [...] wants to be developed by individuals' reflection on meaning."[193] This is not new but took its beginnings in the Reformation and later in the Enlightenment.[194] Schleiermacher already pleaded in his reflections for a new approach to religion in which individuality and experiential reference are central.[195]

Individual and differentiated biographies of one's own choices take the place of normal class-cultural and class biographies. The individual thus has the self-chosen freedom to shape their life plan and the self-imposed responsibility for their decisions.[196] The subjects and interpreters of religion are the individuals themselves, and religion assumes the following function: "Religion alive confronts the individual with the most momentous options life can present. It calls the soul to the highest adventure it can undertake, a proposed journey across the jungles,

191 In Switzerland, this trend is well illustrated by the debate on denominational religious education in public schools. Denominational religious education used to be embedded in the school system and the timetable, but in many Swiss cantons it has lost this embedding and now has to be organized by the religious communities in the children's free time.

192 Ulrich Riegel, 'Pluralisierung', in *Das Wissenschaftlich-Religionspädagogische Lexikon im Internet (WiReLex)* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibel Gesellschaft, 2016), 3, https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/fileadmin/buh_bibelmodul/media/wirelex/pdf/Pluralisierung__2018-09-20_06_20.pdf.

193 Gräb, *Religion als Deutung des Lebens*, 10.

194 Cf. Kumlehn, 'Religion und Individuum', 47–48.

195 This is most strongly expressed in the second address – Über das Wesen der Religion. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern.*

196 Cf. Ulrich Beck, *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, 22nd ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2015).

peaks and deserts of the human spirit. The call is to confront reality, to master the self […] Science makes major contributions to minor needs, Justice Holmes was fond of saying, add that religion, however small its successes, is at least at work on the things that matter most."[197]

Zygmunt Bauman uses the term religious *flaneur* for this form of religiosity. This person demands a justification for their life stories that are both true to life and credible in terms of spiritual culture.[198] The flaneur lives in the moment; they seek neither a contradiction-free nor a coherent life strategy;[199] they seek religious reassurance at their time and in passing.[200]

This leads to a change in the value systems of individuals, where personal happiness becomes the goal.[201] The decisive factor here is the density and quality of experience. Gerhard Schulze, therefore, speaks of an experience society that has a strongly inward-oriented view of life: "Inward-oriented views of life that place the subject itself at the centre of thought and action have displaced outward-oriented views of life. Typical of people in our culture is the project of the beautiful life. At first glance, what they are aiming at seems too disparate to have sociological significance. But there is a common denominator: experiential rationality, the functionalisation of external circumstances for the inner life. […] The project of the beautiful life turns out to be something complicated – an intention to manipulate circumstances so that one responds to them in a way that reflects on oneself as beautiful."[202] Thus religious traditions and doctrines are adapted to one's lifestyle according to how well they fit, according to the experience of certainty and aesthetic coherence, and are autonomously integrated into life or discarded.[203] Personal religiosity and interpretation of meaning thus lead to individual normativity. Nevertheless, this form of self-determination is also shaped and determined by social systems of language and thought.

Michel Foucault developed a critical analysis of individualization in his concept of *pastoral power.* The production of individual truth is also normed by a system. It has to do with maintaining power relations: "We always think within an

197 Smith, *The World's Religions*, 9.

198 Cf. Thomas Klie, 'Kasualgemeinde', in *Handbuch für Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung*, eds. Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2014), 284.

199 Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Flaneure, Spieler und Touristen. Essays zu postmodernen Lebensformen* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), 148.

200 Cf. Klie, 'Kasualgemeinde', 285.

201 It is about the patterns of experience, which can be different depending on the milieu. Thus, what *happiness* means for the respective milieu and then the respective individual also differs.

202 Gerhard Schulze, *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft: Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt/Main/New York: Campus Verlag, 2005), 35.

203 Cf. Kumlehn, 'Religion und Individuum', 49.

anonymous, coercive system of thought that belongs to a time and a language. This system of thought and this language have their laws of transformation. The task of contemporary philosophy and all the theoretical disciplines mentioned above is to uncover this thinking before thinking, this system before the system." Thus, Foucault calls for a search for new forms of subjectivity and encourages opposition to the kind of individuality created by pastoral power.[204] Ernst Troeltsch also pointed out at the beginning of the 20th century that (religious) individuals cannot compose freely but can only change existing melodies: "They are virtuosos who need a foreign material to develop their idiosyncrasies on, and who fall into the void without such material."[205]

As I've presented in the theoretical approaches, personal experience functions as a common thread in the fragmented identities of late-modern people. What is essential and existential in individual life plans is what existed before one's own experience. This experience, in turn, is permanently embedded in a cultural (and sometimes ecclesiastical) system of thought and a specific frame of reference. For the individual, however, personal experience takes on the function of individual authority and normativity, but only for one's own life. Many truths thus live together and side by side, are unique, clearly true through personal experience and at the same time relative in the urban human fabric.

3.2 The urban living spaces

The reality of life for many people in the Western context thus includes not only digitalization, individualization, and pluralization but as well a life within the horizon of urban logic. How these urban logics influence and determine human existence and shape (religious) experiences is outlined below as a further *sensitizing concept*.

What was considered educated, witty, funny, and "man of the world"[206] in ancient Rome, life in the city, lost its appeal in the post-war period. For decades, there was a flight from the city to the countryside. The cities remained deserted in the evenings and at weekends.[207] But the trend of deurbanization is turning, and a

204 Cf. Michel Foucault, 'Subjekt und Macht (1982)', in *Analytik der Macht*, eds. Daniel Defert and Francois Ewald (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 248–50.

205 Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Kirche im Leben der Gegenwart (1911)*, ed. Hans Baron, vol. II, Gesammelte Schriften (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 99.

206 Cf. 'Urbanus : Deutsch " Latein | PONS', accessed 14 January 2016, http://de.pons.com/%C3%BCbersetzung/latein-deutsch/urbanus.

207 This can still be experienced now in the larger financial districts, e.g. in London.

renaissance of "inner-city dwellings" can be observed.[208] The city is being rediscovered both as a place to live and work so that one can even speak of a "*renaissance of the city*".[209] In addition, a rural exodus can be seen in large parts of the world because urban space promises a better life, jobs, and education.

In global urbanization[210], the discourses on this are also booming. Urbanity research is a topic of multi-layered discussions, concepts, and theories that deal with issues and problems specific to the urban context.[211] Cities have a particular culture, and urban areas react differently to issues and events. As a result, urbanity research focuses on the following questions: How do the buildings and the city's design affect its people? How does high density affect the way people live together? How do different neighbourhoods develop their own identity?[212] What happens when the urgency to expand clashes with the need to preserve historic buildings and areas? What forms of community are formed in the city, and how are they maintained? How can digitalization improve life in the city, and what are the characteristics of smart cities?

Urbanity research not only addresses multi-layered questions but also uses a variety of instruments from sociology, ethnology, economics, psychology, geography, and other sciences to explore life in the city using both quantitative and qualitative analytical methods. Nevertheless, urbanity remains a phenomenon that cannot be grasped or defined, leading Pahl to the following statement in 1970: "In an urbanised society, urban is everywhere and nowhere: the city cannot be defined, and so neither can urban sociology."[213]

In the following, I present the megatrend of *urbanization* first in facts and figures. Then I discuss definitions of urbanity and the city, which are especially important concerning human lifestyles and experiences. Then conditions of being human in urban space are discussed, and finally, the theological dimensions.

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208 Cf. for example 'Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung: Renaissance der Großstädte – Eine Zwischenbilanz. BBSR-Berichte Kompakt, 9/2011', accessed 14 January 2019, http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/Veroeffentlichungen/BerichteKompakt/2011/DL_9_2011.pdf.

209 Cf. Dieter Läpple, 'Thesen zu einer Renaissance der Stadt in der Wissensgesellschaft', in *Jahrbuch StadtRegion 2003: Schwerpunkt: Urbane Regionen*, eds. Norbert Gestring et al. (Opladen: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004), 61–77.

210 Urbanization describes a process of increasing the size and density of settlements and villages.

211 Cf. Ronan Paddison, 'Studying Cities', in *Handbook of Urban Studies*, ed. Ronan Paddison (London/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 1–3.

212 People in the different neighbourhoods usually have their very own neighbourhood identity. A typical example is London with Covent Garden, Soho, Bloomsbury, Barbican, Westminster, Kensington, Notting Hill, Camden Town, and many more.

213 Raymond Pahl, *Whose City?* (Harlow: Longmans, 1970), 202.

3.2.1 Urbanity in facts and figures

Western society is an urban society. This is particularly evident in the UK, with almost one-third of people living in England's southeast in predominantly urban and suburban areas. Eight million live in the capital of London alone. In Switzerland, the figures are similar. Almost three-quarters of the Swiss population lives in urban areas. "Switzerland's 50 agglomerations and five isolated cities comprised almost 1,000 municipalities with 5.4 million inhabitants, accounting for 73% of the Swiss population. This urban space extended over some 9000 km^2. The continuous expansion of the large agglomerations led to five metropolitan areas – Zurich, Basel, Geneva-Lausanne, Bern and Ticino. Zurich was by far the largest agglomeration in Switzerland in 2000 with 1.1 million inhabitants, followed by (considered only in their Swiss part) Basel (480,000) and Geneva (470,000)."[214] Worldwide, more people live in urban areas than in rural ones; in 2014, 54% of the world's population. This compares to 30% in 1950. The *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*[215] estimates that 66% of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050. 746 million people lived in urban areas in 1950, but this figure had risen to 3.9 billion by 2014. By 2050, another 2.5 billion people will live in urban regions.

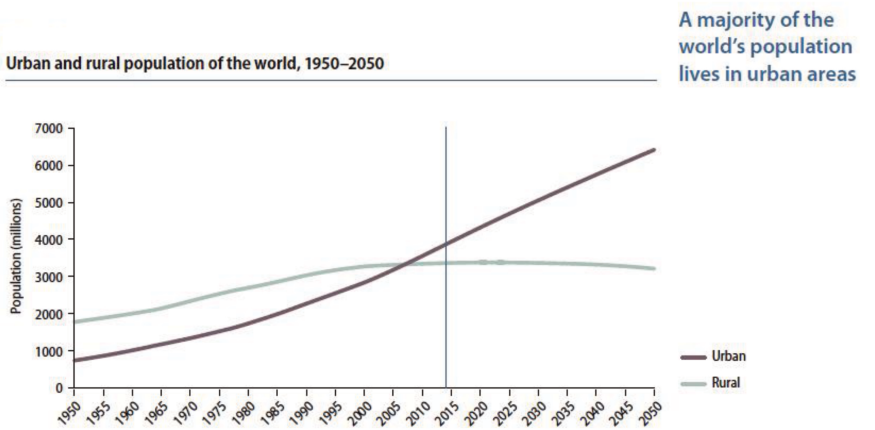

Figure 1: World Urbanization Prospects. The 2014 Revision, Departement of Economic and Social Affairs. Population Division, 2015 United Nations, 7. Used with the permission of the United Nations.

214 'Agglomerationen und Metropolräume 2000', accessed 14 January 2019, http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/regionen/11/geo/analyse_regionen/04.html.

215 'Urbanization – United Nations Population Division | Department of Economic and Social Affairs', accessed 15 January 2016, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/theme/urbanization/.

The most urbanized regions are North America (82%), Latin America, the Caribbean (80%), and Europe (73%). Africa and Asia are the least urbanized, with 40% and 48% respectively. However, these countries have the fastest urbanization rate: Asia and Africa are expected to grow by 90% by 2050.[216]

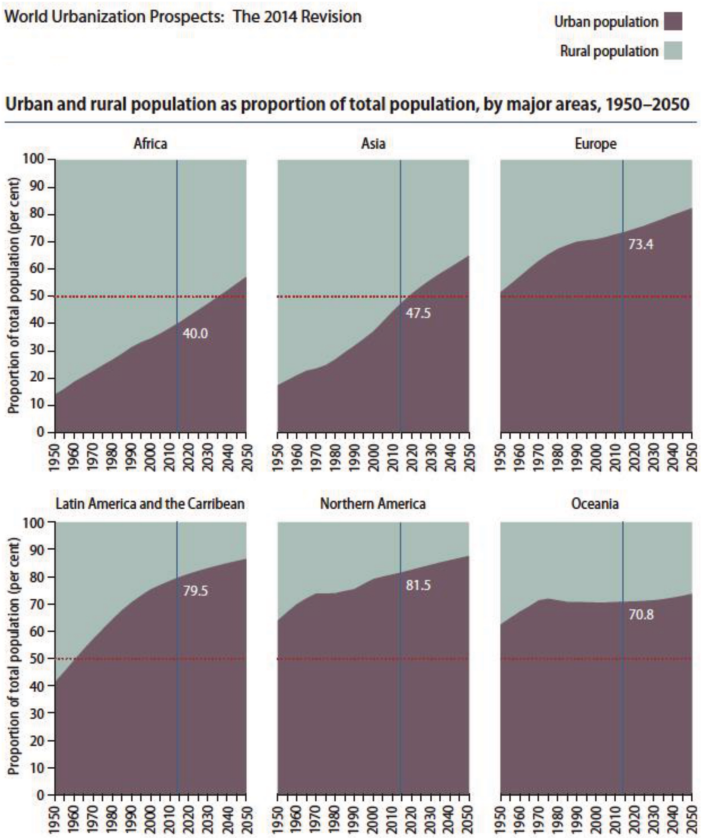

Figure 2: World Urbanization Prospects. The 2014 Revision, Departement of Economic and Social Affairs, 10. Population Division, 2015 United Nations, 10. Used with the permission of the United Nations.

216 Cf. 'World Urbanization Prospect', 1.

3.2.2 Urbanity research

Given these figures, it is not surprising that understanding the city is essential both economically and for grasping sociality.[217] Accordingly, a discernable reassessment of urban culture is underway, and topics of urban design, culture, research, cosmology and, more recently, smart cities[218] are gaining interest.

In 1999, Joseph Grange described the city as an urban cosmos.[219] The cosmos is characterized by the fact that it follows an inherent order. Describing and analyzing this system is a primary focus of urbanity research. In this context, research on the city does not prove to be a straightforward task: "An immediate problem here is that, partly because of the difficulties in defining the term urban, and partly because of the breadth of the subject area, delimiting the boundaries of the field of urban studies is by no means a straightforward task."[220] Nevertheless, older and more recent research on the phenomenon of urbanity show parallels in structure without, however, being subject to standardization.

A frequent point of reference, especially in urban sociological research, is again Max Weber. In his posthumously published contribution to the city,[221] he creates a comparative typology of cities. In this now classic work, Weber "installs the medieval-occidental city as an ideal type for comparison by cultures, which he defines in terms of their economic and political-administrative dimensions. This ideal-typical city is characterized by fortification, the market, its jurisdiction, its associative character and the associated – at least partial – autonomy [...]."[222] In

217 For practical theological discourses, urbanity is and will (become) a central component of reflection and reference. Harvey Cox has been relevant with his theological reflections on the 'city' since the 1960s. Cf. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City; Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective.*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966); Cf. for example Aus der Au et al., *Urbanität und Öffentlichkeit*, 5; Eiffler, *Kirche für die Stadt*.

218 Smart City is a collective term for the vision of a digitalized city. It includes phenomena as diverse as digitalized infrastructure (e.g. waste bins recognize when they are packed using sensors and send a signal to the waste collection service), democratization in cities through communication technologies, the city as a company and surveillance space, and the desirable utopia of increased quality of life in everyday life. Cf. e.g. Sybille Bauriedl and Anke Strüver, eds., *Smart City – kritische Perspektiven auf die Digitalisierung in Städten: digitale Technologien, Raumproduktion, Intervention*, Urban Studies (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018), 11–30.

219 Cf. Joseph Grange, *The City: An Urban Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

220 Paddison, 'Studying Cities', 1.

221 Cf. Max Weber, *Max Weber-Studienausgabe: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Jubiläumspaket* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

222 Dominik Skala, *Urbanität als Humanität. Anthropologie und Sozialethik im Stadtdenken Richard Sennetts* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015), 63.

addition to Weber's reference figure, despite different theoretical conceptions and approaches, thematic similarities can be found above all in the following aspects:[223]

- Most studies start with a theoretical outline of urbanity and a city's definition, presenting and exploring the theoretical frame of reference and concepts.
- The city is described as a microcosm of its own, in which the living environment, the surroundings, the cityscape, building activity, and ecological issues are central. In this context, the question of *space* takes on an essential role in urban design, housing, and dialogue projects.
- Cities are usually vibrant economic centres – economically important – but there are always winners and losers.
- Handbooks on urbanity research usually also discuss problem areas such as crime, poverty and wealth, social segregation, law and justice.
- Therefore, the debates often focus on *the city and its people* – in other words, anthropological discourses on life in the city.
- At the same time, however, the description of the emotional reality of the city goes beyond single individuals or the current population. The city is granted its emotionality, composed of memory, history, plurality, and culture.
- It is hard to imagine urbanity studies without the aspects of community, administration, power, organization, mobility, and, in more recent discourses, questions about the digitality of the city.
- Finally, many urbanity debates conclude with a description of changes and an outlook on the *city's future.*
- Descriptions of and research on urbanization often operate within the framework of globalization debates and have been globalized in some respects.[224]

Despite the commonalities just mentioned, urbanity research can historically be divided into two schools that have separately then developed their distinctive char-

223 The aspects presented here consist of correspondences from the comparison of the following theoretical concepts of urbanity. Cf. Malcolm Miles, *Cities and Cultures* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2007); Ronan Paddison, ed., *Handbook of Urban Studies* (London/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000); William H. Michelson, *Man and His Urban Environment: Sociological Approach*, 2nd ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1976); Deborah Stevenson, *The City* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Grange, *The City*; Klaus Segbers, Simon Raiser, and Krister Volkmann, eds., *The Making of Global City Regions: Johannesburg, Mumbai/Bombay, Sao Paulo and Shanghai* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ Pr, 2007); Paul Meadows and Ephraim H. Mizruchi, eds., *Urbanism, Urbanization and Change. Comparative Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969); Phil Steinberg and Rob Shields, eds., *What Is a City?: Rethinking the Urban After Hurricane Katrina* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2008).

224 Cf. Paddison, 'Studying Cities', 3.

acteristics, namely in the *Spatial/Economic* and the *Socio-Political-Community* discourses.[225]

Spatial/Economic (spatial research and analysis) can be divided into two schools: First, *Locational Analysis,* which emerged in the 19th century and is primarily concerned with the issues surrounding the development of urban land and places. The second school is increasingly concerned with *spatial networks,* i.e., spatial systems. It examines the impact of the construction and distribution of space on the designs of the city and how cities can be restructured. The second school in *spatial* urbanity research can be described as *sociological.* These discourses, which emerged in the late 19th century, ask about the nature and meaning of urban social life. The focus is on social behaviour in the city, to which a paradigm of competition is often applied.

The second direction is called *socio-political community.* This expression has its tendencies: *Community and Urban Power Studies* also emerged in the late 19th century. They mainly refer to community development, community studies, social life, conflicts, and questions of power distribution. The *Neo-Marxist* school, which emerged in the 1960s, belongs in the same direction but with a different focus. It focuses on social processes, urban development, and social injustice, to which a Marxist analysis is applied. *Urban planning/reconstruction/policy-making* emerged in the late 19th century but is still used as a perspective today. As the name suggests, the focus here is on *(good) urban design.* Paddison describes the *postmodern accounts,* which emerged in the 1980s as the last form of urban design. These emphasize various aspects of urban life, such as *the city as a centre of consumption, recreation,* and *appearance.*[226] The urbanity debate becomes even more complex when trying to define the city.

3.2.3 Social scientific and anthropological definitions of the city

At first glance, the term *city* seems unambiguous. It hardly needs any further explanation. Even children find it easy to describe a city based on its features: tall houses, various shopping facilities, good public transport connections, lots of people, etc. The historical concept of the city is hardly more complex: "The historical concept of the city is based on the political-legal and social contrast between city and country."[227] In the Middle Ages, the concept of the city had mainly to do with

225 Cf. for the following two sections: Paddison, 'Studying Cities'.

226 Cf. Paddison, 'Studying Cities', 4–7.

227 Elisabeth Lichtenberger, *Stadtgeographie*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1991), 35.

the granting of rights such as sovereignty, jurisdiction, the abolition of serfdom, customs law, the right of defence, and the right to hold markets. According to Lichtenberger, the following are characteristic of a medieval town: 1. the "enclosure by a wall […] which was an economic and defensive association. 2. crossroads and/or a marketplace symbolising the intersection of traffic and trade and the town's orientation around a centre. 3. the division of the city into quarters (four insulae in the Roman castrum) which lives on in the medieval city as a military-administrative division."[228]

As simple as the description of a city is from a child's perspective and historically, a definition in scientific terms does not prove to be adequate at present. The subject is not satisfied if it is only defined based on the density of people or the basis of contrasts such as urban and rural. Because urbanization is the subject of research in different scientific disciplines and is presented differently globally depending on cultural, social and economic areas, there are considerable differences in definitions.[229] The concept of the city can be defined statistically, geographically, qualitatively, functionally, sociologically, culturally, and so on.[230]

In principle, social life in cities shows patterns and has an organized character, allowing us to speak of urban systems.[231] The social geographer Christian Schmid defines the city based on three criteria, using the programme of difference as a guideline. First, he understands cities as networks of exchange, both in everyday life, economy, migration, and communication. Secondly, cities are defined by borders and the simultaneous dissolution of borders through urbanization. Thirdly, they are centres of exchange and encounters in which social difference collides.[232] In contrast, Frank Eckhardt, for example, takes a complexity-theoretical approach in "The Complex City".[233] He solves the problem of definition by embedding the city in a complexity discourse: "Complexity is to be understood here as the complexity that does not elude scientific description, and that could be grasped conceptually. The city is the place of explanation of nebulous and complicated world views; it is more comprehensive than the place assigned to it geographically and

228 Lichtenberger, *Stadtgeographie*, 35.

229 Cf. Ronan Paddison, 'Identifying the City', in *Handbook of Urban Studies*, ed. Ronan Paddison (London/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 11–13.

230 Cf. also Eiffler, *Kirche für die Stadt*, 64–68.

231 Cf. Peter Saunders, 'Urban Ecology', in *Handbook of Urban Studies*, ed. Ronan Paddison (London/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 36.

232 Cf. Christian Schmid, 'Netzwerke – Grenzen – Differenzen. Auf dem Weg zu einer Theorie des Urbanen', in *Die Schweiz. Ein städtebauliches Portrait: 3. Bde.*, eds. Roger Diener et al. (Basel: Birkhäuser GmbH, 2005), 164–74.

233 Frank Eckardt, *Die Komplexe Stadt: Orientierungen im urbanen Labyrinth* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009).

cartographically. With the inclusion of other problematic situations beyond the physicality of space, the city is contoured as a mental form of human life in which developments and conditions are interconnected."[234]

In contrast, William Frey and Zachary Zimmer, in the "Handbook of Urban Studies",[235] propose a definition of the city as a *functional community area.* This is based on two characteristics: "[A] self-contained local labour market within an area characterised by high frequencies of daily interactions;"[236] furthermore, this community is described as a *functional metropolitan community.* This definition pertains to measurable interactions rather than actual population numbers and density. Frey and Zimmer argue that this definition makes it easier to compare different societies.[237]

As can be seen from this brief compilation, it is impossible to summarize urbanity in a single definition. However, the diverse anthropological references that become apparent in the descriptions are essential for this study. Cities are relational places on many levels[238] that have a lasting influence on the reality of human life and on what people experience.

3.2.4 Conditions and characteristics of being human in urbanity

As can already be seen from the previous explanations, urban life places different conditions and demands on people than those in rural societies. In urban space, freedom and strangeness, individuality, and other forms of sociality, wealth, consumption, and poverty go hand in hand. Thus, life in the city offers "promises and dangers, threats and temptations, freedom and dependence, wealth and poverty, hope and misery"[239] at the same time.

3.2.4.1 Freedom and foreignness

It is precisely individuality that guarantees personal freedom. The urban person assumes this individuality and presupposes that another person's behaviour can

234 Eckardt, *Die Komplexe Stadt: Orientierungen im urbanen Labyrinth*, 115.

235 Paddison, *Handbook of Urban Studies*.

236 William H. Frey and Zachary Zimmer, 'Defining the City', in *Handbook of Urban Studies*, ed. Ronan Paddison (London/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 29.

237 Cf. Frey and Zimmer, 'Defining the City', 30.

238 Cf. Martina Löw, 'Stadt- und Raumsoziologie', in *Handbuch Spezielle Soziologien*, ed. Georg Kneer and Markus Schroer (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 616.

239 'Gott in der Stadt – Perspektiven evangelischer Kirche in der Stadt. ekd_texte_93.Pdf' (Hannover: Kirchenamt der EKD, 2007), 11, http://www.ekd.de/download/ekd_texte_93.pdf.

be meaningful, even if it seems strange. "Behaviour is characterized by a resigned humanity that respects the individuality of the other even when there is no hope of understanding it."[240] Freedom has always been a criterion for life in the city: "City air makes you free!" The city's attractiveness is bundled in this winged word. Initially, the freedom granted by the city was very concrete: serfs could – after a year's stay in the city and, if they had not done anything wrong during this time – regain their citizenship rights as freemen. This reflects the idea of a humane city. At the same time, the proverb indicates that the European city has always defined itself in contrast to the surrounding countryside. "The claim to extensive political self-determination and intellectual freedom corresponds in urban development through the centuries to the cultivation of education, diverse social exchange in public space, the formation of elites, commercial power and political-symbolic architecture, innovations in the technical and artistic fields, but also the dark sides of mass poverty and organised crime."[241] In contrast to life in a village community, the city guarantees a higher degree of anonymity and frees people from the compulsion to communalize. At the same time, anonymity can also lead to alienation: "The freedom to be individual carries the possibility of getting lost. Tolerance in the coexistence of the different can turn into aggression and violence toward the foreigner. The unlimited possibilities of making contacts also mean the difficulty of experiencing and maintaining truly sustainable relationships. The abundance of options for sharing and shaping one's own life is combined with a general sense of confusion and meaninglessness."[242]

The differential society of a city is the meeting place par excellence in which the foreign and the foreigners collide. The sociologist and historian Richard Sennett describes urban existence as "living as strangers with strangers."[243] Here, the motif of strangeness encompasses two dimensions. A person is a stranger to their fellow human beings, and their behaviour is, in fact, often characterized by ignorance. At the same time, a person is also a stranger to themselves.[244] For Sennett, this is "a transcendental condition of the social existence of the individual

240 Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel, *Stadtsoziologie: Eine Einführung* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2004), 62.

241 'Gott in der Stadt – Perspektiven evangelischer Kirche in der Stadt. ekd_texte_93.Pdf', 9f.

242 'Gott in der Stadt – Perspektiven evangelischer Kirche in der Stadt. Ekd_texte_93.Pdf', 12.

243 Richard Sennett, *Verfall und Ende des öffentlichen Lebens. Die Tyrannei der Intimität. Aus dem Amerikanischen von Reinhard Kaiser* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag Taschenbuch, 2008), 112.

244 According to Sennett, this foreignness can be a consequence of the most diverse urban functional-social spheres. Cf. Skala, *Urbanität als Humanität. Anthropologie und Sozialethik im Stadtdenken Richard Sennetts*, 197.

human being."[245] However, strangeness in and of itself is not determined as innate but as something that arises from the context: "he [the human being] is always a person who becomes a stranger under certain conditions, in a specific context".[246] However, being a stranger in itself does not only have negative aspects but is also seen as an "actualisation of freedom potential [...] and self-determined diversity".[247] Especially in gender-specific terms, the city offered and still offers a free space: "I [...] was a grammar school girl in the 1960s, escaping marriage and motherhood, at least for a while or as a sole pursuit, through a scholarship and later an academic position in an urban university".[248] At the same time, however, diversity and social classes are also more significant, and thus the tensions are greater: "Class divides women as much as gender unites them [...] Certainly having money and health makes a huge difference to the 'urban experience'."[249] Unity does not exist, it is necessary to recognize the different experiences: "men are gendered too and, like women, their experience in and of the city are affected by their age, ethnicity, class, sexuality and other social characteristics."[250] As a communal perspective of life in the city, it is, therefore, best to speak of individuals who try to lead a meaningful and good life in the tension between explicit and anonymous social demands.[251] This includes the possibility of satisfying one's own needs through appropriate payment.

Part of the *good life* in Western cities is the almost limitless possibility to equip oneself with consumer goods beyond basic needs. Since many goods must be imported into the cities, cars, trucks, and public transport density is massive. Accordingly, the infrastructure for transport options occupies large parts of the individual's public and private urban space.[252] Thus, large areas of urban space remain alien because they are inaccessible and do not provide living space for people.

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245 Skala, *Urbanität als Humanität. Anthropologie und Sozialethik im Stadtdenken Richard Sennetts*, 197.

246 Julia Reuter, 'Perspektiven in der Soziologie des Fremden', *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, no. 37/1 (2011): cf. remark. 31, 154.

247 Skala, *Urbanität als Humanität. Anthropologie und Sozialethik im Stadtdenken Richard Sennetts*, 199.

248 Linda M. McDowell, 'Women, Men, Cities', in *Handbook of Urban Studies*, ed. Ronan Paddison (London/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 206.

249 McDowell, 'Women, Men, Cities', 207.

250 McDowell, 'Women, Men, Cities', 207.

251 Cf. Gerhard Droesser, 'Stadterzählungen – Auf der Suche nach Verstehenskategorien für eine komplexe Wirklichkeit', accessed 23 January 2016, http://www.medienheft.ch/dossier/bibliothek/d17_DroesserGerhard.html.

252 Cf. Catherine Lutz, 'Cars and Transport: The Car-Made City', in *A Companion to Urban Anthropology*, ed. Donald M. Nonini (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 142.

At the same time, the high mobility in urban areas is another guarantee of freedom. The city is thus, at the same time, a place of experience of freedom and strangeness, living space, and a polluted place[253] in which there are winners and many losers.

3.2.4.2 Individuality and sociality

Even in urban areas, people need specific forms of community that serve as insurance for the individual: "[C]ommunity has typically been interpreted as the means by which the individual is able to develop a sense of belonging and identity with at least part to fit."[254] If the social network no longer consists of family and clan, other forms of sociality must be found. For in addition to self-assurance, the construct of community – also in religious matters – functions as a link between the individual and the city system: "It is not hard to see why the term community is being used adjectivally to qualify public policy: not only does it convey connotations of empathy and localness, themselves implied values of community, but it also harnesses new relationships between the state and civil society, notably of partnership and shared responsibility."[255] Therefore, it is not surprising that this community discourse has experienced a renaissance in urbanity research.[256]

Ferdinand Tönnies is one of the founding fathers of sociology and always had the city and urban elements in the focus of his reflections.[257] So it is not surprising

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253 "Urban environmental issues – solid waste accumulation, sewage disposal, air-borne emissions and, more broadly, dirt and pollution – have been a hot topic in urban research, from Victorian sanitary studies to contemporary work on rapidly growing megacities in the global South. Urban pollution has multiple dimensions: it is a visible, tangible, smellable part of urban life, but it is also a slippery, mutable symbolic category that is used to differentiate urban residents, places, and behavior. Straddling a range of often conflicting categories, dirt is never solely a measurable, material fact. Rather, it is always also a social and cultural phenomenon that cannot be understood through technical models and terms alone. Pollution is a socio-material phenomenon reflecting world views, dominant values, lifestyles, aesthetics, science and technology, and much more. Conceptions of pollution and the management of waste always reflect the Zeitgeist – urban pollution is a historical, social, cultural, political, and cognitive experience, each instance of which must be analyzed within its spatial, temporal, and cultural context. The material and the symbolic aspects of pollution tend to be intertwined in complex, emotionally weighted ways." Eveline Dürr and Rivke Jaffe, 'Pollution', in *A Companion to Urban Anthropology*, ed. Donald M. Nonini (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 414.

254 Ronan Paddison, 'Communities in the City', in *Handbook of Urban Studies* (London/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 194.

255 Paddison, 'Communities in the City', 194.

256 Cf. John Clark, 'Community', in *A Companion to Urban Anthropology*, ed. Donald M. Nonini (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 46–47.

257 Cf. Eiffler, *Kirche für die Stadt*, 113.

that discourses on urbanity still refer to Tönnies' 1887 distinction of the community[258] (thought and action are oriented towards a collective – primarily rural) and society (thought and action are individual and use others for their purpose – primarily urban).[259] Tönnies' simplification is helpful but does not do justice to the complexity of sociality in urban areas, especially when the rural community structure is presented as an ideal: "Ideas of integrated and organic village communities often conceal the social relations on which they were founded and the associated social hierarchies that they sustained. Moreover, conceptions of stability and social order derived from this rural past were, in part, based on systems of inequality, power, and deference (in the English village to the squire and the parson, for example). As a result, the social order was one in which 'people knew their place' and kept to it. Appeals to tradition, stability and social order thus have an ambivalent relationship to questions of inequality and power."[260] Certain concepts of the community can also be applied to the city. Thus, community in the city can be defined in terms of place, specific kinds of social relations and lifestyles, shared interests, practices or forms of work, forms of identity, ethnicities, a particular set of social relations that differentiates itself from others, specific social obligations, sense of belonging, financial capital, education, and so on.[261]

Urban communities create identity, interaction, and connections to other parts of the city, and are at the same time multidimensional and diverse. Sociality in the city helps individuals reduce complexity, speed, and desolidarization and the individual recognizability of urban socialites functions as part of the individual's identity assurance and reassurance. Moreover, belonging to communities also guarantees protection and privileges in urban spaces.[262] For many people, especially outside the rich North, the city is not a privileged place to live: "[S]omewhere between 25 and 70 per cent of urban dwellers, in fact, live in slums: unregulated, informally built, with no formal titles to property, with problematic access to fresh water and sewerage, improvised access to electricity and heating, and few public services at hand."[263]

258 In Tönnies' discussions, communities are characterized by a familiar, almost intimate set of social relations. These communities have a similar way of life and a common culture. They differ from the anonymous patterns of relationships in urban areas. Cf. Clark, 'Community', 49–50.

259 Cf. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Fues, 1887).

260 Clark, 'Community', 51.

261 Vgl. Clark, 'Community', 48.

262 Cf. Paddison, 'Communities in the City', 195f.198.203f.

263 Don Kalb, 'Class', in *A Companion to Urban Anthropology*, ed. Donald M. Nonini (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 170.

Individuality and sociality also play a significant role in the subject area of religion in the city, because in the course of individualization and pluralization, communal and urban religiosity almost wholly disappeared. Personal faith and general religious practice were largely privatized and are seen as an activity of various groupings and communities, and thus are newly located in the space of people's private leisure activities.

The western city is thus also free space in terms of the choice of religiosity and spirituality,[264] which offers space for many different religious groups, institutions and missions that function alongside the traditional religious institutions and buildings.[265] Urban people can thus have a wide variety of spiritual imprints and be relatively free to associate themselves with different religious traditions or break away from them again. Religion remains part of the urban fabric but no longer manifests itself in and through institutions but increasingly in religious organizations, networks, and communities of interest.

In the debate on individualization and pluralization, it is becoming increasingly apparent how people who are committed and close to the Church are also resolving the "tension between family privacy, religious autonomy and traditional churchliness consistently utilising a temporary custom-fit access."[266] In this way, they satisfy their religious needs and expectations *ad personam* and *de tempore* and have this composed pastorally.[267]

3.2.5 Theological perspectives on life in the city

Theological interpretations of the city usually follow social science definitions but sometimes open up different perspectives. It is striking that the diversity paradigm is often used as an explanatory framework in practical theological discourses.[268] For example, in his theological perspectives on the city, Philip Sheldrake uses

264 This looked different in the eastern cities: "The 'Eastern city' was entirely defined and subsumed by the larger society and cosmology. Eastern cities served essentially as sites of religious authority intertwined with sovereign power, as privileged bridges to another and 'cosmic truth'." Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Religion', in *A Companion to Urban Anthropology*, ed. Donald M. Nonini (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 64.

265 Vgl. Blom Hansen, 'Religion', 369.

266 Klie, 'Kasualgemeinde', 282.

267 Cf. Klie, 'Kasualgemeinde', 282.

268 Cf. for example Robert E. Parker, 'The City', in *Cities and Churches*, ed. Robert Lee (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 46–51; 'Gott in der Stadt – Perspektiven evangelischer Kirche in der Stadt. Ekd_texte_93.Pdf'; Philip Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality, and the Urban* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014); Aus der Au et al., *Urbanität und Öffentlichkeit*, 5.

the diversity paradigm: "By 'cities' I mean urban environments characterized not simply by substantial size or large population but also by diversity – social, cultural, ethnic, and religious."[269] However, he goes beyond a mere description of the diversity and assigns a central function to progressive urbanization in the formation of morals:[270] "[S]haping the human spirit for good or for ill [...] create a climate of values that define how we understand human existence and gather together into communities."[271] Therefore, the city is also the place where the "spiritual biography of our civilisation"[272] must be read. Sheldrake thus almost follows a Greek understanding of the polis as the centre of morality, education, art, culture, and aesthetics.

Knut Wenzel and Michael Sievernich also connect to the diversity paradigm and even tie this to Babel. God did not leave the city: "What should have prompted him to do so? Even at Babel, it was not the urbanity that disturbed him, but the evidently rampant compulsion there for homogeneity and unambiguity of lifestyle; dispersion and multilingualism are then restoration of the order of creation and not punishment."[273] For the authors, the urban space is an essential human living space from which neither religion, theology, nor the church has been banished. However, the city is a diversified and plural living space in view of religious experiences and practices.

The EKD paper *God in the City is* also oriented towards the diversity paradigm, which becomes nicely visible in the description of urban places: "Urban places are characterised by a pluralism of life forms and value attitudes in a very confined space, combined with a great deal of individual freedom [...] The city is characterised by the living contexts of a regulated coexistence of strangers who mostly remain strangers to each other. Cities are places of life for a community that unites different origins and ways of thinking and balances them so that their interests become compatible. The integration of the stranger is the utopia of the city."[274] However, the EKD paper further classifies the urban way of life as both a promise and a betrayal. The motif of the promise can also be found in Wenzel and Sievernich. For them, the city is the *Arrival City*, a symbol of the human longing for a life of abundance. The everyday experience that this promise is not fulfilled makes a

269 Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City*, 2.

270 Which in turn goes back to Elias. Cf. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*.

271 Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City*, 3.

272 Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City*, 3.

273 Knut Wenzel and Michael Sievernich, eds., *Aufbruch in die Urbanität: Theologische Reflexionen kirchlichen Handelns in der Stadt* (Freiburg/Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2013), 7.

274 'Gott in der Stadt – Perspektiven evangelischer Kirche in der Stadt. ekd_texte_93.Pdf', 7.10.

city an ambivalent place of promise and unfulfillment. It is understood as the *insecurity of the text.*[275]

In the theological discourses conducted in England, many reflections on urbanization coincide with debates on consumer orientation. Urbanity is consistently associated with the infinite possibilities of consumption that a city has to offer. The city becomes a centre of consumption and, at the same time, a temple of consumption.[276] The motif of promise and unfulfillment is the programme.

The symbol of the city as a *secular city*[277] is outdated in theological literature because secularity is seen as part of urban plurality and diversity. Fundamentally, however, society in general and the city, in particular, are understood as a post-Christian, late-modern urban society. The Anglo-Saxon context, in particular, uses the term "post-Christiandom" in significant agreement to describe both the secularization and the privatization and individualization of Christian religiosity.[278] Nevertheless, especially in the theological literature on urbanity, it is pointed out that religious life in the city must be understood contextually from the human experience: "The authors of Faith in the City suggested that urban theology should be rooted in the personal experience and concerns of local people and that such a theology will be an authentic expression of local culture. They contended that intellectual and doctrinal styles of theology are unable to foster indigenous styles of church life and theological reflection in the city."[279] Theological literature portrays the city as a place where the transcendent creative power of God unfolds in and among people.

Despite the abundance of discourses on urbanity, a combination of difference, complexity, community, and diversity paradigms seems helpful for the present study. These discourses offer a helpful frame of reference, especially for research on the religious experience of urban people. In addition, especially in theological

275 Cf. Wenzel and Sievernich, *Aufbruch in die Urbanität*, 10–12.

276 Cf. for example Paul H. Ballard, ed., *The Church at the Centre of the City* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2008), 3–7.13–14.; Graham Cray et al., *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House, 2004), xi–xiii.9–11.84.91; Vgl. z.B. 'Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation – Faithinthecity.Pdf', 21. 24. 55, accessed 20 January 2016, https://www.churchofengland.org/media/55076/faithinthecity.pdf.

277 Cf. Cox, *The Secular City.*

278 Cf. e.g. Elieser Valentin, 'The Church, the City, and Its Mission in the Twenty-First Century', in *Christianity and Culture in the City: A Postcolonial Approach*, ed. Samuel. Cruz (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 133.

279 Michael Northcott, *Urban Theology: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1998), 3.

terms, the perspective of "etsi Deus daretur"[280] should not be neglected concerning urbanity.

A definitional summary follows to better clarify urban discourses within the horizon of theological questions: *The city is constantly re-forming itself from complex and diversified relational, digital, and spatial networks. A high frequency of interactions, encounters, and exchanges that influence and shape behaviour, morality, and religiosity are specific to urban space. In its plurality, the city is for the individual and its community forms at the same time promise and unfulfillment, dissolution and limitation, freedom and strangeness. It is the place of religious contextual experiences with creative, life-enhancing power. God as the life-giving principle is also semper ubique actuosus in the city.* For this summary, not only was the diversity paradigm consulted as an interpretative framework, but a combination of the difference, complexity, community, and diversity paradigms was used to better take into account the complex and multi-perspective urban reality of life.

3.3 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to raise awareness of the late-modern life and experience of urban people in the West. On the one hand, to show the context in which this practical theological reflection on religious experience is embedded. On the other hand, to map the space of life and experience of the research participants, which, in the sense of Elias and Foucault, is always dependent on social-structural change and its systems of language and thought.

The explanations began with a description of the mobile urban person as a *world citizen*. This outline had an almost normative character but served as a typological construct to characterize the people and society of the rich North. The people were portrayed as both culturally rooted and globally networked in the process. It was shown that descriptions of late modern individuals and societies must be multi-perspective and yet always fall short in macro-sociological terms.

Digitalization, pluralization, individualization, and urbanization were named mega-trends that determine and change the way of life of these people. Their effects on the experiential space of the subject were described. These megatrends decisively change the reality of life and the construction of (religious) experience and identity. For late-modern Westerners, the search for identity and meaning is

280 Ingolf U. Dalferth, *God first: Die reformatorische Revolution der christlichen Denkungsart* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018), 52.

an individual orientation process based on personal experience and various contextual influences.

The explanations on digitalization, showed that digitalization does not only consist of technical innovation but that it also significantly changes human life, forms of communication, perception of the world, privacy, and the public sphere. The digital space is a plural and diversified space in which many individual and group-specific normativities coexist.

Pluralization continues to increase not only on the internet but also in urban spaces. It has been described how the social, scientific, economic, educational, medical, religious, etc., spheres are becoming more differentiated. This leads to the fact that there are no longer any world views, norms, and values that transcend society or apply to everyone. This leads to states with an egalitarian self-image withdrawing their support for specific religious systems. Individualized people in a pluralistic society are thus free to determine their values, norms, and (religious) reference systems. Thus, there are hardly any typical classic biographies anymore, but somewhat differentiated biographies of choice emerge, in which the density of experience and an inner-oriented view of life dominate. This also individualizes faith and religious systems of meaning. Despite individualization, cultural language, and thought systems maintain specific power systems and power relations.

The physical living space has also changed. More than half of the world's population lives in urban areas. Specific to urban areas is the extraordinary density of people, buildings, and means of transport, the social differences, and at the same time the accessibility to education and jobs, but also the ecological problems and changed forms of community. Due to the anonymous living space, the city guarantees freedom and frees us from the compulsion of uniform communalization, but it is also always a place of strangeness. The attempt to lead a meaningful and good life was described as a communal perspective for life in urban space, in the awareness of the precise and anonymous social demands.

Urban community forms are formed through a specific place, social relationships, biographical commonalities, shared interests, work conditions, or practices. The urban community also creates identity and connection and offers protection simultaneously. However, it is liquid and fleeting.

In theological discourses on urbanity, the diversity paradigm is often used as a frame of reference. In addition to this, however, these discourses also focus on *religion, promise,* and *unfulfillment*, *longing,* the city as a *spiritual biography of civilization* and *religious, contextual experience,* and *theology.* Moreover, God as a life-giving force in the city is an integral part of the theological discourses.

Part II **Methodological Interlude**

Introduction

"Grounded theory is ideational; it is a sophisticated and careful method of idea manufacturing. The conceptual idea is its essence [...] The best way to produce is to think about one's data to generate ideas."[281] The hallmark of grounded theory is the formation of theories by developing and testing ideas.[282] In the following chapter, I will discuss the interplay between qualitative social research and practical theology. The methodology of this study, which is within the paradigm of grounded theory, will be described in detail.

