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## Editorial note

The origins of this special issue of *Temenos* lie in the panel we, the guest editors of the issue, organised at the European Association for the Study of Religions' annual meeting in Groningen, the Netherlands, in 2014. The one-day panel 'Connected with God' proved to be an intellectually stimulating mini-conference within an excellent conference. The in-depth discussions, lively interaction, and well-argued critique elevated, focused, and broadened the topic, resulting not only in this special issue but also in novel ways of understanding the Christianities' perceptions of encountering the 'other'. We wish to thank those who participated in the EASR panel who were unable to contribute to this special issue for enlivening the discussion: Benjamin Lindquist, Teemu Mantsinen, Tomas Mansikka, and Alexandra Stellmacher. Moreover, we express our heartfelt thanks to Jon P. Mitchell for the thought-provoking and well-reasoned Afterword. We also wish to extend our gratitude to the anonymous reviewer of this special issue for their insightful comments, to the chief editor of *Temenos*, Måns Broo, for his perseverance and support, and to the editorial secretary of *Temenos*, Pekka Tolonen, for his forbearance and meticulousness. Finally, we wish to thank the contributors to this issue for their commitment to this project and for their diligence and patience.

Guest editors

Minna Opas and Anna Haapalainen



# Temenos Special Issue

## Connected with God: Body, the social, and the transcendent

MINNA OPAS

ANNA HAAPALAINEN

*University of Turku*

### Abstract

The special issue *Connected with God: Body, the Social, and the Transcendent* addresses the very topical question of the architecture of religious, especially Christian, experiences. Specifically, it examines the processes in which Christians experience the connection with, and gain knowledge of, God in and through the body, and, in particular, the role of social relatedness and morality in generating and informing these experiences. The issue challenges the view of an individual subjective relationship with God, and argues that Christian experiences of God's presence are not solely a matter of an individual's relationship with the divine but are very much made possible, guided, and conceptualised through corporeal relationships with social others – believers and other fellow-humans. Through detailed ethnographic and historical examination, the issue also addresses the question of whether and how the form of Christianity practised influences people's experiences of divine presence.

Keywords: *Christianity, Protestantism, senses, body, social*

Christianity, especially in its charismatic forms, is growing quickly in the so-called Global South. Charismatic forms of Christianity are also gaining ground in the West within Christianities customarily regarded as less charismatic, such as Lutheranism. People need to feel their connection with God, to experience it as something tangible and affective. It is common among Christian believers to describe their relationship with God in sensory language: it is people's hearts that 'see' God, and God may 'touch' a person, for example. A personal revival of faith and religious experience is often described with corporeal imagery. Encounter with God can be described even viscerally. Believers shiver, feel warmth, see light, hear angelic voices, and feel the presence of the divine; the connection with God permeates the

body. It is in and through the processes thus described that Christians claim to gain knowledge of God.

But the process of knowing God, to be in relationship with God, is not limited to the relationship between the individual and a transcendent God, but extends into the social space. Other people (as well as objects) participate in the generation of the experiences of God's presence and in assessing the authenticity of the experiences. This raises a question about the relationship between corporeality, epistemology, and the social: how do people gain knowledge of God's presence in Christianities, and, especially, what is the role of the human social sphere in these processes?

By focusing on the social in the experience of God, this special issue seeks to challenge the idea of an individual subjective and intimate relationship with God: how individual, after all, is the person-God relationship? Weberian analysis of Protestantism, the scholarly focus on Charismatic forms of Christianity and, among other things, the commonly held Christian view of the salvation of the individual have directed researchers to study human-God relationships at the level of the individual's sensory experiences and to attempt to surpass the body-mind division. In this special issue we wish to go beyond the autonomous subject to examine how people's relationships with the divine emerge from a multifaceted socio-bodily dynamic. The issue subscribes to the view of bodies being defined by their capacities to affect and be affected (Blackman 2012), and to this multidirectional affectivity being at the heart of the Christian experiences of God. We are interested in how social interaction, taking place at the interfaces of human bodies (regardless of how these bodies are understood in each specific case), affects the experience or the process of knowing God. What characterises the processes in which bodies, personhoods, and relationships coalesce in forming experiences of divine presence? In short, we wish to explore the co-constitutive processes that give rise to the bodily experiences conceptualised as the presence of God or as media for knowing God, and to find ways to speak about and analyse such experiences. However, we also subsume the new-materialist critique of constructionism and seek to bring to the fore the unconscious and the material that cannot be (verbally) conceptualised in the experiences of God's presence.

Although the human sensory experiences of Christian transcendence have gained much scholarly attention (e.g. Cassaniti & Luhrmann 2011; Cattoi & McDaniel 2011; Chidester 2005; Csordas 1993; 2002; Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2011; Hart & Wall 2005; Klaver & van de Kamp 2011; Luhrmann 2004; Orsi 2006; Rudy 2013), there is also a growing field of study concentrat-



ing on the meaning of the social in relation to experiencing or knowing God. The connection between the body and the social in the context of religion is, of course, not a recent topic but has been examined, for example, from the perspectives of phenomenology (Bourdieu 1990; Merleau-Ponty 1965 [1945]), body's metaphoric reproduction of the social (Douglas 2002 [1966]), techniques of the body (Mauss 1973), and social construction and body's interaction with order and disciplinary systems (Foucault 1975; 1997). In the more recent study of Christianity, several different approaches to the role of the social other in the experiences of Christian divine can be disclosed. The social has been observed to play a role in rehearsing or training bodies and minds to experience God's presence (Bialecki 2011; Bielo 2004; Brahinsky 2012; Coleman 2006; de Witte 2009; 2011). It has been noted, for example, that the ability to connect with God requires the development or adoption of a different theory of the mind, one which departs from the western understanding of the mind as strictly delineated and individual (Luhmann 2012), and that the sensory perceptions and the knowledge of God depend largely on what e.g. Birgit Meyer (2008; 2010) has termed 'sensational forms' – ways of inducing experiences of the transcendent. Other scholars emphasise the different processes of co-constitution in the formation of experiences of the Christian divine. (Bialecki 2015; Csordas 1994; Mitchell 2015; Orsi 2006; see also McGuire 2016.) In this view, the experiences of divine presence emerge as a result of material and physical inter-connectedness between persons, and including Christian divinities. Often, the framework of analysis in these studies has been that of lived religion. In general, then, two main tendencies in these approaches to the body and the social in the context of Christian experiences of the divine – one emphasising practices of 'cultivation' and other those of 'constitution' – can be found, albeit in many of the approaches they overlap.

This special issue builds in various ways on these approaches. Although the focus is in the social, it is the very intimate 'small scale' sociality that we are particularly interested in. Previously, crowds – the group effort – have been seen to play a significant role in generating religious experiences. In Pentecostal and Charismatic Catholic mass gatherings, for example, bodies are rehearsed into experiencing through careful choreographies and planned environments (Brahinsky 2012; de Witte 2009; 2011). In this issue we wish not only to examine crowds but also to open a space for the study of experiences of divine presence within the framework of the more intimate social relationships amidst which Christians live their daily lives. How the social other is part of the experience of God's presence or of the knowledge of God,

for example, in the context of family relationships, religious study groups, or combat fighting sessions? How does the presence of and relatedness with equal bodies, fellow-believers, affect the experience of the Christian transcendent, and how, if at all, do these experiences differ from or relate to those influenced by social, religious, and moral hierarchies?

In studying the role of human social relations in the processes of knowing God, epistemological and semiotic questions, and the moral problems they entail, play a central role. The means available for Christians to interact with God and to sense the presence of God in their lives and their bodies, and to talk about these experiences, have preoccupied theologians, lay Christians, and researchers alike for centuries. What characterises the Christian sensorium in and through which the connection with God becomes tangible? Can God be reached through the five (or six) senses normally attributed to western people's physical bodies? (On the cultural variability of the human sensorium, see Classen 1993.) Or does such connection require a specifically spiritually tuned sensorium? At least since the time of Origen of Alexandria Christian theologians have often employed the term 'spiritual senses' to denote the human ability to experience God's presence, although the ways of conceptualising such senses have varied (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012). One aim of this special issue is to examine the ways and technologies related to the body in and through which Protestant Christians experience God's presence. However, as interesting as this question is, such an approach easily leads to a mono-directional view of the human-God relationship. God's presence becomes experienced by and material to human beings. The idea of the Christian God as transcendent, omnipotent, and pre-defined finds its blueprint in the social scientific research on religion, in which people are understood to have only limited possibilities to affect gods, deities, and their plans (Espirito Santo & Tassi 2013, 21). The special issue's emphasis on the role of the social other, however, makes visible the co-constitutive relationship between people and God and other Christian deities. The case studies in this issue show that human beings themselves, especially the social others under examination, affect their experiences of God and, thus, their understandings of God. This is not an ontological stance but an epistemological one, and as such does not aim to nullify the importance many Christians give precisely to God's pre-defined and unchangeable nature. Rather, the observation works to elucidate the dynamism of Christian devotees' lived religion: although God (and even people's life courses) may be held as pre-defined, everyday life is considerably more complex.

Woven into the texture of Christian experiences of God are questions

of morality and ethics. The cases show that moral evaluations made both by fellow-human beings and the believer him/herself crucially affect the perceptions of the truthfulness and legitimacy of one's experiences and how they are conceptualised. Whether one is a 'true believer' depends not solely on one's own understandings but on others' evaluations of experiences. Although through religion ethics is often thought to be intellectualised, materialised, and transcendentalised (Lambek 2010, 3), these evaluations are firmly grounded in grassroots daily concerns, and especially in the question of belonging. To be a member of a Christian collectivity, does one need to have experiences of God's presence and, if so, what kind? Foucault denotes ethics as a 'modality of power' that 'permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and a way of being' (Foucault 1997, 225). It is a means of transforming oneself into 'a willing subject of a particular discourse' (Mahmood 2014, 224). The idea of 'willing subjects' not only intertwines with language or discourses, but also the senses, mimesis, kinesthetics, audition, and other somatic forms of 'piety'. When these bodily experiences are incorporated in processes of ethical learning, as can be seen in the cases this special issue presents, the human sensorium becomes 'an object of pedagogy and ethical attunement' (Hirschkind 2006, 83f.). This can be called 'moral and ethical embodied pedagogy', especially when related to the experiences of God's presence. It attempts to direct believers through their efforts to evaluate these experiences, but also to communicate their experiences to others. The cases presented in this special issue show that spiritual experiences are resources that give the sense of being part of some larger meaning or script, the feeling of value in one's own life, in the eyes of the community, and before God, and the sense of guidance and 'tools' to comprehend the world. (Utriainen 2016.)

### **The social other and Protestant experiences of divine presence**

The special issue includes five original articles focusing on different Protestant churches in Europe and South America. In the opening article Gábor Ittész provides a historical perspective on the topic at hand by examining sixteenth-century Lutheran discussions on the bodily aspects and social embeddedness of knowledge in the eschatological thought of later sixteenth-century Lutherans. He shows that the Lutheran view of the human being was, much in Luther's spirit, one which was yet to make the later modern distinction between the body and the mind or soul; even disembodied

souls retained the body's sensory capacities. He also demonstrates that the individual's knowledge in the interim state of the afterlife was thought to be interpersonally constituted and centred on the human community, and especially on the question of human beings recognising each other in the hereafter. Jessica Rivers' article focuses on evangelical fighting ministries in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Rivers examines how participants in jiu-jitsu grappling rehearse, and in their connected social interaction seek, both to achieve a personal relationship with God and to demonstrate this relationship to fellow-believers. Bodily and affective interaction with others, especially physical hardship and laughing and crying together, is shown to be constitutive of and constituted by human-divine relations. In her article Minna Opas examines the experiences of connection with God among the indigenous evangelical Yine people of Peruvian Amazonia. For the Yine, dreams are a principal locus for encounter with the divine. Opas advances a view of these encounters as co-acted experiences of the divine, influenced both by Christian non-human others understood as active social agents and fellow-believers through the practice of dream interpretation. In another geographical and denominational context Jamie Barnes also undertakes to forward a view that takes seriously the agency of the Christian God. Based on a phenomenological analysis of interviews of a member of a Christian network and auto-ethnographical materials, he argues that both bodies and worlds are formed in the human experiences of the divine. An important element of these processes is the believers' attempts to express their experiences to themselves and others through metaphorical translation into the more familiar realm of the everyday. In the concluding article Anna Haapalainen examines the experiences of being connected with God within the institutional framework of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. She shows that the experiences are formed within the tension created by the church workers' attempts to retain the authority to define the right form of divine experiences within the church and lay Christians' striving for a personal and unmediated connection with God. The discussion reveals that the practices concerning the 'spiritual senses' are used in very different ways in different denominations, but also that the profound questions concerning encounter with God share much common ground.

Together the articles in this special issue show that the human body is in multiple ways at the centre of Christian experiences of God and of the divine: the experiences emerge from, are mediated by, and negotiated in relation to the body. One ontological question Christian experiences and knowledge of God poses concerns the nature of the body and its relation to personhood

and spirit. Ittzés' contribution shows that sixteenth-century Lutheranism, which was still in many ways tied to Medieval thinking, understood the soul and body as inseparable: the 'naked soul' could appropriate the body's epistemic functions in the interim state – it retained the bodily sensorium. Twentieth-century scholarship put forward the view that such understandings had been abandoned at the outset of the modern era. The Protestant tendency for purification (Latour 1993 [1991]; Keane 2007; Weber 2005 [1930]) was especially understood as creating an understanding of the body and soul/mind as separate from one another. However, the articles in this special issue contest the modern purified view of the Christian (Protestant) person in many ways. They advance the view that contemporary Christian bodies are not only inseparable from the soul but also qualitatively different from secular bodies and from one another. This production and transformation of Christian bodies often takes place through powerful spiritual experiences, as Barnes and Haapalainen demonstrate in their articles. Spiritual experiences have a transformative effect on the believer's body and the sensorium. But not only on them: as the articles show, this specific Christian body and sensorium – 'infused with and constituted by Spirit' (Barnes this issue) – produces different worlds too. This particularity of Christian bodies is also noted by Opas in her article on the Peruvian indigenous Yine evangelicals. For them, faith is materialised as a physical organ that can be felt within a person's body and that grows as their faith strengthens. A faithful body does not therefore come to be in an instant, but its production is an ongoing enterprise. Similarly, Christian bodies can also be 'work-in-progress' in urban contexts, as Rivers demonstrates in her article on Brazilian fighting ministries, which require constant work by their participants to produce proper Christian bodies.

The cases discussed in this issue confirm the often-noted difficulty Christians have in expressing the connection with God through sensory language. Regardless of how the sensorium is conceptualised in each geographical and cultural context, the experience of God appears to be beyond its reach. Even when evidenced by familiar bodily features or actions – as in the case of the Brazilian evangelicals by laughter and crying (Rivers) – God-affected actions are separated from occurrences understood as secular. Whether through ontologically different 'speaking bodies' (Barnes) or 'steered bodies' invested with spiritual sensitivities (Haapalainen), bodies made open by physical exhaustion (Rivers), or through a separate organ radiating faith resulting in certainty and confidence in one's body (Opas), people need to attune their sensoria or acquire an additional spiritual sense to feel con-

nected with, and gain knowledge of, God. However, whereas for some of these Christians the world opened by their Christian sensorium constantly feeds into their bodily existence, thus allowing them to live in a different world, for others the experience is not equally unambiguous and they remain locked in a continuous struggle to distinguish between divine and mundane sensations. Regarding sensoria, the sixteenth-century Lutheran thinkers present an exception among these cases. In their writings the ability to be connected with God is not explicitly raised, as attention is instead directed towards the question of remaining connected with one's family. This implies, as Itzés notes, that Lutherans did not find a connection with God problematic. It was a given and natural condition of the human being. In general, however, the articles show that the normal human physical sensorium falls short of reaching the divine, which requires that qualitatively different kinds of capability that work on a distinct existential logic. These capabilities, often glossed as the 'spiritual senses', both surpass the human body and remain inseparable from it.

These struggles to conceptualise spiritual experiences of God's presence turn also into difficulties in communicating them to fellow-Christians and the wider public. The solutions vary: one can strive to affect others by writing and thus communicate what is interpreted as the authentic and true substance of faith (Itzés); create connections with others and invigorate similar emotions in them by laughing or crying (Rivers); transmit one's experience by using metaphors that convey the other-worldliness of the experience (Barnes) or through dream-telling that anchors the experiences to shared cultural knowledge (Opas); or, finally, those who have been-in-touch with God can be guided to describe their experiences in a recognisable way and can be given a sound theological explanation to ease their doubt (Haapalainen). Communicating experiences to others for which there is no vocabulary remains problematic, despite the effort.

The core question of this special issue concerns the role of the social other in informing and generating experiences of God's presence. The case studies afford evidence of the centrality of the 'other' for the experience of God. Taken together, they thus contest the deep-seated understanding in scholarship of the individuality of Protestant faith. From early Lutherans to contemporary evangelicals in different parts of the globe, Christians, just as human beings in general, are understood as being not only related to, but also constituted by their relationships with others. Christians' connection with God is not independent of these relationships either. This becomes explicit in the way sixteenth-century Lutherans, instead of problematising

the human capacity to gain knowledge of God, concentrate on the question of disembodied souls' capacity to gain knowledge of their living kin. Itzéz's analysis suggests that the need to affirm the continuation of social relatedness in the afterlife is proof for Lutherans of the existence of God's kingdom. The case studies raise affectivity as a central means by which the social other participates in people's experiences of divine presence. Rivers shows that experience of God's presence among members of Brazilian fighting ministries is gained through very physical actions: combat fighting, and laughing and crying. God cannot be reached by mere contemplation, but the connection presupposes social and physical interaction between affective bodies. The affectivity of bodies is also central to the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran (Haapalainen) and Amazonian indigenous evangelical (Opas) experiences of the divine. These accounts suggest that affectivity may be seen as bridging the views that emphasise human sociality on the one hand, and divine work on human bodies on the other, in bringing about Christian experiences of being connected with God. The tension between these views is taken up by Barnes, who criticises approaches that reduce (intentionally or unintentionally) Christian experiences of God to socially produced phenomena for eclipsing, ignoring, or denying the agency of God. For him, and for the people he has interviewed, it is God as an active agent who transforms human sensoria and human bodies. But fellow-human beings also participate in the processes of connecting with God through interpretative practices. Opas shows that the Yine evangelicals both instruct one another in how to avoid Satanic traps and take part in the analysis of the significance of dream experiences in relation to their dream encounters with the divine. Through these actions fellow Christians attempt to guard and organise the social and moral life of the evangelical collectivity. Haapalainen observes a similar process taking place among Finnish Evangelical Lutherans. In their attempt to retain control of theological interpretation, ministers assume the role of analysts of lay-Christian experience, and especially of the God-devil axis.

Although not necessarily using the language of morality, the cases in this special issue tackle also with the question of the ethical and moral evaluation of experiences of the divine, which emerges not as a mere mode of control, but as a more refined attitude towards various shared or personal experiences. This may be seen as a problem space in which continuous negotiation about spiritual experiences and their nature is conducted. The articles show that moral evaluations may focus either on the individual or the collectivity, but that in most cases these two sides are inseparably intertwined. Itzéz examines how the process of evaluation is targeted at the community of

the dead and the living. The deceased souls' concern for the well-being of their living kin is proof of their moral condition and thus their humanity, making them eligible for salvation. In the case of the fighting ministries, Rivers suggests that moral evaluation is linked to respect for one's opponent and seeking perfection in training. It is a tightrope walk: honouring the opponent is perfected in practice as well as in not hurting the opponent. Slacking in practice or in a fight would disrespect not only the opponent, but also God. Among the indigenous Yine people Opas studies, morality in people's experiences of God is in a parallel and very physical way related to collective welfare. Given that other people as well as non-humans influence people's bodies and personhoods through physical interaction, and that living well and being a legitimate Christian ideally take place among people with similar (Christian) bodies, people's connections with transcendent actors, and thus the moral evaluations of people's dreams, gain enormous moral significance for the local Christian community. In Barnes's article the individual is placed at the centre of moral evaluation. He shows that moral and ethical struggles can arise from, and be targeted at, the believer's past. The subject of such evaluations is the self before and after the watershed of becoming a believer. In addition to the individual-collectivity axis the articles discuss moral evaluations in relation to discernment between God and the devil. As seen in the case of the Amazonian Yine evangelicals, interaction with the devil may have enduring effects on people's life and faith, which makes the act of discernment of great importance. In Haapalainen's article on Finnish Evangelical Lutherans this discernment concerns both the 'spirit world' and the 'false veneration of people'. The first focuses on the threat caused by the source of transcendent experiences potentially being Satan or demons rather than God; the second deals with the danger of individuals with spiritual gifts becoming objects of veneration instead of God. These problems are taken seriously in the Evangelical Lutheran parish, and the pastors instruct people in how they may be sure that the powers with which they are dealing are indeed from a divine source.

Finally, in relation to the analysis of Christian experiences of God's presence, Barnes and Opas raise the important question of the scholarly inability to take the Christian God seriously. While recent ontological, new materialist, and post-humanist attempts to rethink the position of the human subject and the subject-object relationship have made it possible to study deities in different religious and spiritual traditions not only as objects of human action but as subjects and actors in their own right (Espirito Santo & Tassi 2013), it has proved difficult for religious scholarship to employ a



similar approach to the Christian God (see Bialecki 2014). Unlike in many other cases it seems that taking the Christian God seriously amounts to the researcher subscribing to God's existence. This may in large measure result from the long tensional relationship between theology and social scientific research on Christianity (and especially the study of religion and anthropology). However, in the context of the current deliberate and explicit social scientific and humanistic project to find ways of taking the agency and subjectivity of various nonhuman – animate and inanimate – beings and substances seriously (e.g. Henare et al. 2007), the tide also seems to be turning here, enabling a fresh consideration of the problem of the Christian God. In discussing the influence of Christian transcendent others on believers the articles by Barnes and Opas, although approaching the question from different viewpoints, take a move toward bringing God and other Christian non-humans into the analysis as subjects.

Together, the papers in this special issue reveal the diverse ways in which the social other – whether human or other-than-human – influences the Christian experiences of being connected with God. In making this social connectedness visible this issue contributes to the development of the field of study of Christian and other religious experiences of the divine.

\* \* \*

MINNA OPAS is Senior Research Fellow in Comparative Religion at the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Turku. Email: minna.opas@utu.fi

ANNA HAAPALAINEN is Doctoral Candidate in Comparative Religion at the University of Turku. Email: anna.haapalainen@utu.fi

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# The knowledge of disembodied souls: Epistemology, body, and social embeddedness in the eschatological doctrine of later sixteenth-century German Lutherans<sup>1</sup>

GÁBOR ITTZÉS

*Károli Gáspár University*

## Abstract

In the wake of their rejection of purgatory Protestants had to rethink their eschatological views. The German Lutherans of the latter half of the sixteenth century developed a robust doctrine of the last things, including a teaching on what departed souls know prior to the resurrection. Following an overview of the sources and a brief reconstruction of the overall locus, this article focuses on an analysis of what and how disembodied souls are claimed to know. The evidence holds some surprises. First, while more than lip-service is certainly paid to the ways of knowing God, the authors' real interest lies in the exploration of interpersonal relationships. Their primary concern is how other human beings, whether still on earth or already departed, may be known and what may be known about them. The implications are threefold. Knowledge of God and knowledge of human beings—ultimately, knowledge of self—are intertwined. Anthropology takes centre-stage, and ontology is thus superseded by epistemology. In all this, the body is never relinquished. The apparently unconscious importation of sensory language and conceptualisation of sense-based experience permeate the discussion of ostensibly disembodied knowledge. Knowing, for our authors, is ultimately a function of the body even if this means 'packing' bodily functions into the soul. In this doctrine, which may have had its roots in patristics but which has also demonstrably absorbed impulses from popular religion, knowledge of God is not only deeply connected with individual identity but also exhibits indelible social features and is inseparable from the (re)constitution of community.

*Keywords: 16th century, Lutheranism, resurrection, epistemology, departed souls*

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When the Protestant Reformation rejected the doctrine of purgatory as unbiblical,<sup>2</sup> the fate of the human person between the death and resurrection of the body had to be fundamentally rethought. The early Reformers had tackled the issue,<sup>3</sup> but it is not until the latter half of the sixteenth century that we can speak of a new Lutheran consensus on the question. Exploring the emerging new teaching, in this paper I shall focus on how and why questions of epistemology became central to early modern evangelical discussions of individual eschatology. I shall argue that in clarifying what and how disembodied individual souls know, social and bodily aspects of knowledge emerged as decisive elements.

If this conclusion seems paradoxical, we would do well to recall David Tripp's warning against the temptation of 'assum[ing] that the Protestant Reformation dissolved an over-arching unity prevailing throughout Christendom'. It was in fact against a 'background of a dissolving ecclesial body that both "Protestant" and "Catholic" reformations reaffirmed the claim of God upon the whole body – of the individual, of the church, of society at large' (1997, 131f.). Examining the responses of influential early Reformers to this challenge, Tripp finds in their work 'a discovery ... of a sense of body in the person [and] in the general community' (1997, 147). In what follows, I shall show how that 'sense of body' was developed in a particular (eschatological) context by the next two generations of Lutheran thinkers. In doing so, I shall be interested not so much in what the early modern texts have to say about the post-mortem state of the soul per se as in what they reveal about the presuppositions, commitments, and concerns of their authors. I shall pay more attention to the writers' actual performance, developing a 'sense of body' at different levels, than to their ostensible focus on the disembodied state.

Since my larger argument is based on a reconstruction of historical developments, I shall begin with the sources. Thus, in turning first to that body (of literature) which allows conclusions about other senses of the term,

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2 On the origins and rise of the doctrine, see Le Goff's now classic study *The Birth of Purgatory* (1984). For a defence of its biblical origins, see Anderson (2011), and for a recent assessment of its fortunes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Malý (2015).

3 The reconstruction of Luther's views is a thorny issue, much debated over the last century, that cannot be discussed here. See Thiede (1982 and 1993) for a programmatic exposition, and Lohse (1999, 325–32) for a more cautious overview. Melancthon offered a more sustained and systematic treatment of the question in the concluding chapter of his *De anima* commentary (1544, 303–15 and 1988, 284–9), on which see also Frank (1993). For a recent discussion of the Wittenberg Reformers' early attacks on purgatory, with attention to the bodily senses of sight and hearing, see Evener (2015).

I shall provide a sketchy overview of the texts that underlie my investigation. The first set of material questions to ask of the sources will concern the knowledge of blessed souls in the disembodied state. From this emerges the importance of disembodied souls recognising each other as persons in the interim state. Once the review of the historical material is complete, more systematic reflections can be offered on our findings concerning the bodily aspects and social embeddedness of knowledge in the eschatological thought of the later sixteenth-century exponents of evangelical Christianity.

### A body of literature

The literary corpus I am discussing is quite substantial.<sup>4</sup> It consists of texts that were written over a generation but remained in print for more than half a century. The most successful titles were frequently reprinted, with the whole corpus comprising some forty editions, stemming from territories as far apart as Strasbourg and Berlin, or Dresden and Hamburg, and even Copenhagen. Taken together, these works represent the bulk of the Lutheran lands of the Empire. The corpus is also quite representative in terms of social stratification. It is true that most, but not all, authors were ordained ministers, yet their ecclesiastical status differed considerably from simple country parsons to general superintendents and professors of theology, sometimes of international stature.<sup>5</sup> The works were written in, or translated into, the vernacular. Their physical format also suggests that

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4 The works include, in chronological order of their first publication, Melchior Specker's *Vom Leiblichen Todt* (1560), Andreas Musculus's *Gelegenheit! Thun vnd Wesen der Verstorbenen* (1565), Basilius Faber's *Tractetlein von den Seelen der verstorbenen* (1569), Johannes Garcaeus Jr's *Sterbbüchlein Darin Von den Seelen/ jrem ort/ standel thun und wesen / aller Menschen/bis an den Jüngsten tag/aus Gottes wort vnd der lieben Veter Schrifften/ warhafftiger bericht* (1573), Martin Mirus's *Sieben Christliche Predigten* (preached in 1575, first printed in 1590), David Chyträus Sr's *De morte et vita aeterna* (1581–1582, GT 1590–1591), Moses Pflacher's *Die gantzte Lehr Vom Tod vnd Absterben des Menschen* (1582), Gregor Weiser's *Christlicher Bericht/ Von Vnsterblichkeit und Zustand der Seelen nach jhrem Abschied/ Vnd letzten Hendlern der Welt* (1588), and Bartholomaeus Frölich's *Seelen Trost/ Das ist/ [C]hristlicher bericht vom Zustande vnd Glück der lieben Seelen/ in jener Welt/ biß an den jüngen Tag* (1590). Of course, further works could be added to the list, but it is my contention that they would not significantly alter the emerging picture.

5 Basic biographical information is available on most in standard handbooks: Chyträus: ADB 4:254–6 (NDB 3:254), BBKL 1:1021–122, DBE<sup>2</sup> 2:344, LThK<sup>3</sup> 2:1197, RGG<sup>4</sup> 2:377f. (RPP 3:202); Faber: ADB 6:488–90, DBE<sup>2</sup> 3:199; Frölich: BBKL 2:139; Garcaeus: ADB 8:370f., DBE<sup>2</sup> 3:682; Mirus: ADB 22:1; Musculus: ADB 23:93f. (NDB 18:626f.), BBKL 6:380f., DBE<sup>2</sup> 7:322, LThK<sup>3</sup> 7:542, RGG<sup>4</sup> 5:1593 (RPP 8:619); Pflacher: BBKL 7:421–3, DBE<sup>2</sup> 7:802, RGG<sup>4</sup> 6:1244 (RPP 10:26). While Specker appears in DBA (I.966.317, II:595.158), I have not been able to find any external information on Weiser (cf. n. 21, below).

they were intended for a general readership.<sup>6</sup> Their genres vary, and many works—sermon sequences, catechisms, devotional pieces—were meant for a lay audience. What makes this body of literature especially interesting is that later authors often drew on their predecessors, and their dependence, if rarely acknowledged,<sup>7</sup> can be demonstrated by a careful analysis of the texts.<sup>8</sup>

While differing in some detail, all texts agree<sup>9</sup> that the soul survives the death of the body in a wakeful state. It is carried either by angels into God's hands to be with Christ or by devils to hell. Both places have a variety of names such as heaven, paradise, Abraham's bosom, land of the living, and many more,<sup>10</sup> but no middle ground is admitted. Purgatory is dismissed. Blessed souls are redeemed from all suffering and enjoy peace and rest while worshipping and contemplating God. Both aspects, the happy state and worship of the blessed, are described in some detail. Another widely held and extensively argued claim is that souls cannot appear on earth, although the devil may abuse their shape.<sup>11</sup> The state of the damned is described in similar but opposite terms. Generally, there is less interest in the damned, and authors spend more time on the happiness in store for the faithful.

It is in this general context that discussions of more specific epistemological details occur. Unsurprisingly, the approach our writers take is profoundly scriptural. Whatever points they make, authors routinely argue from biblical evidence. But they bring their own presuppositions to the text, and it is part of my goal to uncover what their exegetical and constructive performance reveals about their prior commitments and underlying convictions about the social and bodily preconditions of knowing God, the self, and the other.

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6 The books were often issued in the relatively small octavo size (sixteen pages or eight leaves—hence the name—to the printing sheet), suggesting affordable publications.

7 Weiser's open use of Mirus's Regensburg Sermons is atypical. He also refers to Faber's 'golden booklet' ('gülden Büchlein'; 1588, B<sup>13r</sup>), cf. Brady (1971) 828.

8 I have developed this argument in a series of papers (Ittzés 2015a; 2015b; 2016) and will assume the validity of their conclusions as I explore thematic connections between individual works in the selected corpus.

9 For details briefly summarised here, see Chyträus (1592) C5<sup>v</sup>–D3<sup>r</sup>; Faber (1572) a1<sup>r</sup>–b2<sup>v</sup>, c3<sup>v</sup>–5<sup>v</sup>; Frölich (1590) 5<sup>v</sup>–14<sup>r</sup>, 17<sup>r</sup>–20<sup>v</sup>, 24<sup>v</sup>–25<sup>v</sup>; Garcaeus (1573) M7<sup>v</sup>–P8<sup>r</sup>, R3<sup>r</sup>–T4<sup>v</sup>, T6<sup>v</sup>–7<sup>v</sup>; Mirus (1590) O2<sup>r</sup>–3<sup>v</sup>; Musculus (1565) C2<sup>r</sup>–5<sup>r</sup> (cf. D3<sup>v</sup>–4<sup>r</sup>), C5<sup>r</sup>–8<sup>v</sup>; Pflacher (1589) 272–4; Specker (1560) 256<sup>v</sup>–265<sup>v</sup>, 269<sup>r</sup>–275<sup>r</sup>, 278<sup>v</sup>–287<sup>r</sup>, 289<sup>r</sup>–291<sup>v</sup>; Weiser (1588) 23–8, 31f.

