TEMENOS

NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION

VOLUME 58 NO. 1

THE FINNISH SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION

2022

The journal is supported by
Nordic Board for Periodicals in the
Humanities and the Social Sciences.

ISSN 2342-7256

TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Volume 58 No. 1

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TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 5–6
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.115492

Editorial Note

2022 has not started as positively as was hoped. The unjustified war and unnecessary loss of life in Ukraine and the prolongation of the Covid-19 pandemic are darkly colouring the beginning of the year. Our thoughts are with all Ukrainians and our Ukrainian academic colleagues now struggling to survive – and later to rebuild their lives.

Current world events have again highlighted the importance of research and our ability to understand the role religion and religious and spiritual phenomena play in societies and as part of social and political processes. The present collection of articles in Temenos contributes to this end by exploring both historical and contemporary material. All the articles in their own way add to our knowledge of the co-constitution of people's religious and social worlds.

The issue begins with last year's Temenos lecture, 'Putting a Q into the Study of Religions: Observations from a Global Mixed Method Study of Religiosity with the Faith Q-set', delivered by Professor Peter Nynäs from Åbo Akademi University on 24 November 2021. In his lecture Nynäs discusses some of the key features of Åbo Akademi University's Centre of Excellence's Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) project, which is truly unique in both its methods and scope.

The following two articles explore processes related to otherworldly and divine beings. James R. Lewis's and Margarethe Løøv's article focuses on processes of divinization. By exploring the case of Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falung Gong, the authors aim to show how contrary to many previous views, processes of divinization or deification are to be understood as versatile and unfolding over longer periods. The authors argue that in addition to being gradual, the interaction between the leader and their followers, which often takes place in social spaces set apart from the wider society, is central to processes of divinization. These processes are also often about coping with external threats. The authors further observe that processes of divinization always depend on their wider cultural and religious context.

In his article Simon Nygaard examines the types of otherworldly beings in pre-Christian Nordic religion from a cultural evolutionary perspective. Building on Robert N. Bellah's and Philippe Descola's views, the author shows how different types of beings can be arranged in different categories

of religiosity in an evolutionary typology. Adding a new category, chiefdom religion, to Bellah's categorization, Nygaard suggests that the different beings of Nordic pre-Christian religion can be understood as gradually evolving from collectives of beings with an anonymous identity associated with tribal religion to the somewhat more individualized beings associated with chiefdom religion, and the highly individualized and often anthropomorphic beings belonging to archaic religion. However, the author notes that despite the dependence of such evolution on social and cultural change, the different beings remain linguistically and functionally connected.

The final two articles in this issue focus on contemporary practices related to Christian churches in the Nordic countries. Laura Kokkonen's contribution focuses on branding in the Orthodox Church of Finland (OCF). In studying official church strategy documents and interviews, she examines how branding is discussed in the Orthodox Church. Kokkonen identifies two main parallel discourses, as well as occasionally contradictory branding-related hegemonic discourses. Although according to the first the church is considered not to engage in branding, in the second marketing is understood as appropriate and even recommendable for the OCF. Based on a study of these discourses, the author concludes that there is an uncertainty in the OCF's relationship with branding. On the one hand marketing and branding are considered incompatible with the idea of the church's authenticity; on the other marketing is considered useful for the church.

In their contribution Anne Agersnap, Kirstine Helboe Johansen, and Ross Deans Kristensen-McLachlan examine Christian cultural tradition and history through Danish Evangelical Lutheran sermons from 2011 to 2016. The examination is based on a study of nearly 12,000 sermons. The authors pay attention to the characters discussed in the sermons and the thematic narrative clusters they form to identify what their interrelations disclose about interpretations of the Bible and history. Taken together, the analysis of biblical figures, political characters, and a class of versatile characters shows that the Evangelical Lutheran pastors are simultaneously stable, reproductive, and experimental in their sermons. They employ well-known biblical stories in the sermons but tell them in contemporary ways. The authors thus conclude that the sermons are a way for the pastors to collectively engage in a dialogue between the Bible and history.

In addition to these articles, the issue includes four book reviews engaging with current publications in our field.

We hope you will enjoy this issue!

Minna Opas and Sofia Sjö

TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 7–40
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.116001

Temenos Lecture 2021

Putting a Q into the Study of Religions: Observations from a Global Study with the Faith Q-Sort

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Abstract

The Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) research project implemented a cross-cultural, comparative, and mixed-method study of religious subjectivities in twelve countries worldwide. At the core of YARG was the use and development of the Faith Q-Sort (FQS), originally designed by David Wulff (2019). The FQS is based on Q methodology and a novel method in the study. Religion as an object of study has become increasingly evasive, and the FQS met our ambition of finding sensitive ways to assess contemporary religiosity in an international perspective. This article seeks to describe the project with a specific focus on the FQS. I draw here on other publications from the project, and our use of the FQS is further exemplified by two of the main analyses we conducted: the bird's-eye view of the shared patterns of being religious in the international sample, and the exploration of cross-cultural variations of these patterns across our country-specific cases.

The Åbo Akademi University Centre of Excellence in research (CoE) Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) project is a cross-cultural, comparative, and mixed-method study of contemporary religion, non-religiosity, and spirituality. It set out to explore broad questions: What are the characteristics of the religious subjectivities and values among young adults globally? What are the main discourses that constitute and shape these subjectivities? What are the methodological and theoretical implications that follow from our results in how contemporary religion is conceived and

studied? These questions are ambitious, especially given that we also aim for cross-cultural reliability. The ambition is therefore better understood as exploratory (see Stebbins 2011); to present some relevant snapshots with reference to the research interests the initial questions define.

We have already contributed results and observations pertaining to the questions to several publications. The journal *Religion* published a special issue on religion and socialization (Klingenberg and Sjö 2019), and Routledge published a volume on religion and media, *Digital Media, Young Adults and Religion: An International Perspective* (Moberg and Sjö 2020). Springer published the volume *The Diversity of Worldviews among Young Adults: Contemporary (Non)Religiosity and Spirituality through the Lens of an International Mixed Method Study* (Nynäs et al. 2022a), and the volume *Interdisciplinary Studies in Sensitizing Religious Variety in a Global Perspective: Between Universalism and Particularism* (Nynäs et al. 2023, forthcoming) is contracted with Equinox as part of their Study of Religion in a Global Context series. The chapter 'The Faith Q-Sort: In-Depth Assessment of Diverse Spirituality and Religiosity in 12 Countries' (Nynäs, Kontala, and Lassander 2021) also merits mention. This article draws on the results and observations of these publications. It overlaps with and is indebted to several of these publications.

I will focus here on some elementary aspects of the YARG project. In the first part of the article I describe the central ideas behind YARG, including theoretical observations and issues related to method and the FQS. In the second part I exemplify how the FQS made a relevant contribution to our interest in comprehending contemporary religious subjectivities. I describe and discuss our study of the shared patterns of being religious, and how they vary across our country-specific cases. This provides a rationale for some reflections on the religious typology and the assumed universal character of such categories.

Current challenges in the study of religions

Researching contemporary religion entails several challenges, and the YARG project was united by two notions especially. First, it has been claimed that 'religion' has changed in recent decades, and we have therefore more often been confronted with the question 'What should scholars of religion deal with in their studies?' Second, it has simultaneously become apparent that we need to make an additional effort to deal with the different biases in our approaches and limitations that to a large extent reflect a dominant Western

position in the field. These notions constituted the core of the YARG project and require some explication.

In contrast with simplified assumptions about a linear disappearance of religious themes, ideas, practices, and phenomena, discussions about secularization in the West have recently shifted to religious change (see e.g. Nynäs, Lassander, and Utriainen 2012; Woodhead 2012). These have involved a range of interrelated theoretical frameworks or conceptualizations such as de-secularization (Berger 1999), re-sacralization (Davie 2010), re-enchantment (Partridge 2005), post-secularity (Habermas 2006; Nynäs, Lassander, and Utriainen 2012), un-churching (Fuller 2001), and de-Christianization (Brown and Lynch 2012), to name a few. Some researchers approach religious change against the background of a general social and cultural process, for example, in terms of a 'subjective or expressive turn' (Heelas and Woodhead 2005), while others refer to international processes and point to an 'Easternization of the West' (Campbell 2007) or approach change from a perspective of historical processes and speak of the emergence of a 'new style religion' that is replacing 'reformation style religion' (Woodhead 2012).

Despite the variety of perspectives, we can underline one initial important observation: we need to be more attentive to how incompatible current secularization processes are with certain forms of religion and spirituality (e.g. Berger 1999; Day et al. 2013; Turner 2010; Nynäs, Illman, and Martikainen 2015). A strict juxtaposition between religion and secularity today entails a simplistic picture; the reconfiguration of religiosity and spirituality evolves alongside the growth of nonreligion. A growing body of research highlights that people increasingly mix ideas, practices, and identities in novel ways, following the changing organization of religion, secularization, and increasing religious diversity (e.g. van der Braak and Kalsky 2017; Bruce and Voas 2007; Woodhead 2012; Gilhus and Sutcliffe 2013; af Burén 2015; Nynäs, Illman, and Martikainen 2015; Nynäs 2017). The complexity and diversification this may entail requires us to be attentive to how change is differently manifested at societal, cultural, and individual levels. Secularization does not erase religion but comprises a change in the conditions for 'religious belief', and this has further consequences for how it can be expressed (Taylor 2007; Warner, Vanantwerpen, and Calhoun 2010).

Studies of contemporary religion have also made it clear that we need to broaden our horizon and account for sociocultural shifts in societies that are of a global nature. For example, studies of the role of media (e.g. Granholm, Moberg, and Sjö 2015; Moberg and Sjö 2020), consumerism (e.g. Gauthier and

Martikainen 2013; Gauthier 2020), and social movements (e.g. Nynäs and Lassander 2015) provide vital perspectives on these changes. Such developments may entail implications for understandings of religious authority and mechanisms of religious socialization, for example (e.g. Brown and Lynch, 2012). Beck's (2010, 42) claim that in contrast with a previous focus on the interrelation between nation and religion 'we see the formation of a new, religiously determined, global sociality in which increased significance is attached to transnational, religious imagined communities which complement, and enter into competition and conflict with the institutionalized forms of national societies and national institutions' thus makes sense.

The need to be more aware of current shifts goes hand in hand with the need to engage with religion outside the Western sphere. However, this is not only a matter of geography. Rather, it is entangled with conceptual and epistemological challenges. In writing about the 'Global East', Yang (2018) underlines that our comprehension of East Asian societies and cultures also needs to include diasporic communities of East Asians and the more general impact of East Asian culture and religion on the West. Furthermore, he claims that this 'presents theoretical and methodological challenges for the social scientific study of religion' (Yang 2018, 7). Yang sides here with several other scholars who draw our attention to how religion has often been one-sidedly conceptualized and assessed as a transhistorical universal essence, while religion as a concept has often been provincial in practice (e.g. Asad 1993; 2003; Balagangadhara 2005; Chakrabarty 2000; Masuzawa 2005; Winzeler 2008). The study of religions has been affected by a bias of presupposing conceptual similarity between various religious traditions. Research on religion has mainly been conducted by Western scholars and on religion in the West, and both common ways of approaching religion and specific measures or assessment tools have emerged on a Western and predominantly Christian horizon.

The conceptual bias is also related to the debate on universality versus particularism in the study of religions: the universality assumption clashes with the increasingly prevailing notion of cross-cultural incommensurability (e.g. Balagangadhara 2014a; 2014b). For example, as Balagangadhara (2014b, 41) states concerning the application of 'Western' understandings of religion on the study of religion in India, scholars tend to assume 'that religion is a cultural universal and that the difference between Indian and western culture (among other things) lies in the difference between their "religions"'. Again, however, we need to admit that the bias in relation to non-Western cultures that we try to address therefore also has wider implications for the

study of religions. Woodhead (2010) underlines that spirituality has often been understood to be socially precarious, because we think of institutions in terms of established churches and hierarchical structures. 'Here again,' Woodhead (2010, 42) writes, 'we see the distorting effect of identifying "real" religion with historic western churches.' This implies a cautious position regarding essentialist, limited, generic understandings of religion based on theistic, doctrinal, institutionally based faith (Beckford 2003; Day 2010; 2011) and a need to abandon dysfunctional categories and models and instead approach religion as a hybrid (Lassander 2012).

Scholars have increasingly engaged with how to develop the conceptual toolkit of the study of religions (e.g. Bowman and Valk 2012; Droogers and van Harskamp 2014; Lassander 2012; 2014; McGuire 2008; Nynäs, Illman, and Martikainen 2015). It is natural that concepts such as religion, spirituality, and belief are created and defined within various forms of academic enterprise. Yet to continue this development, we also need to be attentive to the social location of religion and 'its role in bringing into being forms of identity that actors strategically create in order to adapt to and integrate themselves into various social situations' (Day, 2010, 10). In short, there is a need today to de-centre taken-for-granted categories and perspectives in the study of religions (see Bender et al. 2013a).

Q methodology and the Faith Q-Sort

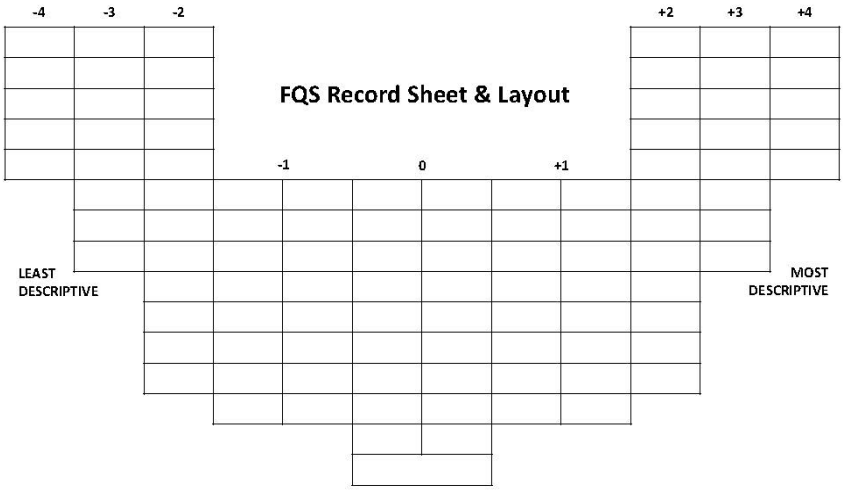
De Roover claims that 'the contemporary study of religion has a unique opportunity to settle the debate on the cultural universality of religion' (de Roover 2014, 2017). As was emphasized in the previous paragraph, in YARG we have taken this to indicate a need to develop new methodological approaches, and the FQS met our expectations. The FQS is based on Q methodology and was originally developed by David Wulff (2019) for the assessment of religion. Within the YARG study we developed and translated the FQS for cross-cultural use (see Nynäs, Kontala, and Lassander 2021).

Q methodology is rather unknown and is usually not discussed in the literature on method, with some exceptions (e.g. Newman and Ramlo 2010; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). It was developed in the 1930s by William Stephenson (1993/1994) to assess subjective viewpoints on a specific topic, or subjectivities. 'Subjectivity' here refers to the range of individual experiences that serve as a platform for agencies, identities, and social identifications, such as variations regarding preferences, emotions, values, desires, interests, practices, views, and beliefs. Subjectivities are fluid and relational

and emerge as parts of interpretative communities at play in various contexts (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007). Q methodology has therefore been found to be of value in a variety of fields, ranging from studies of political opinions and marketing research to studies of educational settings and personality psychology, including studies that assess worldviews (Block 1978; 2008; Brown 1980; Gabor 2013; Watts and Stenner 2012; van Exel and de Graaf 2005; McKeown and Thomas 2013; Nilsson 2015).

A Q study presents the respondents with statements that reflect a broad array of views on a subject matter, and the respondents then rank-order these statements on a record sheet (see Figure 1). The breadth covered by statements in a Q set is significant: it allows a variety of expressions of nuances and complexity and a variety of expected and unexpected configurations to emerge from an analysis. The validity of a Q set depends on how representative it is of the entire field or discourse being studied. A Q set is therefore derived from many different sources that reflect relevant views on the topic, both academic and non-academic points. This can include interviews, observations, literature, material from different media (van Exel and de Graaf 2005). Of course, there is not an endless option of viewpoints that people hold on a certain subject, and the assumption behind Q methodology is that only a limited number of distinct viewpoints exists on any topic (Brown 1980).

Figure 1 FQS Record sheet and layout. The 101 statements of the FQS are printed on cards, and respondents rank them by placing them in different categories on a layout. This reflects the extent to which the respondent identifies with a certain statement in comparison with other statements in the Q set of the FQS.



A Q method study is a qualitative procedure, but it is assisted by quantitative analyses. The individual sorts from a Q study provide an imprint of an individual position, and these can be compared between individuals. However, sorts are usually combined and analysed to achieve more general patterns. We call these prototypes. The data for these are extracted through an analysis of intercorrelations among Q sorts, which are then factor-analysed (see Schmolck 2017; Banasick 2019). The analysis provides tables with factor loadings, item factor scores, and distinguishing statements for each of the factors (prototypes), for example. Through an interpretation of these data the distinct patterns are defined, and these are described with more or less nuance. These prototypes are distinct, but they may also share characteristics. Some statements define a particular prototype, whereas others distinguish one prototype from the other. The latter can be exemplified by a case in which the statement 'Feels that one should remain loyal to the religion of one's nation' (FQS46) is ranked as +4 in one prototype but negatively by all other prototypes. Sometimes a prototype is constituted by a very small number of participants, but it remains relevant, because it is distinct from other prototypes and represents a unique point of view (see Watts and Stenner 2012).

The weaknesses of Q methodology should not be overlooked. The subjectivity and bias of the researcher is often missed (Robbins and Krueger 2000; Sneegas 2020), and the forced distribution in the ranking process may distort viewpoints (Kampen and Tamás 2014). The design of the Q set is critical to avoiding both. Another important aspect is the confusion related to Q methodology being a blend of both quantitative and qualitative analyses (Ramlo 2021). Stenner, Watts, and Worrell (2008, 218) underline that the 'Q sort as a data-collection form is designed to maximize the expression of qualitative variation and to record it in numerical form'. It is not primarily concerned with which proportion of a larger population is associated with which prototype, lacking the possibility to quantify generalizations (see e.g. Thomas and Baas 1992/1993). A Q study will yield results that are closer to concluding that white, brown, and yellow tigers exist than claiming that all crows are black.

Except for McKeown's (2001) Q set for Christian Orthodoxy, Q methodology is relatively new in religious studies. David Wulff (2019) designed the FQS to meet the growing challenge of how to assess religiosity and spirituality and designed an instrument that differed substantially from most other instruments in the field, such as the well-known Allport-Ross Religious Orientation Scale, ROS (Allport 1950; Allport and Ross 1967). Wulff (2019)

compiled 101 statements that reflected major religious traditions, including observations from subfields in the study of religions. The statements tap into ways of thinking and viewing. It covers experiential and emotional dimensions and practices and ways of doing things. Wulff's version was developed in a North American context but has also been successfully used in some studies with both religious and nonreligious groups in other contexts (Kontala 2016; Lassander and Nynäs 2016; Pennanen 2013; Terho 2013).

Any cross-cultural study requires a thorough method assessment. To achieve validity involves item-by-item international, multilingual, and cross-cultural validation of all statements (Wolf et al. 2019). The ambition to produce an internationally valid version therefore requires modesty. For example, the process of producing valid statements tends to push the wording to a level of abstraction that does not necessarily reflect how people themselves express their views. If the statements in the Q set become too distanced from a real-life discourse, they may be difficult to comprehend, inviting participants to play a guessing game or making participants lose interest. In YARG our co-investigators and assistants from all countries could take part in developing Wulff's version. They suggested revisions of statements, proposed new ones, and addressed statements that were problematic for some reason. This contributed to the cross-cultural validity of the FQS with regards to the religious and spiritual worldviews across the world and resulted in the FQS-b. Only this version was used in the YARG study. Table 1 exemplifies statements from the FQS.

Table 1. Examples of statements from the Faith Q set

12. Participates in religious activities chiefly on special occasions.
16. Being religious or spiritual is central to whom he or she is.
29. Is inclined to embrace elements from various religious and spiritual traditions.
46. Feels that one should remain loyal to the religion of one's nation.
70. Rejects religious ideas that conflict with scientific and rational principles.
86. Is committed to following a spiritual path that is in harmony with the environment.

Method and data collection

The data for the YARG project were collected during 2015–16 using a mixed methods approach. The first part of this was a survey (N ≈ 300 / country) assessing the participants' current life situation, social life, sources of news and information, views and convictions, wellbeing and happiness, personal details, and the Portrait Value Questionnaire (Schwartz 1992; 2012; Schwartz et al. 2012). The YARG project is based on convenience sampling, and there is no way to tell if the sample is representative of a larger population and serves a more exploratory interest. Nevertheless, the survey provided valuable data for our sampling for the FQS study. A study with Q methodology does not require many respondents, but respondents need to reflect a variety of viewpoints. Our initial survey allowed a broad sample regarding gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, language groups, class, and value profile for the FQS part (n ≈ 45/ country).

Data were collected in twelve countries: Canada, China, Finland, Ghana, India, Israel, Sweden, Peru, Poland, Russia, Turkey, and the USA. These countries were chosen because they reflected a variety of national, cultural, religious, and linguistic contexts and cover the cultural value areas recognized in the World Value Survey and 'the Global Cultural Map' (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). In all countries we collaborated with a couple of universities where the data were collected, and our network of co-investigators and research assistants played a decisive role for the research process, gaining access, and data collection. Turning to university students was a deliberate choice with regards to our interest in contemporary religiosity and change. Compared with previous generations, social phenomena such as consumer culture and digital media have constituted an inherent and unquestioned experience of more recent generations. Beyer (2019, 278) concludes that 'millennials' have grown up with expanding global horizons and contexts that are 'better regarded as dynamic and contextual projects, as fluid nodes in networks of relations' (see also Possamai 2009; Palfrey and Gasser 2008). We assumed that university students generally had relatively extensive capital in this respect compared to other young adults. However, Klingenberg, Sjö, and Moberg (2022) showed in their analyses that the sample presents great variation across the cases. There is thus no definite homogeneity.

The material produced for the use of our respondents (the consent form, the survey, the FQS, etc.) was translated from English to target languages (Arabic, Bengali, Mandarin Chinese, Finnish, French, Hebrew, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Turkish) with a double back translation method to secure the highest comparability and reliability across cultures (Brislin

1970, 1980; Geisinger 1994; Hambleton 1993; 1994; Harkness 2003; Lin, Chen and Chiu 2005; Plake and Hoover 1979; van de Vijver and Hambleton 1996). This process revealed that religious vocabulary was often marked by biases: religion in one culture was often much more varied than a translator might realize. Translators could often present quite different proposals, and we needed to rely on local academic expert teams to decide on the most adequate translation. The theoretical issues involved in translation are well discussed in a separate publication by Broo et al. (2023, forthcoming).

Information on religious and secular life-views and data on opinions, attitudes, and values are sensitive, and many ethical concerns were raised in the project. We followed both national and European ethical guidelines (TENK 2009; ALLEA 2017). We attained (2015) ethical approval for the YARG project as a whole from the Åbo Akademi University Research Ethics Committee. Procedures for this vary between countries, and our co-investigators followed corresponding procedures in respective countries. In some countries personal worldviews are also politically sensitive. We have therefore refrained from further descriptions of the universities involved in the YARG study and where the data were collected.

Five global prototypes

Our research question about the characteristics of the religious subjectivities among young adults globally receives its most distinct answer in the 'Who are they and what do they value? – The five global worldviews of young adults' study by Nynäs, Keysar, and Lagerström (2022). The study presents an analysis of all the FQS sorts (N = 562), a bird's-eye view of shared patterns in the whole sample. We extracted five distinct prototypes: (1) Secular Humanist; (2) Active Confident Believer; (3) Noncommitted Traditionalist; (4) Spiritually Attuned; and (5) Disengaged Liberal. The narrative descriptions catch the most defining and distinguishing elements of each prototype. They are the result of interpretations; some nuances have been disregarded, and other aspects might have been emphasized more. Short narrative descriptions of the global prototypes follow.

> Secular Humanist:
> The Secular Humanist takes a clear distance to all religious ideas and practices. One is critical of the religious tradition of one's people, and one actively seeks to change societal structures and values, believing that human progress is possible on a worldwide scale. Individual freedom of choice in

matters of faith and morality is an important value, and one believes that one can be deeply moral without being religious. Consequently, the thought of dedicating one's life to serving the divine is a very foreign idea. One cannot identify with those who rely on religious authorities, who observe prescribed religious practices and laws, whose sexuality is strongly guided by a religious or spiritual outlook, and who experience the presence of the divine. In contrast, one views religion as the illusory creation of human fears and desires, and rejects religious ideas that conflict with scientific and rational principles. One views religious content as metaphoric, rather than literally true. The Secular Humanist feels spiritually moved and sustained by music, art, or poetry.

Active Confident Believer

The Active Confident Believer centers life on religion. One believes in a divine being with whom one can have a personal relationship, experiences the divine as a sheltering and nurturing parent who guides and protects. One is an active, contributing member of a religious or a spiritual community, and engages regularly in religious or spiritual practices also in private. One views religion as a central means for becoming a better and more moral person. Longing for a deeper, more confident faith is an essential part of one's life, and the idea of having a vague and shifting religious outlook feels foreign. One feels different from people who see no higher purpose or ultimate destiny for the human species. Neither can one identify with people who take no interest in religious or spiritual matters, or who feel distant, uncomfortable or fearful in turning to the divine. One feels foreign to consider all religious scriptures to be outdated or misguided, or to experience the idea of divinity empty of significance or meaning. One would not participate in religious practices chiefly to meet others' wishes or expectations: being religious or spiritual is central to whom the Active Confident Believer is.

Noncommitted Traditionalist

The Noncommitted Traditionalist values the cultural and societal role of religion. One feels the importance of remaining loyal to the religion of one's nation and of maintaining continuity of the religious traditions of family and ancestors. Personally, one prefers to claim that one believes in some way, but would not identify as religious. One is moved by the atmosphere of sacred or venerated places. One thinks that the world's religious traditions point to a common truth, perhaps that the ultimate is a life force or creative energy, rather than a supernatural being. Accordingly, one views

religious faith as a never-ending quest. Yet, there is no place in one's life for frequent doubts about long-held religious convictions, nor does one feel adrift, without direction, purpose, or goal. One does not identify with people who consider all religious scriptures to be outdated, misguided and of human authorship, who view religion as the illusory creation of human fears and desires, or who feel contempt for all religious institutions, ideas and practices. One feels very foreign to thinking that the idea of divinity is empty of significance or meaning, or to relate to the divine as feminine. One also takes comfort in thinking that those who do not live righteously will face suffering or punishment, and the Noncommitted Traditionalist values purity and strives to safeguard it.

Spiritually Attuned

For the Spiritually Attuned religion and spirituality are important sources of life. One believes in some way, but does not view oneself as religious and has not dedicated one's life to serving the divine. Nevertheless, one sees personal self-realization as a primary spiritual goal in life. One feels spiritually moved and deeply sustained by music, art, or poetry, but can also sense a spiritual or higher order of reality in the midst of nature. One is positively engaged by and interested in other peoples' religious traditions and inclined to embrace elements from various religious and spiritual traditions. One thinks about the ultimate as a life force or creative energy rather than as a supernatural being. One does not rely on religious authorities for understanding and direction, and takes a clear distance to ideas about certain beliefs being crucial for salvation and to claims that regular attendance at places of worship are essential expressions of faith. One does not take part in religious activities to form or maintain social relationships. Rather, one embraces an outlook that actively seeks to change societal structures and values, and actively works towards making the world a better place to live. The Spiritually Attuned cannot identify with notions about men and women being by nature intended for different roles, and is committed to following a spiritual path that is in harmony with the environment.

Disengaged Liberal

The life of the Disengaged Liberal does not center on a religious or spiritual quest. One does not identify as an active, contributing member of a religious or a spiritual community, nor as having thorough knowledge of religious scriptures or texts. Rather, one participates in religious activities chiefly on special occasions. One believes in some way, but does not view oneself as

religious. The divine is viewed as a deep mystery that can be pointed to but never fully understood, but still also as a sheltering and nurturing parent with whom one can have a personal relationship. One becomes more religious or spiritual in times of crisis or need, and prays chiefly for solace and personal protection. One is profoundly touched by the suffering of others, and charitable acts or social action are the primary expressions of one's religiosity. One does not identify with claims that religion should play the central role in the ruling of the nation, or that one should remain loyal to the religion of one's nation. The Disengaged Liberal stresses that one can be deeply moral without being religious. One cannot see oneself letting a religious or spiritual outlook guide one's sexuality or giving up worldly or bodily pleasures for religious or spiritual reasons.

These findings indicate that some religious subjectivities can be considered prominent to varying degrees. The cumulative variance of the global prototypes accounted for 43 per cent, with rather significant differences between single prototypes. The factor score correlations presented in Table 2 provide a good measure of how distinct the global prototypes are, and how they are related.

Table 2. Factor score correlations for global prototypes

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. GP1	–				
2. GP2	-.27	–			
3. GP3	.03	.46	–		
4. GP4	.59	.17	.23	–	
5. GP5	.47	.12	.31	.54	–

Note: GP = Global prototype.