281 Barney G. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory* (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1978), 9.

282 Cf. Theo Pleizier, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons: A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics* (Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2010), 85.

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4 Practical theology within the horizon of qualitative social research – Methodology

> Without empiricism, no one can get by, but everyone must get beyond empiricism. There is no practical theology without empiricism, but this requires more than empirical surveys.[283]

A study on religious experience can be assigned to both the interpretative paradigm of practical theology and that of qualitative social research.[284] This factual content must be given special consideration to avoid losing sight of the theological perspective. Nevertheless, qualitative social research, especially practical theological research, is a suitable and purposeful tool for approaching the subject matter, exploring it, and, in the next step, interpreting it theologically. For in the attentive turning to religious practice, practical theology can ensure its contextual reference and object orientation within the horizon of lived religion and theology and maintain the "field of tension between theological science and lived Christian religion".[285] This is essential insofar as it is considered that "being Christian can only ever be determined contextually. The basic impulse emanating from Jesus is taken up, continued, and transformed in a particular context."[286] Through qualitative social research, the theory-practice circle can be ensured in practical theology.[287] In this context, "[e]mpirical theology is to be understood as a theological research approach [...] which attempts to gain insights into lived religion by methodically secured recourse to experience."[288]

On the one hand, qualitative social research guarantees the central everyday relevance of practical theology. Still, at the same time, it is based on a methodological toolkit: "qualitative research pursues a critical and practical goal of knowledge

283 Michael Meyer-Blanck, 'Praktische Theologie – Mit Empirie und über die Empirie hinaus', *Praktische Theologie* 54, no. 1 (2019): 5.

284 "Qualitative, as interpretative social research, assumes that people in everyday life constantly read and interpret the reality around them." Gert Pickel and Kornelia Sammet, *Einführung in die Methoden der sozialwissenschaftlichen Religionsforschung* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014), 31.

285 Drehsen, 'Praktische Theologie', 174.

286 Grethlein, *Christsein als Lebensform*, 49.

287 Cf. Drehsen, 'Praktische Theologie', 174.

288 Hans-Günter Heimbrock and Astrid Dinter, 'Impulse der Empirischen Theologie für die Klärung des Ansatzes von "Erfahrungswissenschaft"', in *Einführung in die Empirische Theologie: Gelebte Religion erforschen*, eds. Astrid Dinter, Hans-Günter Heimbrock, and Kerstin Söderblom (Göttingen: UTB, 2007), 310.

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110990461-007

and not a purely theory-testing one."[289] Through qualitative social research, practical theology has access to the experiential world of lived religion and lived theology of different people.[290] In particular, the claim of qualitative research to describe processes, life worlds, and actions from the inside, from the point of view of the acting persons, is also helpful and progressive for practical theology. This is above all because the actors' perspectives, mechanisms of action, and patterns of interpretation of the participants are at the centre.[291]

There are overlaps in qualitative social research and practical theology, especially in their approaches to life-world phenomena, because the attentive perception of human circumstances and faith practices is fundamental to the theory-practice circle of both fields.[292] This research attitude of careful perception is strongly emphasized in conceptions of contextual theology,[293] for example, and was also favoured by Tillich.

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289 Peter Atteslander, *Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2010), 78.

290 Cf. Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London/New York: Continuum, 2011), xi.

291 Due to its hermeneutic character, practical theology in the USA claims to understand the "situation marked by profound social and cultural change". Thus Browning goes so far as to deduce the indispensability of practical theology for the social sciences, since religious pre-understanding must also be implied in the objects of research. Cf. Christian Grethlein, *Praktische Theologie* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), 133.

292 A separate debate on the question of the mutual relationship between anthropology and Christianity has been going on for more than two decades. Ethnologists themselves criticize that a strict separation of theology and anthropology is misleading: "Anthropology and sociology both founded themselves as "secular" disciplines, emphasizing the intellectual break with theology. The idea of an absolute break is a misleading one, however. The complex relationship between Christian theology and anthropological theory, a perception of which still lingers in early theory, was increasingly backgrounded as time went on. Anthropology came to believe without much qualification its own claims to be a secular discipline, and failed to notice that it had in fact incorporated a version of Augustinian or ascetic thinking within its own theoretical appartus, even in the claim to absolute secularism itself." Fenella Cannell, ed., *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 339–342.341; An approach that goes even further is represented by Scharen / Vigen. Here ethnography is understood as theology and vice versa. Cf. Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*; A very different approach is taken by Spickard, who argues that theology and ethnography are two different life activities. Serious ethnography means that theological reflection takes place only after the ethnographic data has arrived. It is a second-order activity, equally valuable but not the same. Cf. James Spickard, 'The Porcupine Tango: What Ethnography Can and Cannot Do for Theologians', *Ecclesial Practices*, no. 3 (2016): 173–81.

293 Cf. a.o. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*; Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? Second Edition: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015); Michael R. Armstrong, 'Some Ordinary Theology of Assisted Dying', *Ecclesial Practices* 5,

The primary motivation of many qualitative researchers goes beyond mere observation, documentation, and reflection. Such research approaches are intended to bring about positive changes in social systems and the lives of people, communities, institutions, and groups.[294]

In addition, the classical Reformed guiding principle *ecclesia semper reformanda est*, for example, provides a basis for ethnographic approaches. Reformed churches stand in the tradition and, at the same time, commit themselves to conducting their being church contextually and publicly in dialogue with society.[295] Thus, a qualitative-ethnographic, questioning, local, attentive, and observing essential attitude would be expected in Reformed ecclesiology.

4.1 Research subject and co-researchers

The object of research and the associated problematic situations have already been presented in the first part of the study in the sensitizing concepts. Therefore, it is only concretized here to the extent that the foundation of the theological reflection is the experiences that were classified as religious by the young people *themselves.*[296] The persons participating in the data collection were considered experts (co-researchers) on the issues to be researched and a source of specialized knowledge during the data collection process.[297]

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no. 1 (2018): 39–53; Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002).

294 Cf. Madden, *Being Ethnographic*, 33; Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 15–18.

295 Cf. e.g. Thomas Schlag, *Öffentliche Kirche: Grunddimensionen einer praktisch-theologischen Kirchentheorie* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2012); William Storrar and Andrew Morton, *Public Theology for the 21st Century* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004); Grethlein, *Praktische Theologie*, 430–48; Christoph Weber-Berg, *Reformulierter Glaube: Anstösse für kirchliche Verkündigung heute* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2016).

296 "Ultimately, everything can be called religious. There is no clear and clean definition of the religious. Neither God, nor money, nor power, nor truth are a priori religious or non-religious. There are no specifically religious objects, symbols, actions, institutions, texts or artefacts, any more than there are scientific facts that exist completely independently of economic, political, moral and, indeed, religious conditions." David Krieger, 'Was ist aus der Religionskritik der Moderne geworden, nachdem die Moderne nicht stattgefunden hat?', in *Doing Modernity – Doing Religion*, eds. Anna Daniel et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2012), 19.

297 Cf. Jochen Gläser and Grit Laudel, *Experteninterviews und Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: als Instrumente rekonstruierender Untersuchungen*, 4th ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 12.

The focus of interest is on the co-researcher's construction processes and interpretations. Thus, the research process was about making experiential knowledge explicit while valuing and accepting the autonomy and interpretative performance of the individuals.

Concerning the inductive qualitative procedure in this study, I must note that it is not so much an explicitly formulated concept of religion that makes a religious experience such. Instead, in the sense of a discursive constitution of religion, stories of experiences are told and analyzed that are presupposed to be religious experiences either because of an imprint or an intuitive pre-understanding of the co-researchers.[298]

The open and attentive observation and survey of the field *with* people form the basis of this qualitative study. The aim is to describe the religious world of life and experience from the perspective of the acting people from within, thus contributing to a better practical theological understanding of religious processes. One of the strengths of qualitative social research is that it can draw attention to typologies, processes, patterns of interpretation, and structural features. It is also suitable for researching "human groups, seeking to understand how they collectively form and maintain a culture".[299] Qualitative social research does not aim to depict objective reality but to present individual religious and social processes typologically.[300] Thus, the research process is about making experiential knowledge explicit and, at the same time, guaranteeing the autonomy and interpretative capacity of the individuals.

4.2 Research principles

To be able to research a social and religious reality, it is necessary to approach the actors in their context with a lack of prejudice and sensitivity. For this reason, I have approached the co-researchers with an open, interested, and, as far as possible, hierarchy-free attitude.

Openness is the guiding paradigm in the qualitative research process and this study. Thus, the research process, the choice of methods, and the selection of co-researchers were chosen appropriately for the object of study. Research that proceeds without a "separation of discovery and justification contexts"[301] is to be

298 Cf. Neubert, *Die diskursive Konstitution von Religion*, 32; Ricken, 'Einführung', 10.

299 Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd., 2010), 19.

300 Cf. Atteslander, *Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung*, 77.

301 Atteslander, 77.

strived for. The process character of the object and the research becomes apparent precisely in the communication process between the persons in the field and the researcher, everyday theories and scientific theory building.

In the research process, the researcher's subjectivity should not be disregarded. As a researcher, I always bring a biographically shaped perspective to theological and ethnological topics. Therefore, as a researcher, it is essential to know and reflect on one's motives and motivation for a research project: "Dealing rigorously with reflexivity is an important aspect of contemporary ethnography."[302] This reflexivity is essential to ensuring the influence of the I on the research object while guaranteeing the representation of the you. Reflective subjectivity is not a hindrance, but is described by Raymond Madden, for example, as beneficial: "[R]eflexivity is not really about 'you, the ethnographer'; it's still about 'them, the participants'. The point of getting to know 'you, the ethnographer' better, getting to know the way you influence your research, is to create a more reliable portrait, argument or theory about 'them, the participants'. Subjectivity is, therefore, not a problem for a putatively objective ethnography if it is dealt with rigorously."[303]

Qualitative research depends on a precise explication of the procedure because of its methodological variability. In addition to the description of the methodological approach in this chapter, this was ensured by field and code notes, memos and sketches.[304] In addition, the researcher was advised by sociologists on the qualitative design of the study, observed during a survey, and supported in the coding process by critical feedback from experts.

4.3 Sample structure: Case groups and locations

Following the paradigm of *grounded theory* the selection criteria of persons (groups) were handled relatively openly. The sample structure was determined step by step in the research process, based on the *theoretical sampling* of Glaser

302 Madden, *Being Ethnographic*, 2. Before the author started to explore other people's religious processes, she herself dealt intensively with her access to and experience of religious experience. Cf. chapter 1.

303 Madden, 23; Strauss and Corbin also see their own experiential reference as a useful guideline for essential research questions. Cf. Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 35–36; moreover: Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, 2. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 19.

304 Cf. Atteslander, *Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung*, 77.

and Strauss.[305] Above all, I decided on the sample configuration regarding case groups and size during the process, depending on the current knowledge and theory development state. The selection was based on concrete criteria, including relevance rather than representativeness. The aim was not to secure certainty in the sense of the *quantitative paradigm* but to develop and differentiate a theory on the processual dynamics of religious experience for practical theology.[306] Thus, the selection of groups of people was already aimed at developing typologies[307] and working out mechanisms. Therefore, I have searched for cases that would expand and contrast the knowledge as well as secure and condense it.[308]

Since the individualized, late-modern person is at the centre of the study, I chose young urban people who have had religious experiences in the Christian system of meaning[309] as the focus group. Thus, young people who met these criteria and were willing to participate in the research were sought. The co-researchers attributed the term "religious" to their experiences: "experiences deemed religious".[310]

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305 "Theoretical sampling refers to the process of data collection aimed at generating theories, during which the researcher collects, codes and analyses his/her data in parallel and decides what data to collect next and where to find it. […] The initial decision for theory-led data collection depends only on the general sociological perspective and the general topic or problem area." Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *Grounded Theory: Strategien Qualitativer Forschung*, 3rd ed. (Bern: Hans Huber, 2010), 61. 61–91.

306 This also explains why the sample size is relatively small. Cf. Uwe Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung: Eine Einführung*, 3rd ed. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: rororo, 2007), 163.

307 Cf. Udo Kelle and Susann Kluge, *Vom Einzelfall Zum Typus: Fallvergleich und Fallkontrastierung in der qualitativen Sozialforschung*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), 83–85.

308 Cf. Franz Breuer, *Reflexive Grounded Theory: Eine Einführung für die Forschungspraxis*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 57 f; Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 159.

309 Taves calls the different (religious) views of the world a *global meaning-making system*. This meaning-making system fulfils the function of finding an answer to the BIGQ (the big questions of life) in the life of the individual. Taves does not only include the world religions, but treats spiritual movements, agnosticism, and atheism on the same level. As a BIGQ, Taves lists the following questions: What is? Where does it all come from? Where are we going? What is good and what is evil? How should we act? What is true and what is false? Cf. Taves, '[Methods Series] On the Virtues of a Meaning Systems Framework for Studying Nonreligious and Religious Worldviews in the Context of Everyday Life.'; Cf. in addition Taves, 'Finding and Articulating Meaning in Secular Experience'; Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*.

310 Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, 11.

The restriction to the Christian system of meaning came from the researcher and was a decisive criterion in the case group selection.[311] The desired age of the target group was between 15 and 25 years. Three persons aged 34–50 were also integrated into the survey cycles as a small control group for contrast and theory testing. The co-researchers belong to different Christian religious traditions broadly, including Catholic, Protestant Reformed, Lutheran, and various non-denominational churches. Eight people are regularly involved in a church,[312] seven occasionally to rarely and five not at all or very infrequently (less than 1x a year).

In addition, I further increased the variation by interviewing people from different urban centres (Germany, Switzerland, USA). Since all co-researchers live in westernized, urban areas, their lifestyles and perceptions are shaped by the specifics of this cultural condition, as presented in chapter 3. The international analogies and differences were of interest for theory building. However, through conceptualizing the research questions and methods, I combined the diverse urban spaces into one ethnological field.[313]

Theory building is based on observational memos and qualitative data sets from five cycles of surveys in Los Angeles, Hanover, and Zurich, involving 17 young adults and three individuals between 34–50. I conducted the first survey in the greater Los Angeles area in March 2016. Between each data collection cycle, data was continuously transcribed,[314] coded, analyzed, and fed into the following survey. I collected additional data in Hanover and Zurich between July 2016 and July 2017. You can see the survey locations and the number of groups in the following chart.

The distribution of the people in the groups, according to gender, age, and church involvement, was as follows:[315]

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311 The reason for limiting the study to the Christian system of meaning is the need for research limitation and complexity reduction.

312 Involved in church does not refer to attending church services, but for example, participating or helping in camps, helping in confirmation classes or participating in an interdenominational prayer group in a university setting.

313 Madden makes a strong case that globalization and digitalization can also bring together ethnological fields across countries. Madden, *Being Ethnographic*, 53.

314 Only in the transcription and transfer of the Swiss data into the standard language were the following adjustments made in this habilitation thesis: For the introduction of the relative clauses, the Swiss relative pronoun *wo* was replaced with the standard language equivalent. The dative constructions with the preposition *von*, which are common in Swiss German, were formed with genitive constructions where necessary, and the *im* before year numbers, which is common in dialect, was omitted.

315 All names have been changed and are used in the study in the anonymized form.

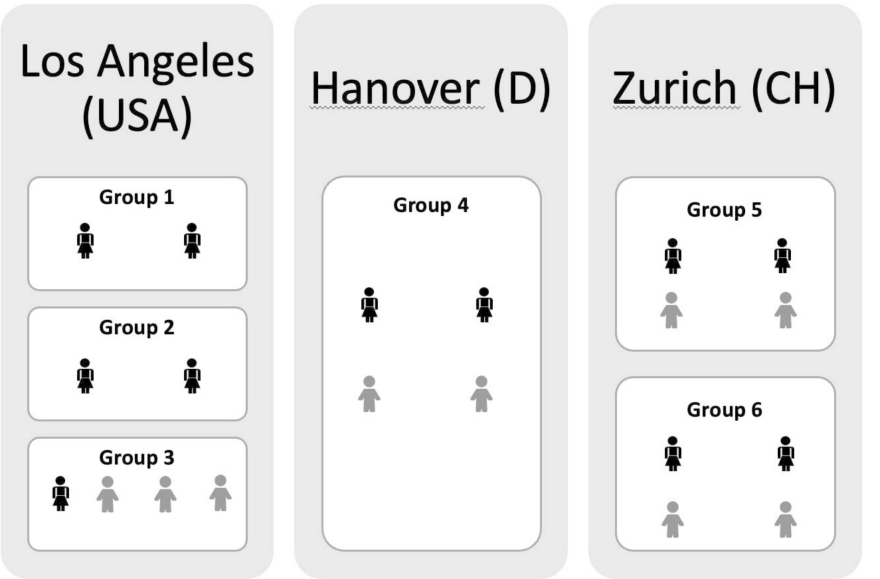

Figure 3: Overview of case groups. © Sabrina Müller.

Table 1: Overview of people

Group	Name	m/f/d	Age	Occupation	Denomination	Church involvement	Ethnic Background
1	Abby	f	21	College Student	non-denominational	as a child	Migration background Russia – USA
	Vanessa	f	18	College Student	non-denominational	as a child	Migration background Asia – USA
2	Carmen	f	50	–	–	None	African American – USA
	Kristine	f	22	College Student	–	as a child	Migration background Latin America – USA
3	John	m	14	Pupil	Protestant	Regularly	white – USA
	Micah	m	15	Pupil	non-denominational	Regularly	white – USA
	Sophie	f	15	Pupil	non-denominational	Regularly	white –USA
	Tim	m	15	Pupil	non-denominational	Regularly	white – USA

Table 1: Overview of people *(Continued)*

Group	Name	m/f/d	Age	Occupation	Denomination	Church involvement	Ethnic Background
4	Niklas	m	21	Educator	Evangelical-Lutheran	Sporadic	white – D
	Janik	m	19	Intern	Evangelical-Lutheran	Regularly	white – D
	Sabine	f	21	Intern	Evangelical-Lutheran	Regularly	white – D
	Mirjam	f	31	Theologian	Roman Catholic	Regularly	white – D
5	Ronnie	m	19	Cook	Ev.-ref.	Rare	white – CH
	Gina	f	16	Pupil	Ev.-ref.	Rare	white – CH
	Leandra	f	16	Pupil	Ev.-ref.	Rare	Migration background UK and Finland – CH
	Felix	m	21	Waiter	Ev.-ref	Sporadic	white – CH
6	Sara	f	22	College Student	Ev.-ref.	Sporadic	white – CH
	Tobi	m	23	Businessman	-	None	Migration background Philippines – CH
	Colin	m	40	Teacher/ Pastor	Ev.-ref.	Regularly	white – CH
	Simone	f	17	Pupil	Ev.-ref.	Sporadic	white – CH

In the analysis, I present the results typologically and exemplarily based on the young people's data sets.[316]

4.4 Data collection concept

During the preliminary theoretical work and the first research and discussions in the field, it became clear that a composition of methods with different approaches and dynamics was necessary to generate an adequate theory. To do justice to the research question and interest, the research could not only be done *on* and *for* but had to be done *with* people.[317] It turned out that religious experience is a highly personal

316 For the use of individuals as a common thread in an analysis cf. e. g. Pleizier, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons*, 114–16.

317 "Our society is characterized by a plurality of knowledge and values. As a result, information, communication, dialogue and cooperation [...] are becoming increasingly important. Not least for this reason, dialogue and participation procedures play an increasingly important role in empirical social research." Marlen Schulz, Birgit Mack, and Ortwin Renn, eds., *Fokusgruppen in der Empirischen Sozialwissenschaft: Von der Konzeption bis zur Auswertung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012), 7.

subject, so a religious language ability concerning the experience was little developed at the beginning of the survey cycle. Thus, the methodological composition had to aim at promoting language and reflection skills during the survey to generate a variety of data.[318] Therefore, the data collection was elaborated through a triangulation of interviewing, art-based, narrative, and interactive methodology.[319] The group setting and the interactive part of the group discussions were influenced by concepts of *Participatory Action Research*, including the work with *focus groups*.[320]

For the survey phase, a process of about 90 minutes was developed with individual phases, biographical narratives, and a group discussion. I divided the process into five phases in which different dynamics played a role. The interviews took place in small groups of 2–5 people plus the researcher. The groups were put together randomly, and the main criterion besides the selection criteria[321] was the willingness of the participants to engage with the topic through different approaches. As a result, those present either already knew each other or met for the first time.

Graphically, the survey phase looked like this:

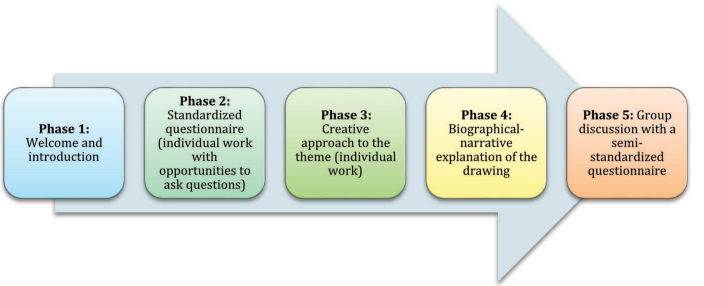

Figure 4: Survey phases.

318 It is helpful if data other than textual data in the sense of individual interviews is also available to (re)construct social and theological processes and reality. Cf. e. g. Astrid Dinter, Hans-Günter Heimbrock, and Kerstin Söderblom, eds., *Einführung in die Empirische Theologie: Gelebte Religion Erforschen* (Göttingen: UTB, 2007), 217.

319 The researcher was assisted by a sociologist in drafting the design and making improvements and adjustments, and also sought feedback from the ethnology department and a religious studies scholar.

320 Cf. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury-Huang, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*, 2nd ed. (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd, 2013); Sheri R. Klein, ed., *Action Research Methods: Plain and Simple* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 6–12; Schulz, Mack, and Renn, *Fokusgruppen in der empirischen Sozialwissenschaft*, 7.9.13.

321 Cf. sample structure: case groups and locations.

Phase 1 was characterized by a friendly *welcome and introduction.* A "friendly conversation"[322] that can be built upon and returned to later in the process is crucial for the nature and quality of the data. In *phase 2*, a *standardized questionnaire* was used. A semi-standardized guide[323] was used for phase 3, a *creative approach to the topic* and phase 5, *a group discussion.* It was explicitly pointed out in *phase 3* that the guide only served as an aid for the design of the drawing. With the questions, an impetus was given for a processual drawing. Phase 3 was characterized by a high level of concentration and silence. *Phase 4*, the *biographical-narrative explanation of the drawing*, was marked by the unrestricted attention given to each person. As each person explained their drawing, the others listened quietly. No guide was used here, but now and then, a question was asked based on the drawing instruction. Especially in the *group discussion* in *phase 5, the goal was for the conversation to take* a natural course.[324] It was observed that this was more successful as the age of the participants increased.

In the following, I will explain the phases in more detail and present the task and question complexes.

4.4.1 Preliminary phase

Not explicitly mentioned in the chart was the preliminary phase in which the requests for participation were made. Contact with the participants was established via *key persons* who were introduced to the research question and the design. These were primarily trusted persons or, in the broadest sense, authority persons (e. g., through theological training, age difference, or employment) for the participants. Thus, the survey phase was often organized by the key person themselves. Since I as the researcher travelled to urban centres for the surveys, I organized the setting myself only twice, in Los Angeles. I only had contact with the participants in

322 James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 1979), 58 – 59.

323 The guide ensured that all important topics were addressed despite the limited time. It was developed with the SPSS principle described by Helfferich, which in a four-step model of collecting, checking, sorting, subsuming (SPSS) always also guides reflection on one's own prior knowledge and the motives for the questions. Cf. Cornelia Helfferich, *Die Qualität Qualitativer Daten: Manual für die Durchführung qualitativer Interviews*, 4th ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 162 ff.

324 Cf. Christel Hopf, 'Qualitative Interviews – Ein Überblick', in *Qualitative Forschung: Ein Handbuch*, eds. Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke, 9th ed. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2005), 351.

advance when I organized the setting myself; otherwise, I got to know the people during the data collection. The *key persons* thus made the selection of participants. The key persons also had a selective perception and, as the case may be, a clear theological orientation. However, precisely because of the variability of the places and the key persons[325] – in the enquiries, conscious attention was paid to different theological orientations and imprints – this did not present itself as a striking problem. Depending on the theological orientation, other linguistic signs and codes were used. However, it was in the researcher's interest to work with people from different religious contexts and traditions in the Western world and thus compare mechanisms and contents, and find similarities and differences.

The bilingual nature of the data collected posed a challenge, as certain metaphors and words are difficult to translate and compare. This problem was addressed with attentiveness and reflexivity throughout the analysis process.[326] Where no apt and neutral equivalent terminology was possible, the meaning was rendered, or the English term was retained.

4.4.2 Phase 1: Welcome and introduction

The first phase lasted five to ten minutes and consisted of welcoming the participants and, somewhat more in-depth than the key persons had done, introducing them to the research idea. It turned out that this introduction and a detailed description of the 90-minute process were essential for the quality of the data. The co-researchers needed enough background information to grasp the process and research object.[327]

Through the help of the key persons, the participants met the researcher with goodwill and interest. In the first phase, this had to be deepened. In this stage, enough trust and security had to be conveyed so that the necessary openness was present in the following phases for the participants to devote themselves to the topic. This was a high demand on the researcher since the atmospheric condi-

325 One key person comes from the Catholic context, two are pastors of the Protestant Reformed Church in Switzerland, one comes from a non-denominational church, one is a campus chaplain at a university and the researcher herself is based in the Protestant Reformed context.

326 I am already used to researching in Anglo-Saxon and German-language contexts through previous research projects and am familiar with the pitfalls of translations. Cf. Sabrina Müller, *Fresh Expressions of Church – Beobachtungen und Interpretationen einer neuen kirchlichen Bewegung* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2016).

327 Cf. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview*, 58 – 67.

tions, in this case, could only have been created through the person, but not through the space, an extended period of time or the like.

4.4.3 Phase 2: Standardized questionnaire

As an introduction to the survey phase, the co-researchers were presented with a standardized one-page questionnaire. This format provided confidence, mainly due to its familiarity. No standardized questionnaire was foreseen in the first method design, but it became necessary in order to build a bridge between the co-researchers and the topic and to convey security. This first phase originally was planned as individual work with no opportunity for conversation. But after the first data collection, this approach was already revised in favour of improved articulation skills. In this phase, the participants had a solid need to be able to ask clarifying questions and to secure themselves thematically through short narrative examples. Because this was made possible in the further surveys, it was precisely in this phase that one could observe how the ability to speak and reflect on one's own religious experiences began to develop. This was then also the primary goal of the short, standardized questionnaire. In addition, this brief survey gave the researcher some helpful background information such as age and religious or church background or how the young people define religious experiences.

The questionnaire looked like this:

Last name
First name
Gender
Age
Telephone number and e-mail address
Profession/Education
In what kind of environment did you grow up?
☐ City
☐ Urban area
☐ Rural area
Describe your religious background (did you grow up churched or unchurched,...)
What is a religious experience for you?
Have you ever had a religious experience? At what age?
What was the setting in which you had this religious experience?
How meaningful are religious experiences for your faith?
Do you belong to a church? If yes: what denomination and what style does this church have? If not: why not?

4.4.4 Phase 3: Creative approach to the theme

After the first research in the field, it became clear to the researcher that she could not only choose cognitive approaches to the topic in the survey phases. Precisely because of the complexity and intimacy of the issue, other ways had to be found to promote the participants' verbalization and ability to reflect. Moreover, without this step, the researcher would have neglected important aspects of the topic. Thus, in the third phase, the participants were asked to make a drawing of their religious experience based on a short description. For this purpose, they were given a sheet with instructions, which had more of an orienting character than an explicit instructional character. The instructions were as follows:

1. Draw your most crucial religious experience (if you have more than one, place them on a timeline).
- How did it feel?
- What did you feel?
- What did you experience?
- Did you have bodily sensations?
- What was the setting or context of the experience?
- What were your circumstances during this time (happy, crisis, age,...)?
2. Draw the process that was triggered by your religious experience.
- What is the impact of the religious experience on your life?
- Do you recognize a process/change triggered by the experience?
- What has changed? With you? Decisions in your life? Environment? Yourself? Ethical beliefs and actions? Identity?

This phase lasted 15–20 minutes in silence as the participants spread out in the room and were absorbed in their drawings. At the beginning of the drawing process, people thought longer, raised their eyes to the ceiling, and drew hesitantly. It was noticeable, however, that there was a pivotal moment for all the people when the pictures began to emerge freely. The connection of this aha-moment during the painting to the ability to speak about the event drawn cannot be underestimated. It was perceptible that from that point on, not only did the drawings develop, but the words also took shape. In addition, the uncertainty seemed to diminish steadily. From this point on, the co-researchers often developed confidence to provide information and speak at all about religious experiences.

In addition to the narrative data, the visual data provided much basic information. Especially in the drawings, the emotional, visual, olfactory, and auditory parts of religious experience found expression.[328] In addition, in this phase, the partic-

328 Sketching and drawing are also recommended for data collection in qualitative social research. Hendrickson herself prepares her field notes this way. She propagates: "[...] looking at

ipants' individual experiences were further put together to form a coherent religious experience. Through creative engagement, "art as a process of self-reinvention"[329] could be observed in the sense of Foucault. This resulted in diverse image creations with a high symbolic content, about which the young people willingly gave information in the next step.

4.4.5 Phase 4: Biographical-narrative explanation of the drawing

From this survey step onwards, the data were recorded audio-visually.

This phase focused on the stories of the individuals. Each participant was asked to describe their drawing[330] and explain it to the others and the researcher. Each person was given a maximum of five minutes. At first, the participants freely narrated, described, and associated. If essential aspects mentioned in the instructions were missing, the researcher asked at the end of the narration.

In this phase, a decisive change could be observed among the participants. Previously, they had spoken rather timidly and awkwardly about religious experiences, but they now showed confidence in dealing with them. The narrative could be reconstructed from their own lives as a biographical narrative experience, which seemed to be helpful.[331] In addition, it could be observed that the participants appreciated the unrestricted attention.[332] This narrative interlude was necessary for the data collection. The visual data were transformed into narratives at this point, which facilitated the later analysis and ensured better comparability of the data.

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and painting the [...] resulted in both a representation of the scene as well as a vivid memory of the sensory experience [...]. Drawing, on the other hand, forces me to slow down and spend time looking and thinking. Drawing also affords me time to contemplate the theoretical issues of my study in relation to what I am observing." Carol Hendrickson, 'Ethno-Graphics', *Penn Museum*, Expedition Magazine, 52, no. 1 (2010): 36–38.

329 Karinna Riddett-Moore and Richard Siegesmund, 'Arts-Based Research: Data Are Constructed, Not Found', in *Action Research Methods: Plain and Simple*, ed. Sheri R. Klein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 112.

330 Cf. for example Marjo Buitelaar, 'Dialogical Constructions of a Muslim Self through Life Story Telling', in *Religious Stories We Live By*, eds. R. Ruard Ganzevoort, Maaike de Haardt and Michael Scherer-Rath (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 143–55.

331 Cf. James M. Day, 'Narrative, Postformal Cognition, and Religious Belief', in *Religious Stories We Live By*, eds. R. Ruard Ganzevoort, Maaike de Haardt and Michael Scherer-Rath (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 33–53.

332 'Benefit of speaking out', Pierre Bourdieu, 'Verstehen', in *Das Elend der Welt. Studienausgabe.*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu (Constance: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2005), 403.

4.4.6 Phase 5: Group discussion

After all the people could tell *their* stories undisturbed, a group discussion followed. This usually lasted 20–30 minutes. The researcher had a guideline at hand but chose a semi-standardized approach to go into specific topics in more depth, to do justice to the group dynamics and give enough space.[333]

The questionnaire contained the following questions, which, as already mentioned, were expanded, deepened, or reformulated during the discussion:

- How important are religious experiences for your faith?
- Can you explain how this particular religious moment came about?
- Why would you classify this experience as a religious experience?
- Was the experience meaningful in any way? If yes, how?
- What is different now?
- What has changed? With you? Decisions in life? Environment? Identity? Ethics?
- Do you have a relationship with God? How is your religious experience related to your relationship with God? Who is God for you? What is "holy" in your life? Do you have any religious practices in your life (prayer, worship services, meditation,…)?
- What role does the church play for you? Are you involved in the church?
- What would the church need to be like to make space for your experience? What should happen in church or at a Christian meeting so that your faith and way of experiencing God are taken into account?
- Is there anything else you would like to say or add?

The basic idea of this phase was "that there are valuable group dynamic effects in group discussions that positively influence the participants' commitment and willingness to give information."[334] The set of questions aimed at entering into a deeper conversation about the meanings and effects of the religious experiences. Especially in the group discussion, references to the previous steps of the process were noticeable. Regularly, reference was made to the biographical narrative of a person or previous statements. Thus, a lively and animated exchange could be observed. The discussion further expanded the database. This was because in the mutual in-

333 The guide ensured that the central themes and questions were addressed. However, neither the order of the questions nor the wording necessarily followed the chronological order. On the one hand, the guideline ensured that the essential topics were addressed despite the limited time frame and, on the other hand, it structured the conversations, which was helpful for the evaluation. Basically, the aim was to allow the conversation to proceed as naturally as possible and to open up a space for group dynamics and intuition. Cf. e. g. Ulrike Froschauer and Manfred Lueger, *Das qualitative Interview: Zur Praxis interpretativer Analyse sozialer Systeme* (Stuttgart: UTB, 2008), 53; Helfferich, *Die Qualität qualitativer Daten*, 159; Hopf, 'Qualitative Interviews – Ein Überblick', 351.

334 Schulz, Mack, and Renn, *Fokusgruppen in der Empirischen Sozialwissenschaft*, 13.

teraction, new topics were raised, and those already mentioned were reflected from different points of view. Through the discourses, contexts of experience were made available, and a verbal mediation of the biographical events in a life story was made possible.[335]

For the analysis of the group discussions, it was observed that a process of learning, comparison, and reflection took place during the survey. This becomes particularly clear in the analysis of the visual recordings. The researcher also addressed how individual constructions of truth are recorded in the group setting and where discourse-analytical[336] work and argumentation must be used. The research intention was a decisive reason why group discussions were integrated into the survey design. Not only should subjective opinions be recorded, but the reflections and discourse on them should be integrated as well.[337]

4.4.7 The farewell

Again, not mentioned explicitly in *Figure 4, Survey Phases* was the farewell. The (often) engaged discussion was followed by a summary of the last 90 minutes by the researcher and a thank you. As soon as the camera was turned off, the participants were most interested in what the researcher had found out and what she had observed today. The young people were happy to receive feedback on their stories and experiences. Most of the time, they left the research setting motivated and encouraged and were thankful for being part of the research process. Why this was

335 Cf. Lisa Pfahl and Boris Traue, 'Die Erfahrung des Diskurses. Zur Methode der Subjektivierungsanalyse in der Untersuchung von Bildungsprozessen', in *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse: Grundlegung eines Forschungsprogramms*, eds. Reiner Keller and Inga Truschkat, 3rd ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), 446.

336 Cf. Reiner Keller, *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse: Grundlegung eines Forschungsprogramms*, 3rd ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011).

337 The basis for discourse analysis is Foucault. According to Foucault, discourses determine ways of speaking and thinking. Discourses determine how something may and may not be talked about. Thus, the concept of discourse is closely linked to the concept of power. As an example: "The discourses of mental illness, delinquency or sexuality do not tell us what the subject is, but only what it is within a certain, very particular game of truth. But these games do not impose themselves on the subject from outside, following a necessary causality or structural determinations. Rather, they open up a field of experience in which subject and object are only constituted under certain simultaneous conditions, ceaselessly modifying their relationship to each other and thus changing the field of experience itself. This follows as a third methodological principle: to adhere to 'practices' in the analysis and to approach the investigation through what 'one does.'" Michel Foucault, *Schriften in vier Bänden. Dits et Ecrits. Schriften*, vol. IV (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), 502; Cf. also Kumlehn, 'Deutungsmacht'.

the case can only be guessed at this point. However, it was evident that a change took place in this 90-minute setting. It seemed to do the participants good to have the possibility to let others share their experiences, to be taken seriously in this, and to be able to reflect on their experiences in a group. In addition, a marked increase in theological language skills and self-confidence regarding one's own religious reality of life could be observed in the 90-minute process.

4.5 Grounded Theory: The inductive character of the survey and evaluation procedure

The interest in religious experiences arose inductively through observations in practice. The topic's centrality was observed repeatedly, both in my own pastoral practice and in my research projects.[338] Especially in pastoral care conversations, the extraordinary importance of religious experience for one's own life was striking.

In this way, the researcher became a theological flaneur[339] concerning religious experience in diverse, urban contexts and with different people.[340] From this, and through intensive engagement with current social discourses and theological conceptions of religious experience, a qualitative methodological composition emerged. The flexible methodology corresponds to and serves the subject matter and is oriented towards the discovery of theories that are systematically obtained and analyzed.[341] Ethnographic practical theological research thrives on this mentality, listening, searching, and immersing itself in different contexts. Thus, the core questions of *how and why urban people perceive their experiences as religious, categorize them and put them into language, and which transformation logics can be mapped* emerged inductively. In the preceding chapters, awareness was raised for the core issues in the sense of a deeper theoretical foundation. This was necessary to be able to grasp the object of research.

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338 E.g. during longer research stays in England. Cf. Müller, *Fresh Expressions of Church – Beobachtungen und Interpretationen einer neuen kirchlichen Bewegung*; Cf. also Sabrina Müller, 'Bedingungen eines gelingenden theologischen Diskurses mit jungen Freiwilligen', in *Jahrbuch für Jugendtheologie Band 4: 'Jedes Mal in der Kirche kam ich zum Nachdenken': Jugendliche und Kirche*, eds. Thomas Schlag and Bert Roebben (Stuttgart: Calwer, 2016), 160 – 70.

339 *Bauman, Flaneure.*

340 "In qualitative work, the researcher is supposed to influence the way the case study is to be put into practice, because the researcher's personality is thought to be his or her most significant tool." André Droogers and Anton van Harskamp, *Methods for the Study of Religious Change: From Religious Studies to Worldview Studies* (Sheffield, UK/Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2013), 4.

341 Cf. Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*, 19.

An open and as unbiased as possible approach seemed adequate and promising, in which the data are decisive for the development of the theory. Therefore, the survey and analysis process is in the interpretative paradigm of *grounded theory*, which differs from quantitative or content-analytical procedures precisely because of its openness to hypothesis and theory development results.[342] In this way, the largest possible openness about results can be guaranteed.

Grounded theory is suitable for developing an object-based theory[343] and for analyzing and triangulating diverse data such as drawings, questionnaires, and individual and group interviews. This is partly because *grounded theory is* "not so much a method or set of methods, but a methodology and style of thinking analytically about social phenomena."[344] The flexibility and variability of *grounded theory* are often used in qualitative social research because "the individual methodological steps can be structured from the phenomenon."[345]

In analyzing the diverse and multi-layered qualitative data collected (visual, narrative, and group discussions), the core question serves as a guideline. In this way, it was attempted early on to prevent disorientation in the data material and to narrow down and reduce it.[346] The data were subjected to a multi-stage computer-assisted coding process using the grounded theory[347] theoretical framework and against the research question's background.[348] They were continuously compared and condensed through open, axial, and selective coding.[349] This enabled the categories and codes to be formed inductively from the data. In the first step, the first three data sets (8 people), collected in Los Angeles, were open coded and axially condensed. Then these codes were applied to the other data sets from Zur-

342 Cf. a.o. Breuer, *Reflexive Grounded Theory*, 39 – 51; Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 386 – 87; Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*, 15 – 35; Inken Mädler, 'Ein Weg zur gegenstandsbegründeten Theoriebildung: Grounded Theory', in *Einführung in die Empirische Theologie: Gelebte Religion Erforschen*, eds. Astrid Dinter, Hans-Günter Heimbrock, and Kerstin Söderblom (Göttingen: UTB, 2007), 242.

343 Cf. Breuer, *Reflexive Grounded Theory*, 39.

344 Heiner Legewie and Barbara Schervier-Legewie, 'Anselm Strauss: Research is Hard Work, it's Always a bit Suffering. Therefore, on the Other Side Research Should be Fun', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 5, no. 3 (2004), http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/562.

345 Mädler, 'Ein Weg zur gegenstandsbegründeten Theoriebildung: Grounded Theory', 243.

346 Cf. Mädler, 'Ein Weg zur gegenstandsbegründeten Theoriebildung: Grounded Theory', 247.

347 *Cf. Glaser and Strauss, Grounded Theory.*

348 The computer software maxqda was used for this purpose. 'MAXQDA – Professionelle QDA Software für die qualitative Datenanalyse – MAXQDA – The Art of Data Analysis', accessed 12 April 2021, http://www.maxqda.de/.

349 Cf. a.o. Breuer, *Reflexive Grounded Theory*, 69 – 109; Flick, *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, 386 – 402; Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*, 115 – 29.

ich and Hanover, whereby the category and code scheme was successively expanded and adapted. The already coded data were continuously revised.[350] Open coding was maintained for a long time in this study and was applied again to the data collected later, precisely because these came from other countries. This avoided narrowing down the categories too early. As a result, 101 codes were used at the beginning, but these codes were continuously clustered so that an overview could be maintained.

All the different data, including the visual data, were deliberately subjected to the same coding process. The aim was to ensure the code tree's greatest possible unity and diversity. In addition, the different data sets were to be prevented from standing unconnected next to each other in unique code and topic blocks. Nevertheless, this procedure ensured the coherence of the various data sets in the analysis.

From the third data set onwards, open, axial, and selective coding became repetitive, striving for ever more significant theorization and conceptualization. At this stage, the memos and field notes were crucial, as they contributed to a greater degree of abstraction. Through the different coding phases and the integration of the reflection memos, it was finally possible to form a core category with which religious experience can be described as a change in the personal frame of reference.

4.6 Summary

This chapter reflected, on the one hand, the significance and synergies of qualitative social research for the theory-practice circle of practical theology and, on the other hand, presented the qualitative method design of this study. In this context, integrating qualitative social research to explore religious experiences and practical theological theory building was considered suitable and appropriate. This is because it ensures context orientation and because qualitative social research's strength is generating new theories by drawing attention to typologies, processes, patterns of interpretation, and structural features. Moreover, both disciplines have a common goal: to bring about positive changes in society, communities, institutions, and individuals.

The case group selection was relatively open. For example, urban people between the ages of 15 and 25 who live in urban areas and say they have had religious experiences were sought. These people are called co-researchers and are con-

350 Cf. Glaser and Strauss, *Grounded Theory*, 79.

sidered experts on the issues to be researched. They were approached with as open, hierarchy-free, and unprejudiced an attitude as possible.

For this to be possible and because the methodology in qualitative social research also depends on the researcher's subjectivity, reflexivity is a central and non-negligible element, which was taken into account through external consultation with sociologists, field notes, and reflection and code memos.

The data collection was presented in detail. A 90-minute (group) process consisting of five phases was designed for this purpose. In this process, there is a stimulus at the beginning after the welcome (phase 1) through a questionnaire (phase 2). The co-researchers filled in the questionnaire silently and only asked clarification questions occasionally. In the drawing phase (phase 3), this stimulus is deepened, triggering a personal process. In the biographical-narrative descriptions (phase 4), the group process begins. It occurs as the second person starts to narrate their individual experience because by then, the second person is already influenced by the first person's narrative. The dynamics of this group process must be considered from phase 4 onwards, namely within the horizon of the questions of how the individual experiences are processed together and how the discourses are constructed from them, especially in phase 5.

Moreover, the entire survey process was not only about the question of the construction of religious experiences but also their transformational effect. Therefore, the survey and evaluation procedure has an inductive character and moves within the theoretical horizon of *grounded theory* since newer approaches to religious experience are explicitly lacking in practical theology, i. e. new theories should be generated, and because openness to results is desired and essential.

Part III A Grounded Theory on the Change of the Frame of Reference through Religious Experience

Introduction

In the inductive analysis of the data, the core category of *change in the reference framework* could be identified. This core category will be outlined in the following three chapters.

To understand and comprehend this core category, the contents of religious experiences, i. e., the personal stories of the co-researchers, are central. The narratives cannot be separated from the theory and process of religious experience. Therefore, first, in chapter five, the stories are described in the form of individual case narratives. In chapter six, inner aspects and basic observations on the personal religious experiences are elaborated in a cross-case and cross-group evaluation. Finally, chapter seven presents the core category with its processual and transformative dynamics in a cross-case and cross-group evaluation.

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5 Individual case presentation: the content of religious experience

Religious experiences construct and reconstruct themselves narratively. Even though the interpretation uses typology and example, it therefore seems important for the interpretation and discussion of the results to give space to the contents of the religious experience. Since the contents are very personal and closely linked to the biography of the co-researchers and the young people are aware of the subjectivity of the experiences, verbalizing the religious experience(s) is often tricky at the beginning of a survey phase.