10 This, indeed, is a big issue for early modern authors, and their discussions of this point provide extensive philological ground to argue the interrelatedness of their texts.

11 This is a major topic in and of itself, requiring independent treatment, which I have provided elsewhere (Ittzés 2014). Cf. also Evener 2015.



### Knowledge of the blessed souls in the disembodied state

Numerous texts in the corpus include an analysis, often formally demarcated, of what and how disembodied souls know, and others draw similar conclusions in passing. The fullest discussion may be found in a close-knit group of texts stemming from Melchior Specker's *Vom leiblichen Todt* (1560, 266<sup>r</sup>–269<sup>r</sup>, 287<sup>r</sup>–288<sup>v</sup>).<sup>12</sup> The subject matter of Specker's chapters 7 and 11 is the knowledge of the righteous and the damned, respectively. Specker develops the former in more detail. He asserts that the blessed souls recognise the Trinity and the secrets of God's kingdom, but then, drawing on the parable of Lazarus and Dives (Luke 16:19–31) and on the episode of the transfiguration (Luke 9:28–36),<sup>13</sup> he spends considerably more time elaborating on various aspects of life on earth after the soul's departure as the object of the departed soul's knowledge. The Trinity and God's lordship may be the apex of human cognition and therefore deserve pride of place on the list, but the bulk of Specker's attention is devoted to literally more mundane—and interpersonal—issues.

After a review of what is known, he turns to the problem of how disembodied souls gain knowledge. He comes up with an Augustinian answer. The bishop of Hippo suggests in paragraph 18 of *On Care to Be Had for the Dead* that before the resurrection of the body departed souls may obtain information about events in this life from newly arriving souls, from angels, or by God's direct revelation (cf. NPNF<sup>1</sup> 3:548). That theory will be widely accepted with virtually no alternative offered in the whole corpus. Unimaginative as this straightforward reliance on patristic material is, its basic orientation is worth noting. Specker, and his later colleagues, are not interested in explaining how an individual's mind works in obtaining, or producing, knowledge. Instead, they focus on its social embeddedness. Even in the hereafter, knowledge is largely not immediate but mediated through a network of others. Thus, both in the *what* and the *how* of knowing, interpersonal aspects predominate, although the divine element, both as object and source of knowledge, is also recognised.

When we compare Basilius Faber's *Tractetlein von den Seelen der ver-*

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12 Specker is most closely followed by Basilius Faber's *Tractetlein von den Seelen der verstorbenen* (1572) and Johannes Garcaeus Jr's *Sterbbüchlein* (1573); cf. Itzész (2015b; 2016). *Vom Leiblichen Todt* is the most successful work of its author, a by now largely forgotten Strasbourg professor of theology. It is a bulky florilegium excerpting texts from the Bible, the church fathers, medieval theologians, and contemporary authors. Organised thematically, its three parts deal with bodily death and its names, the corpse and burial, and the fate of the soul in the *Zwischenzustand*.

13 Both Specker and his followers cite all three synoptic gospels by chapter (Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9), irrespective of the fact that the relevant detail, that Moses and Elijah know that Jesus will die in Jerusalem (v. 31), is Lukan *Sondergut*.

*storbenen*<sup>14</sup> (1572, b1<sup>r</sup>–7<sup>r</sup>) and Johannes Garcaeus Jr's *Sterbbüchlein*<sup>15</sup> (1573, P8<sup>r</sup>–R3<sup>r</sup>, T4<sup>v</sup>–6<sup>r</sup>) with Specker's work, we see that they followed him quite closely. The content of their positions resembles his, and the structure of their argumentation also exhibits parallels. Both later authors adapt the Augustinian position on how souls gain information, and Garcaeus even expands the discussion of the central topic that souls know what is going on in this world. There is, however, a subtle yet significant shift in their focus that should not go unnoticed. The subjecthood of the other is acquiring growing importance among the interpersonal aspects of knowledge.

In the last section of chapter 7 Specker briefly asserts that disembodied souls 'recognise each other. [...] Thereby is the foolishness of those people openly repudiated who [...] hold that souls [...] do not recognise [...] each other.'<sup>16</sup> This is hardly more than a cursory reference. Faber then transforms the related issue of blessed souls thinking of and caring for their relatives into a major topic, and devotes nearly half a chapter to it. Garcaeus goes even further, and treats the matter in a whole new chapter. The increased space assigned to the question obviously mirrors a growing interest in it. When we look at the broader picture, we can register a similar tendency. The topic is largely absent from Andreas Musculus's *Gelegenheit/ Thun vnd Wesen der Verstorbenen* (1565, C2<sup>v</sup>–5<sup>r</sup>).<sup>17</sup> However, in texts after the late 1560s this is precisely the most important, if not the only, epistemological issue.

In the *Sieben Christliche Predigten*, originally preached at the Diet of Regensburg in 1575, Martin Mirus<sup>18</sup> articulates the thesis concisely:

Without doubt they [the righteous souls] also know each other among them-

14 Faber, remembered as one of the most influential educators in sixteenth-century Saxony and renowned for his Latin dictionary, is the only layman among our authors. The *Tractetlein* was a later addition to an immensely popular eschatological piece which went through some twenty editions (cf. Ittzés 2016).

15 Trained in Wittenberg, Garcaeus rose to be a professor of theology and superintendent. His contribution to the natural sciences was also significant. With probably four editions, the *Sterbbüchlein*, on the nature and fate of the soul, was his most successful theological work (cf. Ittzés 2015b, 336–9).

16 '...das sie einander kennen / ... Dardurch würt deren leüten thorheytt offentlich gestrafft / die ... halten / die Seelen ... erkennen ... einander nit' (Specker 1560, 269<sup>r</sup>). The topic appears more emphatically in the otherwise shorter chapter 11 on the knowledge of the damned souls (Specker 1560, 288<sup>v</sup>).

17 Drawing chiefly on Wisdom 5 and Luke 16, his logic is vaguely reminiscent of Specker's points about both the damned and the righteous, but here we find them in a rather embryonic form, with not much explicit reflection on knowledge. Epistemologically, Musculus seems a little more interested in the damned, but even this is not very much, and the question as to whether souls recognise each other is not raised.

18 Court preacher to the Elector of Saxony, Mirus was a prominent theologian of his age and an author of the *Formula of Concord*, an epochal document that successfully settled decades of intra-Lutheran debates. His anti-Catholic Regensburg Sermons circulated widely in manuscript form before their first printing fifteen years later (Ittzés 2015a, 64–6).

selves and live together in true love and friendship, also have fervent love and inclination towards their beloved who still sojourn on earth, enquire about their state from the dear angels and among themselves from those who are newly arrived from there.<sup>19</sup>

The introductory protestation might be a clue that this view was not yet entirely self-evident.<sup>20</sup> In *Christlicher Bericht* (1588) Gregor Weiser<sup>21</sup> takes a clue from Mirus and quotes the relevant passages.<sup>22</sup> When he reflects on the occupation of blessed souls, Weiser makes no mention of their knowledge, and nor does he turn any aspect of epistemology into an independent question of his catechism (1588, 23f., 27, 32). Nevertheless, there is a paragraph by Mirus in the concluding part of the fourth Regensburg sermon in which he comforts those bereft of a family member with the assurance that they are not altogether lost but will be seen again on the 'Dies restitutionis omnium[.]'<sup>23</sup> ... That is why we should gird our souls with patience in the meantime and console ourselves with the same hope.<sup>24</sup> The entire passage is cited by both Weiser (1588, 29) and Pflacher (1589, 276).

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19 'On zweiffel kennen sie sich auch unter einander/ vnd leben beysamen / in warer Lieb vnd Freundschaft / haben auch noch sehnliche Liebe vnd Neigung gegen den jrigen/ so noch auff Erden wallen/ erkündigen sich jres zustandes bey den lieben Engeln / vnd vntr jnen selbst bey denen so newlichst von hinnen komen/' (Mirus 1590, O2<sup>v</sup>).

20 Note the unmistakable references to *De cura* even though Augustine is not mentioned.

21 Little is known of Weiser except that he was a village parson near Meißen, Saxony, and flourished between 1577–1582. *Christlicher Bericht* saved his name from oblivion. Organised in Q&A format, the work heavily draws on prominent sixteenth-century Lutheran theologians to discuss eschatological issues (Ittzés 2015a, 62f.).

22 On Weiser's general dependence on Mirus, see Ittzés (2015a) 72–9. Moses Pflacher, another author who owes much to Mirus, greets the epistemological question in silence in *Die gantze Lehr Vom Tod vnd Absterben des Menschen* (1589), while David Chyträus, drawing on the story of the transfiguration, clearly implies the standard view in *Christlicher, Tröstlicher und in Gottes Wort gegründter unterricht* (1592, D1<sup>v</sup>), but he places the emphasis elsewhere.

23 It might be suggested that this line of interpretation diverges significantly from Specker and his immediate followers, in that it makes personal recognition a privilege of resurrected humans, but I find this argument unconvincing. The textual counterevidence is delivered by Mirus, who does say that *souls* recognise each other before judgement day. (The problematic passage is offered as an application of the foregoing teaching that souls will recognise each other, on which premise the questionable clause thus depends for its interpretation.) The explanation lies in the fact that early modern authors did not see the post-mortem and post-resurrection existence in sharp juxtaposition – a point to which I will return in the next section.

24 'Dies restitutionis omnium, ... Da wollen wir einander in freuden wider sehen / vnd sol vns kein Todt in ewigkeit mehr scheiden/ Drumb wir mitler weile sollen vnser Seelen mit gedult fassen / vnd vns derselben seligen hoffnung trösten' (Mirus 1590, O4<sup>r</sup>).

In the *Seelen Trost* Bartholomaeus Frölich<sup>25</sup> treats the topic in a grand fashion, making the question ‘Whether we will also know each other in the other world’ the subject of his fifth chapter.<sup>26</sup> He responds to what he regards as a widespread popular misconception that only cousins and godparents<sup>27</sup> will recognise each other in the hereafter. Interestingly, he takes a broad epistemological sweep to construct a well-founded answer, and covers much the same ground as Specker in the process. Here we see the consummation of the development that began in the early 1560s in the sense that we have now returned full circle to the rich epistemological picture of *Vom leiblichen Todt*, but this time the disembodied souls’ personal recognition is not a tangentially treated minor point at the end, but constitutes the overarching problem and framework within which the entire discussion is situated.<sup>28</sup>

Sixteenth-century German Lutheran authors thus reflected on epistemological questions while thinking through the fate of the human soul after the death of the body. Disembodied souls’ knowledge of the divine<sup>29</sup> is certainly not passed over in silence, but social aspects of knowledge seem to command even greater attention among the writers. Within this matrix, individuals’ recognition of each other emerged as a major concern of early modern thinkers. It is to this question that we must now turn.

### **Personal recognition and the blurred line between the interim state and post-resurrection life**

Most texts in the selected corpus affirm that departed souls recognise each other in the hereafter. The level of their engagement with the question varies considerably, and the most detailed discussion is provided by Johannes Garcaeus (1573, P8<sup>r</sup>–R3<sup>r</sup>). He enumerates no fewer than ten arguments for the sweeping thesis that the blessed souls know all who fall asleep in Christ, that is, in the community of the righteous everyone knows everyone else personally. First, Peter immediately recognised Moses and Elijah

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25 Frölich is virtually unknown except as a hymn writer who once enjoyed considerable popularity. Silesian by birth, he served as pastor in a small town in Brandenburg. *Seelen Trost*, essentially an *ars moriendi* piece, is one of only two books by him.

26 ‘Ob wir einander in jener Welt auch kennen werden’ (1590, 81<sup>v</sup>–89<sup>v</sup>).

27 ‘Gefettern vnnnd Paten’ (Frölich 1590, 81<sup>v</sup>).

28 It must be noted, however, that it remains undecided throughout Frölich’s chapter whether the argument pertains to the post-resurrection or to the post-mortem state.

29 On the medieval background and the controversy concerning beatific vision, see Bynum (1995), esp. 279–317.

with his eyes 'weighed down with sleep' on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:32–33).<sup>30</sup> Second, Christ was recognised by his disciples when he appeared in his glorified body after Easter. Third, Adam recognised each animal when God had brought them before him to name them, and he needed no introduction to Eve (Gen 2:19–23). Fourth, Elizabeth and 'little Johnny' ('Henselein'; 1573, Q7<sup>r</sup>) in her womb recognised Jesus when Mary came to visit them, as did the Baptist again at the Jordan, although he had never seen Jesus before (Luke 1:39–45 and Matt 3:13–15).<sup>31</sup> Fifth, Abraham knows both Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:25–31). Sixth, the godless recognise the righteous whom they have oppressed (Wis 5:1–5). Seventh, we know, hear, and see our friends and acquaintances in this life. Eighth, we will see God and the angels face to face, so how much more shall we see the elect who are but human beings. Ninth, if the 'wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky' (Dan 12:3), there will be a difference in glory among the elect, which is impossible unless God's exceptional servants ('wunderleute'; 1573, Q8<sup>v</sup>) are recognised. Tenth and last, the righteous with Christ will recognise both themselves and their Saviour (John 17:24–25).<sup>32</sup> Garcaeus appends three unnumbered sets of further prooftexts to this list. The first is on the new Jerusalem,<sup>33</sup> the second includes Jeremiah's and Paul's prophecies about an immediate and complete knowledge of God,<sup>34</sup> and the third is a general allusion to promises of our future Christiform shape.<sup>35</sup> The point in each case is that perfect knowledge includes knowing and recognising one another.

The line between 'arguments' and 'prooftexts' is thus fluid; all but the seventh argument are scripture-based. The overarching logic, with the exception of a few items, is always the same, namely, that the existence of the righteous in the hereafter is a perfected form of their current being. To borrow a technological metaphor, their new life is 'backwards compatible' with their earthly life: everything they were capable of do-

30 Garcaeus simply alludes to the story without citing any reference, but the sleepy eyes again mark out Luke, cf. 'mit schlefferigen augen' (Garcaeus 1573, Q5<sup>r</sup>) and Luke 9:32.

31 Note that in Garcaeus's reconstruction, probably developing Luke 1:45, Elizabeth is supposed to have been providentially aware of the whole angelic message given to Mary (Luke 1:35).

32 In the original, the locus is cited as John 7 (Garcaeus 1573, Q8<sup>v</sup>).

33 Isa 65:17–20, 2 Pet 3:13, and Rev 21:1–2.

34 Jer 31:33–34 and 1 Cor 13:9–12.

35 Garcaeus might have passages like Rom 8:29, 1 Cor 15:49 or Phil 3:21 in mind, and, since he evokes the witness of Paul, Peter, and John (1573, R2<sup>v</sup>), also 2 Pet 1:4 and 1 John 3:2. His actual wording is closest to Phil 3:21.

ing here, they will retain the power to do—and even surpass—there.<sup>36</sup> If such and such is the case in the examples cited, how much more so in our improved state!<sup>37</sup>

Garcaeus sets out to discuss a feature of the interim state (*souls* recognising each other), yet many of the arguments, not to mention the concluding sets of biblical excerpts, may, and some do, pertain to life eternal after the general resurrection. Disregarding several ambiguous items, the second and the ninth arguments are practically impossible to interpret regarding the *Zwischenzustand*. Jesus was recognised in his clarified body (#2) to which the departed souls have not yet attained, and the Danielic verse (#9) is part of a resurrection prophecy. Even if we allow that the New Jerusalem might be interpreted to denote the righteous souls' interim abode, as in Specker (1560, 233<sup>v</sup>–234<sup>v</sup>), the assumption of a glorified body like Christ's (Phil 3:21) cannot commence before the general resurrection. In drawing the desired conclusion from a given example, Garcaeus also frequently speaks of eternal life, and never specifically of souls. In other words, while epistemology is a helpful test case to examine qualities of the interim state, the arguably most important aspect of knowledge after death—the individual recognition of other persons—does not sharply distinguish between the pre- and post-resurrection states.

There is only one passage in the whole chapter where Garcaeus seems to differentiate between various stages of knowing. He draws this conclusion from the third argument:

Adam, through God's created image in him, likewise had knowledge and recognition of all things; nor can his bodily natural deep sleep hinder him in the same in his complete righteousness, wisdom and understanding. How much more shall we have such wisdom, recognise each other [and] converse with each other in life eternal, since in the state where we possess our glory

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36 This is the meaning of backwards compatibility. If, e.g., a new version of a word processor can handle formats of an older software, it is said to be backwards compatible with its predecessor (which, by contrast, may not be able to open files in the native format of the new version).

37 Note that it is of secondary significance what constitutes the inferiority of the examples cited in the arguments over against the future perfection. Reference cases may be taken equally from the pristine condition of creation, from the sinful world, or even from the godless in the hereafter. In one respect or another the state of the blessed souls will surpass each reference case and, given the assumption of backwards compatibility, will include features at least as good as those described in the example.

eternally without loss and danger we shall receive much greater glory [and] more complete clarity than Adam [originally had].<sup>38</sup>

Here we see three distinct states delineated, with a fourth implied. The four states include created perfection, fallen existence, the interim state between death and resurrection, and finally life eternal after the general resurrection. The second stage, earthly life as we know it after the fall, is only implicitly present in the passage,<sup>39</sup> but the other three are explained. First, prelapsarian Adam had perfect knowledge of all things. Adam in the (third) post-mortem state (during ‘his bodily natural deep sleep’) has again recovered his undiminished epistemic powers. Presumably, the same applies to us as well, although this is not made explicit. This is a relatively short but densely packed sentence that deserves a closer look. The *Zwischenzustand* is identified with the help of the metaphor of sleep, and it is qualified by three adjectives. It is deep: death is analogous to, but is even ‘more so’ than, sleep. It is nonetheless natural because Adam is ultimately numbered among the righteous, for whom Christ has tamed death. Finally, it is bodily or, literally, fleshly (‘fleischlicher’): sleep is predicated of Adam the whole person, but the first adjective helps avoid any misunderstanding. Sleep is only to be understood of his body. His soul, by implication, is awake, and indeed enjoys its epistemic functions to the full, purged of the noetic effects of sin (‘in his complete ... wisdom and understanding’).<sup>40</sup> The fourth epistemic state is introduced with a comparison that signals a contrast: ‘How much more...’ The contrast is drawn in terms of eternity and immunity to change on the one hand, and of perfection (glory and clarity)<sup>41</sup> on the other. Eternal life is superior both because of the inherent qualities of our knowing and because there will be no external factors limiting it either. As the additional

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38 ‘Also hat Adam/ durch Gottes bilde / in jm erschaffen/gehabt die wissenshaft vnd erkenntnis aller dinge / in seiner volkomenē gerechtigkeit / weisheit vnd verstand/mus jn daran auch nichts hindern/ sein fleischlicher natürlicher tieffer schlaff. Wie viel mehr werden wir im ewigen leben solche weisheit haben / einander kennen/mit einander reden /da wir viel höher herrlicher/vollkomener klarheit empfangen werden/ denn Adam / in dem stand/da wir vnser herrlichkeit on verlust vnd gefahr ewig besitzen’ (Garcaeus 1573, Q6’).

39 Garcaeus will return to this in the seventh argument.

40 What Garcaeus successfully invokes here in a few words is an entire tradition of theological argumentation. Underlying his choice of adjectives is a Christian interpretation of the sleep metaphor, which itself goes back to Old Testament and Classical sources. That he can effectively do so—and can expect his audience to understand the import of his concise formulation—is a testimony to the strength of the later sixteenth-century consensus on this point. For more on the uses of the sleep metaphor in the corpus, see Itzész (2014).

41 Here we can hear faint echoes of the medieval ‘four dowries’—i.e. perfections of the glorified body—tradition, on which see Bynum (1995) 131f., 235f. and *passim*.

words supplied in my translation above have already indicated, the comparison, on my reading, is not between the post-resurrection state and the *Zwischenzustand*, but between life eternal and Adam's original condition. Promising as the three- (or four)fold structure of the passage is, it ultimately reveals nothing of an appreciable epistemological distinction between the interim state and life after judgement day.

An alternative approach is offered by Basilius Faber. A key difference between him and Garcaeus is that he rather presupposes than seeks to establish that souls will recognise each other. Faber's thesis is the further point that even before meeting in the hereafter, disembodied souls remember and think of their relatives (1572, b4<sup>v</sup>–6<sup>r</sup>). That thesis surely entails the conviction that souls recognise each other, for what would be gained by confirming their care and concern for others if the longed-for acquaintances were not recognised upon joining the company of the righteous souls? The advantage of Faber's approach is that it properly pertains to the *Zwischenzustand*.

Faber advances three lines of thought in support of his thesis. First, souls do not sleep—or, rather, their sleep is such that it does not prevent thinking and recognition. *Prima facie*, the argument hardly strikes us as convincing, for in everyday sleep we may dream but we do not think and recognise those around us in the ordinary sense of the words. Faber's point is not altogether atypical, however. It is akin to reasoning, also offered by our authors, that the souls are alive after the body's death and, therefore, they must be awake. Both arguments make sense if we add a silently assumed premise, namely, backwards compatibility. People recognised each other on earth; if their souls continue in a conscious existence after death, they must also be able to recognise familiar people.<sup>42</sup> The logic is articulated in the second argument that since people care for relatives and friends in this life, they will have all the more, and purer, compassion for them once cleansed and liberated from sin. Faber adds two further considerations, one constructive, the other defensive. It is often said when a mother dies soon after the death of her child, Faber observes with approval, that the baby has begged God that she might also come. Defensively, Faber, imitating Specker, takes issue with Augustine's notion that souls in the *Zwischenzustand* have no compas-

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42 Nowhere in the entire corpus is the problem raised as to whether a limit might be set to recognition not so much by the knowing subject as by the object of knowledge in that souls, not bodies, must be recognised. Authors might insist that existence in the interim state is somehow imperfect until the body is reunited with the soul (e.g. Mirus 1590, O3<sup>r</sup>; Pflacher 1589, 273; Weiser 1588, 27f.), but for all practical intents and purposes the soul is assumed to carry complete personhood.



sion. He also goes beyond his source by questioning the authenticity of *De cura*. It is only with the third argument that he turns to scripture. 'He [the rich man] said [to Abraham], "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment".' (Luke 16:27–28.) If the damned think of their nearest and dearest, how much more the righteous!<sup>43</sup>

Details of Faber's reasoning such as the *locus classicus* from the Lukan parable or the Augustinian problem of compassion clearly link his approach to other treatments of souls recognising each other. However, the general direction of his interpretation—that is, the emphasis on thinking of those left behind rather than recognising them when they arrive at the interim abode—will not be picked up by later authors. Faber's approach allows him to combine the interpersonal aspect of epistemology with its specificity for the interim state, but others do not seem to be interested in such a fine point.<sup>44</sup>

There was not much at stake for them in a clear-cut distinction between eternal life and the *Zwischenzustand*. They were happy to blur the line between the two states. In fact, it seems that they considered earthly existence, the interim state, and post-resurrection life as a series of backwards compatible states, the latter stages entailing all the good qualities of the former and some more. A not insignificant corollary of this view is that the absence of the body in the middle stage is given lip-service at best and is largely ignored analytically. One—if not *the*—crucial dividing line between the two otherworldly states is the re-assumption of the body in the general resurrection. The fact that the two states are virtually indistinguishable in

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43 Note that this is yet another version of the backwards compatibility argument.

44 Frölich is the third author to argue the question in detail (1590, 81–89<sup>v</sup>). His reasoning, although somewhat narrower in scope, is very similar to Garcaeus's, and their theses are also equally broad. Frölich is also convinced that all the righteous will know each other, and that also better than in this life. He also employs the argument from backwards compatibility, but the bottom line, presented in various forms, is that the redeemed will have perfect knowledge, which necessarily also entails personal recognition. He grounds the claim Christologically via Romans 5:15–19 that Christ has not won back what was lost by Adam, unless the personal aspect of knowledge is also included. Ultimately, creatures—and Frölich is much taken by the prospect of our recognising the angels individually—will be known in God; conversely, the promised perfect knowledge of God logically necessitates our knowledge of angels and humans as well. He selects four prooftexts that he analyses in some detail: Lazarus and Dives from Luke 16, Jesus's transfiguration ostensibly from Matthew 17 (but including the specifically Lukan detail of Jesus's impending death in Jerusalem), the surprise of the damned from Wisdom 5, and Paul's expectation of full knowledge from 1 Corinthians 13. All four passages are familiar from Garcaeus, and the interpretation of the latter two is based on the logic of 'analogous but more perfect'. Nor does Frölich draw a sharp distinction between post-mortem and post-resurrection epistemology.

sixteenth-century discussions shows that the absence of the body played no major role in early modern writers' reflections on the interim state. With that, we have completed an overview of the source material and can take a step back and draw some conclusions from what we have seen.

### **Knowledge, body, community**

The literary corpus we have reviewed clearly shows that later sixteenth-century Lutheran writers were interested in the interim state, and they postulated the soul's conscious survival between the body's death and resurrection. That condition makes the *Zwischzustand* a special state, and our authors were apparently interested in reflecting on its unique characteristics. The details of their explorations nevertheless hold some surprises. What matters is not only what they say but also what they do not speak about. In this story, omissions are as important as the issues our texts choose to foreground.

The first characteristic to note is that an ontological approach is entirely lacking. There is no discussion of the nature and being of disembodied souls. Their very existence is surely insisted upon, but affirmation is no analysis, and the latter is missing. Instead of their being, our authors are interested in the actions and knowledge of souls. Of these two issues, the latter seems more important, for the texts ascribe no special occupation to disembodied souls. What these descriptions say souls do differs little from what humans are expected to do after the general resurrection, when their souls are reunited with their (glorified) bodies.

If disembodied souls' activities are not helpful in delimiting the post-mortem from the post-resurrection state, knowledge could be in at least two ways. First, with the body gone and decomposed, souls have no access to sense perception and should have different means of gaining a knowledge of the outside world. The framework is set up for a discussion of that problem, but our authors never in fact engage in it. The epistemic function of the body is not problematised at all. The same sense perceptions, especially seeing and hearing, are attributed to the 'naked' soul that we normally consider mediated through the body. It is not simply that disembodiment seems not to hinder the souls' access to knowledge, but our authors do not even find the question worth asking. We must be careful, however, how we interpret that omission. It might seem on the surface that the texts treat the body as epistemically disposable, but I suggest that this is not the case. Rather, bodily functions are ascribed to the soul. When the body is gone,

the soul takes over its epistemic functions. In other words, the body is never relinquished. Sensory language and conceptualisation of sense-based experience still permeate the discussion of ostensibly disembodied knowledge. Knowing, for our authors, is ultimately a function of the body, even if this means 'packing' bodily functions into the soul.

If modes of knowing outside the body are thus not used to characterise the interim state, the content of disembodied souls' knowledge of this world might still provide an access to its special features. This might explain why so much more attention is lavished on how souls know the temporal world than on how they know the Trinity and spiritual beings—a detail worth registering in and of itself. This world and the *Zwischenzustand* are coterminous. The final conflagration will end both, while God and the angels will continue as objects of knowledge in eternity. Knowing this world is thus a special test case for the interim state. After the resurrection humans can at best remember the world but cannot 'know' it as disembodied souls can. Consequently, one way to delimit the interim state would be to analyse the disembodied souls' knowledge of this world. While in a general sense this is a question that catches the attention of our early modern writers, they do not develop it in the ways we might expect.

Their answer is both limited and uninventive. They simply adopt Augustine's suggestion about the sources of information available to departed souls before the resurrection. They do not contrast those alternatives with the post-resurrection options, although at least one of them—news gathered from newly arriving souls—is certainly unique to the interim state. Rather than using this question to distinguish one ontological condition from the other, authors tend to blur the line between post-mortem and post-resurrection states. The modern, post-Enlightenment, juxtaposition between the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, which twentieth-century Protestant reflection considered so central, does not seem to be shared by Lutheran thinkers of the early confessional era.

Given this general attitude, knowing God outside the body is not contrasted with knowing God in the body, either earthly or resurrected. What is said about knowing God is predicated on the depiction of the heavenly worship in Revelation, and no detailed epistemology of engaging the divine is developed. Significantly, where authors go beyond an affirmation that disembodied souls know the Trinity directly is in declaring that God is foundational for all knowledge: creatures will also be known in God. This signals an indissoluble link between knowing God and knowing others, which leads us to a final point.

With the exception of the centrality of the body, our findings have been largely negative so far, but there is one aspect of the question that receives particular attention in the texts. The topic that interests sixteenth-century authors most is the possibility of personal recognition in the hereafter. Most of the writers touch on it, and several of them offer sustained discussions of it. Their analysis relies heavily on the Bible, but the choice of the question is not scriptural, for it is itself no more inherently biblical than several other issues that authors choose not to explore. Its motivation must have come from elsewhere. The question is part of the patristic tradition upon which the Reformation also depends, but this again is insufficient reason to explain why it elicited so much interest in the sixteenth century. Another factor may have been the challenges of popular religion such as those to which Frölich responded, but the topic probably also provided an opportunity to address some deep-seated concerns.

The assurance that God is stronger than death and that, despite all appearances, the latter is not able to destroy human personhood completely and irrevocably is a central tenet of Christianity. It obviously underlies the texts I am analysing, but it can be articulated in a variety of ways. When our authors emphasise the continuity of personhood and individual identity beyond the grave by arguing that humans will recognise each other in the hereafter, they do not merely unpack Christ's victory over death. They also reveal their understanding of the preconditions of identity and knowing, in which the human community plays a crucial part. We have seen above that backwards compatibility was an operative principle in the arguments about the interim state. It is based on the assumption that the life to come will be a perfected form of this life. Conversely, what is said of the future state is an expression of the implicit understanding of the present human condition.

Personal recognition is not only a prerequisite of community but also assures individual identity, because recognising others also implies being recognised by others. By confessing an afterlife in which individuals are recognised, family members can reunite, and friends meet again, early modern writers not only express their faith in a God who upholds the core of the human person and overcomes the ultimate isolation of death but also affirm that human personhood is to a large extent constituted in interpersonal relationships. Death is not an individual concern. Beyond destroying the self, it also rends the social fabric. If death is to be overcome, both must be reconstituted, because without the community there is no self. Enjoying God's presence, which the faithful look forward to in the hereafter, cannot be complete without enjoying the company of loved ones.

## Conclusion

To summarise, when in the second half of the sixteenth century Lutheran authors turned to the question of the individual's fate after death, they also reflected on what and how disembodied souls might know. They did not develop a robust epistemology, however; their approach remained thoroughly Bible-based. Their theory of knowing, such as it was, remained rudimentary, basically adopting an Augustinian view. The way in which they speak of the interim state, employing sensory language in the context of naked souls, betrays the centrality of the body in knowing. The fact that they do not maintain a sharp distinction between the interim state and post-resurrection existence, but rather ascribe qualities of the latter (a re-embodied state) to the former is another sign of how difficult they found it to let go of the body.

In terms of what is known, our writers certainly considered direct knowledge of God as an unsurpassable blessing awaiting the faithful after death, yet they were more interested in the details of humans recognising each other. That concern indeed emerges as the other focal point in addition to the indispensability of the body. In the discussion of both how knowledge is acquired and what is known, the other takes centre-stage. The individual's knowledge is constituted interpersonally.

I have examined texts reflecting on the knowledge of the disembodied individual soul, yet the analysis has shown that neither disembodiment nor individuality, at the expense of social interconnectedness, is a simple concept that early modern writers accepted at face value. For them, both the bodily and the social aspects of knowledge in the transcendental, spiritual realm were irreducible. Knowledge is dependent on the sensory apparatus of the body – if the body is not available, the soul has to assume its functions – and embedded in interpersonal relationships. Even when God can be known face to face, the experience cannot be interpreted without reference to the human community. What these texts show us, then, is that for sixteenth-century minds knowledge of God is irreducibly intertwined with both the body and the human community.

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GÁBOR ITTZÉS is Advisor for Academic Affairs to the Reformation Memorial Committee of Hungary and an affiliate at Károli Gáspár University, Budapest.  
E-mail: temenos@ittzes.eu

*Abbreviations*

- ADB *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, ed. Historische Kommission bei der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, München, 56 vols., repr. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1981) <www.deutsche-biographie.de>.
- BBKL *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Bautz and Traugott Bautz, 36 vols. to date (Hamm & Herzberg: Bautz, 1970–) <www.bbkl.de>.
- BPal *Bibliotheca Palatina: Druckschriften / Stampati Palatini / Printed Books*, microfiche ed., ed. Leonard Boyle and Elmar Mittler (Munich: Saur, 1995).
- DBA *Deutsches biographisches Archiv I–III*, microfiche ed. (Munich: Saur, 1999–2002).
- DBE *Deutsche Biographische Enzyklopädie*, 2nd, rev. ed., ed. Bruno Vierhaus, 12 vols. (Munich: Saur, 2005–2008).
- LThK *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 3rd ed., ed. Walter Kasper et al., 11 vols. (Freiburg i.Br. etc.: Herder, 1993–2001).
- NDB *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, ed. Historische Kommission der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 25 vols. to date (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1953–) <www.deutsche-biographie.de>.
- NPNF *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: A Select Library of the Christian Church*, Series I, 14 vols, ed. Philip Schaff, repr. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995).
- RGG *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, 4th ed., ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al., 9 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2007).
- RPP *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al., 14 vols. (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007–2013).
- VD16 *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts* <www.vd16.de>.