Traditional categories such as secular, religious, and spiritual are well reflected in these results. Only global prototype 1, Secular Humanist, and global prototype 2, Active Confident Believer, are negatively correlated (r = -.27). Most participants in our study tend to be persons of a prototype that indicates that the secular versus the religious divide is significant. To a large extent people see themselves as either religious or secular, and this is a meaningful distinction. We will return to the fact that this is an organizing aspect for the prototypes. Briefly examining details of how these are distinguished, we find the quite theistic statement about believing 'in a

divine being with whom one can have a personal relationship' (FQS53) and the statement on viewing 'religion as the illusory creation of human fears and desires' (FQS60).

Yet we cannot ignore the distinct nature of the additional prototypes. Global prototype 3, Noncommitted Traditionalist, stands out as a 'religious' prototype, yet differently from prototype 2, Active Confident Believer. Table 2 confirms that they are close to each other and strongly correlated (r = .54), but they are also divided on significant issues. The relevance of personal belief and the role of practice is positively emphasized by global prototype 2, and the relevance of religious identity, in terms of one's tradition and nation, is positively emphasized by prototype 3. The highest correlation is found between global prototype 1, Secular Humanist, and global prototype 4, Spiritually Attuned (r = .59). The correlation between global prototype 5, Disengaged Liberal and both global prototypes 1, Secular Humanist, and 4, Spiritually Attuned, are also high (r=.47; r=.54). One may ask if these three represent a secular trinity. In contrast, the correlation between global prototype 2, Active Confident Believer, and global prototype 4, Spiritually Attuned, is low (r = .17), indicating a distance between being religious and spiritual. Despite the affinity between prototype 4, Spiritually Attuned, and prototype 1, Secular Humanist, they are still divided about issues such as the extent to which one 'rejects religious ideas that conflict with scientific and rational principles' (FQS70) and 'views religion as the illusory creation of human fears and desires' (FQS60), and the relevance one attributes to experiences of a higher or spiritual reality or presence (FQS10; FQS44; FQS68).

Typologies vs multidimensional complexity

Our results reflect Wulff's (2019) original findings with the FQS. Data from our survey also confirmed notable differences between the prototypes across multiple characteristics such as different measures of being religious or nonreligious (Nynäs, Keysar, and Lagerström 2022). Both gender and cross-cultural contextual differences are also relevant for the configurations, as are levels of openness and trust. The three global prototypes, 1 Secular Humanist, 2 Active Confident Believer, and 4 Spiritually Attuned, stand out in their trust for other people. Persons of prototype 2, Active Confident Believer, are most likely to feel positively about themselves and their future. Social moral attitudes and basic human values also play a relevant role. Global prototypes 1, Secular Humanist, and 4, Spiritually Attuned, clearly express liberal social values in contrast especially with prototypes 2, Active

Confident Believer, and 3, Noncommitted Traditionalist. A similar pattern emerges from our analyses of differences between global prototypes and basic human values. It is apparent that there is a close affinity between the value types of 2, Active Confident Believer, and 3, Noncommitted Traditionalist. Generally, the global prototypes seem to be divided along an axis consisting of universalism and self-direction versus tradition and conformity.

On the one hand our bird's-eye viewpoint presents some familiar universal categories of religion such as being religious, secular, or spiritual. On the other we can see that the image is also complicated, and patterns are distorted by other aspects. In other words we need to conceive of any typology as a work in progress, noting that 'typologies are mainly intended, rather, as intuitively distilled "idealized" portraits, intellectual tools for discerning and analyzing patterns of variation' (Wulff 2019, 661). Typologies serve as theoretical or conceptual devices; they are important to the extent that they help us reduce complexity and identify abstract characteristics assumed to be exemplified within empirical reality. Scholars have made various attempts to classify and organize worldviews in types, ranging from deductive 'armchair typologies' to inductive empirically based studies. An extensive list of such typologies can be found in Wulff (e.g. 1985; 2007) and in Hood, Hill, and Spilka (2018, 26–56). As a unidimensional construct, religiosity-related worldviews can be construed either as dichotomous (religious or nonreligious) or a continuum in which individuals can be more or less religious. As a multidimensional construct, various types of religiosity have been enumerated by William James (1902), Erich Fromm (1950), and the well-known classification describing religious orientations by Gordon Allport and Michael Ross (1967), for example. Later, the major Bs of religion – Believing, Behaving, Belonging, and Bonding – are often considered central to the construction of religious typologies (Saroglou 2011).

In a separate study we explored the main global prototypes at a more detailed and systematic level with regard to some prevalent typologies (Nynäs, Novis-Deutsch, and Stenner 2022). Reviewing the statements that define the five prototypes (Table 3), we can again conclude that a religious–secular distinction is a strong organizing dichotomy in our findings. For example, we can see that GP1's outspoken trust in scientific reasoning, a view of religion as an all-too-human creation, contrasts with the rankings of GP2's Active Confident Believer, centred around the belief in 'a divine being with whom one can have a personal relationship' (FQS53). In many respects GP1 and GP2 reflect diametrically opposed views. Yet GP4, Spiritually Attuned, distorts this model. The distinction between spirituality and religiosity is

debated regarding religious typologies (see e.g. Hodge and McGrew 2006; Zinnbauer et al. 1997). Some argue that religion and spirituality are facets of the same construct (e.g. Miller and Thoresen 2003; Hood et al. 2009, 8f.), whereas others view spirituality as an independent construct (e.g. Saucier and Skrzypinska 2006; Huss 2014). In the latter perspective spirituality is considered to be differentiated from religion in a value-laden way, emphasizing individual outlooks, seekership, openness, and holism, and is often associated with practices and means to attain insights and a connection with progressive liberal values and activism (Woodhead 2013).

Factor score correlations between prototypes (Table 2) confirm this as a strong positive correlation between the secular and the spiritual prototypes, and a negative or weak correlation in relation to the two religious prototypes. Table 3 further draws attention to the fact that persons of this prototype tend to affirm statement 28, 'believes in some way, but does not view him or herself as religious' but distance themselves from things that are important to GP2, Active Confident Believer, such as the notions of being an 'an active contributing member of a religious or a spiritual community' (FQS97). In contrast, they tend to agree with statements that are more characteristic of a secular worldview, such as 'views religious content as metaphoric, rather than literally true' (FQS87) and 'considers all religious scriptures to be outdated or misguided' (FQS32). The distinguishing statements for GP4, Spiritually Attuned, are about openness, harmony, and inclusivity, connoting the centrality of nature. In other respects GP4 contrasts with GP2 (and comes slightly closer to GP3), affirming the idea of 'the ultimate as a life force or creative energy' (FQS9).

Nevertheless, neither a religious secular divide nor a tripartite that includes spirituality sufficiently makes sense of our global prototypes, and how they are distinct. Being religious clearly unfolds in at least two different ways in this study's analysis. Global prototype 3, the Noncommitted Traditionalist, is primarily about the entanglement of religion and a moral order, with notions of nation and tradition. Like GP2, persons of this prototype believe 'the meaning of religious texts and teachings' is 'clear and true' (FQS15), whereas the notion of belief is more irrelevant. These observations echo the relevance of more general worldview typologies accounting for social attitudes or values (Saucier 2000; Schwartz 1992; 2012; Inglehart et al. 2014), for example. Such typologies tend to revolve around a primary axis which distinguishes between support for rules, norms, and traditions and support for human autonomy and rationality, potentially adding dimensions such as an emphasis on the needs of the self versus the needs

Table 3. The table shows the three statements (*) that most clearly distinguish each global prototype (GP) from other prototypes, and how they are ranked by: Secular Humanist (GP1); Active Confident Believer (GP2); Noncommitted Traditionalist (GP3); Spiritually Attuned (GP4); and Disengaged Liberal (GP5).

FQS statement	GP1	GP2	GP3	GP4	GP5
70. Rejects religious ideas that conflict with scientific and rational principles.	4*	-2	0	0	1
60. Views religion as the illusory creation of human fears and desires.	4*	-3	-4	0	0
78. Is often keenly aware of the presence of the divine.	-4*	2	1	0	2
23. Engages regularly in religious or spiritual practices in private.	-2	4*	-1	0	0
16. Being religious or spiritual is central to whom he or she is.	-2	4*	-1	0	-1
84. Has a vague and shifting religious outlook.	0	-3*	-1	2	-1
46. Feels that one should remain loyal to the religion of one's nation.	-3	-1	4*	-4	-4
58. Feels that it is important to maintain continuity of the religious traditions of family and ancestors.	-1	-1	3*	-1	0
99. Takes comfort in thinking that those who do not live righteously will face suffering or punishment.	-2	-2	3*	-4	0
29. Is inclined to embrace elements from various religious and spiritual traditions.	1	-1	0	3*	1
11. Has a strong sense of a spiritual or higher order of reality in the midst of nature.	0	1	2	3*	0
86. Is committed to following a spiritual path that is in harmony with the environment.	1	0	0	3*	-2
17. Becomes more religious or spiritual at times of crisis or need.	0	1	1	1	4*
12. Participates in religious activities chiefly on special occasions.	1	-1	0	1	3*
76. Mainly associates with persons of the same religious tradition or outlook.	1	0	0	-1	-3*

Note: -4 to 4 refer to how the statements were ranked by respective prototype

of others (see Nynäs, Novis-Deutsch, and Stenner 2022). The relevance of other dimensions is also evident in other analyses conducted with the FQS. Non-religiosity was a predominant independent worldview in our findings, but it could also in practice be differentiated into several subtypes. Kontala et al. (2022) has compared these to recent typologies of 'unbelief' (see e.g. Lee 2014; 2015; Kontala 2016).

Finally, GP5, the Disengaged Liberal, seems neither secular nor religious, or situational, in moving between religion and secular views. This resembles Wulff's (2019) findings, in which one prototype was considered situationally religious (cf. Stringer 1996). This gives rise to some reflections. On the one hand we can ask whether we need to bring into the discussion of worldview typologies notions of category fuzziness. For example, af Burén (2015) has addressed what she describes as 'simultaneities of religious identities' referring to the 'both/and' character of everyday religious and secular identifications, in which elements from various worldviews are combined in personal outlooks on life in different ways (Kalsky and van der Braak 2017). The dichotomy between the religious and the secular is not relevant to persons of this prototype; nor does spirituality contribute to how it is formed to any great degree. Analyses with the FQS not only make this evident but also systematically show how this is manifested.

Cross-cultural variations as family resemblance

The bird's-eye view provided by the analyses of our global FQS data risks providing an overly simplified and stereotypical image of ways of being religious, nonreligious/secular, or spiritual. Exploring this from the perspective of different typologies also confirms the need for nuance. While identifying these key religious–spiritual types is important, we must maintain a critical awareness of its limits, and the universal dimensions or characteristics that are assumed. Given that much of the research conducted in this area has borne a Western bias and imposed a limited perspective, this is especially important. Nonetheless, at the other end, when we methodologically favour contextual differences and choose a closeup on particularities, we risk losing the opportunity to identify comprehensive categories.

The FQS helped us depart from the more one-sided bird's-eye view and dig more deeply into the variations. In another study we extracted prototypes from each country case separately (Nynäs et al. 2022b). In some countries we could identify only three prototypes (Finland, Peru, and Sweden), whereas in others (China, India, and Israel) the internal diversity was

more apparent, and we could identify up to six or eight prototypes (Table 4). We identified 57 different prototypes, and none of these was identical. In some way they all represented unique narratives and life-view positions, while also reflecting recurring patterns.

Table 4. Number of prototypes globally and per country

Case	prototypes	*n*	case	prototypes	*n*
Global	5	562			
Canada	5	37	Peru	3	43
China	6	46	Poland	4	45
Finland	3	50	Russia	5	45
Ghana	4	45	Sweden	3	30
India	8	45	Turkey	5	37
Israel	6	90	USA	5	49

At first glance there did not seem to be any good way to compare the 57 different prototypes we identified. However, a closer examination of our results from each country indicated that they could be seen as reflections of the five global prototypes – something like musical variations on a theme. A brief examination of two of the nonreligious prototypes, India 1 and Israel Main 2, exemplifies this. The short prototype narratives reveal that on the one hand they both distance themselves clearly from religion and tend to emphasize progress or change. On the other hand they are still configured differently with notions of nationalism and traditionalism involved in the Indian case, for example, whereas the Israeli case is more about knowledge and the authorities.

> India 1
> Rejecting religion, India 1 is positive towards both personal and worldwide human progress. One views religion as an illusory human creation and feels foreign to ideas about being aware or sensing the presence of the divine, spirits, demons or patron saints. One is critical of the religious tradition of one's people and one does not believe that religion should influence the ruling of the nation. Consequently, one cannot see the point with dedicating one's life to serving the divine or identifying with some holy figure. One's

sexuality is not guided by a religious or spiritual outlook and one does not think that men and women are intended for different roles. One supports individual freedom of choice in matters of faith and morality and believes that one can be deeply moral without being religious. One sees personal self-realization as a primary spiritual goal in life and believes that human progress is possible on a worldwide scale.

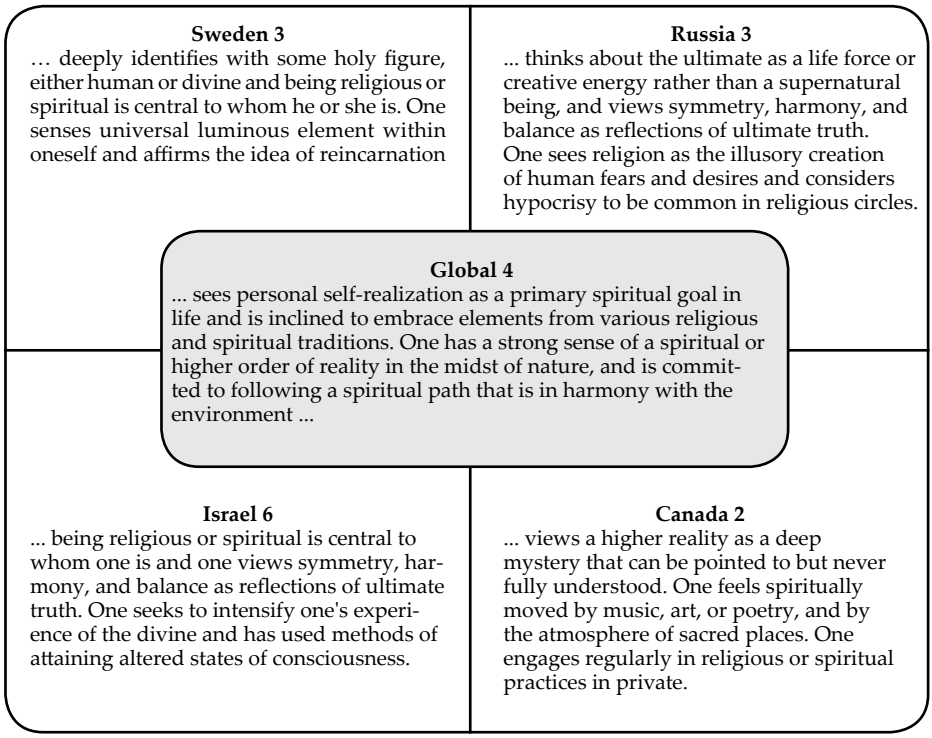
Israel Main 2
Israel Main 2 expresses a clear distance to religion. One rejects religious ideas that conflict with scientific and rational principles and views religion as the illusory creation of human fears and desires. One considers hypocrisy to be common in religious circles and one does not rely on religious authorities for understanding and direction. Religious scriptures are considered to be of human authorship. One takes a distance to ideas about experiences of the divine and one does not observe religious practices and laws. One rejects the idea that religion should play the central role in the ruling of the nation. One has not dedicated one's life to serving the divine. Instead, one believes in being moral without being religious and supports individual freedom of choice in matters of faith and morality, and embraces an outlook that actively seeks to change societal structures and values.

Factor loadings, item factor scores, distinguishing statements, and so on for the prototypes provide additional systematic possibilities for a detailed comparison of prototypes in a cross-cultural perspective. Through this we observed that our prototypes were constituted by several statements that varied from one context to another while reflecting the global prototypes (Nynäs et al. 2022b). For example, being religious or spiritual was not defined by a few specific statements that would all have been replicated from country to country. Rather, we came across an open-ended multidimensional character of what these meant to the respondents. A non-exclusive set of statements tended to be replicated in different ways with different emphases. Sometimes some statements were included; sometimes some statements were excluded or were accorded different relevance. This resembled a play of theme and variations, presenting relevant variations regarding genres or orchestration.

Spirituality is an interesting case in this respect, and the variation and multidimensional character is well reflected in GP4, Spiritually Attuned. Figure N shows some of the variations of spirituality in a simplified way, with a focus on defining elements from the prototypes in Canada, Israel,

Russia, and Sweden. Their emphasis shifts between sensing a universal luminous element within oneself, thinking of the ultimate as a life force or creative energy, viewing symmetry, harmony, and balance as reflections of ultimate truth to viewing higher reality as a deep mystery.

Figure 2. *Examples of cross-cultural variety of being 'spiritual'*



In this study of cross-cultural variations (Nynäs et al. 2022) we could identify how prototypes could also include seemingly conflicting or incompatible elements such as being both religious and secular or associating spirituality with nationalism. A strength of the FQS is its sensitivity to such ambiguities, liquidities, and simultaneities in how patterns are configured while maintaining a systematic approach. This helped us capture the open-ended multidimensional variations of patterns and propose the term 'family resemblance' as a way to describe this. The term was originally introduced by Ludwig Wittgenstein as part of his philosophy of language (Wittgenstein

1998; Andersen 2000), and it offers a fruitful way to conceptualize the dynamic we found in the data. On the one hand it accounts for how religion and spirituality respectively are constituted by overlapping shared features in our case, without any of them necessarily being common to or defining all manifestations on the other. This means that the taxonomies of being religious and spiritual are dynamic, open, and subject to change. They are evasive multidimensional categories, often constituted by simultaneity and ambiguity and confluence but also contradictions.

Concluding remarks

The use of the FQS as a method 'to maximize the expression of qualitative variation' (Stenner et al. 2008, 218) was decisive for finding important patterns, resemblances, and connections within our international sample. It showed how being secular, religious, and spiritual was replicated globally, but that this was a matter of an open-ended family resemblance, in which both context and additional dimensions beyond the religious secular dichotomy came into play. We need to account for a more diverse reality than this taxonomy allows. The FQS provides a systematic approach to this and has also been central to addressing the 'contextual, historical and ideological template that continues to inform' how what we think of as religion emerges in our studies, and this should be taken seriously (Bender et al. 2013b, 287).

Every reader is very aware that scholars in the study of religion have been paying increasing attention to other prominent worldview patterns such as being nonreligious or spiritual, and this research is productive. Yet how long can we keep religion at the centre? Do we need to rethink the primacy of the term 'religion', and how the field of study is accordingly named and constituted (see Droogers and van Harskamp 2014)? Using terms like the study of religion, religious studies, comparative religion, and so on distorts what is emerging within the field of study for which we need to account. The current terminology misrepresents the relevance of other worldviews such as the spiritual and nonreligious, deeming them invisible. We need a broadening of the horizon that explicitly recognizes the current diversity. Religious or not, all people have a worldview of some kind that is essential to them in various ways (Holm 1996).

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TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 41–65
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.97064

God Making in China: Notes Towards a Theory of Deification

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Abstract

Some religious leaders tend to gravitate towards claims of increasingly greater holiness. This sometimes results in the assumption of explicitly prophetic roles or in more extreme cases, claims of divinity. The present paper discusses the apotheosis of Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falun Gong. Although a comprehensive theory of divinization remains elusive, some general points can be made. First, we argue that any effort to theorize deification must include the observation that it is a process that arises in the context of social interaction between leader and followers rather than exclusively within the psyche of the leader, a point which has sometimes been missed in previous analyses. Second, divinization is a gradual process, with claims of divinity typically being amplified over time. Third, one must consider that divinization typically takes place within social spaces more or less set apart from the larger society, with group dynamics that facilitate deification. Fourth, divinization can be a strategy for coping with external threats like critical outsiders and repression. Finally, we argue that any effort to understand deification needs to consider the wider cultural and religious context. 'God' is a polythetic term, and divinization may therefore take on many different forms.

Keywords: *Deification; divinization; apotheosis; China; Frederick Lenz; Li Hongzhi; new religions; Falun Gong*

During the early to mid 1980s one of the co-authors subscribed to a popular periodical entitled the *Yoga Journal*. At the time it was a black-and-white newsprint magazine, held together by several staples in the spine, and

encompassed by a single, glossy full-colour 11- x 17-inch cover. There were perhaps half a dozen pages at the back of the journal that held a series of modest ads, including one that stated 'Come Meditate with Frederick Lenz, PhD', with a photo of an attractive young fellow with his hair up in what might be described as a white man's afro. In the background the ad noted that Lenz had received his MA and PhD degrees from SUNY at Stony Brook.

That ad continued to be placed for some months. Then one day an issue appeared containing Lenz's full-colour, full-page smiling face on the inside front cover, one of the pricier locations to place an ad. Instead of his civilian name, Lenz's self-designation was now Sri Atmananda, and instead of calling attention to his secular degrees, Lenz noted that he had been an abbot in a Japanese Zen Buddhist monastery, as well as the master of a Jnana Yoga ashram in India in past lifetimes. But his growing sense of self did not end there.

Lenz's Atmananda ads continued for some more months until he eventually re-manifested as Zen Master Rama (minus notifications of his prior incarnations). In turn, this new persona appeared in several more issues until Lenz's final apotheosis appeared on the back cover (the most expensive location to post an ad) under the bold heading, 'Come see Rama, the Eighth Incarnation of Vishnu'. And there was Lenz again, in what appeared to be Hugh Hefner's lounging robe, wearing a more restrained expression – which we suppose was more appropriate for an incarnation of divinity.

We have gone into some detail in reporting the specifics of Dr Lenz's growing deification as reflected in his *Yoga Journal* ads because, although this kind of process is common enough, it rarely manifests in such a tangible succession of progressive images. The present paper will discuss divinization[1] through a series of concrete manifestations of divinization drawn from the Chinese tradition. The survey of Sinological examples will then culminate in an effort to understand deification in terms of a variety of different theoretical perspectives.

Divinization in China

Before we can discuss the process of divinization more theoretically we need to address the question of what a 'god' is, and what marks the distinction

1 Despite his evocative title, Paul Joosse's 'Becoming a God: Max Weber and the Social Construction of Charisma' (2014) is not about what we are here calling divinization. The process of divinization builds on the charismatic process. There are useful summaries of studies of charisma in new religions in Erin L. Prophet's articles 'Charisma and Authority in New Religious Movements' (2016) and 'Charisma in New Religious Movements' (forthcoming).

between the human being and god. 'God' is a polythetic term that may carry a range of meanings. It may refer to a certain type of agency (gods cause events), to a certain object of address and worship, and to a certain mode of being. These meanings may overlap, but they are not co-extensive, and the concept and understanding of divinities is sensitive to context. On this basis, Einar Thomassen proposes to replace 'god' with 'superhuman agents' as a general and comparative term in religious studies (2013). However, this strategy is challenged by the fact that some traditions draw a sharp normative line between humans and deities, while others do not.

Some gods are portrayed as superhuman entities that reside in spheres beyond the empirical realm. In such cases there is a clear distinction between god and human beings. The distinction becomes less straightforward when we are dealing with gods that are, or have been, human. The history of religions is full of examples of humans that have been ascribed a divine status: Jesus of Nazareth, Emperor Augustus, Satya Sai Baba, and Chaitanya are just some examples of living human beings who have been perceived as divine in some sense. But what distinguishes a god from a human with extraordinary qualities? Where does one draw the line between *human gods* and other humans with extraordinary religious abilities, such as prophets, oracles, clairvoyants, and healers?

There is no obvious and short answer to these questions. In Islam the prophet Muhammad is perceived to be the most perfect human with extraordinary prophetic abilities, but the tradition draws a sharp distinction between Allah and his last prophet. Greek religion, by contrast, had a pantheon that included the Olympian gods, lower spirits, and local heroes, and the boundary between the human and the divine was fleeting. Humans could be understood as having divine capacities or as being directly under divine protection and providence, as in the case of oracles. In the Greek provinces of the Roman empire, the emperor was worshipped as a divine figure, a feat which was later incorporated into the stately imperial cult. The Greek and Roman pantheon consisted both of mortals who had become gods (like the hero Hercules or Emperor Augustus) and gods who had always been gods (like Jupiter and Mars) (Warrior 2006, 106f.). These examples highlight the fact that there are different perceptions of what a god ultimately is. In the strictly monotheistic Islamic tradition God is a unique, non-human entity. Prophets are humans that stand directly under divine guidance but remain entirely human. In the polytheistic context of Greek and Roman religion there were many modes of being divine. Because different religious and cultural traditions have different views of what a god ultimately is, and

different cosmologies and mythologies related to the relationships between man and god, context is crucial when discussing processes of deification.

What characterizes a deity in the Chinese tradition? To begin with, there is no single supreme creator god in the Daoist and Buddhist traditions. In Daoism the universe comes from the 'Tao', an impersonal principle or force. Nonetheless, Daoism has many minor gods that are believed to exist within this universe and are themselves subject to the Tao. Similarly, in Buddhism, there is no omnipotent being beyond the cosmos, who created and controls the universe. In Mahayana Buddhism gods are venerated and considered part of a rich cosmology that encompasses humans, animals, gods, demons, and bodhisattvas. However, the gods are believed to be subject to the same natural laws and karmic forces as other beings and are not believed to exist above and beyond this world. Second, and in contrast with the sharp spirit–matter divide in the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic complex, the Chinese tradition views spirit and matter as intertwined dynamic aspects of one whole – rather like the Chinese yin-yang symbol. It is thus somewhat less difficult to imagine human beings as divinities in East Asia. Traditionally, the Emperor of China was considered a divinity or demigod – the Son of Heaven (*Tianzi*), who ruled by virtue of the Mandate of Heaven (Dull 1990, 59). Additionally, for several millennia, Chinese millenarian movements, both Daoist and Buddhist, were often led by a divinized messianic figure (Lowe 2011; Shek 2019). A somewhat different yet structurally similar Chinese millennialist movement was the so-called Taiping Rebellion of the nineteenth century, the leader of which claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus (Kilcourse 2015).

One unforeseen consequence of Christian missionary efforts in China was the generation of numerous new religions which often represented deviations from orthodoxy, including blends of Protestantism with indigenous Chinese spirituality. In recent years, one of the most well-known, and certainly the most controversial, of these has been the Church of Almighty God, frequently referred to as Eastern Lightning.[2] A core teaching of the group is that Christ has returned in the form of a woman, Yang Xiangbin. While the traditional Protestant Bible is accepted as scripture – though outdated (Heggie 2017, 4; Folk 2018, 62) – it is viewed as having been superseded by Yang's *The Word Appears in the Flesh*.

In the second chapter of her study of the Church of Almighty God, *Lightning from the East*, Emily Dunn describes the typical leaders (to whom

2 The latter designation is derived from Matthew 24:27: 'For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.'

she refers as heresiarchs) of Protestant-related new religious movements in China as:

> …male [Yang Xiangbin being a notable exception], middle-aged, and from rural north China. He has converted to Christianity early in the reform era, and thus is familiar with some Christian traditions and doctrine. None of the heresiarchs have been involved with the TSPM [the state-approved Protestant church], but rather have been associated with unofficial, autochthonous groups that draw on millenarian Pentecostalism. The founder claims to have received divine revelation that he is Christ incarnate or a prophet specially anointed by God to undertake His work in these 'end times.' Holding out promises of access to the truth (or at least a superior version of it), everlasting salvation, and perhaps physical healing or material blessing, he attracts and leads a handful of followers from his former church who proceed to proselytize Protestants and establish organizational and doctrinal frameworks. (2015, 51f.)

For example, converts to The Efficacious Spirit movement are taught that Christ did not save himself on the cross, and so they should not pray in his name but in that of the 'New Lord' – that is, Hua [Xuehe]. Members celebrate Hua's birthday on 17 January instead of at Christmas (Dunn 2015, 44).

However, these examples should not be taken to indicate that the deification pattern we have been examining here has been entirely taken over by Chinese Protestant-related new religions. In a fascinating account of an emergent Confucian congregation in China, Chen Na, Fan Lizhu, and Chen Jinguo Jinguo describe how the head of the congregation, Mr Li Yusheng (Master Li) was not only the leading organizer of the group but was also worshipped by the members as a deity with supernatural powers (Chen, Fan, and Chen 2018, 8). This was seemingly because, in the words of a prominent congregant, 'If they [Li and his co-leaders] had not been Deities, how could they know so much and how could they talk so eloquently?' (ibid., 12).

To understand the issue we are examining here, the problem with all these examples is that they present deification as a *fait accompli*; the stages leading up to such exalted assertions are mostly invisible.

The divinization of Li Hongzhi

The case of Li Hongzhi, the founder-leader of the Falun Gong movement, offers a particularly rich example of processes of divinization in contemporary

China. The Falun Gong movement keeps meticulous records of Master Li's speeches. Through a detailed analysis of this source material that follows the process of divinization over time we can trace developmental steps related to the expanding status of Li Hongzhi.

It seems that even from the very beginning of his career as a qigong master Li was intent on placing himself in a category above other masters. This intention was reflected in his early lecture series (which formed the basis for *Zhuan Falun*, the central text of the movement), in which he claimed:

> I have unveiled the eternal mystery – it was the secret of secrets that absolutely could not be disclosed. I have revealed the root of all different cultivation practices throughout history... I have said that I have done something unprecedented and opened the widest door... Our school practices cultivation this way, enabling you, yourself to truly obtain gong. That is unprecedented since the beginning of heaven and earth… (Li 2002, 319-321, as quoted in Frank 2004).