In the following, the experiences will be described according to groups.[351] As the drawings made by the co-researchers about their religious experiences were significantly integrated into the evaluation and, in some places, provide considerable insights into the perception and interpretation of the experiences, these are also included.

5.1 Group 1, Los Angeles: Abby and Vanessa

Abby and Vanessa are both from the West Coast of the USA. They do not know each other and have never met.

5.1.1 Abby

Abby is a 21-year-old student. She studies economics and Russian and lives on a university campus in the greater Los Angeles area. Abby grew up in a Christian family and went to a church without denominational affiliation now and then with her family. Since Abby has been studying and living on the university campus, she has hardly been active in the church. Abby feels under a lot of pressure at school and always doubts whether studying is the right thing for her. She has also had bulimia for several years and has significant problems with her self-image and self-worth. Although Abby is friendly and open, she does not talk to anyone about her problems and before her religious experience she withdrew firmly from relationships.

351 German quotations from the data material are translated, but the sentence order and choice of words were left as close as possible to German and Swiss German.

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110990461-009

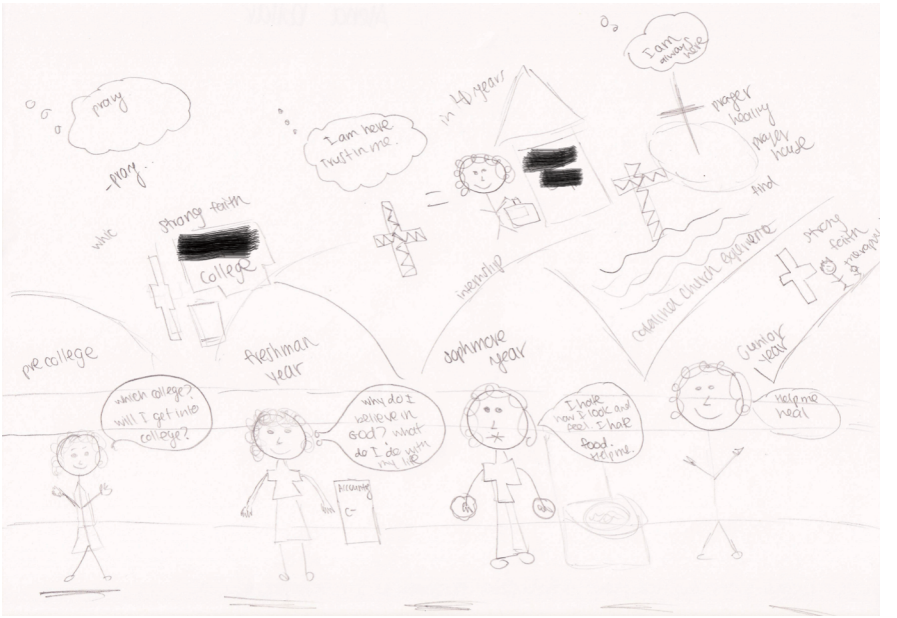

Figure 5: Drawing Abby.

Abby vomits in the toilet, but something happens: "But there was a moment in the bathroom where I realized that if I didn't stop, I would die. So, I just called for help and cried. It was a voice in my head like my body did not allow me to throw up again. As much as I tried, it wouldn't let me go. And I knew at that moment that it was a sign or something from God [...] And finally, just recently, I think through the prayers, and just through constantly praying, my faith grew stronger knowing that I could get some help. I found a therapist right here in the village."[352]

Abby's depiction of the religious experience is designed as a process and integrates the run-up, the event itself and the effects. What is particularly impressive in Abby's self-portrayal is her self-awareness.

5.1.2 Vanessa

Vanessa is an 18-year-old science student who grew up in the Los Angeles area and now goes to university there. Vanessa comes from an Asian family that converted to

352 1 EZ L.A. 1 Abby, 12.16.

Christianity when Vanessa was a child: "We converted when I was in elementary school. I didn't understand what Christianity was; I kind of just went because my parents made me. And people always talked about this Jesus and this God, and it didn't really make much sense to me."[353]

Vanessa describes her life as one characterized by a high sense of achievement. In addition, her self-worth was very dependent on the opinions, expectations, and compliments of those around her. Vanessa's narration of her religious experiences is characterized by an analytical and scientific approach, in which she often asks what makes sense. It is also noticeable that she takes authorities such as parents and teachers very seriously in her life, especially in religious matters.

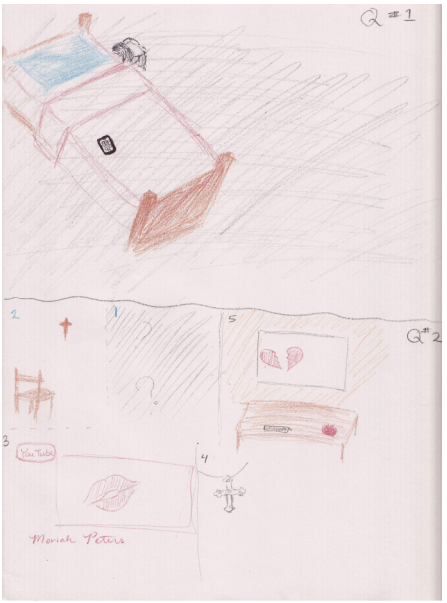

Figure 6: Drawing Vanessa.

Of several of the experiences Vanessa describes as religious, video analysis and field notes revealed that two moments in the narrative were more emotionally dense than the others. They are where she asks about the meaning of life and at the point where she decides to wear a necklace with a cross that reminds her that there is something bigger that makes sense: "I'm like, 'Oh, everything is

353 1 EZ L.A. 2 Vanessa, 7.

science-based, it has to make sense, it's logical'. And I thought, 'Well, in the end, people would just die, so why did I need to continue living or why is it so hard to be around people? Why do I have to struggle through that when I can just be gone? And it wouldn't make a difference because life would go on.' And my mom found out, and she came into my room, and even though we weren't really devout Christians, she said, 'If you're not going to do this for our family, at least do it for God' [...], And I started wearing a cross necklace, and whenever I felt nervous or really upset, I would just hold onto it. It didn't really give me this whole physical feeling; it just made me remember that it's not about me, that there's something bigger out there."[354]

In her drawing, Vanessa has chosen to depict different scenes associated with religious experiences.

5.2 Group 2, Los Angeles: Carmen and Kristine

Carmen comes from the eastern USA, and Kristine is from the west coast. The two co-researchers met in Los Angeles two months ago and have been friends ever since.

5.2.1 Carmen

Carmen is 50 years old and recently moved from Chicago to Los Angeles. Carmen is one of the three people over 26 I included in the study as a control group. Carmen does not belong to any church or denomination but is interested in religion and spirituality.

Her religious experience is divided into sequences and has to do with a difficult divorce situation: "I was going through a divorce, and my family was breaking apart, and there was a lot of anger and hurt, and I felt that I was under attack."[355] The decisive turning point in this situation was an experience in the fitness centre. Carmen was on the treadmill in the fitness centre and lost in thought. Then the gym owner interrupted her and switched on the TV: "And the gentleman who owned the gym came to me while I was on the treadmill, and he offered me the remote control, and I refused it three times. Like, 'I don't want it. I don't watch TV. No.' And for some reason, he just kept pushing it on me. So finally, I said,

354 1 EZ L.A. 2 Vanessa, 11.15.
355 1 EZ L.A. 3 Carmen, 15.

'Fine.' And then I turned on the television, and there was a minister, a female Southern minister on, who I had just caught the very beginning of her show and what she had to say was specifically an answer to every single thing that I was feeling and going through as if it was put on specifically to calm me down and to make me understand that everything was in divine order and that I was going to be fine. So, instead of having this rain cloud and all of this misery, the sun started to shine and what I felt in the moment was that God was listening to me and that there was peace and calm and that God was fighting for me, as well as answers were coming. [...] I felt like God was saying, 'Look, my child, I have this. I got it. You're fine.' And there was one part where the minister said, 'I know that someone's attacking you. You don't have to fight back; God will fight for you.' [...] And so that transformed my experience of dealing with difficult people or people that mean you harm is to overcome their evil by always being pleasant, by always being kind and considerate, and giving them what they need."[356]

In the picture of Carmen, the change in perception of the situation is impressively visible through the colour transitions.

Figure 7: Drawing Carmen.

356 1 EZ L.A. 3 Carmen, 19.21.23.

5.2.2 Kristine

Kristine (22) immigrated with her family from Mexico to the USA as a child. She went to church with her family from time to time and was active in youth work. But that was several years ago, and she hasn't been part of a church community for a long time.

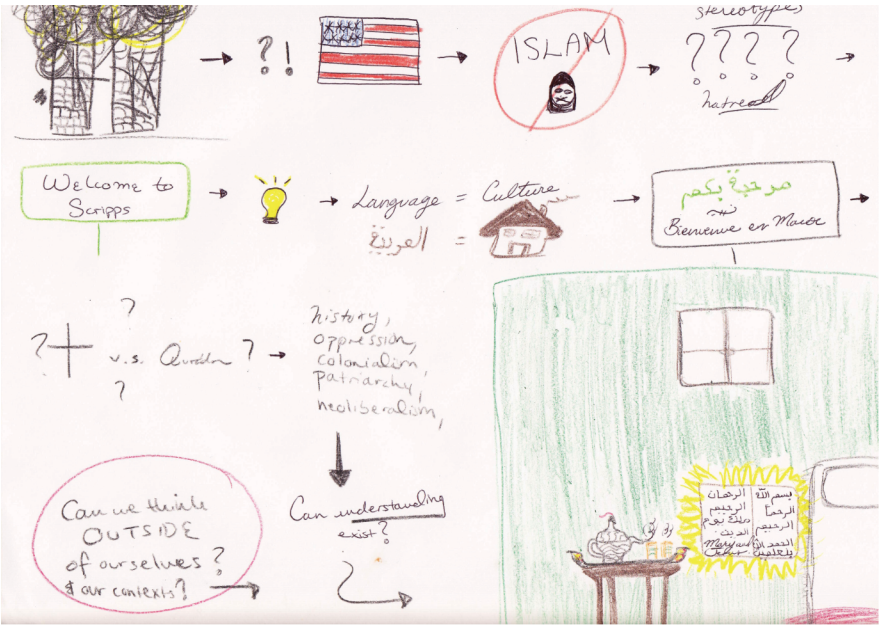

Figure 8: Drawing Kristine.

Her childhood was strongly influenced by the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001. In her school and circle of friends, she experiences strong anti-Islamic attitudes that she traces back to the terrorist attacks. In her circle of friends, all Muslims were seen as terrorists.

Kristine lives in San Francisco and is studying French and Spanish in Los Angeles but was on an exchange semester in Morocco at the time of the religious experience. In addition to her major, she has started to study Arabic and wants to improve her Arabic and French. When Kristine began learning Arabic, she gained a new perspective on the Arab world. During her exchange semester in Morocco, her image was changed again, most powerfully by an experience Kristine describes as religious. Kristine is sitting in a room with a Muslim friend, drinking

tea and discussing. The friend asks her about her Christian origins, takes the Koran and gives her a passage to read that deals with Christianity:

"So, I think the religious experience is that I felt like a light–like I put a light here (Kristine points to drawing)–I felt like a light had happened and I had recognized something. And I had seen Christian values in the Qur'an when I was reading it. So, I think that's what my religious experience was, and it really impacted me in the future to be more sensitive."[357]

5.3 Group 3, Los Angeles: John, Micah, Sophie, and Tim

John, Micah, Sophie, and Tim know each other well. They are friends and meet regularly at school and in the church youth work, where they are all involved. These co-researchers are the youngest, aged between 14 and 16. John is a bit too young for the sample but is close friends with the other three and was keen to participate in the study.

In the stories of these four young people, it is noticeable that the common church background shapes the choice of words and the images of God and it seems that a common goal is to be *joyful.* This topic is exciting from a discourse analysis point of view, but it was not central to the analysis on which this paper is based.

5.3.1 John

John is 14 years old and grew up in a family that goes to church occasionally. He was socialized in church and says of himself: "I grew up in a Christian family with Protestant beliefs."[358] At the time of the religious experience, John was on a one-week aid mission in Mexico, where he had an experience that was in contrast to his normal life. The experience itself took place during a football match: "Well, my spiritual experience was in a mission trip in Mexico, and this is me playing with some of the children in Mexico. And what we did is we drove down to a house for children who had either been abandoned by their parents or their mothers and just playing with them and seeing how joyful they were even when they had very little. It was very inspiring to me. It gave me a lot of hope, and it

357 1 EZ L.A. 4 Kristine, 22.
358 1 Q L.A. 5 John.

made me very grateful for all that I had. And I really reflect on it when I see how much joy and content they had with so little that they had."[359]

John reports that this experience has made him a more grateful person who is now more aware of what he has and how well he is doing.

Figure 9: Drawing John.

5.3.2 Micah

Micah is 15 years old and the son of the pastor of the church in which the other three are also active. In Micah's narratives, a recurring theme is his feeling of not being able to satisfy anyone and not being right the way, he is. This theme relates more to his parents in the group discussion and more to his friends in the individual narrative about his drawing.

Micah's religious experience occurs at a camp during worship time: "My spiritual experience was when I went to camp. I would go every summer for I don't know how many years–like, six years. And I felt like every year at worship–(Micah points to drawing)–I would always feel God in me, telling me stuff,

359 1 EZ L.A. 5 John, 7.

depending on what the song is about. And I would always want to take that down the mountain. It would never usually happen, but one summer, it really did. I had a tough year at school; all my friends were trying to change who I was, like Brayden and all of them. They tried to change who I was. And I was like God didn't want me to change. He wanted me to stay the same. So then, going there, I took it down the mountain to stay the same, and I was a much happier person. See? That's a smiley face (Micah points again to drawing) because I was happy [...] And it made me much more grateful for everything I had. If stuff were going hard, I would just trust God that it would get better because I had faith in Him. And I've stayed that way for a while now. Yeah, it makes me a lot happier and joyful. I felt God speaking to me to be yourself and don't let people change who you are."[360]

In Micah's case, it is also exciting that he has participated in so many religious events and camps through his father that this has become normal and part of everyday life. Nevertheless, this experience stands out because he realized that he does not have to satisfy his friends or father but is allowed to be himself.

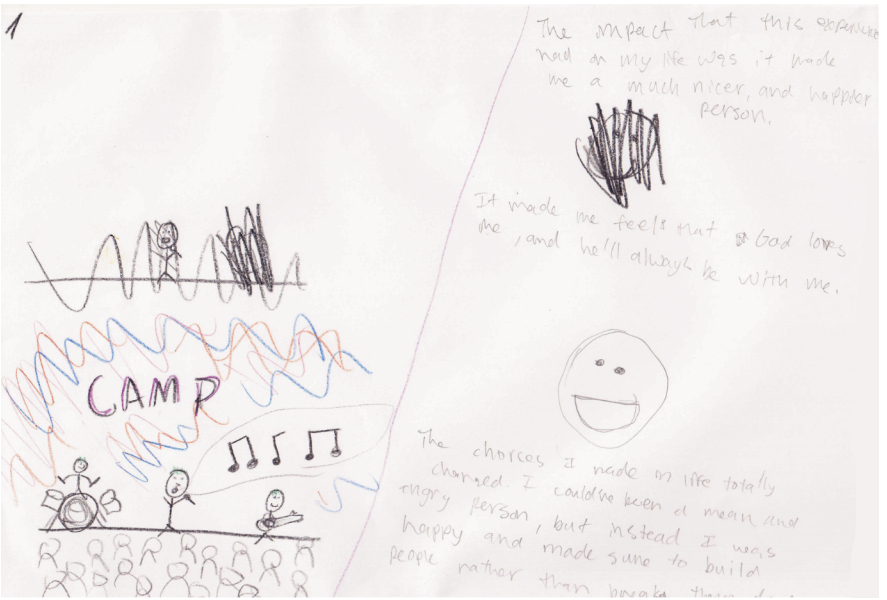

Figure 10: Drawing Micah.

360 1 EZ L.A. 6 Micah, 7.10.13.

5.3.3 Sophie

Sophie is a 15-year-old student going to high school. She grew up in a Christian family; both parents were ministers in a Methodist church. However, at the time of the survey, both parents no longer worked in a church.

In Sophie's story, it becomes clear that she first had to break away from her parents' religious convictions to be able to grow into an independent Christian faith herself. The powerful trigger for this was a concert she attended: "And at first, I was kind of excited to go, but I didn't think that it would be that much different from the other concerts I'd been to. Just because it was just a Christian concert, I didn't think it was going to be anything special."[361] Contrary to her expectations, something happened for Sophie at this concert: "So, they asked people that had been diagnosed or were sick with something to come up. [...] And then the woman in the purple shirt, it took her a few minutes to go up there because she seemed kind of ashamed of it, while the man in the yellow shirt seemed really proud of it. And everyone prayed for them, and it was really cool. And afterwards, I felt like I should go talk to the woman in purple, and I introduced myself, and this was the time when my grandma had a stomach problem, and she was in a coma where her stomach her intestines got infected. So they had to do an immediate surgery, and the chance of her surviving was little to none at all because it was really high risk. And it went really well. And so, I was thinking about that as I was walking up to her, and she actually had something wrong with her kidneys and intestines. She had, I think, kidney or liver intestine disease-cancer or something like that. And so, I felt it was kind of weird that our stories were really similar. And that night, I went home and I just kind of realized that if these people can be so joyful when their lives aren't even in their hands, and that they can't even do anything if they're going to die or not. And I'm not all the time joyful when I'm completely well, and I don't have to worry about dying. And the next day-I grew up in a Christian house, and I've always felt God, but I've never really wanted to pursue something with Him. And after that, I've started pursuing and putting more work into it, just because I like the idea of being joyful all the time and having someone on my side that I can talk to."[362]

361 1 EZ L.A. 7 Sophie, 7.

362 1 EZ L.A. 7 Sophie, 13.15.

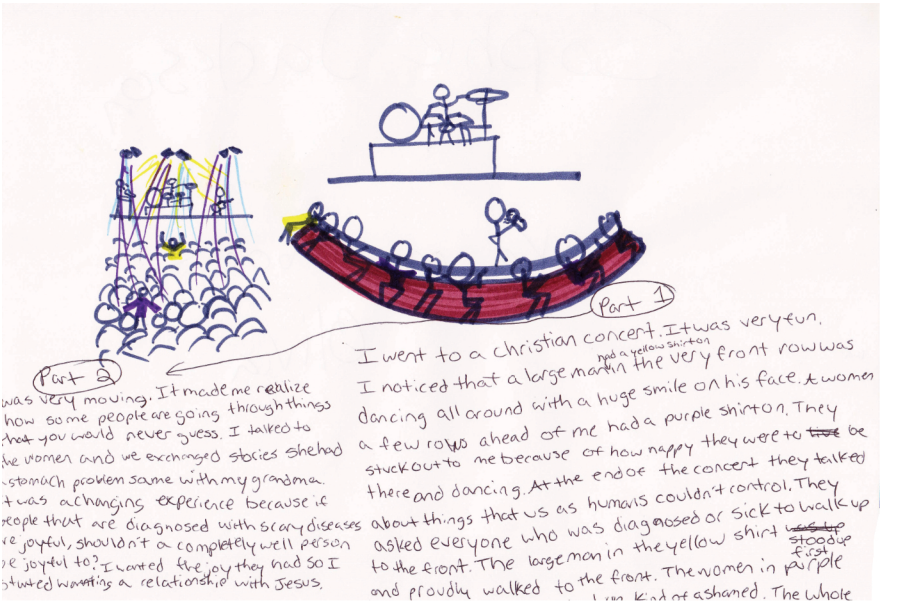

Figure 11: Drawing Sophie.

5.3.4 Tim

Tim is Sophie's twin brother and grew up in the same family. He also goes to the same high school as Sophie. Tim was the last to narrate his experience, and it was noticeable that he felt overwhelmed by the task. Many of the words he used in the narration appeared in the narratives of his friends and sister. Nevertheless, the issue of *trust* seems to be significant with Tim. Religious experience for him is an accumulation of religious experiences, which he finds mainly in a Christian setting, especially in worship music. These shared worship times increased his trust in God; Tim says: "And for me, like, it helped me to trust Him more and not just say like, 'Oh yeah, I trust Him and whatnot,' but to actually trust Him and to actually do it."[363] The religious experience he recounted took place at a camp: "Okay, so my drawing is when we were at camp also with the worship band. And I really liked it. I really like the music because, to me, it felt like another form of prayer, in that kind of sense where you can talk to God also because a lot of songs are prayers to God. And I just like how they're put to music and stuff. And I felt happy

363 1 D L.A. 8 Tim, 59.

when we were doing it because I really liked it, and I really liked being able to feel God and stuff. So, I really liked that experience. And then, up until that point, I wasn't really trusting God fully with everything, but then after that, I began to try to trust God with more stuff."[364]

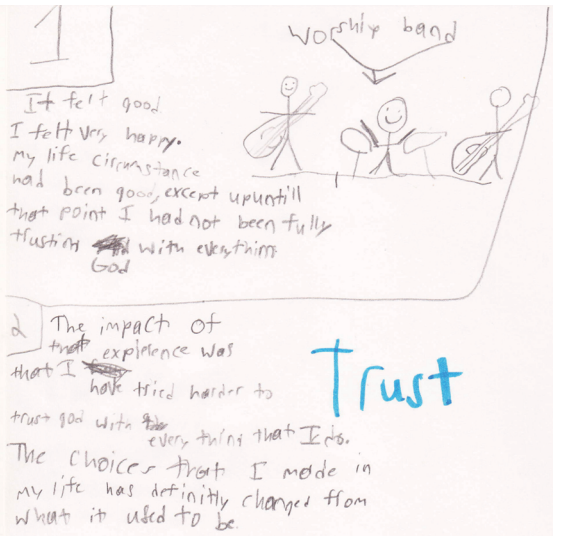

Figure 12: Drawing Tim.

As is clear from Tim's narrative, he is also concerned, like Sophie, with personally finding access to the Christian content he has learnt. Tim expresses this through the term *trust.* He wants to trust God himself and out of himself and discover God in his life.

5.4 Group 4, Hanover: Niklas, Janik, Sabine, and Mirjam

The fourth survey took place in Germany in Hanover. Three people in the group, Niklas, Janik, and Sabine, knew each other. Mirjam did not know the young adults but could put me in touch with these co-researchers through an acquaintance. In addition, Mirjam organized the room and the meeting and participated in the research. Mirjam herself belongs to the adult control group and is a theologian.

364 1 EZ L.A. 8 Tim, 7.

5.4.1 Niklas

Niklas is 21 years old and works as an educator. He was baptized and confirmed in the Protestant Church. His religious experience, which has left a lasting mark on his life, goes back to his childhood. Niklas was hospitalized with meningitis when he was about five years old. It could not be determined what was wrong with Niklas for a long time, and he lay in intensive care for over three weeks: "And at that time, the church was still utterly absurd for me. For me, there was still nothing that I could or should believe. The worst thing about that time was that I didn't know what would happen to me. Whether I would survive or whether I would live with a disability later on. I couldn't speak during the three weeks, and then, after the three weeks, when I started to walk again and learned to talk and so on, I realized, ok, that must have been a guardian angel who somehow got you out of this situation. He wanted you to live. And since then, I have told my mother, yes, I would like to go to church more, I would like to try out everything there is to do, and then I was in the children's choir and took part in the nativity play and all that kind of stuff in church. And since that point, the church has been something massive for me. […] I wear my confirmation cross on those occasions when I'm nervous or need luck. We got a cross like this for confirmation, a cross necklace, and it's my lucky charm, so to speak, for these times when there's stress."[365]

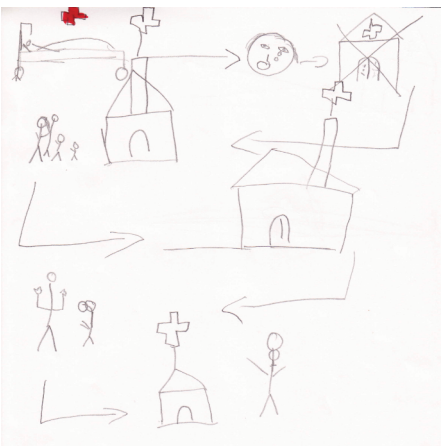

Figure 13: Drawing Niklas.

365 2 EZ HA 1 Niklas, 3.4.6.

Niklas's religious experience dates back about 16 years, but it was evident during the survey that this experience is still very present and highly emotional for the 21-year-old. This experience explains his attachment to the church.

5.4.2 Janik

Janik is 19 years old and is currently doing a *voluntary social year* (FSJ) at the Protestant City Youth Service. In Janik's narratives about what he describes as religious experiences, other people occupy an essential place.

Janik grew up as a foster child in various families but had contact with the church through a foster mother, so he went to the children's service and was confirmed, and he also stood in for the organist at the children's service. This brought him into contact with people from the Protestant Youth (children's and youth work of the Protestant Church in Germany), who made a strong impression on him: "Then there was a super cool Protestant Youth with many people who were somehow older. I could relate to them and noticed that I was still growing with these people and that they were exciting for me. […] And the most exciting thing for me was that before, in my church community, I didn't really have a connection to faith at first. […] And then, at this church district level, I somehow got to know a super cool deacon with whom I could somehow talk a lot about my faith. […] I think that has shaped me the most. It's just really, somehow, the conversations with the people. […] To somehow sit down and ask, what does faith do to you? […] Exactly, that is the fundamental thing for me. Otherwise, I won't come to faith. I have to feel something somehow there, and it has to make sense to me. That there is something and that I believe in something must also bring me something. Otherwise, faith brings me somehow nothing; otherwise, I can learn something by heart, but that's not what I feel. […] and I don't believe that God somehow wants us to stand still or somehow wants us to move forward, and it is precisely this insight that I have realized for myself, hey, I feel God where I am, and not just in church."[366] Through Janik's biography, with the changing family circumstances, the stable relationships in the Evangelical Youth became very important for him. The exchange, reflection, and further development are things that he understands as a religious experience that shapes him.

366 2 EZ HA 2 Janik, 7.13.15.18.21.29.

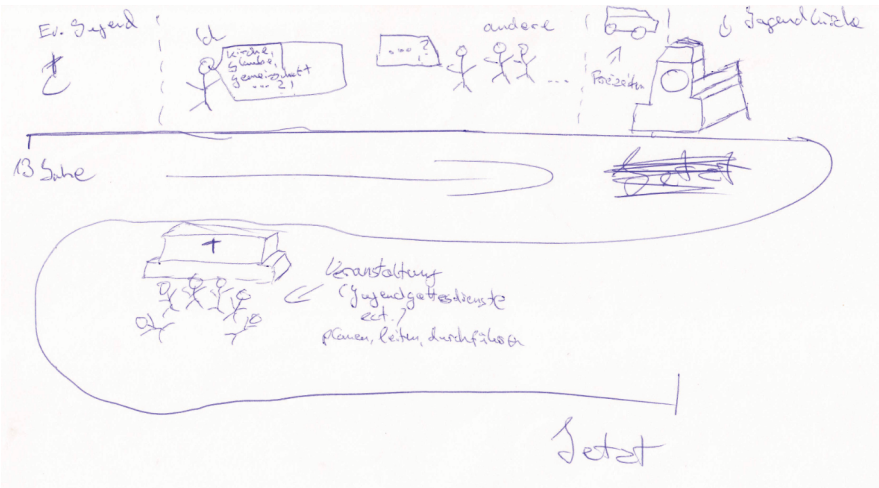

Figure 14: Drawing Janik.

5.4.3 Sabine

Sabine is 21 years old and is currently doing an internship at a youth church in Hanover, which has much to do with her religious experience. Sabine grew up in a family that, although they are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, do not actively participate in church life or attend church services. However, like many of her friends, Sabine participated in the children's church service and was later confirmed. What shaped Sabine, however, was that she prayed the *Lord's Prayer* every evening with her father, who hardly ever went to church.

Sabine's narrative of religious experience begins with her dropping out of university. Sabine wanted to become a teacher, graduated from high school at a very young age, and then dropped out after a short time. She had been at home for several months then but did not know what to do with her life and what education interested her.

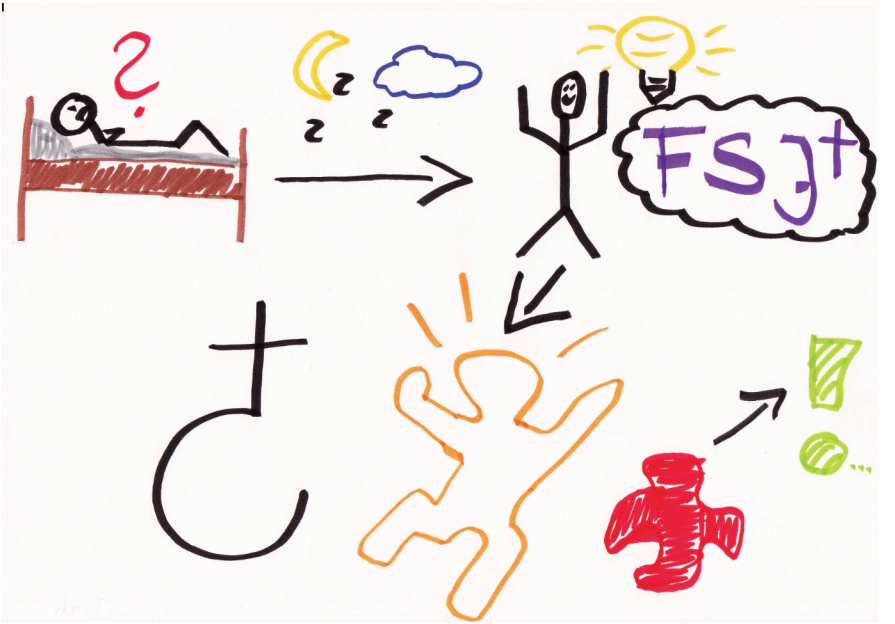

Figure 15: Drawing Sabine.

"I don't know if I really prayed the night before the experience. I was asleep, and the next morning I woke up and knew I could do a social year at the Diakonie. I saw it in purple here (points to the picture), and I was delighted with the idea, so I applied; during my interview, they brought me to the youth church, and that's how I got to know the Protestant Youth. [...] And through this decision, which somehow came overnight, I'm not really aware of why I made it in the first place. I just woke up in the morning and knew this is what I want to do now. And that after weeks of lying around in bed and being in a bad mood, I somehow found it very, very, as if God gave me such a shot in the right direction. And now, after this year, I also know that I want to go further in what I've been doing all year, and yes, I think my religious experience is in the sense that, yes, God put me on the right path when I didn't know anymore what to do with my life now."[367]

367 2 EZ HA 3 Sabine, 3.5.

5.4.4 Mirjam

Mirjam is 31 years old and a theologian. She grew up in the countryside but has lived in Hanover for some time. In the narrative, she reflects that her religious experiences often occur at life's turning points.

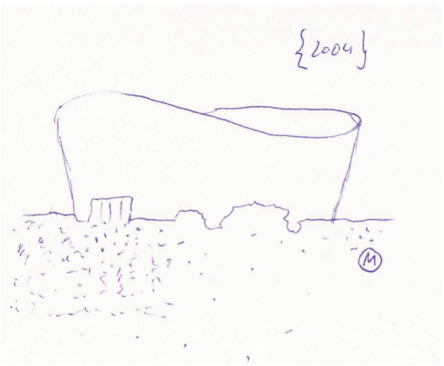

Figure 16: Drawing Mirjam.

Her religious experience is related to a Metallica concert. Mirjam was very annoyed with her classmates shortly before graduating from high school. That's why she decided to take time out together with her boyfriend at the time. The two bought tickets for a Metallica concert and went to Munich. "And I don't really like crowds, which is unusual because I really like going to metal concerts. But you can see the M here (pointing to the picture), and that's me, and you can see here that I'm not in this crowd [...]. Suddenly, a guy came out of the cordoned-off area and somehow handed out golden bracelets. And man, if there's something to get there and it looks fancy, so we grabbed two of those gold bracelets. And then when we get in, we realize that it was pure luck or maybe not because we got these bracelets to get into the front row. And then we stood in the front row for an evening and had our eyes on Metallica. That was a religious experience for me, also at the time, which was important to me because I saw that as incredible; it may sound banal, but it was a huge gift at the time. Just to drive 300 km, to get in the car and say, we're just going to rock, even though everything is annoying us right now and even though we were maybe a bit afraid of what was coming. [...] I noticed afterwards, that was one of the biggest effects, that I realized, gosh Mirjam, there is more to life than this time of graduation [...]. So there is more, we can approach certain things calmly, and there is someone or something that ensures a different reality or that, yes, simply also ensures that at that point I can think beyond that, for example, I can go to normal places where everyone

goes and simply relax, calm down. It allows me to trust myself much more than I can do myself."[368]

5.5 Group 5, Zurich: Ronnie, Gina, Leandra, and Felix

Ronnie, Gina, Leandra, and Felix knew each other before the data collection. Ronnie and Felix are good friends, as are Gina and Leandra. Gina and Leandra know Ronnie because he was a cook at their confirmation camp, and they know Felix because he is a group leader in the confirmation classes. All four live in the Zurich conurbation and have come into contact with Christian content and the church mainly through church lessons.

5.5.1 Ronnie

19-year-old *Ronnie* works as a cook. His family are members of the Evangelical Reformed Church but do not actively participate in church life. Ronnie was influenced by his time in confirmation classes.
Ronnie was in the final year of his apprenticeship as a cook at the time of the religious experience and had agreed to cook for the whole group at the confirmation camp. He describes this camp as having had a profound impact on his faith. It should be emphasized that Ronnie did not participate in the camp program because he was mainly in the kitchen. From time to time, however, he was present in the content-related parts, especially in the evening: "I drew a situation in which I was at the confirmation camp in 2016, in Saas-Grund in the kitchen, and there we took communion in front of the fire on the second-to-last evening, and for me, that was an exceptional situation, simply for the reason that when we were all standing there like that, I broke out in a sweat, it ran cold down my back. I felt like I was no longer entirely under control. I wanted to move my arm, but it just didn't move. Nevertheless, there was a certain warmth around the fire, a feeling of security that I hadn't known before. Then I thought, well, I'm not sick anymore, even if I had been ill two days earlier, but I really associated it with God, and that's actually what my drawing shows. […] When I look back, that was actually the point at which I really had to say, yes, well, there is someone up there. Before that, it was always like, yes, God can exist, but he doesn't have to, but that was really the point at which I had to say, yes, he does exist. In what form is always a bit

368 2 EZ HA 4 Mirjam, 9.11.13.15.

Figure 17: Drawing Ronnie.

of a question, I don't know yet, but that was actually a bit of the origin of my faith."[369]

5.5.2 Gina

Gina is 16 years old and goes to grammar school. She says that she did not grow up in church but attended church classes from the 3rd grade onwards. Otherwise, she rarely went to church on Sundays, although her father was on the church board.

Gina openly says that she is unsure whether she can and should believe in a God. For Gina, however, religion and compassion are crucially connected. Despite her doubts, she tells of various experiences that she interprets as religious experiences and which have impressed themselves on her: "I just wanted to draw little situations like that. I once (points to the picture) held up someone's lift, so when the door closes, or on the train, when the door begins to close I briefly go to push the button; these are such small things, but it shows that somehow, that even though there are millions of people in this world, that somehow you feel for the individual maybe for 5 seconds and briefly press the button so that he catches the train or the lift or something. I also drew such a situation here (pointing to

369 3 EZ ZH 1 Ronnie, 3.10.

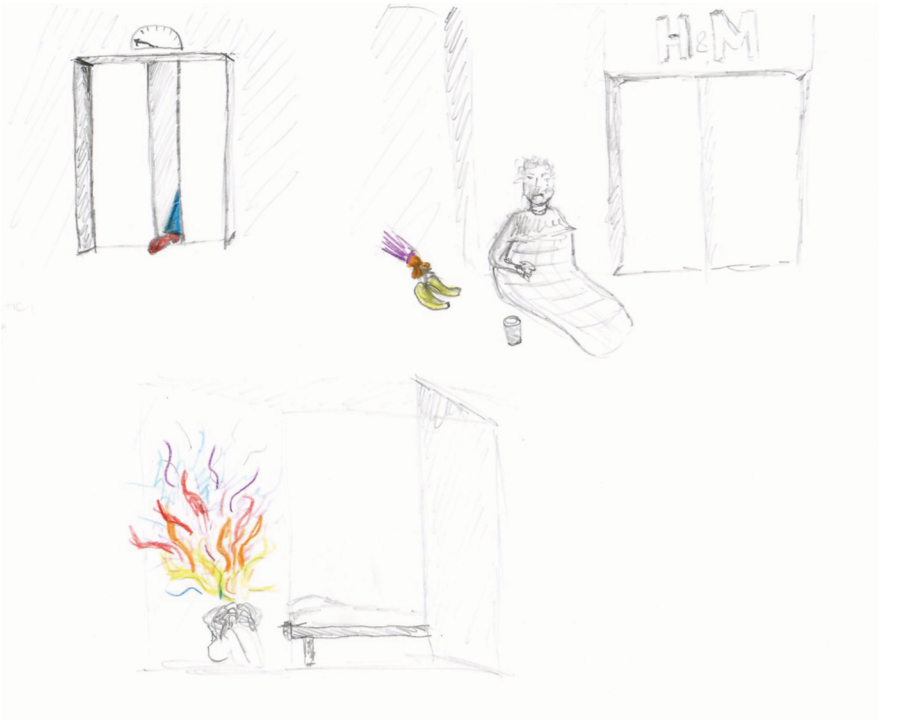

Figure 18: Drawing Gina.

the picture). I went to Constance with my boyfriend for two days, and in Constance, it is very extreme that you see homeless people everywhere. Of course, we were only there for two days, but somehow, we spent the whole weekend bringing bananas and bread rolls to these homeless people. That's also something like showing a little compassion, even though you don't know these people at all. You don't really have anything to do with them or anything. But you still want to help them somehow. […] This is a little different from the other two drawings, but somehow the hour just for me helped me a lot, and I didn't really feel God, I can't really say so, but just the thoughts you had and so on. It triggered something in me and strengthened my faith; I can't describe why because I didn't feel God, but somehow it strengthened 'him' (the faith), so I don't know why."[370]

370 3 EZ ZH 2 Gina, 8.10.12.

5.5.3 Leandra

Leandra, also 16, is a student at a commercial high school. Her parents have no church affiliation. However, Leandra attended church classes from the 3rd grade onwards and was confirmed. The confirmation classes, led by a team of young people and the pastor, appealed to her very much. As a result, she is now involved in this confirmation team.

In Leandra's drawing of her religious experience, the play with colours is very clearly expressed. She describes this experience as transitioning from shades of grey to a colourful image. Although Leandra grew up predominantly secular due to her family background, she has depicted Jesus of Nazareth in her painting.

Figure 19: Drawing Leandra.

Leandra begins her story by saying that she did not pass the probationary period at the grammar school. Back at secondary school, she fell into a black hole: "Everybody: no, come on, you will manage somehow; I just excluded everybody [...], I fell into a hole. Yes, that on the drawing should be the black hole, and also the book that Jesus holds up are thus lives of different people, and that's just my life, and that's just that point when I was there – (pointing to the picture) and that's me. That's the little person there, the little thing. I really shut everybody out, and I didn't do anything. I didn't go to sec either, even though I should have done some-

thing."[371] Leandra found out that she might still have a chance to get into a higher level of education after secondary school, as her entrance exam was still valid for a commercial secondary school. So, she waited several weeks for a rejection or acceptance letter from the school: "It was in a study session where you're always in the school auditorium, and then the bell rang, and I could go out, and then they just said, yes I got it. And I just found, I looked at it all the time, it was mega warm the phone, and that was my experience. Then when the phone rang, I picked it up, and it was really so warm, and then I thought there was no sun, and it was all cold and shady, it was just after winter, so spring, and it was still so warm. No one gave me this job somehow; a colleague gave me the phone or my mother or something. Of course, the school did it, but it could have been that I didn't get it, that I could go back to school or somehow. So, for me, the experience was just, somehow, something higher that made this phone ring. For me, it was somehow just like that. […] And that's colourful, that it's away from black, should represent that."[372]

For Leandra, this phone call, the news that she would be admitted to the commercial high school, was a formative religious experience. This news transformed the dull grey inside her into a new colourful perspective. This change connects her to God and interprets the event as a religious experience.

5.5.4 Felix

Felix is a catering specialist and is 21 years old. He comes from a family which is a member of the Swiss Evangelical-Reformed Church but has no connection to the church. Accordingly, he says that he did not grow up religiously. However, he attended church classes from the third grade onwards and was confirmed.

He has recorded his religious experiences on a timeline. He started in 2012 at the confirmation camp in Taizé and ended in 2017 when he described an experience with a demon. In his picture, differences between safe places and the rather gloomy outside world become visible. God, as in most paintings, is represented with light and bright colours. "It all started with my confirmation camp in Taizé in 2012 […] I was really in a state of tossing and turning, I had a bit of a mental breakdown, and I remember we had a church service, a lovely one, and we sang songs, and because my psyche was so damaged and I was really down, I started to cry and then my colleagues thought, yes, go to sleep in your room. Then I went

371 3 EZ ZH 3 Leandra, 6.9.
372 3 EZ ZH 3 Leandra, 11.14.

out, and during the service, I kept thinking, 'God, if you exist, give me a sign. [...]' Then I left the service and went in the direction of the dormitories, and a stranger ran after me and just hugged me and told me that God is with you, and that was for me, the basic point, so to speak, why-, that was a sign for me that God exists."[373]

Figure 20: Drawing Felix.

On the second point, Felix describes an experience when he cooked with Ronnie at the confirmation camp: "As we had taken communion and burned the letters of the young people. It was like a dome formed around us. So, I felt it and noticed it became hot as if we were sealed off from the outside world. It was um not oppressive but liberating, nice, and warm."[374] For the third experience, which Felix classifies as religious, he talks about a demon: "Then the third picture. That's 2017; I had a little problem with a demon. With the help of Adrian (pastor), I could defeat that, that is, get rid of the demon. His former confirmation teacher was also there. So, the three of us performed so to say an exorcism in quotation marks, and yes, um, I got rid of it, and it showed me that 'yes, right' it's the opposite of God, but I got rid of it with God's help."[375]

373 3 EZ ZH 4 Felix, 5.
374 3 EZ ZH 4 Felix, 9.
375 3 EZ ZH 4 Felix, 11.

5.6 Group 6, Zurich: Sara, Tobi, Colin, and Simone

The fourth group consists of people who also live in the Zurich agglomeration. Colin was the contact person and invited the other three young adults to this survey. He is the local pastor and knows all three who do not know each other or do not know each other well. Colin also participated in the survey and belongs to the older control group.

5.6.1 Sara

Sara is 22 years old and studies in Zurich. She says she grew up as a Christian but only rarely went to church, for example, at Christmas and Easter. With her grandparents, however, the *Lord's Prayer* was always prayed before dinner. Sara was confirmed by Colin and has been involved in the church's annual youth camp ever since. She leads the confirmation camp with Colin and other youths and young adults.

Figure 21: Drawing Sara.

Sara's most critical religious experiences are based on the church camps in which she is involved and are strongly connected to the camps: "Well, I've actually hung everything on the camps for me, because those are my, actually my religious experiences – the important religious experiences in the year. So, on the one hand for me and on the other hand also to see how other people experience it, so how we live religion together. For me, religion has a lot to do with community, and uh, I drew a camp house in the mountains because we are often in the mountains, and each window represents one of the camps we have been to so far. [...] the community and you just deal with your faith, and I always find it nice when then in a discussion such trains of thought emerge in which before not always-, so you have maybe not already thought about what you believe yourself."[376]

For Sara, the camps offer spaces where she finds time to think about her religious beliefs and reflect on them in conversation with other people. The camp community and the culture of discourse are vital to her.

5.6.2 Tobi

Tobi is 23 years old and has completed a commercial apprenticeship. However, he is more of a bon vivant who has always been self-employed. Tobi is of Filipino origin and grew up with his grandparents, who had little contact with the church. Nevertheless, Tobi had himself confirmed. A central theme in Tobi's life is that he feels lonely and not understood.

He had an incisive religious experience at 17 during a challenging phase in his life: "So my first drawing is about when I was 17 years old. I grew up with my grandparents, and yes, when I went through puberty, it became relatively complicated, with alcohol and, let's say, all kinds of things. When the whole thing escalated, the police came to our house that day. And I'm the black guy (in the drawing) sitting on the floor, and I didn't know what to do. The only person I could think of to call, sitting next to me, was my pastor Colin from the confirmation camp. And yes, I think he came straight out of a meeting to help me. Yes, it was relatively difficult for me because I had the feeling that I was all alone in this world and no one could help me, and then Colin came. I expected him to be angry with me, too, and the opposite was the case. He was very sweet and told me to open the door, not lock myself in. Because Colin was a priest, I questioned the whole thing. What is his motivation? Why is he helping a young person like me? I was only in the confirmation camp, and I don't know if I participated that well; I just ensured I didn't

376 4 EZ SG 1 Sara, 4.11.