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- 1565 *Gelegenheit / Thun vnd Wesen der Verstorbenen /von jrem Abschied an / aus diesem Leben / bis zum eingang / nach gehaltenem Jüngsten Gericht / zum ewigen Leben*. Frankfurt a.d.O.: Johann Eichorn. (VD16: M 7151; also available in microform in BPal: F 522–523.)

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*bereyten solle/ Auch Von der Begräbniß vñ Begäncknussen/vnd wie man sich der Abgestorbenen halben trösten vnd halten solle. Item Von der Selen vnd jrem ort/ stand/ vnd wesen/biß auff den Jüngsten tag. Alles auß H. Schrifft/ vnd der Vätter außlegung / fleyszig züsam[m]en gebracht. Strasbourg: Samuel Emmel. (VD16: S 8169; also available in microform in BPal: F 3819–3820.)*

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# The intimate intensity of Evangelical fighting ministries<sup>1</sup>

JESSICA RIVERS  
Indiana University

## Abstract

The author discusses what she learned from her participation in evangelical fighting ministries, paying special attention to how these communities sought to connect with God through interacting with each other. In training with and interviewing the members of these ministries in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the author found that as evangelical Christians, many struggled to establish and maintain the primacy of their personal relationships with God over their interpersonal interests. Yet they also believed their relationships with God were meant to be witnessed and experienced by others. During moments of worship they shared emotional intimacy, granting each other opportunities to make outwardly perceivable their internally felt relationships with God. During their Brazilian jiu-jitsu training, they were encouraged to feel God's presence as they grappled with each other at very close contact. Using the concept of compartmentalisation, the author analyses how these evangelical fighting ministries demarcated their practices into emotional and physical forms of intimacy, thereby finding different ways to achieve what they perceived as personal contact with God in their intense interactions with each other.

Keywords: *evangelical Christianity, fighting ministries, Brazil, body, compartmentalisation*

For years now popular culture has been used in church social programming in urban Brazil. One surprising development since the turn of the 21st century has been the popularising of evangelical fighting ministries. In this article I discuss how certain churches in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, are using social outreach programmes that combine worship with close-contact grappling in an effort to help young people learn about God, each other, and themselves. In my own research I found that these programmes generally offered Brazilian jiu-jitsu-focused sparring sessions bookended with thirty-minute religious activities guided by leaders from their affiliated churches.

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1 I would like to thank Susan Seizer, Jasmijn Rana, the organisers of this special issue, Minna Opas and Anna Haapalainen, and the reviewer for their productive comments on earlier versions of this article.

During their nightly training sessions they would arrange themselves in a circle and sing, pray, and discuss spiritual quandaries and then they would engage in paired confrontations in which they learned how to apply Brazilian jiu-jitsu and judo techniques, which focus on grappling on the ground. In a low-stakes, unchoreographed manner they would roll around on a mat in close contact, sometimes applying chokes and holds. And then they would come back together to pray and sometimes sing before parting ways for the night.

As self-proclaimed evangelicals, many of these ministries' participants devoted their time to maintaining personal relationships with God in the face of myriad interpersonal interests. This could be a difficult task due to the visceral intensity of urban Brazilian daily life, as it was cluttered with stories, sometimes first-hand, of violence, sex, and mind-altering influences (Lewis 1999; Matta 1979; Matta 1991). These participants shared a real concern over how to keep everyday life from getting in the way of their spiritual development. And yet their relationships with God were also supposed to be witnessed, experienced, and even tested by the very people and situations consuming most of their everyday lives. Within evangelical fighting ministries the factors that could potentially disrupt the participants' intimate connections with God could also provide opportunities for furthering them. How did these ministries marshal such intensely intimate, emotional, and physical encounters into means for better knowing God? How did their allowing the profane to sit alongside the sacred affect the exploration of self, other, and the divine? How did expressly human interactions shape spiritual meaning-making?

During worship participants were encouraged to communicate with God and each other not only with words but also through laughter and tears. I analyse how they opened opportunities for themselves to make perceivable their own relationships with God and tested each other's willingness to render themselves emotionally vulnerable. The laughing and crying were not only meant to be public performances of private devotion to God. Just as laughing and crying together have been shown to establish intimacy in other overtly public settings (Haag 1993; Seizer 2011), in this case they also seemed to be markers and makers of good personal relationships with God. During their combat sport training participants of these ministries were meant to learn about their relationships with God by grappling with each other at very close contact in near silence. Their stoic give-and-take of pain happened within an intimate space of physical interdependence. When they were training, potentially uncontrollable emotions, like laughing and

crying, were intentionally foreclosed so that participants could develop fighting techniques and gain an awareness of pain thresholds (Downey 2007a; Spencer 2009).

I use the notion of compartmentalisation as an analytical tool to understand the impact of this aspect of the fighting ethos on evangelicalism. I explore how these ministries kept what members could experience during training clearly demarcated from what they could do during worship. The collective categorisation and (re)direction of certain behaviours encouraged participants to engage in emotional and religious practices one moment, and stoic and secular endeavours the next. I argue that although participants learned to sequester and redirect emotion without much verbalisation or debate, their active compartmentalisation still held important implications for how they might have sensed God. Thus, one of the aims of this article is to expose some of the links between what these evangelical fighting ministries suggest is wisdom from God and what the participants are teaching each other. In particular, I hope to contribute to a certain subfield of the anthropology of religion, which both emphasises 'the role of skilled learning in the experience of God' as well as the embodied 'proclivity' to absorb the spirituality in question (Luhmann, et al. 2010, 66). I use the analyses of affective flows and emotional structures by Knoblauch and Herbrink (2014), Blackman (2012), and Wetherell (2012) to outline the sorts of spiritual meaning-making that can emerge from emotionally and physically intense moments of togetherness.

### **Methodology**

I trained, worshipped, and spoke with people involved in two evangelical Christian fighting ministries and their host churches in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. After analysing the online activity of Brazilian evangelical churches' use of martial arts (Rivers 2011), I conducted research in Rio de Janeiro over the course of three years for a total of roughly six months. I attended worship, trained with evangelical fighting ministries and secular academies, and accompanied them to competitions and retreats. I furthered the combat sport aspect of my research by training in a dojo in Bloomington, Indiana, in the year between my first two trips to Brazil. I also conducted sixty-five semi-structured interviews with pastors, church secretaries, congregants, their friends and family members, as well as professional and amateur fighters and leaders in the fighting community. Following Burdick (1993), I looked at the successes and failures as specified by past and present members

from each church, considering clusters of participants instead of a single demographic. Using this approach, I learned that the notion of a person as a work-in-progress was a salient trope for these congregations and the larger fighting community.

At the evangelical fighting ministries, I listened for what people talk about before and after they train and monitored my own experiences to understand their effects on my body and spirit. Wacquant (2004) opened this line of pursuit, questioning how we might best ethnographically represent all the social and physical experiences a person undergoes when learning to fight both through achingly repetitive, incremental steps and intensely acute physical activities. Since then Downey (2005; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2008) has significantly increased this conceptual toolkit, combining phenomenological and kinesthetic codifying methods for interpreting and translating embodied experiences. Likewise, Spencer (2009) offers tools with which to perceive how a habitus of pain gets generated during combat sports training. Although not directly concerned with theological or religious questions, their careful analyses of the ethical and practical implications of fighting underpins the theoretical negotiations I undertake to analyse how evangelicals grapple with God when they spar with each other.

Engaging in carnal sociology (Wacquant 2004) requires focus on the researcher's own physical and mental states vis-à-vis the people with whom she trains. Using my own body, I put this carnal sociology to work as a qualitative tool for data collection. I investigated how much of the talk that surrounded training determined an action's significance. This investigation included reviewing my extensive fieldnotes and videotaping the training sessions at the facilities. It proved useful to have both types of data, because what the camera stationed on a tripod at the corner of the mat recorded turned out to be quite different than my personal bodily experience of incrementally shaping my 'incarnate intelligence' (Wacquant 2004, viii). For example, the time I spent with these fighting ministries taught me how critically informative it is to experience first-hand the physical pain of losing as well as the intimate and social gratification of winning a match. The interplay of both sensations constitutes the daily basis of the personal and collective transformations of the community that forms a martial arts academy (Kohn 2007). In the field I also realised how important observant participation is not only for learning about the fighting world but also for engaging in the socio-spiritual world. That is, I felt I had to participate in the worship, prayers, singing, Bible readings, and social events to learn how the people around me became members of their own religious communities

and how they then developed relationships with God together.

Because of the noticeable differences in group behaviour during worship and then during fighting, I found it useful to analyse these ministries' knowledge production in terms of how they handled emotions together. Knoblauch and Herbrik (2014) theorise how loosely organised 'emotional styles' can harden into 'emotional regimes', outlining particularly how popular Christian communities normalise their participants' emotional expression and concealment. In my own research I saw how certain emotional regimes did seem to structure and contain opportunities for momentary bursts of emotion. By seeing how peak affective moments were guided by emotional regimes, I came to recognise possible connections between different types of information, such as that which was sensed as coming from God and that which was understood to be coming from human beings.

While it is theoretically productive to outline emotional styles and regimes, it is crucial to keep open the discussion of affect in practice because of its own open-endedness. Blackman (2012) offers a corrective to the potential for any overly causal overlaying of discourse and intentionality onto the active field of affectivity. This approach is especially relevant to the study of charismatic Christian communities because of the debate over what to make of what religious communities say they are doing; that is, the struggle among scholars and believers to explain belief. It can be implied by scholars that there should be a crisis of liberal Western ways of knowing when confronted with an acceptance of God in anthropomorphic terms while maintaining His being immaterial and supernatural (Asad 2003; Barrett 2004; Harding 2001; Robbins 2003). Concerned with this conundrum, Knoblauch and Herbrik (2014, 358) purposely focus solely on what they see and hear communicated. Blackman (2012), on the other hand, investigates all that might flow between the material and immaterial.

Both are eminently appropriate approaches to analysing religious community affective processes, but they come from opposite ends of the spectrum. One looks at what is communicated, which limits the analysis to that which tends to be (overly) managed and directed from the top down. This approach makes it possible to reflect on the hierarchical structures in place in both worship and dojo everyday life. The other operates with an expansive mindset, allowing in the other-natural, multidirectional affectivity of people feeling together as subjects living a 'singularity in the face of multiplicity' (Blackman 2012, 23).

Wetherell (2012) offers a bridge for connecting these distinct positions, attending to the difficulty of wrestling with affect's dynamism while reject-

ing the notion that articulations of it must be indeterminate. She finds that traditional accounts of emotion are far too restrictive while much of the affect theory coming out of cultural studies is all too eager to throw off what has come before to avoid the problem of subjectivity altogether (2012, 3f.). Instead, Wetherell intermeshes psychology with cultural studies to show how subjects' embodied meaning-making happens through well-worn practices that can (but do not always) turn into intense moments.

### **The Churches behind the ministries**

In broad terms the evangelical fighting ministries involved in my research opened affective moments in much the same ways, but their host churches were quite different as were some of the ways they carried out their ministries. This was in large part because an atomised, consumerist model of faith generally instructs the activity of Protestant Christianity in the dynamic field of popular religion in Brazil (Chesnut 1997; Chesnut 2003; Selka 2010).

One of the two churches involved in my research, Bola de Neve, which translates as 'snowball' in English, is part of a large transnational non-denominational network. It is what many scholars would consider 'neo-Pentecostal', although I found that its members rejected that categorisation, preferring instead to simply call it a 'Christian' church. It serves roughly 2,000 regularly attending congregants, and its many social programmes operate from a beachfront, converted three-story condominium in Barra da Tijuca. Its neighbourhood is considered *nouveau riche* by cariocas, that is, inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro. It houses Brazilian footballers, musicians, actors, and a business class, most of whom made their ascent over the last forty years or so. The glamour and optimism of this borough's youthfulness, social ascension, and casual, beachy lifestyle play into the distinct reputation of Rio de Janeiro's Bola de Neve, setting it apart not only from the traditional hallmarks of mainline Protestant churches but also from the solace purportedly provided by strict adherence to (neo)Pentecostal churches' many lifestyle rules (Manning 1980; Novaes and Graça Floriano 1985; Stewart-Gambino and Wilson 1997).

In a very different part of the greater metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro I encountered another successful fighting ministry at work, this time at Igreja Batista Betânia, a Baptist church with a social life as active as Bola de Neve's, although the community's neighbourhood is in the industrial 'West Zone', which is often described as remote, crime-ridden, low-income, and distinctly unglamorous. It hosts roughly 2,000 regularly attending con-



gregants in one of the suburbs that has grown up around the state military academy of Realengo, with which the local communities have a complicated relationship (Svartman 2012).

I found that the churches and their fighting ministries met different needs, despite their shared love and national pride for the martial art of Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Bola de Neve held sessions only once a week primarily for young men already training in secular academies elsewhere. This church community tended to place more emphasis on developing social capital among its churchgoers and their friends, making it possible for amateur fighters to socialise with professionals. In turn, rigorous attention to the development of fighting skills per se was not the primary goal. Rather, attention was paid to creating a space in which men (and in a different part of the church, women) could open up to each other, overtly connecting personal efforts at spirituality with sociality. This ministry spent roughly half of each two-hour session on Bible readings, exegesis, and applications to everyday life, with the group leaders generally offering advice for encouraging more men into the religious fold. The rest of the time was left for open roll, a casual ground game of grappling and loosely applying choke and joint holds. In these ways, more importance was placed on cultivating socio-spiritual competence than martial arts.

Batista Betânia placed more emphasis on developing career fighters than cultivating evangelists. This fighting ministry in fact operated as an academy and was run not within the church (like Bola de Neve) but on its own grounds, in the church's large community centre. It offered Brazilian jiu-jitsu and judo training and degrees for male and female children, adolescents and adults and was open five days a week. It was affiliated with the secular international professional-amateur fighting organisation, the Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Confederation, which provided judges for the biannual belt exams. Moreover, the students regularly participated in regional and international competitions at the weekend, which not only tested and sharpened their fighting skills but also helped them make important student-athlete and potentially professional connections. I saw that while Batista Betânia also provided a path for generating social capital, it differed from what Bola de Neve offered in that there was no unspoken rule at Batista Betânia that fighters would ultimately join the church. Still, like Bola de Neve's fighting ministry, this academy bookended each of its training sessions with prayer and discussion sessions. That said, in this academy Bible readings and questions about fighters' faith and allegiance were purposely avoided to distance members of the church and the ministry from the stereotype of the aggressive

evangelical zealot. Instead, fighters were encouraged to form a circle when the sparring session ended, and then their group discussion would generally mingle secular and spiritual anecdotes rather casually. Despite their differences, these churches' fighting ministries shared the overarching aims of exploring relationships with God through interacting intimately with each other and generated different types of knowledge by compartmentalising their ways of being together according to the tasks at hand.

### **God is working on us: Laughing and crying together**

In encouraging each other to emote and disclose uncontrollably, evangelicals participating in the fighting ministries established a setting in which they could better feel the presence of God. For them, two of the most effective channels for sensing and conveying God's presence were laughing and crying. This may have been because these multidirectional forms of affective communication (Blackman 2012, 61) could be shared actively and freely among the members, setting the stage for growing their own interpersonal bonds and in sensing those bonds also feeling the presence of God.

The following entry from my fieldnotes shows the blending of fighting and worship ethos at a moment of culmination within an evangelical fighting ministry. It also captures the significance of sharing emotions for some of the members of this community.

Dec. 7, 2012: At the Batista Betânia Belt Ceremony, an event held in the church sanctuary in which students in the evangelical fighting ministry are promoted. At the very start of the ceremony the M.C. jokingly promised (like the fighting instructors had earlier in the week at training) that the service would not be religious, but it was. The service was dedicated to the evangelical fighting ministry leader, Hermann, also affectionately known as 'the little old man'. There was a slide show of his daughter Thaizar and other fighters visiting him in the hospital, where he was getting a liver transplant. Afterwards, Thaizar and some of the fighters came over to me. They had been crying, and they asked me if I had cried. I could tell by the way they were looking around as they hugged people that they wanted everyone to cry (profusely). I had heard them use crying as a sign of the significance of an event before, and so, I said, 'Yes, I cried' (even though I had not). They laughed out loud and smiled and nodded – it was the right thing to do.

Thinking back on that night, I can still remember that feeling of being overwhelmed, again and again, like waves rolling over me. My time in the field was ending; I would be going back to the United States in less than two weeks. I felt so much during the ceremony, but for some reason I did not cry. I wish I had cried; maybe that was part of the reason I lied? I felt anger, sadness, concern for Hermann, happiness, pride for personally knowing this community, and yet still wondered if they really accepted me. All these confusing moments of interpersonal significance crashed into each other. Did it have me thinking about God? Yes. And did I look for signs of a presence in other faces? Yes, just as they had looked into mine. That night was comprised of a string of emotionally charged moments. Each one opened a space for intense feelings, but how could they then be overlaid or even directed into more focused thoughts and feelings? How were people supposed to learn about their relationships with God through interpersonal interactions, even those so strongly felt?

For active church members of these ministries, expressing how, or perhaps, even only that they felt something played a key role in sensing God's presence. Not everyone participating in the evangelical fighting ministries attended the affiliated churches; some were not even Christian, proclaiming other faiths or no religion at all. Indeed, that non-congregants participated in the ministries was a point of pride for the church leaders at both Bola de Neve and Batista Betânia. Pastors at both churches told me this ministry helped their churches reach prospective Christians to whom they might not otherwise have had access. For the active church members, there was a strong correlation between behaviour during worship on Sundays and the worship segments of the fighting ministries. Pastors who would offer sermons on Sundays might also lead discussion at training sessions later that week. Moreover, the impetus to laugh and cry together, and the interweaving patterns that would lead to those peak moments at the fighting ministries tended to follow similar pathways, or 'affective ruts' (Wetherell 2012, 14), as those traversed during congregational services. Church members who were respected for their devotion (and good singing voices, it was often said) would guide the others in the worship activities and emotional responses, and I noticed that everyone kindly 'played along'. This is not to say they were acting. Whether they meant it or not did not seem to be the point; rather, the point was that they were there, participating. And thus, perhaps their presence counted towards their spiritual learning just as their participation would when the combat sport training started in earnest.

Laughter played an important role in the worship dynamic. Pastors would share anecdotes about how God might intervene in everyday interpersonal conflicts, such as showing a couple the way out of their lovers' quarrel or how a young working mother could cope with the sense that she had little control over her work or home life. In response those listening would always laugh out loud, nodding vigorously and looking around for knowing agreement from others. They would even reach out and touch each other on the arm, physically searching for signs of commiseration. Likewise, a common theme in everyday conversations with members of both churches' fighting ministries was the analysis of how they as believers knew God was with them even in the smallness of their everyday lives. The laughter that generally followed could be considered an admittance of their acceptance of this truth.

Even though laughter itself is rather inarticulate, in that it is often pre- and post-verbal, it offers some small thing to hold on to, even if people only feel moved to ask themselves, 'Why did I laugh?' Philosopher John Morreall explains that laughter is involuntary and can therefore be said to betray the laugher's character. It denotes triviality but is also seen as a powerful sorter of moral fibre. And yet what is funny is also merely aesthetic and thus difficult to articulate (Morreall 1987, 229f.). Still, laughter is a mode of communication, a sign whose meaning is based on convention, though there generally remains an ambivalence between laughing with and laughing at someone or something. In this case the mingling of the two and the curious notion that God was laughing with (and/or at) the community in question made for moments that were both poignant and ambiguous, simultaneously felt together and individually, with questions surely left hanging in the air.

At the other end of the spectrum but often co-present with the laughter was crying. There are some striking correlations between the study of laughing and crying in religious contexts (Morreall 1999). I am especially drawn to the suggestive power associated with the ineffable quality of both. In establishing the theoretical foundation for the collection of essays, *Holy Tears* (2005), editors Patton and Hawley expand on the specialness of the medium of crying, explaining, 'As vehicles of feelings that go too deep for language – the sorrow of exile, the sparkle of ecstasy, the weight of memory, the wound of empathy – tears resist abstracting intellectual process along with every other alchemy of sublimation...Tears are subjectively sealed – and yet they are contagious' (2005, 3f.). And yet my research bears out what Wetherell, building on the work of Blackman (2007/2008), argues: such flows

of affect are not an object to be caught but rather something like a zone or atmosphere to be caught up in (2012, 141).

During worship being brought to tears could be preceded or followed by people raising their arms in the air, standing on chairs, or, conversely, lying prostrate on the floor. Generally, members would then gather around a crying individual to sway, hug, pray, and cry with them during sermons and prayers, but especially during testimonials and singing. Afterwards, during the slow exit from the church, I would hear people say in approval of their worship experience, 'Oh, God was speaking through him tonight, he really had me crying!' This was generally followed with a question as to whether others had cried as well. This could then be discussed as evidence of whether the presence of God had extended to them or not. 'Working' on someone was how these communities described the presence of God in a person's visceral reactions to a sermon, song, or prayer. During worship at the fighting ministries people would cry when the instructor discussed the hard-fought successes and failures of a recent tournament, a fighter described his personal and family turmoil, or a member shared that he had found Jesus (again, sometimes). In these cases, too, people's tears were seen as evidence that God was 'working' on them. And through their crying and laughing God was also said to be working on the others present, and through them the larger community. But was God working on me when I was in this affective atmosphere? Sometimes I was moved to tears, and much more often to laughter. And I was moved sometimes by the collective emotional release. There was no way for me to know whether the feelings were genuine or not. But the effort to feel together and my wondering at the authenticity of those moments are matters I can explore here.

The bar for trustworthy behaviour and the search for signs of spiritual genuineness were markedly higher for actual congregants during and after church services than among participants at the fighting ministries. Under both circumstances the collective release of tension, whether via laughter or crying, seemed to offer a visceral point of contact between individuals' possible, private intimacy with God and the intimacy they shared with the others present who were actively striving to achieve the same. And in both situations evangelicals would emphasise that their relationships with God should be witnessed and experienced by others. But many congregants also constructed their socio-spiritual identities vis-à-vis a collective notion of a 'bad' evangelical, that is, one who placed the interpersonal value of his or her emoting above the focus on communicating with God. In the fieldnotes entry at the beginning of this section one can see that I could rightly be ac-

cused of this very misconduct in that moment I told the fighters I had cried because I felt that was what they had wanted to hear.

At that point in my research I was very aware of these communities' efforts at distilling spiritual honesty out of the frequent deluges of emotional fervour that took place during worship. I had heard some of them gossiping among themselves at social events, theorising how and why others were emoting in the ways they did. They would even ask, 'Was he faking it? Was she just going through the motions?' Perhaps trying to pre-emptively avoid accusations of falsely emoting, some members would detail the minutiae of their everyday concerns to be analysed for signs of God as well as their own personal missteps, always looking for situations that had not yet been overanalysed by the pastors. Perhaps they believed the more public attention they could pay to their own pedestrian sources of anxiety or grief – and the more realistic the feelings they could generate – the closer they could feel to God. In essence, they were reading and testing displays of emotional honesty in an effort to approximate a truer communication with God.

Thus far, I have focused on several aspects of emotional intimacy as they played out during moments of worship. I have brought brief attention to these components – laughing, crying, and the public analysis of private struggles, because they were the very aspects of connecting with God that were actively discouraged during the combat sport training that took place within the fighting ministries. Those moments could offer quite a different approach to learning about oneself and what it meant to work on a relationship with God.

### **Sequestering emotions on the mat**

As I mentioned earlier, many of the evangelical practices that might have led to uncontrollable emoting associated with worship were carried into the fighting ministries, but crucially they were kept separate from the practices and behaviours associated with fighting. Before and after training members would form a circle and hold hands. While in this hand-holding circle, they would sing, pray, and discuss biblical passages together, often engaging in the demonstrative emotional intimacy generally encouraged during worship in the sanctuary. Sometimes pastors would visit and offer a message. At other times church business and gossip were discussed rather matter-of-factly as a group. And there was always time – only ever before or after training – for members to give testimonials and to air grievances concerning personal health, work, and relationship issues. Just as in wor-

ship, these discussions oscillated between moving members to tears and to laughter. The advanced members often felt more free to move away from the more typical praise-talk of worship towards venting their anger and frustration at their circumstances and sometimes directly at God. This may have been due to the imminence of physical intimacy accompanying the fighting ministry practices. But it was only within those demarcated moments before and after training that participants were permitted to express themselves emotionally.

Supplanting whatever prospects there might have been for emoting in an uncontrollable style, the physical intimacy that instead structured the interpersonal encounters during training was both literal and figurative. It was literal in that the combat sport in which these fighting ministries specialised was Brazilian jiu-jitsu, a grappling and submission martial art, focused on joint locks and chokeholds, that takes place on the ground between fighters in close proximity. It was figurative in that the exchange of pain between participants was determined by corporeal interdependence. Students of martial arts are meant to learn how to sense and react to each other's motives, which in Brazilian jiu-jitsu are more often felt in the body rather than seen beforehand (see also Cohen 2006; Downey 2007b). This knowledge could be said to affect how members of these evangelical fighting ministries interacted with others, including God. A key part of learning to fight is learning to think about one's own reactions vis-à-vis others' actions. What others may do cannot be fully anticipated or understood, but their actions must still be sensed so that they can be reacted to.

Any overt show of emotion or even talk outside the discussion of physical techniques was not permitted as soon as training began in earnest. Thus, there was a clear shift from the demonstration of uncontrollable emotion, which might have signalled the presence of God, to the required demonstration of turning off emotionality entirely to show that one could control it and focus on fighting (and through it God). Like Knoblauch and Herbrink (2014, 366f.), I also found that the goals and setting of an occasion dictated the terms of the different types of spiritual and religious interpersonal communication made available. The encouragement of a freer or seemingly uncontrollable emotional style was something that seemed to travel and swell within the congregation during worship. In contrast, the general concealment of laughter and tears was verbally directed by the fighting ministry leaders and advanced students alike – but only when needed. The main situation in which members needed to be reminded was when they were doing an open roll, which could feel like nothing more than licensed

'roughhousing' and thus quite playful. Generally, there was an understanding that an air of gravitas should be maintained. It was only okay to break the silence and order of training when the fighting instructor gave the signal to do so, by calling the group together and saying pointedly it was time to play. These moments were rare and thoroughly relished by the members of these ministries. They tended to either precede or follow important markers in the church or fighting calendar, such as a group baptism or a large fighting competition.

Emotional displays were kept at bay while members were learning to fight, because the aims of the evangelical fighting ministries were not only evangelism and spiritual development, but also, of course, generating and sharing knowledge about martial techniques. Thus, the combat sports segment of the ministries was imbued with the culture and norms of the fighting world. In many ways the training segments resembled what I saw in all the dojos I visited. There were phases structuring the learning of martial technique: the warm-up and brief group discussion, the techniques demonstration, the practising of techniques, and then the 'open roll', when students grappled with each other. Just as emotions were separated from physical techniques so that students could focus on the physical tasks at hand and not on whatever they might have been feeling momentarily, bodies were discussed in objectified terms so that fighters could focus on applying techniques in a strategic and localised manner. That is, bodies were described and perceived in terms of parts so that the students could see and feel where exactly on their opponents they should place their own limbs. Learning and applying a technique was not unlike learning how to prepare a dish using a recipe. The instructor would show the movement, verbally and physically drawing attention to each of the body part(s) and steps in slow motion as they were needed to complete the task. When a technique was successfully executed, the opponent would tap out of pain or threat of injury. At competitions amateur students and professional fighters were also classified and separated according to their skill level, weight, and gender.

### **Learning from compartmentalising**

In the evangelical fighting ministries involved in my research there were clear efforts made at compartmentalising, that is, recognising and demarcating separations among various activities and behaviours. Specifically, they seemed to carve out and maintain distinctions between the emotional intimacy associated with religiosity and the physical intimacy of fighting. I



believe this work was meant to shore up the distinctions between seemingly different types of knowledge production so that participants could more easily understand and remember what and why they were doing whatever they needed to do at any given moment. I consider compartmentalisation key to what Wetherell (2012) would call the affective practices and affective-discursive meaning-making at work in these evangelical fighting ministries. I follow her understanding that even the most mundane and regularly occurring affective practices are in fact lively, situated communicative acts, organised moment-by-moment into performative patterns. And I agree it is analytically fruitful to think about how persistence, repetition and power pulse through these kinds of situated moment (Wetherell 2012, 102).

To posit the possible implications of compartmentalisation on an individual's spirituality, here my analysis turns away from the general work and play of evangelical fighting ministries to one person's thoughtful commentary on the significances of learning to worship and learning to fight. Olney played a critical role in my research, both theoretically and practically speaking. This person, with whom I had so many heated debates, also introduced me to many people who would become key contacts for housing arrangements, interviews, and access to famous gyms and controversial religious groups, both of which were generally suspicious of outsiders. By twenty-nine, Olney had held a variety of entry-level office jobs, had trained in boxing and Brazilian jiu-jitsu for several years at Bola de Neve, had recently become a pastor, and had already experienced several serious health issues. Taken together, these factors shaped his spiritual point of view. At the same time Olney prided himself on being a true carioca. He could flirt shamelessly with anyone within earshot, and generally did. He was an emotional young man, not at all afraid to laugh out loud, cry, argue, or get excited in front of others. And he felt it was his personal, lifelong mission to make everyone feel welcome and accepted. When I asked Olney about the value, or virtue, of a Christian ministry dedicated to fighting, he explained the logic in these terms:

The fighting philosophy gives balance to people, this helps humble<sup>2</sup> people, who see violence every day; it helps control aggressiveness, anger; it helps people deal with too much violence. The game is a strategy, is contact sport, is respect... It helps them see the difference between a fight in the street and the sport of fighting... There can be no anger or malice.<sup>3</sup>

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2 A common euphemism for being 'impoverished' in Brazilian colloquial talk.

3 All the translations were done by the author.

The elaborate categorisation of people into body parts, of situations into sets of circumstances and activities, and calls for the respect of others as competitors turned combat into a sport, and thus made it open for consideration as a ministry.

On the mat fighters were supposed to sense God through grappling with each other. That is, as they literally rolled around on the floor in close contact in an effort to make their opponents submit out of pain or threat of injury, this act of grappling could offer a very tactile, interpersonal externalisation of internal struggles with God. As such, the training sessions could be and sometimes were described as spiritually therapeutic, both due to 'mindless' stretching periods and the intense, difficult rolls. I asked Olney if there was anything about physical activity that could be important to evangelism. And he answered, 'No.' And, after thinking for a second, 'And yes.' He continued,

What is important for evangelism is relationships and friendship. If it's through sports and contact, okay. If it's through music, okay... When you're evangelising with sport, you feel good, light, unburdened... you are able to liberate your heart. Like if I have an intense fight, really struggling with this guy, at the end, I feel very good, happy. This affects the reception of the Word.

The relativistic norming and structuring of combat sport might have also offered ways to make sense of other areas of everyday life for some of the members. They could use it to structure how they should feel about their feelings and how they should sense God's presence through those structured moments. All this fighting competence, made modular through compartmentalisation, seemed to affect how members discussed God's ways of operating in their lives. For example, their participation in evangelical fighting ministries showed them they could productively experience God's presence on more aggressive terms than what one could expect in other ministries and church programming; moreover, that aggressive presence would be felt in the hands of each other.

When I asked Olney how a Christian fighter makes sense of the call to treat one's body as a temple, he answered that the fighter and his body are well taken care of, so in the moment of fighting he is prepared to face hardship. In this sense he is treating the body like a temple. He continued, saying, 'The Christian, too, is well-prepared, spiritually developed in the Word. When he faces hardship, goodness comes out.' I pushed the discussion further, asking: 'But what happens when you refuse to tap out because of pride?' Olney had said only moments earlier that the refusal to desist was

a positive trait of Brazilian fighters, and that they would rather have their arms broken than give in. I therefore wanted to know how he could say they were still treating their bodies like temples in such acts. Olney responded, 'Ah, yes, this is good. The arm breaks, but the honour, you understand? The honour is not broken... Pride is not a good characteristic in general, but for some cultures it sustains the people; it steadies the character of a person. If there is good in a person, it will secure it.'