When Li Hongzhi founded Falun Gong in 1992, there were other popular qigong groups that were far more influential than Falun Gong. According to Yunfeng Lu 'as a new comer in the qigong circle, Falun Gong was actually not as competitive in healing diseases as Li Hongzhi himself described if we compare it with other qigong organizations' (Lu 2005, 179). Part of Li's competitive strategy was to characterize other qigong teachers as being under the influence of demons:

> There are also demons coming to interfere with you, 'Come and learn from me, and I will teach you something.' Some people, especially those who practice other Qigong, will easily develop some kind of spontaneous movements the moment they sit there and their hand movements seem to be very beautiful. Let me tell you that demons also know such things (Li 1996).

However, to survive and eventually come out on top, Falun Gong needed a broader strategy to win the uneven match. As Lu points out, the solution was to offer different services exclusive to Falun Gong (Lu 2005, 179). Falun Gong soon shifted its focus to 'teaching an all-encompassing moral system' (Goossaert 2008, 23) that ultimately promised salvation, a claim from which other qigong groups had shied.

Li Hongzhi detached Falun Gong from its qigong origins as early as 1993. David Palmer and Yunfeng Lu have called attention to the fact that

Li stopped providing treatment of diseases at this time – which had been a decisive factor behind Falun Gong's early expansion (Lu 2005, 175; Palmer 2007, 225). Additionally, Li also began forbidding Falun Gong practitioners from treating others (Lu 2005, 175). While he de-emphasized direct healing, the element of healing remained. Li claims to have innumerable 'Dharma bodies' (*fashen*) that accompany, protect, and heal his disciples. The Dharma bodies know all that goes through the minds of his followers. Li further claims to be able to eliminate the illnesses of his followers and to give them paranormal powers (Palmer 2019, 46–47). Those true to Li and his teachings will thus remain healthy.[3] The relationship between Li and his disciples is thus directly personal. Li presents himself as a saviour of his individual followers – and of the world as a whole. According to Falun Gong, he is the omniscient and omnipotent saviour of the universe who has revealed the fundamental law of the universe – which is the protection against evil forces and the apocalypse.

The messianic theme distinguishes Li Hongzhi and Falun Gong from the thousands of other qigong masters who were active in China in the 1980s and 90s (Palmer 2019, 46). At the same time as he was retooling Falun Gong from a qigong health-oriented movement into a salvationist sect, he began propagating a fantastic hagiography in which a series of exalted masters visited the young Li, preparing him for his world-saving mission. Benjamin Penny has written insightfully about this early hagiography, both in his book on *The Religion of Falun Gong* and in a previous article, placing it in the context of traditional Taoist and Buddhist religious biographies.

> Master Li's biography is … of particular interest, as it belongs to a long tradition of Chinese biographies of religious figures. There are both Daoist and Buddhist subtraditions within the greater stream of religious biography, but they share a great deal, especially from the structural point of view (Penny 2012a, 80).

In places the youthful segment of Li's biography is reminiscent of gnostic hagiographies of the young Jesus (e.g. Burke 2009), in which he uses his spiritual powers to best his playmates at childhood games. These accounts make clear that Li was exceptional:

3 Getting conventional medical treatment would therefore be unnecessary and seen as a sign of spiritual weakness. This is part of the reason Falun Gong has also been considered dangerous outside China (Yan 2017).

> Once, when he was in the fourth grade, he forgot his schoolbag when he left school. When he returned to fetch it, he found the door of the classroom locked and the windows shut. Then, an idea came to him: 'It would be good if I could get in!' As soon as the thought flashed into his mind, he suddenly found himself in the classroom. And with another thought, he was out again. Even he was amazed at what had happened. Then another idea occurred to him: 'What would it feel like if I stopped right in the glass?' And with that, he was in the middle of the window, his body and brain all filled with pieces of glass. He was in such pain he wanted to get straight out. And with that thought, he was (Penny 2003, 648f.).

In the early days of the group the public face of Falun Gong was just another qigong organization. However, as the official attitude towards qigong changed from support to criticism, Falun Gong became what James Tong refers to as a 'chameleon' organization, (Tong 2009, 29) adopting new self-definitions in an effort to sidestep the increasingly anti-qigong atmosphere emerging among Chinese officials.

As a consequence of these changing conditions, in 1994 Li Hongzhi decided to recast Falun Gong as a Buddhist organization.

> From then on, Li fashioned himself as leader of a religious movement rather than the head of a qigong organization. He changed his birthday to that of Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism. His writings became sacred scriptures (*jingwen*). Meditation and reading of the Li's [sic] scriptures were added to the daily routine of Falungong practitioners. Falungong congregations were not only practice sessions on breathing exercises but also 'Dharma Assemblies' (*fahut*) to study Li's sermons on spiritual cultivation (Tong 2009, 9).

Li attempted to deflect criticism aimed at his change of birthday by subsequently downplaying its significance, asserting that:

> During the Cultural Revolution, the government misprinted my birthdate. I just corrected it. During the Cultural Revolution, there were lots of misprints on identity. A man could become a woman, and a woman could become a man. It's natural that when people want to smear you, they will dig out whatever they can to destroy you. What's the big deal about having the same birthday as Sakyamuni? Many criminals were also born on that date. I have never said that I am Sakyamuni. I am just a very ordinary man (Li quoted in Spaeth 1999).

Li was over forty years old when he 'corrected' his birthdate. So one might ask why he chose to wait until 1994, the same year in which he 'declared that he would devote his time to the study of Buddhism' (Tong 2009, 9) to correct his birthdate. After he changed the year of his birth, Li's birthdate corresponded with the date Buddha's birthday was celebrated.

Li Hongzhi's expanded self-presentation was also evident in an interview in the Asian edition of *TIME Magazine* (10 May 1999) that was conducted in the immediate wake of the movement's suppression in China:

TIME: Are you a human being?
Li: You can think of me as a human being.

Here Li is implicitly claiming to be from a higher spiritual level, masquerading as a human being. This implicit claim is evident in more than a few of Li's other statements. To refer again to his TIME interview:

TIME: Are you from Earth?
Li: I don't wish to talk about myself at a higher level. People wouldn't understand it.

This part of the interview immediately follows a discussion of Li's teachings about aliens, meaning that the interviewer is asking him whether he is an extra-terrestrial. However, Li sidesteps the overt thrust of this question to imply that he is an interdimensional being whose true status is so exalted that ordinary, unenlightened people would be unable to comprehend it.

While the narrative of Li's tutelage under a series of spiritual masters in his early biography was clearly intended to provide him with a prestigious lineage, it seems that later in his career Li's expanding self-image prompted him to diminish the status of even these teachers so that they were merely following his original instructions:

> Actually, everything that I have done was arranged countless years ago, and this includes who would obtain the Fa – nothing is accidental. But the way these things manifest is in keeping with ordinary humans. As a matter of fact, the things imparted to me by my several masters in this life are also what I intentionally arranged a few lifetimes ago for them to obtain. When the predestined occasion arrived, they were arranged to impart those things back to me so that I could recall my Fa in its entirety (Li 2001, 24).

However, Falun Gong can distance Li from the extraordinary claims of this hagiography by pointing out that the relevant document was not written by Li himself. His own writings imply that he is a kind of celestial *bodhisattva* in the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. In a 1998 message to his followers he stated that 'at present I have *once again* come to this world to teach the Fa ["law" or in the Buddhist context "Dharma"] … and directly teach the fundamental law of the universe' (Frank 2004, 236f., quoting from Li 2001, 53).

In terms of iconography the Falun Gong organization has also sold paintings of Li wearing Buddhist robes and standing on or sitting in a meditation posture – paintings that followers venerate (Tong 2009, 77) – and that clearly assimilate Li into the traditional iconography usually reserved for representations of Buddhist Bodhisattvas (e.g. https://www.tiantibooks.org/products/copy-of-master-lis-picture-large).

It should also be said that the Falun Gong organization has not been shy about presenting Li as a divine saviour figure to the general public. Thus, for example, in the final scene of one of the group's 2019 Shen Yun performances,

> … a huge tidal wave is set to destroy the city, but Master Li steps on stage, waves his hands, and sends the water back into the ocean, as… interdimensional wheels fly around in the sky. The spotlight shines on Li, unmistakably cast as a supernatural savior of mankind. Dancers gather near him to celebrate, holding a sign that reads 'Falun Dafa is Good,' and the curtain falls (Silverman 2019).[4]

Li Hongzhi was not, however, content to present himself as being on a par with figures like the historical Buddha. Eventually, one finds numerous places where he places his teachings – and by implication himself – high above Shakyamuni:

> Throughout history, people have been studying whether what The Enlightened One taught is the Buddha Fa. The Tathagata's teaching is the manifestation of Buddha-nature, and it can also be called a manifestation of the Fa. But it is not the universe's true Fa, because in the past people were absolutely prohibited from knowing the Buddha Fa's true manifestation. The Buddha

4 Other observers add that the tidal wave contains 'an ominous picture of Karl Marx' (Robertson 2019), and that Li Hongzhi appears as a 'deity, both Christ-like and Buddha-esque, descend[ing] from heaven, radiating yellow light… The savior had arrived; the day was saved' (Spera 2018).

> Fa could only be enlightened to by someone who had reached a high level through cultivation practice, so it was even more the case that people were not allowed to know the true essence of cultivation practice. Falun Dafa has for the first time throughout the ages provided the nature of the universe – the Buddha Fa – to human beings; this amounts to providing them a ladder to ascend to heaven. So how could you measure the Dafa of the universe with what was once taught in Buddhism? (Li 2001, 11).[5]

And to go even further:

> In July 1998, Li finally implied that he was the creator of the cosmos rather than merely the messenger bringing new revelations to mankind. He said: 'No matter how great the Law is, I am not within it. Except for me, all beings are in the law. That is to say, not only are all beings created by the Law, but also the circumstance all of you live in is created by the Law.... The Law covers the Buddhas, the Dao and all other kinds of gods whom you do not know. No matter whether you are Buddha, Dao or gods, only through the cultivation of Falun Dafa can you return to where you came from' (Li 1998, cited in Lu 2005).[6] … This claim indicates that Li Hongzhi is superior to all beings; and, if there is an omnipotent god, it is Mr. Li himself (Lu 2005, 178).

Li's appropriation of the status of the highest god is also reflected in the Shen Yun song lyrics below, where he appears to have assumed the position of 'The Creator':

> The Only Hope
> It was formed over the ages
> Five millennia of glory, in turmoil today
> The final stage now arrives
> For history holds: where there is creation, extinction
> Yet all hope is not lost
> The Creator has not forgotten mankind

5 In addition to the Buddha, he also explicitly sets himself above Jesus. In this regard refer to Penny (2012b).

6 The lecture from which Lu quotes here, 'The Buddha Law of Falun: The speech at the Falun Dafa assistants meeting in Changchun 1998', appears to have been removed from the web, but Li made the same sort of claim during that same year in Switzerland: '[W]hether it be Jesus or Shakyamuni, they are, after all, enlightened beings of a small scale. I'm not inside the cosmos, so I can resolve problems of the lives at different levels and in different cosmic bodies of the cosmos' (Li 1998).

> But in this illusory place, you must see the truth
> In the followers of Dafa lies the lone hope of salvation (Anonymous 2011).

It turns out one can find so many places in Li Hongzhi's books and lectures where he implicitly or explicitly claims his own divine status that it would take a thesis-length treatment to recount them all. However, it is interesting to reflect upon Li and Falun Gong's reasons for resorting to deification. Why did this occur in the Falun Gong movement as opposed to other qigong groups? The answer to this question may bring us closer to some theoretical elements of deification.

Deification: some theoretical fragments

Observers have noted processes of deification in every major religious tradition. But such commentary is often shallow and judgemental. For analytical purposes, however, a major weakness of both wo/man-in-the-street and journalistic explanatory inferences is that they often utilize a one-sided model of attribution. Minus the social contexts in which both Frederick Lenz and Li Hongzhi are embedded, their gradual evolution from (apparently) humble teachers of meditation and qigong into self-declared divinities seems driven by an entirely internal mechanism – the straightforward unfolding of megalomaniacal personality types.

Even scholars of religion sometimes proffer explanatory schemes based on intrinsic psychological tendencies, as when the prominent Japanese scholar, Shimazono Susumu, asserts that Shoko Asahara and his group, Aum Shinrikyo, exhibited anti-social traits 'from the very beginning' (1995, 400), an attribution of origins shared by the British Japanologist, Ian Reader (2000). This implies that the seeds of Aum's violent climax – the poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway system or potentially, another event of comparable horror – were lodged in Asahara's persona from the very beginning. Parallel to Lenz and Li, Asahara had a similarly enlarged sense of self, as reflected in his book, *Declaring Myself the Christ* (1992), in which he highlights the parallels between himself and Jesus of Nazareth.

Critics of non-mainstream religious groups tend to fall back on this single-factor naive attribution of motive, in part because it dovetails nicely with their critical portrayal of leaders of new religions as morally defective manipulators (Lewis 1989, 394). In this view followers are innocent dupes or at the very least largely passive victims – guru worshippers in the thrall

of charismatic leaders (Jones 2008, 72).[7] This kind of portrayal reflects a strategy of 'cognitive distancing' (Chidester 1991), placing alternative spiritual claims beyond the pale and thus saving us the trouble of taking them seriously. The reality, however, is often much more nuanced.

In part a reaction to this simplistic Svengalian judgement call, academic researchers have called attention to factors in the environment that tend to shift the analysis from a narrow focus on the leader. Thus, in the case of Aum Shinrikyo's violence, Martin Repp points out a variety of ways in which Shimazono and Reader share a 'significant tendency to decontextualize Aum and the Aum incident' (2011, 155) and highlights environmental factors that should be taken into account in any comprehensive analysis of Asahara and the Aum incident. However, this style of analysis can be taken to an extreme, such that it can operate as an implicit apologetic (Robbins 2002, 58). Any complete analysis must thus necessarily situate itself in the middle, placing one foot on each side of this dynamic process.

David Bromley outlines a series of stages through which episodes of NRM mass violence develop. Bromley's variant on conflict amplification is useful as a metaphorical description of the process of divinization:

> (1) latent tension, in which the foundational logic and organization of movement and society stand in contradiction to one another, although there may not be direct engagement; (2) nascent conflict, in which emergent, bilateral conflicts are not articulated in ideological terms, future adversaries have not mobilized organizationally, and parties therefore orient toward one another as 'troublesome'; (3) intensified conflict, in which there is heightened mobilization and radicalization of movements and oppositional groups, entry of third parties, and orientation by parties toward one another as 'dangerous'…; and (4) dramatic denouement, in which polarization and destabilization of dangerous relationships lead to orientation by parties as 'subversive' and to projects of final reckoning intended to reverse power and moral relationships… (Bromley 2011, 16).

What is clear from this outline is that such conflicts are dyadic – dependent on the actions and reactions of each side – and that they are dynamic and processual. Bromley's theory states that these steps are not inevitable. Just as conflict can be resolved at each stage, there are different stages in a process of divinization, and different degrees to which a religious leader may be regarded as divine.

7 An attribution to AUM members insightfully criticized by James W. Jones (2008, 72).

The conflict with the People's Republic of China indirectly contributed to strengthening the messianic and sectarian aspects of Falun Gong. In 1999 the conflict between the Chinese government and Falun Gong intensified following a series of demonstrations arranged by Falun Gong practitioners against the People's Republic of China. On 25 April 1999 a large demonstration was held outside Zhongnanhai in central Beijing in reaction to how a Falun Gong protest in Tianjin had been handled by the Public Security authorities a few days before. Falun Gong was subsequently banned by the Chinese authorities (Penny 2012a, 56f). The apotheosis of Li can in part be seen as a way of responding to and coping with the difficulties Falun Gong has met as a result of the anti-Falun Gong campaign. The repression of Falun Gong is seen as evidence of the demonic forces of society that threaten the Great Law (Palmer 2019, 56). Isolation is not part of the doctrine, but an effect of the anti-Falun Gong campaign. In the face of the isolation, harassment, and sufferings of followers in China, bestowing their leader with divine features provides Li and Falun Gong with an absolute legitimacy. Repression increases sectarianism; sectarianism increases repression. It is well known that leaders tend to become more popular in times of crisis (Mueller 1970). Divinization can be seen as a strategy to gain absolute legitimacy and endure – and indeed find spiritual significance in – the hardships experienced by Falun Gong practitioners.

To now come full circle and refer back to Dr Lenz, what is missing from the series of *Yoga Journal* ads we discussed earlier is his audience of students and the dyadic,[8] relational context which nurtured the progressively growing sense of his own divinity. Each instantiation of Lenz's persona in the sequence is metaphorically parallel to each of Bromley's stages. And like the social conflicts analysed by Bromley, one needs the dynamic interaction between both sides of the dyad to move forwards to the next step.

As most people who have taught spiritual disciplines (as well as some who teach secular subjects) have experienced, one easily becomes the target of a variety of projections and exaggerated expectations. While many of these projections feel good because they stroke the teacher's ego, one must disabuse students of their expectations that the teacher is more spiritual than is actually the case.

Unfortunately, it is not so rare that some teachers cave into these projections. They then try to live up to raised expectations by presenting students

8 'Dyadic' obviously refers to the initial relationship between teachers and their students. Assuming a group expands beyond this first stage, new levels emerge within the group that 'complexify' these interactions, such as the body of followers that Weber referred to as the 'charismatic aristocracy' (Jossee, 2017).

with an incrementally holier persona. In Roy Wallis's words the leader 'seeks to realise in his behaviour the powers and status with which he has been credited, to live up to the image with which he has been endowed' (1982, 38). Students can respond to the teacher's new persona by further raising expectations. The teacher can then respond accordingly by ramping up the apparent holiness of their persona yet further. This continues in seesaw fashion until the façade crashes, or the teacher embraces full divinization, as in the cases of Dr Lenz and Li Hongzhi.

An important point to realize here is that although the person who is the focal point of this process enjoys certain psychological and often some temporal benefits, they are (at least at the beginning) every bit as much a victim of this dynamic as their followers. In Lenz's case he met his end in a very strange suicide in the midst of what appeared at least from the outside, a highly successful career (Lei 1998).

Theory related to deviance amplification also provides us with some insights relevant to deification. Deviance amplification postulates a distinction between 'Primary Deviance' and 'Secondary Deviance', the latter being 'the behavior and experience…which follow the real or imagined response of others (awareness, labelling and the application of social sanctions) to the [initial] deviation and the individual's own interpretation of its significance' (Petrunik 1980, 217). This process was articulated within labelling theory (Wilkins 1965), and originally applied to such behaviours as delinquency, alcoholism, and mental illness, this feedback-loop effect could (minus the negative connotations of 'deviance') be applied to an interpretation of the deification process. However, deviance amplification, though it captures the 'amplification' of the teacher's persona less cynically than popular anti-cult interpretations, tends to downplay essential aspects of the process, such as the role of the other half of the dyad – the teacher's students.

If followers are 'dupes', as the cult stereotype has it, that still leaves the mechanism of students' susceptibility to a teacher's 'trickery' unexplained. Psychoanalytic projection is a popular option: in this reading followers project an unfulfilled need for a father/mother figure onto the teacher, and then adopt infantilized roles as obedient children (e.g. Downton 1973, 225). When we project our ego ideal onto the leader, they in effect relieve us of the burden of failing to live up to these ideals. Instead, we are only required to follow the leader (Wallis 1993, 171).

An alternative, non-psychoanalytic model for understanding how students might amplify a teacher's insightfulness is provided by the so-called 'Dr Fox Effect' (Ware and Williams 1975). The Dr Fox Effect refers to an ex-

periment originally carried out at the USC School of Medicine in 1970. Two speakers gave lectures to an audience of psychologists and psychiatrists on Game Theory. One of the lecturers was an actual expert, while the other was an actor who was given the name Dr Myron L. Fox, who had supposedly graduated from the Albert Einstein School of Medicine.

> The experimenters created a meaningless lecture and coached the actor to deliver it 'with an excessive use of double talk, neologisms, non sequiturs, and contradictory statements.' At the same time, the researchers encouraged the actor to adopt a lively demeanor, convey warmth toward his audience, and intersperse his nonsensical comments with humor. The actor fooled not just one, but three separate audiences of professional and graduate students. Despite the emptiness of his lecture, fifty-five psychiatrists, psychologists, educators, graduate students, and other professionals produced evaluations of Dr. Fox that were overwhelmingly positive. The disturbing feature of the Dr. Fox study, as the experimenters noted, is that Fox's nonverbal behaviors so completely masked a meaningless, jargon-filled, and confused presentation (Merritt 2008, 242).

The Dr Fox Effect is an amplification of the 'Halo Effect' (Feeley 2002), in which extraneous impressions (such as an attractive appearance) cause observers to rank someone higher (e.g. on competency) than they might otherwise merit. In the case at hand students find themselves drawn to the personal charisma of a teacher, an attraction for which one does not have to postulate explanations based on psychoanalytic mechanisms.

We should here note in passing that in Max Weber's analysis what we might term 'garden variety' charisma already contains more than a hint of divinization. For Weber charisma applies

> …to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which [they are] set apart from ordinary [people] and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (1964, 358).

We should also ask other sorts of questions about follower motivations for building up a teacher. In an important analysis of L. Ron Hubbard's hagiography Dorthe Refslund Christensen describes how the Church of Scientology

continues to idealize the founder as the brilliant, never-equalled source of Scientology's teachings. 'He is not a figurehead with no significance; he is the only ultimate source and legitimizing resource of the religious and therapeutic claims of the church… Hubbard is, at one and the same time, an ordinary human being and a superhuman being with special, non-ordinary qualities' (2005, 227, 249). Even long after his passing Scientologists continue to exalt Hubbard, because doing so legitimates their practice of Scientology.

Followers also want to build up the stature of their leaders before they pass away and will sometimes actually prompt leaders to embrace additional amplifications of their status and authority. In the case of Knutby Filadelfia, a small Pentecostal community in Sweden, members of Åsa Waldau's community (in her telling) persuaded her that she was the Bride of Christ described in various places in the New Testament. In Liselotte Frisk's account (2018)

> This belief originated in a question brought up for discussion during the late 1990s, namely if the bride of Christ really should be interpreted as The Church, like most Christian congregations teach, or if it could be a human woman. Pastor Helge Fossmo's statement to Åsa is today quite famous: 'If the bride of Christ is a woman, then it must be you.' Åsa Waldau claims that she thought it to be her duty to try within her if there could be any truth in this suggestion and that she did reflect upon this matter for a while, but says that the whole idea came from Helge Fossmo and not from her (Waldau 2007).

Thus, like the Church of Scientology, members of Knutby Filadelfia desired to perceive themselves as a special group, which they proceeded to do by persuading their leader to assume an exalted status. Early companions who encourage leaders to perceive themselves as 'someone special' are often crucial in their assumption of having an extraordinary role or status (Wallis 1993, 172; Tumminia 2005, 54–55). It is rare that this kind of prompting by followers is quite so explicit, but an unspoken version of the same expectation is at work whenever spiritual leaders begin responding by amplifying their own holiness: '[F]ollowers … pressure their leader for displays of power, demand to see the extraordinary, which is reciprocated with awe and devotion' (Tumminia 2005, 52).[9]

9 Both Eileen Barker (1993) and Lorne Dawson (2011) insightfully discuss the process of accepting a leader's charismatic authority in terms of a relatively static set of social conditions. However, there is a useful description of the dynamic, interactive process by which David Berg came to accept a prophetic role in Roy Wallis's important article on the social construction of charisma (1982), and Paul Jossee paints a fine-grained portrait of how John de Ruiter came to accept an exalted spiritual status in his 'Max Weber's Disciples' (2017). Another useful reference is Diana Tumminia, *When Prophecy Never Fails: Myth and Reality in a Flying Saucer Group* (2005).

For the process of divinization to evolve beyond the experience of simple charisma, the group needs to at least partly close ranks so that core followers have movement spaces within which they can interact with other followers, free from the sceptical gaze of outsiders – which is a different but related variant of Fantasia's and Hirsh's notion of movement 'free spaces' (1995). This is another way of saying that outsiders provide insiders with a reality-testing feedback loop, preventing them from going overboard in the subculture that is emerging around the spiritual teacher. This semi-segregated milieu is necessary before followers embrace such radical teachings as that their human teacher is themselves a god. When this separation becomes extreme, it is referred to as a social implosion (not in Jean Baudrillard's sense) or social encapsulation (cf. Dawson 1998, fifth chapter). At the same time the teacher also reduces or cuts themselves off from interactions with outsiders who might disabuse them of their growing sense of spiritual self-importance. Many groups isolate themselves physically, while others cultivate a sense of themselves as a distinct community and spiritual elite that while in this world symbolically sets itself apart from it (Dawson 1998, 148). This observation can be extended to the elite group implied by the sharp distinction Li Hongzhi draws between Falun Gong practitioners and 'ordinary people'.

Concluding remarks

In the above discussion we have not pretended to lay out an integrated model of the divinization process. Rather, we have isolated certain aspects of deification and applied theoretical elements that seem to fit different phases of the process. Part of the problem is that differing theoretical frames can sometimes be applied to the same aspect of divinization. And while different cases of deification share commonalities, there are also enough variations that, taken together, they resist any straightforward homogenization. This variability makes one or another explanation seem preferable in different instances.

Nevertheless, we have emphasized the more general point that deification can never be considered in isolation from social interaction. Deification is a dynamic dyadic process which seesaws between leaders and followers, gradually building as the process cycles across time. To borrow Wallis's core insight about charisma and apply it here, deification 'is essentially a relationship born out of interaction between a leader and his followers' (1982, 26). Many analysts, especially psychologically oriented critics but also certain

mainstream NRM researchers, miss or downplay the central importance of the charismatic bond in the divinization process.

Divinization is a gradual process, with claims towards divinity typically amplifying over time. A similar dynamic can be seen in processes of conflict augmentation and the more extremist claims and actions of some religious groups. There are different stages in a process of divinization. A religious leader may go through only some initial stages or claim the status of a supreme god. This also points to the fact that some religious traditions enable many different modes of divinity, and that some traditions do not necessarily draw a sharp distinction between gods and humans.

We have further indicated that a greater or lesser degree of social separation – tending towards social implosion (or social encapsulation) – seems necessary before the amplification process veers from garden variety charisma to become deification. Sectarianism protects the group and leader from criticism by mainstream society. External threats like hostility or straightforward repression by mainstream society can act as catalysts for divinization. A strong leader with a divine providence affords the group an absolute legitimacy that helps the followers cope with hardship.

Finally, we have argued that a theory of deification needs to be sensitive to cultural and religious context. 'God' may carry a range of different meanings, both as an analytical concept and as an insider term. Our empirical material primarily relates to the Chinese context, and we would welcome further efforts to theorize based on other cases.

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TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 67–89
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.102495

Otherworldly Beings in the Pre-Christian North: Tribal, Chiefdom, and Archaic Religion and the Use of Cultural Evolutionary Theory[1]

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Abstract

The interplay between societal and cultural change consists of a host of different factors. Religious conceptions are just one and are this article's focus. Various conceptions of Otherworldly beings can be found in the textual sources for pre-Christian Nordic religion. To better understand these differing descriptions, one can employ various theoretical frameworks when constructing the particular model for the reconstruction of pre-Christian Nordic religion. For this article a cultural evolutionary framework inspired by the work of Robert N. Bellah is paired with a model of ontology in a case study suggesting that specific types of Otherworldly beings belong to specific types of religion. It is suggested that Otherworldly beings such as the *álfar* may represent what might be termed a tribal religion, while Otherworldly beings such as the *vanir* seem to belong to an archaic religion. The proposed intermediate category of chiefdom religion is then suggested as relevant for a different kind of Otherworldly being, which is explored by applying Phillipe Descola's work on ontology. These differing groups of Otherworldly beings further seem to fulfil similar functions while remaining rel-

1 This article has been long in the making. An earlier version was presented at the research seminar *Perspectives on the Sagas* at Aarhus University in 2015, and a preliminary manuscript was discussed at a meeting of the *Research Unit for the History of Religion* at the Dept. of the Study of Religion, Aarhus University, in 2017. I thank the participants of both events for their valuable feedback. I owe a note of thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and to Luke John Murphy, Hans J. Lundager Jensen, and Jens Peter Schjødt for valuable feedback on earlier manuscripts versions. A very special thank you is due to Simon C. Thomson for detailed comments and feedback on many aspects of this text in an earlier inception. Any errors remain my own.

evant throughout our textual corpus. This is ultimately seen as an example of Bellah's notion that 'nothing [important] is ever lost'.[2]

Keywords: *Otherworldly beings; pre-Christian Nordic religion; cultural evolution; cultural evolutionary theory; ontology; dispositions of being; Robert N. Bellah; Phillipe Descola;* álfar*;* vanir*; tribal religion; chiefdom religion; archaic religion.*

As a society evolves due to internal and external factors – such as agricultural innovation, warfare, or wider geopolitical circumstances – so does its religion. This happens in part to accommodate these changing societal and demographic conditions. Naturally, the entirety of a society does not change at the same time; the conditions of a farmer in rural Jylland were certainly not the same as those of a chieftain at Lejre, whose religious practices may not have corresponded entirely with those of a chieftain in Uppsala. Thinking along the lines of the cultural evolutionary typology of religion of late scholar of religion Robert N. Bellah, this means a range of different expressions of the same basic religion can be present at the same time – or 'nothing [important] is ever lost' (cf. Stausberg 2021, 105 with references; cf. note 2). This article builds on earlier work that takes Bellah at face value and employs his cultural evolutionary theories in the study of pre-Christian Nordic religion, suggesting that Bellah's cultural evolutionary typology of religion can be productively expanded with an additional category of *chiefdom religion* (Nygaard 2014, 2016).[3]

2 This modification of Bellah's motto with the specification that importance to the specific culture is key seems warranted, since – as Michael Stausberg (2021, 105, n3) has rightly pointed to – it has the potential to be (and has actually been, cf. de Jong 2016, 661) misunderstood. Naturally, things are lost or forgotten through the course of history. In this regard it may also be useful to think in terms of Aleida Assmann's (2008) notions of *canon* (that which is kept in remembrance by memory specialists in – predominantly – societies with writing) and *archive* (that which is not deemed relevant to the group by the religious authorities, and which is thus 'placed in storage' so to speak). In this article Bellah's expression is used to explain the continuity of function between two groups of Otherworldly beings that are conceptualized differently in accordance with the article's understanding of various types of religion. The accumulation of *important* (and thus not all) traits and functions instead of their total loss in the face of religious change – because change also happens – is (and always has been) at the heart of the understanding of Bellah's motto.