Figure 22: Drawing Tobi.

get into any problems. And yes, the feeling was like, actually in the rain I'm squatting in, that the sun is rising, I'm not so alone after all. And this motivation that drives my pastor could well be that it drives me too. Yes, and this moment, when things aren't going so well, and there are problems again, I just think back to that moment. It couldn't have been worse than it was there, so it can't get as bad as it was there. […] Yes, it was clear to me – yes, I don't know what it looked like inside him, but it was clear to me that it was God. Because, I suppose, otherwise, he wouldn't have chosen this path, that is, to study theology."[377]

5.6.3 Colin

Colin works as a pastor in the Zurich area and is 40 years old. He was immediately willing to participate in the study and invite young people from his congregation. He deliberately asked young people whom he did not count as part of the core church community. Colin drew a timeline on his picture with smaller and two larger dots. For him, there are many religious experiences in life, but not all are equally incisive: "And what the yellow line means to me (shows the line on the picture) is actually the divine, which also works through people, which has always been there. That sometimes worked consciously and sometimes unconsciously, and so

377 4 EZ SG 2 Tobi, 3.6.8.20.

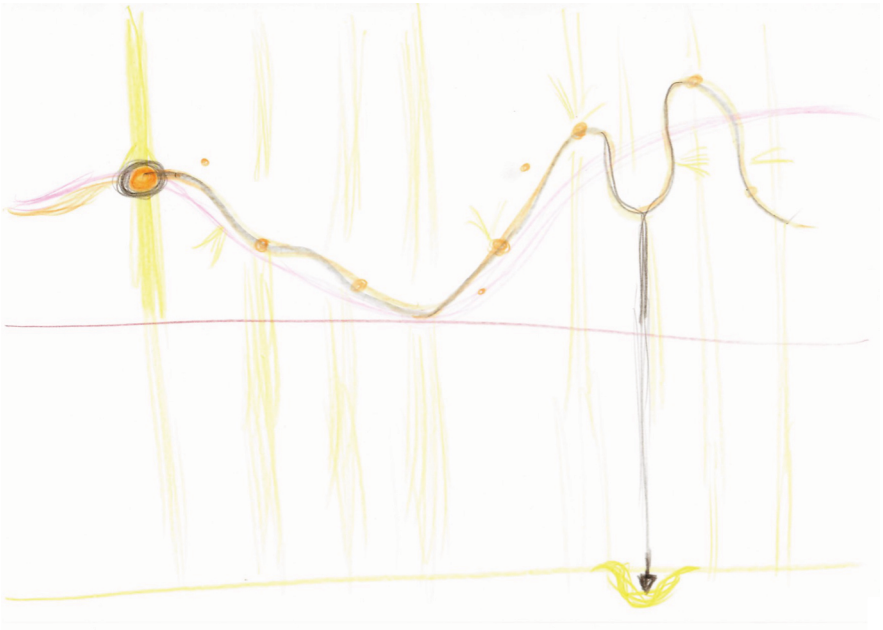

Figure 23: Drawing Colin.

the religious experiences, the many points (shows the points on the picture), are also the ones from everyday life with the family. These are small individual cases that not for me – are religious experiences not necessarily bound to God; they can also work or function through people."[378]

Colin had two meaningful religious experiences abroad, one as a child and one as an adult when he almost drowned. His first experience was in Cameroon at the age of 10. He was visiting an uncle with his family. During that time, there was fighting in Cameroon, and there were dead bodies on the ground. During this time, the family had to cross a dangerous area with the uncle and the cousins: "There were corpses on the ground, and then we said, yes, can't we stop and help? Then they said, no, that's much too dangerous, so we'll go on. Then we were there for a few days, I think I was in a pre-pubescent phase, and I had the feeling, what kind of God is this that allows this to happen? Then we were told that a hazardous route was coming up today; once we had passed through these three villages, everything would be fine. Exactly, I said in advance, so dear God,

378 4 EZ SG 3 Colin, 10.

now please do something, let's see that you exist. [...] we couldn't get away with the truck, and within maybe 40 seconds, 50 people came running out of the bush with machetes in their hands, with torches, with everything and talked in their English to my cousin and the driver, and I think the idea would have been that they would kill us now. [...] So it was striking, they were extremely aggressive, they were hitting the car, and somehow, I don't know if the boss, somebody came and said, yeah it's fine, you can go and then we could drive on. That was quite an intense experience."[379] The second event Colin recounts happened on a congregational trip in Costa Rica: "We arrived in the evening, and we went for a swim. Not much thought into it. And at some point, I wanted to swim back in, and I couldn't get in. It kept pulling me out. I started to crawl, even faster, even more, and always. – Then I caught a wave above it and tried again. It didn't go forward. And then it was really the last second, I thought, ok, now life is over; I think about what has happened and am, [...] in this stress, always swallowed even faster, even more, even more water, and so really, I would say about three seconds before drowning, I somehow got across. [...] I think God would work through people just like directly; it doesn't have to go that far. – Now those were just two so special experiences."[380]

5.6.4 Simone

Simone is 17 years old and attends high school. She went to church from time to time but not regularly, mainly when her mother and sister had a performance with the church choir.

Simone's religious experience took place on a city trip in a group where they came into contact with homeless people. Colin advertised the trip as post-confirmation, and Simone went along out of interest. On the trip, the group had the task of doing something good for a person in Barcelona: "He was just here (pointing to the picture) in the rubbish bin, digging with his shopping trolley, and then we were four or five girls, we saw him and started talking to him. He didn't speak German, only Chinese, which was a bit difficult, but we talked to him, and some of us bought him something to eat. Then I stayed with one of our group and started talking to him using gestures. Yes, that was the trigger because it was about charity, especially in the camp.

379 4 EZ SG 3 Colin, 6.
380 4 EZ SG 3 Colin, 8.17.

Figure 24: Drawing Simone.

When he left, I went away crying because I felt so happy. He was so radiant at the end and also cried when he left because I think that was because no one had talked to him for a long time, and that was the trigger. [...] After that, I decided to write my Matura paper on charity. For that, I had to read some things in the Bible. For that, I also had to go to a Christian institution, a home for the disabled, and work there. [...]. I think it all has a little to do with that. His story (points to the drawn book) also has a lot to do with God, and yes, I think everything religious also belongs to God somehow."[381]

5.7 Summary: Defining religious experience from the perspective of the co-researchers

Religious experiences are perceived as a snapshot in which a process is triggered. Mirjam summarizes these moments: "[I]t seems to me that religious experiences are sacred times. That sometimes maybe make you take your shoes off, so they are also holy words, but I think that describes it, times that make me feel that there is such a thing as eternity."[382] In addition, these experiences are associated with transcendence by all co-researchers, and most place them in a Christian sys-

381 4 EZ SG 4 Simone, 7.9.14.
382 2 D HA 4 Mirjam, 134.

tem of meaning.[383] Religious experience is associated with uncontrollability, (God) cognition, new insights, and high emotionality.

The definitions of the co-researchers are listed below, so an overview can be given. It is essential to mention that these definitions emerged at the very beginning of the survey and were further differentiated in the course of the survey process, especially in the group discussion, and above all, became biographically anchored:

Abby: This experience is a moment in my life without my control or anyone else's. I have no explanation for the event or feeling. I only know that there is a greater power.[384]
Vanessa: Knowing that I am loved and feeling humbled by the knowledge that God exists.[385]
Carmen: Anything that connects me to the divine presence. Nature an overwhelming connection to Divinity – and especially answered prayer as well as knowing that I am hearing, seeing, feeling, answers to the need in questions in my spirit.[386]
Kristine: I believe that a religious experience is when a person feels a strong connection to a higher power/being and feels more at peace and changed after the experience.[387]
John: To me, a religious experience is any experience in which I see God at work.[388]
Micah: A religious experience is something that I think all Christians will have throughout their lives.[389]
Sophie: It's a time when you feel God and, for me, want to pursue a relationship.[390]
Tim: Anything that has to do with the God of Christianity.[391]
Niklas: A religious experience for me is when I experience something that gives me confidence and shows me that no matter what I do, God is with me.[392]
Janik: A religious experience for me is something where I share my thoughts, feelings with others, or feel God with me.[393]
Sabine: A moment or a situation in which God made himself felt.[394]
Mirjam: An experience I cannot create myself that touches my innermost being and leaves it changed.[395]

383 The classification in the Christian system of meaning is not surprising in my opinion, because it was already determined in the research design that this study should be limited to religious phenomena in Christianity. Accordingly, young people who say that they have had religious experiences in the Christian system of meaning participated in the surveys.
384 1 Q L.A. 1 Abby.
385 1 Q L.A. 2 Vanessa.
386 1 Q L.A. 3 Carmen.
387 1 Q L.A. 4 Kristine.
388 1 Q L.A. 5 John.
389 1 Q L.A. 6 Micah.
390 1 Q L.A. 7 Sophie.
391 1 Q L.A. 8 Tim.
392 2 Q HA 1 Niklas.
393 2 Q HA 2 Janik.
394 2 Q HA 3 Sabine.
395 2 Q HA 4 Mirjam.

Ronnie: For me, a religious experience is one in which a special feeling comes forth, e. g., security, safety.[396]
Gina: An experience where you feel that there is more than just living and then dying.[397]
Leandra: An experience with a higher power which helped me find my way.[398]
Felix: For me, a religious experience is an experience with God in which you psychologically take a step towards knowing that God exists.[399]
Sara: A spiritual experience. I experience this, especially in connection with a community.[400]
Tobi: For me, a religious experience is when just a train of thought or something like a spontaneous inspiration changes my feeling/state positively.[401]
Colin: An experience between God and human being and experienced in the human medium.[402]
Simone: Attending church services, conversing with religious people, singing/praying before meals.[403]

In the co-researchers' stories, the religious experience and the changes that come from it are the *work of God* or *experiences of faith.* This means that transcendence is part and content of the experiences, and God or a higher power is seen as the impetus for change. All experiences have in common that they always bring about a change in and of everyday life. Despite the solid reference for transcendence in the definitions of religious experience, the co-researchers assume that these experiences are also interpreted experiences.[404] Thus, transcendence and interpretation are not mutually exclusive in the personal descriptions of religious experience. Transcendental experiences and interpreted experiences go hand in hand. It is striking that a substantial concept of God and religion, and the awareness of the individual interpretive practice of religious experiences do not have to be a dualism. Among the co-researchers, these things are naturally thought of together and seen as complementary dimensions.

396 3 Q ZH 1 Ronnie.
397 3 Q ZH 2 Gina.
398 3 Q ZH 3 Leandra.
399 3 Q ZH 4 Felix.
400 4 Q SG 1 Sara.
401 4 Q SG 2 Tobi.
402 4 Q SG 3 Colin.
403 4 Q SG 4 Simone.
404 Cf. the two chapters: verbalization and subjectivity.

6 Excursus: Inner aspects and basic observations on the religious experiences of the cross-case and cross-group evaluation

The core of the inductive analysis consists of the chapter on *changing the personal frame of reference.* Here, many processual aspects are in the foreground. Parallel to this, some themes emerged as essential during the coding process, which cannot be directly assigned to the processual aspects but are central to a fundamental understanding of religious experience. In these aspects, the *significance* of religious experience for the individual, the multi-layered topic of *imprinting* and the challenges of *verbalizing* such experiences become visible precisely because of their high *subjectivity.* I will present these four themes below.

6.1 The meaning of religious experiences for the co-researchers

Religious experiences are essential for many of the co-researchers and are milestones in their religious biography and identity. The importance of religious experiences for the co-researchers was already clarified in the introductory questionnaire; this was taken up later in the survey, especially in the group discussions.

Religious experiences are closely linked to a personal appropriation of "learned" and "shaped" contents of the faith. They are what lead to a personal appropriation of (Christian) religious content. Sophie brings this to the point both in the questionnaire and in the discussion: "They help bring to life the concepts you are taught."[405] and "They completely changed my faith for me."[406] Religious experiences thus bring something to life or awaken something to life that gains personal significance to such an extent that it leads to a change in the frame of reference under certain circumstances. In the religious experience, an imprint and prior knowledge is brought to life and thereby gains personal significance to the extent that it takes on the function of pointing to God: "I feel that religious experiences are important to my life because they remind me that a higher power exists."[407] This reference function becomes visible even when religious experience is not presented as essential, as in Micah's questionnaire: "Religious experiences don't have

405 1 Q L.A. 7 Sophie.
406 1 D L.A. 7 Sophie, 51.
407 1 Q L.A. 4 Kristine.

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110990461-010

much importance in my faith, to be honest. The only importance that it has is it reminds me that God is always there."[408]

The importance of religious experience lies not only in its indicative function, but it is also described as the cornerstone of personal faith: "I think they support my faith and give a – maybe a cornerstone for it."[409] Also, for the co-researchers, who grew up with a rather unchurched background, it is the religious experiences that make faith possible: "The only thing that has really changed is that now I sort of believe that God exists, but it doesn't really affect my everyday life itself. There are certain situations, like sometimes in the evening when you're alone or something, where you come back to that, think about that, pray accordingly, but now for normal everyday life, nothing has changed for me personally."[410] Sabine goes so far as to see the religious experience as the basis of faith, mainly because the Western world and Western thinking are designed for proof, and religious experience provides that 'proof'. Thereby, experience and imprinting are also linked in Sabine's train of thought: "I can imagine that it has to do with an educational issue somewhere, that especially in the Western world we are educated to question everything. If we have no proof of something, even if we only see the proof for ourselves, then it can't exist. That's why people who are believers also consciously, just like you (looks at Mirjam), consciously see something divine in a situation and therefore project it into God. If they don't have that, then they are simply not believers. So, in the Western world, at least, since we question everything, I think there is no faith without religious experience. That's how I could explain it."[411]

Which functions religious experiences take over in detail and how the interplay of contingency and resilience, faith and (God-)knowledge looks like will be explained in more detail in the chapter 'Processual aspects: Religious experience and the change of the personal frame of reference - cross-case and cross-group evaluation'.

6.2 "Imprinting" as a liquid phenomenon before, during, and after a religious experience

As has been seen in the previous chapter, religious experience can be seen as a significant factor in bringing learned religious content to life and enabling personal appropriation. All co-researchers had access to religious knowledge, e.g., through

408 1 Q L.A. 6 Micah.
409 1 D L.A. 5 John, 4.
410 3 D ZH 1 Ronnie, 8.
411 2 D HA 3 Sabine, 46.

confirmation classes or through the family. However, the significance of religious content for personal life was only revealed through the experience(s) themselves.

In the case of this typological research, a religious imprint that enables specific Christian interpretations cannot be reduced to family background alone, for as can be seen in the narratives of the co-researchers, there are also religious imprints before, during, and after the religious experience that are important for the change and maintenance of the change in the personal frame of reference, as for example, in Sabine's case: "Yes, so actually only after the FSJ had started. Because of the feeling I had there, I very quickly felt very much at home and comfortable in our church. The conversations with my leader, our leaders, that, yes, that's when I first registered that, that was definitely God, that kind of security, that's how I got it."[412] (Religious) imprints happen on so many different levels, such as family, friendship, and media, but also social media, with a hobby and the leisure sector in general – we should remember here, for example, the stories with Carmen's TV sermon in the fitness centre and Vanessa's YouTube song video.

In the narratives, it can be seen that there are different levels of imprinting which influence each other and cannot be sharply separated. For example, among the co-researchers, there are familial, relational, and content-related religious imprints, as well as those that arise through religious practices.[413] These imprints are very diverse and, at the same time, always experience counter-imprints. Thus, religious imprinting must also be understood as a liquid phenomenon due to the conditions of plural and late-modern society.

Many co-researchers, who come from the USA, have been shaped by Christianity in their families. Except for Carmen, they all went to church with their family from time to time and Abby, John, Micah, Sophie, and Tim participated in Christian youth camps.[414] In contrast, most of the German and Swiss co-researchers came into increased contact with Christian content, later on, e.g., through church lessons and confirmation, as for example, Ronnie and Leandra: "I grew up in a family that is religious, but not strictly religious. I was influenced by the confirmation

412 2 EZ HA 3 Sabine, 17.

413 Cf. e.g. Ronnie, for whom the religious practice coincides with the religious experience: "I drew a situation in which I was at a confirmation camp in 2016, in Saas-Grund in the kitchen and there we took communion in front of the fire on the second to last evening and for me that was a very special situation, […] but I then really associated it with God and that is actually what my drawing shows." 3 EZ ZH 1 Ronnie, 3. Or Vanessa, who describes one of her ritualized religious practices as follows: "And I started wearing a cross necklace and whenever I felt nervous or really upset, I would just hold onto it." 1 EZ L.A. 2 Vanessa, 15.

414 Cf. e.g., 1 Q L.A. 1 Abby, 1 Q L.A. 5 John, 1 Q L.A. 6 Micah, 1 Q L.A. 7 Sophie, 1 Q L.A. 8 Tim.

classes."[415] "With my parents -> not at all, only from the 3rd class."[416] Therefore, in these narratives, pastors, and church lessons play an essential role in terms of religiously formative factors.

The stories show that not only individual persons are religiously influential, but also different groups of people who were given the code *Christian setting* in the analysis. Sara, for example, says: "Yes, the community and you just deal with your faith, and I always think it's nice when, in a discussion, trains of thought come up that you haven't always thought about before, so maybe you haven't thought about what you actually believe yourself."[417]

So, it is individuals, but also communities, e.g. from the circle of friends, the youth church, or a prayer group at the university, who are religiously formative for the co-researchers. Likewise, religious songs and streamed church services can also be formative for the personal interpretation of life. In addition, religious imprinting via YouTube, social media, and various television channels is not to be neglected, especially in the USA.[418]

6.3 Verbalization

The narratives reveal that religious experience is a highly personal subject. The young people who voluntarily participated in the research could not spontaneously draw on a pre-formed narrative. At the beginning of each phase of the survey, regardless of country, place, age, or the degree of attachment to the church, there was a questioning, uncertain speechlessness. All participants first needed to link the topic to their lives. This occurred mainly in conversations before the survey and while filling out the questionnaire.

The short, standardized questionnaire proved central to getting to a point where personal stories could be told. In addition, it was precisely in this first phase of the survey that a process of communication among themselves and with the researcher could be observed, namely about whether it was legitimate

415 3 Q ZH 1 Ronnie.

416 3 Q ZH 3 Leandra.

417 4 EZ SG 1 Sara, 11.

418 Two differences within the co-researchers' group should be pointed out here: In this typological research, the family environment is more likely to have a religious influence in the USA, whereas in Germany and Switzerland it is more likely to be the church-institutional environment or its representatives. The second difference lies in the religious influence of media aspects, which is more pronounced in the co-researcher groups from the USA than in those from continental Europe.

in this setting to relate experiences that had taken place in an everyday setting, but which were personally interpreted as religious. It was observed that a personal attribution process had already taken place but that these experiences had never or hardly been talked about up to that point. It seemed as if the religious experiences were kept a secret. It was clear to the co-researchers in private that they understood their experience as a religious experience, yet this seemed to be questionable in a community setting or at the beginning of this survey.

For example, John asked if it was legitimate to talk about an experience that did not occur in a church. Kristine wanted to know if it was okay to recount an experience while she was reading the Koran. Abby commented that she had to reconstruct a part of her life because it was only in this context that her religious experiences made sense. The same was evident in the German-speaking context; the experiences were never told independently of the biographies but permanently embedded in a narrative anchored in the life story.

The time between the lines of the questionnaires became essential for finding language. Equally central for the theological language ability, however, were the drawings. In the drawing, the particular everyday experience could be reconstructed from one's life as a religious experience. This resulted in various picture creations with a high symbolic content, about which the young people later gave information. The aesthetic bridge over symbols led to a narrative written in verbal language. It seemed as if in the reconstructions themselves, another religious experience was being made beyond the experience of the original experience.[419] Experience that was already implicitly accomplished now happened explicitly here, through the process of communication with others. But even in the individual biographical narratives based on the drawing, it is evident how words and language are struggled with, especially in the video recordings. There are many incomplete sentences, they are often interrupted and restarted, and the narrative thread is taken up again differently.

6.4 Subjectivity

Ambivalence in classifying the experience also becomes visible from time to time. This was most evident in the group discussion during the first survey in the Zurich area. All participants recounted their experiences, and three of the four clearly de-

419 Analogies of this process can be drawn to Jüngel's understanding of *experience with experience*. Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *Erfahrungen mit der Erfahrung: Unterwegs bemerkt* (Stuttgart: Radius, 2008).

fined them as religious experiences. However, Gina described herself as being torn between the small everyday experiences she classified as divine and her uncertainty about whether God exists. In the group discussion, her friends reacted pastorally to this. Two of the three people also questioned the everyday effect of religious experience and the certainty that God exists. Towards the end of the discussion, on the other hand, they all spoke of God and tried to trace their image of God. This intense ambivalence was unique to this group but is implicit in other discussions. A struggle with what is a religious experience and the relativity of this must be seen as a feature of such experiences. This could be read as a contrast to other codes but is discussed by the young people as more minor than a contrast and more as part of these phenomena.[420]

Especially in terms of ambivalence, subjectivity, linguistic ability, and clarity, the farewell phase was striking, as already mentioned in the methodological chapter. After the survey, the young people thanked me for allowing them to participate. The participants also did not leave the room immediately, but many informal conversations and queries still took place during this period. The reason for this can only be surmised and reconstructed from the interview notes, but the co-researchers seemed strengthened in their theological language skills and sense of self-efficacy.

The participants' experiences are characterized by subjectivity, as they can only be reported but not observed.[421] The truth of the reality of an experience can always be questioned, since the understanding of the self, the world, and beliefs depend on one's own and the contextual horizon of interpretation. Most of the young people seemed to be aware of this and explicitly assigned their experiences to an individual level of truth, e.g., Leandra: "I'll join the two right away. Because I don't think you can say: yes, it is a religious experience – just like that, it is, I don't think you can say that. You have to be able to assess that personally."[422] Or Ronnie in the same discussion: "I would also say it's completely type-dependent and a matter of opinion. Because one person might say that the sweating I had, well, I was sick two days ago, it still comes from that. And another would see it completely differently and say, well, it's a religious experience, and I think that believing or not believing is simply a matter of opinion. "[423] Or Sara: "I believe in all the different religions we have on earth. For me, it's all the same God. Where people just make explanations in their way about the meaning, what drives you."[424] Suppose

420 Cf. 3 D ZH.
421 Cf. Wissmann, 'Erfahrung I', 84.
422 3 D ZH 3 Leandra, 38.
423 3 D ZH 1 Ronnie, 41.
424 4 D ZH 1 Sara, 140.

the discourse on subjectivity and personal normativity is also analyzed based on age and country. In that case, two conspicuous features emerge: The young participants in the USA (under 20) were less aware of the subjectivity of religious experiences and, based on this, of personal normativity than participants in Switzerland.

On the one hand, this may be because all co-researchers in Switzerland are members of the Protestant Reformed Church and have taken part in religious education but have hardly participated regularly in church life as a whole family. On the other hand, the awareness of the subjectivity of religious experiences is also age-dependent, so it was self-evident for the older control group and almost all participants older than 19. Mirjam formulated this as follows: "And I can't help but interpret it theologically, I can't help but interpret it religiously, I can't help but say, why is she standing there on the street and annoying me? Because I think she's standing there on the street for a reason."[425]

However, this fact also seems to be a barrier for young people to verbalize their religious experiences. The experience, often existential and transcendent for them, stands in the tension between enlightened objective reality and subjective, intuitive, and transcendent knowledge. The hermeneutic process is complicated because most religious moments are everyday experiences or have taken place in a familiar setting. Since the experiences of the young people are private and personal experiences that are often not told to anyone (all 20 participants stated that they had never or rarely talked about these experiences) and which have not already been classified by an institutional framework, the subjectivity and thus the hermeneutic uncertainty is reinforced. Nevertheless, it turns out that it is precisely repetitive experiences, i.e., ordinary everyday moments, that can become extraordinary experiences. In Abby's case, the normality of bulimia is broken by something; in Carmen's case, the usual setting in the gym; in Sabine's case, a realization forms overnight in her bedroom and in Kristine's case, a conversation among friends becomes a very formative experience.

6.5 Summary

The importance of religious experience for the individual and their biography cannot be underestimated. Many co-researchers agreed that religious experiences play a significant role in their lives. Yet the co-researchers never or hardly ever talk about their religious experiences. Dealing with it is like dealing with a secret

425 2 D HA 4 Mirjam, 19.

that is well guarded. This may be due, on the one hand, to the often everyday setting of the experiences, but on the other hand to the awareness of subjectivity and the difficulty of verbalization.[426]

Religious imprinting plays a vital role in this topic. This is true in two respects: on the one hand, concerning interpreting an experience as religious. The assignment to a system of meaning does not happen arbitrarily but is based on previous knowledge and various influences. On the other hand, it also concerns the formation of faith itself because it is a personal experience that brings both prior religious knowledge and family imprinting to *life.* Here again, it becomes clear how essential personal experience is for constructing religious experiences for late-modern urban people.

426 In addition, it can be noted that *talking about* religious experiences also concerns systemic issues. It could be that there is a social barrier to talking about religious experiences. For one's own subjectivity of a religious experience is not only rooted in the subject itself, but also in the fact that it is learned that speaking about these experiences is subjective and private. This would then make the verbalization of religious experiences and phenomena not only an individual problem, but an issue for society as a whole.

7 Processual aspects: Religious experience and the change of the personal frame of reference – cross-case and cross-group evaluation

This chapter is the centre of the qualitative data analysis because it is here that I present and explain in detail the core category, which I formed through the inductive coding process. It becomes apparent that the religious experiences described by the co-researchers are not some insignificant experiences but rather they are experiences that fundamentally change the personal frame of reference. Theologically, the change in the individual frame of reference is in the tension between interpretation and revelation and testifies to how experience becomes faith. However, it seems striking that the co-researchers' stories are not so much conversion experiences in the classical sense, which lead to the first insight that God exists and to great enthusiasm. In addition, many co-researchers had already located themselves in the Christian system of meaning before their religious experience. Nevertheless, all the experiences have in common that they are personal experiences of appropriating faith that point to something transcendent.

The *change in the personal frame of reference* must be understood both selectively and as a process: selectively in that the change of the personal frame of reference is triggered by a lived experience; as a process because the interpretation of the past experiences also influences future experiences, and thus leads to either consolidation or (dissolution) of this religious frame of reference.

During the surveys and the evaluation, it was surprising to see how familiar settings can become personal arenas of religious experience. Thus, the narratives presented here often refer to everyday or camp experiences through which the co-researchers come to a significant new realization, which then influences and changes how they lead their everyday lives. The experiences, interpreted as religious experiences, considerably impact the view of the world and the self.

I will present in this chapter what the *personal frame of reference change* entails, how this process is carried out and what effects and changes result from it. I begin with primary considerations about *the lived experience of changing the personal frame of reference.* Then the process of this change is described in detail.

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7.1 Religious experience: from experience to changing the frame of reference

It must be mentioned at the outset that the core category and thus also the guiding theory of *change in the personal frame of reference* cannot be equated with positive change. It is much more fundamentally about a process of transforming a person in which the axioms of the given frame of reference are changed, rearranged, and put together. As already mentioned, this is only a selective process to a certain extent. The core category of *change in the personal frame of reference* already implies that a processual rather than static theoretical framework must follow.

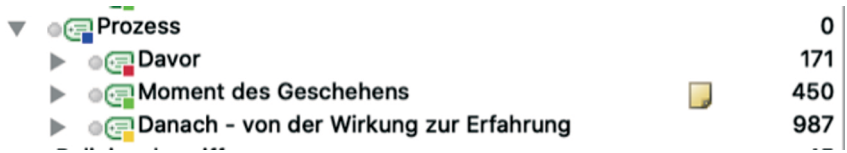

Figure 25: Coding process.

In brief, this consists of a *before*, a *moment of the event*, and an *after*. It is noticeable that 171 codes were set for the *before*, 450 for the *moment of the event*, and 987 for the *after*. From the number of codes assigned, it can already be recognized that the significance of religious experience definitely also lies in the *after* and the resulting changed way of perceiving and self-perception.

In itself, however, the process is more complex because nine non-linear process steps are part of changing the personal frame of reference. This means that themes can be assigned to the purely temporal three-step of *before* – the *moment of the event* – *after*. Thus, it is not the temporal dimension that is essential but the content. The *before* comprises *experiences of contingency* and *conflict*, an *active search movement* and *relational impulses*. At the *moment of happening – the religious resonance space and the special everyday experience, the place, embodiment* and *emotions*, and the *ability to remember* and *(god) cognition* are thematized. The period *afterwards – from effect to experience* is composed of the chapters *self-efficacy and dissolution of limitation*, the *effects on everyday life* and *faith – knowledge – certainty*.

In the following, the processes will be presented in detail.

Figure 26: Code tree.

7.2 Before – Contingency, Search, and Relationship

The *before* of a religious experience is not to be understood as a fixed time frame; rather, it can mean both a phase of life and a specific event in which experiences of conflict and contingency are condensed, and the individual reacts to them with an active – conscious or unconscious – search movement.

In this phase, the concept of imprinting seems interesting because it is not only the family and religious background that shapes the interpretation of particular everyday experiences but also the current social setting. Abby was raised as a Christian and occasionally went to church with her family. Currently, however, she is increasingly influenced by the secular and religiously critical context of the university where she has been living for two years: “So, in college, I always grew up in a family that went to church, not every single week, but most of the time. So, it was really easy for me to enjoy going to the different events that they had and the Bible studies, so I was pretty strong with my faith. But then,

as I turned into college, it started to wither away because I wasn't sure what I really believed in."[427]

Conversely, Leandra has a secular family background but was exposed to the Christian system of meaning in confirmation classes: "Usually it was just Confirmation class, that's it. I didn't think anything of it, it was just Confirmation class, somehow you get confirmed, I didn't exactly think about the presents, but I just thought, yes, then it's finished and so on, but in the confirmation year I took it as such, so I always saw God. Before, it was just always like, Jesus, the Bible and that, done, finished. But now I really thought about it this year, this confirmation year and also in the camp then."[428] All these implicit and explicit imprints affect the *before*, the contingency and conflict experiences, and how we deal with them.

7.2.1 Experience in contingency and conflict

All co-researchers thematize the insufficiency of life or inner and outer moments of conflict. The experience of the principle of openness and uncontrollability of human life experience is an essential trigger in the process of religious experience. The experience of contingency and conflicts is diverse and multi-layered among the young people, so fears of the future, excessive everyday demands, self-doubt, questioning of the system of origin and values, divorce, and illness situations, fear of loss and psychological problems are thematized. Thus John, Gina, Colin, and Simone feel powerless when confronted with poverty and suffering. When she comes across homeless people, Gina faces contingency: "Here (pointing to the picture) I also drew such a situation. When I went to Constance with my boyfriend for two days, it was very extreme that you saw homeless people everywhere in Constance. Of course, we were only there for two days, but we spent the weekend bringing bananas and buns to these homeless people."[429] John is confronted with the insufficiency of life in Mexico when he plays football with children from a children's home. The tension between this poverty and the happiness of these children left a lasting impression on him: "And what we did is we drove down to a house for children who had either been abandoned by their parents or their mothers and just playing with them and seeing how joyful they were even when they had very little."[430]

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427 1 EZ L.A. 1 Abby, 7.
428 3 EZ ZH 3 Leandra, 18.
429 3 EZ ZH 2 Gina, 10.
430 1 EZ L.A. 5 John, 7.

Tobi experiences an extreme conflict situation when the police are at the door of his room: "At first I was rioting in the house, so my grandparents ran out and then they had the feeling that I would hurt them or myself or they didn't quite know what was going on with me. And when they ran out, I found that the easiest thing to do was just to lock the door. And then, after 5 minutes or so, the police were standing in front of the door. […] Yes, and I just think they meant it nicely, not to hurt me or that I have more problems, but I felt even more alone at that moment. Like, I loved them after all, and they just didn't understand what was going on in a life as young as mine."[431] Micah also experiences conflict in his peer group: "I had a tough year at school…all my friends were trying to change who I was, like Brayden and all them."[432] Felix describes this experience of conflict as follows: "Then the third picture. That's 2017; I had a little problem with a demon."[433] Felix did not say what this conflict consisted of, but he chose the highly charged term *demon,* which suggests an existential crisis.

In addition, it can be observed that some of the religious experiences can also be described as experiences at turning points in life: "I recorded two because I read something from several of them. Two that were exciting, when I think about it, also at certain turning points in life […] although everything is annoying us at the moment and we were perhaps also a little afraid of what is coming now. Keyword studies and whether it would work out with the relationship when we move in together. And there were a lot of questions."[434] Leandra is desperate when she doesn't pass the probationary period at the grammar school: "I had practiced and practiced for this grammar school entrance exam, passed it, did everything great and suddenly everything was just gone. I only had half a year there, and I really had nothing after that. I returned to secondary school; everyone had apprenticeships, I was there, and I had nothing, and I thought, yes, I'll exclude everyone now. Everybody; no, come on, you manage somehow; I just shut everybody out and have the image, I fell into a hole."[435]

The contingency experiences are often accompanied by high emotionality, so powerlessness and helplessness, anger and rage, sadness, doubt, and the tension of crisis and faith are mentioned. Vanessa feels powerless and worthless when a relationship breaks up: "And I went through a break-up, and it was just really hard for me. And it felt like there was no one to talk to, and there were some days when I didn't really know what to do during lunchtime. And I remember

431 4 EZ SG 2 Tobi, 11–15.
432 1 EZ L.A. 6 Micah, 7.
433 3 EZ ZH 4 Felix, 11.
434 2 EZ HA 4 Mirjam, 3.11.
435 3 EZ ZH 3 Leandra, 6.

one day when I actually just sat in the restroom, and I just hid so I wouldn't have to see anyone. And I would go into my room and just feel worthless. Especially when you're in a relationship, someone tells you that you're the most amazing thing ever, and then something happens, and you realize you're not the most amazing thing ever."[436] Abby experiences the conflicts predominantly as inner conflicts, with a lot of powerlessness and self-aggression: "And so then, I don't know, I just kind of fell apart that year. I have bulimia, and so from that experience, it was really hard to rebound and then I started hating God– like I was really against it. And it was really hard for me to enjoy life, like all my other friends, and I was very angry."[437]

In principle, contingency and conflict experiences occurred in all narrative data sets and were depicted in detail in the drawings. Moreover, they took up a relatively large amount of space in the individual narratives and also occurred in the group discussions.

So Leandra drew a black hole symbolizing her emotional state, Felix depicted this situation with a demon, Vanessa used a broken heart, and Carmen drew herself as an overwhelmed person. Tobi drew himself in the room with a storm cloud over his head, etc.

7.2.2 Active search movement and relational impulses

It is striking that implicit and explicit search movements are essential for the emergence and interpretation of religious experiences. The personal search movement is based on actively handling contingency experiences and conflict situations. In crises, questions and uncertainty, a searching attitude and sometimes active actions can be observed among the co-researchers. Thus, the co-researchers seek advice from other people, pray, educate themselves on a topic, and actively wrestle with the situation and God: "I was all wrought up. I was so wrought up in the emotion that I could barely hear what was going on around me, but I was asking God for direction in the midst of all this chaos, but because I was so stressed out and so miserable, I couldn't really hear. So, I had a lot of questions, and there was a lot of strong emotion going on."[438] However, this searching movement and making contact does not have to be specifically directed towards a divine counterpart. John, Gina and Simone become active and help the disadvantaged, and Vanessa ap-

436 1 EZ L.A. 2 Vanessa, 7.
437 1 EZ L.A. 1 Abby, 12.
438 1 EZ L.A. 3 Carmen, 15.

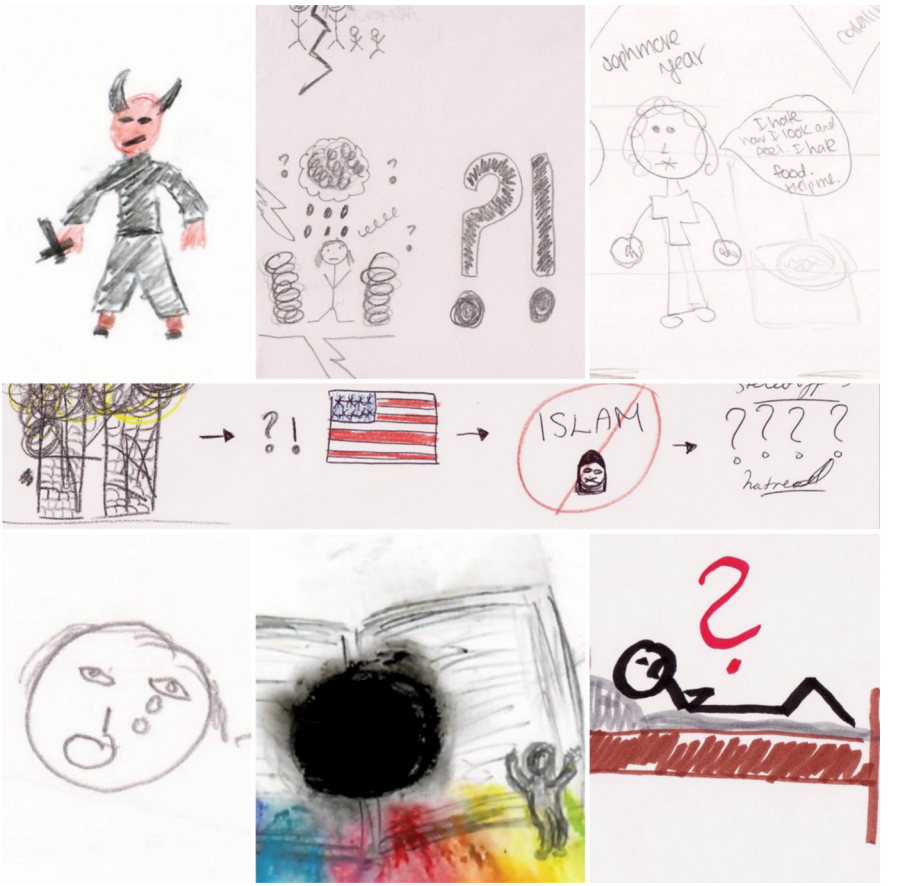

Figure 27: Drawings contingency experiences.

proaches her teacher: "And I went to talk to my teacher, who was clearly a Christian, and he gave me some advice."[439] The search movement and the active handling of experiences of conflict and contingency become most visible when the individual narratives are read as a whole. The example of Kristine can exemplify this theme. In the description of the search movement, the young woman begins with the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, an event that was very formative for her. Since then, she has been preoccupied with how different religions can coexist. Her struggle shows itself in active searching actions. She questions her value system,

439 1 EZ L.A. 2 Vanessa, 9.

learns a new language – Arabic – goes to Morocco for an exchange semester, etc.: "So, I think that I always questioned the American part of my identity. And then I went to a school where they were really anti-Islam, and so that really affected my opinion of Islam. I felt like I had to be on the Christian side, and I would never be able to interact with Muslims in a peaceful way [...] And then I went to college, and that's when I became more critical as a person. And I began studying Arabic because I've always believed that language equals culture and that if you study a language, it will help you understand the culture of the people [...] And then I decided to study abroad in Morocco [...] But when I got there, I was also really conflicted based on what had happened in my earlier experiences in life, which was just: Christianity versus Islam. And could those two ever coexist, or could I ever get past what I had been taught to see Islam in a different way? And then, I started studying a lot about the history of Morocco, and colonialism, and the oppression that had gone on. So, one of the main questions that I asked myself was, 'Can we think outside of ourselves and our context in order to understand? [...] This was when I was reading the Qur'an, and I was in my friend's room, and there's tea there because we were having tea. And he said, 'Oh, you know, in the Qur'an there's a chapter about Mary and about Jesus, and you should read it,' [...] And what it said is that Christians should be respected because Islam is a continuation of Judaism and Christianity, so people should coexist and understand each other. So, taking all of this into account, it was just a really powerful moment in my life. After that, I just became so much more understanding, and I really thought outside of myself. And I think without that religious experience, without having opened up the Qur'an and seeing what they had to say about Christianity, I probably would've continued thinking those terrible things that had been fed to us in the media."[440] In Kristine's work, this search movement is first described without transcendental aspects, but these become central again in the interpretation and resolution of the search movement.

Janik's story of his religious experience also describes a search process characterized by contact, conversations, questions, and friendships.[441] Sabine wonders what to do with her life because she does not know what kind of education she likes. At the same time, her active handling of contingency reveals her form of meaning-making and the associated interpretation of the situation: "I woke up and thought to myself, you just look on the Internet now, how I can submit my application there. And my parents were on holiday at the time, and I called them; Mum, Dad, I've just applied to the Diakonie for an internship for the year, so to

440 1 EZ L.A. 4 Kristine, 14–22.
441 Cf. 2 EZ HA 2 Janik.

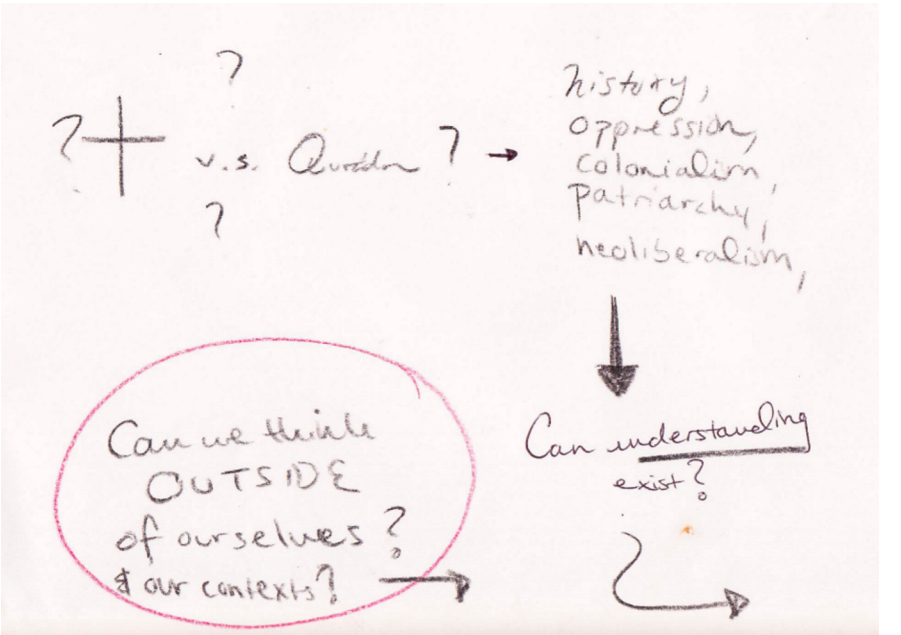

Figure 28: Drawing search movement.

speak. And then, oh, yes, fine, do that, if that makes you happy. Then it was only a few weeks later that I realized the significance of it, that it's not just normal, that you wake up and suddenly know what you want. Because it's not something that somehow belongs to the family or something."[442]

One's active dealing with contingency often goes hand in hand with relational, religious impulses, condensed in this search movement. For example, Tobi and Felix approach the priest in their distress and then experience support in their situation: "Then the third picture. This was 2017 when I had a little problem with a demon. With the help of Adrian (priest), I was then able to defeat that, so get rid of the demon."[443] "And I'm there, the black guy (in the drawing) squatting on the ground, and I didn't know what to do. The only person I could think of to call, sitting next to me, was my pastor from the confirmation camp."[444] Relational religious impulses can be observed in all of the co-researchers' narratives. These im-

442 2 EZ HA 3 Sabine, 13.
443 3 EZ ZH 4 Felix, 11.
444 4 EZ SG 2 Tobi, 3–6.

pulses are not always immediately apparent and can vary greatly depending on the context. However, they are diverse; for example, they can stem from different people such as peers, pastors, or teachers, books, television or YouTube, but also through family imprinting. In the American data, the religious impulse is more obvious precisely because religion receives greater public, political, and media attention. Thus, the impulses were more evident in the mention of television programs and sermons, music, media and family religious imprinting: "For me, it's because I was obviously in a very broken place, and I needed specific answers. I needed a specific understanding. And there was no way on the planet that it was just a coincidence that the television that came on spoke to everything that I was going through and gave me the clarity that I needed. And also this inordinate amount of peace."[445]

In continental Europe, on the other hand, the impulses that stem from positive experiences in religious education and confirmation classes should not be underestimated. Explicit and implicit Christian church education processes could be observed in Hanover and the two groups in the Zurich area. In the examples from Germany and Switzerland, these influences were less obvious but more relational. Thus, an impulse was more likely to be set by confirmation classes or a known person than by the family.

The relational, religious impulses do not necessarily have to have taken place simultaneously with the religious experiences described. But in all cases, religious impulses took place beforehand, among other things, in the discussion of a religious topic, in prayer, through family imprinting, in the camp, or in the fact that the co-researchers were confronted with a religious subject or a Bible text.