If members of these ministries felt that God was on the mat with them, then they might have also experienced in their own bodies that the dynamics between God and people could range from comforting to openly antagonistic and that each type of encounter had its own time and place. I saw and heard this understanding conveyed in the fighting axioms evangelical fighters would say to each other and post on Facebook. They would make statements like 'Those who fight, do not brawl', 'You either win or you learn', and 'To live is to fight.' These were common sayings within the fighting community. But how did evangelicals make sense of them when they were placed beside common evangelical Christian sayings, like 'Turn the other cheek', 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you', and 'Love your neighbour as you would love yourself', all of which could be assumed to link reciprocity with pacifist patience and passivity? Describing the life of a devout Christian fighter, Olney said,

The lifestyle of a person who professes his faith, it is going against the system, he finds a way to live in a spiritual way, and develop a spiritual path. He cannot live only by the instincts, by the flesh, only act on his will to scream, act on his will to talk trash. As a person who is developing his spirit, someone can hit me, and I am a fighter – and as a fighter – I can respond like a fighter! But I do not respond like a fighter, I respond as a Christian. And so when I am offended, I do not offend back.

In this comment Olney momentarily positioned fighting philosophy against Christianity. But there is an overlap in the fighting and Christian ideals he espoused, though he focused on the carnal aspect here. Generally, both advise avoiding (over)reacting to a confrontation. The use of axioms from both the fighting philosophy and Christianity translated and familiarised all sorts of situations that evangelicals who also fight might have experienced on the mat on the one hand and in the sanctuary on the other. Moreover, members of these ministries seemed to recognise times and places for each type of lesson, letting themselves convert fighting ideals like perseverance,

learning by doing, and sometimes even self-preservation into Christian virtues in their own right, depending on the occasion.

What happened on the mat became acceptable in a way it could not elsewhere. In the fighting realm referees and instructors often remind participants to fight hard and clean. In interviews many evangelical fighters explained they felt compelled to fight 'harder and cleaner', due to their awareness of God's presence in them and in their opponents. Olney suggested this concern with the proper treatment of others was a crucial point of contact between martial arts philosophy and Christianity. He explained:

The Samurai Word, like the word of God, is to serve others, to learn to serve others. The other is more important than you, you have to bring honour to the other. The fight [and] its honours carry the seed of religion, respect. I respect those more advanced and those behind me. It's all respect in the dojo, it's all a demonstration of respect. You want to give your best in a fight, like you would want to give a guest the meal and the best coffee in your own home... There is a difference between indoctrinating someone to be upright, and what happens with fighting, the sport, there exist other ways to develop the spirit, but it's different [with fighting]; it comes from the inside out with fighting. It's like just telling someone, 'Don't put trash on the ground' and showing someone put trash in the trash can and not on the ground. There is a difference between indoctrinating respect and discipline, and developing the spirit within someone.

It is a corporeal and mental struggle to balance protecting oneself with looking out for the wellbeing of one's opponent, and so grappling offers a rich site of contemplation concerning how members of these communities might have experienced the compartmentalisation of God's presence. Evangelical fighters would say God was always simultaneously with both opponents. Intriguingly, He was with them in different ways, playing a different role. He was part of one person's loss and part of the other person's victory. Olney gave this anecdote:

Recently I heard there was a UFC fight and a fighter who was challenging Jon Jones for his belt, he got hurt. So they asked Vitor Belfort if he would [even though the fight would take place very soon after]. He said, 'I am ready to fight! I am always prepared. Because with God, I am always going to win.' This is the effect of God on a fighter... He does not yellow.

He does not despair. My fears, they are reflected in him... and when I am paralysed with fear, and I see this guy (Vitor Belfort) facing one of the best fighters, and he says, 'I am prepared, because my faith tells me I am ready for anything, ready to win, ready to lose,' it strengthens me. It influences the fight, the preparation. And you know, Jon Jones is a Christian, too? And he dominates the ring!

After a fight it was common for fighters to say God had been with them both during times of winning and losing, but intriguingly, they did not hold God accountable for the results of the fight. Rather, as Olney explained it, they felt his presence in winning and losing. They would choose to focus on his presence as a catalyst for them to learn and grow from the experience, however painful or humiliating it may have been at the time. In fighting losing is as common as winning, and the work of evangelical fighting ministries was often to connect that existential realisation with what some members would consider a comforting notion: that God was present for all of it.

## **Conclusion**

I have shown how in one moment participants were encouraged to release their emotions to experience God more fully; in the other, participants were taught to separate and suppress certain emotions so that they could learn quite a different aspect of God through their encounters with each other. These moments offered striking counterweights to each other, making distinct, and perhaps complementary, types of engagement in socio-spiritual development possible.

These evangelical fighting ministries found experiencing the building and releasing of tension together to be a productive mode of connecting with God. Through engaging in publicly reciprocating acts of emotion, namely laughing and crying, members of these communities gained access to a God that was first and foremost concerned with honest emotional availability. When they practised martial arts, they learned about their relationships with God by grappling with each other in hard-fought stoic silence, allowing only for the grunts of physical exertion and pain. During the time dedicated to worship 'sacred' traditional practices were enhanced by the inclusion of the 'profane' in the form of banal interpersonal quandaries and overt emotionality. More laughing and crying and discussion of everyday problems increased the feelings being shared among believers and God. Then, when training began, emotion and everyday life were not supposed

to distract the ministries' members from what tougher lessons they were supposed to learn on the mat.

But just as laughing and crying fed into what they may have learned during worship about how to communicate with God via other human beings, compartmentalisation, which kept the mood of martial training separate from that of worship time, might also have shaped how the ministries' members perceived the presence of God in their literal and figurative struggles with other people and themselves. Through the development and release of emotional and physical pressure, these communities learned to recognise the sharable yet also compartmentalisable omnipresence of God in their interactions with each other. In this way the interplay of the development of socio-spiritual and combat sport competencies connected interpersonal intimacy with proximity to God.

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JESSICA RIVERS is Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Communication and Culture at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA. Email: jarivers@indiana.edu

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# Dreaming faith into being: Indigenous Evangelicals and co-acted experiences of the divine<sup>1</sup>

MINNA OPAS

University of Turku

## Abstract

This article examines the role of socio-moral space in people's experiences of divine presence. More specifically, it addresses the questions of how social others influence people's experiences of God and Satan among the indigenous evangelical Yine people of Peruvian Amazonia, and the consequences these interactions have for the individual believer and the collectivity. For the Yine dreams are a privileged site of human encounter with other-than-human beings, and they also feature centrally in their Christian lives. It is in dreams that they interact with angels and sometimes with the devil. By examining Yine evangelical dreams as mimetic points of encounter involving not only the dreamer but also transcendent beings and fellow believers as active agents, the article shows that Yine experiences of God's presence cannot be conceptualised as an individual matter, but are highly dependent on the social other: they come to be as co-acted experiences of the divine.

Keywords: *Christianity, evangelicals, dreams, mimesis, co-acted experiences, Yine, Peru*

'When we Yine have bad dreams, when we have nightmares, it is because of the devil.' (An evangelical Yine woman in her sixties.)

'You have to tell others about your dreams, otherwise the bad things in the dreams will come to pass.' (An evangelical Yine woman in her fifties.)

Ethnographic and textual descriptions of how Christians – Pentecostals and Charismatics, in particular – depict the moment when they experience the presence of God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, and how they thereafter perceive this connection, demonstrate that relatedness with the divine often becomes tangible through bodily sensations such as warmth, shivering, and a feeling of good, or their lack. Through such experiences people become aware of

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their connection with God, their oneness with God, or perhaps their separation from God. Christians and scholars alike – theologians as well as humanists and social scientists – have attempted to understand and verbalise such sensations or, in Birgit Meyer's (2010, 742) words the 'experiential presence', in various ways. The fundamental problem in the endeavour is linked to the 'problem of presence' (Engelke 2007), that is, the problem of making the transcendent present in this world: how can people perceive what by definition cannot be perceived (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2011; Hart & Wall 2005)? Scholarly accounts concerned with the mechanisms through which Christians feel being connected with the divine have customarily taken their cue from this problem, and have distinguished between the tangible and intangible or physical and non-physical in one way or another (e.g. Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2011; Harding 2000). However, the material turn of recent decades has encouraged research to go beyond the physical-non-physical division in the study of these experiences, which have become understood as something much more material than spiritual (in an immaterial sense). The languages of embodiment (Csordas 1994; Klaver & van de Kamp 2011), tactility (Chidester 2005), and metakinesis (Luhmann 2004), for example, have been used to describe the physicality of the Christian experiences of divine presence.<sup>2</sup> Although such material approaches have contributed importantly to our understanding of the human-divine relationship, they have done so at the expense of sociality. Many approaches to the human-divine relationship focus on the relationship the individual believer has with the Christian divine, and take no account of the role of fellow believers and other people in the generation of such experiences. In doing so, they continue the long tendency of viewing Christian subjects as individuals (see Bialecki & Daswani 2015; Daswani 2011; Keane 2007; Mosko 2010; Robbins 2002; Vilaça 2011). Although the role of social others may be acknowledged, it is rarely the examination's focus. Despite recent efforts to bring social relationships into the analysis of these experiences (e.g. Bialecki 2014; Coleman 2006; de Witte 2009; Luhmann 2012; Mitchell 2015), the topic remains understudied.

This article recognises this gap in research and aims, by examining people's connections with God among the indigenous Amazonian evangelical Yine people, to contribute to the study of the social other as part of Christian experiences of divine. The Yine are an indigenous group living

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2 For other studies on the experiences of the presence of the Christian divine, see e.g. Austin-Broos 1997; Brahinsky 2012; Cattoi & McDaniel 2011; Coleman 2006; de Witte 2009; Griffith 2004; McGuire 2003. For similar experiences in other contexts, see e.g. Espirito Santo & Tassi 2013.

in the Peruvian lowlands. While many Yine already live or study in cities, the majority still live in small communities in the lowland rainforest area. Most Yine are Christian, mainly Catholics, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals, but there are also some who are non-religious. The first Yine contacts with Christianity took place with the arrival of Catholic missionaries as early as the 17th century, but in south-eastern Peruvian Amazonia, for example, the Yine were evangelised only from the 1950s, first by the Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators, and latterly by the missionaries trained at the Swiss Mission near Pucallpa, Peru. This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with the Yine people in the Urubamba and Madre de Dios regions in lowland Peruvian Amazonia between 2012 and 2015.

Yine evangelical experiences of the divine presence were inseparably material and social. They were material in that they took place as physical sensations. Yine evangelicals described the condition of being connected to the divine as a lightness of and warmth in the body, or as feelings of denseness within the body. However, these experiences were not mere sensations to them. Some, albeit not all, Yine Evangelicals understood faith and divine presence as materialising as a special organ called *ruwekinri* (his/her life) within a person's body. This organ was invisible, yet perceptible by other senses – it was the site of the experiences of lightness, warmth, and denseness, and from which they emanated. It was affected by the Holy Spirit, which made it grow and thus more easily felt physically. As such, it was also considered to be an important index of a person's faith (Opas, forthcoming). The experiences of the divine that took place through or as this special faith organ were not, however, a question merely of individuals' relationship with the divine, the Holy Spirit, or God. They came to be as what I will term 'co-acted experiences of the divine'. I use this term to refer to people's experiences of divine presence that arise from a social process involving not only the believer and the divinity but also fellow believers and other kindred people (and, in some cases, also other-than-human beings). The social others were an elemental part of the Yine evangelical processes of formation and interpretation of a person's physical sensations of the divine. This was so not only in the general sense of culture affecting the individual's possibilities for interpretation, but also in practice as the evangelicals struggled to live well as Christians. It was in relation to other people that a person's Christian condition was evaluated, and thus linked to the dynamics of everyday social life. This was not a social understood separately from materiality but one that was dependent on the practices of consubstantialisation aimed at life among consubstantial people.

A central locus for the co-acting of experiences of God's presence was dreams, which for the Yine evangelicals were an important 'sensational form' (Meyer 2010) through which the divine became tangible. Instead of a product of an individual person's imagination, for the Yine dreams were sites of social encounter (both with transcendent and immanent others) where the past, present, and future were conjoined. As such, they were an integral part of people's daily life. In this article I will approach evangelical Yine people's dreams as a nexus of social relationships that produces experiences of God's presence and people's faith that materialise as the faith organ, *ruwekinri*. The main focus is on the role of social others in these processes: what are the dream-related ways in which social others (human and divine) take part in the production of experiences of God's presence, and what effect does their involvement have on the individual's faith and on the community of believers? This discussion relates to a wider scholarly project which attempts to surpass the modern purified and intellectualist approaches to religion and belief, and to anchor them instead to people's everyday material and socio-moral practices (Bialecki 2014; Keane 2007; McGuire 2003; Meyer 2008; Orsi 2006).

I will first examine Yine evangelicals' views of the nature of *ruwekinri* as a material faith organ, and then study Yine dreaming and dream-sharing in general, and as part of their Christian praxis in particular. Then, to capture the multiplicity involved in these interactions, I will develop the idea of co-acted experiences of the divine, and argue that these co-acted experiences are best understood as processes of affective mimesis. Finally, I will briefly depart from the study of human social others to discuss the role of Christian divinities as co-actors in the generation of faith among Yine evangelicals.

### **Yine experiences of the divine**

One evangelical Yine woman in her fifties explained the physical nature of the human relationship with the Holy Spirit to me as follows:

We cannot understand [*Givetikaluru*] *Kpashiri* (Holy Spirit). Although we hear the Word of the Lord, we cannot believe, we cannot calibrate, we cannot understand, because it is *kpashiri* (respect). But the words of this world we do understand quickly. ... One has to *receive* the Word of God, then it stays in the heart, *kpashiri* stays in your body.

In this woman's account the presence of the Holy Spirit is something that cannot be comprehended, but must be materialised in the body for a person

to connect with it. It must be physically experienced. In one Yine evangelical account, the effects of the Holy Spirit were compared with the nutrition of the foetus in a mother's womb. Just as the foetus is nourished by the mother and so little by little begins to live and gain strength, so God gives people life and nourishes them with the Holy Spirit (see Opas forthcoming). When incorporated into the body, the presence of the Holy Spirit may be felt as its confidence, strength, and fearlessness.

This view is emblematic of the physiology of Yine epistemology. The Yine consider that thinking and thoughts are generated in the heart and from there are raised in the head or mind. Although everyday 'words of this world' are easily understood, most Yine with whom I discussed this mentioned the role of the heart in the process of understanding and thinking. The heart was considered an affective core of the emotions and thinking. What is noteworthy is, as noted above, that the sensation of being nourished by the Holy Spirit was neither a mere feeling of having the strength to work nor merely a sensation, but was thought by some evangelicals to constitute a special 'organ', *ruwekinri*, his/her life, located in the person's chest or heart. It was this organ, which gained strength and grew when nourished by God, the Holy Spirit, and faith. Although not all Yine evangelicals accepted the idea that *ruwekinri* formed a separate organ – some considered it to be one with the heart or located in it – it was still understood to be something profoundly material and affected by God.

However, *ruwekinri* was not merely the materialisation of an individual's faith and relationship with God but was also more widely involved in the organisation of the evangelical community of believers among the Yine. Its existence was one way to evaluate the Christian condition of a person, which in a relational society also affected others' conditions. Yine social production and organisation relied on the property of consubstantialisation, which meant that people influenced one another's bodies, and thus personhood, through the sharing of different corporeal and other substances and through physical proximity. This form of sociality made personhoods vulnerable and disposed to transformation (Opas 2006; 2008; 2014; see Bonilla 2009; Conklin & Morgan 1996; Grotti 2009; Lima 1999; Londoño-Sulkin 2012; Overing & Passes 2000; Vilaça 2002; 2005; 2016; Vivieros de Castro 1998; Walker 2013). People living in the same community formed a 'community of substance' (Seeger et al. 1987), which, however, included other smaller communities of substance, such as the evangelical congregation. Each member's physical condition therefore mattered because it had the potential to affect the whole group. This also led people to pay attention to the condition of others' faith

and their Christian praxis to which it testified. It was not that a person's own scrutinising of their faith and introspection did not matter. As will be discussed below, people were alert to changes in their bodily experiences of faith. In particular, situations in which the physical sensation of God's presence within one's body and of the size of one's *ruvekinri* did not comply with the person's own estimation of their faith were likely to cause distress (Opas, forthcoming). However, other people also influenced these individual views. As noted above, dreams were of great importance in this respect. I will now examine the role of dreams in the Yine evangelical processes of faith.

### **Dreams and dream interpretation among the Yine**

As is the case in many Amazonian societies, dreaming and dream interpretation is also an integral part of the Yine people's daily social life. Dreams (*gipnawlu*) do not constitute a realm separate from the everyday, even if they may be perceived as such. Rather, they are both affected by the prevailing sociocultural and political conditions, and are themselves of great social relevance 'in that they affect how people live in the world and how they relate to others' (Mittermaier 2010). Concerning the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Zápara, it has been argued that dream mastery is linked to political power: dreaming is central to identity practices and is also significant in questions of territoriality and sociality (Bilhaut 2011). Similarly, in a study of the Brazilian Xavante people's dream performances, Laura Graham (1995) shows that dreaming as a social practice is formative of cultural identity and collective memory, and so enables the control of historical processes and change. Among the Yine I have come to know, dreams do not have a political influence extending far beyond the community's social sphere, but sharing and talking about dreams and interpreting them are still highly social events. It would not, however, be correct to say that Yine dreams and dreaming have no wider political significance. Yine psychoactive dreams or dream-like visions especially have been found constructive and directive of regional social relationships in many ways, not least in relation to shamanistic curing practices and processes of modernisation (e.g. Gow 2006). Nevertheless, in the Yine communities with which I am most acquainted, dreams' greatest importance lies in their role as organisers of daily social life within the community or social group. The view I wish to consider here is that of the sociality of dreams as productive of the Yine physical experiences of connection with God or the Holy Spirit. Although dreams or dream-like states induced by use of psychoactive plants are also integral



to Yine social life, I will here concentrate on 'ordinary' unassisted dreams happening during people's sleep.

Among the Yine people I have heard and been told about many dreams, *gipnawlu*. Just as in other parts of Amazonia the contents of the dreams my Yine hosts describe vary greatly from very mundane events of daily life such as hunting, agriculture, and domestic tasks, to events considered extraordinary in one way or another. The dreams influence the events of daily life and are anchored to them most commonly through indexicality or analogy. The loud sound of a tambour, reminiscent of the sound of an approaching herd of peccaries, signifies good luck in hunting, and dreaming about forest tortoises warns the dreamer of a forthcoming illness – a tortoise may go without eating for long periods when captured, corresponding to a sick person's loss of appetite. Although the central elements in Yine dreams – for any of these reasons outlined above – are often thought to stand for something else – a game animal or a predator may stand for a human being or foreigner and vice versa, for instance – the metaphorism of the dreams does not mean that they are mere representations for the Yine. The events taking place in dreams and the beings encountered in them are not considered simply as products of human imagination. In relation to the Ecuadorian Runa people Eduardo Kohn discusses human dreams as metaphoric sites of encounter. 'Metaphoric dreams,' Kohn (2013, 141; see also Kohn 2010) writes, 'are ways of experiencing certain kinds of ecological connections among kinds of beings in such a manner that their differences are recognized and maintained without losing the possibility for communication.' Human metaphoric dreams thus 'align the situated points of view of beings that inhabit different worlds' (Ibid.). In other words, Runa dreams allow human beings to interact with beings with different corporeal perspectives without the danger of losing their own perspective. Dreams are thus a privileged realm for interspecies communication. To some extent this applies to Yine dreams as well. When they dream, the Yine may perceive things and beings from a perspective unavailable to them when they are awake. The Yine say that when a person dreams, the dream soul – *samenru* – leaves the body to wander about.<sup>3</sup> Encounters with other beings in dreams, be they human, animals, or spirits, are thus understood to take place concretely – the dream souls of different beings interact with each other. One evangelical

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3 During my latest fieldwork period among the Yine in 2015 I noted a change happening concerning this aspect of dreams. Some now said that the dream soul (*samenru*) did not necessarily leave the body when a person was sleeping. I have yet to study the reasons behind this.

Yine woman told me how she had been visited in a dream by her toddler grandson, who lived far away. He had hugged her, and she had given him a bath. When she awoke, her whole body ached, and she knew from this that the boy had died. The transformed bodily perspective of the now deceased boy, which differed from the living human person's bodily condition, had physically influenced the woman's body. As seen here, such dream interactions are not tied to the normal everyday temporal order and chronology but may involve both past events and those that have yet to take place (cf. Kracke 2010). Dreams may tell of success in a hunting trip to come or of a recent death of a relative living at a distance, for example.

Given the centrality of dreams in Yine social life, it is unsurprising that dreams and dream interpretation are also an important part of Yine Christian lives. However, this importance does not derive solely from custom but is also inherent in Yine Christianity. One evangelical Yine pastor crystallised this when he noted, in an allusion to Numbers 12:6, at a meeting following a congregant's testimony concerning a dream, that 'God says: through dreams I shall reveal Myself'.<sup>4</sup> Several Yine evangelicals told me of dreams that had involved elements that were considered Christian: angels, lambs, and doves, for example. Nevertheless, they also interpreted dreams with no specific Christian imagery from within a Christian framework. While positive dreams were often interpreted as signs of God's grace or as answers to prayer, negative or threatening dreams were considered either Satan's attempts to test the person – as noted by the woman in this article's opening citation – or God's warnings of approaching threats. Examples of such dreams were, for example, the above-mentioned dream that a tambour playing was a promise of good luck in hunting, while a snakebite in a dream was understood as a warning which led to the dreamer not going on the hunting trip planned for the following day. Thus, dreams, with or without specific Christian imagery, were proof of God's existence for the Yine Evangelicals: they made God alive and tangible. Although metaphors were part of Yine dream explanations, this tangibility was not only a metaphor. As noted above, different beings and entities, be they visible or invisible, animate or inanimate, could influence one another corporeally in the Yine social world, and encounters taking place in dreams could have physical consequences. Similarly, God, the Holy Spirit, and Satan were also considered capable of

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<sup>4</sup> Numbers 12:6 reads: 'He said, "Listen to my words: 'When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams.'"' (The Holy Bible, New International Version).

physically influencing people (and especially their faith organ, *ruwekinri*), and through consubstantialisation the whole community of believers, in and through dreams. This was why dreams were never merely a concern for the individual.

### **Co-acting experiences of the divine: the sociality of Christian dreaming**

As noted, Yine dreaming as a way to experience the presence of God was not something that only involved the individual and God (or other divinities), but extended into the social space constituted by human-to-human relationships. It was in telling one's dreams to fellow Christians, either as testimonies at church or more informally among family members, that the others became most concretely part of these processes of creation of the Christian lifeworlds and physicalities.

The idea that dreams occupy an important place in the joint production and re-production of lifeworlds is not new. For example, in her examination of Amazonian dreams as a form of communication Laura Graham (1995, 116) notes that among the Brazilian Xavante songs are an important means of externalising dreams: the re-presentation of dreams offers a means of 'signalling the uniqueness of individual subjectivity and the sociability among individuals'. Although Yine dream-telling practices, being enacted at quite casual events, were not as ritualised as they were among the Xavante, their dream-telling can still be said to exist as an institution aimed at forming and re-producing the conditions for sociable life, not merely in the abstract but also physically. 'You have to tell others about your dreams,' one evangelical Yine woman in her fifties cited at the outset of this article explained to me, 'otherwise the bad things in the dreams will come to pass.' When I was travelling with her for about a week in Central Peruvian Amazonia, every morning she told me the dreams she had had during the night. At least once during the week, motivated by her nightly dream, she phoned her spouse to verify that everything was all right with him. In sharing their dreams with each other, the Yine attempted to ensure that the influence of the social others encountered in dreams would not leak uncontrollably into the sphere of normal daily existence, and so possibly have unwanted effects. The situation was akin to the Yine avoidance of entering the forest alone: they always went with a companion because it was thought that alone the risk of being influenced by the consubstantialising practices of other non-human beings was too great (Opas 2014; Vilaça 2005). Telling others about one's dreams was a way to control and protect one's own human bodily

condition and that of those around one. Nevertheless, these others were not merely passive bystanders but were also actively involved in these processes. This was apparent in Yine evangelicals' dreaming and their experiences of God's influence in their lives and bodies.

There were various ways and situations in which social others – fellow Christian believers – could participate in the formation of the individual dreamer's experiences of God's presence to co-act the experiences, and in which people's inner experiences could influence the collectivity as well as the dreaming subjects themselves. The most formal such situations were people's testimonies at the evangelical church. Once, an elderly Yine woman gave a testimony of God's presence in her life at the evangelical church in one of the communities in the Madre de Dios region, describing how Satan had tempted her in her dream. She had been crossing the village river by walking on the water when a massive wave approached her. The wave almost drowned her, but by thinking of God, she could swim to the shore. In her opinion this dream was about Satan testing her faith. Had the wave swept her away and she had drowned, it would have proved that her faith was not strong enough. For her, this dream was proof of her faith: the actions of her dream soul, ungoverned by her daily consciousness, corresponded well to her own experience of her Christian condition. However, at the church this interpretation was subject to the evaluation of others. I witnessed no case in which the dreamer's testimony was seriously questioned, but this was a possibility, as the congregation often engaged in reflection about the significance of the testimonies presented and their place in relation to the dualist battle between good and evil. In this case, however, there was no doubt concerning the woman's testimony. Being very old, she was rarely able to walk to the church to participate in the meetings, but having gained strength in and through the dream she was able to come to share it. This strength was enough to verify her experience. The dream was considered to have added to her physical strength and presumably, although this was not actually said, to the size of her *ruwekinri*. The congregation's approval, their legitimising of the woman's interpretation, both further reinforced her Christian condition but also positively influenced other's Christian bodies through its consubstantialising effect: the dream worked to repel Satan's forces.

Approval or disapproval following dreaming and dream-sharing were not the only means for others to influence people's experiences of the divine. Fellow Christians also co-acted to empower each other to resist Satan's temptations in dreams. One evangelical Yine man in the Urubamba

region in Peru told me of the dream experiences he had had when he was trying to be cured of cancer. During the treatments, when the man was at his weakest, his relatives had instructed him not to accept any food offered to him by deceased relatives in his dreams. 'Do not receive food from your relatives – they are already with Satan,' they had said. The sharing of food was one of the primary means by which the Yine created communities of similars, and was also important for the same reason in different human-nonhuman/spirit relationships (Opas 2006). Thus, to strengthen not only the man's body, but his consubstantiality with his living relatives, they tried to keep the man well-fed, and they also instructed him to decline any gifts of food from the deceased. Consequently, the man explained, when he was offered food in his dream he was strong enough to resist the temptation to be reunited with his deceased kin who were destined to be separated from heaven, and to decline the offer.<sup>5</sup> This was taken to prove his faith in God and was considered the decisive moment when his recovery began. By keeping the man well-fed and by warning him of possible dangers, the man's relatives could influence the outcome of the encounters the man had in his dreams, and thus co-act in the generation of his and their own experiences of God's work in their lives.

Food also occupied a central place in another case of evangelical dreaming I encountered. An evangelical man in the Madre de Dios region told me that he had had a dream in which an unknown person he had understood to be an angel had given him two loaves, which he had eaten. He compared the bread to the (fish and) bread distributed by Jesus, and saw his acceptance of this gift both as proof that his *ruwekinri* was willing to receive such a blessing and as an episode that would contribute to the growth or strengthening of his faith, i.e. the growth of his *ruwekinri*: 'I think my soul will now increase in size,' he told me. However, things took a different turn. After the dream he had no more dreams with a specifically Christian content. This was a difficult situation, because as one of the evangelical brothers long involved in organising evangelical church activities in his community he was expected to be a model for others. Although they were supportive for a while, the congregation's comments slowly started to reflect bewilderment and questioning. Was there a problem with his faith? The man himself began to think that the food may not have been offered to him by an angel after all, but was rather part of Satan's plan. Eventually, his doubt led to him losing the physical sensation of his *ruwekinri*, which he had sensed as a feeling of

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5 On deceased kin attempting to get the living to join them, see Gow 1991; Taylor 1996.

pressure or fullness in his chest, and – although there were other reasons contributing to the decision – to his withdrawal from his active role at the church (see Opas, forthcoming). It is not clear whether his failure to dream as a Christian resulted from the congregation's or his own doubting of his faith. In any case, although he did not wish to blame his fellow-Christians, at least not in my presence, it was clear that the pressure the congregation put on him – even though to my knowledge the issue was never publicly addressed at the church – added to his doubt and influenced his physical experience of being connected with God.

These three cases related to dreams – approved testimonies at church, collective uniting against the forces of Satan, and the failed process of the collective generation of faith – demonstrate that the Yine dreams or dreaming can, indeed, be viewed as a nexus of social relationships that works to produce and legitimate, and inhibit or perhaps even prevent, the experiences people have of God's presence in their lives and within their bodies. Being a Christian and having a Christian body are not merely the individual person's subjective experiences but come to be as co-acted, jointly produced. It has already been noted that especially in many charismatic or Faith Christian environments the Word is in various ways made flesh in the believers' bodies, and that the body can therefore be held as an index of the believer's spiritual state (Coleman 2006, 170–172). These situations also involve fellow believers' moral evaluations, which affect the individual's experience of their faith and may cause social discrepancies within the congregation or a group of believers. The Yine evangelicals' case accords with this view to a great extent. There is, however, one important amendment that the Yine case brings to the discussion. As in the Yine social cosmos people affect each other's bodies through consubstantialising practices such as the sharing of food, physical closeness, and living in proximity, the collective evaluations of a person's faith are concretely and physically tied to the spiritual success of the congregation and its members. The Christian condition of every member's body also affects – although to a varying degree – the bodies of others and, importantly for this article, others' experiences of God's presence within one's body, especially in and as the faith organ, *ruwekinri*.

Although at first sight such processes of consubstantialisation through dreams may appear specific to Amazonian Christianities, dreaming has also been found to have a direct effect on people's lived worlds in other Christian contexts (Bulkeley et al. 2009; Eves 2011; Lohmann 2000). Dreaming is also in many ways parallel to such phenomena as having visions and being

possessed. Given the specificity of the different cases it becomes important, however, that we find a language through which these parallel phenomena can be linked to, and compared with, one another. I find the notion of mimesis useful for this purpose. I draw here on Michael Taussig's and Jon Mitchell's discussions of the topic. For Taussig (1993, 78), who played an important role in developing the notion of mimesis in anthropological and ethnographical analysis, mimesis is 'a space between sameness and otherness, of identity and alterity'. Building on this, Jon Mitchell (2015) has analysed Maltese Catholic statues and visions as mimetic points of encounter between the mundane and the transcendent. In his analysis statues and visions transcend simple definitions of representation because they draw together signifier and signified in a mimetic presence. Although they imitate and thus represent, they also defy representation and create something new – they create relationships. Rather than mere repetition, mimesis is thus a form of 'creative appropriation'. Building on Mitchell's analysis, I suggest that the Yine dream encounters and co-acted experiences of the divine can be productively analysed as instances of what I will call 'affective mimesis'. By affective mimesis I do not refer to the unconscious imitation forming the basis of human identity or ego found in the works of thinkers such as Freud and Nietzsche, and used in literary and film studies, for example (e.g. Lawtoo 2010; 2013). Rather, I wish to depart from the term's psychological uses and deploy it to emphasise the materiality and sociality of dreaming and faith. Underlining the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected (Blackman 2012; see Bialecki 2015) and of dreams to draw signifier and signified together in a mimetic presence working to generate something new instead of simply imitating and re-presenting, I use the notion of 'affective mimesis' to refer to the process in which experiences of being connected with the divine and of the generation of faith take place through physical, i.e. very material, co-action in dreams and in negotiations about their significance, for example. In the cases discussed above the dreamers' bodies are affected by those of deceased and living relatives, angels, and devils through material practices (physical touch, the sharing of – or the refusal to share – food, and giving testimonies), thereby creating experiences of God's (or Satan's) presence in one's life and body.

### **Revisiting the human-God relationship**

Above I have noted that previous studies of people's experiences of God's presence in their bodies have largely concentrated on individuals' experi-

ences and on the individual human subject's relationship with God. I have also argued that in our studies we should pay more attention to the role of social others in these relationships. To conclude my discussion I wish, perhaps at first sight somewhat contradictorily, to return to the relationship between the human being and God. There is, however, a good reason to do this, which is related to the way in which God as the other in these relationships has often been contemplated in research.