3 Bellah's evolutionary theory was first proposed in his article 'Religious Evolution' (1964) and was most fully and finally expressed in his *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (2011). However, his approach has also been criticized. The present article constitutes a constructive criticism of Bellah's theories, while Michael Stausberg (2014) has also conducted a critical review of the scholarly reception of Bellah's 2011 volume.

Working with Otherworldly beings – that is, gods, deities, or entities thought to influence the human world from their Other World – and using the Old Norse *álfar* and *vanir* as a case study, the article explores some examples of Otherworldly beings in pre-Christian Nordic religion that seem to belong to Bellah's categories of *tribal* and *archaic religion*. Bellah characterizes the Otherworldly beings in a tribal religion, that is, roughly what is found in hunter-gatherer societies without a polity, as a collective with an anonymous identity (Bellah 1964, 361–64, 2011, 117–74),[4] and the gods of his category archaic religion, more or less as found in the early states, as marked individuals with gender, age, and personality (Bellah 1964, 364–66; 2011, 210–64). Subsequently, and inspired by French anthropologist Phillipe Descola's (2013) work on ontology and the dispositions of being,[5] the article moves on to make some suggestions of which kinds of Otherworldly beings might belong to a chiefdom religion in pre-Christian Scandinavia (see Fig. 1).

Methodology and theoretical framework

The theoretical (re)construction of past religions is vital to the work of historians of religion in general, as well as of pre-Christian Nordic religion. When working with such traditions, it is vital to acknowledge that attempts at reconstruction will never mirror reality and will always take the form of an ideal model. This model will be informed by the theories used in the reconstruction on the one hand and, of course, any available empirical data on the other; the resulting model is crucial to understanding the data. For pre-Christian Nordic religion the Old Norse textual sources are fragmented and heterogenous. They were typically written down several hundred years after the advent of Christianity in the North, and thus by Christian scribes for (at least theoretically) Christianized audiences. Furthermore, more contemporary (often Latin) sources are written by outsiders like Roman authors and thus stem from a different cultural setting. It demands

4 Bellah does characterize these beings as *fluid* rather than anonymous, which seems to fit Philippe Descola's (2013) totemistic ontology but not the animistic, in which anonymous would be the better description; unsurprisingly, as Bellah uses Aboriginal religion – the totemistic religion *par excellence* – as one of the main examples in 'Religious Evolution'. As tribal religion in the pre-Christian North resembles animism more than totemism (see p. 79 of this article), this – anonymous rather than fluid identity – will be the understanding in the following.

5 See Hans J. Lundager Jensen (2021) for a thorough introduction to the relevance of Descola's work to the study of religion in general and pp. 88-92 for considerations of the benefits of combining the theories of Bellah and Descola.

a certain methodological subtlety to distinguish possibly genuine pre-Christian traits from the influence of the Christian scribes and their religion.[6] Danish historian of religion Jens Peter Schjødt's methodology, in which he suggests thinking of the elements of the religions as intertwining discursive spaces (Schjødt 2012, 272–5), is useful here. Additionally, it has become widely accepted that considerable diversity existed within what we describe purely by that which followed it as pre-Christian Nordic religion.[7] This diversity consists not only of different types of religion but also of variant traditions within these types. Such diversity probably existed because of geographical, regional, temporal, social, and indeed cognitive diversity (Schjødt 2009).

The theories informing this theoretical model can take many forms, and this affords scope for innovation. New theories can be applied to old sources and thereby provide new insights into the possible workings of the religion lying behind them. This article seeks to apply the characteristics of Bellah's cultural evolutionary typology of religion to the sources of pre-Christian Nordic religion in an investigation of the possible differences in the Otherworldly beings as found in the textual sources. As noted above, Bellah's typology may benefit from an expansion with the category of chiefdom religion (Nygaard 2016) and by pairing Bellah's theories with those of Descola. Using both scholars to analyse the sources, this article opens up new ways to think about Otherworldly beings and their place in the religion of the pre-Christian North.

Bellah proposed religion as an integral part of the evolution of the human mind as a fundamental part of human culture, both being part of a biocultural co-evolution (Bellah 2011, 1–116). From this perspective evolution does not concern genes alone but entire organisms and their cultural systems, including religion.[8] Bellah denotes his history of religion not as a history of a series of particular single temporal and geographical foci in different religions but as a general, convergent religious evolution (Lundager Jensen 2013, 11f.). This understanding of cultural evolution does *not* entertain the idea that all societies must undergo this evolution in a unilinear fashion but stresses the convergent

6 There is a longstanding discussion of whether genuine pre-Christian elements can be found in the sources. See Schjødt (2012; 2020) for an overview of the discussion. See also Andrén (2014, 11–25), who includes an overview of the source value of the archaeological research.

7 Among many others see Andrén (2014); Murphy (2018, 2020); Schjødt (2009, 2012, 2020). All with references.

8 Bellah's understanding of religion is not only Durkheimian at its core, but also uses Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as 'a system of symbols' (Geertz 1973, 90) and Roy A. Rappaport's systems theoretical 'adaptive structures' (Rappaport 1979, 145–47) to great effect.

nature of the term 'evolution' as used in Bellah's history of religion – that is, religions may exist as distinctive types corresponding to cultural historical phases and correlating with changing economic, social, and political framework conditions. The distinctive types of religion are characterized by an accumulation rather than a dismantling: 'Nothing [important] is ever lost' (Bellah 2011, 267 [ed. SN]; cf. note 2), so even in very complex religions traits from less complex religions can be found. Utilizing this thought model, Bellah proposed a cultural evolutionary typology of five distinctive types of religion: tribal, archaic, axial, early modern, and modern religion.[9] Pre-Christian Nordic religion is distinctly pre-axial (Nygaard 2016; Murphy 2018; Schjødt 2020).

Tribal religion features a cosmological universe dedicated to Otherworldly beings with an anonymous identity. As a rule, the entire tribe participates in the rituals, which, like the society, are egalitarian. The use of religious specialists is limited to people with a greater degree of access to the Other World – whether inherent or gained through training. Ultimately, the ritual benefits the entire tribe (Bellah 1964, 361–64, 2011, 117–74; Nygaard 2016, 11). The next phase, archaic religion, requires a high degree of urbanization and a polity with a marked hierarchical structure. The cosmological universe consists of a pantheon of usually anthropomorphic gods with human traits such as gender, personality, and approximate age. The distinctive rituals of this archaic religion are handled by a specialized, often full-time, priesthood, and the ruler in archaic religion is seen as divine or semi-divine (Bellah 1964, 364–66, 2011, 210–64; Nygaard 2016, 11).

However, some religions – including pre-Christian Nordic religion – do not seem to fit the typology's categories (Nygaard 2014, 2016).[10] This issue can be resolved by expanding Bellah's typology with the category of chiefdom religion. Because he was primarily a sociologist, Bellah focused on the relationship between religion and society. It seems that society in pre-Christian Scandinavia presents a problem, because this society, as far as it can be generalized, seems to have been neither tribal nor archaic (cf. Nygaard 2016, 12). Iron and Viking Age Nordic societies do not fit the model for the development of an archaic religion (see Bellah 1964, 365): while somewhat stratified, they were hardly urbanized. The largest settlement in the Viking Age was presumably Hedeby, with a population

9 See Bellah (2011, 365–606), as well as the essays in Bellah and Hans Joas (2012), for axial religions and Bellah (1964, 368–74) for early modern and modern religions.

10 This is also indicated by Bellah (2011, 175–209) but is not treated systematically.

of only about 1,500 or 2,000 (Skre 2012, 84). So does this indicate a tribal society? This does not seem to be the case either. The hierarchical societal structure implied by the large armies attested to by various sources makes Germanic Iron and Viking Age Scandinavia look more stratified than tribal cultures: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describes the conquering Viking army of 865/7 as the '*mycel hæþen here*' [Great Heathen Army]. Even though it is difficult to gauge the size of this or any army in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the name alone indicates a very large army. Conservative estimates count around a thousand persons (Sawyer 1971, 126–28), but it may have been many times larger (Jarman 2021, 27); even an army of a thousand people would have been larger than most settlements of the time (cf. Skre 2012). Furthermore, deposits of weapons from entire defeated armies from, for instance, Illerup Ådal in Denmark (early third century CE) contain about ten thousand weapons, thought to represent an army of between two and three thousand persons (Andrén 2014, 92). Even earlier (c. 50 BCE), in *De Bello Gallico*, Caesar describes the Germanic warlord Ariovistus as having an army of fifteen thousand warriors.

Late Viking Age Scandinavia may therefore have been in the early stages of an archaic society: it was not a city state with a fixed hierarchical polity but an early territorial state with a peripatetic ruler governing a large area of land through military as well as religious power (Trigger 2003, 92–119). Haraldr *blátǫnn's* kingdom in tenth-century Denmark may exemplify this, though he seems to have used Christianity in achieving it (see Bønding 2021; Sundqvist 2021 on the role of kings in the Christianization of the North). However, in earlier Scandinavia there were clearly also societies that were fundamentally based on kin and village, but in which a central ruler exerted considerable control. In such 'chiefdoms', like the Lake Mälaren area in Sweden or the areas around Lejre in Denmark in the middle and late Iron Age – and even further back – neither tribal nor archaic religion seems entirely adequate. Rather, we may anticipate a specific chiefdom religion.

Tribal and archaic Otherworldly beings in the pre-Christian North

Two examples of Otherworldly beings in pre-Christian Nordic religion, which, as will become evident, also seem to represent two different types of religion,

are the *álfar* and the *vanir*, who can be found throughout the Old Norse texts.[11] With some exceptions, the álfar are described as a collective of Otherworldly beings with a rather anonymous identity, while the *vanir* are presented as individual gods, each with a gender, approximate age, and distinct personality.[12] Earlier Latin descriptions seem to portray two such different groups of Otherworldly beings which superficially seem to belong respectively to tribal and to archaic religion, although they do not directly represent neither the *álfar* nor the *vanir*.

The álfar – *an anonymous collective*

In chapter 9, 3 of *Germania* the Roman historian Tacitus,[13] writing in 98 CE about the 'Germanic peoples', relates that: '*ceterum nec […] deos neque in ullam humani oris speciem adsimulare ex magnitudine caelestium arbitrantur*' [they deem it incompatible with the majesty of […] the gods […] to mould them into any likeness of the human face] (Peterson and Hutton 1914, 276f.). Anonymous identities and a reluctance to identify the beings with any individual anthropomorphic figure are strongly characteristic of Otherworldly beings in Bellah's tribal religion. Of course, this may not be taken to refer specifically to the *álfar*, but at least to Otherworldly beings of the same type

11 The *vanir* are probably the most well known of the two, comprising mainly Njǫrðr, Freyr, and Freyja (other gods have been proposed as *vanir*, but space restrictions do not allow that discussion to be included here). They are often contrasted with the other family of gods, the *æsir*, which includes well-known figures such as Óðinn, Frigg, and Þórr. The *æsir* will not feature much in this discussion of Otherworldly beings. However, fundamentally, they belong to an archaic religion. The so-called Vanir debate sparked by Rudolf Simek's obituary for the *vanir* (2005, 2010), arguing that the term was nothing more than a rare, collective term for 'gods', will not be discussed here. See Tolley (2011), Frog and Roper (2011), Schjødt (2014), Lindow (2020, 1047–48) for various perspectives on the debate. See also Frog (2021) for an obituary of the term *æsir*.

12 The *álfar* are not exclusively mentioned as a collective: named individual *álfar* include Völundr and Óláfr Geirstadaálfr, and skaldic kennings for human warriors can use the element *-álfr*, hinting at a meaning denoting masculinity (Hall 2007, 28). Similarly, the *vanir* are occasionally mentioned as a collective, for example, in the eddic poem *Þrymskviða* st. 15.

13 Tacitus's account may well contain traditions significantly older than 98 CE, and accordingly, this date does not reflect the earliest possible date for a religion of a tribal type in Scandinavia (as far as *Germania* can be viewed as a trustworthy source or as relevant for more northern Germanic tribes; see Naumann 1934). All indications are that the start of the break between the tribal and chiefdom religion in the pre-Christian North can be located in the Late Stone Age, c. 3900 BCE, with the transition into an agricultural society. Furthermore, if Bronze Age rock carvings (c. 1800–500 BCE, for example, from Hvitlycke, Tanum, Bohuslän, Sweden, and Ekenberg, Norrköping, Östergötland, Sweden) are any indication of religious traditions, individualized beings may have been worshipped for a very long time.

as the *álfar*. Earlier in the same chapter (9, 1f.) Tacitus describes a quite different set of Otherworldly beings: '*Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent. Herculem ac Martem concessis animalibus placant*' [Of the gods, they give a special worship to Mercury, to whom on certain days they count even the sacrifice of human life lawful. Hercules and Mars they appease with such animal life as is permissible] (Peterson and Hutton 1914, 276f.). Here we see individualized and anthropomorphic beings, worshipped in what seems to be an organized cult, although the named gods are not commonly associated with the *vanir*.[14] The clear differences between these two groups seem to take us from the anonymous collective of tribal religion to the marked individuals of archaic religion seemingly existing at the time point in time.

These different sets of Otherworldly beings – exemplified by the *álfar* and *vanir* in this discussion – are not only seen in this Latin source but also frequently in several Old Norse texts, for example, in the Icelandic family saga *Kormáks saga* ch. 22 (p. 288). Here, Þorvarðr has been wounded by Kórmakr in a *hólmgangr*, and to recover, Þórdís the witch tells him:

> Hóll ein er heðan skammt í brott, er álfar búa i; graðung þann, er Kormákr drap, skaltu fá ok rjóða blóð graðungsins á hólinn útan, en gera álfum veizlu af slátrinu, ok mun þér batna.
>
> [A knoll is not far from here, in which the *álfar* live. The bull that Kormákr killed you shall get and redden the knoll with the bull's blood and make a [sacrificial] feast to the *álfar* of its meat, and then you will get better.][15]

Here we see the *álfar* as an anonymous collective of beings living underground in a knoll with healing powers. The *álfar* also feature in the eddic poem *Hamðismál* st. 1:

> 1. Spruttu á tái
> tregnar íðir,
> grœti álfa
> in glýstǫmu;
> ár um morgin
> manna bǫlva

14 The names given by Tacitus are normally seen as an interpretatio Romana for Óðinn, Þórr, and Týr respectively.

15 All translations from Old Norse are the author's own.

sútir hverjar
sorg um kveykva.[16]

[Sprang forth on the path grievous actions, made the *álfar* weep, the joyless; early in the morning the wicked deeds of men, every sorrow kindles grief.]

Again, we see the *álfar* as a collective of unnamed beings, in line with the description of Otherworldly beings in tribal religion.

The vanir – *individual gods*

By contrast, the *vanir* are presented as three individual gods: Njǫrðr, Freyr, and Freyja. They are endowed with personal characteristics and a gender and defined by their family relations. Njǫrðr is the father of the other two gods. He is very wealthy, has beautiful feet, and loves the ocean but hates the mountains (*Gylfaginning*, 23). The siblings Freyr and Freyja are defined in relation to their father and one another. In *Gylfaginning* (p. 24) Snorri Sturluson describes the two siblings as both beautiful and mighty, but they also have individualized characteristics. The eddic poem *Skírnismál* tells us Freyr can be quite covetous, and he is a bold rider of a good family in *Lokasenna* st. 37. Freyja is '*ágætust af Ásynjum*' (*Gylfaginning*, 24) [the most excellent of the female gods] and an approachable goddess of love, as Snorri states. In *Lokasenna* st. 32 she is said to be a lustful sorceress, while *Þrymskvida* st. 13 tells of her as a strong-willed woman. In short, the *vanir* are presented as marked individuals, each with their own characteristics, personality, and gender, thereby resembling the gods of archaic religion.

The *álfar* and the *vanir* thus seem good representatives of the tribal and archaic types of religion respectively. In the following I will argue for continuity between the two groups of Otherworldly beings from tribal to archaic religion. It is important here to remember the previously mentioned statement, 'nothing [important] is ever lost' (cf. note 2), meaning that as Nordic society and thus its religion evolved, the álfar did not lose their place but were complemented by the *vanir*.

Continuity of function from tribal to archaic religion

As shown in some of the above examples, the area of functions of the *álfar* and the *vanir* seem to overlap. Both groups are providers of prosperity and

16 All subsequent references to eddic poetry given by title (in italics) and stanza number are to the edition by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014).

wellbeing. In *Gylfaginning* (23f.) Snorri writes that Njǫrðr is the granter of wealth in land and possessions, Freyr is the ruler of the produce of the earth, and Freyja governs love affairs and has an affinity with death, because she is said to choose half of the battle slain in both *Gylfaginning* (p. 24) and the eddic poem *Grímnismál* st. 14. Similarly, the *álfar* are providers of wellbeing and health according to *Kormáks saga* ch. 22, as well as of wealth. In *Flateyjarbók* the late king Óláfr Guðrøðarson is offered sacrifices *til árs sér* [for a good year [harvest and prosperity included] and peace] in his grave mound, and because of this he is given the byname Geirstadaálfr – a compound of his dwelling place and -álfr, the singular of *álfar*.[17] To simplify, one might say that the *álfar* and the *vanir* take care of the same area of function within their respective types of religion – tribal and archaic – and this appears to point to a degree of continuity between the two groups.

This is further supported by the theory of a shared identity between the *álfar* and the *vanir*.[18] While the *álfar* and *vánir* are sometimes clearly distinguished in eddic texts,[19] they are often not. The seemingly formulaic and idiomatic expression ása ok alfa used in eddic poetry is a case in point.[20] Its use in the following examples conveys that the *álfar* and the *vanir* are used as two words for the same group of entities. This may be taken as an expression of a shared identity or at the very least a continuity of function allowing for this identification – a continuity that may also serve as evidence to support the theory of religion as an evolving cultural phenomenon. The most explicit occurrences of this conception can be seen in *Lokasenna* and *Grímnismál*, where it seems the term *álfar* is being used to refer directly to *vanir* gods. *Álfar,* not *vanir,* is used, even though the gods usually termed the *vanir* are mentioned by name. The examples from *Lokasenna* follow.

2. Of vápn sín dœma
ok um vígrisni sína
sigtíva synir:
ása ok álfa,
er hér inni eru
manngi er þér í orði vinr.

17 Both groups also seem to be connected to rulership, which this source indicates for the *álfar* (cf. Sundqvist 2015). The *vanir's* connection can mainly be seen through Freyr's connection to specific families of rulers like the Ynglingar (cf. Sundqvist 2002). This shared connection could be argued to substantiate the continuity of function between the two groups.

18 See also Schjødt (1991, 306–307); Hall (2007, 35–39; Gunnell (2007, 121–123); Nygaard (2022).

19 For example, *Alvíssmál*, *Sigrdrifumál* st. 18 and *Skírnismál* st. 17–18.

20 See Nygaard (2022) for an analysis of the discourses of the *álfar* in eddic poetry, pp. 293–97 on the discourse of shared identity.

[Of their weapons and of their valour, the sons of the victory gods speak: of the *æsir* and *álfar* who are in here, no one claims to be your friend.]

13. Jós ok armbauga
mundu æ vera
beggja vanr, Bragi;
ása ok álfa,
er hér inni eru,
þú ert við víg varastr
ok skjarrastr við skot.

[Both steeds and arm rings you will always be in want of, Bragi; of the *æsir* and *álfar* who are in here, you are the most cautious in killing and most scared by shooting.]

30. Þegi þú, Freyja!
þik kann ek fullgerva,
era þér vamma vant;
ása ok álfa,
er hér inni eru,
hverr hefir þinn hór verit.

[Be silent, Freyja! I know you full well, you are not in want of flaws; each of the *æsir* and *álfar* who are in here has been you lover.]

Additionally, the prose introduction lists many gods before describing them as, collectively, *ása ok álfa*:

Til þeirar veizlu kom Óðinn ok Frigg kona hans. Þórr kom eigi, þvíat hann var í Austrvegi. Sif var þar, kona Þórs, Bargi ok Iðunn kona hans. Týr var þar […] Þar var **Njǫrðr** ok kona hans Skaði, **Freyr ok Freyja**, Víðarr son Óðins. Loki var þar […] Margt var þar **ása ok álfa**.[21]

[To this feast came Óðinn and his wife Frigg. Þórr did not come, because he was on eastern roads [i.e. in Jǫtunheimar killing giants]. Sif was there, Þórr's wife, and Bragi and his wife Iðunn. Týr was there […]

21 Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1: 408). My emphasis.

> There was **Njǫrðr** and his wife Skaði, **Freyr and Freyja**, and Víðarr, Óðinn's son. Loki was there […] Many of the *æsir* and *álfar* were there.]

The obvious term – *vanir* – is not used. This probably has some significance in a poem so deftly constructed and mythologically well informed as *Lokasenna.* It becomes especially conspicuous when Freyja is accused in st. 30 of having had sex with all the *æsir* and *álfar*. It is difficult to explain how Freyja can have engaged in sexual relations with the *álfar* as an anonymous collective of Otherworldly beings; in keeping with what Snorri writes about the incestuous relationship of the *vanir* in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4 – mentioned later in *Lokasenna* st. 32 and 36 – the most convincing explanation is a shared identity between the *álfar* and *vanir*.[22] *Grímnismál* st. 5 does not contain the expression *ása ok álfa* yet seems to display the idea of a shared identity between *álfar* and *vanir* very clearly.

> 5. Álfheim Frey
> gáfu í árdaga
> tívar at tannfé […]
>
> [The gods gave Álfheimr to Freyr as a tooth payment in days of yore […]]

It presents Freyr as the ruler of Álfheimr ('world of the *álfar*'), and the indication of time given, *í árdaga*, tells us that Freyr has played this role since the earliest of times. Such indications of time are significant in eddic poetry, which prompts us to assign some meaning to its mention here; it may be taken to indicate an ancient connection between the *álfar* and *vanir*, which could further attest to the continuity between the two groups.

All in all, it seems that not only are the *álfar* and the *vanir* good representatives of tribal and archaic religion respectively; with the continuity in function between them discussed above, it also seems plausible to place them within an evolutionary framework. In short, the *vanir* described in the medieval Old Norse sources can be seen as a continuation

22 See also Hall (2007, 36). The possible function of incest in chiefdom religions is argued for in Nygaard (2016, 21–24).

of the *álfar* – who may stem from conceptions as old as the Bronze Age[23] – that have developed from anonymous, collective Otherworldly beings at home in a tribal religion to individualized gods that fit and serve the purpose of an archaic Late Viking Age religion and society.

Otherworldly beings in chiefdom religion

However, keeping the idea of chiefdom religion in mind, the Otherworldly beings of this type of religion may help clarify this model of religious evolution. How are the Otherworldly beings of chiefdom religion described, and how do we know what to look for? A discrepancy between Bellah's descriptions of the Otherworldly beings of tribal religion and the theories of French anthropologist Phillipe Descola mentioned above may assist us here. Bellah connects tribal religion with the worship of ancestors. However, using the theories of Descola suggests this may not be so. Descola's theory of the dispositions of being stresses that humans order their world through identification, which comprises a mediation between the self and the non-self, where the self compares its own appearance, behaviour, and properties with those it ascribes to others (humans and non-humans alike). This is done to discern the ways in which the self both differs from and resembles the object 'other' (Descola 2013, 112; Lundager Jensen 2021). This leads Descola to propose four ontologies or worldviews, which each have different systems for the characteristics of beings and different cosmologies and social systems. He calls them *animism*, *totemism*, *naturalism*, and *analogism*. While animism and totemism have a rich scholarly background, Descola uses the terms differently than in previous scholarship (Lundager Jensen 2021, 71–9). He uses the dichotomy of interiorities and physicalities to characterize the different ontologies (Descola 2013, 120–5, 232–44). Animism is characterized by an identification of similar interiorities but dissimilar physicalities. For example, this is seen in the myths of North and South American or Siberian hunter-gatherer cultures, in which humans and animals can both communicate and procreate – their interiorities are the same, but they have different physicalities (Descola 2013, 129–43).[24]

23 This idea relies on the potential connection between Bronze Age cup marks on stone often connected with some form of food offering – at least in modern folklore – and the *álfar*. In Swedish folklore, these cup marks are called *älvkvärnar* ('elf mills'), while the fourteenth-century Old Norse text *Heimslýsing ok helgifræði*, ch. 9, describes the practice of consecrating food on stones to spirits of the landscape (*landvættir*) like the *álfar* (cf. Murphy 2018, 75f.; cf. Gunnell 2020, 1574ff.).

24 This was probably also the ontology of the tribal religion in the pre-Christian North.

Totemism is characterized by an identification of similar interiorities and similar physicalities. The best example is the Australian tribes used in the scholarship which originally coined the term. Within any given tribe everything goes back to the Dreamtime, to a given human/animal/plant hybrid from which everyone and everything within the given group stems. Both the interiorities and physicalities are similar (Descola 2013, 144–71). In the naturalistic ontology interiorities differ, whereas physicalities are similar. This is the ontology of modern society and scientific thought in which humans have special mental capacities, which sets them apart from non-humans, who have the same natural physicalities but lack similar interiorities (Descola 2013, 172–200). The last ontology is analogism, in which both interiorities and physicalities differ. Everything is fragmented into an infinite multitude of beings but is at the same time hierarchized and connected. The caste system in India is an example of this, as is the correlation between microcosms and macrocosms in Chinese divination or indeed the cosmology of pre-Christian Scandinavia (Descola 2013, 201–31).

Now, animism and totemism are characteristic of the types of society Bellah terms tribal, and the ontologies behind Descola's animism and totemism can be correlated with the characteristics of Bellah's tribal religion (see also Lundager Jensen 2021, 88–92). There is one exception: ancestor worship. In analogism ancestors begin to play a role as a way of organizing the multitude of small differences, in 'contrast to animism and totemism, from which these cumbersome ancestral figures are absent' (Descola 2013, 227). Thus, all indications are that analogism and its hierarchization might be characteristic of archaic religion, as well as chiefdom religion. Following Descola, I would propose that when we encounter instances of ancestor worship in pre-Christian Scandinavia, we should place this characteristic not in tribal religion but in chiefdom religion.

This influence of analogistic hierarchization may be one of the keys to an understanding of the chiefdom religion of Bronze and Iron Age Scandinavia. To make such hierarchies, one must identify the individuals or groups of beings who form the hierarchy, and it could be proposed that this analogistic hierarchization starts a process of individualization of the Otherworldly being, spanning and correlated with the cultural evolution of pre-Christian Nordic religion and society. The current theory offers tribal religion's anonymous collective of Otherworldly beings on the one hand and archaic (Late Viking Age) religion's individualized anthropomorphized gods on the other. The idea of chiefdom religion enables the identification of something in-between – that is, a type of Otherworldly being that is less

differentiated in the explanatory hierarchy than the *vanir*; that is, something slightly individualized yet not given a personality or an anthropomorphic appearance.

An example is the worship of ancestors mentioned as a point of contention above. It has been suggested that the *álfar* were in fact at some point or in some contexts believed to be ancestors. An example of the connection between ancestor worship and the *álfar* is the above-mentioned ninth-century king Óláfr Guðrøðarson, to whom sacrifices were made after his death; he was subsequently named Geirstadaálfr (see also Laidoner 2020, 121–5; cf. Sundqvist 2020 for a critical treatment). This renaming may imply his absorption into a new family unit, his becoming one among the *álfar*. The worship of ancestors or their role in the belief system may very well have originated in chiefdom religion as it was found in pre-Christian Scandinavia (cf. Steinsland 2005, 344; cf. Nordberg 2013, 279–99[25]). Another example could be the weeping *álfar* of *Hamðismál* quoted above. The context of their sadness is the tragic ending of Guðrún's line with the deaths of her sons, Hamðir, Sǫrli, and their half-brother Erpr. This may allude to the *álfar* as a collective of ancestors, due to their reaction to knowing the sorrow which is going to befall Guðrún's family; some personal connection must exist for this reaction to make sense. As previously mentioned, these ancestors are specific to Descola's analogistic ontology, which I propose informs chiefdom religion.