In the process, the personal search movement is decisive for the condensation of a situation in which a religious experience, the moment of happening, then occurs. In crises, questions and uncertainty, an attitude of expectation can be observed in people with religious experiences. This can but does not have to be specifically directed towards a divine counterpart. Nevertheless, the search movement is based on the expectation of discovering something unavailable or transcendent. In any case, people who speak of religious experience have received religious impulses from somewhere through which they felt directly addressed. External religious impulses thereby encounter a resonance space in the biography and emotionality of the individual, which leads to a *special* (everyday) experience.

445 1 D L.A. 3 Carmen, 109.

7.3 Moment of happening – the religious resonance space and the special everyday experience

The religious experience often manifests itself in everyday situations. An essential feature is that the attribution of the religious does not happen through an external form, another person, a specific church setting, or religious practice. Instead, the specificity is revealed when the experience encounters a (religious) resonance space. At the *moment of happening,* both the contingency experience and the search movement are condensed. The relational impulses create this resonance space in which the previously contradictory elements are transformed, and viable and constructive solutions appear. Incoherencies are thus reformulated, and a comprehensive context of meaning is created. From different perspectives and positions, the Big Questions[446] (Where do I come from? What is the meaning? What is good and what is evil? Where are we going?…) are compared with the personal system of meaning. This aha-moment, in which a new realization comes to the person, is central to the process of religious experience. In this aha-moment, energy is released to reframe the original situation and reproduce the new insight.

Since these processes are usually not consciously undertaken by the individual, everyday religious experiences occur unexpectedly and surprisingly. From a researching, outside perspective, however, processual typologies can be discerned that allow us to expect the religious reframing of the experiences, at least in part: Contingency experiences and relational, religious search movements run along over a more extended period in the life of the individual and can also repeat and alternate. In certain situations, the experience of conflict and, depending on the case, the search movement become more intense. If an emotionally dense moment arises in parallel, experiences can be interpreted religiously and become religious experiences over time, even outside traditional Christian, church, or family settings.

It should not be forgotten, especially when describing *moments of events,* that these are always reconstructions of the past. A personally meaningful experience is recounted retrospectively, which became a biographical life experience through processes of interpretation by the individual.

When it comes to the *moment of happening,* a distinction can and must be made between life-changing and life-accompanying religious experiences. Many co-researchers report life-changing experiences in their narratives, such as Abby, Carmen, Kristine, Micah, Sophie, Niklas, Janik, Sabine, Mirjam, Ronnie, Leandra, Felix, Tobi, Colin, and Simone. Other experiences can also be seen as life-ac-

446 Vgl. Taves, 'Finding and Articulating Meaning in Secular Experience', 15 ff.

companying religious experiences, e. g. Vanessa, John, Tim, Gina, and Sara. The distinction between life-accompanying and life-changing experiences is not always clear-cut and is at the individual's and the researcher's discretion. What is apparent, however, is that when asked about religious experiences, the co-researchers often tell stories where one can speak of life-changing religious experiences.[447] In the process, the frame of reference also changes.

This *change in the frame of reference* goes hand in hand with a changed concept of knowledge and leads to a shift in perspective, which, as the case may be, relates to the view of the self and/or the world, and the personal religious system of meaning. This in turn leads to a rhythmization of the perception of religious and transcendental aspects in the individual's life. Based on this, life-accompanying religious experiences arise that occur more frequently than those first mentioned and are related to this changed mode of perception.[448]

Although the experiences are characterized by subjectivity, there are factors in the life stories common to all religious experiences. Thus, the perceptions, the physical and emotional sensations, and the nature of the experience at the moment of the event are central. Furthermore, the thoroughly detailed ability to remember, as well as bodily memories, is striking. The chapters on *The place of religious experience*, *Embodiment and emotions during the religious experience, The ability to remember* and *Relational (God) cognition – recognizing and being recognized* go into greater depth on exactly this topic.

7.3.1 The place of religious experience

The normality of everyday life with its regular repetitions, familiar places, and processes is not the place where the co-researchers expected transcendent experiences. Nevertheless, these situations show themselves as the typical setting where young, urban people have religious experiences. In most experiences, religion is implicitly present as a theme in the background.

A typological classification of the experiences is not easy because the boundaries are fluid. However, the 20 experiences can be classified as follows: 13–14 experiences happened alone or with a friend in a "special" everyday setting, four to five experiences in a camp and two experiences at a concert.

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447 A precise differentiation and the discourse on life-accompanying and life-changing experiences can be found in chapter 7.4 *Afterwards – from experience to impact and* specifically in the subtopic *Rhythmization.*

448 The connection between rhythmization and lifelong religious experiences is described in chapter 7.4.3.3 *Afterwards – Effects of religious experiences.*

Table 2: Setting of religious experience

Group	Name	The setting of the experience
1	Abby	Toilet
	Vanessa	Room
2	Carmen	Fitness studio
	Kristine	Friend's room
3	John	Football match in a camp
	Micah	Camp
	Sophie	Concert (Christian)
	Tim	Camp
4	Niklas	Hospital
	Janik	Conversation with friends
	Sabine	Room
	Mirjam	Concert and wedding
5	Ronnie	Camp
	Gina	City trip
	Leandra	School
	Felix	Camp and home
6	Sara	Camp (Christian)
	Tobi	Room
	Colin	Travel
	Simone	City trip

In the co-researchers' narratives, it is striking how fluid the boundaries between the everyday and the religious, between the profane and the sacred, and between immanence and transcendence are and how they depend on the co-researchers' personal interpretations. For example, the gym where Carmen stayed during her religious experience is clearly a profane place for the co-researcher. However, this place was transformed for a few moments into a sacred place, in that Carmen

felt directly addressed by the televangelist.[449] Similarly, for Abby, Vanessa, Sabine, and Tobi, their mundane, ordinary bedroom/bathroom was transformed for a moment from a profane place to a sacred place where something significant was happening.

The camp experiences, most of which took place within a religious framework, also move within this tension. For example, a close (video) analysis of Micah's narrative reveals that he also interprets church camps in an almost secular way.[450] In Ronnie's case, on the other hand, it is noticeable that although he only cooks at the confirmation camp and thus hardly takes part in the program, the elements in the evening are religiously significant for him. In Sara's case, it is also noticeable that the whole camp has a profoundly religious component, whether it is sports, eating, or discussions.

In summary, it can be said about the places that, at first glance, they are often profane places where a religious experience takes place. At the moment of the event, however, aspects of the religious break-in and thus a profane place is transformed into a sacred one for a short amount of time. Especially when travelling, the experience of the contingency of others or new encounters can set a process of religious experience in motion.

7.3.2 Embodiment and emotions during the religious experience

As has already become visible in the definitions of religious experiences, emotions and bodily sensations play a central role. But only combining emotions and physical sensations with a new cognition gained in this aha-moment leads to reordering the frame of reference. Emotions, bodily sensations, and awareness are the yardsticks for whether or not transcendence is thought of in the experience and the retroactive interpretation.[451] If this is the case, the changed frame of reference is then interpreted, verified, and strengthened by the effect of everyday life in the *afterwards* phase.

The extracts from the co-researchers' narratives presented here are typological. The combination and accumulation of strong positive and negative emotions, bodily sensations and new insights in a given moment can be found in the data.

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449 There are several analogous biblical stories in which profane places became holy places. Let us recall, for example, the story of Moses in front of the burning bush from Ex 3:2–5.

450 Because Micah's father is a pastor, Micah has participated in many church camps since early childhood. For him, such camps became a normal part of his everyday life.

451 It remains to be discussed whether this is an abductive form of gaining knowledge.

Without this epistemic character or contingency resolution, the physical sensations or emotions alone would most likely not be interpreted religiously.

In Abby's narrative, the accumulation of the emotional and physical dimensions is well evident, both in the individual description and the subsequent discussion:[452] "But there was a moment in the bathroom where I realized that if I didn't stop, then I would die. So, I just called for help and cried. It was a voice in my head like my body did not allow me to throw up again. As much as I tried, it wouldn't let me go. And I knew at that moment that it was a sign or something from God that it was like, 'You shouldn't continue.' No one's going to stop me [...] So, through the meaning, I guess, where I couldn't control myself anymore was a moment where I knew that there was something else that needs to control me, and that could only be religion. And so that moment in the bathroom where I just couldn't do anything anymore and I lost everything, and I was just crying. That was the moment, like a very monumental moment where I just knew that I had to stop because if I do this again, I could die because my heart would stop."[453] Abby's despair and self-rejection intensify, and, figuratively speaking, her contingency coping strategy, vomiting, fails at the lowest point of her bulimia on the toilet. She expresses this in the following words: "like my body did not allow me to throw up again. As much as I tried, it wouldn't let me go."[454] In Abby's case, the *moment of happening* coincides with a powerful bodily experience, namely the loss of control over her body, and at the same time with high emotionality, which is shown in crying.

But also for the other co-researchers, emotions and bodily sensations are essential for interpreting such moments, and tears appear in many narratives. Carmen, for example, tells of being overwhelmed with tears at the moment of the event: "So, in the moment that I'm listening to all of her words, I was just overwhelmed with tears. I was just crying beyond belief. I could not wipe them away, and I never stopped walking on the treadmill."[455]

Physical aspects also play a central role in Niklas' story. He describes his healing process as a religious experience. The development from no longer being able to speak and walk to physical recovery is interpreted as a religious experience: "I also couldn't speak for the three weeks and then after the three weeks, when I started to walk again and learned to speak and so on, I realized, ok, that must

452 The quotes used here have often been deliberately kept at length, as this is the best way to illustrate the combination of embodiment and emotion during the moment of the event.

453 1 EZ L.A. 1 Abby, 12 and 1 D L.A. 1 Abby, 54.

454 1 EZ L.A. 1 Abby, 12.

455 1 EZ L.A. 3 Carmen, 21.

have been a guardian angel who somehow got you out of this situation. He wanted you to live."[456]

Janik talks about how he can only believe if he also feels something: "Exactly. Exactly, that is the fundamental thing for me. Otherwise, I won't come to faith. I have to somehow feel something for myself, and it has to make sense to me somewhere."[457]

For Ronnie, a combination of bodily sensations and a feeling of security was crucial to understanding this moment as a religious experience: "Taking communion in front of the fire and for me that was a very special situation, just for the reason, when we were all standing there like that, I broke out in a sweat, it ran cold down my spine, I was like not quite in control anymore. I wanted to move my arm, but it just didn't move. But still, there was a certain warmth around the fire, security that I hadn't known before."[458]

Leandra also speaks of warmth and of the phone being unexpectedly hot and deduces, among other things, that this must be more than a purely immanent situation: "Then when the phone rang, I took it, and it was really so warm, and then I thought, it wasn't sunny, and it's quite cold and shady, it was just after winter so spring, and it was still so warm. [...] And outside it was raining too, but I somehow didn't notice the rain at all; I was outside on the phone, and then I went back inside, and so slowly I realized what was happening."[459]

7.3.3 The Ability to Remember

In the narratives, the religious experiences are embedded biographically and temporally. They are remembered quickly, even if they happened several years ago, and it seems crucial for the co-researchers to be able to describe the *moment of the event in* detail. For example, Mirjam still knows exactly where she was standing before the concert, even though it was almost 20 years ago; Leandra describes the weather and the phone's temperature in her narrative. Colin still remembers the number of men they were threatened by; Salome recounts her experiences with different homeless people and mentions places, sums of money, and names. Carmen can remember refusing the remote control several times at the gym: "[A]nd the gentleman who owned the gym came to me while I was on the

456 2 EZ HA 1 Niklas, 3.
457 2 EZ HA 2 Janik, 29.
458 3 EZ ZH 1 Ronnie, 3.
459 3 EZ ZH 3 Leandra, 18.20.

treadmill and offered me the remote control, and I refused it three times. Like, 'I don't want it. I don't watch TV. No.' And for some reason, he just kept pushing it on me. So finally I said, 'Fine'."[460] And it is also important for Sophie to describe the place of the religious experience, i.e. the concert and the people, in great detail, including the colour of the T-shirts: "Once I got there, though, I immediately noticed that there was a big guy in the very first row with a bright, yellow shirt on. And he was dancing like crazily, like sporadic. And it was really funny, but I was kind of weirded out by how joyful it seemed that he was. And then there was a woman in a purple shirt two rows ahead of me, and she was dancing, too."[461]

The accuracy of the descriptions on the atmospheric, spatial, emotional, physical, and cognitive levels is striking. Similar to a traumatic experience, the co-researchers remember details that would have been long forgotten in everyday events. The significance of such experiences for the individual can be guessed from such conspicuousness. Unlike traumatic experiences, however, these experiences do not subsequently break into everyday life in an uncontrolled way in the form of flashbacks. Rather, they structure, integrate, and rhythmize a new (God) cognition.

7.3.4 Relational (God) cognition – recognizing and being recognized

The *moment of happening* is primarily a moment of personal knowing and being known. It is a relational moment that is associated with transcendence. Tobi says: "Yes, it was clear to me. Well, I don't know what it looked like inside him, but for me, it was clear that it was God."[462]

It is striking that in many drawings, this moment is depicted with yellow colour, a sun, light, and fire. The colour is often chosen for holiness, transcendence, and God and can therefore also be located within the thematic horizon of defining characteristics.

In the narratives of the co-researchers, it becomes apparent that cognition is not a normal cognitive process based on logical conclusions but that a different form of cognition is meant: "I can feel like certain things are known internally, and some people may call that intuition, but I feel like it's heightened to a degree that it is just beyond self-knowing that it is a divine knowing."[463]

460 1 EZ L.A. 3 Carmen, 19.
461 1 EZ L.A. 7 Sophie, 12.
462 4 EZ SG 2 Tobi, 20.
463 1 D L.A. 3 Carmen, 53.

Figure 29: Drawings (God) cognition.

This recognition is about more: the feeling of being recognized existentially in all distress, with doubt, shame, powerlessness, despair, and open questions. Tobi uses the following metaphor: "And yes, the feeling, it was like, actually in the rain, in which I'm squatting, that the sun is rising, I'm not so alone after all."[464] Tobi's drawing also shows the tension between storm clouds and the rising sun. In Abby's case, recognition is associated with a divine encouragement that brings reassurance that she is not alone. This is also clearly visible in Abby's drawing.

In the cognitive process, two directions of movement concerning transcendence become discernible. On the one hand, there is the experience of *God coming*

464 4 EZ SG 2 Tobi, 8.

Figure 30: Drawing recognize.

towards me, and, on the other hand, *God is there.* For Sabine, for example, the core of this experience is that God "has made himself felt."[465] Similarly, for Niklas. In his story he describes as well how an angel comes to him: "I also couldn't speak during the three weeks and then after the three weeks, when I started to walk again and learned to talk and so on, I realized, ok, that was definitely a guardian angel who somehow got you out of this situation."[466]

Another motif that is often used is *God is there.* The co-researchers recognize this being-there for the first time or again: "And what the yellow line means to me (shows the line in the picture) is actually the divine, which also works through people, where it has always been there."[467] Similarly with Carmen: "Oh, it's paramount for me to have these kinds of experiences because they solidify for me the fact that I am heard and that there is an energy of love, of presence that is here with me, that cares about me, and that is there for the inner workings of my life."[468] And Janik also describes the awareness of this aspect of presence, which is related to transcendence, as a central component of cognition: "A religious experience for

465 2 Q HA 3 Sabine.
466 2 EZ HA 1 Niklas, 3.
467 4 EZ SG 3 Colin, 10.
468 1 D L.A. 3 Carmen, 12.

me is something in which I share my thoughts, feelings with others or feel God with me."[469]

The cognition process itself is mainly related to the theme of *unavailability* and *insufficiency.* The recognition at the moment of happening includes a moment of unavailability that is not within the sphere of influence or under the control of the co-researchers. In turn, unavailability is described and interpreted differently by the co-researchers. However, they each refer to smaller and larger moments in which a feeling arises that there must be more. Gina, for example, summarizes this as follows, despite openly expressing doubts about whether God exists or not: "Because I'm actually quite at odds with myself about whether God really exists, but I have to somehow-, I have to say that he doesn't exist, I can't do that either, and then I have to say that there are just the little experiences in life where you have to say that there must be more."[470]

On the other hand, Micah describes a process of change that begins with the realization that *I am okay the way I am:* "And I would always want to take that down the mountain. It would never usually happen, but one summer, it really did. I had a tough year at school…all my friends were trying to change who I was, like Brayden and all of them. They tried to change who I was. And I was like God didn't want me to change. He wanted me to stay the same. So then, going there, I took it down the mountain to stay the same, and I was a much happier person. […] I felt God speaking to me to be yourself and don't let people change who you are."[471]

These moments' (divine) unavailability is related to resolving inner and outer conflicts and responding to existential needs and crises. These are very individual and context- and situation-dependent. Colin, for example, survives two life-threatening situations. Kristine's and Simone's image of another religion and marginalized people is changed. Abby experiences this unavailability by finding a therapist: "I think it's when you know you can't do anything about it and no one else can, and something is still being done. Like, for example, finding a therapist."[472] And Carmen got specific answers to her situation: "For me, it's because I was obviously in a very broken place, and I needed specific answers. I needed a specific understanding. And there was no way on the planet that it was just a coincidence that the television that came on spoke to everything that I was going through and giving me the clarity that I needed. And also this inordinate amount of peace. I just don't

469 2 Q HA 2, Janik.
470 3 EZ ZH 2 Gina, 4.
471 1 EZ L.A. 6 Micah, 7.13.
472 1 D L.A. 1 Abby, 35.

see that as coincidental. So I feel as though it was absolutely divine intervention in a situation where I was just completely wrought up and losing it. Yeah. There was just no way that there was anything else to me."[473]

This kind of personal cognition is classified differently than everyday cognitive processes or acquired knowledge: "That was the moment, like a very monumental moment where I just knew that I had to stop because if I do this again, I could die because my heart would stop."[474]

What is recognized and how is described differently in the narratives. One striking commonality, however, is the highly relational reference to transcendence, God, or religion. Sabine formulated: "And through this decision, which somehow came overnight, and I'm not really aware of why I made it in the first place. I just woke up in the morning and knew this is what I want to do now. […] and yes, I think my religious experience is in the sense that yes, God put me on the right path when I no longer knew what I should actually do with my life now."[475]

The bodily sensations and emotions, combined with a moment of recognition, lead to reframing the situation. 16-year-old Sophie summarizes this as follows: "Well, because there are certain times for me when I can actually feel God, and I know he's always there, but I sometimes feel more than others he wants to make himself known more. And I think the Holy Spirit also contributes to that… of helping you realize that it was God instead of just your imagination."[476]

Thus, the *moment of the event,* the religious experience, and the interpretation of it as a religious experience impact personal faith. This form of relational (God) cognition is the starting point for developing or expanding a personal religious system of meaning and reformulating individual faith. Felix describes this in the following words: "Then I left the service and went to the dormitories, and a complete stranger ran after me and just hugged me and told me that God is with you, and that was the basic point for me, so to speak, why-, so that was a sign for me that God exists."[477] Ronnie puts it similarly: "When I look back, that was actually the point when I really had to say, yes, well, there is someone up there. Before that, it was always like, yes, God can exist, but he doesn't have to, but that was really the point where I had to say, yes, he does exist. In what form is always a bit of a question, I don't know yet, but that was actually a bit of the origin of my faith."[478]

473 1 D L.A. 3 Carmen, 109.
474 1 D L.A. 1 Abby, 54.
475 2 EZ HA 3 Sabine, 5.
476 1 D L.A. 7 Sophie, 45.
477 3 EZ ZH 4 Felix, 5.
478 3 EZ ZH 1 Ronnie, 10.

In Sophie's story, on the other hand, one can speak of an expansion and a personal appropriation of the belief system: "And the next day-I grew up in a Christian house, and I've always felt God, but I've never really wanted to pursue something with Him. And after that, I've started pursuing and putting more work into it, just because I like the idea of being joyful all the time and having someone on my side that I can talk to."[479]

As shown, the *moment of action* is always accompanied by a realization. A country-specific tendency can be depicted: In the stories of the co-researchers in the USA, the new insight tends to trigger an expansion of the personal religious system of meaning, whereas, in the German-speaking context, it tends to trigger an emergence and development.

7.4 Afterwards – from effect to experience

In the *moment of the event,* energy is released that is now available *afterwards* so that the current conflict or contingency situation can be changed. The *moment of happening* becomes a religious experience through its effects on the *afterwards* and must be interpreted and verified by the individual.

This *moment of happening* triggers a change so that something in the individual's life is set in motion and the frame of reference changes. Tobi describes this very pointedly through the metaphor of a ball that starts rolling: "Well, for me personally, after the first experience I had, it was like a ball that started rolling. It wasn't, how shall I say, I don't expect such a consistent experience when I'm feeling worse again, that there will be such a moment again, I wouldn't say enlightenment, but the same experience that happened the first time. […] And simply if it doesn't happen again for a more extended period of time, it's not like I lose faith or something, or I don't force it. I expect I don't wait for it, for example, like when things are going badly for me, then I just wait until such an experience comes again or something. Then nothing changes in my faith."[480]

In the moment of the event, in the condensation of contingency, emotions, and realization, something comes into being that only manifests itself fully *afterwards* and must also prove itself there. This process step is central for something to become a religious experience. In the process, fundamental transformations in the co-researchers' understanding of their own identity can be observed, which go hand in hand with the *change in the frame of reference.* Limitation and powerless-

479 1 EZ L.A. 7 Sophie, 15.
480 4 D SG 2 Tobi, 13.15.

ness are dissolved through the *moment of happening*, and the co-researchers feel able to act. This increases the sense of *self-efficacy*. In Carmen's picture, this is visible through the changed expression of her person, the colours, but also through her position in the image. She expressed this as follows: "So, this is me at the end able to just give love to other people and just bridge the gap of whatever disagreements or bad energy there is with love and compassion."[481]

Figure 31: Drawing afterwards.

In the co-researchers' stories, a different way of dealing with *contingency experiences* can be seen *afterwards*. Many other *everyday effects* are mentioned, such as orientation, help, joy, gratitude, increased empathy, certainty, trust, and faith. In addition to the everyday impacts, a process of interpreting and verifying the new intuitive knowledge is also recognizable. Changes in one's certainty and the evaluation of one's faith, as well as the rhythmization of the changed frame of reference, are also understandable. In the following, these aspects will now be presented in more detail.

481 1 EZ L.A. 3 Carmen, 30.

7.4.1 Self-efficacy and dissolution of limitation

An integral part of religious experiences is the dissolution of different limitations and inabilities to act. A positive change in self-image accompanies this. Self-image is closely linked to a sense of self-efficacy. This is well visible in Niklas' and Mirjam's definitions of religious experience: "A religious experience for me is when I experience something that gives me self-confidence and shows me that no matter what I do, God is with me"[482], or "An experience that I cannot create myself, that touches my innermost being and leaves it changed."[483] The experiences always have to do with the self and the person's identity, sometimes in the sense that the experience gives certainty that one is ok even unchanged: "And I was like God didn't want me to change. He wanted me to stay the same. So then, going there, I took it down the mountain to stay the same, and I was a much happier person [...] I felt God speaking to me to be yourself and not let people change who you are. Because what I am is more important to myself than what people think of me."[484]

The increase in self-efficacy and the dissolution of limitation do not happen primarily through activism but through a newfound calmness and serenity based on a form of 'knowing God'. This is a big theme with many co-researchers, and Abby, Carmen, and Mirjam put it this way: "I was very relieved when I knew that there was something still there for me, behind me that I just never noticed. So, I think it was important."[485] Or Carmen: "So, I heard it deeply on that day and what it was really about is that [...] all of your issues are known by God. So, I felt that in whatever I do and however I move in my life that God knows what I'm going through and goes ahead and prepares the way."[486] Or: "So there is more, we can approach certain things calmly, and there is someone masculine or feminine or something that provides for a different reality or that, yes, simply also ensures that sometimes I can think outside of it, e.g. go to normal things where everyone goes and this something gives me a relaxedness, a serenity and trust in myself that is much greater than I have on my own."[487]

The resulting personal changes and effects on everyday life are based on this certainty of God's presence and care, and the newly gained experience of self-efficacy. For Vanessa, for example, this is linked to the knowledge that she can make a

482 2 Q HA 1 Niklas.
483 2 Q HA 4 Mirjam.
484 1 EZ L.A. 6 Micah, 7.13.16.
485 1 D L.A. 1 Abby, 25.
486 1 EZ L.A. 3 Carmen, 28.
487 2 EZ HA 4 Mirjam, 15.

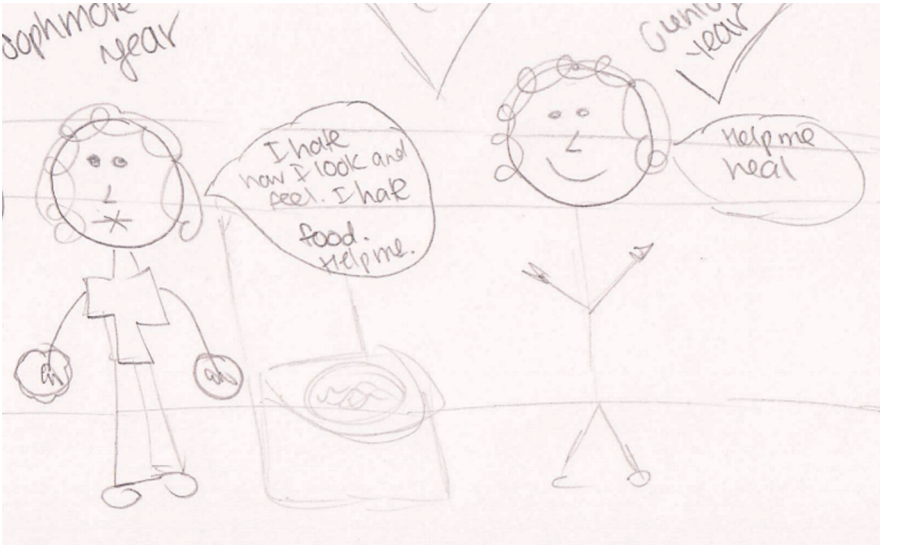

Figure 32: Drawing self-efficacy.

difference in this world: "So, I'm just kind of wondering, why do we matter, if there is no real end? And it just kind of guides me through, knowing that I matter and that the people around me matter and the things that we do today do matter."[488]

The change in self-perception becomes impressively visible in Abby's picture. Her eating disorder, which goes hand in hand with a negative self-image and self-rejection, is not simply gone through the religious experience. But by changing her self-image in the experience and creating a sense of self-efficacy, she can talk about her problems, seek help, and go to therapy.

It is shown that the co-researchers' sense of self-efficacy and the changed self-perception impact the perception and shaping of everyday life, the interpretation of situations, and the personally lived theology.

7.4.2 Effects on everyday life

As has already been shown, the religious experiences described by the co-researchers are less ecclesial than rather *special* everyday experiences. Accordingly, they are interpreted from everyday life, and the changes have to prove themselves in

488 1 D L.A. 2 Vanessa, 56.

everyday life. Thus, the reference to everyday life is a characteristic component of religious experience. The knowledge of (God) and the increase of self-efficacy are directly related to daily life's effects and are often triggers for changed everyday perceptions and lifestyles.

The guiding theme in *everyday effects* is the transformation of the ordinary. This is represented by a before and an after; the daily effects are told in this arc of tension (which is part of the logic of transformation processes). It is nevertheless striking that a religious experience is mainly thought of within the horizon of sustainable transformation, which means more than a mere positive change. Colin compares this process to a tree that grows deeper roots and a bigger crown: "For me, it would be deeper roots and like wider foliage, so this openness. So growing in both directions, into the depths and outwards. For me, that would be the quintessence of religious experiences that work in both directions. Deeper towards the inside and broader or bigger or wider towards the outside."[489]

The everyday effects are not based on positive intentions but result precisely from the changed frame of reference. They are contextual and closely linked to the biographies of the co-researchers and mostly have an inward effect, such as overcoming contingency, hope, or orientation, and an outward effect, such as empathy and gratitude. Kristine sums it up as follows: "I believe that a religious experience is when a person feels a strong connection to a higher power/being and feels more at peace and changed after the experience."[490]

In the following, the effects of everyday life will be presented in more detail, based on the topics of *coping with contingency through visualization* and *emotional changes.*

7.4.2.1 Overcoming contingency through visualization

The co-researchers reflexively access the religious experiences in everyday life;[491] they are brought to mind and thus develop an effect repeatedly and beyond the moment. Tobi and Carmen reflect on this situation: "Yes, and this moment, when things are not going well again, and there are problems again, I just think back to this moment. I think it couldn't have been worse than it was there, so it can't get as bad as it was there."[492] Carmen: "It's to remind myself in times of de-

489 4 D SG 3 Colin, 101.

490 1 Q L.A. 4 Kristine.

491 "It was very inspiring to me. It gave me a lot of hope and it made me very grateful for all that I had. And I really reflect on it when I see how much joy and content they had with so little that they had." 1 Q L.A. 5 John, 7.

492 4 EZ SG 2 Tobi, 8.

spair or forgetfulness of just how connected I am and just how well things work out when I am in a certain place. It is to go back and retrain myself or revisit prior situations that have really connected me previously to that higher power in similar moments and to just relax and the knowingness that all is well. So, in any aspect of apprehension, fear, uneasiness, even, you know, loneliness, just to remember a time when God showed up and showed out."[493]

Religious experiences thus become coping strategies for the insufficiencies of life and can lead to a new view of the contingent. This means that religious experiences not only resolve the contingency and conflict situation in which the co-researchers found themselves at the *moment of the event*[494] but can also lead to a new way of dealing with other contingency situations.[495]

It must be noted that the new possibilities of coping with contingency after religious experiences do not mean, for the co-researchers, that everything would now be perfect and that there would be no more problems. Instead, the new way of dealing and the increased personal resources in coping with contingency experiences should be emphasized. Tobi is an excellent example of this: "Yes, and for me the thought that it was really that bad before and I think I carry that on now, how should I say, that it shouldn't get that far again, that I notice it beforehand, but I needed two or three times afterwards that someone gives me a push so that it doesn't fall back into old patterns, but fortunately it's never that bad again, – it's never been as bad as it was then."[496]

Dealing with contingency situations can be multifaceted, but as we have just seen, for both Tobi and Carmen, it goes hand in hand with intensive remembering and visualizing. Vanessa formulates it similarly; for her, holding on to the idea that God exists is central: "[F]or me it's more like I need to have that self-control and remember that there is a God who exists, and if I don't have a God who exists, then science falls apart. And everything falls apart if I don't have a God."[497] Or Niklas: "Well, I also believe there is a difference. You have, I don't have the word for it right now; you know why you're going to make it. You know why- that when you have a problem, you see the solution, so to speak, by saying, yes, the key to the problem is my faith in God, or God is the solution to the problem, and others see in it, they see the solution again quite banally."[498]

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493 1 D L.A. 3 Carmen, 72.

494 Cf. chapter 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and dissolution of limitation.*

495 Based on the narratives, one could formulate the thesis that religious experiences increase resilience.

496 4 EZ SG 2 Tobi, 30.

497 1 D L.A. 2 Vanessa, 15.

498 2 D HA 1 Niklas, 69.

What seems to be interesting here is that overcoming contingency through visualization occurs in all three contexts and does not seem to be dependent on age, family background, or the content of the religious experience.

For some co-researchers, the newly gained possibility of coping with contingency is linked to symbols and symbolic actions. For example, Vanessa and Niklas describe that they wear a necklace with a cross to remind them of specific things, and Niklas also wears the necklace frequently when he is nervous and uncertain. Tobi, on the other hand, keeps the new situation present by maintaining the relationship with Colin for several years now.[499]

7.4.2.2 Emotional changes inside and outside: "To become a better person"

In the self-descriptions, it becomes clear that the feeling of *self-efficacy* and the better possibilities to cope with contingency influence the inner emotional stability and interactions with other people. The religious experience is described as a gift that can trigger gratitude, joy, confidence, hope, healing, etc. Depending on the narrative, other needs, worries, and concerns are at the centre, to which there now seems to be an answer in the everyday effects. Here too, the response event is seen less as a selective event but rather as an insight or certainty that has an impact and through which a process is triggered. For John, this is related to gratitude: "It was very inspiring to me. It gave me a lot of hope, and it made me very grateful for all that I had. And I really reflect on it when I see how much joy and content they had with so little that they had."[500] Kristine also speaks of gratitude, and Micah, Sophie, Toby, and Carmen speak of joy. Janik, Sabine, and Tobi feel seen and understood by God in everyday life. For them, there must be someone who *sees* and knows them in all situations and accepts them. Janik summarizes this being *seen* as follows: "Well, it's not a picture of a person in my head, but it's actually the feeling, hey, there's someone who accepts you just as I am, and I'm up for him, and he's up for me or her or whatever. It can also be a deer that can speak. So that's, I don't know, I'm not at all interested in imagining a picture, but for me, it's this world of feelings; it's actually God for me, yes, God is there."[501]

The perspective of hope is also mentioned several times concerning the effect on everyday life. Religious experiences are perceived as something that gives hope and confidence in everyday life. For Abby, for example, the hope is to be cured of bulimia; this gives her the strength for therapy. Carmen, too, often speaks of new

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499 "The first thing, I still maintain a good friendship with Colin. So that's, I think, the longest impact." 4 EZ SG 2 Tobi, 30.

500 1 EZ L.A. 5 John, 7.

501 2 D HA 2 Janik, 115.

hope after the religious experience, despite a difficult divorce situation. Leandra has expressed this experience of hope in her painting, in the rainbow that appears next to the black hole and forms a kind of bridge: "And that's colourful, that it's away from the black is what that should represent."[502]

Figure 33: Drawing hope perspective.

Sabine also sees *hope* as a central factor, which for her even constitutes the difference in perspective between a believer and a non-believer: "I think that we have more hope. Because we say, hey, God was by my side, in a similar situation, we will consult God again and hold on to the fact that he has helped us before. As opposed

502 3 EZ ZH 3 Leandra, 14.

to someone who says, hey, that was a coincidence, who then just lets it come to him and then, perhaps, has no hope or puts all his hope in his principle of coincidence. So I could see that being the difference, that we have something to believe in."[503] So *faith* and *hope* are closely linked in the co-researchers' stories.

Another set of issues frequently mentioned in the everyday effects is the theme of *healing*, *liberation*, and *help.* Religious experiences are described as healing experiences in which healing or liberation is experienced. In the case of Abby and Niklas, where physical aspects play a significant role, both speak of healing. Abby also speaks of liberty. On the other hand, Felix speaks explicitly of liberation and a newly acquired freedom, which consists of the fact that the *demon is* now gone from his life. For Kristine, the newly acquired freedom lies in becoming free of prejudices and dealing more empathetically with what is foreign to her, such as Islam.

In the accounts of the co-researchers, these inner emotional changes are connected with the claim that they also show themselves externally, e.g., in dealing with other people. Thus it is reported that the religious experience led to increased empathy towards other people and the acceptance of different opinions. A slogan used in the USA that goes hand in hand with this claim is *to become a better person.* For example, Micah says: "Like how it made me turn into a better person and be a better Christian because I realized how great God was and how much he loves me and everyone else."[504] Although the slogan is explicitly used in the American context, the claim *to want to become a better person* is evident in all contexts despite different formulations. The co-researchers claim that they have become a better person through the religious experience or are in the process of doing so.

This claim is, in turn, closely linked to what the co-researchers call *faith.* Sabine summarizes the goal of her faith as follows: "Spontaneously, I would answer this with becoming a better person than I am now, maybe. He can help me with the things we were talking about before. Situations from which we could learn positive lessons, that kind of thing. Or just that we made this big push in the right direction, I'm also trying to lead the way, to be good for myself and also to be good for my fellow human beings. That's how I would answer it right now, off the top of my head."[505] And Kristine describes herself as more open and understanding because of her religious experience: "So, taking all of this into account, it was just a really powerful moment in my life. After that, I just became so much more understanding, and I really thought outside of myself."[506]

503 2 D HA 3 Sabine, 67.
504 1 D L.A. 6 Micah, 57.
505 2 D HA 3 Sabine, 99.
506 1 EZ L.A. 4 Kristine, 22.

The religious experiences also lead to a better theological and linguistic ability through visualization and self-assurance. This is not necessarily about the experience itself but personal religious convictions. In the words of Felix: "So in my life that has made quite a lot of-, so uh has made a lot of difference. That I am also more open towards-, well I have more understanding for it if someone now comes and says, I believe in God, then I can now say much better, yes me too, I can do it too. If someone comes and says, I don't believe in God, because I had these experiences, these individual sequences, I know I'll try to explain somehow, of course I know I can't explain it, it's too difficult for them, but at least I try. That's what has changed for me: I try to be more committed to that."[507]

The newfound convictions are not only expressed verbally but also sometimes through clothing and accessories, as in Simone's case: "Then I bought a book by David Togni, I don't know if you know him. He also had a religious experience, and there are clothes by him with Love Your Neighbour, the brand, and it's written everywhere. I've become a fan of his; I've got a brand for my mobile phone, a cap, a jacket, and my backpack."[508] All in all, the effects on everyday life are diverse and individual. Still, patterns are recognizable, especially regarding overcoming contingency, emotional stability, and a form of *martyria* through word and deed to the outside world.

7.4.3 Belief – knowledge – certainty: verify and interpret

This chapter set an above-average number of codes in inductive coding, namely 20 % of all codes.

The period *afterwards* is not only characterized by the theme of *self-efficacy* and *everyday impact* but also by a broad discourse on *faith – knowledge – certainty,* which deals in detail with questions of *verification and interpretation, orientation and meaning, rhythmization*, and *certainty of faith.* What was recognized at the *moment of the event* and is related to the theme of *(God) cognition*[509] is now retroactively interpreted and verified in the *after.* In the process, it is discussed, for example, whether religious experiences should be regarded as a turning point or an impetus. Colin explains: "For me, I think religious experiences are often to a certain extent turning points, in the sense of what happens here does something to me, in the sense of how I think and live. That doesn't always mean that it goes up-

507 3 EZ ZH 4 Felix, 15.
508 4 EZ SG 4 Simone, 7.
509 Cf. chapter 7.3.4 *Relational (God) cognition – recognizing and being recognized.*

wards, but it's more like these wave-like stories, so sometimes where religious experiences also make you reflect and bring about a certain distance."[510] Simone responds, "I find a turning point a bit difficult, maybe more of a push. So my life hasn't completely changed because of that, but it made me a bit more aware that you should do that, and it's become clearer."[511]

7.4.3.1 Verify and interpret

In the co-researchers' stories on religious experience, connections between *experiencing*, *believing*, *knowing,* and *certainty* are evident. Thus, this thematic complex is closely connected to the chapter *Moment of happening – relational (God) cognition.* For the co-researchers, (God) cognition results in new or different access to knowledge, certainty, and everyday life. Precisely these processes are subsumed under the core category of *change in the frame of reference.* A close linkage of emotion and cognition takes place, which leads to expanding the concept of knowledge so that one can speak of intuitive knowledge and certainty. This is closely related to the co-researchers' convictions that their religious experience has led to new knowledge, which however also expands and changes in everyday life. 50-year-old Carmen uses the term *intuition* for this, and 15-year-old Sophie describes it as follows: "I feel like it's a feeling, but then I also feel like it's just a bunch of thoughts that normally wouldn't have come together without God helping put them together."[512]

The concept of knowledge described here is therefore not a static or purely cognitive one, but one that is strongly linked to intuition and emotionality. Nevertheless, the reflexive component should not be underestimated. In combination with reflexivity and interpretation, emotionality is essential for the co-researchers to self-assess their faith. John, Janik, and Sara express themselves: "I think it's a combination of both. I feel something, then I reflect on it with thought"[513] or "Otherwise I don't come to faith. Somehow I have to feel something that also kind of makes sense to me. That there is something and that I believe in something that is of some kind of use to me."[514] And: "For me, faith, so faith is something that I take with me. In my head afterwards, in a sense inside myself, that is, so for me, a religious experience now, that doesn't have to be an experience in that sense, but maybe just has a realization of what you actually believe exactly, if

510 4 D SG 3 Colin, 16.
511 4 D SG 4 Simone, 30.
512 1 D L.A. 7 Sophie, 20.
513 1 D L.A. 5 John, 17.
514 2 EZ HA 2 Janik, 29.

you can conceptualize that somehow."[515] Sabine goes even further and understands religious experience not only but also as an interpreted experience, which has a lot to do with Western imprinting: "Exactly. So with the things, we have learned. For example, I have already heard stories from our deaconess, who really heard a voice present. I don't think you can deny that it is an evident religious experience. But the things we have, we have interpreted them religiously because we wanted to, and if we hadn't grown up in the Christian faith or our ((incomprehensible word)), we would, of course, have interpreted them quite differently."[516]

The cognition (of God) at the *moment of the event* cannot be separated from the retrospective interpretation and verification. The question of what came first can even be called a chicken-and-egg problem because cause and effect or experience and interpretation are in a reciprocal relationship. Sabine explicitly mentioned this: "I woke up and thought to myself, you just look on the internet now, how I can submit my application there. [...] It was only a few weeks later that I realized the significance of this, that it is not just normal to wake up and suddenly know what you want. Because it's not like that, something that somehow belongs to the family or something."[517] What Sabine already hints at here is mentioned even more explicitly by other co-researchers. An experience is interpreted as a religious experience by the co-researchers when a feeling of unavailability resonates for the persons concerned, something seems inexplicable, and a change occurs as a result of the event that was not consciously planned by the individual and which exceeds their possibilities. This is very much at the centre of the experience evaluation and is repeatedly emphasized in the narratives and discussions.[518] (A feeling of) unavailability must therefore be taken into account concerning religious experiences.

515 4 D SG 1 Sara, 5.

516 2 D HA 3 Sabine, 50.

517 2 EZ HA 3 Sabine, 13.

518 To name just a few of the many passages: "Like a lot of things that I don't know how I could've done alone." 1 EZ L.A. 1 Abby, 7; "An experience I can't create by myself, that touches my innermost being and leaves it changed." 2 Q HA 4 Mirjam; "So, I think the religious experience is that I felt like a light-like I put a light here (Kristine points to drawing)-I felt like a light had happened and I had recognized something." 1 EZ L.A. 4 Kristine, 22; "But nevertheless there was a certain warmth around the fire, a feeling of security that I hadn't known before, and then I thought, well, I'm not sick any more, even if I had been sick two days before, but then I really associated it with God and that's actually what my drawing shows." 3 EZ ZH 1 Ronnie, 3.

It also becomes clear that the co-researchers know that what they call God and religious experience could be interpreted differently.[519] Nevertheless, they stick to their interpretation but relativize it because they see it as a personal truth with individual normativity. For example, Leandra: "Logically, the school did it, but it could also have been that I didn't get it, that I could go back to school or somehow. So, for me, the experience was yes; somehow, something higher just made this phone ring. For me, it was somehow just like that."[520]

Interpreting these experiences has to be seen as a long and circular process that leads the co-researchers to intensive confrontations with themselves and sometimes religious issues. Simone's conflict over a more extended period is visible: "In any case, we still had some money left over, and then I went to someone and started talking to him and so on. And that was also a bit of a déjà vu from there (points to the part of the drawing with the homeless man in Barcelona). After that, I decided to write my Matura paper on charity. For that, I had to read some things in the Bible. For that, I had to go to a Christian institution, a home for the disabled, and work there."[521]

According to the co-researchers, whether something can be described as a religious experience or not depends explicitly on the personal interpretation of the individual. Religious experience can only become accessible narratively and individually, as Leandra explicitly emphasizes. According to the co-researcher, each person should be able to speak for themselves whether something can be regarded as a religious experience or not: "I'll join the two right away. Because I don't think you can say, yes, it is a religious experience just like that, it is, I don't think you can say that. You have to be able to assess that personally."[522]

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519 Sophie, for example, talks about the need to be open to God's work so that it can be experienced: "I feel like all those religious moments, your mind had to be open to receiving them. Because all the things that all of us have shared, we haven't been against, we haven't been ((abc)), or hating God or against God. We've been at a place where we were looking for him." 1 D L.A. 7 Sophie, 29. Or Micah, who understands a Christian concert as a place with religious framing, where the openness to religious experiences must be greater and in this context says the following to Sophie and Tim: "I think it happened at a concert or something because you're singing about God, so it makes you think more about it, and being more open like you said." 1 D L.A. 6 Micah, 38. Felix also connects his first religious experience with the place: "Okay, for me it's quite simple, because I was in Taizé, which is more or less a religious institution, so how should I put it? It's a religious place where lots of people come and where they pray three times a day. No, there are services with songs three times a day and that's why I can already say that it's quite religious, my thing that has to do with Taizé." 3 D ZH 4 Felix, 34.

520 3 EZ ZH 3 Leandra, 11.

521 4 EZ SG 4 Simone, 9.