In studies of human-God relationships the latter is often considered to be somewhat inactive. Although God is interactive and tangibly present in believers' own accounts, scholarship has taken a somewhat biased approach, concentrating on the individual believer's side of the relationship. This tendency owes much to scholarship's difficult relationship with the Christian divine (Robbins 2003; Bialecki 2014; Espirito Santo & Tassi 2013, 21). The recognition of God's agency in research has often been taken to equate with an acceptance of God's ontological existence, which has inhibited attempts to take God seriously in research. Nevertheless, as God is an active agent in people's accounts, and as the actions of God, angels, and Jesus are considered to have physical and tangible influences on people's bodies and worlds, we cannot continue to dismiss their agency. Recent post-humanist and materialist turns and, in relation to Amazonia the ethnography of human-nonhuman relations and objecthood, have paved the way for research that is neither restricted to nor begins with the human being (e.g. Espirito Santo & Tassi 2013; Henare & al. 2007; Mitchell 2015; Santos-Granero 2009a; Tsing 2013; Viveiros de Castro 1998). It is becoming clear that when we speak about social relationships we cannot discard other-than-human beings or objects and things. In the Amazonian context social networks have been shown to include very different kinds of agent. Plant spirits – through plants' materiality – heal and guide people (Caiuby Labate & Cavnar 2014), and hammocks (Walker 2013) and flutes (Santos-Granero 2009b), for example, are co-constitutive of human bodies. Within this framework it would seem odd if the Christian God, the Holy Spirit, and Satan were denied an active agency. I therefore wish to revisit the human-God relationship concerning human experiences of the divine presence from this perspective. Indeed, in relation to the Yine social cosmos, God assumes the agentive position quite easily. In the Yine dream world people's dream souls are considered to interact with a host of different beings, including plant spirits, witches, shamanic helper spirits, and



Christian divinities.<sup>6</sup> Although it is usually angels, and only rarely God in person, who are seen and interacted with in these dreams, this does not nullify God's agency.

Regarding two-way communication between Yine evangelicals and God, dreaming was intertwined with praying. In their prayers Yine people could ask for healing from illness, health for themselves or their loved ones, blessing for a relative living far away or travelling, the strengthening of faith, and signs of God's presence in their lives. People expected or hoped that God would answer such requests by causing the person to encounter in dreams angels, Jesus Christ, a bright light, lambs, or other things commonly interpreted as somehow Christian. Having such dreams was understood to have a direct and tangible influence on a person's daily life. Whether interpreted as confirmation of a person's faith or as a promise of healing from an illness, these dreams were considered to lead to the strengthening of the person's *ruwekinri* and to help them live as good Christians.

Such reciprocal processes are exemplified by the many cases in which Yine evangelicals have dreams related to healing. One woman in her fifties, for example, told me how she had suffered from serious pain in one of her legs for several years. The illness was commonly understood among the Yine as being caused by witchcraft. The woman was already on the verge of committing suicide because she could no longer tolerate the pain. Nevertheless, as a devout Christian, she prayed once more. In the dream that followed she saw a white-robed man, whom she identified as an angel, who told her to stand up and walk. In the morning, when she woke up, she stood up and her leg no longer hurt, at least not as badly as before. She was convinced that this was an answer to her prayer.

Examined from the perspective of affective mimesis, this dream does not mechanically reproduce the relationships in accordance with a predetermined formula and imagery, but rather works sensuously to constitute the human-divine relationship. The angel encouraging the woman in her dream to stand up and walk presents a case not merely of reproducing an image of white-robed angels as God's messengers and repeating the biblical theme of the cripple healed by Jesus, but may instead be understood as a mimetic encounter, and as such as creating something new. It is God's answer to the woman's specific prayer and a confirmation of her faith. However, it is such not only as an intangible promise but as an affect: just as in Genesis Jacob's fight with God is described as a tactile experience that left him limp-

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6 In accounts dating back to the early 20th century great shamans, during their intoxication, could travel to heaven and see God (Gow 2006).

ing (Gen 31: 22–31; see also Knauss 2013, 110), the encounter with the angel affected the woman's body by removing her pain and reinforcing her faith through the strengthening of her faith organ, *ruwekinri*. As discussed above, the Christian actor, in this dream the angel, was neither conceptualised nor experienced as a product of the imagination: in the dream an encounter between the woman's dream soul and the angel was said to have taken place. In general, then, we can see here that God, as an active agent (even when acting via messengers), holds a central place in the co-active production of faith sensations, and that the encounters taking place in dreams work to form and modify, and by their failure to appear, even end, people's relationships with God. By so doing, just as the Catholic statues Mitchell discusses, they affect the person's daily life and create lifeworlds. The encounter between the angel and the woman had the effect of changing her life. Having been on the verge of suicide, she now had enthusiasm for life. The case therefore affords a good demonstration of the importance of taking God and other Christian divinities seriously in analysing Christian lived religiosity.

### Conclusion

In this article I have examined the inter-linkages of faith, knowledge, and materiality among the Yine people of Peruvian Amazonia. I have asked how the Yine 'know' the extent to which and how they are connected with God, the extent of their faith, and how social others are part of these processes. By examining Yine evangelical dreaming and dream-sharing practices, I have attempted to show that their experiences of God's presence in their lives, and most focally in their bodies, are the result of both human-to-human and human-to-divine co-action.

Yine dreams are in this light shown to be a nexus, a battleground for good and evil, and an arena for the negotiation of personal faith and social relationships both with the divine and with fellow human beings. Among the Yine dreams are at the same time highly individual and thoroughly social, but both in a very concrete physical sense. The Yine evangelicals – through their shared physicality and the property of their bodies in influencing one another in physical interaction – inhabit the same socio-moral space inhabited by God, which either nourishes their faith – understood as localised in the heart – or forming a special faith-organ, *ruwekinri*, or inhibits it from growing. It is not therefore of no consequence if someone fails to have Christian dreams, and for this reason the sharing of dreams occupies an important place in Yine evangelicals' private and congregational lives. Although the

processes of interpretation involve many disagreements, the importance of dreams as channels for communicating with God and as means to prove one's faith are not contested. The Yine continue to dream their faith into being.

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MINNA OPAS is Senior Research Fellow in Comparative Religion at the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Turku. Email: minna.opas@utu.fi

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# The speaking body: Metaphor and the expression of extraordinary experience

JAMIE BARNES

University of Sussex

## Abstract

This article explores the relationship between language, experience, and the body. Employing a phenomenological approach that takes the sensory body as its starting point, it focuses on three instances of 'divine experience', looking at the ways in which social actors seek to express that experience through metaphorical translation into more familiar, everyday realms. It argues that within this perceptual process – which starts in bodily experience and ends in words – both bodies and worlds are formed: bodies open to (often sensory) aspects of divine experience, and worlds that include the divine, alongside instances of divine agency. Indeed, such bodily conceptual and linguistic work is, social actors claim, the product of divine agency. At the heart of the three instances of divine experience explored here rests the issue of 'new birth', itself a metaphorical move employed to express a phenomenon in which the body appears to be transformed into something new, namely a habitation of divine presence. As such presence 'bubbles up' from within, it sometimes 'overflows' in words. The body speaks. Alongside exploring the metaphorical moves employed to express this type of bodily experience, this article raises the ontological question of what kind of body *it is*, in such cases, that is speaking, thus providing a phenomenologically inflected response to recent 'ontological' debates within anthropology.

*Keywords: body; phenomenology; senses; Christian experience; metaphor; ontology; 'ontological turn'; language; being; new birth; auto-ethnography.*

'And there was a guy called Mr Harrison,' Dave says, 'who was one of the older men there. He was probably about your age, about fortyish. He just said, 'God is speaking to some people in this room this morning and you just need to know that this is how you respond to him.' And he gave one or two headlines as to what to do. And I responded in accordance to what he said, really. And I felt then as though I'd got struck by lightning. These guys came running across the room, laid hands on me – young, enthusiastic guys about my own age, really. And, yeah... I just think that my life was completely radicalised within.'

'So did you feel that you got struck by lightning in your response to Mr

Harrison, or when these guys laid hands on you?' I ask.

'It was as their hands landed on my head, I think.'

'Right, right. So, it was something quite... *physical*, as well as spiritual, you think?'

'Yeah,' Dave responds but he doesn't sound convinced, 'yeah...'

This fragment of dialogue is taken from a larger conversation between my father-in-law, Dave Webb, and me, recorded in late 2011 during a period of anthropological fieldwork.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the interview was to explore the story of Dave's life, with a particular focus on the events and experiences that had played a significant part in shaping him into who he is today. In this part of the conversation Dave is describing his conversion, an event which had taken place some thirty-eight years previously, in the summer of 1973. So far in the interview, Dave has described his childhood and young adulthood growing up in the north of England. He has spoken of how, from his earliest recollections, church and community life were interwoven in the lives of his extended working-class family; how, at the age of twenty-one, his curiosity about God was awakened through the seemingly miraculous transformation of the local church minister following a visit to some nearby 'revival' meetings; and, finally, he has traced his arrival at a Christian Endeavour holiday centre in North Wales where he is attending one of the early morning prayer meetings where the events described in the conversation above take place. In this meeting, as Dave responds to Mr Harrison's instructions – or perhaps, more precisely, as the hands of the two young men land on his head – he experiences something extraordinary. 'I felt then as though I'd got struck by lightning,' he says, expanding on his description by adding, 'I just think that my life was completely radicalised within.' Dave expresses to me, in words, a highly significant event drawn from the lived experience of his life.

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1 This 18-month ethnographic fieldwork was part of an Economic and Social Research Council-funded doctoral project (grant number ES/I900934/1), based in the southern Balkans and looking at Christian experience. The research was auto-ethnographic in nature, being situated amongst the network of relationships that had emerged for me since moving to Greece as part of an 'apostolic team' in 1998 (for an in-depth account, see Barnes 2015). This interview was recorded in the lounge of our rented house in the north of Albania, in the city of Shkodër, where part of the project was based. It was later transcribed to produce the materials used here.

The exploration of the relationship between language and experience has a long history in anthropology (e.g. Whorf 1956; Needham 1972; Classen 1993; Csordas 1990, 1994, 1997; Coleman 1996), with anthropologists interested both in how language *shapes* experience (e.g. Stromberg 1993, Geurts 2003) and in how experiences are *shaped into* language (e.g. Bruner 1986; Turner 1985). Despite this extensive work, Desjarlais and Throop (2011), in their recent review of phenomenological, experience-based approaches, highlight a lack of due attention given to adequately addressing 'linguistic, discursive, or semiotic forces' (2011, 97). To rectify this, they suggest future trajectories of these studies might embrace deeper explorations of the relationship between the phenomenal and the discursive, 'between, that is, experience, being, and sensate perception, on the one hand, and language, aesthetic and rhetorical forms, and communicative practices more generally on the other' (Ibid.). Similarly, Porcello, Meintjes, Ochoa and Samuels (2010), in their recent review of anthropological explorations of *sensorial* aspects of experience, come to the same conclusion. Although citing some notable exceptions (e.g. Classen 1993; Stoller 1997; Csordas 1994, 1997; Engelke 2007; Geurts 2003), they argue that, as with phenomenological studies more generally, 'a recurring feature in the anthropology of the senses is its rejection of language, discourse, and semiotics as modes for encountering and understanding the sensuous cultural world' (2010, 59).

Taking a cue from these challenges, in this article I seek to speak into the obscure space where language meets experience. As such, I employ a phenomenological approach that takes the experiencing body as its starting place (Csordas 1990; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Thomas Csordas (1990), in his seminal article on embodiment, drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Hallowell (1955), directs us towards the body as the 'existential ground of culture' (Csordas 1990, 5). Whilst bringing into question a framework built around the notion of 'culture', I build on Csordas's key insight that experiences in the body form the existential ground upon which different ways of being-in-the-world are formed. Through examining my father-in-law's and my own conversion experiences, I argue, along with Csordas, that pre-objective, deeply felt bodily sensation indeed plays a significant role in constituting one's lived world. In contrast to Csordas, however, and in large part due to my own ontological positionality in relation to the 'that-which-is', I feel no need to reduce such instances of divine experience to mere products of the 'socially informed body' (1990, 23). In this respect my work builds on recent 'ontological' challenges (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007; Alberti et al. 2011; Holbraad 2012) to take radically different domains

of experience seriously or, in Blaser's words, to recognise 'ontologies in their own terms' (2009a, 890).

In his phenomenological work on embodiment Thomas Csordas builds on Merleau-Ponty's observation that perception starts in the body and 'ends in objects' (cited in Csordas 1990, 9), rather than the other way around. Experimenting with the implications of this line of thought, I also argue that out of pre-objective Christian conversion experiences new 'objects' (new bodies and new worlds) emerge. If the body is, as Merleau-Ponty states, a 'certain setting in relation to the world' (1962, 303), then the Christian body is a particular *type* of setting in relation to a particular *type* of world. As such, conversion (for the converted) is often experienced as a significant landmark event in which the body is transformed into something new and within which new spiritual sensitivities emerge, 'opening out' towards domains of divine experience that appear, previously, to have been perceptually obscured (see James 1982[1902]). It may be useful, from both an emic and an etic perspective, to speak about these spiritual sensitivities through the notion of the 'spiritual senses', as has often been done historically within the Western Christian tradition (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012). However, I argue that a more fruitful approach lies in appreciating the metaphorical moves that social actors make in translating experiences from one domain into another, something that I explore in relation to my own experiences and expressions of divine experience, alongside Dave's. Finally, I put both into dialogue with articulations of divine experience recorded in the gospel stories, further showing how distinctive worlds become convincing to social actors as they compare their own experiences with these other accounts.

In relating language to experience this article explores two issues, the first linguistic, the second ontological. Firstly, what are the dynamics involved, the methods (many of them, I argue, metaphorical) by which the speaking body articulates certain aspects of its experience? And secondly, where social actors articulate aspects of what might be called 'divine experience', what kind of body is it, in such cases, that is speaking?

### **The sensing body**

My starting point here is a phenomenological *event*, by which I mean the collection of experiences that Dave has described above and which acted to set his life on a new course. In this, I do not mean to say that I know exactly what happened to Dave in that early morning prayer meeting

back in 1973. Here, I am reliant upon his description.<sup>2</sup> But what I do mean to say is that I am willing to take seriously the fact that something very significant did happen. It was, I believe, the event itself (interwoven with Dave's subsequent descriptions of that event)<sup>3</sup> that changed the course of his life. Seemingly, what happened to Dave during this event was highly sensory in nature. He employs sensory terminology in order to convey his experience – he *felt* he got struck by lightning. At this point in the interview, I press him for further explanation. What I want to know is how embodied and concrete the experience really was; '[What you felt] was something quite... *physical*, as well as spiritual, you think?' What I am trying to get at is whether Dave's experience was something vague and insubstantial, two characteristics which might, I imagine, be associated with the 'spiritual', or whether it was, by contrast, something quite substantial and real, something he felt *in his body*.

Despite subtly rejecting my categorisation of his experience (as 'physical', as well as 'spiritual'), Dave appears to affirm the implicit notion behind my question in his subsequent description:

...yeah. I always described it as, when I was a kid, we used to collect sticklebacks in jam jars and put them on the shelf, on the window ledge outside the house. And it was great for a day or two, but then you would lose interest in them, and your mother would be saying, 'Can you clear this up.' And eventually you realise you'd better clear it up, and there was a jam jar full of dead fish and green slime. And then, as you put it under the tap outside in the garden, you put the tap on, all of this slime just came out of you, and it would sort of peel off, this green film which had attached itself to the jam jar, and you'd be left with a clean jar. I think that's what I felt happened.

As mentioned, when pressed to label his experience as 'quite... physical' Dave appears to gently resist. Why is this? Is Dave, in his momentary pause, reflecting a longstanding western dualism between the immaterial spirit and the material body (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012, 3)? In other words, is he reluctant to describe what happened to him as 'physical' because God is *Spirit* and an encounter with Spirit should not be reduced to something 'physical'? If so, it might have been better for me to avoid any physical/spiritual categorisation altogether, and to ask if what he experienced had been something that he had felt *in his body*. If I had, I

2 See Stromberg (1993) for a fuller exploration of the issues surrounding this problem.

3 This being the focus of Stromberg's (1993) argument.

strongly suspect that he would have responded affirmatively. Both his descriptions imply that what Dave experienced, he experienced *in the body*, his metaphors being highly evocative of deeply felt bodily sensation. As lightning might be felt as an electrifying shock or as a powerful jet of water might be felt exploding upon and cleansing an inner surface, so Dave *feels* the Spirit's intrusion deep within his own being. His resistance to labelling this experience as 'physical', I would therefore suggest, springs from a tacit resistance to the reduction of what kind of being he is and the elision of the ontological landscape he inhabits. For Dave, as for many other Christians, his ontology, his landscape of that-which-is extends well beyond the physical. Likewise, for Dave, as for many other Christians, the experiencing body is not merely a physical entity but is, rather, infused with and constituted by Spirit, with conversion often being experienced and conceived as the point at which this infusion takes place (Mealey 2012; Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012, 16; Coleman 1996).

### **The new body: Being and perceiving**

From an anthropological perspective Simon Coleman describes how in the logic of incarnation the Christian mind and body are understood as being 'colonized by the transcendent world of the Spirit' (Coleman 1996, 111). The metaphors that a person *experiencing* conversion might employ are likely to be slightly different – the mind and body being 'brought to life' through the permeation of the Spirit's breath, or the experience of the Spirit as life-giving water 'bubbling up' from a deep internal spring. But the issue is the same – new birth is something to do with the Spirit emerging, settling, or dwelling *within* the human person. Alongside this, in what at first appears to be a paradoxical statement, Lindquist and Coleman suggest that the Christian 'believer' does not really 'believe' in the existence of God. 'For the believer,' they explain, 'the existence of God is not "believed" but "perceived"' (Lindquist & Coleman 2008, 5, drawing on Pouillon 1982[1979]), with conversion often marking the opening up of this previously perceptually-obscured sphere.<sup>4</sup> Through Christian conversion, therefore, a transformation occurs both in *being* (what one ontologically *is*) and in *perceiving* (what one is able tangibly to *sense* or *perceive*), the one being intimately interwoven with the other. The body, through the Spirit's infusion and indwelling, is transformed into something new, being also

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is the startled apprehension of this previously obscured landscape that appears, in part, to so powerfully invade Dave's life during this event.

endowed with new sensory capacities 'opening out' towards non-physical realities in new ways.<sup>5</sup>

The idea that the body's sensory apparatus might extend beyond the physical senses is not something new in Christian experience and thought (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012). Origen of Alexandria, living in the second and third centuries, is credited as the first to coin the expression 'spiritual senses' (*sensus spiritales*) to refer to those parts of the sensorium that extend beyond purely physical human perception (Ibid., 2–4; Vinge 1975 cited in Howes 2009, 18). Augustine, two centuries later, believed that it was through such spiritual senses that 'God and God's activity in the world' could be discerned (Lootens 2012, 56). And in the 1700s John Wesley specifically associated conversion with an 'opening of the spiritual senses' by which the divine began to be perceived (cited in Mealey 2012, 253). Aristotle, Classen tells us (1993, 2), numbered the senses as five. Many early Christian authors in the West, following Aristotle, developed their notions of the spiritual senses around an idea of there being *five* spiritual senses which worked in a way 'analogous to but not reducible to ordinary sense perception' (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012, 3). Thus, Augustine wrote of how he 'tasted' God and was 'touched' by him, found him 'fragrant', and spoke of how God 'shattered [his] deafness' and 'put to flight [his] blindness' (from his *Confessions*, cited in Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012, 3).

However, much contemporary anthropological work on the senses problematises local assumptions about the numbering and ordering of the senses. Kathryn Geurts convincingly argues that the commonly held Euro-American notion of there being five senses is itself merely a historically, socially, and culturally constructed 'folk ideology' (2003, 7). She points out that if, in accordance with contemporary scientific logic, the qualification for something being categorised as a sense is that it possesses a corresponding physical 'organ' (e.g. the ear for hearing, the nose for smelling, the skin for touching etc.) then balance, which has such a corresponding 'organ' (the vestibular organ of the inner ear), should also be labelled as a sense (Ibid., 4). Not stopping at balance, late twentieth century sensory scientists, Geurts tells us, 'would probably agree on a taxonomy of approximately nine sensory systems' (Ibid., 8). David Howes, quoting Durie, points out that the more materialist scientists 'study the structure of our sense organs,

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5 Within this ontology of the body, materiality and immateriality, as categories to think with, slide into the background. If materiality is understood as that which reveals itself to the senses (Tilley 2004), that which can be sensed, then the Spirit, in these terms and to the body described here, is also material.

the more senses we appear to have' (Durie 2005, 35 cited in Howes 2009, 23), conservative estimates putting the number at ten, more radical ones estimating it as high as thirty-three (Ibid.).

If contemporary neuroscience unsettles commonly held assumptions about the sensorium, cross-cultural explorations of sensory orders further reveal the contingent nature of our own understandings. The 'anthropology of the senses' (e.g. Classen 1993; Classen & Howes 1996; Classen 1999; Howes 2009; Classen, Howes & Synnott 1994) has, in large part, done this through showing how different people in different places and at different times number and order the senses in a vast variety of different ways. One thing that emerges from this body of work is that local sensory orders reflect indigenous 'ethno-ontologies', local experiences and understandings of what exists and is valued in the world that might be sensed (see Geurts 2003). In thinking about Christian experience this is where the notion of the 'spiritual senses' finds, at least from an emic perspective, its ontological appeal. It locates in the body (even if we leave open our understandings of what the body actually *is*) senses capable of perceiving aspects of reality beyond those apprehended through more narrowly constructed sensoriums. In appealing to the senses a Christian implies two things, both ontological and each reflecting the other. The first concerns the nature of *the world* that he or she inhabits, and the second concerns what kind of *being* he or she is inhabiting that world. If perception, as Merleau-Ponty has argued, starts in the body and ends in objects (cited in Csordas 1990, 9) or 'things', the Christian puts his or her particular mark on the world by proclaiming that what he or she has sensed in the body is God, and in so doing constructs not only the world perceived but also the body that perceives it. In other words, the Christian's inhabited world and body (like every other inhabited world and body) emerge out of perception.

### Speaking

'[T]he goal of a phenomenological anthropology of perception,' Csordas writes (1990, 9), 'is to capture that moment of transcendence in which perception begins, and, in the midst of arbitrariness and indeterminacy, constitutes and is constituted by culture.' Dave's lightning experience seems just one such transcendent moment, a vivid experience, a moment of 'existential beginnings' in Csordas's terms, something he experienced, quite powerfully I have suggested, in his body. But what exactly does Csordas mean here by 'culture'? Elsewhere he speaks of the 'socially informed body'



(1990, 23), locating this as the site through which perception emerges. The idea, of course, is that the body is located and embedded and has a locally constituted habitus through which experience in the body is reflectively objectified. By inference, the words 'social' and 'culture' highlight the role of human others in this process, something which may, in fact, obscure other formative dynamics within perceptual processes. As such, I would suggest a slightly broader reading. Alongside 'culture', I would suggest that a being's perception is constituted by its *experience-thus-far-of-life-in-the-world*, including the vast array of material environments within which it has grown and been grown and that have played their part in shaping its 'perceptual orientation' (Ingold 2000a, 144).

At the point that Dave is 'struck by lightning' and takes it to be God, he reveals at least two aspects of his *experience-thus-far-of-life-in-the-world*, namely, that he knows what lightning is and can at least imagine what it feels like to be struck by it (either through experiences of his own or through relating to the experiences of others); and secondly, that he has an (also undoubtedly socially constituted) conception of a being called 'God'. However, what is of note here is that, in seeking to express his experience (Bruner 1986; Dilthey 1976), Dave makes no appeal to any language of the 'spiritual senses'. Nor does Augustine, as the statement quoted above demonstrates. Both simply employ the *language* of the common senses, and leave implicit the fact that when, for instance, Augustine speaks of 'tasting' God, he is not referring to the stimulation of taste buds within his mouth. Likewise, Dave told me he *felt* as if he had been struck by lightning, leaving the interpretation of what he meant by that to me. And this brings us to an interesting point. The notion of the 'spiritual senses', although appealing in that, by extending a corporeal sensorium, it appears to give us a framework and language to talk about aspects of divine experience not easily conceptualised through more narrow conceptions, nonetheless remains, within Western thought, closely linked to a fivefold sensory model.

As we have seen through the work of Geurts and others, reifying this fivefold model as ontologically pre-existent is itself problematic, because sensoriums vary from place to place. This in itself should make us extremely cautious about reifying an extended tenfold model based on five 'corporeal senses' and five 'spiritual' ones, a point to which Christian thinkers have themselves been sensitive. Recognising no tangible 'spiritual sense organs' comparable to the more visible 'corporeal sense organs' has, for many, brought the strict delineation of *five* spiritual senses into question (LaNave 2012, 165; Rahner cited in Gavriluk & Coakley 2012, 5). Origen himself

spoke of '*one* divine sense', but went on to speak of the '*many* forms of that sense' (McInroy 2012, 25, my italics). Karl Rahner, in a seminal article written in the 1930s, at first expounded a doctrine of the spiritual senses closely analogous to five physical senses, but in his later work considered such a strict division 'rather forced', preferring instead to emphasise 'the unitive character of spiritual perception' (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012, 4f.). What, then, is happening when Christians, such as Dave or Augustine, employ sensory language in order to express their experiences of the divine?

To answer this question, we might come back to the 'goal' of a phenomenological anthropology of perception (Csordas 1990, 9). If the moment of transcendence is that point of 'existential beginnings', the point where what is experienced in the body meets a being's relationally constituted experience thus far of its life-in-the-world, then perception is what emerges from that place. In relational (cultural) contexts that emphasise five senses, Geurts argues (2003, 56), subjective human experience and perceptual events become categorised, formed, in terms of those five sensory channels, the acquisition of language aiding in this objectifying process (Ibid.). The implication is, of course, that in contexts where different sensory models exist, subjective human experience would be formed and expressed differently, something that Geurts illustrates through her work with the Anlo-Ewe speaking people of West Africa. For the Anlo-Ewe, for whom indigenous bodily understandings reflect ways of being-in-the-world very different from those common in many Euro-American contexts, subjective human experience ('feeling in the body') is, needless to say, conceptualised and expressed without any reference to a fivefold model (Ibid., 41).

With this in mind we may return to Augustine's description of tasting, touching, smelling, hearing, and seeing God with an understanding that moves us away from the danger of reifying our notion of the 'spiritual senses', yet at the same time allows for an emic perspective of the body and the world in which the divine exists and might be tangibly sensed. If Augustine spoke of 'tasting' God and yet was not referring to something that happens in the mouth, we must assume that he was referring to something else. We might suggest that, living within the paradigm of a fivefold sensorium, he was merely expressing his subjective experience of the divine, what he perhaps even experienced in the body,<sup>6</sup> within the conceptual sensorial terms

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6 I say what he 'perhaps... experienced in the body' because it is, of course, possible that Augustine is translating experience from a domain other than bodily sensation or sensory perception. He may, it is conceivable, be speaking, for example, not so much about perception as about desire.

that were available to him, in other words the language of the five senses. At heart, he was translating experience from one domain (his experience of God) to another domain (his experience of the senses). He was, in other words, making a fundamentally *metaphorical* move.

### Translating experience & experiencing bodies

Lakoff and Johnson (2000[1980]) argue that metaphor – the capacity to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another – is central to the ways in which we organise our lives. Our conceptual systems, which govern our thoughts, actions, and perceptions, are fundamentally metaphorical in nature. For the anthropologist James Fernandez (1972), metaphor works by connecting two distinct domains of experience, a process that often involves relating inchoate experiences to more concrete, observable realms. ‘Thus,’ writes Fernandez (1974, 122), ‘in “mercy... droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,” the “gentle rain” gives to the abstract and vaguely conceived “mercy” a concreteness that literal definition is hopeless to achieve.’ It is important to note here that, from a phenomenological perspective, metaphor does not devalue certain spheres of experience as being less ‘real’ than others.<sup>7</sup> It simply moves or translates one domain into another, often tentatively and experimentally, due to the essential untranslatability of phenomena. Building from the materials of experience, we imaginatively play with different metaphors, trying and testing their effectiveness to express different aspects of that experience, as well as their capacity to situate us in particular and desired ways in the world (Kirmayer 1993, 185, 187).

With this in mind I wish to move from a consideration of Dave’s experience to a consideration of my own experience. Since within anthropology the embodied ethnographer is him or herself ‘the research instrument par excellence’ (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, 17), a reflexive exploration of one’s own experience and ontological positionality seems an ethical necessity when considering the experience and ontological positionality of others, as these aspects inevitably, and often tacitly, influence and shape one’s interpretation of the ‘other’s’ world (Ewing 1994). The importance of bringing

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7 For example, to the person *experiencing* mercy, caught in a trap, embroiled in relationships of unequal power and feeling the weight of life-circumstances bearing down upon them, the easing, removal or complete dissolution of that weight by an agentive hand (i.e. ‘mercy’) no doubt constitutes a very real existential phenomenon. It is this phenomenon, this domain of experience, that the subject seeks to express through making a metaphorical appeal to a different domain (in this case the dropping of ‘gentle rain from heaven’).

my own experience into dialogue with that of other research participants became clear to me whilst carrying out the doctoral research on which this article is based. Since the object of my research was Christian experience, and my specific focus was the group of which I had been part for many years, the question was not whether I should include my own experience in the study, but why I would even consider excluding it, especially in light of the fact that reflexive and auto-ethnographic practices have a long-established history in anthropology (Okely & Callaway 1992), including many auto-ethnographic accounts of what might be called 'extraordinary' encounters (e.g. Stoller & Olkes 1987; Favret-Saada 1980; Turner 1992). Hence, in 2013, I embarked on writing an auto-ethnographic account of my own conversion experience, something which had taken place many years earlier, in Cambridge in early 1995. The following passage is taken from that account:

...on the first day of the mission, having initially been quite resistant to attending the meeting, my 'heart' changed throughout the day so that, by the early evening, I felt a kind of internal, gently bubbling excitement about going, actually a kind of joy. Upon entering the auditorium, my friend and I found a place to sit... When the speaker began to talk, I began to listen in a way in which I had never listened before. In truth, I found him very easy to listen to; he spoke in a calm and mildly humorous way. But my attentiveness cannot merely be explained by his agreeable style. Most remarkable to me was how much I *wanted* to listen, how much I *wanted* to understand the things he was talking about. My listening, I found, was centred in a very deep part of my body, in a very deep part of my being. My attention was 'gripped' in a gentle but firm way. Alongside this, there was a feeling of opening out, a kind of inner spaciousness that connected me with the spaciousness around me. I felt both 'gripped' and, at the same time, totally at ease. It was as if the very spaciousness in which I found myself was enabling my attention to be focused. As this man spoke, it seemed to be bringing not only a change in my understanding, of my possible 'place' within a new and different story, but also a change in how I was *experiencing* listening itself. Metaphorically, if the body were compared to a house, it felt like underground rooms that had been shut up and never used before were being opened up, and with that came the opening of a different realm of sensory awareness, a different capacity to hear. (Barnes 2015, 74f.)

What I am describing here, from the 'gently bubbling excitement' to the feeling of 'inner spaciousness' and 'opening out', to the sense of attentiveness

in 'a very deep part of my body', is brought together in my final metaphor of the house. In 'translating abstract bodily feelings into words' (Hunt & Sampson 2006, 21), I am moving experience from one sphere (deeply felt bodily sensation) to another sphere (the image of the underground rooms of a house being opened up). The interesting connection between this experience and Dave's is the appeal that both make to things felt *inside* the body, to sensations within some kind of inner space. With Dave, this comes across most strongly in the second metaphor he employs, his description of the forgotten jam jar, 'full of dead fish and green slime'. The key moment, of course, is when the jam jar is put under the tap, the tap is turned on, and 'all of this slime just came out of you, and it would sort of peel off, this green film which had attached itself to the jam jar, and you'd be left with a clean jar'. What appears like a verbal slip – 'all of this slime just came out of *you*' – in fact simply highlights the way in which the metaphor is working. Dave is connecting different domains of experience in order to convey what he felt. Whatever 'hit' Dave that morning was something like a powerful jet of fresh water (and something like lightning) which somehow went right inside him and peeled off a layer of internal 'slime'. My experience, although more gentle and therefore appealing to a different metaphor (underground rooms opening up and letting in both light and air), points to a similar shift in internal bodily sensation.