The mysterious goddess Nerthus, named only by Tacitus in *Germania* ch. 40, may be another Otherworldly being from pre-Christian Nordic chiefdom religion. Tacitus describes her as residing in a '*vehiculum, veste contectum; attingere uni sacerdoti concessum*' [consecrated chariot covered with robes] (Peterson and Hutton 1914, 320f.). After the chariot has been drawn in procession around the landscape, '*mox vehiculum et vestes et, si cedere velis, numen ipsum secreto lacu abluitur*' [the chariot and the robes, and, if you are willing to credit it, the deity in person, are washed in a sequestered lake] (Peterson and Hutton 1914, 320f.).[26] Tacitus seems to imply that the chariot and hangings are synonymous with the goddess, who has not been given human form or indeed any personal characteristics other than being viewed as a feminine deity. Nerthus could thus be an Otherworldly being specific to chiefdom religion – a deity in the early stages of analogistic hierarchization, not part of an anonymous collective but not quite having a marked individual appearance either. Furthermore,

25 Nordberg (2013) presents a thorough and critical examination of the research into ancestor worship in pre-Christian Nordic religion (along with sun and vegetation cults) and its ideological historical roots (pp. 247–55 on the *álfar* specifically).

26 See Nygaard and Murphy (2017, 44ff.) on the Nerthus procession.

Nerthus, through her area of function, may constitute a link between the *álfar* and the *vanir*, further supporting the idea of a continuity of function between not only the two, but all three types of Otherworldly beings (*álfar*, Nerthus, *vanir*), spanning all three types of religion (tribal, chiefdom, archaic). Tacitus describes Nerthus's ceremony as bringing '*pax et quies*' [peace and tranquillity]. No wars are started, and weapons are forbidden when Nerthus is in the area. A parallel with the Nerthus myth is found in *Gunnars þáttr Helmings* in *Flateyjarbók*, which describes Freyr as undertaking the same kind of procession ritual recounted in *Germania* 40 (Nygaard and Murphy 2017, 46ff.), when he is transported around the landscape in a chariot as a wooden idol by a female ritual specialist, bringing prosperity to the land.

Procession rituals aside, there may be even older links between Nerthus and the *vanir*; the Proto-Germanic cognate of Nerthus is the same as Njǫrðr's and can be reconstructed as **nerþuz* (power) (Steinsland 2005, 147ff.; de Vries 1962, 410; Nygaard 2016, 22f.), linking Nerthus with the *vanir* both linguistically and functionally. It is also noteworthy that the gender of the reconstructed Proto-Germanic root **nerþuz* is ambivalent (Vikstrand 2001). This may indicate an ambiguously gendered, semi-anonymous Otherworldly being specific to chiefdom religion, which later took semi- and fully anthropomorphized form in Nerthus and Njǫrðr respectively.

The shared linguistic root of Nerthus and Njǫrðr has led to interpretations of the two gods as a form of divine twins, while Freyr and Freyja have been seen as a younger version of Njǫrðr and Nerthus, and thus also divine twins (de Vries 1970, 2: 244–55; Andrén 2020). Similarly, the pair of siblings also have a common root, though in Old Norse, meaning lord and lady.[27] In various Indo-European mythologies, divine twins are fertility deities who are in some way connected to horses (cf. Ward 1968, 11f.). In Scandinavia this is the case for Freyr in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in *Flateyjarbók*, where King Óláfr Tryggvason finds a stud of horses belonging or dedicated to him in the Freyr-*hof* [Freyr temple] in Þrandheimr in Norway. Another common trait of divine twins throughout Indo-European mythologies is a connection to a female who is in turn herself connected to the sun (Ward 1968, 10f.). In *Vafþruðnismál* st. 47 we hear of the daughter of the sun called *álfrǫðull* ('*álfr*-wheel'), who is to take her mother's place when the mother is eaten by the monstrous wolf Fenrir. This may provide a link between the *álfar* and the divine twins of pre-Christian Nordic religion.

In pre-Christian Scandinavia divine twins seem to be male and fe-

27 Elmevik (2003, 5–13) is critical of this etymology, suggesting the alternative of 'the fertile one', while Olof Sundqvist (2013, 11–35) has defended the older interpretation.

male, while they are both more usually male in other mythologies. Considering Descola's analogistic hierarchization, this may be significant; the divine twins of pre-Christian Scandinavia, Nerthus/Njǫrðr-Freyja/Freyr, may be representations of Otherworldly beings of the chiefdom religion. In the process of hierarchization the former collective with an anonymous identity may have been slightly more individualized, while retaining some elements of their collective nature through twinning and in pre-Christian Scandinavia by being of ambivalent gender. Other examples of male/female divine pairs are Ullr and Ullin (de Vries 1970, 2: 153–63) and Fjǫrgyn and Fjǫrgynn (de Vries 1970, 2: 274f.)[28] – unfortunately, very little is known about any of these beings, and there is no way of knowing whether they were thought of as twins or not.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, it seems plausible to arrange the different Otherworldly beings in pre-Christian Nordic religion as gradually evolving as follows: collectives of beings with an anonymous identity belonging to something akin to tribal religion (the *álfar*); slightly individualized and hierarchized, but not personified beings that are still part of a collective and may belong to a chiefdom religion (ancestors or divine twins like Nerthus/Njǫrðr); and highly individual, often anthropomorphic beings with personalities, age and gender (yet still often seen as a collective) belonging to an archaic religion (the *vanir*). However, and in keeping with Bellah's theories, 'nothing [important] is ever lost': although the Otherworldly beings do change and evolve, a large degree of continuity both linguistically and functionally still seems to exist (see Fig. 1). This provides interesting ideas for further research into applying the explanatory framework of cultural evolutionary theory to historical religions, which might become a valuable tool for the reconstruction of such religious traditions – especially when paired with Descola's notions of ontology and the dispositions of being.

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28 Also connected with the pair Freyr/Freyja.

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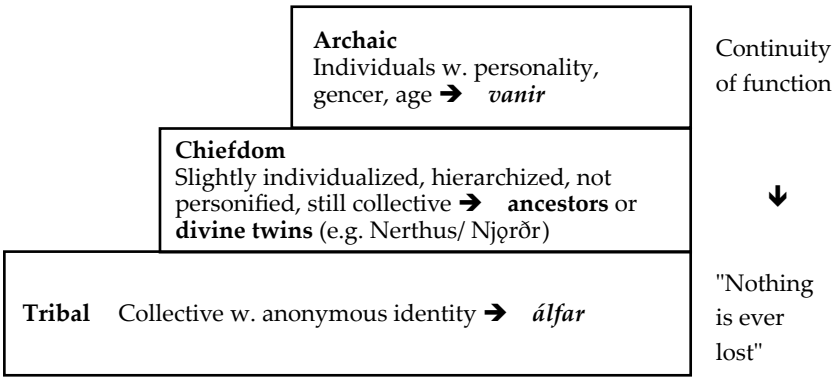
Appendix. Figure 1. Typology of Otherworldly beings in tribal, chiefdom, and archaic religion



TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 91–117
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.99585

The Dichotomy of Branding: Discourses in the Orthodox Church of Finland

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Abstract

This article investigates branding in the Orthodox Church of Finland. How does the Orthodox Church discuss its public image, and how does the theoretical lens of branding add to this discussion? In this study church communication workers were interviewed, and church strategies examined. The results indicate that discourses within churches are diverse and even contradictory. In the identified discourses the authenticity of the church is defended and the improper nature of marketing is asserted. At the same time marketing techniques are considered useful: marketing strategies employ public image and visibility. Based on Beyer, it is suggested that interviewees place a greater emphasis on church function. Moreover, this article discusses how identified discourses contribute to a broader discussion of the Orthodox Church's relationship with modernity.

Keywords: *Orthodox Church; communication; branding; Finland*

In the Finnish countryside there are two Orthodox monasteries. A marketing magazine interviewed the Valamo Monastery in Eastern Finland about its brand development and tourism promotion through marketing professionals. During the interview it was stated that the Valamo Monastery 'could and should be marketed',[1] and that the 'strength' of the Orthodox Church lay in its constancy (Veljien vartijat). Part of the Orthodox Church of Finland (OCF) is therefore using marketing techniques, raising the question of whether the entire church is following the same path.

Sociologists have observed that religious change – culminating in detachment from the authorities and leaving historical churches – has the greatest

1 Each citation of data is the author's translation of the Finnish original.

impact on established churches (Stolz and Usunier 2018, 15). It has been observed that the significance of the main church in Finland (the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, or the ELCF) has weakened in Finnish society and personal life (Ketola et al. 2016), and specifically, baptisms have declined (Hegstad). As the ELCF's membership continues to decrease, the organization employs a variety of methods such as advertising and marketing. The second established church in Finland is the OCF. It is commonly believed that the OCF is somehow unaffected by similar developments or is simply uninterested in marketing. Although the membership has remained relatively static, the OCF is not isolated from society or current phenomena; however, changes may seem less visible and less dramatic. Either way, church membership is increasingly being questioned. It is within this context that churches may utilize their reputation and brand more extensively.

According to Laitila (2015) 'some churches' are actively trying to find a place in the modern world. In pursuit of this goal, he writes, they address current issues and even change their public image as a result. In contrast with the ELCF the OCF has less actively constructed its public image or engaged in extensive campaigning.[2] Generally, the OCF is considered to have a relatively good public image (Ketola et al. 2016, 81, Palmu et al. 2012, 52–54) and may therefore feel the need to actively 'market' itself. According to Metso (2018) 'as a minority church, the Orthodox Church of Finland has not been subject to the same expectations and demands of society' as the mainline church and has therefore not been under pressure to change itself or actively participate in discussions of current issues.

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of how branding is discussed and constructed in official church strategy documents and interviews. The concept of branding is used as a theoretical lens for researching church communications. Despite the fact that this article operates on the concept of branding, it does not mean that churches will actually use it. This perspective will be discussed in more detail later. The research consists of two main strategies, two communication strategies, and six interviews with church employees engaged in communication. The article employs discourse analysis, focusing on themes that emerge in the language or text, to identify repertoires employed in the church. Furthermore, Beyer's (1994) theories of religion's function and performance will serve as a frame for the discussion section.

2 For campaigns see Kokkonen 2020.

The Orthodox Church of Finland: a short history

With the ELCF the OCF is one of the two established churches in Finland (Laitila 2006, 157). Both these churches were established by the state and are often referred to as majority and minority churches: 66.5 per cent of Finns are members of the ELCF, and 1 per cent are members of the OCF (approximately 55,000) (Kirkon jäsenyys; Tilastotietoja kirkon väestöstä vuodelta 2021). Kupari and Vuola (2019) have written that the OCF can justifiably be considered an exceptional case among Orthodox Churches. It is simultaneously an autonomous national church and a small minority church embedded in a dominantly Lutheran society.

As Laitila (2006, 175) points out, the Orthodox Church in Finland is both Finnish and Orthodox. It is an autonomous part of the worldwide Orthodox Church, and it is primarily affiliated as such with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The OCF has been present in Finnish Karelia since the twelfth century (Martikainen and Laitila 2014, 151). In 1918 the OCF was designated as Finland's second state church when Finnish Orthodoxy was reorganized into an autonomous regional church (Laitila 2006, 161, Metso 2017). During the Second World War 70 per cent of the church's members immigrated to Finland (Metso 2017). Simultaneously, a significant part of the material property was lost (Laitila 2006, 1666.) As Martikainen (2005, 118) has written, the identity of the church is quite complex, because it is both a minority and originally an immigrant church.

Throughout history the membership of the OCF has remained relatively constant. However, at the beginning of 2019 the OCF reported that the number of church members had decreased by more than 600 individuals. This was considered a major loss, because membership had fallen below 60,000 (Kirkon jäsenmäärään tuntuva lasku). In 2020 the number of members decreased in a similar manner (Luvut miinuksella, toiminta ja potentiaali plussalla). The reports talk about how more people are leaving the church, the number of baptisms is declining, and a 'lack of religious conviction has been found the main reason to leave the church' (Kirkon jäsenmäärään tuntuva lasku). In any community a steady decline in membership can indicate a serious issue.

Theoretical framework

In this article the theoretical framework is connected with the realm of neoliberalism and consumerism. Indeed, they are closely linked: neoliberalism and consumerism constitute a joint process within which economics has

replaced politics as a defining and anchoring force (Gauthier 2020, 4; see also Gauthier, Martikainen, and Woodhead 2013b). In this context consumer culture represents a significant cultural influence. It refers to the spread of consumerism, which broadly validates consumption and its logic (Featherstone 1991, Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013a, 4, 15; Miles 1998, 1; Slater 1997; Stolz and Usunier 2018, 3). In this article churches are placed within the context of a consumerist society in which consumerism and its impacts affect churches internally and externally.

Marketization is one of the characteristics of consumerism. It describes a phenomenon that either drives or shifts market-related practices and logic into previously non-economic areas of life (Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013a, 3) – that is, market-related practices are extended, and marketing penetrates areas that were previously unrelated to the market (Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen, 2013b). This article also discusses the church's attachment to this field.

Many sociologists (such as Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013a, Stolz and Usunier 2016) have written about the challenges religious institutions face in formulating their relationship with consumerism especially. Indeed, churches and other non-profit organizations have increasingly become market-oriented in response to operating in accordance with the prevailing culture and practices of the modern world: churches utilize secular methods or tools of marketing, advertising, and the reconstruction of their communication. Based on Moberg's (2017) discourse analysis, many European established churches have increasingly applied market methods, especially strategically. I have previously discussed how branding a mainline church can contribute to meaning-making (Kokkonen 2020). In a sense, as Stolz and Usunier (2018) argue, religions copy secular models that have demonstrated effectiveness in other areas of life. This process is commonly referred to as readjustment; new techniques are used to achieve one's goals.

Branding is a specific tool and an increasingly popular marketing concept. It is the process of communicating a particular image designed to attract attention to a product, service, or actor.[3] A brand is used to describe a public image that is deliberately constructed in marketing communications. Marketing generally refers to activities undertaken by a company or organization to market its product or service. As many non-profit organizations have undertaken both marketing and branding, their application has spread from gaining profit to stable membership or creating positive images, for

3 See for example Gauthier et al. 2013a; Stolz and Usunier 2018, Aaker and Joachimstahler 2000.

example. Stolz and Usunier (2018) define branding as the process by which a public image is created through marketing communication. According to Krönert and Hepp (2010), branding is not just advertising or marketing but presenting oneself in accordance with a mediatized culture. Branding is actually an example of marketization in action.

The study of branding in small religious communities like the OCF has mainly concerned new religions (see e.g. Ringvee 2017). Modern studies of Orthodox churches have tended to focus on how they are perceived in mediated culture from the outside through newspapers and media, for example. Bayer and Rodinova (2020) examine the Russian Orthodox Church's image in the secular press. Coman (2019a) analyses the Orthodox Church of Romania, concluding that the church can be interpreted as a brand based on several aspects. Moreover, Coman (2019b) studies the kind of 'brand image' the Romanian Orthodox Church has on digital platforms.

The purpose of this article is to continue the discussion on established churches in a consumerized and marketized environment. Throughout this article, branding is defined as constructing a public image using a methodology from marketing communications. 'Brand' is primarily a theoretical lens through which church communication may be viewed. However, the term 'brand' also appears in the material, as we will see later. It is important to note that this phenomenon can be seen in two ways: first, a brand is a term through which material (interviewees) can also perceive church communications. This perspective is prevalent, because interviewees discuss the relationship between branding and the church. Second, the use of the term can imply something else: marketing terms and logic can also be subtly emphasized. The idea that marketization occurs widely in many areas supports this view.

Method

As the Finnish Orthodox Church is small, this article applies a qualitative methodology. The approach is detailed in the following.

In the field of religious studies Moberg (2017) has made use of a discursive perspective to study the marketization of churches. In his view discourse analytical frameworks and approaches must always be tailored to the particular needs of each study, so each new use necessarily leads to a combination of and modification of previous frameworks. In addition, discourse analysis is often used in conjunction with other theoretical perspectives, especially in religious studies (Moberg 2021, 31–32). Methodological

guides for discourse analysis developed by Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen have been used to study religions in Finland. Neither the discourse analysis they present nor discourse analysis in general is a clear-cut methodology. Instead, it affords a holistic perspective on social and cultural research. This study aims to use a customized method of discourse analysis in accordance with Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen (2016, 43, 47). As the original language is Finnish and has been translated to English, this review does not address linguistic issues. The following will present the starting points for this article based on the above premises.

Jokinen et al. (2016) have described how discourse analysis examines social practices, and how individuals use language in different situations, as well as the meaning systems they produce. They argue that this framework consists of five starting points based on the assumptions that 1) the use of language and social construction are related; 2) there are different (parallel or competing) systems of meaning; 3) relevant activities are contextual; 4) actors are attached to meaning systems; and 5) the use of language has consequences. In the following I briefly illustrate the basis of my premises.

In relation to the assumption that 1) using language and social construction are interconnected, Jokinen et al. (2016) identify three critical terms: constructivism; non-reflectivity; and meaning system. The constructivist viewpoint emphasizes that language is based on the assumption that language constructs social reality. All statements therefore describe and create something; they both describe and construct reality. The second concept, non-reflectivity, refers to the fact that language does not accurately reflect reality. Third, the idea of constructivism is closely attached to structuring language as socially shared meaning systems (Jokinen et al. 2016, 29, 34). The systems in question are termed discourses or interpretative repertoires (e.g. Suoninen 1992), and they are shaped by social practices. Interpretative discourse analysis seeks to identify common discourses that produce and maintain shared meanings and interpretations (Jokinen et al. 2016, 43, 338).

This article aims to identify hegemonic repertoires – or those that are common. According to Jokinen et al. (2016) hegemonic repertoires are identified by locating the data and paying attention to the similarities or parts of the same meaning systems. The more often a piece of a particular discourse is repeated and in more contexts, the more hegemonic the discourse is considered to be. The more self-evident and absolute it appears, the more effective it is, even if it does not dominate the material. It is useful to examine how the hegemonic discourses identified in the material are produced and reproduced, as discourses are not static. These questions ask how the

obvious ones are constructed, and whether hegemonization occurs unnoticed or consciously (Jokinen and Juhila 2016). In addition, sub-repertoires constituting hegemonic repertoires are identified.

The second starting point Jokinen et al. (2016) define is based on the premise that there are different (parallel or competing) systems of meaning. Language users may therefore operate in parallel or competing systems. Additionally, different repertoires interact with one another, which is described by the term intertextuality (or interdiscourse). An intertextual text always has a relationship with other texts (it argues in relation to them), and the presumed audience influences its production (Fairclough 1992, 127–129.)

This article seeks to examine how language is used and argued. It identifies and classifies discourses I have chosen to call repertoires. As observation units, these repertoires are categorized thematically and typified according to how they have been constructed. According to the theoretical framework described above the material can be identified according to the chosen topic. Consequently, to organize and categorize the data, it was assumed that the church had something to do with branding (or that communications could be interpreted through the branding lens), and the data were categorized based on this assumption. As a result, the focus is on how the church's relationship with 'branding' is constructed in language. The main focus is on how the OCF speaks, conveys its public image, and reflects its 'brand'. This is analysed in two ways: first, the church's strategies are reviewed to frame the official discourse of the OFC at the strategy level. The repertoires and identities the interviewees adopt are then examined, and what these repertoires reveal about branding the church is discussed.

Furthermore, only a few concepts from categories 3–5 (Jokinen et al. 2016) are used. The third starting point deals with contextuality, and the idea of cultural context is applied. It is important to consider the context in which an activity takes place, especially in relation to a specific period, place, or environment. Here, the context consists of theoretical starting points related to the surrounding temporal culture described in this article. In the fourth category the concepts of identity, subject position, and the user of discourse all function to describe the processes of speaker construction. For example, individuals can move between different positions and thus create different discourses by adhering to different meaning systems. In the fifth and final category the productive aspect of the consequences of language use is considered: that statements both claim and produce something (Jokinen et al. 2016). The data also construct a view of church branding, rather than simply describing it.

Data

Two types of data were collected for this article: official strategies and interviews. Furthermore, they form different types of genres, or the established production styles of texts (Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen 2016). Two major strategies and two communication strategies cover the decade between 2010 and 2020 in the strategy documents. The OCF began developing official strategies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It has since published two main five-year strategies (Ortodoksisen kirkon strategia 2010–2015 and Tavoite- ja toimintasuunnitelma vuosille 2016–2020) and a communication strategy (Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon viestintästrategia 2010). A communication strategy from the Orthodox Parish of Helsinki is also included (Helsingin ortodoksinen seurakunta. Viestintästrategia 2017–2019). It is the largest parish in Finland, with a third of all Orthodox Finns belonging to it.

As discussed earlier, the Finnish Orthodox Church is a relatively small organization. Only a few individuals are involved in the church's communication: one employee for the entire church, another with Russian-speaking members, and one for the Parish of Helsinki. A fourth communications-related employee, the archbishop's theological assistant, provides information and communication about the archbishop. Based on the estimations and information gathered from the interviewees, approximately ten people were employed in these four occupations between 2010 and 2020, including permanent employees and substitutes. In this study they were contacted personally, and six were interviewed. Despite its small size, the sample of six is comprehensive given the size of the church administration, the number of employees, and the qualitative approach. The interviews were conducted between 2018 and 2020, ranging from half an hour to two and a half hours.[4] To preserve anonymity, more detailed occupations are not provided. No additional identification or connecting separate citation is provided. Furthermore, dialects and any other recognizable ways of speaking have been eliminated when translating the citations to English.

The thematic interviews were conducted to discuss carefully selected topics. The themes chosen included the church's public communication, the role of the interviewee in it, and general communication and its development in the church. Additionally, examples such as the ELCF's publicity campaigns were brought up to stimulate discussion and ask further questions.

4 All but two interviews were conducted in person. One was conducted by email, and the other by telephone, both at the interviewee's request.

Pre-interview research indicated the interviewees might find it difficult to discuss the church's public image, not to mention a particular emphasis on branding. Since the intention was not to examine the brand of the church as such but to use it as a research premise, additional materials were used. These materials allowed discussion without the interviewer offering an outside perspective.[5] Additional materials included specific citations related to 'public image', 'visibility', and 'strengths' from the strategies (similar to those discussed in more detail in the analysis) and a shortened version of a blog by an Orthodox Church employee entitled 'Give the devil your little finger? The church and brands',[6] which discussed the Orthodox Church in terms of branding both critically and humorously. Using materials from the 'inside', that is, with the words of the actual members, provided an opportunity to introduce topics such as image construction to the discussion.

In the following analysis strategies are considered first, followed by interviews. The question addressed is how branding is constructed within the OCF, and in more detail what the socially constructed repertoires within the OCF are. Several hegemonic repertoires and their supporting sub-repertoires are identified and discussed in what follows.

Strategies strengthening the church's image

All the strategies reflect the church's public image in various ways, but do not operate through the concept of 'brand'. However, image building and branding have similar purposes in that both endeavour to control the public image. A repertoire constructed through strategies can be classified as *strengthening the church's image*. This hegemonic repertoire shows that considering the image is a normal part of the church's activities. As outlined in the following, it is evident in each successive strategy.

The first main strategy (Ortodoksisen kirkon strategia 2010–2015) emphasized 'strengthening' the church's image and stated that the church needed a communication strategy to 'create a positive public image'. The church faces a challenge: to 'be visible in the media at the right time and in the right way' but also to 'ensure positive visibility in society'. Furthermore, the church should be 'known as a community having mentors and advanced father confessors' (Ortodoksisen kirkon strategia 2010–2015).

5 The Finnish Orthodox Church is quite small, and it was evident from the interviewees that the researcher was not a member. Many respondents wanted to ask about the issue at the beginning of the interview.

6 Orig. Pikkusormi pirulle – kirkko ja brändit.

The hegemonic repertoires of strengthening a positive church image and visibility are repeated.

Similarly, the second main strategy stresses the importance, because the 'church's positive public image' must be 'strengthened'. In addition, church communication is supposed to 'support the public visibility of the church's strengths'. Furthermore, communications are intended to present the church as an 'alternative' and 'a counterweight to a busy and demanding life' (Tavoite- ja toimintasuunnitelma 2016–2020). Both main strategies thus emphasize themes with similar repertoires. Certain core themes are also identified for the church, emphasizing the church's spiritual leadership and support, as well as its role as an alternative to a demanding lifestyle.

The theme of strengthening positive visibility continues in the church's communications strategy (Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon viestintästrategia), in which communication and information are defined as part of the church's operations. Communication is supposed to 'ensure that church members, partners and society have the correct image of the Orthodox Church and sufficient information about its operation and the services it provides'. According to the strategy the purpose of church communications is to build the atmosphere and image of the church. Communications and information have 'strengthening a positive image' as their strategic objective. In addition, both the church's internal and external communication aims to 'raise awareness'. The emphasis is thus on broad objectives rather than defining specific aims. Additionally, the theme of services is introduced: the church is a service provider in some respect.

Finally, the communications strategy of the parish of Helsinki (Helsingin ortodoksinen seurakunta. Viestintästrategia 2017–2019) follows the same theme. The document calls on staff members to enhance the public image of the parish as 'part of the Finnish Orthodox Church'. Moreover, 'the publicist is responsible for media affairs, building a positive public image'. In this document further consideration is given to the identification of messages in the strategy: 'the basic messages of the parish express its goals as part of the strategic goals of the OCF and express everything essential (in words): why the church exists, what it strives for, and what means and values guide its operations. Basic messages convey a recognizable image'. This strategy emphasizes the importance of essential messages. However, the messages themselves are not defined. In addition, the strategy highlights the importance of staff – 'every parish employee influences the church's reputation and publicity through their own communications' – and underlines 'reputation leadership' without further explanation.

Viewing the material in the context of marketing, it is evident that several marketing concepts are formed in these strategies. First, the idea of a basic message is introduced (but not defined), although some key themes are suggested. Second, the notions of the church as a service provider and reputation leadership are addressed. Furthermore, hegemonic repertoire is evident in all the strategies examined here, which highlights the importance of public image. Each of these strategies addresses issues such as increasing visibility, strengthening the church's (already positive) image, or presenting the church in a particular aspect. According to these documents the OCF not only discusses its public image but actively constructs it. However, the construction of the strategies is not shared, as shown below. Based on the discussion presented below, it appears the interviewees have quite different repertoires: the strategies do not appear to reflect the interviewees' realities.

The Church does not brand

According to the interviewees the church does not deliberately brand itself or construct its image. This is the first hegemonic repertoire in this material.

> In my opinion the Finnish Orthodox Church hasn't joined this branding. (Interview 4.)

> Looking at the church's core mission, well, it isn't hanging around in the media but offering worship, baptizing, and burying people. (Interview 1.)

> It isn't our priority to build a positive image. (Interview 2.)

This repertoire differs fundamentally from the strategies. Most interviewees deny that the OCF uses branding and argue that issues as such are not even discussed within it. According to the interviewees the church does not apply marketing tools in general. It is somewhat repetitive, because five out of six interviewees averred that marketing was inappropriate for the church. This hegemonic repertoire is entangled with tensions associated with the relationship between marketing and the church. According to all the study's interviewees marketing, advertising, and branding is not generally supported or favoured in the Orthodox Church, and marketing communications are perceived to be inappropriate or unsuitable for church settings. In the citations above the impropriety was evident, but it was further emphasized in the following passages:

> I don't see that it [branding] is the mission of church's communication, because anything we bring to the centre if it is not Christ is the wrong thing [to raise]. (Interview 1.)

> We cannot raise something that sells more in this age as a point of communication beyond our basic message. (Interview 1.)

> Does our own message remain in it any longer? (Interview 3.)

The hegemonic repertoire is constructed and justified in accordance with the church's essence or nature: marketing is unsuitable because something essential may be lost – namely, the church's message. The repertoire I classify as *the church does not brand* is structured through four supporting subrepertoires, which will be discussed next.

Four of the interviewees stated that the OCF already had an image and therefore did not construct an additional image. There was some variation in how this was stated. Yet all four interviewees regarded the church as having a distinctive quality, a strong feature, or even a pre-existing brand – without any effort on the part of the communications. This image or brand was described in various ways: one interviewee said that the 'church's brand is face-centred', another that 'when we are visible, we are usually always the exotic, good-scented, beautiful, a little mystical'. Timelessness, a positive disconnection from the present, dogmatic unity, and originality were all mentioned by these four interviewees. For example:

> We're with the Catholics here; we have a very different passage of time in the church because [the Orthodox Church] is not hectically attached to this day in the same way [as the rest of the world]. (Interview 2.)

> Our strength is clearly our dogmatic unity [...] We are clearly unanimous regarding different things. If you ask any of our priests, they will give you exactly the same answers. (Interview 1.)

> The core message of our church, or one of them, would probably be that we would want, or the Orthodox Church wants, to communicate that it is the original, the Church of Christ. For 2,000 years, all the traditions and everything have been preserved originally in the Orthodox Church. We are real, caring, anyone can come, tolerant, and so on – and everything attached to it. We would probably like to communicate that we're a praying church and the real original [church]. (Interview 4.)

According to three interviewees the church was already a strong and positive brand:

> There is demand for the Orthodox Church, and its richness is found especially in the strong brand that it already has. And it's pretty positive. (Interview 4.)

> When we talk about the public image of the Orthodox Church of Finland and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, I feel the analogy is that there is *an* Evangelical Lutheran church, and then there is *the* Orthodox Church [italics added]. (Interview 1.)