522 3 D ZH 3 Leandra, 38.

Other people who are seen as role models and discussion partners also play a role in the interpretation. For some of the co-researchers, other people are mentioned as essential for understanding the religious experience and for constructing religious knowledge.[523] Depending on the case, these are friends, a camp community,[524] pastors, or other role models. For Janik, this person was a deacon, for Tobi and Felix, a priest, and Vanessa particularly emphasizes the role model function of her teachers: "And then it leads up to when I was a senior and having my teacher, who was just a brilliant man. […] He treated people fairly. He treated them well. And I just thought that was really amazing. And if these people can be doing things that don't make sense, and they're intelligent people, then there must be something good there."[525]

Other people and (camp) communities open up the possibility for many co-researchers to reflect on their religious experience and faith.[526] Generalized statements can hardly be made here, but what is striking is that especially the young co-researchers refer more often to community and camp experiences than the people over 20 years old and those who belong to the older control group.

7.4.3.2 Meaning and orientation

Closely linked to the process of interpreting and verifying religious experiences is the dimension of meaning and orientation. In the process of interpretation, religious experiences are given a pointing function: they point to something and, at

523 The fact that other people have an important function for a religious experience to occur at all has already been presented in chapter 7.2.2 *Before – Active search movement and relational impulses.*

524 The camp community in particular is put in an interesting light by Sabine. On the basis of a community experience, she explains how religious experiences can not only be experiences with God, but also community experiences of people who believe in the same God: "And on the last evening, we sat there in the tent with 300 people or so, close together on the floor and so on, and it was totally- , so I found that a real religious experience, that people from all countries somehow sang Hallelujah together and Colin and I both had really goose bumps, we almost didn't see the dew in the tent. And somehow it wasn't God that was present, but the community that came about through this faith. That we all came together from different motives and from different countries and shared this song together that evening. What do you think, I find that a religious experience, even if it doesn't have to do directly with God." 2 D HA 3 Sabine, 30.

525 1 EZ L.A. 2 Vanessa, 15.

526 "Yes, the community and you just deal with your faith and I always think it's nice when, in a discussion, trains of thought come up that you haven't always thought about before, so maybe you haven't already thought about what you actually believe yourself." 4 EZ SG 1 Sara, 11; "Yeah, it's more feeling and experience and other people telling me things." 1 D L.A. 1 Abby, 22.

the same time, beyond something that gives both meaning and orientation.[527] As an example, Gina and Leandra are mentioned here, where Gina refers to the dimension of meaning and Leandra to a direction in life: "An experience where you feel that there is more than just living and then dying"[528] and "An experience with a higher power that helped me find my way."[529] John considers such religious experiences very meaningful because they change his perspective: "Yeah, I would say that it's meaningful because I really think about it, and it really changes how I view things."[530]

The themes of meaning and orientation are also central to Sabine's religious experience because she gains a new direction in life that seems meaningful to her through her professional reorientation.[531] Furthermore, religious experiences have an orienting function because they are remembered, told, and thus kept alive as a formative biographical experience.

Within the horizon of faith, knowledge, and certainty, the orienting and meaning-giving function goes beyond the actual religious experience. It can be justified with the change in the frame of reference. For many co-researchers, God becomes a source of knowledge and certainty, which has an orienting and meaningful function for everyday life. Sabine draws a comparison between God and her father,[532] Carmen sees her confidence in transcendence,[533] Kristine her openness to the world,[534] Tobi and Janik the feeling of being accompanied,[535] and so on. In addi-

527 "[I]t gives me a sense of understanding that everything has an order to it and it's ordered by a higher power and I'm within that order." 1 D L.A. 3 Carmen, 27.

528 3 Q ZH 2 Gina.

529 3 Q ZH 3 Leandra.

530 1 D L.A. 5 John, 56.

531 "And that after weeks of lying around in bed and being in a bad mood, I felt very, very much like God had given me a shot in the right direction. And now after this year I also know that I definitely want to continue what I've been doing all year and yes, I think my religious experience is in the sense that yes, God put me on the right path when I no longer knew what I should actually do with my life." 2 EZ HA 3 Sabine, 5.

532 "Then he either stands by me with advice or the other way round, he gives me strength so that I can find my own way and that's exactly what God does, God somehow does that for me too." 2 D HA 3 Sabine, 110.

533 "It's to remind myself in times of despair or forgetfulness of just how connected I am and just how well things work out when I am in a certain place. It is to go back and retrain myself or revisit prior situations that have really connected me previously to that higher power in similar moments and to just relax and the knowingness that all is well. So, in any aspect of apprehension, fear, uneasiness, even, you know, loneliness, just to remember a time when God showed up and showed out." 1 D L.A. 3 Carmen, 72.

534 "So, I think that when I took the chance to just sit, stop and read the Qur'an and read this chapter that talked about Christianity. It was just for me so incredibly enlightening because I

tion, the meaning of religious experience is seen in the positive impact on life, as described in the chapters on *self-efficacy* and *the impact on everyday life.*

Sara states that religious experience gives meaning to life because it improves life: "It gives meaning to life in the sense that it improves life. I think we have had many experiences that have improved life in one way or another. I think it's significant."[536] Janik also agrees: "And it doesn't have a goal for me, but I realize, hey, it does me good when I talk to God or when I feel God, that does me tremendously good."[537] This life improvement has already been presented in-depth within the thematic horizon of self-efficacy, resilience, and everyday impact and is also impressively visible in the pictures.[538]

There is always a differentiation; having meaning and orientation through religious experiences and personal beliefs does not mean that there cannot also be disorientation and chaos in life. Tobi describes this impressively in his story,[539] and Niklas uses the metaphor of pain: "For me, it somehow changes that I can let go. So I can't necessarily push away problems I have, but know, ok, there's whatever is up there, it's by my side, and I feel it and know I can let go without having (short pause) pain that doesn't go away at some point. So, of course, you have pain,

saw that if everyone just stopped and took a moment to really inquire and seek answers and seek that sort of knowledge that so much understanding could be achieved through that. And I felt that after that moment I just felt so much peace and I felt like I grew a lot. And it has really affected me till now, just the way that I approach talking about different religions and different cultures. So, I think that that was just a really central experience to my life and towards me becoming more accepting and understanding." 1 D L.A. 4 Kristine, 117.

535 E.g., "[W]hen I realize that this is coming up today and I somehow know, hm, this can also go down the drain very quickly. And if I can somehow remember that, hey, there is someone, I can somehow ask for someone to be there for me. In situations where I realize, wow, I'm really upset right now, this is going on, the place is boiling, to somehow go into myself and say, hey, calm down, it's okay, it'll be okay, let it work, let it go." 2 D HA 2 Janik, 78.

536 4 D SG 1 Sara, 91.

537 2 D HA 2 Janik, 104.

538 Let's remember here, for example, Leandra, who describes the improvement of life through the metaphor of colours: "And that's colourful, that it's away from the black, that's what it should represent." 3 EZ ZH 3 Leandra, 14. Or Tobi, who addressed the feeling of loneliness: "Somehow the feeling, I can't say you're never alone, but like the feeling, the constant being alone was gone. Like.– (thinking about it) It was such a weird feeling, like from zero to 100 somehow." 4 EZ SG 2 Tobi, 35.

539 "So now for me personally, so after the first experience I had, it was like a ball that started rolling. It wasn't, how shall I say, I don't expect like such a constant experience, when I'm getting worse again now, that then such a moment happens again, I wouldn't say enlightenment, but the same experience as it was the first time." 4 D SG 2 Tobi, 13.

even if you are in a religious experience ((incomprehensible word)) like that. But otherwise, for me, it has very positive effects, definitely."[540]

In the case of the 20 co-researchers, religious experiences thus do not lead to a conviction that a life without contingency experiences is now possible but rather, as described in the chapter on *self-efficacy and dissolution of limitedness*, to a new view of and a new way of dealing with them. This view and the changing pattern of dealing with contingency are maintained by *rhythmizing* the experience.

7.4.3.3 Rhythmization

The rhythmization of religious experience arises, on the one hand, through a form of making God *present* through religious experience and, on the other hand, through smaller *religious experiences that accompany life.* Remembering the religious experience also maintains the change in the frame of reference, leading to a form of *certainty of faith.*[541] Closely related to the rhythmization of religious experience is the chapter on *the ability to remember.* The co-researchers use various religious practices and tools for the rhythmization of religious experience and the assurance of faith that emerges from it: Abby talks about how central regular prayer is for her,[542] and Vanessa and Niklas sometimes wear a cross as a 'reminder of God's presence',[543] for Carmen, Kristine, Janik, and Ronnie the quiet times (in the evening) when they can reflect on themselves, their experiences, and God are important,[544] Simone wears accessories of the clothing brand 'Love your Neighbour' as a reminder of her experience[545] and Sara helps out at a church youth camp every year.[546] All co-researchers rhythmize their religious experience(s) in some way. So, for example, by helping at a church camp at least once a year and making the camp a place of religious experience, Sara rhythmizes her faith life and reassures herself of the changed frame of reference.[547]

In Colin's case, who belongs to the older control group, the rhythmization of religious experiences is very clearly visible in his drawing. There are prominent

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540 2 D HA 1 Niklas, 74.

541 Cf. the next chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*

542 Cf. 1 EZ L.A. 1 Abby, 10.

543 Cf. 1 Z L.A. 2 Vanessa; 2 D HA Niklas, 165.

544 Cf. 1 D L.A. 3 Carmen, 27; 1 D L.A. 4 Kristine, 24; 2 D HA 2 Janik, 78.

545 Cf. 4 EZ SG 4 Simone, 7.

546 Cf. 4 EZ SG Sara, 4.

547 One conspicuous feature should be noted here: rhythmization can take place in religious settings among the co-researchers, but this does not have to be the case. Services of worship are not mentioned for this form of rhythmization; they do not seem to be of central importance in this form of individualized religiosity.

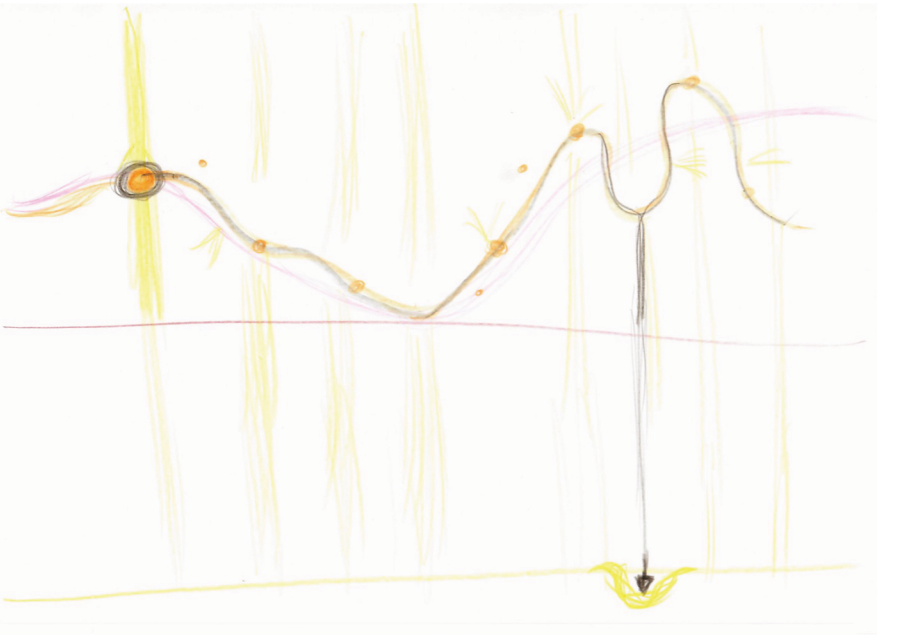

Figure 34: Drawing rhythmization.

and minor points, i.e., life-changing and life-accompanying religious experiences: "And what the yellow line means to me (shows the line on the picture) is actually the divine, which also works through people, which actually was always there. Where sometimes it worked consciously and sometimes unconsciously, and so the religious experiences, the many points (shows the moments on the picture) are also the ones from everyday life with the family. These are small individual cases where not, for me,– religious experiences are not necessarily bound to God; they can also work or function through people. But these are two relative experiences, yes, intense experiences."[548]

Suppose the religious experience occurred some time ago, and the change in the frame of reference remained. In that case, the rhythmization of religious experiences seems to manifest itself as part of life experience. Religious experiences become a life-accompanying phenomenon that leads to a feeling of connection with God and a positive self-assurance in the co-researchers. As an example, statements by Abby and Niklas include: "Okay. For me, I think they're (religious expe-

548 4 EZ SG 3 Colin, 10.

riences) the most important because that's what keeps me connected with faith,"[549] and "Yes, I'm just thinking, so they are important for me, in that case, because I never forget why I believe. That is-, so for me, religious experiences are important because I always get something nice back, and I feel good afterwards and because it-. Ok, these experiences strengthen you, no matter if it's in your self-confidence or you as a human being or they also show you that you can talk about it without any problem and without being looked at stupidly by others because I don't care at all. I think that and what others think of it doesn't matter to me at all. So it's crucial for me to feel that."[550]

7.4.3.4 Certainty of faith and self-assurance

As already indicated in the previous chapter, religious experiences have a function of self-assurance of personal biography and beliefs.[551] They form a bridge through memory and envision a relationship with what the co-researchers called God, Jesus, the sacred, or a higher power.[552] This is particularly evident in the definitions of religious experience. The co-researchers have three definitions of religious experience, which are repeated here as a reminder: "Knowing that I am loved and feeling humbled by the knowledge that God exists."[553] "It's a time when you feel God and, for me, want to pursue a relationship."[554] "A religious experience for me is when I experience something that gives me confidence and shows me no matter what I do, God is with me."[555]

The function of self-assurance through religious experience also affects the *ability to speak and give information* about personal beliefs and religious attitudes. It leads to an individual (primarily personal) *theological productivity.* This is evi-

549 1 D L.A. 1 Abby, 10.

550 2 D HA 1 Niklas, 12.

551 Carmen, for example, speaks quite specifically of a strengthening effect: "Oh, it's paramount for me to have these kinds of experiences because they solidify for me the fact that I am heard and that there is an energy of love, of presence that is here with me, that cares about me, and that is there for the inner workings of my life." 1 D L.A. 3 Carmen, 12.

552 Micah sums this up as follows: "They remind me though that God is always there. So, if something religious happens, even if you're not at church or something, like at school, then you're like, 'Wow, he's always with me.'" 1 D L.A. 6 Micah, 7. Sophie agrees with Micah and describes in her words again this tension between remembering and visualizing: "Yeah, I agree with Micah. Sometimes it feels like just because you can't see him doesn't mean he's there. But then, sometimes when I'm having disbelief, I'll feel him somehow, it'll be like a song or something like that. I think it just helps to reassure your faith, like give it a solid ((ground))." 1 D L.A. 7 Sophie, 9.

553 1 Q L.A. 2 Vanessa.

554 1 Q L.A. 7 Sophie.

555 2 Q HA 1 Niklas.

dent, for example, in the self-statements in which the co-researchers express why they believe. All co-researchers mention the strengthening of personal beliefs except Gina. Abby formulates this as follows: "I think my connection of religion is stronger, so when people ask me, 'Why do you believe in God? I can tell them, 'This is what happened. This is why I believe.' Or 'He has changed my life'."[556]

Likewise, the certainty of faith, self-assurance, and theological and linguistic ability also show up in statements related to a greater openness to other people, cultures and religions, triggered precisely by the religious experience.[557] Sara explicitly puts this *openness in a nutshell:* "I think we have all experienced that religion has actually opened our eyes and made us more open to the world in this respect. And in the outside world, for example, in the media, religion is often portrayed as the opposite, which is actually a pity. Today we still have the feeling that religious people are the ones who are closed and narrow-minded. But that actually, that faith, when you have to deal with it, when you are confronted with situations, makes you more open-minded."[558]

Self-assurance and certainty of faith through religious experience and its rhythmization in the form of *lifelong religious experiences* go hand in hand because in and through the changed frame of reference, personal identity is always also understood as a religious identity. This is especially true since (God) cognition is part of the world's knowledge and the interpretive frame of reference for a new experience. For example, Sabine says in this regard: "I think we have more hope. By saying, hey, God was by my side, we will consult God again in a similar situation that comes up and hold on to the fact that he has helped us before. In contrast to someone who says, hey, that was a coincidence, who then just lets it come to him and then perhaps has no hope or puts all his hope in his principle of coincidence. So I could see that being the difference, that we have something to believe in."[559]

The basis of this form of certainty of faith and self-assurance is, as already indicated several times, not so much an ecclesiastical or religious imprint – which is, however, very significant as an interpretation of experiences[560]– but the personal feeling and the intuitively acquired knowledge/cognition: "[I]t would be impossible for me to know how else I would feel God if I did not have experiences in my faith,

556 1 D L.A. 1 Abby, 60.

557 In particular, this is mentioned by Vanessa, Kristin, Colin, and Simone.

558 4 D SG 1 Sara, 68.

559 2 D HA 3 Sabine, 67–68.

560 See for example Sophie: "I grew up in a Christian house and I've always felt God, but I've never really wanted to pursue something with Him. And after that, I've started pursuing and putting more work into it, just because I like the idea of being joyful all the time and having someone on my side that I can talk to." 1 EZ L.A. 7 Sophie, 15.

in my religious experiences, without which I could not know or feel God at all. From there, they are actually existential for me in faith, so that I perceive God for myself."[561]

Certainty of faith and self-assurance are essential elements that contribute to maintaining and consolidating the changed frame of reference.

7.5 Changing the frame of reference – Summary

As shown, the frame of reference changes processually through religious experiences. The accumulation of codes for the *afterwards is* striking. Of the 1608 passages coded in the process 10.6 % fall on the *before,* 28 % on the *moment of the event*, and 61.4 % on the *after.* This suggests that abductive interpretation processes play a central role in the topic of *religious experiences* – that is, they must be interpreted from the *change in the frame of reference* and the changed image of the world, self, and God. In concrete terms, the *after* or the effects demand interpretative inferences about the experience. Nevertheless, the individual process steps cannot be separated; they are mutually dependent: the emotionally and physically dense *moment of the event* demands an interpretation, and the changes in the *after* require a *before* to be perceived comparatively. Thus, the *change of the frame of reference* is less seen as a linear event but rather as a circular-narrative process that is revealed to the individual through everyday life and in biographical memories and narratives.

The religious experiences described in the data are not so much church experiences as remarkable everyday experiences in which contingency experiences, personal search movements, religious imprints, and religious triggers, as well as insight and certainty, felt with intuitive power, are condensed and in which self-efficacy is increased. This is accompanied by a personal process of interpreting, verifying, and rhythmizing a new frame of reference. Since many of these religious experiences occur in an everyday setting, verbalizing and classifying such experiences are challenging.

Through the religious experience, a change of perspective is triggered in the individual, which is often, but not permanently, unique, and simultaneously holistic so that worldview and self-perception are transformed. Here it is essential to understand that this transformation is not just a synonym for positive change. Instead, within a given frame of reference or experience, the hidden coherences be-

561 2 D HA 2 Janik, 8.

come visible, the axioms of the given frame are changed, and its elements are reassigned accordingly, leading to a process of change in the person.

This leads to a reinterpretation of one's identity and position in the world and thus to a changed view of oneself, others, and the world. However, the world is not suddenly experienced as perfect and life without any contingency. Still, new possibilities in dealing with contingency and new interpretations of everyday life are opened up within the horizon of a transcendent reality. The co-researchers thus receive additional resourceful empowerment in dealing with difficult/challenging life situations.

In the processual genesis of religious experience and its effects, the concept of everyday life plays a significant role in this qualitative typological study. The religious experience unfolds its impact amid life and leads to everyday lived religiosity and theology of the late-modern urban individual. This form of religiosity and lived theology is not bound to a specific church. Rather, it is based on the interpretative performance of the individual, who, through imprinting, support, and accompaniment, claims or has the power of interpretation over personal experiences – both religious and secular imprinting and education, as well as personal relationships, influence the co-researchers. Nevertheless, the individual and religious interpretation of life within the horizon of transcendent reality must be seen as a personal achievement. Simply put, it is a process of self-assurance from uncertainty to certainty.

This also reveals a pragmatic approach to supposed pairs of opposites such as *immanence and transcendence, faith, knowledge and certainty,* and *revelation and interpretation.* They are thought of together, at least in interpretation. Ambiguity is part of the reality of life and is not a problem for the (religious) life of the late-modern urban individual. The transitions between supposed pairs of opposites are liquid and only unfold situational and personal normativity.

Part IV **Discussion and Outlook**

Introduction

The study began with an interest in phenomenological practice observations of young urban people's religious experiences. Thus, in chapters two and three, I used sensitizing concepts to outline religious experience and the late-modern urban habitat of individualized people. In chapter four, the methodological, qualitative design of the study was explained in more detail, and in chapters five to seven, the analysis of the co-researchers' images, biographical narratives, and discussions was systematically presented. The whole procedure was based on the paradigm of the inductive and explorative approach of grounded theory. Specifically, it investigated how and why urban people perceive their experiences as religious, categorize them, and put them into language. In addition, I asked about transformation logics in religious processes, which can be mapped, for example, concerning self-perception and perception of the world, identity, or personal theologizing.

Based on this, the qualitative data will be made fruitful in practical theology in the following two chapters. Chapter eight discusses the qualitative data from a practical theological point of view, and chapter nine gives implications and action-guiding impulses for practical theology.

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8 Interpretation of the results within the horizon of the initial questions

> What is the connection between know-how and other kinds of knowledge, between knowledge and action, and between practical knowing and the kind of knowing necessary for knowing God? We need to learn more about how people embody knowledge and effect change. That is, we need to know more about the connections between knowledge, practice, action, application, and transformation.[562]

Bonnie Miller-McLemore's desideratum to learn more about the transformative processes of religious knowledge stands at the beginning of this chapter. The discussion that now follows in this chapter must be seen within the horizon of this desideratum. The aim is to reflect on religiously conditioned transformation based on qualitative data and inductive processes.

The analysis made apparent what was already indicated in the sensitizing concepts: Religious experience is a dense and complex phenomenon. This is not only because religious experience cannot be observed but because it is related in numerous ways and has to do with anthropological change processes. It should be emphasized once again that the processual character of religious experience was always at the centre of the analysis, e.g., between *recognizing* and *being recognized* or between *verifying, interpreting*, and *making sure of one's faith*. This processual dynamic also reflects the individual search for an interpretation of one's own life in the light of Christian perspectives of hope.[563]

In chapter 8, this transformation logic is now discussed in practical theological terms against the background of the core category of *change in the frame of reference* and the research question from the first chapter.[564] For this purpose, the guiding questions are unfolded in three parts after a preliminary methodological remark and in close discussion with the analysis: In the first part, I make fundamental practical theological anthropological reflections on the understanding of religious experiences and the concept of religion. In the second part, I explore the question of the cognitive quality of religious experience. In the third part, I discuss the processual and transformative aspects of such experiences for individual life.

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562 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, 'The "Clerical Paradigm": A Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness?', *International Journal of Practical Theology* 11, no. 1 (2007): 36.

563 This thesis will be developed in the course of this chapter.

564 Cf. chapter 1.2.

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110990461-013

In all three parts, systematic and practical theological considerations are made concerning the analysis, and the three thematic horizons are accordingly discussed, classified, and findings are presented. Already in the analysis and now also in these sub-chapters, the discourses are intertwined; therefore, they flow together repeatedly in these chapters and are not treated separately.

8.1 Methodological preface

One methodological peculiarity, especially in the German-speaking context, should be specifically mentioned here. The specific approach presented in chapters eight and nine is transdisciplinary and moves in different discourse and language spaces. In the study itself, a consistently inductive approach is pursued; this is evident in the inclusion of the topics and even in the use of reference literature.

I use the reference literature as an epistemological discussion counterpart and hermeneutic visual aid for the core themes of the analysis. Reference texts from different scientific traditions are used. The aim is not to discuss the scientific traditions themselves but to consistently relate these approaches to the results of this study. In concrete terms, this means that Paul Tillich, Ingolf U. Dalferth, Johannes Fischer, and Wilhelm Gräb, for example, are brought into conversation with the findings of the analysis.

The aim is not to compare the different systematic starting points of these theologians with each other, since this would go beyond the scope of this study on the one hand, and on the other hand is not at all intended in the layout of this inductive-qualitative research work. In concrete terms, this means that, for example, a more revelation-theological and Christological approach from the Barth and Jüngel line, such as that of Dalferth, can stand next to a theological-anthropological approach by Tillich. This juxtaposition of the different approaches is not to be understood harmonistically concerning the two approaches, but rather both authors contribute something to the discussion of the analysis.

In this context, the discourses conducted in chapter eight are to be located more within the horizon of a liquid theological grounded theory and are to be understood less as normative and deductive theory building. The use of different – especially theological – theoretical approaches is based on terminology and contexts of meaning that show parallels in theory formation. However, this does not involve the juxtaposition of strict conceptual analogies. Methodologically, one could speak of a leap from normativity to discursivity in dealing with (normative) systematic grand theories. Metaphorically speaking, different islands of conversation – normative theological approaches and phenomena from inductive contextual analysis – are brought into an equal inductive conversation here. In this ap-

proach, the various theological theories are read through an inductive-contextual hermeneutical lens that favours the small-scale, the fragmented, the incidental, the narrative, and the particular.[565]

At the same time, I should note that the following chapters are characterized by my efforts to build a bridge between different contexts and different theologies – especially the Anglo-Saxon and German-language ones. The research approach and the use of reference literature in chapters eight and nine are also determined by the theological imprint and localization of the author herself.[566]

8.2 Practical theological anthropological considerations

The analysis presented here can now reveal the fundamental theological understanding of *religious experience*: the subject is more complex, multi-layered, and ambiguous than it is often presented in theological discourses. Differentiations of and sensitization to the phenomena presented are necessary.

For it is astonishing: there are late-modern, enlightened individuals in whom a specific form of great transcendence[567] occurs, which is interpreted individually (and often privately). There are forms of religion in the urban-secular space that develop individual existential significance and, at the same time, are not linked to a generally valid normativity or a certain ecclesiasticism. Some everyday life experiences are significant religious experiences, are cast in everyday language and can trigger highly transformative processes.

It will be shown that religious experiences of late modern, individualized, and urban people can be understood as a concept *beyond dualisms*[568] and as a liquid everyday phenomenon that simultaneously transcends daily life. For it turns out that individualized people living in a Western-enlightened urban context deal with their religious experiences in a highly differentiated and, at the same time,

565 Cf. for example Nicola Slee, *Fragments for Fractured Times: What Feminist Practical Theology Brings to the Table* (London: SCM Press, 2020), 3. "I regard the occasional, contextual and fragmentary nature of this collection as a virtue rather than a problem! Like much British theology, my own work eschews the large-scale, systematic or comprehensive approach typical of Germanic theology of the first half of the twentieth century and favours the small-scale, the incidental, the narrative and metaphorical, the particular."

566 See also chapter 1.3 *Personal interest and self-reflexivity.*

567 For the term transcendental experience cf. Knoblauch, 'Die Soziologie der religiösen Erfahrung'.

568 What is meant by a concept *beyond dualisms* and how this is justified is now discussed in the next three chapters.

unexcitingly everyday way.[569] In the narratives of the co-researchers, different categories of interpretation – revelation-theological and subjectivity-theological,[570] transcendence and immanence, functional, substantial, discursive, and transformational-theological aspects – of religious experience coincide.

In the sociological and psychological tradition of religion, religious experience is often understood functionally and examined in terms of its effect on overcoming contingency.[571] The focus is primarily on mechanisms of the religious experience process,[572] which are discussed depending on the scientific and cultural location, with or without reference to transcendence or the concept of God.[573] Moreover, the debate about the modes of operation and mechanisms of religious experience often displaces the discourse about its content.[574] For example, in his description of religious experiences as *great transcendences,* Hubert Knoblauch deliberately omits or leaves empty the content-related and qualitative determination of this experience. For him, great transcendental experiences are experiences of difference that can be measured by everyday experience and not by a particular experience. The specific moment of great transcendental experience is the *transgression of*

569 A research desideratum here could be the expansion of such a study to further target groups and e.g., also older people.

570 In the German-speaking context, Gräb (subjectivity theology) and Dalferth (revelation theology) are relevant in this regard. In contrast, Tillich takes a middle position, especially through his contextual orientation. Anglo-Saxon theologians such as Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Christian Scharen, and Pete Ward position themselves definitively and decidedly within the horizon of revealed experiences with a strong concept of transcendence. Cf. Wilhelm Gräb, *Sinnfragen: Transformationen des Religiösen in der modernen Kultur* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006); Dalferth, *God first*; Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*; Miller-McLemore, 'The Contributions of Practical Theology'; Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

571 This approach goes back to Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), among others. Durkheim was of the opinion that religious experiences should not be understood as an indication or even proof of transcendent reality, but as an expression of religious practices and ideas of a community. Cf. Hubert Knoblauch, *Religionssoziologie*, Sammlung Göschen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 59–65; A functionalist understanding of religion and religious experience was also shaped by Luckmann. Cf. Thomas Luckmann, *Die unsichtbare Religion*, ed. Hubert Knoblauch, 8th ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), 12–13; In recent times, Hubert Knoblauch has taken a phenomenological position in which religious experience is understood as a great experience of transcendence. Cf. Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 53–80.

572 Cf. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered.*

573 A conceptual approach and differentiated presentation of the concept of religious experience in historical and contemporary discourses have already been given in chapter 2 *Religious experience: a conceptual approach.* Therefore, this will not be further elaborated here.

574 Cf. Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 1–10.

boundaries (or, in the case of atheistic worldviews, the hope for a better future).[575] These extraordinary experiences of transcendence result from interaction "as an active transgression of the subject, which only thereby becomes aware of its identity."[576]

From a practical theological perspective, the *contents* of religious experience must necessarily be discussed together with the functions and mechanisms. For the content level, filled relationally concerning the Christian symbolic world and here concretely filled with Christian perspectives of hope, is the decisive reference point of qualitative determination. The theological view of the content of the description of experience itself opens up, so to speak, a more profound anthropological determination, which Joas calls the *meaning of religion*.[577] The effects and mechanisms of religious experiences can thus only be interpreted theologically to a limited extent, if not insufficiently, without their contents. They do not do justice to anthropological self-interpretations. For their meaning for the individual and society depends essentially on the content-theological determination concerning the concrete life situation of the person.

Therefore, Knoblauch's concept of religious experience as a great experience of transcendence is underdetermined concerning the specifically Christian qualitative sample of this study in the sense[578] that the co-researchers, as the results show, refer to a personal and relational concept of God with a definition of content. This brings into view a specific perspective of the religious and religious experience, which is based on the experience of the Christian perspective of hope.[579]

Nevertheless, Knoblauch's phenomenological definition of religious experience as a great experience of transcendence and his discussions on the topic, in particular, are helpful in many ways from a practical theological point of view and specifically concerning this study. Many central aspects of the analysis find a theoretical grounding in Knoblauch's conception.

Based on the analysis, it is proposed – in a typological and not a quantitative sense – to understand the religious experiences of urban individualized people

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575 Cf. Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 64–65.

576 Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 68.

577 Cf. Joas, *Glaube als Option: Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums*, 150–54.

578 From the perspective of the sociology of religion, Knoblauch's definition is precisely not underdetermined, because for this purpose, concepts must be used in a comparative manner for different religions, without defining the transcendental concepts of other cultural circles. Cf. Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 62–64.

579 Reference is made here, for example, to Fischer who speaks of a "theology from the perspective of faith". Johannes Fischer, *Theologische Ethik: Grundwissen und Orientierung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), 17–24.

within the horizon of a concept *beyond dualisms.* Here, religious experience presents itself as a liquid everyday phenomenon, but one in which everyday life is transcended simultaneously. The narratives of the co-researchers cannot be interpreted in terms of the supposed *binary opposites* of, for example, sacred or profane, transcendence or immanence, theology of revelation or theology of subjectivity and religion or science, but rather the apparent opposites can no longer be determined as opposites.

Due to the access to research and the data situation, this is in contrast to the binary distinction, which has a long tradition and was, for example, still considered a characteristic of religion by Niklas Luhmann.[580]

Here, Knoblauch, following Thomas Luckmann, represents another non-binary position of transcendence, which shows itself in the form of *wholeness* in modern spirituality and is characterized by the absence of binary distinctions.[581] This approach resonates with the analyzed narratives of the co-researchers, in which it is precisely the links between everyday life, particular everyday experience as a religious experience, and the integration of this as a transformation of the everyday perspective that stand out. As the analysis has shown, the young people see themselves as subjects who understand the meaning,[582] have religious experiences and interpret them,[583] carry out actions, and help shape the social world.[584]

Thus, the religious experience of urban people takes place in everyday life, but at the same time transcends it[585] in that the experience of the Christian perspec-

580 Cf. André Kieserling and Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, 5th ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2002).

581 "Therefore, this non-binary conception of transcendence must be distinguished from that binary conception which defines transcendence in opposition to immanence. Non-binary transcendence, as I understand it here, requires no opposition. In the sense of the Latin 'transcendere', it does mean to go beyond or to transcend. However, the term by no means necessarily presupposes a distinction between two fixed realms. Instead of distinction, it denotes connection and dissolution of boundaries as transcending and overcoming what can be seen as a boundary or difference. Transcending can be understood as a process that, precisely because it overcomes potential boundaries, does not necessarily have to draw a border. Transcending therefore does not require the drawing of a boundary as between the sacred and the profane. As we shall see, the 'wholeness' of modern spirituality will offer many examples of the absence of boundary drawing." Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 55–56.

582 Cf. e.g., chapter 7.3.4 *Relational (God-)cognition – recognizing and being recognized*; chapter 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and dissolution of limitedness*; chapter 7.4.3.2 *Meaning and orientation.*

583 Cf. chapter 7.3 *Moment of happening – the religious resonance space and the special everyday experience*; chapter 7.3.4 *Relational (God-)cognition – recognizing and being recognized.*

584 Cf. chapter 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and dissolving limitations*; chapter 7.4.2.2 *Emotional changes within and without: "To become a better person".*

585 Cf. Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 64–65.

tive of hope can restructure the perspective on everyday life and the self. This can be seen in this study, for example, in chapter 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and dissolution of limitation* and chapter 7.4.2 *Impact on everyday life.*

Likewise, the *processual determination* of the course of experiencing in Knoblauch's phenomenological perspective is anthropologically advanced since this presents itself in the present study as one of the core themes of religious experience. In the religious experiences of the co-researchers, an active process becomes visible in which a new kind of religious consciousness, in the sense of becoming aware, is formed, which is *related to* something and, in this case, to 'God'.[586] The same becomes visible in chapters 7.3.3 *Ability to remember* and 7.4.3 *Belief – Knowledge – Certainty: verify and interpret,* especially in 7.4.3.1 *Verifying and interpreting* and 7.4.3.2 *Meaning and orientation,* because in remembering and interpreting a further structuring horizon of meaning opens up, which transcends everyday life with the experience of the Christian perspective of hope.[587]

Although religious experiences have a situational cultural quality, they are individual and, at the same time, relational experiences with a 'transcendent counterpart' that are not talked about with other people or only later. This relational aspect of the religious concerning a divine 'counterpart' was made strong by the Jewish sociologist Martin Buber, among others. In the encounter with the (divine) Other, the I is exceeded or transcended: "Man becomes I in the Thou."[588] So in the encounter with the stranger, a form of self-revelation and self-knowledge takes place simultaneously, which was expressed in the analysis in chapters 7.3.2 *Embodiment and emotions during the religious experience,* 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and dissolution of limitedness* and 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*

The understanding of transcendence just described, which keeps the possibility of transcendent existence open, is, however, in this respect also again in tension with Knoblauch's approach of great transcendence, whose foundation lies in the concrete sociality of the human being, i.e., in the concrete encounter with the human Other.[589]

From a practical theological point of view, a different position is preferred here in this study: The specificity of theological research, which distinguishes it from other research cultures, is not gained through its methods or the concrete facts it analyses. Its specificity is the perspective with which it brings up the phe-

586 Cf. Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 58.

587 Cf. Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 59.

588 Martin Buber, *Das dialogische Prinzip: Ich und Du. Zwiesprache. Die Frage an den Einzelnen. Elemente des Zwischenmenschlichen. Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips*, 17th ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2017), 34.

589 Cf. Knoblauch, *Populäre Religion*, 67.

nomena, namely unlike the modern sciences, not within the horizon of the *etsi Deus non daretur*,[590] but within the horizon of the possibility of transcendent existence – within the horizon of the *etsi Deus daretur*.[591] In this specific way, theology addresses existential dimensions of being human[592] and fundamental human modes of orientation and questions. In this way, theology takes the cognitive capacity of human beings seriously[593] and does not reduce their religious experiences either to purely functional or to substantial conceptions of religion.[594] Thus, from a theological-anthropological point of view, the dignity of human experience given personal, powerful interpretative narratives is central.

A practical theological view of the analyzed narratives of (young) urban people suggests a third variant between substantial and functional interpretations. The co-researchers cannot be assumed to have a purely substantial understanding of religion. Their thought and self-distancing processes already show that they know the subjectivity of religious feelings, views, and experiences.[595] This is precisely why they are not generalized but have an individual truth character or contribute to the construction of personal normativity, as could be worked out in chapters 6.4 *Subjectivity* and 7.4.3.1 *Verifying and interpreting*.[596] At the same time, the co-researchers can take the opposite position, i.e. a worldview without the concept of God. Nevertheless, even a purely functional concept of religion, which excludes the possibility of divine existence, wouldn't do justice either to the understanding of transcendence or to the transformative potential of the narratives presented here. A purely functional approach remains at the level of analytical observation

590 Cf. Fischer, *Theologische Ethik*, 28.

591 Cf. Dalferth, *God first*, 52.

592 "Revelation is the manifestation of what concerns us ultimately. The mystery which is revealed is of ultimate concern to us because it is the ground of our being." Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 110.

593 This is especially true with regard to the believer's own awareness of truth and knowledge of faith with regard to God, world, and self. Cf. Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Kombinatorische Theologie: Probleme theologischer Rationalität*, vol. 130, Quaestiones Disputatae (Freiburg/Breisgau: Herder, 1991), 34–36.

594 Cf. Müller and Suhner, 'Eine Frage der Relation: Praktisch-Theologische Annäherungen an die Frage nach Irrtum und Erkenntnis', 15–18, here 17.

595 Cf. chapter 6.4 *Subjectivity*.

596 At the centre of this is the "search for the truth for me". Hans-Günter Heimbrock, 'Wahrheit und Lebenspraxis. Praktisch-theologische Überlegungen.', in *Renaissance religiöser Wahrheit: Thematisierungen und Deutungen in praktisch-theologischer Perspektive*, eds. Ilona Nord and Thomas Schlag (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), 25–44.

and thus calls into question the individual's religious agency and interpretive power in relation to the dignity and quality of the experience.[597]

Moreover, it takes too little account of the creative-interpretative process of the subject. It leads to "one-sidedness if religion is limited to its performance for the subject or society."[598] An alternative to the two previously mentioned determinations, which makes the "everyday understanding of religion the starting point",[599] is a discursive,[600] interpretative determination of the phenomenon.[601] In this way, "the determination of a research object can generally occur at the current discursive practice of a society, i.e., at the contemporary everyday understanding".[602]

Rootedness in the understanding of everyday life is central to this study, as the theme of *everyday life* is essential, as a common thread, in all sub-areas of the analysis because religious experiences and daily life correlate with each other to a high degree.[603]

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597 An important insight, which comes from contextual theologies such as liberation theology and feminist theology, is that personal life experiences are the essential basis of all theological theorizing. The experience-based narrative (life) interpretations of individuals are therefore not only nice to have and to be regarded as an accumulation of data, but they make it possible for the first time to make (theologically) appropriate interpretations and classifications corresponding to the subject matter. Cf. on this Kp. 9 and et al. Zoe Bennett Moore, *Introducing Feminist Perspectives on Pastoral Theology* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 11; In the horizon of feminist methodology, Joey Sprague's book on this topic is highly recommended, as she places the standpoint of theory at the centre. Cf. Sprague, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers*.

598 Heinz Streib and Carsten Gennerich, *Jugend und Religion: Bestandsaufnahmen, Analysen und Fallstudien zur Religiosität Jugendlicher* (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2011), 17; Cf. also Michael Bergunder, 'Was Ist Religion? Kulturwissenschaftliche Überlegungen Zum Gegenstand der Religionswissenschaft.', *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*, no. 19 (2011): 6–7; Neubert, *Die Diskursive Konstitution von Religion*, 27–28.

599 Pollack and Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne*, 59.

600 For a discursive definition of religion, cf. e.g. Krieger, for he orients his definition of religion on Latour and Luhmann and defines religion in a discursive way as a specific mode of communication. Cf. Krieger, 'Was ist aus der Religionskritik der Moderne geworden, nachdem die Moderne nicht stattgefunden hat?', 23; See also e.g. Monika Jakobs, 'Religion und Religiosität als diskursive Begriffe in der Religionspädagogik', *Theo Web. Zeitschrift für Religionspädagogik*, no. 1 (2002): 70–82.

601 Cf. Streib and Gennerich, *Jugend und Religion*, 14.

602 Bergunder, 'Was Ist Religion? Kulturwissenschaftliche Überlegungen Zum Gegenstand der Religionswissenschaft.', 20; Cf. also Pollack and Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne*, 59–62.

603 The concept of everyday life, which is strongly emphasized here, refers to the subjective and interpretive experience of the co-researchers and to how they find themselves in the world – the orientation to existence in everyday life does not diverge from religious experience, but is consis-

Moreover, a discursive definition of religious experience has the strength of being open to interpretation and change.[604] Its hermeneutic definition of the human being is based on Ricoeur. The human being is understood as a hermeneutic being constantly striving to interpret and make sense of their experiences.[605] A discursive, meaning-oriented approach can do justice to the dignity of the discursively unfolded religious experience and the interpretative contribution of the co-researchers.

Caution is required, however, if the determination of religious experience is reduced to a sole activity of the individual as an interpretative process because this leaves the passivity that is part of religious experience underdetermined. The determination of everyday experience as religious experience is the individual's interpretative achievement. But for these interpretative determinations to occur at all, *passivity* is of central theological importance. These passive moments, the 'coincidence' of a new perspective and the experience of unavailability, equally underlie interpretation. The active and searching subject[606] also encounters limitations in the religious experience, existential doubts, and personal impossibility.[607] Yet something changes, and a religious resonance space with transformative potential emerges.

A religious experience typologically manifested in the late-modern urban co-researchers consists of a direct, qualitatively dense experience that encounters a religiously receptive resonance space and the interpretation of this event – whereby this enumeration is not to be understood in the sense of a linear chronology. This resonance space is certainly related relationally and in terms of content: relationally to 'God'[608] and the experiencing subject and in terms of content to the re-

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tent in its linguistically coded interpretation. However, the importance of the co-researchers' points of contact with the Christian system of meaning should not be underestimated.

604 Fundamental to a definition of religion as a dynamic-cultural system is the work of Geertz. Cf. Clifford Geertz, 'Religion als kulturelles System', in *Dichte Beschreibung: Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme*, trans. Brigitte Luchesi and Rolf Bindemann, 13th ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987), 44–95.

605 Cf. Ricoeur, *Der Konflikt der Interpretationen*, Chapter 1.

606 Cf. chapter 7.2.2 *Active search movement and relational impulses.*

607 Cf. chapter 7.2.1 *Contingency and conflict experience*; chapter 7.3.2 *Embodiment and emotions during the religious experience* and chapter 7.3.4 *Relational (God) cognition – recognizing and being recognized.*

608 When speaking of 'God' in this context, a distinction to which the systematic theologian Paul Tillich has repeatedly referred seems helpful. Tillich warns against confusing the symbols communicating in experience with God, for this would be tantamount to idolatry. In this horizon, religious experience would be an experience with (contextual) symbols that point to the unconditioned. Religious experience, however, would not be an immanent experience with God (the unconditioned),

alization of this relationship and to what necessarily and existentially concerns and affects the individual, in Tillich's words: "ultimate concern".[609] At the same time, the passive moment belongs precisely to the anthropological quality of knowledge of religious experience.[610]

8.3 Quality of knowledge of religious experiences

Religious experiences have a specific quality of cognition in and for everyday life. In the analysis, especially in chapter 7.3.4 *Relational (God-)cognition – recognizing and being recognized* and 7.4.3 *Belief – knowledge – certainty: verify and interpret*, it becomes clear that religious experiences hold a particular form of understanding that is at the same time part of everyday life and extraordinary.[611] As has just been shown, it is an everyday experience with ultimate concern, where the special is not a distinction between transcendence and immanence but an ultimate concern. For the co-researchers, religious experience is a relational experience in which they both *know* something and *are known* simultaneously, through which meaning and life orientation are generated. In particular, *being recognized* takes on transcendent and existential dimensions because it touches on a fundamental anthropological dimension of being accepted, which can transform contingency experiences into self-efficacy experiences.[612] In the co-researchers' self-perception, one thus becomes, as it were, a subject of knowledge; they not only recognize themselves but are recognized, as it were, by 'God'. By *being recognized* and *acknowledged* beforehand, they attain a specific form of cognitive ability in which being and recognizing are mutually dependent. In Tillich's words, religion and religious experience

since this is beyond human capacity. The symbols mediate between the conditional and the unconditional, but do not resolve this tension. Religious experience is thus dependent on symbols and always remains in need of interpretation. In this way, Tillich's definition of religious experience counteracts religious fundamentalism, for religious experience is profoundly contextual and individual, and it is subject to personal processes of interpretation. Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 139–40.