From a phenomenological perspective, Tim Ingold (2000b) argues that it is only in the appeal that metaphor makes to a shared familiarity of sensory experience that it finds its resonance or power. He illustrates this through describing what it felt like for him to stand next to a railway crossing just at the point that a train raced past. 'It thundered past me,' he writes, 'in a flash.' To convey something of his experience, Ingold connects several different sensory domains – the sound, sight, and *feel* of the train racing past, with the sound and feel of thunder, and the shocked visual sensation of lightning. The aptness of this metaphor to convey such a highly sensory experience, he argues, depends upon a shared familiarity between the speaker and his audience of the sound of thunder and the sight of lightning. In knowing these, the listener (or reader in this case) can sense something of the speaker's (or writer's) experience, even if that same person has never stood by a railway track and experienced a train racing past. Ingold is careful to point out that what he is speaking about here is more than just a conceptual familiarity. It is, rather, a familiarity rooted in personal experience. '[I]n having recourse to this metaphor,' Ingold states, 'it is my *experience* that I want to convey to you, not some conceptual prototype of a "passing train" for which the audi-

tory and visual sensations of thunder and lightning happen to provide apt vehicles of symbolic expression.' (Ibid., 285) It is, he argues, in connecting different domains of experience that people continually forge and re-forge the verbal conventions of their society in efforts to make themselves, and their own sensory practices and experiences, understood to others (Ibid.).

Dave, in seeking to convey to me his very real, very tangible experience, engages in exactly this kind of metaphorical work. The two primary metaphors he employs – being struck by lightning and the cleaning out of the dirty jam jar – both appeal to an assumed shared familiarity, rightly in this case, between him and me of these two different domains of experience. I am familiar both with experiencing lightning (although, admittedly, not being struck by it) and with the green films of slime that collect on the inside of neglected jars. At the same time, these metaphors work, they resonate with me, his audience, because of a shared understanding, rooted also in my personal experience, of human bodies and the worlds they inhabit. In my understanding God *is* the kind of being that, were one to encounter, could certainly engender a feeling in the body similar to being struck by lightning. And in my own experience, although for the most part worked out in gentler ways than the experience Dave describes, the Spirit *does* intrude deep within one's own being, bringing about a radical change. In this way Dave's metaphors make sense to me, his audience, because they appeal to a shared familiarity of bodily experience alongside similar conceptual understandings and interpretations of that same sensory experience.

### Speaking bodies

Stories about Jesus present him as a master of metaphor, continually, in Fernandez's terms, connecting his experience of the inchoate ('heaven') to the more concrete ('earth'), whilst simultaneously being misunderstood by those around him who believe him to be speaking in purely literal terms (i.e. with no translation between different spheres). Thus, when Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be 'born again', the latter makes no metaphorical translation, and understands Jesus to be talking about a *literal* re-birth.<sup>8</sup> 'How can an old man enter a second time into his mother's womb?' Nicodemus asks incredulously. Similarly, when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well,<sup>9</sup> he begins to talk to her, through metaphorical translation, about

8 The story is found in John, chapter 3.

9 The story is found in John, chapter 4.

aspects of divine experience which she, throughout the conversation, continues to understand in literal terms (i.e. devoid of any translational movement). Jesus offers her 'living water'. She misunderstands, believing him to be talking about the physical water in the well. 'You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep,' she says. 'How are you hoping to get this "living" water?'

What is pertinent here in terms of my argument thus far is that Jesus is using the concrete, physical environment around him to speak about more inchoate aspects of divine experience centred in the human body. 'Everyone who drinks this (physical) water will thirst again,' he says, 'but the water that I give a person will not only quench all thirst, but will become *within* that person a well of water springing up to eternal life.' The woman – whether deliberately or not – continues to ignore the metaphorical movement and to misplace the subject of Jesus's utterance in the external environment, causing Jesus in response to address her 'heart', that centre of charismatic devotion attached, at present, to a charismatic object – a 'well' – that promises much, but is failing to deliver to her the waters of *Life* (see Barnes 2015; Shils 1975; Csordas 1997, 138; Eisenstadt 1968, xxvi). Jesus, in exposing her attachment to an untrustworthy charismatic object, is no doubt prompting her to recognise him as the Christ, a worthy charismatic 'object', or leader, able to open deep within her own being a genuine spring of living water. There is a very real sense in which Jesus, through these metaphorical moves, is speaking about the body, through the Spirit's infusion, becoming something new.

If we return to Dave's and my experiences, we can see these same themes of internal transformation emerging. Dave describes himself as being 'completely radicalised within' and, through his employment of the image of fresh water peeling off an inner layer of slime, expresses that this experience was deeply cleansing, perhaps cleansing of an inner part of him that few other experiences had ever reached. I describe a gently bubbling excitement, developing into a deep listening, opening out to an inner spaciousness, which in sum felt like a very deep part of me opening up and letting in fresh, clean air. In both cases there is a change *within*, the very thing that Jesus points to through his metaphor about the opening up of a deep, internal living spring. And here we can see why Christians like Dave and I might find such stories about Jesus so convincing and how they might easily become authoritative guides as to how the world is. In this story of encounter with a Samaritan woman, and others like it, Jesus seems to point to an experience of the body and the world that, in resonating with one's

own experience of the body and the world, appears to remarkably shrink, if not collapse, the distance between one's own lived world and his.<sup>10</sup>

Expressions of such 'changes within' are common within the literature dealing with Christian conversion, with metaphors of 'depth', the 'heart', the 'Spirit', and the 'soul' often being employed to express such experiences (see de Witte 2011; Harding 2000, 19, 34; Stromberg 1981; Turner & Turner 1978, 8; Lootens 2012, 56, 64). For example, William James (1982[1902]), in his seminal work on religious experience, amidst a host of similar examples, records the following case:

I remember the night, and almost the very spot on the hill-top, where my soul opened out, as it were, into the Infinite, and there was a rushing together of the two worlds, the inner and the outer. It was deep calling unto deep – the deep that my own struggle had opened up within being answered by the unfathomable deep without, reaching beyond the stars. (1982, 66.)

Other instances recorded by James speak of a 'stirring of the heart' (Ibid., 67); the 'heart bound[ing] in recognition' at God's voice (Ibid., 69); an 'explosion' of joy in 'the bottom of my soul' (Ibid., 225); and something happening 'in my interior mind', whose 'impressions, more rapid than thought, shook my soul' (Ibid., 226). James relates such experiences to a level of deep, sensed intuitions and impulses that fall beneath the level of everyday consciousness. Indeed, writing at the dawn of the twentieth century, he applauds the then recent steps in psychology acknowledging a level of sub-conscious awareness falling outside what he calls the 'ordinary field' (Ibid., 233), suggesting that this 'deep' sphere of human experience might well be the very place that '*if there be* higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psychological condition of there doing so *might be* our possession of a subconscious region which alone should yield access to them' (Ibid., 242, italics in original).

The relationship between 'inner' experiences and being 'touched' by God has been dealt with more recently by Marleen de Witte (2011) in her research carried out in a Ghanaian charismatic church. As with the cases above, de Witte also records expressions of experience formed around metaphors of 'inner depth'. One church member tells de Witte, 'You have to open your heart to the Spirit... when the Spirit touches you, you feel it deep deep in-

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<sup>10</sup> The reason, I would suggest, that neither Nicodemus nor the Samaritan woman initially understood Jesus's metaphorical translations may well have been because there was no resonance between Jesus's experience of his body and the world, and their own.



side' (2011, 491). Such 'inner' experiences authenticate, de Witte suggests, a particular religious subjectivity (Ibid., 492), but can also be connected to the wider social and structural context within which such experiences take place (Bourdieu 1990[1980]). Drawing on Meyer's notion of 'sensational forms' (2010) alongside work on the disciplining of the senses and the body (e.g. Chidester 1992, 2005; Csordas 1997), de Witte is able to account for these experiences as being generated by a powerful and complex interplay of charismatic performance and 'encoded, learned bodily behaviour' (de Witte 2011, 491). Although appearing immediate and spontaneous, 'the feeling of the Holy Spirit touching,' de Witte argues, 'is produced by adopting and repeatedly practising certain bodily forms' (Ibid., 505). As such, De Witte's work raises the question of authenticity. If church members' experiences can be accounted for through the disciplining of the body and the tuning of the senses within a particular charismatic regime, then can any of these experiences be attributed to a genuine encounter with a divine being?

In a sense de Witte leaves this question unanswered, or perhaps, even, unasked. The theoretical framework she sets up is, indeed, particularly convincing when applied to what William James might call 'excited assemblies' where 'suggestion and imitation', as James (1982, 229) puts it in a far less theoretically developed way, undoubtedly play a significant role in engendering experience.<sup>11</sup> And yet, because it is convincing, this same framework obscures the aspect that, for me, is the most interesting – human beings' actual engagement and interaction with the divine. Since everything may be accounted for through a process of learned embodiment, God – as an actual living being – appears strangely absent from the Ghanaian church setting that de Witte describes. Is this actually the case? Or is this merely the impression created by the analytic frame through which we are invited to perceive this other world?

Following Merleau-Ponty's idea that perception starts in the body and ends in objects, I have suggested that people put their particular ontologi-

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11 De Witte deals with more 'excited' and less 'excited' assemblies in this article, using the same theoretical framework. However, the framework would seem less powerful in explaining certain unpremeditated experiences such as, for example, that of President Finney, recorded by James (1982, 255): '[A]s I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed, it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love; for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me, like immense wings.'

cal mark upon the world by interpreting bodily sensations in particular ways (something as true for anthropologists as for anyone else). As such, metaphorical translation of experience from one domain to another is by no means a neutral process, but is also a rhetorical, agentive construction of the world as one imagines, hopes, and wishes it to be. Following this, it stands to reason that Dave could have explained what happened to him in that morning prayer meeting in completely different terms from the way he did, or could even now re-interpret his experience, thus producing different 'objects' and a different 'world' in which to live. When Dave arrived at the prayer meeting he was, in fact, feeling 'physically sick' and 'exhausted' from a series of late nights and early starts. At the same time, he arrived with a sense of expectation, even urgency about what might happen:

I had this sense of, 'Oh dear me, this is the last day of the week.' I was actually on holiday for two weeks, and this was the end of the first week. And I think I just had this sense within me that something was going to happen today. And I went in, and literally within minutes of sitting down I felt God speak *to me*.

'In what way?' I ask.

Well, through tongues and interpretation of tongues – which was not spoken, 'David Webb, blah, blah, blah.' It was spoken out into the meeting. And for the next hour I sat there sweating my pants off really, because I didn't really know quite what to do, or how to respond. But I knew that in some way I needed to. And so, round about an hour later, coming up to eight o'clock, if I'm not mistaken, there was another sort of prophetic type word. And at that point, I knew that I needed to respond. And there was a guy called Mr Harrison, who was one of the older men there...

Here we see what happened in the run up to Dave's 'lightning' experience. It is not difficult to draw out from this an embodied psychological drama that explains his experience without requiring any reference to God as a living agent. Dave arrives somewhat disorientated (tired, feeling physically sick etc.) and, at the same time, with a pressing sense of urgent anticipation (his time at the camp is running out). He is 'open' to something happening, and seems to be almost willing it. It is within this context that something *does* happen (a 'word' spoken out into the meeting) that Dave interprets as God speaking to him. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, perception (hearing the voice of another person) ends in an object (God). It seems also that the voice, whatever it said, has invited a response that sets Dave on edge ('sweating

[his] pants off') for the next hour. The tension increases. Another person speaks. One of the older, authority figures in the room affirms that God is speaking, further concretising God as an object present in the gathering. Dave responds to this man's instructions, the two young guys come running across, lay hands on him, and (bang!) lightning. Dave, through his own expectations and the charged social environment in which he found himself, was 'set up' for just such an embodied experience. His 'encounter' can be explained in these terms.

But this, of course, is not Dave's explanation of these events, nor for that matter my own. As stated, the Christian subject puts his or her particular mark on the world by proclaiming that what he or she has sensed in the body is God, and in so doing constructs not only the world perceived but also the body that perceives it. And this brings us back to a crucial point. The body, as we have seen, speaks. But what *kind* of body *is it* that is speaking? From an etic perspective, Christian conversions such as Dave's or mine, have often been explained in terms *apart from* any ontological transformation within the body itself. Therefore, Stromberg (1993) points to the reconciliation of psychological anomalies through conversion narratives; Harding (2000) attributes conversion in large part to a shift in language; and even Csordas (1990, 23) explains aspects of divine experience as the product of the 'socially informed body' rather than the product of any subjective experience of God. An emic perspective, on the other hand, explains the conversion experience as an 'encounter', a meeting with a divine Being that results in the ontological transformation of the body itself, the opening up of an internal 'spring' (the Spirit) that was simply not open before that moment in quite the same way. The body, essentially, is transformed into something new. And it is *this* body, the body that is open to domains of divine experience, that speaks, often employing metaphor to translate that experience into more familiar realms.

### Conclusion

More than a hundred years ago William James took up this same issue of the new body in his work on, for the most part Christian, conversion. He thought it was 'natural' that those experiencing the kind of phenomena I have explored here could well come away feeling that they had been worked on by a higher power, warranting their subjective belief 'in a radically new substantial nature' (1982, 228). Drawing on the cases available to him, James identified several repeated themes within this transition, one of

which was ‘an objective change which the world often appears to undergo’ (Ibid., 248). As I have shown in this article, on the one hand this change relates to ontology or *being*, as exemplified in the words James quotes from Joseph Alleine, the New England Puritan: ‘the sincere Christian is quite a new fabric, from the foundation to the top-stone. He is a new man, a new creature’ (Ibid., 228). On the other, it relates to *perceiving*, as exemplified in the words of Jonathan Edwards, the revivalist preacher: ‘...it follows that... there are [also] new perceptions and sensations entirely different in their nature and kind from anything experienced by the [same] saints before they were sanctified’ (quoted in Ibid., 229).

The issue of radically different natures has surfaced more recently in anthropological thought through a growing body of work associated with what has come to be known as the ‘ontological turn’, which argues that ontologies, worlds, and natures give us better tools to think with than the previously popular anthropological concept of ‘culture’ (Holbraad et al. 2010). In this vein Mario Blaser argues that the employment of the culture concept is the product of a particular trajectory of modernity that obscures or denies radical difference through a process of what he calls ‘Sameing’ (Blaser 2013, 549; see also Blaser 2009a, 2009b; Descola 2013). This process works, Blaser explains, because the ontology of modernity, and of Euro-modernity in particular, is built on a fundamental distinction between Culture (a realm of human creation) and Nature (a realm of existing things), within which the concept of culture tames radically different worlds by explaining their difference as merely ‘cultural perspectives’ upon a single, pre-existent reality.<sup>12</sup> In place of ‘culture’, the ‘ontologists’ (Bessire & Bond 2014) propose tackling the differences usually apprehended as cultural in a more radical way, in other words in terms of ontologies being played out amongst, at times, incommensurable worlds (Blaser 2013, 565; Holbraad 2012).

My approach here, in taking up Csordas’s theory of the body as the ‘existential ground’ not just of ‘culture’ but of ontology, has been to seek to embed ontology in experience and, in so doing, to show how both bodies and worlds emerge out of perception. Through a focus on philosophical and conceptual solutions to alterity, to quite literally *thinking* through things (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007), one of the weaknesses of ontological approaches thus far has been their avoidance of considering the role that phenomenological aspects of experience play in the perception, perfor-

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12 ‘There is,’ Vigh and Sausdal (2014) explain, ‘in the ontological turn, not one nature (human) and many cultures (people), but many worlds of separate and incommensurable ontologies, or “multiple natures”, as Viveiros de Castro terms it.’ (See Viveiros de Castro 1998; 2011; 2015)

mance, and constitution of various worlds (Mitchell 2015). In employing a phenomenological method, I have sought to highlight an embodied, experiential, and subjective approach to ontology that explores the ways in which different embodied knowledges and worlds come into being. If perception starts in the body and ends in objects, this is certainly not to say that there are no 'things' out there in the world to sense, but it is rather to highlight the way in which different lived worlds emerge through the perceptual process.

In line with what William James observed, for both Dave and me our conversions marked distinctive turning points in our lives when certain modes of perception came alive to us. Two years after my interview with Dave, and when I was writing about and reflecting upon my own conversion experience, I raised this point with him in conversation. Did he feel (as I did) that the way he experienced his body before and after his conversion was somehow different? He responded by saying that he had no doubt that this was the case. We might attribute this to a process of socialisation, a learning of a charismatic habitus or encoded bodily behaviour that both engenders experience and teaches a person how to read bodily sensations in particular ways, and through this bring God, as an object, into one's landscape of *that-which-is* (Csordas 1990; de Witte 2011; Luhrmann 2012). However, for many of us such explanations are insufficient. They fail to resonate with what we understand the world to contain, nor do they take full account of experiences that, when they took place, surprised us because they were unpremeditated, unusual, or out-of-place: experiences which happened, in President Finney's words, '[w]ithout any expectation... without ever having the thought in [our] mind[s] that there was any such thing.' (Quoted in James 1982, 255.)

Each time the body speaks it makes its world anew. Caught on the cusp between past experience, its *experience-thus-far-of-life-in-the-world*, and a nascent world in large part brought into being by the body's own articulations, the speaking body negotiates a path that it also bears responsibility for forming. In so doing, worlds are created, objects are formed in Merleau-Ponty's terms. Included within this process of objectification is the body that is speaking. If, as social actors seem to claim, the body *is* transformed into something new through conversion-type experiences such as the ones explored here, this raises the question of how we might conceptualise such ontological transformations. Social actors, as I hope to have shown, develop their own solutions to this problem. In seeking to conceptualise and articulate their experiences they often metaphorically translate them into different spheres, a process that reveals assumptions both about the world

(for example the 'things' it contains) and the body (for example its sensory 'capacities') that inhabits it. In this light one of the metaphorical themes that emerges in the examples addressed here is that of divine experiences as they relate to notions of existential 'depth'. This raises questions for further investigation: not only the question of the significance and role of phenomenologically 'deep' experiences in shifting an individual's ontology, but also the question of whether the body occupying such spheres of divine experience is experientially and ontologically *different* from other types of experiencing bodies, and, if so, in what ways?

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JAMIE BARNES is Teaching Fellow of Sociology with Special Reference to the Study of Religion at the University of Sussex. E-mail: jb368@sussex.ac.uk

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# Spiritual senses as a resource<sup>1</sup>

ANNA HAAPALAINEN

University of Turku

## Abstract

This article discusses knowledge gained through experiencing the presence of God through the 'spiritual senses' as a resource in an Evangelical Lutheran parish. Believers' being-in-touch experiences with the divine produce a special kind of knowledge that can be shared and passed on in the parish. This 'spiritual asset' plays an important part in parochial activities. This development can be explained by the rise of experience-based religiosity and charismatic Christianity, a global Christian trend which is also affecting the mainline churches.

*Keywords: Christianity, Evangelical Lutheranism, charisma, spirituality, senses, knowledge*

A: [B]ut if there is a permanent change, it is always from God. I really yearn for the way God changes people. It is always a great miracle when you are there to see it. You really cannot say that the whole church is like 'Wow, wow! What happened?' But anyway, it is a miracle.

Q: How do you see it?

A: You just see it.

Q: But how?

A: It's like... You see it with your spirit. You just can't say that it happened now, or now he believes this sentence or something like that, like he is doing this or that. You just see it like [snaps fingers] and that is when the inner motivation has rotated 180 degrees and everything is seen with new eyes. (Interview 1.)

This short extract is from an interview I conducted in 2012. I was talking with a chaplain of the Michael's Parish<sup>2</sup> (Turku, Finland), and we were discussing the work they were doing in the parish. During the interview he

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1 This article was supported by the Church Research Institute and Oskar Öflunds Stiftelse.

2 The Michael's Parish prefers to use the translations 'Michael's Parish and Michael's Church' without the prefix 'St' mainly because the Finnish names are *Mikaelinseurakunta* and *Mikaelinkirkko* without the prefix 'saint' (*pyhän*). The parish and the church are named after the Archangel Michael.

emphasised that the church (the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland<sup>3</sup>) had not 'cared about people', and that they were trying to change that attitude in their own parish. He talked about the importance of lay activity, and how they were encouraging laypeople to be involved in constructing a 'living parish'. From his perspective the key method for increasing lay involvement was to promote the work of the Holy Spirit in granting 'spiritual gifts'. During the interview he talked about growing in faith, making a personal choice, receiving a spiritual baptism, and interacting with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as an integral part of everyday religiosity. In his parish 'spiritual senses'<sup>4</sup> were in active use as an important resource for reinforcing lay agency and thus strengthening the role of experience-based religiosity in the wider church.

The traditional forms of Finnish Evangelical Lutheranism, which is often described as a folk church, have been strongly based on teaching and word. There is a perception that this traditional form of Evangelical Lutheranism fails to provide sufficient room for individual experience and emotion which emphasise ways of expressing personal spirituality or sharing knowledge about God gained through the 'spiritual senses'. Recently, however, more sensual forms of Evangelical Lutheranism have emerged, especially in city parishes. (Haapalainen 2015, 104; Palmu et al. 2012; Interviews 1–5.) I argue that an experience-based knowledge of the transcendent has become a more visible and public feature of Finnish Evangelical Lutheranism, and that the diminishing value of church-based religiosity is causing church bodies to identify forms of religious practice which enable active lay involvement and emphasise the importance of experience-based religiosity in parishes especially in larger cities.

The 'spiritual senses' are treated in this article as the capacity to be-in-touch with the transcendent. This sensing of the 'other' (see Utriainen 2016) is indeed an embodied practice in which the bodies of believers come to be defined by their ability to affect and be affected (Blackman 2012). Although a resource for individual believers, the spiritual senses are also something which – from the institution's perspective – needs controlling. This article's approach considers the role of the social group in the process of 'embodied

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3 Henceforward I will use acronym ELCF when referring to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

4 Paul L. Gavriluk and Sarah Coakley (2012) speak about this spiritual sensitivity of being-in-touch with the 'other' through the notion of 'spiritual senses' particularly from historical and theological viewpoint. Their usage of the notion of 'spiritual senses' resonates with the emic-understanding of these being-in-touch experiences arising from my ethnographic materials.

pedagogy' (Utriainen 2016). This notion refers to the processes in which believers are taught ways to 'feel the presence' and 'testify about their experiences of being touched by the Spirit' (cf. Brahinsky 2012; de Witte 2009; 2011). However, the social direction, enforcing, or constructing of the correct way to feel the Spirit is only one side of the coin. The other is that by adapting and using the 'spiritual senses' laypeople gain a more substantial agency and religious expertise among their peers, as well as among parish workers. The value placed on lay religiosity has the potential to transform Finnish Evangelical Lutheranism.

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted between 2012 and 2014 at the Michael's Evangelical Lutheran Parish.<sup>5</sup> I use interviews with the parish's workers and field notes from various parish events.<sup>6</sup> I also use supporting textual materials, such as strategies published by the ELCF. The article's theoretical discussion is based on three examples, each related to a different kind of event, drawn from my fieldwork material. The first is a compilation from various small group discussions held after Bible study, the second is a description of a service held in the parish hall, and the third description is from a weekend event. The first two descriptions are mainly of activities organised by the parish and its workers, but the last was a collaborative event held with the support of an organisation called 'Spiritual Renewal in Our Church' (SROC).<sup>7</sup> In all these cases the embodied experiences of encountering God, lay activity, and lay agency are strongly emphasised, albeit in slightly different ways. Before I present these ethnographical descriptions, I will examine the context that has enabled these forms of experience-based religiosity to emerge alongside traditional Finnish Evangelical Lutheranism more closely.

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5 The Michael's Parish is in the southern coastal town of Turku, Finland. It belongs to the Turku and Kaarina Parish Union (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland). The parish itself extends from the city centre to Turku's port and includes several large suburbs. The parish is diverse and the socioeconomic status of people living within its boundaries varies greatly. Some suburbs struggle with problems of unemployment and marginalisation, but there are also upper middleclass and middleclass socioeconomic pockets. The parish's core operations and events happen in the church itself, in the central parish house, the church hall, or the surrounding area. (FN2011; FN2012).

6 The interview and field note material are anonymised. However, it should be acknowledged that anonymisation is never waterproof and there is a possibility that subjects may be recognised. I have therefore chosen to use interviews with workers rather than with parishioners, because workers have been interviewed as office holders in the organisation, and therefore have a more secured position than parishioners. I have kept the ethnographical descriptions somewhat general to avoid giving information that might lead to individual laypeople in the Michael's Parish being recognised.

7 Henceforward SROC. For more information about Spiritual Renewal in Our Church, see Haapalainen 2015, 101.

### **Why spiritual senses? The ELCF's problem and answer**

The decline in institutional forms of religion does not mean that religion itself has somehow lost its relevance in people's lives (Casanova 1994). The reported changes in religiosity during the twenty-first century are thought to have emerged from a twofold process where simultaneously people's affiliation to institutionalised denominations has been in decline and interest in personal spirituality has been increasing (Gillant-Ray 2005, 358). This development has been reported by several scholars of religion (Davie 1994; 2000; 2004; Day 2009; 2010; Heelas and Woodhead 2007; Woodhead 2009). The shifting focus from a church-based religiosity to an individualised spirituality has also affected institutionalised denominations. In ELCF parishes this has meant a process where individual experiences, affects, and personalised faith are emphasised, resulting in increased value being given to lay activities and voluntary work (Kääriäinen et al. 2005, 261; 2003; OCSC 2007; CoE 2015). The ELCF bodies consider involvement in parish life to be more than sitting in the pews and hearing the word at Sunday Mass.

In the Michael's Parish the workers are striving to answer this call for an individualised spirituality. One of the pastors said during an interview: 'Religiosity has moved in a more individualistic direction. It has fragmented into a billion different things and people choose one piece here and one piece there and build their own.' This 'choosing of one's path' clearly poses a challenge for the church. The pastor went on to state that they (the church/the parish/the pastors) had previously emphasised theological teaching above everything else, but that strategy no longer worked because 'people do not want to be passive and just listen, they want to be involved and do things' (Interview 2). The problem is not merely about the individual's need to construct a personal religious and/or spiritual world, but also their need to be part of and contribute to a group or meaning, even for a short period before turning to something new. Terhi Utriainen (2016, 149) writes concerning this tendency:

The concrete and material practices of 'my own path' would allow people to connect the modern value of individual choice with another kind of value: that is, the feeling of being part of something larger, a plan or script that helps one to direct one's own life.

This quotation also aptly describes the attitudes of ELCF workers. As one pastor said to me: 'Yes it [individualisation] is a reality, but it does not exclude the longing for communality.' (Interview 3) ELCF workers believe



that the 'church' will provide this 'larger plan or script' and within it the individual may find their path. It should also be noted that communality has become fluid and adaptable; forms of participating, contributing, and believing change because of a person's lifestyle, situation, and interests (Frisk & Nynäs 2012). Thus, the ELCF values lay agency, since it engages people more deeply in parish life. In many interviews and discussions workers shared their concern about the lack of commitment among parishioners. They told me that people did not wish to be part of the parish as a whole, but to 'shop' for events or simply 'pop in' briefly (Interviews 1, 2, and 4). At the same time, ELCF workers agree that theological teaching and guidance has become more demanding because of personalised expressions and practices of faith. In one interview a pastor spoke of how individuals have increasingly wished to add various personalised elements to the sacraments (Interview 2). In another, one of the chaplains said:

And people believe (laughs), and it makes me laugh... people believe anything. Something they read in magazines or see on television [...] I have noticed this especially during the Alpha course. I have encountered these searchers. Many are interested in New Age angels [...] and people with 'healing hands' and all these things that come out of the New Age scene. (Interview 1.)

Influences from a syncretistic and diverse religious environment are treated with derision and discussed in detail, especially New Age influences like those the pastor described. These influences are vigorously uprooted when they are met. Church workers consider angels and healing to belong to the sphere of Evangelical Lutheran theology, and so they reject them when they emanate from another religious or spiritual reality. Workers and parishioners, especially those belonging to the parish's more charismatic sub-groups, agree that the 'spirit world' exists and should be treated with extreme caution.

The challenge of 'individualisation' is a shared one, whether it is caused by internal or external factors, but attitudes about the actions needed to solve this problem vary. The ELCF has launched two 'missional guidelines' (strategies), 'Our Church – Shared Commonwealth' (OCSC 2007) and 'A Church of Encounter' (CoE 2015). Both emphasise individuality and the diminishing value of church-based religiosity as the core problems in the contemporary religious environment; and both present spirituality, emotionality, encounter, lay activity, and experience-based religiosity as key to

solving the problems the ELCF is facing. In following the very open-ended guidelines presented in the strategies, all the workers at the Michael's Parish emphasise that enhancing the opportunities for lay involvement in the parish is the best way to stop unwanted change. However, the parish's workers propose varying theological solutions to provide a suitable structure to enforce the church's role in people's everyday lives: returning to traditional Evangelical Lutheranism; returning to the fold of 'Mother Church';<sup>8</sup> or moving in a more charismatic direction (Haapalainen 2015).

Charismatic Christianity has gained a stronger foothold and greater influence in the global Christian arena, especially in recent years. It is flexible and adapts itself to various temporal and spatial contexts. Shared denominators in this 'fluid and flexible' Christian trend are emphasis on a personal faith, individuality, experience-based spirituality, and charisma (Robbins 2010, 156–58; Woodhead 2008, 327; Anderson 2004, 1–15; Ahonen 2003, 129–35; Walker 2000; Bebbington 2000). Neo-charismatic Christianity especially is seen as a product of modernity, a counterbalance to secularisation (Iqtidar and Lehmann 2012, 2, 4). Where the 'spiritual senses' in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland are concerned, it should be noted that the experience of encounter with the transcendent has often been the preserve of the ELCF's revival movements (Anderson 2014, 95; Heikkinen and Heikkilä 1997, 152f; Huotari 1981, 172). From a historical, but also a contemporary,<sup>9</sup> perspective the ELCF's workers and members supporting more traditional and commonly shared expressions of faith have largely ignored or even rejected the charismatic revivals (Mantsinen 2014, 19, 23; Ruohomäki 2014, 447–50; Salonen et al. 2000, 279; Heino 1997, 61). This rejection of charismatic religiosity in the ELCF belongs to a long continuum in Catholic and Protestant denominations' attitudes towards Pentecostal movements and charismatic Christianity beyond Finnish society (Synan 2001). However, in recent decades charismatic Evangelical Lutheranism has become more visible in the ELCF. This development owes much to the

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8 The scenario of a possible return to 'Mother Church' – the Catholic Church for the speaker – arose during a rather mundane conversation in the corridor before a parish event. The worker said that if Lutheranism was a lifeboat when the mother ship was adrift, it may now be the case that the lifeboat is no longer needed and that Evangelical Lutherans can return to the fold of the Catholic Church. This short discussion was speculation for the sake of it, but the speaker drew strongly on a more Catholic interpretation of faith in general during our other discussions. (FN2013.)

9 For example, the Nokia Mission was considered to controvert Evangelical Lutheran theology and it was discharged from the ELCF (Puumala 2007; Pihkala 2000).

work of SROC,<sup>10</sup> which has resulted in cooperation between SROC and the ELCF from the grassroots to the administrative level, of which the work done at the Michael's Parish is an excellent example (Haapalainen 2015).

Significant numbers of parish workers are ready to admit that charismatic Christianity seems to provide everything that has been lacking in institutionalised – even bureaucratic – church-based Evangelical Lutheranism: a sense of meaning; deep spirituality; sensual experience; and respect for lay involvement in contributing to the parish's spiritual life. One chaplain said this represents a narrow view of charismatic Christianity. He emphasised that 'spiritual gifts ... belong to different parts of the body so that all of them together form a reasonable spiritual whole' (Interview 1). These shared stories and testimonies allow others to enter a space in which they can sense the presence of God and find value in their own lives, but also contribute to the construction of the parish as the 'body of Christ'. People actively involved in charismatic events at the Michael's often say – and even write in a brochure produced by the parish – that the events are 'shamelessly spiritual'. They feel pride in their work and feel that the active use of the 'spiritual senses' is the best way to direct a 'drifting church' back to its former glory. They feel that the end times are near, and the gifts and religious experiences granted to their congregation come directly from God:

In recent theological teaching there has been a lot of talk – how should I put this? – that now the end times are here, God will pour out the Holy Spirit and parishes will return to the ideal state of the first congregation. (Interview 1.)

Although the charismatic groups at the Michael's Parish are unwilling to admit that charismatic practices in Evangelical Lutheranism should be treated as a functional solution to the problem of individualisation, it cannot be said that others, themselves not drawn to charismatic expressions of faith, do not see this kind of religiosity as a functional solution. It is noteworthy that attitudes towards charismatic Christianity are not unanimous. Some of the workers at the Michael's were quite sceptical, and pointed out that charisma and encouraging people to seek the 'spiritual senses' should be treated with extreme caution, since it has the potential to misdirect people's attention towards 'those who have gifts' instead of towards God and the gospel. One worker explained the emergence of charismatic Evangelical Lutheranism somewhat sceptically:

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10 SROC/Mission. 'Tavoitteet ja toiminta' [Goals and operations], webpage maintained by Spiritual Renewal in Our Church, <[http://www.hengenuudistus.fi/hengen\\_uudistus\\_kirkossamme/](http://www.hengenuudistus.fi/hengen_uudistus_kirkossamme/)>, accessed 29.5.2015.