> If you have a good product [as the church is], it is itself a brand. (Interview 2.)

It is noteworthy that although the sub-repertoires are diverse, they are united in describing the church as an existing feature by its nature. However, the most important aspect is that it does not require an image, because its 'brand' is embodied in its character. At this point, therefore, the term 'brand' is used to indicate that the church does not construct it.

Several interviewees also emphasized that the OCF's membership of the worldwide church was a second reason for the lack of branding. They also pointed out that the Finnish church was not fully independent in its decision making. Although this reasoning might be considered organizational in nature, it is also connected with the church's nature. Accordingly, the OCF is neither able nor equipped to make brand-related decisions:

> I would say that we cannot affect the brand because it is global, like the brand of the Catholic Church. We here in Finland cannot build it. You don't build McDonald's brand in Finland either [...] In the same way [...] as the Catholic Church of Finland is not a separate [fortress], the Orthodox feel they are part of Christ's church. Maybe the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church think they are part of four million people. However, we think we are part of 270 million people. As a brand, we're part of a worldwide brand. (Interview 1.)

> Then there are certain things that would not change, because our church isn't in the position of decision making. I know we wouldn't even discuss them. (Interview 4.)

Based on the third sub-repertoire of reasons – the OCF does not brand – the OCF does not seek to increase its membership, so its image is targeted at its existing Orthodox members rather than the general public. The interviewees stressed that the Orthodox understanding of Christian mission did not involve 'converting'. The Orthodox Church therefore does not aim for public communication in this sense. Furthermore, the church's incapacity to make independent decisions is demonstrated.

> The Orthodox Church has never walked from door to door; our history does not recognize this type of mission or shouting on street corners. In our church, the mission has been understood as we're here, and if anyone comes in the door, they're welcome. (Interview 1.)

Thus far, it has been noted that interviewees express the view that the church does not brand because of the nature of its image. It is made clear that the church is not an independent or non-public organization and is not a marketing institution. Yet this may reflect a broader tradition that the church and marketing are incompatible. However, there are other parallel or even competing views, which will be discussed next.

The fourth sub-repertoire for the lack of branding is justified from a slightly different perspective, because it is based on the organizational obstacles to marketing. As the interviewees point out, there is a conflict between communication professionals and church leaders (i.e. theological employees). Four of the six interviewees shared this view. As these interviewees stated, the leaders of the OCF did not fully understand the importance of communication to the operation of the church. In the opinion of interviewees communication is the image the church projects, and this contributes to retaining the church's position in society. The interviewees describe a lack of clarity and direction in church communication:

> [Strategic communication] is very important, and [I wish] that we would stop to think about the current state, where we are. Even when talking about a church, communication must have some aims, as we do, because it's very hard to communicate if there is absolutely no united line. (Interview 3.)

> We're shooting on a large scale at everything possible and just hoping that something will hit the target. (Interview 3.)

The interviewees reported a lack of guidance and support in communication:

> If I'm honest, it [the church's official webpage] is very difficult, in a manner

> of speaking, to find the church's tone there; the so-called tone of voice is very difficult to follow. (Interview 3.)

> Of course, we should know where we're heading and why. It's a key thing. Obviously, the communications need to think about the kind of image we want. (Interview 2.)

Several communication workers were looking for a model for how to communicate or act in the public sphere. Public appearance and comments were key to maintaining a positive public image according to the interviewees. The leaders' public visibility in the media differed from communication workers' perspectives in this respect:

> There has not really been a culture of the archbishop discussing his opinion. [...] [I would like] us to move in a direction in which, for example, the archbishop commented more actively on various situations, joined the conversation. (Interview 4.)

> The initiative must come from the church's leaders [...] I would say that there we are trying to grow our media space, but, as I said, if the church leaders aren't committed, it's pretty hard to do. (Interview 1.)

> We won't be able to get from words to actions until the leaders courageously lead the troops and don't take a position safely at the back. (Interview 5.)

A few interviewees mentioned that the church could be made more visible in both traditional and social media, for example. The OCF and ELCF are compared as follows:

> Compared with the situation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church [...] [the bishops] take a lot of initiative in it [public commenting]. Our situation is very much the opposite. (Interview 1.)

Indeed, two interviewees hoped for active engagement on social media:

> However, if we had a Twitter account, for example, 'the Orthodox Church of Finland', we might be able to get involved in the kind of discussions about values in which we should be involved. (Interview 1.)

> Or a really good bishop can be active. A bishop could have a Twitter account. (Interview 4.)

Workers were expected to communicate professionally, but the leadership was reluctant to specify a specific message. It appeared the interviewees were even interested in introducing new (marketing) methods to the church, but the church leaders did not agree. In addition, this sub-repertoire also validates the hegemonic repertoire of why the church does not brand. It is currently determined by the circumstances.

The hegemonic repertoire that the church does not brand has thus far been justified with two sets of sub-repertoires, based on the church's nature and organizational structure. However, these repertoires are not opposites but parallels. The reasoning attached to the church's nature would seem to fit the church's general understanding of Orthodoxy and tradition and the social construction of its community as constant and established. However, the organizational reasoning forms a sub-repertoire of its own. An explanation for these parallel sub-repertoires may be found in terms of identity and subject position, because interviewees' portrayal of themselves may influence the repertoire they create. In discourses people may favour many approaches, not one (Jokinen et al. 2016). In addition, individuals may use language and construct meanings differently, depending on the context. People can define themselves in various, sometimes conflicting, ways (Jokinen et al. 2016, 44). One reason for emphasizing the church's nature is connected with the preconditions (Jokinen et al., 2016, 49), because interviewees are both parishioners and communication professionals. They may thus consider themselves as representing both the organizational communications and the social construction of parishioners. When the interviewees described themselves as communication specialists reflecting marketing possibilities, they emphasized administrative reasons. Furthermore, the theme is developed in the following sections, because the second hegemonic repertoire is even opposed to the first.

Marketing is appropriate and recommended

Applying marketing to the church is even recommended as a second hegemonic repertoire. This hegemonic repertoire overlaps with the first – the church does not brand – and intersects with the supporting sub-repertoire rooted in the protection of the church's nature. Nevertheless, it does align and validate justifications based on the organizational rationale. Intertextuality – argumentation in relation to others – is thus demonstrated. Ultimately, these two hegemonic repertoires coexist despite their differences.

This hegemonic repertoire is notable in that all the interviewees stated

that they would consider concessions (to the line of not marketing or branding the church), as long as the actions were carried out in a manner that was compatible with 'the nature of the church'. This theme also overlaps significantly with the prevention of such practices by leaders, although this repertoire is not exclusively concerned with these issues. The interviewees provided the following examples:

> Well, I would see that [an outdoor advertising campaign] wouldn't be completely ruled out if properly planned. (Interview 3.)

> We do think about the church's public image a lot… We're aware of it – we wish to mould it obviously to be positive and in a way that would make the Orthodox Church and parish approachable, even for new members. (Interview 6.)

> If it's well planned, it [campaigning] isn't ruled out. But I cannot say right now what it could be. If we wanted to produce an outdoor advertisement, what themes would we want to raise? (Interview 3.)

Campaigning emerged primarily for two reasons: first, the interview questions included a presentation of ELCF campaigns. Another reason is that the campaigning of the Lutheran Church is already well established, as the church has organized publicity campaigns since at least the end of the 1990s (Kokkonen 2020).

Various formulations were given to justify the concessions described above. One was that although the church is considered a special case, it should also remain connected to modern life, or 'the world', and the church could, or even should, communicate in a contemporary manner:

> The church has a balancing act in both the ecclesiastical community and the world. Maybe that's the biggest difference – how to find the balance. Perhaps they're not that separate from each other. (Interview 3.)

> I wish we could be proactive instead of reactive, that we wouldn't only react to what has already happened, afterwards. More like, we would plan and think – if we wish to come up with something, we need to think of how, [...] what is the angle, and when. (Interview 4.)

Financial limitations were also frequently mentioned:

> But we have no resources or whatever to have any strategic media communications operations. (Interview 1.)

In general, concessions were described in various ways, often indirectly:

> As I said, all communications must put one's money where one's mouth is. If we create a specific message for the public, people's experience must match it. Suppose we advertise ourselves as or make ourselves close to people, a warm, very traditional, and kind of strong-minded community – if someone comes to church or is in contact with church social work, the experience has to match [what was advertised]. (Interview 6.)

> I don't know if anyone dares to say out loud yet what the brand or image the church wants to have in public. (Interview 2.)

Citations such as those presented here provide an exception to the statement that marketing does not belong in a church context: a proper application. Most interviewees expressed a positive attitude towards some 'new' communication areas such as marketing, advertising, campaigning, sending a clear message about the church, or establishing a public presence, or branding. Five out of six interviewees explained this by describing how the OCF could utilize new methods and even organize publicity campaigns, as indicated above. The interviewees indicated that the church could apply these methods when applifications were carefully considered. 'Daring' to suggest a new image is very intriguing, because it may reveal something about the culture. It at least reveals a distinction is being made between the sacred and profane.

In this hegemonic repertoire of applying new methods, the interviewees clearly placed themselves as communication professionals. It seems to represent the formation of a subject position. They often refer to their 'understanding of communications', as well as their willingness to engage in communications. In interviewees' repertoires the church conflicts with secular marketing, but they simultaneously offer their own repertoire, positioning themselves as professional communicators. Some interviewees described communication as expert-driven, implying that communication workers guide communications in the church:

> The church's [only] publicist has very free hands to develop communication. (Interview 4.)

> The communication has originated from professionals. (Interview 3.)

Similarly, this repertoire is related to something previously discussed: church leaders make major decisions, while communicators have relatively great responsibility and freedom. Nevertheless, some sort of contradiction is formulated.

In these discussions the nature of the church is valued, but a dichotomy between the original church and 'modern' practices is also articulated when the interviewees describe the church from the perspective of their profession, and the two distinct hegemonic repertoires arrive at a crossroads. They identify the traditional meeting of the modern, and how the church would benefit from marketing and new methods. This is further elaborated in the next chapter.

Between two constructions

The purpose of this article was to identify discussions of branding in the OCF. As a result, two main constructions may be viewed as parallel hegemonic repertoires. These two hegemonic repertoires overlap to some extent, and their boundaries are often blurred.

Diverse data construct quite different realities that may overlap with or even contradict one another. For example, the strategies have their hegemonic repertoire for visibility and strengthening the church's image. Furthermore, the strategies emphasize the importance of public image as a vital part of the church's operations. There are also some market-based core ideas such as key messages. Nevertheless, as the interviewees' speech indicates, this is not a shared reality, because the strategies do not correspond to the interviewees' views. The interviewees do not fully share a repertoire constructed in the strategies, at least not to the point where underlining the church's image is completely normalized. It can be said that the repertoire of strategies is far ahead of the constructions of communication professionals.

Constructions are diverse throughout the interviewees' hegemonic repertoires, and how they are constructed. In response to the question of whether the church should be branded or not, or to strengthen its image, the interviewees embrace different positions simultaneously. Accordingly, they construct the hegemonic repertoire *the church does not brand* based on both its nature and its organizational structure. Additionally, interviewees mention external causes, because they perceive that they lack autonomy regarding all communications. Marketing, the second hegemonic reper-

toire of interviewees, is appropriate and recommendable and more related to strategies, despite the fact that interviewees construct a future in which strategies already prevail. The interviewees agree that the church should benefit from adopting new methods when they are applied properly. Nevertheless, these concessions need to be appropriate to the church's nature and character. The church is thus viewed both as a special case and as part of society.

As illustrated here, some actors may be more willing than others to copy secular methods, even within the same organization. According to Beyer (1994, 79–94) religion is either characterized by its function or its performance. This theory provides a somewhat suitable framework for discussing this case. Beyer maintains that the concerns raised in performance-oriented religiosity are not primarily religious issues. For example, social problems are emphasized. Yet an approach that emphasizes the function of religion is typical of conservative groups and churches. This emphasizes religion's spiritual function. Beyer has written about how function focuses on a core spiritual mission, whereas performance results in applying religion to broader social problems. Religion is prioritized as something to be taken seriously and as a valid message for this age. This division makes it easy to see that the OCF is actually more centred on function – that is, its transcendent core message. Even in this material it is apparent that the church is not particularly keen on current issues, and that the focus is usually more on the function. According to Beyer (1994, 93) 'religion in the modern world takes on a privatized or a public face depending on whether one is looking at religious function or religious performance'. The function is particularly highlighted in this study when the interviewees emphasize the fundamental nature of the church. Although the strategies seek to increase the church's visibility, they also emphasize the church's qualities such as the church as a counterweight to the world or the spiritual life of its members. Yet this emphasis has an echo of performance –something other than the core function.

A fundamental contradiction exists here regarding the application of marketing elements to the church. To discuss the church's role as both an eternal institution and part of society, it is necessary to discuss both Orthodox tradition and modernity. The analysis suggests that the OCF is positioned as both part of the contemporary world and as eternal and static; this opposition is evident throughout the repertoires that are constructed. The consumerized and marketized world serves as a setting for the 'modern' that Orthodoxy 'encounters'. Marketing in general reflects the adoption of secular methods to church contexts (Stolz and Usunier 2016) that also occurs

in established churches. Makrides (2012) asserts that the Orthodox world generally has difficulty assimilating the multiple products of modernity that Western Christianity has already embraced. As Laitila (2006, 175) has described, the OCF's character or 'aim has [often] been to preserve rather than change'. Willert and Molokotos-Liederman (2012) have written that terms such as 'innovation' have negative connontations, and Orthodoxy therefore generally prefers to emphasize 'renewal' or 'renovation' if the tradition is somehow 'changed'. However, Orthodox churches differ from each other somewhat because of their national and local bonds and depending on their ties to a 'mother church' like the Russian Orthodox Church. As Orthodox communities have lived in diaspora in many Western countries like Finland, Makrides (2012) writes that 'their long presence and interaction in a plural and multicultural context has rendered these Orthodox different in many respects'. Furthermore, the Finnish Orthodox Church represents a distinct community that is seamlessly connected with the Finnish sphere and is therefore not directly comparable with any other church.

At this point it can already be said that the OCF does not exist in isolation from the consumerist market society around it. Pettersson (2013, 56) has argued that churches must change their communication methods. Taking this analysis into account, the OCF does not appear to know how to address this 'must'. Yet data show that certain actors (at least those in charge of strategies) actively promote market-related ideas. In Finland the OCF has generally enjoyed a positive image and stable membership. There is no doubt that this has significantly affected how the Orthodox Church perceives the necessity of improving its public image – or rather the lack of necessity. It may be that Valamo monastery, mentioned at the beginning of this article, is an exception in its marketing strategy in the OCF, because tourism is the monastery's main source of income.

It is notable that the majority church in Finland (the ELCF) has applied marketing and branding by adopting some aspects and eschewing others (Kokkonen 2019). It has also implemented additional messages as a societal actor (Kokkonen 2020). It could be said that the OCF is at least considering something similar, since the requirement for proper application and benefit is apparent. According to the strategies it appears the OCF is enhancing its public image and visibility, but the interviews indicate that nothing concrete has occurred beyond the strategies. Even when the church has its own meaning – the core that should not be touched or altered – the results of this study illustrate how church discussions revolve around public visibility. The most important motive is probably to ensure, validate, and

justify the status of churches in society in the future. Moreover, examining church communications from the perspective of branding leads to at least two conclusions. First, the Orthodox Church actively defines its relationship with branding and marketing in general. Second, some hidden practices can be identified using the chosen theoretical lens of branding: the church uses some marketing and even branding ideas, especially in the strategies, because it discusses its public image and visibility in ways that are partly consistent with branding in general. Finally, many communication professionals in churches stated that marketing could benefit the church.

As is typical of qualitative discourse analysis, the data and results of this study cannot be generalized but present a perspective based on selected data and the theoretical frame. It is not the aim of this study to give an absolute answer but to provide an overview of discursive constructions through selected examples. A reader is provided with an overview of the strategy work, employee discussions, and divisions of the Finnish Orthodox Church, centred around selected themes.

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TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 119–46
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.100454

Unveiling the Character Gallery of Sermons: A Social Network Analysis of 11,955 Danish Sermons

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Abstract

In this article we examine the character gallery in a digitized corpus of 11,955 Danish sermons from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark written between 2011 and 2016. We study these sermons as a collective text production in which the characters represented illustrate aspects of Christian tradition and cultural history. We depart from the following questions: which characters populate Danish sermons, and what representations of biblical texts and history are displayed from the interrelations of these characters? In line with Bakhtinian thought we approach the sermonic character gallery as a polyphony of voices, and informed by the Deleuzian idea of the rhizome, we understand this character gallery as a network in which characters through their connections to other characters form clusters of thematic narratives. We represent this network through a social network analysis using computational tools, and closely analyse which characters are connected in the network's sub-groups, and how. We find that biblical figures especially enhance stories of Jesus as saviour, teacher, or caretaker, while political figures tend to be dissociated from biblical figures and representing narratives of historical atrocities. In addition to these figures a large group of anonymized characters prevails.

Keywords: *sermons; character gallery; rhizomes; network analysis; digital humanities*

A key feature of Christian sermons is pastors' ability to mediate and negotiate between the context of biblical texts and the historical context of congregated listeners (Pleizier 2017; Jensen 1996). However, we have surprisingly little knowledge of how this negotiation unfolds in practice in sermons as a vast collective text production. In this article we remedy

this by arguing that the agents pastors inscribe in sermons provide unique and thus far unexplored knowledge of how pastors collectively navigate between biblical and cultural contexts in sermons. We take this first step by conducting an exploratory and computationally driven social network analysis of the character gallery in 11,955 sermons from 2011 to 2016 written by pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark (ELCD). We start from this question:

Which characters populate Danish sermons, and what representations of biblical texts and history are displayed from the interrelations of these characters?

Our approach draws inspiration from the current state of homiletics in the Nordic countries. It also represents a radical new path for studying sermons. In our study of the character gallery in the sermon corpus we emphasize the dialogical potential of sermons as proposed by the theologian Marlene Ringgard Lorensen (2013). Meanwhile, we shift the perspective from including a listener-oriented dialogue between preacher and congregants to including the unique dialogue between sermons, the Bible, and the surrounding culture, using the Deleuzian theory of *rhizomes*. We thus attend to sermons as a vast production of theological texts, providing historical documentations of Christianity and culture instead of attending to sermons' communicative function in church. To this end we follow theologian Clifton Guthrie's call for quantitative measures to study sermon content (Guthrie 2007).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

Sermons depend on the church context and the prescriptions in force for preaching. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is a majority church with a large membership (73.2 per cent of the entire population of Denmark as of 1 January 2022). However, membership is in stable decline, due primarily to demographic changes (down from 79.8 per cent of the entire population in January 2012). Despite its large membership, regular church attendance is low, with approximately 11 per cent of the population attending church at least once a month (Andersen et al. 2019). Although membership levels are declining in general, it is still common to engage in church ceremonies for important life events. For example, 81 per cent of all those who died received a church funeral in 2021.[1]

The ELCD is affiliated to the state of Denmark through the constitution, and there is no national synod. The church is organized in ten dioceses

1 These statistics can be found at <https://www.folkekirken.dk/om-folkekirken/folkekirken-i-tal> and <https://www.km.dk/folkekirken/kirkestatistik/> accessed 2 May 2022.

supervised by ten bishops, and each diocese consists of deaneries and local parishes, in which the local congregational councils influence the local church's life.[2] As of 2016 the church had 2,169 parishes led by one or more pastor. ELCD pastors have a university theological degree and after their theological studies undergo the ELCD's practical pastoral training course to be ordained.[3] In 1948 the ELCD was the first church to ordain female pastors, and slightly more pastors today are women – 55 per cent in 2014 (Henriksen 2014) – than men.

ELCD services follow a liturgical order approved by the bishops and authorized by the Queen of Denmark in 1992. However, the liturgical order describes several variations between which local parishes can choose. Yet the service must contain two or three bible readings: one from the Old Testament and/or epistles and one from the gospels. These readings are determined by two lectionaries – one for even and one for uneven liturgical years. The liturgical calendar has 69 holidays applicable for each Sunday in the calendar and Christian feasts, and pastors must always preach on the gospel pericope of the given holiday. Most services take place on Sundays before noon. Given that there are 2,169 parishes, it follows that approximately the same number of sermons are delivered every week. However, the church does not keep statistics for the precise number of sermons delivered in ELCD parishes, which also include sermons for feasts and special services (for example, at nursing homes) in addition to the weekly Sunday services.

The study in this article is based on analyses of a sermon corpus of 11,955 ELCD sermons mainly from 2011 to 2016, written by 95 pastors.[4] Assuming that 2,169 sermons are delivered every week – with the previously mentioned reservations in mind – the corpus comprises roughly two per cent of all the sermons delivered in a year. The corpus was opportunistically sampled directly from pastors, meaning it is not a representative sample, forming instead a case of sermons in the ELCD from the stated period. However, despite inherent imbalances, the corpus still exhibits relevant variations in terms of metadata (date, holiday, parish size, and diocese, as well as gender, age, and place of education). There is a slight overrepresentation of sermons by men in the data (M: 57 per cent; F: 43 per cent). The pastors were born between 1950 and 1988, and most of the sermons were written by pastors

2 For further information about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, see Nielsen and Kühle (2011) or Christoffersen (2010).

3 Parish statistics can be found at <https://www.folkekirken.dk/om-folkekirken/organisation/sogn>, accessed 3 December 2021.

4 The corpus is hosted at Aarhus University and stems from a collaborative project. The project partners are data owner Kirstine Helboe Johansen (Dept of Theology), Anne Agersnap (Centre for Grundtvig Studies), Uffe Schjødt (Dept of the Study of Religion), Ross Kristensen-MacLachlan (Center for Humanities Computing Aarhus), and Kristoffer Laigaard Nielbo (Center for Humanities Computing Aarhus).

born in the 1960s (45 per cent) and 1970s (25 per cent). Geographical dispersion is indicated based on the diocese to which the pastors belong. Since Danish dioceses encompass both large cities and small villages – except for the Diocese of Copenhagen, whose boundary corresponds to the capital's boundary – the corpus does not account for the sermons' rural contra-urban areas. Approximately 96 per cent of the sermons in the corpus were written between 2011 and 2016, while a limited number were written on either side of this period. There is also a small number of sermons for which we have no date (approximately 0.02 per cent of the entire corpus).[5] Although the corpus is not a representative sample of sermons in the ELCD and has some inherent imbalances, it provides a comprehensive and important case sample for investigating pastors' documentations and practices of biblical, historical, and cultural narratives.

The empirical turn in homiletics: the Nordic context

Taking inspiration from North America and Germany, the discipline of homiletics has recently undergone an empirical turn. This implies a focus on how sermons and preaching unfold today in practice instead of normative standards for preaching. The empirical approach has especially entailed a listener-oriented perspective that attends to how churchgoers hear and perceive sermons. From surveys to qualitative interviews the body of empirical work has evolved since the 1970s until today (Rietvald 2013). With inspiration from the North American *Other-wise Homiletics*, qualitative studies and the listener-oriented focus have also become influential in preaching studies in the Nordic countries (Lorensen and Johansen 2020). Influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin, Danish theologian Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen has investigated the dialogical potential of sermons (Lorensen 2013); a similar approach is found in the works of theologian Marianne Gaarden, who has studied sermons as dialogical phenomena between preacher and congregants with listeners as active co-authors (Gaarden 2014). Likewise, in Norway, Hilde Fylling has investigated churchgoers' expectations for sermons, and which aspects they find most compelling (Fylling 2015), and most recently, Linn Sæbø Rystad has demonstrated the complexities involved in preaching specifically for children (Rystad 2021).

Although this listener-oriented focus is paramount in the empirical turn, American theologian Clifton Guthrie argued in 2007 that quantitative approaches from other disciplines could provide an even wider scope for

5 For a detailed presentation of the sermon corpus (sampling, annotation, and archiving procedures) and corpus statistics see Agersnap et al. (2020).

understanding the practice of preaching. He especially emphasized that the analysis of sermon content was an underexplored aspect of quantitative research in homiletics, which otherwise tended to favour self-reporting surveys of preachers and congregants (Guthrie 2007). An example of the latter in a Nordic context is Svein Thorbjønsen's and Magne Supphellen's survey of Norwegian preachers' self-reported use of social-ethical topics in their sermons (Thorbjørnsen and Supphellen 2018). The focus on social-ethical issues also prevails in comparative studies of sermon texts in the Nordic countries – however, without using quantitative measures. These examples include Egil Morland's study of sermons during World War Two in Norway (Morland 2014), as well as comparative studies of sermons written during the 2015 refugee crisis (Lorensen et al. 2017; Angel and Johnson 2019). In contrast with these textual studies, Swedish linguist Hans Malmström has applied quantitative and computational resources to study around 150 written sermons from English-speaking denominations with a particular listener-oriented focus (Malmström 2014; 2015a; 2015b). However, the quantitative and computational approach to sermons is still very rare in the Nordic countries. The empirical turn in the Nordic countries has until now been largely characterized by qualitative interviews or text studies with a distinct focus on the communicative context in church. However, a less well-studied aspect of sermons is their uniquely collective dimension. Within the computational turn in literary studies Franco Moretti has enhanced literary works of the same epoch as a collective text production, arguing:

> (…) a field this large cannot be understood by stitching together separate bits of knowledge about individual cases, because it isn't the sum of individual cases: it's a collective system, that should be grasped as such, as a whole (Moretti 2007, 3–4).

Similar to Moretti's perspective on literature, we depart from an understanding of sermons as a collective system: pastors formulate a weekly sermon, usually in the form of a written text, through which they interpret a prescribed gospel pericope from a shared historical and cultural horizon.[6] We therefore maintain the dialogical perspective from the listener-oriented focus and the social and historical focus from the Nordic qualitative text studies, while adopting computational tools and quantitative measures to study this dialogue in sermons as a collective text production.

6 For a further developed understanding of sermons as a collective text system see Agersnap (2021).

Sermons: a polyphony of voices

The recent homiletical interest in the role of the listener was acknowledged and developed in the idea of the roundtable pulpit originally promoted by American theologian John McClure (McClure 1995), in which pastors are encouraged to invite congregants to a roundtable on the biblical text as part of their preaching preparation. Empirical research has shown that listeners do not necessarily limit their understanding to what the preacher expressly says or means. Rather, they creatively co-create and further develop the meaning of a given sermon, depending on their own context and reflection, as shown by Gaarden and Lorensen in the Nordic context (Gaarden and Lorensen 2013; Gaarden 2014).

Based on such empirical insights, homiletical interest has increasingly shifted to creating sermons open to a variety of individual interpretations. It is possible to create such sermons through direct interactions with potential listeners (and thereby co-authors), following the tradition of the roundtable pulpit (Lorensen 2013, 55). However, this also requires a re-evaluation of what a sermon is, and what the pastor ought to achieve when preaching. Inspired by Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, Lorensen strongly distances herself from the sermon as a transmission that attempts to convey a meaning from the preacher to the listeners as passive recipients. Lorensen instead follows Bakhtin in understanding language as dialogical. From this Bakhtinian perspective language and communication is – or should be – dialogical and deeply oriented towards the other as itself a subject. Lorensen thus introduces the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony to suggest how an author can renounce monological privileges and instead seek to establish polyphonic interactions between autonomous characters in the text (Lorensen 2013, 66). For the communication taking place this means

> …the addressee does not just hear one voice, that of the author, but many voices, voices belonging to 'personalities' with whom the reader, via the act of reading, is drawn into a dialogue. In this polyphonic encounter the border between discourse and reality is transcended (Lorensen 2013, 66).

This ideal of open dialogue – a polyphony of voices that invites the recipients of the novel or sermon to participate as active interpreters and co-creators – was developed by Lorensen and has recently gained empirical support (Lorensen 2016; Lorensen and Buch-Hansen 2018). However, in this article we will focus on the characters who *embody* the polyphony of voices rather than the recipients or the co-creative listening process.

In contrast with novels and other literary texts, sermons are not fictional, and the characters included are always known in principle beforehand. This pertains to both biblical and non-biblical characters. Although the pastor is responsible for inviting voices into the sermon and constructing their roles, the characters themselves evoke other stories and contexts in which they occur, along with previous encounters between these characters and the listeners. From a cognitive-linguistic perspective we can say that these characters act as *reference points* (Langacker 2009, 83–85). These reference points may provide access to richly textured background knowledge, meaning that the mere mention of certain characters can result in a wide range of connotations for certain listeners (Semino 1997, 119–159). The characters are therefore not floating signifiers to which the pastors assign meaning; they already bear meaning, and it is as such that they enter sermons.

Rhizomatic networks

To uncover not only who the characters in the sermons are, but also how they are interrelated and connected, we deploy the Deleuzian concept of rhizomes (Delueze and Guattari 1980). Gilles Delueze and Félix Guattari distinguish between *the tree* and *the rhizome* as systems of thinking. Arborescent thinking is linear and vertical: the tree can only grow in one predefined direction, and all its many branches develop from the same stem. This arborescent mode thus represents coherence and unity across time and space. In contrast, a rhizome is an open system that establishes connections between elements in all directions and has no clear beginning or endpoint. A prototypical rhizomatic structure is an animal burrow, with underground tunnels that connect chambers in several different and often unpredictable ways. Unlike the tree that grows in a linear predefined direction, the rhizome is changeable and develops horizontally because of momentary interactions between elements. From a Deleuzian perspective human activity can also be understood rhizomatically: environments and encounters affect human beings in unforeseeable ways to produce new emotions, thoughts, and concepts (Deleuze and Guatteri 1983, 1–58).