609 Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 1.

610 Cf. Hartmut Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit*, 2nd ed. (Vienna/Salzburg: Residenz, 2018).

611 Cf. Sabrina Müller, 'How Ordinary Moments Become Religious Experiences. A Process-Related Practical Theological Perspective', in *Religious Experience and Experiencing Religion in Religious Education*, eds. Ulrich Riegel, Eva-Maria Leven, and Daniel Fleming (Münster/New York: Waxmann, 2018), 79–96.

612 Cf. chapter 7.2.1 *Experience of contingency and conflict* and chapter 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and dissolution of limitation.*

are not different from everything but break into everything. Everyday immanence becomes transcendence through the experience of being.[613]

This is theologically exciting concerning at least two things because the relational and the structuring dimensions of religious cognitive processes addressed here are found in the biblical tradition in the word field *recognize.*

Theologically, *recognizing* already goes back to the creation myth, in which the Hebrew word ידע is used.[614] The creation myth focuses on the ability to identify and the god-like ability to distinguish in the sense of competence to differentiate between good and evil.[615] Thus, the specific participation "in the divine ability to know and distinguish [...] the resulting ability of man to create"[616] comes into view. This reality-ordering and life-orienting ability is already located in the anthropological beginnings of the biblical tradition and, from this perspective, must be regarded as fundamental to being human.

The relational dimension goes hand in hand with the life-oriented function of the biblical ability to know. Thus, Willy Schottroff pointed out that relational aspects of cognition can be found in the whole field of meaning of the Hebrew ידע.[617] In the Hebrew word ידע, the experiential dimension and the affective personal reference are thus inherently included, which is also evident in other, more cognitively connoted translation variants such as *acknowledge* and *consult.*[618]

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613 Cf. Paul Tillich, 'Religionsphilosophie', in *Frühe Hauptwerke, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1959), 298.

614 An in-depth discussion of the concept of knowledge cannot be undertaken within the framework of this study, in view of the necessary research limitations. However, reference is made, for example, to Franz von Kutschera, *Grundfragen der Erkenntnistheorie* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1982).

615 It should be noted here, especially when references are made to biblical stories, that these stories are not received in the sense of scientific or historical truths, but within the horizon of legends, myths, and dreams that, as it were, mythopoetically place an anthropological truth of being human at the centre.

616 Müller and Suhner, 'Eine Frage der Relation: Praktisch-Theologische Annäherungen an die Frage nach Irrtum und Erkenntnis', 11.

617 Cf. Heinzpeter Hempelmann, *Die Wirklichkeit Gottes: Theologische Wissenschaft im Diskurs mit Wissenschaftstheorie, Sprachphilosophie und Hermeneutik*, vol. 1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 46.

618 Cf. for example Ez 14:23; 17:24 or Joel 4:17. For discussion cf. Walther Zimmerli, 'Erkenntnis Gottes nach dem Buche Ezechiel', in *Gottes Offenbarung*, vol. 19, Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament, Walther Zimmerli (Munich: Kaiser, 1963), 41–119; Hempelmann, *Die Wirklichkeit Gottes*, 1:45–68.

Not only in the creation myth but also in the entire biblical tradition, this form of 'creation-active' *recognizing* and *being recognized* is often referred to.[619] Thus, within the horizon of the root word ידע, to *recognize* can be understood as an epistemic, creative activity that always relates to something, someone and/or a context as a relational event. This corresponds to a great extent with relational *cognition* as presented in the analysis in chapter 7.3.4 *Relational (God) cognition – recognizing and being recognized.*

If this biblical-theological background is included in the discourse on the quality of knowledge of religious experience, the relational and active qualities must come into particular focus. Concerning these qualities, religious experiences are also relational moments of development that lead to active handling of contingency, change the self-image, and increase self-efficacy.[620]

The 'Christian' religious experiences analyzed in this qualitative study with their reality-ordering and relational aspects show many analogies to the life-orienting and relational dimension of the Hebrew ידע.[621] In the analysis, it becomes clear that cognition cannot be understood as a purely cognitive process but involves moments of opening up reality,[622] which can also take on a corrective quality vis-à-vis the mind.[623]

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619 Examples of this are Ps 139 and Jn 4. In the first verses of Ps 139, the psalmist explains how fundamental and existential relational recognition and being recognized is, how much it extends to the whole of human existence. The human being comes into view with his or her whole being. Jn 4 is another example of this. This story tells of the encounter between Jesus of Nazareth and the Samaritan woman at the well. There is no great action at the well; there is only a conversation between two people in which the woman's life story is brought up. Nevertheless, an existential relational moment of development is pointedly told in this story, for the Samaritan woman went away changed.

620 It is worth remembering in particular the *active search movement* as presented in chapter 7.2.2 and the presentations of the analysis in chapter 7.4.1 and 7.4.2, where the themes of *self-efficacy* and *impact on everyday life* were presented.

621 A further discussion of the implicit meaning of culturally shaped pre-understandings of religious cognitive processes cannot be undertaken within the framework of this study. Precisely because of this correlation, however, it could be a fruitful endeavour, especially in the context of critical reflections on implicit religious formation processes in the West. The question would then be whether the correspondence between the Hebrew meaning of *recognizing* and the similar characteristics that could be worked out in grounded theory can already be seen as implicit formative pre-understandings of religion in Western society.

622 Dalferth describes this moment of opening up with the attainment of a new point of view. Thus the world is seen differently, from the perceptual perspective of a believing person. As a result, the phenomena of the world are not only experienced as worldly, but at the same time as signs of God's presence. Cf. Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Radikale Theologie*, 3rd ed., vol. 23, Forum Theologische Literaturzeitung (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 72.235.245. In the context of this

The process of *recognizing* and *being recognized* must be seen as an experience of unavailability because, on the one hand, it is not subject to the control of the co-researchers. Still, on the other hand, inner and outer conflicts are resolved in the process.[624] Thus, the quality of knowledge of religious experience is an existential one, in which one's own life comes into view concerning the other person, the world and the 'divine': "When faith refers to God in speaking and thinking, this is therefore concerning experienced reality and gains its specific meaning from the fact that the word 'God' designates something in this reality."[625] In this way, the epistemic quality of religious experience is closely tied to the experience of transcendence,[626] the related content dimension of experience, and the co-researcher's lifeworld. Therefore, the subject experiences itself as localized in the world in a specific way concerning the neighbour and God. Within this horizon, faith is not an alternative to cognition but, as Trutz Rendtorff notes, can include and enlarge it: "I believe in God means, meaningfully, that I become aware of an extension of the reality of life that is beyond the empirical-sensual objecthood of reality, an extension from which light falls on the proportions of the sensually perceptible world."[627]

This form of realization of reality, which in this study is called a *change in the frame of reference,* is called by Fischer *practical realization of faith,* which is reflected in all references to the world and life and places the believing person (always

study, however, it is essential to keep pointing out that although it is a matter of a new perspective or a personal change in the frame of reference, this is not an isolated event and does not always mark a transition from 'unbelief to faith', but that even a person who already locates themselves in the Christian religious system can nevertheless acquire a new perspective on the personal fulfilment of life and faith, but also on their environment.

623 This insight into the function of religious experiences is nothing new and was also described by Ritter, for example. The analysis of the qualitative data collected here is a further confirmation of theoretical approaches that point to unavailable moments of development. Cf. e.g. Ritter, 'Erfahrung. Religiöse Erfahrung/Erleben/Gefühl/Deutung', 53.

624 The contrast between the contingency and conflict experiences and the resolution of these is well seen in chapter 7.2.1 *Contingency and conflict experience*, chapter 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and resolution of boundedness and* chapter 7.4.2.1 *Coping with contingency through envisioning.*

625 Fischer, *Theologische Ethik*, 17.

626 With Troeltsch, such religious experiences could also be assigned to mysticism, which is characterized by its inwardness, presence, and immediacy. Ernst Troeltsch, 'Das stoisch-christliche Naturrecht und das moderne profane Naturrecht. In: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie (DGS), Verhandlungen des 1. Deutschen Soziologentages vom 19. bis 22. Oktober 1910 in Frankfurt am Main' (Frankfurt/Main: Sauer u. Auvermann, 1969), here 172.

627 Trutz Rendtorff, *Gott, ein Wort unserer Sprache? Ein theologischer Essay*, vol. 171, Theologische Existenz heute (Munich: Kaiser, 1972), 19.

anew) in them.[628] *The practical knowledge of faith* – or the *knowledge of revelation,* as Tillich calls it[629]– becomes visible in chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.* Through religious experience and its underlying specific quality of cognition, co-researchers can locate themselves in the space of *Deus* (and sometimes Christus) *praesens*, which means "to know the world in the light of the texts [that] tell his [Jesus Christ's] story."[630] The experience of this view is rhythmized retrospectively and prospectively in everyday life.[631] Thus religious experience, especially within the horizon of its rhythmizing quality, becomes an inner generative source of specific and intuitive knowledge – of certainty.[632]

The Anglo-Saxon theologian Pete Ward discusses this specific knowledge in terms of participatory, i.e., active aspects concerning 'God': "My starting point has been to explore the nature of theology as the knowledge of God. I argue that knowledge of God is distinct from other kinds of knowledge because God cannot be known in the same way we know about other things. Knowing God is participatory in nature. In other words, the practice of theology is sharing in the life of God."[633] This is particularly interesting because such active, interpretative, and participatory aspects can be traced again and again in the analysis of the co-researchers' religious experiences.[634]

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628 For a detailed account of this, cf. Johannes Fischer, *Glaube als Erkenntnis: zum Wahrnehmungscharakter des christlichen Glaubens*, vol. 105, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie (Munich: Kaiser, 1989), 17–75.

629 Tillich's description of the realization of revelation seems to be more related to a specific moment than to a process. This study, however, suggests a processual understanding. Nevertheless, Tillich's specification is to be understood as a helpful addition to the previous explanations: "Revelation is the manifestation of the mystery of being for the cognitive function of human reason. It conveys knowledge – a knowledge, however, that can only be received in a 'revelation situation', through ecstasy and miracles. This correlation points to the special character of 'revelation cognition'. […] Revelation knowledge does not increase our knowledge of the structures of nature, history and man. […] Revelation knowledge is knowledge of the mystery of being in our situation, not information about the nature of things and their mutual relationship. Therefore, revelatory knowledge can only be received in the revelatory situation, and it can – in contrast to ordinary knowledge – only be communicated to those who participate in this situation. […] Revelatory knowledge is knowledge of the mystery of being in our situation, not information about the nature of things and their mutual relationship." Paul Tillich, *Systematische Theologie*, Studienausgabe, de Gruyter Texte (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 137–39.

630 Fischer, *Theologische Ethik*, 20.

631 Cf. chapter 7.4.3.3 *Rhythmization.*

632 Cf. chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*

633 Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 6.

634 Cf. chapter 7.4.3 *Belief – knowledge – certainty: verify and interpret.*

Points of contact for this complex relationship between experience, (practical) knowledge, and faith go back to the scholasticism of Anselm of Canterbury. Anselm of Canterbury deals decisively with the connections between faith, knowledge, and understanding. He discusses a form of faith that seeks insight (fides quaerens intellectum) and a process of faith that struggles for understanding (credo ut intelligam).[635] The co-researchers interpret the religious experiences so that faith and insight come together in the experience. The interpretation happens from the perspective of faith. It becomes, in faith, specific knowledge of one's localization and a (not necessarily punctual and unique!) form of knowledge of God[636] in the sense of being turned towards God in the individual's life. The change in the frame of reference, through which a specifically religious perspective on the interpretation of the world is opened up, thus simultaneously shapes the further interpretation of personal experiences. In this process, religious knowledge, presented within the thematic horizon of *imprinting* in chapter 6.2, helps the co-researchers have security of faith and has a locating (with Fischer: localizing) function. In contrast, religious experience strengthens the inner certainty of faith.[637]

At the same time, the terms *security of faith* and *certainty of faith* also reflect the tension between the ecclesial location or character and the individualized description of one's faith and personal image of God. A shift in normativity from a religious-public to an individual-private one can be observed because religious experiences have a solid personal normativity.[638] This is particularly evident in the fact that the experiences are seen as an increase in knowledge, based on which one acts and shapes one's own life. This personal normativity, interpreted as relational and based on religious experience, is constructed in private – often unconsciously – and further developed based on new experiences. It must prove itself in the everyday, lived existence of the individual.[639]

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635 Of course, Anselm of Canterbury's remarks are to be located in the scholastic context and must be thought of together with his proof of God. Nevertheless, a reference to this discourse seems exciting because the religious experiences of the co-researchers also take on the function of everyday, often unexcited proofs of God. Cf. Robert Theis and Anselm von Canterbury, *Proslogion/Anrede: Lateinisch/Deutsch*, neuübersetzte (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), Chapter 1.

636 Cf. Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 28–30.

637 Cf. chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*

638 In the analysis, the question of normativity is presented in particular in chapter 7.4.3.1 *Verify and interpret.*

639 Arnett renames this process as "to think for themselves with regard to religious issues" Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, 2nd ed. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 212–14. It is also worth recalling chapter 3, *Human existence in late modernity*, where it was pointed out that in late modern people, the search for identity and meaning are individual orientations based on personal experience.

In this way, these personal religious experiences (in the lives of the co-researchers) take on a form of *permanent cognition.*[640] The permanence is evident in the changed self-localization, mainly because the subject can no longer go back behind this experience, precisely because it is a holistic and embodied experience.[641]

With Gadamer, it could be argued that religious experiences have different but independent objectivity.[642] In this context, however, the *lasting acquisition of knowledge* is not to be understood as something static but within the horizon of the process of religious experience as a dynamic, life-related, contextual, and discursive relating[643] to – a "doing theology"[644] – from which a specific form of everyday lived theology emerges that is grounded in the world of life and experience.[645]

8.4 The transformative effect of religious experiential processes

As has just been shown, the specific cognition of religious experience is already a relational, participatory, and processual one that leads to "understanding the whole of life in all its dimensions and areas once again in a new and different way",[646] namely within the horizon of a Christian perspective of hope for everyday

640 Cf. in particular chapter 7.3.3 *Memory*; chapter 7.3.4 *Relational (God-)cognition – recognizing and being recognized and* chapter 7.4 *Afterwards – from effect to experience* including subchapters.
641 See chapter 7.3.2 *Embodiment and emotions during the religious experience* and chapter 7.3.3 *Memory.*
642 Cf. Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*. Part Two.
643 Cf. Buber, *Das dialogische Prinzip*; The systematic theologian Ingolf U. Dalferth expresses this relatedness, among other things, as follows: "We are not how we experience ourselves, but how we are experienced by God in Jesus Christ; and we only experience ourselves as we are when we experience ourselves as God experiences us and as he makes this known to us in faith through the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ". Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart: zur Wahrnehmung Gottes in den Erfahrungen der Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 91.
644 This debate has gained a foothold especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. Cf. e.g. Astley, *Ordinary Theology*; Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology: Resources for Contextual Theology*, 2nd ed. (London/New York: Mowbray, 2009); Storrar and Morton, *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, 53; David Tracy, *Talking about God: Doing Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983).
645 These thoughts are elaborated in the last chapter of the study.
646 Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Die Kunst des Verstehens: Grundzüge einer Hermeneutik der Kommunikation durch Texte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 512.

life.[647] In this way, *recognizing* and *being recognized* is, in turn, closely connected to the transformative aspects of religious experience. The processual and transformative[648] aspects could be mapped repeatedly in the formation and discourse of the core category. Not only is a religious experience itself a processual event, but individual processes are reinforced or triggered by it. Process and transformation cannot be separated from each other and are thus discussed together in this chapter. In addition, this chapter slowly builds up the concept of transformation from personal hermeneutics to the formation of religious identity.

8.4.1 Personal hermeneutics

From a processual perspective, as was shown in chapter 7.2 *Before – Contingency, Search and Relationship,* there are events, impulses, and activities that precede a religious aha-moment. Thus, from the external perspective, criteria can be named that retrospectively make the occurrence of a religious aha-moment more probable. For the co-researchers, however, the religious moment of discovery always occurred unexpectedly and surprisingly. It is the experiences of contingency and conflict, the active search movement in response to contingency and relational (religious) impulses, which are fundamental for the emergence of a religious resonance space, in which, again verifying-interpreting, personal transformation processes occur, and a religious reframing of the contingency situation and personal life takes place within the horizon of a Christian perspective of hope. This, in turn, correlates to a great extent with the personal search movement, in which the questioning and searching individual aligns themselves with a transcendent counterpart.[649] The active handling of the experience of contingency is guided and accompanied by an openness to the unavailable.

However, many of these process steps take place unconsciously, and the verbalization of religious experience is a fundamental problem of this, on the one hand,

647 Cf. chapter 7.4.2 *Effects on everyday life and* especially chapter 7.4.2.2 *Emotional changes inside and outside: "To become a better person".* Also, chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*
648 Transformation does not simply mean a change, but a fundamental and lasting change. A change that is so fundamental that it is no longer possible to return to the previous state. A change in which the entire frame of reference, the view of self, of others, and of the world is fundamentally altered. In philosophy, Plato's Allegory of the Cave is an example of a fundamental transformation. Cf. Wilhelm Köller, *Perspektivität und Sprache: Zur Struktur von Objektivierungsformen in Bildern, im Denken und in der Sprache* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 169–74.
649 This does not have to be explicitly named or designed as a conscious 'search for God' towards a personal counterpart. Cf. chapter 7.2.2 *Active search movement and relational impulses.*

because experience per se is not first expressed in conceptual language and on the other hand, however, because it presents itself in this study as an explicitly sensitive phenomenon.[650] Suppose a suitable research setting is created in which the co-researchers' verbal and/or aesthetic linguistic and expressive ability is increased. In that case, it becomes apparent that the awareness of subjectivity is a specific feature of religious everyday experiences.[651]

In this typological study, it becomes apparent that young urban people with everyday religious experiences do not make a general claim to normativity, probably precisely because the religious experiences take place outside the physically perceptible normative religious system (which is often symbolized by the church).

Thus, the observations here prove Luckmann right because religiosity increasingly shifts from the institution to the private sphere.[652] As a result, the religious experiences of urban people are subject to personal hermeneutics (which includes both interpretation and understanding).[653] This individual hermeneutic is always shaped by origin, present life design, relationships, and specific systems of meaning. Nevertheless, these formative systems aid the individual in reconstructing his life design and normativity. Thus, the religious experiences here are something quite different from what could be called ecclesial enactment[654] since they do not unfold any explicit public efficacy but take place in private and in secret. However, through the logic of transformation, they, in turn, develop personal efficacy in everyday life, which at the same time is equivalent to another form of public communication of religion, primarily through action.[655]

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650 Max Weber already pointed out the problem of verbalizing religious experience. He emphasized that irrationality and incommunicability are not the prerogative of religious experience alone, but that they are inherent in experience and are therefore an anthropological problem and not specifically a religious one. Cf. Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*, 7th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1978), 112.

651 Cf. Wissmann, 'Erfahrung I', 84.

652 Cf. Luckmann, *Die unsichtbare Religion*.

653 Cf. chapter 7.4.3.1 *Verify and interpret* and chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*

654 Cf. Jan Hermelink, *Kirchliche Organisation und das Jenseits des Glaubens: Eine praktisch-theologische Theorie der evangelischen Kirche* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011), 27–31.

655 This is of course highly exciting for the various disciplines of practical theology, since, for example, many of the explanations of church theory still implicitly carry with them a claim to institutional interpretation. Cf. e.g. Hermelink, *Kirchliche Organisation und das Jenseits des Glaubens*; Isolde Karle, *Praktische Theologie*, vol. 7, Lehrwerk Evangelische Theologie (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2020); Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag, eds., *Handbuch für Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2014).

8.4.2 The transformative potential: religious experience as Widerfahrnis and life-historical interpretation of meaning

As was made visible in the analysis in chapters 5–7 and discussed in chapter 8.1 *Practical theological anthropological considerations*, the transformation of late-modern urban people through religious experiences, at least in this typological sample, is not to be understood as a purely selective event that is exclusively affected by an experience. Equally, the transformative process is discursively related to God and thus goes beyond a strictly life-historical interpretation of meaning.

The discourse on religious experience and its potential for transformation often comes to a head in contemporary theological discourse[656] so that religious experience and the change in the frame of reference triggered by it are classified either as a *Widerfahrnis*[657] or as a *life-historical interpretation of meaning*. Two exponents from German-speaking theology that illustrate these polarities are the systematic theologian Ingolf Dalferth, who has already been quoted several times, and the practical theologian Wilhelm Gräb. In the following, the strands of argumentation of the two theologians will be briefly outlined to then be able to better classify the religious experiences at hand here concerning their transformative potential.

For Dalferth, the change of the personal frame of reference is a change of perspective related to Widerfahrnis and thus unfolds a tremendous transformative power.[658] Dalferth formulates the relationship between experience and Widerfahrnis as follows: "God reveals himself by hiding himself precisely and thus becomes addressable as a certain indeterminacy. But what, for whom and as what God comes to be experienced in this way as the difference is not in the power of the experiencer, but only of the one who reveals himself in this concealing way. Accordingly, God's determination is experienced sub contrario as self-determination and his experience in precise concealment as a Widerfahrnis. The event of this Widerfahrnis is understood as a gift".[659] In this, God does not make godself present as an object of experience, but in a relational sense as "I-am-for-you-there […] more precisely as I Now There With You For You Through Me".[660] Therefore, theology is

656 Cf. also chapter 8.2 *Practical-theological anthropological considerations*.

657 As a reminder: The term Widerfahrnis is challenging to translate. Among other things, it stands for a combination of the following words: event, happening, incident, experience, and knowledge.

658 Whereby Dalferth specifically addresses the change from disbelief to belief, which is not of central relevance in this sample here. Cf. Dalferth, *Radikale Theologie*, 258.

659 Dalferth, *God first*, 280–81.

660 Dalferth, *God first*, 297. Relationality becomes apparent at various points in this study. In principle, the change of the frame of reference is already to be understood as a dynamic-relational

also concerned with "God's creative activity in, on and for us and in and on our world"[661], which at the same time means that in a theological discourse one is always also affected by God's effectiveness.[662] In Dalferth's programme, religious experiences and the transformation processes that emanate from them are understood as Widerfahrnis and as relational gift of God within the horizon of the Christian system of meaning.[663] The aspect of Widerfahrnis, which is strengthened by Dalferth, comes into play in the analysis, especially in chapter 7.3 *Moment of happening – the religious resonance space and the special everyday experience.*

For the practical theologian Wilhelm Gräb, too, the concept of experience is a central concept of his theological reflections, e.g. when he defines religion as religious experience[664] and makes this strong as the fundamental object for a theology that is capable of connection.[665] For Gräb, the origin of religious change processes lies in "experiences of a break-in, upheaval and breakthrough that make us ask for meaning"[666] and met in an interpretive and self-interpretive way, resulting in a feeling of self-confidence and being held.[667] The aspects considered central by Gräb can also be found in many places in the analysis. Thus, the experiences of intrusion are evident in chapter 7.2.1 *Experience of contingency and conflict* and the interpretive aspects are decidedly in chapter 7.4.3 *Belief – knowledge – certainty: verify and interpret.*

In his explanations, Gräb pursues a functional approach in which religion serves to cope with contingency and has the task of interpreting life's experiences: "With its specific communication code, the distinction between immanence and transcendence, finite and infinite, temporal and eternal, certain, finite experiences can always be described differently. These experiences can be transferred into interpretations that nevertheless make them understandable and manageable in a

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event. However, relationality is explicitly mentioned in Chapter 7.3.4 *Relational (God) cognition – recognizing and being recognized.*

661 Dalferth, *God first*, 197.

662 Dalferth, *God first*, 198f.

663 And so, at the same time and in equal measure, categories that are interpreted and which in turn interpret experience.

664 Cf. Gräb, *Sinnfragen: Transformationen des Religiösen in der modernen Kultur*, 29.

665 Cf. Wilhelm Gräb, 'Religion und die Bildung ihrer Theorie: Reflexionsperspektiven', in *Religion in der modernen Lebenswelt. Erscheinungsformen und Reflexionsperspektiven*, eds. Wilhelm Gräb and Birgit Weyel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 194.

666 Wilhelm Gräb, *Lebensgeschichten, Lebensentwürfe, Sinndeutungen: eine praktische Theologie gelebter Religion* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 66.

667 Cf. Gräb, *Lebensgeschichten, Lebensentwürfe, Sinndeutungen: eine praktische Theologie gelebter Religion,* 66–69.

certain way within the horizon of the indeterminable and infinite."[668] Religion thus becomes an implicit and explicit subjectivity-theological offer of interpretation for people's experiences. Accordingly, finite experiences can be interpreted within the horizon of the infinite: "Religion is religious experience, and religious experience is religiously interpreted experience."[669] These experiences are interpreted concerning the symbol 'God', through which "the whence of the immediate, bodily sensed feeling of the absolute dependence"[670] is determined. Thus, religious experiences are always subjective experiences, preceded by a sense of the infinite and dependent on the articulation of traditional symbols and rituals.[671]

Very fundamentally, Gräb understands religious experiences as specific aesthetic experiences that are sensually perceived and experience a religious interpretation.[672] These experiences have transformative power, and through these experiences, the person changes: "The imaginative activity of religious consciousness then, first of all, adds the religious interpretation to the aesthetic, bodily-sensually gripping transformation experience. The pious mind interprets the transformation experience as an experience of transcendence or as a realization of the absolute. Finally, it interprets it in the language of Christian faith as an experience of God."[673] In Gräb's approach, religious experiences also have transformational potential namely in that, as aesthetic experiences are interpreted religiously, they ask for meaning and open up purpose.[674]

8.4.3 Religious experience as an unavailable resonance relationship

As has just been shown, both Dalferth and Gräb certainly have the transformative potential of religious experience in mind. We now ask specifically about the transformative effect of religious experience within the horizon of this qualitative study. It must thereby be noted that the various aspects of Widerfahrnis and life-historical interpretation of meaning coincide in a more complex way and that Wider-

668 Gräb, *Sinnfragen: Transformationen des Religiösen in der modernen Kultur*, 26.
669 Gräb, *Sinnfragen: Transformationen des Religiösen in der modernen Kultur*, 30.
670 Gräb, *Sinnfragen: Transformationen des Religiösen in der modernen Kultur*, 31.
671 Gräb's strong reference to Schleiermacher is not to be overlooked. For a more detailed account of Schleiermacher's significance within the thematic horizon of religious experience, please refer to chapter 2.
672 Cf. chapter 7.3.2 *Embodiment and emotions during the religious experience* and chapter 7.4.3.1 *Verify and interpret*.
673 Gräb, *Sinnfragen: Transformationen des Religiösen in der modernen Kultur*, 117.
674 Cf. Gräb, *Vom Menschsein und der Religion*, 248–55; Cf. Gräb, *Sinnfragen: Transformationen des Religiösen in der modernen Kultur*, 115–18.

fahrnis and the self-interpretation of the subjects, especially in the self-interpretation of the co-researchers, are not mutually exclusive. This is particularly in the sense that the different categories of interpretation, i.e., Widerfahrnis and subjective-life-historical interpretation of meaning, are both included as interpretive categories. Thereby, a specific form of an unavailable processual change of perspective, as described by Dalferth, coincides with one particular life-historical interpretation of meaning, as strongly argued by Gräb.

In the context of this study, therefore, a definition of religious experience can be made based on the analysis. The goal here must be to depict religious experience as an interpretive discourse category beyond the classical dualisms to do justice to the narratives of the co-researchers. This is in awareness that the hermeneutic key contains different categories of interpretation. The following definition is intended to do justice to these various aspects: *Religious experience is a Widerfahrnis with a God experienced as relational (relational event), which can transform the personal frame of reference into the horizon of a Christian perspective of hope, whereby the interpretive and understanding handling of this experience is an integral part of the experience.*[675]

A religious experience can thus be thought of as a moment of resonance[676] on the horizon of transcendent existence, which is always related to that which necessarily concerns the individual, i.e., existentially. In this way, religious experience not only promotes a form of transcendent external relationship but, at the same time, a new form of self-relation.[677]

This can also be placed within the horizon of biblical statements because, ultimately, it can be asked what creates this resonance space in which the individual is enabled to transcend their everyday life. In the biblical parable of the sower, which is told by all three Synoptics (Mk 4:1–20; Mt 13: 1–23; Lk 8:4–15), this question is metaphorically explored. It is pictorially illustrated how, under certain conditions, a resonance space for the 'word'[678] arises in the hearers, and the seed grows and bears fruit. In other situations, nothing happens; the seed withers, and there is no sounding board for growth.

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675 Cf. chapter 6.2 *"Imprinting" as a liquid phenomenon before, during, and after the religious experience*; 6.4 *Subjectivity*; chapter 7.3.2 *Embodiment and emotions during the religious experience*; chapter 7.3.4 *Relational (God) cognition – recognizing and being recognized;* 7.4.3.1 *Verify and interpret*; chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of belief and self-assurance.*

676 Cf. Rosa, *Resonanz*, 435f.

677 Cf. chapter 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and dissolution of limitation*; chapter 7.4.2 *Effects on everyday life* and chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*

678 The word in the sense of God.

In this parable, part of the unavailability fundamentally inherent in religious experience and resonance is expressed, for they remain unavailable until a certain point.

Therefore, from a practical theological point of view, it is not advisable to measure and evaluate the truth content of religious experiences according to scientific criteria but rather, as Tillich says, it can be placed within an existential horizon of revelation: "Revelation is the manifestation of what concerns us ultimately. The mystery which is revealed is of ultimate concern to us because it is the ground of our being."[679] Religious experience is what it is for the interpreting individual: a qualitatively dense resonance relationship, with immanent and transcendent aspects, in which the perspective of hope is always also a goal.

8.4.4 Religious experience as a catalyst for a personal transformation process within the horizon of Christian perspectives of hope

In particular, the processual perspective on religious experience, in which transformation through experience and formative, interpretative and verifying theological activity concerning 'God's work' go hand in hand (and, as already mentioned, must be seen as a chicken-and-egg problem) have life-enhancing potential for change. The perspective on one's own life and the world is repeatedly transformed in this process, and a renewal of this perspective is brought about rhythmically.[680] It becomes apparent in the analysis that this transformative process begins with the individual's self-perception and self-relation, and only then and in the further interpretation and reflection of the experience has an effect on the perception of others and the more extensive personal system of meaning.[681]

Here, the self-assurance of personal biography described in chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance*, the (newly acquired) relational perspective of hope and the certainty of faith are the supporting elements of transformation. Here, especially concerning certainty, we should recall the distinction in Reformation theology between *securitas* and *certitudo. Securitas* expresses the human fu-

679 Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 110.

680 Cf. chapter 7.4.3.3 *Rhythmization.*

681 This process is almost exemplary in Kristine's case: "So, taking all of this into account, it was just a really powerful moment in my life. After that, I just became so much more understanding and I really thought outside of myself. And I think without that religious experience, without having opened up the Qur'an and seeing what they had to say about Christianity, I probably would've continued thinking those terrible things that had been fed to us in the media." 1 EZ L.A. 4 Kristine, 19–22.

tile endeavour for security. *Certitudo*, on the other hand, refers to a certainty that cannot be acquired by oneself but is given by 'God'.[682] Within the horizon of this certainty, the self-concept of God's own creatureliness also gains significance, for the subject rhythmically places itself in a theological-relational reference horizon.[683]

This way, new interpretative patterns for one's life are formed. The previous life-historical interpretations of meaning are reshaped by an exogenous influence (Widerfahrnis) and the everyday hermeneutics of the person changes.[684]

In this qualitative study, it is evident that the co-researchers, stimulated by their personal religious experience, tend to design new hermeneutic schemes.[685] Religious experiences thus become impulse generators for new patterns in everyday hermeneutic processes.

By being embodied and perceived with emotional intensity,[686] religious experiences increase the readiness for change and trigger transformation processes that can take place in a short time, significantly increasing resilience[687] and lead-

682 Cf. Christian Grethlein, 'Gemeindeentwicklung. Gemeindeaufbau/Church Growth/Gemeindeleben/Verein', in *Handbuch Praktische Theologie*, eds. Wilhelm Gräb and Birgit Weyel (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 504.

683 Cf. Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Umsonst: Eine Erinnerung an die kreative Passivität des Menschen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 190–93.

684 According to Heidegger, the individual has two possibilities to react to new experiences, either the old established patterns of interpretation harden even more, or new hermeneutic schemes are devised. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 19th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2006), 280–310.

685 Why this is the case for the majority of the co-researchers cannot be answered definitively – however, the core category of *change in the personal frame of reference* and the changed self-localization already imply that the hermeneutic schemata also change.

686 Cf. chapter 7.3.2 *Embodiment and emotions during the religious experience.*

687 There are a number of research reports that examine the relationship between religion and its positive health effects in young people. In these, religious beliefs are seen as a resource for health and well-being that can increase resilience. Cf. Sian Cotton et al., 'Religion/Spirituality and Adolescent Health Outcomes: A Review', *Journal of Adolescent Health* 38, no. 4 (2006): 472–80; Jennifer Nooney, 'Religion, Stress, and Mental Health in Adolescence: Findings from Add Health', *Review of Religious Research* 46 (2005): 341–54; Lynn Rew and Y. Joel Wong, 'A Systematic Review of Associations among Religiosity/Spirituality and Adolescent Health Attitudes and Behaviors', *Journal of Adolescent Health* 38, no. 4 (2006): 433–42; Religious beliefs are not only considered a protective factor against drug use, but also have a positive effect on mental health (e.g. as a strengthening of self-esteem or against depression). Religious young people have fewer psychological problems and are better able to cope with stress. Cf. Harold G Koenig, 'Research on Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health: A Review.', *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 54(5) (2009): 285; In addition, it can be shown that when religious youth have suicidal thoughts, they can mobilize more social resources. Cf. Koenig, 287–89; however, there are also studies that show that young people who are active in church can certainly experience victimization in a primarily secularized context.

ing to astonishing changes in the structures of thought and action in the lives of individuals.[688] In the interpretive, abductive perspective[689] of the co-researchers, these moments are starting points for the development and expansion of the religious system of meaning, which results in an experience-based and thus individualized form of expression of personal faith and in the formation of individualized religious identities.[690] In this process, the subjective and independent fulfilment of faith is at the centre, "What and how to believe is clarified by the individual subjects themselves."[691]

Deliberately, the nomenclature of *conversion* was not used for the transformation processes described here, although there are undoubtedly many overlaps and similarities. The main reason for this is that the transformation processes of the co-researchers do not aim at and have not led to the adoption of a specific style of piety or the integration of the co-researchers into a particular church group. The co-researchers' transformation narratives are precisely characterized by a specifically individual hermeneutic.[692]

In contrast, precisely these group-specific characteristics are referred to in the discourses on *conversion.* For example, from Roman Siebenrock: "In a general sense, conversion refers to any deepening and renewal of a person within a worldview framework of a particular group. Conversion thus does not necessarily imply

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It becomes apparent, for example, that suicidality is increased by religion-related bullying. Cf. Leslie J. Francis and Ursula McKenna, 'The Experience of Victimisation among Christian Adolescents in the UK – The Effekt of Psychological and Religious Factors', in *Understanding Religion: Empirical Perspectives in Practical Theology. Essays in Honour of Hans-Georg Ziebertz*, eds. Ulrich Riegel et al. (Münster: Waxmann, 2019), 55–78.

688 Cf. the various biographical narratives in Chapter 5 *Individual case presentation: the content of religious experience.*

689 The concept of abduction goes back to Peirce. Köller summarizes the abductive process in the horizon of new perspective formation as follows: "The ability to abduct is an ability to form new interpretants or new perceptual perspectives. It prevents sign processes from always reproducing only well-rehearsed mental operations, because it opens up the chance to assign new representational contents to old familiar means of representation or to vary the cognitive and communicative perspectivity of linguistic signs." Köller, *Perspektivität und Sprache*, 247.

690 "In the uniqueness, unrepeatability and unjustifiability of one's own experience, the individual determines himself." Track, 'Erfahrung III/2. Neuzeit', 117.

691 Luther, *Religion und Alltag*, 13; In religious education, the concept of abduction plays no small role, especially in the Ziebertz School. Cf. e.g. Hans G. Ziebertz, Stefan Heil, and Andreas Prokopf, eds., *Abduktive Korrelation. Religionspädagogische Konzeption, Methodologie und Professionalität im interdisziplinären Dialog* (Münster: LIT, 2002).

692 Which, as already mentioned several times, is naturally always also determined by family and social imprinting. Cf. chapter 6.2 *"Imprinting" as a liquid phenomenon before, during and after religious experience.*

a change of community. 'Conversion', on the other hand, means not only the adoption of a hitherto alien belief system but above all a social and institutional group change."[693] Siebenrock says further that conversion changes the basic ideological orientation and thus also changes the sociologically determinable social affiliation,[694] which is not generally the case in this analysis.

The narratives here also do not correspond to other criteria for conversion. For example, many of the typical standards for conversion that Detlef Pollack makes a strong case for, such as the "break with one's past, the replacement of the old identity, not its supplementation"[695] or the inability to "self-critically reflect on one's understanding of the world and oneself"[696] or the rigid world view,[697] are also not recognizable.

An understanding of conversion closer to the co-researchers' narratives can be found in Patrick Todjeras' discussion of deconversion. Of the five criteria mentioned for conversion, the first criterion, the shift of religious ideas from the margin to the centre, does not apply. The remaining four criteria, such as positive emotions, new orientation, a feeling of reassurance, and the stabilization of religious identity, are undoubtedly recognizable in the analysis presented here.[698]

The explanations on conversion already show that there is also no agreement in the field of conversion research on how conversion is to be defined. Thus, it is deliberately left open here to what extent the narratives of the co-researchers can also be spoken of as conversion or changes in faith[699] since the choice of the term depends decisively on its definition. In this study, *religious transformation/change* and *change of the frame of reference* are preferred, as they can better consider the specific dynamics of the analysis. For this reason, most of the terms used in this

693 Roman A. Siebenrock, 'Bekehrung/Konversion: Zur Transformation weltanschaulicher Orientierungssysteme', in *Bekehrung/Konversion: Zur Transformation weltanschaulicher Orientierungssysteme* (Linz: Gesellschaft zur Förderung wissenschaftlicher Forschung und Publikation, 2017), 5, https://permalink.obvsg.at/AC11361253.

694 Cf. Siebenrock, 'Bekehrung/Konversion: Zur Transformation weltanschaulicher Orientierungssysteme', 12.

695 Detlef Pollack, *Rückkehr des Religiösen?*, vol. 2, Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland und Europa (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 320.

696 Pollack, *Rückkehr des Religiösen?*, 2:322.

697 Cf. Pollack, *Rückkehr des Religiösen?*, 2:323.

698 Cf. Patrick Todjeras, *'Emerging Church' – ein dekonversiver Konversationsraum: Eine praktisch-theologische Untersuchung über ein anglo-amerikanisches Phänomen gelebter Religion*, vol. 28, Beiträge zu Evangelisation und Gemeindeentwicklung (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 483–87.

699 Cf. Johannes Zimmermann, 'Sind Glaubensveränderungen schon Konversion? Eine kritische Reflexion zum Konversionsbegriff', in *Konversion zwischen empirischer Forschung und religiöser Kompetenz*, ed. Martin Reppenhagen (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 89–108.

study refer to religious change and transformation, which, when filled with content, strengthen a personal perspective of hope[700] and where religious identity is changing.

8.4.5 Individualized religious identity

The religious identity constructions that emerge in these change processes are not to be understood as coherent but as fragmented religious identities formed narratively and discursively.[701] The pluralization of the lifeworld and life in networks plays a significant role here, as a wide variety of liquid and formative factors impact the individual. As seen in the analysis, the co-researchers are in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between imprinting, their various lifeworlds, and personal experience, so the shaping competence[702] must come into view, especially concerning the construction of religious identity. The following should be emphasized here: "The individual is not merely a part shaped by the whole, but a constructive actor who also confronts the socio-cultural environment as an independent entity and interacts with it."[703]

In the narratives of the co-researchers, specific autonomous processes of de- and reconstruction of one's own life and thus one's own identity can be seen. Through the changed self-localization, which is based on the practical realization of faith for one's life, the different experiences are put together and interpreted in a new way. A specific form of changeable religious identity based on personally interpreted experience emerges in the process. As has already been shown, the whole process of religious experience, as it presents itself in the *before*, in the *moment of the event*, and the *after,* is marked by the question of one's self-location, of one's personal successful life as related and meaningful, and thus always revolves around the question of personal identity in the broadest sense.[704] In this context, an accumulation of both the fragmentary experience in the form of contingency

700 "Religious worldviews in particular make it possible to transform the unfathomability of contingent events so that positive or negative incidents can be integrated within finite human life, resulting in improved quality of life." Scherer-Rath, 'Narrative Reconstruction as Creative Contingency', 135–36.

701 Which in turn corresponds to the explanations of a discursive concept of religion in chapter 8.1.

702 Cf. in this regard the explanations of Luther, *Religion und Alltag*, 162–82.

703 Luther, *Religion und Alltag*, 161.

704 "Individuals have to evolve their own frameworks of thought and action in which to interpret their action and decide on a course of action." Scherer-Rath, 'Narrative Reconstruction as Creative Contingency', 133.

experiences and relational aspects is conspicuous in the descriptions of religious experiences. In each step of the process, the *before,* the *moment of the event*, and the *after,* different forms of expression of contingency and relationality could be depicted. With the *before,* it was, among other things, the contingency and conflict experiences in chapter 7.2.1 and the relational impulses in chapter 7.2.2; in *the moment of happening*, these aspects can be seen in the discourse on embodiment and emotions in chapter 7.3.2, the ability to remember, chapter 7.3.3, as well as relational (God) cognition. *Afterwards,* the changed self-relationship and dissolution of limitation in chapter 7.4.1, the emotional changes in chapter 7.4.2.2, and chapter 7.4.3.4 certainty of faith and self-assurance testify to the negotiation of a new self-reference and self-understanding.

Helpful for an understanding of this form of religious identity and identity construction within the horizon of the present study is the combination of the explanations of Henning Luther, who understands identity as fragmentary,[705] and those of Monika Wohlrab-Sahr.[706] She understands identity within the horizon of the sociological structural model as relational, narrative, and biography-bound.

In Luther's approach to fragmentary identity, everyday and existential experiences – experiences of difference – are the fabric from which the self is woven and the driver of ego development. Therefore, he always considers the individual at the same time as a fragment from the past and the future, which should be enabled to interpret the history of life independently within the horizon of Christian tradition.[707]

This form of identity formation is again referred to in Wohlrab-Sahr's structural model as a communicative relationship with the self. In this context, a biographical identity emerges when persons communicate with so-called significant others and learn to reflect on themselves. "The formation, reproduction and transformation of biographical identity is a selection-based structural formation process. Identity 'organizes' divergent experiences over time in a certain way and through this – through reproduction and transformation – produces a struc-

705 "However, if one looks at human life as a whole, i.e. both in its temporal extension and in its breadth of content, only the term fragment seems legitimate to me as an appropriate description." Luther, *Religion und Alltag*, 168.

706 Both approaches work to avoid a substantialist notion of a coherent core of identity. Henning Luther makes this explicit with the concept of the fragment, yet neither lapses into a purely constructivist understanding in which identity, and here specifically religious identity, is understood as a selective event. Cf. Luther, *Religion und Alltag*; Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, 'Die Realität Des Subjekts: Überlegungen zu einer Theorie biographischer Identität', in *Subjektdiskurse im gesellschaftlichen Wandel*, eds. Heiner Hohl and Joachim Keupp (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015), 75–97.