Nowadays people, based on Pietism and [the teachings of] Luther too, are quite individualistic and trying to find their own path. [...] Like, a normal slogan is “Have you found our Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour?” So, you have to come to faith even though you have participated in confirmation school – you still have to find God. [...] Lutheranism is drawing strongly on revival Christianity, Pietism, and Pentecostalism. (Interview 4.)

This individualistic undercurrent is also recognised in the reformers’ theological tradition, and thus some parish workers think that Finnish Evangelical Lutheranism, though suffering from the changes in the religious landscape (secularisation, post-secularity, new spirituality), is also imbued with Lutheranism’s innate individualism. Interestingly, Luther rejected the Catholic ‘theology of glory’ (that sinful human beings cannot gain knowledge of God through reason) and emphasised the ‘theology of the cross’, which holds that a believer strives to know the God revealed by the suffering of the vulnerable Jesus on the cross (Mjaaland 2015, 92f.; Mannermaa 1998). When the believer recognises the suffering of the cross through their senses and heart, they can be-in-touch with God and his word (Deschamp 2015, 211f., 217; Morgan 1998, 66). Knowing God through the ‘spiritual senses’ comes to be framed as personalised embodied practice.<sup>11</sup> It is a relationship between the human being and God, the individual and the transcendent. Whether it is a supporter or an opponent of charismatic Evangelical Lutheranism, the main concern holds: what if these ‘gifts’ and the knowledge gained through the ‘spiritual senses’ are misused and the individual’s glory surpasses that of God?

## **Making room for the spirit**

### *Small groups*

In small group discussions the theological direction of the laity was more apparent than in other types of event. The intimate setting of a handful of

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11 Luther emphasised preaching as the main mode for transmitting the gospel. Those who believe come to hear the Word. The Word itself, understood as the same as the Word of creation, becomes sensible, audible, and visible in the sermon (Jorgenson 2014, 42f., 47). This means that the hearing of preaching co-constituted by the Word of God invigorates the ‘spiritual senses’ and enables ‘the faithful’ to sense the divine. For Luther, the ‘spiritual senses’ take the ‘physical senses’ as their starting point, but they do not bypass it. Faith approaches art: it enables us to see ‘the whole in a part, and the part in the whole’, since the ‘heart has eyes that reason does not know’ (Jorgenson 2014, 49).

people sitting around a small table drinking coffee with a pastor created an atmosphere in which gentle and deeply personal guidance was easily given. In this 'therapeutic' environment laypeople were given a voice, and some degree of authority, to form their personal and individualised understanding of Lutheran faith, albeit under ministerial supervision.

The Michael's Parish organised 'Tuesday Bible Study' events on a weekly basis in the spring of 2012 (these meetings are still held today). The one hour Bible Study lecture began at 6 p.m. and was followed by coffee, tea, and snacks. People gathered together to share the evening snack and then divided into smaller groups and scattered throughout the parochial house to find a peaceful place to discuss the evening's teaching. I participated in one of these groups in the spring of 2012. The discussions in the groups were loosely connected with the lecture, but at a more personal level than was the case in the general Q&A session immediately after it. The experiences and thoughts of the laypeople were reflected on in detail and the pastor, who functioned as an unofficial chair, directed the discussion with questions and theological insights related to the topic. This 'direction' was considered vital by the parish workers, because they felt that laypeople lacked theological knowledge and were thus likely to misinterpret their experiences.

Following the lecture on 'Evil' at one Tuesday Bible Study meeting (28.2.2012), the group discussed the 'spirit world' and Satan at length. Many had experiences of malevolent powers tampering with their lives. The image of Satan was personalised: Satan was described as 'the king of lies', 'wanting us to believe that he is strong', or 'attacking believers'. In some descriptions the presence of malevolent powers was quite sensational. People had felt fear, doubt, and strange sensations that were inexplicable and vanished once they started to pray or read the Bible. In another small group discussion, after a lecture on Joshua and Jesus (10.4.2012), the discussion focused on experiencing the mercy and love of God. People shared their own experiences of 'feeling the guidance' or 'feeling the presence' of God in their lives. They spoke of warmth when they felt the love of God or the spiritual security that came from the experience-based knowledge they had gained during these encounters with the transcendent. They concluded that those who believed were like children: they took the faith in its entirety and made no attempt to explain it rationally. They often said that those who had taken Jesus into their hearts should always strive to sense the omnipresence, love, and mercy of God, but that they were at the same time in danger of being attacked by Satan and his demons, who wanted to possess the believer. Indeed, many of the small group discussions after the Bible Study revolved around the

'spirit world' and the effects that a variety of spirits had on human beings (FN2012). In an interview one of the pastors spoke about this:

We are totally lost where the spirit world is concerned [...] and do not know how to cope with it [...] What if we hear that two laymen have performed an exorcism which the pastor was incapable of dealing with? His job is to take control of the situation, not to run away and say that they did not teach us to handle these situations in the Theological Faculty. (Interview 1.)

Discussions with parishioners and workers suggested that any spiritual experience might be brought about either by God or the spirit world, and therefore every testimony, meditation, and description of personal experiences was subject to evaluation and doubt. Parishioners did not question the possibility that the believer might 'feel' or 'sense' God or that it was possible to gain a specific knowledge of the transcendent through these experiences. There was, however, a system of 'moderation' in these small group discussions in which theological premises were guarded by parish workers and laypeople were 'taught' theologically sustainable interpretations of their experiences. This direction was crystallised in one entry from my interview material: 'We have to be very clear with laypeople. They do not know what they are dealing with. All that is experienced does not come from God, [...] if we as priests do not guide them into the right path, you know.' (Interview 1.) The stories the parishioners shared were indeed considered important, but the pastors re-expressed and explained these experiences. Theological education and knowledge surpassed experience-based knowledge.

#### *Encounter point service*

The second event differed significantly from the small group discussions. The service was more public, and included some teaching, even if it was done somewhat freely. In this event the pastors acted to some extent as examples of how to share spiritual experiences and communicate in a theologically sound way about encounters with divine powers. Lay involvement was neither public nor verbally shared, because the laity were not given an opportunity to share their own experiences. However, the evening's setting enabled people to be-in-touch with the transcendent. The parochial house became a place where a sense of the presence of God was possible, and parishioners were shown the appropriate ways to be connected with God.

I participated in an Encounter Point<sup>12</sup> (*Kohtaamispaikka*) service<sup>13</sup> at the Michael's Parish house in February 2012. When I arrived, I was met by a welcoming committee that greeted everyone warmly, especially focusing on those who had not been there before. The chaplain in charge had invited a guest speaker who had been a well-known pastor and healer in the late 1990s. The evening began with praise and contemporary Christian music. This was followed by the story of the chaplain's son, who had been ill. The chaplain had prayed and fasted until his son had been healed. This personal story of healing set the parameters for the rest of the evening. Lively and emotional Christian music performed by the 'house band' was interspersed with a short and humorous drama about a healed car crash victim. Parishioners sang along, praised the Lord, raised their hands, and shouted 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah'.

About halfway through the service the chaplain introduced the guest and conducted a short interview with him. 'Who are you really, and how did you become a healer?' the chaplain asked. The guest told of how he had prayed that his wife's back would heal, and that all her problems had disappeared instantly and his wife had recovered. He said this experience had scared him, but he had started to practise prayer for healing in his parish. He felt that he had been appointed for this task by God. He said that the power of healing came from weakness, because it was weakness that made it possible to act as a mediator for God's powers. The power of God fluctuated; it was not the same in every situation. He described how this power entered the 'prayer world' and was real and tangible. Prayer was simultaneously an adventure and a hazard, because the charismatic prayer-healer was always the target of malevolent spirits. People should never, therefore, become attached to their sensations, but should focus on the powers' source. They should ask, 'Am I or is s/he doing this in the name and the blood of Jesus Christ?' because the 'blood of Jesus' evicted satanic spirits and powers. After the interview the congregation recited a confession and prayed for the healer, who responded by blessing them. The chaplain encouraged people to feel the power of God, free their gifts of the Spirit, and come onto the stage to be prayed for and healed. Two-thirds of the congregants formed a row on the stage and the healer, followed by his assistants, started to

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12 I have translated the Finnish name *Kohtaamispaikka* as Encounter Point following the translation logic of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. For example, their strategy (2015) is called *Kohtaamisen kirkko* and its official translation is *Church of Encounter*.

13 These services follow liturgical guidelines, but there is no communion, and the service is quite free in its structure.

pray with each one of them individually. His head tilted slightly towards the person standing in front of him, he spoke softly, and at the end of his prayer he touched the person. More than 70% of those who were prayed for and healed collapsed. Some started to speak in tongues, some simply lay there in silence, and a few started to weep, but there were also people who merely walked away from the stage as if nothing had happened (12.2.2012/FN2012). The spiritual encounter testimonies at this event were given by two pastors. They gave an example of how to share the knowledge gained through encounter with God, and how to describe an apparently indescribable spiritual embodied experience. They also provided a tool for the moral and ethical evaluation of such experiences, and emphasised that everyone should be aware of their source.

#### *Michael's Winter Days*

The third event differed slightly from the others. Lay involvement played a central role in it. Trusted laypeople were permitted to share the knowledge of God they had gained through the 'spiritual senses'. This supported lay agency communicated to the other parishioners that pastors were not alone in having knowledge about God, but that laypeople could contribute and participate in theological teaching. At this event the strongest value was given to lay and experienced-based knowledge.

The Michael's Winter Days took place over two days, and were organised under the title 'Emerge Holy Spirit'. The teaching focused on spiritual gifts as the constructing power in the parish. The Winter Days had several guest speakers, all giving testimonies about the 'work of the Holy Spirit' in their lives. In his introduction the chaplain told the audience that the idea for this event had come as a revelation during the SROC summer event. The revelation had not been 'hindered by the bishops', and the chaplain said that 'they would evangelise using the word of God as it is', and that 'the kingdom of God was and would be revealed' to them. The chaplain continued by saying that there was similar 'charge' in the atmosphere on this occasion and that the Holy Spirit would surely emerge for every participant. As he concluded, he said that it was not important 'to feel in the head [mind] as the Sadducees had, but to feel in the heart', and continued in a raised voice: 'Do you wish to see Him today?' The congregants responded by shouting back 'Yes!'

The first speaker was an Evangelical Lutheran pastor who had struggled with his faith. His first encounter with the Holy Spirit had happened during



confirmation camp, when the Spirit had touched him so powerfully that he had collapsed between the pews. He had received a mission to act as a shepherd, but he had resisted it for years until the moment of his ordination, when he had had an experience of spiritual baptism. He told the congregation that after the second 'touch of the Spirit' he had collapsed on many occasions. Another speaker spoke of the difficulties she had had in her life. She had been ill, had overcompensated in every area of her life, and had been misguided in her faith until the moment the Spirit had descended on her. At that moment she had had a revelation: 'It was not me, but the Lord in me.' This experience had made her weep for three days in a row, and then she had begun to sing. She said that it was physically impossible to sing after crying for so long, but she had done it anyway and this was a true miracle of God. She had come to know God's phone number, 5015 (Psalm 50:15), and had been given the sense of God's omnipresence in her life. At the end of her talk she showed a PowerPoint slide on which the sentence '**BASIC INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE LEAVING EARTH = BIBLE**' was written. She said that the Holy Spirit gave human beings the 'eyes that reveal the true meaning of the Bible'; the basic instructions were in the Bible, but we needed to receive 'the eyes of the heart' to see them.

The evening of the second day of this event was reserved for prayer and praise. It started with a testimony given by one of the Michael's parishioners. He spoke vividly of how he had been touched by the Spirit during one of the chaplain's sermons and how he had shivered and received the gifts of 'contrition and penitence'. After the first testimony another speaker came onto the stage and introduced herself as an 'intercessor, prophet, and God's fool' and began to tell her story. She had been a seeker, trying to find an answer from various religions until the moment she had heard God's voice saying, 'Are you looking for glory for yourself or are you looking for the glory of God?' She said that in that moment an unbearable brightness had surrounded her and she had sensed lightning going through her body. 'The Holy Spirit had touched me,' she said. She had received in that moment a spiritual gift called the 'words of knowledge'.

She continued her testimony by inviting the participants to bring forward their troubles and receive their personal messages from God. She told them: 'Jesus sees you, Jesus heals you.' The 'charge' in the hall increased, praise began, and the congregation began to move around, hands raised, singing, and shouting 'Hallelujah'. The prophet continued, walking around and occasionally stopping in front of someone and telling them what God wanted to say to them. At the end of the evening the prophet shared 'the words of

knowledge', but now in public so that everyone could hear the prophecies assigned to certain people. She continued for a while and then said: 'Those who want to give their lives to the Lord, come forward. Be courageous. Be brave. I still see people in the pews who have been touched by the Spirit. Come forward.' A group of people gathered on stage and started to pray out loud. The prophet raised her voice and began to pray: 'Father, I am here in front of you. You know my life. You know all the sins that I have committed. I want to give my life unconditionally and wholeheartedly to you!' Participants on the stage and in the pews started to give testimonies, others repeatedly said 'thank you Lord', some wept, and some shivered. The atmosphere was deeply emotional. I sat in the pews and observed the congregation, and some of the pastors present, starting to speak in tongues. The pastor and the laypeople were in that moment all equal in their experiences. (17.–19.3.2012/FN2012.) Pastors and trusted laypeople were permitted to speak during the presentations. After the lay testimonies the chaplain made a few comments about them, framing them with a theological explanation. As representatives of the ELCF institution, the pastors tended to set a certain theological tone in the aftermath of the lay testimonies. However, at the end of the event a free expression of faith was encouraged by both the prophet and the pastors through their own praise, glossolalia, and strong expression of their feelings. The congregation followed their lead.

### **Two sides of a coin: control and gain**

The Michael's Parish organises various types of event, from highly devotional prayer weekends to family days, and even the declaration of Christmas peace to beloved pets. Clearly, the range of the events has to be wide enough to serve the interests of the parishioners' altering tastes and needs.<sup>14</sup> The parish's main concern is the decline in its membership, or, to be more precise, the decline in active parishioners who feel that the Michael's Parish is their 'spiritual home'. The interpretation of religiosity supported in the Michael's Parish is to a degree 'vernacular' (Primiano 2012, 1995): lay religiosity is treated as a resource, but with constraints, as has been seen in the example of small group discussions. Moreover, religiosity is indeed seen in the congregation as a practice that penetrates every aspect of people's daily lives. The parish workers see the 'church' and the congregation as theologically supportive structures that enable lay involvement and lay

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<sup>14</sup> Phenomenon also reported by Palmu et al., 2012, and by the ELFC's strategies OCSC 2007 and CE 2015.

agency, as well as providing theological teaching and guidance. Teaching and guidance were present in every example, but in various ways: personalised (small groups) and exemplary (Encounter Point, pastors/Winter Days, laypeople). The idea of 'lived religion' – as Meredith McGuire (2008; 1992) has described it – permeates this religious institution and its congregations as active laypeople become increasingly influential in the parish. Nevertheless, it is the institutional framework that has the power to direct the variety of individualised forms of religiosity. In various interviews and discussions parish workers state quite forcefully that parishioners need to 'do' things. One of the deacons told me that it was better to invite people to build a grill shed in the parochial house's yard than it was to invite them to hear the gospel, because when people are 'doing things, it is easier to connect with them because they feel there is a value in their contribution'. Although the deacon was talking about concrete activity with a material result, it is possible to stretch this idea to cover somewhat less tangible activities in which lay involvement is targeted at spiritual construction rather than the construction of a shed. (Interview 5.)

The changing religious landscape in Finland has led the ELCF to scrutinise both its internal and external influences (Palmu et al. 2012). The tables have turned, and the practice of sensing the other have come to the fore not only in the sphere of post-secular spirituality or on the fringes of the ELCF, but in the public religious practice of this highly institutionalised denomination (see: Nynäs et al. 2015). The OCSC (2007, 39) strategy states: 'We support the birth of small operational groups and communities and support the various opportunities whereby the members (of the church) may be able to develop activities and create new forms of operation.' The need for small group activities is recognised by both the institution (the ELCF) and its local parish workers. The institution encourages parishes to organise activities that give room for parishioners' experiences and thoughts, as well as to increase lay involvement, not only as an audience, target group, or listeners, but also as a generative force developing new forms of activity. All the events described are the result of this administrative guideline. Small group discussions are especially seen as the first stage in developing an active and appreciated resource for parishes. They are something that might be called a grassroots embodied spiritual pedagogy (Utriainen 2016), where a combination of respect, guidance, and the value placed on personal experiences enforces parishioners' engagement. The small group discussions are treated as 'safe spaces' where people have an opportunity to reflect on their own life paths or think about the theology connected with them. One pastor described the importance of small group discussions as follows:

People have that existing need. I think it is good that we have these small groups. In a larger group many just keep their mouths shut; when [they are] in a smaller group they find it easier to ask their questions and say what they are wondering about. (Interview 3.)

However, despite the positive attitude towards increasing lay involvement, there remain some problems. It all comes down to who has sufficient theological education and knowledge, as well as the relationship between laypeople and clergy. For example, it was the pastors who set the tone of the Encounter Point service. However, lay agency was not totally subservient to theological expertise. The free, emotional, and sensational atmosphere of the evening allowed individuals to feel connected with God – to be touched by him. It is noteworthy that the parish also needs to provide the opportunities for people to be encouraged to ‘practise’ and ‘try out’ their ‘spiritual senses’ in an environment that is still theologically constrained.

Religion, and Protestantism especially, in contemporary Western societies is described as ‘a sphere of life cut off from bodies, senses and everyday agency’ (Utriainen 2016, 148). However, alterities, the variety of others or the transcendent, have found their way back into people’s lives through different practices of enchantment, whether these are Christian or not (Ibid.). These religious (enchanted) practices are not merely a way to reclaim religious agency, but are also a means to teach embodied subjects to communicate (contact/construct relationships) with the ‘other’. These practices are often built through bodies (Brahinsky 2012; de Witte 2009, 2011; Asad 1993; Mahmood 2005), and thus imprinted in bodies and habitus (Utriainen 2016, 142f). The relationship between a believer and the other (God, Jesus, Holy Spirit) is a practice of enchantment. Being-in-touch with or ‘to be touched’ by the Spirit translates into language that has its starting point in the physical sensory spectrum, but stretches its limits. It moves to the sphere in which experiences are indeed verbalised differently: ‘It seems that the intellect operates in a non-ordinary, indeed unique, way when God becomes the object of its vision’ (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012, 6f).

Ways to pass on one’s experiences are not explicitly taught, but modes and nuances in the testimonies become familiar through repetition in various small group discussions, meetings, events, and situations, as seen in the examples from my fieldwork at the Michael’s Parish. The parishioners, guest speakers, and pastors are all contributors to and subjects of what Terhi Utriainen (2016, 143) calls ‘embodied pedagogy’. To reach out, to contact, and to form and sense a relationship with the other is the first step. Taking

this first step was encouraged in small group discussions and especially in the Encounter Point service. The second step is taken when these experiences are passed on. At the Michael's Winter Days trusted laypeople were given the stage. Many had a long history of giving testimonies. They were people who had started at the grassroots level and had gradually gained a stronger foothold in the sphere of the public teaching of theology, not quite as pastors' peers, but close enough.

All these activities aim to enable the 'communication of transcendence' (Besecke 2005) within an institutionalised religion. The ELCF workers and representatives have realised that religion, following David Morgan (2010, 8), does not 'happen in spaces and performances but as them'. It is the people who practise religion, who choose to participate or to step aside. The intensity of emotions and sensational experiences increasingly defines the ways people 'live their religion' or practise it in Western societies (Taira 2006, 19, 46–51). The parochial hierarchies between clergy and laypeople still draw strongly on theological education and knowledge, but the knowledge gained through the 'spiritual senses' is now more valued. Charismatic practices especially – made possible by smaller charismatic communities inside the parish – provide 'enchanted', intense, and emotional experiences that enforce believers' individual relationships with God. These charismatic Evangelical Lutheran communities are built systematically within the larger communities where the congregation or the whole church acts as the body.

As has already been said, this tradition of sensing the transcendent has always belonged to Finnish Evangelical Lutheranism: it can even be found in the writings of Luther himself. It is not, therefore, something novel or extraordinary. However, this experience-based, emotional, and sensational religiosity is more prominent than it has previously been. Its increasing influence means that the relationship between parish workers and parishioners is changing. Parish workers no longer organise events for laypeople or act as dispensers of theological knowledge, but accompany laypeople in sharing their experiences. Such testimonies, meditations, and descriptions of being touched by the Spirit cannot be ignored. In the Michael's Parish expertise based on experience is flourishing under the guidance of theological experts. Moreover, the gospel is not to be shared by the church workers (deacons, youth workers, pastors, chaplains, or the vicar) alone with laypeople, but also between laypeople:

When we talk about missionary work or evangelisation, then it is definitely from person to person. [...] For example, let's take the message 'God loves

you'. To see it printed in a newspaper is one thing, but when another person says it to you, it is a stronger message. (Interview 2.)

At the heart of these practices are the bodies of believers, because encountering the transcendent is understood as first and foremost a sensory experience, though one that is profoundly different than other sensory experiences. Because it is extraordinary it must be directed by the parish's workers. This embodied knowledge is a valued resource in the parish because it sends a powerful message to parishioners that their religious experience is almost as valuable as theological teaching, or at least as something that adds value to the more traditional forms of Finnish Evangelical Lutheran religious life.

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ANNA HAAPALAINEN is Doctoral Candidate in Comparative Religion at the University of Turku. Email: anna.haapalainen@utu.fi

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# Afterword

JON P. MITCHELL

*University of Sussex*

## Context

This special issue makes a welcome addition to the burgeoning anthropologically inspired work on Christianity. It takes as its central theme the thorny issue of religious experience, and in this case particularly the kind of experience that lies at the centre of Protestant Christianity – direct, unmediated experience of God’s presence. Refreshingly, it is framed not merely in terms of changes in intellectual fashion – the turns towards the body, the senses, ontology, aesthetics – but also in terms of substantial and substantive changes within Protestant Christianity itself. These changes may be linked to what we could call a Pentecostal revolution within Protestant Christianity, which has placed the experience of God at its centre – so much so that much Pentecostal effort goes in to inculcating such experience (Brahinsky 2012). Being experientially connected with God becomes an outcome, rather than a pre-condition, of religious activity.

The term ‘Pentecostal revolution’ stems from Ruth Marshall’s work in Nigeria (Marshall 2009), where she identifies a simultaneous reconfiguring of the political and religious landscape as Pentecostalism took hold and expanded across the country. The concept could equally be applied to other contexts. Although it is not clear the extent to which the rise of Pentecostalism has restructured entire polities in other contexts, as it appears to have done in Nigeria (though it may well also have done), it is certainly true that people’s spiritual, material, and political lives have been radically transformed through Pentecostalism. It is also true that the experiential focus of Pentecostalism has leached into a much broader range of Christian constituencies – from the Alpha movement (see Stout and Dein 2013) to Catholic Charismatic Renewal (see Csordas 1997) – such that it is a central pillar of much Christian activity in the contemporary world.

This empirical topicality, as well as its intellectual topicality, makes this a valuable special issue. Its articles cover a range of geographical and temporal contexts. Combining historical, literary, and Bible studies approaches with more contemporary anthropological ones, it tacks backwards and

forwards between 'old' and 'new' Christian contexts – Northern Europe and South America.

### **Method**

It is methodologically diverse. Although much of the work is 'ethnographic', it draws attention to the range of techniques and approaches that are necessary to explore the inchoate world of religious experience. Given the inherently and sometimes explicitly secular nature of European academic discourse – including anthropological discourse (see Stewart 2001) – the challenge of exploring religious experience has often been framed as one of exploring otherness; or in Cannell's words, 'taking seriously the religious experience of others' (2006, 3). To 'take seriously' often means to occupy – albeit in an imaginary or 'as if' way – the position from which such experience might be seen to 'make sense'. More subtly, and given the fact that in many cases for people who have religious experiences, those experiences don't necessarily 'make sense' to themselves, the task might be to occupy a position from which an experience – although inchoate – is seen as evidence of God's presence.

'Making sense' in relation to religious experience throws into relief the kinds of knowledge permitted in the process of 'sense-making', which in turn throws into relief the kinds of method we might use to explore religious experience. These methods in turn throw into relief the distinction between (secular) self and (Christian) other in the research process. The papers by Barnes and Rivers are the most notable in this regard.

In Rivers's exploration of Brazilian fighting ministries, in which evangelical Christianity is combined with the Japanese martial practice of jiu-jitsu to generate powerful and emotional experiences not merely of the martial practice itself but, through its rigours and constraints, of God, fighters literally sense God through grappling with each other, feeling pain and fear, but also control, mastery, and elation. To explore this Rivers takes on the task of 'carnal sociology' as developed by Loic Wacquant (2011), which seeks to establish methodological grounds for an exploration of processes that are embodied. It builds on Bourdieu's arguments concerning the logic of (social and bodily) practice, which is a logic beyond – and defying – the semantic logic of structural analysis (1990), and Bourdieu and Wacquant's call for a new 'reflexive sociology' that transcends the distinction between self and other, subject and object, in the research process (1992). Wacquant developed the idea in relation

to his own research on masculinity and exclusion in African American neighbourhoods of Chicago, during which he realised, first, that fieldwork in the city's many boxing gyms would serve him well, and second, that to understand the significance of boxing he would have himself to enrol and train – even compete – as a boxer. His argument was that the only way to understand bodily processes is to research them bodily. In the process, the researcher's own body becomes a significant tool of research, and the balance of participant observation is shifted to a type of observant participation (Wacquant 2011, 87).

The approach takes us back to a long-standing dilemma within the study of religion: whether researching religion requires the objective stance of a disinterested – perhaps secular – outsider; or whether to *really* understand another's religious experience one must oneself believe. It is one thing to understand the bodily practices of boxing or jiu-jitsu, and the kinds of experiences they generate, through participating in them as practices. It is another to attribute these experiences to the presence of God. In other words, is there something beyond bodily practice and participation that is necessary for an understanding of the position from which the activity of jiu-jitsu is simultaneously an elaborately cultivated bodily practice and an engagement with God?

For Barnes, the necessary extra step to a full understanding of religious experience is an acceptance of the existence of God. His challenging paper makes further methodological innovation, through the pursuit of auto-ethnography that implicates both his own and one of his main research interlocutor's conversion experiences. Auto-ethnography as method – or a term for method – has developed from something which resembled 'anthropology at home' or 'native anthropology' – rather traditional ethnographic research in communities to which one either belongs, or which are close to the communities in which one belongs, or in communities which are in the classificatory 'home' – the West, or Europe, or Finland etc (Hayano 1979). It has shifted towards a more introspective and reflexive project, focusing not on the community or culture of the ethnographer, but autobiographically on the ethnographer themselves (Reed-Danahay 1997). In Barnes's case, his own accounts of the moments of conversion are juxtaposed with those of his key informant, Dave, to demonstrate the significance of these foundational encounters with God.

## Ontology

For Barnes, himself a Christian, taking religious experience seriously is a given; God *is*, and the study of religious experience should proceed from this single, simple fact. The task in hand, then, becomes not so much explaining – or explaining away – why some people attribute certain experiences to the presence of God, but rather finding ways of faithfully rendering these experiences in description. This is a challenge equally for the ethnographer as for the Christian themselves – and in Barnes’s case, they are one and the same.

Barnes makes an important contribution to the ongoing debates about ontology within contemporary anthropology. The so-called ‘ontological turn’ turns on a rethinking of anthropology’s understanding of relativism (Holbraad 2012; Pedersen 2012). Where earlier accounts had rested on the assumption of a shared world, and shared nature, which was differently understood in different societies, through different cultures; different world-views; different epistemologies, this newer scholarship – ontographic scholarship – ‘takes seriously’ these differences to the extent that it considers them as different worlds. Rather than one world seen differently, there are multiple worlds, multiple natures, multiple ontologies. Where anthropologists encounter radical difference – radical alterity – in others, they must reconfigure the categories that make up their own world to enable them to enter theirs.

The pursuit of wonder (Scott 2013) inherent in this project hinges on the alterity of the ethnographic object. The importance of Barnes’s paper is that wonder comes not from his encounter with an ethnographic other, but from his encounter with God. As a result, the ontographic project is turned on its head, as he presents himself – as in Wacquant’s carnal sociology, only more so – as simultaneously subject and object; self and other.

Ontology is also addressed in Minna Opas’s paper, on experiences of God among the Yine people in Amazonian Peru. For the Yine, God is a felt material presence perceived through the body, and particularly through a dedicated ‘faith organ’ – *ruwekinri* – that develops in the body and over time becomes progressively more attuned to God’s presence. The Yine God is not merely present, however, but also active – as agent within a broader cosmology, or a broader ‘world’ of material and immaterial, human and non-human agency.



## Body

This agency is felt within and through the body. As a central theme throughout the collection, the body looms large in all the papers. Yet the precise nature of the body and the bodily remains open to question, not least for the Christian groups themselves discussed in the papers. In Ittzés's paper, the problem of the body is brought to light in sixteenth-century German Lutherans' discussions of body, soul, and the afterlife. Their particular concern was the interim state between bodily death and final, bodily resurrection. Rejecting Catholic notions of Purgatory, they nevertheless considered the interim state as one in which body and soul were separated, but in which the soul remained 'wakeful', and retained the bodily capacities of perception – seeing, hearing, and the recognition of others. Bodily capacities are ascribed to the soul, rendering the senses, and perception, transcendent. This forces us to reconsider our understanding of the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent within Christianity, placing religious experience – and engagement with God – at the intersection of the two.

This is clear for the Yine, for whom the transcendent is made bodily immanent in the *ruwekinri* faith organ, but also features in the other chapters. For Rivers, the immanent bodiliness of fighting brings Godly transcendence into play; the fighting body is a Christian temple. For Barnes, the extension of bodily perception – and bodily senses – to the spiritual is problematic. He argues that spiritual sensing – or sensing the spiritual – is *sui generis*; irreducible to normal, bodily, perception processes. Although the body might provide a source of metaphors through which to describe religious experience, it is qualitatively different from other experience. Thus, when Augustine talks of 'tasting' God, he is not referring to a literal tasting that employs the bodily taste organs and a sense of taste. Rather, he is using the bodily sensorium metaphorically in an attempt to describe the experience of presence. Barnes, then, stands in contrast to Ittzés; but is this distinction between on the one hand an explicit extension of the bodily into the spiritual and on the other a resistance to do so, a product of the difference between early modern and late modern Christianities; or is it simply evidence of the multiplicity of possible understandings of Christian religious experience?

An answer, perhaps, comes from Anna Haapalainen's paper on contemporary Lutheranism in Finland, at Michael's parish in Turku, where a range of different types of activity – prayer groups, Bible study and encounter services – guide practitioners towards a particular type of 'spiritual sensing'. The focus on pedagogy is important, as pastors guide parishioners towards not only theologically 'correct' interpretations of

religious experience, but also towards a cultivation of the appropriate means of sensing the spiritual. Here the emphasis is on seeing and hearing ‘through the heart’ – conceived not as metaphorical but more literally. The Evangelical Lutheran heart, we might say, stands in the same relationship to the presence of God as the Yine *ruwekinri* organ. While the Lutherans are probably not referring straightforwardly to the bodily heart – the organ of blood flow – neither are they simply speaking metaphorically. The listening and seeing heart is present in the body, and enables the sensing of the presence of God.

From this we might conclude that there is a potential range of Protestant spiritual sensoria, which conceive of the body and its senses in different ways – from the literal embodiment of *ruwekinri* to the not-quite-literal embodiment of the heart to the metaphorical embodiment of Augustine’s tasting. In each case sense-making combines with sensing – but in different ways and with different outcomes.

### **The Social**

Although the Lutherans discussed by Haapalainen are strongly individualistic, it is nevertheless in the social context that the dynamics of the presence of God is elaborated and understood. Indeed, all the papers included here, and the collection as a whole, emphasise the fundamentally social dynamics of religious experience. This is a welcome reminder that although Christianity – and particularly Protestant Christianity – often centralises the personal relationship with God, this relationship is shaped by and established within the contexts of the social. It is these different social contexts that inform and shape the range of different relationships between body, senses, and experience.

Thus, the social is a feature of Itzéz’s exploration of the interim state. Disembodied souls not only perceive things in the same way as bodies, they recognise significant others and, we might suppose, continue their social relations post-mortem. Similarly, the Yine, for whom the dream is the principal medium of engaging with God’s presence, consider dreaming to be a fundamentally social activity – both in terms of what happens *within* the dream and in terms of the social currency of recounting a dream. Dreams allow a person to engage in social relations with kin, spirits, and God, conceived of as consubstantive with the self. The Brazilian fighting ministries use fighting to co-produce the presence of God, resulting in intense emotions, with laughing and crying seen as social manifestations of

this presence. And for Barnes, the metaphorical serves as a social mechanism through which the spiritual sensory is expressed.