We argue that sermons can also be understood rhizomatically. They are affected by given contextual factors such as the time of the year or the specific congregation. Moreover, the characters included in the sermons are connected with a range of external contexts, whether biblical, political, the media, or the arts (to name only a few examples). In other words sermons facilitate interrelations between characters with a wide range of different

cultural connotations. In this sense sermons – specifically understood as a collective text production in line with Moretti – are an ongoing process of production and re-production, establishing and dissolving interactions between different spheres of culture through the characters pastors choose to include or exclude.

Methods

We study sermon characters as a character gallery. To this end we develop a pipeline for extracting and identifying characters in the corpus and representing and interpreting the relations between them in a rhizomatic network. This involves the combination of computational tools with manual analyses.[7] We use a computational method known as *Named Entity Recognition* (NER) (Jurafsky and Martin 2009)[8] to automatically extract all references to specific individuals in the corpus. The NER identifies 12,357 unique personal entities in the corpus. However, in some cases the software incorrectly tags certain linguistic features as referring to people, which we naturally need to eliminate. Furthermore, we wish to focus on the most common characters, and we therefore only include entities that occur ten or more times across the corpus. Many of the extracted entities also refer to the same characters appearing with different spellings, misspellings, and possessive forms. We therefore collapse these variations into one unique character.[9] After this entire process of cleaning we end up with a substantially reduced dataset of 600 unique characters. We then manually code the extracted entities by labelling them with metadata regarding their originating contexts, such as whether characters originated from biblical sources. We code each character as one of four types. *B* characters are characters from biblical sources; *N* characters are non-biblical but specific characters (for example, *C. S. Lewis*); *P* characters are non-specific characters with generic proper names (for example, *Anders*); and *R* characters are named according to a social role (for example, *Enken* (*the widow*) or *Kongen* (*the King*).

7 Parts of this analysis have been presented as methodological examples of largescale textual analysis of Scandinavian languages in Agersnap and Johansen (2021).

8 Additional details about computational methodology and the relevant code can be found in the online repository for this article, located here: <https://github.com/centre-for-humanities-computing/sermon-networks.dk>

9 For example, we collapsed the extracted entities *Hitler*, *Hitler's*, and *Adolf Hitler* into one character under the name *Adolf Hitler*. If a character name contains (/), this indicates that a character can appear in the sermons under two names.

Table 1. Coding manual

Category	Code	Definition
Type	B	Biblical character
	B_a	Ambiguous biblical character
	N	Non-biblical character
	P	Proper nouns
	R	Social role
Gender	1	Male character
	2	Female character
	0	Character unidentifiable as male or female
Time	OT	Old testament character
	NT	New testament character
	ONT	Character or name in the old and new testament
	CON	Character who was alive in 2011-2016
	PAST	Character who was not alive from 2011-2016
Nationality	DK	Danish character
	NOR	Icelandic, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Faroese or Greenlandic character
	EUR	European character
	NAM	US or Canadian character
	GLO	Non-European and non-North American character
Domain	POL	Politician
	LIT	Fictional writer
	MUS	Musician
	ART	Artist within the visual arts
	THE	Theologian
	ACT	Actor
	ROY	Royal character
	REA	Character from reality show
	TV	TV personality (show host, anchor etc.)
	RAD	Radio personality (show host, anchor etc.)
	SOC	Social media personality (bloggers, youtubers etc.)
	SPO	Athlete
	BUS	Personality associated with business communities
	ACA	Academic
	DEB	Public voices or debaters
	FIC	Fictional character ex. from literature, movies, tv shows etc.
	LEG	Legendary or mythological character
	OUT	Unidentifiable character

B_a characters and *N_a* characters are entities that probably refer to biblical characters or specific non-biblical characters due to their high frequency scores, but that are also common Danish names – like *Maria* (*Mary*). All character types are gender coded, *B* characters and *N* characters are time coded, and *N* characters are further nationality and domain coded. Domain coding provides information about the cultural domain in which *N* characters originate. This approach gives us a comprehensive insight into the characters populating the corpus.

We employ *network analysis* to study the relational patterns between characters throughout the collection.[10] In recent years this method has been applied with great success across a range of topics in the humanities, including the structure of dramatic texts (Stiller et al. 2003; Fischer et al. 2017) and sixteenth-century protestant letter writing in England (Ahnert and Ahnert 2015). In network analysis, each unique entity in a sermon is considered a *node* in a network. Each of these nodes is joined to other nodes that appear in the same sermon by an *edge*. Thus, for sermon *pr1000_76* in Table 2 below the nodes are *Eva*, *Adam*, and *Jesus/Jesus Kristus*.

Table 2. Example of nodes in individual sermons

Sermon ID	Entity
pr10000_76	Eva, Adam, Jesus/Jesus Kristus
pr10001_76	Esajas, Gud, H.C. Andersen/Andersen
pr10002_76	Hyrderne, Jesus/Jesus Kristus, Melchior, Augustus/Kejser Augustus, Herren, Balthazar, August, Esajas, Artaban, Maria, Josef
pr10003_76	Storm P/Storm, Jesus/Jesus Kristus, Peter den, Gunnar, Adam, Thomas, Martin A. Hansen, Satan, Khalid, Ivan
pr10004_76	Jan Lindhardt, Benny Andersen, Jesus/Jesus Kristus
pr10005_76	N.F.S. Grundtvig, Jesus/Jesus Kristus, Søren Kierkegaard, Augustin, Holger
pr10006_76	Martin Luther, Palle, Anders Stjernholm, Freud
pr10007_76	Martin Luther, Kain, Jesus/Jesus Kristus
pr10008_76	Faderen/Fader, Kain, Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther, Abel
pr10009_76	Martin Luther, Johannes, Kristus, Jesus/Jesus Kristus

10 For a book-length introduction to network analysis see Easley and Kleinberg (2010).

These nodes can be joined to form an *edge list*, showing every possible combination of the pairs as follows:

Eva	-- --	Adam
Eva	-- --	Jesus/Jesus Kristus
Adam	-- --	Jesus/Jesus Kristus

We automate the process of creating an edge list using a short computer program.[11] Across all the sermons, the top five pairings between characters can be seen below in Table 3.

Table 3. Example of an edgelist

Character A	Type	Character B	Edges
Jesus/Jesus Kristus	undirected	Johannes	1938
Jesus/Jesus Kristus	undirected	Paulus/Saulus	1794
Jesus/Jesus Kristus	undirected	Kristus	1495
Jesus/Jesus Kristus	undirected	Maria	1343
Jesus/Jesus Kristus	undirected	Peter/Simon Peter	1283

The first and third columns show the names of the individual nodes. The fourth column shows the number of times these entities appear together in a sermon, and the second column indicates that this relationship is *undirected*.[12] The full edge list shows not only a long list of binary relations but can be conceptualized as a complex network of overlapping edges and nodes. The number of connections each node has is known as a *degree*, which indicates how well connected a character is in the network.

As Mathieu Jacomy (2021, 56) highlights, these networks of joined up nodes can be studied *visually* by inspecting a visualization of the constructed graph or *statistically* using various metrics. We adopt the statistical approach, using a community detection algorithm to study the network's internal structure (Blondel et al. 2008). Put simply, this involves partitioning the network into smaller sub-units or communities, which are understood as

11 Most of the network analysis was performed using the open-source software *Gephi* (Bastian et al. 2009). Additional information on the process can be found online: <https://gephi.org/>

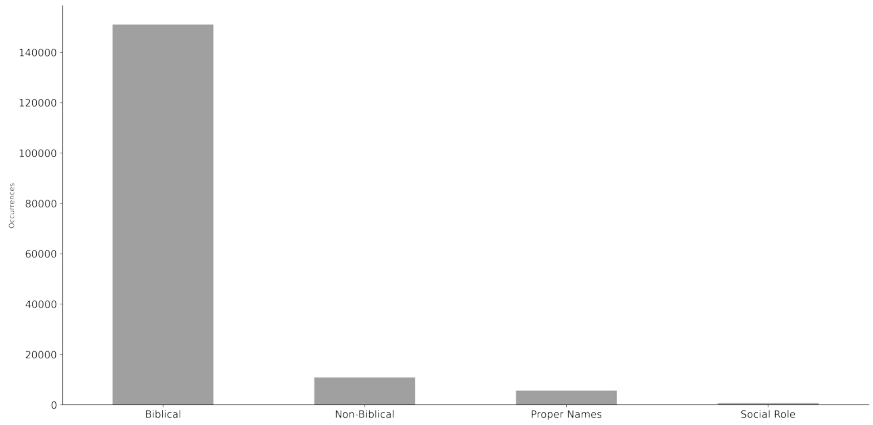
12 All edges between nodes in this analysis are *undirected*. An example of a *directed* edge is a situation in which we could say that Jesus was talking *to* Paul. This directionality is not a feature of our current data.

clusters of highly interconnected nodes. Characters are assigned a modularity class label (MC) that indicates to which sub-group they belong and the other characters to whom they are most strongly connected. The modularity class parameter thus serves as a bottom-up grouping of characters that we initially categorized in a top-down manner. For the purposes of our current data this means the algorithm shows specific communities of characters in the sermons, based on their patterns of co-occurrence. We experiment and fine-tune the parameters to return the most coherent groupings from a human perspective, which results in ten distinct modularity classes.[13] In the next section we present some of the main characteristics of each modularity class in the network, identifying certain clear patterns and tendencies in the sub-groupings.

The social worlds of sermons

Our methodological pipeline provided us with insights into how sermons' social worlds are structured – both in terms of the distribution of character types and the connections between character types. In Figures 1 and 2 below we see two representations of biblical (B/B_a) characters, non-biblical (N/N_a) characters, proper names (P characters), and social roles (R characters) in our data.

Figure 1. Total number of biblical characters, non-biblical characters, proper nouns and social roles in the corpus. The items refer to labels in the coding manual (table 1).



13 See the full network data, sorted according to modularity classes in the Github repository under 'output'.

Figure 2. Number of unique of biblical characters, non-biblical characters, proper nouns and social roles in the corpus. The items refer to labels in the coding manual (table 1).

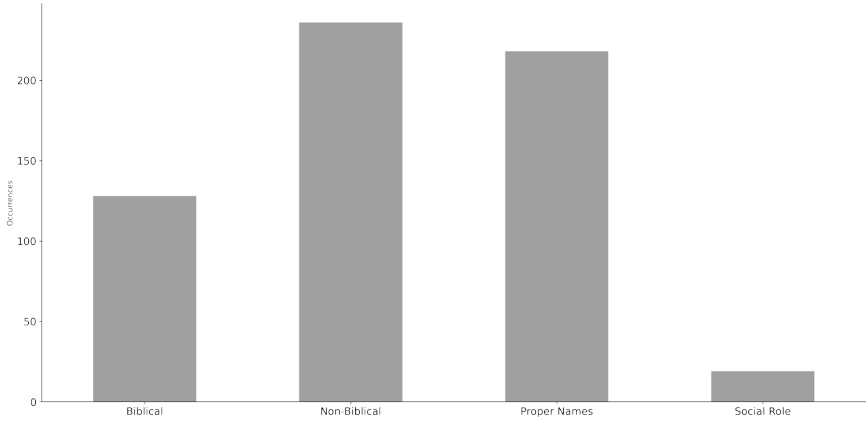


Figure 1 shows that according to raw frequency biblical characters by far outnumber non-biblical characters in the corpus; Figure 2 shows that the group of non-biblical characters contains many more unique characters than the group of biblical characters. Moving closer to the varying class of non-biblical characters as represented in Figure 3 below, we find a distinct majority of theological characters. The character gallery of Danish sermons is thus primarily populated by biblical figures and theologians (THE), who

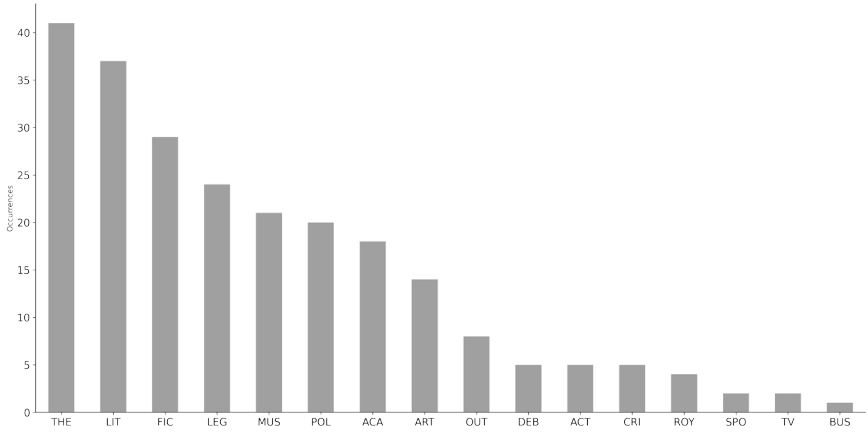


Figure 3. Distribution of cultural domains among non-biblical characters in the sermon corpus. The items refer to labels in the coding manual (table 1).

actively engage or have engaged with the biblical sources. This finding makes sense: pastors themselves are expected to interpret biblical sources in sermons. From the remaining cultural domains, however, we find that pastors focus more on characters from the contexts of literature (LIT), politics (POL), and art (ART) than from more popular cultural platforms such as radio (RAD), television (TV), and social media (SOC).[14] A preference for high culture therefore seems to prevail in the corpus.

Our network data allow us to see how the individual characters are related, which gives more nuanced understanding of the characters' roles in the sermons. The community detection algorithm returned ten distinct classes. Of these, three classes consisted of only two nodes with relatively few edges (MC6, MC8, MC9), which we excluded from our analysis. The remaining classes are summarized and named in Table 4 below.

According to the network analysis the most central characters, both in terms of frequency scores and degree, belong to MC0. We have therefore named this community 'Main characters'. Apart from two characters with low degrees, all the characters in this community are New Testament figures. The modularity class 'Nativity and theology', MC1, consists primarily of biblical figures, followed by theologians. Many of the New Testament characters appear in the nativity narratives. In parallel, the Old Testament characters are mainly prophets or characters known in the Christian tradition for forecasting the birth of Jesus Christ – for example, *Esajas (Isaiah)* and *David/Kong David* (*David/King David*). The theologians in this modularity class are mostly past authoritative figures and/or prominent Danish theologians.

In the 'The Fall of man' modularity class, MC2, the most central characters are a coherent group of Genesis characters from the same mythological context related to the story of Adam and Eve. This modularity class is also connected with the time around World War II through the author and concentration camp prisoner *Primo Levi*, the Danish World War II liberation fighter *Erik Hagens*, and the Danish physicist *Niels Bohr*. Modularity class MC3, 'Versatile characters', is the largest, encompassing the majority of unique characters in the data. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of P characters, R characters, and Old Testament figures in the corpus are found in this class. Relative to the size of MC3, only a few characters have large degrees (such as *Moses* and the Danish hymn writer *Hans Anker Jørgensen*). However, this group consists primarily of characters with only a few connections to other characters in the sermons.

14 Some labels such as RAD, REA, or SOC are not plotted in Figure 3 due to their limited representation in the data.

Table 4. Sample of seven modularity classes

Modularity Class	Nodes	Characteristics	Top 10 nodes (degree)
MC0	10	Main characters	Jesus/Jesus Kristus (Jesus/Jesus Christ), Kristus (Christ), Paulus/Saulus (Paul/Saul), Johannes (John), Peter/Simon Peter, Jakob (Jacob), Josef, Maria (Mary), Stéphane Hessel, Adriana
MC1	54	Nativity and theology	Herren (the Lord), Martin Luther, N.F.S. Grundtvig, Søren Kierkegaard, Esajas (Isaiah), Gud (God), David/Kong David (David/King David), Herodes (Herod), Faderen/Fader (the Father/Father), Augustus/Kejser Augustus (Augustus/Augustus the emperor)
MC2	10	The fall of man	Eva (Eve), Kain (Cain), Djævelen (the Devil), Adam, Abel, Erik Hagens, Niels Bohr, Felix, Primo Levi, Randi
MC3	402	Versatile characters	Moses, Hans Anker Jørgensen, Judas, Markus (Mark), Stefanus (Stephanus), Messias (Messiah), Isak, Henrik, Jens, Andreas (Andrew)
MC4	84	Literature and biblical outcasts	H.C. Andersen/Andersen, Christian/Kristian, Martin A. Hansen, Maria Magdalene (Mary Magdalena), Thomas, Niels/Nils, Storm P/Storm, Søren Ulrik Thomsen, Søren, Benny Andersen
MC5	11	Other biblical stories	Matthæus (Matthew), Lukas (Luke), Johannes Døberen (John the Baptist), Simon, Abraham, Martha, Lazarus, Samaritaneren (the Samaritan), Faust, Nemo
MC7	17	Politics	Adolf Hitler, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Anders Breivik, Barack Obama, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mao Zedong, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Stalin, Osama Bin Laden

In MC4 the main character type is N characters, which mostly consist of Scandinavian authors. Other considerable N characters are legendary figures and fictional characters. Taken together, these three types indicate that narrative contexts are an important aspect of MC4. B characters such as *Maria Magdalene* (*Mary Magdalene*), *Levi/Levi tolderen* (*Levi/Levi the publican*),

and *Tiggeren* (*the Beggar*) also appear in this group, named 'Literature and biblical outcasts'.

We have named MC5 'Other biblical stories', which is a small group mainly comprised of B characters. The biblical characters are figures who are primarily related to each other during the Trinity season in the Danish lectionaries. MC7 is the only modularity class that does not include any biblical figures. Instead, it contains 14 N characters, including political figures (POL: 7), theologians (THE: 2), and terrorists coded as criminals (CRI: 2). The remaining N characters are the Norwegian author *Karl Ove Knausgaard*, the psychoanalyst *Freud*, and the former chair of the Danish Atheist Society, *Anders Stjernholm*. We call this cluster of characters 'Politics': although they may not be coded POL, most are politically motivated or engaged in some way.

The network analysis shows that the characters we assigned top-down to domains seem to be reconfigured into new domains bottom-up, and thereby with each connotation providing support for the other. These reconfigurations follow a Deleuzian logic that previously known phenomena can create new understandings based on their connections with other phenomena. From our subsequent manual analysis reported in the following we find that biblical, literary, and political figures especially are reconfigured in distinct domains in interesting ways, while a majority of characters is assigned to one rather indistinct group.

Narrative and thematic dynamics in sermons

Biblical narrative worlds

Biblical figures do not appear as a coherent group in the network analysis – rather, they participate in different modularity classes. Their roles vary, depending on the other characters with whom they appear. However, we find that biblical characters stand out as both the most frequently mentioned and the most central character type in the corpus, because they tend to form the nodes of the largest degrees in the network. This is particularly true of the 'Main characters' group, in which the characters do not denote specific biblical contexts but are well connected with many other characters in the corpus and are therefore highly likely to occur with them. In contrast, the 'Nativity and theology', 'Literature and biblical outcasts', and 'Other biblical stories' groups represent biblical narrative worlds from the gospels in which *Jesus*, who in the network belongs to 'Main characters', is the protagonist.

In 'Nativity and theology' the biblical character gallery represents the prophecies and the nativity story. Interestingly, all representations of God – *Gud, Herren*, and *Fader* – are assigned to this class instead of being part of 'Main characters' with the New Testament protagonists. In company with other nativity characters and Old Testament prophets this indicates that God is endowed with agency in the corpus, mostly in the context of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ. This finding confirms the directly active role of God as the initiative agent in the nativity story. Overall, this modularity class comprises a distinct encounter between the Old Testament, New Testament, and authoritative theologians. The 'Nativity and theology' class thus emphasizes the nativity story as Christianity's foundational story. It is in this story that the distinctly Christian tradition (New Testament) is connected with the traditions from which it springs (Old Testament) through the action of God. This surfaces through the characters in this modularity class, supported by interpretative agents who through time have authorized this story as foundational (authoritative theologians).

In contrast with 'Nativity and theology', the 'Literature and biblical outcasts' and 'Other biblical stories' groups represent narratives from Jesus's adult life. In the first of these we find a small group of characters personifying social outcasts for whom Jesus cares in the gospels: *Maria Magdalene*, *Levi*, *Tolderne*, and *Tiggeren*. Accompanying these characters we find a large group of authors who are known for writing about and enhancing what is aberrant, odd, or complex. For example, *Benny Andersen* writes existential and humorous poetry about peculiarities in everyday life; *Astrid Lindgren* writes about children who differ from the norm (Pippi Longstocking), or who are vulnerable and self-sacrificing (The Brothers Lionheart); *H. C. Andersen* writes about the boy Kaj, who was tempted and corrupted but saved by Gerda (The Snow Queen); and *Fyodor Dostoevsky* writes about morality, doubt, and sacrifice (The Brothers Karamazov and Crime and Punishment).[15] This modularity class thus points to biblical narratives that are told through and supported by literary narratives.

In contrast, the 'Other biblical stories' group is primarily defined by biblical characters. These stories represent biblical narratives that comprise gospel sources for sermons written in the Danish church calendar's Trinity

15 Many of the characters from these stories can be observed in the full network data available in the Github repository.

season:[16] the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), the story of Martha's and Mary's encounter with Jesus (Luke 10:38–42), the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the arms of Abraham (Luke 16:19–31), and the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, in which Martha and Mary also feature (John 11:19–45). The liturgical texts in this period are known for representing many of Jesus's teachings about living a Christian life, and several are from the gospel of Luke, who also appears in this modularity class.

The 'Nativity and theology', 'The Fall of man', 'Literature and biblical outcasts', and 'Other biblical stories' modularity classes all enhance distinct kinds of biblical narratives. They show the different roles biblical characters are given in the sermons, while the narratives each in their own way encompass small narrative worlds that revolve around Jesus as the prophesied saviour ('Nativity and theology'), the compassionate ('Literature and biblical outcasts'), or the teacher ('Other biblical stories'). Although Jesus belongs to the 'Main characters' group, he is still the central agent in all these stories. This indicates that 'Main characters' constitutes a narrative centre of the network, comprised of the most central agents in sermons who may play essential roles in the contexts of the other biblical clusters in the network.

In contrast with the other biblical modularity classes, the 'Fall of man' group represents a distinct Old Testament narrative context – and it is the only Old Testament narrative that is so distinctly demarcated and highlighted in the network. Since the Old Testament characters accompany some characters associated with the time around World War II (*Erik Hagens*, *Primo Levi*, and *Niels Bohr)*, 'The Fall of man' seems to establish a narrative about evil and corruption told through Old Testament sources and few, but recent, twentieth-century historical sources.

Politics and morality

'Politics' stands out as the only sub-group in which we find primarily *N* characters and no biblical figures. Most of the characters in this modularity class are political figures connoting two general contexts: *Adolf Hitler* – the most central node in this cluster – *Mussolini*, *Stalin*, and *Mao Zedong* connote the time of World War II, whereas *Barack Obama*, *Nelson Mandela*, and *Saddam* connote affairs in recent global politics. This finding shows that political issues in the corpus do not point to a Danish context, which are

16 The ELCD's liturgical year is ordered according to different seasons such as Advent, Lent, and Easter. Trinity follows immediately after Pentecost and lasts from the first Sunday after Pentecost until the last Sunday in the church's year (at the end of November).

further supported by the fact that characters labelled POL are rarely Danish figures. 'Politics' is thus noteworthy for including very few Danish figures, although the POL label is the fourth most common character type among N characters in the corpus.

Another group of characters in this modularity class is terrorists whose attacks have been ideologically framed, such as *Anders Breivik* or *Osama Bin Laden*.[17] Combined with the dictatorial leaders, politics in this modularity class thus connotes violence, strife, and distress. The terrorist motif also emphasizes a societal agenda that has been prominent in a global context since the 9/11 attacks in New York and that remained prominent in the 2011–2016 period. Moreover, the motif resonates with the political figures representing contemporary global politics.

A remaining group in this modularity class seems to be distinctly associated with the two political contexts. Archbishop *Desmond Tutu* and *Nelson Mandela* share a context as activists for human rights in South Africa. These two characters mark a contrast to the politically motivated terrorists and dictators. Underlying the political domain in the sermons, an ethical theme about good and evil thus seems to unfold. The other theologian in the modularity class is *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, who belonged to a resistance movement against Hitler's dictatorship. The author *Karl Ove Knausgaard* has explored Hitler's life and psyche in his writing in an attempt to understand the dictator and his disposition for violent action (Knausgaard 2013). Similarly, Knausgaard pondered the personality of Anders Breivik after the Norway massacres in 2011 (Knausgaard 2014).

It is interesting that the chair of the Danish Atheist Society (DAS) in 2016, *Anders Stjernholm*, also appears in this group. Stjernholm was not publicly known until March 2016, when DAS began a campaign encouraging people to renounce their membership of the ELCD. This agenda seems problematized in the corpus given the other characters in this modularity class. With Knausgaard and Breivik he adheres to a group of characters who gained public attention between 2011 and 2016. This observation suggests that this modularity class provides a context in which problematic issues in the eyes of ELCD pastors are framed. Taken together, the figures in 'Politics' form a distinct domain in the sermons in which mainly political contexts are reconfigured into raising this-worldly narratives about good and

17 Initially, we labelled the entity *Omar* as a P character (see the full network data), but due to the other characters in this modularity class we infer from the network analysis that he is probably the terrorist Omar El-Hussein who attacked the synagogue and 'Krudttønden' cultural centre in Copenhagen and killed two people in 2015.

evil – narratives that are represented without distinct anchoring in biblical sources. The moral dimension, which becomes part of the political domain, is not unique to 'Politics'. In the 'Literature and biblical outcasts' and 'Other biblical stories' modularity classes the motifs of care and otherness, as well as the focus on Jesus's teachings, also appear to be represented within a moral frame – about what is right and wrong. However, the closest class to 'Politics' is 'The Fall of man'. Here, a narrative about evil is told through biblical sources, supplemented by a few World War II figures. The history of World War II and stories of evil are thus contexts associated with the biblical sources ('The Fall of man') in some cases and in other cases with this-worldly events in recent history ('Politics'). World War II therefore seems an important historical period in the sermons. It is of course noteworthy that the majority of the sermons are from pastors born into the generation immediately following the war, when its immediate aftermath and effects were still being felt across Europe.

The anonymized mass

The small clusters of biblical figures and the group of political figures in particular act as consensus groups: pastors seem to agree that the characters in these groups are substantial parts of specific and important narratives. In contrast, the 'Versatile characters' modularity class stands out as a large group of several nodes with low degrees and frequencies in the corpus. This characteristic reduces the distinctiveness of the character gallery within this group. Their main similarity appears to be that they are secluded from the consensus groups; they are peripheral characters in the corpus. This group therefore stands in stark contrast with 'Main characters', as the 'Versatile characters' are the least likely to take part in the established narrative worlds in the network. The peripheral role of these characters also pertains to the character types, which consist primarily of P characters and R characters. Since we cannot infer specific identities from their names, these characters become anonymous figures in the network, lacking distinct and consistent roles in the corpus. Their anonymity seems to group them together and define this modularity class.

More than half the Old Testament characters in the data appear in this group. In 'Nativity and theology' the Old Testament characters represent narratives used to forecast and legitimize Jesus Christ as saviour, whereas the most central Old Testament characters in the corpus occur in 'The Fall of man'. In contrast with these more distinct clusters, the many Old Testament

characters in 'Versatile characters' are part of a group that tends towards the periphery and anonymity. This indicates that apart from a few remarkable Old Testament characters, these characters generally play a minor role in the sermons compared with the New Testament characters. This seems evident in the sense that pastors are supposed to base their sermons on a gospel pericope. Nonetheless, it is interesting that Old Testament characters do not form more distinct sub-groups or connect with the New Testament groups described previously, given that there are also Old Testament pericopes in the lectionaries that are prescribed to be read aloud in the first part of the church liturgy in the ELCD.

Many contemporary *N* characters also belong in the 'Versatile characters' class. Accordingly, contemporary characters rarely seem to gain distinct or central roles in the corpus. This suggests there is no consensus among pastors about which aspects of contemporary culture or time to incorporate in sermons – apart from when contemporary antagonists such as in the 'Politics' group are concerned. In that modularity class some new and contemporary characters are placed within a clearly delimited group connected with good and evil. In contrast, 'Versatile characters' may represent an underlying and ongoing negotiation among pastors about which 'new' elements to integrate into sermons. The *N* characters in this group are likely to be the most floating characters in the corpus. Some are prospects that might obtain a place in a consensus group in future sermons – and others might disappear altogether and will be replaced by other prospects.

The rhizome revisited

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari write: 'A rhizome doesn't begin and doesn't end, but is always in the middle, between things, inter-being, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, exclusively alliance' (Deleuze and Guatteri 1983, 57). In our study we analysed the sermon corpus as a network based on a rhizomatic logic. However, our analyses have reposed the question of whether sermon characters illustrate rhizomatic alliance or arborescent filiation – whether sermons are production or reproduction.