707 Cf. Luther, *Religion und Alltag*, 168–70.179.

ture."[708] Identity is understood as the organization of experiences representing the person's unity. External impulses or instabilities and change processes can lead to partial revision and structural change. "However, even in times of massive external change, forms of structuring that have once been established take hold. New ones have to refer to previous selections, and from a certain point of stabilization, an inescapable biographical 'reality' emerges."[709]

Due to the high degree of biographical bondage that goes hand in hand with the contingency and conflict experiences in the process of religious experience and with the plural possibilities of interpretation available to the subject, individual and unfinished religious identity constructions emerge through the organization of experiences. These are characterized by individuality, fragmentarity, and relationality and can hardly be tied back to just one specific ecclesiology or ecclesial community form, but instead must prove themselves as faith in the horizon of everyday life and their practical relevance for life.[710]

The transformative effect of religious experience described here unfolds through the changed frame of reference in everyday life as a Christian perspective of hope for the future.[711] It grows out of Widerfahrnis and subjectivity, and as a faith nourished by hope and flows into an everyday lived theology. In this sense, it is also necessary to point out the incompleteness and ambivalence of such religious identity, for in doing so: "Faith [...] is never a security of answer, but a questioning existence between contestation and certainty."[712]

8.5 Summary

In this chapter, the guiding questions were discussed and classified within the horizon of the qualitative analysis and in hermeneutic discussion with a group of authors who seemed helpful for the topic. The guiding questions were developed in three parts, the first part concerning fundamental practical theological anthropological considerations. In the second part, the epistemological character of reli-

708 Wohlrab-Sahr, 'Die Realität des Subjekts: Überlegungen zu einer Theorie biographischer Identität', 88.

709 Wohlrab-Sahr, 'Die Realität des Subjekts: Überlegungen zu einer Theorie biographischer Identität', 89.

710 Cf. Dalferth, *Gedeutete Gegenwart: zur Wahrnehmung Gottes in den Erfahrungen der Zeit*, 86–90.

711 Henning Luther already pointed out the importance of the future perspective for identity formation. Cf. Luther, *Religion und Alltag*, 169.

712 Luther, *Religion und Alltag*, 23.

gious experience was discussed, as this contributes decisively to changing the frame of reference. In the third part, based on parts one and two, the transformative aspects of such experiences for personal life were discussed. Central to the whole discourse was the observation that religious experience is necessarily processual. Equally central was the discovery that religious experiences unfold their effects, especially in everyday life and as an everyday phenomenon.

In chapter 8.1, it was stated that religious experiences of late-modern, urban individuals are to be located beyond the classical dualisms, e.g. of immanence or transcendence, interpretation or revelation and that functional, substantial, and discursive conceptions of religion implicitly coincide in the reflections of the co-researchers. Concepts of religion with classical binary distinctions fall short here. Hubert Knoblauch's concept of *great transcendences,* as experiences of differentiation in everyday life, showed itself in this analysis to be further reaching to delimit and locate the phenomenon. This is because his non-binary approach, which emphasizes the holistic nature of modern spirituality, enables a specific, analysis-oriented interpretation of the phenomenon. In addition, however, with particular reference to a specifically practical theological perspective that reckons with the possibility of transcendent existence, the necessity of a theological determination of content was emphasized. The definition of content was made, based on the analysis and regarding Martin Buber, as the relational experience of the Christian perspective of hope. Based on this, it was suggested that the religious experiences of the co-researchers should be understood neither substantively nor functionally but as a discursive phenomenon related to everyday life. The passive aspects of religious experience should not be underestimated. Through this conglomeration of diverse aspects, a religious resonance space emerges that is relationally and contextually related to 'God' and the existential dimension of being human (ultimate concern).

The passivity or the interplay between recognizing and being recognized, experience and interpretation were discussed more intensively in chapter 8.2. It was noted that the human being in religious experience is, as it were, both the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge. This is already recognizable in the biblical tradition, for example, and as illustrated here using the Hebrew word ידע (to recognize) and the creation myth. In Hebrew *cognition,* the relational, subject-oriented, and reality-ordering perspective of the subject and object of understanding is already inherent. With Johannes Fischer, the question of the form and quality of this cognition, which is fundamental for the change in the frame of reference and the transformed perspective on self and world, was then pursued. Thus, Fischer speaks of a *practical cognition of faith* that leads to this changed perception of the world. However, faith and understanding are not to be understood as opposites

but rather, in the sense of Anselm of Canterbury, as complementary aspects of late modern religious identity that lead to a lasting dynamic gain in knowledge.

This is then also the basis for the transformative effect of religious experiences, which is discussed in chapter 8.3. In the sample of this study, the specific feature of religious experiences is that life is once again understood differently, namely concerning the Christian perspective of hope for everyday life that has already been mentioned several times. For the constitution of the specific perspective of hope, the personal interpretation concerning one's life and dealing with contingency is decisive. The hermeneutic approach to experiences and one's life is to be understood as an individual activity in everyday life that attempts to think together with the Widerfahrnis of the past and the interpretation of meaning in life history. This insight was discussed based on the *revelation-theological* approach of Ingolf Dalferth and the *life-historical interpretation of meaning* of Wilhelm Gräb within the horizon of transformative potential. Both Dalferth's and Gräb's approaches seem to be fruitful for the data of this study. For in many places in the narratives of the co-researchers, there are discourses both on Widerfahrnis and on the life-historical interpretation of the meaning of precisely these experiences. In the self-interpretation of the co-researchers Widerfahrnis and interpretation are interwoven in a complex way and not as often presented in the reference literature two separate areas.

Based on these comparative discourses, it became possible to present a definition of religious experience, in which the specific results of this study come into view and in which hermeneutic conclusions are the various categories of interpretation: *Religious experience is a Widerfahrnis with a God, experienced as relational (relational event), which is capable of transforming the personal frame of reference within the horizon of a Christian perspective of hope; in this context, the interpretive handling of this experience is an integral part of the experience.*

In this context, religious experience was understood as a practical theological discourse category that cannot be located in classical binary understandings of religion. Instead, it can be described within the horizon of different categories of interpretation as a resonance relationship. The transformative effect of religious experience can also be located within this horizon: a changed subjective perspective on oneself and everyday life, which is rhythmically renewed in everyday life. The change begins with self-view and self-relation and expands to the perception of others and the personal system of meaning. In concrete terms, new interpretative patterns and hermeneutic schemes are formed for one's life. In the interpretive abductive perspective of the co-researchers, the religious experiences themselves are the starting point for the personal changes and the formation of individualized religious identity.

These religious identities are discursively formed and are always fragmentary and fragile, especially given a pluralized network society. At the same time, the creative shaping competence of the person who autonomously deconstructs and reconstructs life, also in religious matters, should not be underestimated. Thus, it was also shown that in all phases of the religious experience process, questions about one's self-location and identity run along as central cross-cutting themes.

The form of religious identity presented in this study was discussed with theoretical approaches by Henning Luther and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, as this made it possible to take into account both fragmentariness, relationality (also as a communicative self-relation), the specific mode of the orientation of religious experiences in the sense of structuring elements of life completion and narrative biography-boundness. The religious identity presented here is based on a specific form of religious life experience and interpretation, which is based on experience-based knowledge and proves to be a life-promoting, life-serving, and life-shaping force in everyday life. The specificity of this kind of religious identity lies in the fact that it is not the ecclesial tie-back that is central. Rather, the practical relevance in everyday life is expressed in the form of everyday lived theology.

9 Experiencing the Christian perspectives of hope – a practical theological outlook

> And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.[713]

As has just been shown, religious experiences unfold their relevance in everyday life, especially given the individualization and pluralization of religion in everyday lived religion and theology.

Suppose the central importance of individual religious experience for constructing personal religious identity and theology as an everyday practice is taken seriously. In that case, this has clear implications for forming practical theological theory. These lines of thought are pursued in the last chapter with the conceptual outline of a *lived theology.*

9.1 References between religious experience and lived theology

In a first step, the aim is to show the relationship between religious experience and (lived) theology.[714] As has been established, it is the everyday and, at the same time, extraordinary experiences that are essential for developing religious identity and personal lived theology. For example, Abby's realization of *God is always there,* and Sabine's new career path shape their inner theological convictions and their way of theologizing. But what kind of theology emerges through religious experience? What is the connection between everyday life and lived theology? And to what extent is it legitimate to speak of theology in this context?

It is not a novelty of this study to particularly emphasize and focus on the close connection between theology and experience.[715] Tillich is a systematic theologian who has already been quoted several times in this study. The core of his reflections lies in the correlation between theology and culture. Tillich is never tired of emphasizing that the source of theology lies in experience: "The sources of systematic

713 Joh 1,5. *King James Bibel Online*, https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/.

714 During the preparation of this study, several essays and a smaller monograph on the topic were published in parallel. Some of the ideas presented here can therefore also be found in the following publications: Müller, *Lived Theology*; Müller, 'How Ordinary Moments Become Religious Experiences. A Process-Related Practical Theological Perspective'.

715 As already pointed out in Part I *Sensitizing concepts* Chapter 2 *Religious experience: a conceptual approach.*

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110990461-014

theology can be sources only for one who participates in them, that is through experience."[716] Moreover, religious experience and (practical) theology are deeply intertwined, especially in Anglo-Saxon and postcolonial theology, but also in liberation theology.[717] Without religious experience, theology lacks its central reference source; without theological systems of reference and interpretative processes, the religious experience remains merely everyday experience.[718] Suppose this thought is taken to its logical conclusion. In that case, daily life is the specifically theologically productive place from which everyday lived theology emerges and manifests itself – quite independently of denomination.[719] It is important to stress again that this kind of lived theology is always contextual and diverse.[720] However, their shared moment lies in their very emergence – they are grounded in existential human experiences, are related to God in their self-localization and open up a *perspective of hope.* This perspective of hope is counterfactual trust,[721] a nonetheless, a

716 Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 46.

717 The strong orientation towards experience is rooted in Anglo-Saxon pragmatism. However, it would be too short-sighted to locate it there alone, because liberation theology and feminist approaches in particular have pointed out the absolute necessity of correlating human experience and theology: "leading to a plethora of liberation theologies all returning to context and experience as primary source of knowing". Or: "To understand theology in practice and to make religious experience and ministry a text for study and discernment is actually one of practical theology's most significant contributions to the academy." Miller-McLemore, 'The Contributions of Practical Theology', 2.11.

718 For example, the intercultural pastoral theologian Emanuel Lartey, following in the tradition of Charles Gerkin, aptly points out the task of pastoral theology and poimenics to the interpretation of human experience within the horizon of a Christian frame of reference: "Gerkin sees pastoral counselling as basically an interpretative practice by means of which persons are enabled to find meaning and narrative sense in their lives. For him pastoral counselling is a process of interpretation and reinterpretation of human experiences within the framework of a primary orientation toward the Christian mode of interpretation […]" Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 16.

719 The connection between religious imprints and the active subject with an open sense and taste for the infinite should not be underestimated.

720 Bevans would argue that all theology is contextual. For a definition of contextual theology cf. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3–15.

721 Rendtorff describes this counterfactual trust precisely within the horizon of perspectives of hope thus as "the counterfactual trust in the success of life", which "mediates between the limited ability of man and the success of life, because responsibility for the ultimate success of life is left to God himself. Thus the believer is empowered to invoke, in the face of his or her own limitations, that he or she only needs to contribute to the success of life in his or her own individual way." Trutz Rendtorff, *Ethik*, eds. Reiner Anselm and Stephan Schleissing, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 127.

light that shines in the darkness that cannot be extinguished (John 1,5)[722] and feeds theology and faith. The connection between experience and a change of perspective within the horizon of faith is again also emphasized by Fischer when he speaks of an experiential theology: "Accordingly, there is firstly an experiential theology from the perspective of faith, the specificity of which results from the localization common to believers concerning God."[723]

However, locating theology's genesis in experience alone would be oversimplified. Practical theology is fundamentally in tension between two poles that must be maintained. On the one hand, it is traditionally seen as a reference system of biblical and historical communication of the Gospel. On the other hand, practical theology reflects contemporary communication and experience of the Gospel and the lived religion and theology of people in the present.[724] Tillich presupposes as a premise that theology can only fulfil its task if it is related to tradition as well as to the current culture, context, and even to individual circumstances of groups and individuals: "The task of theology [...] is mediation between the eternal criterion of truth as it is manifest in the picture of Jesus as the Christ and the changing experiences of individuals and groups, their varying questions, and their categories of perceiving reality."[725] In addition, the anthropological and individual meaning-giving function should be emphasized: "[T]heology deals with the meaning of being for us."[726] A culturally sensitive theology is connected to its abundant source, the (religious) experience of late modern individuals, and feeds on it.[727]

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722 The theme of light (and darkness) in connection with hope is evident in the images of the co-researchers and is now reproduced here in analogy to the Johannine biblical quotation.

723 Fischer, *Theologische Ethik*, 17.

724 For example, Tillich again: "[T]he statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth of every new generation." Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 28; Pointedly, the problem is formulated by Schreiter as follows: "In the midst of this tremendous vitality that today's Christians are showing, one set of problems emerges over and over again: how to be faithful both to the contemporary experience of the gospel and to the tradition of Christian life that has been received. How is a community to go about bringing to expression its own experience of Christ in its concrete situation? And how is this to be related to a tradition that is often expressed in language and concepts vastly different from anything in the current situation." Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, xi.

725 Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1948), ix.

726 Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 21.

727 On closer examination, the experiences that are seen as objects of theology receive two specifications. Tillich refers to questions and experiences that have existential and meaning-giving character and are religious. Cf. Mary Ann Stenger, 'Faith (and Religion)', in *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell R. Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 103; These do not lead into emptiness and meaninglessness, but are founded in the courage to be, that is, "in the God who appears when God has perished in the fear of doubt." Tillich, *The Courage*

Especially if the practical theological theory-practice circle of late modern lived religion is taken seriously, practical theology cannot avoid perceiving a religious experience as one of its central objects. Especially if practical theology wants to contribute to *human flourishing*[728] within the horizon of anthropological relevance to life[729] and therefore focuses on the perspective of personal interpretation of meaning, Christian perspectives of hope for everyday life, and individual theological empowerment, which falls within the subject area of *lived theology*.[730]

9.2 Lived theology – a definition of the term

It is in the everyday, lived theology that the religious system of meaning and the religious self-determination of the individual is expressed. Lived theology is based on religious experience but also on the formations of Christian self-under-

to Be, 139; For practical theology, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, among others, emphasizes this time and again: "To complicate matters further, academic practical theologians are especially attentive to concrete problems (e.g., immigration, marriage, violence), existential experiences (e.g., suffering, joy), and religious and spiritual practices (e.g., celebrating worship, taking care of children)." Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, eds., *Conundrums in Practical Theology* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), 1.

728 On the term 'human flourishing' cf. e.g. Henk de Roest, *Collaborative Practical Theology: Engaging Practitioners in Research on Christian Practices* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 160. "Part of the mission of the church consists of combatting oppression, poverty, isolation or any kind of danger or evil, of strengthening resilience, promoting human flourishing and creating a climate for shared life through dialogue, mutual care, friendship, and compassion for others." A prominent systematic theologian who makes 'human flourishing' the starting point of his theological reflections is Miroslav Volf. He counts the promotion of 'human flourishing' as the core task of theology: "[F]lourishing of human beings and all God's creatures in the presence of God is God's foremost concern for creation and should therefore be the central purpose of theology". Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 11; In the German-speaking context, the discourse is conducted within the horizon of 'gelingendes und erfülltes Leben'. Cf. Jörg Lauster, 'Leben. Genetischer Code/Lebensphilosophie/Inneres Erleben/Ewiges Leben', in *Handbuch Praktische Theologie*, ed. Wilhelm Gräb and Birgit Weyel (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 145–46.

729 E.g., by "[…] interpreting the basic existential experiences in a way that is useful for life and offering people helpful ways of expressing these experiences" Kumlehn, 'Religion und Individuum', 52.

730 For the connection between lived theology and empowerment cf. Müller, *Lived Theology*; Cf. also for the concept of empowerment in religious education: Michael Domsgen, *Religionspädagogik* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019).

standing.[731] Although the connection between experience and theology has been the subject of theological discourse for several centuries[732] and is also considered a central theme in practical theology, little attention is paid to the everyday lived theology of individuals in the German-speaking context. This is in spite of the observation of a significant increase in religious productivity[733] and participatory lived theology, which is related to the dynamics of digitalization,[734] among other things.[735]

Nevertheless, in the classical debates on practical theology in the German-speaking world, there is no fixed term for the fluid and everyday theology of late-modern individuals grounded in religious experience. In the Anglo-Saxon world, on the other hand, attention has long been paid to the contextual everyday theology of people. Decisive impulses in this discourse came from Jeff Astley, who works with the word composition *ordinary theology*.[736] Pete Ward has recently summarized various Anglo-Saxon discourses, including those on *lived religion*, *ordinary theology*, and *the four voices of theology*. He suggests working with the term *lived theology*, which originates from Charles Marsh et al., as this can describe the phenomenon most comprehensively.[737]

In this study, the very broad concept of *lived theology* is now deliberately included, as this corresponds to the everyday phenomenon of religious experience and religious identity construction presented here as an active process of transformation within the horizon of the Christian perspective of hope. It seems suitable as a collective term for these practical dynamics.

The *lived theology* that emerges from religious experiences is a practice phenomenon. In the layout of this work, the previous results lead to the following description: *Lived theology* refers to the individually constructed,[738] personally verified and rhythmized theology of the individualized person that is integrated into

731 In other words, in what is understood by Christian tradition and Christian traditions. In this context, reference should be made to the diverse discourses on the topic of *imprinting* that were conducted in this study. Both the liquid and the concrete family and church imprints refer to Christian traditions.

732 Cf. chapter 2 *Religious experience: a conceptual approach.*

733 Vgl. Grethlein, *Praktische Theologie*, 5.

734 Cf. chapter 3.1.1 *The digital experience space.*

735 For the growth of religious productivity in the digital space, I want to refer to podcasts such as *Frischetheke* or *Homebrewed Christianity*, to hashtags on Twitter such as *#dnkgtt* and *#digitalekirche*, or to Sinnfluencer*innen and participatory networks on Instagram such as *@seligkeitsdinge* and *@herz.netz.werk*.

736 Vgl. Astley, *Ordinary Theology*.

737 Vgl. Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 55–67.

738 Consisting of experience and (religious) imprinting.

everyday life.[739] This contextual theology is experiential and experienced, and feeds its context of justification from its practical relevance to everyday life.[740] In this context, personal faith convictions and lived (and reflected) faith practice are integral components. Since religious experience and lived theology is highly correlated, especially within the horizon of their processual aspects, this form of theology is not static. Lived theology is subject to the change of life circumstances and context;[741] it takes up the historical-theological processes of negotiation (Christian tradition), classifies them, transforms them in turn contextually, and manifests itself in the fullness of life: "[O]rdinary theology in some sense 'works' for those who own it. It fits their life experience and gives meaning to, and expresses the meaning they find within their own lives."[742] What seems significant here is that the theology that emerges from religious experience is more than the individual experience itself since it is open to and capable of discourse, has critical-reflexive components and is publicly communicated, often embodied, through the transformed self-localization and the changed relationship to self, other, and world in the course of life. Lived theology can thus be defined as follows: Lived theology is grounded in the world of experience and the reality of people's lives. It becomes theology when it finds reflected expression and meets with public resonance.

A more precise location of *lived theology* in its discourse context of *lived religion* follows in the next chapter.

9.3 Lived theology as a complement to the conceptions of lived religion, lived faith, and ordinary theology

The conception of religious experience and *lived theology* elaborated here is intended to add a complementary perspective to the discourses of *lived religion*, *lived faith*, and *ordinary theology*. In *lived religion* and *lived faith* discourses, anthropological aspects of self-determination, reflective capacity, and theological productivity are missing. The concept of *ordinary theology*, on the other hand, lacks the aspects of theology that is not verbal but embodied and sensually experienced and

739 Cf. chapter 7.4.3 *Belief – knowledge – certainty: verify and interpret* including the sub-chapters.
740 Cf. chapter 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and dissolution of limitation* and chapter 7.4.2 *Impact on everyday life.*
741 Cf. Green, *Let's Do Theology*, 3–5. This is also impressively evident in the individual narratives in the individual case presentations in chapter 5.
742 Jeff Astley, 'The Analysis, Investigation and Application of Ordinary Theology', in *Exploring Ordinary Theology. Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, eds. Leslie J. Francis and Jeff Astley (Farnham, Surrey, UK/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 2.

communicated. In the following, the individual conceptions will be briefly discussed. Attention will be paid to how *lived theology* can complement the other concepts.

The term *lived religion* has been widely used and owes its popularity in the German-speaking context to Wilhelm Gräb, Albrecht Grözinger, Astrid Dinter, and Hans-Günter Heimbrock, among others.[743] The term has not experienced a standard definition but "denotes a common search attitude and precisely not a methodologically uniform, common programme."[744] Through the programme, an increased "turning of theology towards a theory of religious lifeworld, everyday religion and biography, as which the theories of lived religion [can be] concretely executed"[745] was carried out. Heimbrock aimed for an even more open definition by describing *lived religion* as an open process of experience in everyday life, stating: "And it is specifically a matter of trying to get in touch with the pre-reflexive immediacy and pre-familiarity of such experiential processes."[746] Dinter and Heimbrock refer to everyday phenomena that the individual classifies as personally significant but not explicitly religious.[747]

Regarding the reflexive moment, there are similarities between *lived religion* and *lived faith*. The programme of *lived faith* lacks the explicitly reflexive and critical element. Here, too, pre-reflexive processes are often central. In contrast to *lived religion,* however, *lived faith* is explicitly linked to a religious programmatic and is also frequently found in literature categories on life help, life counselling, and Christian religious testimonies.[748]

Unlike the terms *lived religion* or *lived faith,* which mostly describe pre-reflexive moments, *lived theology* denotes an experienced, embodied, and reflected practice of faith that develops public efficacy through the fulfillment of life and in-

743 Cf. for example Dinter, Heimbrock, and Söderblom, *Einführung in die Empirische Theologie*; Gräb, *Religion als Deutung des Lebens*; Grözinger and Pfleiderer, *'Gelebte Religion' als Programmbegriff Systematischer und Praktischer Theologie*.

744 Grözinger and Pfleiderer, *'Gelebte Religion' als Programmbegriff Systematischer und Praktischer Theologie*, 7.

745 Georg Pfleiderer, 'Gelebte Religion – Notizen zu einem Theoriephänomen', in *'Gelebte Religion' als Programmbegriff Systematischer und Praktischer Theologie*, eds. Albrecht Grözinger and Georg Pfleiderer (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2002), 32.

746 Dinter, Heimbrock, and Söderblom, *Einführung in die Empirische Theologie*, 73.

747 Cf. Dinter, Heimbrock, and Söderblom, *Einführung in die Empirische Theologie*, 73–74.

748 Cf. for example 'AUFATMEN | Das Magazin zum Gott begegnen und authentisch leben | Spiritualität | Zeitschrift bestellen', SCM Bundes-Verlag (Schweiz) | INSPIRIERT LÄBE | Zeitschriften | Hefte abonnieren | Abo-Service | Redaktion | Inserate Joyce Meyer, *Wie man Gottes Reden hört: Erkennen Sie Gottes Stimme und treffen Sie die richtigen Entscheidungen*, 3rd ed. (Hamburg: Joyce Meyer Ministries, 2015).

cludes both certainty and critical moments of doubting and questioning.[749] Lived theology develops however an individual, albeit liquid normativity[750] and is part of personal truth construction.[751]

It would also have been conceivable to base the theology identified in this study more on Astley's concept of *ordinary theology*, to which there are undoubtedly many parallels and similarities. The conceptual spectrum of *ordinary theology* is broad, and thus there would be different possible interpretations of it. In German, for example, one could also speak of *everyday, simple,* or *normal theology.* However, since the conception of *lived theology* developed here attempts to encompass a broader spectrum of theologies, it was preferred to the translation variations of *ordinary theology* for the following reasons: Astley limits the term *ordinary theology to* the *God-talk* of believers. Moreover, he uses the term exclusively for persons who have had no theological education: "Ordinary theology is my term for the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education."[752] In the first part of his definition, Astley chooses a processual approach to the phenomenon and places the emergence and further development of faith in a reflexive context. This makes sense and can also be found in the analysis presented here. However, the second part of Astley's definition overlooks two essential aspects. First, he reduces *ordinary theology* to *God-talk*, that is, to the speech act about religious beliefs. Secondly, in this conception, a separation is made between lay people and theologians – and between everyday theology and academic theology – and *ordinary theology* thus becomes a lay theology.

On the first point: This study has been able to show that the everyday lived theology of late modern people cannot be reduced to an act of speaking because, on the one hand, verbalization is challenging,[753] and on the other hand, this fails to

749 Cf. chapter 7.4.3.1 *Verify and interpret* and chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*
750 Cf. e.g., chapter 6.4 *Subjecthood*; chapter 7.4.3.1 *Verify and Interpret*; chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*
751 This also distinguishes the conception, for example, from Friedrich Mildenberger's expression of the threefold speech of God, because according to Mildenberger, this is intended to relieve "theology of the task of having to prove its speech of God itself". Friedrich Mildenberger, *Biblische Dogmatik: Eine biblische Theologie in dogmatischer Perspektive. Band 3: Ökonomie als Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991), 15.
752 Leslie J. Francis and Jeff Astley, eds., *Exploring Ordinary Theology. Everyday Christian Believing and the Church* (Farnham, Surrey, UK/Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 1.
753 Cf. chapter 6.3 *Verbalization.*

recognize the emotional and embodied, action-oriented, and artistic theological dimensions of theologizing.[754]

On the second point: Astley's conception of *ordinary theology* has a strong educational idealist and community theological perspective because he assumes that this kind of theology is to be distinguished from that of theologians and that *ordinary theology* is predominantly practiced in church congregations. Astley does mention that even academically trained theologians have a personally constructed lived theology, which, for example, has a decisive effect on their understanding of ministry and the church employment relationship. Still, he only applies his program to the laity. Thus, the term *lay theology*, which is sometimes used in German-speaking countries for the theology of the general priesthood,[755] would be analogous to *ordinary theology*. The programe of *lived theology*, however, cannot be reduced to a community theology and explicitly includes all who locate themselves in the Christian system of meaning, including academically trained theologians.[756] Therefore, it is argued that this form of *lived theology* described here, whose abundant sources are human experience and Christian tradition, concerns everyone and that separating a lay theology and a theology of ordained persons is not helpful.[757]

Carles Salazar makes a helpful distinction between possible theologies with his concept of *popular religion*. Salazar's *popular religion* shows many similarities with the *lived theology* presented here. Salazar counts religion among the cultural phenomena and thus justifies the different forms and characteristics that theology can take. He distinguishes between *erudite* and *popular theology*.[758] The former is located in the academic discourse and primarily refers to the work of academically

754 Cf. e.g., chapter 7.3.2 *Embodiment and emotions during the religious experience;* chapter 7.4.1 *Self-efficacy and dissolution of limitation* and chapter 7.4.2 *Effects on everyday life.* Of course, it is inherent in the term *theologia* that it focuses on the teaching and speaking of God through its root word of *theos* and *logos*. Nevertheless, in both the Old and New Testaments, theology emerged through songs (psalms), symbolic acts, metaphors, and diaconal services.

755 Cf. for example Ralph Kunz, 'Zur Notwendigkeit einer Theologie des Laientums und zu den Chancen und Stolpersteinen der gemeinsamen Verantwortung in Gemeinde und Kirche', in *Alle sind gefragt: Priestertum aller Gläubigen heute*, eds. Ralph Kunz and Matthias Zeindler (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2018), 29–52.

756 Reference should also be made here to the older control group in this study, which consisted of one female and one male theologian, among others, and in whom the same mechanisms with regard to religious experiences were visible as in the other co-researchers.

757 Cf. also the sample of the groups (Chapter 5: Mirjam and Colin), because these people from the control group are theologians, one female and one male.

758 Cf. Carles Salazar, 'Believing Minds: Steps to an Ecology of Religious Ideas', in *Religious Experience and Experiencing Religion in Religious Education*, eds. Ulrich Riegel, Eva-Maria Leven, and Daniel Fleming (Münster/New York: Waxmann, 2018), 23.

working theologians. Its task is the research, preservation, and contextual reflection of Christian traditions and current religious practice. In contrast, *popular theology* is shaped by culture, context, and people's experiences, making it processual and changeable. Salazar compares this kind of theology to the normal processes of life: "Popular religion is in this sense analogous to language, sexuality or kinship."[759]

With the term *lived theology*, complementary to other conceptions mentioned, the theologizing of people, which goes beyond a purely verbal activity, is to be taken seriously. Here, the person is the theology-producing subject of their *lived theology*.[760]

9.4 Lived theology as practical theology "from below"

The individual, especially in religious experience and its *lived theology*, has the "[…] dynamic freedom of self-chosen interpretive practice concerning religious content, symbolic interpretations, ritual practice and individual value preference."[761] The traditional theological authorities such as academic theology and the church are thus increasingly losing their power of orientation for individuals' religious self-localization and opinion formation.[762] People interpret individually and with peers in common networks,[763] within the horizon of Christian perspectives of hope for everyday life.[764] "'Sola experientia' proves to be the necessary interpretation of

759 Salazar, 'Believing Minds: Steps to an Ecology of Religious Ideas', 23.

760 A similar form of theology is described in more recent times, in Catholic theology, with the term 'People theology'. Cf. e.g., the following definition: "The present work focuses on people and their theologies and argues that anyone and everyone who has grappled with and reflected on questions of meaning, God, religion etc. has a personal theology. Theology is not understood here in a 'narrow' sense as a reflection on faith that takes place on a scientific level and that can only be exercised by specialists on a professional level, but as a 'reflection of faith on itself', as a reflected or reflective 'speech' of God in the respective context of the person doing theology." Monika Kling-Witzenhausen, *Was bewegt Suchende?: Leutetheologien – empirisch-theologisch untersucht* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2020), 20.

761 Schlag, 'Öffentlichkeit 4.0', 321.

762 Cf. Gräb, *Religion als Deutung des Lebens*, 22.

763 Cf. Campbell and Garner, *Networked Theology*, 14.

764 Of course, in this hermeneutic activity, the individual and social religious imprints should not be underestimated. For religious nodes show up in these network-like discourses. Thus, access to these Christian perspectives of hope is made possible on a material level, for example, through discourse communities of the Bible, religious spaces of experience of local congregations, religious media communication, pastors or peers. Cf. the religiously formative aspects in the narratives in

'sola scriptura', 'solus Christus', 'solo verbo' and 'sola fide'."[765] Accordingly, the sola experientia related to 'God' is the necessary interpretation of a context-appropriate communication of the Gospel.

Lived theology develops, changes, and expands through religious experiences and aims at a changed perception and shaping of the self and the world. The outline of a *lived theology* presented here is precisely that reflection of religious self-understanding which puts all phenomena in a new light, or as Dalferth puts it in his *Radical Theology* for the Dynamics of Faith: "[B]ecause it does not describe any new phenomena (experience), it describes all phenomena anew (experience with experience), thus unfolding a new point of view (standpoint and horizon) from which all phenomena are to be seen and understood anew."[766] Namely, as shown in this study, based on the Christian perspectives of hope, as a liberal and life-promoting everyday practice in which *human flourishing* is also central to a sense of self-efficacy.[767]

This perspective of hope empowers[768] the individual concerning the fulfilment of life and personal resilience but also relates to one's theological-hermeneutical processes, theological productivity, and theological language ability. This is because the focus is not on a pure needs orientation but on an individual resource orien-

chapter 5 *Individual case presentation: the content of religious experiences* and chapter 6.2 *Formation as a liquid phenomenon before, during, and after religious experience.*

765 Ebeling, *Wort und Glaube*, 3:12.

766 Dalferth, *Radikale Theologie*, 23:235.

767 On the topic of *human flourishing*, cf. chapter 7.4.2.2 *Emotional changes internally and externally: "to become a better person"*.

768 On the concept of empowerment cf. e.g. Norbert Herriger, *Empowerment in der Sozialen Arbeit: Eine Einführung*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014); "The English word '*empowerment*' means something like: transfer of responsibility and increase of the ability to act. The aim of empowerment is to strengthen the autonomy and self-determination of people and communities and to create room for manoeuvre. A strength of empowerment is the resource-oriented perspective. From a Christian perspective, the potentiality of empowerment lies in the doctrine of justification and in individual aspects of pneumatology. […] The empowerment and enhancement of the (spiritual) ability to act are addressed particularly succinctly in the Letter to the Romans. In the doctrine of justification lies the germ of the freedom to live. In the Letter to the Romans (Rom 5:18), this is linked to the freedom of each individual person: 'So then, just as through the fall of the One there came to condemnation for all men, so through the fulfilment of the legal order of the One there comes to all men the acquittal that leads to life.' Likewise, in Romans (Rom 8:15–17), this freedom is related to pneumatology: 'For those who are driven by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God. Surely you have not received a spirit of bondage to live again in fear; no, you have received a spirit of adoption, in which we cry out: Abba, Father! This very Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God.'" Müller, *Lived Theology*, 68–69.

tation, through which self-determination, productive (theological) creative power, and hope are strengthened.[769]

The subject orientation in practical theology, considered central, expands in such an approach that the subject not only comes into view but becomes a constructive and productive agent of theology. Joey Sprague sums this up in feminist methodology as follows: "Rather than constructing a hierarchical dichotomy between science and common people's understandings, from this perspective, concrete experience and the wisdom developed through it are valuable tools for evaluating knowledge claims. Instead of an elite hierarchy controlling and distributing knowledge to the populace, knowledge claims are worked out through dialogue with the everyday social actors."[770]

Luther had already mentioned that this means turning to everyday life: "Turning to the subjects means first of all that practical theology [and in this sense also the church] goes to the place of the subjects, i.e., to everyday life."[771] This is about "making the promise of Christ [here: the Christian perspective of hope] relevant to a specific situation."[772]

With the contextual approaches of an experience-based Christian perspective of hope and *lived theology* elaborated here, the case is made that theology (and practical theology) must start inductively with the theology-productive subject[773] and its experience.[774]

The approach outlined here finds its foundations in the contextual (practical) theologies *from below.* For this kind of everyday, experiential identity and theology formation demands an inductive and contextual perspective in practical theological theory formation that emerges *bottom-up.* This approach finds its foundations in a *theology from below,* grounded in the tradition of contextual theology(s) that go back to the Latin American theologies of liberation and feminist theologies. At the same time, thoughts of postcolonial theories are also evident in it, in the sense that it pleads for a practical theology that not only takes up the *voices from the margin,*

769 Cf. among others chapter 7.4.2 *Effects on everyday life,* chapter 7.4.3.2 *Meaning and orientation* and chapter 7.4.3.4 *Certainty of faith and self-assurance.*

770 Sprague, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers*, 49.

771 Luther, *Religion und Alltag*, 18.

772 Ernst Lange, 'Zur Aufgabe christlicher Rede', in *Predigen als Beruf. Aufsätze zu Homiletik, Liturgie und Pfarramt*, ed. Rüdiger Schloz, 1st ed. (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1976), 64.

773 Martina Kumlehn, for example, concludes that subject orientation always means experience orientation at the same time. Cf. Kumlehn, 'Religion und Individuum', 52.

774 Which can also be seen as a consequence of an individualized and pluralized society.

or in this case, the voices of urban (young) people, but that practical theology is developed from this perspective.[775]

Against this horizon, theology is not only a science that ensures results but also a practical, lived theologizing, an individual and communal activity.[776]

9.5 Outlook

If personal religious experience is the basis of religious identity construction, lived theology, theological productivity, and an individual perspective of hope, it must be asked to what extent such insights have an influence on practical theological theory formation, study, and ultimately, in turn, on reflected theological and pastoral practice. To what extent are the *voices from the margin,* in this case, the voices of young urban people, listened to so closely that they influence practical theological research, theological teaching and learning, and church practice?

Let us take the example of practical theological teaching and learning, i.e., the *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*.[777] Theological scholarship demands and requires the ability of self-distancing to describe and classify religious phenomena and church practice from different perspectives. For this reason, meaningful teaching experiences are central to the theological learning process.[778] However, the experience can only be meaningful if it either affects me personally existentially or if the traditional meanings can be experienced or comprehended.[779] Therefore, the "transitions between traditional forms and late-modern needs must be discovered" because in "one's own experience faith [must] take place as a certainty-giving

775 Cf. for example Angie Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2009); R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, 3rd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2016); Dreyer, 'Knowledge, Subjectivity, (De)Coloniality, and the Conundrum of Reflexivity'.

776 "More and more, local theology is pointing the way to a return to theology as an occasional enterprise, that is, one dictated by circumstances and immediate needs rather than the need for system-building." Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 23.

777 Cf. e.g. Ludwig Huber, Arne Pilniok and Rolf Sethe, eds., *Forschendes Lehren im eigenen Fach: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Beispielen* (Bielefeld: Bertelsmann, 2014); Raymond P Perry and John Smart, eds., *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: An Evidence-Based Perspective* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007).

778 Cf. L. Dee Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

779 Cf. Reinhard Pekrun, 'Emotions in Students' Scholastic Development', in *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education : An Evidence-Based Perspective*, eds. Raymond P Perry and John Smart (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 553.

force."[780] Thus, it is conducive to teaching and learning in practical theology if a resonance relationship is created with that which concerns the individual unconditionally and existentially,[781] especially concerning the perspective of freedom and hope to be promoted.

Practical theological teaching and learning that does not take the (religious) experiences of students seriously and does not integrate them misses its mission[782] because the goal of theological education cannot be a dissociated contact between personal experience, lived everyday theology, and practical theology. Good practical theological teaching should enable students to perceive, articulate, and differentiate their own and other people's experiences, with the explicit aim of keeping the meaning-giving and sense-giving dimension of theological learning in view: "If learning is regarded not as the acquisition of information, but as search for meaning and coherence in one's life and, if the emphasis is placed on what is learned and its significance to the learner, rather than how much is learned, researchers would gain valuable new insights into both the mechanisms of learning and the relative advantages of teacher-controlled and learner-controlled modes of learning."[783] This kind of resource orientation strengthens students' confidence in their own experiences and abilities and promotes self-determination and productive theological formative power.

This means that the contextual level of experience, i.e. the life story of future pastors as well as the religious experiences of the people in the respective context, should be a central component of pastoral theological reflection and theological education.[784] Thus in terms of *holistic formation,* aspects of *knowing, doing*, and *being* will be linked.[785] Experiences and stories, the *living human web*,[786] within

780 Fechtner et al., *Praktische Theologie*, 266.276.

781 Cf. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*.

782 Cf. Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, 7; Wolfgang Klafki, *Neue Studien zur Bildungstheorie und Didaktik: Zeitgemäße Allgemeinbildung und kritisch-konstruktive Didaktik*, 6th ed. (Basel: Beltz, 2007).

783 Philip C. Candy, *Self-Direction for Lifelong Learning: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 1991), 415.

784 For an application-oriented example cf. Phillis Isabella Sheppard, 'Womanist Pastoral Theology and Black Women's Experience of Gender, Religion, and Sexuality', in *Pastoral Theology and Care: Critical Trajectories in Theory and Practice*, ed. Nancy J Ramsay (Chichester West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 125–48.

785 Cf. Marilyn Naidoo, 'Ministerial Formation of Theological Students through Distance Education.', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (2012): 1.

786 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, 'Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology', in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, eds. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 90f.

the horizon of a dialogical event, thus become the focus of training, practical theological theory formation, as well as of church and theological practice.[787]

This would entail a changed pastoral-theological and ecclesiological self-understanding because pastoral-theological and ecclesiological reflection and action would then be in the supportive service of individual and communal hope-generating interpretations of meaning.[788] The core task of the pastor is to promote hermeneutic (experiential) processes of everyday theology.[789] Solidary network structures are at the centre, and the church in this horizon of thinking is not primarily an offer-generating organized institution but a practice-related, communal theological activity, which can increasingly also take on hybrid forms (e.g. digital ecclesial spaces of experience).[790] This also means that the church emerges from practice and changes again precisely through it. The church is there when someone says: "I feel God where I am," – namely in everyday life. In doing so, it is essential to "open spaces for people to experience, in which they can draw hope beyond what they have achieved and thus allow themselves to be confronted with uncertainty."[791]

Practical theology is not a competitor of individual lifeworld lived theologies, but has the task of supporting them, as Georg Pfleiderer, for example, emphasizes: "This correction consists in redeeming the demand that a theology as a professional theory of lived religion should not itself understand and operate as a competitor to the lifeworld non-professional interpretations of life, but as their theoretical and practical support."[792] If this program is taken further, the goal of pastoral activity cannot be, for example, the communication of the Gospel itself, but the promotion of this communication through the perception and reflection of religious

787 "Theology must rather be an activity of dialogue, emerging out of a mutual respect between 'faith-ful' but not technically trained people and faith-full and listening professionals." Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 18.

788 In many places this is already happening in practice, for example in pastoral care discussions.

789 "Theological reflection and inductive hermeneutics are the form of maieutics that pastoral theology can bring." Müller, *Lived theology*, 81. Cf. also 79–87. Kristin Merle comes to a similar conclusion. She sees the task of theology and the church in "understanding people's religious-ideological interpretations of meaning as sovereign and dealing with them in this way. This is first and foremost a task of hermeneutics of religion, but then also a task of maieutics of religion." Merle, *Religion in der Öffentlichkeit*, 412.

790 Cf. chapter 3.1.1 *The digital experience space.* As concrete examples, compare e.g. the @twomplet on Twitter or the Herz.Netz.Werk on Instagram.

791 Grethlein, 'Gemeindeentwicklung', 505.

792 Pfleiderer, 'Gelebte Religion – Notizen zu einem Theoriephänomen', 31.

experiences and the accompaniment of lived theologies in diverse contexts.[793] Therefore, practical theological reflections and pastoral practice must begin with observation and listening, "to begin with the working: to look and see what works in practice, and then to reflect theologically on that. [...] The theologian takes a step aside, as it were, now standing beside him- or herself, giving up the former identity, at least to a certain degree."[794] The aim here is the continuous interaction of theory and practice, specifically of practical theology and lifeworld individual and communal religious practice, which should be rooted in both contextual religious experiences and the resources of religious traditions.[795]

The *experience of the Christian perspective of hope* is a transformative process in the service of freedom,[796] which is about making the Christian perspective of hope relevant or, in Lange's sense, "making the promise of Christ relevant to a specific situation".[797] Thus, it is first and foremost the experience of the Christian perspective of hope that "[helps] people to deal with all that is detrimental to life and encourages [them] to live and experience their faith in such a way that they can perceive themselves in their individuality and relatedness to others and shape their lives in a hopeful and committed way."[798]

By making the everyday religious experiences of the Christian perspective of hope, the starting point of its reflection, practical theology does justice to the conscious reflection of contemporary religious practice in the Schleiermacherian sense.[799] Still, at the same time, it also points beyond this as an impulse-giver: "Dis-

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793 "Contextualization, therefore, is not something on the fringes of the theological enterprise. It is at the very centre of what it means to do theology in today's world. Contextualization, in other words, is a theological imperative." Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 15.

794 Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, 74.

795 Cf. for example "For preliminary purposes, pastoral or practical theology can be defined as a prime place where contemporary experience and the resources of the religious tradition meet in a critical dialogue that is mutually and practically transforming." James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, eds., *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford, UK/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), xiii.

796 Without wanting to go into other problems and the differences in the theology of ministry, a common resonance with Ernst Lange should be named here. For in Lange's sense, it is a matter of talking to the other person: "I talk to him [the listener] about his life in the light of the promise of Christ as testified in the Holy Scriptures. And that ultimately means: I talk to him on the basis of biblical texts." Lange, 'Zur Aufgabe christlicher Rede', 62.

797 Lange, 'Zur Aufgabe christlicher Rede', 64.

798 Karle, *Praktische Theologie*, 20.

799 Cf. e.g. Karle: "Practical theology does not directly influence religious or ecclesial practice. It does not produce the practice that forms the object of its reflection but finds it." Karle, 10; Hauschildt and Pohl-Patalong, *Kirche*, 55–73; Dietrich Rössler, *Grundriß der Praktischen Theologie*, 2nd ed. (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1994), 40.

ciplinary expertise is always highly valued. But its ultimate aim lies beyond disciplinary concerns in pursuing an embodied Christian faith."[800] In the sharpening of its object as the *experience of the Christian perspective of hope*, the practical theological reflections and the formation of theory are about the essence of Christian theology: "It is the business of Christian theology to bring the specifically Christian into language concerning the profane experience of the world in such a way that basic elements of religious experience are addressed and brought to consciousness. It is a matter of regaining a language through which the natural, everyday experience of the world as nature and history opens up to the fundamental experience of life."[801]

The experience of the Christian perspective of hope as a basic concept of practical theological work is, at the same time, continuous contextual theological expression- and language-finding based on sensitivity to narrative-dialogical, participatory, and contextual spaces of experience. Prioritizing contextual religious experiences brings practical theology into the midst of life: "[T]heology is about the messy particularity of everyday lives examined with excruciating care and brought into conversation with the great doctrines of Christian tradition"[802] and leads to the existential, meaning-giving, and liberating perspectives of hope of human life. These, in turn, are the central objects of transformative practical theology.

800 "Practical theology as a term refers to at least four distinct enterprises with different audiences and objectives, the two just named: it is a discipline among scholars and an activity of faith among believers. And it has two other common uses: it is a method for studying theology in practice and it is a curricular area of subdisciplines in the seminary." Miller-McLemore, 'The Contributions of Practical Theology', 5.

801 Ebeling, *Wort und Glaube*, 3:24.

802 Miller-McLemore, 'Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology', 86.

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