What emerges, then, is a range of ways in which the intimacies of engagement with God become collectivised, or distributed, across social space. Both in terms of their causes and their consequences, religious experiences of God's presence are thoroughly socialised; taking place in social contexts and understood in social contexts. This is not to say that they are reducible to social contexts. On the contrary. In their own ways, the papers here remain faithful to the aim of 'taking seriously' religious experience, and treating it on its own terms. In doing so they make a fine contribution to the study of Protestant Christianity, raising important issues to take forward into the future.

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JON P. MITCHELL is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex.  
Email: J.P.Mitchell@sussex.ac.uk

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## Book Reviews

**Siv Ellen Kraft, Trude Fonneland and James R. Lewis (eds):** *Nordic Neoshamanisms*. New York: Palgrave, 2015, 270pp.

This book is set against the backdrop of colonialism throughout the Nordic countries and, in the case of Norway during the Second World War, the destruction of Lapland. Placing these events in the study's background is effective because it gives significance to how a combination of these forces has been instrumental in the loss of Sami culture and religion (shamanism), a topic that is paramount in the context of scholarly discourse.

The book contains chapters by the following: Bente Gullveig Alver, Cato Christensen, Trude Fonneland, Olav Demant Jakobsen, Anne Kalvig, Siv Ellen Kraft, James R. Lewis, Stein R. Mathisen, and Torun Selberg – scholars and editors either from, or who live and work in, Norway. Henno Erikson Parks, however, lives in Finland and is engaged in the study of shamanism in Estonia.

Because the book is mainly concerned with the study of Sami shamanism, the starting point of the analysis is pre-Christian religion, which is discussed in the shadow of Norse traditions and dominant Norwegian society, where both cultures are investigated in the context of what has been referred to as Nordic Neoshamanism. From within these traditions a colourful, highly informative, and important network of the study of both Sami

and Nordic religion and New Age Spirituality has emerged, which introduces new information, contexts, and worldviews to the study of Sami shamanism.

It may be argued that what makes these new contexts of particular interest in relation to the study of Sami shamanism in the Nordic countries is the core themes that are overwhelmingly evident within the literature. The first discussed in these works are the discourses concerning the background to the study presented by Olav Hammer and Trude Fonneland. These scholars address the nature of the issues arising in relation to shamanism in Sami pre-Christian religion and its ties with an ancient hunting culture, contrasted with New Age landscapes and cross-cultural imports, and what this means for identity and ethnicity. The second theme, addressed by Merete Demant Jakobsen, examines the ethics involved in shamanic training and teaching and the ways in which these New Age practices have been imported into Fennoscandia and have influenced various branches of shamanic healing and worldviews.

One of the most interesting and comprehensive discussions focuses on the presentation of the life stories and profiles of female *noaidi* (shamans) through the works of Bente Gullveig Alver and Anne Kalvig. In contrast to historical data, the practice of shamanism amongst the Sami of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in sources compiled by male priests throughout Lapland, demonstrates

that the phenomenon is portrayed as a largely male institution. The new research therefore overturns these ancient stereotypes and confirms the importance of demonstrating that the study of post-colonial Sami culture reveals a series of distinct insights and an understanding of the position of woman as healers, mediums, and tradition-bearers in contemporary society. Torunn Selberg discusses the transition of shamanism from the historical hunting cultures of the Siberian tundra to western towns and cities. She thus highlights the transition from contact with the spiritual worlds through prehistoric religion and sacrificial traditions to communication with these worlds through modern day practices, and the important role these play in the link between the shaman and psychology in relation to female spirituality and indigenous culture. Similarly, the scholarly works of Henno Erikson Parks examine the remnants of female witchcraft in a case study of shamanism in Estonia against the backdrop of Soviet rule in the Baltic States, and the important role historical literature plays in the search for meaning and identity in this context.

In contrast to what is noted above, there are also points of contention outlined in the chapter by James R. Lewis, who, like other scholars, examines the literature and the influence of the American anthropologists Michael Harner and Carlos Castaneda, as well as the Sami shaman Ailo Gaup, concerning the evolution of neoshamanic practices and cross-cultural influences such as those from Native American

spirituality. Lewis adeptly describes the attitudes and interpretations from within the American movement and its influence on Sami shamanism. For example, he shows that religion for the Sami has been a primary ethnic marker of culture and identity, and he therefore examines the impacts of New Age spiritual practices in various ways to see if they contribute to further division and ambiguity when viewed within a post-colonial setting.

Cato Christensen skilfully analyses the important role Sami religion plays as it is presented in films and media in relation to ethnicity, identity, and the forwarding of traditional knowledge via Sami shamanism as the Sami themselves present it, and what this means in terms of cultural continuity and originality. Stein R. Mathisen brings to light the often-forgotten legacy of the witchcraft trials in Norway and offers a detailed examination of the important role archived material such as ritual artefacts plays in the reconstruction of Sami shamanism in the tourist industry. His research brings into focus important questions concerning the continued misrepresentation of Sami culture in relation to the painful history of the persecution of the Sami *noaidi*, museum collections, and the development of tourism. He also examines how the symbolism of the ancient drums continues to be exploited, not unlike the priests and missionaries who sought to de-contextualise Sami religion and culture during the witchcraft persecutions of the 17th century.

A second chapter by Trude Fonneland brings a new dimension to research into Sami shamanism and the visibility of the revival movement in Northern Norway as encountered in an annual mind, body, and spirit festival called *Isogaisa*, where shamans from all over the world meet. Her analysis is set against the backdrop of colonialism and the re-emergence of shamanism in Norway, where it is now recognised as an official religion. She also outlines how the organisers see shamanism as a countercultural force in relation to Christianity, and describes the festival events, which provide various experiences for visitors and enable a sense of community and continuity of tradition.

Siv Ellen Kraft examines the fundamental role music plays in the re-emergence of the Sami *joik* through the work of Mari Boine in Indigeneity and identity. The merit of Kraft's work is that she analyses the effects of trance and altered states, the role and function of magic in shamanism, and the impact this has on audiences.

The only error I have found is made by Trude Fonneland, who in her discussion of the evolving shamanic movement in Norway and one of its key organisations, namely, the Shamanic Association, describes representative shaman Franck White Cougar as non-Sami (p. 43). To clarify: Franck is of Sami ancestry, and I understand this error has been corrected in more recent texts.

The quality and importance of this book for the study of Nordic

religion and Religious Studies in general may be summarised as follows: this is the first comprehensive contribution to ground its study of Sami religion in both a historical and modern context, thus capturing what can be called the 'Revival Movement' which is sweeping Northern Norway and the Baltic States.

In each contribution there are important examples of different discourses from Estonia, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the United States of America, which have been woven together to restore culture and identity. The book also captures how similar belief systems are evident in relation to spiritual practices and worldviews in the case of Sami and Native American Spirituality.

What is also important for the scientific study of religion is that personal accounts from different shamans have been given freely, in contrast to the duress suffered by the *noaidi* and healers during the colonial period between the 17th and 19th centuries. This freedom, it can be argued, plays a fundamental role in the contribution that the study of religion, tradition, nature worship, and the global network of shamanism makes to our understanding of this new religious domination in Norway and the re-emergence of shamanism in the Western world.

**Francis Joy,**

University of Lapland, Finland

FRANCIS JOY is a PhD Candidate at the University of Lapland Faculty of Art and Design, and researcher with the Sami Indigenous Research Team at the Arctic Centre. E-mail: francis.joy@ulapland.fi

**Tuomas Martikainen and François Gauthier (eds):** *Religion in the Neoliberal Age: Political Economy and Modes of Governance*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 248pp.

**François Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen (eds):** *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 250pp.

How is religion entangled with politics and economy in a globalised world? How can one explain the causes and outcomes of these entanglements? The answers to these questions are of necessity as varied and complex as the studied phenomena themselves. To orientate oneself in this landscape, where changing relationships between religion, state, and economy produce novel and at times even surprising outcomes, some sort of road map is desirable. To this end, the complementary volumes of *Religion in the Neoliberal Age* and *Religion in Consumer Society*, edited by François Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen, constitute an excellent guide.

'We live in the age of neoliberalism' is the opening statement of *Religion in the Neoliberal Age*, which few would contest. In a world seriously threatened with economic collapse neoliberal thinking seems to govern different if not all aspects of social life. The editors remind us, however, that the dominance of this 'finance and consumer-capitalist' ethos is not a new phenomenon but has developed in the last three

decades, alongside the process of globalisation. What we see before our eyes is the reaping of this development's fruit.

It is not only the world economy that is in danger of hitting rock bottom. Traditional religion, especially in Europe, has suffered a serious blow: relations between the state and Christian churches have weakened; the media increasingly governs the way people see the world; and since the 1960s a growing number of non-Christian religions have challenged the status and influence the churches once had. At the same time religions have gained a new visibility and importance in the post-Cold War world and in post-colonial geopolitics, heightened after 9/11. In addition, alternative spiritualities are growing in popularity, and in the process Weberian disenchantment is giving way to a religious re-enchantment. In the study of religion a favourite paradigm to explain the prospects of traditional religion has been the theory of secularisation in its various forms. However, Gauthier and Martikainen argue that in a globalising world the secularisation thesis is insufficient. Nor do they subscribe to the Rational Choice Theory, which explains the religious field in terms of utilitarian-minded actors following the logics of the marketplace economy. Instead of looking at the effects of socio-economic change as a one-way street where religion is simply a target, these books edited by Gauthier and Martikainen aim



at eliciting the various dialectical processes that take place between religion and state/society/economy.

The starting point of the above-mentioned two volumes is explained in the Preface of *Religion in Consumer Society*. The editors write:

In brief, our key thesis is that the twin forces of neoliberalism and consumerism are penetrating and transforming the 'religions' world-wide, though in locally embedded forms. [...] It should be well understood that these two volumes can be taken together as interpreting a single, complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. (p. xv)

Due to this focus on a 'single phenomenon', there is inevitably a considerable overlap between the two volumes; consumerism and neoliberalism intermingle and so do both books' articles. At the same time these volumes are constructed around somewhat different perspectives so that one can read them independently, and they certainly also make interesting reading as individual works. In what follows, however, I will discuss them interchangeably.

The focus of *Religion in the Neoliberal Age* is on the institutional issues where management, regulation, governance, and securitisation constitute some key processes. Eleven articles are divided into two parts, of which the first deals with religions in the new political economy and the second with the political governance of religion. *Religion in Consumer So-*

*ciety* continues with similar themes but focuses more clearly on consumerism and how religions operate in societies where consumerism is a culturally and socially dominant ethos. This volume is also divided into two parts: the first examines 'changing world religions', while the second examines 'commoditised spiritualities'.

The current political economy, infused as it is with consumerism, offers challenges but also opportunities for both well-established churches and other forms of spirituality. With respect to the former Schlamelcher and Gray (*Religion in the Neoliberal Age*) and Petterson (*Religion in Consumer Society*) give examples of the new roles that the German Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland, and the Lutheran Church of Sweden have acquired. When church membership declines and people are distanced from the church, mainstream churches need to find new ways of attracting people. People are seen increasingly as a consumerist clientele who are enticed to church by new services and novel spaces. In other words, churches need to brand their functions in competing with each other to attract people to their folds. Some are more successful than others.

*Religion in Consumer Society* offers many other examples of the entanglements of religion with consumerism, such as American megachurches (Ellingson), Catholic monasticism (Palmisano), Judaism

(Niculescu), and Buddhism (McKenzie). For example, megachurches in the USA work on 'the cult of the individual' and 'sacralise consumerism' to appeal to their participants and constitute a new type of congregation. In the process they drastically influence the field of American Protestantism as a whole.

With respect to the political governance of religion churches can also find, and be given, new social roles in a multicultural society. For example, in Ireland the Catholic Church acts as an instrument of the government in the project of immigrant integration and, in the process, aims at gaining new legitimacy in Irish society, its reputation having been badly damaged by serious scandals. Hackworth (*Religion in Consumer Society*) goes as far as to use the term 'religious neoliberalism' with respect to the uneasy alliance between neoliberals and religious fundamentalists in the United States. It is exactly these kinds of example that secularisation theories fail to elicit or explain.

Awareness of neoliberal economy and politics draws attention to changes happening within churches and the effects that these changes have on the role of faith-based organisations in contemporary society. However, these changes concern not only well-established churches and religions, or 'world religions' as they are called in *Religion in Consumer Society*, but also have an effect on other forms of spirituality, as exemplified in the second part of the above-mentioned

volume. Whether 'new' or 'old', religious traditions are compelled to act in line with the market economy and its consumerist ethos. At the same time one should not be completely overwhelmed by the consumerist lens. In her article on Glastonbury as a historical pilgrimage site and locus of New Age spirituality Bowman draws attention to the self-understanding of the 'spiritual entrepreneurs' who regard their work for this religious centre as 'their own spiritual path, as an expression of their spiritual values and as being of service to the spiritual value of Glastonbury' (p. 223).

In addition to religion the effects of neoliberalism are also felt in other areas of state and society. Surprisingly, perhaps, not even the legal sphere has remained untouched by the market ideology, as Chagnon and Gauthier, as well as Beaman, demonstrate in *Religion in the Neoliberal Age*. Using Canada as an example, they demonstrate that the ethos of radical individualism and understanding social reality and personal aspirations purely in economic terms has infiltrated the definition of justice and the practice of law.

Another phenomenon that the secularisation theories fail to address is the state's need to manage or govern religions. The reason for this is highlighted by Spickard (*Religion in the Neoliberal Age*), who draws attention to a current trend whereby religions to a large extent tend to gain visibility as conserva-

tive, authoritarian, intolerant, and even violent traditions and, in the process, have lost their credibility as legitimate critics of current society and politics. In the face of this development, 'states have shown a growing interest in regulating religions in order to suppress or promote certain forms of religious behaviour', as Martikainen notes in the same volume (p. 129). These measures of regulation can take many forms, such as the securitisation or promotion of dialogue between the adherents of different religions. Thus, unwanted religious activism is controlled, for example, by counter-terrorism laws, or by using religions as instruments for the management of social and economic risk. In other words, religions play a dual role both as targets and allies of securitisation policies.

*Religion in the Neoliberal Age* and *Religion in Consumer Society* are weighty and inspiring reading due to their use of very rich empirical material from Europe and North America. In addition to presenting interesting empirical observations, many of the articles take part in a more theoretical discussion about the role and social place of religion. For the more theoretically oriented reader it is the introductions that offer the most thought-provoking reading. These introductions will be basic reading for anyone who seeks to be familiar with what is happening in the sociological study of contemporary religion. It is impossible here to go into detail concerning

the sophisticated argumentations of these introductions. I will therefore select one general theme that seems to be an underlying thought in both volumes.

Neoliberalism and consumerism have been heavily criticised. Against this, Gauthier and Martikainen maintain that 'a priori normative analytics' does not serve research's aim of grasping the diversity of religious phenomena in a 'globalized, hypermediatized political and cultural economy'. In their view avoiding a normative standpoint is also a necessity for working towards alternative theories concerning these phenomena. Doubtless, this would be a wise decision if one wanted to produce a multifaceted analysis of the complex processes of the contemporary world, as both volumes certainly do. At the same time it is difficult to turn a blind eye to the devastating effects of neoliberal politics and economics on the world at large. Where globalisation is concerned, it is obvious that free movement across borders and affluent, consumerist lifestyles are the privilege of but a few.

As Spickard notes (*Religion in the Neoliberal Age*), neoliberal politics 'have done tremendous damage to poor people around the world' (p. 47). He also draws attention to the annual report of the OECD, which shows that in different countries economic inequality has grown in the last thirty years of neoliberalism's hay day. In light of these observations neoliberalism seems largely to serve the interests of the world's wealthiest countries and the most

privileged segments of individual societies. Observations such as these make one very uneasy about claims to neutrality.

In research that aims at analysis instead of evaluation, as is the case with Gauthier and Martikainen, one could well turn the negative side-effects of neoliberalism into research questions and investigate how different religious institutions and actors support or critique neoliberal politics and economy. Moreover, one cannot avoid asking how the picture would change if, instead of western countries, the volumes had also covered cases from Africa and Asia. This might be a second step: to look at and test the observation and arguments provided by *Religion in the Neoliberal Age* and *Religion in Consumer Society* in a more global context.

The above-mentioned reservations notwithstanding, one can only congratulate Gauthier and Martikainen for their innovative and outstanding work in *Religion in the Neoliberal Age* and *Religion in Consumer Society*. These two volumes offer an excellent springboard for further empirical research and novel theory-making in the sociology of religion.

**Tuula Sakaranaho**

University of Helsinki, Finland

TUULA SAKARANAHO is Professor of the Study of Religions, University of Helsinki.  
E-mail: tuula.sakaranaho@helsinki.fi

**Lori G. Beaman and Steven Tomlins (eds):** *Atheist Identities: Spaces and Social Contexts*. Cham: Springer, 2015, 219pp.

Atheists, the non-religious, and the religiously unaffiliated have become a popular research topic in many disciplines and subject areas, including religious studies. *Atheist Identities*, edited by Lori Beaman and Steven Tomlins, is the second volume in the series *Boundaries of Religious Freedom: Regulating Religion in Diverse Societies*. It deals with questions related to atheist identities, particularly in the North Atlantic, meaning, in this case, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. It consists of eleven chapters and the editors' introduction. The contributors are in various stages of their careers, consisting of PhD students, established scholars, and emeritus professors. The volume's origin lies in a workshop held in Ottawa in 2012.

The starting point of the volume is the observation that the terms used in studying atheist (and closely related) identities are messy. However, the task is not to get rid of this messiness if the object of study is a heterogeneous field with people carrying multiple and situational identity tags, but to make sense of the complexities of the field of study. The volume does this by organising various approaches and focusing on three levels: social identities, group identities, and individual identities. In practice, this means studying the constructions and negotiations

of atheist identities in the public sphere, examining atheist activist organisations, and analysing atheism as an individual's self-identity within and without activist organisations. I find this three-level approach very useful analytically.

Although this would be an adequate framework for a coherent and relevant volume, the editors add to it the themes of multiculturalism, regulation, and reasonable accommodation (including questions such as 'Does multiculturalism include atheist identities?') This part works well in some chapters, but it is not explicitly addressed by most. It seems to me that this is a link between atheist identities – a relevant topic in itself – and the series highlights regulation, governance, and religious freedom as its key words.

In addition to data that is already in the public sphere the chapters utilise ethnographic fieldwork and participant observations, interviews, and surveys, thus guaranteeing a multifaceted examination of the topic. The individual chapters themselves provide relevant findings, but together they provide an opportunity for cross-national and cross-cultural comparison. Two results are noteworthy. First, as the editors suggest, 'A defining difference remains between the more hostile atmosphere towards atheists in the United States and the much more indifferent/accepting climate in Canada and the United Kingdom' (p. 5). This is interesting, because it argues that neighbouring countries can have very different 'climates'

for atheism and that geographically distant countries can resemble each other in this respect. Second, the volume's findings argue for the significance of nation-specific explorations of atheism, rather than universally applicable generalisations. This is concomitant with David Martin's take on the secularisation debate. As he writes in *The Future of Christianity* (Ashgate, 2011, p. 7), 'the theory of secularization [...] is profoundly inflected by particular histories, which in the modern period are national histories qualified in a minor or major way by regional variations'. Martin's argument is not referenced in *Atheist Identities*, but on the basis of findings of individual chapters it can be suggested that the same insight applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the study of atheism.

Rather than summarising and evaluating each chapter deeply, I shall limit myself to a couple of comments, some appreciative and some critical. William A. Stahl's overview of the Canadian religious context – a chapter driven by Charles Taylor's insights – is followed by Lori Beaman's superb chapter on atheist involvement in legal cases. With two examples she argues convincingly that ostensibly religious symbols such as a cross located in the classroom are re-articulated as cultural and national symbols with heritage-value in selected present day nation-states, thus representing atheists as people who are not only irreligious but against the dominant values of society more generally. One of the cases concerns Italy and

the European Court, thus departing from the volume's geographical focus, but it is a chapter worth reading.

Stephen LeDrew's chapter persuades us to think of the history and current forms of atheism in terms of binaries such as 'scientific atheism' and 'humanistic atheism', 'confrontation' and 'accommodation', 'individualism' and 'social justice'. These are useful ideal-types in simplifying the complexities of historical and current positions, particularly in American atheist discourse. They illustrate the so-called 'New Atheism', which highlights science, confrontation, and individualism, but I am unsure whether the other halves of the binaries form a clear-cut whole. Furthermore, it is possible to find well-known public intellectuals who could be seen as representing both scientific and humanistic atheism, such as A. C. Grayling.

Altogether five chapters focus on atheist or non-religious organisations of various kinds. Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith write about organised secularist rituals in the United States, while Spencer Bullivant analyses his fieldwork experience in the United States at a non-religious summer camp called Camp Quest. Steven Tomlins and Christopher Cotter explore atheist university clubs in Ottawa and Edinburgh respectively, while Lorna Mumford focuses on London's non-religious meeting groups. These are all relevant recent case studies of organisations that received little scholarly attention a decade ago.

Peter Beyer traces what he calls the 'punctuated continuum' of identities among young immigrants in Canada and demonstrates that it might be wiser to talk about 'a continuum of identities ranging from one socially operative category to another – here atheism and religion – than of an arrangement of people into a delimited set of categories, whether two or more' (p. 139). This insight is implicitly present in many chapters of this volume, including Amarnath Amarasingam's study of Sri Lankan Tamil youth in Canada, which demonstrates nicely how religious identification can mean ethnic and cultural belonging rather than a belief-position. However, as it fails to address atheist identities explicitly, it fits less well with the rest of this volume than the other chapters.

The volume concludes with Ryan Cragun's survey analysis of atheists in the United States. It confirms what is already known – that atheists are typically young, white, unmarried (partly because of their age), liberal, and well-educated men. Cragun also explores the differences between 'New Atheists' and 'other atheists'. Although I consider this approach extremely relevant, the operationalisation of 'New Atheists' is somewhat flawed. Cragun includes in the category all who meet three criteria: (1) those who do not believe in God and life after death; (2) those who agree that evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth; and (3) those who think that the Bible is a book written by men and is not the word

of God. It is unsurprising that these extremely broad criteria result in the conclusion that 80% of all atheists are considered 'New Atheists'. I am convinced that this percentage encompasses such a diverse group of people – not to mention their heterogeneous attitudes towards Dawkins and other well-known so-called 'New Atheists' – that narrower criteria would have been appropriate.

Finally, I wish to raise two minor points that apply to the whole volume. First, the editors define atheism in the introduction as '*the belief that there is no God, no gods, no Goddess, and no goddesses*' (p. 4, emphasis original). I have no quarrel with this definition, but if the objective of the volume is to study atheist identities by highlighting how people understand what their atheism consists of, what it entails, and which practices are appropriate for it, it is not clear to me why an analytical definition of atheism is preferred to people's self-identification. Many chapters would be good if they defined their scope of study with a focus on people identifying as atheists or who are active in organisations that apply the term.

Second, although the volume focuses on North America and the United Kingdom, it could have included more references to other areas. I am mainly thinking of continental Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Nordic countries. For example, a special issue of *Approaching Religion* (1/2012), *The New Visibility of Atheism in Europe*,

which deals with such areas as well as the United Kingdom, and offers a comparison between Scandinavia and the United States, is not utilised (although there is a passing reference to one of its articles in the thematic issue). The issue was published on open access six months before the meeting that initiated this volume, so it would have been quite easy to contextualise the findings from North America and the United Kingdom more strongly in relation to previously published studies.

Despite these few critical comments, this volume is indispensable for anyone wishing to contribute to the study of atheist identities in the contemporary world. Its individual chapters offer useful case studies and I assume that many readers will want to read the whole volume, because most of the contributions are so strongly related. It also demonstrates that the topic must be addressed on at least three levels – the social, the group, and the individual – and that the kind of identity people have is strongly dependent on their various national histories.

**Teemu Taira**

University of Helsinki, Finland

TEEMU TAIRA is Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religions, University of Helsinki.  
E-mail: teemu.taira@helsinki.fi



**Tomáš Bubík and Henryk Hoffmann (eds):** *Studying Religions with the Iron Curtain Closed and Open: The Academic Study of Religion in Eastern Europe*. Leiden, Brill, 2015, xviii+320pp.

This book is the ultimate result of an international grant project entitled 'Development of the Study of Religions in Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th Century', supported by the Czech Science Foundation. Participants in the project were charged with undertaking a historical and systematic analysis of the academic study of religion in their own countries. The overall objective was to provide the international community of scholars of religion with the first new, comprehensive treatise on the development of 'Religious Studies' in this region of Europe in the English language. 'Our fundamental hypothesis [for the project],' the editors note, 'is that the field, as a constituent of the humanities, is specifically inclined to idealization, perhaps even more so than any other discipline' (p. x), and the 'main contribution of the book', they maintain, will 'test whether and to what extent the Study of Religions has such a proclivity to chronic idealization', especially, but not only, under Communist regimes (p. x). Individual national studies in this volume include, in order, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, and Russia.

In 'The Czech Journey to the Academic Study of Religion', subtitled 'From the Critique of Religion

to its Study', Tomáš Bubík provides a brief survey of the historical and cultural conditions that impacted the development of the academic study of religion as a backdrop to its decline during the Communist era after 1948. By 1954, he shows, scientific atheism had become the primary theoretical approach to understanding religion, replacing the academic study of religion with anti-church and anti-religious propaganda (p. 31). A scholarly approach re-emerged in the Republic after the dissolution of the Institute of Scientific Atheism, an approach 'characterized by the most unbiased standpoint possible', as Bubík puts it, 'even if the truly objective standpoint cannot be reached' (p. 46). This new, scientific approach to understanding and explaining religious phenomena and religions is now anchored in such institutions as university departments, in journals for publication of academic research on religions, and in academic societies that support research in this field nationally and internationally.

David Václavík provides an analysis of the development of the study of religion in Slovakia, indicating the problems for the field given that a Slovakian national identity emerged only in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and given the loss of independent statehood for Slovakia after World War II. The domination of the Marxist scientific worldview after 1948, moreover, had a significant negative impact on the study of religions in that country. It is only with the demise of the Slovakian Institute of Scientific Atheism after

1989, he points out, that interest in the academic study of religion was particularly influenced by the social sciences, especially psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

In his research on the study of religions in Poland Henryk Hoffmann provides a summary of its development from the nineteenth century to the present. Hoffmann shows that there was clearly a 'secularist current' in the field that lasted until 1918 and that the interwar period was dominated by a diffusionist 'cultural historical method' intent on demonstrating an 'ur-cultural monotheism'. No department or institute of scientific atheism, he points out, was ever established in Poland during the Communist period, and the study of religions attained academic recognition in the 1970s. As for the present status of the field, he writes: 'Despite many difficulties initially associated with the lack of state, and later because of many complications of [a] political and ideological nature, Polish study of religions developed gradually, in accord with its international development.' (p. 118)

András Máté-Tóth and Csaba Máté Sarnyai provide an overview of the study of religion in Hungary by way of brief biographies and summaries of the views of the field's most representative influential scholars, and supply an overview of its most significant publications. They see the development as having occurred in four distinct periods: a period of liberal thought from 1860 to 1920; a nationalist period from 1920 to 1950; a period of open hostility to the field under the Communist regime from

1950 to 1990; and what they call a pluralist period from 1990 to the present. They maintain that scholars in Hungary were always open to the scholarship of highly respected international colleagues in the field throughout the atheistic period, indicating/suggesting continuity of the work in Hungary with the study of religion outside Soviet influence.

Ülo Valk and Tarmo Kulmar write: 'The history of Religious Studies as an academic discipline in Estonia has developed over time in three main directions, each primed by specific ideological factors and sometimes also political needs.' (p. 167) These directions include the long history of interest in Christianity, in Oriental Studies, and Indology in the nineteenth century, as well as research into ethnic religions and pre-Christian mythology. They attempt to provide an overall picture of the field in brief accounts of the outstanding scholars who best represented these trends. Their account clearly shows that the internal priorities of the discipline were mostly subordinated to ideological directives (p. 182), although they think the field today is experiencing 'a powerful internationalization process' (p. 197).

Janis Priede focuses his study of the Study of Religions in Latvia on its development in the twentieth century since, as he maintains, '[a]ny attempt to introduce a strict chronological division between the pre-academic and academic study of religion in Latvia is arbitrary' (p. 200). He pays attention, therefore, to the most significant scholars in the field in the twentieth century, especially

those who continued the tradition of 'the study of religion started by philologists, literary scholars, folklore specialists, and Orientalists [...]' (p. 238). The two important strands of study today, he points out, include folk religion and mythology, which had been a significant field after World War I, and, interestingly, the religious ideas to be found in Latvian (and Russian) writers.

Liudmyla Fylypovych and Yuriy Babinov maintain that although it can in some senses be considered 'one of the oldest branches of human knowledge', the study of religion in Ukraine is nevertheless a young discipline (p. 239). Early in the twentieth century research on religions came under strict ideological control and its major task became the propagation of atheistic thinking. Despite that pressure, however, they claim that Ukrainian scholars succeeded in exploring a range of serious questions in the field, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union, moreover, the discipline was renewed. 'Today,' they write, 'Religious Studies coexist in Ukraine in parallel academic and theological modes, which complement each other rather than competing [because the] secularity of academic Religious Studies does not imply hostility towards religions [...]' (p. 256).

In outlining 'Religious Studies' in Russia Ekaterina Elbakyan raises the interesting question as to whether a 'Soviet Religious Studies' ever really existed. Nevertheless, Elbakyan also notes that in the pre-war years Russian scholars were engaged in studying Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and religions of the East such as

Buddhism. This research, however, was largely in support of atheistic propaganda, and especially so from the 1950s to the 1980s. Elbakyan, moreover, points out that '[i]ssues concerning the theory of scientific atheism as well as the question of its exact placement among other social sciences occupied an important position in Soviet research of the time' (p. 291). Tasks listed for future consideration include distinguishing the study of religions from theology (transcendent matters), solidifying its academic character, and integrating it into the broader international framework of religious studies.

These historical reflections on the study of religions in Eastern European countries show that despite difficult political conditions and ideological influences, the Study of Religions, as the editors put it, has 'gradually but steadily moved forward' (p. xv), and has filled in many gaps in understanding the discipline from a global perspective. I think the editors are also justified in claiming that this volume brings into view primary sources of materials related to the study of religion in these countries which is relevant not only in understanding the history of this specific discipline but also of the humanities in general (p. iv).

**Donald Wiebe**

University of Toronto, Canada

DONALD WIEBE is Professor at Trinity College in the University of Toronto, [dwiebe@trinity.utoronto.ca](mailto:dwiebe@trinity.utoronto.ca)



## Contributors

JAMIE BARNES is Teaching Fellow of Sociology with Special Reference to the Study of Religion at the University of Sussex. E-mail: [jb368@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:jb368@sussex.ac.uk)

ANNA HAAPALAINEN is Doctoral Candidate in Comparative Religion at the University of Turku. Email: [anna.haapalainen@utu.fi](mailto:anna.haapalainen@utu.fi)

GÁBOR ITTZÉS is Advisor for Academic Affairs to the Reformation Memorial Committee of Hungary and an affiliate at Károli Gáspár University, Budapest. E-mail: [temenos@ittzes.eu](mailto:temenos@ittzes.eu)

FRANCIS JOY is a PhD Candidate at the University of Lapland Faculty of Art and Design, and researcher with the Sami Indigenous Research Team at the Arctic Centre. E-mail: [francis.joy@ulapland.fi](mailto:francis.joy@ulapland.fi)

JON P. MITCHELL is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex. Email: [J.P.Mitchell@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:J.P.Mitchell@sussex.ac.uk)

MINNA OPAS is Senior Research Fellow in Comparative Religion at the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Turku. Email: [minna.opas@utu.fi](mailto:minna.opas@utu.fi)

JESSICA RIVERS is Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Communication and Culture at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA. Email: [jarivers@indiana.edu](mailto:jarivers@indiana.edu)

TUULA SAKARANAHO is Professor of the Study of Religions, University of Helsinki. E-mail: [tuula.sakaranaho@helsinki.fi](mailto:tuula.sakaranaho@helsinki.fi)

TEEMU TAIRA is Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religions, University of Helsinki. E-mail: [teemu.taira@helsinki.fi](mailto:teemu.taira@helsinki.fi)

DONALD WIEBE is Professor at Trinity College in the University of Toronto, [dwiebe@trinity.utoronto.ca](mailto:dwiebe@trinity.utoronto.ca)