The biblical figures who dominate the 'Nativity and theology', 'The Fall of man', and 'Other biblical stories' modularity classes seem to cluster according to principles of familiarity with difference, as the characters either come from the same biblical narratives or from narratives from the same period of the liturgical year. The 'Main characters' group does not point to

specific narratives but unites characters with roles of narrative or authoritative weight in the New Testament. In general, the co-occurrences of the biblical characters therefore follow an arborescent rather than a rhizomatic mode. They form what we might call 'trees of consensus'. We therefore find that pastors broadly agree that these characters and their narratives are particularly important to reproduce. They seem to be kept stable and predominantly within a biblical universe. Due to the high frequency of their appearance and the tightly knit clusters they form, our study indicates stability and repetition as the main characteristics in pastors' engagement with these topics. We therefore hypothesise that we will be likely to find the same overall pattern in periods before or after the timeline of the sermon corpus.

In 'Literature and biblical outcast' we find a group of biblical characters who share narrative themes but accompany characters from completely different contexts. In our interpretations we have focused on the literary context, although this modularity class could be further examined in terms of the legendary (LEG) and aesthetic (MUS and ART) contexts. The formation of this modularity class is rhizomatic in the sense that the biblical characters are unfolded in dialogue with other cultural contexts, indicating that stories about biblical outcasts especially are told through sources other than just biblical ones. The various sub-domains thus configure in a new setting in sermons, and the stories are facilitated anew.

The 'Politics' modularity class is particularly noteworthy, because it has no biblical characters. However, since this modularity class is primarily anchored in the World War II motif, with Hitler as the most frequent and most connected character, it appears to be reproductive of narratives of evil and strife especially connected with a specific historical period. The World War II context seems to have become a rooted narrative, thus following an arborescent logic. Meanwhile, this cluster also encompasses characters who are new on the public stage, provided they are somehow attached to the rooted narrative. In this sense we have characterized this grouping as a distinct ethical domain which might be understood as a kind of 'tree rhizome': its context is rooted, while it can encompass new elements representative of the period covered by the sermons. These new characters may not be awarded a continuous role in future sermons and could be replaced by new characters that configure narratives about evil and ethics in the given period.

A significant number of the 'new' characters in the corpus can be found in the largest modularity class, 'Versatile characters'. Here we find characters of all types and domains from our manual labelling: *B* characters, *N* characters, *R* characters, and especially *P* characters. In this sense characters clearly

operate on rhizomatic terms. They compose the widest sub-network, and their connections seem contingent and momentary, with the majority of the characters appearing infrequently and with a small number of connections. It is therefore difficult to infer any common features or significant relationships between these characters, other than the fact that they are peripheral. However, this does not mean that they should be considered obsolete. On the contrary, 'Versatile characters' includes characters that have not (yet) obtained consensus among pastors with respect to their roles in the sermons, and it thereby reveals a field of potential movement and renewal. Rhizomatically, it remains to be seen which routes are blind alleys or serve only momentary purposes, and which lead to stable incorporation in future networks. In this class of characters we have found the creative test lab of the sermons.

Conclusion

Many individual characters are featured in the character gallery of Danish sermons – a feature that Marlene Lorensen argued was of importance for displaying polyphonic voices in sermons. However, labelling characters top-down reveals that some clear categories are dominant among the characters, and that the 'voices' tend to come from biblical sources and theological authorities. From a general perspective this indicates that pastors are influenced by their theological training and are loyal to the liturgical order that prescribes biblical readings for pastors to expound. Meanwhile, the computational bottom-up grouping from the network analysis displays nuances in the role of characters and the dynamics of which they are part in sermons. While the study is not based on a strictly representative sample of ELCD sermons, the sermon corpus provides a comprehensive case sample for observing tendencies in the construction of sermon galleries and posing hypotheses that paves the way for new research questions.

According to the analysis the characters in the sermon corpus have two main functions: they enhance and illuminate the story of Jesus; or they expound ethical or existential issues. These main functions unfold in a mixture of arborescent and rhizomatic modes. The New Testament characters, as well as selected Old Testament characters and *N* characters, appear to consolidate several thematic trees. In supplement to these a myriad of versatile characters offers and tests new hermeneutical and illustrative potentials in rhizomatic movements. We thus find that pastors are stable and reproductive, as well as experimenting, in their sermons: the pastors appear to be focused on both passing on what seems collectively defined as the main stories and on telling

these stories in contemporary ways – though perhaps more the former than the latter. The analyses therefore also demonstrate how preaching unfolds a collective dialogue of pastors between the Bible and history. The study is very exploratory, but the type of data and the analytical approach allow new ways of exploring and investigating dialogical dimensions in sermons as opposed to the dialogue between preacher and congregants, which until now has been the dominant perspective of the empirical turn in homiletics. The many sermon documents raise awareness of sermons as historical theological documents that are intertextually linked.

In the character study we have seen that distinct biblical narratives receive the most attention in sermons. Although there is a national selection of biblical pericopes for each of the 69 official church holidays, the analyses show that there is a particularly marked agreement among pastors in focusing on the gospel passages for Christmas and the Trinity season, because these passages are part of delimited clusters in the network. We therefore observe an underlying yet collective consensus among pastors concerning which narratives are particularly important to enhance, and thereby which parts of tradition are particularly important to preserve. Again, this consensus may be due to pastoral training and ecclesial background, but it may also be due to different audiences in church at different times of the year, calling for accentuations of certain biblical sources compared to others. However, the World War II motif in the sermons demonstrates that pastors not only preserve and reproduce a religious tradition but also incorporate a historical event that is not directly associated with biblical narratives and themes in the sermons. This demonstrates a complex dynamic in sermons of reproducing religious tradition, as well as reproducing a changing narrative anchored in both history and society. Following this line of thought, we might interpret the 'Versatile characters' as disparate characters who do not (yet) have links attaching them to general themes or narratives.

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TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 147–9
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.114997

Book Reviews

Paul Hedges: *Religious Hatred: Prejudice, Islamophobia, and Antisemitism in Global Context.* Bloomsbury Academic, 2021, 297 pp.

Why do we hate? This question is posed by Paul Hedges at the outset of his book on religious hatred. Professor Hedges (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU, Singapore) is a leading expert in interreligious studies and a prolific writer on interreligious encounters and dialogue, intercultural theology, and plural contexts. He takes a broad but pragmatic approach to his theme, starting with the assertion that neither are various forms of hostility and prejudice spurred by or directed towards religion new phenomena, nor are religions especially prone to or major causes of hatred between people. However, religion and hate often mix. Religious traditions have no agency of their own; only humans do. Hence, religious hatred is quintessentially one of many subsets of general human hatred, Hedges argues, asserting that religious hatred is a form of prejudice shaped by cognitive, psychological, sociological, and contextual factors, which can and do lead to discrimination, dehumanization, and brutality.

From this starting point Hedges sets out to 'untheorize' the study of religious hatred by unpacking some of the most central concepts in the field: genocide; Islamophobia; and antisemitism. Methodologically, this entails the ambition to dismantle grand narratives and overarching theoretical explanations that portray such phenomena as unique, inexplicable, and almost metaphysical manifestations of hate that 'haunt history as a ghost'. Instead, Hedges suggests, each fits into a larger framework of prejudice and violent human impulses that arise in certain social contexts. They are not singular forms of hatred but 'part of a wider set of phenomena explained by patterns of human identity creation, prejudice, and violence'. Untheorizing therefore implies 'showing interconnectedness and the local variable, and contingent factors, rather than supposing an ongoing essence which may be separately theorized'. (pp. 4–5). Hate and prejudice are thus generally shared human inclinations and experiences, but how they take form in the world and in interpersonal relations is situational and context-bound. This constant balancing between the universally human traits of prejudice and othering on the one hand and the very particular times, places, and situations in which religious hatred flourishes on the other is a rewarding aspect of Hedges' study. While its theoretical contribution is significant for the research field in general, it still does not fall prey to unwarranted or overtly tidy generalizations. As such, it offers a balanced contribution to an often heated and polarized conversation.

The study is divided into ten chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue, structured in four sections: 'Why do we hate?'; 'Bridges from the past'; 'Contemporary Western hatreds'; and 'Prejudice beyond the West'. Each section contains theoretically and conceptually driven research chapters, richly illustrated by both historical and contemporary ethnographic examples. Each ends with a more personally framed interlude, presenting well-argued views on the themes under study in the previous chapters from the author's perspective.

The book's first section sets the study's theoretical framework. It introduces classic and contemporary theories of stereotyping, prejudice, and dehumanization, starting with Gordon Allport's field-defining work of 1954, which today remains the crown jewel of the research field. Hedges also introduces social identity theory (in-groups and out-groups) and performative theories to show that prejudice entails deeply engrained cognitive and social structures that define how we feel, think, and act towards other human beings. As such, stereotyping and prejudice are natural; the only way our minds can cope with the overpowering multitude of the world around us is to lump things together in categories that we evaluate according to pre-set templates – usually those readily available to us in our close context. We do not always act on such prejudiced thinking, but time and time again in human history we see that discrimination, dehumanization, exclusion, and violence can follow in their wake. While Hedges' theorization as such brings little new to the table, it is an important reminder of the deeply human mechanisms that can lead from hateful words to genocide. A novel contribution to this well-established framework is the stress on prejudice as contextual and intersectional, which adds to the value of the discussion.

Hedges moves on to untheorize genocide, describing it as an extreme form of violence made possible by the mechanism of prejudice and hatred available to humans in extreme situations, a de-essentialized and complex social phenomenon. Similarly, Hedges is critical of an essentialized categorization of the term 'religion' (as proposed e.g. by the World Religions Paradigm) and thus maintains that religious hatred, which is the book's focus, must be understood to signify 'both hatred stemming from religion and hatred provoked by (a specific) religion(s)' (p. 43). Moving on to the contextual discussions of anti-semitism and Islamophobia in the following two sections, a specialist on these religions may feel there is a lack of detail and a need to dig more deeply elsewhere to clarify the particularities of specific events and arguments. However, I find that this book's important point and explicit contribution is precisely to provide an overview of religious hatred in its various forms to elucidate the shared mechanisms – why we hate, and what perceptions of our own and others' religions have to

do with all this. This is a generalist work, which supports a novel understanding at the conceptual level. An interest in pursuing further research into the particularities of the contexts and times of interest to the specific reader will certainly be fuelled by Hedges' open and probing conversation.

That said, I am impressed by the broad and deep learning displayed on these pages. Hedges provides insightful readings of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic theologies and philosophies and can discuss antisemitism and Islamophobia in various historical periods in a substantial and meaningful way. Hedges also meaningfully connects the discussion with contemporary research on racism and broadens the view from a purely Western, Europe-centred discussion of contemporary hatred of Jews and Muslims to a more global perspective. The fourth section on prejudice beyond the West introduces important discussions of Islamophobia in the Buddhist and the Hindu world that are often invisible to students at European universities.

The book is written in straightforward and jargon-free language that makes it suitable for a course book but also relevant for senior scholars and the general public. It is carefully worded with elegant alliterative sentences, inviting the reader to stop and reflect: 'Texts, traditions, and teachings are tricky things tending to transformation' (p. 46).

At the end of the book Hedges returns to an important question, posed in the introduction and re-engaged in the final words: can you study hate at a convenient analytical distance, or will the theme necessarily force you to take a stand? The lines between academic study, advocacy, and activism are not always as clear cut as we might wish them to be, and autobiography always feeds into the research we pursue and the conclusions we draw, Hedges asserts: 'Prejudice and violence happen to people. While studied here as interesting social phenomena, they occur in the world we belong to no matter how distant the events […] may seem' (p. 182). They affect our world, people we know, where we live, and the stories we are told. Hedges therefore contends, with Frans Fanon and Elie Wiesel as his interlocutors, that it is important to see that all forms of prejudice are interconnected. This usually starts with words but may end with violence. The good news is that religious hatred is something human beings do to each other. We may also choose to do differently and foster dialogue, plurality, and interconnectedness.

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TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 150–1
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.119412

Ferdinando Sardella and Lucian Wong (eds): *The Legacy of Vaiṣṇavism in Colonial Bengal.* London: Routledge, 2020, 266 pp.

Bengali Vaiṣṇavism, also known as Gauḍīya or Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, is a vital strand of Vaiṣṇava Hinduism that has attracted a notable amount of academic attention. Many of the early studies focused on the tradition's literary contribution, but important new perspectives have since been added. During the last couple of decades an important actor within this broadening of the field has been the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. The present book is the fruit of a workshop arranged by the Centre in 2015, bringing together scholars from the disciplines of social and intellectual history, philology, theology, and anthropology to examine the impact of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism in colonial Bengal.

A particular aim of the workshop was to problematize the oft-held views of the colonial era as either a rupture with an authentic premodern tradition or more often as a reformation of a corrupt moribund one. This is the theme of the introductory chapter by editors Lucian Wong and Ferdinando Sardella. Wong and Sardella briefly delineate the historical background of the theme of the book – the British colonial hold over Bengal from 1757 to 1947 and all the societal and intellectual changes to which it led – but note that the emphasis on change and 'reform' during this period has led to a blindness to the fact that pre-existing Hindu religious currents and traditions (*saṃpradāya*) did not disappear but rather continued to exert an often powerful influence on society, often in tandem with the reformers and their movements.

Bearing this in mind, the book itself is divided into two parts. The first deals with how Bengali Vaiṣṇavas adopted colonial modalities. For example, in chapter one Varuni Bhatia writes about how the *bhadralok* (the educated Hindu Bengalis) engaged with the life of Caitanya in the colonial period. Caitanya (1486–1533), the founder of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, seen by his followers as an *avatāra* or a descended form of the divine couple of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, was recast as a religious and particularly social reformer, often compared to Luther, and rather than being seen as a divine personage he was often portrayed as a human figure. Bhatia notes that this shift alerts us to questions of the translatability of religious concepts, questions raised by many of these colonial authors themselves.

Chapter four may be given as another example. Gerald T. Carney presents the reader with a fascinating portrait of Baba Premananda Bharati (born Surendranath Mukherjee, 1858–1914), the first Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava who endeavoured to spread the tradition's teachings to the West, teaching in the USA in 1902–1907 and 1910–11. Carney offers the reader a wealth of primary material about Baba Bharati, who is fascinating not only as a pioneer but as a meeting point of the traditions of Prabhu Jagadbandhu (1871–1921)

and Rādhāramaṇa Caraṇa Dāsa Deva (1853–1905), both important and controversial Vaiṣṇava teachers in their own right.

While part one is interesting and important, it is part two that takes the book to an entirely new level, as the chapters here contend with the portrayal of a Vaiṣṇava reformation during the colonial era. Much of the motivation for this reform sprang from an unease about the perceived loose sexual morals of certain Vaiṣṇavas, often called *sahajiyās*. This unease has also carried over into scholarship in both revulsion and titillation. In a brilliant and provocative essay Tony K. Stewart explores the metahistory of *sahajiyā* scholarship and the multifaceted power of sexuality and secrecy.

In chapter eight, building on the fieldwork she did for her doctoral dissertation, Sukanya Sarbadhikary deals with the secret texts of these *sahajiyās* themselves. The excerpts Sarbadhikary presents may not be literary masterpieces, but they present their listeners or (in our case) readers with a fascinating insight into the *sahajiyās'* rich oral tradition, one in which key Vaiṣṇava terms are given new esoteric meanings that are unintelligible for outsiders. Sarbadhikary's ethnological work is characterized by a remarkable sensitivity to her informants and material.

The main threads of the book are tied together in Lucian Wong's concluding chapter, 'Colonial morals, Vaiṣṇava quarrels: tracing the source of nineteenth-century anti-Sahajiyā polemics'. Wong argues that the unease about the *sahajiyās* among the Bengali *bhadralok* during colonial times stemmed not only from their Western education and sensibilities but also formed a link in a longer tradition of anti-*sahajiyā* writing. Wong's carefully argued chapter thus exemplifies how the colonial era offered an opportunity for forces of both rupture and continuity, often creatively working together.

It is difficult to maintain a uniform level of excellence in an edited volume, and this book is no exception. Despite the systematizing efforts of Amiya Sen, the authors interchangeably write about Bengal and Bengali and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, while referring to the same tradition. This naturally reflects a larger terminological confusion within the subfields of this scholarly community, but the editors could have smoothed this out. The same applies to transcription systems; the name of one key text is written as both 'Caitanya Caritāmṛta' and 'Chaitanya Charitamrita'.

But these are very minor quibbles. This is an excellent volume, bringing together both senior and junior scholars of the field and combining careful philological, historical, and ethnographic work with exciting theory about a key era for this religious tradition. The editors are to be commended for their work in bringing all this together so organically: the chapters do not simply deal with the same subject but actually complement each other.

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TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 152–4
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.119462

Erika Willander: *Unity, Division and the Religious Mainstream in Sweden.* Palgrave Studies in Lived Religion and Societal Challenges, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 137 pp. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-52478-4 .

In *Unity, Division and the Religious Mainstream in Sweden* Erika Willander focuses on how best to understand the role religion plays for the majority of Swedes, who are situated between decidedly religious and non-religious positions. The empirical data presented in this book have been published in two previous publications: Willander's 2014 PhD thesis, and a 2019 publication on the religious landscape in Sweden, published in Swedish.

In this volume the presentation of the religious mainstream in Sweden draws on two main sources of data, which are presented in conjunction as a basis for theorization on Swedish majority religion. The first set, 250,000 blog posts written in Swedish, are analysed through Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA), which seeks to explore in which semantic contexts 'religion' is used in the Swedish blogosphere, thereby untangling the connotations of 'religion' in everyday language. As a complement to the LSA, excerpts from interview data serve as examples of everyday discussions of religion, making the point that religion is not an appreciated topic of conversation in the mainstream population. The second source consists of representative survey data from the European Values Study (EVS, 1982–2011) and Society, Opinion and Media (SOM, 1988–2016). The survey data are employed to demonstrate how the attitudes to other cultures and religious traditions found in the religious mainstream can be understood as boundary work, demarcating 'us' from 'them' – that is, religious minorities. Willander employs a historical comparative method to contextualize the contemporary sets of data with the aim of not only establishing the contours of the religious mainstream but also demonstrating their historically persistent character. The analyses are further complemented by an historical overview of the legal regulation of religion in Sweden, as well as an analysis of the contemporary demographic profile of the religious mainstream.

The religious mainstream in Sweden is presented as a collectivity (resembling Benedict Anderson's imagined communities) that is characterized by shared patterns of behaviour underlined by a certain rationale, which in turn results in implicit social bonds between its members. Since the rationale and shared patterns of behaviour are related to the 'religious', Willander refers to this collectivity as 'the religious mainstream'. While the Church of Sweden plays a central role for this collectivity, a result of bonds with others and shared patterns of behaviour in relation to the religious often taking place in this particular social context, the empirical analyses are not limited to Church of Sweden members. The

Church of Sweden can thus perhaps be understood as an implicit node for the collectivity Willander describes.

In the introductory chapter Willander declares her intention to study the religious mainstream in Sweden from a 'lived religion' approach. The approach is particularly prevalent in the discussion of how religion should be conceptualized in empirical studies of religious mainstreams, where Willander claims that the Swedish mainstream's supposed indifference to religion is a result of how religiosity has traditionally been measured and defined within the sociology of religion. The overview of research on religiosity in Sweden from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day (Chapter 3) serves to demonstrate how the sentiments of the religious mainstream in Sweden are with some exceptions overlooked, because it does not match the theoretical understandings of 'religion proper' and/or interests on behalf of the researchers. Due to the 'focus on an abstracted version of religious beliefs' (2020, p. 29) in survey research, Willander argues that experiences and understandings of the religious found in the Swedish population have been downplayed or overseen.

Willander refutes the understanding of European (sic!) mainstreams as indifferent to religion: while these collectivities may well be characterized by indifference to internal church matters and theological reasoning, 'this indifference (…) does not have to include the aspects of the religious that family stories bring to the fore' (p. 7). Willander claims that the religious mainstream in Sweden plays a central role for the Swedish religious landscape, not least because its majority position entails the power to construct and maintain cultural boundaries, both in informal settings and public debate. However, the empirical study of collectivities such as the religious mainstream in Sweden calls for an exploratory approach to religion as a social phenomenon and the abandonment of certain established assumptions about religion. The presented analysis can therefore be understood as Willander's way of practising what she preaches.

Willander's compilation of historical data from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, which demonstrates that the low religious attendance figures in Sweden are a persisting feature of Swedish religion rather than a result of religious decline, presents a clear and thought-provoking contribution to research on continuity and change in Swedish religion. The LSA affords an insight into a novel empirical field and raises questions about how religion in the blogosphere can be explored further. The survey and interview data presented largely resonate with findings from previous studies.

Willander convincingly argues that the image of religion in Sweden has been tainted by the explicit and implicit understandings of 'religion proper' that have been dominant

in quantitative studies within the sociology of religion. A reader acquainted with Nordic religiosity is likely to agree with her about the limited usefulness of conventional survey questions on religious beliefs and practice for uncovering mainstream religion. However, Willander's approach concludes by conceptualizing the Swedish mainstream as a *religious* mainstream. A scholar who regards Sweden as a clear case of secularity, non-religion, or religious indifference is therefore likely to agree with Willander's reasoning up to a point yet arrive at a different conclusion about how best to conceptualize the collectivity she describes. This suggests that while the quantitative sets of data presented in this volume are comprehensive in character and skilfully handled, separate sets of data require a solid conceptual or theoretical base that holds the analysis together. As isolated pillars of data, objections can be raised about why these sets of data should be interpreted as reflections of a religious rather than a secular or cultural collectivity. Willander's argument is precisely that when these sets of data are analysed in conjunction, the resulting image paints a picture of the Swedish majority as far from indifferent in their position towards religion. To shore up the main tenets presented in the empirical data, it might perhaps have been helpful to complement the lived religion approach with another concept or theory, as it may have further strengthened the claim Willander wishes to make.

In her foreword, Erika Willander writes that she wishes to 'participate in dialogue about religiosity in Sweden in the midst of ongoing change' (2020, v). The volume testifies to her broad insights into the field of sociology of religion and quantitative surveys of religion in particular, and the broad range of empirical data presented mirrors Willander's versatile methodological skills. Willander therefore demonstrates in this book her important role as part of the ongoing discussion about mainstream religion – and not least, how it should be studied.

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TEMENOS
NORDIC JOURNAL OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION
Temenos Vol. 58 No. 1 (2022), 155–8
DOI: 10.33356/temenos.119489

Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, and Randall A. Poole (eds): *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, 752 pp.

The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought examines the varying trends and traditions within Russian religion over a period of more than a thousand years, focusing primarily on the last two hundred. It is a comprehensive anthology, including chapters written by specialists in various fields of theology, philosophy, the history of ideas, cultural studies, linguistics, etc. As emphasized in the *Introduction*, the subject is not religion(s) *in Russia*, but explicitly Russian religious *thought*. This means, its subject matter is specifically *Russian* religious thought, as distinct from European (or Eurasian) and Christian or monotheistic thought in general. Second, it is about religious *thought*, which here more precisely means such thinking and reflections that are expressed and conveyed in writing available for a wide circle of readers.

The handbook embraces 750 pages and includes 40 chapters. I shall comment in this review on only a few examples of the themes treated. The criteria for my choice have been my own main interest and scholarly competence, in combination with what I think may be useful for readers from several different fields. Both criteria are clearly very subjective.

I shall start with a summary of the outline. The first part, *Historical Contexts*, gives an overview of the main historical periods, starting with the conversion of early Rus' to Orthodoxy in the ninth and tenth centuries, continuing through complicated and sometimes turbulent times until the nineteenth century. Parts II and III discuss in more detail the changes during the nineteenth century and after the Russian Revolution. In Part II, *The Nineteenth Century*, important theological thinkers like Petr Chaadaev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Soloviev are discussed separately, alternating with thematic chapters on issues such as the clerical academies, Slavophilism, and nihilism. Part III focuses on the period between 1900 and 1922, with chapters on important trends like religious idealism, *theosis*, mysticism, and reflections on transcendence. There is also a chapter on Judaism. Chronologically, Part IV continues with the early Soviet era, with chapters on 'musical metaphysics', icons, and poetry, and is followed by Part V, which discusses Russian religious thought outside Russia. Part VI presents analyses of religious thought in Soviet Russia, with chapters on religious thinking in the Silver Age, prison camps, Russian cinema, and the thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin. Finally, the three chapters in Part VII summarize historical trends and recurring themes and reflect on the influence of Russian religious thinking on Western theology and the role of Christian thought in Russian cultural history through the centuries.

The thorough analyses of the dynamic nineteenth century in Part II offer various perspectives invalu-

able for understanding political and cultural trends and conflicts, as well as the historical contexts of authors like Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. Victoria Frede examines the influence of nihilism on nineteenth-century Russian philosophy and literature, and in another chapter Randall A. Poole discusses the impact of Slavophilism on the development of Russian religious philosophy, observing that the roots of Slavophilism can be found in both European romanticism and patristic theology and explaining characteristic traits such as personalism and communal love ('sobornost'). For the Slavophiles, Poole observes, Russia's history and culture were distinct from the more legal and rationalistic theology of the West, enabling Orthodox theology to cultivate other traits such as spirituality and communal love with romantic ideas of Old Russia as a model characterized by an ideal of mutual non-interference between the state and the people.

Rebecca Mitchell examines religious themes in Dostoyevsky's novels, which have influenced religious thought both in Dostoyevsky's time and even more in the twentieth century. Here, themes of suffering, redemption, and not least the figure of Christ are explained in the light of both Russian Orthodox theology and Dostoyevsky's personal life. Taking the reader through the author's understanding of Christian soteriology and eschatology, Mitchell concludes that Dostoyevsky's authorship has been important for Russian culture both in modernizing religious thinking and at the same time resisting the possibly negative aspects of (Western) modernity. Caryl Emerson discusses Tolstoy's rather complicated and seemingly contradictory religious approach, especially focusing on the author's crises followed by his conversion to religious anarchism and finally his expulsion from the Russian Orthodox Church. Tolstoy's ideas on death and a possible afterlife are explicated as partly influenced by Platonic philosophy, whereas, according to Emerson, ideas in his thinking that may point to Buddhist or even Taoist influence are more likely understood as expressions of mystical ideas stemming from Judaeo-Christian monotheistic belief in its own right.

In Part III, *The Religious-Philosophical Renaissance, 1900–1922*, the chapter 'God-Seeking, God-Building, and the New Religious Consciousness' by Erich Lippman explains developments of atheist thinking in the decades prior to and immediately following the Russian Revolution. God-seeking was built on the emphasis on man being the image of God and having the capacity to be genuinely god-like in this life. The God-builders had an almost opposite outlook, claiming that it was necessary to create a new God, built on human ground: 'anthropotheists'. The doctrine of 'theosis' stems from early Greek patristic theology and is in turn closely related to mysticism. The concept has been present throughout Russian Christian thinking and

was also taken up especially by lay Christian thinkers in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the idea being that the goal should and could be an actual transformation to godlikeness: not symbolically but ontologically. In Ruth Coates words: 'It is not enough to imitate Christ in his virtues (indeed for some thinkers this is not required at all): only participation in his divine nature (or that of Sophia) will do'. In 'Judaism and Russian Religious Thought' Dominic Rubin examines, first, attitudes to Jews and Judaism among non-Jewish authors and philosophers, including antisemitic themes present not least in writings influenced by romanticism and religious conservatism, and second, examples of Jewish thinkers who in various ways formulated particularly Russian interpretations of Judaism. The author concludes that despite the more or less ever-present, or at least recurring anti-Jewish attitudes and even antisemitism, there was also still room for specifically Jewish religious thinking to be expressed and reformulated, even in the early Soviet period.

In Part IV the cultural fields of music, poetry and visual arts are examined as areas for the aesthetic expression of spirituality, with examples from Late Imperial and twentieth-century music, poetry, and the visual arts, offering interesting perspectives not least on a period which was often viewed from the outside primarily as technocratic and atheistic. In the final chronological part 'Religious thought in Soviet Russia', focusing mainly on the second half of the twentieth century, Caryl Emerson offers an analysis of what she sees as a religious subtext in Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theory. Bakhtin was certainly not in his own view or any traditional and strict sense a 'religious thinker', but Emerson is not alone in identifying what she labels a 'religious subtext' in his literary thinking, which she analyses in terms of personalism and 'self–other' relations in the spirit of Martin Buber. If religious aspects are subtle in Bakhtin's thinking, it is no doubt more explicit in Andrei Tarkovsky's art, discussed by Alina Birzache in her chapter on cinema, in which she examines spirituality and messianism in the art of Tarkovsky and later filmmakers, finding an increasingly individualized spirituality in Russian film in the post-Soviet era especially.

The final part, *Assessment,* brings the handbook together. The present reviewer recommends readers to read the whole book, but if this is impossible, it might be a good idea to concentrate on these three chapters, which provide exactly what they promise: an assessment of the central ideas and cultural themes that have formed Russian religious thought through the ages, such as Gnosticism, sobornost, and theosis. Paul Valliere reflects on the influence of Russian religious thinking in the West through emigration following the Revolution, the role Russian Orthodox thinkers played in twentieth-century ecumenical dialogue, and their influence on important move-

ments and thinkers in both Catholic and Protestant thinking. The final chapter, written by Igor I. Evlampiev, brings the history together again, from the ninth century until today. Here, the author concludes that the religiously formulated hope to unite the divine and the human can be found in a wide variety of expressions throughout Russian religious thinking, whether expressed in theological terms as theosis or in anthropological analyses and political programmes. Although the chapter's emphasis is on Christianity's central place in Russian society and history, the author also concludes that even for thinkers like Berdyaev, Semyon Frank, and Andrei Tarkovsky, Christian teaching has in fact been understood and expressed as a teaching primarily about the human being's divine nature.

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